Strategic Enrollment Management in the Post-Pandemic Era

A step-by-step guide to sustainable enrollment growth, presented by Anthology.

At Anthology, our mission is to provide dynamic, data-informed experiences to the global education community so that learners and educators can achieve their goals. Having survived the shockwaves of the global pandemic, we believe that higher education now has a great opportunity to embrace data and create learning opportunities that truly match the needs of modern learners.

This starts with a strategic approach to enrollment. The pandemic has exacerbated a broader trend of enrollment decline for many institutions, while the so-called "demographic cliff" means that from 2025 onwards the traditional pool of high school graduates will be reduced by as much as 20%. It's little wonder that **81% of institutional leaders consider improving enrollment and learner retention a top priority for 2023.**

The only answer is innovation. To drive enrollment growth, institutions will need to leverage new data sources, attract new demographics, and embrace new modalities that align with learners' goals and career aspirations.

Strategic Enrollment Management in the Post Pandemic Era is a concise, step-by-step guide to help you develop a holistic plan to recruit and retain learners. It covers the full enrollment funnel—from strategy to boosting prospects at the top of the funnel to nurturing learners through to enrollment and then supporting them through to completion—and highlights the key trends and factors that institutions need to be aware of today if they are to thrive tomorrow.

Contents:

Preparing for Success

When faced with enrollment challenges, it is often difficult to know where to start. Learner demographics, program offerings, and the competitive landscape are all becoming more diverse and complex, making the development of a clear strategy both more challenging and more important.

What does enrollment success look like for your institution? How will you know if you are on the right track? And when is the right time to pivot? None of these questions can be answered without a clear view of the relevant data, and too often strategies are built off incorrect or incomplete information, leading to poor results.

In this section, we will take an in-depth look at enrollment data. Firstly, we will look at Key Enrollment Indicators (KEIs) to isolate the factors most closely aligned with enrollment success, before then reviewing how you can develop a cross-institutional data strategy to ensure you always have visibility over these crucial metrics.

1: Understand Your Key Enrollment Indicators

Shifting demographics, the need for increased net revenues, online learning options, declining transfer markets, and a variety of other pressures necessitate a long-term enrollment strategy rather than a rushed, short-term approach. Key Enrollment Indicators (KEIs) are a good place to start to unravel these complexities and develop a plan that will enable you to achieve your strategic goals.

As defined by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO):

> *"Key Enrollment Indicators (KEIs) are a set of factors that help an institution understand its complex enrollment patterns in the context of its unique culture and enrollment profile. They are divided into two groups: **enrollment cohorts** and **metrics of success**. Understanding the KEIs of the institution will help its leaders, faculty, administration, and staff make better choices about which enrollment initiatives will have the greatest impact on the institution's health and learner success, optimizing enrollment while staying true to their academic mission."* (Source: **AACRAO**)

Enrollment Cohorts

Enrollment cohorts are broad groups of students who are either enrolled currently or represent a great opportunity for future growth. There is no one-size-fits-all enrollment cohort set that can be applied to all institutions; for example, "military and veterans" might be essential for an institution near a military base, but less so at other locations.

A common mistake that institutions make is to define too many cohorts, thus spreading resources too thin and reducing effectiveness with their most valuable groups. As a rule, having a small number of cohorts on which you can truly focus is preferable. Cohorts that behave similarly during the enrollment process should be combined to add efficiency.

Here are just a few examples of common enrollment cohorts:

Dual enrollment	First-time freshman	Hybrid
High school	Transfers	Doctoral
Workforce	Masters	Professional
Adult learners	International	Military and veterans
Transfers	Online	Continuing education
Certificate of completion	Graduate certificate	Non-credit CPE

For more information on major cohorts by institution type, see **AACRAO**.

Role of Enrollment Data

Once enrollment cohorts have been identified, the next step is to collect data across the learner enrollment journey for each group. For example, what was the volume of inquiries for your online master's degree programs? How many of those inquiries turned into started applications? And so on, for every major step through the enrollment funnel.

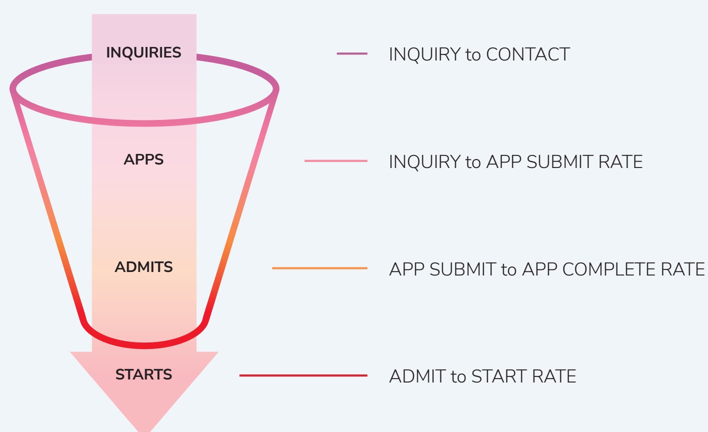
Don't rely exclusively on short-term data. Collecting several years of data will help identify any anomalies that may come from just a single year's results, particularly as the pandemic years showed large variations.

Metrics of Success

Having collected enrollment data, the next step is to look at conversion rates through each stage in the funnel. This is where we move from raw data to insight, and you can identify where there are barriers that are impacting enrollment.

Enrollment Metrics that Matter

Depending on the institution, the enrollment funnel can be broken down at various points.



Develop an Enrollment Model

Here is where the cohorts you have defined become important. For each cohort, you want to compile data and conversion rates through the funnel. The example below looks at a single year's data for the Online Graduate Learners cohort. It highlights key bottlenecks in the process; for example, why do 60% of online graduate students who start the application process fail to submit it? And why are a third of submissions incomplete? Deep analysis of the data will help you isolate the KEIs that are really going to make a big difference to overall enrollment growth.

Performance	***Year One***
Total Leads	5000
Lead to App Start	15%
Started Apps	750
App Start to App Submit	40%
Submitted Apps	300
App Submit to App Complete	65%
Completed Apps	195
Acceptance Rate	85%
Admits	166
Accept to Enroll	60%
Enrolls	99
Lead to Enroll	2%

Continue to Track and Optimize Over Time

There is no quick fix for sustainable enrollment growth. Having identified your KEIs, you then need to track these measurements over time, optimize your approach accordingly, and be agile as trends change.

Returning to our Online Graduate Learners cohort above, data from year one indicated issues with the application processes–both in terms of submission and completion. By refreshing their application process, including an enhanced mobile experience which is crucial for this audience, the institution was able to improve these metrics and, as a result, increased overall enrollment by 44% over the following two years.

Performance	***Year One***	***Year Two***	***Year Three***
Total Leads	5000	5000	5000
Lead to App Start	15%	15%	15%
Started Apps	750	750	750
App Start to App Submit	40%	45%	50%
Submitted Apps	300	338	375
App Submit to App Complete	65%	70%	75%
Completed Apps	195	236	281
Acceptance Rate	85%	85%	85%
Admits	166	201	239
Accept to Enroll	60%	60%	60%
Enrolls	99	120	143
Lead to Enroll	2.0%	2.4%	3.0%

2: Devise a Clear Data Strategy

If we acknowledge that every learner is different—with unique academic, social, and economic circumstances, among a host of other factors—it is no surprise that the path to degree completion can take many forms. To date, institutions have lacked a holistic picture of learners' unique experiences, making personalized interventions difficult.

Driven by our vision for Anthology Intelligent Experiences (iX)™, we are invested in helping higher education provide personalized, data-led learning experiences–including through the enrollment process. As our chairman and CEO, Jim Milton, noted in a recent article in Forbes:

> *"The pandemic accelerated higher education's adoption of technology, and that acceleration is set to power the next chapter of learner success and lift completion rates through personalization. By breaking down data silos across an institution as well as leveraging and synthesizing data in smarter ways, educators can personalize experiences to empower action or organize support. The goal is to unlock the potential of each learner and support them on their educational journey.*
>
> *The first step is to look inward. Institutions should start by determining analytical needs, assessing the evolution of their ability to handle data, and identifying ways the data may be used to generate value. Integrating prospective learner data, current learner information, learner engagement trends, and other relevant information to drive personalization requires a data analytics and business intelligence strategy."* (Source: **Forbes**)

There are three essential considerations when building a data strategy:

Data Action Before Data Collection

In our conversations with institutions, we often hear that they are struggling with too much data. Put simply, data only has value if it can be used to better serve your learners, and your data strategy should be oriented around reliable sources of actionable data rather than collecting data for data's sake. **Step 1** outlined the key data points for enrollment specifically, so try not to confuse matters by collecting data that cannot feed into your KEIs. Shifting the focus to the learner will also help break down institutional silos and make the process of sharing and leveraging data between departments more effective.

Assess Whether the Organization is Truly Set Up to Deliver

Each institution is unique, with different resource levels, program offerings, student cohorts and much more. Too often institutions set a data strategy that they are not equipped to deliver, rather than concentrating on key initiatives that drive meaningful change. Again, focusing on the needs of learners is the best way to centralize efforts and develop processes that will inform the larger goal of streamlining the learner experience and boosting enrollment.

Examine Data in Layers

Taking a closer look at the institution's architecture, it is helpful to break down data into three layers:

- The technology layer–are you leveraging technologies that make data accessible across the institution?
- The information layer–is there a reporting structure that aggregates data and provides a clear view on student outcomes?
- The experience layer–does your institution have a holistic view of the student experience, inside and outside the classroom, in a way that allows for personalized plans for each learner?

For many institutions, the experience layer is still an aspiration rather than a reality. As you are building out your data strategy, consider actionable data sources that you do not leverage currently which can help build a more robust understanding of the student experience.

DATA: AN INSTITUTION-WIDE CHALLENGE

- The average institution has **35 different technology applications** across the student lifecycle, making data connectivity a huge challenge and opportunity. (Source: **Nucleus Research**)
- "More calls for **data-informed decision making and reporting**" Ranked #3 on Educause's Top Ten Higher Education Trends for 2023. (Source: **Educause**)

Growing the Top of the Funnel

Now that you have a grasp on what success looks like for your institution and how it will be measured, the next step is to generate more prospects at the top of the funnel. With learners considering a wider range of education options than ever before, you need a concise lead generation strategy which can set you apart from the competition.

Prospects nowadays are using a large number of sources to inform their enrollment decisions, including social media, institution websites, course reviews, university rankings, and of course their friends and families. As the research process becomes increasingly online, institutions need to take a digital-first approach to drive leads to the top of the funnel and personalize the journey for each learner.

There are four key questions for institutions looking to attract more prospects at the top of the funnel.

1. What makes our offer different from the competition?
2. Have student needs been considered when taking programs to market?
3. Is our marketing plan digital-first and multi-faceted?
4. Are there opportunities to leverage alternative credentials and other innovative modalities to further increase demand?

PERSONALIZATION IS CRUCIAL

- For learners who say they've had a great university experience, **69%** felt their experience was personalized. Today, learners expect tailored communications, from applying to a university to graduation. (Source: **Salesforce**)

3: Differentiate Your Offering

As the range of available education options continues to expand—both within what has traditionally been considered higher education and elsewhere—institutions are struggling to establish a genuine point of difference. This is particularly the case in both the online and graduate spaces, which have become significantly more competitive in recent years.

The key to differentiation in 2023 is this: what are the needs of learners that are currently not being met? By interrogating data from your current learners and the broader higher ed landscape, you can isolate unmet needs for learners and develop an offering to match.

Starting with your current learners, you want to take a panorama, or high level, view of core information such as their demographics, where they are located, and what motivated them to join your institution; data that can be readily available from when they enrolled. Take it a step further by looking in more detail—what we call a microscope perspective—at data that allows you to really understand their learning experience. This might include qualitative and quantitative feedback from individual learners and aggregated insights from your LMS to identify what course content is resonating, and what study habits can be identified to help attract new learners.

The same concept applies when you look at learners outside your institution. Start with a panorama view of the market, looking at demographic changes for relevant learners and other trends. Then take out your microscope and isolate specific success stories in similar areas and how they respond to learner needs.

Once you have viewed from all four of these perspectives, insights will inevitably start to emerge—and you'll leave the exercise with an understanding of which learner needs you must meet to grow your programs.

A CROWDED MARKET WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF CHOICE:

- As of 2020, there were nearly **40,000 master's programs** available in the United States, a staggering **24% increase** versus 2012. (Source: **NCES IPEDS**)
- Meanwhile, undergraduate learners are now on average **applying to 5.6 different institutions**. (Source: **Inside Higher Ed**)

GCNYC Glasgow Caledonian New York College | FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

Client Success Story:

By following this approach, Glasgow Caledonian New York College **(GCNYC)'s "For the common good"** master's program initiative has met a market need for DEI jobs, establishing a clear niche in a very crowded market. **Read more.**

4: Expand Your Applicant Pool

Here is a controversial idea: what if we were to consider prospective learners as customers? No doubt academic leaders would balk at the suggestion that education is or should be described in such a transactional manner, and rightly so, but for the purposes of boosting enrollment we believe it is a helpful lens.

Put simply, to consider a prospect a customer is to grapple with the full breadth of their needs. When it comes to enrollment, there are three essential questions to ask, and having clear answers to all three will inform a marketing and outreach plan that can increase the volume of applicants at your institution.

What is the Product?

Learners are not just looking for degrees, they are looking for opportunities. Both their time and money are hard earned, and they are going to invest it at institutions they feel offer pathways to continue their career. Institutions miss out on enrollment opportunities by thinking of their programs as simply degrees or credentials, thus not presenting the true value of their product to prospects.

What Does it Require from the Prospect?

Digital technology has completely changed the way service industries operate, and what once required a trip to the shop, long consultations, and/or lengthy forms has been replaced by digital—increasingly mobile—processes that can be completed in minutes. This is now the expectation for learners, and institutions that do not make the application process easy and intuitive will invariably lose out to those who do. Understand the lifestyles and tech usage of your key demographics and ensure that your application process is optimized to match.

What Does it Cost?

Every customer is influenced by price, and prospective learners are no exception. As we enter the post-pandemic era, learners will be more price-conscious than ever, and being clear on this is a fundamental step in building your applicant pool. Informing learners about financial aid processes and the like is a crucial part of this, as it helps them quickly get to an understanding of the real cost of their chosen program.

UNDERSTANDING LEARNERS' ENROLLMENT PREFERENCES

- **69%** of learners say that their career outlook and career options are important in determining which university to attend. (Source: **Anthology**)
- **66%** of learners expect an application to take an hour or less to complete. (Source: **Anthology**)
- Cost of attendance is now the **most important factor** when learners are considering at which institution to enroll. (Source: **Anthology**)

For detailed insights on learner expectations and experiences for the enrollment process, review our "**Learner Feedback Informs Admissions and Enrollment Strategies**" research and whitepaper.

5: Design a Multi-Faceted Marketing Plan

Having identified your institution's point of difference and how it can be positioned to align with student needs, the next step is to implement a marketing strategy to promote it. Enrollment marketing is always most successful when it is student-centric, and today that means it should be digital first and multi-faceted.

Five crucial considerations for enrollment marketing include:

Define Your Brand

In **Step 3** we looked at how you can uncover unmet student needs to find a point of differentiation for your institution. To convert this into a student-facing proposition, consider the following question: if a student is considering a range of education options, why should they choose yours? What is it about your program offering, culture, mission, and/or other factors which they can't find elsewhere?

When you have a concise answer to this question, you can then start to develop it as a tagline which will get attention in the market. It is essential that this is rolled out consistently across all touchpoints, so the key benefits you offer to the learner are in view throughout the enrollment process.

Define Your Target Audience

Marketing communications should be designed specifically for your ideal learner. It is a crucial step to know to whom you are appealing as you market various degrees and courses in which a wide range of audiences may be eligible to enroll. Understanding how and what kind of communication your target audience prefers is also critical to turning prospects into enrolled learners.

Messages are not one-size-fits-all and audiences are savvier than ever in terms of identifying when a brand takes the time to "care about them", or at the very least address them accurately. Conducting a focus group or survey of current students can illuminate the key attributes of learners that would flourish at your institution, and identify preferences, interests, and motivations that will allow you to communicate to prospects more personally and authentically. Creating a persona of your ideal learner will help craft messaging that feels authentic and resonates with them directly.

Because many departments make decisions across an institution, it is important to regularly assess any recent changes in your offerings and check if your marketing reflects those. Examples of updates could include:

- Your university has traditionally offered an on-campus bachelor's degree and is expanding to an online option. Are all applicable pages on the website updated to convey the new offering?
- Your college wants to attract students who work full-time while juggling a family. Is flexibility featured and the benefits of asynchronous online courses readily apparent?
- Your institution serves a large Hispanic population with potential for further growth. Do the student testimonials reflect the student body that the university welcomes? Are open houses prepared with bilingual facilitators who can interact with extended family support systems?

Different messaging should apply to different personas on all marketing collateral, from ads to webpages to emails to traditional media. If there are time or resource pressures, it is better to narrow down the number of target cohorts rather than do generic campaigns to many different personas.

Target Paid vs. Organic Efforts Differently

Once you've defined your brand and determined your audience, you want to make sure to have both the broadest reach as well as the best brand reinforcement to be the institution of choice when the prospect makes their decision. It is essential that the information you provide matches the level of interest from the student.

For example, if a prospective student is scrolling Facebook and happens upon your ad, it might introduce for the first time the idea of going back to school. At that point, they are at the very beginning of their search and will be doing a lot more research on their own before they decide to pursue education.

Alternatively, if a second prospective student has been considering returning to school for a while and does a search engine query for "online bachelor's degrees near me", you want your website to rank in the first few organic results, but in case it does not, you also want to have a paid search ad shown as well.

Because of these differences in intent, you want to include your brand presence in all the above scenarios– social media to plant the idea in the first place, which generates demand, as well as paid search and organic SEO results to capture the demand.

Website and Paid Media Landing Pages–What's the Difference?

Understanding where a student is in their journey can help drive what messaging goes on your website and how you utilize paid media landing pages. A website is for high-intent searchers who go directly to your institution site to find their way to the program of interest and is highly dependent on strong SEO. A landing page is a stand-alone media webpage designed with the sole intent to capture the interest and contact information of that visitor that you "invited" to learn more through a paid media ad.

When you are paying for the visitor through well positioned media ads, your top priority is to capture interested prospects while simultaneously providing a smooth user experience. Consider our first prospect from the example above, who has seen a Facebook ad which has prompted them to consider going back to study. Your landing page should support key information to pique their interest, but not be so detailed as to make the process overwhelming. Similarly, you want to try and capture their information to contact them at a later stage; however, lengthy forms covering birth date, military status, address, and other very personal information will be off putting and cause them to disengage.

On your website, however, prospects are ready to digest much more information and are nearer a decision— like our second prospect above, who is actively looking for courses in their area. As a result, they are typically willing to give more personal information and can even be convinced to apply for their desired program. Generally, inquiries that come in through the website convert into students at a far higher rate than those through paid media; however, a combination of the two will lead to the best overall results.

Right Message, Right Place, Right Time

Like we saw in **Step 4**, prospects are looking for opportunities rather than degrees. Your messaging should reflect this, with targeting to ensure the message lands at the moment they will be most receptive.

- Write about the prospect's expected outcomes and experience–not the degree program's.
- Choose actionable words without sounding aggressive. For example, instead of "This degree will help you sharpen your accounting skills," try "Sharpen your accounting skills and position yourself for leadership with this degree."
- Content must be optimized for search engines with relevant keywords and packaged in a consumable format (i.e., quick to read, with most important information first).
- Prioritize outcomes, ROI, and employability statistics.
- Paid media targeting and flighting (planned times when the ads run) must be strategic; consider holidays and start terms if budgets are limited.

Each communication channel also has important considerations:

- Website – Should be built from the point of view of someone weighing up an enrollment decision. Does your website have all the information required to inform their choice, and is it easy to find? Can they quickly get help if something isn't clear? Test the site with your target audience and apply their feedback.
- Content Marketing – Should be designed to make your offering relatable. Use keyword trends to align with areas of interest for students and improve organic rankings, and provide practical advice in easily-digestible formats–including for things like financial aid which, when not properly understood, can turn students away.
- Advertising – Go where your target audience already is, digitally and in the real world, and design your ads to be optimized for each platform. Do not use a YouTube-length video to advertise through an Instagram reel–repurpose to match the medium to get the best results.
- Landing Pages – Include the basics and information to interest a prospect enough to request more information. Make sure to include the most important information "above the scroll" and that the page is mobile-friendly; it isn't unusual to see higher than 80% of visitors on mobile devices.

Having generated leads, it is then essential to deliver personalized communications to drive them through to enrollment. We'll look at this further in **steps 7 and 8**.

Wichita State University

Client Success Story:

By partnering with Anthology OPX, Wichita State University has embraced an innovative marketing approach that has driven consistent online enrollment growth for more than half a decade. **Read more**.

6. Leverage Alternative Credentials

Call them badges, short courses, certificates, micro-credentials, or simply non-traditional educational programs. No matter which name you prefer, alternative credentials are fundamental to enrollment growth in a post-pandemic world where learners are looking to reskill or upskill to meet the needs of a changing employment market. **Steps 4 and 5** outlined how aligning with career opportunities is important to attract learners, and alternative credentials are a fundamental part of this.

Theoretically, at least, the task here is simple: identify the skill shortages that employers are struggling to fill and create credentials to match, as these will double as the areas that learners are most interested in. Of course, with the job market changing all the time this is easier said than done and requires a much more agile approach than has traditionally been the case with degree programs.

Keeping abreast of general employment trends and skill shortages is a crucial first step. As well as regular commentary in the news, there are a number of valuable data sources available online that you can leverage–the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**, for example, provides topline data on areas of skill shortage and how they compare with employment trends, including an interactive, state-by-state view. At Anthology, we extend our Anthology® Occupation Insight tool to partners who wish to get a more granular view of the employment landscape.

But there is a final data source which remains critically underused: local employers. Building close partnerships with major local employers and industry groups will provide detailed insight into areas of skill shortage and how alternative credentials benefit institutions, learners, and employers alike. We will look further at the enduring value of employer partnerships in **Step 10**.

ALTERNATIVE CREDENTIALS: AN AREA IN HIGH DEMAND

- Globally, the Alternative Credentials market is forecast to see a **CAGR of 17.8% through 2027**, with 56% of growth driven by North America. (Source: **Technavio**)
- **74%** of employers agree that alternative credentials have helped their organization fill skills gaps. (Source: **University Business**)
- **Less than half** of employers believe that higher education is fully realizing the potential of alternative credentials. (Source: **University Business**)

Nurturing Through to Enrollment

Now that you have grown the number of leads coming in, you need to look at how you nurture them through to enrollment and increase yield. This requires a continuation of the personalized approach you started higher up the funnel, where every learner feels that their needs are understood and will be met if they choose to attend your institution.

The table below illustrates some of the most important tasks at this stage in the funnel. The core principle is that responsive, targeted communication is essential—with prospects often applying to multiple institutions, if you are not replying to them quickly, they are probably going to enroll elsewhere.

Focus on Speed-to-Contact	***Consultative Coaching***	***Ongoing Support***	***Impacting Enrollment***
Build the funnel by increasing front-end contact rates	Maximize early funnel conversion and increase application completions	Improve application conversion rates	Maximize late-funnel yield rates
Leverage technology to maximize contact rates. Build a strong first impression and efficiently and quickly qualify interest and admissions requirements.	Consultative enrollment coaching: connect student motivations to the institution's value proposition, identify synergies, encourage to apply, and complete education.	Support students with navigating enrollment processes and with collecting required application documents.	Strong start coaching keeps students motivated and organized through the final steps of getting started and enables institution team to focus on complete applications.

In this section, we will start by looking at how these principles apply for different learner demographics. From there, we will take a closer look at the important task of maintaining yield.

7. Support Diverse Learner Types

Supporting learners outside of the "traditional" high school graduate is going to be fundamental for enrollment success at every institution. As we saw in **Step 1**, the specific cohorts will differ for each institution. That said, there are some key cohorts which are worth taking a closer look at, as they are important for many institutions and require a tailored approach for enrollment.

First Generation

A guiding principle for first generation students is to not assume they come to your institution already familiar with the enrollment process. Even for things like visiting a campus prior to enrollment, first generation students are less likely to participate, often because they have not received sufficient information to know what comes next on the journey.

To ensure you're ready to support this valuable cohort, consider the following questions:

- Is key information available in languages other than English? And, if not, what are the languages most common in your area?
- Is enrollment coaching readily available?
- Have you clearly articulated the path to career success post credential?
- Is pricing and financial aid information clear for someone who is not familiar with these areas?

FIRST GENERATION LEARNERS: A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

- While overall college enrollment was down for 2022 versus the year prior, Latino and Asian learners saw increases of **1.6%** and **1.8%**, respectively. (Source: **National Learner Clearinghouse**)
- Both Latino and Asian populations are forecast to grow and will represent a combined **28% of the US population** by 2030 (vs 23.5% in 2016). (Source: **Census data**)
- Nationally, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) account for just 3% of all four-year nonprofit colleges and universities. They enroll 10% of all Black college learners and produce 16% of the bachelor's degrees and 20% of the STEM degrees earned by Black learners. A **recent analysis** from UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute found that HBCUs move their graduates into the middle class at nearly twice the rate of all institutions of higher education.

The Adult Learner

Did you know that the median age of a university student is actually *younger* now than half a decade ago? Despite considerable investment from institutions to attract adult learners and growing industry needs for reskilling, data from the National Student Clearinghouse shows that, aside from part-time graduate students, the expected shift to mature aged students has not materialized.

Median Age		***Fall 2017***	***Fall 2022***
Undergraduate	Full-Time	20.6	20.4
	Part-Time	23.9	23
Graduate	Full-Time	27	26.8
	Part-Time	32.6	32.8

(Source: **National Student Clearinghouse**)

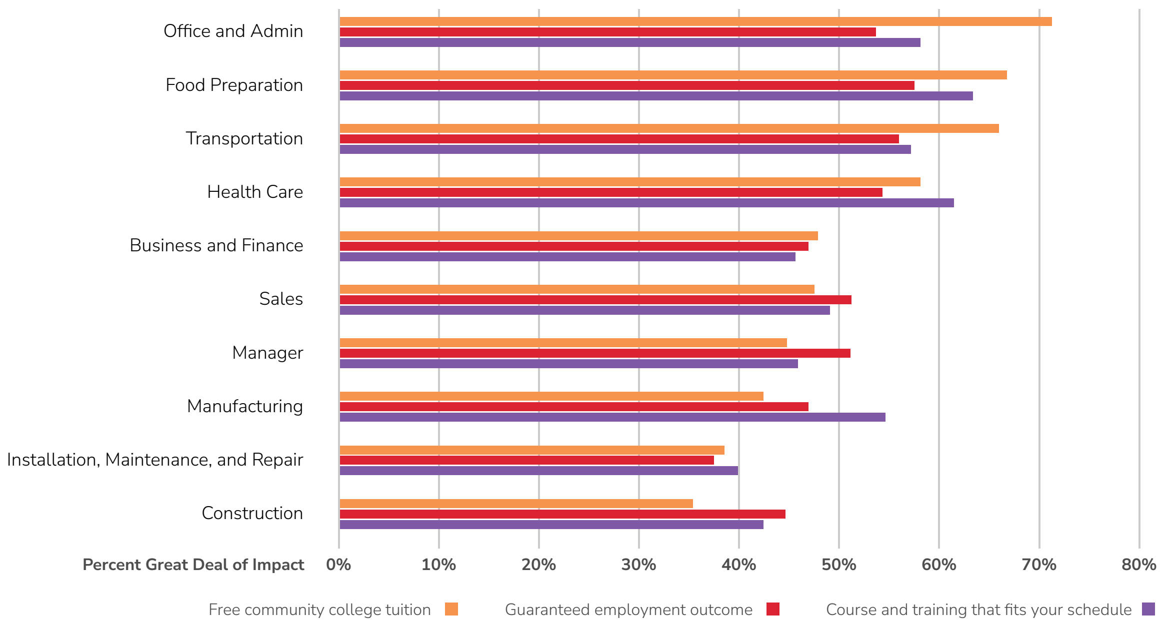
This represents a clear missed opportunity for many institutions. Here are some key questions to refine your offering for this cohort:

- Do you have a genuine marketing strategy for adult learners? Note this is not just a targeting strategy, but a comprehensive marketing plan based around their needs, as detailed in **Step 5**.
- Are you offering flexible modalities, and ensuring that this is clearly communicated through the funnel?
- Do you have a mobile strategy in place? Even though college applications still lean toward desktop devices, research on mobile is very common for time-poor audiences.
- Are you showing a clear career path off the back of their credential? This is best practice for all cohorts, as we have seen in earlier sections, but for adult learners it is an absolute must.

Some College, No Degree

The rate of students stopping out continues to spiral—a worrying trend we will look at further in **Step 9**. With more than **40 million students in the "some college, no degree"** cohort, supporting them back to study is a massive opportunity for enrollment growth.

Strada Education's landmark study of more than 40,000 Americans who started but did not complete college found that career outcomes, affordability, and schedule flexibility are their main considerations when they weigh up returning to study. However, as the table below shows, these factors play out differently depending on the occupation of the respondent. For example, free community college tuition has the biggest reported impact on enrollment for those working in office and administrative, food preparation, and transportation occupations; while for those working in health care or manufacturing, guaranteed employment outcomes would be much more impactful. Those working in sales, management, or construction place the most emphasis on schedule flexibility.



(Source: **Strada Education**)

Understanding which incentive would motivate which persona in this learner category is critical in maximizing your re-enrollment rate. To determine the biggest opportunities for your institution specifically, ask the following questions:

- What are the top five learner cohorts related to stop out data set?
- What are the top key performance indicators (KPIs) to support them?
- What are five intervention strategies that are going to make the biggest difference to your overall enrollment goals?

8: Maintain Yield While Staying Learner Centric

Once you have begun to assess a learner's interest in your school and are moving forward in nurturing them, think about the ways in which you're communicating with them—both in one-on-one outreach, as well as within the overall landscape of other communications from your school. Ask yourself:

- Am I part of a larger support team that is also reaching out to the learner?
- How can I articulate my role in the context of other support available?
- Are we collaborating across departments for efficient, consistent communication?
- Do we have a clear and easy-to-follow communication plan?
- How will we determine if our communications are enough...or too much?
- Are we meeting learners where they are, using communication channels they actually use?

Improving Yield

Topics	***Definition***	***Questions to Ask***
Yield	The percentage of applicants who were admitted that enroll at the institution	• How had your yield changed since the pandemic? • What efforts are underway to improve applicant yield?
Yield Communication Plans	Defines how many times the institution engages an admitted student and when. Specifies when phone, emails, and texts are sent during the period of admittance and term start.	• How frequently do you reach out to your admitted students? • What modes of communication do you use (phone, email, text, etc.)? • To what degree is your communication plan automated using a CRM?

As soon as you've connected with your incoming learners — providing relevant communication via the right channels — it's now time to help them navigate the complex steps of their application process. Consider each of these key steps:

The Application

- Does the learner know how to access and complete the online application form?
- Do they need letters of recommendation? And if so, do they have the relationships and skills to secure them?
- Do they know how to send their transcripts?
- Are they aware of the school's priorities? For example, does your school place emphasis on the learner's GPA, written statements, and/or standardized testing scores?
- What (if any) placement tests are required and how are they scheduled?

Finances

- Does the learner know what FAFSA is and whether they are eligible to apply?
- Do they know the FAFSA cycle that is most relevant to their start date (e.g., are they taking early summer classes or bridge programs)?
- Have they considered scholarships at the local, state, and federal levels?
- Do they have contact information for the financial aid office at the school?
- What budget tools are they comfortable using?
- Do they plan on working during school?

It is important to remember that the application process can feel overwhelming to learners, many of whom have never been through a process like this on their own before and may not have other support systems in place. Providing learners with clarity and transparency is critical to their success. The process can really slow down if your learner does not know where they are in the enrollment process, or who they should be talking to at your institution. As you move through different steps in the enrollment journey with your students, ask yourself:

Is There a Supportive Hand-Off in this Process?

- When handing off a learner to a different department, do I have a hand-off plan in place?
- What's the name and contact information of their next point of contact, and does the student have this information?
- Is it clear whether the student needs to reach out or if the staff member needs to reach out?
- Do I have a plan to follow-up with the appropriate staff member(s) to make sure the applicant successfully connected with them?

Is the Learner File Updated with the Most Current Pipeline Actions?

- For example: Has their deposit been received? Are placement tests scheduled? Has orientation information been sent out?
- Do we have a communication plan to keep our learners informed of their status?
- Does every department or enrollment team member have the ability to update the file relevant to their stage in the pipeline?

LEARNERS ARE CALLING OUT FOR MORE SUPPORT

- **40%** indicated that the enrollment process would have been easier if there was an advisor to speak with. (Source: **Anthology**)
- **59%** say that email is their preferred communication channel during enrollment and application, with phone and SMS the next most popular channels. (Source: **Anthology**)

Supporting Through the Full Lifecycle

The enrollment challenge faced by higher education goes beyond recruiting new students. While institutions shift their focus to attracting new learners, in many cases any gains in recruitment are offset by increased stop-out rates.

The student-centric mindset that has underpinned your strategic enrollment management plan to bring students through the doors needs to continue right up until the day of graduation. It is far more cost and resource effective to retain your current learners than recruit new ones, and your overall enrollment will only grow if you give recruitment and retention equal emphasis within your institutional strategy.

This final section focuses on two particular use cases that are essential to supporting the student through the full lifecycle. First, we will look at how you can leverage data from across the institution to improve retention, before then turning our attention to employment trends and how they can be used to keep learners on track through to completion.

9: Connect Data to Improve Learner Success

Data not only holds the key to attracting new learners, it is also essential to retaining those which you already have through to completion. Recent years have seen worrying increases in stop-out rates across higher education, making re-enrollment a huge opportunity *(***see Step 7***)* while also placing increased emphasis on improving retention.

The first task to improving retention is to understand why learners are stopping out. Our research suggests that "had to work" represents the dominant reason at many institutions, encompassing both the time and financial pressures that learners are under and how many are struggling to balance their studies with other commitments. Review the current data you have available as to why learners at your institution are stopping out and put a plan in place to fill in gaps in your current data and knowledge.

Having established why your learners have paused their studies, you then want to make sure that you have the data available to identify learners at risk to similar factors. Your LMS is a great starting point, as understanding how learners are progressing through their courses not only reveals how they are performing academically but can often reflect challenges outside of the classroom as well. From there, you may wish to consider survey data, financial and accounts status, and information related to extra-curricular participation to build a more holistic view of the learner's wellbeing.

All this insight will allow you to build proactive communication plans to keep at-risk learners on track. Multi-modal outreach is not only required but expected by your learners. Lastly, employing aligned messages across a range of mediums will improve overall responsiveness—we see great results when a text message precedes a phone call and when a phone call is followed by an email, for example.

Finally, nothing is more important to improving retention than ensuring quick responses when learners ask for help. This is particularly the case for stressful matters such as financial aid, where a single missed phone call or email can result in a lost learner. Ensuring timely, accurate responses to learner inquiries —and leveraging technology to provide this at scale—is an absolute must.

LEARNER STOP OUT: A NATIONAL CRISIS

- There are **40 million Americans** who have started college but not achieved a credential—a population of similar size to California or Canada!
- This number is rising, not only nationally but also in every state.
  (Source: **National Learner Clearinghouse**)

Client Success Story:

By partnering with Anthology's Help Desk and One Stop solutions, the University of Central Oklahoma dramatically improved the learner experience, improved retention rates, and saved thousands of staff hours for their in-house support teams. **Read more**.

10: Align with Workforce Needs

We saw in **Steps 4 and 5** that outlining a clear pathway to career prosperity is essential to build your applicant pool. But this is just the start—ensuring that learners keep sight of the opportunities that their credential is unlocking is fundamental to improving retention rates.

To do so, you need to have data on the latest employment trends available to many different teams within the organization. Faculty and instructional designers should be aware of what skills the market is demanding so that they can reinforce these areas within lessons, while advisors and support staff can leverage these insights to help learners plan their learning journey and leave the institution with the right skills and credentials to get the job that they are looking for. The result is a genuinely personalized experience for learners, where from their first interaction with your institution to their last they are being guided toward employment and are aware at all times of what they need to do to achieve their career goals.

Building strong partnerships with employers is an under-utilized strategy to align with workforce needs. Traditionally, these partnerships have focused on the general value that studying at the institution can offer; however, there is now the opportunity to focus more closely on specific skill shortages that employers are facing. This can be resource intensive, so it's important to understand where the biggest opportunities lie and focus your efforts there. Remember, as detailed in **Step 6**, alternative credentials allow extra agility to develop great partnerships with industry.

Finally, as we continue to move towards a genuine lifelong learning approach, remember that your institution can provide immense value to an employer's current staff as well. By helping your industry partners with upskilling and ongoing development of their existing employees, you can create deeper, more holistic partnerships that offer career pathways for your learners.

INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER ED

- 59% of employers report that not having enough skilled employees has a major or moderate impact on their business. (Source: **Udacity**)

COPPIN STATE UNIVERSITY

Client Success Story:

As part of a comprehensive partnership to boost enrollment and retention, Coppin State leveraged Anthology's Occupation Insight tool to provide advisors and course designers with the latest industry data, aligning their program offering and support services with their learners' careers aspirations. **Read more**.

Ready to the take the next step on your strategic enrollment journey?

As this guide maps out, building enrollment is a multi-faceted challenge. Only Anthology brings comprehensive knowledge across the full enrollment funnel, combining data, technology, and great human service to drive success for both learners and institutions.

INTEGRATED DATA

Full Funnel Visibility

Stop Out Risk Profiling

Academic Progress

Career Outcomes

TECHNOLOGY

A Holistic Ecosystem of EdTech Solutions

Learner-Centric **SIS**

Modern **CRM**

Flexible **LMS**

PEOPLE

Enrollment and Retention Coaching

Performance Marketing

Virtual Support

Research