DRIVING
TOWARD A DEGREE

2024

THE DUAL FRONTIER IN STUDENT SUCCESS: NEW SOLUTIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the establishment of land-grant institutions in the late 19th century and the democratization of access via the rapid expansion of state master plans for higher education after WWII in the 20th century, the US higher education system transitioned from elite-focused to serving a larger, more diverse community. Now, in the 21st century, the Carnegie Foundation and American Council on Education are creating a parallel system that runs alongside the Carnegie Classifications[1] to assess colleges on their ability to improve social and economic status for today's diverse students rather than traditional inputs such as research activity, degree types awarded, and enrollment profiles. Set to launch in 2025, these changes could encourage institutions to strengthen holistic support services, ensuring that all students thrive and achieve upward mobility during and after their studies.

In this dynamic environment, the dedication of institutions and their advisors, faculty, and staff is pivotal in transforming the promise of a degree into reality for students of all ages and backgrounds. Recognizing the challenges associated with navigating complex academic requirements amidst increasingly abundant educational pathways, institutions are more committed to enhancing advising systems than ever. Efforts to increase capacity for personalized, timely guidance to ensure that every student has the necessary support to thrive are more important than ever. By addressing student success challenges and leveraging available resources, higher education can continue to empower students to fully engage with and benefit from the support services offered.

Driving Toward a Degree, a longitudinal study conducted by Tyton Partners focused on the state of holistic student supports in postsecondary education, sheds light on the ongoing challenges faced by student support professionals. Year over year, advisor caseloads, a lack of coordination, and low student engagement are named as top barriers to improving advising. In this year's research, two different themes emerge bearing distinct implications for the outlook on advising (see *Figure 1*):

- Generative AI is in its nascent stages of being utilized to mitigate advisor capacity constraints stemming from perennially large caseloads.

- Advisor burnout and turnover present a heightened challenge to improving advising.

We present evidence indicating that generative AI shows early promise as a catalyst to address longstanding capacity challenges and rising issues with advisor turnover.

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1. *https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/carnegie-classification/2025-social-and-economic-mobility-classification/*

Figure 1

Top institutional barriers to improving academic advising

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Caseloads for advisors are too high 28%	Caseloads for advisors are too high 37%	Caseloads for advisors are too high 41%	Caseloads for advisors are too high 47%	Caseloads for advisors are too high 43%
Limited budget 27%	Limited budget 28%	Lack of coordination across departments 30%	Low student engagement with advising resources 35%	**Retention of advisors/turnover 37%**
Faculty resistance to change 26%	Lack of coordination across departments 27%	Limited budget 25%	Lack of coordination across departments 30%	Lack of coordination across departments 36%
Lack of coordination across departments 23%	Faculty resistance to change 22%	Poor accountability for advising outcomes 24%	**Retention of advisors/turnover 28%**	Low student engagement with advising resources 33%
Low student engagement with advising resources 23%	Low student engagement with advising resources 21%	Low student engagement with advising resources 23%	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks 26%	Limited budget 27%
Poor accountability for advising outcomes 21%	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks 18%	Ineffective onboarding/ lack of training for faculty as advisors 17%	Ineffective onboarding/ lack of training for faculty as advisors 24%	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks 27%
Leadership's resistance to making academic advising a priority 21%	Poor accountability for advising outcomes 17%	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks 16%	Limited budget 23%	Ineffective onboarding/ lack of training for faculty as advisors 21%
Poor accountability for advising outcomes 20%	Ineffective onboarding/ lack of training for faculty as advisors 17%	**Retention of advisors/turnover 15%**	Poor accountability for advising outcomes 15%	Uncertainty about how best to reach students 17%

Notes: *Survey question: "What are the top three barriers to improving academic advising for all students at your institution? Select top three." 2020 n = 1,440. 2021 n = 1,310. 2022 n = 685. 2023 n = 1,756. 2024 n = 942*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2020/21/22/23/24, Tyton Partners analysis*

Our national surveys of over 3,000 higher education administrators, frontline advising staff, and students suggest the following actions to better address advising challenges:

- Call to action for institutions
  - For institutional leaders
    - **Audit and enhance data quality to unlock generative AI's potential:** Ensure that high-quality data are used as input for automated tools like chatbots to foster trust in generative AI and alleviate advisor pressure. Audit student success data for completeness, standardized terminology, and consistent units to prepare for future information access needs.

- **Mitigate the impact of advisor turnover and support new advisors:** Address advisor turnover by delegating specialized tasks, such as re-enrollment, to dedicated teams or external success coaches. Additionally, ensure that new advisors have manageable caseloads and provide professional development opportunities to facilitate a smooth transition and sustained effectiveness.

- **Promote a culture of collaboration for holistic student support:** Establish standard operating processes that promote coordination and break down organizational silos. Foster strong communication channels between support services, academic advisors, and faculty.

- For all frontline support teams (including faculty and holistic support providers)

  - **Promote awareness of student support services:** Be vigilant in observing signs of student needs, such as changes in behavior, academic performance, or attendance. Introduce available support services to students when/where possible. When observing signs of a student struggling, proactively guide them to appropriate support services.

  - **Prioritize proactive outreach:** Leverage data (e.g., student usage of support services) to implement proactive outreach programs to identify and assist students who may be struggling, with special emphasis on at-risk student populations.

- For professional academic advisors (primary role)

  - **Give generative AI tools a try:** Engage in training sessions and independent experimentation to increase comfort with interpreting data insights and use of generative AI in student success, which should streamline effective caseload management by freeing up time to focus on more complex advising needs.

  - **Enable holistic advising conversations by leveraging technology to automate transactional activities:** Explore solutions that assist in accomplishing transactional course selection and registration tasks efficiently, enhancing student autonomy, facilitating more informed discussions, and creating advising capacity for addressing students' broader concerns, such as safety and financial issues.

  - **Partner with other support service functions:** Collaborate with other resources at the institution—such as student success coaches, career services, and financial aid counseling—for specific tasks to prioritize meeting time for personalized student support and holistic advising conversations.

- For providers of holistic support services (i.e., mental health, financial aid, career services)

  - **Support academic advisors in growing their knowledge base:** For example, leverage knowledge transference between academic advisors and financial aid counselors, allowing academic advisors to cover topics outside of core course selection, registration, and degree progress and fulfilling student desires to discuss financial challenges with academic advisors.

- Call to action for solution providers

  - Capacity-building solutions

    · **Address pressing challenges:** Develop scalable solutions to alleviate high advisor caseloads and facilitate the onboarding and integration of new advisors, prioritizing efficiency.

    · **Tailor professional development:** Design programs catering to the diverse needs of advisors and students to enhance skills and effectiveness in support delivery.

    · **Focus on outcomes:** Offer analytics for measuring solution impact on retention, graduation rates, and overall satisfaction.

  - Integration solutions and communications platforms

    · **Ensure high-quality, interoperable data:** Provide tools for data auditing and standardization to maintain accurate student records across platforms and source systems.

    · **Enable comprehensive reporting:** Ensure real-time data access for informed decision-making among advisors and frontline staff across support offices.

    · **Promote data-driven decision-making:** Equip institutions with dashboards and visualization tools to identify trends and support strategic decisions, especially concerning at-risk student populations.

    · **Facilitate timely, active communication with students:** Make it simple for frontline team members to (pro)actively communicate with students with pertinent nudges and reminders. Allow all communication channels to be easily tracked in institutional systems (e.g., SIS, CRM, LMS) to reduce administrative burden.

METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Tyton Partners conducted three national surveys of higher-education stakeholders in 2024, gathering insights from approximately 1,600 students, 1,300 academic advisors and support professionals, and 300 administrators. Survey topics covered current structures and practices across student support offices, challenges faced by support professionals, and usage of technology, including generative AI. Respondents represent a range of perspectives across the institutional student support landscape (more details available in *Appendix*). Importantly, this year's student survey respondents do not represent the average racial/ethnic makeup of national college students; large proportions of students from underserved racial groups (Black and Hispanic, in particular) were intentionally sampled to provide enough statistical power for between-group comparisons.

NEW SOLUTIONS: GENERATIVE AI APPLICATIONS IN STUDENT SUPPORT

Advisor caseload and capacity challenges persist, and generative AI could alleviate some of this burden. A place to start might be in course registration automation, given how transactional and rules-based the traditional course selection and scheduling process is for students. However, most administrators and student support professionals have not yet regularly used generative AI, even though technology providers are rapidly embedding generative AI into their solutions. Staff should experiment independently to familiarize themselves with generative AI capabilities and take advantage of training opportunities when offered by their institutions. When exploring generative AI's potential for student success, cautious urgency is essential; institutions need to balance timely implementation with nurturing stakeholder trust and ensuring that generative AI applications throughout student support services are founded upon high-quality student success data.

A POTENTIAL CATALYST FOR PROGRESS: GENERATIVE AI SUPPORTING CORE TRANSACTIONAL ADVISOR ACTIVITIES, NAMELY COURSE REGISTRATION

Year after year, our research finds that advisors face high caseloads (as elaborated on in the *Perennial Challenges section*). With limited capacity, they struggle to engage in holistic conversations with their students and cover topics that students want to discuss (see *Figure 20*). This year, our findings point to generative AI tools within course registration as a potential opportunity to relieve advisor burden and promote more holistic advising experiences for students.

Course registration and related discussions are the most time-consuming set of activities for academic advisors (see *Figure 2*). Importantly, course registration involves both discussion-based (e.g., goal setting) and transactional sub-activities (e.g., scenario mapping). This presents a significant opportunity to leverage generative AI in a way that augments, not replaces, advisor skill sets.

Figure 2

Daily activities of academic advisors

Help students select courses or a plan of study — Primary-role advisor: 95%, Faculty advisor: 59%

Course planning is also the advising activity that takes up the most time each week for primary-role advisors

Liaise with other departments (financial aid, career services, etc.) for referrals — 72%, 21%

Review caseload to prioritize students who need my attention — 68%, 24%

Serve on advising or departmental committees — 61%, 51%

Help new students get adjusted (orientation, FYE courses, etc.) — 60%, 24%

Help students explore research or career interests and opportunities — 59%, 43%

Administrative tasks such as reviewing policies and determining accommodations — 50%, 29%

Content creation via programming, social media, etc. — 21%, 7%

Teach or tutor — 20%, 60%

Faculty advisors spend the most time each week teaching or tutoring

Administer placement or other testing — 5%, 4%

■ Primary-role advisor
■ Faculty advisor

Notes: *Survey question: "On a typical day working as an advisor, please select all of the activities you engage with on a daily or near-daily basis. Select all that apply." Faculty and professional advisor n = 800*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Advisors spend a significant portion of their time on course registration and planning, likely because they also view the topic as most core to their responsibilities (see the ***Perennial Challenges section*** for more detail). Further, they are unconvinced that students can effectively register for courses independently. Students, on the other hand, are generally confident in their independent abilities (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3

Student* and advisor** opinions on students' abilities to select the right classes for graduation without an academic advisor's help

First-year students

n= 306 913

	Students	Advisors
Strongly disagree	5%	50%
Disagree	7%	27%
Neutral	35%	11%
Agree	26%	6%
Strongly agree	27%	5%

−42%

Non-first-year students

n= 1,117 916

	Students	Advisors
Strongly disagree	4%	15%
Disagree	6%	23%
Neutral	30%	24%
Agree	27%	25%
Strongly agree	33%	14%

−21%

Findings are generally consistent across institution sector and size

■ Strongly disagree
■ Disagree
■ Neutral
■ Agree
■ Strongly agree

Notes: *Survey questions: *"I am confident in my ability to select the right courses each term for me to graduate without my academic advisor's help." **"Students [in their first year/beyond their first year] can select their own classes each term without help from an academic advisor"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Listening to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Despite the time and effort spent on course registration, only 40% of advisors say that their institution has implemented academic planning technology at a similar level (see *Figure 4*). Here, generative AI may be uniquely positioned to support advisors and students. As an underutilized technology, it can potentially save advising meeting time spent on the technical aspects of course registration, enabling more holistic advising conversations. And as a complex and interactive set of tools, generative AI can reassure hesitant advisors that students are being supported in the transactional elements of course registration while also satisfying students' desire for independence. By starting the generative AI journey focused on transactional elements, institutions can more slowly come to grips with how they can maintain accountability as generative AI's remit expands—students may need to be coached on how best to prompt the technology, and safeguards must be put in place to avoid faulty action taken based on erroneous generative content.

Figure 4

Implementation of select advising technologies

	At scale	Implementation in progress	Planning for implementation	Not systematic	Not implemented	n=
Analysis of progress to degree	75%	15%	3%	5%	1%	861
Solutions that facilitate advisor management	58%	21%	5%	13%	3%	826
Academic planning	46%	18%	6%	17%	13%	805
Integration platform, data lake, or data warehouse	39%	23%	12%	14%	13%	686
Student messaging platforms that aim to influence student behavior	38%	22%	7%	17%	16%	761
Assessments that measure students' risk profiles	29%	20%	8%	22%	21%	698

Notes: *Survey question: "Which of the following primary advising functions does your institution use technology to support?"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Indeed, our findings suggest that, out of a list of common student supports, course registration is the support where institutional staff and students are most aligned when it comes to potential for generative AI usage in student supports (see *Figure 5*). Even in this case, administrators and students would prefer a mix of human and automated interaction for student interactions around course registration.

Figure 5

Institutional* and student** preference of student's human interaction vs. automated/generative AI interaction with support services

Prefer students interacting with professionals only

Prefer students interacting with automated/generative AI services only

| | 0 | | | 5 |

Course registration: 2.56 2.79

Academic advising: 1.95 2.19 2.66

Financial aid: 2.15 2.33 2.65

Career advising: 2.06 2.36 2.71

Mental health: 1.51 1.74 2.55

Admin and students both prefer a mix of human and automated services for course registration

■ Frontline student support providers
■ Administrators
■ Students

Notes: *Survey question: *"Please indicate the extent to which you would prefer your institution provide generative AI tools to student support services. Please indicate an answer for each type of support service." Administrator n = 218. Support staff n = 804. **"In addition to applications around schoolwork, generative AI tools can be also used for student support services. Generative AI tools have lots of possible benefits related to providing student support services, though there are also possible limitations associated with the technology. We would like to better understand where you see the benefits and limitations of generative AI tools. Please indicate the extent to which you would prefer your college/university use generative AI tools to provide student support services. Please indicate an answer for each type of support service." Student n = 1,412*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Listening to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Some institutions, ahead of the curve, have already introduced generative AI into their advising and student support operations. We showcase a few examples of how institutions have chosen to carve out areas to experiment with generative AI tools (see *Figure 6*). Through targeted deployment of point solutions, institutions can thoughtfully control how students interface with generative AI recommendations.

Figure 6

Exemplar applications of generative AI tools deployed as point solutions

COURSE REGISTRATION

In a pilot with the University of Central Florida, Campus Evolve's chatbot **is helping students choose courses by asking student–specific, detailed questions** rather than relying only on student and institutional data in existing systems such as SIS (unlike many traditional LLMs).

ACADEMIC ADVISING

The University of Michigan is one of the few institutions to launch its own institution–specific LLM (U–M relied on a walled–garden Microsoft model as a base). U–M Maizey, an advising–specific sub–model, is trained on U–M advising data and provides students with 24/7 support to augment support from professional advisors.

STUDENT AFFAIRS
(persistence and retention)

In 2016, Georgia State introduced "Pounce," an AI chatbot by Mainstay, to **mitigate summer melt among incoming freshman.** Recently, Mainstay has launched Firefly AI, a generative AI solution that allows institutions like GSU to control training and response sets while still utilizing more powerful models.

MENTAL HEALTH

Amarillo College utilizes TimelyCare to provide more 24/7 emotional support as well as improved scheduling. TimelyCare's **AI–powered symptom checker helps students self–assess** and identify potential solutions and resources more quickly.

CAREER ADVISING

Coco, Handshake's career copilot, integrates into Handshake's job search portal, offering a **more personalized, nuanced alternative to job search filtering.** Coco also recommends students to resources, including career advisors, for more complex discussions.

INTEGRATION SOLUTIONS

SnapLogic supported Skidmore in the college's efforts to migrate its data to a cloud–based platform. AI–based integration reduced errors made by manual data entry, and it increased process interpretability while reducing training onramp time for new staff members.

Sources: *CampusEvolve, TimelyCare, Handshake, University of Miami Career Center, SnapLogic, Tyton Partners analysis*

Conceptions of generative AI point solutions for course registration highlight the need for caution when using generative AI. Aggressively implementing generative AI without considering the human-centered nature of student support activities can decrease service quality. It would be a mistake to replace advisors with generative AI tools. Students will need support from their advisors and counselors to leverage the tools in accurate, efficient manners (and to fill in gaps where the technology falters). Generative AI should be viewed as an additional resource for students to engage with and augment limited advisor capacity. Indeed, both students and frontline support staff agree on two main reasons for limiting generative AI: the importance of human interaction and the potential risk to service quality (nearly three out of four frontline support staff are most concerned about generative AI distorting essential human interactions).
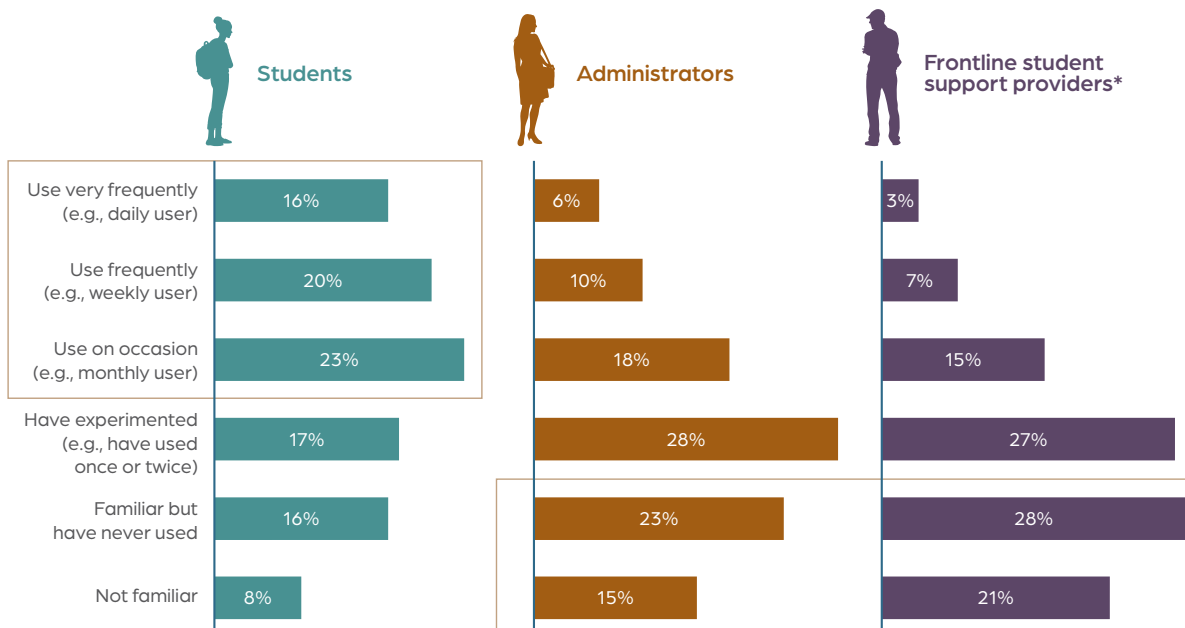
FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES: CURRENT USAGE AND NEXT STEPS

GENERATIVE AI USAGE AND AWARENESS WITHIN STUDENT SUPPORT DEPARTMENTS

59% of students use generative AI at least once a month. Student support offices at institutions lag behind, with less than a third of institutional respondents reporting the same usage (see *Figure 7*). Frontline support staff are not engaged with generative AI—nearly half have never used generative AI tools.

Figure 7

Usage and awareness of generative AI tools

	Students	Administrators	Frontline student support providers*
Use very frequently (e.g., daily user)	16%	6%	3%
Use frequently (e.g., weekly user)	20%	10%	7%
Use on occasion (e.g., monthly user)	23%	18%	15%
Have experimented (e.g., have used once or twice)	17%	28%	27%
Familiar but have never used	16%	23%	28%
Not familiar	8%	15%	21%

Notes: *Survey questions: "Which of the following best describes your own use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for [school-related] work [or activities]?" Student n = 1,526. Administrator n = 306. Support staff n = 1,266. *Administrators defined as non-academic advising, non-faculty staff holding director positions or above, as well as student affairs and equity professionals, while frontline support providers include academic advisors, other support providers, as well as some faculty*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Listening to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Based on trends in faculty and student usage across our longitudinal studies[2], however, we do anticipate an increase in institutional generative AI usage across all stakeholders as time goes on. With these qualifying factors as a backdrop, investigations into generative AI applications across student supports are expected to increase. Currently, generative AI users across support roles hold a much greater belief in generative AI's ability to improve student persistence and retention (see *Figure 8*) over non-generative AI users. Assuming that the usage and experimentation with generative AI will increase over time, institutions would do well to proactively explore other areas in which generative AI can improve coordination across supports, relieve capacity constraints, and increase student engagement.

Figure 8

Institutional belief around generative AI's impact on student outcomes
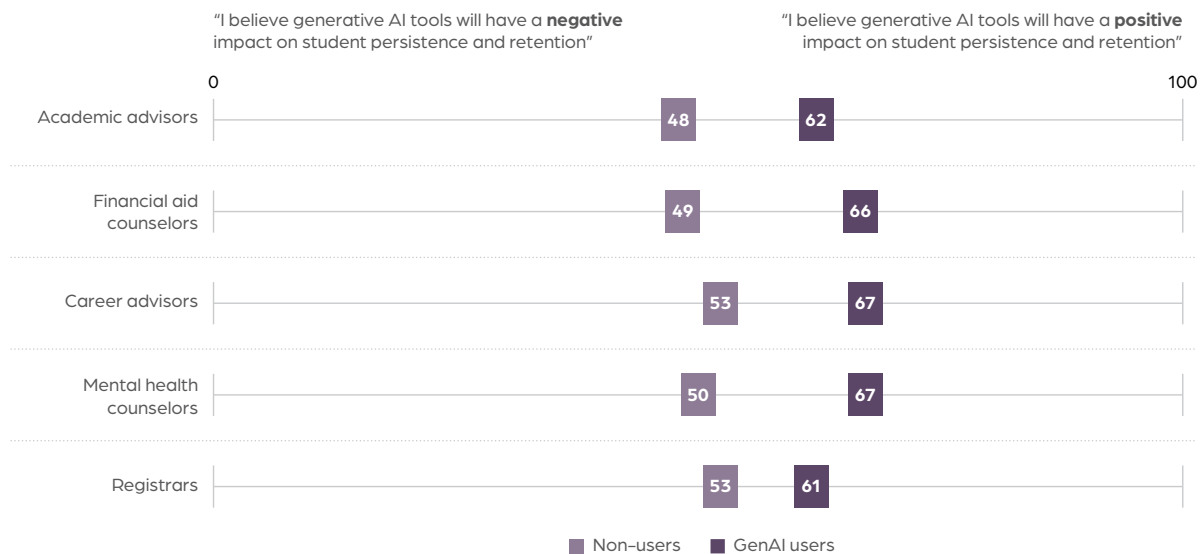
Notes: *Survey question: "Please read each pair of statements and decide to what extent you agree with one more than the other." Academic advisors n = 621. Financial aid counselors n = 81. Career advisors n = 95. Mental health counselors n = 81. Registrars n = 67. Each bucket includes professionals as well as administrators familiar with the support*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Our survey pushed institutional stakeholders to think about generative AI, specifically in the context of student supports. Many, however, are unaware of actions taken by their institution to bolster student supports via generative AI (see *Figure 9*). Another significant portion do not believe that their institution has taken any generative AI-related action in student supports. According to respondents, about one in five institutions is providing generative AI training, and one in five institutions is developing policies around generative AI usage for student support staff. While these figures are not completely encouraging, further action may be in progress. Elsewhere, three in five provosts have reported that a generative AI policy is currently under development.[3]

2. Bharadwaj, P., Shaw, C., Henrie, A., Martin, S., Janson, N., & Bryant, G. (2024, June). *Time for Class 2024*. Tyton Partners
3. Flaherty, Colleen, Doug Lederman, Inside Higher Ed, and Hanover Research. 2024. "2024 Survey of College and University Chief Academic Officers." Inside Higher Ed

Institutions can and should do more to raise staff awareness of policies and generative AI actions. Student usage outpaces staff usage, and technology providers are racing to implement generative AI in their products. Support staff continue to feel the pressures of high caseloads and uncoordinated services—just so, they see the largest strengths of generative AI as its potential to increase service efficiency and its potential to improve capacity. By not including student support staff in their generative AI efforts and decisions, institutions risk poorly aligned efforts, missed opportunities to relieve staff of undue burden (e.g., around course registration), and worse. Indeed, nearly a third of high schoolers are already using tools like ChatGPT to deal with mental health issues.[4] If institutions do not leverage generative AI in their support services, this next generation of students may turn to external and un-vetted solutions that do.

Figure 9

Institutional actions taken around generative AI, according to <u>administrators and frontline support staff</u>
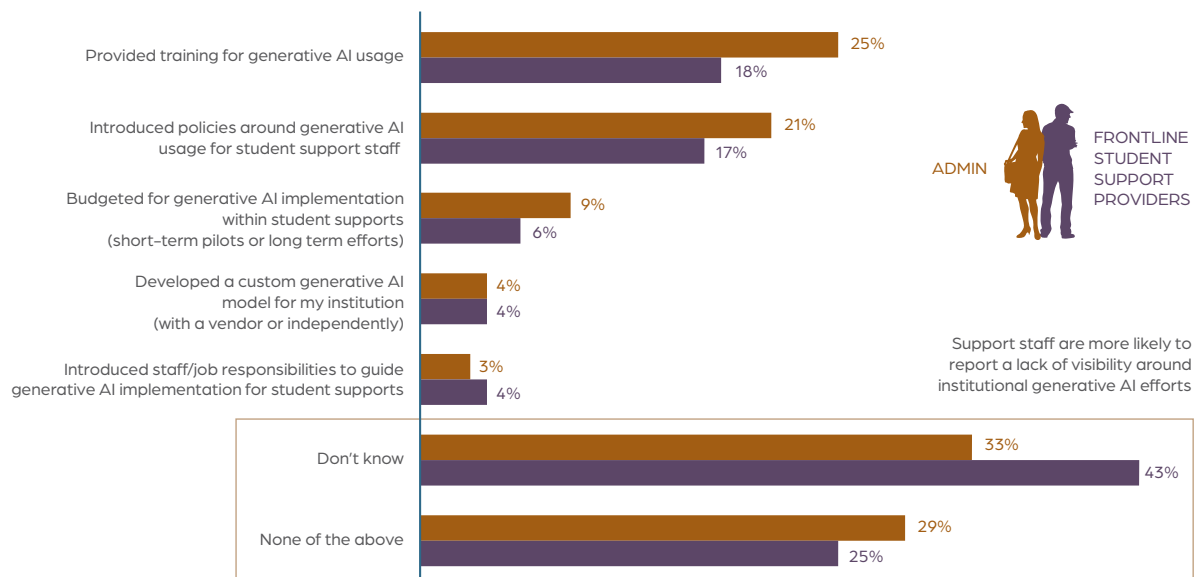
Notes: *Survey question: "Please select the actions your institution has taken regarding generative AI—only select actions if they affect student supports. Select all that apply." Administrator n = 260. Support staff n = 997. Combined select answer stems (short-term and long-term budgeting; developing a generative AI model with a vendor and independently)*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

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4. Laird, Elizabeth, Madeliene Dwyer, Hugh Grant-Chapman, and The Center for Democracy & Technology. 2023. "EdTech Threats to Student Privacy and Equity in the Age of AI." *https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/091923-CDT-Off-Task-web.pdf*

NEAR-TERM OPPORTUNITY: IMPROVING TRUST AND FAMILIARITY THROUGH TRAINING

Support administrators and staff want their institutions to provide further training on generative AI and student-facing generative AI tools (see *Figure 10*). Although a quarter of respondents are unsure of what activities to prioritize, this uncertainty is less prominent compared to their awareness of current institutional activities. Most support administrators and staff have an opinion on how their institution can advance with generative AI, indicating interest in the technology.

Figure 10

Top-priority generative AI activities for student supports
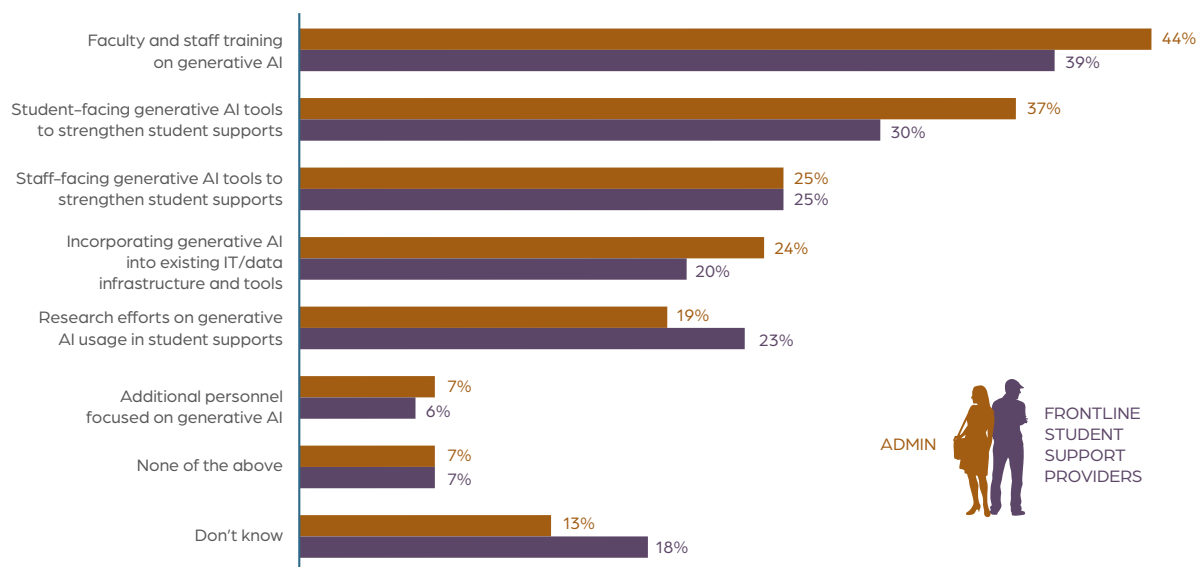
Notes: *Survey question: "Which two generative AI activities would you prioritize as most valuable for your institution's student supports? Assume these activities would only impact student supports. Select top two." Administrator n = 260. Support staff n = 997. " To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I would completely trust the information from chatbots powered by generative AI if they were provided to me by my school." n = 1,412, 4-5 on a 5-point scale used here as "trust"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

There are, however, several barriers to generative AI implementation that institutions must consider; chief among them is the lack of trust and familiarity with generative AI reported by support administrators and professionals. Even among generative AI users, distrust of generative AI is seen as the top barrier to further generative AI implementation within student supports. For these more fundamental barriers, increased exposure to and clarity around generative AI tools may appease many who are hesitant. Focusing on training and policies, therefore, may effectively address the most pressing barriers that institutions face now.

Tool availability is not a limiting factor for institutional efforts to increase exposure to generative AI tools. Incumbent and emerging technology providers alike have certainly taken to the generative AI wave. While two-thirds of institutional respondents do not know whether their current institutional student support technologies offered generative AI capabilities, there is indeed an existing and rapidly expanding set of generative AI-supported technology solutions for student supports (see *Figure 11*).

Figure 11

Exemplar generative AI product integrations by incumbent <u>solution providers</u>

ellucian.

Ellucian, the operator of popular solutions like Banner, CampusLogic, and CRM Advise, spans most institutional offices and is integrating AI across its capabilities. Ellucian is developing AI technology across its product portfolio to help both students achieve their goals and institutional leaders enhance their operations. On the student experience front, Virtual Advisor serves as a financial–aid focused chatbot and Ellucian Journey supports students through their academic pathways, from higher education to workforce. For administrators, Ellucian Insights offers generative AI–enhanced analytics, Insights X–Ray identifies noteworthy trends across institutional data, and Forms Assistant rapidly generates detailed forms based on simple prompts. Through these innovations, Ellucian is advancing the use of AI to improve both student success and institutional efficiency.

salesforce

Salesforce recently announced AI capabilities in Education Cloud. Intelligent Degree Planning and Skills Generator are two product features that leverage AI to help advisors **personalize students' course pathways and concretely link academic journeys to potential careers.** Called Einstein, Salesforce's AI platform has many AI capabilities, including, but not limited to: predictive AI to predict outcomes (e.g. student's likelihood to apply , enroll and graduate); and a broad set of co–pilot experiences for conversational AI in the flow of work for staff: case summarization, student record summarization, generation of campaign content for marketing campaigns, suggested replies to incoming inquiries, email content generation and a lot more.

EAB

EAB has integrated several AI capabilities into its Navigate360 platform. These include a message content creator for advisors, a report assistant, and a student–facing, conversational knowledge bot. The knowledge bot gives students an easier way to get support, instructions, and answers to common questions while easing the burden on university staff. The bot learns on its own to interpret variations of student questions and can deliver more accurate answers that have been contextualized to the student based on the institutional knowledge of them.

watermark

Watermark (Aviso Retention is a portfolio company) has recently focused AI efforts on helping institutions improve program learning outcomes. As a wide–reaching incumbent, Watermark does not limit AI to student success and has focused on developing AI–powered solutions that save time with routine tasks, accelerate data interpretation and synthesis, and infuse new ideas into institutional and student success improvement initiatives.

Sources: *Ellucian, EAB, Salesforce, Watermark, Tyton Partners analysis*

Providers, often in collaboration with innovative institutions, have offered important scaffolding for generative AI use cases: chatbots to support advisor capacity and offer basic, personalized Q&A for students, at-risk student identification and outreach, and beyond. Students want generative AI as part of their support experience (see *Figure 5*) and their daily usage (see *Figure 7*), indicating comfort with the technology. Providers readily offer generative AI solutions, and many of these established providers are already embedded into institutions' existing technology stack, as shown in *Figure 11*. Solutions exist that can connect across multiple student support functions (e.g., Mainstay, Ellucian, EAB, Ocelot) or that are tailored for a specific office (e.g., TimelyCare, Handshake, TheApply.ai).
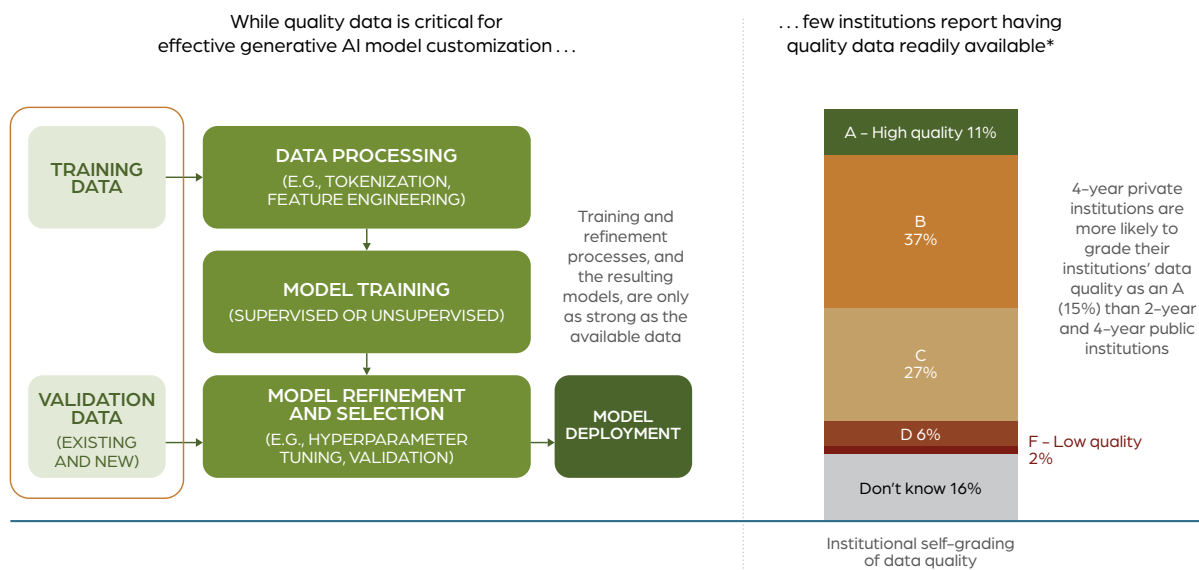
With point solutions and source system solutions all offering generative AI functionality, the onus to strategically increase, the adoption of generative AI across institutional technologies, therefore, falls more squarely on institutions themselves. The capabilities to relieve advisor capacity or scale personalized student outreach may already exist in an institution's technology stack. To maximize the return of their investments in technology, current and future, institutions must prioritize understanding, adapting to, and harnessing the potential of generative AI.

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITY: IMPROVING DATA QUALITY

Over time, as more attention is paid, the quality of student success data will become increasingly important. Though crucial to generative AI model creation, only one in 10 institutions rates its student support data as "A" quality (see *Figure 12*). Incomplete, inaccurate, or biased data will jeopardize generative AI's ability to produce accurate and tailored content—low-quality data will lead to low-quality analysis and low-quality model output. While generative AI can also help automate integration pipelines and support nontechnical staff, disparate data sets need common foundations and definitions to facilitate interoperability across systems as well as seed generative AI model. Both institutions and technology providers have a part to play in ensuring that student support data sets are properly structured to fully leverage generative AI.

Figure 12

Quality student success data: definition, generative AI use case, and self-assessed grade

While quality data is critical for effective generative AI model customization . . .

. . . few institutions report having quality data readily available*

TRAINING DATA → DATA PROCESSING (E.G., TOKENIZATION, FEATURE ENGINEERING) → MODEL TRAINING (SUPERVISED OR UNSUPERVISED) → MODEL REFINEMENT AND SELECTION (E.G., HYPERPARAMETER TUNING, VALIDATION) → MODEL DEPLOYMENT

VALIDATION DATA (EXISTING AND NEW)

Training and refinement processes, and the resulting models, are only as strong as the available data

A – High quality 11%
B 37%
C 27%
D 6%
F – Low quality 2%
Don't know 16%

4–year private institutions are more likely to grade their institutions' data quality as an A (15%) than 2–year and 4–year public institutions

Institutional self–grading of data quality

Notes: Survey questions: *"How would you rate the quality of your institution's student support data? Consider features like handling of missing data, consistency of data and definitions, and handling of duplicate data. Focus on the quality of the data rather than the technology that may host it." n = 1,572

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

As students continue to demonstrate their appetite for generative AI, institutional student support offices look to play catch-up. Training, policies, and even student-facing tools are high-potential strategies to raise awareness of generative AI activities as well as to increase trust and understanding among staff. In conjunction with those efforts, institutions can begin the process of ensuring that their student support data is of high-enough quality to allow for generative AI model training. Despite support administrators and professionals' general aversion to student interactions with generative AI support services right now, institutions should feel encouraged—and urged—to develop bold and multipronged approaches to address all layers of generative AI barriers. Doing so will help avoid future bottlenecks and ultimately set departments—and students—up for success.

NEW CHALLENGES: HIGH ADVISOR TURNOVER

The timing of generative AI's potential couldn't be more apt, given that advisor turnover now represents a significant challenge. Emotional exhaustion and burnout are of particular concern for primary advisors with high caseloads. Technology such as generative AI, along with professional development, could serve as solutions to enhance advisor efficiency and facilitate collaboration across student supports.

Highlighted as an emerging issue in last year's *Driving Toward a Degree* publication, advisor turnover has persisted as a significant challenge in 2024, now ranking as the second most prominent institutional barrier to enhancing advising (see *Figure 13*).

Figure 13

Selection of "Retention of advisors/turnover" as a top institutional barrier to improving advising over time
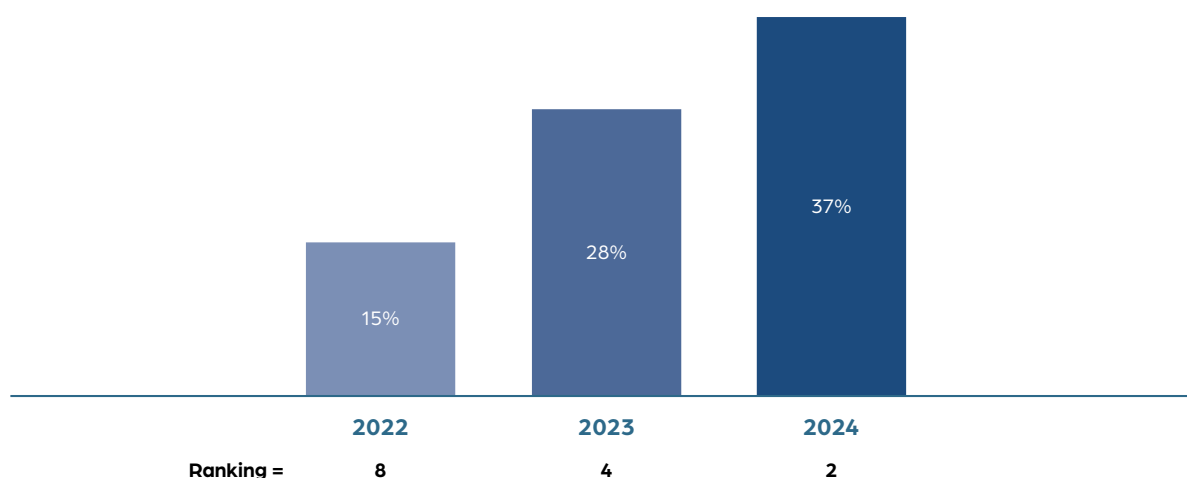
	2022	2023	2024
	15%	28%	37%
Ranking =	8	4	2

Notes: *Survey question: "What are the top three barriers to improving academic advising for all students at your institution? Select top three." 2022 n = 685. 2023 n = 1,756. 2024 n = 942*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2022/23/24, Tyton Partners analysis*

Prior research from NACADA also suggests that emotional exhaustion and burnout are a real problem for academic advisors, with 40% of academic advisors saying they feel burned out from their work at least once a week to every day.[5] Students have been feeling the impact, as shown by a September 2023 article in the University of California Santa Cruz's student newspaper discussing the high turnover rates the academic advising department has experienced.[6] The article recounts the experience of a student who had three academic advisors in seven semesters.

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5. Soria, Krista M., Elise Kokenge, Cassandra A. Heath, Erin C. Standley, Shannon J.F. Wilson, Jacob R. Connley, and Aaron I. Agramon. 2023. "Factors Associated With Academic Advisors' Burnout." NACADA Journal 43 (2): 105–20. *https://doi.org/10.12930/nacada-23-14*
6. Barry, Ella. 2023. "The Academic Advising Crisis — Students and past advisor weigh in." The Scribe, September 13, 2023. *https://scribe.uccs.edu/the-academic-advising-crisis-students-and-past-advisor-weigh-in/*

Our survey shows that nearly a third of primary advisors indicate that they have been in their role at their institution for less than two years, showing that there has been recent turnover (see *Figure 14*). When asked about the activities engaged with on a daily or near-daily basis, primary-role advisors with tenure less than two years are less likely than primary-role advisors with tenure greater than two years to help new students get adjusted, liaise with other departments (financial aid, career services, etc.) for referrals, and conduct administrative tasks, such as reviewing policies and determining accommodations. Lower engagement with these activities, particularly helping new students get adjusted and liaising with other departments, can have a significant impact on student experience with advising.

Figure 14

Tenure in role* by institution sector and advisor type

	2–year		4–year public		4–year private	
n=	56	26	456	157	127	109
Less than 2 years	32%	12%	34%	10%	31%	4% / 7%
2–5 years	34%	27%	31%	13%	35%	18%
5–10 years	21%	62%	19%	29%	20%	71%
More than 10 years	13%		17%	48%	14%	
	Primary–role advisor	Faculty advisor	Primary–role advisor	Faculty advisor	Primary–role advisor	Faculty advisor
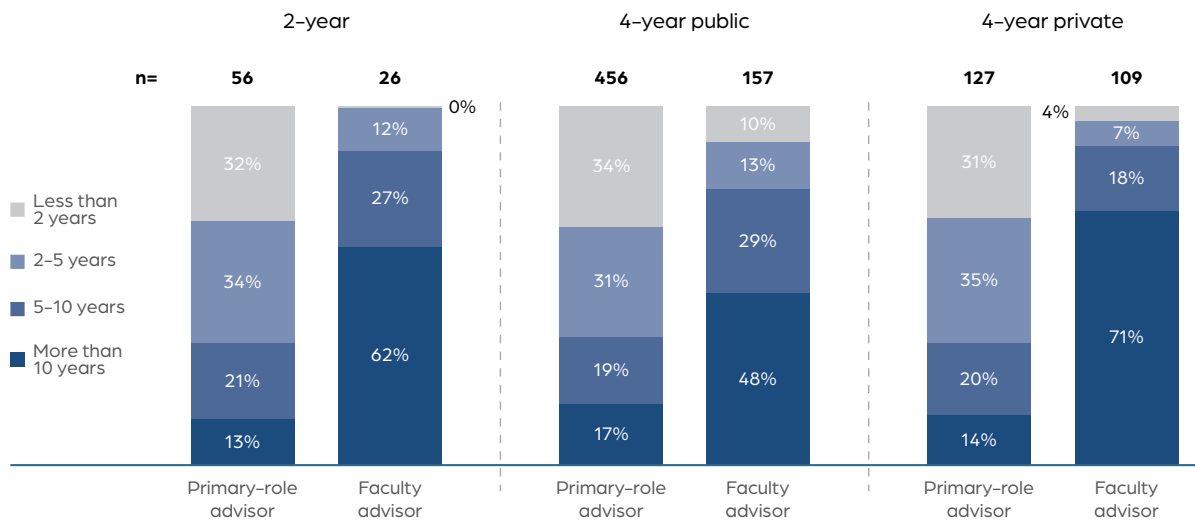
Notes: *Survey question: *"How many years have you worked in this role at this institution?"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Advisor retention is of particular concern for institutions with high caseloads. A fifth of primary-role advisors with caseload sizes of greater than 400 say they are unlikely to continue their role in the next five years (see *Figure 15*). This further exacerbates capacity issues, as advisor turnover has become a top barrier to improving advising in recent years. New advisors start off with lower caseloads than seasoned advisors (the average reported caseload for new primary-role advisors is 264 versus 303 for seasoned primary-role advisors), increasing overall strain on the advising team until new advisors gain their sea legs.

Figure 15

Primary-role advisor likelihood of continuing in role in 5 years by caseload size

n=	42	183	189	95

Legend:
- Not at all likely
- Unlikely
- Neutral
- Likely
- Very likely

CASELOAD SIZE =	0–99	100–249	250–399	400+
Not at all likely	2%	5%	4%	5%
Unlikely	7%	7%	8%	15%
Neutral	10%	15%	12%	15%
Likely	26%	30%	26%	21%
Very likely	55%	44%	50%	44%
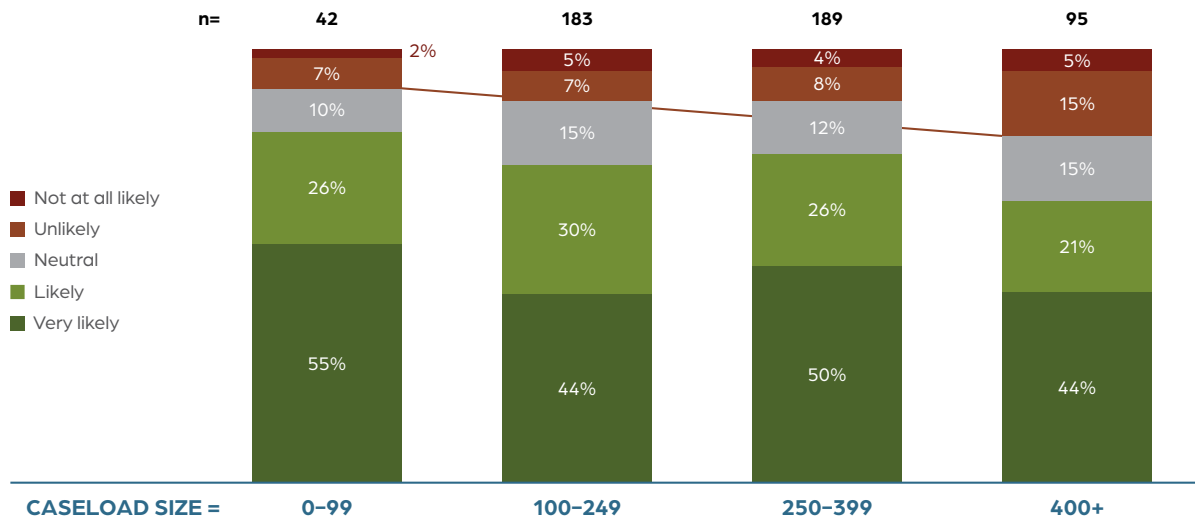
Notes: *Survey question: "How likely are you to continue in your career as an advisor in the next five years?"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

THOUGHTFUL ONBOARDING AND RAMP-UP FOR NEW ADVISORS

Offering structured training and mentoring during onboarding can ensure that new advisors develop the necessary skills and competencies to effectively serve students and contribute to the advising team. A deliberate ramp-up period can provide new advisors with time to adjust to higher caseload demands. Ultimately, a thoughtful approach accelerates the integration of new advisors and enhances their long-term success and retention within the institution.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Institutions can support academic advisors, particularly those with less tenure, by providing continuous training and professional development opportunities, such as capacity building. Capacity building helps academic advisors deepen their understanding of academic policies, curriculum requirements, and student support resources, as well as develop advisors' interpersonal and communication skills to more quickly and effectively build relationships with students. Importantly, professional development can help reduce the risk of burnout by introducing advisors to frameworks, tools, and strategies to prevent burnout.[7]

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7. Fahey, Stephanie, Nettie Freshour. 2023. "From Burnt Out to BRIGHT: Tools to Aid in Revitalization in Work Life." NACADA Voices of the Global Community. September 1, 2023. *https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/From-Burnt-Out-to-BRIGHT-Tools-to-Aid-in-Revitalization-in-Work-Life.aspx*

PERENNIAL CHALLENGES: CASELOAD AND COORDINATION

The escalating challenge of advisor turnover exacerbates the perennial barriers to improving advising that institutions face year after year, including limited advisor capacity and lack of coordination across student supports. These challenges undermine an advisor's ability to provide comprehensive, holistic guidance, therefore limiting advisor impact on student success. More effective incorporation of other student supports, physical and digital co-location of student supports, and increased data and system integration represent several potential solutions to addressing these persistent barriers.

HIGH CASELOADS

Throughout the last five years of *Driving Toward a Degree* research, high caseloads consistently emerge as the primary institutional obstacle to improving advising. Advisors endure the circumstances, but the negative impact of high caseloads is clear. As seen in the previous section, advisors burdened with higher caseloads face heightened risks of burnout. Additionally, advisors with high caseloads meet with a smaller proportion of their assigned students, conduct shorter student meetings, and are less likely to implement high-impact advising practices.

Primary-role advisors, particularly those at two-year institutions, contend with the highest caseloads (see *Figure 16*), with faculty advisors generally having much lower caseloads. Consequently, advisors at two-year institutions also voice the greatest concern regarding their caseload manageability, with fewer than 20% indicating that their caseload is "always manageable." Given that community colleges typically enroll more students from vulnerable populations who could benefit from increased advisor support, the negative impact of a high advisor caseload may be acutely felt by students at two-year institutions.

Figure 16

Primary-role advisor caseload size* by institution sector

n =	41	389	110

Legend:
- 400+
- 250–399
- 100–249
- 0–99

	2–year	4–year public	4–year private
400+	27%	21%	11%
250–399	44%	37%	34%
100–249	24%	34%	43%
0–99	5%	7%	13%

| **AVERAGE CASELOAD**	**319**	**286**	**234**
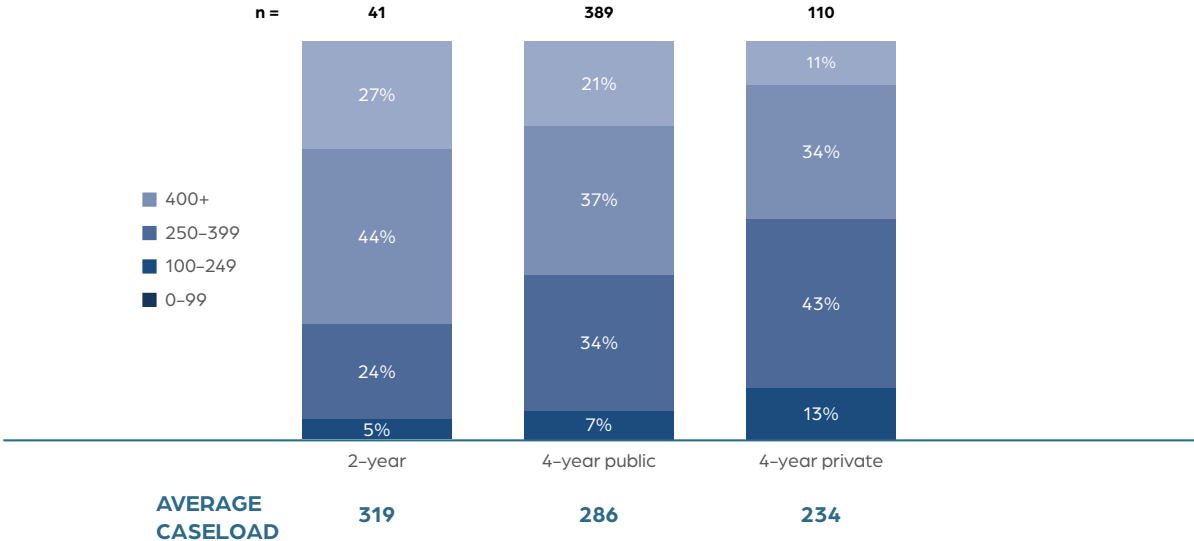
Notes: Survey question: *"What is the size of your advising or counseling student caseload for this spring term? (Please enter a numeric value.) Whether your institution has a semester or quarter system, for the purposes of this survey, fall is considered from August to December and spring from January to June"*

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

Advisors at two-year institutions also experience greater challenges with supporting students at pivotal junctures throughout their academic journey. "Contingency planning when students fall off track" and "successful adjustment to college" are key milestones that are less supported at two-year institutions than at four-year public and four-year private institutions (see *Figure 17*). Higher caseloads and the resulting strain on resources present additional challenges for advisors to provide support at the moments when it is needed most.

Figure 17

Student milestones that are least supported by institutions* by institution sector
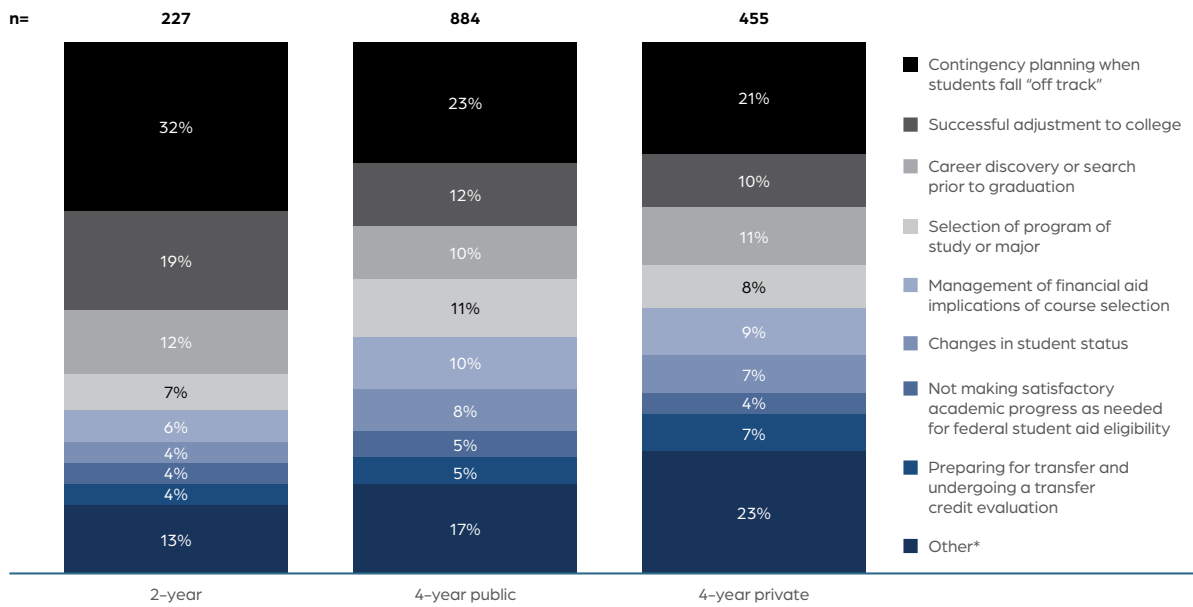
Notes: Survey questions: *"Which of the following student milestones/inflection points do you believe is least supported by your institution?";
*Other includes: Other, None, and Don't know

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

ADVERSE EFFECTS STEMMING FROM HIGH CASELOADS

1. **Advisors with higher caseloads report a lower adoption of high-impact advising practices** (see *Figure 18*). These practices, including maintaining advisor-student pairings over time and mandating that students meet with their academic advisors at least yearly, strive to develop a through line and consistent support experience for students across their academic journey. Failure to implement these best practices hinders the potential impact of academic advising on student success.

Figure 18

High-impact practice implementation by caseload size

CASELOAD SIZE

Legend: Not implemented | Not systematic | Planning for implementation | Implementation in progress | At scale | —— Implementation Trend
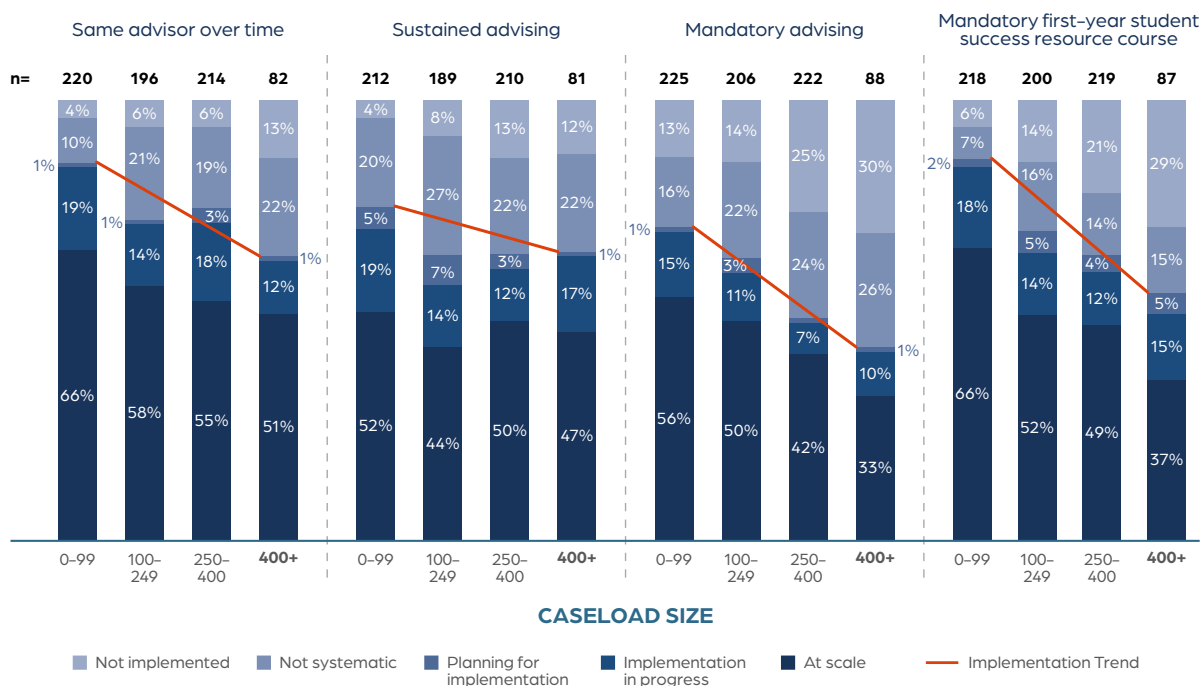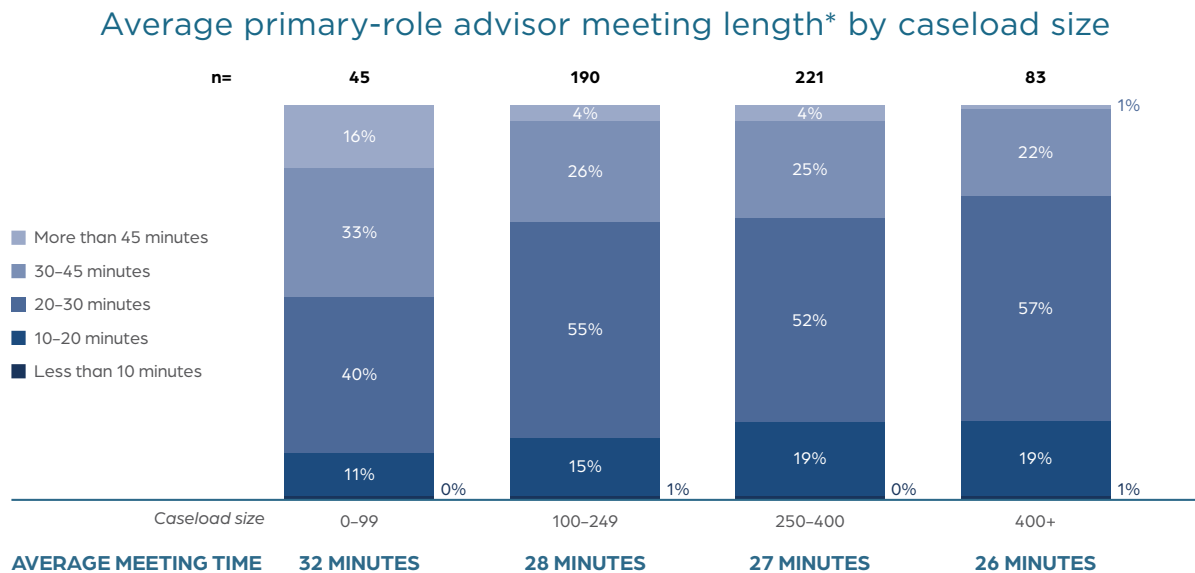
Notes: *Survey question: "Please assess the degree to which your institution implements these student advising policies and practices. Assignments of academic advisors to work with the same students over time. Sustained advising to engage students in supportive activities throughout their tenure at college, instead of, for example, only the first semester. Mandatory advising to ensure students engage with an advisor at least once per academic year. Mandatory enrollment in first-year experience courses designed to orient students to student success resources"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

2. **Higher caseloads result in advisors meeting with a lower portion of their caseload.** Primary-role advisors with a caseload of under 100 say they meet with 80% of their caseload, while advisors with caseloads greater than 400 only meet with 60% of their caseload. By engaging with academic advisors, students benefit from academic planning and goal setting, career guidance, personalized support, and resource connections. High caseloads limit the ability of all students to receive this holistic advising.

3. **Advisors managing heavier caseloads have lower average student meeting times.** Primary-role advisors with a caseload size of under 100 report an average meeting time of 32 minutes, while primary-role advisors with caseload sizes of over 400 report an average meeting time of 26 minutes (see *Figure 19*). Our research is corroborated by NACADA advisors who have shared that they have limited appointment services by shortening length due to workload challenges.[8] This difference in meeting length can have a crucial impact on a student's advising experience, potentially leading to feelings of being rushed rather than heard, dealing with unanswered questions instead of receiving clear guidance, or even opting to navigate their academic journey independently rather than seeking future advisor support.

Figure 19

Average primary-role advisor meeting length* by caseload size

n=	45	190	221	83

Legend	0–99	100–249	250–400	400+
More than 45 minutes	16%	4%	4%	1%
30–45 minutes	33%	26%	25%	22%
20–30 minutes	40%	55%	52%	57%
10–20 minutes	11%	15%	19%	19%
Less than 10 minutes	0%	1%	0%	1%

Caseload size

AVERAGE MEETING TIME	32 MINUTES	28 MINUTES	27 MINUTES	26 MINUTES

Notes: Survey question: *"For about how long do you typically meet with a student?"*

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

4. **There is a mismatch between the topics that advisors have time to discuss and the topics that students want to cover.** Academic advisors regard traditional course registration matters, such as selecting courses, registering for the next term, and reviewing progress toward graduation, as crucial topics to cover during advising sessions. Other topics—such as referrals, picking or changing a major, and career options and interests—are considered of secondary importance. There are also some differences between primary-role and faculty advisors, with primary-role advisors more likely to consider referrals, academic policies, and reviewing transfer credit to be essential, while faculty advisors over-index on career options and interests.
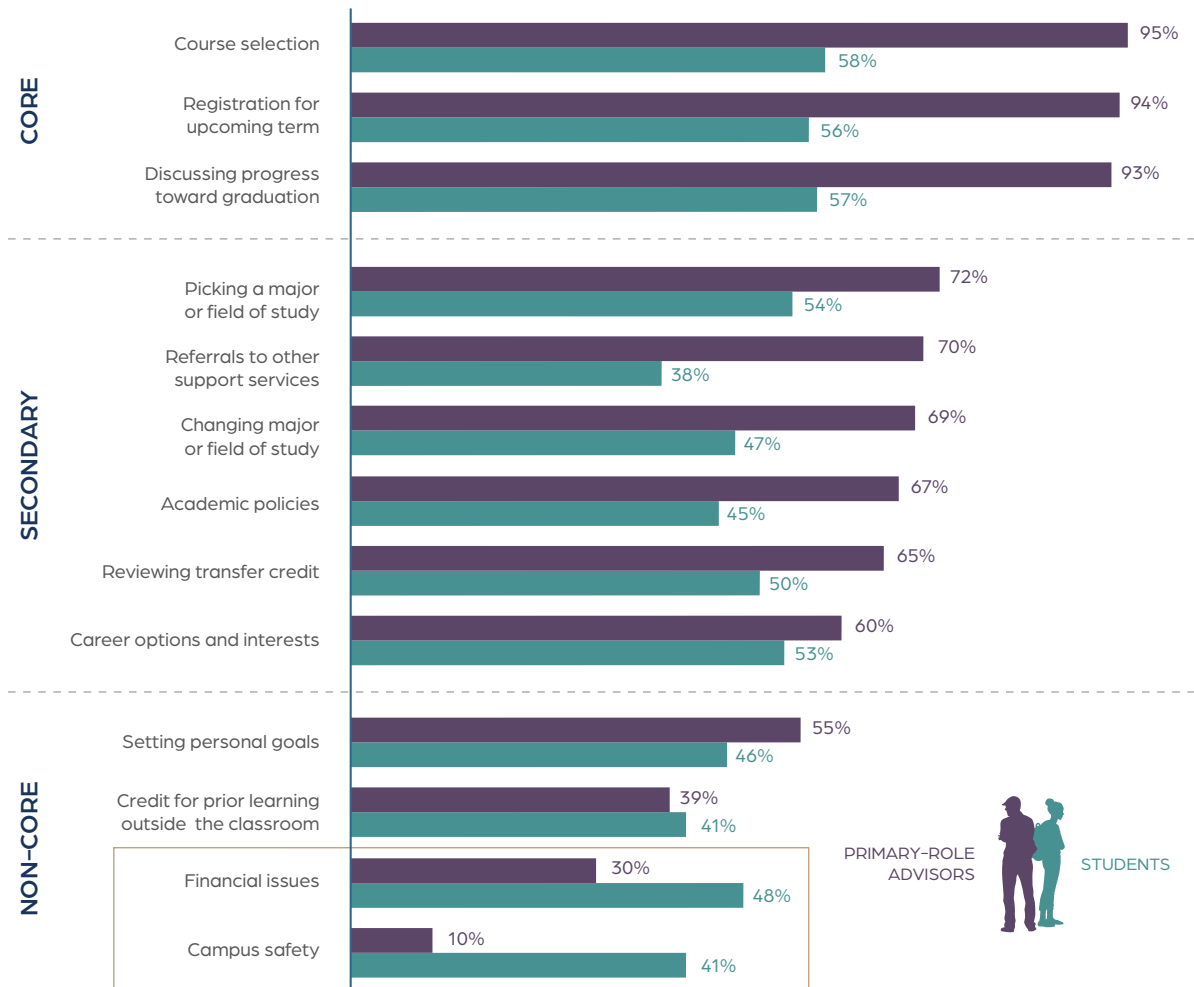
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8. Cumbia, Melissa, Lauren Varboncoeur. 2021. "Workload Stress in Primary-role Advising: Our Perspective on Causes, Effects, and Resolutions." NACADA Voices of the Global Community. November 18, 2021. *https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Workload-Stress-in-Primary-Role-Advising-Our-Perspective-on-Causes-Effects-and-Resolutions.aspx*

Additionally, there is a big differential in student demand and advisor ability to meet the demand to discuss topics like financial concerns and campus safety with advisors (see *Figure 20*). These two topics can significantly influence retention rates—for example, financial stress stands out as one of the foremost factors affecting student persistence.[9]

Figure 20

Academic advisor and student perspectives on important topics to cover

Sorted by primary-role advisor importance

	PRIMARY-ROLE ADVISORS	STUDENTS
CORE		
Course selection	95%	58%
Registration for upcoming term	94%	56%
Discussing progress toward graduation	93%	57%
SECONDARY		
Picking a major or field of study	72%	54%
Referrals to other support services	70%	38%
Changing major or field of study	69%	47%
Academic policies	67%	45%
Reviewing transfer credit	65%	50%
Career options and interests	60%	53%
NON-CORE		
Setting personal goals	55%	46%
Credit for prior learning outside the classroom	39%	41%
Financial issues	30%	48%
Campus safety	10%	41%

Notes: Survey question: "Advisor meetings can cover a variety of topics. Please indicate whether you think the following topics are important or not important for you to discuss with your academic advisor (regardless of whether you actually cover the topics). The 'Don't know/NA' column is chosen by default, so please make sure to change it (if applicable) to express your opinion." Student n = 1,439. "Academic advising meetings can cover a variety of topics. Please indicate whether you think these topics are essential for you to discuss with students in your caseload." Advisor n = 892

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Listening to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

9. Robb, Cliff A. 2017. "College Student Financial Stress: Are the Kids Alright?" Journal of Family and Economic Issues 38 (4): 514–27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-017-9527-6

POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO HIGH CASELOADS

LEVERAGE COACHING AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

Professional student success coaches work closely with students to help them achieve their academic, career, and personal goals by offering dedicated attention to promote student retention, engagement, and overall success. Peer mentors can provide many of the same benefits through academic, social, and emotional support. Introducing a coaching or a mentoring program could help alleviate pain from a high academic advisor caseload and promote stronger outcomes for students. Institutions that already have these programs in place should continue to ensure coordination between the program and other student support services—currently, student success coaches and peer mentoring are among the student supports that receive the lowest number of referrals.

While selecting an outside provider to coach or mentor students can offer valuable support, it's crucial to recognize that these individuals operate as extensions of the institution rather than permanent employees. Therefore, integrating them effectively into campus culture, processes, and norms is essential in order to capture the full benefits.

LACK OF COORDINATION ACROSS STUDENT SUPPORTS

Coordination and integration across student supports is crucial for holistic advising but proves challenging for institutions. This challenge is further compounded by new advisors who aren't yet thoroughly familiar with the intricacies of student supports at their institution. We assess the coordination of student supports across physical co-location, digital co-location, effective communication between providers, and back-end integration (see *Figure 21*).

Figure 21

Tyton Partners' coordination framework

PHYSICAL CO–LOCATION
Relative location of support service offices on campus(es): one–stop shops, mini–hubs, or disparate locations

DIGITAL CO–LOCATION
The degree to which students can access student supports online through a single student portal

COORDINATION IN SUPPORT OF HOLISTIC ADVISING

COMMUNICATION PRACTICE (NOT JUST REFERRALS)
Providers communicating their strategic goals at a unit level and reinforcing positive student behaviors

INTEGRATED DATA AND SYSTEMS
Back-end integration to link student records, which exist across different systems, inclusive of utilization and case notes

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

PHYSICAL CO-LOCATION

Roughly half of institutions indicate that student support provider offices are situated in separate locations rather than being centralized. Larger institutions are more likely to have student support provider offices located separately, which is often not conducive to student access and limits student awareness of the full range of support services.

Students attending institutions where student support offices are centralized in a one-stop shop tend to be more aware of a greater number of services compared to students whose institutions scatter support services across separate locations.[10] This dynamic likely contributes to students at institutions with a one-stop shop generally having stronger feelings of belonging, especially students at public institutions (see *Figure 22*).

Figure 22

Student sense of belonging* by student reported institution type and physical location of support office(s)**
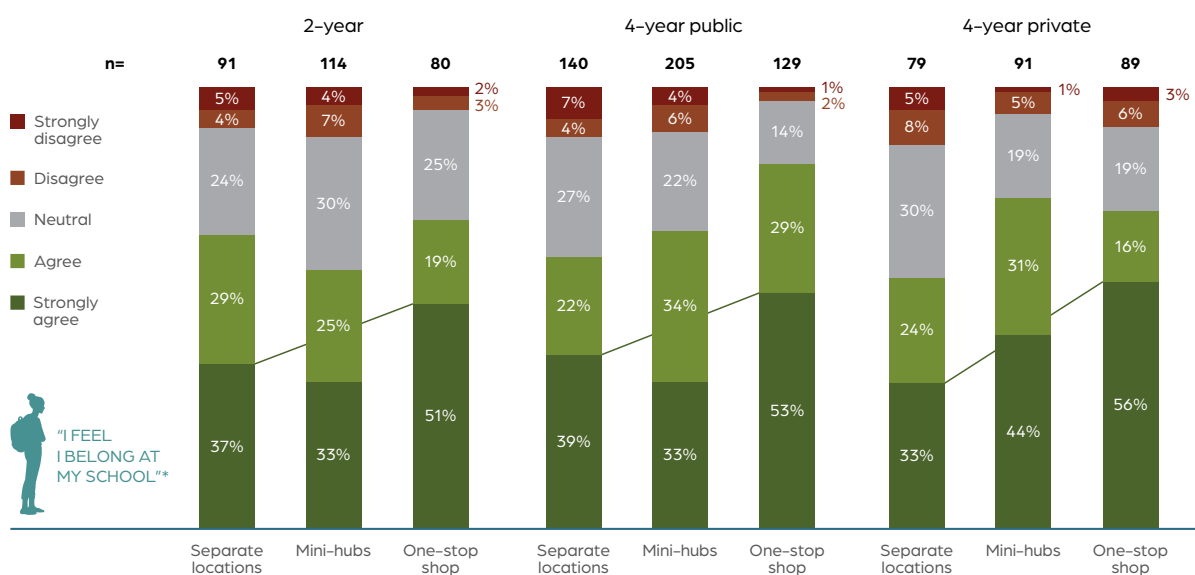
Notes: Survey questions: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school."
**"How are these student support provider offices arranged on campus?"
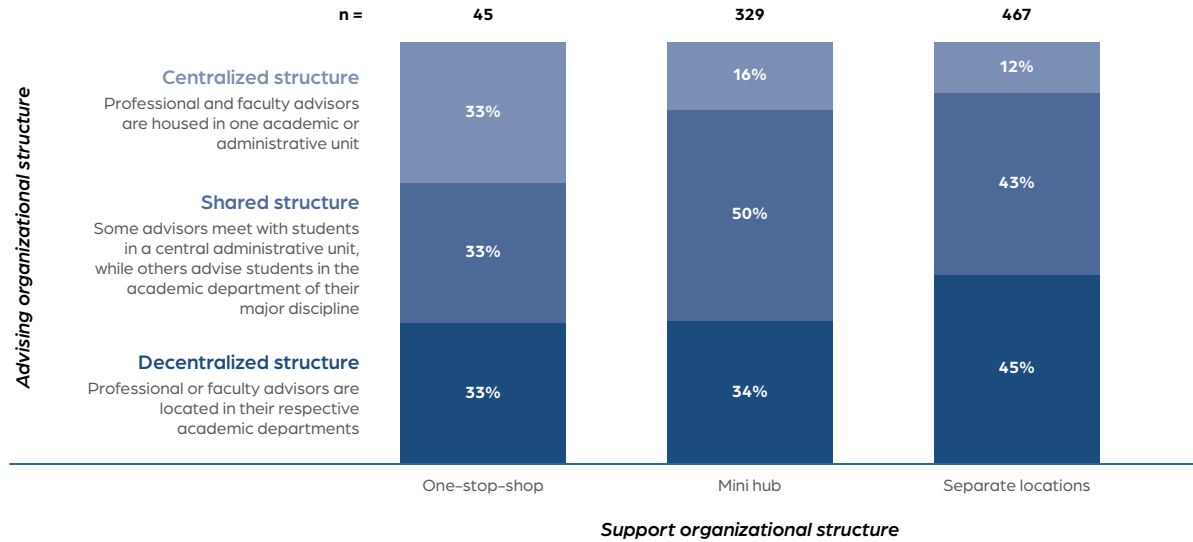
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

Institutions with a one-stop shop are more likely to have a centralized advising structure, and institutions with separate locations are more likely to have a decentralized advising structure (see *Figure 23*). Given the impact of hosting student support offices as a one-stop shop on students' sense of belonging, it is worth considering the potential benefits of centralizing these services to streamline access and enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of supports.

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10. Bharadwaj, P., Shaw, C., Condon, K., Rich, J., Janson, N., & Bryant, G. 2023. Driving Toward a Degree 2023. Tyton Partners

Advising organizational structure* by support organization structure**

n =	45	329	467

Centralized structure
Professional and faculty advisors are housed in one academic or administrative unit

Shared structure
Some advisors meet with students in a central administrative unit, while others advise students in the academic department of their major discipline

Decentralized structure
Professional or faculty advisors are located in their respective academic departments

Advising organizational structure

One-stop-shop: 33% / 33% / 33%
Mini hub: 16% / 50% / 34%
Separate locations: 12% / 43% / 45%

Support organizational structure

Notes: *Survey question: *"Institutions use different organizational structures to deliver advising services to students. Which organizational structure does your institution use for advising?"; **"How are these student support provider offices arranged at your institution?"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

DIGITAL CO-LOCATION

Digital co-location is the degree to which students can access student supports online through a single portal. Institutions with a one-stop shop for student support services are more likely to also offer a single online resource portal, as are two-year institutions (see *Figure 24*).

Figure 24

Digital portals: relation to physical co-location and sector

Availability of a single digital portal*
by support organization structure**

One stop digital portal by institution type

n=	97	579	757	227	884	455

- ■ All online equivalents are accessible through a single portal
- ■ Some online equivalents are accessible through a single portal
- ■ No portal

One-stop shop: 39% / 56% / 5%
Mini-hubs: 15% / 74% / 11%
Separate locations: 9% / 70% / 21%
2-year: 25% / 66% / 9%
4-year public: 13% / 72% / 16%
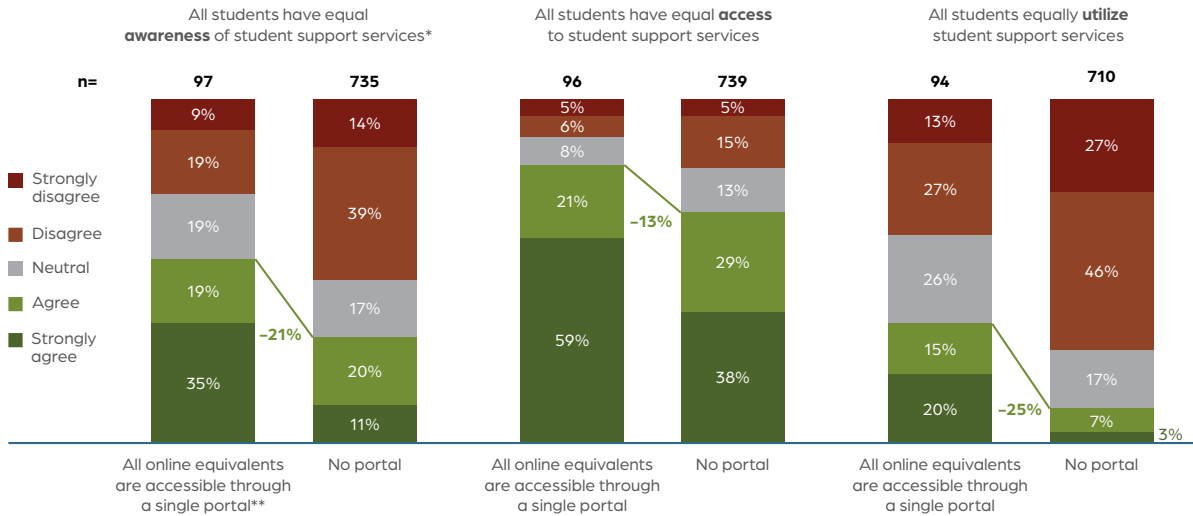4-year private: 15% / 67% / 18%

Notes: *Survey questions: *"To help us understand your institution, please select the statement that you believe is most accurate. All online equivalents of student support services are accessible through a single student support or resource portal. Some online equivalents of student support services are accessible through a single student support or resource portal. No online equivalents of student support services are accessible through a single student support or resource portal." **"How are these student support provider offices arranged at your institution?" Don't know, None of the above, and Other are excluded*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Digital co-location likely provides similar benefits to physical co-location, such as increased student support awareness and student belonging. Institutions practicing digital co-location are more likely to agree that all students have equal awareness, access, and utilization of student support services (see *Figure 25*).

Figure 25

Digital student portals and awareness, access, and utilization of student support services

Notes: Survey questions: *"Please choose the phrase that best describes your level of agreement with the following statements regarding student supports."
**"To help us understand your institution, please select the statement that you believe is most accurate"

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

As institutions grow in size, deliberate efforts toward cross-student support communication and integration become imperative. Larger institutions are less likely to agree that strong communication channels exist between student support stakeholders and are less likely to agree that student supports are integrated. This may be because student supports at larger institutions are less likely to be physically co-located and therefore are more likely to operate in silos.

Moreover, at smaller institutions, student support providers often fulfill multiple roles, leading to a natural integration advantage. Conversely, larger institutions, where student support providers typically have more specialized roles, do not benefit from this inherent integration.

INTEGRATED DATA AND SYSTEMS

Ninety-five percent of advisors agree that technology used to support advising increases the effectiveness of advisors. In part due to this increase in effectiveness, institutions are increasingly adopting technology solutions and report utilization of an average of nine systems across academic advising, career services, and financial aid sessions with students (see *Figure 26*). This use of technology solutions is anticipated to grow further in the near future, with half of advisors reporting that the number of technology systems and resources required to complete an effective advising session has risen in recent years.

Figure 26

Number of systems used in student support meetings

AVERAGE NUMBER OF SYSTEMS	3	+	2.4	+	2.3	+	1.9	=	~9 SYSTEMS
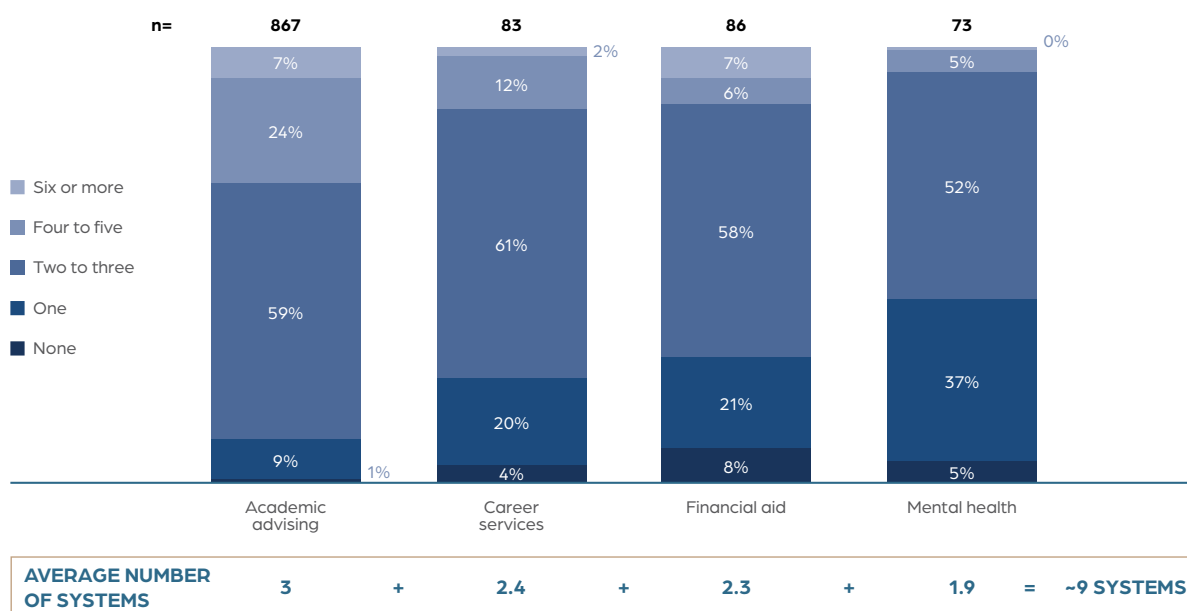
Notes: *Survey questions: "How many different technology products or systems do you use as part of your academic advising/financial aid counseling/mental health counseling/career services sessions with students?"*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Managing multiple systems to their fullest capabilities is a considerable demand, particularly for advisors grappling with heavy caseloads and limited resources. Hence, the primary obstacle in utilizing advising technology is often the lack of integration among these solutions. Positively, an increasing number of institutions are implementing integration platforms to streamline the workflow of technologies used in advising functions. Nonetheless, institutions have yet to fully leverage the wealth of data scattered across various solutions.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO LACK OF COORDINATION ACROSS STUDENT SUPPORTS

CO-LOCATE STUDENT SUPPORTS

Where feasible, institutions should prioritize the co-location of student supports, both in physical spaces and online platforms. Physical co-location increases student awareness of available supports as well as student feelings of belonging. Acknowledging that physical co-location may not be viable for all institutions, the aim should be to achieve true digital co-location to receive the benefits of increased student awareness and access.

STRATEGIC DATA AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION

Institutions should carefully plan the integration of generative AI into their existing technology infrastructure to prevent it from becoming an additional tool that staff must learn and manage. Additionally, as discussed previously, to fully leverage the capabilities of generative AI, it is imperative that student support data maintains a high level of quality. This necessitates the ongoing improvement of the interoperability of data across systems, the use of integration tools, and the streamlining of related workflows.

Nearly half of respondents are uncertain whether their institution tracks student support utilization by student subgroups, and over 40% are unaware if their institution reports success metrics separately across student subgroups. Furthermore, advisors generally face challenges accessing data pertaining to demographics of students they haven't personally met, resulting in a segment of students who remain "invisible" to advisors. Data and system integration, leveraging generative AI and integration solutions (see *Figure 4*), can illuminate this segment of students and provide advisors with information and resources on how to engage.

IMPLICATIONS

Our national, longitudinal research reveals a critical moment to rethink student success in higher education: How do we leverage emerging technologies like generative AI to address these lasting challenges? Where can institutions deploy their limited staff resources to make the most impact on student outcomes? This report highlights how emerging technologies like generative AI, used in combination with capacity-building solutions, can alleviate the ongoing challenges experienced by institutions that seek to serve evolving learner needs. If the findings in this report trigger questions for you or your organization, please reach out to us so we can collaborate to answer them to the best of our ability with the data we have amassed here.

In conclusion, we call on all higher-education stakeholders—administrators, academic advisors, holistic student support providers, registrars, institutional research departments, and solution providers—to unite in a concerted effort aimed at advancing retention and persistence outcomes for all students. This imperative requires intentional leadership, a collaborative culture, streamlined processes, appropriate sharing of data across support systems, and the utilization of cutting-edge technologies such as generative AI. By embracing these principles and taking a coordinated approach, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and holistic support system for students across the board.

APPENDIX

Driving Toward a Degree is a series of national, longitudinal surveys of over 3,000 higher-education students, advisors, faculty, and administrators. The surveys are designed to evaluate the state of student support services—academic advising in particular—at higher-education institutions across the United States and identify barriers to access and success for all students.

For this year's study, students, advisors, faculty, and administrators received online surveys ranging from 14 to 45 minutes (depending on their individual roles) in April of 2024. We collected responses from approximately 1,600 institutional stakeholders at over 800 unique postsecondary institutions and about 1,600 students from both two- and four-year private and public institutions.
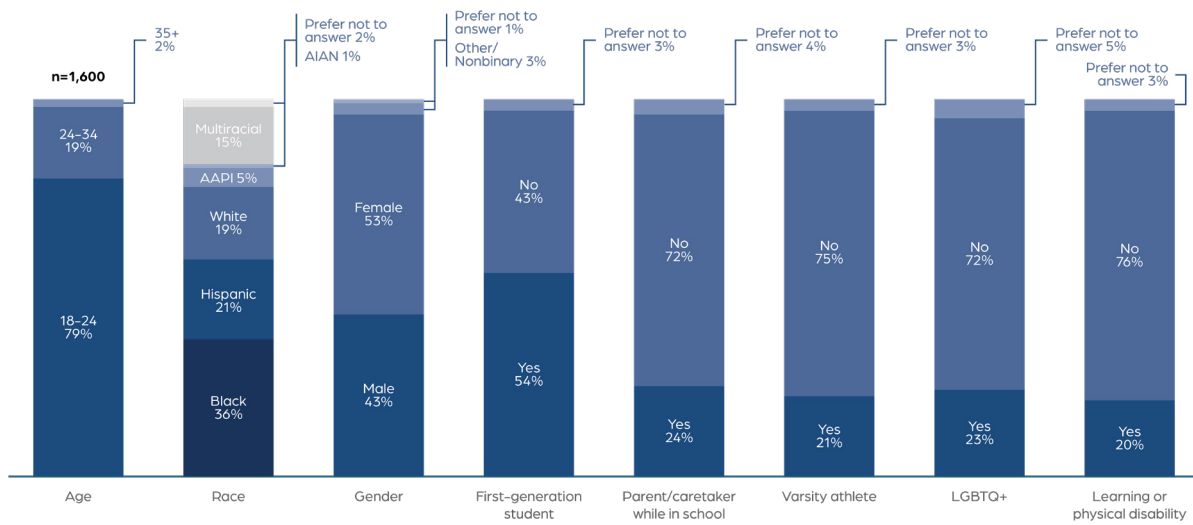
Figure 27

Overview of national surveys fielded in Spring 2024

		Administrator Survey	Instructor Survey	Four-Year Student Survey (currently enrolled)	Community College Student Survey (currently enrolled)
Qualified completes	T4C '24	316	1,827	999	527
	T4C '23	306	1,748	1,514	534
Time to complete	T4C '24	25 min	39 min	14 min	14 min
	T4C '23	26 min	38 min	11 min	7 min

This year's survey gathered responses from a representative set of advisors, administrators, faculty, and students nationwide in terms of region, age, race, gender, and other collected demographic information. Because not all questions were presented to every respondent, response numbers vary by segment. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to slightly more or less than 100%.

Figure 28

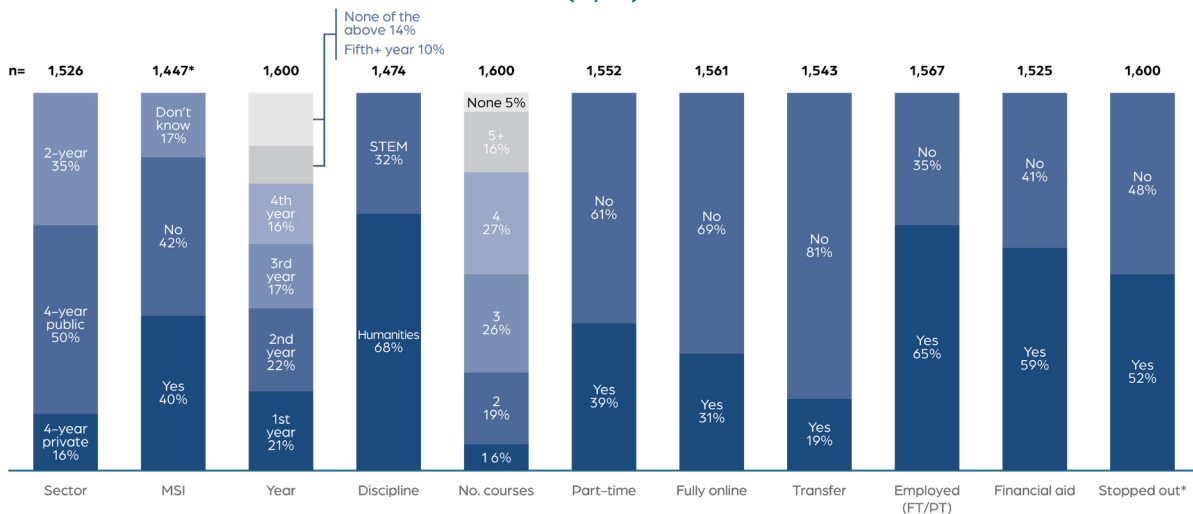## Listening to Learners 2024 student survey respondent characteristics (1/2)

Notes: *AIAN stands for American Indian/Alaskan Native background. AAPI stands for Asian American or Pacific Islander background*

Sources: *Listening to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Figure 29

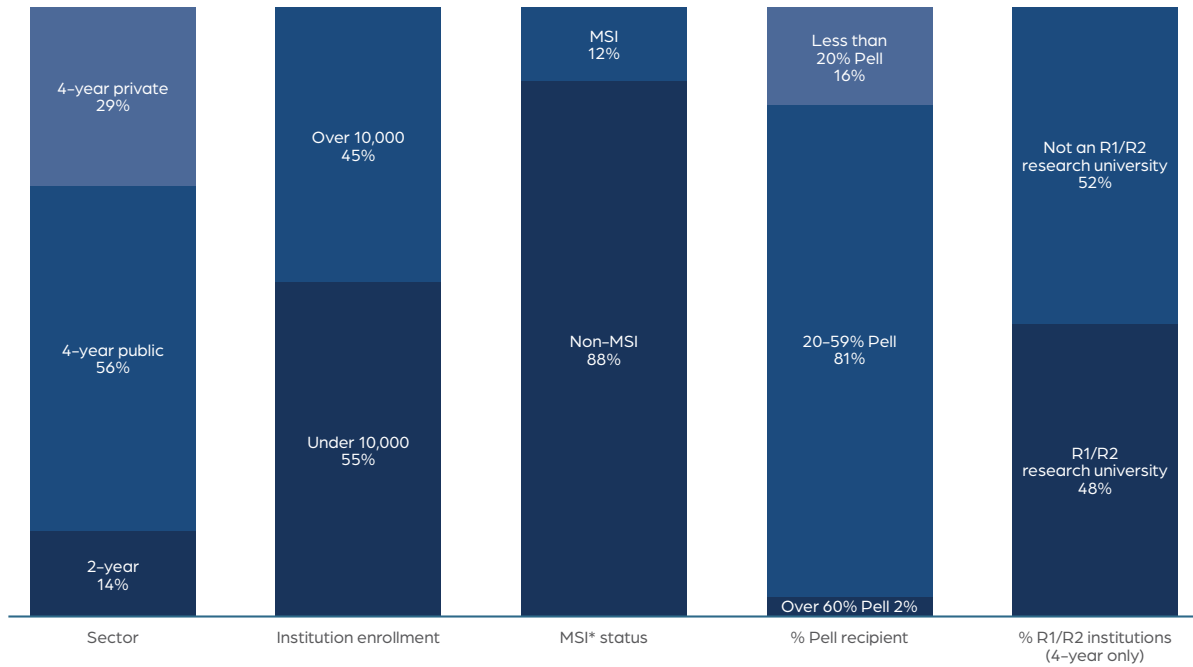## Listening to Learners 2024 student survey respondent characteristics (2/2)

Notes: ** Students who have ever taken an enrollment break between the first year of college and today*

Sources: *Listen to Learners 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Figure 30

Overview of institutional survey respondents (1 of 3)

n=1,572

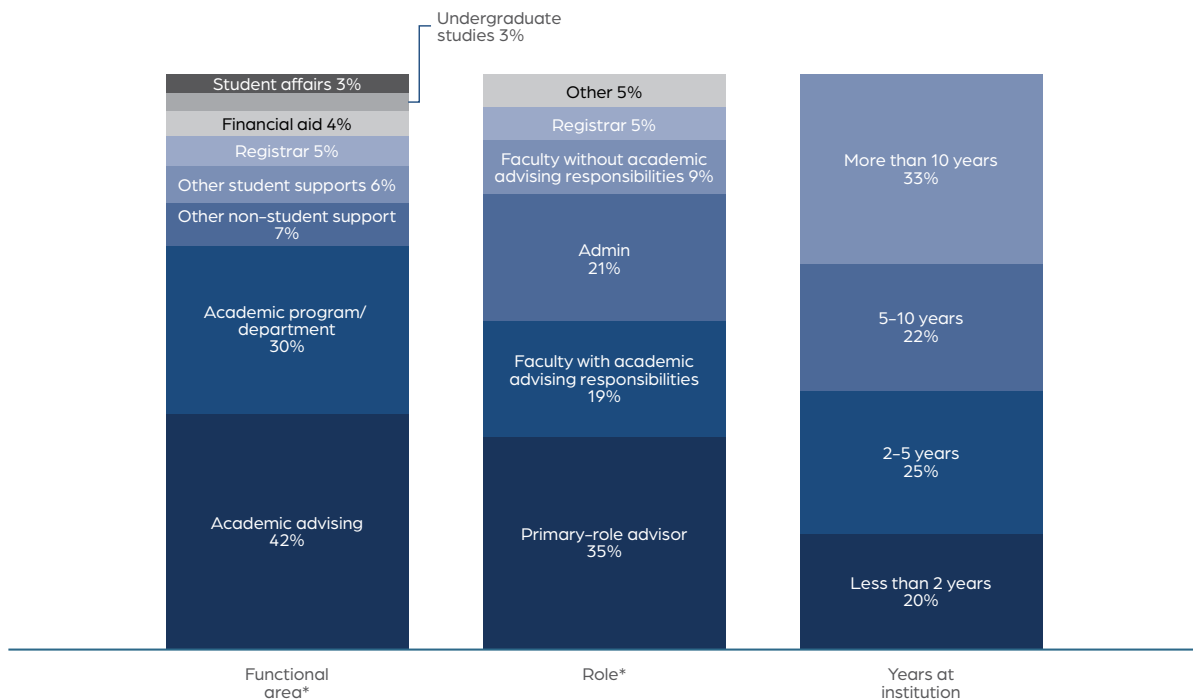| Sector	Institution enrollment	MSI* status	% Pell recipient	% R1/R2 institutions (4-year only)
4-year private 29%	Over 10,000 45%	MSI 12%	Less than 20% Pell 16%	Not an R1/R2 research university 52%
4-year public 56%	Under 10,000 55%	Non-MSI 88%	20–59% Pell 81%	R1/R2 research university 48%
2-year 14%			Over 60% Pell 2%	

Notes: *"MSI" = Minority-Serving Institution; sample sizes differ throughout the deck due to dropouts, partial responses, and availability of IPEDS data*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Figure 31

Overview of institutional survey respondents (2 of 3)

n=1,572

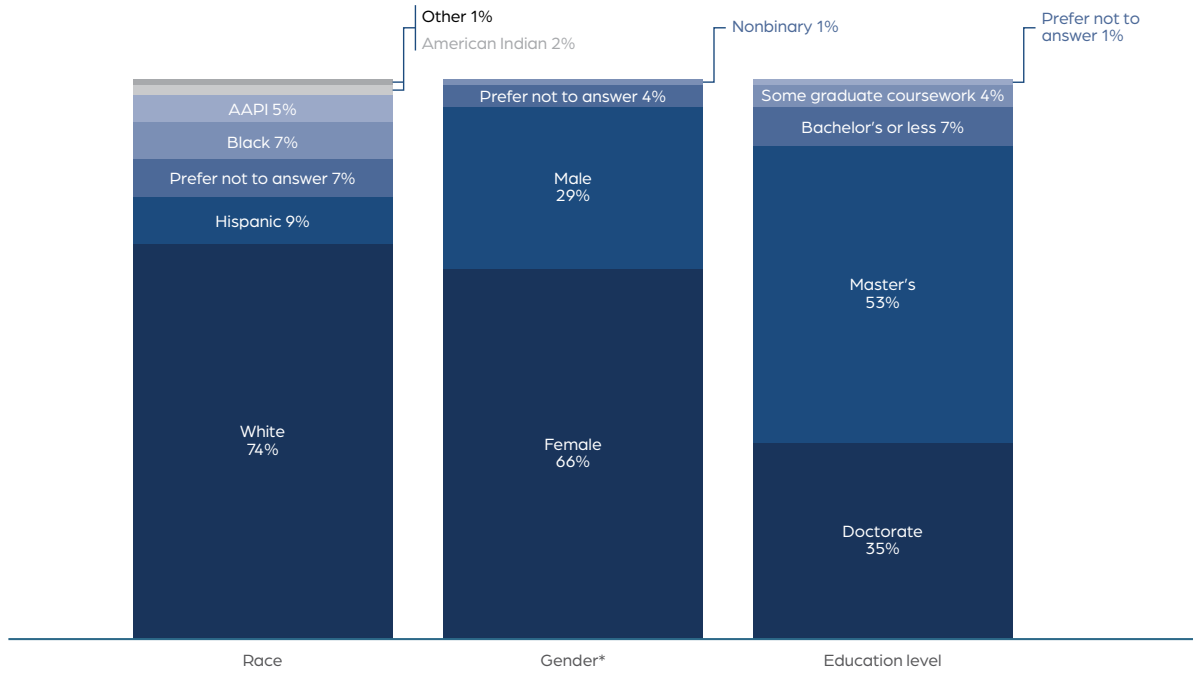| Functional area*	Role*	Years at institution
Student affairs 3%	Other 5%	More than 10 years 33%
Financial aid 4%	Registrar 5%	
Registrar 5%	Faculty without academic advising responsibilities 9%	
Other student supports 6%	Admin 21%	5–10 years 22%
Other non-student support 7%		
Academic program/ department 30%	Faculty with academic advising responsibilities 19%	2–5 years 25%
Academic advising 42%	Primary-role advisor 35%	Less than 2 years 20%

Undergraduate studies 3%

Notes: *Functional areas and roles with less than 2% of respondents were excluded from graphs*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis*

Figure 32

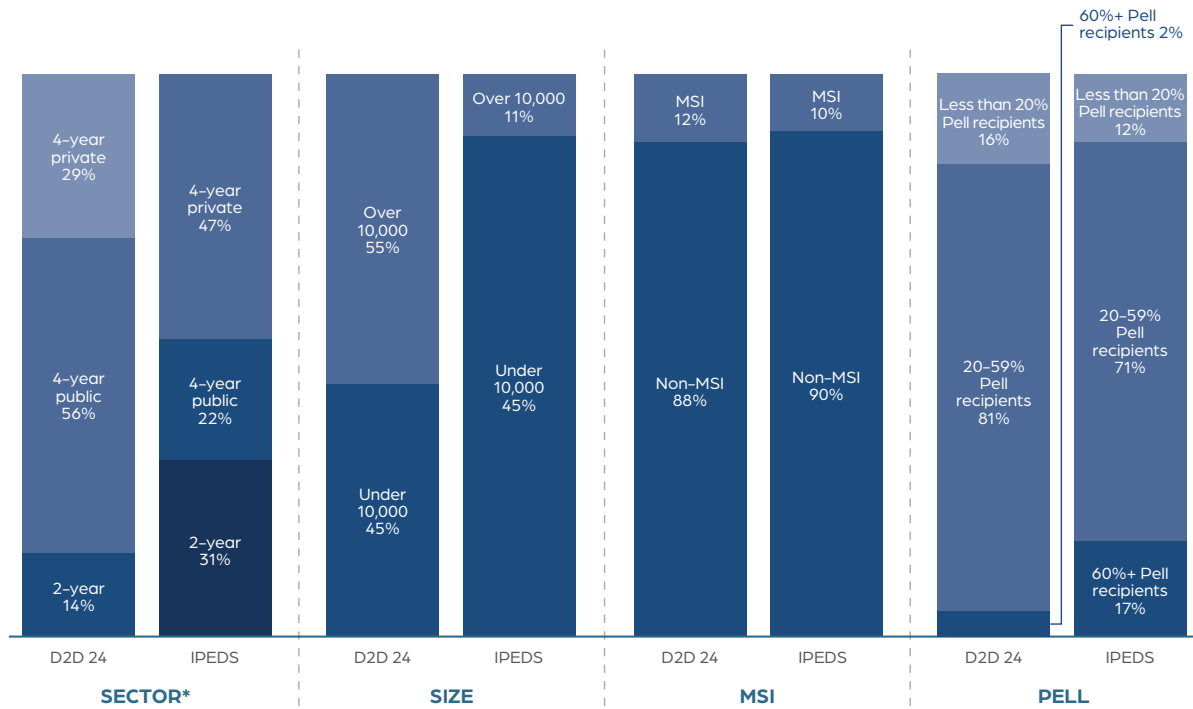## Overview of institutional survey respondents (3 of 3)

n=1,572

Other 1%
American Indian 2%
Nonbinary 1%
Prefer not to answer 1%

Race
- AAPI 5%
- Black 7%
- Prefer not to answer 7%
- Hispanic 9%
- White 74%

Gender*
- Prefer not to answer 4%
- Male 29%
- Female 66%

Education level
- Some graduate coursework 4%
- Bachelor's or less 7%
- Master's 53%
- Doctorate 35%

Notes: *"Other" n = 4 is not shown

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 33

Comparison of institutional respondents and IPEDS distribution

60%+ Pell recipients 2%

SECTOR*

D2D 24:
- 4-year private 29%
- 4-year public 56%
- 2-year 14%

IPEDS:
- 4-year private 47%
- 4-year public 22%
- 2-year 31%

SIZE

D2D 24:
- Over 10,000 55%
- Under 10,000 45%

IPEDS:
- Over 10,000 11%
- Under 10,000 45%

MSI

D2D 24:
- MSI 12%
- Non-MSI 88%

IPEDS:
- MSI 10%
- Non-MSI 90%

PELL

D2D 24:
- Less than 20% Pell recipients 16%
- 20-59% Pell recipients 81%

IPEDS:
- Less than 20% Pell recipients 12%
- 20-59% Pell recipients 71%
- 60%+ Pell recipients 17%

Notes: *2-year includes private and public institutions

Sources: NCES, Driving Toward a Degree 2024, Tyton Partners analysis

Based on the entire response set, the 95% confidence interval is +/- 2% for questions asked of support administrators and professionals. Questions addressed to a smaller subset because of skip logic have wider confidence intervals. As with all large-scale surveys, *Driving Toward a Degree* has the potential for bias. It is possible that respondents willing to take the time to discuss their own experiences with advising have stronger opinions than those who chose not to participate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EXAMPLES ARE NOT ENDORSEMENTS

This document includes examples and resources for the reader's reference. The presence of these materials is not an endorsement of any expressed views, products, or services. The materials feature opinions and recommendations from different experts, along with hyperlinks and websites that belong to other public and private organizations.

CITING THIS RESOURCE

Lin, N., Shaw, C., Condon, K., Hammel, M., Tseng, Z., Janson, N., & Bryant, G. (2024, August). Driving Toward a Degree - 2024. Tyton Partners

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