Acquia

Data visualization

Build Meaningful and Engaging Digital Experiences For Your Higher Education Institution

Put your college or university in a better position to succeed with students, parents, and other key audiences online.

Leaders in higher education face many challenges in attracting and retaining students in the coming years.

Projected Enrollment Rates Remain Uncertain

From 2011 to 2020 enrollment for degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the U.S. dropped by over 2 million. That's a 12.7% enrollment reduction in just one decade.

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
18.1 million	17.7 million	17.4 million	17.3 million	17.0 million	16.8 million	17.0 million	16.6 million	16.5 million	15.8 million

Actual and projected enrollment rates for 2021 to 2030 show signs of improvement.

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
15.4 million	15.8 million	15.9 million	16.2 million	16.4 million	16.6 million	16.7 million	16.8 million	16.8 million	16.8 million

If 16.8 million students do enroll in 2030, it would be a 9.1% improvement from the 2021 low, but that forecasted number would still be 1.3 million less than the 2011 high.[1]

Overall Cost and Perceived Value of a Degree May Be Discouraging Prospective Higher Ed Students

175% In the last 20 years, college tuition has increased by as much as 175% for in-state tuition and fees at public universities.[2]

2X The cost of higher education is increasing at about twice the rate of the consumer price index.[3]

55% 55% of students from public four-year institutions have student loans.[4]

$28,950 Students from public four-year institutions that have student loans owe an average of $28,950 each.[4]

44% The number of U.S. adults aged 18 to 29 who view college education as "very important" slid from 74% in 2013 to 41% in 2019. That's a 44% drop in just six years.[5]

What Both Students and Parents Are Looking For

As the pool of prospects has dwindled, there is more pressure on college and university recruitment programs to compete for new students. Better position your institution to succeed by keeping in mind what students and parents value most.[6]

- Academic quality
- High value for the financial investment
- A personalized recruitment approach
- Global study opportunities
- Better preparation through professional work opportunities
- Entrepreneurship skills
- Lower-cost options
- Hybrid learning approach (a mixture of online and in-person teaching)

To Attract More Students and Parents, Leverage the Most Effective Tools and Channels

Colleges and universities are challenged to provide top-notch digital experiences to highly diverse audiences – current students, prospective students, their families, faculty, administrators, and alumni – across many types of devices and channels.

Aim to deliver compelling digital experiences through:

Websites | Mobile Apps | Email | Text | Video | Social Media Channels

"A college's website is the most popular resource for students looking for information about their preferred college. Students and parents use college websites, making them the biggest single source of information for students and parents."

Forbes[7]

84% of parents use college websites.

61% of college-bound students are spending three or more hours online every day, with most of that time on TikTok.

75% of recent high school graduates use college websites.

61% of parents are on Facebook following college accounts while their students are researching potential schools.[8]

Higher Education Institutions Face Challenges in Delivering Digital Experiences

Administrators at colleges and universities face hurdles in communicating the quality of their programs on websites, apps, and channels that students and parents will use.

Challenges include:

- Siloed departments that can't easily collaborate
- Hardship getting digital and marketing communications to market quickly
- Difficulty creating and managing multiple websites
- Multiple different teams that waste time creating similar content
- Spending too much time searching for approved digital assets like photos, images, and videos
- Lack of confidence that personal information about students, parents, and faculty will stay secure

Ideas Schools Can Use to Deliver More Effective Digital Experiences

Help Key Audiences Find What They Need

Provide customized content for unique audiences like students, parents, alumni, teachers, donors, and employees — then make sure that everyone can easily find and navigate to that information.

Highlight Recent and Relatable Stories

Give prospective students a better idea of what your school's culture and institutional values are like with up-to-date content, including photos and videos.

Prioritize Personalization

Tailor content and messaging to specific student populations. 59% of students would open an email from a school they did not know if the topic or offer presented was of interest to them.[9]

Optimize for Accessibility

In 2020, U.S. businesses faced potential legal fees of up to $6.6 billion for inaccessible websites. Optimizing your website for accessibility helps you deliver a better experience for more potential visitors anyway. So aim to make sure your website meets WCAG guidelines and your videos are captioned.[10]

Tech Solutions That Higher Ed Institutions Use to Optimize Their Digital Strategies

Cloud-Based Hosting Platform

Because colleges and universities interact with many different audiences, their websites and apps can be targets for data thieves. A dedicated cloud-based hosting platform will help optimize performance, maximize uptime, streamline work processes, reduce costs, and improve security.

Content Management System (CMS)

Content management systems are used for creating websites and digital experiences that help you attract, engage, enroll, and retain students, faculty, and alumni. Drupal has become the preferred CMS for higher education because it's secure, scalable, and provides the most flexibility for creating and managing various kinds of content that diverse groups and audiences are looking for.

Personalization Engine

A personalization engine helps deliver dynamic content tailored to user behavior, preferences, and demographics to enhance the experience of prospective students, alumni, and donors.

Customer Data Platform (CDP)

A customer data platform is a software application that gathers customer data from multiple sources to provide a unified view of customers from one central location. With a CDP implemented, college or university administrators can better understand prospective students' preferences and help serve customized content to address them.

Digital Asset Management (DAM)

A digital asset management tool can be used to track and organize digital assets like photos, illustrations, images, audio files, and video files in a central library. For digital experience teams at higher education institutions, a DAM system can be especially useful in expediting work and streamlining productivity across previously siloed departments or locations.

Used by 71% of the top 100 universities, Drupal is the most popular CMS in higher education today.[11]

Using solutions like these as part of a digital experience platform (DXP) gives colleges and universities messaging and marketing advantages across most of the key channels that prospective students and parents use to learn about higher education institutions and programs.

Why Higher Ed Institutions Choose Acquia DXP Solutions

Boost Brand Awareness
170%
Stanford University increased traffic to its undergraduate experience page by 170% in a project drawing upon Acquia Site Factory for brand governance and security and Acquia Cloud Platform for dynamic website hosting.

Streamline Content Creation
1 million
The University of Georgia manages a library of 1 million digital assets using Acquia DAM — making it easier for creators to collaborate, develop, and publish consistent content quickly.

Deliver Compelling Experiences
12x
After leveraging Drupal to build an immersive virtual experience for its graduates during the pandemic, the Rhode Island School of Design saw a 1,200% spike in site traffic, which Acquia infrastructure handled seamlessly.

Drive Engagement
7.5 million
South Dakota State University recorded 7.5 million pageviews over 9,700 pages and 14,900 unique URLs for its new website built on Drupal and hosted on the Acquia Cloud Platform.

Scale More Effective Marketing Efforts
29 landing pages
Princeton International used Drupal CMS to implement 29 new landing pages for its new, easy-to-use, high-performing website.

Leverage Powerful Integrations to Boost Sales
Double Digits
Adtalem Global Education's website is performing double digits higher for same-day sales, year over year through its integrated Salesforce Commerce solution.

Migrate Websites Quickly, At Scale
300 sites
George Washington University migrated 300 sites to Acquia Site Factory in just seven weeks.

Increase Conversions Tied to Enrollment Efforts
86%
University of Dundee used Acquia solutions to add personalized calls-to-action on course and subject pages, which drove 86% of all conversions.

Acquia DXP is recognized as a Leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Digital Experience Platforms.[12]

Leaders in the higher education sector face increased competition for a declining number of students in the coming years. The academic institutions that place students, parents, alumni, faculty, and donors at the heart of their digital experience strategies will be better positioned to succeed.

See How A Digital Experience Platform Gives Modern Educational Institutions An Edge

Learn how higher education institutions leverage the power of Drupal and Acquia to solve real-world digital experience challenges.

Read the e-book

Notes

1. "Postsecondary Education: Undergraduate Enrollment," National Center for Education Statistics, May 2023 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha

2. "The time is now to do something about the rising cost of college," Megan Cluver, Deloitte Consulting, in Fast Company, March 2023 https://www.fastcompany.com/90862270/the-time-is-now-to-do-something-about-the-rising-cost-of-college

3. "Higher Education Faces Hurdles In 2024," Dr. Brian Mitchell, Forbes, February 2024 https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/02/14/higher-education-faces-hurdles-in-2024/amp/

4. "2024 Student Loan Debt Statistics: Average Student Loan Debt," Alicia Hahn, Jordan Tarver, Forbes, July 2023 https://www.forbes.com/advisor/student-loans/average-student-loan-debt-statistics/

5. "Half in U.S. Now Consider College Education Very Important," Stephanie Market, Gallup, December 2019 https://www.gallup.com/education/272228/half-consider-college-education-important.aspx

6. "New Surveys Highlight The Leading Factors In How Students Choose A College," Michael T. Nietzel, Forbes, September 2023 https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltnietzel/2023/09/26/new-surveys-highlight-the-leading-factors-in-how-students-choose-a-college/

7. "What Are Prospective Students (and Their Parents) Thinking About College?," Marybeth Gasman, Forbes, November 2023 https://www.forbes.com/sites/marybethgasman/2023/11/21/what-are-prospective-students-and-their-parents-thinking-about-college/?sh=e9ab7b838a72

8. "2023 College-Bound Student and Parent Surveys," Spark451, September 2023 https://www.spark451.com/blog/2023-college-bound-student-and-parent-surveys-download-the-reports/

9. "New Surveys Highlight The Leading Factors In How Students Choose A College," Michael T. Nietzel, Forbes, September 2023 https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltnietzel/2023/09/26/new-surveys-highlight-the-leading-factors-in-how-students-choose-a-college/

10. "U.S. Businesses Potentially Spent Billions on Legal Fees for Inaccessible Websites in 2020," Bureau of Internet Accessibility, January 2021 https://www.boia.org/blog/did-u-s-businesses-spend-billions-on-legal-fees-for-inaccessible-websites-in-2020

11. "Drupal/Higher Education: Empowering universities globally," Drupal.org, 2023 https://www.drupal.org/industries/education

12. "Acquia Named a Leader in the 2024 Gartner® Magic Quadrant™ for Digital Experience Platforms," Acquia, March 2024 https://www.acquia.com/resources/report/acquia-named-leader-2024-gartner-magic-quadranttm-dxp