



# 2025 Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion

For four-year and two-year institutions



# Introduction

Every year, thousands and thousands of students enter college with dreams of transformation and achievement. Yet the path to graduation remains surprisingly complex. What truly works in helping students succeed?

This report cuts through the noise to reveal the most effective strategies used across higher education. Drawing from extensive data across private four-year, public four-year, and two-year institutions, we have identified the precise tactics that are moving the needle on student success.

You'll discover why some institutions consistently outperform their peers in retention and completion. More importantly, you'll learn exactly how they do it—from academic support systems that work to management practices that drive real results.

This is a practical playbook for education leaders who want to make data-driven decisions about where to focus their limited resources. Whether you're looking to improve first-year retention, boost graduation rates, or better serve specific student populations, you will find actionable insights backed by hard evidence.

The landscape of higher education keeps shifting. Student needs are evolving. But the core mission remains: helping students reach their full potential. This report shows how today's most successful institutions are making that happen.

Perhaps most critically, this research arrives at a pivotal moment when the very definition of student success is being reimagined. Today's students bring unprecedented diversity in their backgrounds, goals, and learning preferences. They're digital natives who expect personalized experiences and immediate feedback. As you'll see in the following pages, leading institutions are responding by building more sophisticated, flexible frameworks that embrace this complexity—while still delivering measurable results. Their experiences offer a roadmap for balancing individualized support with institutional accountability in an increasingly dynamic educational landscape.

## About This Study

### Source of data and methodology

Data in this report reflect responses from 144 institutions (63 four-year privates, 43 four-year publics, and 38 two-year colleges) that collectively enroll approximately 851,298 undergraduate students (according to data reported to IPEDS). Respondents participated in the RNL national electronic poll of “Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion” between October 25 and December 1, 2024. The poll was emailed to student affairs, academic affairs, and retention officers at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness options that were given to respondents: “very effective,” “somewhat effective,” and “minimally effective,” rather than including the fourth response, “practice not used.”



# Key Findings



## Most widely used strategies and tactics for student success, retention, and completion

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

- Academic support
- Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major
- Student success coaching (internal)
- Faculty advising, one-on-one
- Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

- Academic support
- Advising by professional staff, one-on-one
- Student success coaching (internal)
- Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health
- Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major

### TWO-YEAR

- Academic support
- Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses
- Advising by professional staff, one-on-one
- Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health
- Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)



## Most widely used programs and strategies targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

- Programs designed specifically for first-year students
- Programs designed specifically for online students
- Honors programs for academically advanced students
- Programs designed specifically for international students
- Programs for student-athletes

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

- Programs designed specifically for first-year students
- Honors programs for academically advanced students
- Programs for student-athletes
- Programs for students with disabilities
- Programs designed specifically for veterans

### TWO-YEAR

- Programs designed specifically for first-year students
- Programs designed specifically for veterans
- Programs for students with disabilities
- Honors programs for academically advanced students
- Programs for student-athletes



## Management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

- Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success
- Development of faculty skills in instruction
- Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition
- Setting measurable goals for college completion rates
- Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

- Monitoring student usage of academic support services
- Development of faculty skills in instruction
- Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning
- Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate
- Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete

### TWO-YEAR

- Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates
- Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year
- Setting measurable goals for college completion rates
- Title III or Title V funding
- Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs



# Key Themes In Success Definitions

<b>1</b>	<b>Degree Completion &amp; Retention</b>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on graduation within 150% of the expected time</li></ul>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emphasize timely progression through degree programs</li></ul>	<b>TWO-YEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider multiple completion pathways, including transfer rates</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Support Systems</b>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Favor personalized mentoring</li></ul>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on scalable support structures</li></ul>	<b>TWO-YEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize flexible, accessible resources</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Holistic Development</b>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stress spiritual and emotional growth alongside academics</li></ul>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Target overall student well-being</li></ul>	<b>TWO-YEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emphasize personal and professional development</li></ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Career Outcomes</b>	<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE &amp; FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize post-graduation employment</li></ul>		<b>TWO-YEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emphasize workforce readiness</li></ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>Student-Defined Goals</b>	<b>ALL INSTITUTIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growing recognition that success varies by individual</li><li>• Emphasis on personal goal achievement</li><li>• Flexible definitions accommodating diverse student objectives</li></ul>		

## Key findings

Colleges and universities define success in ways that reflect their core mission and values, but degree completion remains a fundamental measure of student success across all institutional types. In addition to traditional metrics, respondents define success with broader and more individualized indicators and recognize the need to adapt support systems to fit their unique student populations.

- **Mission alignment:** Each institution type defines success in ways that reflect its core mission and values.
- **Universal completion focus:** While timeframes vary, degree completion remains a fundamental metric.
- **Evolving metrics:** Traditional measures are being supplemented with broader success indicators.
- **Student-centered approach:** A growing shift toward individualized definitions of achievement.
- **Resource optimization:** Varied approaches to support systems based on institutional context.

## Implications of success definitions in higher education

The diversity of approaches to defining student success across institutional types reflects the complexity of modern higher education and the evolving needs of today's students. While each institution type emphasizes different aspects of success—from the holistic development focus of private institutions to the career-ready emphasis of two-year colleges—several important implications emerge from this analysis:



### Measurement complexity

As definitions of success become more nuanced and multifaceted, institutions face growing challenges in measuring and documenting outcomes. Traditional metrics no longer suffice; new assessment approaches are needed to capture the full spectrum of student achievement.



### Resource alignment

Institutions must ensure that their support systems and resources align with their stated definitions of success. This may require rethinking traditional service models and developing more integrated, flexible support structures.



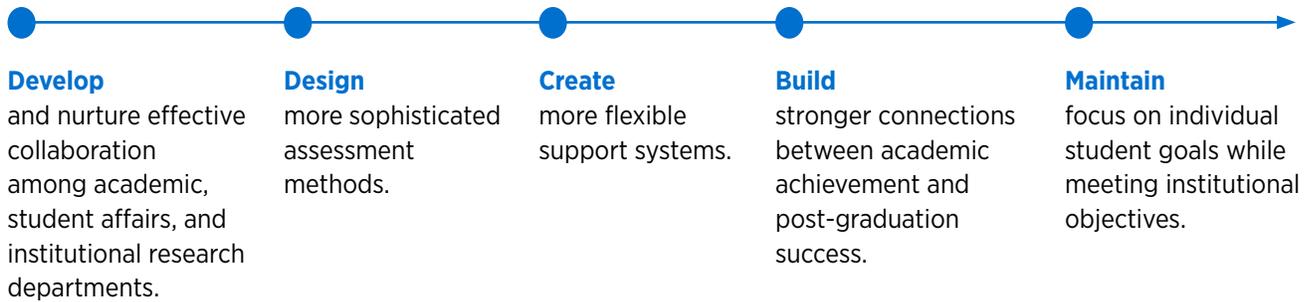
### Stakeholder communication

Clear communication about how success is defined becomes increasingly important as definitions expand beyond traditional metrics. Institutions must develop robust and consistent internal communications focused on success and effectively convey their frameworks to students, families, employers, and policymakers.

## Looking ahead

As higher education continues to evolve, definitions of student success will likely become even more sophisticated and individualized. Institutions that can effectively articulate, measure, and support their vision of student success while remaining responsive to changing student needs will be best positioned to thrive.

The challenge moving forward will be maintaining this broader, more nuanced understanding of success while meeting increasing demands for accountability and measurable outcomes. Successful institutions will need to:



Today's students represent unprecedented diversity in age, background, preparation, and expectations. They engage with technology and information differently than previous generations, often preferring hybrid or fully online learning experiences, expecting immediate feedback, and seeking flexible pathways to their goals. To ensure student success, institutions must develop and embrace adaptive, technology-enhanced learning environments that respond to diverse learning styles and life circumstances.

## What Guides Retention Planning Efforts?

There are notable variations in how different institutions guide retention planning efforts. Two-year institutions show the strongest integrated approach, with 74% utilizing both institutional strategic plans and strategic enrollment plans. In contrast, four-year public institutions demonstrate a more divided approach, with 47% using both plans, while 33% rely solely on institutional strategic plans. Private four-year institutions fall somewhere in the middle, with 57% employing both planning methods.

TYPE OF PLAN INSTITUTION HAS	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Institutional strategic plan	21%	33%	21%
Strategic enrollment plan	5%	9%	3%
Both of the above	57%	47%	74%
Neither	17%	12%	3%

## A written plan guides the institution’s efforts aimed at student success, retention, and completion

Despite using institutional plans to guide retention and success efforts, less than half of four-year privates and slightly more than half of four-year public and two-year institutions develop a written plan to document the specific context, strategies, and action steps to meet stated goals.



## Frequency of updating plan

Private four-year institutions lead in annual updates at 83%, notably higher than both public four-year (63%) and two-year institutions (62%). The data reveal some concerning trends for institutions that don’t update annually, particularly among private institutions, where 60% of non-annual updaters last revised their plans between three and five years ago.



## When was the plan last updated for those who don’t update it annually?

TIME FRAME	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Within the last year	0%	22%	25%
1-2 years ago	20%	56%	50%
3-5 years ago	60%	22%	25%
6+ years ago	20%	0%	0%



## Institutional approaches to student success planning

PLAN CHARACTERISTICS	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Our plan includes retention goals for at least the first four terms and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	23%	25%
Our plan has retention goals for the first through fourth year as well as graduation/completion rate goals and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	20%	25%
Our plan has retention goals for the first through fourth year, graduation/completion goals, and specific student success strategies aligned with the entire undergraduate experience.	33%	38%
Other	25%	13%

Nearly two-thirds of respondents from two-year institutions report having a comprehensive student success plan that addresses retention and completion goals as well as strategies to support these goals.

PLAN CHARACTERISTICS	TWO-YEAR
Our plan includes retention goals for at least the first two terms and strategies focused on first-year students.	24%
Our plan has retention goals for the first and second years as well as graduation/completion rate goals and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	10%
Our plan has retention goals for the first and second years, graduation/completion goals, and specific strategies aligned with the two-year experience.	62%
Other	5%

## Integration of learning outcomes in institutional planning

Developing student learning outcomes is one of the most effective ways to guide assessment in and out of the classroom. With increased focus on outcomes and accountability, student affairs divisions should articulate what students will know and be able to do as a result of participating in out-of-class experiences.



**50%**

Four-year private

**63%**

Four-year public

**62%**

Two-year

# Governance and Structure of Student Success Committees: A Cross-Institutional Analysis

## Institutions with a retention/student success committee



**71%**

Four-year private

**53%**

Four-year public

**66%**

Two-year

## Committee chair

WHAT AREA IS THE COMMITTEE CHAIR FROM?	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Student Affairs staff	20%	9%	20%
Academic Affairs staff	24%	13%	8%
Faculty member	4%	0%	0%
Student Affairs leadership position	4%	26%	28%
Academic leadership position	24%	17%	4%
Committee does not have a chair	4%	4%	0%
Committee has more than one chair from different areas	9%	13%	24%
Committee has more than one chair from the same area	2%	0%	0%
Other	7%	17%	16%

## Role of committee

What type of role your committee adopts is less important than making sure its members understand their role. Committees who understand their role will be more likely to stay focused on the scope of work they are charged with completing.

Respondents who had a committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the role of their committee for student success, retention, and completion.

ROLE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Committee is empowered to make decisions affecting multiple campus areas.	16%	35%	20%
Committee is charged with making recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	51%	40%	52%
Committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	33%	25%	28%

## Chief Retention Officer

Respondents indicated an individual position within their institution charged with leading and coordinating activities for getting results in student success, retention, and completion.



**70%**

Four-year private

**79%**

Four-year public

**71%**

Two-year

### Which office does the chief retention officer report to?

Respondents were asked to choose the best response from the five options below for the reporting responsibility of their chief retention officer (or top officer in charge of initiatives for student success, retention, and completion).

OFFICE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
President	18%	3%	22%
Academic Affairs	57%	50%	15%
Student Affairs	7%	15%	41%
Enrollment Management	11%	18%	15%
Other	7%	15%	7%

# AI in Student Success, Retention, and Completion

Institutions that have an AI governance policy for students, faculty, and staff



**35%**

Four-year private

**28%**

Four-year public

**34%**

Two-year

## AI strategies for student success, retention, and completion

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)*

*Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

PRACTICE	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	27%	88%	90%
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	18%	80%	80%
Use of AI in early alert communications	6%	100%	100%
Use of AI in academic advising	0%		

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

PRACTICE	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	31%	72%	88%
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	24%	100%	89%
Use of AI in academic advising	11%	100%	100%
Use of AI in early alert communications	8%	100%	100%

### TWO-YEAR

PRACTICE	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	24%	100%	100%
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	20%	100%	100%
Use of AI in academic advising	7%	100%	100%
Use of AI in early alert communications	3%	100%	100%

## Key Findings

### Limited overall AI adoption

- Despite high effectiveness ratings, actual AI implementation remains surprisingly low across all institution types.
- Usage rates rarely exceed 31% for any AI application.
- Four-year public institutions show slightly higher adoption rates overall.

### Most common AI applications

- Student communication crafting (20-27% adoption across institutions).
- Question-answering systems (18-31% adoption).
- Academic advising and early alert systems show the lowest adoption rates.

### Effectiveness patterns

- When implemented, AI solutions show remarkably high effectiveness rates (80-100%).
- Two-year institutions report 100% effectiveness across all AI applications.
- Effectiveness rates are consistently high for both online/hybrid and traditional on-campus settings.

### Institution-specific trends

- Four-year public institutions lead in AI adoption for academic advising (11%).
- Private institutions show the lowest adoption of AI in academic advising (0%).
- Early alert communications show particularly low adoption (3-8%) despite 100% effectiveness ratings.

### Mode of delivery impact

- AI effectiveness is generally comparable between online/hybrid and traditional on-campus settings.
- Slight variations in effectiveness appear mainly in four-year institutions.
- Two-year institutions report uniform effectiveness across both delivery modes.



## Looking ahead

We anticipate several key trends in the integration of AI within student success and retention efforts that will have significant implications for student success and how we can improve how we connect with students.

- **Academic advising will see a surge in AI adoption.** Driven by the success of AI in other areas, academic advising will experience a significant increase in AI adoption, particularly in areas like appointment scheduling, personalized recommendations, and early intervention.
- **Early-alert systems will become more proactive with smarter responses.** The high effectiveness of AI in early alert systems will encourage institutions to implement more proactive and sophisticated systems, potentially leading to earlier identification of students at risk and more targeted interventions.

- **Personalized learning pathways will become more prevalent.** AI will play a crucial role in creating personalized learning pathways for students, tailoring educational experiences to individual needs and learning styles.
- **Focus on meaningful interactions.** AI has the potential to free up time for educators and staff to do what they do best: connect with students on a deeper level. Imagine a future where we can spend more time mentoring, offering personalized support, and fostering critical thinking skills in a more meaningful way.

## AI management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy);  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	Practice Used	Effective*
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	51%	55%
Use of AI in student assignments	40%	58%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	19%	21%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	Practice Used	Effective*
Use of AI in student assignments	45%	53%
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	42%	50%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	27%	67%

TWO-YEAR	Practice Used	Effective*
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	54%	65%
Use of AI in student assignments	31%	74%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	27%	70%

## Key Findings

- **Implementation gap:** There's a significant gap between adoption rates and reported effectiveness across most categories, suggesting untapped potential in AI implementation.
- **Two-year college success:** Two-year institutions consistently report the highest effectiveness rates across all AI practices, despite sometimes having lower adoption rates. This suggests they might be implementing AI more strategically or effectively.

- **Communication opportunity:** While AI in faculty-student communications has the lowest adoption rates, it shows remarkably high effectiveness in public institutions, indicating a potential area for expansion.
- **Professional development priority:** Faculty professional development in AI maintains the most consistent adoption rates across institution types, suggesting this is viewed as a foundational element for AI integration in education.



## Looking ahead

The noticeable gap between how much AI is adopted and how effective it actually is in classrooms suggests that we need to focus more on developing and using AI strategies that are tailored to specific learning situations. This may involve:

- **Data-driven decision-making:** Using student data to find where AI can make the biggest difference in learning and well-being.
- **Pilot programs:** Run small test programs of AI tools in certain classes or departments to see how well they work and get feedback from students and teachers.
- **Ongoing evaluation:** Continuously monitoring and evaluating the impact of AI tools on student learning outcomes, adjusting strategies and interventions as needed.
- **Faculty training and support:** Offer ongoing training and support for teachers to help them effectively use AI in their teaching.

In addition, the role of AI in faculty-student communication is poised for significant growth. While currently underutilized, AI has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in public institutions, particularly for tasks like personalized messaging, automated responses to student inquiries, and intelligent tutoring systems. This success will likely drive increased adoption across all sectors of higher education.

To ensure our faculty have the skills they need to create outstanding, in-demand graduates, equipping faculty with the necessary AI skills is crucial. The consistent emphasis on faculty professional development across all institution types reflects a growing understanding that effective AI integration requires a skilled workforce. We can expect to see increased investment in faculty training programs that focus on AI literacy, ethical considerations, and the pedagogical applications of AI tools. This will empower faculty to leverage AI effectively to enhance student learning and improve the overall educational experience.



# General Strategies and Tactics for Student, Success, Retention, and Completion

Our analysis examined 34 distinct strategies employed by institutions to support student success, retention, and completion. This section focuses on the **five most widely** implemented strategies and their effectiveness across online/hybrid and traditional on-campus environments by type of institution. **Please refer to the appendices for detailed information on all 34 strategies and their complete effectiveness metrics.**

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

## FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

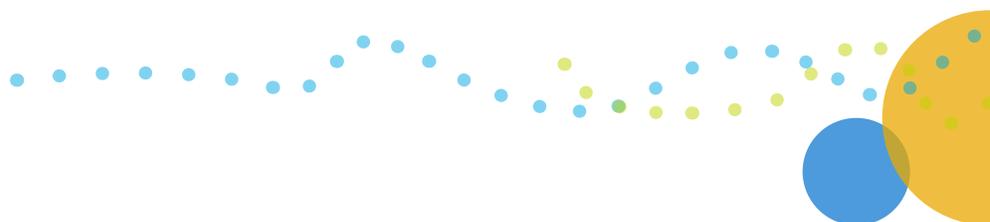
STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	81%	98%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	93%	93%	95%
Student success coaching (internal)	90%	82%	100%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87%	82%	95%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	87%	93%	98%

## FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	65%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	93%	87%	91%
Student success coaching (internal)	91%	84%	100%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	89%	80%	97%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	88%	69%	90%

## TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	93%	100%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	97%	100%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	94%	96%	96%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	91%	81%	88%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	88%	81%	92%



## Programs and strategies targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion

Our analysis examined 15 distinct strategies employed by institutions targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion. This section focuses on the five most widely implemented strategies and their effectiveness across online/hybrid and traditional on-campus environments by type of institution. **Please refer to the appendices for detailed information on all 15 strategies and their complete effectiveness metrics.**

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

## FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	88%	80%	95%
Programs designed specifically for online students	59%	97%	53%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	58%	27%	69%
Programs designed specifically for international students	53%	46%	92%
Programs for student-athletes	48%	40%	75%

## FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	94%	57%	100%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	81%	46%	100%
Programs for student-athletes	69%	35%	90%
Programs for students with disabilities	69%	54%	94%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	67%	59%	88%

## TWO-YEAR

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	83%	94%	95%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	64%	102%	90%
Programs for students with disabilities	64%	100%	89%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	54%	88%	77%
Programs for student-athletes	50%	72%	66%



## Management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

Our analysis examined 36 management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion by institutions. This section focuses on the five most widely implemented practices and their effectiveness across online/hybrid and traditional on-campus environments by type of institution. **Please refer to the appendices for detailed information on all 36 strategies and their complete effectiveness metrics.**

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	Practice Used	Effective*
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	89%	90%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	89%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	89%	74%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	87%	86%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	87%	91%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	Practice Used	Effective*
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	94%	86%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	85%	81%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	85%	89%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	85%	88%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	82%	77%

TWO-YEAR	Practice Used	Effective*
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	88%	83%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	88%	74%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	85%	81%
Title III or Title V funding	85%	91%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	85%	72%

# Appendices

## General strategies and tactics for student, success, retention, and completion

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	81%	98%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	93%	93%	95%
Student success coaching (internal)	90%	82%	100%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	87%	82%	95%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	87%	93%	98%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	86%	80%	91%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	83%	81%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	80%	97%	94%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	80%	79%	91%
Use of social media to engage students post-enrollment	75%	72%	77%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	73%	77%	89%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	71%	96%	98%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing before they leave	71%	57%	65%
Peer mentoring	64%	63%	94%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	62%	81%	91%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	62%	34%	93%
Global experiences/studies abroad	61%	35%	91%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	60%	60%	82%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	60%	84%	93%
Student life program supporting student success	59%	50%	97%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	58%	43%	93%

#### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Orientation program targeted to adult students	36%	76%	67%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their finances	35%	87%	84%
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	27%	88%	90%
Summer bridge program	25%	72%	93%
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	18%	80%	80%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	10%	80%	67%
Use of AI in early alert communications	6%	100%	100%
Use of AI in academic advising	0%		

#### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	65%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	93%	87%	91%
Student success coaching (internal)	91%	84%	100%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	89%	80%	97%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	88%	69%	90%
Global experiences/studies abroad	85%	57%	88%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	83%	72%	96%
Use of social media to engage students post-enrollment	83%	84%	93%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	82%	41%	96%
Peer mentoring	78%	59%	100%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	77%	96%	96%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	76%	63%	97%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	75%	75%	96%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	75%	66%	96%
Student life program supporting student success	73%	61%	100%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	72%	84%	96%
Supplemental instruction	71%	71%	100%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	70%	79%	88%

## FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	70%	79%	88%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	68%	74%	92%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	63%	84%	91%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their finances	63%	58%	83%
Faculty and staff development dedicated to increasing understanding of the role of AI on campus	62%	87%	82%
Learning communities	61%	69%	96%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	59%	30%	100%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	54%	82%	72%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	50%	60%	94%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing before they leave	43%	54%	80%
Summer bridge program	41%	45%	88%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	35%	90%	92%
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	31%	72%	88%
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	24%	100%	89%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	12%	100%	100%
Use of AI in academic advising	11%	100%	100%
Use of AI in early alert communications	8%	100%	100%

## TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	93%	100%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	97%	100%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	94%	96%	96%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	91%	81%	88%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	88%	81%	92%
Student success coaching (internal)	86%	68%	85%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	85%	89%	100%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	73%	72%	77%

## TWO-YEAR (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY OR TACTIC	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/ Hybrid	Traditional/ On-campus
Faculty advising, one-on-one	73%	76%	86%
Use of social media to engage students post-enrollment	73%	68%	75%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	71%	89%	85%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	69%	94%	96%
Student life program supporting student success	69%	62%	86%
Supplemental instruction	65%	100%	100%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	64%	79%	84%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	63%	100%	95%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their finances	61%	81%	85%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	61%	86%	88%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	61%	61%	94%
Faculty and staff development dedicated to increasing understanding of the role of AI on campus	53%	78%	86%
Peer mentoring	47%	89%	100%
Learning communities	44%	91%	92%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing before they leave	40%	64%	69%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	39%	66%	73%
Global experiences/studies abroad	34%	50%	75%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	27%	78%	100%
Summer bridge program	24%	80%	100%
Use of AI to help students get answers to common questions	24%	100%	100%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	21%	75%	100%
Use of AI in crafting communications to current students	20%	100%	100%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	19%	100%	100%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	8%	67%	67%
Use of AI in academic advising	7%	100%	100%
Use of AI in early alert communications	3%	100%	100%

## Programs and strategies targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)*

*Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	88%	80%	95%
Programs designed specifically for online students	59%	97%	53%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	58%	27%	69%
Programs designed specifically for international students	53%	46%	92%
Programs for student-athletes	48%	40%	75%
Programs for students with disabilities	48%	65%	86%
Programs designed for conditionally-admitted first-year students	44%	70%	73%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	39%	100%	70%
Programs for first-generation students	35%	38%	73%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	29%	100%	91%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American students	29%	51%	84%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	27%	54%	60%
Programs designed specifically for LatinX students	24%	57%	100%
Programs designed specifically for LGBTQ+ students	24%	83%	100%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	12%	100%	75%

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	94%	57%	100%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	81%	46%	100%
Programs for student-athletes	69%	35%	90%
Programs for students with disabilities	69%	54%	94%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	67%	59%	88%
Programs for first-generation students	61%	78%	100%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	58%	79%	83%
Programs designed specifically for international students	58%	50%	100%

## FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC (CONTINUED)

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for online students	56%	83%	58%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	36%	91%	100%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American students	33%	43%	100%
Programs designed specifically for LGBTQ+ students	33%	51%	100%
Programs designed for conditionally-admitted first-year students	33%	44%	84%
Programs designed specifically for LatinX students	28%	50%	100%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	17%	100%	100%

## TWO-YEAR

PROGRAM OR STRATEGY	Practice Used	EFFECTIVE*	
		Online/Hybrid	Traditional/On-campus
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	83%	94%	95%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	64%	102%	90%
Programs for students with disabilities	64%	100%	89%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	54%	88%	77%
Programs for student-athletes	50%	72%	66%
Programs designed specifically for online students	48%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	43%	88%	89%
Programs for first-generation students	43%	88%	80%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	38%	100%	90%
Programs designed specifically for international students	34%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for LGBTQ+ students	21%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American students	20%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	18%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for LatinX students	17%	100%	100%
Programs designed for conditionally admitted first-year students	11%	50%	66%

## Management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

*\*Strategy is very effective or effective (only out of those institutions using the strategy)  
Sorted by the percentage of institutions using the practice*

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	Practice Used	Effective*
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	89%	90%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	89%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	89%	74%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	87%	93%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	87%	91%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	87%	86%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	86%	77%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	84%	89%
Tracking rates of academic probation	83%	88%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	83%	80%
Development of faculty skills in advising	83%	66%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	81%	84%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	81%	68%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	79%	78%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	77%	69%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	75%	73%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	75%	72%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	74%	89%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	74%	81%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	74%	74%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	72%	76%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	72%	63%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	70%	87%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	70%	77%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	70%	74%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs and their motivation to complete their degree	68%	78%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE (CONTINUED)	Practice Used	Effective*
Training in professional service skills for new employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	66%	73%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	66%	71%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	64%	80%
Training in professional service skills for student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	61%	70%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to the following year	59%	81%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	53%	66%
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	51%	55%
Use of AI in student assignments	40%	58%
Title III or Title V funding	34%	68%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	19%	21%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	Practice Used	Effective*
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	94%	86%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	85%	89%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	85%	88%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	85%	81%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	82%	88%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	82%	80%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	82%	77%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	79%	91%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	79%	91%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	79%	87%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	79%	72%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	76%	87%
Tracking rates of academic probation	76%	83%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	76%	63%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	73%	78%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	73%	78%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	70%	73%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	70%	69%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	67%	85%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC (CONTINUED)	Practice Used	Effective*
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs and their motivation to complete their degree	67%	81%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	67%	76%
Development of faculty skills in advising	67%	76%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	64%	75%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	61%	79%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	61%	79%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	61%	79%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	58%	83%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to the following year	58%	78%
Training in professional service skills for student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	55%	87%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	55%	82%
Title III or Title V funding	55%	76%
Training in professional service skills for new employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	55%	76%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	48%	81%
Use of AI in student assignments	45%	53%
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	42%	50%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	27%	67%

TWO-YEAR	Practice Used	Effective*
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	88%	83%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	88%	74%
Title III or Title V funding	85%	91%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	85%	86%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	85%	81%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	85%	72%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	81%	80%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	81%	80%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	81%	72%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	81%	67%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	77%	86%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	77%	75%

TWO-YEAR (CONTINUED)	Practice Used	Effective*
Development of faculty skills in instruction	77%	74%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	77%	65%
Training in professional service skills for new employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	77%	65%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	73%	84%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	73%	79%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	73%	74%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	73%	59%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	69%	83%
Development of faculty skills in advising	69%	67%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	65%	94%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	65%	89%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	65%	83%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	65%	77%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	62%	74%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	54%	78%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	54%	72%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	54%	70%
Faculty professional development dedicated to the use of AI in the classroom	54%	65%
Tracking rates of academic probation	50%	86%
Training in professional service skills for student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	50%	84%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to the following year	50%	54%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs and their motivation to complete their degree	46%	67%
Use of AI in student assignments	31%	74%
Use of AI in faculty-student communications	27%	70%

## Talk with our student success experts

Ask for a complimentary consultation with us. Our student success experts work with hundreds of institutions each year on retention strategies and planning, student assessment, early-alert programs, and retention data collection and analysis.

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RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,500 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, ensuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL helps institutions scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

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RNL offers a full suite of solutions to increase student outcomes, including:

- Early-alert assessment instruments
- Student satisfaction and priorities assessments
- Student retention planning
- Yield and engagement to prevent stop-outs
- Predictive analytics for student retention

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