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STUDENT SUCCESS
MISSION
CRITICAL

EDUCAUSE serves a tremendously wide range of colleges and universities, nearly 2,000 from 45 countries. Many sustain crucial and substantial research efforts, and some have created unique programs that are focused on the external communities they serve. Some are open-access institutions, and others are highly selective. Regardless of the mix, the teaching and learning enterprise is a basic element of their mission, and in turn, the success of our students is undeniably at the heart of the work of higher education. And even (or especially) when we are most preoccupied with our day-to-day activities, we can benefit from concentrating on *why* we are doing all this hard work. The reason, of course, is to help students define and meet their educational goals. As we strive to tackle the challenges of our daily work, we must also make sure this work advances the societal mission of all our institutions: educating students, a mission more critical than ever before—and more scrutinized by others.

To kick off our discussion of student success, we invited perspectives from colleagues at associations that represent leaders in various areas of higher education. We wanted to hear how *their* constituencies approach this core institutional issue. What does student success mean for their members? What major facets of student success are they trying to identify? What strategies are they prioritizing to address student success? From the perspective of their members, what role should technology play in the future of student success? If they could change one thing in the landscape for student success nationally, what might that be?

Below are three essays about student success from Kevin Kruger of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), Rebecca Martin of the National Association of System Heads (NASH), and George L. Mehaffy of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)—followed by thoughts from EDUCAUSE President and CEO John O'Brien.

The **STUDENT SUCCESS** Imperative

Kevin Kruger
President,
Student Affairs
Administrators in
**Higher Education**
(NASPA)

For students, success is about persisting toward a degree and, ultimately, graduation. Unfortunately, too many students who are enrolling in higher education institutions do not get to the finish line. Specifically, low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color complete college at significantly lower rates than their peers. This is a crushing blow to these students and their families, who often have accumulated debt through this process. And in an economy where by 2020, 65 percent of new jobs created will require a college education, these young people will find themselves outside the strongest opportunities for economic success.

Increasing persistence and completion for these students has thus become a primary focus of student affairs programs and services. We know that mentoring and coaching are important tools for improving degree progress for these students. We know that creating opportunities for involvement and engagement

Title IX violations and sexual harassment on campus. Alcohol and substance abuse. Mental health issues and suicide. Student protests and controversial speakers. Threats to campus safety. Hazing and other acts of violence. These "headline news" items are the issues that too often define the work of student affairs professionals in higher education today. Most senior student affairs leaders would also say that the staff time and resources needed to address these issues have increased significantly over the last ten years.

The health, safety, and well-being of students have always been a primary focus of student affairs professionals. But with the rise in serious psychological issues among traditional-age college students, the increase in student activism by this current generation of students, and the growth in the enormous challenge of managing sexual assaults, the importance of this aspect of student affairs work has never been greater.

However, it is critical for us to understand that the role of the student affairs professional goes well beyond crisis and risk management. Central to our core mission is a focus on student success. What does student success mean for student affairs leaders? It means supporting the academic achievement and personal growth of every student. It means creating a campus ecosystem that recognizes that learning takes place not only through an engaging curriculum but also beyond the classroom, where students engage with each other and begin to develop the key competencies necessary to be successful in their chosen careers.
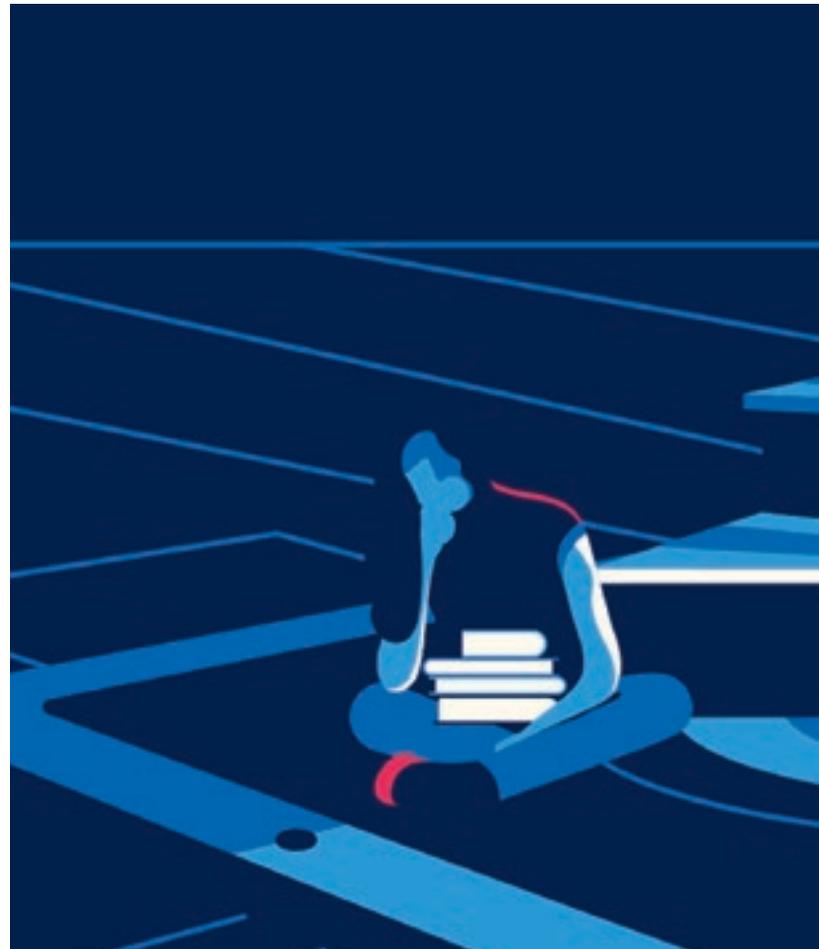
in campus-based experiences pays great dividends for student success. And we know that outside of basic financial aid, small amounts of financial assistance can play a huge role in student success. Emergency aid programs, food pantries, completion grants, and other forms of assistance have been shown to increase degree persistence for students. In some ways, the modern student affairs professional must assume the role of social worker as the challenges facing low-income and first-generation students require much more individual support and coordination of services in order to guide them through degree completion.

However, given the constrained fiscal environment of most colleges and universities, where will we find the resources to

We know that creating opportunities for involvement and engagement in campus-based experiences pays great dividends for student success.

support these newer student success strategies? This is where a strong partnership between student affairs leaders and campus chief information and technology officers is critical. As predictive analytics becomes more sophisticated, there is a tremendous opportunity to capture behavioral and engagement data in the campus data warehouse and to use that data both to identify students who may need greater support and to understand which experiences contribute to student success. For example, campus-card data can tell a complex story of how students use their time, where they go, and how they are engaged with the campus. New mobile-based applications can also identify where students are engaged and, based on this behavioral data, can nudge them toward academic support resources, new involvement opportunities, or career-related programs. All of this will require sophisticated data analysis and, more important, seamless connections to the campus student information system. Finally, with little resources for new staff to meet the increased demand for services, cloud-based and mobile applications and virtual self-serve technologies will become increasingly important in the student affairs world. Collaboration between student affairs and IT professionals around sourcing and selecting the most effective and integrated technology solutions will be critical.

The complexity of the challenges facing our campuses is very likely going to increase. The most recent election in the United States has heightened campus tensions around free speech, equity and diversity, immigration, and a whole host of other social justice issues. These will be key issues for student affairs professionals to manage. But in the midst of this, it will be equally important for us to sharpen our focus on student success and on degree completion for all students. Strong collaboration between student affairs, academic affairs, and IT leaders will be critical to the success of our students and also our institutions.

Collective Impact for STUDENT SUCCESS:
Leveraging the Power of Systems

Rebecca Martin

Executive Director, National Association of System Heads (NASH)

Increasing college attainment and closing equity gaps are priorities across the United States, with widely recognized benefits for individuals, the economy, and civil society. Exemplars of student success have emerged across higher education institutions, systems, and states, but national completion rates continue to rise only slightly, and equity gaps continue to widen. Lessons and best practices developed in one institution are not being scaled across campuses and systems.

To address this need, in 2014 NASH launched the landmark initiative NASH TS³ (Taking Student Success to Scale, http://ts3.nashonline.org/). Collectively, TS³ is made up of 24 systems and over 300 institutions that span 18 states. These systems have a combined undergraduate enrollment of 2.9 million students, representing approximately 20 percent of all public undergraduate enrollments in the United States. In 2014–15, they awarded 578,000 undergraduate degrees and certificates. These systems also serve some of those students who are most in need. Among the 2.9 million undergraduate students, more than 1 million (35%) received Pell Grants. Additionally, nearly 800,000 (27%) undergraduate students identify as an underrepresented minority.

There are compelling examples of evidence-based student success interventions being taken to scale in NASH systems. It is time to move these pockets of success to the next level, accelerating and amplifying the interventions that work by leveraging the power of systems to support a sustained, large-scale effort. Utilizing a collective-impact approach, TS³ focuses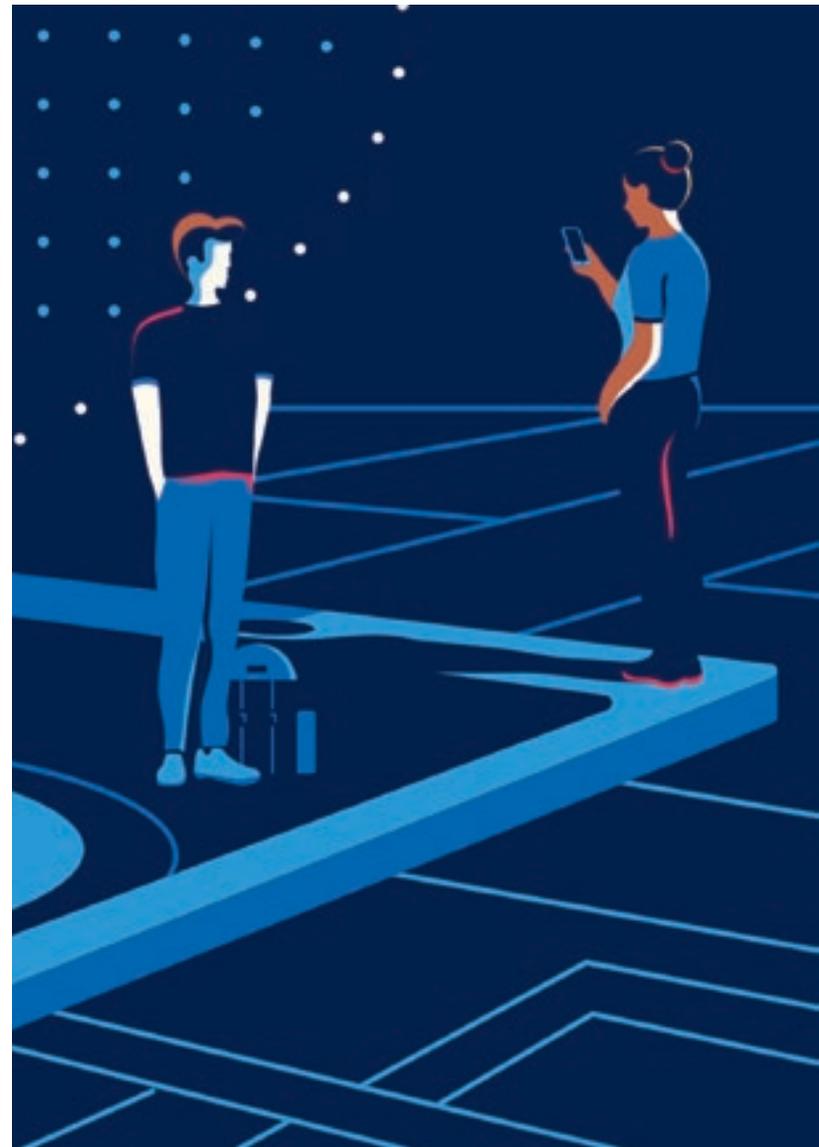 on three interventions, selected for their potential to make a significant change. Based on evidence of impact on persistence and completion for targeted student populations, these three interventions were identified as a starting point for a holistic and collective approach to redesigning our systems to support today's students. They were specifically chosen because of their demonstrated impact on underrepresented minority and low-income students:

- Redesigning the Math Pathway
- Guided Pathways Using Predictive Analytics
- High-Impact Practices for All Students

NASH members use the TS³ Network to support their work in any or all of these three interventions, which the TS³ leadership view as tightly related. Each of these interventions is being scaled up in at least one NASH system—with demonstrated improvement for all students, as well as impact on closing equity gaps for underrepresented minority and low-income students. Leaders from systems on the cutting edge of these interventions are guiding the work. Scaled across the 24 TS³ systems, these interventions will generate an impact greater than the sum of their parts. Ultimately, the goal will be to implement all interventions across all campuses in each of the participating systems, with long-term sustainability at the core.

Technology plays a key role in all of this work. Offering advanced advising services and tracking the progress of individual students require sophisticated systems that make data available to end users in secure yet easily accessible ways. Building high-impact practices into degree requirements necessitates new approaches to transcripts and student record systems. Monitoring progress on multiple dimensions of student success relies on well-developed data management systems that provide the right data to the right people at the right time. Technology leaders often hold the keys to these solutions and to others that promote student success.

NASH is working to bring about a key change in the higher education landscape: taking what we know works and getting it to all of our students. The evidence shows that these interventions can make a difference in student retention and completion. Our challenge now is to scale these best practices to reach every student in our public institutions.

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It is time to move these pockets of success to the next level, accelerating and amplifying the interventions that work by leveraging the power of systems to support a sustained, large-scale effort.

STUDENT SUCCESS: Seven Things Not to Do

George L. Mehaffy
Vice-President for Academic Leadership and Change, American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)

The current focus on student success represents a major shift from an earlier focus on access. We now realize that it is not enough to get students into college; we also need to graduate them. So today, higher education institutions, states, the federal government, and foundations are all much more focused on completion and student success than they are on access. It's not hard to figure out why the shift has occurred. Students and their families are taking on increasing amounts of debt, states and the federal government are concerned about their investment in loans and grants, and institutions are concerned both about the success of their students and, increasingly, about their own financial viability, which is inevitably linked to retention and graduation.

Not surprisingly, a great deal of effort and enormous resources are being devoted to figuring out the appropriate strategies, policies, and practices that can make a difference in increasing student success. Everyone is looking for the secret sauce. The exciting part about this work is that there is cause for substantial optimism about increasing student success, particularly for low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color. We have seen, in some settings, specific strategies that make a significant difference.

At the same time, I watch with some concern as campuses search for solutions. The transfer of a practice that is successful in one environment into a new environment does not always turn out well. Some kinds of reform efforts, though
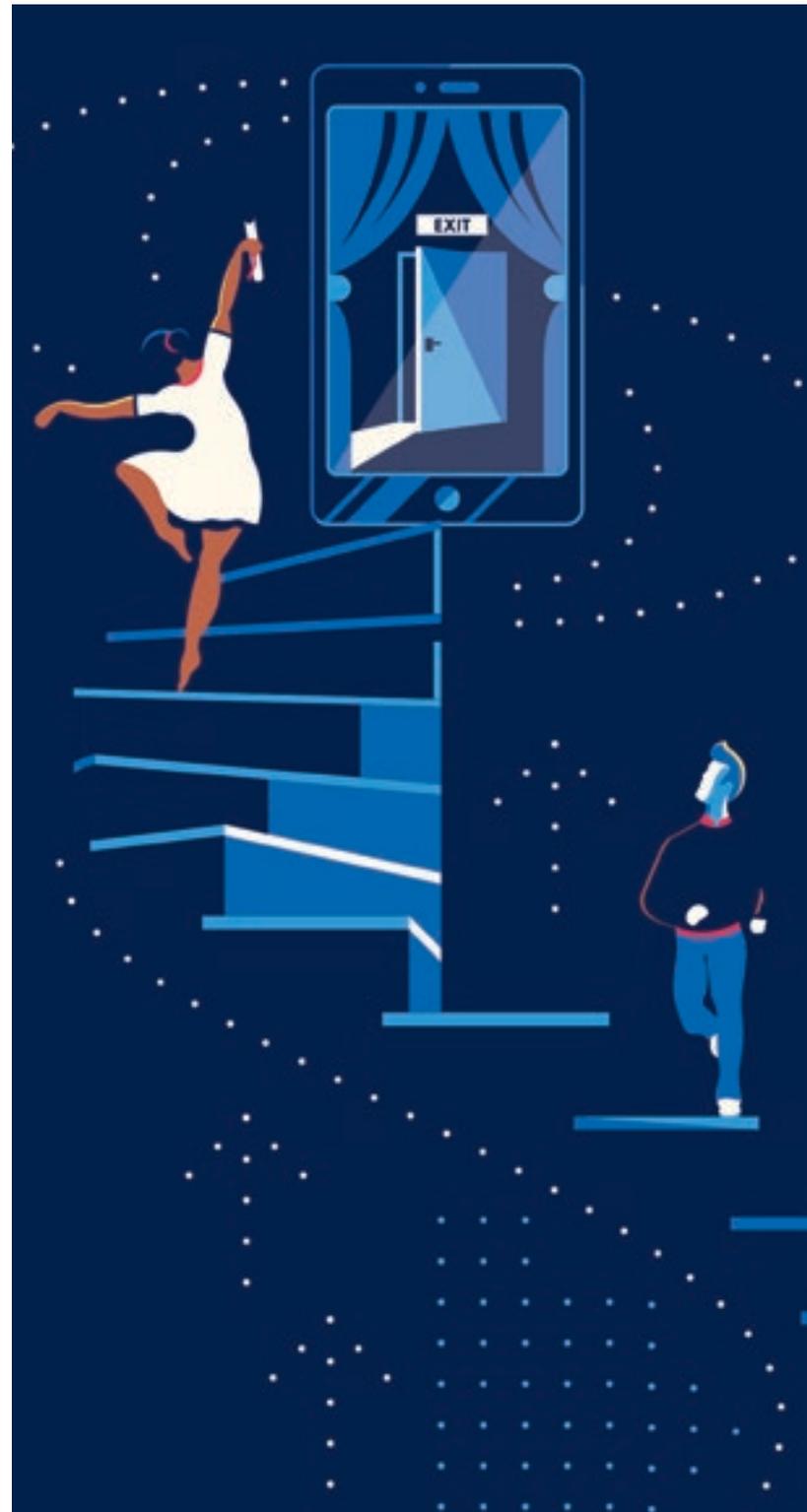
well-meaning, are doomed to failure from the outset. In fact, the landscape of innovation in higher education is littered with examples of good intentions gone awry, promising practices somehow subverted. One way to think about an agenda of transformation might be to begin first with what to avoid. From our work on several projects involving student success, I've built a list of seven things one should *not* do.

1. *Fix only one thing.* Everybody is searching for the magic bullet, and sometimes there is a tendency to think that one strategy is the solution. My sense is that the campus is an ecosystem, and changing one part requires changing other parts too.
2. *Assume one-size-fits-all.* When we see a successful strategy used somewhere else, we immediately think that if we did the same, we might get the same results. But even institutions that appear to be quite similar can in fact be very dissimilar, in terms of history and circumstance.
3. *Ignore culture.* Peter Drucker's famous saying is as true in higher education as it is in business: "culture eats strategy for breakfast." The culture of the campus—particularly whether faculty and staff believe that they are partly responsible for student success—shapes outcomes in dramatic ways.
4. *Avoid the academic heart of the enterprise.* Many of the transformation efforts that I see focus on things at the margins rather than at the center. I see changes in institutional strategies and changes in student support areas. But the core of the enterprise is the curriculum and particularly the classroom. Some people avoid tackling that area because it is likely the most difficult. However, substantive change in student success outcomes must include attention to what happens to students in classrooms and in their academic journeys.
5. *Overlook implementation issues.* Innovation requires careful consideration of who is affected—that is, whose ox is gored—by the implementation of a new program or strategy. Unless there is careful attention to implementation issues, an innovative strategy is likely to be stillborn.
6. *Downplay the experience of students.* Far too often, we have seen the development of great programs that seem to be ideal. Yet the programs fail because they don't understand the student experience.
7. *Insist on a top-down initiative.* Most successful initiatives on campuses require, in my experience, strong support by both faculty/staff and senior administrators.

So what would I do to increase student success? The core concept in the AASCU project Re-Imagining the First Year of College assumes that real transformation requires multiple, scaled innovations. Several innovations are very promising. First, student belonging and growth mindset issues must be considered when thinking about success for low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color. Predictive analytics, connected to an intrusive advising system, has shown substantial promise, particularly for earlier intervention. Summer bridge programs are an effective way to matriculate underprepared students. Academic co-requisite courses paired with developmental education courses have shown enormous success, particularly in the Tennessee Board of Regents work. The work around pathways, with clear degree maps and with reduced choice, helps students navigate in a complex environment. Moving from accepting only one course (e.g., college algebra) for a mathematics requirement to allowing three alternatives would significantly increase student pass rates. Course redesign—including careful review of gateway courses, the addition of high-impact practices, and the creation of interdisciplinary courses of high interest—would engage students more in their academic work. An early career focus and the use of meta-majors help students who are trying to decide their future. Financial counseling, financial literacy, and emergency grants and loans for juniors and seniors in good standing are all financial strategies that contribute to student success.

But for a comprehensive approach to student success, the heart of the matter is what happens in classrooms. We need new and better ways to engage faculty in thinking about student success. We need new professional development strategies that are faculty led and that build communities of practice around successful pedagogy. We need new incentives to reward faculty who work to help all students succeed. For student success to be successful, we must spend a substantial amount of time paying attention to the area that is least attended to in our current student success work: what happens in classrooms.

Finally, in all of our work toward student success, we must not forget the power of culture. The best programs, ideas, and strategies will die if placed in the hostile environment of an unsupportive culture, much like throwing seeds onto a piece of granite and expecting them to sprout. Talking about student success, celebrating effective practices, challenging sometimes unstated beliefs, and recognizing individuals who are contributors to student success are all ways that an institution can build a culture that encourages and promotes student success.

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STUDENT SUCCESS

A Vital LINCHPIN

John O'Brien

O ne of the most important evolutionary changes in higher education recently has been the broad recognition that access is not enough. Most educators today understand that the goal line has moved from helping students gain entry to college to helping them succeed once they have enrolled. That fundamental reorientation in focus is profound. It means that our hardest work needs to involve finding the strategies and tactics that will best enable students to meet their educational goals, whether they are pursuing a degree or striving toward some other educational objective.

Within that context, it has been gratifying to watch the topic of student success ascend as a key issue on the EDUCAUSE annual list of top 10 IT issues. Although this issue did not even appear on the list until 2013, it ranked in the top 4 through 2017.[1] Analyzing the top issues that emerged as members' priorities for 2017, EDUCAUSE Vice President Susan Grajek

and the 2016–2017 EDUCAUSE IT Issues Panel came to a compelling and insightful conclusion. Even though the theme of student success was not the #1 issue, a critical mass of the top 10 issues themselves are, in fact, "all about student success." The authors concluded that the 2017 top 10 IT issues list supports higher education's focus on student success through four key themes: IT foundations, data foundations, effective leadership, and successful students. Further, interviews with panel members about the annual top 10 list corroborated that "the summative motivation for addressing today's digital challenges is student success and, accordingly, institutional success." The authors wrote: "IT leaders realize that the success and potentially the future of their institutions rest on the success of their students and that digital technology is an essential foundation for both institutional and student success."[2]

Without a doubt, we have been building toward the convergence of student success and information technology for several years. But I think the student success focus of the 2017 top 10 IT issues list has two additional, even deeper implications. First, it reflects a critical pivot in our orientation—from think-

ing narrowly about the IT ramifications of student success (e.g., "What emerging, captivating technology might help students succeed?") to conducting a much broader exploration (e.g., "What role can and should information technology play in helping the institution advance its student success mission, and how can the IT organization contribute strategically to help accomplish that goal?"). Looking at this challenge through that larger lens suggests that our thinking about the nexus between information technology and student success has matured and deepened. Second, the student success focus embodies a new level of interest—and perhaps even a new degree of urgency—around the need for institutional leadership to call for all stakeholders, from disparate areas and roles (including students and faculty), to transcend silos and collaborate to achieve this goal.

The Promise of Technology-Enabled Advising

Meeting the challenges of this difficult work will require both nuanced and transformational change at higher education institutions, which in turn will require transformational strategies and tools. To that end, EDUCAUSE is deeply committed to the potential of technology-enabled advising[3] as a framework for a campus-wide commitment to student success. With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, EDUCAUSE is leading efforts to explore the promise of integrated planning and advising systems to move the difficult-to-move needle of student success. With a major grant challenge, we are providing three years (through 2018) of financial and technical support to twenty-six institutions that have been selected to design and implement projects that use predictive analytics to improve degree planning, student advising and counseling, and the targeting of and intervening with students at risk, honing institutional support and services to improve student success. In addition, ten "community member" institutions are collaborating with the grantees. Together, the thirty-six colleges and universities constitute a network of student success leaders who are sharing practices, learning new approaches, and enhancing their student services.

One overarching theme in the grantees' work is that they are essentially applying design thinking to the development of systems that can best serve students—thinking that is intentionally informed by the perspective of the students themselves. Another impressive dimension is a focus on sustainability through understanding the return on investment of the advising redesign projects. Initial results indicate that institutions are making investments in ongoing resources that will ensure they have the ability to support the initiatives beyond the term of the grant.[4]

More broadly, the grantees are nurturing change leadership and helping their institutions develop a capacity for cross-campus transformation focused on student success. In other words, the grantees are investing in holistic, institution-wide change, not merely incremental improvements.[5] Now halfway through their projects, the grantees are working to inculcate across campus the sense that student success is everyone's responsibility. Finding and developing productive strategies and practices for working across functional silos and engaging disparate campus offices and stakeholders in pursuit of the same goals can be challenging indeed. Ana Borray, director of iPASS implementation services at EDUCAUSE, characterizes the work at this stage by noting that virtually all the grantees are "in a learning phase to determine how best to bring this all together."

We applaud the grantees' hard work. Effecting this kind of transformational change is essential if we expect to improve student success more than just incrementally.

Alignment across the Campus

The contributions above from our colleagues at NASPA, NASH, and AASCU underscore the significance of engaging campus leaders in an institution's student success efforts. We'll never get the traction we need unless leaders across an institution create common goals and are committed to working together to meet those goals. One positive step in this direction is the growing number of new cabinet-level positions whose core focus is student success. With titles such as vice president for student success or vice president for degree completion, these leaders emphasize the importance of student

success as a strategic focus for their institutions.

Of course, CIOs also need to engage and collaborate actively in institutional efforts to improve student success. The most effective CIOs understand how their work contributes to institutional goals and must deliver on those responsibilities accordingly. In that sense, campus initiatives around student success create unique opportunities for CIOs and their staff to be part of institutional change leadership. Because technology is such an integral part of student success strategies, for example, this work allows IT experts to help break down campus silos and create new methods for true cross-campus collaboration. In the age of "BYO" everything, even for critical IT systems, this work is an opportunity to elevate the IT organization's core capabilities in procurement, contracting, and negotiation and in the successful definition and management of high-stakes projects.

Finally, we also must do more to engage faculty in our student success goals. Some of what we've learned about technology-enabled advising implementation suggests that faculty are among the least-involved stakeholders, along with students. This is particularly ironic because these systems are designed to support students, and research shows that faculty buy-in is critical.[6] If systems for student success are going to succeed, and if we expect faculty to use these systems, we need to include faculty in their planning and deployment. Similarly, we need to make sure that these efforts reflect the perspectives of their ultimate beneficiary, the student.

Promising Evidence of Change
We are seeing promising evidence that substantive change may be taking hold. The EDUCAUSE technology-enabled advising work, for example, shows that campus leaders are looking for ways to work together productively to advance their institutional goals for student success. From the president on down, they are deeply focused in their commitment to student success. Institutions are addressing the complexities of integrating different technological solutions. They are innovating to better meet students' needs, for example through stackable credentials and pathway models—approaches that can occur only through the collaboration of multiple campus stakeholders. Similarly, institutions are discerning how best to apply technology to pedagogy in the support of student success. Finally, individual institutions are documenting improved student success as a result of change strategies.[7]

Of course, we are not yet where we need to be. Student com-

> **Campus initiatives around student success create unique opportunities for CIOs and their staff to be part of institutional change leadership.**

pletion rates are still too low. Campus systems and processes are still not adequately aligned in support of student success. Although technology solutions and analytics in support of student success are evolving rapidly, efforts are often still too fragmented, presenting significant integration challenges at the back end and preventing a unified student experience. The organizational barriers inherent in our siloed campuses still impede progress. However, if colleges and universities increasingly take a strategic view of student success, and if their leaders deliberately work to engage collaboratively in establishing a shared vision and goals for student success, those fundamental requisites for progress will bear fruit.

Without a doubt, improving student success is extraordinarily hard work. I strongly believe that solutions such as those embodied in the technology-enabled advising work supported by EDUCAUSE represent some of the most promising tools for finding traction when it comes to this most intractable challenge. Student success is a vital linchpin: if students don't succeed, colleges and universities don't succeed. Our full attention must be concentrated on the mission-critical goal of helping students define—and meet—their educational goals. ∎

Notes
1. See "Top 10 IT Issues: 2000–2017," an interactive graphic that tracks the rankings of the top 10 IT issues over the years: http://library.educause.edu/~/media/interactive-content/2017-it-issues-trends/index.html.
2. Susan Grajek and the 2016–2017 EDUCAUSE IT Issues Panel, "Top 10 IT Issues, 2017: Foundations for Student Success," *EDUCAUSE Review* 52, no. 1 (January/February 2017).
3. See "Technology-Enabled Advising," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Postsecondary Success (website), accessed March 22, 2017.
4. Donna Desrochers and Rick Staisloff, "Creating Sustainable Innovation with iPASS," *EDUCAUSE Review,* March 8, 2017.
5. See EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, "7 Things You Should Know About Change Management," October 12, 2016.
6. D. Christopher Brooks, *IPAS Implementation Handbook,* research report (Louisville, CO: EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research, October 2014); Ronald Yanosky, *Integrated Planning and Advising Services: A Benchmarking Study,* research report (Louisville, CO: EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research, March 2014); Hoori S. Kalamkarian and Melinda Mechur Karp, "Student Attitudes toward Technology-Mediated Advising Systems," CCRC Working Paper No. 82, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, August 2015.
7. See Ana Borray and Nancy Millichap, "Can Making College Completion Paths More Personalized Increase Student Success?," *EDUCAUSE Review,* March 3, 3017.

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