

A photograph of two young women in a classroom or office setting. They are both smiling and looking at a computer monitor. The woman in the foreground is wearing a plaid shirt and holding a white mug. The woman behind her is wearing a grey jacket. The background is slightly blurred, showing a whiteboard and other office equipment.

ellucian®

Move the needle on student success

Five ways a degree planning
solution can help your
students stay on track and
graduate on time

**AN eBOOK FOR REGISTRARS, ACADEMIC
ADVISORS, AND ENROLLMENT COUNSELORS**

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Introduction

In a recent report, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that only 53 percent of students who started a four-year degree program in 2009 have graduated six years later. Graduation rates were even lower for students who began their programs after age 20, which could be attributed to either an improved job market or increased problems with affordability, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. While some students switched from full-time to part-time, 33 percent had dropped out entirely.¹

The reasons vary, but lack of clear academic plans, affordability, and college-readiness top the lists. To reverse this trend, 84 percent of campus officials named student success among their highest priorities for 2016.² And it's not just a higher education issue, it's an economic issue. American workers need college-level knowledge and skills in order to succeed in today's global workforce.

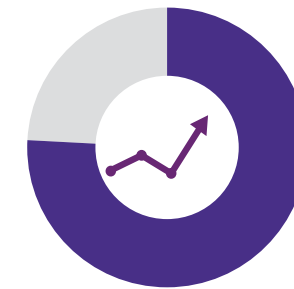
The good news is that a degree planning tool can help address all these issues.

The student success imperative

According to the *University Business' Outlook 2016*, higher education institutions are focusing their efforts on:



93%
improving
retention rates



76%
increasing
learning outcomes



63%
boosting
graduation rates



59%
helping first-generation and/or
low-income students

¹ Time, "College Graduation Rate Slips for 4-Year Degrees," Nov. 17, 2015

² University Business' Outlook 2016

Time is money

Help students avoid taking unnecessary courses

With tuition and fees climbing at a steady clip and scholarships and financial aid dwindling, more students are unable to afford college. According to a new report from Complete College America, “Students and parents know that time is money. The reality is that our system of higher education costs too much, takes too long, and graduates too few.”³ The report cites several reasons why it now routinely takes six years to graduate instead of four, including slow student progress, inability to register for required courses, credits lost in transfer and remediation sequences, and taking too few credits per semester to finish on time.

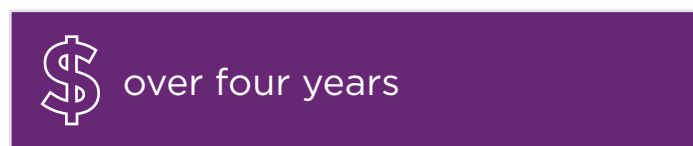
Those two years are costing students (and their parents) big bucks. Each additional year at a four-year college costs an average of

\$22,826 in tuition, fees, room and board, and books. It also costs students in missed opportunities to earn—approximately \$45,327 each year—which is the average starting salary for those with a bachelor’s degree.

Keeping student tuition and fees down is a top priority. A degree planning solution with clear “on-track” and “on-time” indicators; pre-loaded degree plans that make pre-requisites and course sequencing easier to understand; and sample plans demonstrating which courses are required as well as when they should be taken are all tools that help students avoid taking unnecessary courses and wasting time and money on classes that won’t add up to an on-time graduation.



On average, students who graduate in six years spend **40 percent more** than those who graduate in four.⁴



³ Complete College America, “Four-Year Myth,” 2014

⁴ USA TODAY College, “Breaking the 4-year myth: Why students are taking longer to graduate,” 2015

Make it easy to get things done

Improve efficiency for academic advisors

The average ratio of students to academic advisors is 375-to-one, according to the National Academic Advising Association. Given the increased workload, advising too often focuses on course schedules rather than problem solving or identifying opportunities such as internships, career opportunities, and study abroad. Because academic advisors provide the personal connection between campus services and students—a connection that is directly linked with retention rates—it is imperative to make advisors' jobs easier.

A degree planning solution can help automate daily manual tasks, such as course scheduling, freeing advisors to spend more time with at-risk students and improve advisor/student relationships, which leads to better continuity and year-to-year progression. It also provides transparency between advisors and students—so both parties have clearly defined goals and a step-by-step plan to meet them. An easy-to-use online solution with mobile capabilities facilitates a convenient, on-demand user experience that helps busy advisors create degree audit worksheets, assign model degree plans, calculate GPAs, and much more with a few clicks.

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement:



33%
of first-year students met with an academic advisor **less than two times**

23%
met with an advisor **just once**

9%
never met with an advisor

Get it done on time

Increase four-year graduation rates

For a non-flagship public university, only 19 percent of students graduate on time and even at flagship research public universities, the on-time graduation rate is only 36 percent. Only 50 of the more than 580 public four-year institutions have graduation rates above 50 percent.

So what's behind the prolonged academic experience? For full-time students, the culprits may include lack of clear academic plans, changing majors and/or universities, and taking unnecessary courses. But 75 percent of today's students are juggling some combination of families, jobs, and school while commuting to class; according to the U.S. Department of Education, only a quarter go full-time, attend residential colleges, and have most of their bills paid by their parents.⁵



On average, students take **14 additional credits** than needed to complete their bachelor's degree.

A degree planning solution can help students take enough credits each semester to graduate in four years. Giving students tools to develop and track their course of study increases the likelihood that they will graduate. And this same planning makes it possible for institutions to offer the courses students need. In 2015, studies show that only 64.2 percent of students return to their institution for the second year in a four-year public institution and 70.2 percent in a four-year private institution.⁶ Keeping students enrolled helps institutions show policy makers and potential funders that their school is successful and a worthy investment.



⁵ Complete College, "Time Is the Enemy," 2011

⁶ ACT, National Collegiate Retention and Persistence-to-Degree Rates, 2015

I got the power

Foster an environment of student empowerment

Many students don't take advantage of their academic advisors, leaving them without a comprehensive plan to graduate on time. And many first-generation college students might be unfamiliar with the process and may not know who to go to for help.

With a degree planning solution, students have clear expectations from day one, which helps them set achievable goals that lead to on-time graduation. It keeps them on track by highlighting what's needed to complete a program as well as what they have taken to date. This gives students a greater sense of control over their academic planning process, and it allows them to explore a wider range of subjects than they might normally choose. A mobile solution makes it easy for students to search degree requirements and see the courses they are registered for from their smartphones.



Give students the tools they need to create their own academic experience.

Cut the cookie cutter approach

Help advisors provide more personalized support

Today's students run the gamut racially, ethnically, and socially and they struggle with financial, academic, social, and emotional challenges. First-year, first-generation students' needs are very different from the non-traditional student juggling career, family, and homework. That's why advisors need to provide individualized support.

When advisors don't have to navigate a confusing system, they dedicate more time to students' individual needs and interests in guiding them toward the right classes. Issues often arise when advisors make different course substitutions from student to student.

A degree planning solution with universal program and requirement browsing capabilities can help standardize the advising process. It also gives students who rely on federal financial assistance a reference that indicates how they should complete the degree requirements during their period of eligibility.



Personalized advising can help students fully experience and appreciate the academic path they have chosen.

Conclusion

Help your students clarify, plan, and track their course of study in order to progress more confidently to a degree.

Colleague® Student Planning is a comprehensive, web-based degree planning, scheduling, advising, and registration solution that helps students and their advisors successfully negotiate an institution's curriculum requirements. Colleague Student Planning helps:

- ✓ Improve the quality of interaction between students and advisors
- ✓ Allow institutions to map future course offerings more effectively
- ✓ Provide students with the self-service tools they need to register and develop a plan they can follow



ellucian®

Ellucian is the world's leading provider of software and services higher education institutions need to help students succeed. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries rely on Ellucian to help enable the mission of higher education for over 18 million students.

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