



## EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

Student expectations for college have changed significantly in the last decade. There is now a higher demand than ever not just to get a good education, but to get an education with strong job and career prospects. This shift is leading is forcing campuses to change their early career programming as well as their academic advising to focus on embedded career context.

Pragya Systems conducted a survey of 26 academic advising leaders at 22 different institutions (see Appendix A) at the NACADA conference to throw more light on the trends and priorities in student success initiatives across various campuses.



## Educational Relevance Gap

As college tuition and fees have risen continually over the past decade, there is now a higher demand than ever for college degrees that yield strong career prospects. UCLA's "[The American Freshman](#)" surveyed 165,743 freshman at 4-year colleges on the key drivers for their final college selection. Of 23 reasons ranked by students, that "the college's graduates get good jobs" ranked second highest right after that "the college has a good academic reputation"<sup>1</sup>. In a 2015 survey of 3,257 students, Cengage Learning found that "getting a good job" was a primary driver of the enrollment decision for 73% of students enrollment decision<sup>2</sup>. Finally, a 2018 review of two decades of enrollment data for 1,040 4-year institutions by the Wall Street Journal shows that campuses are separating into "winners and losers" with those campuses demonstrating higher ROI and student engagement experiencing enrollment and retention gains while campuses without a similar perceived return experiencing declines<sup>3</sup>.

Campuses are often not organized to help students align their coursework and academic learning experiences to post-college goals, creating an "educational relevance" gap. Academic advisors at four-year colleges and universities are on average assigned 367 students<sup>4</sup>, which compounds the "educational relevance" gap by making it difficult for students to get personalized attention in linking college learning to post-college goals. The challenges of advising personalization are compounded by rapidly changing employer requirements, choice of interdisciplinary programs and increased priority employers place on co-curricular and experiential experiences.

## Priority on Advising Redesign

Many campuses are now focused on redesigning their advising processes, particularly advising processes for first year students and around the integration of academic and co-curricular learning. Of the institutions we surveyed at the NACADA conference, over 70% considered advising redesign a very high or high priority (See Figure 1).

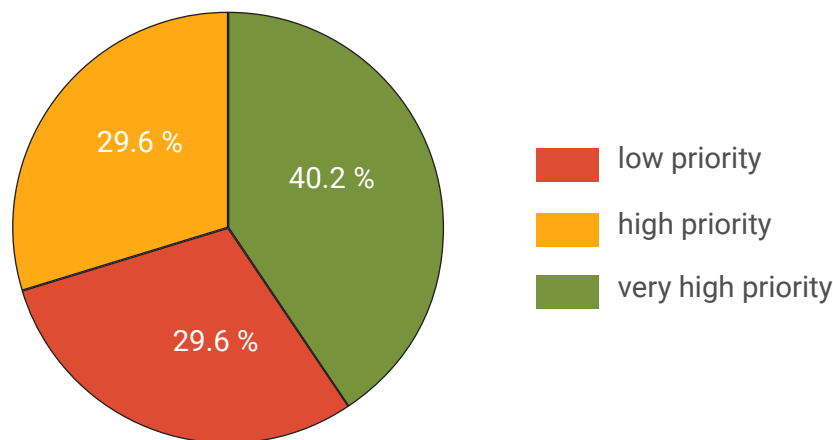


Figure 1 : How high a priority is it to redesign advising in your campus?



The primary goal for this advising redesign is, unsurprisingly, increasing retention<sup>5</sup> (Figure 2). There were 1.5 million fewer college students in 2018 than 2010, a decline of around 9%, which is forcing most campuses to sharpen their strategies to maximize retention of existing students. The other driver, for about one-third of institutions in our NACADA survey, is to increase the efficiency of advising teams (i.e. case load). Budget constraints at many institutions mean they are not in a position to expand their advising and counseling teams, but rather need to maximize the impact of the team's already in place.

The link between advising impact, student retention, and efficiency of staffing budgets has made a strategically important initiative for the majority of campuses in the NACADA survey. Almost 70% of the respondents indicated their President or Provost were key drivers of advising redesign initiatives (Figure 3). The educational relevance gap and the need for advising redesign problem is also felt acutely by leadership in advising and success officers. An equal number of just over 60% of respondents said their Dean/Director of Advising and/or their VP of Student Success were focused on bottom-up efforts to make advising more holistic and increase its impact on the integration of student learning.

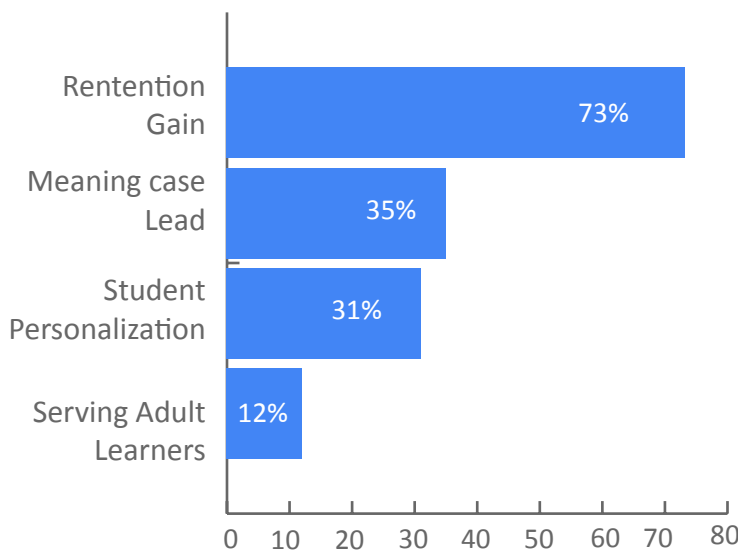


Figure 2: If there is an initiative, what is the primary goal?

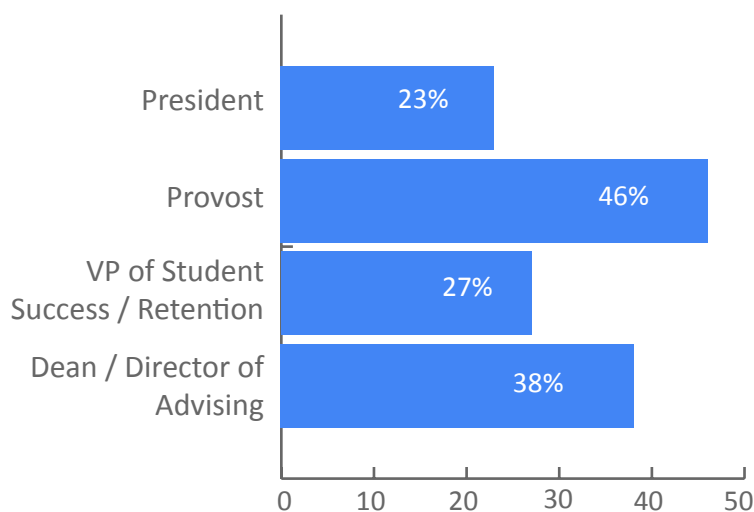


Figure 3: Who drives the initiative?

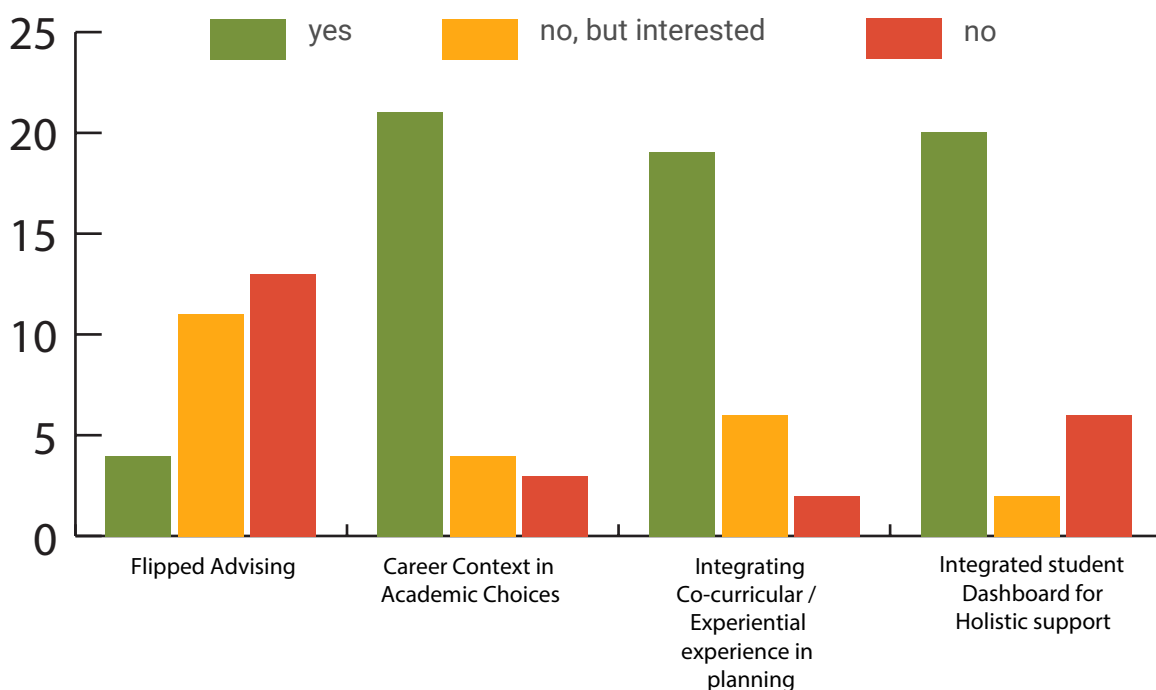


## Goals for Advising Redesign

As we turned to asking NACADA conference participants their top programmatic goals for an advising redesign, there was a clear and consistent focus on integration of holistic advising and the integration of career context, academic, and experiential learning. Strong majorities of respondents agreed that each of the following were priorities for advising redesign

- Building career context into academic choices (74%)
- Integrating academic and co-curricular in student planning (67%)
- Offering a holistic advising dashboard across learning and support services (74%)

Figure 4 : Have you evaluated these initiatives in your campus?



Freeing up an advisor from the burden of gathering information about each student, and more importantly providing a student with the information they need directly at the right time, was less a concern for most campuses, with only 11% indicating this a priority. Flipped Advising (a concept borrowed from blended learning and flipped courses) is still a relatively new idea. However, close to 41% of the respondents were interested in pursuing this idea and we expect the awareness of this to improve rapidly over the next year.



The results of our survey suggest that while retention is an important and in some ways existential problem for institutions, campuses recognize that a key way to support retention gains is making educational relevance actionable. Helping students to stay in school and being on the right track for a promising career all speak to the core issue of educational ROI. To that end, any of the respondents recognize that career context in advising is crucial. It is important to overcome the organizational design of campuses with many unique offices, that from a student perspective, can seem like an “information maze.” It is also important because more than 50% of students don’t engage with career services, and for many that do, it is too late in the college journey.

More than 50% of students who intern at companies are hired permanently when they graduate (NACE). Being ready for employment is more than academic coursework and “soft-skills” are rarely part of the learning objectives of traditional courses. Hence, the value of co-curricular and experiential experiences have risen dramatically over the past few years. Close to 90% of the polled institutions are actively considering a better way to integrate this into the student journey.

Simplifying the interface to the plethora of campus services, many of them mission critical to campuses and students like advising, academic support services and health / wellness, is a big challenge. Large universities often have portals and mobile apps to help bridge this gap, but very few (if any) of these portals provide a single holistic personalized view to the students. This improves engagement of students, maximizes the efficacy of campus support and can provide the necessary data for campuses to help students in a more streamlined way. More than 80% of the Universities recognize this.

## Next Wave of Holistic Advising Solutions

Ten years ago, institutions had very little insight into student data. In order to address the growing problem of retention, institutions started implementing Early Alert systems that analyze data across multiple dimensions to flag at-risk students. Predictive Analytics was the next step forward in terms of sophistication of these data analytics systems. The implementations of Predictive Analytics aren’t yet as widespread as Early Alert software as shown by the charts above, but are in place at more than half the campuses surveyed with most of the other half considering this direction for the future (Figure 5).

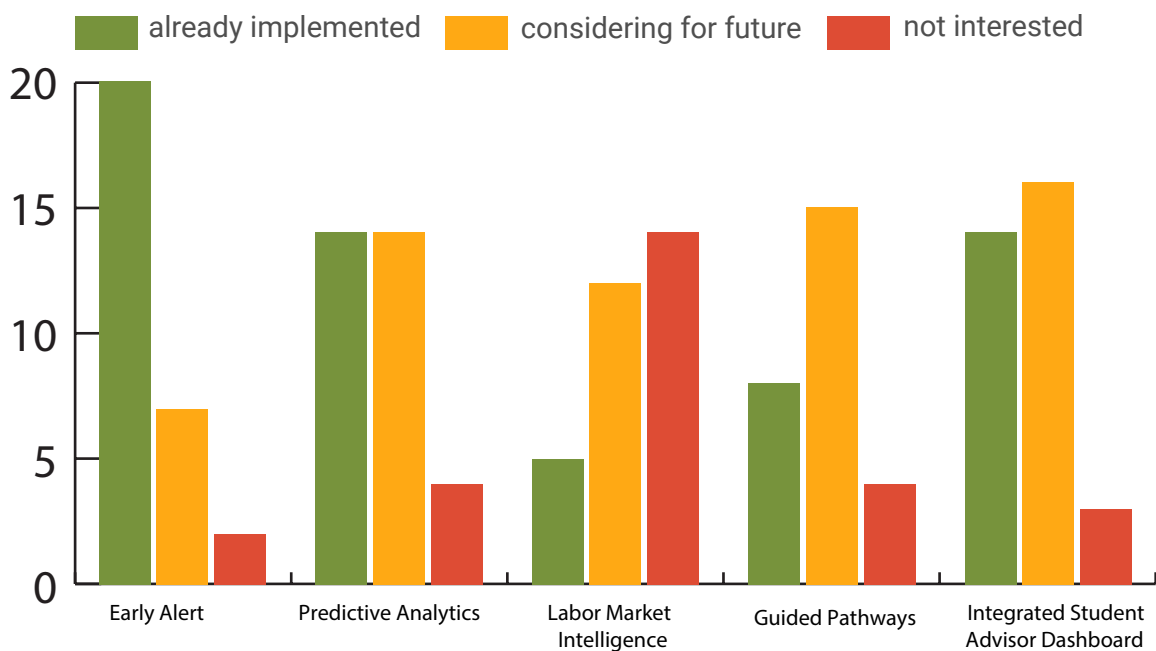
Our survey results suggest that the participating campuses are well aligned to developing a new set of capabilities for the next wave of holistic advising, including:

- **New information streams:** An advising model that links career context to academic courses requires new kinds of information. Labor Market Intelligence sheds light on job outlook for different career and academic paths. Until recently, this has primarily been used by academic leaders to analyze effectiveness and relevance of their curriculum. The awareness of the value of LMI in advising is still in its nascent stages, but almost 50% of survey participants were exploring this direction. Some institutions are looking at leveraging alumni pathways to augment the aggregate labor market outlook.



- **Integrated student experience:** About half of the campuses have implemented an integrated student dashboard. The other half are considering this direction in the future. The sophistication of these dashboards differ greatly across different institutions and products. However, the notion that students and advisors in the same view should be able to see and interact with academic, co-curricular and career programming is quickly becoming an accepted part of high impact advising.
- **Career-embedded Pathways:** Many of the institutions are also pursuing Guided Pathways. About one-third of our respondents indicated that they had implemented Guided Pathways with another 50% exploring for the future. Guided Pathways are well defined for community colleges, but the implementation even in that market is sporadic. However, the basic notion of student pathways and their value is recognized by institutions of all types.

Figure 5 : What is the status of the following solutions at your institution?





## About Us

Pragya Systems was founded with a vision of significantly improving the quality and relevance of higher education while reducing its cost. Pragya has launched a new class of higher education technology focused on dramatically simplifying the flow of information on and off campuses for students, faculty, administrators, alumni and employers.

Pragya's team is a unique blend of EdTech talent and content/enterprise/mobile expertise. Our core team has led the development of many of the EdTech platforms deployed on campuses today. Pragya is collaborating with some of the top higher education institutions in the world and is backed by some of the best known investors and advisors in EdTech. Pragya was an early partner of IBM Watson for education and is a winner of the prestigious NSF SBIR grant.



## Endnotes

- 1 <https://blog.cengage.com/students-goals-after-college-graduation/>
- 2 <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/college-rankings-blog/2014/03/13/freshmen-cite-reputation-cost-factors-in-college-choice-survey>
- 3 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-decades-of-growth-colleges-find-its-survival-of-the-fit-test-1519209001>
- 4 <https://hechingerreport.org/student-advising-plays-key-role-in-college-success-just-as-its-being-cut/>
- 5 <https://studentclearinghouse.org/nscblog/why-are-colleges-seeing-a-decline-in-undergraduate-enrollments/>

## Appendix A - Participating Institutions

1. Babson College
2. Concordia University
3. FIT
4. Fitchburg State University
5. Lesley University
6. Manhattanville College
7. McGill University
8. Northeastern University
9. Regis College
10. SUNY New Palz
11. UMass Amherst
12. UMass Lowell
13. UMass Boston
14. University of Vermont
15. UVM
16. University of Connecticut
17. Wentworth Institute of Technology
18. Western Connecticut State University
19. Wheaton College
20. MIT
21. National University
22. RIT