

SURVEY REPORT

Leadership Perspectives on Higher Education Data Strategy

5 Priorities Uncovered in EAB's Data and Analytics Survey of 65 Higher Ed Leaders



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Executive Summary

Data Is More Essential than Ever, but It Remains Difficult to Access and Apply

Today's higher ed leaders recognize the critical role data plays in every facet of operations, but few institutions apply data to its greatest effect. Several obstacles block the way, including understaffing, governance and access issues, and inadequate technology. These roadblocks render data inaccessible, unreliable, and inapplicable, stymying efforts to make progress on crucial imperatives including retention, success, and efficiency.



This fall, EAB surveyed 65 cabinet-level leaders about their analytics priorities and the roadblocks they face. Read on to explore our findings and see actionable suggestions to help you achieve your data and analytics goals.

For information on the survey demographics, visit page 23.

Quick hits from the survey results

Nearly Half

of leaders say staff and faculty do not have easy access to reliable data

1 in 3

schools experienced a failed technology initiative in the past five years

77%

of institutions said an insufficient number of staff members was their largest roadblock to success

This report will explore 5 themes:

- 1. Data is crucial to accomplish fundamental priorities.
- Staffing is a critical need, particularly in technical roles such as Institutional Research and Information Technology.
- 3. Ad hoc analytics backlogs and data access gaps prevent progress on important initiatives.
- 4. Data warehouses, which centralize data in one place, are a high priority but challenging to implement.
- 5. Leaders plan to invest heavily in technology, but these investments come with significant risk.

What are you excited to do with data this year?

Throughout the report, **look for** responses to this open-ended prompt from our survey



Priority 1: Use Data to Improve Enrollment, Retention, and Student Success



Analytics Are Crucial to Institution-Sustaining Work

Data plays an ever-increasing role in higher education decision-making. But which institutional initiatives rely most on data and analytics? The survey results indicate that leaders consider data and analytics critical to the implementation of fundamental, institution-sustaining initiatives, most notably enrollment and student retention.





Priorities with Largest Number of "Important" or "Very Important" responses:

99% Retention 97% Enrollment 91%

Resource Allocation



Retention, enrollment, resource allocation, and academic support are persistent needs, and leaders feel the urgency of applying data to improve their work in these areas. With continued instability in the pandemic's wake, the proliferation of alternative modes of certification, and the encroaching 2025 enrollment cliff, institutions are laser-focused on improving performance in these key priority areas.



TAKEAWAY

Leaders consider analytics crucial to successful efforts in enrollment, retention, resources allocation, and student academic support.

Leaders Plan to Use Data to Improve Student Success

Rate the following data goals by priority at your institution

Chart shows "high priority" responses received for each category

n=65



Across all job titles, school sizes, and school types, "improving student success and equity" was the clear frontrunner for what institutions hope to achieve with data. Leaders understand the vital role data plays in helping students succeed academically, and leaders see that goal as their north star for analytics efforts.

In recent years, data has increasingly played a central role in student support efforts. Predictive modeling technology identifies students who would most benefit from support, and student success management systems facilitate counselor communications and appointment scheduling with those students. Comprehensive historical analyses allow schools to identify which resources, outreach methods, and communication styles work most effectively.

Student success analytics is a key focus area for modern institutions and one that is likely to continue to grow: a 2021 Educause poll found that 72% of respondents said their institutions' investment in student success technologies had increased either "a little" or "a lot" in the prior 12 months.

If leaders see data as vital to student success and other institutional priorities, what prevents leaders from using data to make progress on them? We examine that question in the sections to follow.

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I am excited to:

"Use the data we have to be more proactive in our work with students."

Vice Provost Large public undergraduate institution

TAKEAWAY

Leaders see applying data toward student success and equity efforts as their highest data priority. Student success technology plays a major role in helping institutions improve and expand their support efforts.



Priority 2: Stabilize Campus Data and Analytics Amid Staffing Shortages



Low Staff Capacity and Lack of Training Hinder Progress

Which of the following problems do you currently face?

Respondents could select all applicable options n=65



The pandemic and its ripple effects put stress on every regular decision-making process. Patterns that institutions had followed for years suddenly fell apart. Areas such as course planning experienced a major disruption, requiring a great deal of additional attention and staffing. The urgency for staff is higher, and employment competition from both inside and outside of higher education is intense. With those factors in mind, it is no surprise that institutions see understaffing as a significant challenge.

The natural impulse may be to look at hiring more staff to resolve this issue, but that may not be the most realistic path forward. Understaffing is especially acute now, but it is a long-standing challenge, and more staff may simply not be coming back to higher education after leaving for private industry. When data and analytics initiatives are understaffed, the remaining staff are under greater pressure to complete data requests and share findings. Providing broader, more automated access to trustworthy data can relieve some of this burden, as data consumers who can service their own needs are less reliant on other staff to provide them with information.



Provosts expressed more concern about understaffing than presidents did. This may reflect the fact that the highest positions in an institution are insulated from the direct impacts of understaffing, getting the data they need without seeing the pressure staff go through to deliver it.

Provosts More Likely to See Understaffing as a Roadblock

93% of Provosts 55% of Presidents

📫 TAKEAWAY

Institutions face several barriers to success with analytics, but a lack of sufficient staff capacity is the most common among them. Broadening access to data offsets some of the impact.

> Source: Venit, "The Pandemic Ripple Effect: Four Potential Long-Term Impacts on College Enrollment and Student Success," EAB, 2022; EAB 2022 Data & Analytics Higher Ed Leadership Survey.

Staffing Issues Loom Large on Leaders' Minds

31% 32% 22% 12% knowledge loss due to Inadequate technology Staff training and expertise Less-than-optimal decisions based on untrustworthy data

Which of the following issues do you consider to be the most concerning?

The two most selected responses to the question above relate to staffing: one to the risk of knowledge loss because of turnover, and the other because of a lack of staff training and expertise in analytics. Improved documentation, training, and onboarding procedures can stave off the impact of both problems.

Participants could select only one option

If institutions lack a solid method for storing and retaining institutional knowledge, staff turnover is highly detrimental: any time a seasoned staff member leaves, knowledge they haven't logged goes with them. Strong documentation is a critical step to combat this knowledge loss. Create continuity by recording trainings and logging storage locations, access methods, and data entry protocols. This facilitates knowledge retention and makes onboarding and training more straightforward and effective.

Additionally, centralized, standardized data can relieve the burden of all issues this survey question inquired about. It can retain knowledge during periods of high staff turnover, facilitate staff onboarding, and improve decision-making by establishing a shared source of truth. I am excited to:

"Use data to inform senior leadership decisions."

Vice President Large public undergraduate institution

Staff turnover and training are significant roadblocks, and many leaders also indicate that technology holds them back from making progress on core initiatives. Establishing a clearly defined and documented source of truth via a data warehouse retains institutional knowledge during turnover and lessens training time by facilitating access to trustworthy data.

For additional information on data warehouses, see Section 4.

Turnover in Technical Roles Is Especially Acute

Roles that require technical training (such as positions in Institutional Research and Information Technology) are in high demand and shortening supply. An intensely difficult two years during the height of the pandemic, coupled with tempting out-of-industry offers, drove many IR and IT professionals to explore alternatives. In our survey, the vast majority of higher ed leaders saw staffing in technical roles as a major issue over the course of the last year.

And this isn't happening only in technical roles: a 2021 survey conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources found that 35% of higher ed employees were likely or very likely to seek other employment opportunities in the twelve months following the survey period. That number has increased since 2020, when 24% of higher ed employees responded the same way.

Historically, higher education has not relied as heavily as other industries on professionals with extensive training and experience in analytics. But as business intelligence plays an ever-larger role in critical facets of higher education, the need for technical staff grows more urgent. This urgency comes during a time of shrinking budgets and increased enrollment pressures.

Attracting and retaining staff who have alluring options in private industry is a significant challenge. Institutions must leverage their unique value propositions as employers to recruit and retain technical staff. As we will explore in Section 3, elevating data professionals into roles with more opportunity for strategic input is one method of demonstrating appreciation and value for skilled staff.

One-quarter of respondents said that staffing was not a serious issue. This group consisted mostly of schools with fewer than 5,000 students; every large school (over 15,000 students) said the issue was serious or very serious. This is not a surprising disparity, as larger schools have larger IT and IR offices and more roles to fill. However, it drives home just how significant the staffing crisis is within higher education's technical roles.

Larger Schools More Impacted by Staffing Crisis

Serious or Very Serious:

Not

of schools with more than 15,000 students

schools with Serious: more than 15,000 students



of schools with fewer than 5,000 students

38%

of schools with fewer than 5,000 students

In the past 12 months, how serious a problem has staff turnover been in IT, IR, and other technical roles?



Small public undergraduate institution

TAKEAWAY

The talent crunch has had a significant impact on technical roles such as IR and IT, and the effect is more pronounced at larger schools.

Source: https://www.airweb.org/article/2022/07/22/cupa-hr-2022-higher-education-employee-retention-survey-initial-results, EAB 2022 Data & Analytics Higher Ed Leadership Survey



Priority 3: Close Access Gaps and Engage Data Professionals



Faculty and Staff Are Less Likely to Have Data Access

The first step to applying data toward institutional priorities is to gain reliable access to that data. But who has access to data, and who doesn't?



Faculty/staff/executive leadership on my campus can easily access reliable data. n=65

Our survey results show that leadership generally feels that its data needs are met. At the same time, leaders acknowledge that their level of access does not always extend to the rest of their institutions.

At many institutions, staff and faculty have access to data within their specific area of work but seldom have access to more comprehensive analytics that could provide a more holistic understanding of the question they seek to answer. The results of the survey reflect that notion.

Nearly 90% of leaders at large schools reported that they have easy access to reliable data. With large staffs, bigger schools have the capacity to provide the data their leaders need. Smaller schools reported lower levels of access in every category. Regulated, decentralized, self-service analytics can help smaller schools expand data access despite the reality of having smaller staffs.

TAKEAWAY

Executive leaders have more reliable data access than staff or faculty, and smaller schools struggle more with access. Decentralizing analytics can close these gaps.

Smaller Schools Report Less Data Access than Larger Schools

	Fewer than 5,000 students	More than 15,000 students
Faculty have access	38%	63 %
Staff have access	35%	69%
Leadership has access	56%	87%

Streamlined Data Access Is a High Priority

A plurality of respondents said they plan to place "some focus" on the three priorities we inquired about. Many institutions plan to put "heavy focus" on all three priorities, with "unifying campus data sources" receiving the greatest number of "heavy focus" responses.

Higher ed has notoriously complex data ecosystems, many of which do not communicate with each other or provide access to comprehensible data (such as student information systems and learning management systems). Mismatched codes and varying data entry practices lead to frustration and mistrust in data.



I am excited to:

"Give more people more access and more analytics."

Assistant to the President Small private undergraduate institution

Leaders see streamlined access to data as critically important, as nearly two in three institutions surveyed reported that providing better access to data was a top priority on their campus.

A key step to streamlining data access is to ensure that data is digestible and usable. Analytics falls short when users do not feel they understand and trust the information they consult. Providing dashboards and analytics sandboxes to allow users to explore and learn can increase success and adoption. Institutions can market their data and analytics resources internally with one-pagers and user guides that explain the benefits of available analytics resources.



Leaders understand the need to unify data sources and facilitate data access at their institutions and place high priority on both. Internal awareness campaigns can improve adoption and expand analytics benefits.

Rate the following priorities by how much focus your institution will put on them in the next twelve months:



Rate the priority level of streamlining data access to facilitate decisionmaking at your institution:

n=65



Cabinet's Work with IR Remains Largely Transactional

How does institutional research (or institutional effectiveness) interact with your institution's cabinet?

Participants could choose all applicable options



Leaders understand the important role data plays in achieving their most critical priorities. Even so, survey respondents were significantly more likely to work with IR and/or IE on an ad hoc rather than a strategic basis. Few respondents considered IR/IE as integral to the regular decision-making process, instead consulting IR/IE only for specific questions and reporting needs. As an institution's resident data experts, institutional researchers offer significant insight when brought in directly on decisions. Thus, institutions that do not incorporate IR and IE more closely into their strategic decisions are missing an opportunity to apply data to its fullest extent.

While broadening data access and equipping stakeholders to answer their own questions are important priorities, trained data professionals play a critical role in governing data and conducting deep analysis to inform strategic decisions. However, many institutions underutilize those data professionals, often relegating them to compliance reporting and ad hoc data delivery rather than incorporating their insight into the regular decision-making process.

If institutions are not ready to fully integrate IR or IE into the Cabinet, creating space for IR to listen in on higher-level conversations will help IR integrate strategic priorities into its daily work. There is likely significant hidden overlap between the Cabinet's priorities and the data IR can provide. When IR is made aware of the Cabinet's conversations and initiatives, IR can provide data and insight that the Cabinet may not have thought to ask for.

Learn more: How to Staff Your Analytics Function



I am excited to:

"Partner with the data stewards/custodians to make data visible and actionable to my direct reports—so that they can execute on strategic priorities."

> Vice Provost Large public undergraduate institution

Institutional Research departments play a critical role in delivering the insight leaders need to make decisions. In large part, IR's interaction with leadership is still transactional and ad hoc, rather than strategic and ongoing. Schools should engage data professionals in strategic decisions.



Priority 4: Bring Campus Data Together in One Place



A Slim Minority of Schools Have Centralized Data

Data warehouses enable leaders, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to access and apply reliable data drawn from systems that traditionally make data access and analysis challenging, such as student information systems and learning management systems. Data warehousing establishes a single, centralized source of truth.

When staff, faculty, and leadership don't consult the same data source, they are likely to reach different conclusions or miss opportunities. For example, an academic advisor with access to touchpoints from every stage of the student lifecycle can integrate financial, health, and academic services into their support offerings, while an advisor without that level of access might miss key contributors to an individual student's unique challenges.



Only 9% of respondents described their institutional data as "centralized in a warehouse." An additional 76% said that their institution had some systems integrated but that others remained siloed. This majority likely consists of schools that do not have the capacity and resources to fully integrate data, schools that do not see it as a priority, and schools that have made some progress toward complete integration but that are not there yet. Regardless of the reason, institutions without a fully integrated data warehouse are missing a complete understanding of their data and everything it can do to support their strategic priorities.

Data stewards often feel a sense of ownership over the data they manage and sometimes do not want to relinquish control of the data or grant wider access. In these instances, leaders play a critical role in reframing the data as an institutional rather than a personal asset. Leaders must clarify that the data exists to be used in furtherance of the institution's goals rather than any individual team or department's goals. Centralizing data in a warehouse can foster this collaborative attitude toward analytics. Siloed data is at risk of being seen as "belonging" to a certain department, while centralized data is clearly in the institution's domain.

TAKEAWAY

Most schools have made some progress toward integrating data sources, but very few have fully integrated their data into a centralized warehouse. Leaders play a key role in de-siloing data.

Warehousing Is an Active Effort at Many Institutions

There appears to be a gap between institutions that technically have a data warehouse and those that have implemented a warehouse holistically. In an earlier question, only 9% of respondents described their data as "centralized in a data warehouse," but in response to this prompt, 25% stated that they already have a data warehouse. This suggests that many institutions have a warehouse but have not integrated all data sources on campus.

Institutions sometimes underestimate the time and resources required to build (and maintain) a data warehouse. Standard data definitions, validation, and governance involve a significant effort beyond the initial integration. A data warehouse requires people, processes, and technology to work together perpetually.

Institutions using internal staff to build a warehouse also used external resources at the following rates:

47%

42%

External consultants

External Technology

Often, institutions have a data warehouse (or multiple warehouses) for specific purposes (such as a finance data warehouse) but do not have a campus-wide warehouse. Many institutions do not have the internal staff capacity or direct expertise to fully integrate the wide range of data sources found on a typical college campus.

Roughly half of institutions currently building warehouses partner with external experts to supplement their internal staff. Is your institution building a data repository or warehouse to serve as a "single source of truth"? n=65



Which resources is your institution using to build the data warehouse/repository (select all that apply)?





TAKEAWAY

Even schools with data warehouses may not use them to their fullest extent, and many schools rely on a combination of internal and external resources when building a warehouse.



Priority 5: Invest in Technology Supported by Trustworthy Partners



Technology and Software Investments Will Increase

Over the next 12 months, do you anticipate that your institution will invest more or less in the following priorities (compared to current levels of investment)? n=65



Most leaders plan to invest about the same amount in each priority as in past years. Technology and software upgrades were the only priority to receive a greater number of "more" or "significantly more" responses than "about the same" responses. While investments will range in focus, EAB has observed a few areas of increased attention in recent years.

Institutions received significant stimulus funding in the wake of the pandemic, which equipped schools to make investments in student success technology. At some institutions, these investments were long-sought and overdue, and HEERF or CARES Act funds will improve these efforts. Additionally, some of the planned investment is likely directed toward learning management system upgrades and expansions, as hybrid and online classes necessitate usage of LMS features that may have been underused before.

Many schools report that they plan to move campus systems to the cloud or migrate large systems (such as ERPs, SISs, and other major platforms). These measures require a high up-front investment but often offset long-term costs.

Centralizing data in a warehouse accounts for some portion of planned investment in the year to come. Earlier in this report, nearly one-third of responding institutions reported that they are currently building a data warehouse.



I am excited to:

"Create dashboards for retention and graduation rates that allow us to drill down to the college/department/program level."

Associate Provost Large public undergraduate institution

TAKEAWAY

Expected investment in data and analytics will match or exceed levels from previous years. Technology and software upgrades, particularly in areas such as student success platforms, learning management systems, and data warehouses, will see increased investment.

Choosing the Right Partner Is Key to Mitigating Risk

Nearly a third of respondents stated that in the last five years, their institutions implemented a technology that did not impact key metrics or deliver on its promises.

Investing in new technology is a costly endeavor on multiple fronts. Technology involves a large monetary investment and significant staff time to vet, purchase, and implement. In qualitative terms, a failed technology effort can undermine trust in data and analytics efforts. In that way, choosing which technology to invest in is a high-stakes decision.

Technologies failed for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason selected was that implementation was not a smooth process. If an initiative does not start smoothly, it can fail quickly.

Partnering with a vendor with expertise in higher education can mitigate the risks of technology investments. Knowledgeable vendors understand the industry-wide staffing limitations, decentralization, and historical underinvestment in data and can apply experience to manage those challenges. Demonstrated ROI with other institutions reduces the risk of a vendor overpromising and under-delivering.

In the last five years, has your institution implemented data and analytics technologies that have not had an impact on your key metrics or delivered on their promise? n=63



Why did this technology fail to have an impact?

Participants could select all applicable options





Implementation not as smooth as expected



n=17

"Make better decisions and show progress on KPIs."

CBO Small public undergraduate institution

🗭 TAKEAWAY

Finding the right vendor—one with a reputation for delivering on its promises and with direct experience in higher education—is key to mitigating technology investments risks.

Source: EAB 2022 Data & Analytics Higher Ed Leadership Survey.



Takeaways and Resources



Key Takeaways and Further Resources



Take the Next Step

- See how EAB's partners use Edify to achieve their data and analytics goals
- Assess your institution's performance across 10 key elements of data culture and practice
- <u>Create the structure and staff needed for a modern analytics function</u>
- Learn how to define enterprise data terms at your campus
- Visit EAB on the web to see how we can help your institution achieve its goals in enrollment, student support, advancement, and beyond

What Else Are Leaders Excited to Do with Data?

Survey respondents shared a wide range of additional priorities in the open-text prompt at the end of our survey. Some leaders were excited simply at the prospect of getting access to data, while others had plans to conduct sophisticated analyses in the coming year. These disparate statements reflect the varied progress and priorities leaders have for data and analytics at their institutions.



Research Overview

RESPONDENTS

In Fall 2022, EAB surveyed 65 leaders in cabinet-level positions to gather their thoughts about the present and future of data and analytics on their campuses.

SURVEY RESPONDENT PROFILE

Job Title	Total
Provost	16
President	12
Vice President	12
Other (Deputy Provost, Enrollment Manager, etc.)	9
СВО	8
Vice Provost	5
CIO or Chief Data Officer	3

Institution Type	Total
Private, primarily granting bachelor's degrees	33
Public, primarily granting bachelor's degrees	24
Public, primarily granting associate degrees	2
Other	6

Enrollment	Total
Fewer than 5,000 students	34
More than 15,000 students	16
5,000-15,000 students	15

IR Department Size	Total
2–3 FTEs	22
4+ FTEs	20
1 FTE	15
No FTEs	8

Edify: a Data and Analytics Solution for Higher Ed

Get Insight into Your Most Critical Priorities

Today's complex decisions require increasingly nuanced data and analysis. Mounting pressures highlight the need for data and technology to deliver value and drive change.

But too often, data is stored in disparate systems, and questions pile up faster than you can answer them. How could you accelerate progress on your most important initiatives if your data was ready to answer questions as they arose?



OUR SOLUTION

Edify pairs powerful data warehousing technology with direct-to-user analytics tools in one single solution to activate your data for the decisions that matter.



Higher ed best practice rules and validations to ensure a single source of truth





Support to meet you where you are: your use of Edify can be self-service, or partially or fully managed by EAB

Learn more at eab.com/Edify or email Edify@eab.com.



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