

# 5

## common pitfalls that keep students from graduating— and how to avoid them

An eBook  
for institutions,  
advisors, and  
enrolment  
managers

Learn how one solution can help you increase student retention and completion rates while improving efficiencies.

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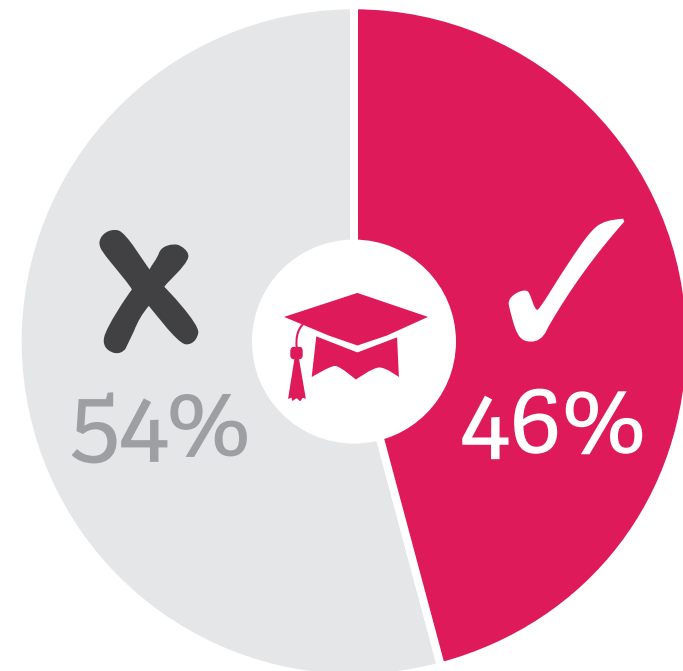
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# Introduction



Students are not graduating on time, if at all— **only 46% of Americans will complete once they start.**

There is a graduation crisis in this country. In fact, only 46 percent of Americans will complete their college education once they start.<sup>1</sup> This has institutions reconsidering their priorities—focusing more on how they can better help students stay in school and graduate.

There are many factors preventing students from completing their college education. Unfortunately, students are showing up, but the lack of administrative and academic resources to help them succeed is holding them back. While students are having a tough time, institutions are also facing challenges attributed to the reduction in retention rates—including lost revenue.

There are many reasons why students drop out or don't attain their degree, but the fact is, universities simply don't have enough advisors on staff to help them create a clear path to graduation. As a result, drop-out rates are on the rise and institutional funding is at risk.

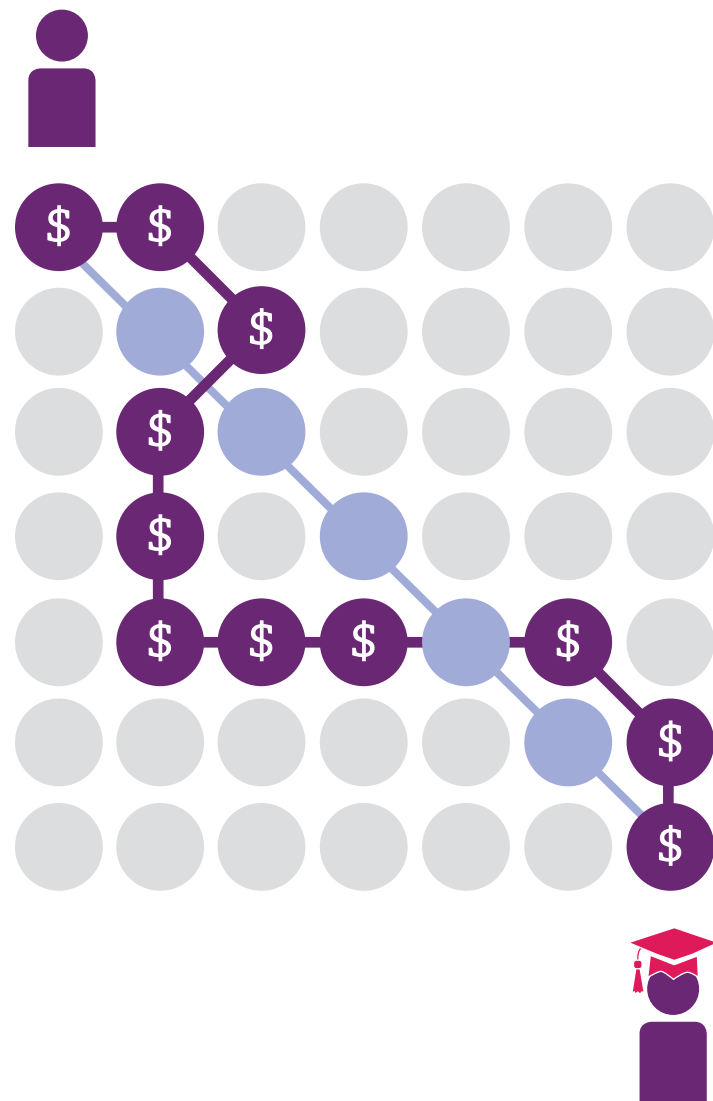
As institutes grapple with finding a better way to support students and improve completion rates, many states are making it mandatory protocol to provide students with an educational plan to help them stay on track and graduate on time. To truly experience benefits for students, advisors and institutions, will require institutes to take a more holistic approach in their academic planning programmes, encompassing solutions in all three areas.

This eBook takes a look at five tough problems schools are facing and how automated tools can provide strategic solutions that increase student graduation rates and improve business outcomes for institutions.

1. "Education at a Glance," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010.

# Pitfall #1

## What a waste



Too many students are taking unnecessary courses and credits that do not count toward their degree.

Many students are wasting time and money by taking more credits than needed to complete their graduation requirements.<sup>1</sup> Just take a look at the following figures supporting this premise:

**Certificates:** Required credits: **30** / Credits taken: **63.5**

**Associate:** Required credits: **60** / Credits taken: **79**

**Bachelor's:** Required credits: **120** / Credits taken: **136.5**

### Background

Every student wants to graduate on time and with as little debt as possible. So when it comes to taking the credit hours that will enable them to get where they're going on time and within budget, less is definitely more. Unfortunately, without a clear and definitive way to identify individual courses that will satisfy graduation requirements, many students navigate the system blindly, hoping they're making the correct choices.

For this reason, students rely heavily on what their advisors tell them. However, with the average case load ratio of 333 students per advisor in a medium-size institution, advisors are overwhelmed and uncharacteristically hindered in their ability to assist students individually.<sup>2</sup>

1. "Time is the Enemy," Complete College America, September 2011.  
2. NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising, 2013.

# Pitfall #2

## Driving blind

Students on financial aid or athletic eligibility scholarships are putting their educational funding at serious risk by selecting the wrong courses.

Nearly 60 percent of undergraduate students received some type of financial aid in the 2011–2012 academic year.<sup>1</sup> That’s a lot of financial aid, grants and scholarships; and it’s a clear indicator of how students depend on funding to complete their college educations.

### Background

In order to remain eligible for financial aid, students are required by federal law to maintain satisfactory academic progress. This not only means maintaining an acceptable GPA and taking a certain number of credit hours, but completing the required coursework within a specific period of time.

Considering the stringent course and time requirements, it’s important that students know precisely which courses they should take and when, because if they don’t, taking the wrong course could disqualify them for funding. When it comes to making sure their coursework complies with their scholarship guidelines, students simply can’t afford to be guessing.

Of equal importance, student must continually monitor their GPA to ensure it stays high enough to maintain eligibility. Unfortunately, too many students don’t realise there is a link between taking unnecessary classes, changing majors and declining GPAs, therefore the potential loss of their financial assistance.

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1. 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.



# Pitfall #3

## Been there, done that

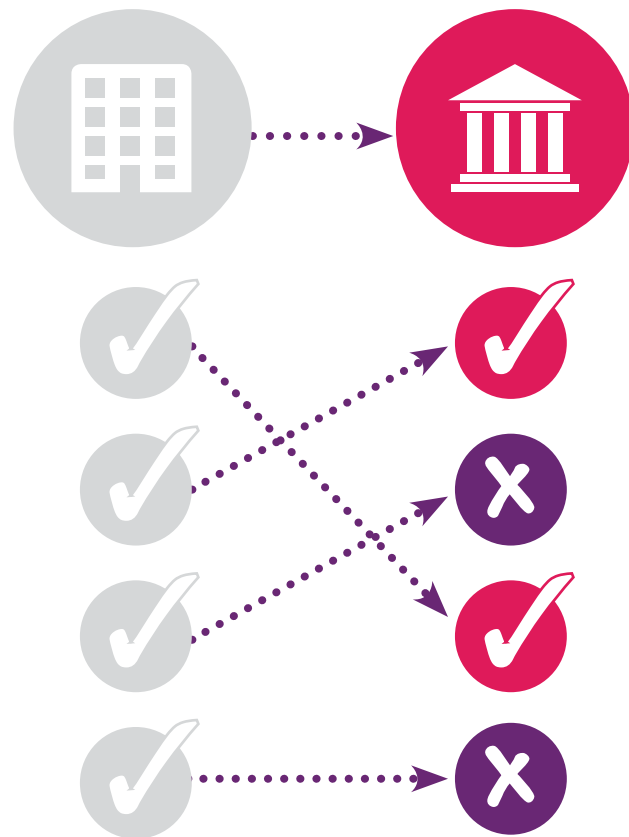
When students transfer or change institutes, they often end up retaking courses unnecessarily.

One-third of students transfer or change institutes at least once before earning their degree.<sup>1</sup> This change in institution types, out of state transfers and even transfers from two year to four year colleges, makes it difficult for students to identify courses that will move with them to their new school.

### Background

Students who change schools undoubtedly want to transfer as many credit hours as possible in order to save time and tuition costs. However, a complicated transfer admission process that can take weeks to move students through the registration system makes it difficult for students to identify early in the academic planning process those courses and credits that will transfer.

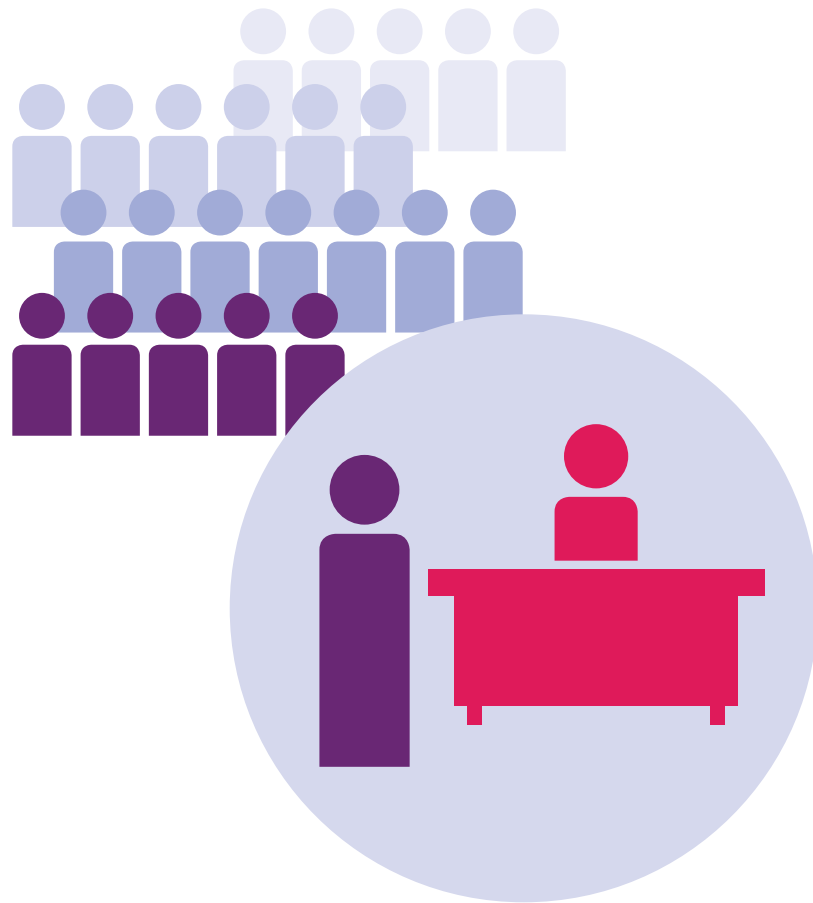
Without the help of advisors to map existing courses to their new school, many students needlessly repeat courses. Moreover, once they are enrolled at their new college, students don't have an easy way to articulate transfer credits that can be correctly applied to their degree audit, nor can they easily identify possible course substitutions.



1. Transfer and Mobility Report, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

# Pitfall #4

## So many students, so little time



Heavy caseloads are making it increasingly difficult for academic advisors to individually guide and support students.

Academic advisors continue to struggle with a large number of students. As a result, the ability to effectively manage and maintain consistent follow-up with a student's academic process has become problematic as institutions look to improve advising and auditing efficiencies, i.e., do more with less.

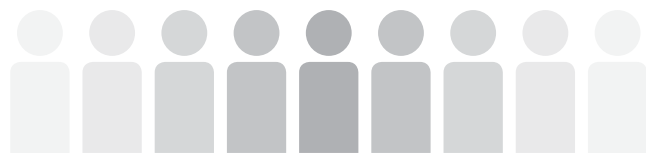
### Background

With manually driven processes and only so many hours in the day, advisors are working with far too many student caseloads during the academic year. This problem is compounded by the fact that schools are reducing the number of advisors while enrollment numbers are actually increasing. At a time when help is needed the most, advisors are finding their jobs becoming harder as their caseloads soar.

This increase in workloads hinders the ability of advisers to do what they do best: provide students with meaningful academic support and advice on how to efficiently plan and execute to achieve their educational goals. Given the time it takes for advisors to conduct ongoing audits, course planning continues to be a slow and inefficient process.

# Pitfall #5

## Lost another one



Institutions are facing serious challenges when it comes to retaining students.

It's been reported that fewer college students are graduating. In fact, recent research indicates that only 60.6 percent of bachelor degree students will manage to complete their studies. Even more dismal, only 18.8 percent of students working toward an associate degree will ever make it to graduation.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Colleges are under a great deal of pressure to move students across the finish line. For institutions that have funding tied to student retention and completion rates, many are rethinking programme methodologies and how they can help more students achieve academic success—whether full or part-time. The fact is, the longer students take to complete their graduation requirements, the less likely they are to graduate.

Unfortunately, many students are failing to graduate on time because required courses are not available at the right time. This not only results in a longer wait time to graduate, but requires students to pay for an extra semester's tuition costs. Additionally, with the lack of visibility into their degree audits and programme plans and with no immediate access to advisors, students are increasingly frustrated and stressed, also contributing to the higher dropout rates.

1. "Time is the Enemy," Complete College America, September 2011.



# What can institutions do?



Find a way to align students, advisors and institutions to better help students create a clear pathway to graduation.

Institutions must create a comprehensive academic advising, transfer articulation and degree audit solution to help students and their advisors successfully negotiate curriculum requirements.

While many colleges have automated audit programmes to help students understand what courses they've taken, they fall short when it comes to planning and transfer capabilities to better advise students on what they need in order to graduate on time.

**For this reason, institutions need an advanced web-based solution that can provide:**

**Students with...**

- » **A user-friendly application** that includes self-service capabilities for degree audits, planning and transfer articulations.
- » **An easy process to navigate their way to graduation**, matching their academic requirements with relevant course suggestions, so they're only taking courses required for graduation.
- » **A web-based degree audit and planning solution** that provides personalised advice and interaction, allowing students to explore "what if" and "look ahead" scenarios that keep them on track and graduating on time.



### Advisors with...

- » **Integrated and transparent transfer articulation tools** to map another school's courses to their own institution, allowing them to help transfer students in performing their own coursework evaluations and to better understand what courses might and might not be transferred.
- » **Automated degree evaluation, planning and transfer articulation capabilities** to eliminate antiquated manual processes, so they have more time to provide insightful advice that supports better student outcomes.
- » **The ability to mine data** in the student educational planner and compare it to the actual audit to improve course planning.

### Institutions with...

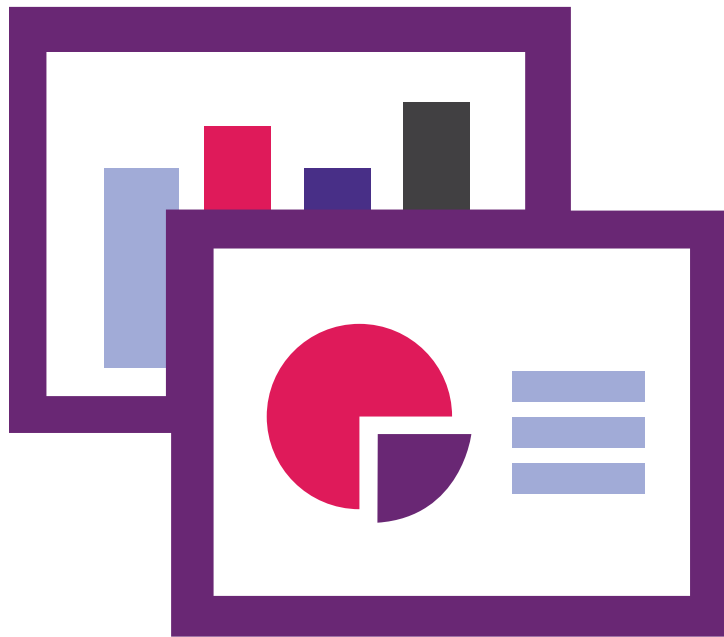
- » **Tools to plan and offer the right courses at the right time** to support course offerings based on student demand.
- » **Real-time self-service transfer articulation** to increase enrolment among transfer students.
- » **Tools that enable advisors to provide true 1:1 guidance to their students**, thereby improving retention and graduation rates.

## Ellucian recommendations

Over the past several years, degree audit and planning has become an increasingly important element in assisting students with their educational planning. Yet today, there remains a great many students who aren't making it to graduation.

As a way to solve these problems for students, advisors and institutions, institutes should consider the following three strategies:

- » **Simplify transfer articulation with clearer, more efficient transfer mappings.** Administrative tools with the ability to map courses and process transcripts in real-time, can provide a comprehensive description of degree requirements between schools and communicate with prospective students.
- » **Provide students with self-service tools.** With automated online tools, students can self-articulate their own coursework, allowing them to immediately see where they stand with course and degree requirements.
- » **Improve research and reporting.** To have the ability to see where a student is in terms of financial awards, if they're following their educational plans, or missing courses, schools need a technology-driven repository that acts as a storehouse of advice, audits, and plans. This aggregation of information helps advisors provide proactive, highly personal support.

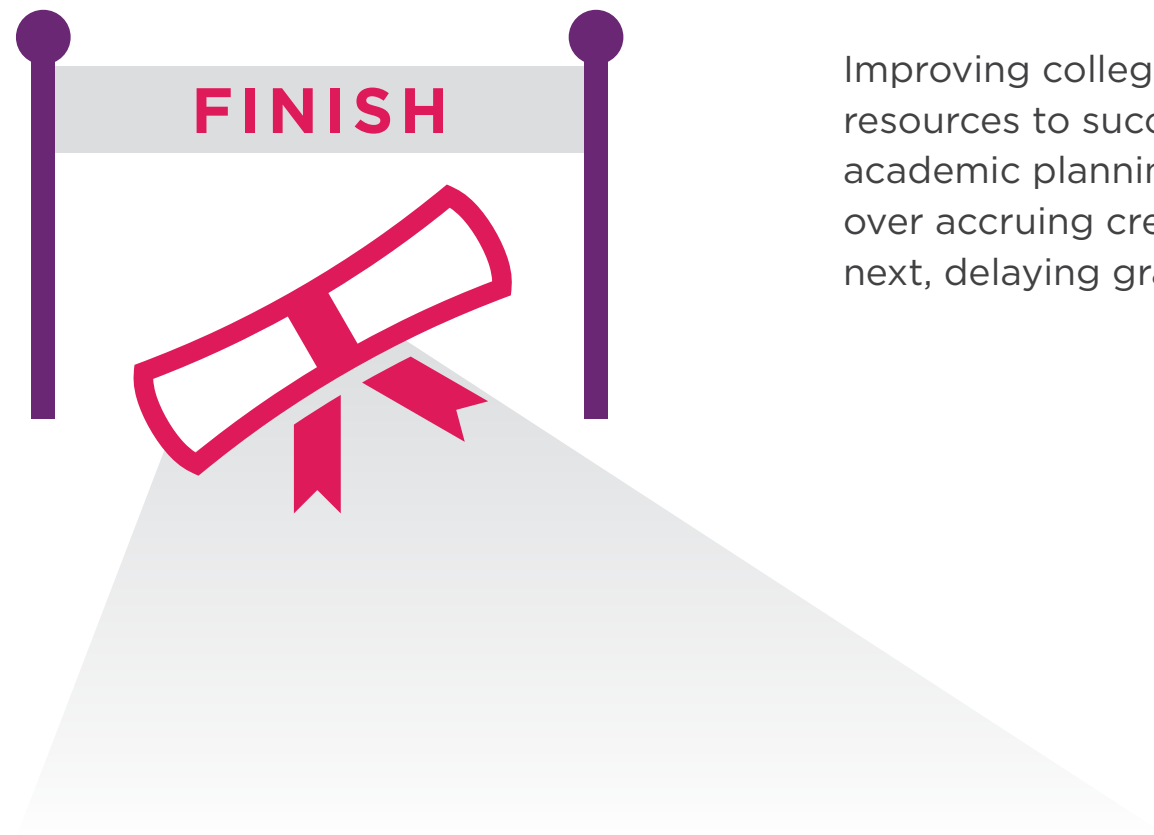


# Conclusion

Institutions are dedicated to academic success and want to see students stay in school and graduate. To be successful, students require the tools to identify courses they've already taken, the knowledge to match them to their major, an accurate supply of course suggestions and ongoing advisor support.

While many schools recognise the need in areas such as transfer articulation, improved course planning and 1:1 advising, they lack the ability to aggregate student data across multiple platforms, improving communications between the student and advisor, as well as the institution itself.

Improving college completion truly begins by providing students with guidance and resources to succeed. Without the automated tools to take a more direct route to academic planning, students will continue to move in the opposite direction—stressing over accruing credit hours they don't need and can't afford, frustrated about what to do next, delaying graduation, or dropping out altogether.



# About Ellucian

Ellucian Degree Works™ is a degree audit, transfer articulation and student planning solution that aligns students, advisors, and institutions to help students graduate on time. We've helped more than six million students, in 675 institutions, navigate their way to graduation. Students love it so much they actually tweet about it. **Learn how it can help students graduate on time.**

Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world. We deliver a broad portfolio of technology solutions, developed in collaboration with a global education community and provide strategic guidance to help education institutions of all kinds navigate change, achieve greater transparency and drive efficiencies. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries around the world look to Ellucian for the ideas and insights that will move education forward, helping people everywhere discover their potential through learning.

To learn more, please visit [www.ellucian.com/emea-ap](http://www.ellucian.com/emea-ap).



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