



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Innovating the Student Experience



THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

WITH
SUPPORT
FROM



Your Student Experience Is the New Growth Strategy

A strategy that helped Collegis partners achieve 10% average growth in new enrollments across 2024 and 2025

Higher education leaders are being asked to grow enrollment, improve retention, and meet rising student expectations, often with fewer resources and tighter budgets. This requires schools to rethink legacy models and build a foundation that drives engagement and unlocks a deeper understanding of each individual student.

Simply stated, the old recruitment and retention playbook doesn't work.

It was built for a different era, when students moved through predictable stages, and schools often waited until a student missed a milestone or stopped responding before engaging them. At that point, you're reacting to an outcome instead of intervening proactively. It's not about recruiting harder. It's about operating smarter.

We've entered an age of hyper-personalization, where students expect engagements that reflect their interests, behaviors, and needs in real time. The experience you provide is now compared against every other digital experience in your students' lives. Meeting those expectations requires connected data, integrated technology, and the right talent and teams to put both to work.

AI and automation can accelerate engagement, but only if built on a strong foundation. Layering AI onto disconnected systems with unreliable data doesn't solve problems. It amplifies them.

Growth begins when institutions can see each student as an individual with a unique journey and set of needs, not as a segment or statistic. We've seen it firsthand at [Collegis Education](#).

When an institution comes to us for enrollment support, getting their data, systems, and workflows into working order is part of the engagement. That foundation enables stronger execution that, over the past two years, has enabled our partners to drive double-digit enrollment growth. And the results speak for themselves.

Montclair State University Online

+62% YoY graduate spring start growth

College of Saint Mary

+49% YoY increase in undergraduate enrollment

Better data drives better decisions. Better decisions create better engagement. And better engagement delivers stronger outcomes. Institutions that connect data, technology, and human expertise in ways that make students feel understood, supported, and confident in their next step are the ones that will come out on top.

If you're ready to move from fragmented engagement to a more connected, data-enabled student experience, Collegis Education can help.

Reach out to us – we're ready when you are.

Contact Collegis



Sincerely,



Kim Fahey
President + CEO
Collegis Education

Innovating the Student Experience

Key Takeaways From a Virtual Forum
Presented by *The Chronicle* and Collegis Education

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With lingering public skepticism about the value of college and mounting enrollment challenges, higher education faces an urgent need to innovate — to bridge the gap between student expectations and the student experience.

Most colleges offer a choice between traditional in-person learning and online programs, yet today's students expect a seamless blend of both. Institutions offer a range of student-support services, including academic coaching, mental-health support, and career counseling. Yet on-demand services in retail and entertainment have raised students' expectations for college services to be immediate, seamless, and personalized.

To gain insights on how leaders can bring together teams across campus to create a holistic view of what students want, use technologies to curate and personalize student services, and inspire change and break down silos, *The Chronicle* held a virtual forum, "Innovating the Student Experience," on May 28. The following comments, edited for clarity and length, represent key takeaways from the forum. To hear the full discussion, watch the recorded webinar [here](#).

IAN WILHELM: I don't know how many times I've heard folks in different roles say that the way higher-ed structures today's campuses — how offices are divided — is not set up for current students. How do you break down those silos between campus divisions?

SCOTT A. BASS: We spent four years on this subject. It's truly an institutional investment by all parties. This is one point in the entire higher-education system where everybody is responsible. Everybody can make a difference in the student experience, from the custodian, to the person who provides food, to what goes on in the classroom.

These high-priority territorial areas — with their own languages, their own specialization, their own identities, their own national associations — are very hard to shatter. They are really deeply embedded in the organization. Rather than seeking to change those structures, recognize their value in developing a more integrated, more interdisciplinary, more multifunctional group.

LEONARD E. CLEMONS: The results that we get in institutions are directly correlated to the structures that we have in place. If we are stuck in neutral on retention results, if we're stuck in neutral on graduation, if we're stuck in neutral on positive career outcomes, but we haven't shifted or reviewed our existing structures, it should be of no surprise.

We have to be willing to disrupt the norms, not because we have bad personnel, not because we have folks that aren't committed. But the structures which we have built have created barriers for the right folks strategizing together to get the results that we want. We have to be willing to look at our structures and be willing to disrupt in a very strategic and intentional way.

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WILHELM: You all have worked hard to reform some policies that are over several decades old. It's a slog to do that, but obviously those need to be revisited, as things are not the way they used to be.

T. CHASE HAGOOD: For us, the lesson has been that the structural redesign only works when the policy redesign accompanies it. You cannot modernize student support, student success, student affairs, this holistic view of the student, without thinking about the workflow and the governance pieces that are built for a different era of higher education in this country.

The challenges that are in front of us cannot be managed solely by moving personnel. What we found in our policy work is the necessary change was about aligning some institutional systems with the contemporary expectations that we've got from our students' perspective, from their parents' perspective, from our donors' perspective, from our legislature's perspective, from the federal perspective. Those contemporary expectations — about transparency, about consistency, and about our value — it's just been vitally important.

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WILHELM: Christine, I want to bring you into this conversation. I'm just curious about going back to ASAP's origin, which is back in 2007. How have you thought about the silos you needed to break to keep the program and make sure it worked the way you wanted it to?

CHRISTINE BRONGNIART: ASAP was really born in response to all of the structural and sticky challenges, archaic approaches to student success that persist, and continue to persist, even despite a model like ASAP. It's a program within an institution that lives within a college. There's only so much a program such as ASAP can do to shift culture, and to shift policy and practice. But what we can do is lift the hood, look at the data, and understand where some of those academic policies and some of those more entrenched academic challenges are barriers to student progress, and center those conversations on the student experience and ensure that we're bringing light to areas where there could be change.

CLEMONS: Christine stated something very important, which is that CUNY is not student blaming. Sometimes we see that in institutions — they're listing all the reasons why the student isn't successful, what they're not prepared for, what the high school may or may not have done, they're too engaged in social media, and all these other things. The reality is we have to adjust.

WILHELM: Scott, you drew some inspiration by taking folks on some field trips.

BASS: There are a lot of other places that are very successful with their employees, and very high levels of satisfaction from customers. Cleveland Clinic is an institution that is focused explicitly on the patient experience. They created a whole structure around it with a chief experience officer, and every doctor, everyone who provides any kind of support, had training about empathy, about understanding, and listening.

We took a bus to Cleveland from Washington, D.C. We would rotate seats to discuss issues, and the Cleveland Clinic put on eight-hour back-to-back sessions on some of the models of deep thinking they had done, things that they saw as potentially applicable to higher education. We had several meetings with doctors. They said, look, we're so busy, yet we did find spending time with a patient and just listening for a bit and understanding their experience, we believe we did better. Over five years, they had dramatic changes in their scores in terms of patient satisfaction.

We came back thinking about that. We're talking about the way we think about the student experience — an entire contribution to the growth and development of the individual. Not just the academic, but the experience of the student in his or her entirety.

WILHELM: I want to talk about ASAP a bit more, in terms of the scaling of an innovation. ASAP was created in the fall of 2007, and then the pilot was at six CUNY community colleges. The initial cohort was about 1,100 students, and since then it's expanded to over 125,000 students. How do you think about scaling? What has been successful in terms of scaling something?

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BRONGNIART: We did expand, pretty ambitiously, from 4,000 to 25,000 students per academic year in the span of three years. We had a core model, and the city of New York generously invested in a substantial expansion of the model. We had to think about ways that we could maintain the core fidelity of that delivery-service model, but not invest in a massive army of new academic advisers within the program. We had to look at the advisement approach and be even more prescriptive and segment our students in support-level categories. We know that every student doesn't necessarily need the same touch, or the same dosage of advisement.

We use a triage assessment, ensuring that a new student has the highest level of care and touch — and then there's high, medium, low support levels that dictate that advisement dosage semester to semester.

Students don't know that they're in a particular support level. An adviser is very careful to say, you know what, I want to see you one more time next semester, just to make sure you're on track, or you know what, you're doing great, why don't we just see each other twice next semester? It's all grounded in kind of a holistic assessment of how a student is doing, and how much support they might need to be successful.

One of the keys to our model's successes is our administrative structure. We have a central office where we try to unload all of those clunky administrative pieces of work. So we directly administer the student financial resources, manage the contract, say, with the MTA, distribute the textbook stipend students receive each semester, cover the gap between their need-based aid and the tuition and fees. We make sure those wheels keep cranking, and that that is not the work that our partners on our campuses are doing day in and day out — they can be more focused on student support.

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We all just have a very clear sense of accountability within the program, so even as we expanded and scaled, we never lost sight of our North Star. We ensure that at least 50 percent of our students graduate with their associate degree within three years.

WILHELM: What's something we didn't get to today?

HAGOOD: What is it like leading student success and student experience work in universities today? What it's like, for me, and I hear it in the other panelists' voices, is that one, it's a privilege to do the work, and two, we have to be full-throated about why we do the work: because we care about our students, we care about our institutions, we care very deeply about our society, and the kind of thriving democracy that we have all inherited and are about to pass to the next generation.

BASS: Two recommendations: The first is assessment. Assessment is the most important thing to do to understand the student experience. Talk to the students. Develop journaling projects. Those are very useful to understand what's really going on in the life of students. Workshops, conferences, meetings, assemblies, where students come together to inform us as to what's going on, and then identify specific pinch points that we can fix.

The second, and probably the most important, is that it is the responsibility of every single unit on the campus and every individual on the campus. Their interaction is critical. You never know what a few words will mean to the student years later. Everybody's responsible for student experience.

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