

# Improving the College Experience Through Better Communication

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



**Editor's note:** This is the final article in a three-part series exploring challenges and opportunities in higher education today. **Part 1** outlined some of the biggest obstacles facing colleges and universities. **Part 2** offered a playbook for overcoming these barriers.

**A**S CAMPUS LEADERS LOOK AHEAD TO A POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE, they'll have to innovate to meet the rapidly evolving demands of stakeholders. To succeed, institutions must enhance the student experience, create flexible learning and working environments, nurture relationships throughout the student lifecycle, meet stakeholders' needs in a timely manner and keep the campus community safe. Strategic communication is critical to meeting each of these goals.

Avaya, a worldwide leader in enterprise communications, offers solutions that can help colleges and universities connect various student and staff experiences through seamless communication across multiple platforms and channels. In an interview, **Vincent Martinez**, executive government advisor for Avaya, described how institutions can benefit from Avaya's solutions.



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## Can you explain what Avaya does?

**VM:** Today's customers are more demanding than ever, and COVID has only intensified that. It has changed how we work, travel, shop and live. I don't think there's any going back. I may still order dinner online and have it delivered, or stay in the parking lot and have items brought to my car. That will continue to happen.

Communication is what allows organizations to provide those exceptional customer experiences, and our Avaya OneCloud platform supports very robust communication. OneCloud includes capabilities such as Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS), which allows users to communicate in the cloud using any device or messaging channel; Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS), which tracks customer interactions across multiple channels; and Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS), which enables users to embed voice, video and messaging capabilities into existing applications.

What OneCloud lets you do is layer in different technologies to create the student and faculty experiences you're hoping to achieve. It's a fully composable platform. We offer integrated APIs for any other cloud-based solution, such as an LMS or ERP system. In the middle of that, you can have an artificial intelligence orchestrator. Whether that's Watson or another solution, colleges are able to leverage what they have to create AI-based workflows within their communications.

We also offer Avaya Spaces, which is a robust collaboration platform. It's similar to WebEx or Zoom, but it can be integrated into an LMS or other external applications. Finally, we have alliance partners like Google and others who provide different components such as call intercept and social listening.

We bring together all of these solutions that are highly adaptable to any environment, so that colleges can provide the type of experiences they want for their stakeholders. You can't do that with traditional, siloed technology systems.

## How might colleges take advantage of these capabilities to enhance the student experience?

**VM:** Using our software, institutions can send personalized communications that guide students through the college experience. For instance, you could send a message to students saying, "Your tuition is due in three days, click on this link for easy payment options." You can integrate Avaya OneCloud messaging with your accounting software, so that when students receive the message, they can click through to complete the transaction. You can do this with other transactions as well: "Registration begins today, don't forget to sign up for fall classes." The solution gives students an easy way to do that.





You can also set up the system to deliver congratulatory messages to students when they achieve a certain grade, as a means of positive reinforcement to increase engagement: “Congratulations, you got an A on that last assignment. Here’s what you should be working on next,” with a link to the next assignment. All of these messaging capabilities can be integrated easily into any application using our library of APIs.

### How can Avaya solutions help institutions meet the need for flexible working and learning environments?

**VM:** With the UCaaS capabilities of Avaya OneCloud, employees can receive calls to their campus extension on a home phone, a cell phone or a personal computer, so they don’t have to be tethered to their desk — they can work from anywhere productively.

What’s more, Avaya Spaces simplifies real-time communication and collaboration among students and faculty online. Besides voice and videoconferencing for up to 1,000 people, Avaya Spaces includes a virtual whiteboard application that instructors or students can use to make notes and demonstrate concepts, then capture that information and post it for anytime, anywhere access. Colleges can integrate Avaya Spaces into their LMS or other software, and they can use it for online classes, meetings and virtual office hours.

### How can Avaya OneCloud help colleges nurture relationships with students from enrollment through graduation and beyond?

**VM:** Communication with students is the key to supporting their success. It can mean the difference between a B or a C, or even losing that student.

The CCaaS capabilities of OneCloud allow institutions to communicate with students more strategically across multiple channels and manage all of that from a single interface. The ability to see all the various ways you’ve communicated with a student in one location is very useful for a student success manager. They can see which messages are having the greatest impact and where there may be gaps in communication that can be addressed.

You have to find the right balance of sending information. It can’t be too much, or the student will just tune it out. It has to be timely and relevant information at the moment it’s most needed.

### You mentioned “social listening” before. Can you explain how colleges might use this capability to meet student needs in a timely manner?

**VM:** Suppose a student posts a message to social



Social listening is gleaning actionable insights from AI and then taking whatever action you choose, whether that's an automated message or a personal response.

media saying, "I'm thinking of applying to these three universities and majoring in engineering. Do you have any advice?" With social listening, you could be constantly monitoring social media sites for the use of your school's name. The application would pick up on that post and check to see if the person has a profile with your university. If they don't, the system could reply to that person's post with a message containing more information about your engineering program and a link to facilitate the registration process.

Or, suppose it's finals week and a student is stressed out. Maybe they didn't do as well on the test as they hoped, and they post a message suggesting they're distraught. That might be an opportunity to connect the student with mental health support. There's a fine line in terms of intervening; you want to respect their privacy, but if they're posting to social media, it's a public cry for help. You can intervene with appropriate resources to help them work through that issue.

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### How can Avaya OneCloud help with campus safety?

**VM:** Our platform has built-in capabilities to help institutions comply with safety regulations like Kari's Law

and RAY BAUM's Act. It enables direct 911 dialing from any campus extension, as well as location-based 911 services so emergency first responders know exactly where to go with a call comes in. OneCloud also includes a "panic button" capability to call for help with the push of a button, as well as emergency messaging capabilities that allow authorized personnel to send out automatic notifications to the campus community through multiple channels quickly and easily.

Those are all capabilities we offer to everyone. When you start to layer in other applications with our CPaaS capabilities, it becomes even more powerful. For instance, you could use Internet of Things sensors to trigger automated warnings. There's a sensor in my daughter's school that can detect when a gun is fired and alert public safety officials; you could add that capability to the system as well. The possibilities are endless.

### Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?

**VM:** Enrollment is dropping, and that means there is less revenue coming in for institutions. We can help by providing a lower-cost, more highly efficient way of communicating. With Avaya OneCloud, you can get the right information to people in a timely manner with less effort, while improving their experience both on and off campus.