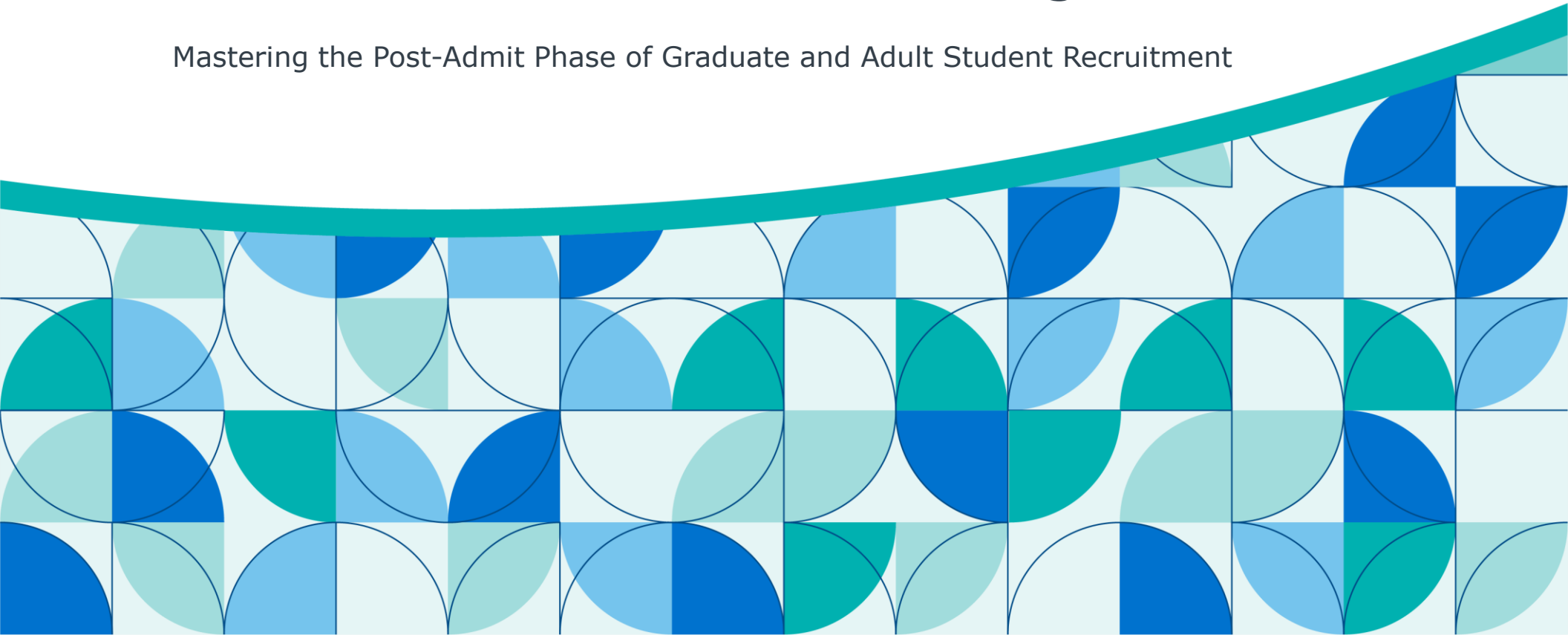




INSIGHT PAPER

An Enrollment Leader's Guide to Adult Learner Yield and Melt Management

Mastering the Post-Admit Phase of Graduate and Adult Student Recruitment



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Executive Summary

Six Conclusions for Graduate, Adult, and Online Enrollment Teams

1

Conversion matters more in a slower-growth market

As growth in graduate, adult, and online enrollment becomes harder to sustain, institutions must focus less on volume alone and more on conversion quality. The most effective teams help learners move efficiently from interest to start by reducing friction, clarifying value, and reinforcing program fit.

2

Today's graduate and adult learners are harder to convert

Compared with earlier cohorts, today's adult learners are more cautious about cost, more skeptical about return on investment, and more likely to weigh school against work, caregiving, and other life responsibilities. That makes yield and melt management more complex and more important.

3

Make yield a first priority relative to melt

Because the group of admitted students is so much larger than that of committed students, improvements in yield performance deliver commensurately larger downstream enrollment impacts. Whether that milestone is registration, first-course enrollment, initial payment, or another action, improving yield usually produces a larger enrollment impact than focusing on melt alone.

4

Drops in yield rate are no cause for concern—up to a point

As institutions expand reach, launch new programs, or generate more applications, some decline in yield rate may be expected. The problems start if avoidable friction, weak value communication, and poor follow-through drive that rate down even further.

5

Yield and melt challenges and opportunities vary by institution and program type

Graduate, adult, and online enrollment teams do not face a single, uniform challenge. Student motivations, timelines, and barriers differ by program, modality, and audience. The most effective strategies reflect those differences and focus intensive support where it will make the greatest impact.

6

Marketing and brand management play a key role in yielding students

Yielding students is easier when recruitment and post-admit communications clearly connect your institution's strengths to the outcomes they care about most. Strong brand and marketing work reinforce confidence in your value, your flexibility, and your ability to help learners reach their goals.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Understanding Today's Yield and Melt Challenges

PART

1

Defining Yield and Melt

Essential terminology

This page defines the terms *yield* and *melt*—a step that will be unnecessary for most readers, but given the crucial importance of the terminology involved, one that we would be remiss in skipping.

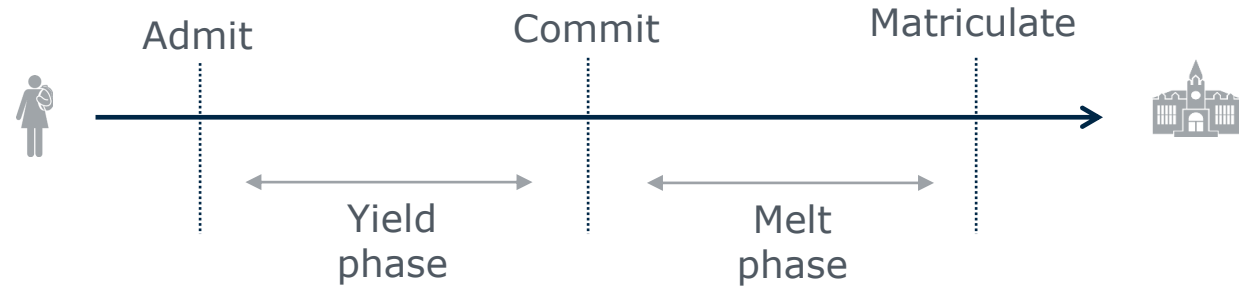
As indicated at right, the yield phase is the period of time between when a student is admitted and the time that they deposit or otherwise commit to an institution. For many graduate, adult, and online programs, this commitment might look like a registration, first-course enrollment, or initial payment. This is especially true in programs with rolling admission or compressed decision timelines, where many students do not finalize their plans until close to the start of classes.

The melt phase extends from that commitment milestone until the student matriculates.¹

Variations

The material in this page is something of an oversimplification, and the picture can differ between institutions, if not in the fundamentals, then in the particulars.

The Yield and Melt Phases Are Defined by Milestones on a Student's Path to Matriculation



Yield and Melt Math

How Yield Rate and Melt Rate Are Calculated

$$\text{Yield rate} = \frac{\text{commits}}{\text{admits}}$$

$$\text{Melt rate} = \frac{\text{commits} - \text{matriculations}}{\text{commits}}$$

1) Typically, a student is not officially designated as matriculated until they are counted in the census for the year's entering class.

Yielding and Matriculating Students Has Never Been Harder

Three Factors Defining Today's Challenge



An unstable market context

Recent years have seen an increasingly unstable market context (COVID, changes to Grad PLUS loans, direct admission, executive orders from the White House, etc.). Consequently, the absence of a stable baseline for comparison has made it harder to interpret and predict students' yield behavior.



Increased sensitivity to cost

The cost of higher education often does not really register until a student receives their first bill, an occurrence that leads some to pivot to less costly options, such as non-university providers like Coursera or Grow with Google, at the eleventh hour. Factors such as reduced Grad PLUS loan availability will likely make this more common.



Students' struggle to persist

Many adult learners are balancing work, caregiving, and other competing responsibilities. At the same time, they may be navigating reentry into higher education, unfamiliar technology, financial uncertainty, or questions about schedule fit. In that context, even minor friction in the post-admit phase can interrupt momentum and prevent them from enrolling.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A 'Yield Cliff'

Problematic performance

Drops in yield rate are not necessarily a cause for concern, but there is a threshold beyond which they do signal underlying trouble.

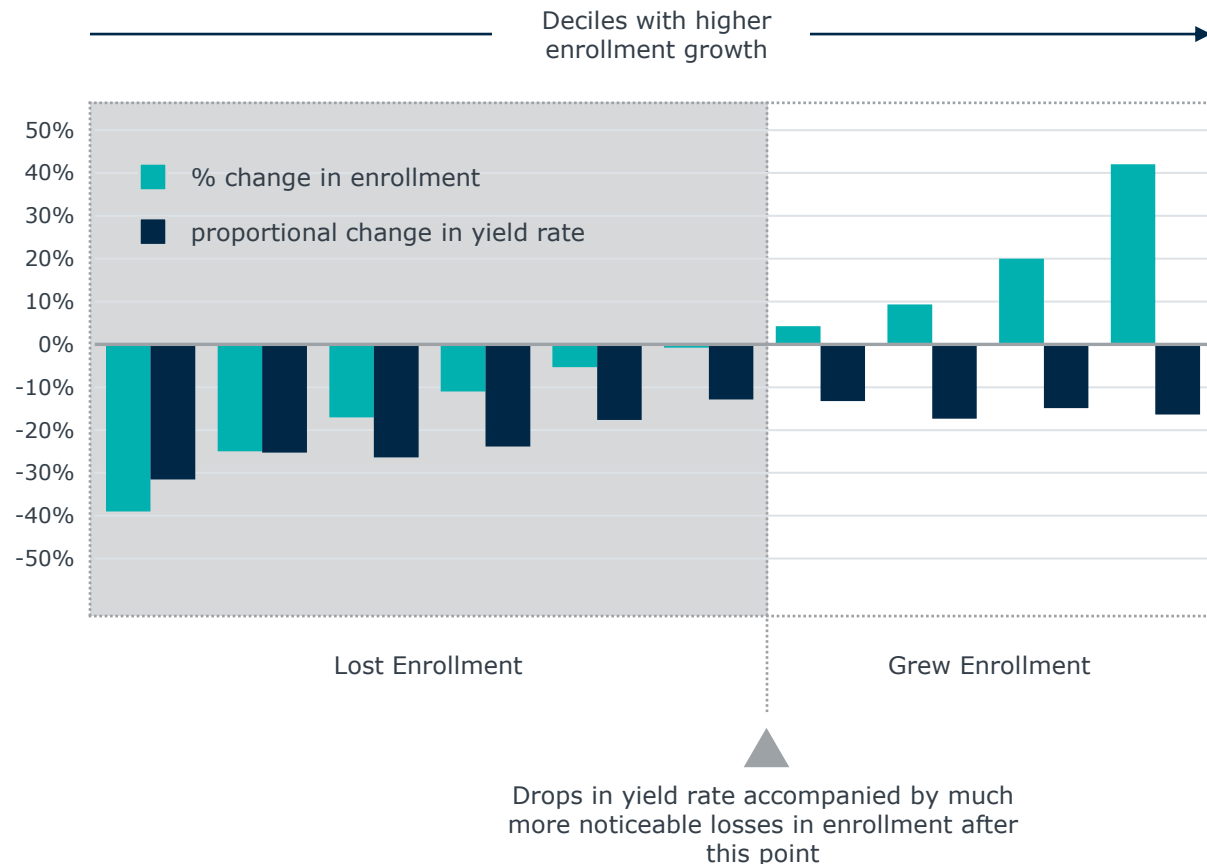
The chart at right illustrates this point by looking at changes in yield rate and enrollment over a five-year period. Although the analysis is based on undergraduate data, it still offers a useful directional lesson for graduate and adult enrollment teams: when yield weakens beyond a certain point, enrollment outcomes can suffer.

The schools in the analysis were divided into growth deciles, and the change in yield rate was calculated for each. The deciles with positive change in enrollment showed no clear pattern in their yield-rate change, apart from it being negative for each decile and existing within the relatively narrow range of -13% to -17%.

By contrast, the deciles that saw negative changes in enrollment did show a pattern, with greater reductions being associated with greater drops in yield rate. These schools also displayed a much wider range in terms of yield performance than did schools that grew enrollment.

Beyond a Certain Point, Drops in Yield Rate Do Constitute a Danger Sign

Proportional Change in Yield Rate and Enrollment, by Enrollment-Growth Decile, Entering Class 2018 to 2023, Competitive Four-Year U.S. Colleges and Universities (IPEDS)



Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Does Top-Notch Recruitment Marketing Look Like?

Execution Excellence Is in the Details

As discussed on the preceding page, the affinity that you build with prospective graduate and adult learners all across the recruitment funnel pays dividends in the post-admit phase. The stronger your early outreach, the more likely admitted students are to see your program as a strong fit and continue toward enrollment. For these audiences, effective recruitment marketing depends less on broad student-search volume and more on clear value messaging, timely follow-up, and reducing friction across inquiry, application, admission, and start.

Hallmarks of Well-Executed Recruitment Marketing

Lead-Generation Strategy ❑ Audience-source diversification and saturation ❑ Proactive adjustments based on source volatility ❑ Optimized websites and lead-capture forms ❑ Paid search aligned to high-intent program keywords ❑ Employer and alumni referral channels	Email Deliverability ❑ Creation of dedicated domain to protect .edu ❑ Domain warming ❑ Dynamic email-audience modulation ❑ Ongoing monitoring and risk management ❑ Tracking and triage
Lead Management and Nurture ❑ Fast follow-up to new inquiries ❑ Segmented and personalized communication by audience type ❑ Behavior-based nurture for inactive or stalled prospects ❑ Reengagement strategy for stopped-out or delayed-start learners ❑ CRM workflows that support inquiry-to-start progression ❑ Campaigns that last 25+ months	Global Insights ❑ Benchmark against comparable programs and market segments ❑ Analyze market trends and opportunities ❑ Adjust campaigns based on shifts in student behavior ❑ Optimize campaigns on the fly, based on in-cycle performance ❑ Test email variants ❑ Innovation pilots on emerging channels

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Channel Management

- ❑ Paid search and paid social coordination
- ❑ Creation of static and motion ads
- ❑ Ongoing copy and creative testing by audience segment
- ❑ List-match coordination with overall campaign
- ❑ Image- and copy-based performance optimization

Reporting and Analytics

- ❑ Full-funnel year-over-year dashboards
- ❑ Real-time campaign performance data
- ❑ Filtering by lead score
- ❑ Historical benchmarking data
- ❑ Multi-touch attribution

Creative and Content Development

- ❑ Multiple program-specific landing pages
- ❑ 60+ program and audience-segmented nurture flows
- ❑ 15+ paid social ad variants
- ❑ Informed-delivery ad set
- ❑ Customized landing pages
- ❑ Programming of landing pages for pre-populated data
- ❑ Ensuring seamless, instant login
- ❑ Placing trigger pixels on .edu to for content customization

Management of Omni-Channel Deployment

- ❑ Recurring name acquisition, including monthly new launches
- ❑ Channel synchronization and alignment
- ❑ Ongoing data processing and cleaning
- ❑ Inquiry and application data capture
- ❑ CRM data return
- ❑ Proofreading of copy across channels
- ❑ QA testing for functionality and accuracy
- ❑ Response management



Associated EAB offerings: [Adult Learner Recruitment](#), [Apply Advance](#), [Digital Agency](#), [Hybrid](#), [Financial Aid Optimization](#)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Central Role for Enrollment Teams in Melt Prevention

A post-deposit handoff

In the past, it has not typically been the practice of admission teams to continue courting admitted students after they have made their first meaningful commitment; rather, students have been handed off to the various departments charged with getting them to take the steps required for matriculation.

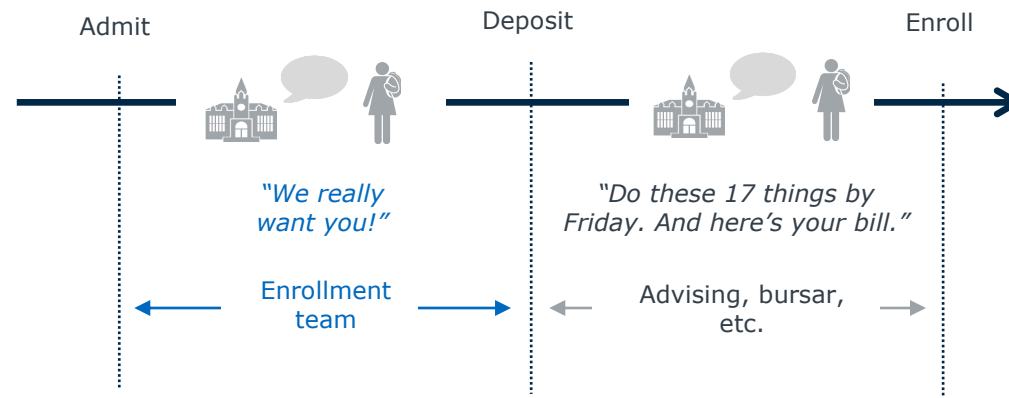
Extended engagement

Current market conditions have created an imperative for admission teams to carry the crucial work of yielding prospective enrollees into the post-commitment phase, many even past the point of matriculation and up until the add/drop census date.

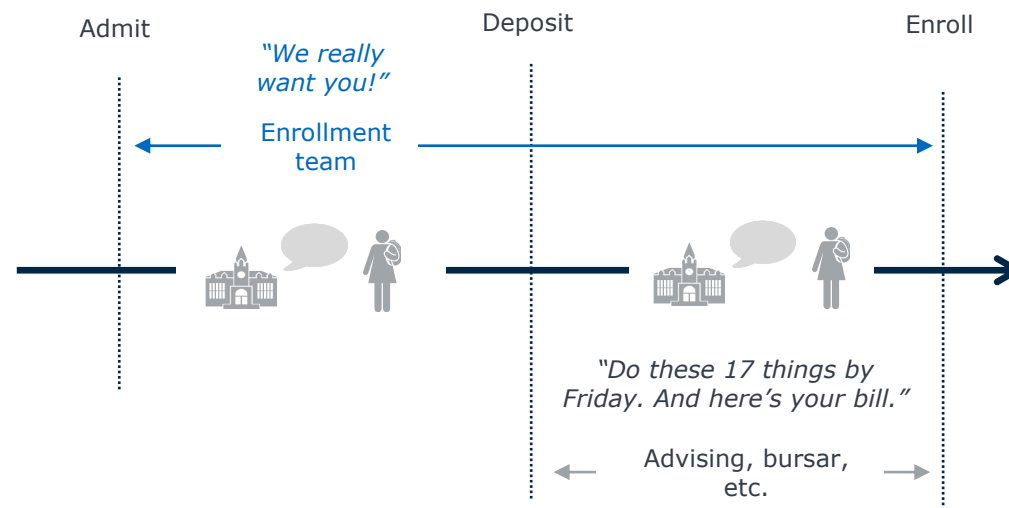
For example, some schools continue to recruit students who have not committed to them right through melt season—including ones who may have already deposited at other institutions.

Getting Beyond the Transactional Pivot

Post-Admit Communications, circa 2020



Post-Admit Communications, circa 2025



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Yield Versus Melt

Where to focus?

When enrollment teams are looking to improve student engagement in the post-admit phase, they face the decision of how much effort and resources to invest in the yield and melt portions of it.

A numbers game

This is a complex question that hinges on considerations such as where invested efforts are likely to make the greatest difference.

But any such considerations should be understood in the context of the greatly differing numbers of students involved, with the group of admitted students being much larger than the group of committed students. As illustrated in the table at right, the same change in yield rate will tend to have a much bigger impact on downstream enrollment than will an identical proportional improvement in melt rate. (The more pronounced color gradient for yield in the table at right is an indication of this.)

The right answer for most institutions will be to devote proportionally more effort to their yield work, while not ignoring melt management.

Relative Downstream Impact on Enrollment Growth

For Proportionally Identical Changes in Yield and Melt Rate, a Hypothetical/Illustrative Model

			Yield Rate					
Proportional change			0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%
New rate			25%	26.3%	27.5%	28.8%	30.0%	31.3%
Melt Rate	Proportional change	New rate						
	0%	10%	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%
	-5%	9.5%	1%	6%	11%	16%	21%	26%
	-10%	9%	1%	6%	11%	16%	21%	26%
	-15%	8.5%	2%	7%	12%	17%	22%	27%
	-20%	8%	2%	7%	12%	18%	23%	28%
	-25%	7.5%	3%	8%	13%	18%	23%	28%

A 25% proportional increase in yield rate boosts downstream enrollment by 25%, while the same proportional decrease in melt rate increases enrollment by only 3%

Increase in enrollment

Yield and Melt Management in the AI Era

A scalability challenge

One of the most difficult challenges facing admission teams when it comes to yield and melt management is the need to scale intensive and highly personalized outreach across increasingly larger admit pools.

AI aspiration vs. reality

In this regard, the arrival of generative AI on the scene could not have been more timely.

Chatbots are already greatly extending colleges’ ability to field questions from admitted students, while placing little additional burden on admission staff.

That said, enrollment leaders everywhere report being inundated with pitches from AI vendors, which, while often painting a truly compelling vision of new capabilities just over the horizon, are also often vague as to specifics. The material at right offers some generalized assessments as to the state of maturity of various sorts of AI admission tools you’ve probably been hearing about. See also the next two pages, which offer guidance on how to assess AI investments you might be considering.

AI Use Cases with the Greatest Relevance for Yield and Melt Management

By Maturity Level

Maturity	Enrollment Use Cases
	Chatbots Chatbots automatically field all manner of queries, greatly increasing the number of students getting answers to their questions while also freeing up staff capacity
	Enrollment analytics Enrollment data is fed into an AI, which generates insights such as particular students’ likelihood to enroll and predicted aggregate enrollment outcomes
	Manual AI-assisted content creation Admission staffers use ChatGPT or similar tools to draft communications with prospective students, enabling them to produce better content more quickly
	Autonomous agentic AI recruiter AI system initiates and manages comm flows with prospective students, adapting messaging, cadence, channel, etc. on the fly based on data gathered on students

Fully mature     Hypothetical/nascent



Associated EAB offering: [EAB Chat Agent](#)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Evaluating Potential AI Deployments

Four Categories of Questions to Discuss with AI Vendors You're Considering

Distinguish between capabilities that actually exist (and work as advertised) and ones that are planned or are in development/testing

1

Capabilities and functionality

AI chatbot knowledge and accuracy

- What kinds of questions from prospective adult learners can the vendor's chatbot answer on its own? How does the vendor ensure those answers are accurate and up to date?

Personalized multichannel outreach

- Based on which data/analyses does the AI system personalize communication for each student? Across which channels (.edu, email, SMS, phone calls) does it operate? Are content, timing, audience, and channel of messages decided autonomously by the AI, or are those things managed via non-AI techniques (e.g., rule-based marketing automation)?

Enrollment analytics

- Does the system include AI-enabled predictive analytics (e.g., for assessing individual students' likelihood to yield)? How is the accuracy of related predictions assessed? How capable are the system's models of delivering accurate analyses amid large shifts in market context (e.g., your state public system's introduction of a direct-admission program)?

2

Implementation and integration

Integration with existing systems

- How does the platform integrate with your current systems (CRM, SIS, etc.), and what data exchange is required? Will you need to regularly import/export data, or does the system offer real-time sync via APIs? Ask the vendor to outline the technical steps required to implement data integration—involvement of your IT department, data mapping, etc.

Initial setup and training needs

- Ask your vendor for an onboarding plan showing how long it will take to implement and train the AI for your school and the specific tasks that that work will comprise. Clarify your team's responsibilities with respect to tasks such as authoring material for the AI's knowledge base, verifying the AI's responses during training, labeling data, setting up decision rules, etc.

Ongoing maintenance and content updates

- After launch, what ongoing work will be required from your staff to ensure that the AI remains effective? How will the AI integrate updates to the content on your .edu? Does the vendor have a plan according to which they offer periodic reviews of your AI's performance and related retraining? If not, does your team have the capacity to do that yourselves?

Source: EAB research and analysis.

3

Data privacy and compliance

Student data

- Which data on prospective students will the AI use, where will it be stored, and how will student privacy be protected? Ask if the vendor is FERPA-compliant and SOC-2-certified for data security. If the AI uses third-party large language models or cloud services, seek confirmation from the vendor that personal data is not being sent to services that might retain it.

Content moderation and sensitive topics

- Determine how the platform prevents the AI from giving students information that is inaccurate or that is inappropriate in terms of content or tone. Ask if the system can be configured to use preapproved knowledge sources, to set boundaries on certain topics (e.g., if a particular student asks about their chance of being admitted), and to identify and hand off sensitive queries to a human staffer. Ask if your staff can review logs of conversations between the AI and students.

4

Vendor dependability

Proven results and references

- Ask your prospective vendor for evidence that their AI tool improves enrollment outcomes and/or efficiency (e.g., data on increased funnel conversion rates). Ask for references; contact and interview them.

Transparency on AI

- Ask your vendor to distinguish between parts of their service that are powered by AI and parts that entail other, non-AI forms of automation or that entail human work behind the scenes.

Support and ongoing partnership

- Ask the vendor what post-sale support they provide and how they would partner with your team over time. Ask if they offer a dedicated account manager and/or regular check-ins to review performance of the system. Ask if they will assist with optimizing the AI's behavior on an ongoing basis.

Cost and additional investment

- Ask the vendor to explain their pricing model. Are there any additional costs for implementation, extra features, or scaling up usage? Is the pricing based on a flat-fee subscription model, on a per-student basis, or on some other model? Be wary of systems that require a lot of add-ons or additional software to work as advertised.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Strong Brand Is a Force Multiplier for Your Yield and Melt Efforts

Engagement infrastructure

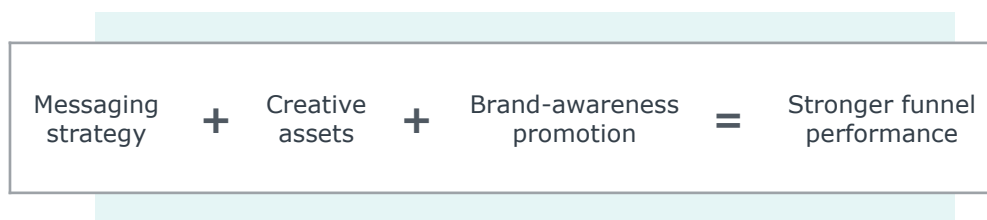
One underappreciated aspect of [effective brand management](#) is the degree to which it enhances everything else you do to attract and convert prospective students, not least of all in the post-admit phase.

Three ways that it does this are shown at the top of this page. First, a strong brand is based on a carefully considered messaging strategy that connects things students care most deeply about with things that your institution is demonstrably great at. Second, well-executed brand work gives that messaging a form of creative expression that boosts its emotional resonance with students. And third, effective brand management increases awareness of those messages among key audiences.

The kind of impact that work can have, in terms of shifting student perceptions and improving enrollment outcomes, is suggested by the data at right.

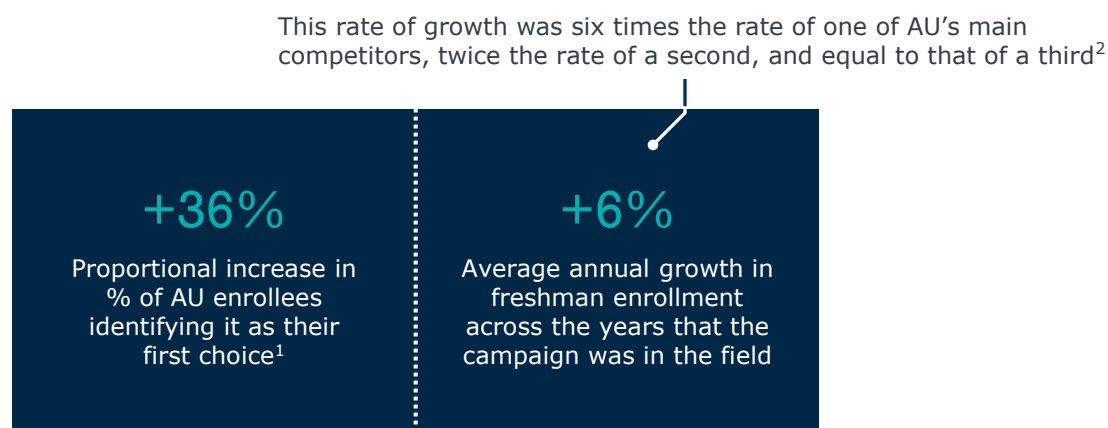
See the following pages for more detailed elaboration on the points mentioned above, including implementation guidance.

Components of Brand Work That Boost Conversion Rates



Yes, It Does Work: Example from the Undergraduate Market

Case in Point: Results Associated with Launch of a New Brand Campaign at American University



1) It grew from 45% to 61%.

2) The institution that matched AU's rate of growth undertook its own very successful brand overhaul, seven years before AU did.

Sources: EAB research and analysis; Theresa Flannery, *How to Market a University*.

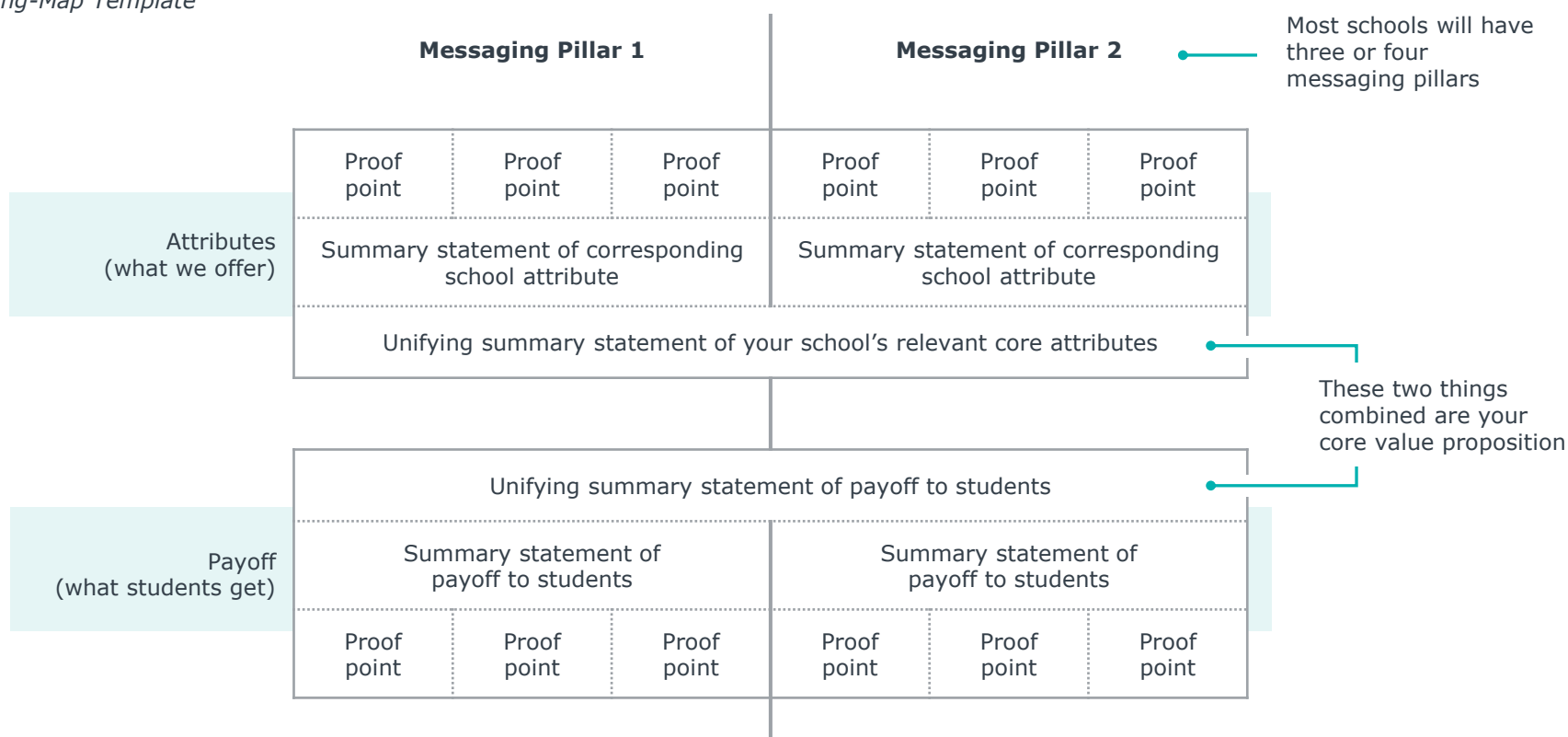
A Brand-Messaging Map

A Powerful Tool for You and Your Campus Community

Cheat sheets for key elements of your brand can serve as powerful tools for you and your internal stakeholders. This and the facing page show one example—a messaging-strategy map. Its purpose is to lay out information from your brand platform in a way that makes more readily apparent possible hierarchies of messaging in your communication with students. The material below shows the sorts of information contained in the various parts of the map, while the facing page shows an actual example. The messaging-strategy map serves as a touchstone for outward expressions of your brand.

A Detailed Overview of Your Messaging Hierarchy

Messaging-Map Template



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Sound Brand Management Activates Your Campus Community

Empowering the Main ‘Purveyors’ of Your Brand to Better Engage Prospective Students

On-campus experiences are widely acknowledged to be a linchpin of schools’ yield efforts. So, more generally, are prospective students’ interactions with current students, alumni, faculty, your enrollment team, and other members of your institutional community. The best way to make those interactions consistently positive and impactful is to ensure that your brand suffuses your institution’s culture at every level—something that is accomplished by education and training on your brand. The goal here is not just to make sure members of your community stay on-message in their communications with prospective students; having a deep understanding of your brand helps them to *live* it, embodying it in all related interactions.

21%

Of surveyed graduate and adult learners use in-person events to learn more about programs

Guidance on Five Key Aspects of Brand Education and Training

1	Purpose and aims	Build awareness:	Ensure that members of the institutional community are familiar with the institution’s brand narrative, voice, visual identity, and values
		Promote consistency:	Enable consistent messaging and design across departments, platforms, and communications; repetition builds equity in your brand
		Empower advocacy:	Equip employees, students, and other stakeholders to speak confidently and accurately about the institution and program
		Enhance recruitment:	Ensure that your enrollment team takes full advantage of the brand-expression assets you’ve created, which will boost the efficacy of your recruitment outreach
		Support strategic goals:	Tie your brand-building efforts explicitly to institutional goals, including those outlined in your strategic plan and those of individual departments
2	Participants	Units:	Admissions and enrollment, advancement, alumni relations, marketing and communications, academic departments, student affairs, athletics, human resources, career services, executive leadership
		Roles and titles:	Directors and associate directors, communication specialists and content writers, faculty who engage externally, those managing department newsletters or webpages, social media managers, graphic designers and videographers, departmental web editors

Source: EAB’s 2025 [Survey of 8,000+ Graduate and Adult Learners](#)

3	Curriculum	Introduction to brand principles: Overview of branding concepts and their significance in higher education
		Institutional mission and values: Deep dive into the institution's core principles and how they inform the brand
		Visual identity guidelines: Proper use of logos, color schemes, typography, and other visual elements
		Messaging framework: Key messages, tone and personality, storytelling techniques
		Case studies: Examples of effective brand application within and outside the institution
		Practical guidance: Practice applying brand guidelines to real-world scenarios
		Feedback mechanisms: Ways for participants to provide input on brand materials and training
4	Frequency	New employees: During onboarding (within first 60 days)
		Existing employees: Annual refresher or biannual workshop
		Major brand updates: Special onetime or rolling training sessions
		Unit-level sessions: By request, on rotation (especially for comms-heavy units)
5	Delivery formats	Workshops: Ideal for interactivity and questions
		Live virtual training: Accessible by remote workers and hybrid teams
		Self-paced online modules: Useful for scalability and asynchronous access
		Brand camps: Half-day or full-day immersive sessions
		Lunch-and-learns: Short, informal sessions for small groups
		Train-the-trainer programs: Empower campus "brand ambassadors" to extend training in their units

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Tactics for Engaging Admitted and Committed Students

Advancing Four Yield and Melt Management Imperatives

PART

2

An Overview of the Tactics Covered in This Report

Novel and/or foundational

This report is necessarily selective in terms of the best practices it covers. Some ideas were included because of their newsworthiness, i.e., they are things enrollment leaders may not have heard of or perhaps do not fully understand. Others were chosen because they should be considered “musts” by every enrollment team, due to the critical role they play in improving yield and melt performance and their wide applicability.

Deep dives

Some of the tactics within the “musts” category are given a more detailed treatment in this report than others. In some cases, this is due to their outsized impact on enrollment outcomes. In others it is because giving detailed guidance for them is necessary and practicable. In yet others it is because a deeper understanding of the rationale underlying the tactic promotes a better grasp of its implementation. This more detailed presentation is indicated by the “deep dive” annotation in the list at right.

Four Imperatives for Improved Yield and Melt Performance Define Four Corresponding Categories of Tactics

1

Engage adult learners on their own terms

- Tactic 1: Adult Learner Messaging Audit
- Tactic 2: Outcomes and ROI Marketing
- Tactic 3: Context-Aware Financial-Aid Monitoring
- Tactic 4: Non-Consumer Reapproach

2

Enable intensive engagement with adult learners

- Tactic 5: Outreach-Intensity Triage Analytics (*deep dive*)
- Tactic 6: Next-Generation Alumni Network Infrastructure

3

Make personalization a priority

- Tactic 7: AI Chatbot
- Tactic 8: Virtual Private Tour

4

Commit to communications-infrastructure excellence

- Tactic 9: Value-Messaging Cross Training
- Tactic 10: Consolidated Matriculation Communications (*deep dive*)

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Imperative 1:

Engage Adult Learners on Their Own Terms

Acknowledging Students' Specific Goals and Preferences

Adult learner goals

From an enrollment management standpoint, understanding the true [goals and preferences of your prospective students](#) is the most effective way to tailor your messaging. According to our survey of over 8,000 graduate and adult learners, their top three reasons for furthering their educations are to advance their career, pursue their passions, and increase their earning potential.

Decision factors

The chart at right shows the top 10 reasons that adult learners choose to further their education.

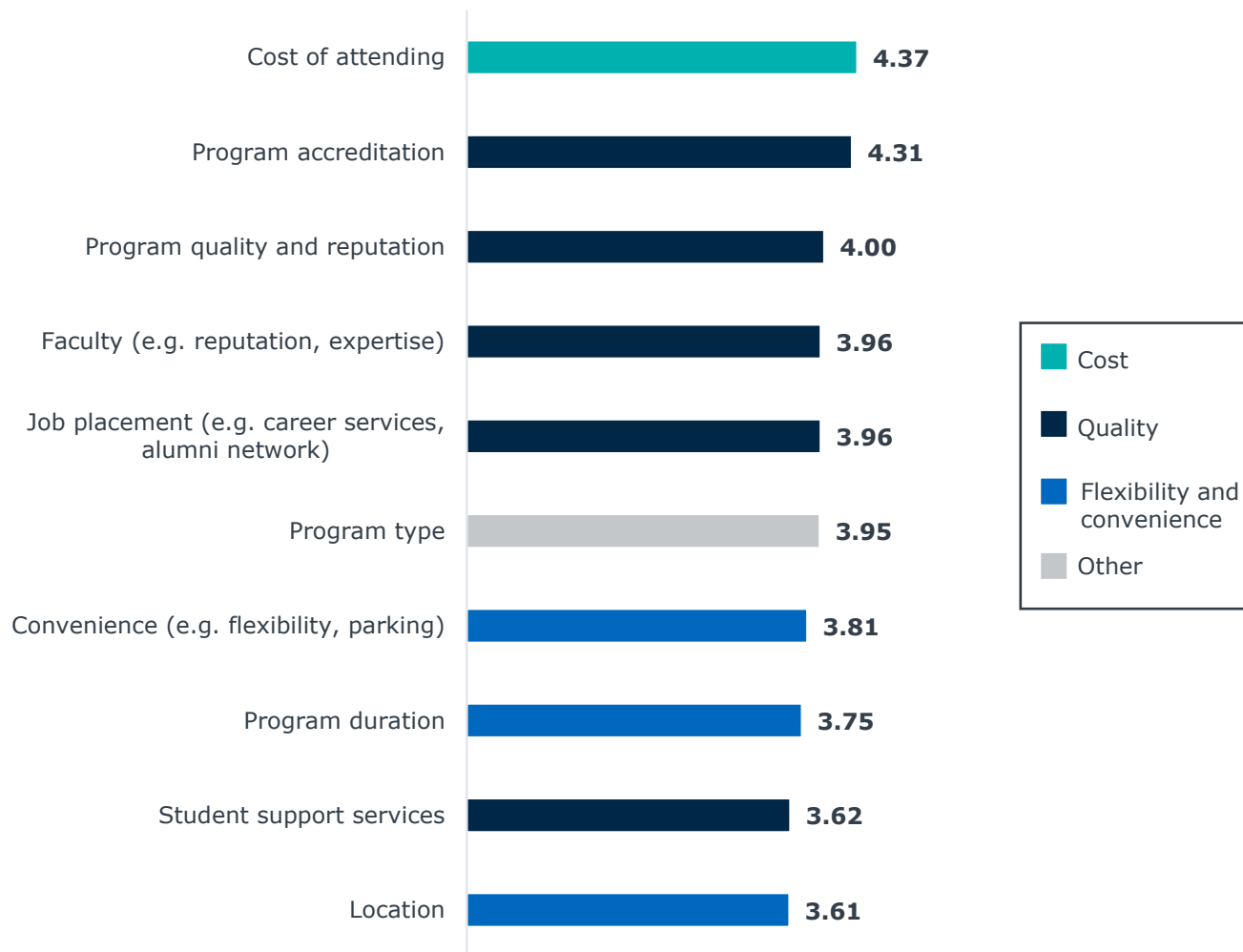
Having this kind of insight into students' goals has always been an important part of getting recruitment messaging right. It is all the more so in the context of markedly increased levels of financial stress.

The chart is annotated with various categories that adult learners might associate with the listed factors that influence enrollment decisions. This exercise suggests ways that related communications might be positioned, e.g., emphasizing return on investment, flexibility, supportiveness, and program quality.

In terms of your enrollment decision, indicate the importance of the following factors

Scale: 1=Not important, 2=Slightly important, 3=Moderately important, 4=Very important, 5=Extremely important

Top Ten Responses; EAB's 2025 Survey of 8,000+ Graduate and Adult Learners



An Adult Learner Messaging Audit

A need for tailored comms

Given the set of concerns and goals specific to the current generation of adult learners (see preceding pages), you'll want to revisit your communications with them to ensure you're addressing their peculiar needs.

And you'll want to do that specifically for the post-admit phase, as the things that most concern admitted and committed students are not the same as those that preoccupy students in earlier funnel stages. Another is that students' levels of anxiety, doubt, and other negative emotions can increase when the hypothetical notion of enrolling becomes real, e.g., when they have to finally commit to a single school or when they receive the first bill from your institution.

A high-level plan

The material at right outlines a high-level plan for auditing your communications with admitted and committed students, factoring in the unique psychological profile of adult learners.

Three Aspects of Your Post-Admit Communications You'll Want to Get Right

Messages

Feasibility and flexibility

- Show students that attending and graduating from your institution is doable for them. Emphasize the excellence of your support services—academic, financial, mental health, etc.—and highlight the flexible modality and timing options available to them.

Choice, opportunity, and control

- Research has shown that one of the most powerful messages you can share with prospective students is that an advanced degree is their best bet for maximizing the amount of choice, opportunity, and control they'll have in their later lives.

ROI

- Address both the cost and earnings sides of your value equation. Sample statistic to provide: program-level data for monthly earnings versus debt payment for students graduating from your institution, relative to your peer institutions.

Your brand-messaging pillars

- Schools with well-managed brands will have a brand-messaging map, which focuses on the intersection point between their school's strengths and student priorities. Use yours as a basis for identifying other messages to underscore in your outreach.

Channels

Assess how well represented the above messages are in all the channels you use to communicate with admitted and committed students. Pay special attention to channels that students rely on most in the post-admit phase, those that most powerfully influence them, and those that your team can most readily influence. For most schools, those channels will include your school's website, in-person interactions with members of your campus community, and email-based comm flows.

Timing

Adapt the messages you're sending to factor in important contextual factors, e.g., sending information on academic support services when students receive results from placement testing or ROI information when the first bills go out.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Proof of Value

A cost threat

Few enrollment leaders will need reminding of the groundswell of negative sentiment among Americans regarding higher education, much of it being some variation on the “college is not worth the cost” theme.

As noted earlier, such worries can be especially damaging in the post-deposit phase, when prospective students are forced to confront most directly the scale of the financial commitment required of them.

As seen on the right, the top reason graduate and adult learners removed schools from their consideration list was cost.

Concrete proofs

In addition to the more general sorts of arguments described on the preceding page, admission teams can also offer students more concrete and tailored evidence of the soundness of the investment they are being asked to make.

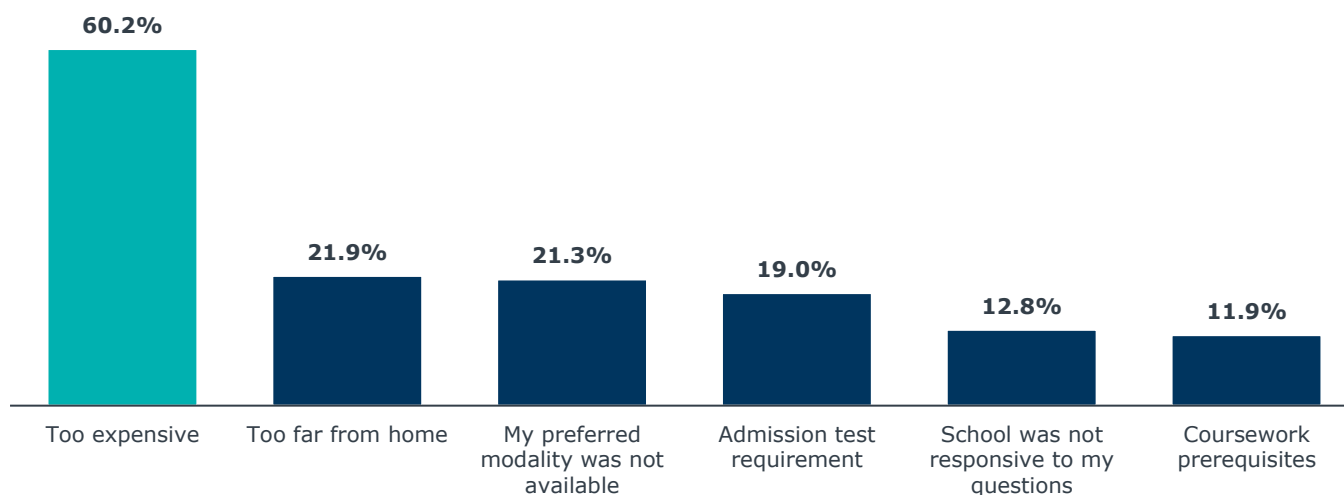
Consider an ROI calculator that a student could use to tell them the likely financial consequences of their pursuit of a degree from your institution. Provided the related data reflects favorably on you, it can do much to put worried prospects’ minds at ease.

Using Student Data to Understand Barriers to Enrollment

Results from EAB’s Survey of 8,000+ Graduate and Adult Learners

“Select any reason that caused you to remove a school from your consideration set.”

Asked of participants currently enrolled, planning to enroll, or planning to enroll but not within the next two years; responses >10%



1) Pseudonyms.

Sources: EAB’s 2025 [Survey of 8,000+ Graduate and Adult Learners](#); EAB research and analysis.

Dynamic Aid Adjustments in a Broader Yield Context

Dollars move the dial

Of all the levers that schools can use to convert admitted and committed students to enrolls, aid is among the most powerful. Many schools understand this and place correspondingly high importance on their aid models.

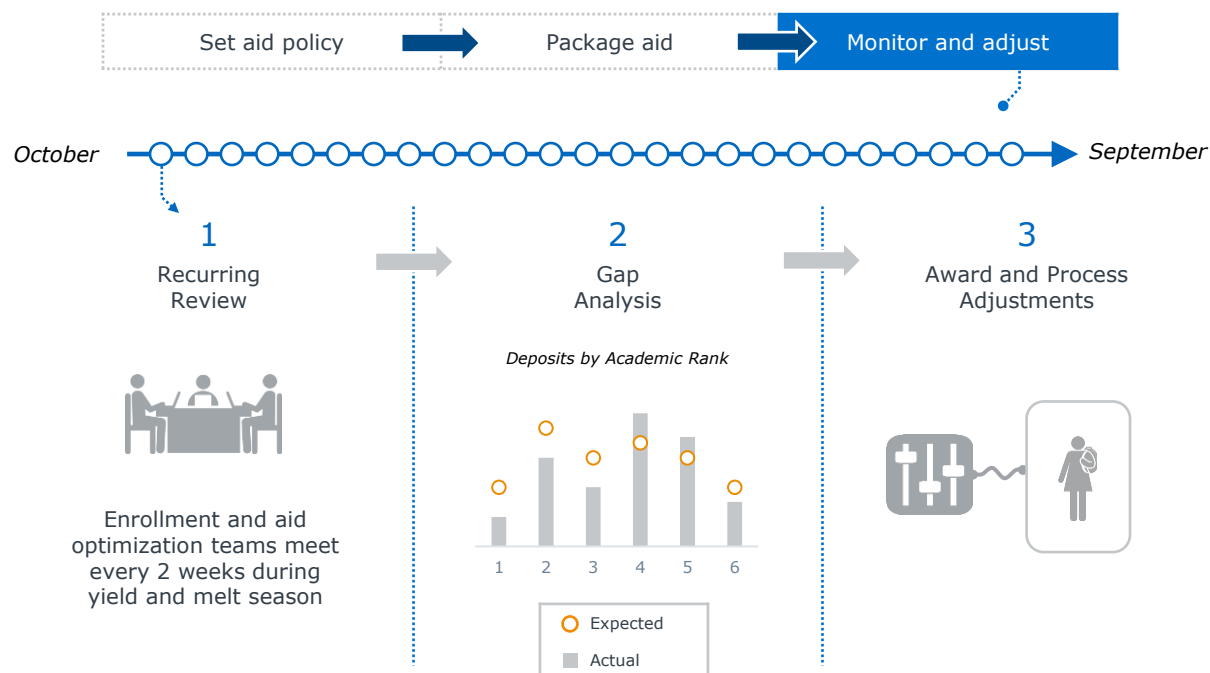
Less widely appreciated is the role that aid granting and related processes can play in influencing students not only at the point of the initial award but throughout yield season.

Dynamic adjustments

This page illustrates an approach consistent with the premise described above—one that treats aid disbursement as a continuous and dynamic process. Rather than “setting and forgetting” aid grants, enrollment and aid optimization teams meet regularly throughout yield season, comparing actual deposits to expected levels and disbursing additional aid as required to address shortfalls.

Important additional work that happens in those meetings is spotting non-aid factors that may be negatively impacting yield performance.

Aid Monitoring in Action



A “Dollars-Plus” Perspective

At the heart of financial aid optimization (FAO) monitoring are analytics that tell you the probable impact of a change in a student’s aid award on their likelihood to convert. That said, there’s far more to impactful aid monitoring. Any number of additional factors can affect a student’s propensity to accept your admit offer, including how effectively your offer letter and post-admit communications position your school’s unique value proposition and how good you are at answering students’ most pressing questions. Optimally executed FAO monitoring can distinguish between yield shortfalls caused by the size of your aid awards and those caused by the broader set of factors just mentioned.



Associated EAB offering: [Financial Aid Optimization](#)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Re-Recruit Students Who Failed to Yield or Melted

Promising prospects

A large number of admitted and committed adult learners end up not enrolling at any institution. Rather than simply forgetting about these populations, treat them as hot leads for re-recruitment in future enrollment cycles.

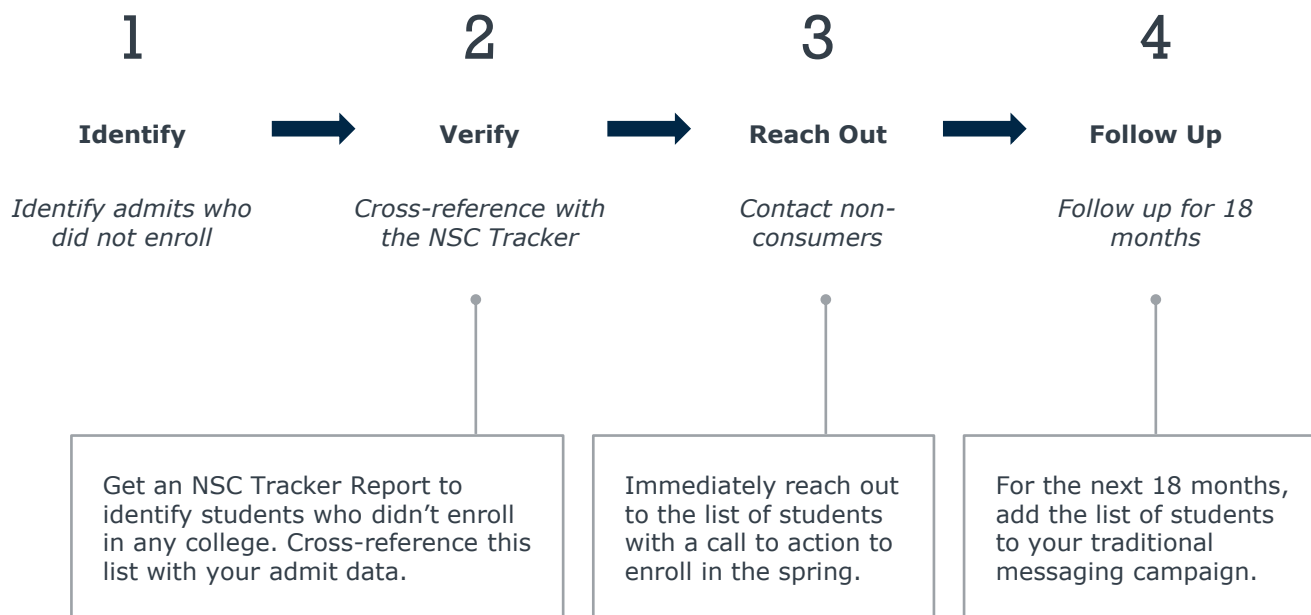
These students not only have shown that they are interested in furthering their education; they have also demonstrated interest in your institution specifically. Furthermore, having already been through the admission process once, they are less likely to stumble on unfamiliar processes such as applying for financial aid.

Putting NSC data to work

The material at right shows a methodical approach to identifying and reengaging with the category of students just described, based on cross-referencing data from National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Tracker Reports with a list of individuals who were admitted to your institution but did not enroll.

Your Clearinghouse Report Helps Identify Non-Consumers to Reengage

A Four-Step Process



Sources: Community College Research Center, "What we know about Transfer," Teachers College, Columbia University, Jan. 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.



Imperative 2: **Enable Intensive Engagement with Adult Learners**

Cut Your Yield-Management Task Down to Size

A tall order

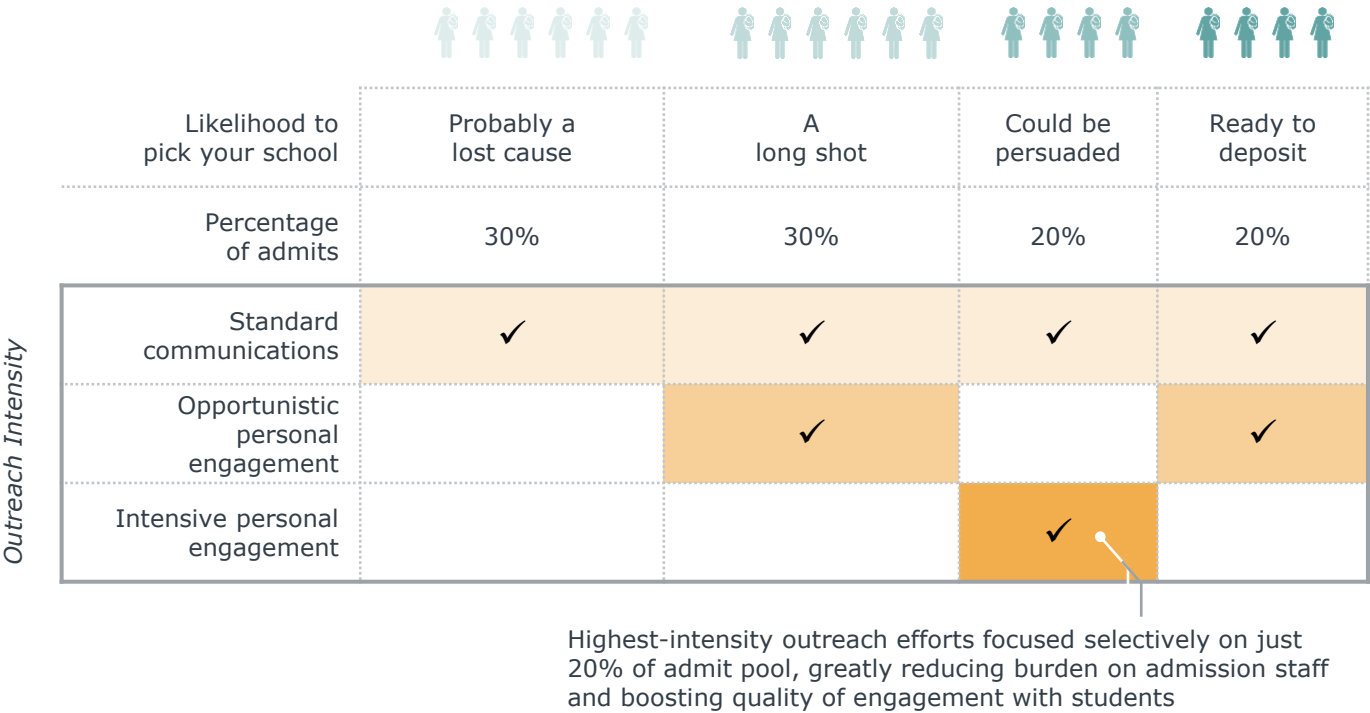
One of the central challenges of yield management is the size of colleges’ admit pools. As mentioned earlier in this document, schools face an urgent imperative to grow their admit pools, this being the single most powerful determinant of downstream enrollment outcomes, including class size and revenue. At the same time, converting these students increasingly requires highly intensive and personalized outreach.

Focus where it matters

Few enrollment teams have the capacity to perform high-touch outreach across the whole of their admit pool. All too often, they are left to guess which students to focus on and hope for the best—an approach that can lead to underinvesting in some prospects and overinvesting in others. Solving this problem entails getting a more accurate read on your admitted students’ intent, which enables you to focus your most intensive efforts where they will have the biggest impact—an idea that is developed further across the next few pages.

Admitted Students

By Likelihood to Yield and Optimal Degree of Outreach Intensity, Typical EAB Partner Institution



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Ask Students About Their Intentions

The power of surveying

One of the most effective ways of predicting students' yield behavior is also the simplest—just ask them what their plans are.

EAB research has consistently shown that admitted students' response to the question "Do you intend to enroll?" is highly correlated with the actions they ultimately take. For example, around three-quarters of students who respond "yes" end up enrolling, while just 1% of those who answer "no" do so.

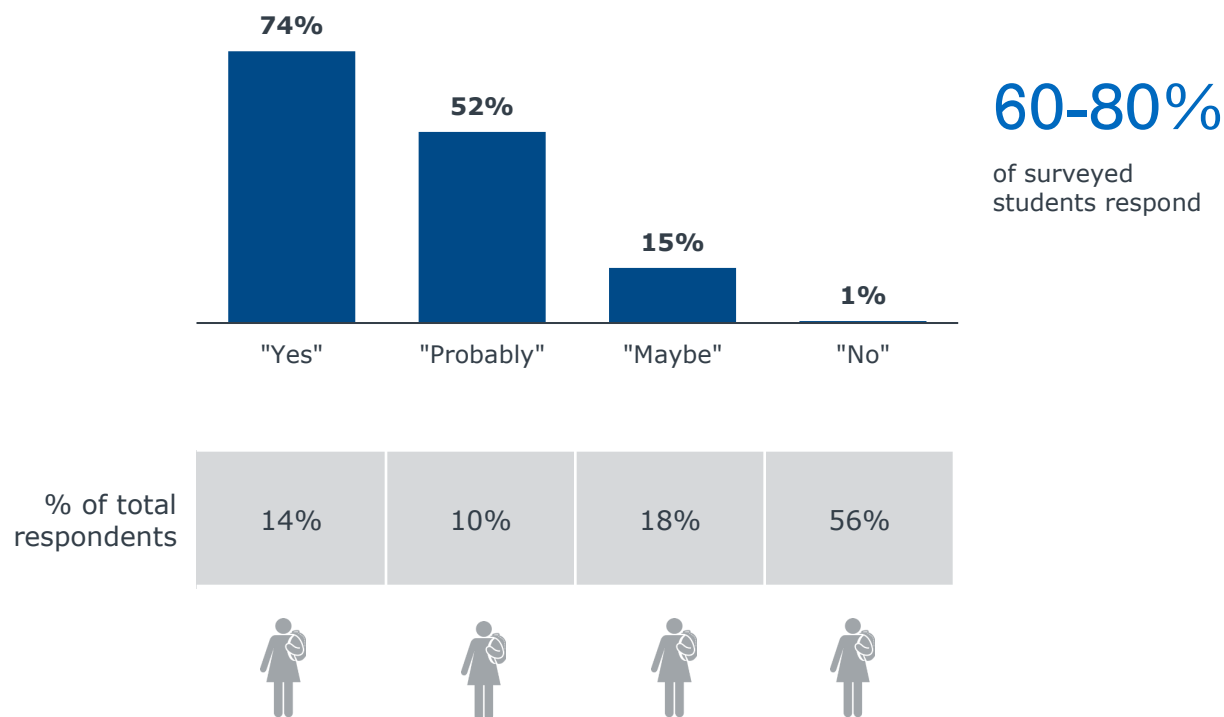
Based on a typical distribution of responses, data from surveys enables enrollment teams to focus their most intensive outreach on just a quarter of respondents, thereby greatly reducing their workload, with no related yield-performance penalty.

How you ask matters

One important additional consideration related to yield surveying is that, while not all students respond, using best practices in outreach to them consistently produces response rates in the neighborhood of 40%.

Students' Survey Responses Accurately Predict Their Yield Behavior

Enrollment Rate by Admitted-Student Response to the Question "Do You Intend to Enroll?"¹



1. Not shown here are an additional 2% of students who responded "done."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Use a Robust Predictive Model

The limits of surveying

As shown on the preceding page, student surveys can offer reliable insight into yield behaviors of around 40% of your admit pool (the typical upper limit for survey response rates). But what do you do about the remaining 60%?

Looking to predictive analytics

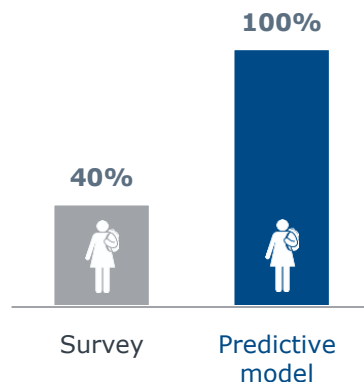
One important answer is found in data science. As explained on this and the following pages, predictive models can provide actionable insight on likelihood to yield for all students in your admit pool.

Furthermore, they can do so earlier in yield season. EAB research has shown that statistical models incorporating data from recruitment-marketing interactions, typically available several months before survey responses, are highly predictive of student behavior.

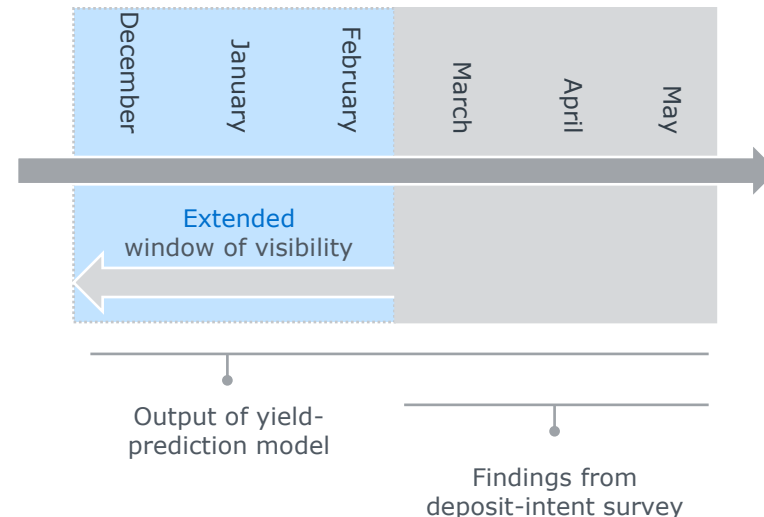
The greatest degree of insight into student intent becomes available to enrollment teams earliest when both approaches—student surveying and predictive modeling—are used in combination.

Delivering Earlier Insight on More Students

% of Admitted Students Covered



Timing



Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Unstable Marketplace Raises the Stakes for Yield Modeling

Yield becoming less predictable

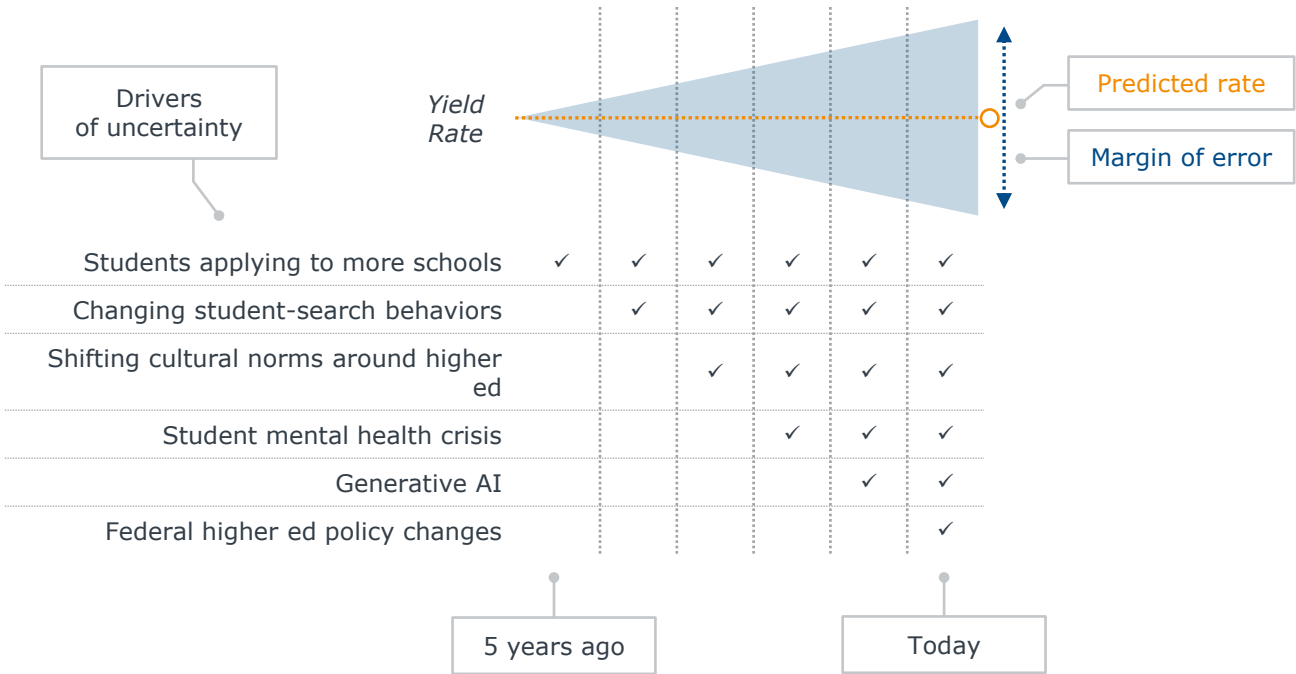
As explained on the preceding page, predictive models can increase the number of students for whom you are able to accurately estimate propensity to yield. One factor making this more important than ever is increased yield volatility. There was a time not so long ago when yield rate did not vary markedly from year to year. That is no longer the case. As shown at right, numerous factors, from students applying to more schools to the rise of generative AI, are boosting the uncertainty associated with yield season.

A problem you can't ignore

The problems caused by that kind of uncertainty are not merely hypothetical. The COVID pandemic, for example, demonstrated just how consequential large, unanticipated swings in yield rate can be, with some schools having suffered double-digit drops in enrollment and others unintentionally over-enrolling their classes by 10% or 20%. The corresponding imperative for enrollment teams is to find better ways of predicting yield—an aim that, for most, will mean using more robust predictive models.

Cumulative Factors Making Yield Rate Harder to Anticipate

Predicted Versus Actual Yield Rate



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Robust Models Work Even in Chaotic Market Contexts

Model quality matters

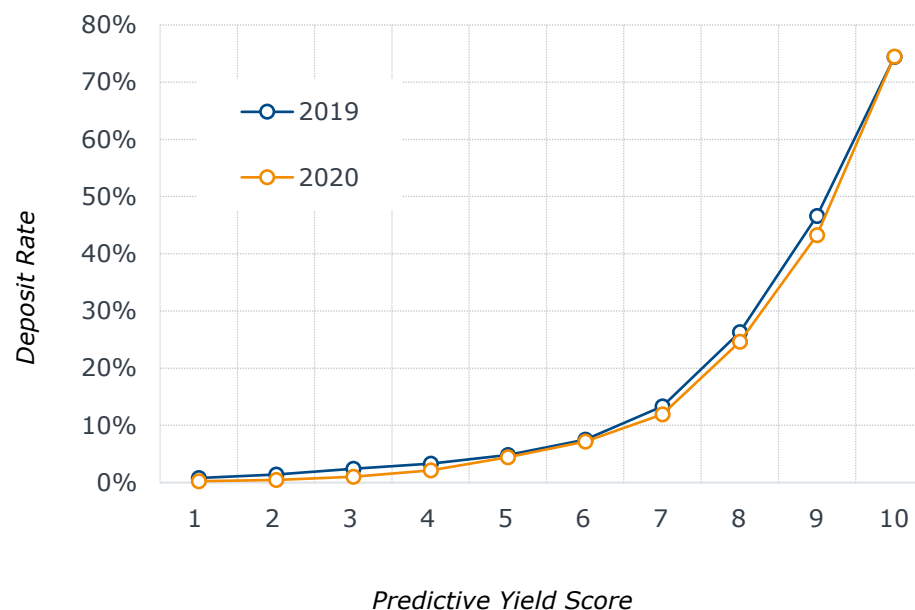
When thinking through what use you might make of data science in managing yield, it's important to understand that not all predictive models are created equal.

Yield-related statistical models vary greatly in their predictive power, accuracy, and ability to adapt to unexpected market conditions. This is especially true in this day and age, as an explosion of data available on students, associated advances in data science, and the arrival on the scene of generative AI are enabling previously unseen levels of modeling power.

EAB's own research has shown that advanced statistical methods, incorporating the right inputs, give yield models a remarkable degree of adaptability—having enabled them, for example, to predict yield with undiminished accuracy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case in Point: Sustained Accuracy Across the COVID Pandemic

Deposit Rate by Yield Score, EAB Yield Predictive Model, Aggregate Data Across EAB Partner Colleges, Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Makes a Yield Model Robust?

Seeking a solid foundation

As explained on the preceding page, predictive models vary greatly in terms of their quality and efficacy.

If you're using the output of a model to inform the actions your admission team is taking—and that is, after all, their main purpose—then that variation in quality matters quite a bit.

Characteristics of strong models

So—how can you tell if your model is good enough?

Certainly, it may be judged retrospectively, as you compare predicted with actual outcomes, which is absolutely something you should do.

But you can also assess the quality of models based on characteristics of them that are evident prior to implementation and are associated with strong performance. Five examples of such characteristics are shown at right.

Five Key Characteristics



Specific to your institution

Your model should be designed specifically for your institution, using your data. (Some third-party models are generic, based on data from other institutions.)



Dynamically updated

Your model should be calibrated throughout yield season to adapt it to changes in market context.



Diversified

Your model should use a diverse array of variables, so that if the predictive power of one is diminished, others can compensate.



Methodologically cutting-edge

Your model should take advantage of ongoing advances in data science, which can greatly increase the accuracy and timeliness of yield prediction.



Networked

Your model is fed by the full range of data your institution has on students, acquired via behavioral sensing across your communications ecosystem.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Hardwire Your Response

From insight to impact

As mentioned earlier, the insight that predictive modeling gives you into individual students' likely yield behavior helps your admission team better tailor outreach to them, focusing your counselors' most intensive efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

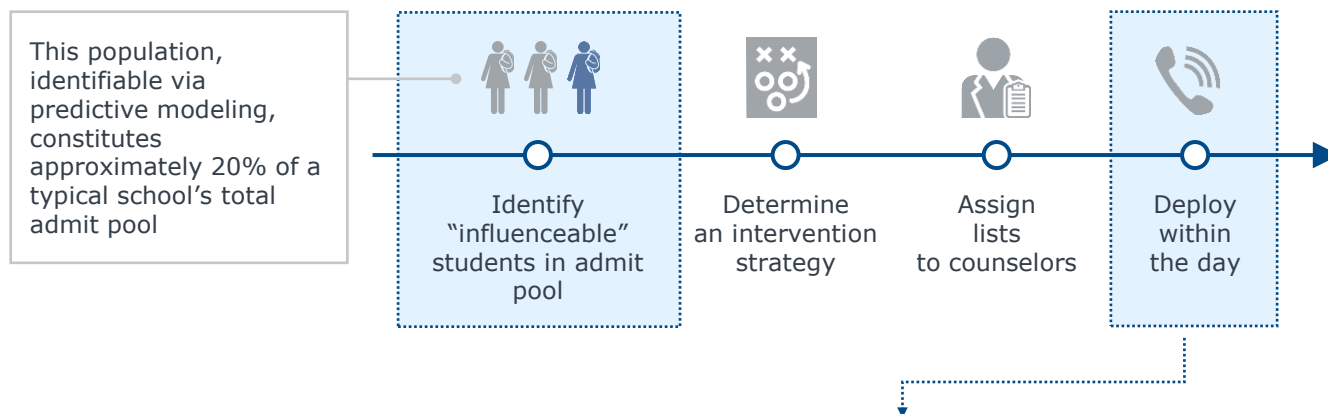
But to make the most of that capability, you'll need to have processes in place that reliably translate insight on students into concrete action by your team.

An action plan

The graphic on the upper portion of this page shows a basic four-step process by which that aim is accomplished, from identifying a subset of "influenceable" students to their assignment to particular counselors to actual deployment of outreach.

As shown below that, triage of this sort enables outreach to this group of students to be both highly customized and intensive—the sort of contact proven to produce higher rates of conversion in the right students but impossible to scale across an entire admit pool.

Creating a Short Path from Descriptive Information to Action



	Communication preferences and interests	Customized communication plan
 Student A	- Email, phone (7–9 p.m.) - Has questions about alumni network - Interest in MBA	Email and call in the evening, emphasizing robust MBA alumni networking events
Student B	- Email, mail - Has questions about flexibility - Interest in nursing degree	Email with information on online format options and evening schedule
Student C	- Email, phone - Has questions about financial aid - Interest in adult bachelor's degree	Phone call and follow-up email explaining student's financial aid package

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Connecting Admitted Students with Your Network of Alumni

Enlisting the community

One of the most impactful things you can do to increase the intensity of your engagement with admitted students is to involve your alumni network in the effort.

Current students a special case

A key constituency in this regard is your currently enrolled students. Not only are they better able to relate to prospective students, but they are also more likely to be perceived as objective (relative to, say, admission counselors or administrators). Furthermore, their large numbers represent a big potential supplement to your own team's bandwidth.

One way of getting your alumni network involved is to have them serve as mentors to admitted and committed students.

There's lots to like about peer mentoring ...

Insight

Peers have a deeper intuitive understanding of admitted students than you do and also possess knowledge about the campus experience that you do not

Trust

Admitted students are more likely to regard information from their peers as honest and impartial, compared to that coming from your school's officialdom

Capacity

Increasing mentoring capacity is easier than creating new admission-counselor capacity and therefore holds greater potential for engaging more students

... but formidable obstacles can stand in the way of its adoption

Expertise

Design and execution of effective mentoring programs depends on a specialized knowledge base and learning gained from experience

Bandwidth

Managing mentoring programs can require more capacity than some admission teams can spare

Recruitment

Some alumnus will have limited interest in serving as mentors; others will feel they are too busy to do so

Quality control

Mentors need to have knowledge of requisite mentoring best practices, need to be capable of following them, and must be motivated to do so

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Imperative 3: **Make Personalization** **a Priority**

AI Chatbots—the Ultimate in Scalable Personalization?

A chatbot revolution

Personalized interaction with admitted students hinges on understanding what they want to know and getting them that information with a minimum of fuss.

Generative AI has been revolutionary in this respect, bringing high-quality chatbots, formerly an expensive niche technology, within easy reach of every institution. Furthermore, unlike many other enrollment-related [use cases for AI](#), chatbots have an established track record in higher ed, as the case study on this page demonstrates.

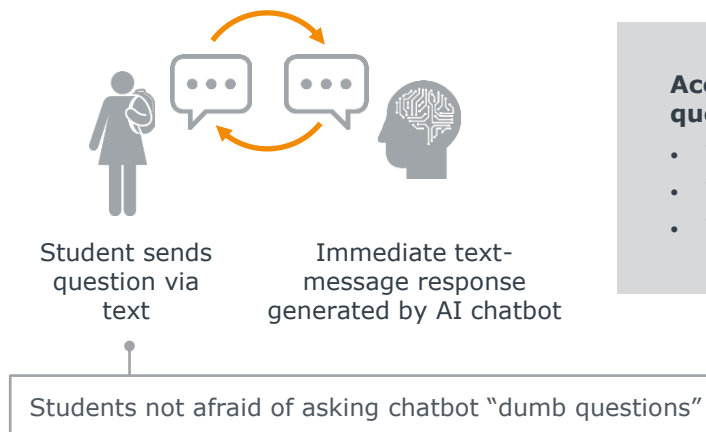
Specialization on the horizon?

An exciting frontier for chatbots in the admission context is the possibility of their being specialized to specific use cases, including yield and melt management.

While all-purpose chatbots—the sort trained on the full spectrum of information on your school that might be of interest to students—do a good job of serving students at all funnel stages, it is reasonable to suppose that chatbots trained specifically on interactions with admitted and committed students could reach unprecedented levels of efficacy.

AI Chatbots Are Not New to Higher Ed

Georgia State's "Pounce" Chatbot Has Been Active for Years



Accommodating the enormous variety of questions admitted students ask

- "When will I get my scholarship package?"
- "Should I enroll in summer school?"
- "Can I transfer prior graduate credits?"

Demonstrated Effectiveness

135K

Text messages sent across four months

50K

Queries received from students

0.9%

of queries required human intervention

94%

of students recommend the system

Significant admissions-team capacity freed up



Associated EAB offering: [EAB Chat Agent](#)

Sources: "How Georgia State University supports every student with personalized text messaging," blog.admithub.com/case-study-how-admithub-is-freezing-summer-melt-at-georgia-state-university; EAB research and analysis.

Personalization Comes to the Virtual Tour

A digital supplement

One growing concern among enrollment leaders is an ongoing drop in the percentage of admitted students making campus visits—a category of activity widely understood to be pivotal for converting students.

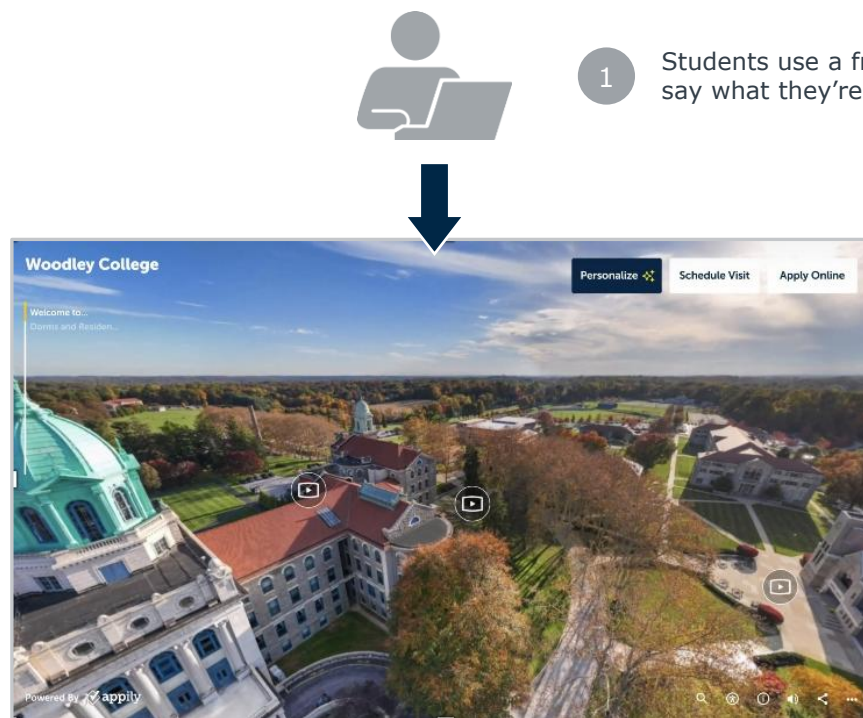
This trend has been accompanied by growing interest among admission teams in virtual campus tours, which, while not a substitute for in-person visits, provide many of the same benefits, in addition to other advantages unique to the virtual approach.

Growing sophistication

Increased use of virtual tours is also attributable to growth in sophistication of the technology itself, including the layering of different media within a single tour experience (video, immersive interactive panoramic photos, etc.) and advanced narrative techniques used to structure the tour experience.

The latest innovation to come to virtual tours is AI-based personalization, as described at right. EAB's own implementation of this approach has found it to significantly boost tour performance.

AI Enables a Customized Virtual Campus Tour Experience for Every Student



1 Students use a free-form text box to say what they're most interested in

2 Via its natural-language processing capabilities, generative AI converts a student prompt into a personalized virtual tour itinerary

43%

of visitors used the free-form text option to customize their tours

+9%

Increase in time on tour associated with customized itineraries



Associated EAB offering: [Virtual Tour](#)

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Imperative 4: **Commit to Communications-** **Infrastructure Excellence**

Hardwiring Cost-Benefit Messaging in Interpersonal Interactions

Human infrastructure

While the preceding pages focused primarily on digital infrastructure, it is important to keep in mind the human infrastructure involved in optimal communication with students.

Interactions with members of your campus community arguably have a greater impact than any other single factor on students' attitudes toward your institution and to college-going more generally. That being the case, you'll not want to leave the success of those interactions to chance.

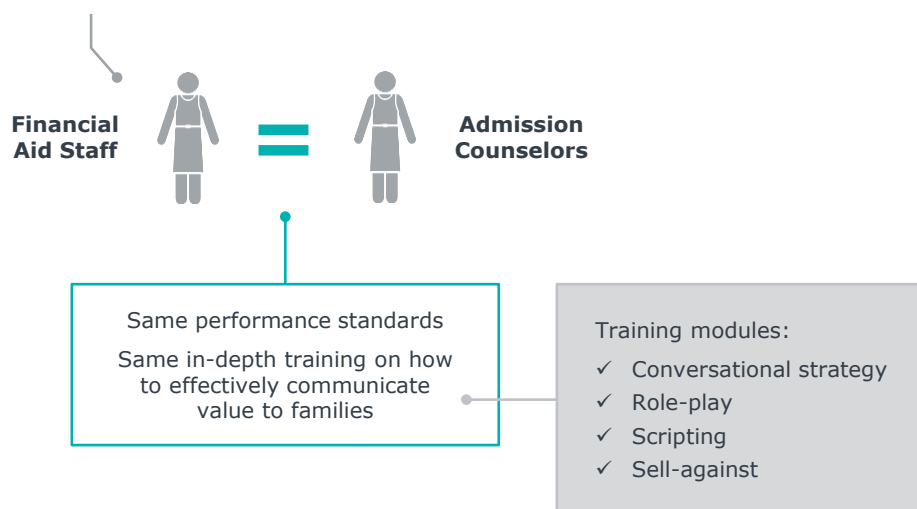
Upskilled financial aid staff

One especially important category of communications that members of your organization have with admitted and committed students is conversations that touch on cost.

This page shows one example of how to ensure that those conversations reassure students and their key influencers, like partners and employers, rather than scaring them off. As indicated, it is based on training financial aid staff to also foreground your institution's unique value proposition in any discussions of cost, payment, etc.

Financial Aid Staff and Admission Counselors Trained to Same Level on Value Communications

Not often hired or trained with an eye to sales-type skills, and therefore not typically equipped for the challenging and complex work of convincing families that the benefits of an education from your institution more than justify the cost of attendance



Note that the dynamic illustrated on this page cuts both ways. Financial aid staff should be able to describe your school's value proposition to families in a compelling way; by the same token, your counselors should be able to speak with confidence to the fundamentals of cost, debt, and financial aid.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Students Overwhelmed with Uncoordinated Communications

Worse than you think?

Most enrollment leaders have a general sense that their committed students are getting a lot of outreach from different departments within their institutions. Fewer have a detailed understanding of what that looks like from the student's perspective and just how problematic the full set of resulting communications can be if not managed carefully.

An adult learner's perspective

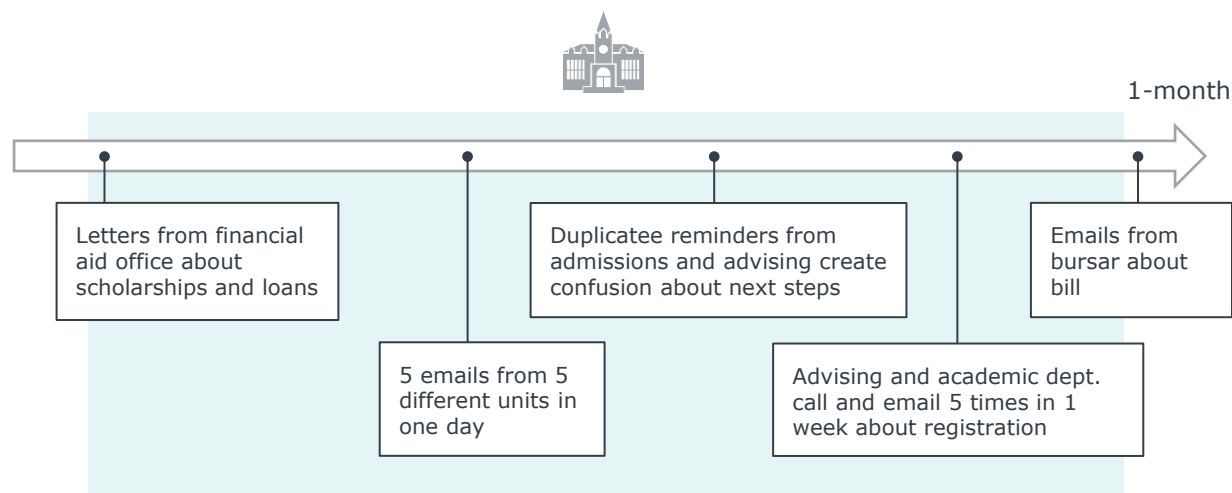
Shown at right, by way of example, are findings from just such an audit undertaken by a school we're referring to as Calatrava University.

As indicated, Calatrava found that students on track to enroll at the school received more than 300 communications from various university departments in just one month.

In addition to uncovering an excessive volume of messages, the audit also found that lack of coordination between senders had resulted in duplicative, contradictory, and otherwise confusing communications going out to students.

Calatrava University¹: A Case in Point

Uncoordinated Communications Originating in Various University Departments Confuse Prospective Students



328

Touchpoints



- ⊗ Volume of contact is excessive
- ⊗ Sequence does not align with enrollment process
- ⊗ Timing is not coordinated
- ⊗ Content is contradictory
- ⊗ Message importance does not match contact intensity

1) A pseudonym.

Cross-Functional Coordination Creates a Clearer Path to Start

Coming together

The audit described on the preceding page was part of a larger effort Calatrava University undertook to make sure its post-admit communications with adult learners were working as intended. The material at right shows other important steps involved in the process.

As indicated, a team of stakeholders representing all university departments communicating with students was formed, the audit was undertaken, and the full set of messages was evaluated for conflicts, redundancies, etc. A revised communication flow was then created, which, among other things, reduced the number of messages sent to students by 66%.

Accommodating stakeholders

Additional steps, not shown here, can be taken to help ensure full cooperation of stakeholders—for example, having the admission team take on tasks associated with drafting and sending messages for other departments, including copywriting and graphic design work.

Four Steps to Coordinated Communications

Calatrava University's¹ VPEM Spearheads Creation of a Comprehensive Plan

1



Team assembled

Calatrava's VPEM brought together representatives from all departments reaching out to students in the post-admit phase

Departments represented included enrollment, student affairs, and academic colleges

2



Communications audit performed

All communications scheduled with students from September through August were gathered and reviewed

Communications considered included emails, letters, and telephone calls

3



Communications reduced and refined

Duplicative messages were consolidated, conflicting messages were reconciled, low-importance messages were eliminated

Calatrava reduced the number of communications required by 66%

4



New plan written up and distributed

The team's recommendations were summarized in a cross-silo communication plan

Includes critical step of securing stakeholder approval

1) A pseudonym.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Correct Committee Structure Helps Ensure a Successful Outcome

Preempt pushback

One of the more difficult challenges associated with creating coordinated communication flows is getting stakeholder engagement right. Many departments are understandably reluctant to do anything that they think might inhibit accurate, agile, and responsive communication with students.

Committees count

There are a few steps schools can take to ensure stakeholder cooperation.

One is to build a powerful case for the need for change among senior administrators, who can serve as champions for the effort.

Another, shown at right, is to be thoughtful about how stakeholders are engaged. An intelligently designed committee structure ensures that key stakeholder voices are heard while also minimizing demands on their time. It also helps ensure that the revised communications plan that emerges from the process is as effective as possible.

Committee Structure Used in Cross-Silo Communication Optimization

	Purpose	Composition	Time Required
 Steering Committee	Guides creation of the other two committees, oversees implementation of the integrated plan	Includes representatives from admissions and financial aid; formed by VPEM, led by director of admissions or marketing	6–12 months
 Cross-Functional Communication-Planning Committee*	Conducts communications audit and creates buy-in for integrated communications plan	Includes one individual from each department who communicates directly with students (assistant or associate director level or above)	6 months
 Content Enhancement Committee	Revises and edits communications that emerge from the audit process	Includes a minimum of two people from the marketing or communications department (skilled in copywriting)	3 months

*Departments represented

- Enrollment management (admissions, registrar, financial aid)
- Academic affairs (colleges, advising, support)
- Other offices (marketing, web , CRM operations)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Centralized Start Hub Helps Learners Complete the Right Next Steps

An online matriculation hub

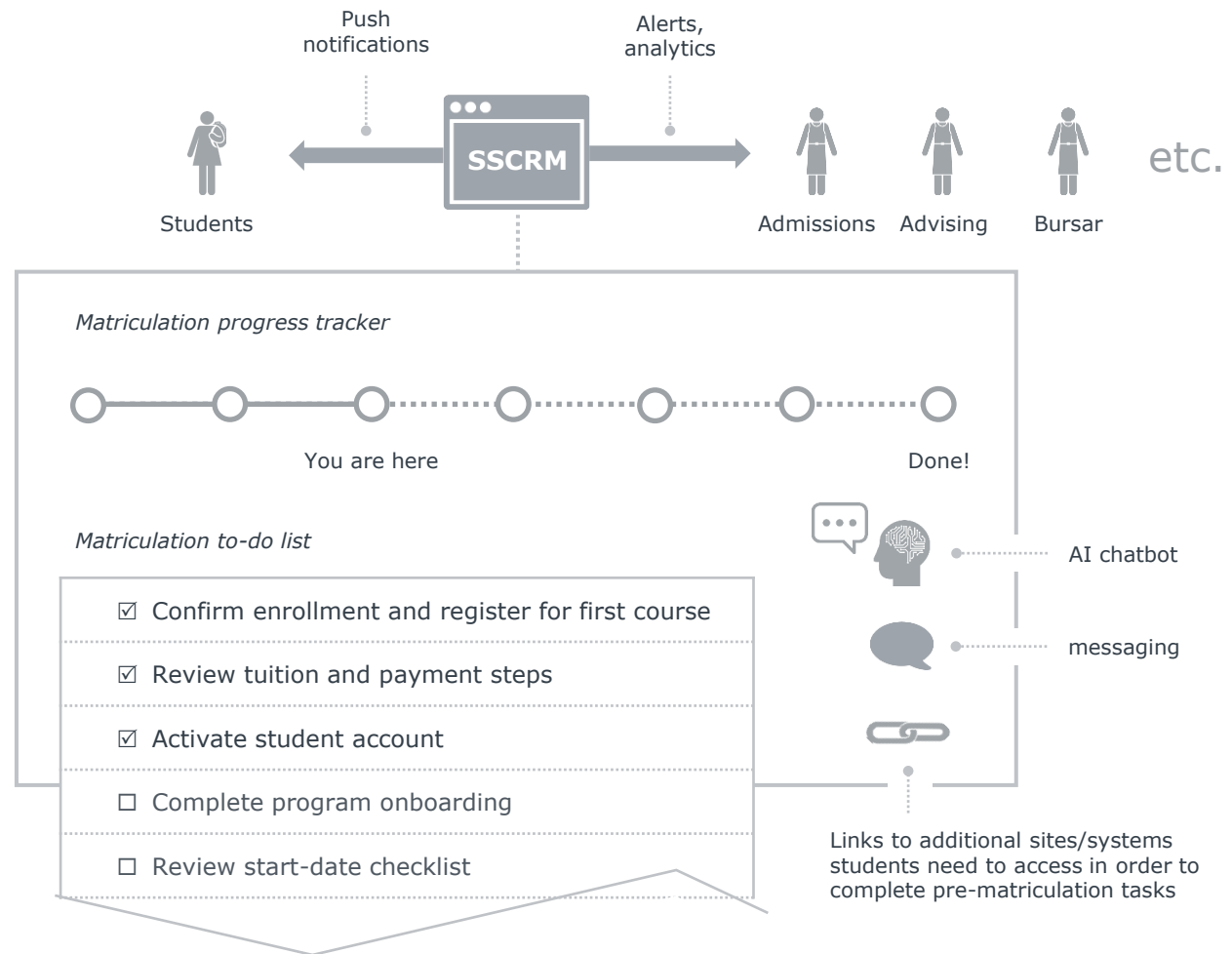
As suggested on the preceding pages, consolidation, streamlining, and centralized oversight of communications with committed students are among the most impactful things you can do to minimize melt.

Some institutions have taken the further step of hosting that activity, together with tracking of student progress on related tasks, within online portals—either purpose-built ones or, more commonly, via extensions of existing CRM systems.

Hosting in the SSCRM

The material at right shows the example of a hypothetical implementation within an institution's student success CRM (SSCRM). One advantage of this approach is that several key university departments and functions, such as academic advising, would already be native users of the system. Another is that it can more easily create a longitudinal student data record spanning the pre- and post-matriculation phases, enabling more robust student analytics.

Sample Implementation: A Melt-Prevention Extension of a Student Success CRM



Associated EAB offering: [Navigate360 Enrollment CRM for Graduate Programs](#)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

An ‘In-Brief’ Compendium of 12 Additional Tactics

Observed in the Field and Worthy of Your Consideration

Cost and value	
1	Aid-award translation Convert aid offers from other schools into a format matching yours, to help students make apples-to-apples comparisons
2	Program-specific outcomes marketing Provide students with career outcomes data by academic program, e.g., average monthly debt payment versus average monthly earnings in first year after graduation
On-campus events	
3	Condensed informational session Replace lengthy podium-and-presenter-based visit-day informational sessions with a shorter (<10-minute), lavishly produced video
4	Strategic campus-visit promenade Reorganize the route that visiting students follow on campus to ensure that the first thing they see is the most impressive and best-loved part of your campus
5	On-demand visit shuttle Use an app or similar means to enable visiting students to request, at will, transportation from one part of your campus to another
6	Unburdened campus experiences Complete tasks that can be done online (e.g., class registration) in advance of a student’s visit to campus, to free up time for in-person networking type activities

Personalization	
7	“Unfakeable” customization Add a paragraph to your admit-offer letter that discusses detail from the student’s application in a way that makes it clear it was not generated via automation
Communications plan	
8	Post-deposit gap communications Create a non-transactional, affinity-building monthly email series that can be initiated as soon as a student commits
9	Paper-based prominence boost Develop a mailer series around key pieces of information you absolutely want students to know
10	First-gen post-deposit comm flow Segment your post-deposit communications by first-gen status, so as to more effectively address these students’ unique needs
Analytics	
11	Pre-matriculant needs survey Survey committed students about their needs, before they enroll; use your findings to develop related programs for future entering classes
12	Retrospective melt analytics Survey students to figure out why they melted; develop dedicated comm flows targeting the most common root causes

Sources: Eric Hoover, The Home Stretch of Student Recruitment; EAB research and analysis.

EAB Adult Learner Recruitment

Outperform the Market at Every Stage of the Funnel



Curate

Expand and diversify your pool of right-fit students



Cultivate

Customized campaigns to drive students to application



Convert

Improve yield and retention to maximize enrollment potential



Strategize

Identify and build market-ready programs for competitive advantage

What Makes Us Different

Unrivaled Mix
of Proprietary
and Known
Lead Sources

Turnkey, Full-Funnel
Conversion
Engine

24/7, Transparent
Access to
Campaign Data
and Full Attribution

Rigorous Testing to Stay
Ahead in a
Dynamic Market

Proven Impact in a Dynamic Landscape

200+

Partner institutions

40+

Years of higher
education expertise

6:1

Average ROI across
multiyear partnership

18%

Average graduate
enrollment growth



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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.