What Do Students Have to Say About Student Success Technology?

Module 3.2

Module 3.2: Watch

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COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

The Ada Center

ADVISING SUCCESS NETWORK

What Do Students Have to Say About Student Success Technology?

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Feedback from the Field

The Ada Center Gathered Student Success Technology Input from 213 Students Across Spring 2022-23

Student Voices from 71 Institutions
Mix of interview modalities

- Community College
- Public 4-Year
- Private 4-Year
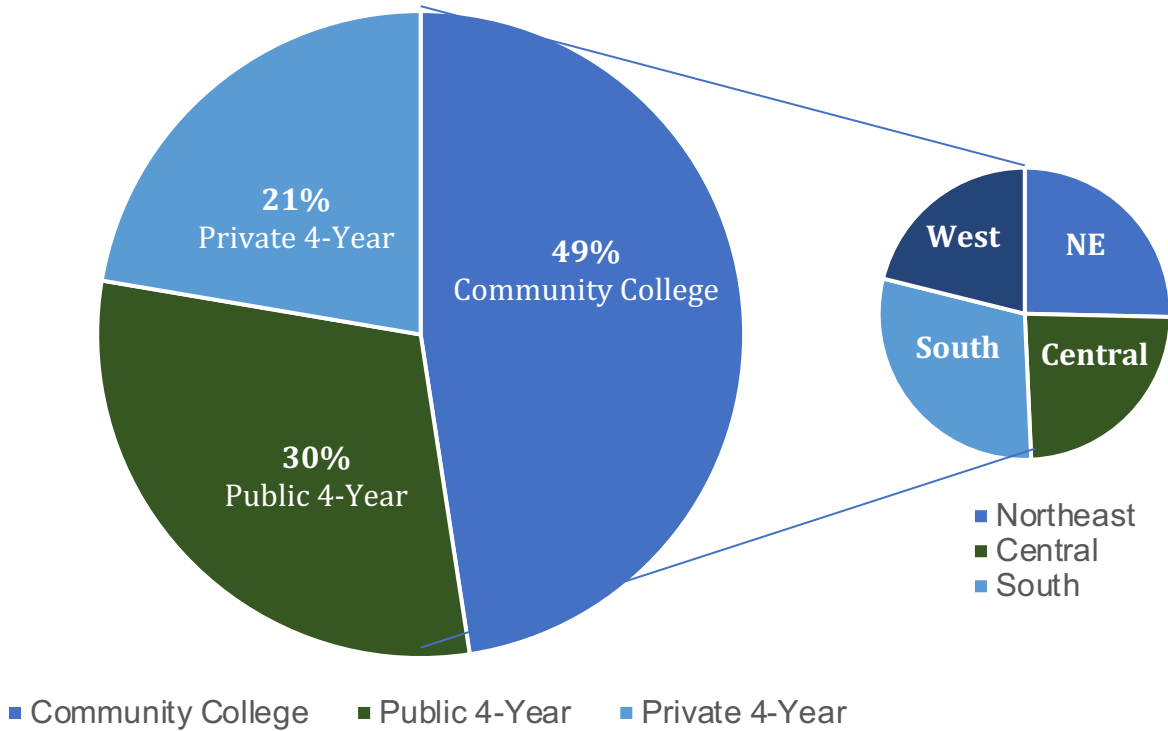
Student Demographics

Black	102
Latino	79
Unspecified Racial Minority	11
Declined to Identify	21

45%
Poverty-impacted students

59% vs. 41%
Male and Female students

All students received compensation ($30 gift cards) for participation in the project, though many attempted to refuse compensation.
In addition, The Ada Center commissioned students from community colleges to contribute art to The Ada Center materials.

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Our Broader Team Behind This Work

Andrés Hernández,
Principal

Candice Wilson-Stykes,
Analyst

Brittney Davidson,
Principal

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Student Feedback on Learning Management Systems

Featured Student Artist: Morgan Liu

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Learning Management Systems
Generation Z Can't Imagine Life Without It, Older Students View it as "The Outlook of College"

Now a True Virtual Classroom and Hub of Digital Learning

"I'm a fan of calendars and reminders, though I like them to all be in once place. The [LMS] feels like my personalized starting hub where I'm organized and get work done."

"Connecting to tutors via [the LMS] is so easy. The tutor automatically is paired with the class I'm worried about, which saves me a lot of time when I'm explaining my problem!"

"I'm surprised by how quickly everything loads on [the LMS]. I can easily log in, check my assignments, add a comment to the discussion tab, and log out on my phone. I'm not waiting for a giant webpage to load."

60% of Students Choose Courses Based on Faculty LMS Use

"I closely look at [LMS] usage by instructors after enrolling in a class – ten percent of the time, modules are assigned randomly and the only information available is the syllabus. I drop those classes immediately."

"When a professor has clearly gone beyond just posting their syllabus on the LMS, I'm more likely to recommend the class to my friends."

"I like to see my professor responding to comments on the discussion tab, especially if it's more than 'Yes' or "I agree.' It shows me she cares."

Room for Improvement on Faculty Use and Expectation Setting

"There are a few faculty members that don't update the calendar feature so it's out of sync with the assignment tab. This is the only time I've missed an assignment and it actually led me to drop out of classes I needed for my major."

"You get nervous using new things on [the LMS] unless your instructor says to do it. If they give you a green light, then it becomes easier! If they don't tell you, you get more nervous and don't use it even if it helps your learning."

"We didn't use the discussion tab much in high school. What counts as a 'quality' response that gets me a good grade? It feels like it's just up to the professor."

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Student Feedback on Chatbots

Featured Student Artist: Morgan Liu

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Chatbots

Thumbs Up to All Types of Chatbots: Advising and Learner Management Have Highest Impact

Assignment Tracking Buddy

"Every time I log in to my LMS, my school chatbot helps me in keeping track of my assignments continuously. It's a great way to double check my progress!"

"My school chatbot noticed that I started turning in assignments late and suggested that I meet with a tutor if I was having trouble. That was really amazing, I wouldn't have connected with a tutor otherwise."

"My chatbot actually sends out the assignments, so it's the one that tracks my progress and sends reminders. It's like a teacher's assistant!"

Resource for Navigating Simple Life Questions

"My chatbot helps eliminate time-consuming tasks, like looking up our registration deadlines."

"There were so many complaints before about wrong school fees charged at our school. Our chatbot lets us easily access our account and view them."

"Our chatbot gives us basic info on things like appointments, facilities, etc. It's a great way to get all your info in one spot."

Praise for Attention to E&E

"I feel like our chatbot helps optimize costs - it can handle part of repetitive or administrative tasks on its own, and it also helps teachers create more detailed learning plans and materials."

"The technology costs at my school have gotten really high recently. The chatbot makes me feel like they're trying to reduce costs across the board, though, since it's so much simpler and cheaper to have a bot answering a question that a human."

"Our chatbot is great because it responds very quickly to every question it receives."

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Student Feedback on Degree Planning Tools

Featured Student Artist: Isa Saldivar

Degree Planning Tools

Poor Implementation Hampers Tool Utility, Though Students Give High Marks to the Notion

Students Lavish Praise on the Technology Concept…

"Our degree planning tool's graphical display is really great. I can easily see all the courses I need to earn my degree without doing much digging."

"We get updates when degree requirements change, which so far has been really helpful – especially when the chatbot chimes in."

"I want to know that I'm taking the right courses in order to earn my degree. Our degree planner is a nice 'double check' that I use with my advisor to make sure that we're all on the same page."

"I feel satisfied when my degree progress bar updates. Go me!"

But Share Stories of Faulty Underlying Data…

"The worst was when I was trying to make a transfer to another school. The data was totally wrong, as the prereqs for the Cal State system had completely changed twice in one year. I now spend two hours each month making sure I'm signed up for the right classes."

"The 'Off Track' indicator keeps going off in my [degree planner], even though I'm taking and passing all the classes my advisor recommended. I can't get it to turn off! This makes me so nervous, I started taking Lexapro."

"I can't actually look up what classes I should take in [my degree planner] if it's during the summer. For some reason, the [degree planner] only shows courses in the fall and spring!"

And Mixed Messages from Disparate People and Systems

"I was mainly relying on my degree planning tool for transferring, but then my EOPS counselor told me it was out of date and not to use it. Now I'm confused about which classes count and which ones were a waste of time."

"I thought all I had to do was follow the suggestions made by our [degree planner tool] in order to graduate. My advisor thinks I'd be better off taking some more advanced classes, given how good my grades have been. Why should I work even harder, when [the degree planner] says I don't have to?"

"This tool ruined my life. It forced me to take an EXTRA YEAR of classes because it wasn't aligned with the registrar's degree tool."

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Student Feedback on Enrollment Tools

Featured Student Artist: Ryan de Vera

Enrollment Management Tools
Tools are Underappreciated for Their Role in Setting Students Up for Matriculation and Success

Students Ask for Technology-Driven Spam, Just This Once

"We received an enrollment deadline e-mail two weeks ahead of the deadline, then 3 days ahead of the deadline. I needed those reminders because I was juggling work and school.

Normally I hate spam, but for something like enrollment I want to get those texts and reminders so I can submit my forms and get the classes I need. Super helpful!"

"I thought I had sent in all my enrollment information, but it turned out I forgot to complete my financial background info. I never check my e-mail, but a text I got from the school was what got me to finish it up."

Enablement of Personalization Causes College Connection

"My school's new student e-mails had a summary of the conversations I'd had and my interests. That was great, I didn't feel like I was getting spammed to enroll and pay them money!"

"When I indicated on my application form that I was an older student, my school started sending me resources about computer and videoconferencing training specifically for older enrolled students. I loved that!"

"I picked this college because it felt like they knew me, even though I may have been more comfortable at an HBCU."

Strong IT Capacity Means Real Time Updates

"At first, when I completed my FAFSA, it felt like I was sending my information into a black hole. Thankfully, almost all my enrollment e-mails said the school received my FAFSA info (and, on what date). Those little notes helped make me feel like things were on track for my financial aid."

"After I sent in my transcript, the school's reminder e-mails included information on the classes I should take my first semester. That was great – it helped me start thinking about what life would be like as a student."

"Why do I keep getting e-mails reminding me to do what's already done? Did they even get my transcript?"

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Student Feedback on Student Alert and Communication Tools

Featured Student Artist: Morgan Liu

Student Alert and Communication Systems
Systems Have Potential, but Only with Widespread and Intentional Engagement

A Smattering of Success Stories

"Our syllabus had one set of due dates, but the professor said another, so my first few assignments were late. A warning from my professor helped me realize what the problem was and got me back on track."

"I kept missing classes because my internet connection at home was so bad. I checked my email and got a warning, so I decided to get some new equipment from my school to fix my problem in order to avoid a bad grade."

"I was really struggling in my Math class, but I thought that was normal – who gets it right the first few times? An alert from my instructor had some information on tutoring, which gave me the help I needed."

But Most Students Report Low Adoption

"I received an alert once when I was a Freshman, but not after that. I was under the impression that I'd be getting them more? Seems a little odd to me."

"Alerts? I get a few of those from my TRIO counselor – they usually have info about news I might have missed. I've never gotten one from an instructor, though."

"My professors are really great about picking up the phone and calling us if there's a problem, like if I missed a quiz. E-mail is a different story, they don't really communicate with us in an online way."

...and Missed Opportunities

"All of the important messages from my school were going to my inbox where I add and drop classes, not where I actually do my assignments. I wish everything was just in my [LMS] or Gmail."

"I have no choice on how important communications are being sent to me. What works for me might not work for another student."

"My friends are always the first ones to let me know of a big class or school change, like a closure for COVID. The school's notice always comes later."

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Student Feedback on Course Registration, Student Portal, and Institution Website

Featured Student Artist: Ryan de Vera

Course Registration, Student Portal, and Institution Website
Powered by Faulty Underlying Data and Core Systems, Focus Institutions Struggle to Make Most of These Key Tools

Website Quality Plays a Major Role in Student Success

"Our website got a major upgrade and now I can figure out how to access emergency aid through just two clicks. Before I didn't even know that was a thing I could do. Without that aid, I wouldn't be here anymore."

"Our school website used to have a 'breaking news' type thing during COVID, which was really helpful and easy to check. I wish that was still a thing – I'm not sure how to get important information now. It's just buried deep. My info lifeline is gone."

"I really like that our school website isn't super 'busy' – there's one information bar at the top that takes me to enrollment, classes and advising, and jobs. It's one of the reasons I transferred here – everything I need to do can happen easily on my phone."

Course Scheduling Still Missing Key Data at Focus Institutions

"If there's no information on where a class is being held, then I won't consider registering for it. How could I ever register and build out a schedule without that information?"

"I've been a remote student since COVID began and enjoy being one. However, I still don't understand why our school can't label class styles properly. I'm tired of dropping a class after finding out that in-person attendance is required!"

"Why can't I find information on whether a class is pre-recorded? I can only balance work and school if I know which classes are being held live or not. And sometimes classes jump between being live and recorded, which stresses me out!"

Student Portal Interface Plays a Big Role in College Connection

"I feel like a lot of important information is just buried in the student portal. Why do I have to click on 'More,' then 'Announcements,' to find out that the library is closed?"

"The Student Portal looks like a zoomed in website on my phone. It doesn't work at all, which is a shame because that's how I access lectures. How is this possible?"

"I always get locked out of the portal if I use two devices at the same time. And I almost never remember my password, so I have to wait hours before I can log in to my Student Portal again while I wait for someone from IT to help me."

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Student Feedback on Career Counseling Tools

Featured Student Artist: Ryan de Vera

Career Counseling Tools

Students at Focus Institutions Scrambling for Job Placement without Effective Technology Assistance

Can't Find Existing Tools

"I only heard about [Handshake] because, when I got here, I was nervous and tried to click on every link. When I got to [Handshake], it didn't look good, but I realized it had a lot of really great information."

"I'm not sure why our career website doesn't exist in [our LMS]. To access ours, you have to log in to a special section of the school website. Couldn't they just build in a hyperlink somewhere in [our LMS] and make it easier?"

"I just recently found out our school has tools to help find jobs. This should be included in orientation or at least mid-semester!"

Current Tools Lacking Robustness to Compete with Public Job Boards

"My school uses some outdated sources for getting jobs. The best we get is an email saying that 'ABC company is hiring X position,' but that's after the job has expired online on a different website."

"The best that my school does with helping us find our career paths is an FAQ that lists a bunch of basic questions, like 'How do I know I'll like this job?' or 'I don't know where to start.' The advice is all the same – book an appointment. I thought there were online tools that could help with that?"

Identified as High Need

"Our school desperately needs some type of technology that gives advice for career mentorship and enables us to get ideas for diverse careers."

"Finding career opportunities is the worst way that technology is used at my school, but finding jobs online is the only way that's available to me while I'm remote. So, if that doesn't work, how else are we supposed to find jobs?"

"I just graduated…now what? Online websites say it can take anywhere between three to six months to find a job, but I need to pay bills now!"

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Student Feedback
on Advising Tools

*Featured Student Artist: Ryan de Vera*

Advising Tools
Student Desire for Choice Has Grown Amid Technological Leaps and COVID-19

Evolved Standards of Advising Met by Some Institutions, But Not Others

"Connecting with your advisor is super easy at our school. You can choose to connect a couple of different ways. At first, I connected with my advisor over phone calls, then we transitioned to e-mails and videoconferencing, and my advisor was super quick to respond."

"Now that we have videoconferencing options, it'd be nice if advisors were available in the evening hours, since I work all day and mainly take night classes. I don't have the type of job where I can just 'take a break' for an appointment. My friends at more tech-savvy schools seem to have that type of help."
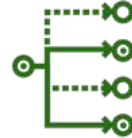
Multiple Modalities of Help Increases Student Access

"I don't always want to videoconference with an advisor, especially if it's a simple question. Can we just e-mail each other like normal people?"

"I really want the ability to share a screen with my advisor when we're doing a check in appointment about next semester's classes. Not a Zoom – I don't always want to show my face. Just some way to make sure we're both looking at the same thing."

"We've made so many changes at our school since COVID, but I still need to call to make an appointment with an advisor? That's out of date."

Basic IT Infrastructure Still a Barrier to Support at Focus Institutions

"Why can't I make an appointment with a financial aid counselor online? Or at least, I wish there was some type of system that would notify me of how long I need to wait. I spent 6 hours waiting to speak with someone last fall, so I just left."

"Our servers were down when I was in dire need of a counselor. I couldn't get through to anyone, since online appointments were the only option and I was at home for the holidays."

"Reminders about my online appointments don't seem to be working – they keep getting sent to the wrong inbox, even after I told my counselor about it."

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Missed
Opportunities

Featured Student Artist: Morgan Liu

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Missed Technology Opportunities
Community Building Tools and Student-Friendly Applications

College-Sanctioned EdTech Tools Remain Outdated and Underdeveloped

"We use tools that feel more like 'our generation,' like Whatsapp, to keep in touch with each other about class. The discussion tab on [the LMS] is fine, but it doesn't notify me about new posts the way Whatsapp does."

"I'm always on Gmail, so Google Meets is where I connect with classmates. We don't really use the school default option…"

"When we're in class, we open a shared Google Doc and take turns writing notes from lecture. It's smart – not a lot of typing, lots of collaboration, and we can see if concepts are confusing to one of us or all of us."

Academic Community-Building Happening in Unfacilitated Channels at Focus Institutions

"Almost all of our classes use a Discord server for communication between students. It's easier than what the professor suggests, since everything's in one place."

"We needed somewhere where we can collaborate -- about the assignments, what's going on, etc. Discord was great for that."

"Anyone interested in Computer Science already knows about IRC and how channels are a great way to keep communication going in a group. Our CS professor gets it, but all my Gen Ed instructors are clueless."

Over Half of Students Discussed Pandemic-Driven Role of "Class Representative"

"Now most of my classes have a 'class representative,' who's responsible for disseminating information to all other students virtually. We appoint the class rep ourselves. This has been very helpful, and it keeps the professor from being bombarded by IT questions they can't answer."

"Since the pandemic, there's always at least one student who's almost always able to go to class. Once we figure out who that is, we make sure to ask them to send out important information to all of us like deadlines. We sometimes end up asking the class rep to help us with homework, since that person is probably the smartest anyway."

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