EDUCAUSE
iPASS
Lessons From the Field
Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) involves new approaches to how we advise students in a holistic way that leverages technology in support of students completing what they set out to do. It includes education planning, counseling and coaching, as well as risk targeting and intervention, allowing institutions to support students in new ways with a clear focus on retention and completion. Research and the institutional experience demonstrates that bold changes are required and must be sustained to substantially improve student success outcomes.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust funded an iPASS grant competition through EDUCAUSE and Achieving the Dream to test the effectiveness of iPASS at 26 institutions across the country.
The focus of the work was in three areas:

- **Education planning**: Guiding students to select courses and programs of study that are most efficient and relevant to completing a degree or credential that meets their academic goals.

- **Counseling and coaching**: Connecting students to on- and off-campus resources and allowing students and advisors to monitor progress, provide ongoing feedback and create personalized action plans for educational success.

- **Risk targeting and intervention**: Affording faculty, advisors and administrators the ability to better predict and report course failure and program stop-out in order to support timely and effective interventions.

The grantees worked from 2015 through 2018, launching a variety of campus-wide, technology-based solutions that resulted in many early successes specific to the work and served as an impetus for enduring transformations in institutional approaches to change management. Though the work was demanding and forced the institutions into unchartered territory with the faculty, administrative departments, advisors and students, the consensus of the participants was strongly in favor of taking on the challenge. Grantees reported the following significant successes:

- Measurably improved student experiences and outcomes.

- New, deep collaboration across campus units and increased institutional alignment.

- A shift in advising from transactional/drop-in to relationship-based and intentional and a broadening of the advising from narrow, course-based context to a holistic, career-focused context.

- Professionalization of the advising function on campus with advisors participating on their campuses in new and more influential ways.

- A holistic view of a student’s academic experience available to every department with a much more complete view based on instant access and new and better information.

- Semi-centralization of the advising function (on campuses with a decentralized function); development of common goals, language, and cultural approach for professional advisors; and renewed energy compared to previous advising structures.

- New and stronger relationships between advisors and colleagues on the student success team and with institutional research (IR) and information technology (IT) staff.

- A shift in the focus for student success initiatives from the technology to the advisors, with the overarching goal of improving the student experience.
This report distills guidance from iPASS grantees on how to move forward with a transformative technology-based planning and advising project, with a specific focus on advising transformation, faculty engagement and predictive analytics. The work was undertaken by Metros Consulting and Summit Strategies.

**The Charge**

Highlight grantee successes, identify lessons learned and provide actionable recommendations for institutions interested in and ready to embark on transformative student success by reimagining degree planning and advising services.

**The Interviews**

Twelve grantees from a cross-section of institutions, including community and technical colleges and undergraduate and doctorate-granting universities, participated in phone interviews to share lessons learned in three areas critical to success in iPASS: (1) advising transformation, (2) faculty engagement and (3) predictive analytics. Participants discussed how they designed and implemented their projects; what opportunities the work afforded their teams, stakeholders and academic communities; what challenges they faced; who was most impacted by the changes; how they communicated their progress to their many constituents; how they measured success; and what outcomes would be applicable to other institutions.

A synthesis of the interviews surfaced a set of key themes that formed the basis for the second part of the methodology, a series of three focus sessions.

**The Focus Sessions**

In online focus groups for each of the three success categories listed above, participants reacted to the themes and considered what would be useful to other academic leaders who might be ready to initiate similar initiatives at their institutions. They provided insight on: What didn’t work and why? What did they wish they had known prior to beginning the project? What was the “secret sauce” that ensured success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advising Transformation</th>
<th>Faculty Engagement</th>
<th>Predictive Analytics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County Community College</td>
<td>Morgan State University</td>
<td>Community College of Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Arizona University</td>
<td>Northeast Wisconsin Technical College</td>
<td>Middle Tennessee State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
<td>Ramapo College of New Jersey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NAVIGATING THIS DOCUMENT

**Actions**

- The institutions engaged in three key actions related to their initiatives: Envision, Implement and Connect.

**Themes**

- Several themes emerged from the responses gathered from the interviews and vetted by focus sessions participants. Through an iterative process, ten rose to the top of the list as most relevant and useful to members of the higher education community interested in embarking on similar types of student success initiatives.

**Perspectives**

- Each theme is summarized and presented through the institutional perspective organized under Points of Pride, Lessons Learned and Tips and Tricks. The themes and highlights are illustrated by examples generously shared by the institutions.

### ACTIONS

**Envision**—Higher order activities that should be initiated prior to or early on in a project. They are strategic and visionary in nature.

**Implement**—Activities that take place during and throughout the project. They are functional in nature.

**Connect**—Activities that take place during the entire project lifecycle and often beyond. They are process oriented in nature.

### THEMES

1. Strategy and Vision
2. Executive Champion and Buy-In
3. Transformation and Change
4. Focus
5. Process Over Product
6. Teamwork
7. Professional Development
8. Stakeholders and Partnerships
9. Communication
10. Data and Metrics

### SUMMARIES

- Points of Pride / Lessons Learned / Tips and Tricks
- Points of Pride / Lessons Learned / Tips and Tricks
- Points of Pride / Lessons Learned / Tips and Tricks
- Points of Pride / Lessons Learned / Tips and Tricks
**ENVISION THEMES**

**Strategy and Vision**—Position the project within the organization to align with its mission and strategic plan, build momentum and create the most value, meaning and impact.

**Executive Champion and Buy-In**—Ensure that there is a prominent and well-respected campus leader championing student success and promoting institutional buy-in.

**Transformation and Change**—Adopt a collective mindset that assumes a certain level of risk-taking and embraces transformation on multiple levels. Prepare to manage the obvious and unexpected changes in institutional culture and practices.
Position the project within the organization to align with its mission and strategic plan, build momentum and create the most value, meaning and impact.

A clearly and continually articulated institutional strategy and vision that reinforces the initiative's goals and positions it as an institutional priority is integral to success. One academic leader communicated to their constituency that their iPASS project was not just a one-time upgrade but a new, ongoing and innovative way of doing business. Many grantees had multiple initiatives related to student success going on at once. Connecting them to tell a bigger, broader story, toward a common and central goal, made them all more powerful, cohesive and unified.

### Strategy and Vision | Points of Pride

**The whole institution had the same goal.** It became much more connected via the networks that had been forged. It no longer subsisted unit by unit or division by division—the academic community was dedicated to sharing.

**The faculty union acknowledged the importance of student success.** Some institutions were able to resolve union-based challenges to new processes, requirements and structures by showing the relevance of student success initiatives in concrete ways.

### Strategy and Vision | Lessons Learned

**Don’t label the student success initiative a “project.”** The strongest initiatives were viewed as campus-wide efforts aligned to the mission for the whole university—a crucial component of how the institution does business—not a project or initiative emanating from a singular department or college.

**Strategy and vision are specific to an organization.** So much depends on the cultural nuances of the particular institution. There is a framework, but no one-size-fits-all models, especially across institutional types and institutional cultures. If an institution wants to initiate academic transformation, it has to build its own blueprint and then align it directly with its own particular institutional strategy, vision, planning methodology and culture.

"Every student will have a plan for successful engagement with this institution."
Integrating multiple systems is a challenge. Many of the grantees utilized change management planning techniques, such as Kotter's Leading Change processes, to help meet the challenge of breaking through institutional silos, integrating multiple programs and dissimilar technology systems with thoughtful process improvements that are student-centric. Thinking ahead about how to obtain buy-in, planning for and scheduling extra time, matching communication style to the various audiences and celebrating small wins were techniques used to advance the work.

Strategy and Vision | Tips and Tricks

Communicate the “why” of the initiative first and frequently. Starting with the “how” (the technology solution) or the “what” (advising reform) won’t move people emotionally. The “why” is more about the mission. Feeling and seeing mission alignment is important for everyone in the organization.

Strategic planning around funding is essential. In order to sustain the work done and continue to realize the value of the efforts, additional funding and/or matching grants must be identified in the early stages so that the funds are there to sustain the work later. Use early wins to build the case for a mandate to redirect funds to support the initiative long term.

The work must be included in the institution's strategic vision. It needs to be part of the core set of institutional priorities. The diagrams below illustrate how Northern Arizona University and University of Central Florida tied their multiple programs together under single student success initiatives.

Initiative Alignment

Northern Arizona University’s Student Success Initiative.
2. EXECUTIVE CHAMPION AND BUY-IN

Ensure that there is a prominent and well-respected campus leader championing student success and promoting institutional buy-in.

A powerfully-positioned, visible, influential and highly respected executive champion is critical for success, but not enough. The entire leadership team must be committed and willing to make trade-offs to ensure buy-in at all levels of the organization. In some cases, new leadership positions were created to oversee student success responsibilities and new people hired or existing staff promoted into these roles. Leadership worked best when the executive champion’s directives cascaded down through the organization and became part of the collective mindset. It was less successful when their messages hit communication bottlenecks or, worse, resistance from constituents who did not want to change the way they worked. Grantees agreed that total buy-in was impossible, but that you still had to keep the initiative moving forward and keep up the momentum regardless of push-back from a minority of naysayers.
The most successful implementations had active participation from the top levels of administration. This included provosts co-chairing, co-sponsoring and co-leading meetings, and deans and department heads actively leading key components. This "cascading leadership"—the initiative being referenced and integrated at all levels of the organization's workstreams—meant that communications flowed smoothly across the entire organization, ultimately becoming self-reinforcing.

"The president understands the tool, knows how to use it and references it in his conversations with other leaders and students."

Getting buy-in was not a major issue on campuses with engaged leadership. This dynamic was attributed to leaders who, while being very positive, also were unequivocal about the direction the university was going and unwavering about their expectations that everyone would participate. They were positioned to make the case, try to help people understand, but also were willing to say, "Because this is what our mission requires us to do."

Inspiring leadership generated buy-in at many levels, in many ways. At one institution, the vice-provost for teaching and learning shared information about a new technology so convincingly that one of the deans volunteered to invest additional dollars in it, helping to create a virtuous circle of investment and boosting attention to the goals of the student success effort.

Drive the initiative down to the grassroots. While a strong executive champion is essential, turning that top-level support into the collective mindset that advances transformation can be a challenge. Some grantees commented that they wished they had "pushed it downwards" more than they did, specifically by investing more in faculty and staff professional development and more in additional training for frontline staff.
Deal with resistance by enlisting peers and inviting participation. When grantees experienced resistance, they cited two strategies in particular for curtailing it and obtaining buy-in. First, institutions took the proven approach of leveraging peer-to-peer training for advisors and faculty. Second, they addressed negative feedback proactively, drilling down to understand the essence of the resistance and then responding quickly to specific issues. More than one institution described friction with faculty related to skepticism about the data sources of system-generated alert messages or dissatisfaction with alert message wording. In these cases, administrators were able to bring faculty on board—and to improve the student experience—by “opening the hood” of the iPASS systems to engage faculty in understanding and customizing the iPASS application alert functions.

Move forward when there is significant, not complete, consensus. None of the grantees waited for full consensus to launch their advising redesign and system implementation projects. They moved forward once they had majority agreement about tactics and plans. Achieving majority support sometimes required slowing down to listen for genuine issues, but none of the grantees paused to bring everyone on board once they began working toward their goals.

Executive Champion and Buy-In | Tips and Tricks

Use top-down support to keep the project on track. Ask leadership to “lean in” at key points and provide the extra “push” sometimes needed to move calendars, timelines and/or budgets.

Use early win data to reinforce that the solution is working. When faculty and staff see statistically meaningful progress in the numbers—rising GPAs, improved student persistence and retention and declining stop-outs—buy-in happens organically. Likewise, when their own work becomes significantly simpler (completing attendance and other required reports using auto-populated data provided by the tool), buy-in happens on its own.
Adopt a collective mindset that assumes a certain level of risk-taking and embraces transformation on multiple levels. Prepare to manage the obvious and unexpected changes in institutional culture and practices.

There has to be an impetus for change. It could be a new executive leader coming in with a different vision for the institution. It might be the need to replace a legacy system with a technology solution that provides improved, future-proofed functionality. Or it simply might be the institution’s aspiration to improve its students’ academic experience and enhance their ability to find meaningful employment upon graduation. What many of the grantees came to realize is that change of this magnitude triggers transformation that affects the way an organization conducts its business. Introducing transformation is tricky and requires flexibility, courageousness and a certain amount of vulnerability. Grantees agreed that adopting industry standard change management principles helped drive change across the organization and foster an innovation mindset for reimagining processes and procedures.

### Transformation and Change | Points of Pride

**Changes in organizational structure led to success.** One institution had recently appointed a new president who initiated a major reorganization in which academic affairs and student affairs were combined. This organizational change elevated the iPASS initiative to be more visible, garner more resources and support and impact a broader audience at a faster rate. Another school merged offices to create the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. This collaboration of the data-driven enrollment management units with the student development oriented student affairs units fostered analysis of how data enhanced the student experience. At yet another institution, the opposite happened. Career Services was moved under Workforce Development and was no longer optimally aligned with the iPASS experience.

**Institutions reported significant changes in the nature of advising from purely transactional to richly holistic.** They also observed that repositioning advisors and advising led to deeper, more meaningful relationships among students, faculty and administrative colleagues.

“We’ve come so far in the last five years ... Paper is a thing of the past. Our faculty would hold a sit-in if we tried to stop now.”

**Technology and automation replaced paper-based information management systems.** This transformation provided several campuses a completely new, instant, accurate picture of where each student stood at any given point in time, and who among the faculty and staff was best positioned to help that student take the next steps toward success.

“It changed the face of advising here in every way possible....”
Skepticism evolved into optimism. One campus reported a 180-degree shift in advisor mindset from skepticism to optimism. There was initial skepticism about how much the advising team could handle. That evolved into optimism and a willingness to participate once the advisors saw the potential for achievement, considered concrete results and heard students talking about how much the new processes helped them with their academic planning.

Transformation and Change | Lessons Learned

If the solution isn’t working, reassess and change direction. One institution made the courageous decision to abandon a platform midway through the implementation. It was clear that the product wasn’t meeting student, faculty or administration needs. Rather than continue on, their leader listened carefully to the complaints, weighed user needs, and ultimately made the decision to switch to another technology solution. While it was not an easy choice, it ultimately strengthened the resolve of the team and invited more participation by those who had previously held back.

View the transformation within the bigger institutional context. Transforming advising processes is typically just one component in a larger cultural shift toward new ways of doing business. At one institution, a number of major enterprise system upgrades were taking place across campus at the same time the iPASS project was moving forward. They realized in retrospect that by focusing solely on advising, they missed opportunities to collaborate and coordinate with others to help prepare their academic community for across-the-board changes in workplace practices. The diagram below illustrates how Montgomery County Community College embedded student success within a broader institutional context.

Appreciate the value of incremental change. With a decentralized advising model, transformation may not always be the end goal, at least not at the beginning; alignment and incremental change can be very powerful and should not be discounted. A best practice is to focus on and celebrate the smaller incremental changes that will ultimately lead to the transformation.

Components of Montgomery County Community College’s Student Success Initiative.
Reimagine all of your processes and procedures. Don’t just paste new technologies on top of old processes and expect them to take hold or function at 100%. Take the opportunity to clear out legacy systems, including carefully evaluating current processes with a student-centric lens and revising processes to optimize the student experience. Implementing new systems does and should bring process improvements that map directly to student success criteria. After examining their current processes, one school established “academic guidance” as a foundational educational function, with technology playing an essential and supportive role.

Be mindful of how big the “ask” is. Changing a process might seem relatively small but it might be changing much more than a process—it could change relationships, statuses and the meaning of one’s work. Be sure to fully understand the upstream and downstream implications of process changes.

Invest in the frontline staff. Transformation occurs when why a change is being made is something everyone can embrace or appreciate. The why is followed by clearly articulating how to implement change and fully understanding who will be affected by the change. In the majority of the iPASS projects, funds were dedicated to professional development specifically for frontline staff so that by better understanding their critical strategic contribution and the breadth and depth of the project, they were able to build the contextual and technical skills to do the required work.

Focus—Stay laser-focused on requirements and functionality that enhances the student experience.

Professional Development—Provide relevant and timely professional development and training opportunities to various groups across the entire lifecycle of the initiative from conception to implementation.

Teamwork—Manage the work efficiently and effectively by assembling and empowering multifunctional, cross-functional teams.

Process over Product—In planning and communication, emphasize people and relationships (process) over technologies and tools (product).
Stay laser-focused on requirements and functionality that enhances the student experience.

Focus is a theme that ran through many of the conversations. The grantees reinforced that it was essential to:

- Keep the strategic focus on student success.
- Keep the tactical focus on getting the work done, despite staff turnover, platform switches, pushback from disengaged stakeholders and other distractions.
- Keep the technological focus on the institutional and student requirements, not the product’s latest bells and whistles.

**Focus | Points of Pride**

Ask “What do students really need to succeed?” Institutions that were able to shift the focus to and keep the focus on their students’ experiences were most successful in the implementation phases of their projects.

“There’s nothing we do unless it increases and enhances the student experience. The institution’s focus on student success changed the way we worked.”

Participants were selected to work on the project because they supported the vision and were eager to engage in the work. By keeping them focused and incentivized with challenging work and professional development opportunities to learn new skills, institutions were able to build team loyalty and minimize turnover.
Focus | Lessons Learned

Make a choice and start; a false start is better than no start at all. The institution that initially chose a platform that didn’t meet the institution’s or students’ needs effectively and had to make a change midway through the implementation did not regret this diversion. Officials at that institution learned that they had a high level of tolerance and a large capacity for disruption and change. These were invaluable attributes that helped them remain focused on their end goal and ultimately led to their choosing the right solution.

“We knew where we wanted to go and had a sense of how to get there—we remained focused on this even through some mid-term changes that we needed to make.”

“Don’t be distracted by all the things you could find out; focus on the things you need to find out. We are data rich and information poor.”

Say “no” to some things to stay focused on “yes.” It was easy to be tempted by the promise of additional funding or resources, but campus leaders had to be willing to decline interesting but tangential opportunities to ensure that the quality of the work at hand was not compromised.

Choose the focal data points carefully. Focus on what the institution needs to know to measure success, and not on all the interesting things that people might want to know.

Focus | Tips and Tricks

Keep the technology choices focused on the people using them. Do an environmental scan of the members of the academic community who will be directly and indirectly affected by the initiative before choosing a technology solution. Focus on the users and understand their needs, preferences, idiosyncrasies and limits so that the technology solution will be a good fit.

Stay focused; don’t chase all the features. Vendors are eager to demonstrate the full functionality of their products. However, it is up to the campus to define what they need first and foremost, keeping in mind what is available and possible. This lets a campus leverage their investment strategically, allowing for phased adoption and planned process improvements in support of student success. Decisions about functionality should be made with input from a wide range of stakeholders including institutional research and information technology experts.
Emphasize people and relationships (process) over technologies and tools (product).

The grantees were unanimous in proclaiming that the most meaningful transformations were around people, not technology. Institutions brought constituents together from across their campuses and within their communities to examine their processes and, within the context of their campus culture, envisioned new processes and functionality. Then, and only then, did they investigate technology solutions that could best deliver on those requirements.

**Process Over Product | Points of Pride**

Campuses identified needs first, then chose a technology product. Institutions examined their processes, identified requirements and only then looked for ways that technology could help them do things better or in ways that couldn't be achieved otherwise.

The real wins were around technological solutions that made the work easier to do. The current generation of advising applications offer multiple levels of functionality that perform a wide variety of actions. However, when too many features were implemented at once, it drove the learning curve up and distracted users from fulfilling their most important objective: getting what they needed to accomplish done more effectively and efficiently. Functionality should be deployed in a phased approach that allows for the most important and critical tools and workflows to be implemented, evaluated and adopted first. Once the academic community is comfortable using these functions and they prove to advance student success, additional tools and workflows can be deployed.

**Process Over Product | Lessons Learned**

It's about process, not technology. Grantees learned that they needed to listen to the frustrations that the advising community experienced in using the existing legacy systems before introducing new options. Many of the old systems were homegrown solutions, built years ago by IT, without input from the advisors and students who used them.
Always build linkages between technology innovation and the broader vision. One of the campuses implemented an administrative system connected to retention and persistence. They did not seek faculty and student input because the system didn’t directly affect them on a day-to-day basis. As a result, the project was perceived by the academic community as just another technology upgrade, and they missed the opportunity to link it to the broader vision for student success and to use it as a stepping stone toward the evolution of their institutional culture.

Process Over Product | Tips and Tricks

Respect the practical wisdom of faculty and advisors who interface with students daily and directly. An institution stands to lose something deeply human and valuable when it puts more faith in its technology than in its people. Honoring the perspectives and experiences of students and the knowledge and valuable professional discretion of faculty and advisors keeps them engaged with the initiative. However, it is not feasible to simply increase the numbers of advisors and continue to do things the way they have always been done in the past. There is no doubt among the grantees that without the technology tools, they could not impact students positively at scale yet, at the same time, technology and process enhancements need to be regularly reviewed by the people who interact with students most frequently.

Provide advisors tools so they can be more successful. Give advisors something that will help them do their jobs better. As an example, one advisor made the case for two sets of peripherals, so students could work on their desktop computer alongside them. As a result, the institution provided every advisor with two displays, two keyboards and two mice.

“We learned this time that bringing people together was more key for us than introducing tools.”
6. TEAMWORK

Manage the work efficiently and effectively by assembling and empowering multifunctional, cross-functional teams.

All iPASS grant projects were implemented by internal teams and, in some cases, with support from vendors and outside consultants. Teams were deemed most successful when they were multifunctional and cross-functional. Most important was identifying individuals to serve on teams who truly understood the project’s overarching vision, had an appetite for change, were in it for the long run and were passionate about and engaged in the work. The essential components of teamwork are critical for iPASS projects: building and maintaining trust, feedback cycles and empowered decision-making. Grant leaders recommended acknowledging teams and their members by celebrating project milestones with incentives and recognition activities and events.

Teamwork | Points of Pride

Institutions formed multifunctional, cross-functional teams. All of the teams comprised people from information technology, institutional research, leaders from teaching and learning and student services. Building trust, in which team members were free to share opinions and offer and accept constructive criticism, was an important factor in ensuring a productive team experience. Cross-functional teams provided critical “ambassadorship” when project leaders initiated changes or made additional requests.

Different approaches were used to manage the teams. One campus appointed a steering committee that met biweekly and will continue to meet after the grant. Another campus tasked subgroups with oversight for particular pieces of the initiative. Members were empowered to make decisions and communicate results.

Teamwork | Lessons Learned

Don’t use same ten people for everything. Institutions that relied on a small number of people cited several challenges including staff burnout and personnel turnover, both of which resulted in gaps in knowledge and isolation. This ultimately affected the initiative’s ability to be perceived as a campus-wide effort. Even for the most passionate contributors, overreliance on the same people left certain staff overcommitted and overwhelmed.
Recognize and correct equity imbalances between advising teams. It is difficult to balance advisor caseloads equitably and work toward standard and transparent practices. Acknowledge that all advising conversations are not created equal; certain topics and certain majors require more time than others. Consider different formats to achieve these goals. One institution switched from 45-minute advising sessions across the board to 45-minute sessions for more complex types of advising and 30-minute sessions for simpler types of advising bolstered by group sessions. Ensure equitable access to professional development funds for advisors, including covering conference expenses.

Teamwork | Tips and Tricks

Start with a multifunctional, collaborative team. Adding people with specific expertise to the team later in the process may be tempting from an efficiency point of view, but it is actually less efficient in the long run. Bringing everyone on board at the beginning ensures strong buy-in and a shared understanding of the initiative’s history and goals.

Celebrate team accomplishments publicly and privately. Thanking, acknowledging and recognizing teams and their members is an easy but important gesture. Publish individual and team successes in a newsletter and/or host an award luncheon in their honor. Provide showcase opportunities for team members to attend conferences and participate in a panel or presentation, contribute to a poster session or be interviewed for an article focused on them and their work.

Provide incentives for achieving goals. One institution’s leadership held a competition between the college’s advising teams to identify why students didn’t reregister. The leadership was less interested in the number of registrations than in deriving a better understanding of the obstacles that kept students from registering. The prize was a professional development stipend for each winning team member. The colleges gathered advising notes on as many nonregistered students as possible, with two colleges getting 100% response. Better understanding of why students did not re-enroll led to improved communications and processes for supporting at-risk students.
Provide relevant and timely professional development and training opportunities to various groups across the entire lifecycle of the initiative from conception to implementation.

The iPASS grant leaders understood the importance and power of coordinating professional development (PD) and training for constituents at all levels of the organization. If PD and training were weak links, the project was bound to falter. That said, PD and training had to be timely, well designed, accessible, useful and offered throughout the entire lifecycle of the project and even beyond. Successful PD and training not only introduced participants to new processes and new technologies, but also taught them how to improve work efficiencies and inspired them to understand their work and role in the larger context of academic transformation.

**Professional Development | Points of Pride**

Professional development activities led to deeper conversations around advising transformation and student success. Groups of advisors began meeting on their own apart from the grant’s professional development requirements. The project leads saw an opportunity and followed up on this by establishing an institute to provide dedicated time and space for more advisors to participate.

Several institutions developed, modified or co-created training for faculty. Using existing faculty to work with the vendors on training made the content more customized and relevant and paved the way for quicker adoption and implementation. Extending the training to an online platform allowed part-time faculty a more convenient option for participation.

“Don't worry about training students. Just send them a quick email and a video link! There was no adoption curve.”

A presentation slide from University of Washington's Advisor Academy training program.
Don’t waste faculty members’ time. Recognize that the faculty are smart, busy, adult learners; their professional development must be engaging, practical, well-designed and targeted to the right level of sophistication. Ask the faculty to help identify areas where training can be most helpful. Ensure consistency and promote efficiency by formalizing and documenting the training and mentoring processes so that they can be replicated, shared and improved. Integrate FAQs, guides, tutorials and access to just-in-time support into the system at the most likely points of need. Make use of existing messaging channels, within the Learning Management System, or in standard campus, college, or department websites, newsletters, emails and other forms of communication.

Accept that there won’t be 100% compliance. Change is difficult, even when it’s desirable. Some faculty and staff resented and resisted the idea of change and were hesitant to modify the way they have always worked. Most institutions reported significant participation, but almost all of them had holdouts. This did not significantly affect the initiative’s outcomes, whereas waiting for 100% participation would have slowed or even derailed progress.

Standardize your training to create a common vocabulary and philosophical orientation. Many institutions formalized professional development through Advisor Institutes, Advisory Summits or an Advisor Academy.

Use the professional development opportunities to go beyond technology training. Encourage participants to think of their professional development experiences within the broader context of academic transformation. Provide networking opportunities in and after the training sessions where participants can engage with each other and with the facilitator to expand their thinking.

Provide advisors with training on how to holistically coach students. By providing training on how to coach, institutions gave their advisors additional tools and techniques for supporting students. Coaching, like advising, is a professional skill with its own set of protocols and competencies.
STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Identify, understand and continually engage students, faculty and staff within the organization. Build and sustain connections and leverage partnerships with peers, vendors, union representatives and other experts in the field.

Entire groups of internal and external stakeholders exist outside of the teams charged with planning and implementing an iPASS grant. Many different types of partners are engaged in the work and its effect on the institution and the broader higher education community. Everyone agreed that it is critical to communicate progress continually and in a timely manner to stakeholders and partners. When dealing with stakeholders, especially students and faculty, it is valuable to include them early on in the conversations and embed them into the planning, implementation and testing processes.

**Stakeholders and Partnerships | Points of Pride**

*Students are arguably the most important stakeholder.* iPASS institutions have come a long way in how they communicate with students. The grant experience provided them opportunities to talk with students about planning more than just courses. It has encompassed their whole curricular pathway, including participation in co-curricular activities and giving much more thought about planning for advanced education opportunities, future careers and life beyond college.
Stakeholders and Partnerships | Lessons Learned

Transfer students are beneficiaries of pathway planning tools. Transfer students are particularly vulnerable to falling behind and losing time and money because they are often nontraditional learners, requiring different types of support systems. Implementing tools to help them succeed academically and socially and, in the case of one school, actually plan co-curricular activities consistent with their goals was especially helpful.

Institutions were reminded of the genuine care faculty have for students. Concerns about how aggressive to be in terms of risk-prediction interventions boiled down to concerns about crushing student hopes, dreams and agency over their future. Institutions took this opportunity to listen carefully to understand the nuances of faculty concerns and the expectations of students and their families. They then followed up by showing faculty where their input had meaningful impact. One school was able to improve the closure rate of academic progress items in the system by ensuring that faculty knew that their feedback was received and utilized.

Start earlier and with more intentionality around culture change. Identify the problems the staff and administrators are trying to solve and how they are working around the issues. If the culture is generally passive about interventions, think carefully about how to introduce predictive risk analysis and intervention. Develop new, more transparent norms around data collection and data sharing to bring the technology into a culture ready to accept it and use it meaningfully.

Apologize for mistakes. Following this simple rule from grade school really made a huge difference for one IT department that made the mistake of adopting and implementing a technology solution without consulting the key stakeholders: advisors. While the IT department was acting in good faith, the impact was not what they planned. Owning this and apologizing to the advisors allowed both departments to improve communication channels and work together in a more productive way.

Don't neglect the frontline staff. Staff are stakeholders of a different but important sort. As the people executing many of the important steps in a significant change scenario, they have a unique and valuable inside perspective to offer on how things are going and what could work better. Include their voice in planning and implementation and make sure they are in the communication loop.

Develop a culture of respect for the advising staff. iPASS projects threw a spotlight on advising and advisors. It elevated the services that advisors provided, helping faculty and administrators better understand their professional contributions. The projects elevated advisors, who often knew the back story of what really was happening with students in and outside the classroom, while challenging them to demonstrate capacities to accept change, modify their work practices and embrace technology for its inherent strengths.
Embed students into the process at the front end. Include their voices when determining functionality either by putting them on the design team or holding focus groups with them to help determine functionality. Engage them in pilot testing. Consider training them and using them as peer mentors. Create a student experience team. Include student government leaders in discussions and other student representatives who may be more typical of those at risk. Focus on the tools and applications they use such as mobile devices, games, text and next generation social media platforms, not just the technology the staff are familiar with, like email and Facebook. Student perspective is key, and they will reject a solution outright if they don’t comprehend how it personally helps them navigate the academic system.

Invite faculty to the table early on and engage them in the conversation. Engage faculty in substantive and important pieces of the initiative. Faculty participated in a range of tasks, from helping to define parameters for risk scoring to working with vendor partners to customize and present trainings. Institutions that sought feedback from faculty valued what they heard and used it in practical ways, often to improve user-friendliness.

Get to the front of the line with your IT department. Use the executive sponsor’s pull to reserve some of the IT department staff time for consultation, integration and testing. Understand the IT department may not be able to do everything you need, so budget and be prepared to engage outside IT consultants to work closely with the internal IT team.

Engage a coach. As part of the EDUCAUSE iPASS grant, award recipients were supported by an outside coach, which almost all found helpful in terms of access to relevant resources and connecting with other iPASS grant–funded institutions. Coaches also kept spirits up and provided encouragement when things were trying and difficult. Coaches asked hard questions, which were easier to hear from someone outside the institution, and ultimately challenged teams to meet and exceed their goals.

Acknowledge and thank stakeholders and partners. All of the institutions noted that faculty and other stakeholders were extremely busy. Learning how to use new systems, engaging with and actually using them, took a significant commitment of time. Share with them the impact their efforts have had on the institution’s greater goals and on students’ experiences.
Communicate the project’s progress and value clearly, broadly, consistently and continually.

Communication was central to a project’s acceptance and success and, at the same time, one of the hardest things to get right. Casting an appropriate narrative early on allowed an institution to define, position and control how others perceived and reacted to the iPASS initiative. Communication had to be customized, personalized and directed to diverse and disparate audiences both inside and outside of the organization. Messaging that was initiated from executive leadership had to filter down through a multitude of personnel layers and still be fresh and effective.

**Communication | Points of Pride**

**Establishing communication cadence was important for building support campus-wide.** One institution’s student success office selected and emailed a few key data points of interest to administrators and followed up with weekly emails tracking and updating that data and promoting upcoming events related to the initiative. The mail list grew to over 150 people on and off campus who were interested in following the school’s progress and efforts.

**Casting the appropriate narrative helped to define the project.** Institutions learned early on that they had to control the message, set the tone and position it with the right audiences at the opportune time. Communication must be continual, both vision/mission and outcomes/results driven and tailored to diverse and disparate audiences. One way institutions were able to communicate successfully was when they were able to capture and tell stories about actual students, sharing their experiences and positive outcomes.

**Marketing played an important role.** In order to successfully communicate the right message, at the right level and at the right time, some of the schools invested in a dedicated communication resource, often a marketing expert, who could connect the dots and ensure that linkages to the broader vision, the “why,” were clearly and continually promoted at all levels of the organization. One institution hired a communication specialist who chose language and visual presentation carefully to make communications to students and families clearer and more direct. Under his guidance, messages were crafted following Education Advisory Board (EAB) suggested best practices, including simplifying language and translating “academic” jargon into easy-to-understand terms, using active voice and condensing text under topical headings.

**Institutions had to be creative about the ways they marketed their initiatives.** One school invented a project mascot and supplied a costume which a staff member would wear at key events. Another created entertaining videos that were marketed to students. Still another convened campus-wide awareness events.
Institutions had success directing communication efforts towards the student space. Institutions focused on benefits to students and their families ranging from information about improved application processes to descriptions of ways that the new system would help them save time and money. Campuses used the messaging components of the new advising systems to contact and stay in touch with students. See an example from Northern Arizona University's Nudge Campaign below.

Continuing Students all campuses  
High – Very High Persistence Predictions  
Sent to approximately 15,390 students

Subject Line: Thrive as a Lumberjack!

[Student’s first name]

Can you believe it’s October? I hope the term has started out well for you. Remember you are part of a great community. This year will provide you new opportunities to develop, grow, and connect. Think about the reason you applied to NAU in the first place. Remind yourself about those goals and aspirations; you can achieve your goals here.

Good luck this term. Reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

[Assigned Advisor]

"I wanted to say thank you. I have been having a rough couple of weeks with everything in my life and this small email really helped me. So, thank you and I am excited to be able to meet with you next week to plan for my future."

—Response to one of Northern Arizona University’s Nudge Campaign’s automated messages.

iPASS’s reach extended way beyond the campus. iPASS grant leaders, at the various institutions, continue to interact with each other and with other higher education colleagues and stakeholders. Consistent with being true innovators, they are speaking on their own campuses and at regional and national events and conferences about the successes and lessons learned, reflecting on what they would have done differently and helping other institutions and system stakeholders avoid pitfalls. This cross-institutional sharing helps peer institutions to plan and launch their own student success transformations.
**Communication** | *Lessons Learned*

Reframe negative messages, rather than deny them. Rather than defending or trying to refute the idea that the institution is "taking away advisor’s tools,” emphasize the implementation of new tools to reduce workload and increase effectiveness.

Don't overautomate communication. Just because the technology platform can send automated messages in many different formats, it’s not mean that it is the best approach. Use the faculty and advisors to discern when the situation is sensitive or complex enough to warrant a personal communique over an electronically delivered message. Institutions need to coordinate their student communication efforts because if students are bombarded with messages, digital or analogue, there is a good chance they will choose to ignore them.

Share the big wins, but also showcase the small victories. Almost all of the institutions noted that the fast pace of the iPASS initiative, coming on top of or in parallel with other initiatives, was very taxing. Communicate not just what you plan to do, but when you accomplish a goal, share and celebrate the small victories and short-term wins. Acknowledging the incremental wins kept the teams and stakeholders motivated, energized and moving forward when the work seemed impossibly overwhelming.

**Communication** | *Tips and Tricks*

Link and connect the message to the broader vision. Tying back to the institution's mission was an excellent way to engage the entire academic community and create alignment. Don't just list feature enhancements, promote the project’s benefits and continue to reinforce why the work is being sanctioned and what problems it is solving. Report results on effort and how students are being positively impacted and how the solutions are making everyone’s job easier.

Provide the early adopters multiple platforms to evangelize on behalf of the technology. Offer them opportunities to provide examples, share tips and demonstrate new features to peers by contributing to blogs and newsletters, speaking at lunch-and-learns and presenting at professional development sessions and other events.

Allow for comments when communications are sent. Feedback is a good measure of effectiveness and indicates whether people are really engaging with the message.
Collect and use data and metrics for success wisely and transparently.

Data, when used appropriately, provides quick and visible ways to evaluate assumptions, identify patterns and trends, and surface issues. Institutional leaders have to balance the expertise and wisdom of their staff with the ways that data can and should be used to add value and advance transformational change. Determine what to measure and then narrow the focus by aligning metrics to the institution's mission and vision.

**Data and Metrics | Points of Pride**

**Advisors had access to data that they never had access to previously.** Many institutions used the iPASS initiatives to deepen their advising staff’s understanding of data both at the individual student level and at the departmental and institutional levels. This gave them access to data they had never had access to before. Coupled with targeted training, they were able to learn how to make meaning of the data and apply it to their work. One institution used newly acquired institutional data, equating the first four weeks of classes with student success, to design interventions and programs leveraging the data with audiences that included faculty, students, staff and families.

**Provide advisors with the skills needed to use data effectively.** One campus established an Advisor Academy that provided standardized training. This provided a platform for advisors to become competent in collecting and evaluating individual and aggregated student data and share what they learned with others involved in the initiative. Advisors also worked collaboratively to determine ways to interpret data and standardize responses.

**Encapsulate data as part of an institution's student success narrative.** Some of the schools created and shared stories describing student successes that were backed up by data, but not driven by data. By emphasizing a more human perspective, data could be used to support student impact. Vignettes featured students who benefited from more productive and frequent interactions with their advisors, were able to plan and monitor their academic progress using self-service tools and dashboards and were more aware and able to take advantage of their educational options and career opportunities. One institution took a longitudinal view and followed students from when they began their education to when they began a new career.
Data and Metrics | Lessons Learned

Explain how the data adds value, where it comes from and why it can be trusted. Data provided one perspective on the facts around student experiences. Some institutions found their advisors and faculty were unwilling to accept or even entertain that perspective because they didn’t trust the sourcing, the indicators of reliability or the value of the data as a complement to their own understanding of the student experience. Investing in the effort to explain the impact and value of the data and build trust around it ensures that time and energy are not wasted on defending, validating and justifying the data.

Step away from the data if there is a conflict between it and the advisor’s wisdom. Some institutions noted that advisors with personal knowledge of student situations added useful insight into data-generated conclusions. Where they saw conflicts between data and human experience, most found it better to favor human experience and insights. Data was more likely to be accepted and used when it was actionable and tied directly to the advisor’s work.

Risk prediction data generated the most controversy. Several institutions reported spending additional time to parse risk prediction data. In those instances, faculty led teams to consider individual variables that were aggregated to produce the predictions and then reconsider different, more meaningful configurations and inputs to inform those risk prediction signals.

Respect the limits and interest level of “non-data people” dealing with data. Advisors enjoyed having access to new data and were impressed by the breadth of the view it provided, but they did not have the facility or the time to become as facile as their institutional research (IR) colleagues. In successful programs, this served as a springboard for departmental collaboration with IR. They provided ways to interpret data, whether it be through visualization techniques, verbal explanations or written descriptions. Advisors helped IR hone in on what data and which metrics were most relevant for their work. In the end, both the advisors and the IR professionals were contributing to institutional decisions driven by data. Technology also contributed to a better understanding and acceptance of data by providing real-time access, interactive dashboards and a variety of reporting options.
Data and Metrics | Tips and Tricks

Narrow the use of metrics to align with the institution’s strategy and vision. Decide what to track and what to measure. Leverage historical data and apply leading indicators to help identify a first wave of student participation, as well as lagging indicators that will help assess results. One school’s goal was to meet their state’s funding formula and also attract more first-generation and Pell-eligible students, so they identified and tracked data that addressed those specific metrics. Another institution’s board of trustees formalized their commitment to student success by adopting policies based on the iPASS project’s data-driven metrics.

Choose metrics that will measure success as defined by the initiative. Technology tools can measure, slice, dice and combine data in more ways than imaginable. Focus on the key metrics for assessing student success that align with the institution’s mission, vision and strategy. Faculty gravitated toward data that tracked attendance; advisors were drawn to data that supported degree auditing and planning. One college tracked its advising satisfaction/utilization scores using nationally benchmarked surveys including SENSE, CCSSE, and the Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Other use examples shared by grantees included collecting data on first-time student or transfer student retention, drop-withdrawal-failure rates, time to degree, graduation rates and retention or course success across demographic divisions.
Position the data in a way to achieve impact at scale. No institution can hire enough advisors to provide holistic advising to all students. Technology solutions provide ways to personalize approaches, target resources and achieve impact at scale. Track technology adoption, document implementation procedures and measure success factors early on to ensure critical transformation is occurring and that changes are scalable.

Consistently report out on the same data. Find the three or four data “nuggets” that are most meaningful to your audience and report out on those indicators in the same way at a regular, cadenced interval. Grantees commented that their communities responded most favorably to metrics that provided early alerts, tracked advising appointment attendance, monitored student retention and flagged grades. Consistent and targeted reporting builds support and deepens the initiative’s visibility and profile across campus.

Invest in ways to make data more transparent, accessible and legible. Provide access, ask for feedback and expect and engage in dialogue around the use and misuse of data. Translate numerical data into visually rich metrics using charts, diagrams and professionally designed infographics. A good example is Northeast Wisconsin Technical College’s “Leading Indicators” infographic that they updated and shared weekly with their academic community.

“Adopting at scale is the part that makes the impact real.”
EDUCUSE's iPASS Grant Challenge Website provides a rich collection of grant-related resources. There is information describing the need, the grant challenge, implementation services, progress updates, iPASS partners and links to additional resources.

The site also includes a list of all 26 grant recipients along with 10 community members. Each entry includes a link to a description of the institution, contact information, an abstract describing the proposal and a project update. Under the iPASS Resource tab, there is a comprehensive list of iPASS resources including blog posts and articles written by grantees and project partners; EDUCUSE Learning Initiative's (ELI) “7 Things you Should Know” publications; EDUCUSE Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) papers, handbooks, surveys and guides; and checklists, guides, frameworks, market analysis and tools developed by grant partners.

Lastly, EDUCUSE has provided public access to multiple iPASS webinars with downloadable slides on topics including "Key Structures and Processes for Holistic Student Support," “Advisor Voices,” “The Coach Approach to Student Advising” and “Integrating Student Success Initiatives,” just to name a few.

EDUCUSE’s iPASS Grant Challenge Website: https://www.educause.edu/ipass-grant-challenge/
Many professional organizations are committed to student success and their membership would benefit from access to iPASS resources. Grant recipients interviewed for this publication suggested the following organizations:

- EDUCAUSE: [https://www.educause.edu](https://www.educause.edu)
- Achieving the Dream: [www.achievingthedream.org/](http://www.achievingthedream.org/)
- American Association of Community Colleges (AACC): [www.aacc.nche.edu/](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/)
- Association for Institutional Research (AIR): [www.airweb.org](http://www.airweb.org)
- Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU): [www.aplu.org](http://www.aplu.org)
- National Academic Advising Association (NACADA): [https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/](https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/)
- National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO): [https://www.nacubo.org/](https://www.nacubo.org/)
- National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD): [https://www.nisod.org/](https://www.nisod.org/)

Thanks to Susan Metros of Metros Consulting and Holly Morris of Summit Strategies for research and authorship of this report.