



Leveraging Technology to Increase Student Persistence

A checklist for finding the right career readiness solution

Student persistence is a problem for many colleges and universities in the US.

In 2020, nearly two thirds (64%) of students had completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2014. And while that number is slightly higher for private compared to public institutions, that's still over a third of students who left their school to study elsewhere—or nowhere at all.

And the numbers get worse for community colleges.

In 2020, among first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate degree at 2-year degree-granting institutions, about 34 percent obtained their credential within three years¹.

In addition, more than half of university employees are ready to quit after the turmoil of hybrid learning and increased stress from all sides. According to the **2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey** by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), 57% of the higher education workforce is likely, very likely, or somewhat likely to look for new employment opportunities within the next year. This number includes both faculty and staff.

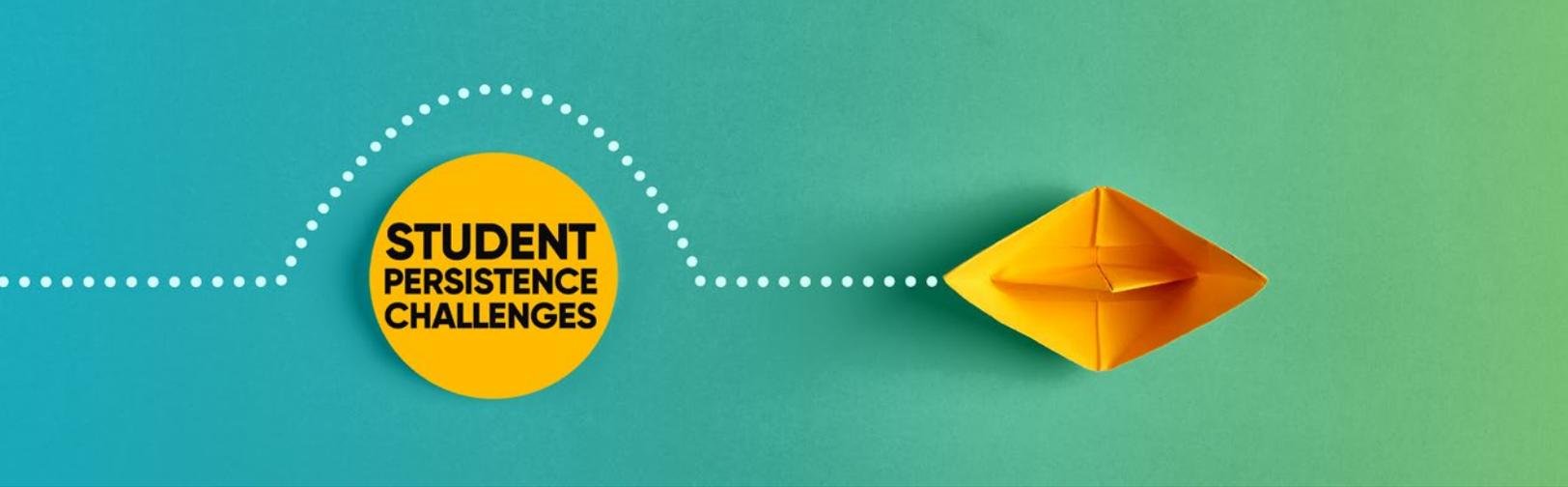
Adding to the high stress levels is the fact that college staff have more responsibilities for each student than ever before.

With the fast-paced changes in technology, and more attention to the concerns of mental and emotional well-being, it's a wonder that 57% figure isn't higher. These challenges can vary depending on factors like the size and type of institution, the student population they serve, and the specific policies and resources available to the staff. In addition, unlike high school students, many college students aren't even aware of the resources available to them to aid them in reaching their educational goals.

Here are a few of the concerns that higher education staff are expected to address for students:

- **High student-to-counselor ratios:** Many colleges and universities have a limited number of career counselors to serve a large student population, making it difficult for counselors to provide personalized attention and support to each student.
- **Lack of resources:** Limited budgets and resources impact the availability and marketing of services on campus, in addition to the lack of professional development opportunities for staff themselves.
- **Changing technology:** Technology is constantly evolving, and staff must be made aware of options available while also being adaptable to new tools as they're implemented.

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>



STUDENT PERSISTENCE CHALLENGES

- **Financial concerns:** Students need support to navigate through a range of financial issues, including stress related to tuition, loans, scholarship renewal, and living expenses. In addition, students living on their own for the first time often need assistance with financial literacy and budgeting.
- **Academic pressure:** Helping students succeed academically by assisting with course selection, academic planning, study skills, and addressing academic challenges.
- **Career readiness:** Guiding students through career exploration, job search strategies, internships, resume building, interview preparation, graduate school applications, and more.
- **Mental and emotional well-being:** Addressing issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and peer pressure, providing a safe space for students to discuss their feelings, and more, are all concerns surrounding their well-being.
- **Crisis response:** Handling crises such as self-harm, grief, trauma, or emergencies, providing immediate support, and connecting students with appropriate resources require faculty to balance confidentiality with the safety and well-being of the campus community.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** College campuses are diverse environments with students coming from all sorts of backgrounds. Faculty may have to address issues related to cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and provide support for underrepresented groups.

Add to this list substance abuse and prevention, helping with time management and organization, supporting different life transitions and adjustments, and digital literacy concerns. That's a lot on your and your colleagues' plate in addition to ensuring students stay on track and persist in their studies.

Luckily, there are solutions out there to help streamline some of the processes. There are technologies that can lighten the load in helping students along their career journey and get them to graduate.

But not all solutions that support post-secondary faculty and students are created equal.

This ebook will help you decide which career readiness platform, along with specific tools, is the right fit for your school by explaining some of the crucial components that platform should have. The goal is to leverage technology to both increase retention and student persistence and help your students succeed—all while making your job a little easier.

How self-awareness, personality, and interests help students

Before starting your search, it's important to understand what contributes to helping students to persist.

The first part is helping students to focus on developing self-awareness to understand themselves better. How does this relate to persistence?

When students understand themselves, they can verbalize their wants and needs better. This helps them advocate for themselves while in school and later in the workplace. A great way to increase students' self-awareness is through understanding their individual personalities. Learning about their unique personality preferences helps students:

- Identify their learning style and set themselves up for learning success.
- Understand how to work with others who have different personalities.
- Mitigate stressful situations, or just stress in general, by knowing their unique triggers and uncovering remedies.
- Explore what parts of working environments might be easier or more difficult for them as they explore career options.

Once they understand their personalities, the next step is helping them to discover their interests.

What do they like? What do they dislike? When students are beginning their career exploration journey, understanding interests is crucial. In addition, exposing students to all the possibilities of potential careers can help them connect interests to real professions after they graduate.

Here's one place technology can help lighten the load for staff, including college counselors and academic advisors. Certain technology solutions can help students figure out their personal interests and map them to potential careers before stepping foot into the counselor or advisor's office.

Meta-analysis by Rounds and Su² has shown the power of interests relating to educational and occupational choice, performance, and success. And it makes sense. When a student's interests align with what they're studying, they're more likely to be engaged. Focusing on interests helps students develop persistence. It empowers them to get through "boring" courses and difficult times.

Note on assessments

It's important to find assessments that are reliable and valid. Don't rely on free assessments that aren't backed by research when helping students make decisions that will impact their lives.

To learn more, read **Selecting Career Assessments.**

² Rounds, James, and Su, Rong. "The Nature and Power of Interests ." Current Directions in Psychological Science , 2014, pp. 1–6., doi:10.7554/eliflife.25012.017.

Increasing college student persistence with the right technology

You have a lot of options available to help you scale offerings, connect with students, and give students the insights they need to increase their persistence—and ultimately retain them as students until they transfer or graduate. It's crucial that whatever you look for is helping students to be career ready.

The problem is knowing **what to look for and connecting those features and data to overall student success**. Below are a few suggestions of what to look for.

Essential elements of student readiness platform solutions:

1. Analytics to track data

Access to analytics on the back end of a platform will allow you to see and track student data. If the platform you seek offers assessments, you will want to be able to immediately access this data once the student has completed an assessment. For example, say the student has taken a valid interest assessment to help them figure out career options. If they rate their results negatively (some tools allow to rate results from 'agree' to 'disagree'), your counselors will have a starting point when meeting with the student to discuss why this would be. Maybe they have pressure from family to choose a different career from what they're actually interested in. Or on the opposite end, if they show interest in everything, this could mean they need more time to learn about careers. This information can be used to guide counseling conversations.

Utilizing analytics as a counselor leads to more productive career conversations and increases student persistence with targeted data.

Another example is the ability to see majors and careers that students are interested in to help your staff make program and course decisions early on. There are platforms where you can filter based on career interests, personality types, learning types, and more. All of this information helps to give a larger picture for your school. Are there enough courses offered to cover the demands based on how many students are interested in specific majors? Should you offer more in-person, hybrid, or online courses based on student learning preferences?

This information would also be beneficial on a recruitment level. One way to do this is to offer an interest assessment during a career day at a high school campus. Through these responses, you're able to see and determine if your school is offering enough courses in the majors that potential students are showing interest in.

2. Program exploration

Students looking to enroll at your school should have the opportunity to search for any program within your institution. Important details that would help them figure out which program is right for them can include scholarship opportunities, financial aid available, specific courses, and enrollment information.

But that alone isn't enough. It's also important to **incorporate their interests into their career search as they decide on a major**. By helping them to understand how their interests align to career options, they are able to make more informed decisions and get excited about choosing and developing their future goals and plans.

While there are tools, such as assessments, that map to careers, look for a platform that can also map to specific programs your institution offers. This allows for better follow-up when connecting with students who might not verbally express interest in a certain program or major—sometimes because they don't even know the program or major exists.

3. Skills identification

Many college students don't recognize the skills they've developed in their first jobs. Being able to put names to the skills helps students develop a positive self-image. It allows them to confidently talk about what they've gained from work and volunteer experiences. Additionally, students can see which skills they may want to focus on and strengthen to achieve their educational and occupational goals.

Look for technology solutions that give students confidence in their skills and the vocabulary to name the skills they've learned to use. This is crucial for when we talk about career readiness and ensuring that students are working towards what they need to do to enter the workforce.

4. Scalable resources

The ability to scale offerings and resources to all students ensures that everyone gets equal access to opportunities to be successful, both in school and once they graduate.

Often, many students fall “under the radar” and aren't aware of career resources available to them. This creates an equity gap because the students were never taught that they had these options. Even students who don't exhibit the typical signs of potentially dropping out are just as likely to get lost and need resources and guidance to ensure they stay the course.

Look for a solution that offers scalability while also ensuring access to trackability. Being able to track tasks you assign, such as taking a career assessment, and communicating reminders or results (text or email) ensures that your school is reaching all students in a timely manner. It also helps time-bound counselors reach more students more effectively—especially those who need it the most.

5. Quick implementation

Whether it's a career assessment or an entire career readiness platform, implementation on a wider scale is a cause for concern at most schools. Learning a new program or getting trained in it can not only cost a lot of money but can also take time away from your already time-constrained faculty. The time of year can also be tricky, especially when starting or ending the school year.

Be sure to ask about how long the implementation process is expected to be. Also ask about any training needs to begin using the service or product right away.

Ideally, while many companies should be able to customize the product you need, it should not take months to implement. You are looking for a solution to a problem of limited scope and resources to better support your student population. The last thing your school needs is adding a solution to further complicate your already overloaded daily functions.

6. At-risk student tracking

One of the risks of low retention, and ultimately low persistence, is that students drop out before graduation. Some solutions that aid in student persistence and retention offer assessments that measure "red flag" competencies, proven to identify students at risk of dropping out.

With this information, college or university staff can easily identify these at-risk students and take measures to increase support for them before it's too late. Additionally, at-risk student tracking can also help prepare students early in their educational journey. It helps them in correcting any course of action and getting on the path that leads them to graduate on time.

Look for solutions that offer specific feedback to both the staff and the students to help them throughout their time in school. There are psychometrically valid assessments that identify competencies and serve as a strong starting point.

7. Individual student insights

Focusing on individual student persistence is more effective than using the metric of retention alone. There are solutions that can individually help students increase their persistence by giving them insights unique to them as people. Consider ones that give students some or all of the following individual insights:

- **Learning styles:** Understanding how they learn best (for example, through listening to a lecture or by a more hands-on activity) is going to help them be more effective in their studies.
- **Risk-taking:** Do they typically take risks or like to play it safe? Depending on the career they choose, this is important to know and work through. It helps them to understand both their comfort level of the expectations a job may have and what skills they need to acquire to be successful in it.

- **Team orientation:** Does a student prefer to be an independent contributor or collaborate with a team? What does this mean for them in school, where group projects are often required, and in the workforce, where some jobs may require either individual or team collaboration?
- **Communication style:** Knowing their preferred communication style is important for any future career or educational path. Additionally, learning about different communication styles helps students be more effective when working with others.
- **Interests and interests mapped to specific careers:** Studies have shown that when students are interested in a subject, they tend to do better in it. Why not make this a foundation for career exploration starting as soon as a student enrolls? Finding the proper, valid assessments, backed by science and data (which is crucial), can help students first identify their interests and then map to specific jobs and careers they can explore.
- **Personality type:** This gets a lot of mixed reactions and sometimes has a bad reputation as “putting people in boxes.” But the power of understanding personality type is not to create limitations. It’s to help students understand how they see the world. It also helps students understand in what ways they can flex or learn new skills and abilities that will help them be successful.

Personality type has been used in thousands of companies to help employees understand themselves, understand their colleagues, and learn how to best work with each other (a crucial skill in any job).

Make sure you find reliable assessments—the free ones aren’t backed by data or science.

8. Resource management

Unfortunately, budgets for increasing persistence aren’t unlimited. It’s important to know how you’ve used your resources, which ones resonate best with students, and which ones are sitting idle.

So, make sure your platform can manage and track resources (such as assessments, courses, or training programs). Can you tell if your students have completed assessments? How far along are they on the task they’ve been instructed to work on?

Additionally, certain platforms allow you to send reminders to students to ensure completion of specific tasks. There are also platforms that offer the ability to manage these resources through specific access codes and allow staff to limit access code use, as needed.

Ideally, you want a solution that will allow your staff to create very specific tracks with tasks for students to complete. Here’s an example:

You want your First-Year Experience classes to take career assessments as part of an assignment. You need them to complete both a personality and career assessment, review results for both, watch a couple of short videos, and then come to class prepared to discuss in a group setting.

There are platforms that allow you to create this very specific assignment path step-by-step. This will help to guide the student while tracking their progress, as well as potentially sending reminders when tasks aren't completed in a specified timeframe. In the back end of the platform, you should be able to see in real time as they complete the assessments and collect their results.

This, along with back-end analytics, helps to ensure that schools know exactly what tools, assessments, and resources are being utilized. This aids in better resource planning and student outreach.



Additional features to consider

Here are some of the additional features to look for in technology platforms that can aid in increasing student persistence:

1. Searchable career resources for students

Some students want to take their career learning into their own hands. It's important to allow a space for these students to explore specific details about careers that interest them.

It's extremely helpful for students to explore up to date information that's available from ONET, BLS, and IPEDs, such as school programs, salaries (both national and local), work activities, job details, level of education, skills required, and more. Yet even though students can access each of these databases on their own, it doesn't mean much when they don't know what major or career they're interested in.

Having all this information accessible in one place is the first step. But the information becomes even more relevant when they understand exactly how their interests and personality map to occupations and careers. It gets them more excited as they explore. Taking this approach makes it more likely that students will take the initiative to continue their educational journey.

2. Resume creation

By first focusing on figuring out skills acquired through past work and volunteer experiences, and then adding any credentials and trainings they've obtained, platforms that include resume creation stand apart from other platforms. They prepare students for the world of work without the risk of using outdated resumes found online.

3. Easily accessible education plans

The ability to develop education plans within a platform can be a great recruitment tool. By helping students explore majors and map out which courses they need to meet their educational goals, you can entice high school students into considering your institution.

For example, let's say your campus recruiters can offer an access code for students to take an assessment at a high school career day. You'll then have their follow-up information to reach back out and schedule a time to create an education plan. This helps to increase your school's appeal to students who may have never known to consider it in their school search.

Look for a solution that can easily create these plans and make the plan available to the staff when they need to access it.

Your school may not need all the features we describe above, but we hope this checklist is a starting point for what to look for in your search for the right technology.

If time is a barrier to implementing new technology, look for a solution that's easy to get up and running and simple for staff to use. Make sure that whichever solution you choose includes an implementation plan as part of the on-boarding process.

The **VitaNavis® platform**, developed by The Myers-Briggs Company, is an easy to use solution that covers all of the features above—and more. The implementation process is quick and seamless, and we provide all the necessary training to ensure your success.

Are you interested in learning more? Email us at vitanavis@themyersbriggs.com for a demo code to get started on a free trial.