Acquia

Catching Up With Student Expectations.

Higher Education

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Introduction

Along with nearly every other industry, the world of higher education is facing unprecedented transformation driven by evolving technology.

The goal of higher education—to develop knowledgeable citizens who will contribute to society—remains unchanged. But the methods for attracting those individuals, and maintaining solid relationships with them throughout their educational journeys and beyond, are shifting rapidly. While developments in technology present a challenge, they also offer solutions. Effective planning and implementation now can enable institutions to thrive, and provide affordable, quality educational opportunities for the long term.

Today, both current and potential students expect access to the information and services they want, when they want them, on the platforms of their choosing. It's a huge demand. And the ability to meet those expectations will be key to the success of any higher education institution.

Facing Higher Education Industry Trends

Trend 1

Advances in technology and changes in expectations offer upsides for both students and institutions going forward. But along the way, those advancements also surface plenty of hefty specific challenges.

Students Are Demanding Value, Innovation, and New Delivery Models

As consumers receive comprehensive digital servicing from more and more industries, their expectations of receiving the same types of experiences from higher education institutions have risen accordingly. A Gartner study found 38 percent of higher education institutions responding were altering their business models due to shifts in demands and expectations. Students now expect proven value for their tuition dollar, as well. Often, they'll weigh the money they must spend against the actual skills they'll learn and the professional opportunities they can expect to receive after obtaining their degrees.

Importantly, students now expect their higher education experiences to be accessible where and when they choose, and to take advantage of the latest technological developments. Online learning, technologically advanced classrooms, and virtual reality are becoming critical to the success of both institutions and students. Advancements in cloud storage, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and many other areas are impacting nearly all aspects of university operations.

Trend 2

Affordability and Regulatory

Changing demographic trends, shifts in the perceived value and necessity of a college education, and other dynamics are disrupting the status quo for higher education. Closures, mergers, and discounted pricing have led many institutions to reconsider their tuition costs. Due to unfavorable new federal policies, Moody's recently downgraded the sector outlook from "stable" to "negative." Standard and Poor's followed, proclaiming a negative outlook due to growing credit pressures.

An increasing focus on student debt levels has made tuition increases unpopular, leaving institutions to search for ways to cut costs. In a sign of the significance of expected changes, a Harvard professor recently predicted that half of all colleges will be bankrupt in 10 to 15 years.

"In the past 12 months, we saw increasing evidence that higher education is no longer sitting on a pedestal and that college may not be viewed as necessary to get ahead in modern society. Polls have found gaps ... in belief that a college education is worth the price."

Lisa M. Rudgers and Julie A. Peterson, "Saddle Up: 7 Trends Coming in 2018", Inside Higher Ed, Jan. 2, 2018

Trend 3

Protecting IP and Personal Data to Mitigate Risk Is Crucial

The constant stream of corporate data breach events has left consumers—and students—increasingly wary. The Equifax breach in July 2017 put the private information of more than 143 million Americans at risk—roughly half the U.S. population.

The high level of personal and financial data higher education institutions hold creates increased vulnerability, requiring greater diligence. "The public is focused on safety and security more than ever, particularly on campuses. Institutions find themselves needing to demonstrate that they are getting ahead of these risks," according to PwC's "Opportunity and Challenge Focus Areas for Higher Education."

Catching Up With Student Expectations

Challenges Facing The Higher Education Industry

Although advances in technology and changes in behavior undoubtedly present significant opportunities to higher education institutions, those opportunities aren't without their unique challenges.

Competitive Benchmarking-Driven Decision Criteria

Today, a prospective student's first experience with an institution typically takes place on the university's website. Institutions must ensure that initial interaction reflects the value they have to offer, and provides a robust overview of the student experience. Similar to the dynamic of online retailing, prospective students now "shop" for schools online. They'll follow up with a physical visit to a campus only after a satisfactory online experience. Institutions must shift their mindsets to align more with a retail customer experience than with a traditional academic presentation.

Fragmented Legacy Processes And Reliance on Analog Systems Obstruct Progress

Antiquated technology leads to disrupted customer experiences, production delays, and plenty of challenges to security and scalability. History, tradition, and habit leave many institutions reliant on old-fashioned paperwork. Voluminous backlogs of undigitized records and resources create a daunting task for institutions of all sizes. Moving faculty and staff to digitized systems can require significant training, and often meets with resistance.

Siloed Communications Among Departments

Admission, enrollment, and other administrative functions are now seen as part of the overall student experience, in close connection with academics. Optimizing every contact with a student, from initial recruiting to commencement, requires an agile and collaborative environment. Institutions must overcome ingrained, separated processes and move to collaborative systems that improve experiences across the entire student journey.

"Higher education institutions must view disruptive innovation as an opportunity to achieve revenue growth, maintain competitive advantages against peers, meet the demands of constituents and contribute to the evolution of the higher education industry more broadly."

"Perspectives in Higher Education 2018," PwC

To Grow And Thrive, Higher Education Institutions Must Prioritize:

1 **Awareness, Reputation, Rankings, and Points of Difference**

An increasingly competitive environment means small changes aren't enough. For an institution to be perceived as keeping pace with student expectations and prepared to lead into the future, it must fully embrace the potential digital transformation offers.

2 **Enhancing the Student Experience**

As students seek proven value for their tuition dollar, institutions must ensure they offer the skills that lead to success after graduation. It's vital to establish a deep understanding of a student, beginning at first contact and continuing throughout the educational journey – and beyond. That comprehensive understanding enables the institution to continually offer opportunities that interest the student and deepen the relationship. At the same time, that captured data can enable educators to understand where support is needed, and respond accordingly.

3 **Cost Containment**

Government funding for higher education is increasingly at risk, and budget pressures are growing. Faculty in the popular STEM fields are in high demand, and expect commensurate compensation. Tuition increases are viewed negatively against growing student debt. All of which puts pressure on budgets set aside for digital transformation. Emphasizing the long-term benefits of keeping pace with technology is vital.

4 **Cultivating and Managing Donors**

Institutions can make the most of digital advancements by deepening engagement and ensuring they're providing the right content at the right time. By developing a rich data foundation beginning with that first website visit and continuing beyond graduation, they'll be equipped to understand the most effective messaging and channels for each alumnus and alumna, and better able to sustain beneficial relationships long into the future.

Finding the Way: How Acquia Can Help

Forward-thinking professionals in higher education institutions aren't asking whether or not they need to accelerate their digital transformations. They're determining the level and source of funding they need to put into digital marketing platforms, personalization tools, and better methods of engaging with potential and current students, as well as alumni and donors.

Moving ahead, institutions must offer a more intuitive, personalized digital experience, while gaining better control of their digital assets, and effectively using analytics and insight to develop an efficient journey for students and alumni that leads to a lasting relationship. Digging for data and insights to understand the true effectiveness of each effort is key. Knowing what's working, what's not, and where the gaps lie are all vitally important.

Acquia is the pioneering partner that can help build those experiences and relationships—on your own terms.

Our web content management and customer journey orchestration have empowered leading brands to create the world's greatest digital experiences. We'll help you establish the more intuitive, personalized digital experiences today's students expect – all using open source technology, all with the required security.

Gain control of your digital assets, deliver the right content at the right time, and tap into the data and insights you need to understand what works, what doesn't, and why. Meet your prospective and existing students with what they need at every step of the journey.

> **"Colleges will need to recreate the campus experience through apps and other technology that allows the non-traditional student to feel a part of the university community."**

Mariana Cavalcanti, vice president of user experience, Ellucian

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Mediacurrent is a remotely distributed, full-service Open Source product agency that defines, designs and delivers websites, platforms and digital experiences. We partner with organizations across industries to create digital products that provide utility to users, build value for businesses and move technology forward.

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Acquia empowers the world's most ambitious brands to create digital customer experiences that matter. With open source Drupal at its core, the Acquia Digital Experience Platform (DXP) enables marketers, developers, and IT operations teams at thousands of global organizations to rapidly compose and deploy digital products and services that engage customers, enhance conversions, and help businesses stand out.

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