What Do Students Think About Our Technology?

Module 3.1

Contents

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

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

The Ada Center

ADVISING SUCCESS NETWORK

Getting Started With Module 3

Institution leaders and practitioners all tend to agree that the student voice matters and should be included in major strategic initiatives. However, meaningful student engagement in student success technology decision-making remains limited, even for tools that are primarily meant to be student-facing. Certainly, some institutions will call on students to occasionally pilot products that are far along in the procurement process or may include a few technology-related questions in student feedback surveys. These engagement efforts, while useful, often come too late to proactively inform major technology decisions and/or do not capture the level of detail necessary to make critical, concrete changes to technology implementations.

This module will explore how to leverage student insights effectively, equitably, and efficiently to build a technology ecosystem that is authentically student-informed and student-centered.

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What You'll Learn:
Module 3 Learning Objectives

- Why is the student voice critical for technology strategy?

- What does current research say about student perspectives about major student success technologies?

- How can my institution adopt a student-centered mindset for student success technology decision-making?

- How can my institution effectively and equitably engage students across the technology planning, procurement, implementation, and continuous improvement lifecycle?

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How You'll Learn:
Module 3 Contents and Resources

Module 3:
3.1: *Read Me!*
What Do Students Think About Our Technology?

3.2: *Watch*
What Do Students Have to Say About Student Success Technology? – Webinar

3.3: *Read and Plan*
How to Conduct Effective Student Focus Groups

3.4: *Read and Discuss*
Examining Student Success and Technology Through a Student Lens Discussion Guide

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Why Student Voice Matters….Across Technology Types

Students are end-users for hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of technology investments, but often weigh in on only a fraction of these tools.

Key Student-Facing Technology Tool Types

The Ada Center has interviewed over 200 students across 20+ institutions. The features and functions related to the following student success technologies were recalled the most often across all students and institutions.

- ❖ Institution Website
- ❖ Chatbots
- ❖ Learning Management System (LMS) & Teaching and Learning Applications
- ❖ Student Admission/Application Portals
- ❖ Enrolled Student Portal
- ❖ Academic Planning & Degree Audit Tools

- ❖ Communications from Admissions/Recruitment CRMs
- ❖ Communications from Enrolled Student CRMs & Nudging Tools
- ❖ Student Engagement Tools (e.g., peer-to-peer community-building)
- ❖ Logistics Tools (e.g., appointment-scheduling)
- ❖ Career Navigation Tools

Consider: What do you know about your students' relative usage and perspectives on the technologies above? How confident do you feel about your insights?

"We Don't Know What We Don't Know"
Testimonials From the Field Illuminate Errors in Common Assumptions

"We assumed students just 'don't respond to email.' Turns out, having multiple CRM products meant that each department or unit was messaging them constantly. They're getting hundreds of messages a week. Of course they aren't listening!"

- VP Admissions, HSI in Northeast

"We figured our students were digital natives, but they found navigating our LMS to be really challenging. We can't assume we know what's intuitive and what's not. Designing for students means designing with students."

- Dean, Community College in South

Why Student Voice Matters….Across the Student Success Technology Implementation Lifecycle

Student voices bring a unique and invaluable perspective that ensures the relevance and effectiveness of technology initiatives. During planning and procurement stages, students can provide insights into their needs and preferences, helping to select technologies that align with their educational goals. During implementation, student voices can guide the process, ensuring that the chosen technologies are user-friendly and accessible. And finally, involving students in continuous improvement discussions allows for ongoing feedback, enabling leaders to refine and enhance technology solutions based on students' real-world experiences. By embracing student voices throughout the entire technology lifecycle, leaders can ultimately create a student-centered technological ecosystem that fosters engagement, innovation, and most importantly, student success and equity.

Benefits of Student Input Across Technology Adoption Lifecycle

Planning & Procurement

Students can identify gaps, pain-points and opportunities within the current technology ecosystem

Students Can…

- Help prioritize which missing or underdeveloped tools and features are most important to address for student success;
- Elevate the needs and perspectives of underrepresented and/or historically marginalized student populations;
- Inform later-stage product scaling approach for broader student population.

Product Implementation

Students can help ensure product(s) user experience design is aligned with diverse student needs

- Inform configuration decisions, including product workflows, user interface layout, etc. to ensure accessibility, ease-of-use, and overall value of tool for students;
- Improve language used in product instructions or student-facing messaging to ensure clarity, accessibility, efficacy, and equity;
- Inform training and support needs for key student-facing tools based on initial student responses, questions.

Scaling & Continuous Improvement

Students can validate product(s) efficacy, inform further evolution and innovation

- Confirm whether student-facing tools are being used, amongst which groups tools are being used the most/least, and why (or why not);
- Confirm whether or not (and for whom) student-facing tools are perceived as helpful and why (or why not);
- Inform resource allocation and prioritization for additional tool adjustments, feature roll-outs.

Diversity and Equity as a Student Voice Imperative

IMAGINE: Anywhere University is exploring a new student portal. The project team understands the value of soliciting student perspectives on major technology initiatives and set out to recruit students to help across the entire technology decision-making and implementation process.

Imagine that Anywhere University recruits the following students:

Student A: Jill Hill

Age: 20
Major: Biology/Pre-Med
GPA: 3.7

Jill is a part of Student Government and an active member of several on-campus clubs, including the Black Student Union and the LGBTQ student group. She lives in the dorms and is enrolled full-time in 16 credit hours this term. Her parents both attended Anywhere University.

Student B: Jack Mack

Age: 28
Major: Business Administration
GPA: 3.1

Jack transferred to Anywhere College last term. He lives at home with his wife and young son and commutes 20 minutes to his in-person classes twice a week. Most of his courses are virtual. He works part-time at the local grocery store and is enrolled in 9 credits this term. He is the first in his family to attend college.

Consider: How might these students' perspectives on technology differ? Which technologies might they each deem most important? Least important?

Ultimately, it is critical to gather input from students who represent diverse backgrounds and encompass a wide range of potential pathway types (e.g., transfer, part-time, full-time, virtual learners, etc.). In this way, we ensure that technology initiatives can cater to the needs and preferences of all learners. Different types of students will pick up on different-in-kind user needs and product gaps. They will have different, nuanced feedback on language and framing, ensuring that messaging within technology tools is inclusive. And, during product scaling efforts, these students can often serve as diverse and impactful ambassadors for new student-facing tools.

However, effectively and equitably engaging diverse student voices requires thoughtful planning and, at times, more creative outreach and engagement methods. The materials in this module will offer guidance around how to leverage a student-centered mindset to ultimately recruit, engage, and respond to student perspectives on the technologies that most influence their success.

Next Steps

There is no single right way to foster impactful student input on technology. Institution contexts, technology types, and implementation phases and timelines can all influence a team's approach to gathering student input. However, this module that will provide a series of research-based resources to help inform and guide your student engagement strategy.

☑ *Read* Module 3.1 What Do Students Think About Our Technology?
⏳ <1 hour

☐ *Watch* Module 3.2 What Do Students Have to Say About Student Success Technology? – Webinar
⏳ <1 hour

☐ *Read and Plan* Module 3.3 How to Conduct Effective Student Focus Groups
⏳ <1 hour

☐ *Read and Discuss* Module 3.4 Examining Student Success & Technology Strategy Through a Student Lens Discussion Guide
⏳ <1 hour

Module 3.1 Individual Reflection:

1) Consider a technology tool or tools that you feel are not optimally serving students. What assumptions or hypotheses do you have about why these tools are either not being used or not being used effectively?

2) Reflect on any ongoing or anticipated technology initiatives at your institution. How might you and/or your team incorporate student perspectives into these projects?

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.

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.

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