

DRIVING

TOWARD A DEGREE

2021

EQUITY IN ADVISING: PRIORITIZATION AND PRACTICE

RESEARCH BRIEF #4



Bay View Analytics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Driving Toward a Degree is a research collaborative for increasing student success across the higher education landscape. Since 2016, data has been collected and analyzed via longitudinal primary research to understand the state of institutional practices and technology adoption that facilitate holistic student support. The goal is to offer insights to help institutions evolve their student supports and improve overall student success, retention, and completion.

This year's research examines barriers to improving advising in higher education and we are honored to have over 2,800 respondents, representing over 1,300 unique institutions, participating in our survey. Each year, we ask advisors, student support professionals, and administrators about the barriers to improving advising on campus. Where we see cause for concern is that colleges and universities perennially identify the same challenges since 2017.

In this final of four research briefs, we focus on the measurement of attitudes and practices related to equity in the advising community. We acknowledge equity in student success and outcomes is characterized and measured by the complex intersection of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family composition, age, and socioeconomic status, among other demographics. This research is focused on understanding equity only through the lenses of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. We discuss gaps in the equitable rollout of advising practices and include suggestions on how to make progress towards more equitable student experiences.

Key insights:

- By looking at data pertaining to advising technology implementation by percentage of student body that is Pell-eligible and by race / ethnicity, we observe advising technology is purchased and deployed at similar rates by institutions that serve different student populations.
- However, students do not all have equitable access to advising technology nor do students engage with advising technology equitably so there are opportunities to improve student access to advising technology.
- Advisors across all institutions believe representative diversity across support staff and students would be impactful.

INTRODUCTION

Equity and access are tantamount to defining student success in higher education. State and institutional policymakers have created many policies to incentivize improved access to advising technology and in pursuit of equity-minded practices, but how well and how quickly are those practices being implemented? And how does the perception of institutional progress on improving equitable access and outcomes compare to actual implementation?

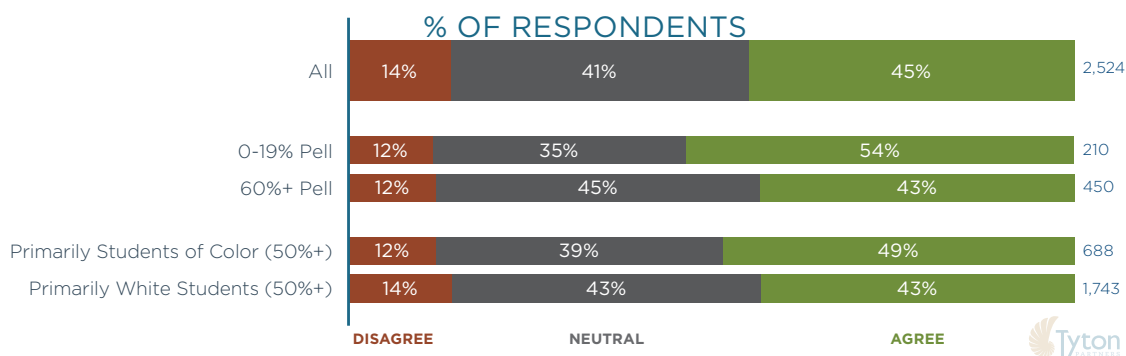
CHARACTERIZING EQUITY IN ADVISING

We cannot understand our progress towards a goal of more equitable access and outcomes in higher education if we cannot measure where we are today in prioritizing and defining equity as a field. In the charts that follow, we track how advisors and administrators believe their institutions prioritize equity within the context of students supports as well as whether prioritization of equity results in culturally sensitive student supports. In each measure, we break down the data by race / ethnicity and by Pell-eligibility of the student body as reported in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

In Figure 1, a plurality of institutions indicate that they agree with the statement: “My institution prioritizes racial and socioeconomic equity in student supports across all levels and departments.” This agreement is true of institutions that serve high and low percentages of students who are Pell-eligible, as well as institutions with a majority population of students of color and those with a majority population of white students. However, the portion of the respondents that felt “neutral” on this statement was very similar in magnitude to the portion of respondents that “agreed.” Additionally, we observe that institutions which serve high portions of Pell-eligible students are more ambivalent about their institution’s prioritization of equity. These results are disheartening because if institutions want to drive towards equitable student outcomes, advisors and other support staff all need to believe that prioritizing equity is important to student success and institutional success.

Figure 1

MY INSTITUTION PRIORITIZES RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC EQUITY IN STUDENTS SUPPORTS ACROSS ALL LEVELS AND DEPARTMENTS*



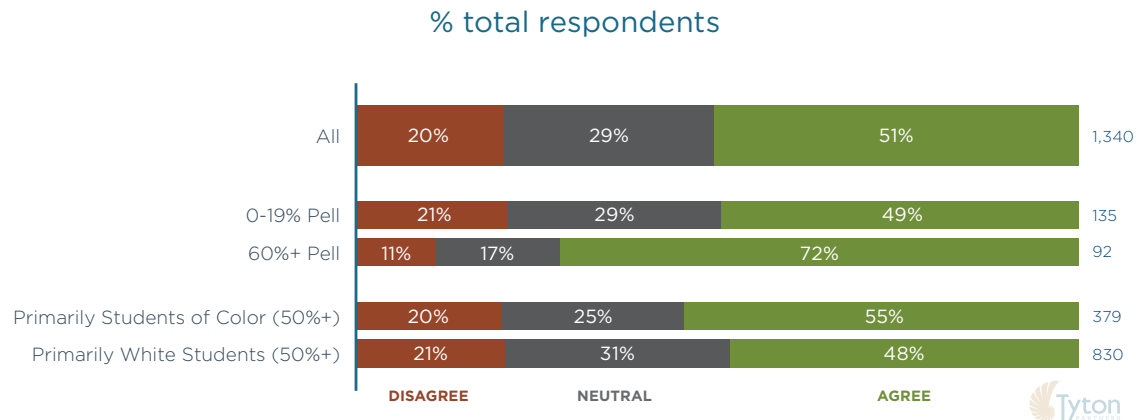
*Survey question: Slider: Racial and socioeconomic equity in student supports is not a strategic priority for my institution – My institution prioritizes racial and socioeconomic equity in students supports across all levels and departments; n in chart

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

In Figure 2 below, we see that institutions that primarily serve high portions of Pell-eligible students and primarily students of color are more likely to agree with the statement: “My institution understands the aspirations and experiences of students and uses that information to design and provide culturally responsive student supports.” These responses are encouraging, but collectively only a slim majority of all respondents believe this to be true.

Figure 2

MY INSTITUTION UNDERSTANDS THE ASPIRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND USES THAT INFORMATION TO DESIGN AND PROVIDE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STUDENT SUPPORTS*




*Survey question: “Please rate your agreement with the following statements: My institution understands the aspirations and experiences of students and uses that information to design and provide culturally responsive student supports
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

INSTITUTIONAL ADOPTION OF ADVISING TECHNOLOGY

From an institutional perspective, scaled adoption of technology in categories related to advising appears equal across segments, with no observable differences in the combination of “at scale” and “implementation in progress” to all students when comparing institutions that primarily serve students of color versus institutions that primarily serve white students, see Figure 3 for details. The similar rates of adoption of advising technologies holds true when comparing institutions that serve students who are 60% Pell-eligible versus institutions which serve student bodies that are less than 20% Pell-eligible, see Figure 4 for details.

Figure 3

ADOPTION OF ADVISING PRODUCT CATEGORIES BY STUDENT RACE / ETHNICITY




	PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT & MANAGEMENT		ACADEMIC PLANNING AND AUDIT		DIAGNOSTICS		ALERTS, SIGNALS, & NOTIFICATIONS		CASELOAD MANAGEMENT		INTEGRATION SOLUTIONS	
	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White	50%+ Students of Color	50%+ White
At scale	8%	8%	28%	25%	17%	13%	21%	22%	32%	31%	25%	18%
Implementation in progress	16%	13%	24%	24%	17%	20%	27%	26%	25%	25%	19%	24%
Planning for implementation	14%	18%	13%	16%	14%	18%	10%	17%	11%	13%	14%	20%
Not systematic	20%	26%	22%	22%	19%	23%	19%	22%	19%	20%	21%	20%
Technology not used	42%	35%	12%	13%	33%	25%	22%	13%	13%	11%	21%	18%

*Survey question: Which of the following primary advising functions does your institution use technology to support?

Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 4

ADOPTION OF ADVISING PRODUCT CATEGORIES BY PELL-ELIGIBILITY



	PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT & MANAGEMENT		ACADEMIC PLANNING AND AUDIT		DIAGNOSTICS		ALERTS, SIGNALS, & NOTIFICATIONS		CASELOAD MANAGEMENT		INTEGRATION SOLUTIONS	
	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell	< 20% Pell	60%+ Pell
At scale	10%	9%	26%	25%	18%	11%	21%	19%	35%	27%	22%	19%
Implementation in progress	14%	21%	21%	27%	12%	20%	14%	34%	19%	29%	19%	26%
Planning for implementation	16%	22%	12%	16%	16%	22%	24%	15%	15%	14%	16%	19%
Not systematic	26%	22%	26%	21%	23%	23%	14%	20%	18%	22%	18%	22%
Technology not used	35%	26%	14%	11%	31%	24%	28%	12%	14%	8%	25%	14%

*Survey question: Which of the following primary advising functions does your institution use technology to support?

Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

While institutions report roughly equal adoption levels of advising technologies, our survey did not investigate whether these are truly comparable technology roll-outs. This work is silent on whether all advisors utilize technology available to them, whether technology solutions are created equal (or purchased in similar configurations), and perhaps most importantly, whether or not all students are able to leverage available technology at equal rates. While Figures 3 and 4 are encouraging, in the next section of the brief we explore students having equitable access to advisors via technology—and with advisors using technology and find that there are troubling barriers to overcome.

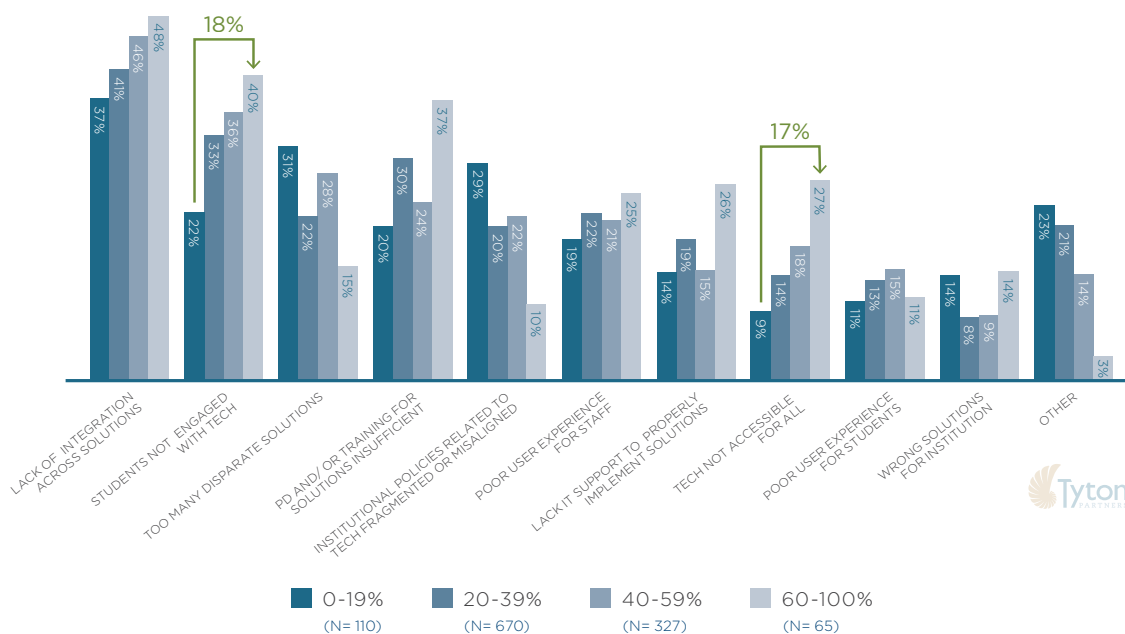
INSTITUTIONS SERVING LOW-INCOME STUDENTS FACE BARRIERS IN ADVISING TECHNOLOGY USE

Students do not have equal access to nor engage with advising technology at similar rates. As highlighted in Figure 5 below:

- Students do not have equitable access to advising technology: there is a 17-percentage point difference of this issue in institutions which serve the highest portions of Pell-eligible students relative to the lowest portions of Pell-eligible students.
- Student engagement with advising technology is not the same across institutions. There is an 18-percentage point difference of this issue in institutions which serve the highest portions of Pell-eligible students relative to the lowest portions.

Figure 5

TOP BARRIERS FOR ADVISING TECHNOLOGY*, BY PERCENT PELL-ELIGIBLE



*Survey question: What are the top three barriers for advising technology used at your institution?

Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

EDUCAUSE has done extensive research in the area of student device access and ownership¹ and our research supports their conclusions that technology device access or ownership are key to student success. Beyond computer access, internet access is also a key piece of learning infrastructure needed for education and the digital divide intersects with equipment deficits to cause barriers for students.

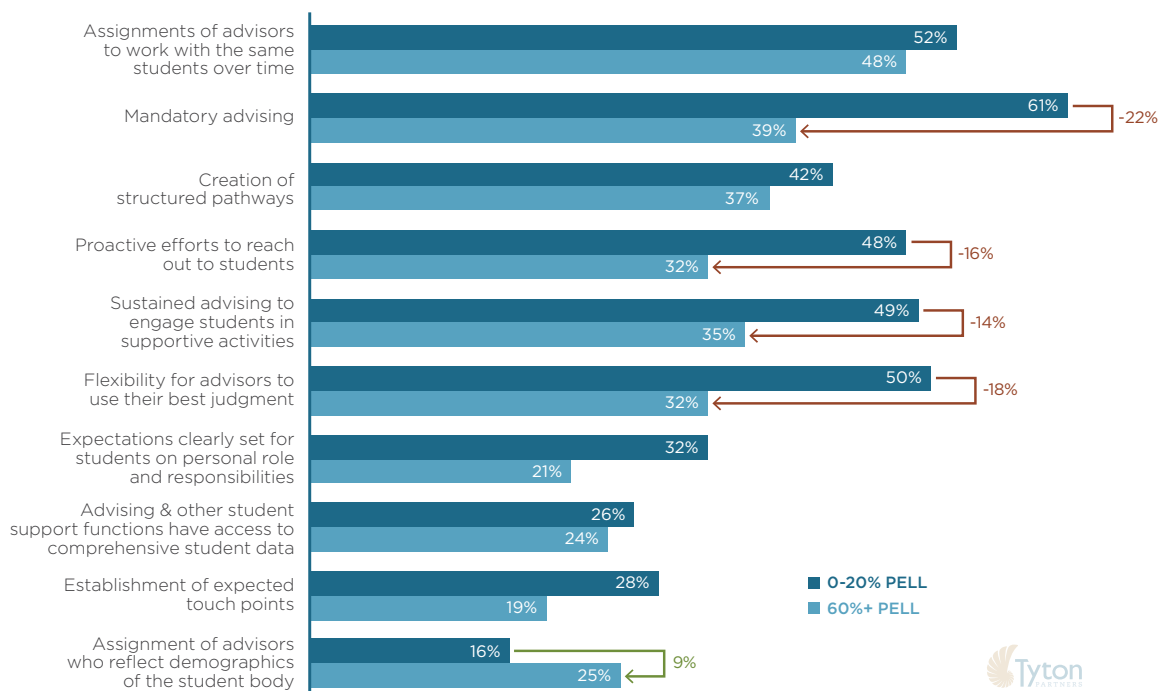
1. <https://www.educause.edu/ecar/research-publications/ecar-study-of-community-college-students-and-information-technology/2019/device-access-ownership-and-importance>

EVIDENCE OF INEQUITY IN SSIPP ADVISING PRACTICES

Given the barriers to advising technology access and utilization by students, it is not surprising that the implementation of advising practices is not equitable when viewed from the student perspective, even when institutions adopt advising technology at similar rates. We examined scaled implementation of several sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized² (SSIPP) advising practices in the chart below. The largest gap in equitable practices shows up when we examine the data by percentages of the student body that are Pell-eligible. In Figure 6, mandatory advising stands out as a practice far more often deployed at scale at institutions where less than 20% of the student body is Pell-eligible.

Figure 6

ADVISING POLICIES IN PRACTICE* AT SCALE , BY PELL-ELIGIBILITY



*Survey question: What are the top three barriers for advising technology used at your institution?

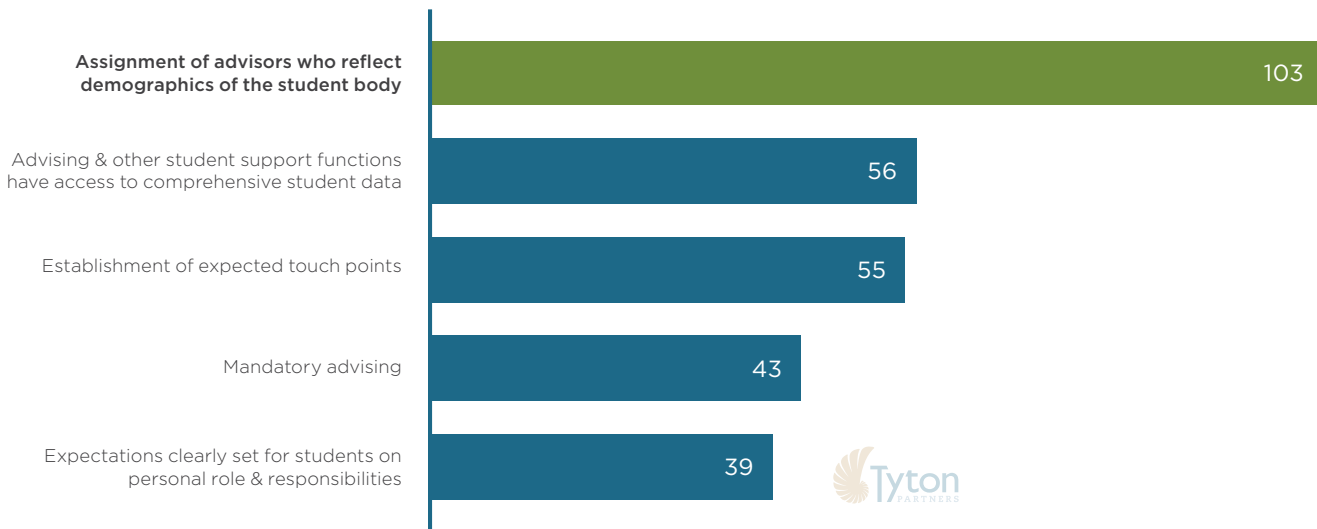
Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

When asked to rank which non-implemented advising practice would be most impactful at their institutions, advisors across all types of institutions cited “assignment of advisors who reflect demographics of the makeup of their student body.” Figure 7 summarizes the other responses to practices that advisors felt would be impactful at their institutions. Regardless of Pell-eligible percentage or race/ethnicity, advisors indicated the belief that representative diversity in student support staff would be impactful.

2. Community College Research Center (CCRC). (2013). *Designing a system for strategic advising*. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/designing-a-system-for-strategic-advising.pdf>

Figure 7

POTENTIALLY IMPACTFUL ADVISING PRACTICES*, BY NUMBER OF TIMES RANKED IN TOP 3



*Survey question: For the advising policies and practices that your institution **has not implemented**, please rank the following, with 1 being the most impactful. N=153

Note: *Only the 5 most-selected responses are shown.

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

CONCLUSION

Designing an advising system that results in equitable outcomes for students should be a priority for all institutions and across all actors within each institution. Roughly 40% of survey respondents indicated neutral feelings on whether their institution prioritizes socioeconomic and racial equity in students supports. Below are some ways student success stakeholders can play a role in furthering equitable outcomes for students:

- Higher education administrators can further elevate equity in the mission of all student support functions.
- Institutional HR leaders can recognize the potential impact that representative diversity in students can have on student success and make a concerted effort to recruit support staff that students can readily identify with.
- Student success centers / IT / library teams need to remove barriers to technology for use by students. Beyond re-opening campuses so student can access computer labs and wifi, laptop loaner programs should be explored.
- Financial aid leadership should be involved in the conversation. Access to internet and equipment are basic needs for students who want to succeed in college and unfortunately most colleges do not factor these costs into the costs of attendance (COA)³. See below for starting the strategic conversation on campus on this topic.

3. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/how-every-college-student-america-can-get-laptop-and-hotspot>

EQUITY IN ACTION:

TACTIC 1:

To reduce barriers in technology use by students, some institutions have experimented with laptop loaner programs and found them to be effective in retaining students, particularly during the pandemic⁴. Some case studies of this practice can be seen at Delaware State University⁵ (through partnership with Apple), Durham Tech⁶ (made possible in part by CARES Act Funding) and at Robeson Community College⁷.

TACTIC 2:

Explore adding technology and internet costs to the formal cost of attendance (COA) at your institution. As defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965, COA is a list of components needed for school and colleges can adjust this figure at any point. COA has important financial implications for students as it represents a limit on grant aid a student can receive as well as factors into how much a student can borrow from the government.

TACTIC 3:

If you are hiring for student support staff, consider your student body demographics and purposefully align your support team to those demographics.

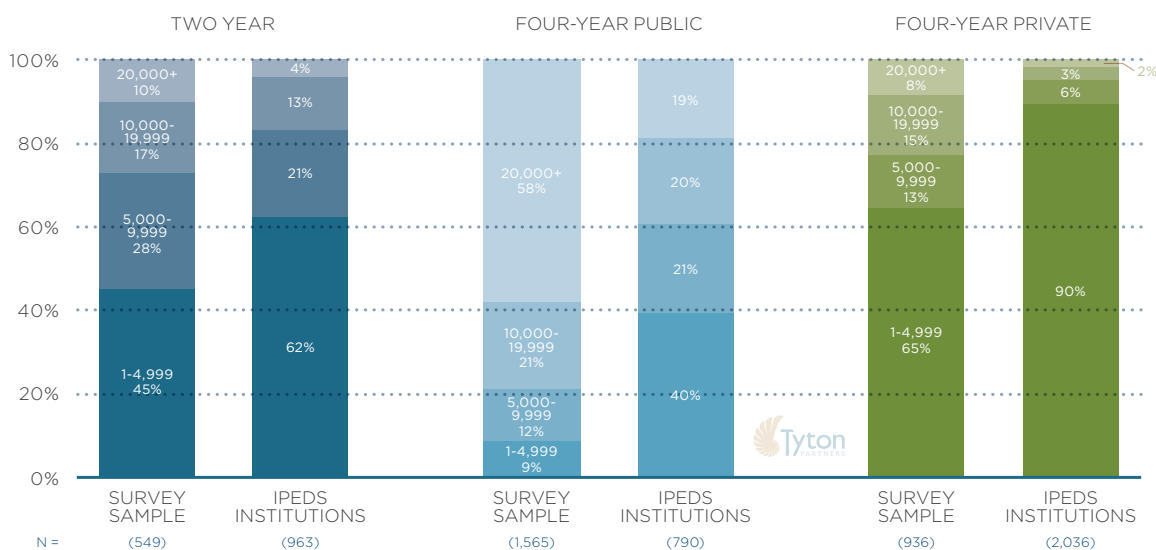
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4. <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/15/902500905/need-a-laptop-colleges-boost-loaner-programs-amid-pandemic>
 5. <https://www.desu.edu/news/2018/09/dsu-gives-ipad-pros-all-freshmen>
 6. <https://www.durhamtech.edu/news/durham-tech-launches-laptop-loaner-program>
 7. <https://www.robeson.edu/loaner-laptop-program>

APPENDIX

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure A1

RESPONDENT DISTRIBUTION BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND SIZE, 2021



Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

METHODOLOGY

Information for this research brief comes from a national survey of higher education administrators and advisors—including faculty. The survey was distributed through the help of the following partners: Achieving the Dream (ATD), NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, Complete College America, EDUCAUSE, and the Reinvention Collaborative. The survey was in the field from February 2 through February 26, 2021.

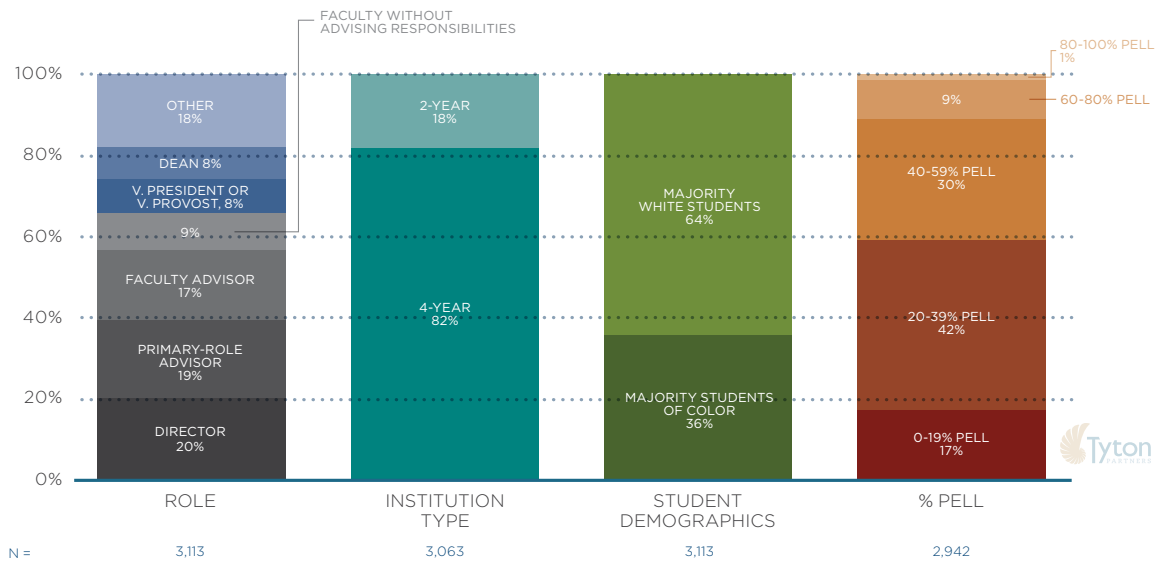
PARTICIPANTS

For the study, 2,894 higher education administrators and advisors representing over 1,300 institutions from across the U.S. higher education landscape participated in the survey. Participant institutional affiliation was matched to the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to retrieve institutional characteristic data, allowing for analyses to be conducted by institutional characteristics such as sector, size, and student demographics.

The largest sectoral representation in the sample comes from public four-year institutions (51%), followed by 31% from private four-year institutions and 18% from two-year institutions. The survey sample is reasonably well-aligned to the national sample by sector and size.

Figure A2

RESPONDENT DISTRIBUTION BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND SIZE, 2021



Note: Other includes: Student affairs professional, Other (Please specify), Provost, Career services professional, Chief Business Officer / Chief Financial Officer, Financial aid professional, Chief Technology/Information Officer (CTO/CIO), Mental health professional

Sources: IPEDS, Driving Toward a Degree 2021, Tyton Partners analysis

MATERIALS

The survey consisted of questions designed for administrators and advisors with roles in the following student supports: academic advising, career services, financial aid and literacy, student life, counseling & psychological services, academic support/ tutoring, and teaching.

PROCEDURES

All data were checked for completeness, missing values, or erroneous codes. All responses entered as 'other' were reviewed to determine if they should also be coded as one of the fixed responses. Data weighting was used to adjust the survey sample size to more accurately represent the national postsecondary education institutions. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, results are presented in aggregate and summary statistics.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Driving Toward a Degree is a data-driven resource designed to help institutions pursue integrated student supports. Since 2016, data has been collected and analyzed via longitudinal primary research studies by Tyton Partners, with the support of the **Bay View Analytics** and in partnership with **NASPA –Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**, **NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising**, **Achieving the Dream** (ATD), **EDUCAUSE**, **Complete College America**, and the **Reinvention Collaborative**. Contact Tyton Partners (drivetodegree@tytonpartners.com) to take advantage of the *Driving Toward a Degree* initiative as a data-driven resource for improved student success through supports redesign. To learn more about our organization, visit tytonpartners.com.

We welcome the opportunity to help institutions and suppliers alike address the gaps in their policies, practices, and technological products, and to assess current capabilities and identify future needs. To learn more and access other research briefs in this series or prior year studies, visit drivetodegree.org.

We also invite you to share this series and your perspective on holistic student supports via the Twitter hashtag [#drivetodegree](https://twitter.com/drivetodegree).

This publication was created with feedback from the **Advising Success Network** (ASN). ASN is a dynamic network of five organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and students from low-income backgrounds. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices to advance a more equitable student experience to achieve our vision of a higher education landscape that has eliminated race and income as predictors of student success. The ASN is coordinated by **NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**, and includes **Achieving the Dream**, the **American Association of State Colleges and Universities**, **EDUCAUSE**, **NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising**, and the **National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition**.

Driving toward a Degree and the Advising Success Network are made possible thanks to generous support from the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**.

ABOUT TYTON PARTNERS

Tyton Partners is the leading provider of investment banking and strategy consulting services to the education sector and leverages its deep transactional and advisory experience to support a range of clients, including companies, foundations, institutions, and investors.

In higher education, Tyton Partners' consulting practice offers a unique spectrum of services to support institutions, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and companies in developing and implementing strategies for revenue diversification and growth, student persistence and success, and innovations in teaching and learning.

In September 2020, Tyton Partners launched the Center for Higher Education Transformation. Building on 10+ years of experience, scores of engagements in higher education, and hands-on executive experience, the Center offers advisory services for institutions seeking transformational impact. Tyton's advisory offerings enable mergers and affiliations, revenue growth and diversification, transformative partnerships and creative capital access for all types and sizes of institutions.

For more information about Tyton Partners, visit tytonpartners.com or follow us at [@TytonPartners](https://twitter.com/TytonPartners).

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