

How Can I Prioritize Competing Technology Needs?

Module 4.4

Module 4.4: Watch and Complete

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

The Ada Center in Brief

Supporting Higher Education IT Capacity



- Founded on the belief that **technology is not a silver bullet** to any problem, but with the right planning and implementation, software can play an important role in advancing student success and equity.
- Supports **national initiatives** such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Frontier Set and Higher Endeavor, Complete College America, Achieving the Dream, State Success Centers, AACC Pathways, and others.
- Develops **research-based resources** for the field and works directly with colleges and states in need of technology strategy, purchasing, and implementation support.



Meet Our Namesake

"A new, a vast, and a powerful language is developed for the future use of analysis, in which to wield its truths so that these may become of more speedy and accurate practical application for the purposes of mankind than the means hitherto in our possession have rendered possible."

– Ada Lovelace, Founder of Scientific Computing

Refresher From Module 4.3: “Check Your Basement”

Avoid Expensive, Duplicative Technology By Auditing Your Current System

Example from “Sample Community College”

User Story <i>One per line, specify user title and function (e.g., Advisor can...[action],”)</i>	Do We Already Have This Capability? (Y/N) If “Yes”, What Is The Name of the Existing Tool?		Next Step: <i>Indicate:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy • Build On Existing • Improve Usage of Existing
Advisor can see a list of existing students/caseload	Y	Y - Excel	Buy – Excel not sufficient
Advisor and support staff can see student profile with classes, recent communication, grades, and notes from other support staff and faculty in a user-friendly interface	N	Y/N – Banner + Portal	Buy/Integrate – Portal has some of this but is still in build mode; Banner requires heavy manual lift for many tasks. New CRM can provide more seamless user experience, push/pull data from Banner, and link to Portal

Buy, Build, or Iterate?

Many products with the same names (e.g., CRM) have varying levels of functionality, with the most robust incorporating additional features that may overlap with other products in your ecosystem. Analyzing whether the institution should replace existing tools or aim to integrate them with a new tool will help to prioritize products and vendors.

Leaders should explore:

- What is the relative level of quality/utility of our existing tools?
- Would it be easier to integrate our existing tool into a new system, or to replace point solutions with a more comprehensive system?
- What are the cost, capacity, and cultural implications?

Does Your Institution Struggle With Prioritization?



“Like downloading all the apps at once...”

If you’ve ever tried to download multiple things at once, you’ll notice that the download time slows with each added item.

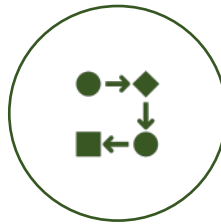
The same is true of IT projects. Too many tools or features at once can grind progress to a near halt and leave little bandwidth for the strategic planning necessary for technology efficacy (which then creates more issues and expenses over time).

Realistic Prioritization

*It is vital to have strong prioritization practices both **across** your ecosystem of technology projects, as well as **within** individual projects that involve tools with a range of features and capabilities.*



Establish **Guidelines for Strategic Prioritization**
That Balance Focus and Flexibility



Leverage Strategic Prioritization Guidelines to Rank
Urgency and Importance of Technology Project(s)
and/or Features

Create Guidelines for Strategic Prioritization of Student Success Technology Features

Maricopa Colleges Avoids “Boiling the Ocean”

Background:

- 10 College System
- Culture of Autonomy
- Multiple Big Goals (e.g., meta-majors, academic plans, advising dashboard)

Agile, Principle-Based Prioritization

- Put Students First
- Start With What We Have
- Embrace Mobile
- Build Version 1.0 First

Communicating Tradeoffs and Timelines

- Roadshow with Principles
- Transparent Priority/Next Step Updates
- “No for now, not no forever”

Consider Utility and Time Horizon in Prioritization

What Are the *Most Critical Tools/Features* Needed *Now and In the Future?*



Which of these are must-haves vs. nice-to-haves?

- According to which stakeholders?



Does our feature prioritization align with our goals? Are all high priority features absolutely necessary (and feasible)?




Which of these requirements do we most need in the near-term?



Which of these tools or features may be pre-requisites for other important technologies down the road?

Your Turn: Module 4.4 Worksheet Overview



Guide: Creating Prioritization Principles


Prioritization principles can differ greatly from institution to institution. Criteria can shift depending on the institution's relative strengths, resources, existing technology ecosystem, and goals.

The following cheat sheet includes prioritization principles that have been used across a variety of 2- and 4-year institutions. Different sets of principles can direct procurement teams in completely different directions. For example, a team that decides to make "Students First" one of their prioritization principles may select a product with top-of-the-line student-facing features, but a more limited advisor dashboard, whereas an institution that selects "Empower Faculty and Staff" might do the inverse.

Institutions may also define or interpret their prioritization principles differently. What is important is that all stakeholders ultimately coalesce around the top 3-5 principles, and that these principles are clearly defined and communicated across the institution.

Cheat Sheet: Sample Prioritization Principles

- Accessibility, Equity, and Inclusivity
- Security and Privacy
- Students First
- Empower Faculty and Staff
- Embrace Mobile First (Ahead of Desktop)
- Scalability
- Future-Proofing
- Integration and Interoperability
- Enable Data-Driven Decision Making
- Communication and Collaboration-Focused Feature Set
- Teaching and Learning Focus
- Optimizing What We Have
- Start With the Basics
- Aim for Innovation
- Cost-Effectiveness
- Clean User Experience Over Advanced Capabilities



Prioritized Features List: **Worksheet**

Prioritization Guide:

- **High:** Foundational requirement for product, must-have in near term, deeply aligned with all prioritization principles
- **Medium:** Important for long-term viability and scale, aligned with most prioritization principles
- **Low:** Nice to have as an upgrade over time

Feature User Story	Priority (High/Medium/Low)
Pull from list of "Buy" stories in Part 4: Identify Gaps and Opportunities in Current System	What is the relative importance and urgency for this feature?