

# 5 Strategies to Help Colleges Succeed in a New Era

Institutions that address students' needs with flexibility, support and communication will be well positioned to thrive post-pandemic.



*This article is the second in a three-part series examining key challenges and opportunities in higher education today. **Part 1** described some of the biggest obstacles facing colleges and universities as they look to recover from the effects of the pandemic, including enrolling and retaining students, ensuring student success, meeting the changing needs of stakeholders and reinventing support services. **Part 2** provides a playbook for overcoming these hurdles.*

**T**HE CHALLENGES FACING CAMPUS leaders in the coming years are significant. But with the right combination of tools and tactics, colleges and universities can emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever. Here are five key strategies that will position higher education institutions for success in the future.



Successful institutions anticipate their students' desires and provide consistent, reliable service wherever and whenever it's needed.

## 1 | Deliver an exceptional student experience — on or off campus.

In the business world, delivering what the customer wants is critical. As higher education becomes increasingly competitive, this is also true for colleges and universities.

Brands that offer a superior consumer experience bring in nearly six times more revenue than competitors that lag in this area, **Forbes reports** — and 73 percent of consumers say a good experience significantly influences their brand loyalties.

Successful institutions anticipate their students' desires and provide consistent, reliable service wherever and whenever it's needed. "Whether students are on or off campus, their experience should remain the same," noted Vincent Martinez, executive government advisor for **Avaya**.

For colleges and universities, enhancing the customer experience involves making it easy for students to register for courses, pay tuition and fees, reserve course materials and complete other functions from any device or location. To realize this vision, institutions need the ability to communicate with students effortlessly through multiple channels. They also need to integrate various cloud-based technologies to allow for data to flow seamlessly from one system to another.

"Universities are rethinking their stacks of technology systems in order to break down the siloes that exist between them," Martinez said. "They're looking for systems that can better serve the needs of students."

## 2 | Create flexible working and learning environments that enable real-time communication and collaboration from anywhere.

The shift to remote learning and working that occurred in spring 2020 demonstrated that not all students and staff must be on campus in order to be successful, provided that the right support systems are in place — and it has changed people's expectations moving forward.

Students have come to expect a flexible learning experience that takes advantage of digital tools and methods, and employees are also asking for more latitude in where they're allowed to work. Flexible, hybrid work policies will be critical for attracting and retaining talent in the future, **Inside Higher Ed has reported**, with as many as 83 percent of employees saying they don't want to return to working five days a week in a physical office environment.

As the authors wrote: "There is no going back to





Campus leaders can boost enrollment, retention and success by engaging with students and building strong relationships with them throughout their educational journey.

the way things used to be. Colleges and universities must now prepare students for a world that has shifted significantly toward flexible work.”

To support this new reality, institutions need solutions for communicating and collaborating online in real time, supporting the ability to work or learn effectively from anywhere. “If members of the campus community want to be able to work or learn from home, they should have the toolset to do that,” Martinez said, “so they’re not missing a beat.”

### 3 | Nurture relationships with students from pre-enrollment through graduation and beyond.

**Research shows** that when students feel connected to their college or university, they are more likely to persist in their studies. Campus leaders can boost enrollment, retention and success by engaging with students and building strong relationships with them throughout their educational journey.

“Colleges are developing relationships with students from the first moment they express interest in the school through when they graduate and beyond, encouraging them to be active alumni and contribute to the college’s foundation,” Martinez pointed out.

For this relationship-building to occur, institutions must communicate strategically with students, prospects and alumni across multiple channels. Colleges need an easy way to track and manage all touch points with stakeholders through a single interface, so everyone who is responsible for a student’s success is on the same page.

“Empowering a university’s call center agents is critical for nurturing those relationships,” Martinez said. “Call center agents need the tools and training that will allow them to be more effective.”

### 4 | Make support services more readily available to students.

Support services like academic advising, tutoring and mental health assistance have always been **important factors in student success** and completion. During the pandemic, they have become **even more critical**.

Rethinking the delivery of support services to meet students’ needs in a more timely and effective manner is an essential strategy for helping additional students succeed. One new development that holds promise in this area is “social listening.”

“That’s when you listen to what is being posted on social media using artificial intelligence,” Martinez explained. “The ability to glean actionable insight from social media



As campus leaders consider how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, they should think carefully about the physical safety of students and staff as well.

interactions can help prevent something unfortunate from happening and make sure students quickly get the care they need. It's a very powerful solution."

## 5 | Ensure the health and safety of students and staff.

The emergence of COVID-19 has prompted colleges and universities to develop tools and strategies for keeping their communities safe from viruses and other diseases. At the same time, threats to physical safety still remain — and **new public safety regulations** such as Kari's Law and RAY BAUM's Act require colleges to have a modern communications infrastructure for notifying first responders in the event of an emergency.

Kari's Law requires direct 911 dialing capabilities within multi-line telephone systems (MLTS) such as those employed by college campuses. RAY BAUM's Act states that colleges and other organizations using MLTS technologies must provide a dispatchable location for every 911 call, so emergency first responders know exactly where each call originated from.

As campus leaders consider how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, they should think carefully about the physical safety of students and staff as well.

"Colleges need to be able to notify people in a timely manner across multiple channels and request emergency resources as quickly as possible," Martinez says. "Seconds can literally mean someone's life."

## Communication Is Key

Institutions that will enjoy the most success in the coming years are those that can innovate to serve the rapidly evolving needs of students and staff most effectively — and strategic communication across multiple platforms lies at the heart of this innovation.

"Communication is the key to improving the overall customer experience, regardless of what industry you're in," Martinez said. "We have become the most difficult customers you can be, because we want everything at once. We want to be connected, and yet we want to be left alone. We want to be treated equally, and yet we like to be treated uniquely as well."

To meet these competing needs, he said, communication "has to be full-featured and effortless across the entire organization."

**Learn more about the Avaya OneCloud ecosystem and its solutions at [avaya.com](https://www.avaya.com).**