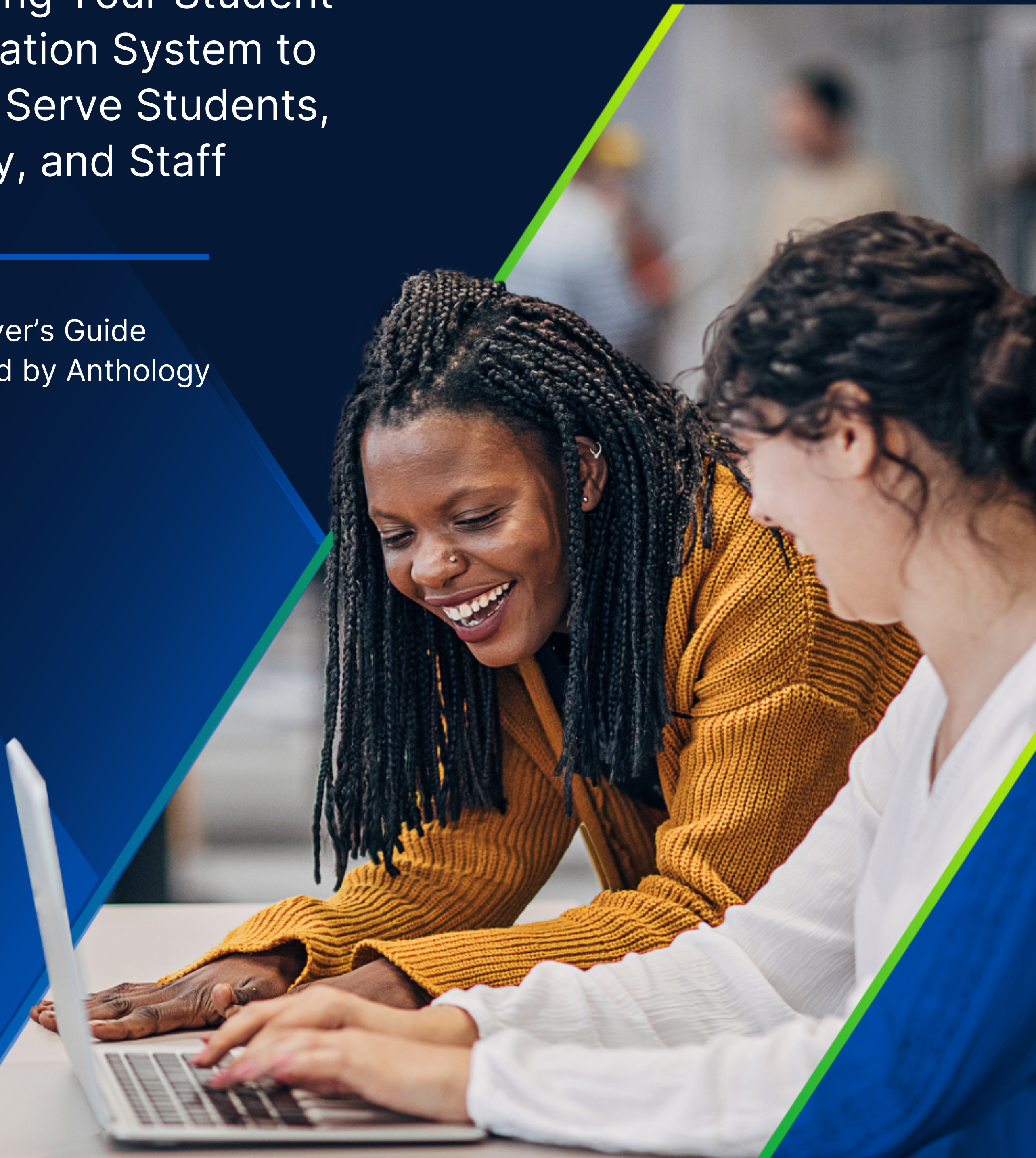


Modernizing Campus Technology:

Student 
by Anthology

Updating Your Student
Information System to
Better Serve Students,
Faculty, and Staff

A SIS Buyer's Guide
Presented by Anthology



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Introduction

The terms digital transformation and digital modernization have long been entrenched in the vocabularies and strategic plans of higher education leaders. It is by now widely agreed that embracing technology is essential for institutions to thrive, though many are still working through their best approach. As a core campus technology, upgrading the student information system (SIS) is a critical consideration in this process.

Modernization is a continuum, and many leaders still believe their institutions have a long way to go. Inside Higher Ed's [2024 Survey of Campus Chief Technology/Information Officers](#) found that 62% of CTO/CIOs consider digital transformation a high priority moving forward, echoing results from previous years, though many also report that this ambition isn't always shared by the broader leadership at their institutions.

When technology leaders are asked the areas of investment they feel have historically been the most effective, "administrative information systems and operations" is the third highest response at 52%, well ahead of, among others, initiatives like "online courses and programs" (32%) and "data analysis and learning/managerial analytics" (29%). In a tough economic climate, in which every dollar needs to be wisely spent, focusing investment where it shows positive return is of the utmost importance.

At Anthology, we believe that the student information system should be at the core of institutions' digital transformation plans. Far from a purely administrative tool, modern SIS alternatives touch all parts of the learning experience, and help tackle a wide range of institutional challenges, from enrollment to retention to administrative efficiency and much more.

While many institutions choose to review their SIS and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software in parallel, and both have a crucial role to play in campus modernization, we believe the SIS should take precedence given the direct role it plays in the student experience.

This paper provides a practical guide for transforming your SIS and modernizing your campus. We start by making the case for modernization and explaining why SaaS software is an essential component. We then take a closer look at the key functionalities you should prioritize when choosing a modern SIS solution, as well as associated considerations you can keep in mind as you assess the market. Finally, we address the practical side of upgrading your SIS—which we understand is often far from straightforward—and provide best practices to successfully migrate to a new provider.



The case for SIS modernization

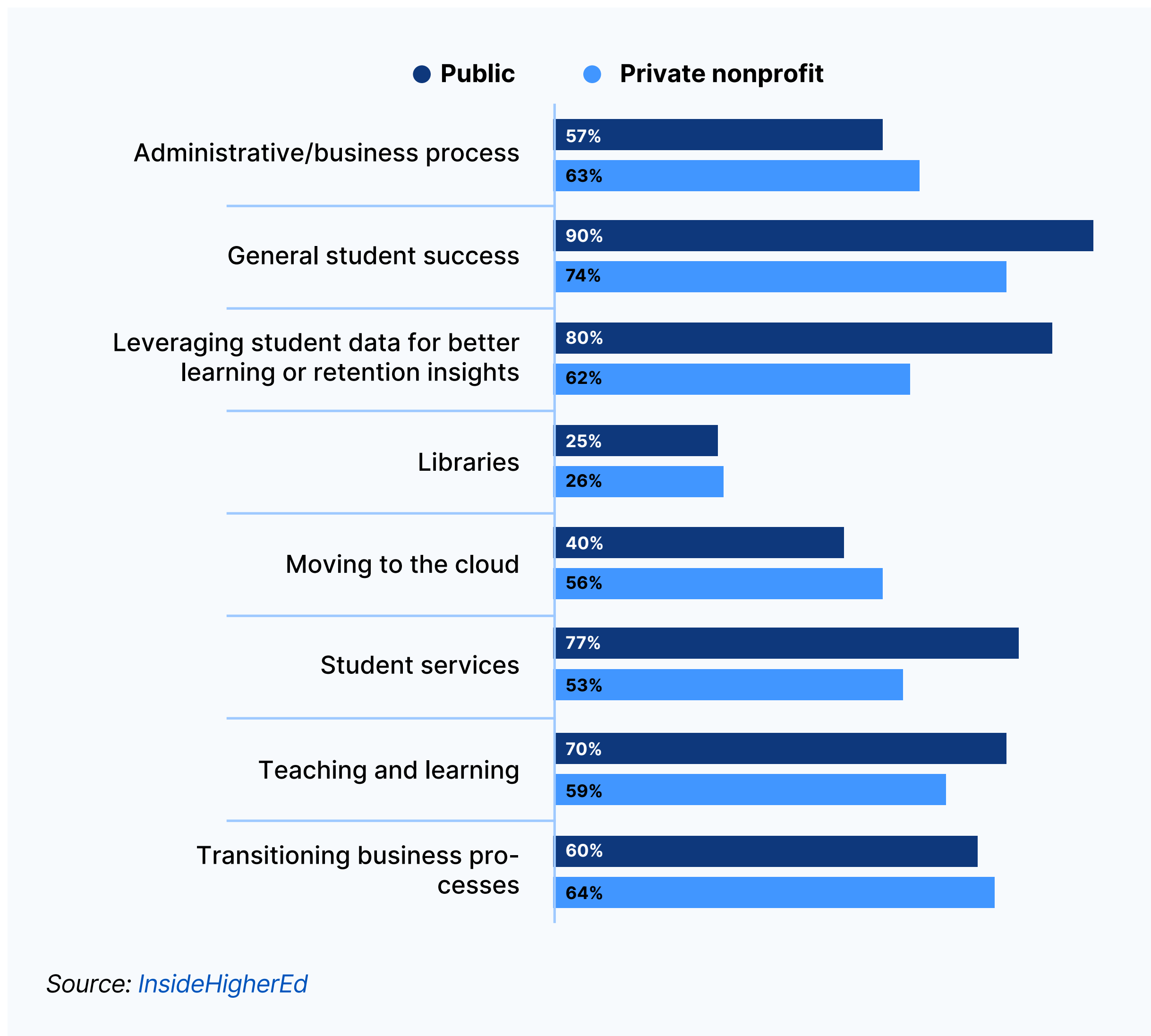
When discussing the possibility of upgrading their SIS with institutional leaders, the response we often hear is “we’d absolutely love to, but...”. The specifics of the “but” can vary but regularly fit into one of two broad categories.

The first is simply that migrating to a new SIS is a big undertaking. It’s resource-intensive, time-consuming, requires buy-in from a vast range of stakeholders, and—in the perception of many—is expensive. These challenges are indeed significant, and we’ve dedicated the final section of this guide to working through these practical considerations.

The second, which we’ll address here, is that while a SIS modernization is on the list of technology upgrades that the institution is considering, that list is long and growing

much faster than the budget needed to fund everything on it. In a world where funds are limited, the argument goes, the focus needs to shift to the classroom and the technologies that can be tied directly to student success.

To demonstrate the point, consider the graph below. In the introduction, we reviewed information from Inside Higher Ed around technology leaders’ perceptions of where they have seen value for previous investments, with administrative tools ranking among the highest. The same audience was then asked their priorities for future investment, and—despite the positive ROI that administrative technology has delivered in the past—pedagogy takes precedence in their plans, particularly in public institutions.



It is of course true that all of these represent worthy areas of investment, and even more so that institutional leaders face difficult prioritization decisions when budgets are static or in decline. The case for investing in an upgraded SIS, however, is simple—it touches all parts of the student experience, including many of the themes covered in the graph, and thus is fundamental to student success.

Take teaching and learning, for example. Most SIS solutions will offer a base level of integration with your learning management system (LMS), allowing for student profiles and grades to be passed between the two. But as teaching and learning modalities evolve, a more dynamic SIS is required to match the flexibility that is now being promoted in the classroom. If your institution wishes to embrace competency-based education (CBE), for instance, can your SIS also support this, or is it stuck in the days of numeric grading?

As this example demonstrates, modernizing the SIS can bring a range of financial benefits for institutions as well. This begins with reduced maintenance costs and other immediate efficiencies, extending over time to provide opportunities for genuine growth and the possibility to extend a broader range of programs to different types of students.

Finally, while the related data isn't abundant, all available information suggests that students are also eager for an improved administrative experience. [A detailed study of more than 2,000 students](#) found that “improving the student portal” was second on the list of technology aspects that learners wish to see improved, behind only “Wi-Fi access” and ahead of a raft of data, pedagogical, and cybersecurity considerations.

The same research found that 38% of learners found it hard to access the student portal from their phones. A modernized SIS can help break down major barriers that prevent students from completing their credentials, such as lack of clarity on progress through their degree and complications with financial aid processes.

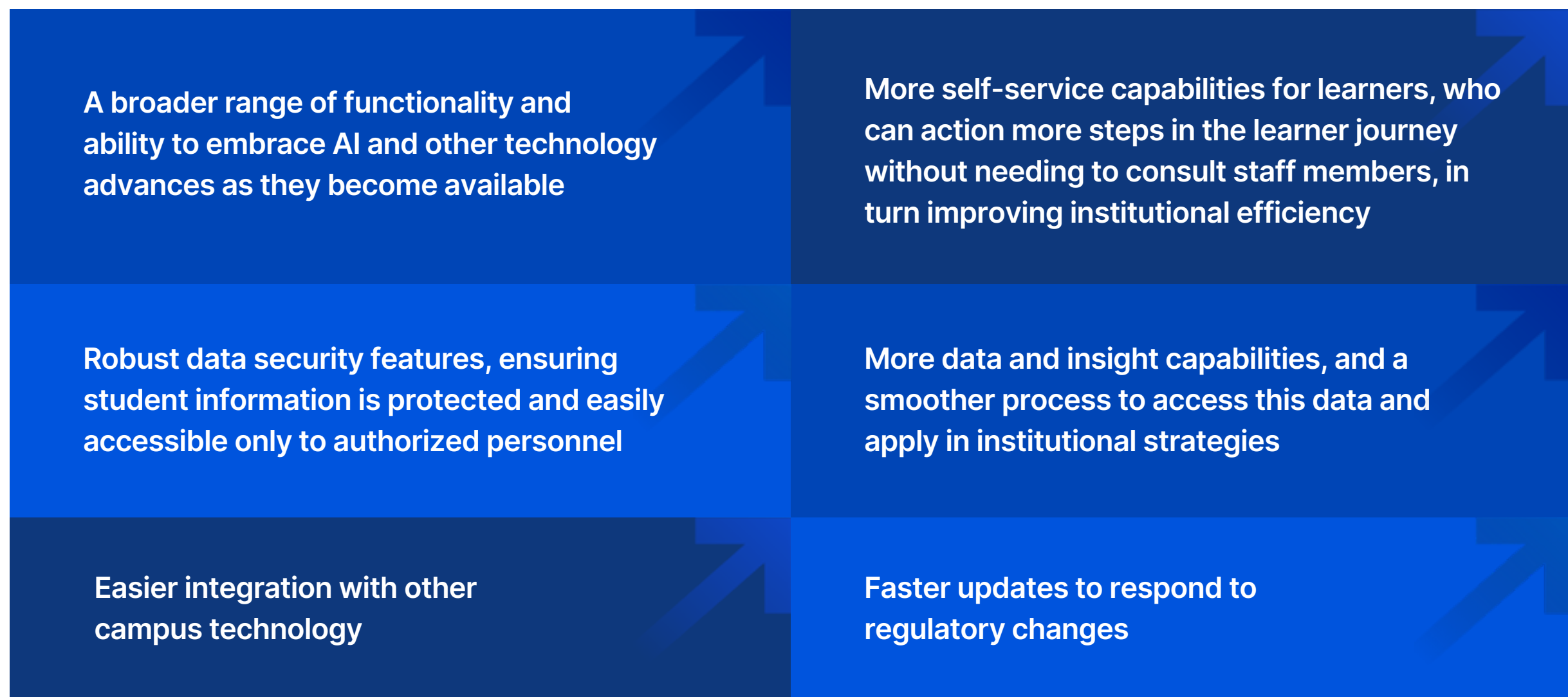
Put simply, upgrading your student information system is a fundamental step to delivering a true digital transformation on campus. In fact, so central is the SIS to the student experience that staying with an antiquated technology will restrict your ability to modernize across the board. Later in the guide, we'll explore in more depth what you should consider when looking for a new SIS, and how you can ensure that your investment will meet learner needs and future-proof your institution.



The background is a solid blue color with several thin, light blue and green lines forming a geometric pattern of triangles and quadrilaterals. The lines are thin and intersect to create various shapes across the page.

Why SaaS?

Truly delivering the dynamism and flexibility that modern learning demands isn't possible without moving from on-premises to cloud-based (software as a service) technology. The benefits of a cloud-based SIS include:



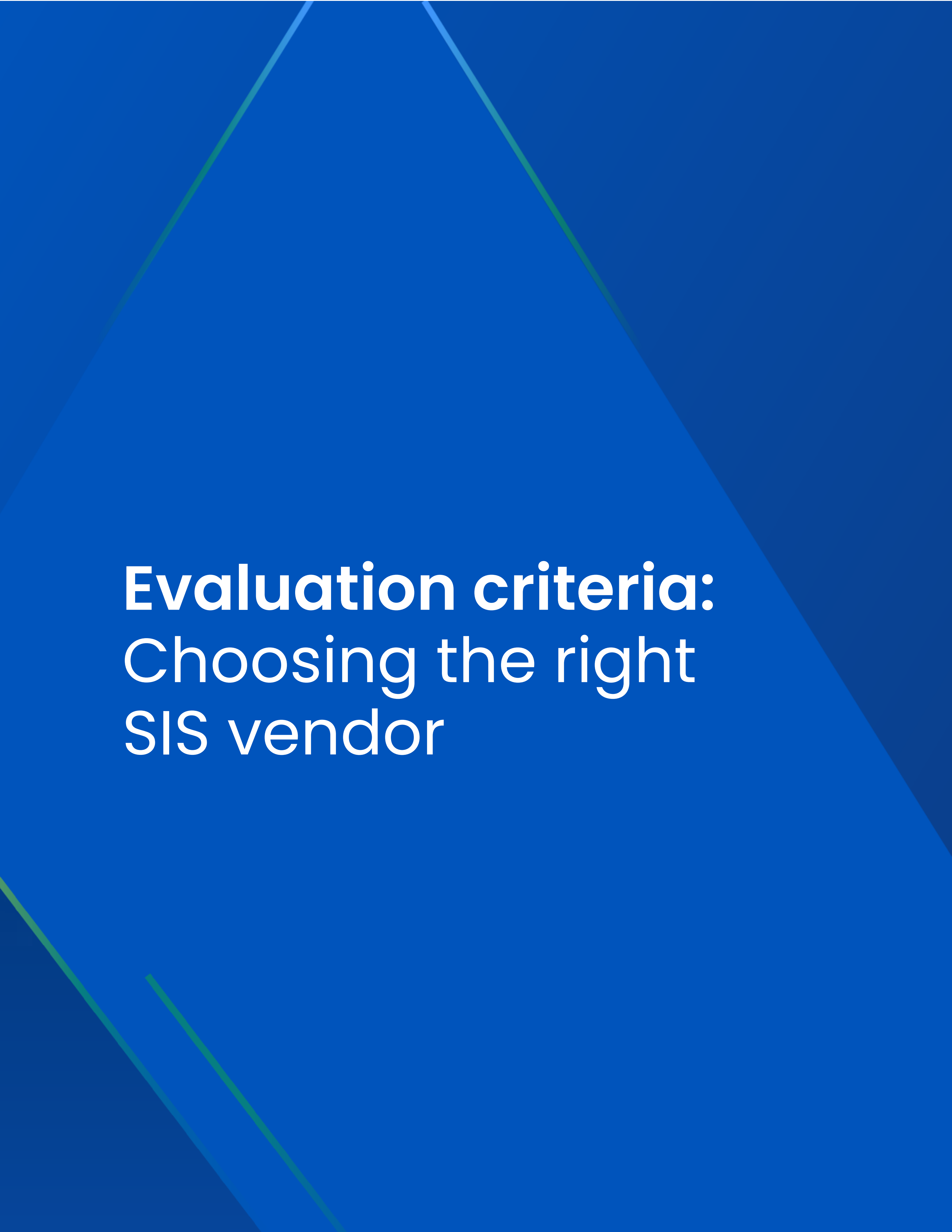
As outlined by [Educause](#), common misconceptions around SaaS technologies—including that their adoption must always involve a long, painful experience—continue to restrict their use in higher education, to the detriment of both institutions and their learner:



Higher education institutions need to move past the common misconceptions about SaaS technology. By tackling these myths head-on and recognizing the true potential of SaaS solutions, institutions can fully leverage these modern tools to improve operational efficiency and better serve their students. As higher education advances, adopting adaptable, affordable, and easy-to-use SaaS technologies will play a crucial role in fostering innovation and helping institutions meet their operational goals and students' needs.



Lastly, a reminder that there is expertise to help guide you through the migration process. In the final section of this guide, we'll look at best practices for a smooth cloud transition and arm you with valuable tips to ensure that everything goes well.

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Evaluation criteria: Choosing the right SIS vendor

The SIS market offers a range of alternatives, and there is no “one size fits all” that can be applied here. There is also a school of thought that recommends you pair your SIS journey with an ERP. You can, but it will expand the scope of your effort and the complexity of the review process. Instead, start with the technology most likely to directly impact student success—the SIS—and expand from there.

As each institution’s needs are unique, you may need to consider a few options to find a solution that aligns with what you’re looking for. However, there are several key themes that all institutions should keep in mind when they go to market. These reflect not only key challenges that higher education faces today, but also opportunities to future-proof and ensure that learner needs are met in the future as well.

1

Can the SIS actively improve the enrollment process?

The importance of boosting enrollment needs no repeating. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a long-term trend of declining student numbers in higher education, while experts are predicting that demographic changes—in particular, a marked decline in the US birthrate—will see a [further 15% reduction in the learner population between 2025-2029](#). It is a financial imperative for every institution to find a way to differentiate from competitors and bring in new students.

Student centricity is key. Learners are increasingly looking for flexibility of course delivery, allowing them to learn at their own pace and balance their studies with work and other commitments, and for clear alignment between their credential and opportunities in the workplace. Adopting new modalities, including short courses, competency-based education, and microcredentials, is a great way to appeal to both desires, which in turn can appeal to different learner demographics and boost enrollment.

As [AACSB](#) notes, “Microcredentials enable students to acquire specific, targeted skills in fields such as such as project management, data analysis, and programming. Because these competencies closely match industry needs, students become highly valuable in today’s

competitive job market. In fact, 97 percent of leaders who offer microcredentials attest that these programs strengthen long-term career outcomes for students.”

But here’s the problem. Many SIS alternatives can only support a traditional, term-based academic calendar, which restricts an institution’s ability to adopt other forms of instruction. As new modalities become central to enrollment efforts, you need a SIS that is a help, not a hindrance, when delivering these programs.

RFP Considerations



Can the SIS support multiple academic calendars, or is it exclusively term-based?



Is data and insight from the SIS readily available and easy to export, so it can inform enrollment outreach to new prospects?

Did you know?

Anthology® Student is built with the learner in mind and employs a student-first data structure, meaning it isn’t tied to a term-based approach and can support varied modalities. Read more about the benefits of a student-first approach [here](#).

2

Does the SIS provide an intuitive experience for students?

Bringing in new learners is only half the battle. Retaining them through graduation is equally important, and many institutions have reported a worrying increase in stop out rates in recent years. While there has been some stabilizing since the shock of the pandemic, data suggests that a [quarter of all college students don't persist beyond their freshman year](#).

The SIS has a crucial role to play in improving retention. As it sits at the heart of the learner experience and connects a wide range of disciplines, resources, and processes, a poor user experience can cause frustration and disrupt the learner journey. A good experience, conversely, can save learners time, provide them with direct access to the information they need, and dramatically improve their perception of the institution. It is also essential that the experience is consistent and intuitive across all devices, and institutions should expect to review the student experience on mobile when they consider different SIS alternatives.

A particularly important consideration here is the demonstration of student progress. When students understand how they are progressing toward their degree and what remains for them to achieve it, they are more motivated and likely to persist. For example, a degree progress audit, provided by a modern SIS, provides the student with full clarity on where they stand today and the key next steps to pursuing their goals.

Furthermore, the SIS is a valuable information source to inform student outreach and increase retention. When evaluating the options, institutions should first consider which solutions have the necessary integrations to build a comprehensive understanding of each learner, and then how easily these insights can be surfaced and shared with advisors to allow for proactive outreach to at-risk students.

RFP Considerations



Does the SIS provide students with a full, end-to-end view of the academic journey?



Does it offer a degree progress audit (DPA), with a visual representation of learner progress and detailed analytics?



Is there an intuitive student portal, and does it provide a great experience across all devices?



Is the SIS a valuable and accessible source of data to support retention initiatives?



Is it built on a robust, cloud-based architecture, allowing for evolution over time as student needs change?

Did you know?

The student portal in Anthology Student was built mobile-first, ensuring a great experience on the device that learners prefer for administrative tasks.



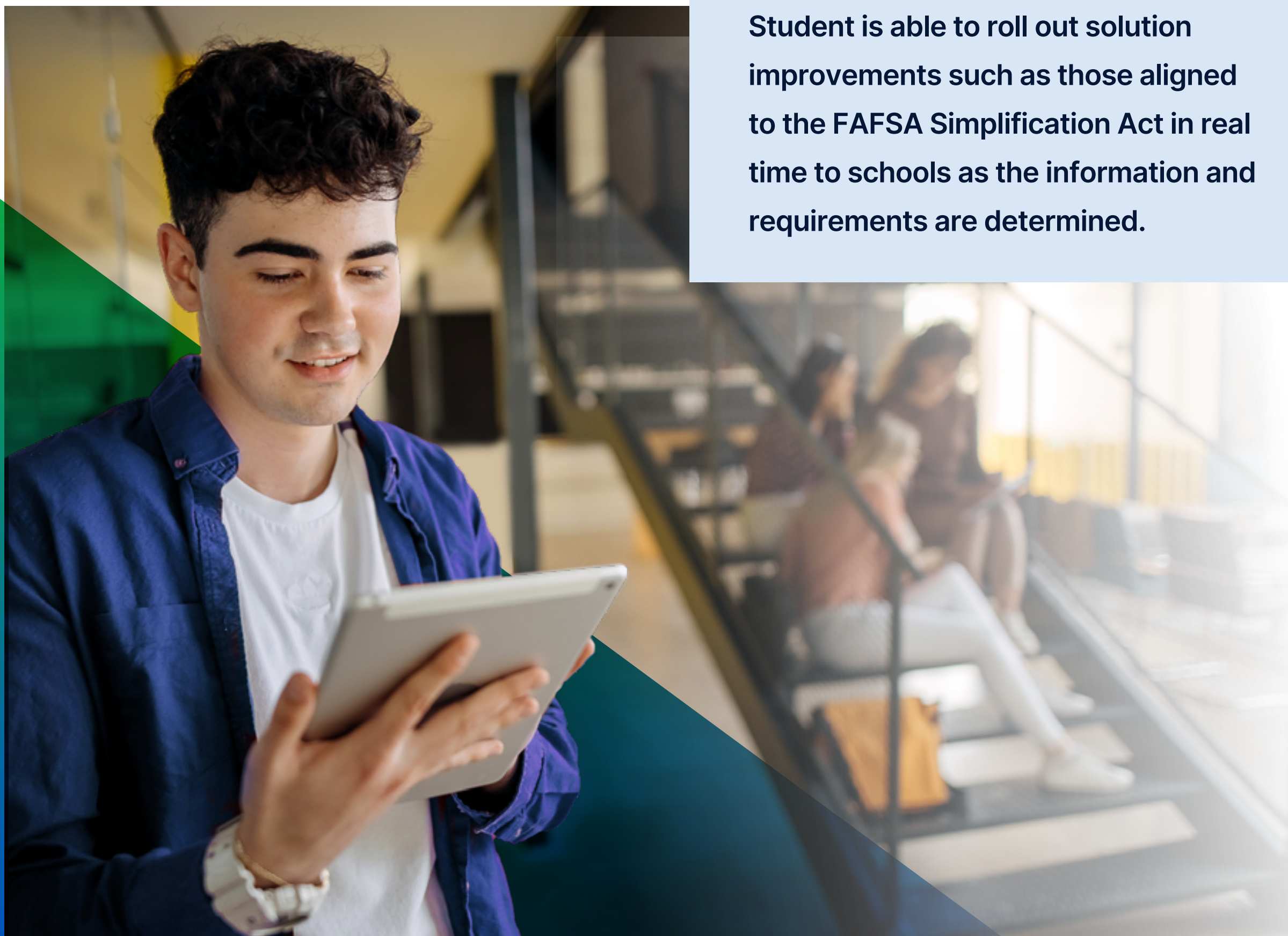
3

Can the SIS help streamline financial aid processes?

Continuing with the topic of retention, there is nothing that places a student more at risk of stopping out than issues with financial aid. With **72% of all undergraduate students now receiving some form of aid**—be it federal (55%), state (23%), institutional (28%), or a combination of the three—ensuring smooth and clear processes for application is an integral part of the learning experience.

And here again we see a central role for the student information system.

Your SIS should streamline the application experience, saving time for learners and administrative staff alike, and providing easy access to resources that clarify the process. In addition, the SIS should also make a student's financial aid status readily available to advisors and inform outreach to learners at risk of forgoing their studies due to complications with finances.



RFP Considerations



Does the SIS provide robust student records, including family income, assets, dependent status, etc.?



Can it support the Financial Need Analysis Calculation?



Is it easy and efficient to generate reports for federal and state agency compliance?



Does it provide active support for the FAFSA Simplification Act?

Did you know?

As a true SaaS solution, Anthology Student is able to roll out solution improvements such as those aligned to the FAFSA Simplification Act in real time to schools as the information and requirements are determined.

4

How does the SIS deliver efficiency and effectiveness for administrative users?

Let's shift our attention now to your staff. Of course, if the SIS can deliver on the three areas detailed above and provide an improved experience for students, then admins will also reap the benefits, as they'll have a reduced number of student inquiries to respond to and be able to focus on proactive initiatives.

In addition, there are key features that a modern SIS should provide to directly enhance administrative roles. Crucial tasks like class scheduling, workload management for instructors, and student record maintenance should be simplified by technology, automating processes, and cutting back on administrative burden without requiring staff to cede any control over high-stakes workflows. A cloud-based SIS will also permit easy integration with other software that they use regularly, further streamlining their roles.


Plus, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) represents a huge opportunity to provide further efficiency to administrative roles. In our [detailed study](#) of staff at higher education institutions, we discovered a strong willingness to embrace AI; in fact, the research revealed positive sentiment towards AI adoption for every major administrative task on campus. Respondents were particularly bullish about the possibility for AI to enhance "data, reporting, and analytics," "student support services," and "admissions and recruitment,"

and institutions should prioritize SIS vendors who are actively exploring a role for AI in their product development plans to address these and other needs.

RFP Considerations

 **Can the SIS simplify the process of faculty workload management, including workload validation and payment?**

 **Does it offer easy integration with other technologies?**

 **Does the vendor have robust policies for AI adoption and plans to embrace in their product roadmap?**

Did you know?

The new AI Course Scheduler makes Anthology Student the first major SIS to leverage AI to simplify the process of scheduling courses, allowing institutions to apply a dynamic approach that responds to learner demand.



5

Can the SIS support finance, human capital management, and payroll?

Administrative excellence at today's higher education institutions involves far more than just the coordination of academic activities. There is also the side of "making the institution run smoothly," if you will, encapsulating—among other things—the crucial areas of finance, human capital management (HCM), and payroll.

A modern SIS should integrate seamlessly with your current systems, as well as offer the opportunity to modernize in these areas. This should start with all the core components necessary for professional output in each discipline; in the case of finance, for example, this will include budgeting tools and tax processing, while for HCM you will need staff profiles, leave management, and professional compliance checking for relevant roles. Consider including professionals from these areas as part of the SIS review process to ensure that the tools meet their requirements.


However, a university isn't just another office or job site, and there are key needs specific to the sector that you should also consider. An example is student accounting, providing a holistic view of everything that makes up a student's financial situation, from accounts, to aid, to fines, and more. Another is ROI analysis for programs and faculty, informing investment for the future. In both




cases and many more, you'll need a provider that can go beyond generic outputs and provide a service that is truly tailored to higher education.

RFP Considerations

 **Can the SIS easily support finance, payroll, and HR as part of an integrated system?**

 **Does each of these areas meet associated professional standards?**

 **Is the vendor focused on higher education, and have they adapted their offering to meet the needs of the sector?**

 **More specifically, does the SIS provide:**

- A comprehensive view of all student accounting data?
- The ability to track, pay, and report on all federal work study programs?
- Payroll alignment with the local and country specific tax codes?
- Integrated faculty management across SIS and ERP systems?
- Faculty contract management?

Did you know?

Anthology Student is a comprehensive SIS + ERP solution. The ERP capabilities leverage the Microsoft Dynamics 365 platform to provide higher ed-specific finance, HCM, and payroll tools. You can opt to leverage Anthology Student's SIS-only capabilities or implement a complete SIS + ERP solution to meet your unique business needs.

6

Can the SIS form an integral part of a data-powered institution?

Throughout this guide we have briefly touched on the importance of data. In the overall process of digital transformation, the possibility to generate clear, centralized, accessible data that spans the learner lifecycle is perhaps the biggest benefit of all.

Just ask the team at Educause. In their Top 10 for 2025, they highlighted the “[data-powered institution](#)” as the sector’s top opportunity to rebuild trust and return to growth.

“Leaders need evidence and guidance to decide which investments are most likely to be effective for students and for the institution,” they explain. “Institutional stakeholders all see a particular problem from different points of view. Data and key performance indicators can help decision-makers come to a unified understanding of how the institution is performing, what it’s good at, and where additional investments are needed.”

All campus technologies should now be assessed through this lens, and perhaps none more so than the student information system. Considerations for data when looking at a SIS may reasonably begin with management capacity and security protocols and should also extend to review how this data is made available to users to genuinely boost institutional advancement. It’s at this point that the full value of all the capabilities described above are realized, and you can achieve what every institution seeks—improved student outcomes combined with institutional efficiency.

RFP Considerations



What data management capabilities does the vendor offer?



Are there stringent security measures to protect user data?



What insight and reporting capabilities are available?



Can these reports be tailored to ensure that the right people have the right info to drive change?



Can the vendor provide AI integration for reporting?

Did you know?

Anthology Student provides four different reporting levels—spanning from easy-to-use, pre-built reports available in Microsoft Power BI, as well as SQL Server Reporting Services—ensuring that the vast amount of SIS data can be made available in different roles, with output that’s appropriate for varied levels of technical knowledge. It is also automatically integrated with Anthology® Reach (CRM) and Anthology® Blackboard (LMS) to break down data silos across institutions and provide a comprehensive view of the full lifecycle.

Making the move to your new SIS

Let's revisit Educause's Top 10 themes for 2025. As discussed in the previous section, the data-powered institution leads the list, but nipping closely at its heels in spot 2 is "administrative simplification." As detailed throughout this guide and reinforced by Educause's analysis, streamlining administrative technologies such as SIS and ERP systems improves institutions' operations, reduces costs, and ultimately improves the learner experience.

Educause then expands on what institutions need to do to seize the huge opportunity of administrative simplification:



Get the process right. The time it takes to review and redesign processes can't be underestimated. It also takes time to understand the capabilities of a new system and its potential impact on processes. Helping the community understand and focus deeply on the process work, even though it takes time, will lead to much more effective outcomes. Stakeholder disagreements during this work are inevitable. They can delay and derail the results. So, this work needs an empowered leader who can negotiate and reinforce sensible decisions reasonably quickly.



When it comes to SIS migrations, process is everything. Given the large amounts of data involved and all the different stakeholders who use the technology, a meticulous plan is essential to ensuring a smooth transition to your new and improved software.

Here are five key tips for a successful SIS migration. You can use these to assess both the vendor you are planning to work with, as well as the readiness of your internal team:

1. Ensure strong executive support, planning, and governance

A large undertaking like a SIS migration can only work with the full support of the institution's leadership. Strategic planning ensures clear objectives, data housekeeping, integrations, security, and implementation approach. This guarantees that all key stakeholders are aligned, well briefed, and in agreement at each step, as well as operational continuity, user adoption, and compliance.

2. Provide frequent and consistent communication

With many stakeholders involved, it is essential to have clear communication throughout and reduce the impact driven by change. Agree upfront on how information is to be communicated at key junctures through the migration, maintain open lines of dialogue throughout, and establish a process for escalation should any challenges occur.

3. Celebrate successes

An often-overlooked benefit of a detailed migration plan is that it outlines key milestones on the road to your new SIS, and, as a result, provides opportunities to recognize progress throughout. It's important to celebrate each completed step and acknowledge the efforts that have led to its completion, as this will keep morale high as you work towards your goal of a modernized SIS.

4. Empower project team members

Like any large project, a SIS migration can only progress at pace when team members are empowered to take ownership of key actions and decisions. While it's important to bring all stakeholders along for the journey and to ensure executive approval at key junctures, core team members should be given responsibility for workstreams related to their areas of expertise and trusted to lead in these disciplines.

5. Establish partnerships

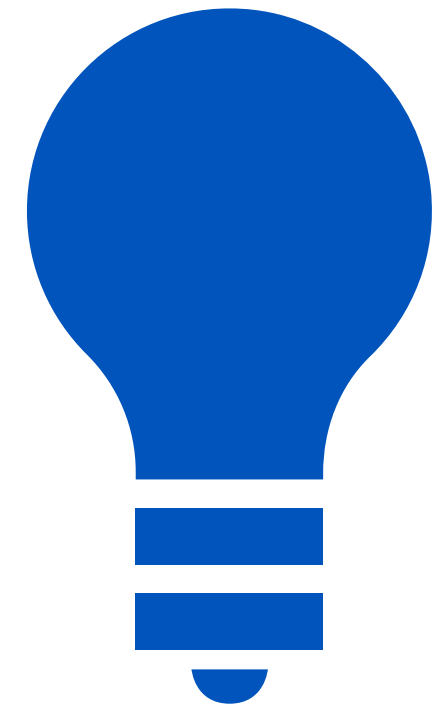
Making the right move also means finding the right partner who can provide the support and expertise needed during and after a SIS implementation. Partnering with Anthology Global Services, for example, means having a robust support network of consultants to guide the project and lead your team through training and SIS adoption, as well as to provide best practices for data accuracy and reporting, integrations, compliance, risk mitigation, and customizations—overall ensuring an efficient and successful transition.

RFP Considerations

| | |
|--|--|
| What data migration and third-party integration process and price does the vendor offer? | Are there any process automation tools used during the implementation? |
| What's the vendor support and expert access policy during and after the implementation? | Does the vendor provide dedicated onboarding and training resources during and after the implementation? |
| Does the vendor provide cost alternatives that facilitate potential budget increases driven by unexpected issues or additional processes that were not scoped? | |

Anthology Student has the largest and most experienced consultant network in the SIS market.

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Ongoing support after the migration is complete to maximize the ROI of your SIS investment</p> | <p>Simplified data migration, with the data extract and mapping owned by the Anthology team</p> | <p>Proven methodology including core “authorization to proceed” checkpoints at every stage to ensure quality throughout the project</p> |
| | <p>All implementation staff are employed by Anthology and work closely with our product development team.</p> | |
| <p>Automated testing tools for additional efficiency</p> | <p>Premium training and resources available for all stakeholders via Anthology Academy</p> | <p>Managed Services can supplement your team’s work during or after the implementation and provide long-term support with features and functionality use, configuration maintenance, and solution optimization within institutions’ business processes</p> |
| <p>Dedicated and experienced project manager throughout the SIS migration process</p> | | |



“

Anthology has really been there with us every step of the way as we have been working through this aggressive timeline. They have been guiding us. They've been supportive. Anything that we needed to change, they helped us troubleshoot, they helped us figure out anything that we were struggling with, and we were learning a lot of configuration that we've never done.

—**Juanita Garcia**, Vice President of Student Services,
Southeast New Mexico College

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Want to learn more about how we can help you thrive? Explore [Anthology Global Services](#).

About Anthology

Anthology delivers education and technology solutions so that students can reach their full potential and learning institutions thrive. Millions of students around the world are supported throughout their education journey via Anthology's ecosystem of flagship SaaS solutions and supporting services, including the award-winning Blackboard® (LMS), Anthology® Student (SIS/ERP), and Anthology® Reach (CRM). Through the Power of Together™, we are uniquely inspiring educators and institutions with innovation that is meaningful, simple, and intelligent to help customers redefine what's possible and create life-changing opportunities for people everywhere. [anthology.com](https://www.anthology.com)