DRIVING
TOWARD A DEGREE
2019

THE EVOLUTION OF PLANNING AND ADVISING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PART 1:
INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Tyton PARTNERS

BABSON Survey Research Group

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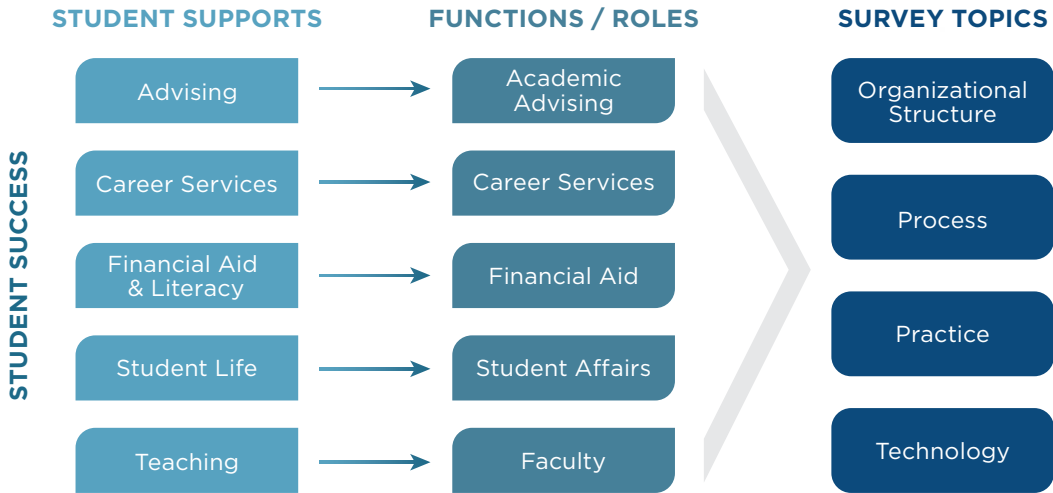
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colleges and universities across the United States are grappling with unprecedented and multifaceted pressures. On one side, the postsecondary system is working to serve an increasingly diverse student population. While great strides have been made over the last several decades to increase access to higher education, institutions of all types are having to evolve to ensure that access is paired with degree completion or a career outcome, particularly for the non-traditional student population. These pressures have profound and positive implications for our society and economy. On the other side, another pressure is far less promising: institutions are facing declining funding and revenue streams, while working to keep higher education as affordable as possible. Responding to these pressures presents a series of difficult trade-offs, leaving institutions little room for error. These new pressures and challenges have sparked a number of promising innovations and improvement initiatives. This year, we turn our attention to the growing movement toward integrated and holistic student supports.

Driving Toward a Degree is a data-driven resource used to measure the extent and impact of various institutional structures, processes, practices, and technologies related to student success. Student success is actualized by institutions through student supports, which are defined as products and services used to promote students' educational, personal, and professional development by targeting both academic and non-academic barriers to achievement.

These student supports include academic advising, teaching, career services, financial aid & literacy, and student life. *Driving Toward a Degree* surveys a national sample of key stakeholders in functions related to student supports across a range of institutions. Stakeholders include a mix of administrators, advisors, and faculty from the following functional areas: academic advising, faculty, career services, financial aid, and student affairs.

Driving Toward a Degree is part of a research collaborative for increasing student success through the redesign of student supports. It is led by Tyton Partners with the support of the Babson Survey Research Group and in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD), NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

Figure 1.1

STUDENT SUPPORTS	FUNCTIONS / ROLES	SURVEY TOPICS
Advising	Academic Advising	Organizational Structure
Career Services	Career Services	Process
Financial Aid & Literacy	Financial Aid	Practice
Student Life	Student Affairs	Technology
Teaching	Faculty	

STUDENT SUCCESS

Similar to our previous three publications between 2015 and 2017,[1] *Driving Toward a Degree: The Evolution of Student Supports in Higher Education* is a two-part series tracking the progress of student supports redesign from institutional and supplier perspectives in support of improved student outcomes. The goal is to offer insights to help institutions make informed decisions toward redesigning their student supports to improve overall student success, retention, and completion.

PART 1: INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Drawing from the largest national study on student success, with insights from 3,300 institutional stakeholders across 1,100 unique institutions, Part 1 measures the extent and impact of various student success practices, products, and services related to undergraduate student supports. Respondents and institutions are representative samples of higher education across the United States by role, responsibility, and seniority for respondents and by size, type, and selectivity for institutions. See Appendix Exhibits A and B for demographic details.

Part 1 also introduces readers to contextually relevant benchmarks, allowing institutions to gauge their progress and identify which barriers prevent them from making progress. Institutions of all types are in various stages of progress toward integrated and holistic student supports; we offer three key themes about the current state of this movement:

1. **Increasing numbers of institutions are aiming to achieve integration across supports to serve the whole student.** However, limited direct engagement and limited regular coordination between stakeholders remain major obstacles to achieving an integrated student experience.

2. **Institutions with integrated student supports, through clear lines of responsibility and strong communications channels between stakeholders, as a whole, demonstrate higher rates of retention and completion.** Underlying these improved outcomes are a number of factors related to institutional structures, processes, practices, and technologies. A brief list of examples includes integration of advising technology into a single product from one company, smaller caseload sizes for advisors, and tangible evidence of more direct engagement and regular coordination between student supports stakeholders.

3. **Reported adoption of guided (i.e., degree) pathways by institutions is increasing – by an average of 9% across all types of institutions since 2017.** However, retention and completion rates for institutions reporting guided pathways adoption are the same or lower than those reporting no guided pathways adoption. While guided pathways adoption is at varying degrees of maturity and implementation, models are quite diverse, and our analysis suggests that underlying this dynamic is a lack of integration at guided pathways institutions. These institutions are no more integrated than institutions that have not adopted guided pathways.

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1. Please visit ***http://drivetodegree.org***.

PART 2: SUPPLIER LANDSCAPE

Part 2 (available for download at *drivetodegree.org*) similarly draws from the student success study, as well as from interviews with over 30 institutional decision-makers and product and services suppliers in student success. Part 2 allows readers to gain insight into the present state of integrated student supports technologies across metrics related to market segmentation, market reach, product adoption, and product integration, and to look toward future evolution in the product landscape.

PART 1: INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

ON THE RADAR

In the past, siloed student supports were the standard, while holistic student supports were merely a blip on the higher education radar. Today, increasing numbers of institutions are aiming to achieve integration across supports to serve the whole student. We zeroed in on how institutions are approaching the opportunities and challenges of serving students more holistically.

Institutions reporting integration across student supports have two main characteristics in common:
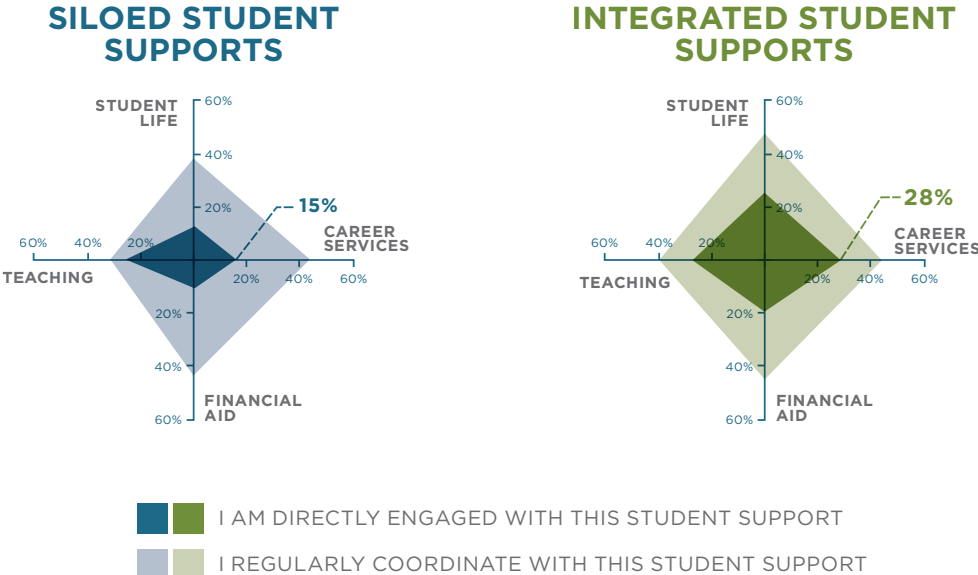
1. Clear lines of responsibility over student supports

2. Strong communication channels between institutional stakeholders

However, no matter how clear these lines of responsibility or how strong the communication channels, functional silos persist. Limited direct engagement and regular coordination between stakeholders remain obstacles to achieving an integrated student experience.

We chose academic advising as the lens through which to view direct engagement and regular coordination because we believe advising most often exists at the crossroads of student supports. For both siloed and integrated institutions, levels of regular coordination across student supports are relatively similar. Where the differences lie are in the levels of direct engagement: integrated institutions have rates of direct engagement nearly two times greater than their siloed counterparts. For example, 28% of academic advisors at integrated institutions report direct engagement with career services, compared to 15% of academic advisors at institutions with siloed student supports (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS

SILOED STUDENT SUPPORTS — STUDENT LIFE, CAREER SERVICES (15%), TEACHING, FINANCIAL AID

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS — STUDENT LIFE, CAREER SERVICES (28%), TEACHING, FINANCIAL AID

- ■ I AM DIRECTLY ENGAGED WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT
- ■ I REGULARLY COORDINATE WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT

In an ideal scenario of robust coordination and engagement, the light green and light blue portions would cover large swaths of the radar charts. However, the current coverage indicates that more coordination and engagement are required to achieve holistic student supports.

CLUSTERS OF COLLABORATION

Based on survey responses, we grouped institutions into three distinct clusters according to sentiments regarding clear lines of responsibility over student supports, strong communication channels between institutional stakeholders, and integration of student supports (Figure 1.3).
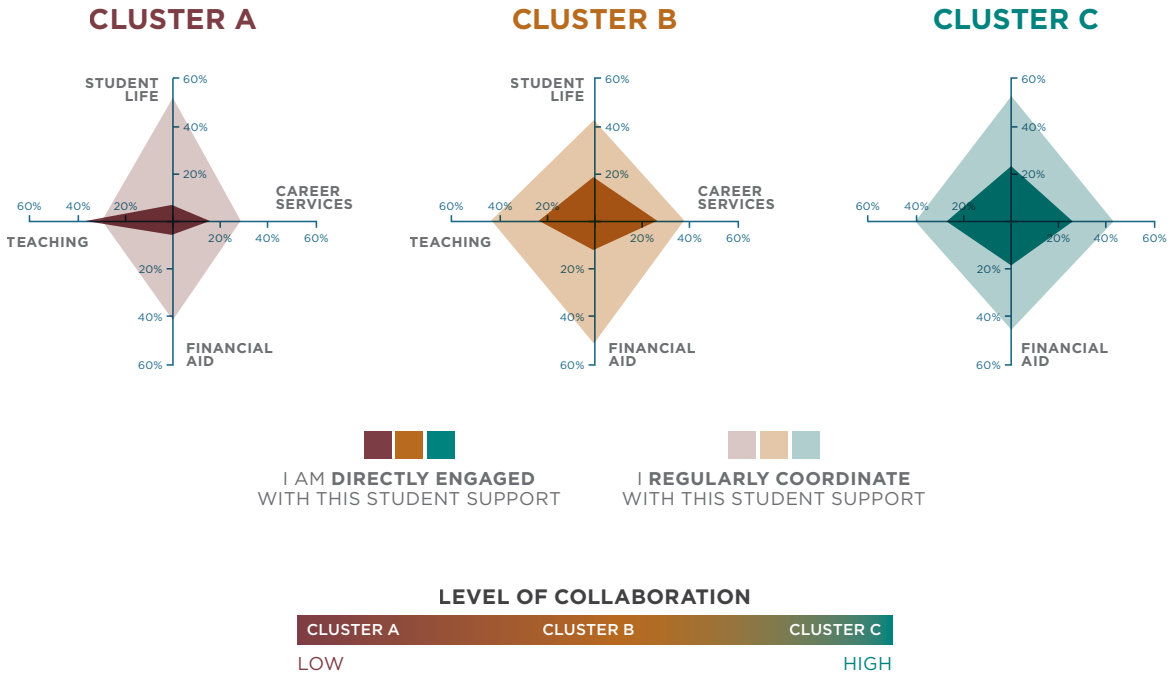
Figure 1.3
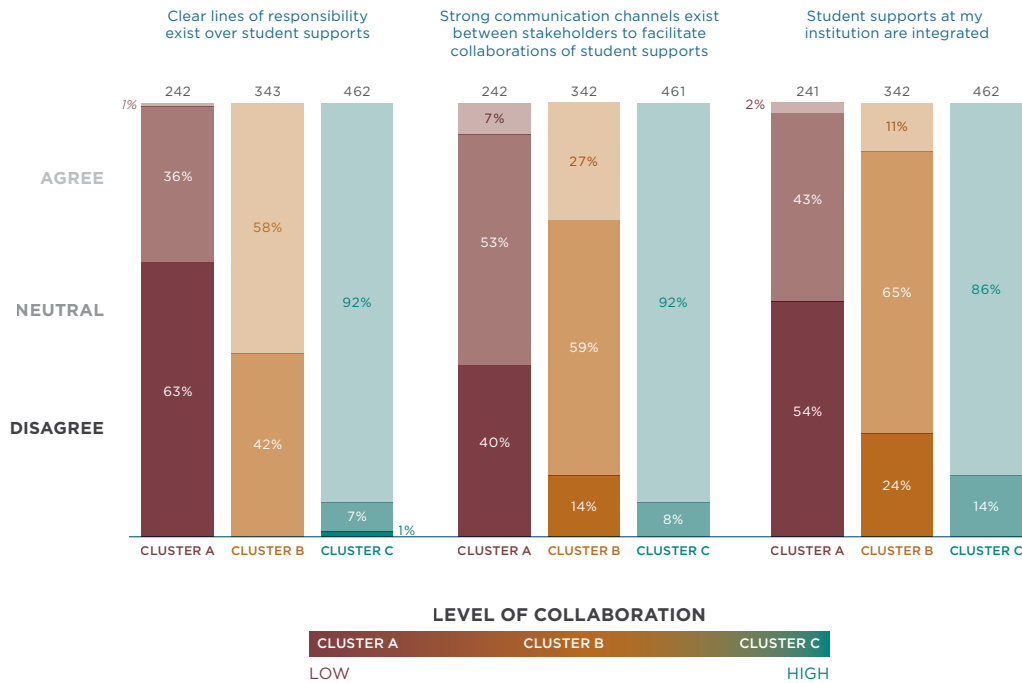
Clearly, Cluster C demonstrates the highest levels of collaboration (i.e., clear lines of responsibility, strong communication channels, and integrated student supports). Cluster C institutions are not meaningfully different from the other institutions on the basis of size, type, and selectivity (see Appendix Exhibits C and D), although they educate slightly more Pell-eligible students than Cluster A institutions (Figure 1.3).

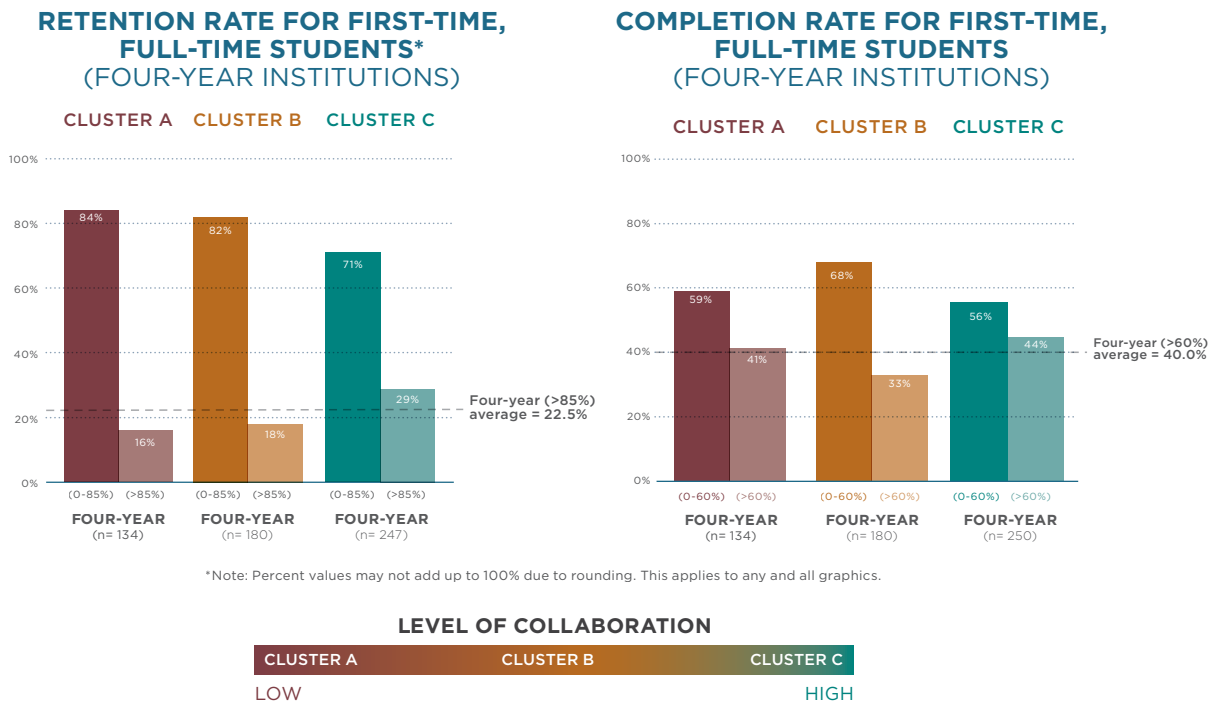So what are Cluster C institutions doing differently? As shown in the figure below, direct engagement and regular coordination between academic advising and other supports stakeholders underlie an integrated student supports experience. Cluster C has considerably more direct engagement by academic advisors and slightly more regular coordination across supports than Clusters A and B (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4

CLUSTER A

CLUSTER B

CLUSTER C

I AM **DIRECTLY ENGAGED**
WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT

I **REGULARLY COORDINATE**
WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION

| CLUSTER A	CLUSTER B	CLUSTER C
LOW		HIGH

While the sentiments regarding engagement and coordination are significant, even more consequential are the most common and quantifiable metrics of student success – retention and completion rates. Based on the most recent IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) data, four-year institutions in Cluster C report higher rates of retention and completion for first-time, full-time students than four-year institutions in Cluster A or B (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5

RETENTION RATE FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME STUDENTS*
(FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)

CLUSTER A   CLUSTER B   CLUSTER C

- 84%
- 16%
- 82%
- 18%
- 71%
- 29%

Four-year (>85%) average = 22.5%

FOUR-YEAR (n= 134)	FOUR-YEAR (n= 180)	FOUR-YEAR (n= 247)
(0-85%) (>85%)	(0-85%) (>85%)	(0-85%) (>85%)

COMPLETION RATE FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME STUDENTS
(FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)

CLUSTER A   CLUSTER B   CLUSTER C

- 59%
- 41%
- 68%
- 33%
- 56%
- 44%

Four-year (>60%) average = 40.0%

FOUR-YEAR (n= 134)	FOUR-YEAR (n= 180)	FOUR-YEAR (n= 250)
(0-60%) (>60%)	(0-60%) (>60%)	(0-60%) (>60%)

*Note: Percent values may not add up to 100% due to rounding. This applies to any and all graphics.

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION

CLUSTER A	CLUSTER B	CLUSTER C
LOW		HIGH

Across two-year institutions, the results are less definitive, but still point toward higher rates of retention and completion through increased collaboration. Two-year institutions in Clusters A and C report similar rates of retention for first-time, full-time students, but two-year institutions in Cluster A report the lowest completion rates. Cluster B's two-year institutions report lower retention rates than Clusters A and C, but slightly higher completion rates than Cluster C's two-year institutions (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6

RETENTION RATE FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME STUDENTS
(TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)

COMPLETION RATE FOR FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME STUDENTS
(TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)
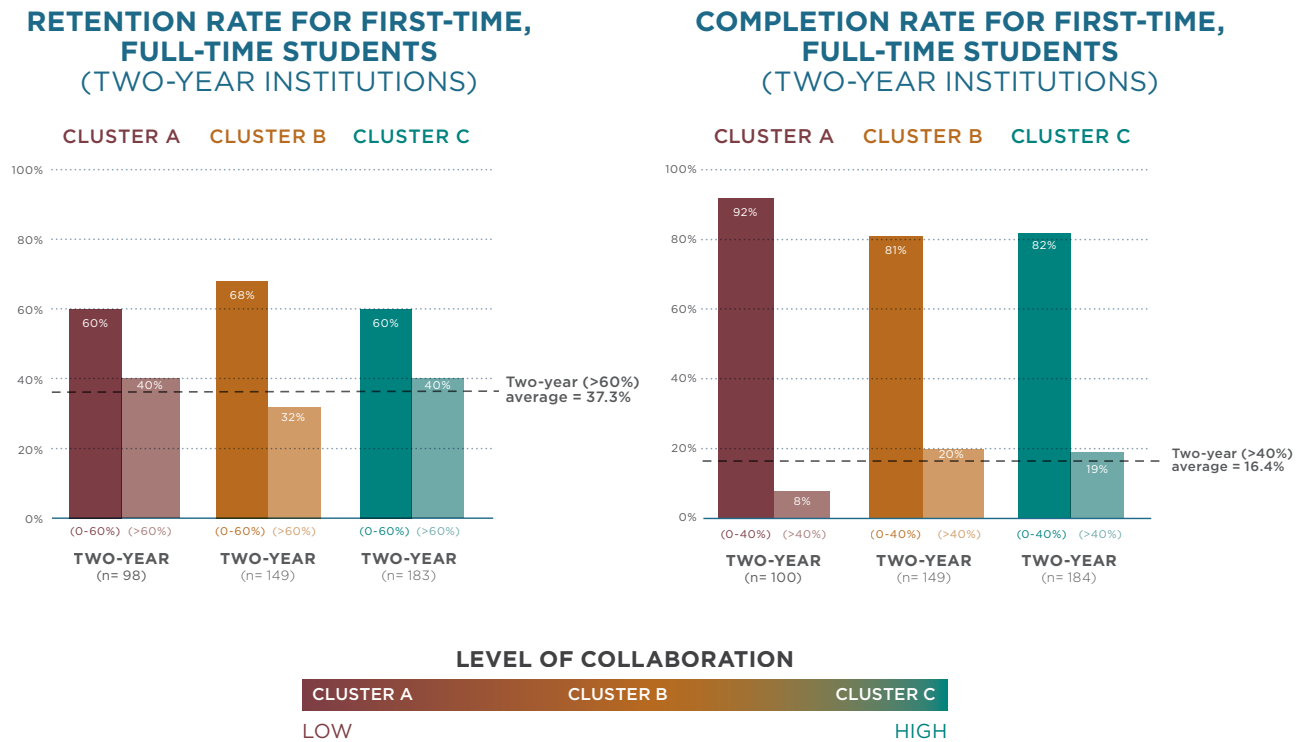
These results indicate correlation, not causation. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the positive correlation between collaboration and student success metrics across the clusters. The data tells a story of more successful clusters having higher levels of collaboration.

- Cluster C institutions are achieving this type of integration through specific actions in the areas of structure, process, practice, and technology.

- Cluster C institutions are more likely than Cluster B institutions to include redesign of student supports as a primary initiative in their strategic plans, and Cluster B institutions are more likely to do so than Cluster A institutions.

- Undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio trends similarly across clusters, but Cluster C has a slightly lower ratio.

- Cluster C reports the most positive sentiments toward faculty engagement in advising.

- Cluster C has higher levels of required advising for all undergraduate students and more positive sentiments about a centralized advising structure.

- Cluster C has the highest rates of guided (i.e., degree) pathways adoption.

- Clusters B and C report smaller advisor caseloads than Cluster A.

- Cluster C reports the highest levels of advising technology integrated into a single product from one company.

- Cluster C reports the most increases in spending on advising technology over the past three years, as well as higher rates of widespread use of advising technology.

TWO CASE STUDIES OF STUDENT SUPPORTS REDESIGN

The **University of Virginia** opened the doors of the **Dathel and John Georges Student Center** in October 2017 as a focal point for the university's Total Advising Initiative. Part of the university's strategic plan, the Total Advising Initiative calls for an integrated approach to student advising practices. The Georges Student Center supports this mission by providing students with a single location to find everything they need related to academic and professional guidance. While the Total Advising Initiative remains a work in progress, initial results point toward increased student satisfaction through **collaboration** among student supports staff in a central location.

"The (Total Advising Initiative) at the onset was solely academic in nature, but as the steering committee began having meetings, student services providers across UVA began making their case that they should be involved, as student success is about more than just [academic] advising."

– Richard Minturn, Senior Academic Facility Planner, University of Virginia

As part of its 2015–2020 strategic plan, the **University of Kentucky** realigned its student supports to **Four Pillars of Academic Excellence:** Belonging and Engagement, Student Health & Wellness, Academic Success, and Financial Stability. The university's research had determined that student success is built on these four pillars, and the realignment was designed to meet these pillars by directing more resources to frontline student support services and staff. **Collaboration** between and consolidation among student supports were crucial to this realignment, and the university has taken steps toward its goals of retention rates of 90%, graduation rates of 70%, and significant closure of the gaps in retention and graduation rates that exist for underrepresented student populations.

"We wanted to find a way to serve the entire student population by taking a student-centered approach, combining academic supports with student affairs to create a new structure [for the Office of] Student and Academic Life. This reorganization, partnered with innovative communication platforms and data-driven decision-making, helped 'move the needle' on student success at UK."

– Kirsten Turner, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, University of Kentucky

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Reported adoption of guided (i.e., degree) pathways is increasing across institutions, but what makes an efficient and effective pathway for students? How can institutions best design their teaching and learning and their student supports to have more students on the yellow brick road to success? The best pathway programs start with educational planning tailored to students' end goals and then allow for adaptation through the utilization of supports to enable students to achieve their goals.

Since 2017, Tyton Partners has measured the adoption of guided pathways across institutions. We describe guided pathways in our study as courses in the context of highly structured, educationally coherent program maps aligning with students' career goals and educational advancement.[2] Two-year institutions are the most common adopters, but adoption has increased by 9% across all types of institutions (Figure 1.7). There is undoubtedly an institutional push to lay out clear, cohesive academic programs for students, and to align student supports to assist students down their program path to successful completion.

Figure 1.7

HAS YOUR INSTITUTION ADOPTED OR BEGUN TO ADOPT GUIDED PATHWAYS?

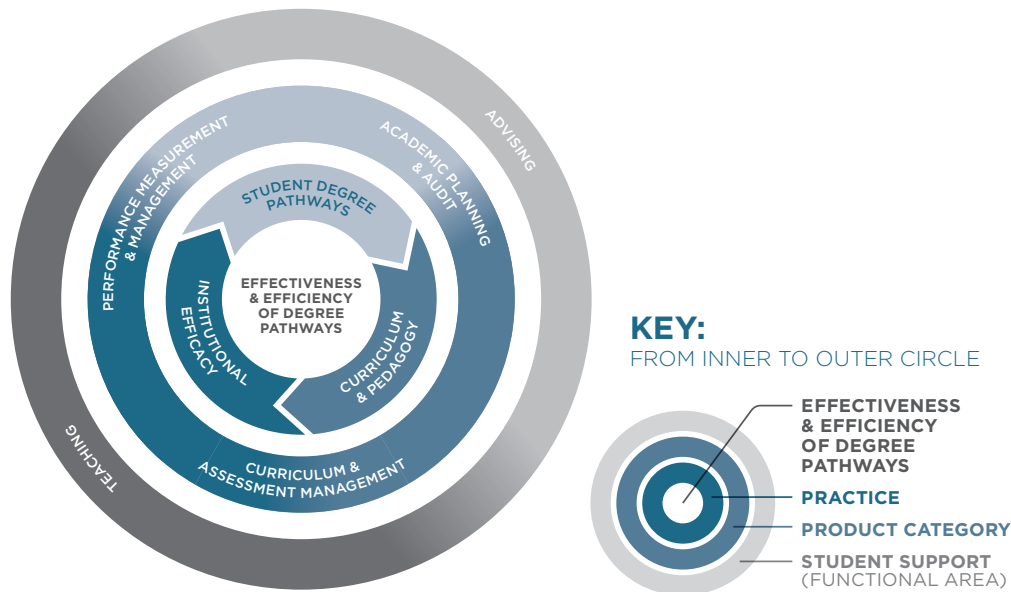2016-17 (n= 1,818) 2018-19 (n= 1,339)
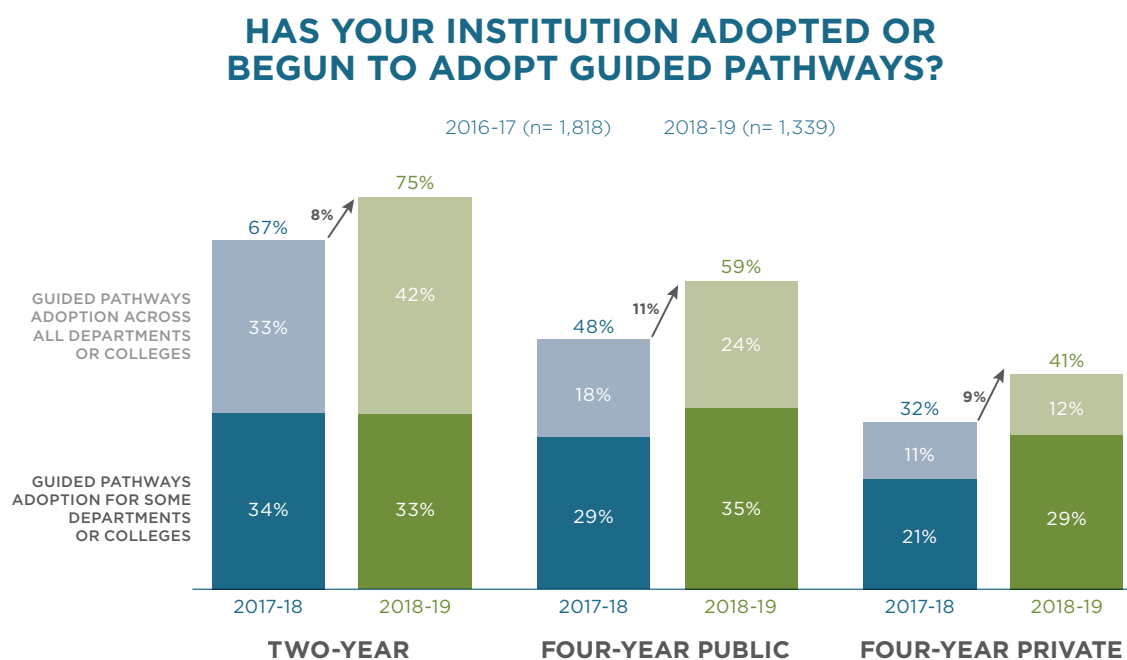
Although we are seeing increased (reported) implementation of guided pathways (across some or all departments and/or colleges), completion and retention rates for institutions reporting adoption of guided pathways are lower than those not reporting adoption of this approach. Through a combination of IPEDS and survey data, we determined that retention and completion rates for two- and four-year institutions, that reported adoption of guided pathways before or during the 2015–2016 academic year, were the same or lower (by as much as 10%) in subsequent academic years than institutions that had not reported adoption of this approach. However, this does not mean guided pathways cannot be the yellow brick road to student success. Many institutions' guided pathways are still in the early stages of implementation, and significant progress toward the improvement of retention and completion rates requires a sustained commitment to execution.

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2. Definition from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University

There are two crucial elements to establishing efficient and effective degree pathways for students: **(1)** understanding students' remedial needs and **(2)** aligning institutional capacities to best address those needs. Underlying each of these elements are three key practices and their corresponding technologies: **(1)** Performance Measurement & Management, **(2)** Curriculum & Assessment Management, and **(3)** Academic Planning & Audit (Figure 1.8).
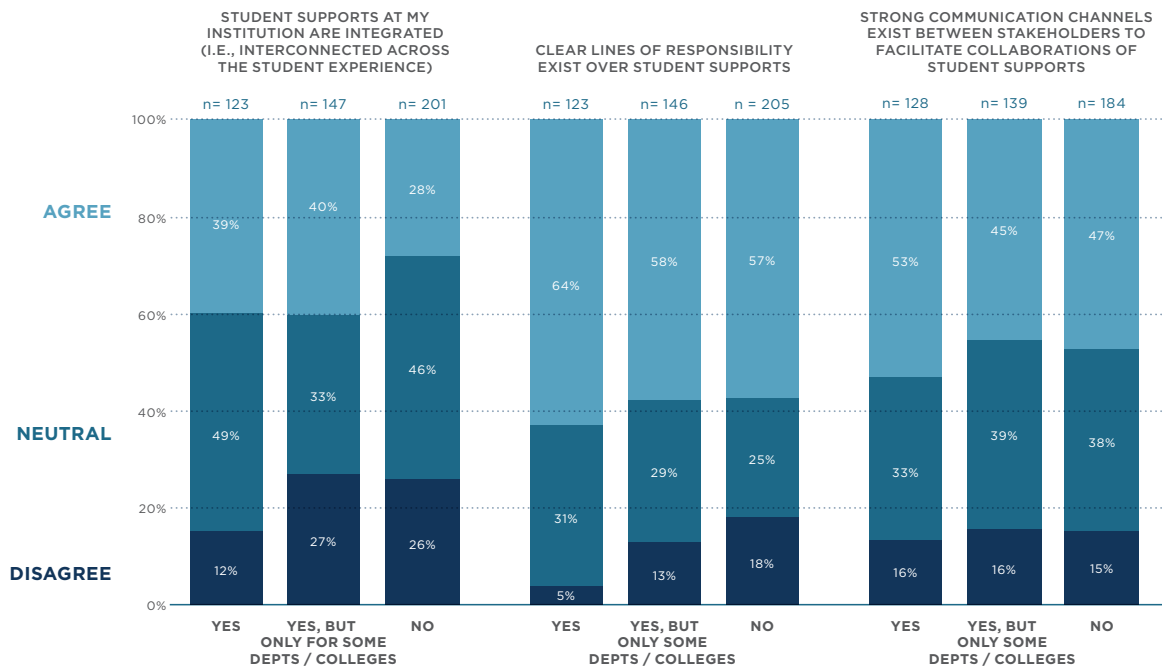
Figure 1.8

KEY:
FROM INNER TO OUTER CIRCLE

EFFECTIVENESS & EFFICIENCY OF DEGREE PATHWAYS
PRACTICE
PRODUCT CATEGORY
STUDENT SUPPORT (FUNCTIONAL AREA)

1. **Performance Measurement & Management** Technologies maximize the impact of student supports by evaluating what is working and for whom. These tools support the practices of institutional efficacy and student degree pathways. They help institutions understand the impact of their programs, initiatives, and interventions with statistical rigor while minimizing selection bias and avoiding the constraints of randomized controlled trials. They work to enable more efficient impact measurement aimed at identifying causation rather than correlation.

2. Existing within Performance Measurement & Management are **Curriculum & Assessment Management** platforms, which are integrated systems for curriculum development, outcomes assessment, program review to improve course/program quality and student engagement, and measurement of academic progress. These platforms support the practices of curriculum & pedagogy and institutional efficacy. They align curriculum to learning outcomes; embed outcomes assessments into courses; and enable administrators, faculty, and students to gauge their progress and continuously improve by using data to generate actionable insights. These platforms also facilitate or incorporate prior learning assessments, competency-based education, co-curricular recognition, and e-portfolios.

3. **Academic Planning & Audit** tools minimize the common missteps of false starts, unnecessary or unstructured courses, and meandering degree paths, which add time and cost to student completion. These tools support the practices of student degree pathways and curriculum & pedagogy. In concert with the other technologies, academic planning & audit tools generate personalized, real-time, and optimal pathways toward completion.

Taken together, these practices and technologies outline an opportunity to improve student success through aligning course and program resources to student supports delivery, establishing degree benchmarks to determine where students are on their academic journey, and optimizing finite resources by understanding which supports are the most impactful.

Nevertheless, these practices and technologies alone do not provide sufficient conditions for successful guided pathways implementation. Institutions that are adopting guided pathways are no more integrated in regard to student supports than institutions that are not. Nor have institutions reporting guided pathways adoption established clearer lines of responsibility over student supports, or stronger communication channels between stakeholders (Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9

HAS YOUR INSTITUTION ADOPTED OR BEGUN TO ADOPT GUIDED PATHWAYS?

In addition, the levels of direct engagement and regular coordination across student supports are not noticeably different for institutions reporting guided pathways adoption (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FOLLOWING STUDENT SUPPORTS AT YOUR INSTITUTION?
(FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ADVISING)

I AM DIRECTLY ENGAGED WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT

I REGULARLY COORDINATE WITH THIS STUDENT SUPPORT

Shaded areas represent percentages of student support stakeholders who reported direct engagement or regular coordination with other supports
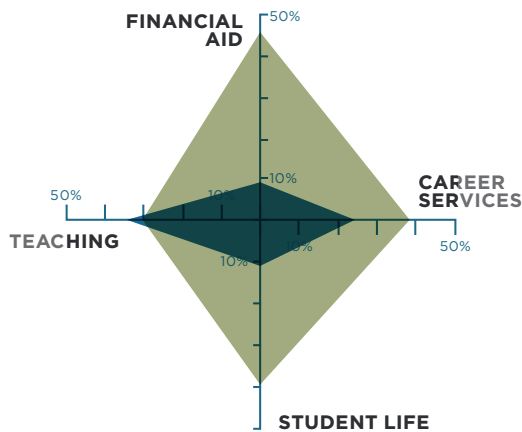
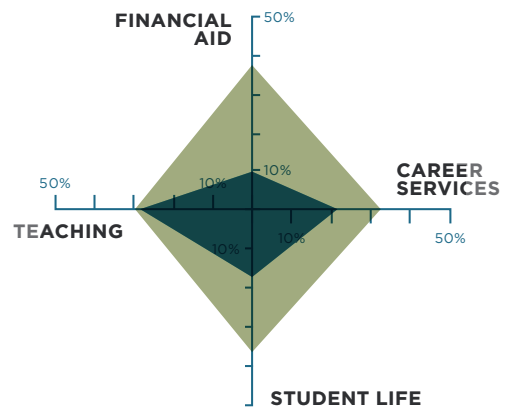**GUIDED PATHWAYS ADOPTION ACROSS ALL DEPARTMENTS AND/OR COLLEGES**
n= 363
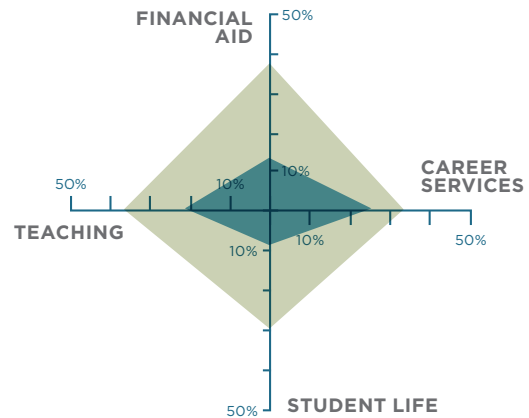
GUIDED PATHWAYS ADOPTION FOR SOME DEPARTMENTS OR COLLEGES
n= 424

NO ADOPTION OF GUIDED PATHWAYS
n= 540

In order to establish efficient and effective degree pathways for students, it is therefore critical to implement initiatives that promote thoughtful collaboration alongside the three key elements and their corresponding technologies.

CALL TO ACTION

Driving Toward a Degree is a resource designed to help institutions pursue integrated student support initiatives and is underwritten by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. 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.

We also invite institutions to share their progress toward integrated student supports via the Twitter hashtag ***#drivetodegree***.

Driving Toward a Degree focuses on five elements for student supports redesign (Figure 1.11):

1. **Leadership** – Commitment to and vision for student supports and for structures to support effective leadership, including clear lines of authority and responsibility

2. **Collaboration** – Structures to enable direct engagement and regular coordination between student supports stakeholders

3. **Capacity** – Resources (e.g., staff, funds, and technology) to support the efficiency and effectiveness of academic advisors, success coaches, career counselors, financial aid officers, etc.

4. **Technology** – Technology solutions to bolster student supports

5. **Student Engagement** – Practices to increase utilization of student supports programs and resources

Figure 1.11
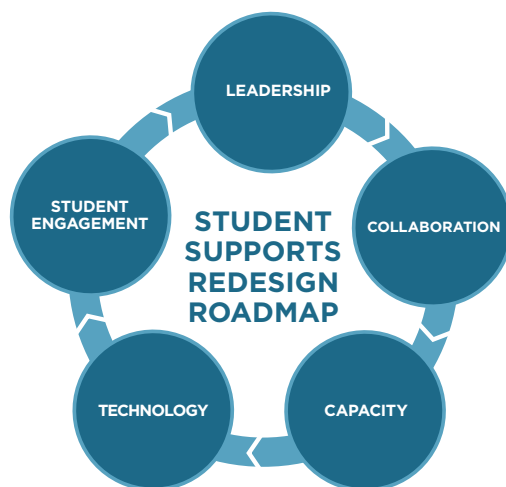
The insights generated from Driving Toward a Degree provide guidance to institutions on the important contextual elements that frame the student supports redesign roadmap.

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 and companies in developing and implementing strategies for revenue diversification and growth, student persistence and success, and innovations in teaching and learning technology.

For more information about Tyton Partners, visit *tytonpartners.com* or follow us at *@tytonpartners*.

Figure 1.12

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Jeff has been conducting research on the impact of technology on higher education and K–12 for over a decade. His most recent work includes annual survey reports on the state of online learning across US higher education, reports on open educational resource awareness and adoption in both US K–12 and higher education, and international surveys on online and distance education.

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Nicholas joined Tyton Partners in 2016 as a principal in the strategy consulting practice. He previously served in roles in the education and impact investing markets, tackling problems in innovation, optimization, and due diligence. Nicholas earned his BA from Johns Hopkins University, his MBA from Columbia Business School, and his MIA from Columbia University's School of International & Public Affairs.

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APPENDIX

EXHIBIT A: INSTITUTION ATTRIBUTES

Figure 1.13

INSTITUTIONS BY TYPE, SIZE & SELECTIVITY

n= 3,362   n= 3,355   n= 3,253

INSTITUTION TYPE	INSTITUTION SIZE	SELECTIVITY
Four-Year Public 19%	>20K 6%	Four-Year – More Selective 19%
Two-Year 39%	10-20K 8%	Four-Year – Selective 22%
Four-Year Private 42%	5-10K 12%	Four-Year – Inclusive 20%
	1-5K 60%	Two Year 39%
	<1K 14%	
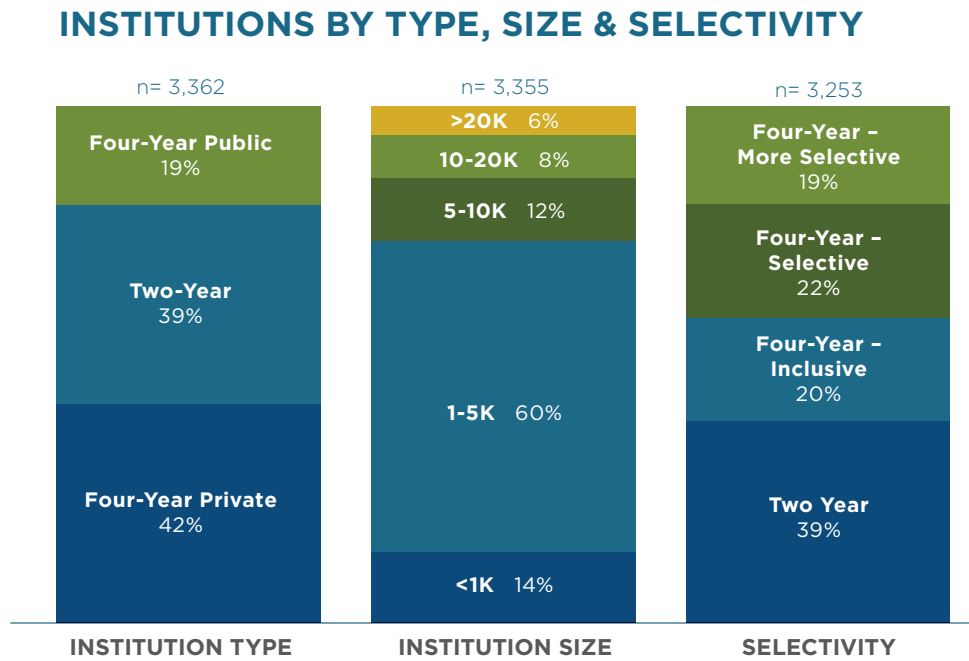
EXHIBIT B: RESPONDENT ATTRIBUTES

Figure 1.14

RESPONDENTS BY RESPONSIBILITY, ROLE & SENIORITY

FUNCTIONAL AREA	ROLE*	YEARS IN ROLE
n= 3,388	n= 3,030	n= 3,386
Career Services 5%	Senior-Level 13%	>20 yrs 10%
Financial Aid 7%	Mid-Level 47%	16-20 yrs 7%
Student Life 12%	Faculty 13%	10-15 yrs 15%
Teaching 25%	Primary Role 27%	6-9 yrs 14%
Advising 50%		4-5 yrs 15%
		1-3 yrs 29%
		<1 yr 10%
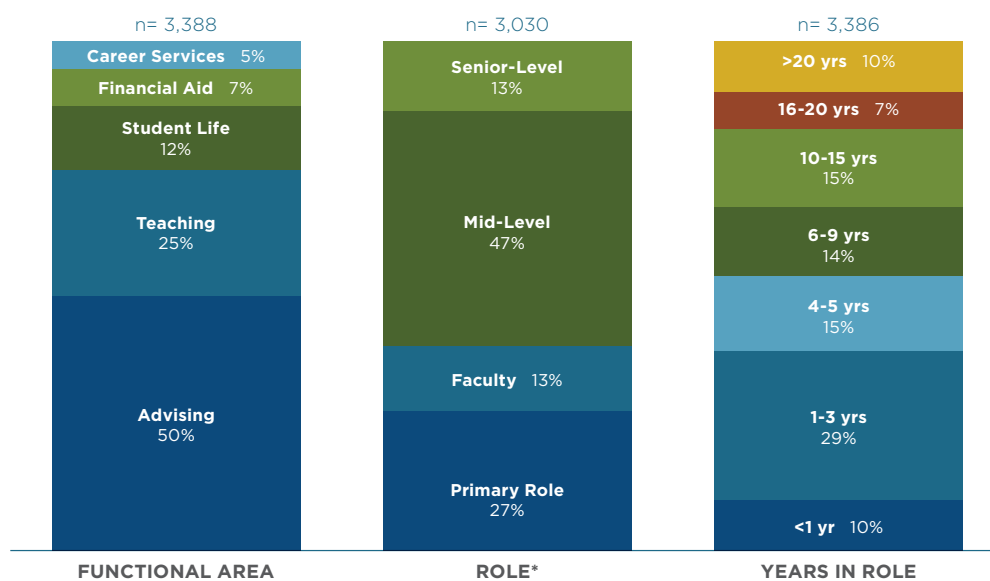
Figure 1.15

CATEGORY	ROLE
SENIOR-LEVEL	Provost
	Vice President or Vice Provost (including assistants, associates, etc.)
MIDDLE-LEVEL	Dean (including assistants, associates, etc.)
	Director (including assistants, associates, etc.)
FACULTY	Faculty with academic advising responsibilities
	Faculty without academic advising responsibilities
PRIMARY ROLE	Primary-role (academic/professional) advisor
	Student affairs officer
	Financial aid officer
	Career services officer
	Counselor

EXHIBIT C: CLUSTER DEMOGRAPHICS – TYPE & SIZE

Figure 1.15

INSTITUTION TYPE

	CLUSTER A (242)	CLUSTER B (343)	CLUSTER C (459)
Two-Year	40%	43%	40%
Four-Year Public	18%	20%	11%
Four-Year Private	42%	38%	49%

INSTITUTION SIZE

	CLUSTER A (342)	CLUSTER B (241)	CLUSTER C (458)
>20K	7%	5%	3%
10-20K	7%	8%	6%
5-10K	12%	11%	9%
1-5K	56%	66%	62%
<1K	19%	10%	20%

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION

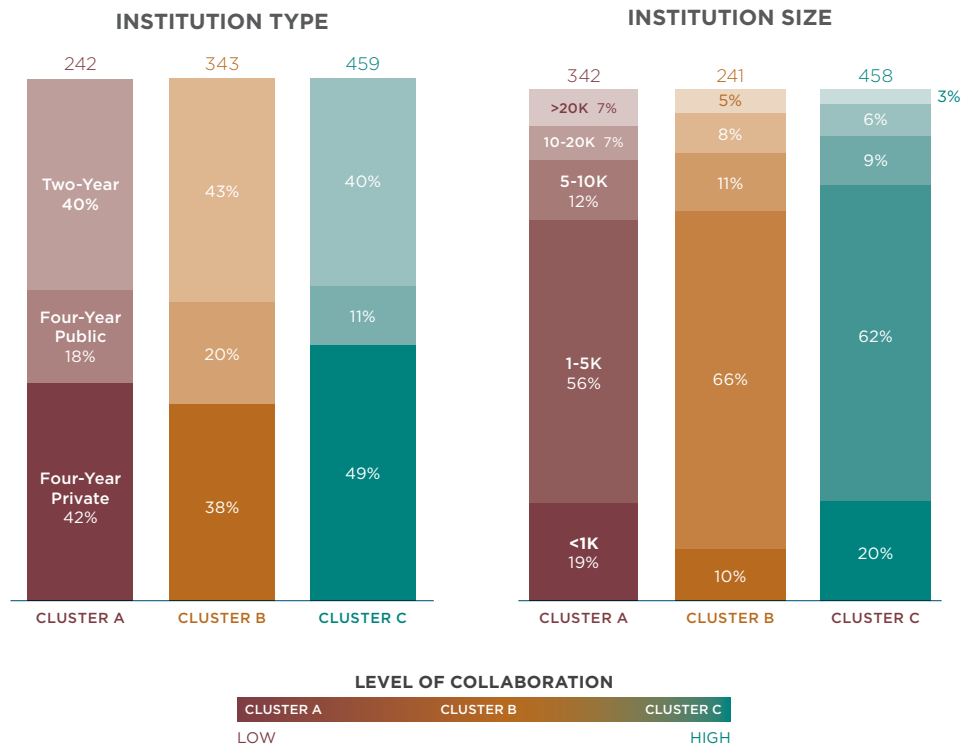CLUSTER A — CLUSTER B — CLUSTER C

LOW — HIGH

EXHIBIT D: CLUSTER DEMOGRAPHICS – PELL GRANT PERCENTAGE & SELECTIVITY

Figure 1.16

PELL GRANT PERCENTAGE

	CLUSTER A (342)	CLUSTER B (238)	CLUSTER C (445)
>46%	20%	35%	30%
(31-45%)	42%	41%	35%
(0-30%)	39%	24%	35%

SELECTIVITY

	CLUSTER A (237)	CLUSTER B (336)	CLUSTER C (427)
Two Year	41%	42%	40%
Four Year – Inclusive	18%	23%	20%
Four Year – Selective	27%	23%	19%
Four Year – More Selective	14%	12%	21%

LEVEL OF COLLABORATION

CLUSTER A — CLUSTER B — CLUSTER C

LOW — HIGH