The EVOLUTION of Student Success

How has the way we define and measure student success changed over time?

Lineages of species divide over time and give rise to descendants that resemble their forbearers but are also distinct in unique ways. The evolution of student success best practice has happened in the same way. Today, the definition and quantification of success is very complex—with more change likely to come—leaving many strategists struggling to set a course for their institutions.

As we think about where student success is headed in the next decade, it's useful to look back at where we've been. **Use this infographic to review the evolution of student success metrics and start planning for the future.**

What will you track?

YOUR FUTURE

Student success doesn't need to mean the same thing to all schools. Your strategy should be tailored to the specific needs of your students your finances, and the mission of your institution.

Use this space to reflect on what student success means at your institution and what data you have—or still need—to measure it.

THE FUTURE

Pandemic recovery

Institutions expand support to grapple with the long-term academic and socioemotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are we tracking?
- Mental health support utilization
- Enrollment and pass rates in developmental education

Career relevance

Institutions aim to make higher education career relevant and re-enroll working adults to aid them in lifelong upskilling.

What are we tracking?
- Job placement
- Repeat enrollment

TODAY

Student experience

Institutions work to improve the student experience to better match innovations in the consumer economy, removing friction from administrative processes and connecting data to make it easier for students to tailor their academic and extracurricular activities to their interests.

What are we tracking?
Social participation

Anti-racism

Equity and inclusion initiatives move to proactive antiracism in the wake of national racial justice movements.

What are we tracking?
Disaggregated data for all current success metrics

2010s

Guided pathways

Institutions create structured pathways for specific educational goals. Lowering complexity and constructively limiting choice keeps students on track.

What are we tracking?
- Time to degree
- Excess credits

Holistic advising

Advising starts to include academic, financial, and personal needs. Advisors use technology to contact students and manage caseloads. Institutions begin building early alert systems to proactively identify and reach students in need of support.

What are we tracking?
- Advising engagement
- Persistence rate
- Support utilization
- Issue resolution

Equity and inclusion

Institutions widely promote equity and inclusion, investigating which policies and structures have a disproportionate impact on their minoritized students.

What are we tracking?
- Graduation by race
- First-year retention by race
- Some other disaggregation of existing metrics

Late 2010s
Student success management

Student inaction is seen as a major driver of attrition. Advisors launch targeted campaigns to help unregistered students resolve financial and administrative barriers. Institutions employ student-facing tools such as smart phone apps to facilitate smooth and frequent communication.

What are we tracking?
Next-term registration

1990s—EARLY 2000s

First-year experience

Student engagement efforts focus on incoming students. Leaders plan to reduce attrition by easing the transition to college.

What are we tracking?
First-year retention

The completion agenda

Leaders shift their focus beyond the first year to address frustrations with inconsistent course offerings and murky academic requirements. Institutions organize requirements into standard degree plans.

What are we tracking?
- Graduation rate
- Degree output

1980s—1990s

Affinity programs

Student success leaders begin documenting equity gaps in college access and completion. Institutions develop underrepresented minority affinity programs to provide tailored support to specific groups.

What are we tracking?
Underrepresented minority enrollment

1970s

Student engagement

Researcher Vincent Tinto popularizes the idea that retention is driven by student engagement.

What are we tracking?
Scattered measures of student satisfaction

1930s—1960s

The beginnings of student success

In the late 1930s, the federal government surveys 60 schools in the first-ever study of "student mortality." Later, post-war enrollments swell as a result of the GI Bill and baby boom until the late 1960s, when the impact of expanding college access to new populations combines with the effects of student movements to generate the first widespread concerns over student attrition.

Lineages of Student Success Best Practice

- Student engagement
- Degree planning
- Next-generation advising
- Equity gaps

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