

How Does My College Create a Student Success Technology Plan?

Module 2.1

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This resource will be most useful for technology project managers, student success initiative leaders, and/or steering committees engaged in student success technology strategy



Getting Started With Module 2

As the old adage goes, “failing to plan is planning to fail.” Many institutions have experience creating strategic student success plans; they have set KPIs around retention, graduation, and equity, they have worked diligently to apply Guided Pathways principles across the campus, and they have attended workshops and conferences to tackle transfer policies, workforce alignment, and developmental education reform. But, too often, technology strategy, procurement, and implementation decisions are either fragmented across various departments/units and/or siloed from broader student success initiative planning. As a result, institutions may end up with an expensive technology ecosystem filled with disconnected or duplicative tools that ultimately fail to provide a sturdy foundation for student success efforts.

This module will help institutions begin the journey of turning that around. You will walk through a process akin to a chiropractic adjustment for your student success strategies and technologies by creating a **student success technology plan**. This plan will provide a roadmap to better align your technology tools with your student success initiatives.

What You’ll Learn: Module Learning Objectives

- What is a student success technology plan, and why does it matter?
- Who should be involved in creating a student success technology plan?
- How can we understand our existing technology and process gaps and opportunities as they relate to our student success goals?
- How can we prioritize key technology projects and align relevant processes to establish a strong foundation for our student success goals?

How You’ll Learn: Module Contents and Resources

Module 2:

2.1: Read Me!

How Does My College Create a Student Success Technology Plan?

2.2: Read and Plan

Student Success Technology Planning Team

2.3: Complete

Initiative and Technology Process Mapping Activity Guide

2.4: Read and Reflect

Post-Mapping Reflection and Prioritization Guide

What Is a Student Success Technology Plan, and Why Is It Important?

IMAGINE THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO: A college has shifted to a cohort advising model and has acquired various tools to help coordinate faculty and staff around student care. But, one year later, everyone is frustrated:



Faculty

"There's so much going on. 'Initiative fatigue' doesn't begin to capture it. I can't deal with learning a new system."



Advising

"I like the new system in theory, but not all the information I need is in there. I'm bouncing between this and the SIS and my Google sheets."



IT

"We're trying to support 30+ student success tools with a team of 4. And some of those tools do the exact same thing. I don't know why we have them all."



President

"These vendors promised us these tools would help. I'm not seeing the needle move, and we've spent a fortune."

WHAT WENT WRONG?: In truth, the specific root causes can be varied. This is an institution that has multiple tools with overlapping functionality, too many IT projects for a lean team to handle, and end-users – faculty, staff, and likely students as well – who aren't reaping the benefits of an expensive suite of tools.

So what can be done differently? According to The Ada Center, "Institutions that frontload critical planning activities and conversations prior to procuring...can often save hundreds of thousands of dollars (before paying a vendor's licensing and implementation fees)."¹

Research on hundreds of student success technology procurement and implementation processes has illuminated that the most successful projects begin by discussing the following questions:

- ❖ *What should our critical student success priorities be for the next 2-3 years?*
- ❖ *To achieve these priorities, what discrete activities must happen?*
- ❖ *How will we know the model/initiative is supporting strong and equitable student outcomes?*
- ❖ *What changes do we need to make to our existing technology structures and processes to support this new model or initiative?*

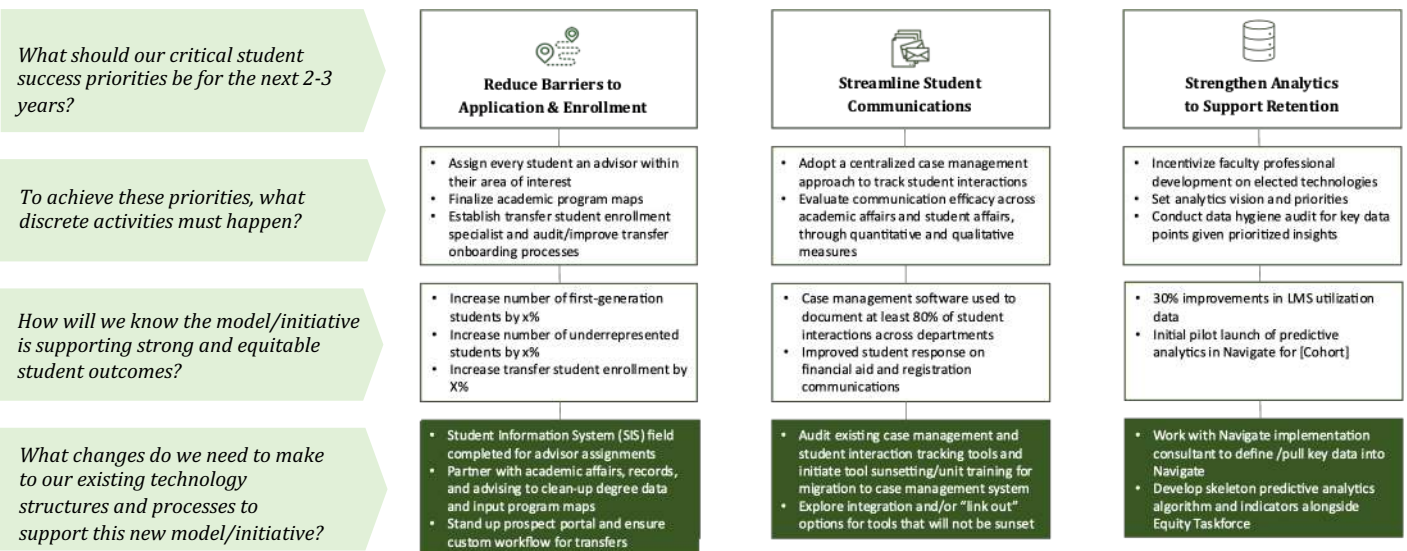
By leveraging these questions, a **student success technology plan links and aligns student success priorities with the technology structures and processes most critical to ensuring their success.**

Let's explore an example...

¹ See The Ada Center. *Advising Technology Procurement & Planning: A Practical Playbook for Higher Education Leaders*. 2020. <https://www.theadacenter.org/s/Ada2020-Tech-Playbook-Final.pdf>.



Sample Student Success Technology Plan: Anytown College



In this example, Anytown College has decided to prioritize three major goals in the coming 2-3 years: 1) Reduce Barriers to Application and Enrollment, 2) Streamline Student Communications, and 3) Strengthen Analytics to Support Retention. Note that these goals are more specific than "Improve Retention" or "Increase Enrollment," but still fairly big-picture. The team then spent time considering which processes or activities were most important to each goal, KPIs to assess progress/success, and finally, prioritized just a handful of technology projects that they determined were most critical to ensuring the success of each goal.

In an environment when every initiative – and therefore every technology project – can seem urgent and important, **a high-level student success technology plan elevates discussions about what activities are must-dos vs. nice-to-dos given the strategic goals of the institution.** This focus is critical. Particularly at resource-strapped institutions, it can be both counterproductive and expensive to pursue too many projects at once. After the plan is in place, it **can continue to serve as a north star for the institution** as teams contend with appealing (but potentially unnecessary) new tool pitches, staff turnover, etc.

Of course, college teams cannot simply put pen to paper and create a student success technology plan immediately. Each row and column requires careful discussion, reflection, and tough decision-making. This module will provide resources to guide this process as you and your team aim to produce your own version of the high-level plan above.

Next Steps

This module is meant to take you step-by-step through a series of activities and reflections that will allow you to gradually fill out your high-level student success technology plan.

The next resource is Module 2.2: Student Success Technology Planning Team, which will help you to gather the right people to help assemble your student success technology plan.



Read Module 2.1 How Does My College Create a Student Success Technology Plan?



<1 hour



Read and Plan Module 2.2 Student Success Technology Planning Team



1– 2 hours



Complete Module 2.3 Initiative and Technology Process Mapping Activity Guide



3– 4 hours



Read and Reflect Module 2.4 Post-Mapping Reflection and Prioritization Guide



3– 4 hours

Module 2.1 Individual Reflection:

- 1) What internal resources might be helpful to review as you prepare to create a student success technology plan? (e.g., college strategic plans, existing technology inventory databases, etc.)
- 2) Who else might benefit from reading this primer on student success technology planning?



About This Series

This five-part instructional series on Student Success Technology is designed for minority serving institutions (MSIs) and their friends. Taken together, these instructional resources aim to provide practitioners with the tools to establish and maintain a technology ecosystem that effectively supports the institution's broader student success and equity goals. The exercises and resources within these modules are also widely applicable across the higher education field.

This resource was compiled with generous funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and was authored by The Ada Center based on six years of insight from The Ada Center's work with hundreds of MSIs and access-focused institutions. The curriculum would not be possible without the thought partnership and support from Complete College America and the Advising Success Network.

For additional curriculum modules, please visit:

www.completecollege.org/navigating-student-success-technology

For questions about this resource, or to explore additional higher education technology research and tools, please visit

www.theadacenter.org/resources.

