

DRIVING

TOWARD A DEGREE

2021

DELIVERY OF A SEAMLESS STUDENT EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH BRIEF #2



Bay View Analytics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Driving Toward a Degree is a research collaborative for increasing student success across the higher education landscape. Since 2016, data has been collected and analyzed via longitudinal primary research to understand the state of institutional practices and technology adoption that facilitate holistic student support. The goal is to offer insights to help institutions make informed decisions toward evolving their student supports to improve overall student success, retention, and completion.

This year's research examines barriers to improving advising in higher education and we are honored to have over 2,800 respondents, representing over 1,300 unique institutions, participating in our survey. Each year, we ask advisors, student support professionals, and administrators about the barriers to improving advising on campus. Where we see cause for concern is that colleges and universities perennially identify the same challenges since 2017.

In this second of four research briefs, we focus on lack of coordination across departments as a perennial barrier to effective advising and student success. Building upon last year's publication, we revisit collaboration—which manifests itself as clear lines of responsibility, strong communication channels, and integrated student supports—as a vehicle for establishing holistic student supports and improving student outcomes. Furthermore, we examine the role of technology in bridging information so that advisors have the necessary resources to better serve students in their caseload.

Key insights:

- The most collaborative four-year and large two-year institutions see statistically significant increases in student retention.
- Striking differences exist in the rate at which the most and least collaborative institutions implement sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized (SSIPP) advising practices.
- All sectors (two-year, public four-year, and private four-year institutions) believe lack of integration across technology solutions is the top barrier to implementing advising technologies.
- While most institutions have limited Integration Solutions—defined as platforms to ease information sharing across several systems (e.g., student information system, learning management system, customer relationship management software, and academic advising technology)—implementation at scale and across institutions remains quite low.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, institutions expected students to navigate a self-service or “cafeteria” model, which allows students to choose from different programs and a variety of disconnected student supports. But there is a growing emphasis on holistic student supports, which challenges institutions to “become student-ready by integrating and enhancing myriad support services into a seamless, timely, and personal experience for every student.”¹ This comprehensive perspective seeks to shift the focus to a coordinated system, thereby ensuring students receive the support they require to persist, graduate, and attain gainful employment. As a continuation of our series, this research brief explores the interplay of coordination policies and practices and integration technology as a means of achieving holistic advising and, therefore, creating student success.

1. Achieving the Dream (ATD). (2021). Holistic Student Supports.
<https://www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/holistic-student-supports>

Figure 1

TOP THREE BARRIERS TO IMPROVING ADVISING

2017	2019	2020	2021
Limited budget (40%)	Low student engagement with advising resources (28%)	Caseloads for advisors are too high (28%)	Caseloads for advisors are too high (37%)
Low student engagement with advising resources (40%)	Caseloads for advisors are too high (27%)	Limited budget (27%)	Limited budget (28%)
Caseloads for advisors are too high (37%)	Limited budget (26%)	Faculty resistance to change (26%)	Lack of coordination across departments (27%)
Lack of coordination across departments (33%)	Lack of coordination across departments (23%)	Lack of coordination across departments (23%)	Faculty resistance to change (22%)
Faculty resistance to change (32%)	Lack of training for faculty as advisors (23%)	Low student engagement with advising resources (23%)	Low student engagement with advising resources (21%)
Lack of professional development/training (32%)	Poor accountability for advising outcomes (21%)	Poor accountability for advising outcomes (21%)	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks (18%)
Technical integration challenges (27%)	Faculty resistance to change (21%)	Leadership's resistance to making academic advising a priority (21%)	Poor accountability for advising outcomes (17%)
Poor accountability for institutional outcomes (21%)	Advisors are too overburdened with admin tasks to advise students (20%)	Poor accountability for advising outcomes (20%)	Ineffective onboarding / Lack of training for faculty as advisors (17%)



*Survey question: What are the top three barriers to improving advising at your institution? Select up to three.

**Changes in magnitude across the respective answer options can be attributed to the addition of barriers to choose from in 2019 and 2020; (2017 n=1,291), (2019 n=1,339), (2020 n=1,440), (2021 n=1,310)

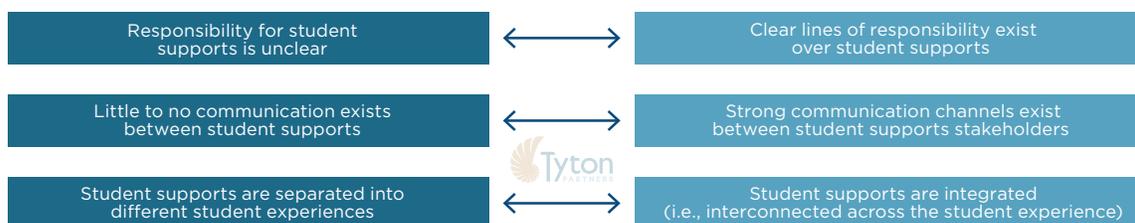
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2017-2021, Tyton Partners analysis

CHARACTERIZING THE PROBLEM

Four years after launching the first iteration of the *Driving Toward a Degree* survey, “lack of coordination across departments” continues to be among the top barriers advisors face to improving advising at their institution. The rapid transition to remote learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated issues for institutions that lacked the structures, policies, practices, and technologies to operate effectively in a remote environment.

In last year’s publication, we introduced the clusters of collaboration, which classified institutions into three distinct groups based on respondents’ sentiments regarding where they believe their institution falls across the following dimensions:

Figure 2



Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

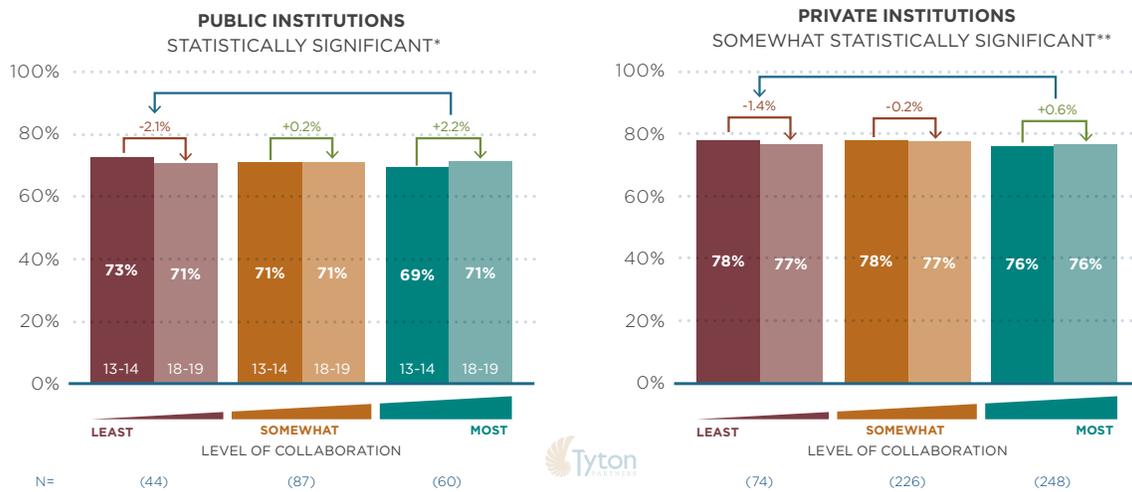
Institutions that are the least collaborative are those where respondents placed furthest left across the spectrums, whereas the most collaborative institutions were furthest right. These clusters sought to help answer two fundamental questions: (1) Are more collaborative institutions actually improving student outcomes?; and (2) What practices, policies, structures, and technologies are these most collaborative institutions employing to make holistic student supports more than just another initiative?

When disaggregating the clusters by sector and examining changes in full-time retention rates between academic years 2012-13 and 2017-18, we found that the most collaborative two- and four-year institutions experienced the largest increases in retention rate. This methodology was once again replicated using this year's sample, but refined to control for factors (e.g., institutional selectivity, financial resources, student demographics) that could skew the data.

Consistent with 2020 results, the most collaborative four-year institutions—irrespective of sector—have seen the largest increases in full-time retention rates when comparing the 2013-14 and 2018-19 academic years. The most collaborative institutions experienced increases in retention rates between roughly 1-2%, while the least collaborative institutions experienced declines in similar proportions.

Figure 3

CHANGES IN FULL-TIME RETENTION RATES ACROSS CLUSTERS OF COLLABORATION, 2013-2014 TO 2018-2019, FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS



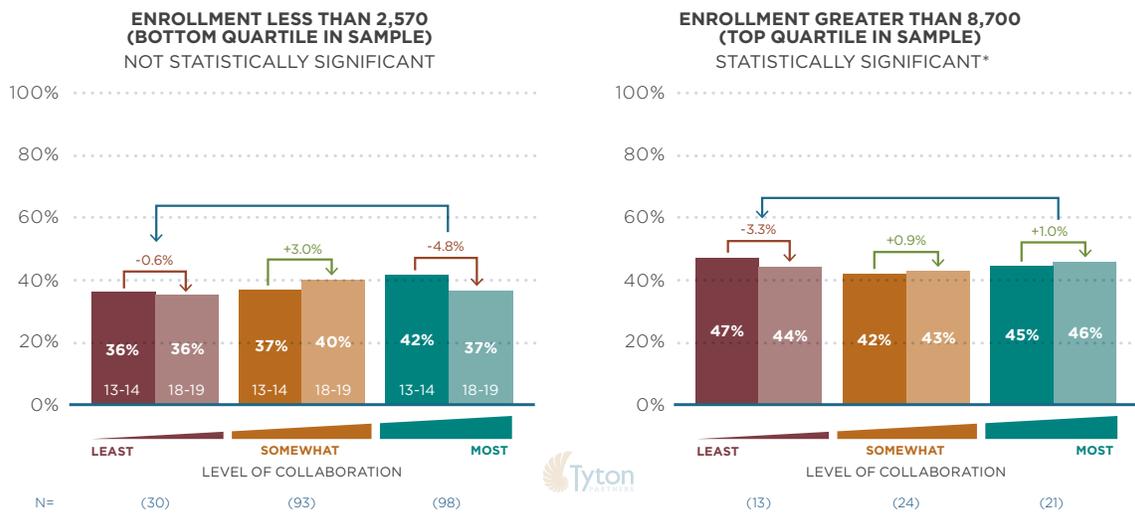
*p-value < 0.05, **p-value between 0.10 and 0.05

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, College Scorecard - Academic Years 2013-14 and 2018-19, Tyton Partners analysis

For two-year institutions, given that funding is largely driven by headcount, clusters were disaggregated by enrollment, examining trends across institutions with enrollment less than 2,570 and those with enrollment greater than 8,700. While no statistically significant relationship was identified among the clusters of collaboration within the bottom enrollment quartile, the most collaborative institutions in the top quartile experienced the largest statistically significant increase (+1%) in part-time retention rates.

Figure 4

CHANGES IN PART-TIME RETENTION RATES ACROSS CLUSTERS OF COLLABORATION, 2013-2014 TO 2018-2019, TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS



*p-value < 0.05

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, College Scorecard - Academic Years 2013-14 and 2018-19, Tyton Partners analysis

In brief, this year's findings further reinforce the importance of a collaborative approach to improving student outcomes and creating higher levels of student satisfaction. Beyond bridging organizational siloes, however, survey data unveils a need for institutions to examine their current technological infrastructure to address siloes that are inhibiting advisors from most effectively and efficiently executing their responsibilities.

INFLUENCE ON ADVISING PRACTICES

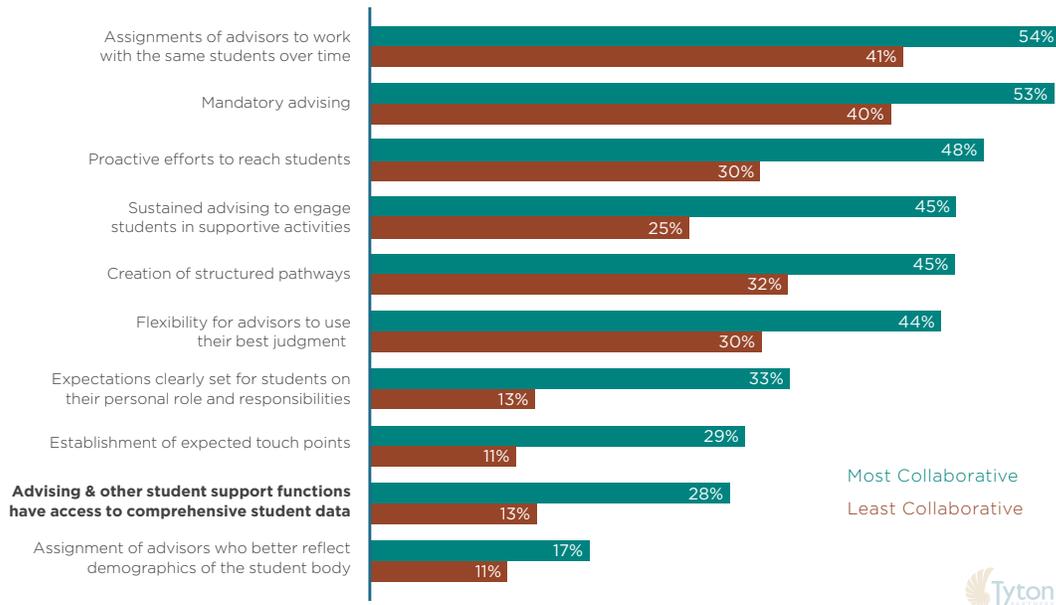
In addition to collaboration, we investigated the adoption of sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized (SSIPP)² advising practices across our clusters. We found that the most collaborative institutions implement SSIPP practices at scale at an average of 15 percentage-points higher than their least collaborative counterparts. With regards to coordination, 28% of the most collaborative institutions report scaled access to comprehensive student data compared to just 13% of the least collaborative institutions. Beyond access to comprehensive data, use of mandatory advising, proactive efforts to reach students, sustained advising to engage students, and establishment of expected touchpoints—among other policies and practices—are also adopted at scale at a higher rate among the most collaborative institutions.

2. Community College Research Center (CCRC). (2013). Designing a system for strategic advising. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/designing-a-system-for-strategic-advising.pdf>

Figure 5

ADVISING POLICIES IN PRACTICE* AT SCALE

% total respondents



*Survey question: Please assess the degree to which your institution implements these student advising policies and practices. (Most collaborative n= 416, Least collaborative n= 187)

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

The adoption of a SSIPP approach has been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes, especially for students at two-year institutions.³ While difficult to scale, particularly at larger and/ or less resourced institutions, the use of advising technologies can assist in the implementation of some of these practices.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology has played a central role in COVID-19 response: facilitating contact and communication, easing the flow of information, and ensuring institutions can continue to deliver services—academic or non-academic—to their students. While technology has enabled institutions to continue operating, advisors cite lack of integration across solutions as the top barrier to advising technologies adopted by their institutions. This is a pain point across all sectors, but an especially acute barrier at public four-year institutions, in which 50% of respondents identified lack of integration as a barrier, compared to 39% at two-year institutions and 41% at private four-year institutions. When the data is disaggregated by percentage of Pell-eligible students, those serving a high percentage (60% or more) also cite lack of integration at a higher rate than their peers (48% compared to 37% at institutions with fewer Pell-eligible students).

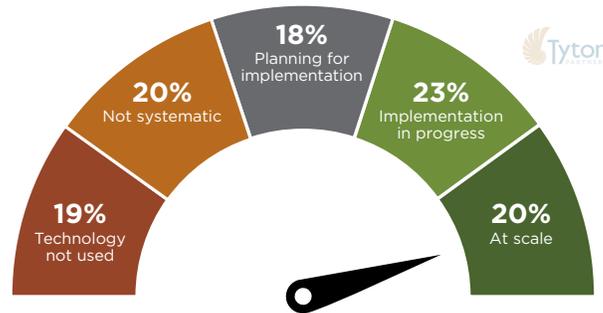
The integration of institutional systems enables advisors to gain a comprehensive view of students, which enables better service delivery and the timely identification of learners who require additional support. In the face of disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or any situation leading to institutional resource constraints, integration enables advisors to deliver more personalized, targeted student advising while minimizing the burden on an already-strained population.

3. Ibid

When asked about the implementation of Integration Solutions—defined as platforms to ease information sharing across several systems (e.g., student information system, learning management system, customer relationship management software, and academic advising technology)—80% of respondents indicated some degree of adoption; however, only 20% reported adopting any platforms at scale. Furthermore, scaled adoption of Integration Solutions was higher among larger, public (two-year and four-year) institutions.

Figure 6

ADOPTION OF INTEGRATION SOLUTIONS



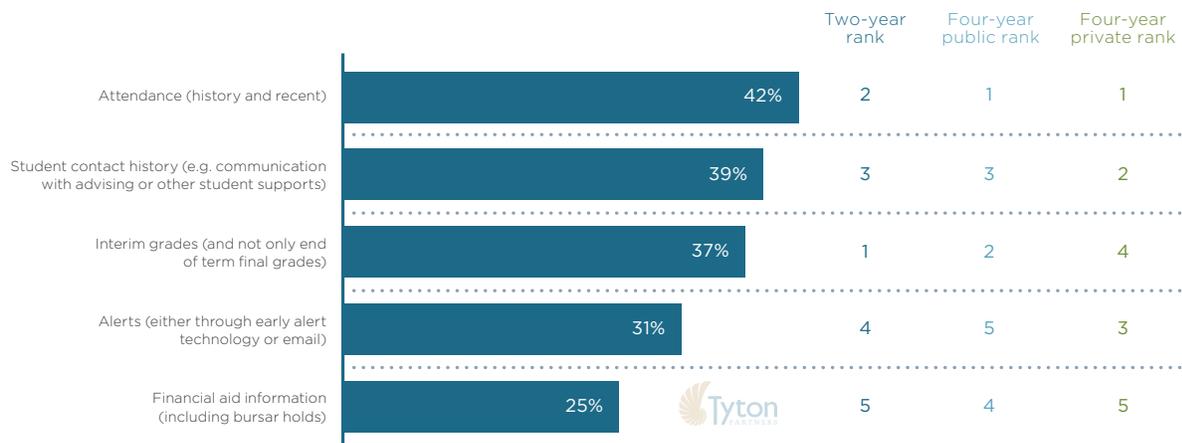
*Survey question: Which of the following primary advising functions does your institution use technology to support?, n= 1,162
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

The adoption of integration platforms is imperative to holistic advising. A high-quality solution should empower stakeholders with the data points they require to drive best-in-class advising practices and foster a seamless student experience. Without smoother and more reliable integrations, advisors and students will continue to undergo fragmented experiences as they try to connect information from multiple platforms. Survey respondents across all sectors believe easier access to key student success metrics, such as attendance history, student contact history, and grades—among other data—would allow them to be more productive in their roles.

Figure 7

DATA THAT, IF MADE EASILY ACCESSIBLE, WOULD INCREASE ADVISORS' EFFECTIVENESS

% total respondents



*Survey question: Of the data you currently do not have easy access to, which three items would make you more effective in your role advising students? (Select up to three); n=1,1189

**Only the 5 most-selected responses are shown.

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

Among those adopting Integration Solutions, satisfaction with technologies is moderate. Platforms evaluated by Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chief Technology Officers (CTOs) received an average 6.75 (out of a perfect score of 10) customer satisfaction score, with Microsoft, Ellucian Ethos, and Salesforce being the most widely adopted platforms in the survey sample.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when stakeholders across departments are collaborating and have access to comprehensive data, the entire institution runs more productively and, most importantly, ensures students are receiving the necessary support to succeed. To create a more coordinated system of supports around students, we need to advance the awareness and equitable usage of Integration Solutions.

COORDINATION IN ACTION:

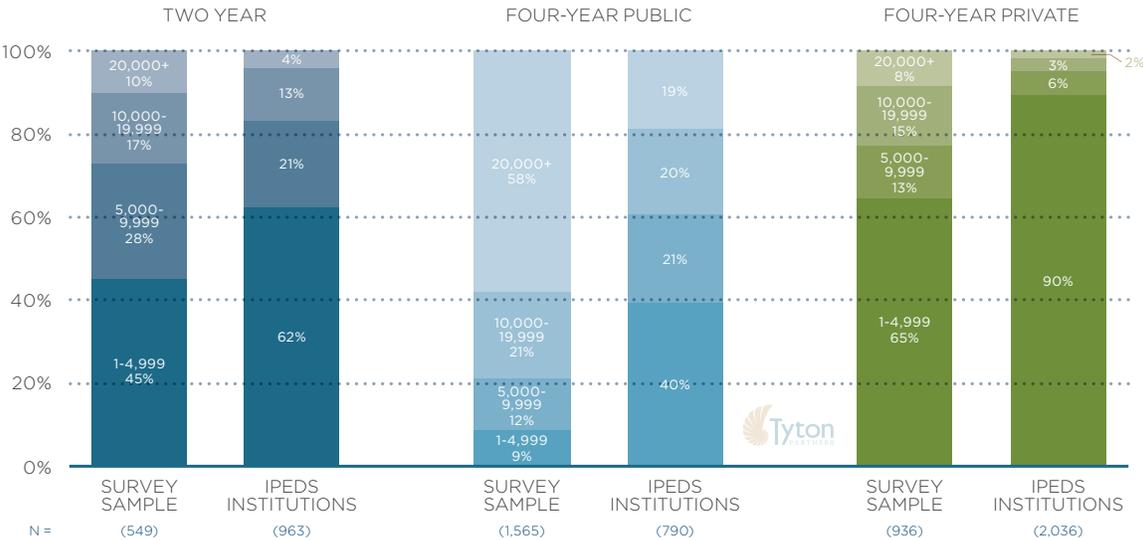
- Collaboration helps foster a culture of coordination. A collaborative nature can be cultivated through the use of communication technologies (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams, Basecamp) and shared file storage platforms (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive) that facilitate and streamline the sharing of information.
- For effective coordination, it is important to establish formalized communication channels.
- Practices as simple as organizing lunches that connect student support stakeholders can create informal spaces for staff to communicate and share learnings and best practices.

APPENDIX

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure A1

RESPONDENT DISTRIBUTION BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND SIZE, 2021



Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

METHODOLOGY

Information for this research brief comes from a national survey of higher education administrators and advisors—including faculty. The survey was distributed through the help of the following partners: Achieving the Dream (ATD), NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, Complete College America, EDUCAUSE, and the Reinvention Collaborative. The survey was in the field from February 2 through February 26, 2021.

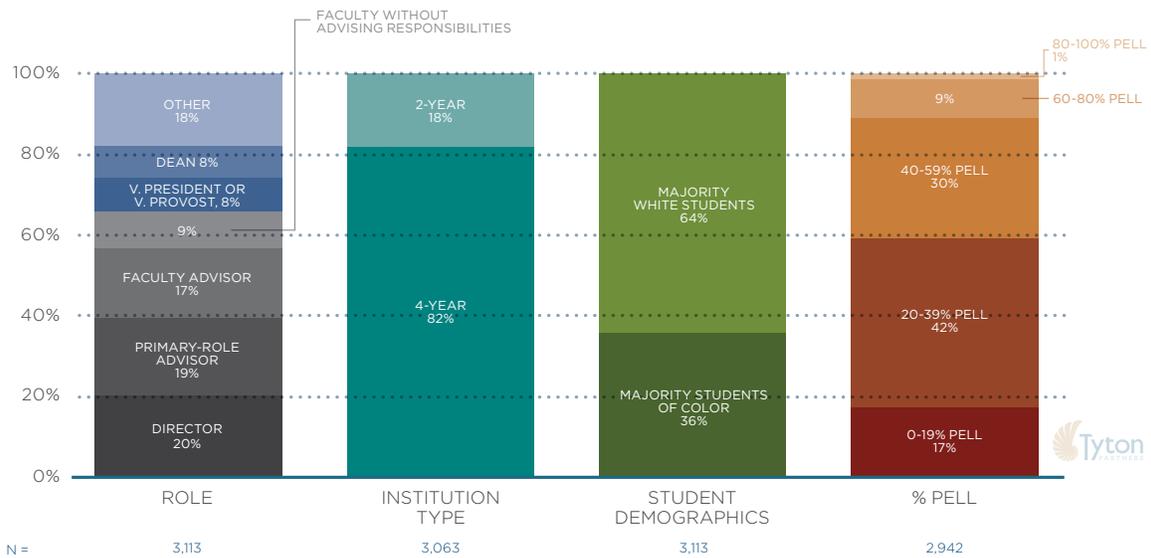
PARTICIPANTS

For the study, 2,894 higher education administrators and advisors representing over 1,300 institutions from across the U.S. higher education landscape participated in the survey. Participant institutional affiliation was matched to the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to retrieve institutional characteristic data, allowing for analyses to be conducted by institutional characteristics such as sector, size, and student demographics.

The largest sectoral representation in the sample comes from public four-year institutions (51%), followed by 31% from private four-year institutions and 18% from two-year institutions. The survey sample is reasonably well-aligned to the national sample by sector and size.

Figure A2

RESPONDENT DISTRIBUTION BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND SIZE, 2021



Note: Other includes: Student affairs professional, Other (Please specify), Provost, Career services professional, Chief Business Officer / Chief Financial Officer, Financial aid professional, Chief Technology/Information Officer (CTO/CIO), Mental health professional

Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

MATERIALS

The survey consisted of questions designed for administrators and advisors with roles in the following student supports: academic advising, career services, financial aid and literacy, student life, counseling & psychological services, academic support/ tutoring, and teaching.

PROCEDURES

All data were checked for completeness, missing values, or erroneous codes. All responses entered as 'other' were reviewed to determine if they should also be coded as one of the fixed responses. Data weighting was used to adjust the survey sample size to more accurately represent the national postsecondary education institutions. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, results are presented in aggregate and summary statistics.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Driving Toward a Degree is a data-driven resource designed to help institutions pursue integrated student supports. Since 2016, data has been collected and analyzed via longitudinal primary research studies by Tyton Partners, with the support of the **Bay View Analytics** and in partnership with **NASPA –Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**, **NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising**, **Achieving the Dream** (ATD), **EDUCAUSE**, **Complete College America**, and the **Reinvention Collaborative**. Contact Tyton Partners (drivetodegree@tytonpartners.com) to take advantage of the *Driving Toward a Degree* initiative as a data-driven resource for improved student success through supports redesign. To learn more about our organization, visit tytonpartners.com.

We welcome the opportunity to help institutions and suppliers alike address the gaps in their policies, practices, and technological products, and to assess current capabilities and identify future needs. To learn more and access other research briefs in this series or prior year studies, visit drivetodegree.org.

We also invite you to share this series and your perspective on holistic student supports via the Twitter hashtag **#drivetodegree**.

This publication was created with feedback from the **Advising Success Network** (ASN). ASN is a dynamic network of five organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and students from low-income backgrounds. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices to advance a more equitable student experience to achieve our vision of a higher education landscape that has eliminated race and income as predictors of student success. The ASN is coordinated by **NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**, and includes **Achieving the Dream**, the **American Association of State Colleges and Universities**, **EDUCAUSE**, **NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising**, and the **National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition**.

Driving toward a Degree and the Advising Success Network are made possible thanks to generous support from the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**.

ABOUT TYTON PARTNERS

Tyton Partners is the leading provider of investment banking and strategy consulting services to the education sector and leverages its deep transactional and advisory experience to support a range of clients, including companies, foundations, institutions, and investors.

In higher education, Tyton Partners' consulting practice offers a unique spectrum of services to support institutions, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and companies in developing and implementing strategies for revenue diversification and growth, student persistence and success, and innovations in teaching and learning.

In September 2020, Tyton Partners launched the Center for Higher Education Transformation. Building on 10+ years of experience, scores of engagements in higher education, and hands-on executive experience, the Center offers advisory services for institutions seeking transformational impact. Tyton's advisory offerings enable mergers and affiliations, revenue growth and diversification, transformative partnerships and creative capital access for all types and sizes of institutions.

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