



FOURTH EDITION

Connected Education Report

Expanded insights and trends from 1500+ students and 500+ higher education leaders across six global markets.



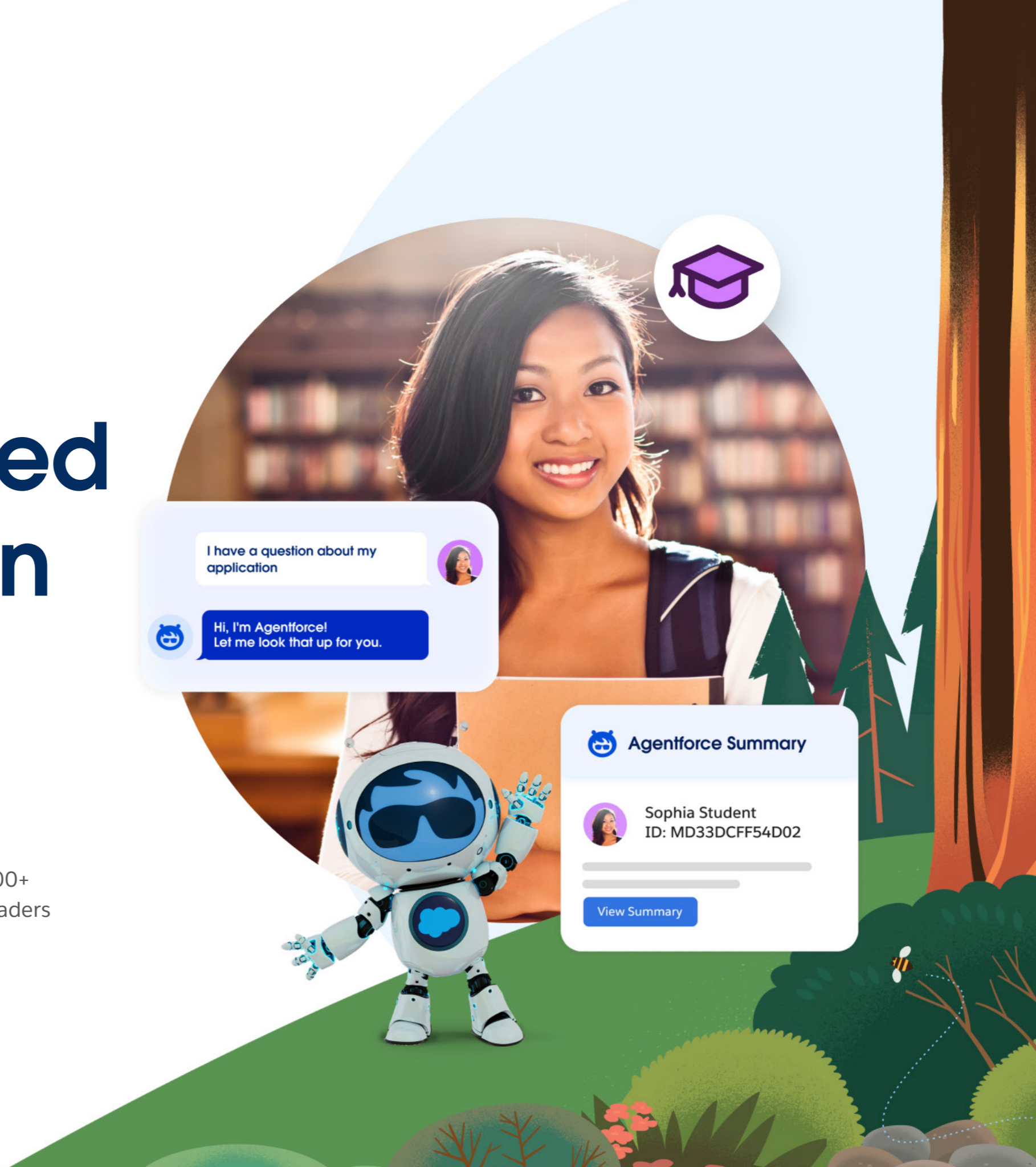
I have a question about my application

Hi, I'm Agentforce! Let me look that up for you.

Agentforce Summary

Sophia Student
ID: MD33DCFF54D02

View Summary



A Note from Salesforce to Higher Education

Today's higher education leaders must increase enrollment, retention, and fundraising - all with growing student and staff expectations and limited resources.

Despite these demands, leaders remain committed to driving student and institutional success.

But their tools often fall short of delivering on expectations.

This Connected Education Report offers a timely snapshot of the higher education landscape in 2025. Drawing on insights from students and senior staff across institutions globally, it highlights the expanding role of unified data, AI, and autonomous agents in shaping the educational experience.

Students—already immersed in AI-enabled tools in their daily lives—are not only receptive to its use in education but now expect seamless and personalised service and experiences.

There is everything to gain for institutions willing to embrace AI: streamlined operations, more meaningful student engagement, and - crucially - giving staff the time and space to focus on the relationships and human connections that really matter.

Let's seize the opportunity together!

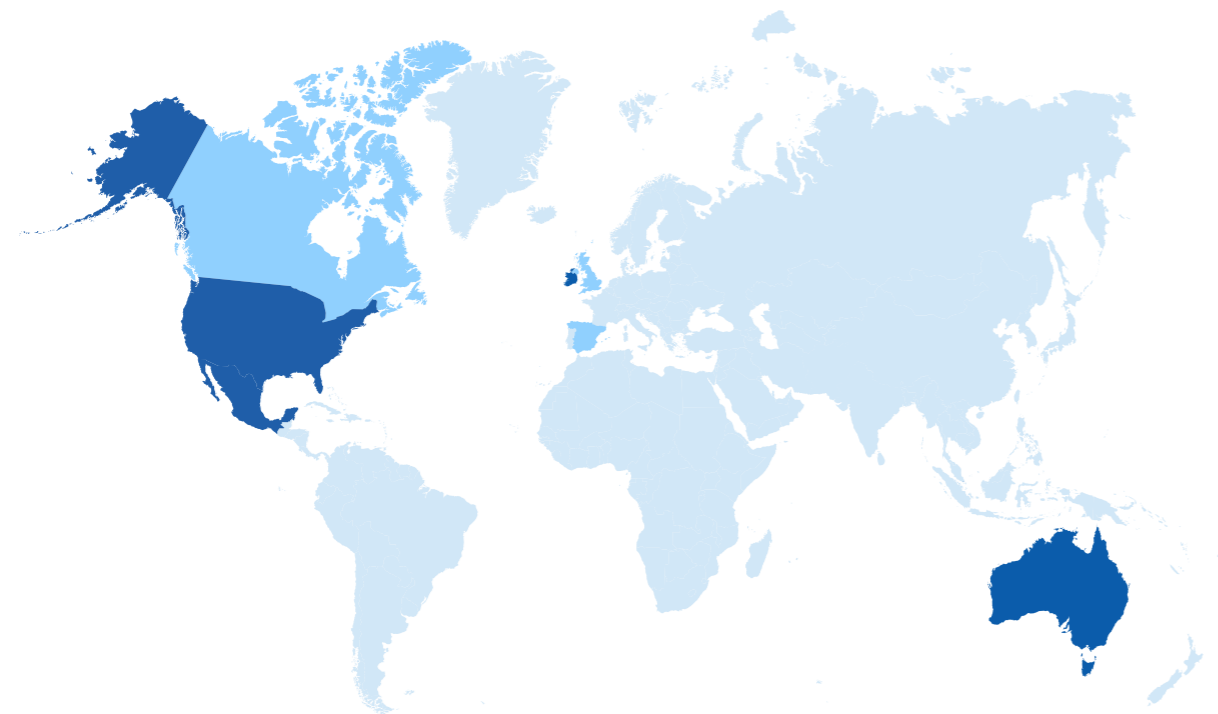








What You'll Find in This Report

A total of 2,091 responses were collected from April 1, 2025, to May 2, 2025, via an online quantitative survey run by Reputation Leaders in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, Australia, and Ireland.

Reputation Leaders also conducted 12 in-depth qualitative interviews with highly experienced higher education senior leaders in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, Australia, and Ireland from April 4, to May 16, 2025.

Due to rounding, not all percentage totals in this report equal 100%. All comparison calculations are made from total numbers (not rounded numbers).



Country		Students	Staff
United States		352	101
United Kingdom		334	100
Canada		250	79
Spain		222	77
Australia		204	82
Ireland		200	90
Total		1,562	529

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Executive Summary

AI future for higher education staff

- ▶ More **time back**
- ▶ More **high-value work**
- ▶ More **innovation**
- ▶ More **human connection**

AI enhanced experience for students

- ▶ Better **student & career support**
- ▶ Quicker **responses to queries**
- ▶ Personalized **admissions**
- ▶ Deeper **connections**

“ The impact of AI on the learning experience is extraordinary. How do we harness AI for the good of the work that we do?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ADVANCEMENT, USA

01

Higher Education Seeing The Transformative Potential Of AI

Amid uncertain times, rising student expectations and increasing pressure to improve efficiencies on multiple levels, staff are optimistic about an AI-supported future which offers gains in productivity; freeing up time for higher-value efforts and a more responsive, personalized, and student-centered experience.

02

Student Perspectives in 2025

Most students are having a good university experience (and this has been increasing since 2021) but less than half would say their experience was really great. Room to improve on overall service - but it will require support which extends beyond the classroom.

03

Streamlining The Path To Enrollment: AI-Driven Recruitment & Admissions

The path from exploration to enrollment is no longer easy as student priorities have shifted. They expect a process which is simple and responsive and not an admin overload. Cue AI and autonomous agents to bring speed, personalization and agility; filling the gaps for streamlined interactions with students at the top of the funnel.

Executive Summary

04 Better Student Experiences: AI Enhances Services, Support & Connections

Students are satisfied with core services, but onboarding and wellbeing support need work. Staff are already seeing the huge potential for AI to step in and bridge support gaps with personalized and proactive support for smarter and more student-centred services. Students are full open to - and using - AI across the journey and it is already boosting experience despite some wariness of AI use in the wellbeing space. Careers teams face growing pressure to better prepare students for the workforce.

05 Lifelong Connections: AI Supports Advancement & Alumni Relations

Strong emotional ties drive better student experiences, and those students go on to become university promoters and engaged alumni and donors. Advancement teams are using AI to harness the data, information and knowledge they hold to drive better alumni relationships and build future donor relationships on genuine connection and engagement.

06 Staff Perspectives in 2025

Staff are generally supported and satisfied in their roles, but feeling the pressure to perform - especially in a new AI-enabled environment. Steps must be taken to improve clarity in communications between institutions and staff and to empower them through upskilling around AI - a critical enabler of digital transformation.

07 Future Focus: Shifting AI From Tactical To Transformative

Many institutions still operate in data silos, despite knowing a unified strategy is essential. The vision for staff is real-time insights, connected data, and advanced AI use—and it's now a top priority for institutions over the next 3–5 years. Early adopters of autonomous agents are seeing impact, but wider staff training is needed to unlock full potential. Leading institutions share three things: committed leadership, empowered teams, and a “test and learn” mindset. Without this alignment, AI risks staying in pilot mode—falling short of the transformation today's students and staff expect.

01

Higher Education Seeing the Transformative Potential of AI



01

2025: Uncertain Times For Higher Education

Higher education leaders globally state that this is a year of exceptional instability for higher education, with funding cuts and geopolitical tensions all adding to a shifting landscape that prioritizes student-centricity, digital fluency, and workforce relevance.

Staff are concerned about impending financial and staffing cuts, but optimistic about innovation and better student support.

“ This is an unprecedented moment of great uncertainty. It's very different than other crises that we've faced in the past. The role of the university is being redefined right now.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ADVANCEMENT, USA



01

Student Expectations Are High, And Rising

It's a lot for institutions to live up to as students want quick and proactive responses and service levels to mirror brand experiences they have in their daily lives. They reserve the right to change their mind on university or college choices, even last minute.

But they also want to be wanted. They crave long term connections and educational experiences that make them feel known, supported and give them a sense of purpose.

Not just a number

Last-minute decision making means the path to enrollment is no longer linear; institutions need real time connection to keep pace and not lose prospective student mindshare.

Today's students expect: more proactive and tailored support, deeper connections, and service levels mirroring brand experiences in other aspects of their lives

Students need more proactive and personalized support from their college/university than they did 5 years ago

82%

Students compare the service levels at college/university to the service they receive in other aspects of their life

78%

Students are now looking for a longer-term connection with their institution

74%

Students are now more indecisive about college/university choices: changing their minds / making last minute decisions

68%

Base: 529 Staff

““ They're expecting a much better response turnaround...because the technology is there, so why is it still taking so long?

DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS, AUSTRALIA

The Pressure Is On To Build A Modern, Future-Proofed Institution

Tech to enhance, not replace connection

““ Everything they do is so digital...without ever having to speak to a human. From a convenience perspective, it's great...but there are some developmental pieces that are missing.

ASSISTANT DEAN, USA

Embracing debate, diversity & dialogue

““ I think that space to be able to debate...has already been eroded massively. That freedom... that we maybe take for granted. I think that's absolutely critical to be an effective contributor later on when students get to work.

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UK

““ We're providing services for students that were here 25 years ago. We need to start meeting students where they are...getting our hands around the diverse students that we have.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CAREERS, USA

Big brand pull is no longer enough

““ I think the brand is not enough anymore. Students are more practical in the way they choose institutions, looking for those that are more tailored to them. If you have the brand and you have the student-focused approach, then you are on the right path.

CEO & PRESIDENT, SPAIN

Human centric, experience rich

““ Students are looking for a real, lived experience...that you can't get in the virtual world...that really takes you out of yourself. Otherwise, we may as well just pack up and go home.

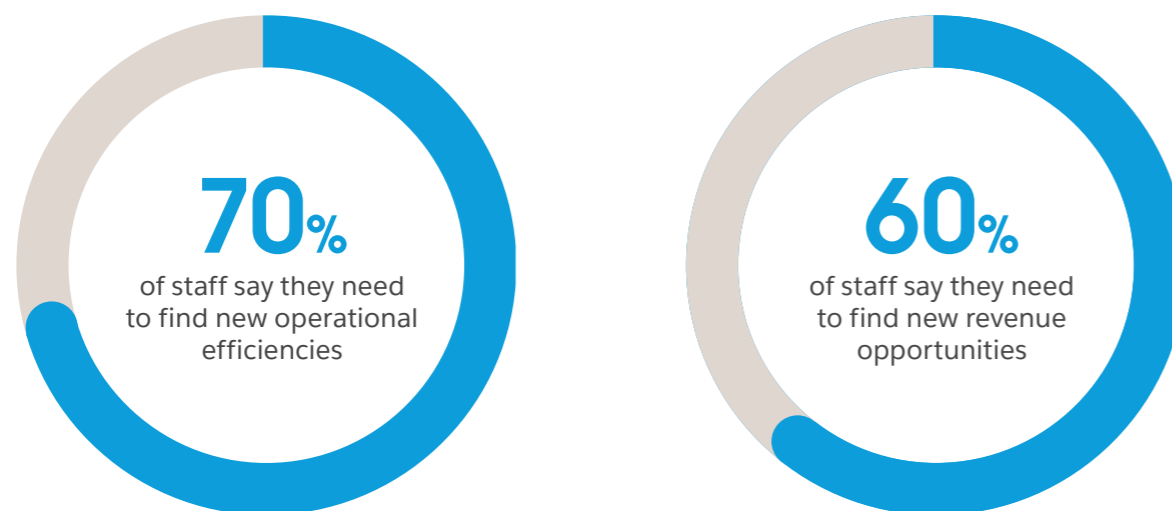
DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UK



Finding New Efficiencies And Revenue Opportunities Are Key Priorities For Staff

Staff are feeling the pressure of strategic issues. Seven in 10 say they need to find new operational efficiencies, while six in 10 are focused on uncovering new revenue opportunities

Navigating smaller budgets, rising expectations, and shifting business models underscores the urgency for smarter, tech-enabled strategies that unlock both savings and growth.



Base: 529 Staff

“ So much time is wasted looking, searching, going back through historical data. The one complaint I hear from my colleagues all the time is how much admin there is. I'm all in favour of anything that helps with that.

DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, IRELAND

“ We have one imperative right now to increase our pipeline of international applications. Technology can do a lot of things...we could handle an increase in volume without having to recruit another staff member.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS, AUSTRALIA

“ Universities are very driven by personnel and it's a great expense. So, support services are hard to quantify because they're not revenue generating. Being able to supplement your staffing for a reasonable cost has to be really great.

ASSOCIATE DEAN, EDUCATION & STUDENT EXPERIENCE, UK

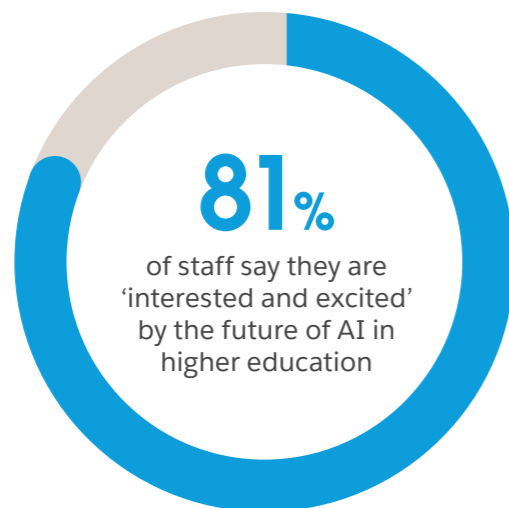


01

Help Is At Hand

Staff and students are seeing, and experiencing, the huge transformative potential of AI to enhance their experiences

AI Optimism Runs High Across Institutions



Base: 529 Staff



“ Even in email comms, we have hundreds if not thousands of versions of different emails. If we have opportunities for automation through AI that allow us to personalize and target more..it's an opportunity to lift your head and think more strategically.

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING INSIGHTS, UK

“ It's actually helping you do your job. If we don't grasp that opportunity, we are going to be stuck in these old ways.

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UK

“ Just imagine the conversation we could have three to five years from now on that interplay between AI and the CRM. It's going to transform how we do our work.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ADVANCEMENT, USA

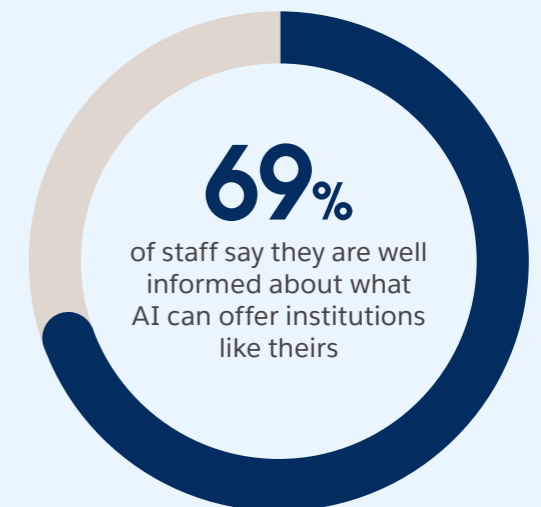
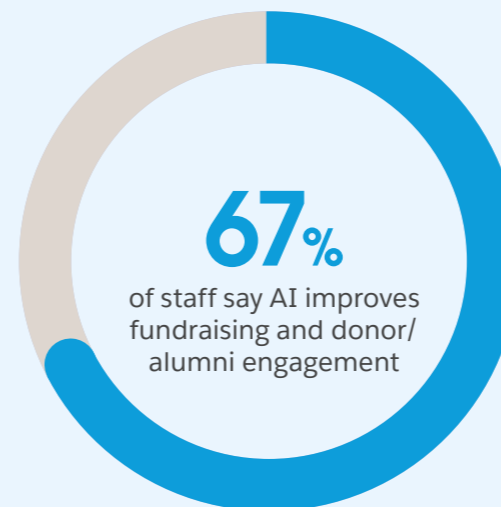
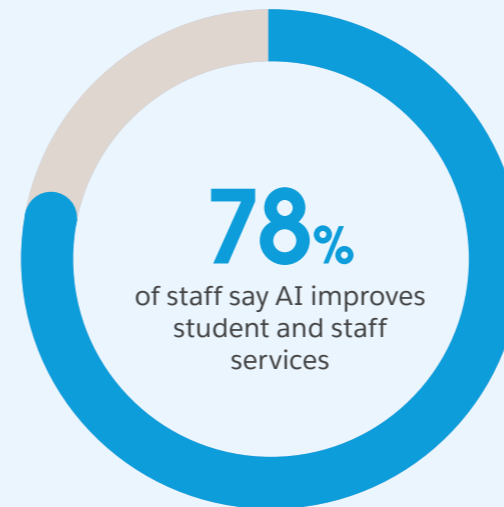


01 Staff See The Benefits Of AI, And Believe It Can Transform Operations Across The Student Lifecycle

Staff are increasingly confident in the role AI can play across higher education operations. A strong majority say AI helps free up time for higher-value work and supports more effective planning through AI-powered analytics.

Beyond operational gains, many staff also recognize AI's ability to enhance student and staff services and strengthen fundraising and alumni engagement.

AI use is shifting from reactive to strategic as institutions look to embed AI not just as a tool, but as an enabler of smarter, future-focused decision-making.



Base: 529 Staff

83%

AI tools free up time for higher-value activities

- ✓ Process Analysis & Overhaul
- ✓ Strategic Thinking
- ✓ Innovation & Creativity
- ✓ Team / Staff Development
- ✓ Human Connection
- ✓ Student Guidance
- ✓ Personal Learning
- ✓ Reflection

01

From Admin To Impact:

Staff foresee AI & autonomous agents giving them time back for higher-value work

When asked how they'd use the time saved by AI and autonomous agents, immediate thoughts turn to work process efficiencies, including faster task execution and more creative thinking. Staff also yearn to focus more time on self development and student support, suggesting that automation isn't about doing less—it's about enabling people to do more of what matters.

AI and autonomous agents are not just productivity boosters, but enablers of more meaningful, strategic, and human-centered work; elevating the purpose of higher education roles, not just streamlining them.

Staff want AI to unlock time for strategy, growth, and human impact

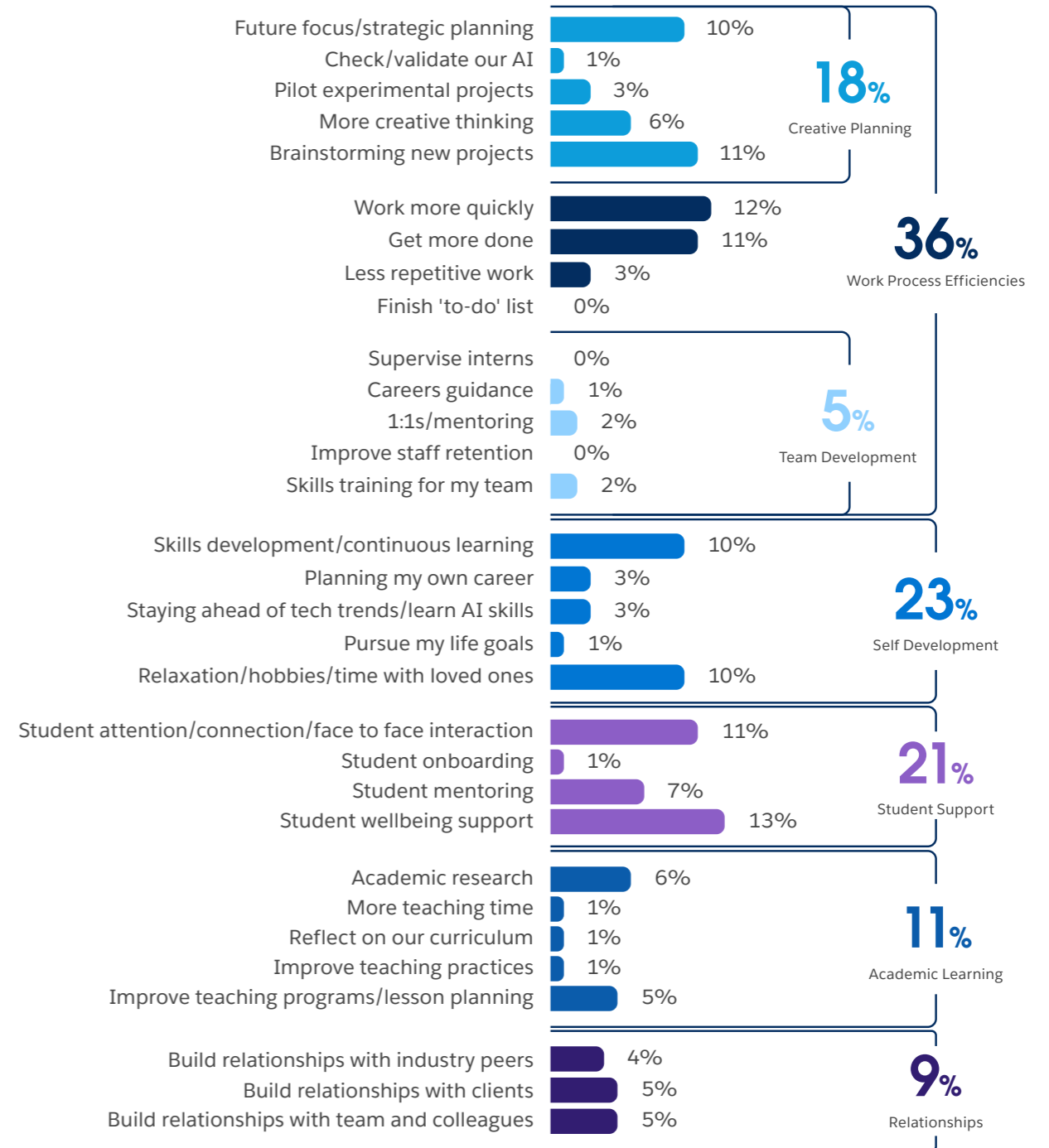
If you could engage AI and autonomous agents to help you with your work, what would you do with the extra time they gave you back in your working day?

“ I would probably use my time to learn other things that I have put on the back burner or develop relationships.

“ I would spend more time developing staff and really helping them grow.

“ I'd like to spend more time talking to students and listening to what their issues are.

“ It's to free us up to do the things we're really good at. More of the student facing, the interaction, the human side.



Base: 529 Staff

02

Student Perspectives in 2025



02

Student Experiences Are Improving But There Is Still Room To Turn Good Into Great

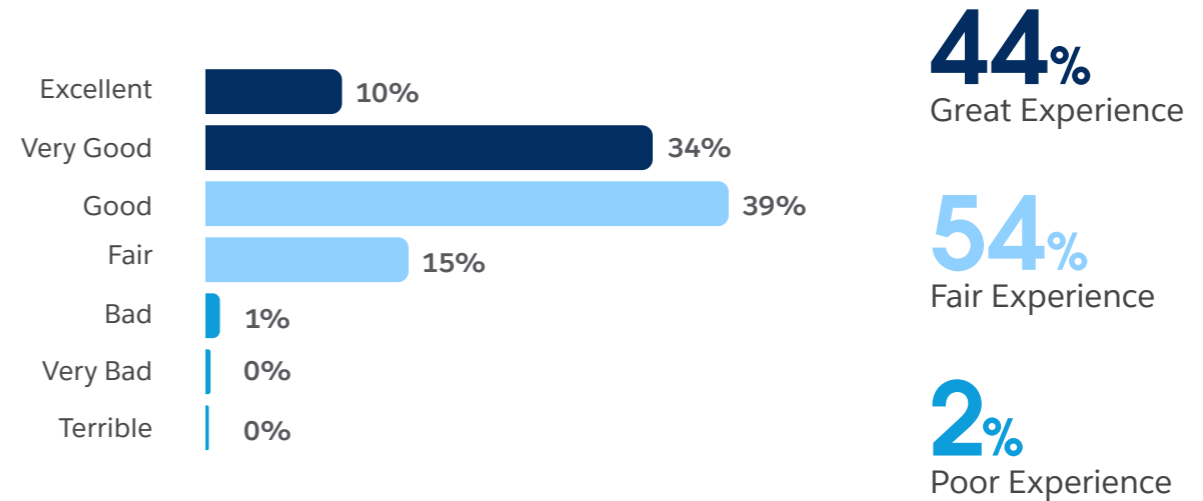
The majority of students in 2025 are having a positive (great or fair) experience although less than half would rate it as ‘great’ (excellent or very good), and only 10% say it’s excellent. While satisfaction is widespread, institutions still have work to do to elevate the overall experience from functional to exceptional.

Good news: Great university experiences have risen significantly since 2021. The proportion of students reporting a great university experience has nearly tripled over the last four years—from 16% in 2021 to 44% in 2025.

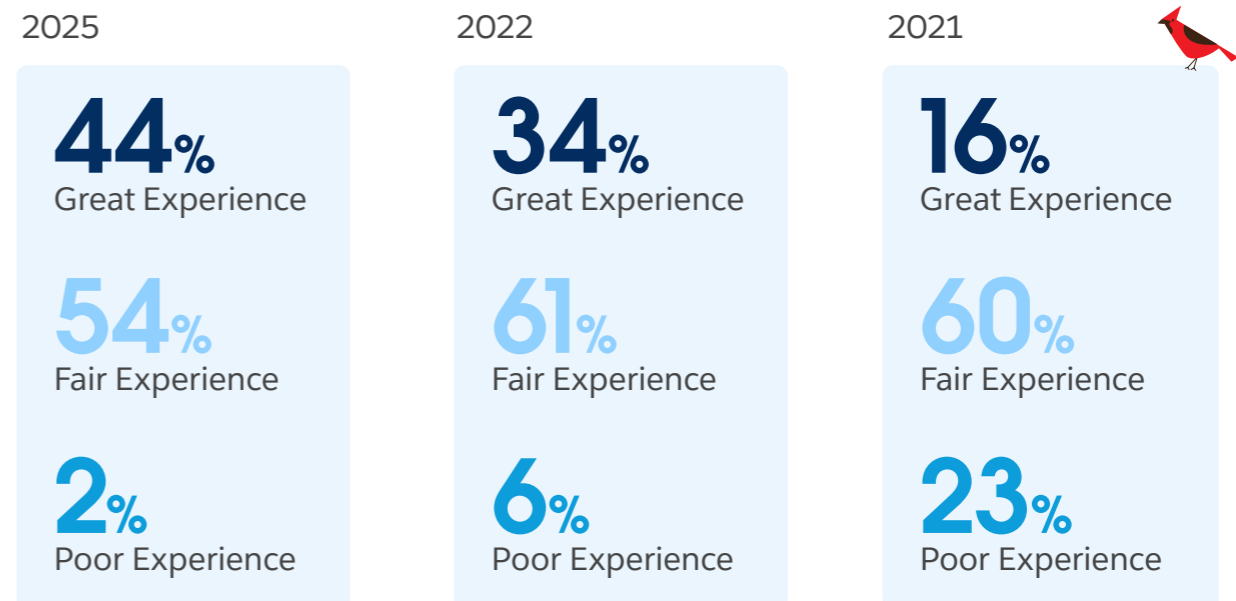
Institutions have made meaningful progress—and have an opportunity to build on this momentum and drive deeper satisfaction.

The majority of students have positive experiences, but “great” still eludes many

Overall, how would you rate your experience at your college/university?



Great experiences are on the rise – with sharp improvements since 2021



Base: 1,562 students

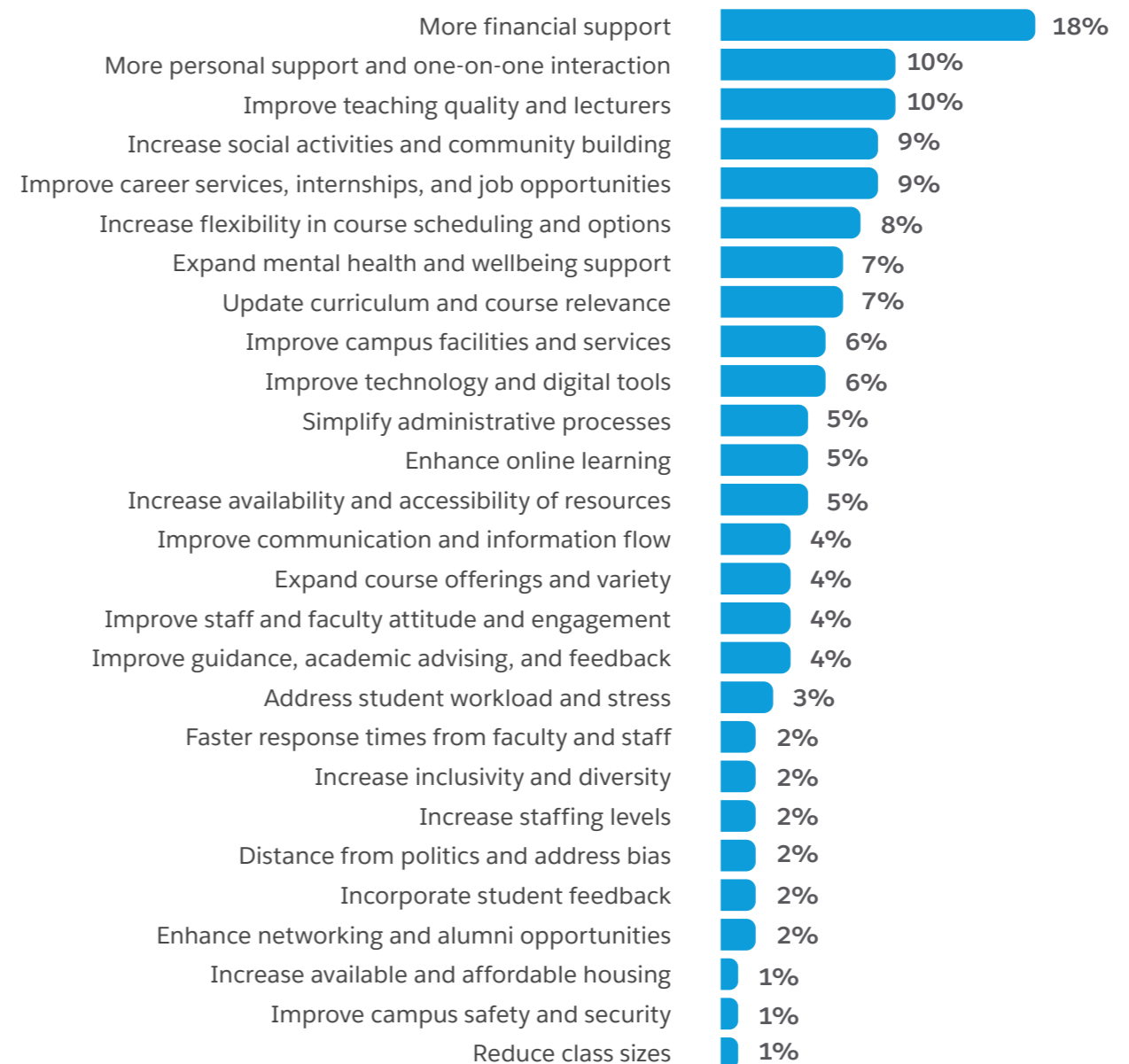
Taking Student Experiences From Good To Great Requires Support That Goes Beyond The Classroom

Students identified a range of improvements that would enhance their overall college or university experience, with financial concerns topping the list. Nearly one in five students called for greater **financial support, including reduced tuition fees, more scholarships, and affordable housing**. Many also expressed a strong desire for more personal, one-on-one support through mentorship, academic guidance, and emotional wellbeing services.

Teaching quality emerged as another key theme, with students urging institutions to make lectures more engaging, interactive, and relevant. Beyond academics, students emphasized the importance of building a stronger sense of community through more social activities and events. Career readiness was also a priority, with calls for improved career services, internships, and job placement support.

Improving the experience starts with financial support and connections

How can universities and colleges improve the overall student experience?



Base: 1,562 students

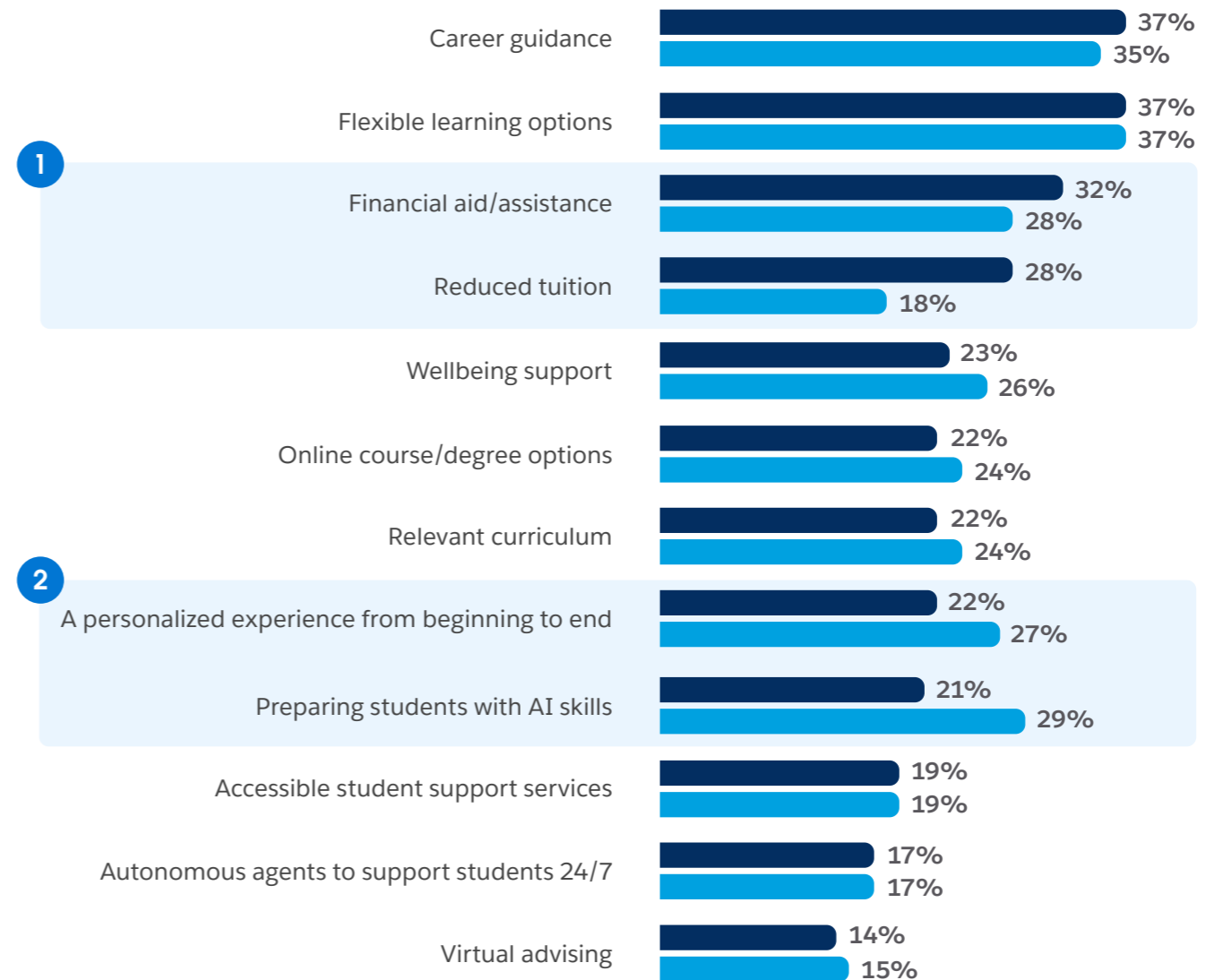
02

Mind The Gap: Students and Staff Agree Careers and Flexibility Are Top Priorities –But Some Needs Risk Being Overlooked

What do students want and what do staff think is important for colleges/universities moving forward?

- What students want
- What staff think is important

- 1 Are staff missing the importance of financial support?
- 2 Staff are more sold on the importance of personalization and AI preparedness than students appear to be



Base: 1,562 students; 529 Staff

03

Streamlining The Path To Enrollment: AI-Driven Recruitment & Admissions



03

The Path to Enrollment Is Getting Personal and Practical

Since 2022, what students value most has shifted—from location to flexibility and fit.

In 2025, students are placing greater emphasis on flexibility, cost, and personal fit—overtaking traditional factors like location and rankings.



Student enrollment decisions are evolving

Most important factors for students in deciding to enroll in colleges/universities



Base: 1,562 students

03

How Can Institutions Stand Out From The Crowd?

Institutions are betting on - and winning - with AI-powered engagement

From advanced segmentation to autonomous agents, those experimenting with AI are seeing results.

What are the tactics?

Institutions are using digital tools and career-focused content to attract students. Top tactics include digital advertising, AI skill-building, virtual events, and career insights—while personalized and AI-powered experiences remain underused.

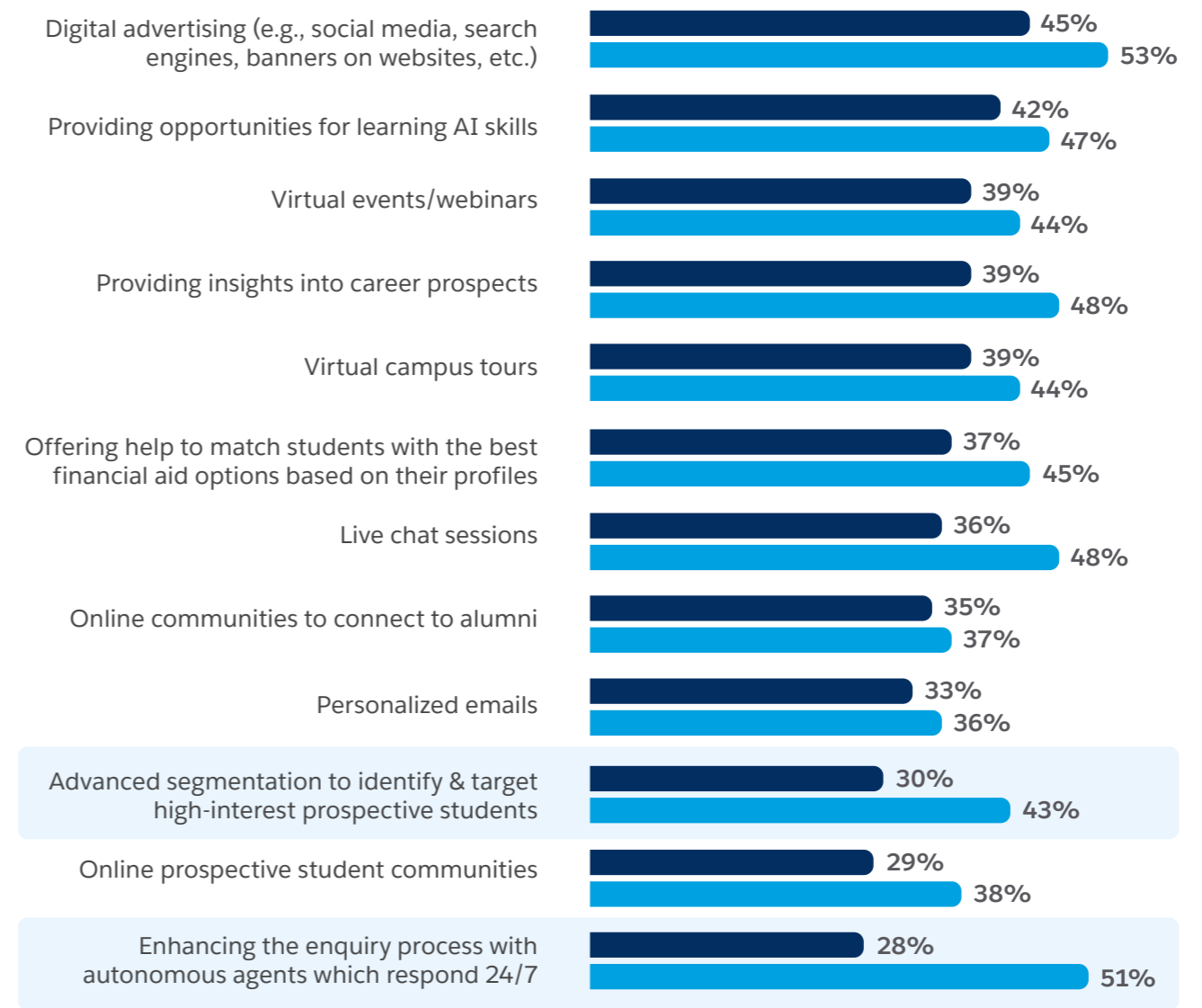
What works best?

Staff are seeing greatest success where they have implemented digital advertising and the use of autonomous agents to enhance the recruitment process.

Institutions see success with AI-driven and career-focused recruitment

Tactics and policies for attracting prospective students

- Tactics or policies implemented
- Tactics or policies that were successful



Base: 529 Staff

03

Students Expect A Simple, Clear Admissions Journey –But Many Find It Falls Short

77% of students say the application process should be as simple as online shopping—signaling a clear desire for a smoother, more intuitive experience. Yet 28% report frustrations during the application journey, from complex forms to unclear processes and hard-to-find information online.

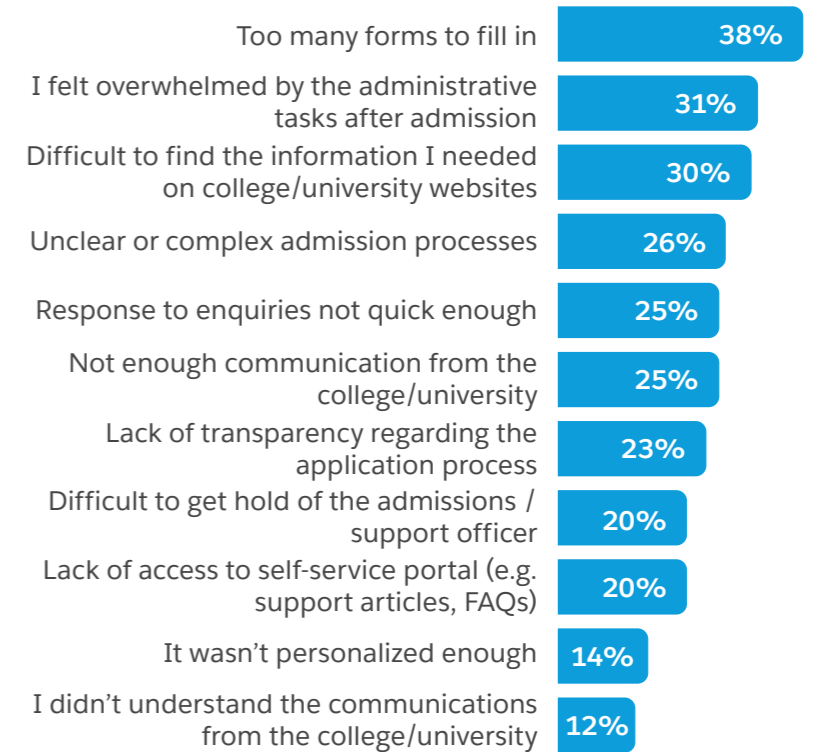
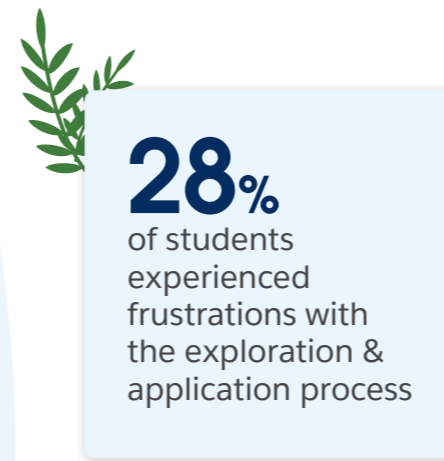
Admin overload and lack of transparency cause frustration

Students felt burdened by the volume of administrative tasks. Many struggle with finding the information they need or understanding next steps.

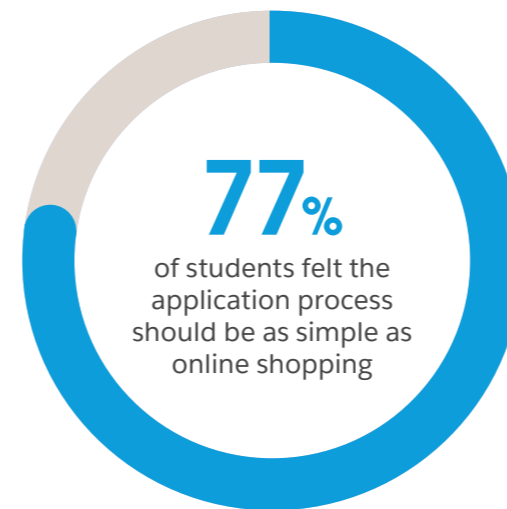
One in four students felt let down by the lack of communication from their university during the admissions process.

Over 1 in 4 students frustrated with the application & admission process

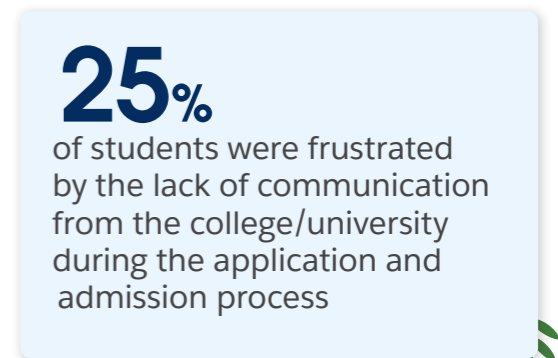
What did you find frustrating about the application & admissions process?



Base: 436 students who found the application process frustrating



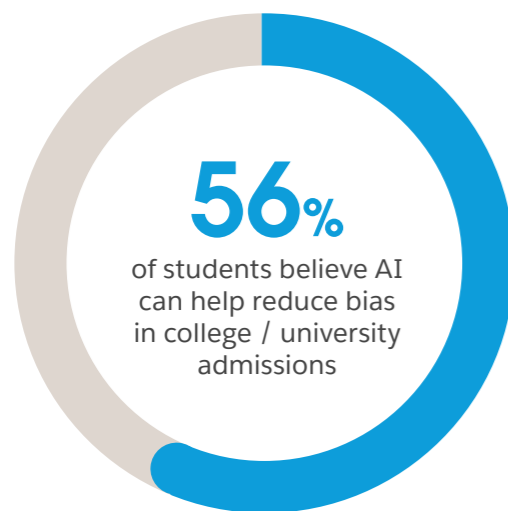
Base: 1,562 Students



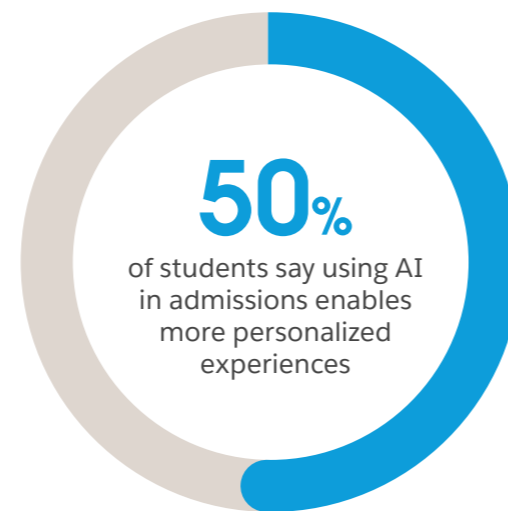
Students And Staff See Promise In AI

How to fix a frustrating admissions experience?

AI can reduce bias



AI to make admissions personal



Base: 1,562 Students

Recruitment & admissions are early test beds for AI applications

Staff tell us AI is starting to fill the gaps in student engagement between stages of the admissions process; they are seeing the benefits of AI to speed and streamline interactions at the top of the funnel.

Pilots & planning

““ We're running an AI pilot for a programme which is ingesting all the applications and asking AI to make a recommendation as to whether students should be made an offer or not.

ASSISTANT DEAN, USA

Answering basic questions

““ I think there is really great potential on that front end for admitting new students. It can answer basic questions about the school. "How much does it cost? Do you have this programme and can you send me more information?" You can reduce some expenses there, but also provide service outside of traditional working hours.

ASSISTANT DEAN OF STUDENTS, USA

03

When Speed Is Of The Essence, Autonomous Agents Can Step In To Assist

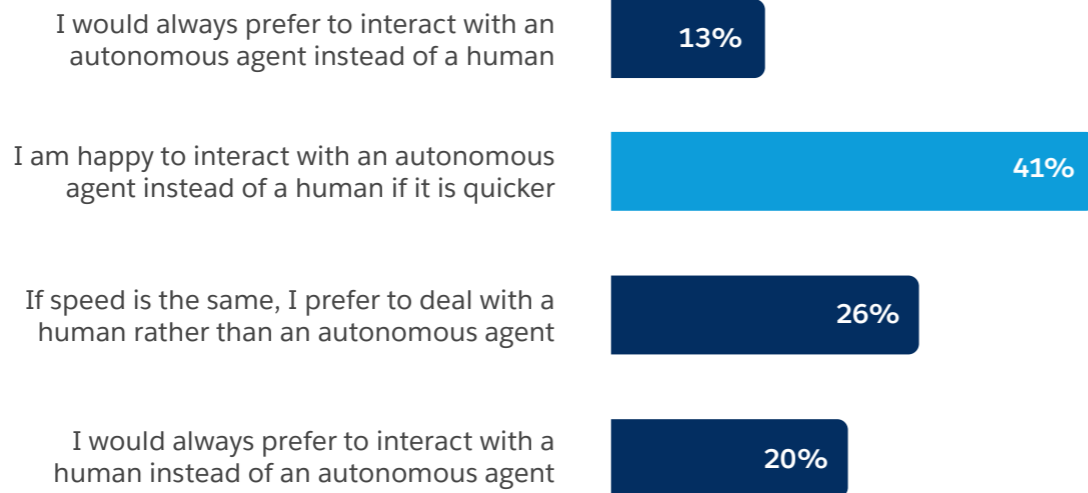
Most students are open to the idea of autonomous agents, provided they get answers faster: speed of service is a deciding factor

Staff Agree: Speed > Accuracy

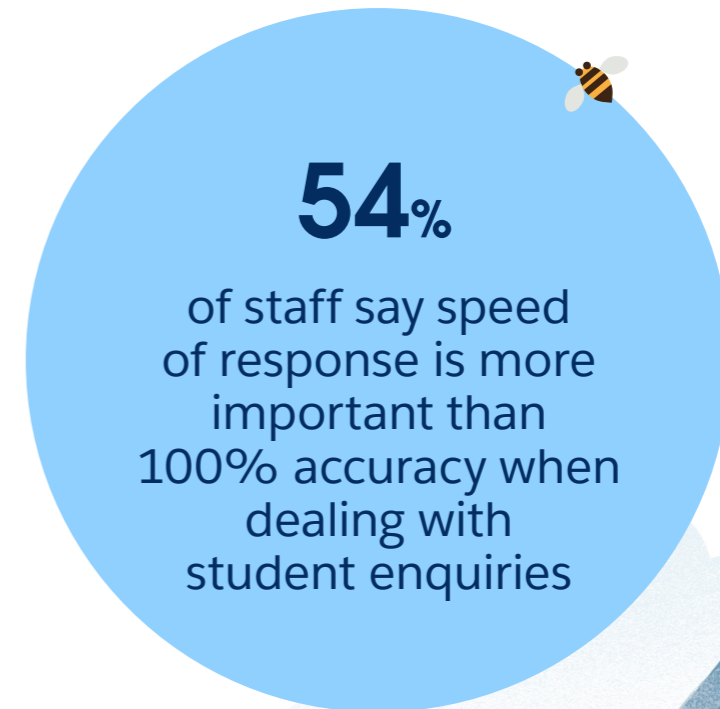
More than half of staff say speed of response outweighs total accuracy when addressing student enquiries.

These growing expectations for real-time support make a strong case for AI-enabled tools like chatbots and virtual assistants that can deliver timely answers, even if follow-ups are needed later for precision.

Which of the following describes your view on using autonomous agents to help with the enquiry and admissions process?



Base: 1,562 Students



Base: 529 Staff

04

Better Student Experiences: AI Enhances Services, Support & Connections

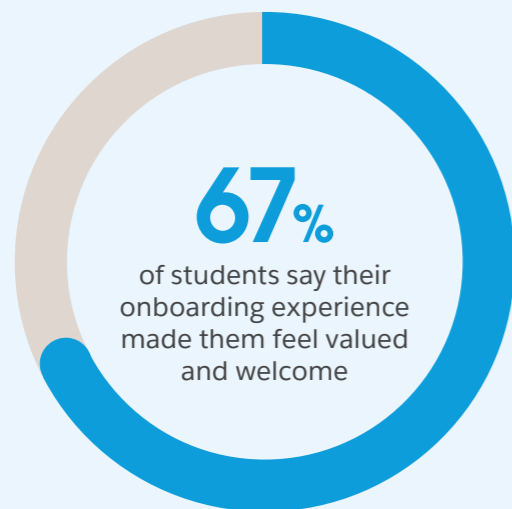


04

Onboarding Remains A Missed Opportunity To Make A Strong First Impression

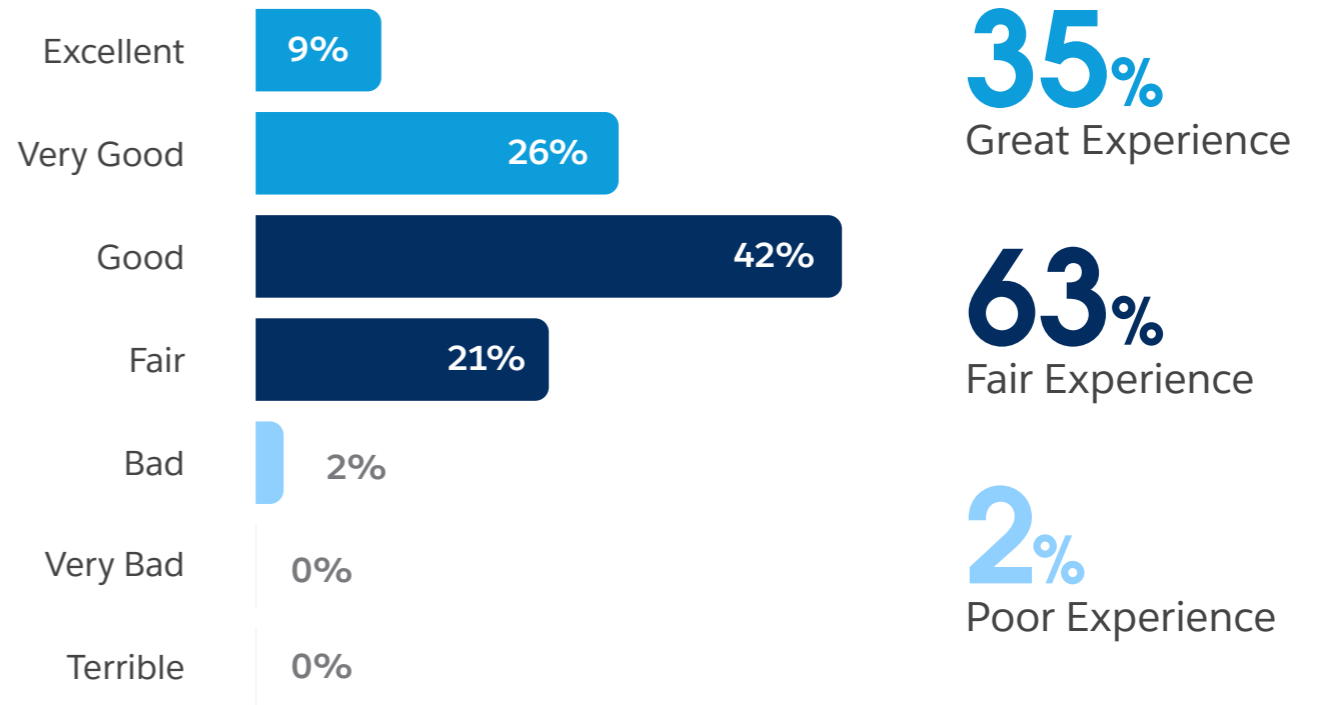
The majority of students (63%) describe their onboarding experience as good or fair, but only 35% consider it “great” (excellent or very good). Despite being a foundational part of the student journey, onboarding satisfaction has stagnated, showing no improvement since 2022.

While 67% of students say they felt valued and welcomed during onboarding, a significant 39% still felt alone. Institutions may be welcoming students, but not always creating a sense of inclusion.



Most students say onboarding was ‘good’—but few rate it as excellent

How would you rate the onboarding experience at your college/university?



Onboarding experiences have stalled—no improvement since 2022.

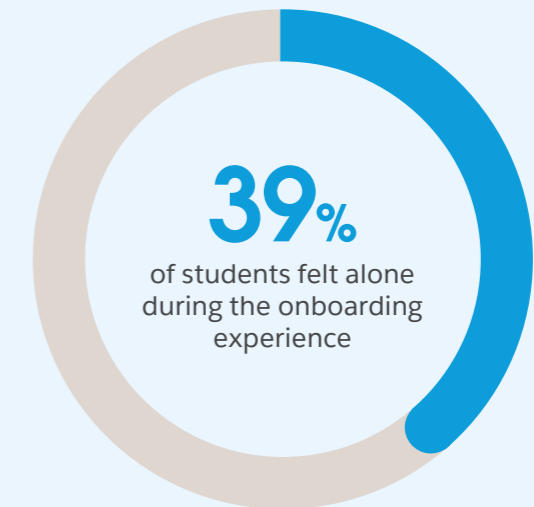
Base: 1,562 Students



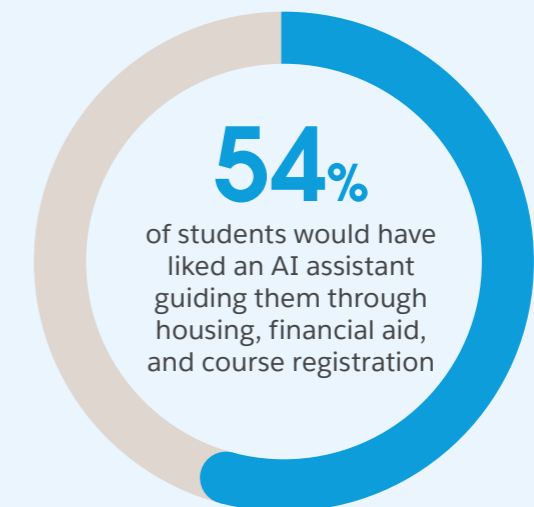
AI Could Bridge Support Gaps

Over half (54%) of students say they would have liked an AI assistant to help them navigate tasks like housing, financial aid, and course registration. With some students reporting struggles during the application processes due to generic communication and confusing terminology, AI is increasingly seen as a tool to provide personalized, 24/7 support and reduce early friction—especially for those who may not know where to turn for help.

Nearly four in 10 students felt alone during onboarding—even if most felt welcomed



AI is seen as a way to fill onboarding gaps—especially for practical needs

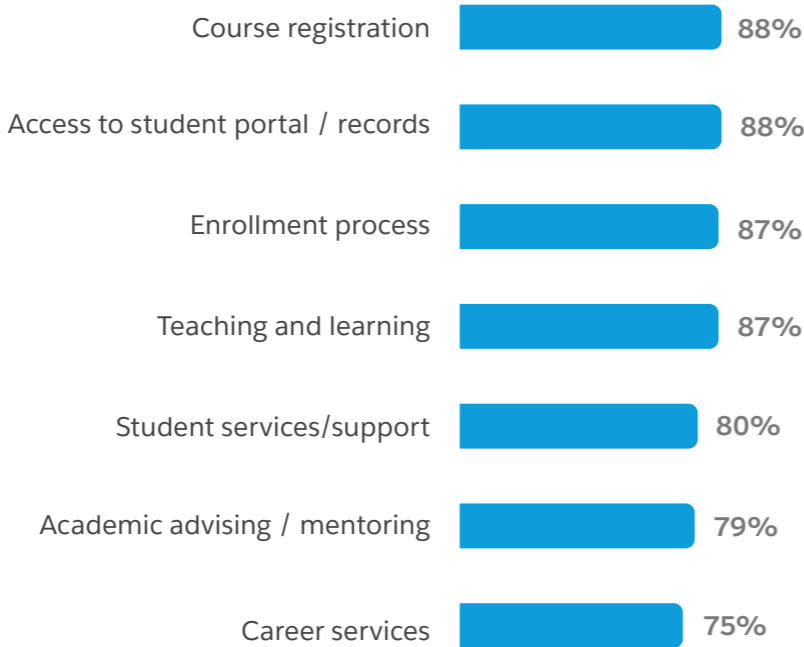


04

Once Involved In Student Life, Satisfaction For Most Core Services Is Strong

But wellbeing services highlight a perceptions gap as staff overestimate how well their university supports student wellbeing; 38% of staff believe their institution places great importance on wellbeing, only 20% of students agree—most say support is basic or limited.

How satisfied are you with the following services at your college/university?

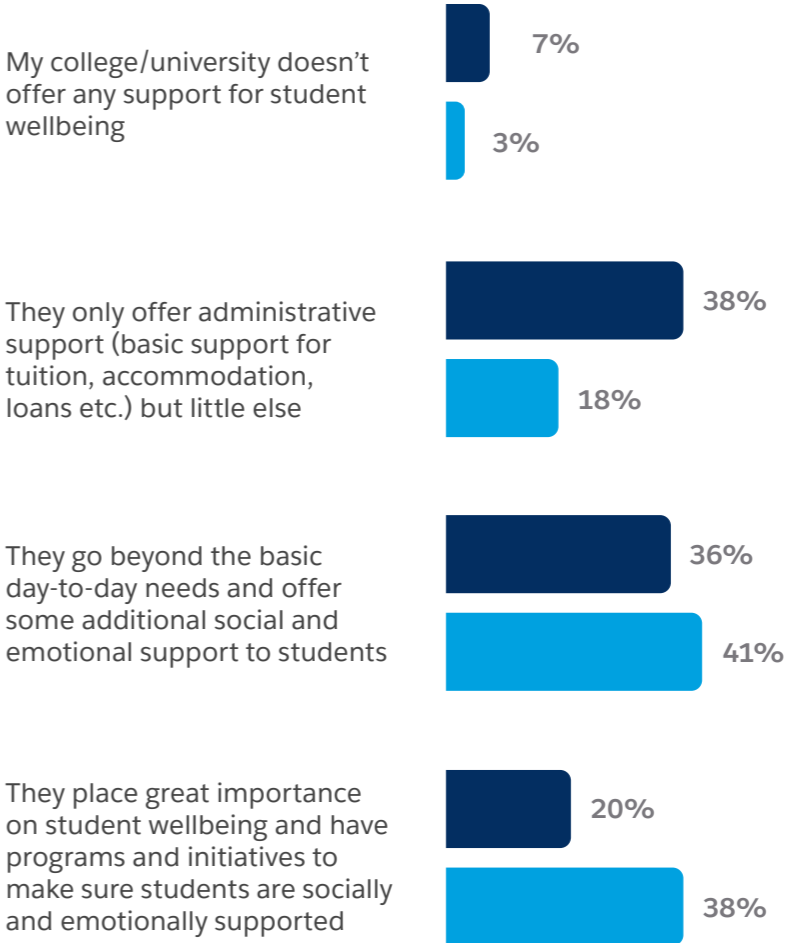


Financial support services / financial aid	64%	Only financial support, wellbeing and health services lag behind.
Mental wellbeing resources	63%	
Medical health center	57%	

Base: 1,562 Students

Which of the following best describes your college/university's commitment to student wellbeing and support?

- Students
- Staff



Base: 1,562 students; 529 Staff

04

Students Are Ready For AI; Especially If It Keeps Them Informed

Nearly half of students say they haven't used AI tools like real-time updates or advisor support—but would be happy to. **These tools offer a powerful opportunity to streamline communication, close information gaps, and meet students where they are.**

Room to grow students engagement with AI technologies

Have you used the following AI technologies throughout your student journey?

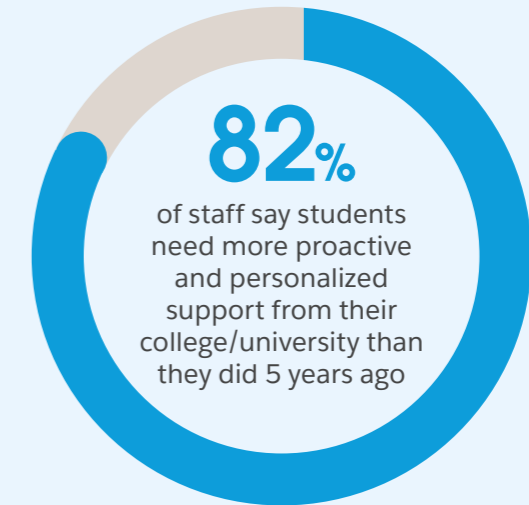
- AI for academic research or writing
- Requests for information being answered by AI
- AI for preparing for work
- AI to auto-fill applications and reduce repetitive data entry
- AI checklists
- AI for student and career support
- Personalized AI responses from admissions, advisors, and advancement teams
- AI for advising support
- Real-time AI updates on my application status
- AI for wellbeing support
- Autonomous agents



Closing the usage gap:

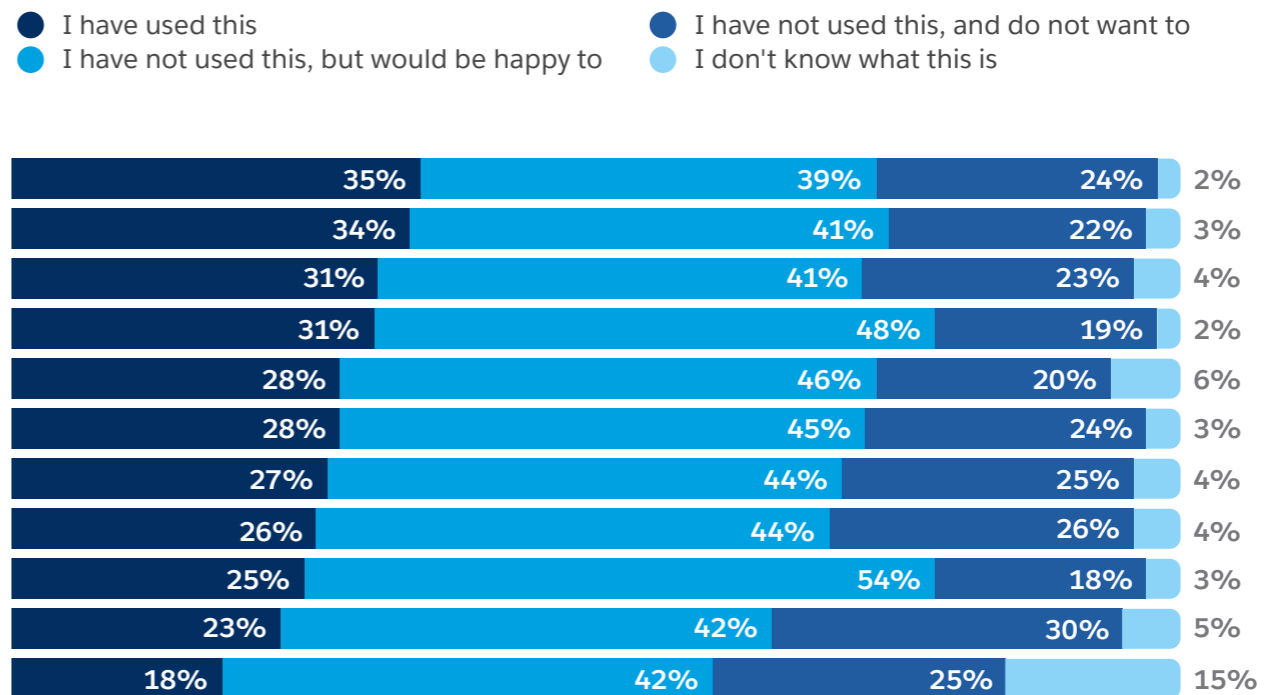
Staff say personalized and proactive support is now more critical than ever as 82% of staff believe students now need more support than they did five years ago.

Most students are open to using personalized AI-driven responses. Yet nearly half of students have not used them.



Base: 529 Staff

A third of students reject AI for wellbeing support, with concerns about losing the human touch.



Base: 1,562 students

Using AI Across The University Journey Leads To Better Student Experiences

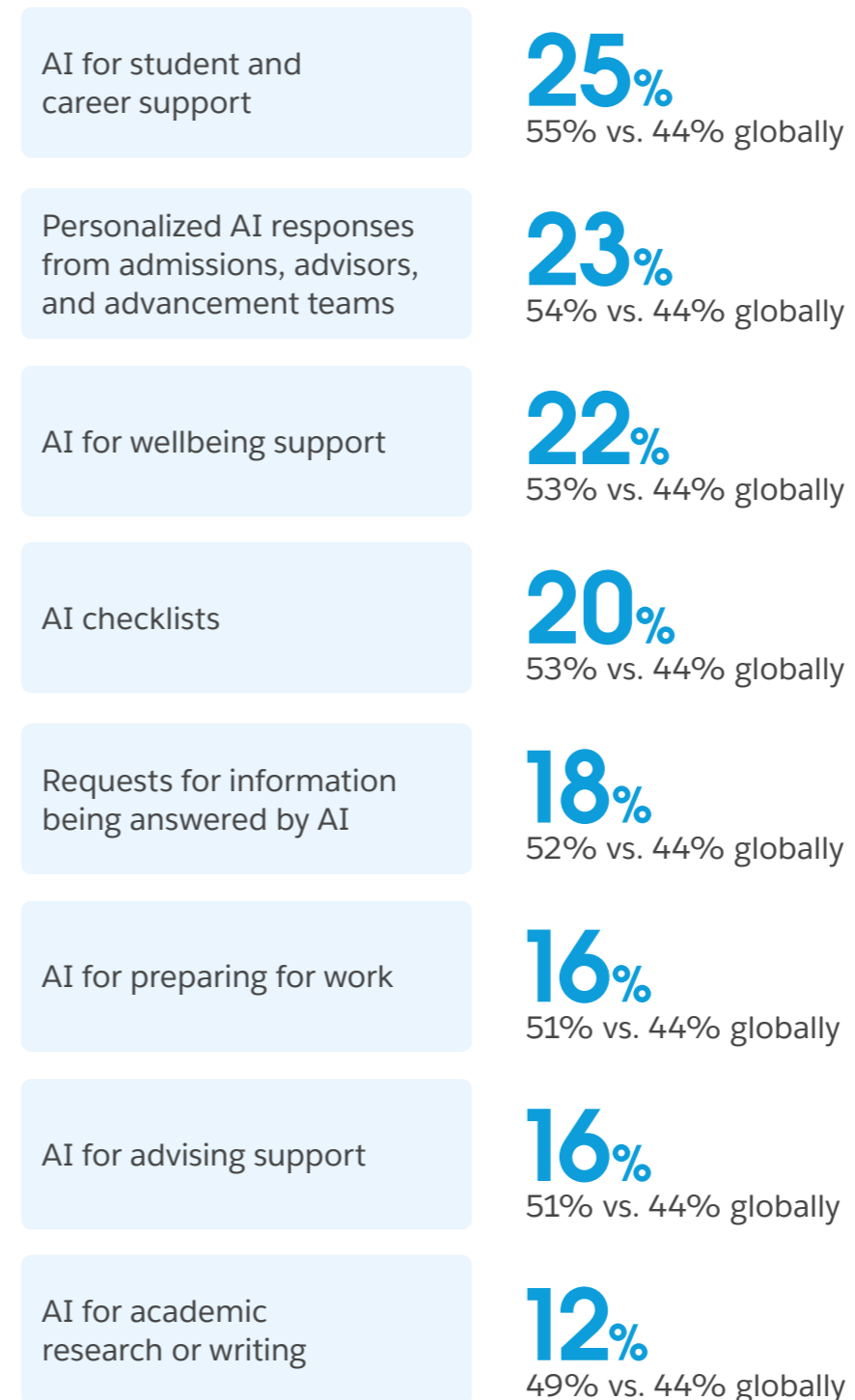
AI access boosts student experience—especially for support and personalization

Students with access to AI tools for career guidance, wellbeing, and personalized responses are up to 25% more likely to report a great university experience. AI can help institutions to flex to their diverse student cohort and support self-discovery and life-readiness, not just academic achievement.

“Meeting the needs of the 19 year old versus someone who is a parent or attending virtually...they need different skills on the support side. That's an opportunity for AI to assist. I'm not saying AI can be a one size fits all, but AI can handle the more basic questions.

ASSOCIATE DEAN, EDUCATION & STUDENT EXPERIENCE, UK

Students who have used...



More likely to have a great student experience

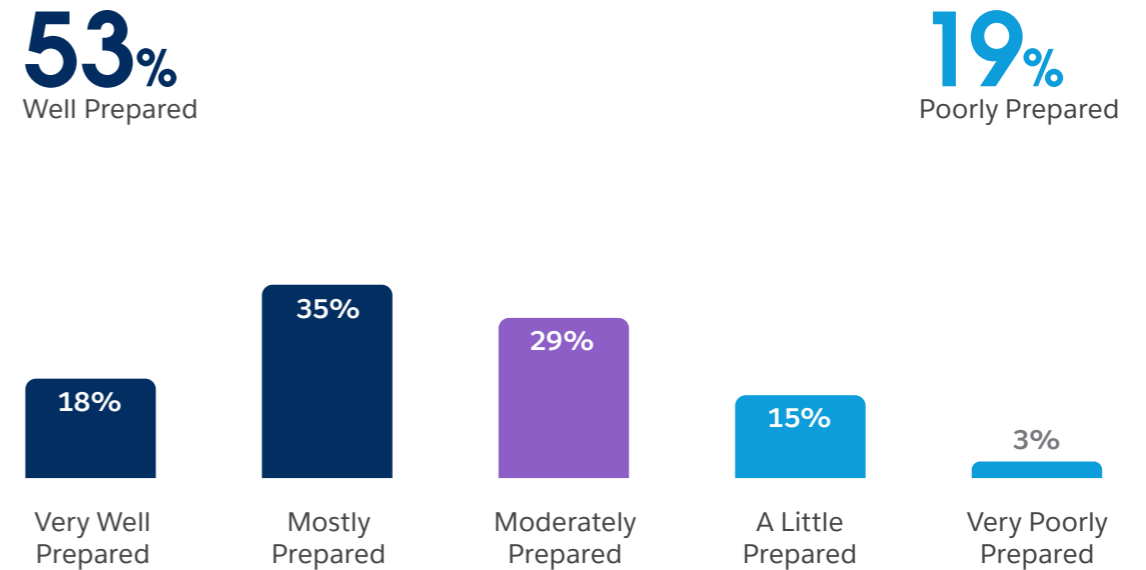
Base: 1,562 students

04 As Students End Their Journey, Institutions Are Still Falling Short In Preparing Them For The Future

Institutions still face challenges in preparing students for life after graduation

Just 53% of students say they feel well prepared for the real world of work (only 18% say "very well"). This falls far short of student expectations as 44% say they chose their institution based on career prospects.

How well do you think that your current course of study has prepared/will prepare you for the real world of work?



Base: 1,562 students

Career promises fall short of student expectations
 44% of the students reported selecting their institution for career prospects, but only 18% feel very well prepared for the world of work.



“ I think the generational gaps of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are really showing now.

ASSISTANT DEAN OF STUDENTS, USA

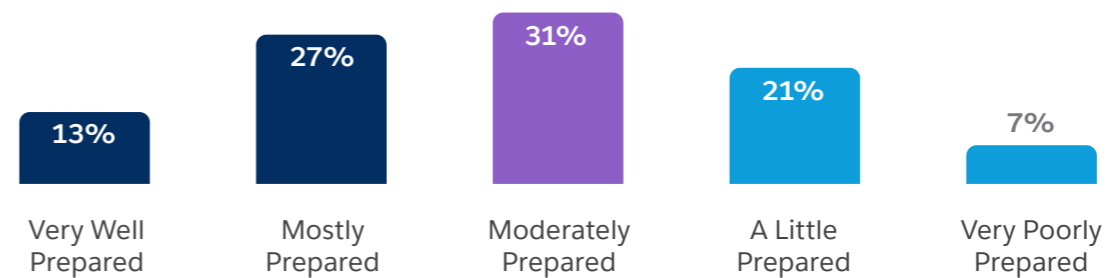
Readiness for an AI-driven world is even lower

Only 40% of students feel well prepared for a future where AI impacts every aspect of work, while 28% say they feel poorly prepared. As AI continues to transform the workforce, institutions will need to rethink how they equip students with the skills and confidence to thrive in this evolving landscape.

How well do you think that your current course of study has prepared/will prepare you for the ‘new world of AI’?

40%
Well Prepared

28%
Poorly Prepared



Base: 1,562 students

05

Lifelong Connections: AI Supports Advancement & Alumni Relations



05

While Institutions Strive To Create A Foundation Of Community, Deeper Engagement Is Still Missing For Many

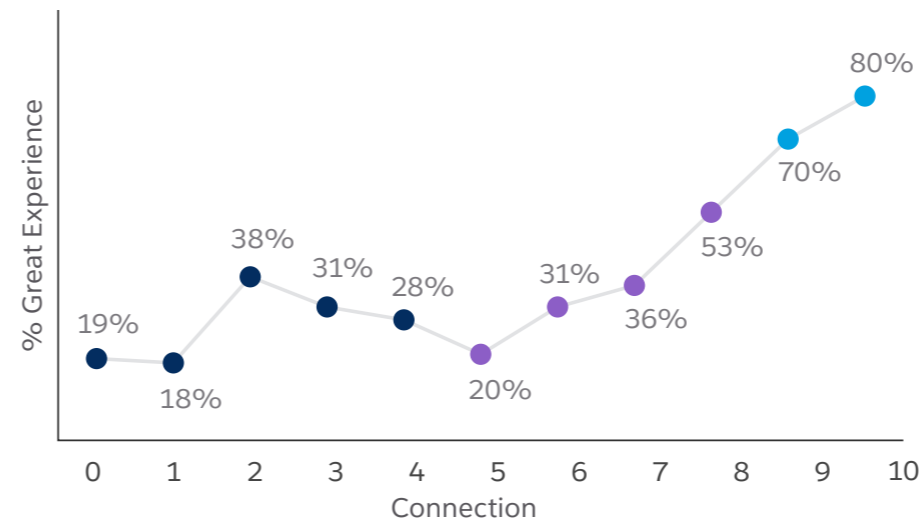
Only 20% of students say they feel very connected, 26% feel they totally belong, and just 33% say they have a strong sense of purpose.

Connection, belonging, and purpose go hand in hand with great experiences

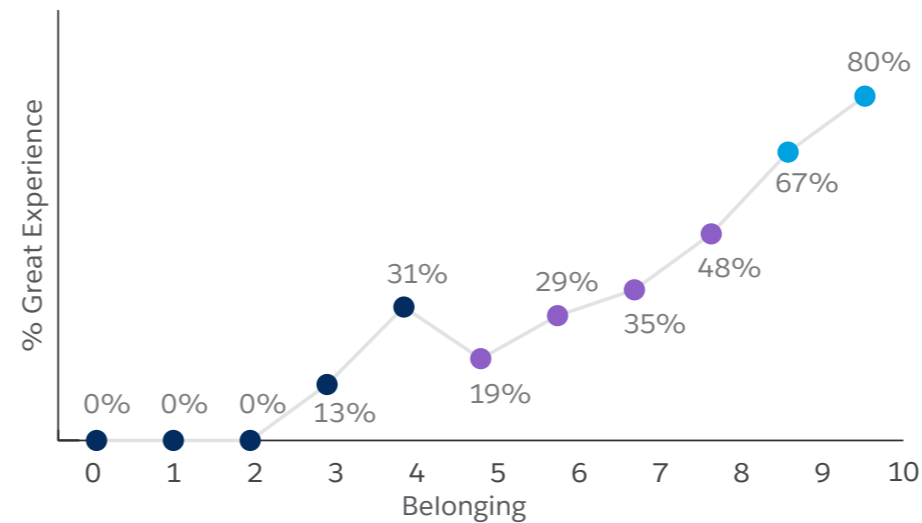
Students who feel a strong sense of connection, belonging, and purpose are significantly more likely to report a great university experience—with satisfaction levels jumping from under 20% to over 75% as these feelings strengthen.

Investing in emotional and community-based support is critical to boosting overall student experience.

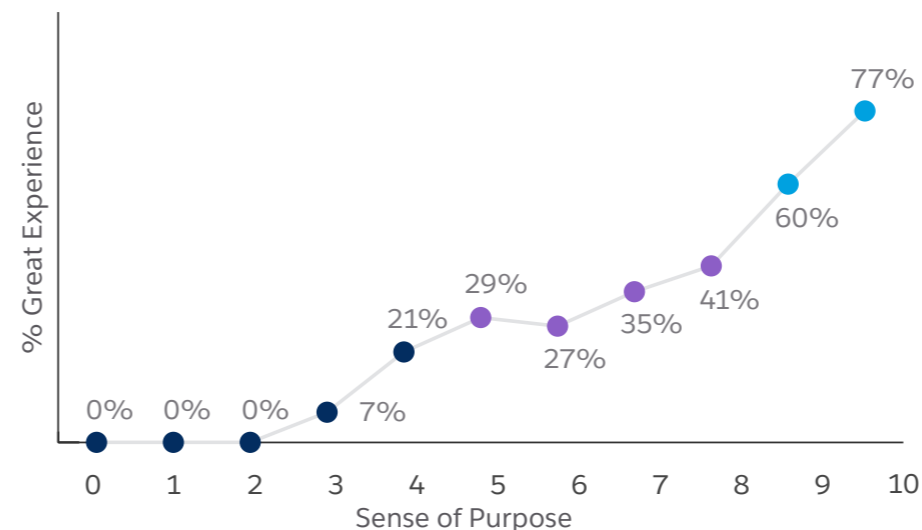
Stronger emotional ties drive better student experiences



20% of students feel very connected



26% of students feel they totally belong



33% of students feel a strong sense of purpose



05

Advancement And Fundraising Teams Rely On Engaged Alumni And Strong Goodwill Towards The Institution

But this doesn't happen by accident. Promoters are built through strong, emotionally resonant experiences

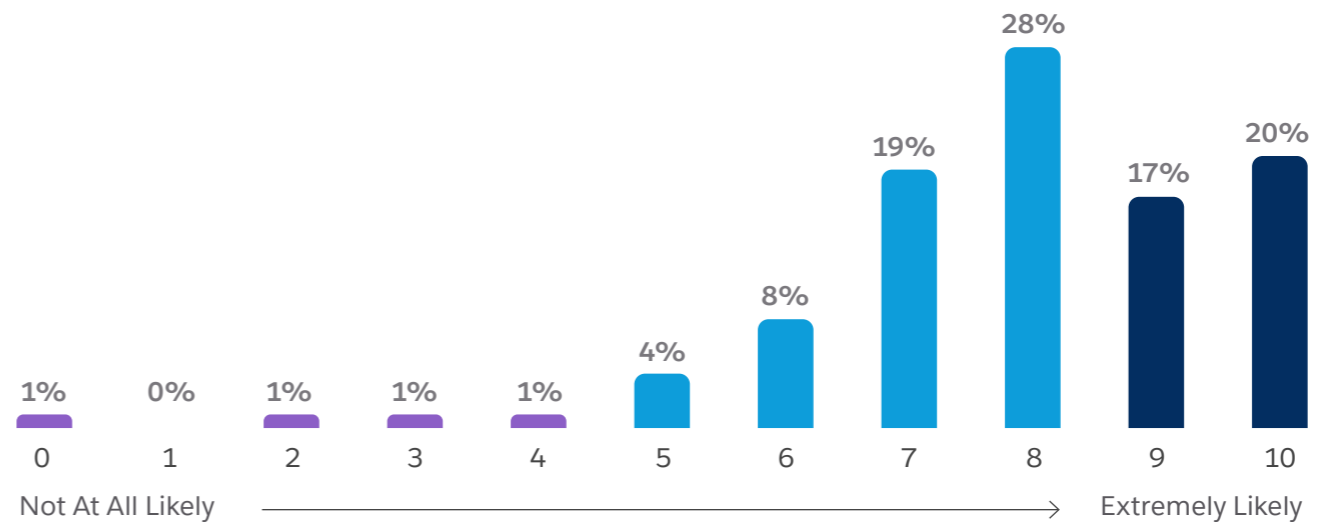
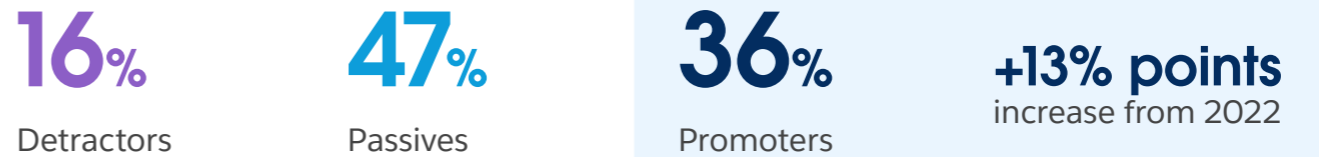
Over a third of students are likely to recommend their college or university to friends or family—marking a 13-point increase from 2022.

What sets promoters apart isn't just satisfaction with logistics or academics—it's a deeper emotional connection. Students who are likely to recommend their institution are significantly more likely to have had a great overall experience, a smooth onboarding, a feeling of connection and belonging - and a university journey that gives them a sense of purpose.

Meaningful, emotionally supportive experiences are critical to strengthening student loyalty and word-of-mouth advocacy.

Over a third of students are future promoters of their university

How likely are you to recommend your college/university to your friends or family?



Emotional connections drive advocacy

	Promoters	Detractors
... had a great university experience	73%	9%
...had a great onboarding experience	65%	5%
...feel connected to the student or alumni community	84%	28%
...feel that they belong at the college/university	90%	28%
...feel they will have a sense of purpose when they graduate	92%	37%

Base: 1,562 Students

AI Can Help Here Too: Advancement Teams Are Using The Best Of AI To Augment Their Donor And Alumni Community Engagement

Powerful targeting & personalized stewardship

“ Any university has an extraordinary amount of data on its alumni, "Do you own a home? Do you have stock options?" And we have all the data around giving..."how much? what patterns?" So we take this data and do predictive modelling to identify small groups of people for marketing or other kinds of outreach.

We're starting to experiment too, in stewardship. You take 20 letters that the president has written...say "generate a letter to John Doe...make it sound like the president wrote it." And then you get your letter and you tweak it. It's saving people an incredible amount of time...it's all these efficiencies that we're finding.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT, USA



However, staff remain candid about data silos continuing to present a challenge to the advancement department which relies heavily on accurate and timely transfer of alumni and donor information.

Using AI to connect students with alums

“ We're working on some things to help match students with alums from an AI perspective. We're trying to be a little bit smarter about what kind of information we have about alums and how we might match with students. That's in early product development here.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CAREERS, USA

Improving engagement & conversion

“ People are saving anywhere from 5 to 15 hours a week just using AI tools. It allows us to have that actual in-person connection because we have more time to focus on the major donors or reaching new donors where you need to build the awareness and knowledge. So it's very significant on the HR capacity. If we can increase our reach without significantly increasing our HR budget, that's a huge advantage.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, CANADA

“ Information is power. Everything that we can learn about an individual or a potential donor is very helpful. For us, the continuity of knowledge is very important.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, CANADA

06

Staff Perspectives in 2025



06

Staff Viewpoint: Supported And Satisfied, But Feeling The Pressure To Perform

A tension exists between institutional support and performance demands as most staff feel satisfied in their roles and supported to do their jobs effectively, but over half say they feel under pressure to increase productivity

As institutions face rapid change, staff are calling for more structured professional development to stay effective and engaged.

This is a dramatic 34-point increase since 2022—highlighting rising pressure to keep pace with evolving demands.

This shows how rapidly staff roles are evolving, driven not just by technology, but also by new institutional priorities, shifting student expectations, and budgetary pressures. Institutions that want to retain and empower staff will need to make professional development a strategic priority.

77%

of staff say - AI-powered analytics help me plan more effectively

82%

of staff say - I feel satisfied with my job

53%

of staff say - I feel under pressure to improve the productivity of my work

+34% points
increase from 2022

62%

of staff say they need reskilling, upskilling or additional training

Base: 529 Staff

06

Upskilling Around AI Is A Critical Enabler Of Digital Transformation – Without It, The Best Tools Could Fall Short

AI upskilling is not always an easy path, but it's crucial to bring your staff on the journey

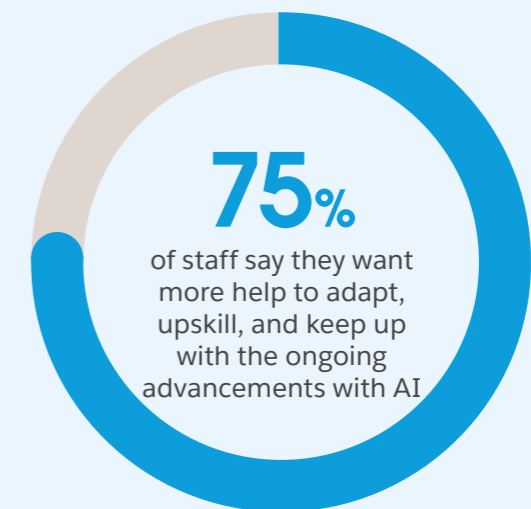
Staff tell us they are struggling to keep pace with AI

““ You've got fixed employees on permanent contracts... the upskilling of them can be positive, it can be challenging, and a lot of the time it's not why they've joined...they joined because of their love of a subject.

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UK

““ I'd give all their faculty a book like this. It's called Teaching with AI. It's a good book. Give all your faculty that and do some faculty training around it... Find those people, elevate those people, let those people be your champions.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CAREERS, USA



Base: 529 Staff

06

Communication Challenges Are Eroding Engagement And Efficiency

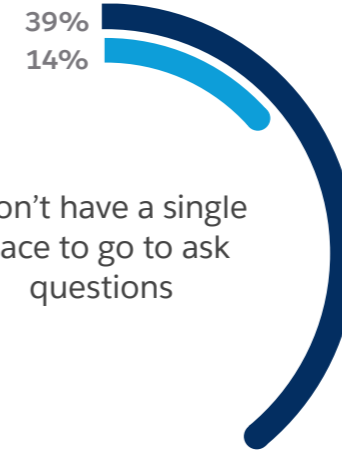
Four in 10 staff say they don't have a clear place to ask questions— a 25-point increase since 2022. This shows a worsening breakdown in internal communication and knowledge access.

Communication gaps are widening

Staff demand more dialogue and clarity as seven in ten staff now say their institution needs to improve communication with faculty and staff—a sharp rise from 53% in 2022.

As institutions navigate rapid change, clear, timely, and inclusive communication has become a critical expectation.

● 2025
● 2022



I don't have a single place to go to ask questions

+25% points increase from 2022



My institution needs to communicate more with faculty and staff

+17% points increase from 2022

Base: 529 Staff



07

Future Focus: Shifting AI From Tactical To Transformative



07

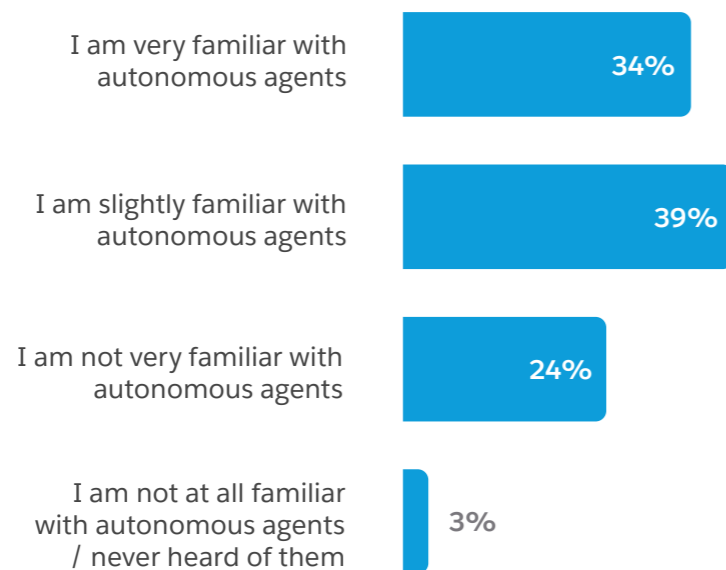
Room To Educate And Train Staff On Autonomous Agents; Those Who Have Used Them Are Seeing Results

While awareness of autonomous agents in higher education is growing, familiarity remains limited—and concerns persist. Only a third of staff say they are very familiar with the technology. A significant 61% are worried that autonomous agents could eventually replace human roles. Yet among those who have experience with these tools, the benefits are clear: staff overwhelmingly agree that autonomous agents can accelerate admissions, improve student services, and free up time for more meaningful, student-focused work.

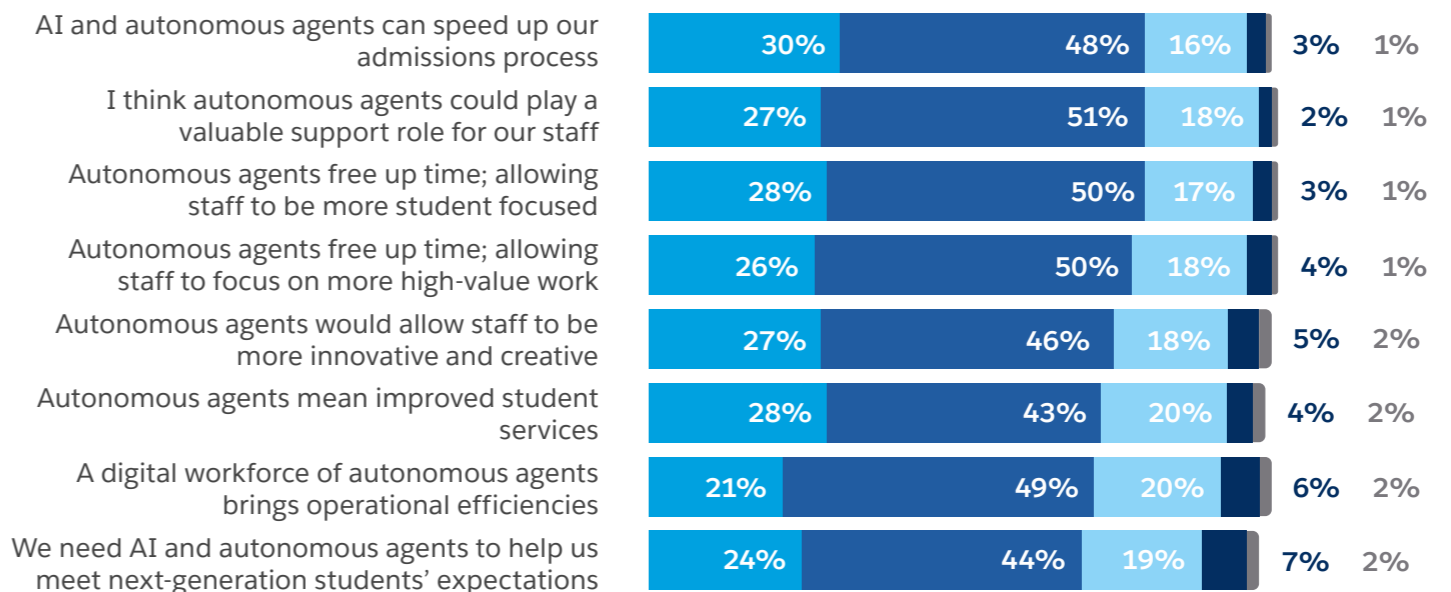
This gap between perceived risk and demonstrated value highlights a critical need to educate staff—not only to clarify what autonomous agents are, but to build confidence in how they can be responsibly and effectively integrated into higher education.



Lack of familiarity fuels anxiety



Understanding unlocks optimism



Advising And Student Support Staff See AI And Autonomous Agents As Key To Smarter, More Student-Centered Service



AI and automation aren't just abstract concepts for advisors—they are essential enablers of more responsive, efficient, and personalized student support.

Staff working in advising and student support roles are seeing first-hand the practical benefits of AI. Over eight in 10 say AI-powered analytics help them plan more effectively, while nearly as many say AI tools are freeing up time for more impactful work and improving the quality of student and staff services.

There is also strong belief in the potential of autonomous agents to further enhance support. More than three-quarters say these tools can speed up admissions, play a valuable support role for staff, and allow for a more student-focused approach by reducing administrative burden. Many also see autonomous agents as a way to meet the expectations of next-generation students and enable more creative, innovative work.

Staff working in advising and student support roles say...

82%

AI-powered analytics help me plan more effectively

79%

AI tools free up time for higher-value activities

74%

AI improves student and staff services

85%

AI and autonomous agents can speed up our admissions process

79%

I think autonomous agents could play a valuable support role for our staff

76%

Autonomous agents free up time; allowing staff to be more student focused

76%

Autonomous agents free up time; allowing staff to focus on more high-value work

71%

Autonomous agents mean improved student services

65%

Autonomous agents would allow staff to be more innovative and creative

65%

We need AI and autonomous agents to help us meet next-generation students' expectations



Breaking Down Barriers Of Fragmented Systems Will Be Key To Success

Staff and students broadly agree that their institutions are digitally accessible and collaborative: 88% of staff and 81% of students say they can easily access data and resources online, and over 80% believe departments are well connected and share information effectively. These perceptions point to an encouraging level of interpersonal and interdepartmental coordination.

However, under the surface, staff face growing operational barriers. Over half report struggling to access the data they need due to fragmented systems—a figure that has doubled since 2022. This signals that while people may be connected, platforms are not.

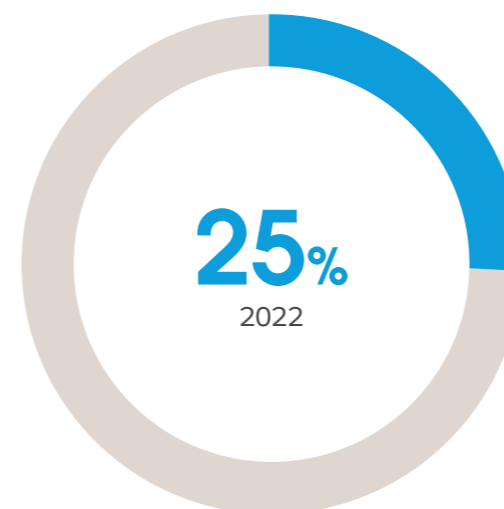
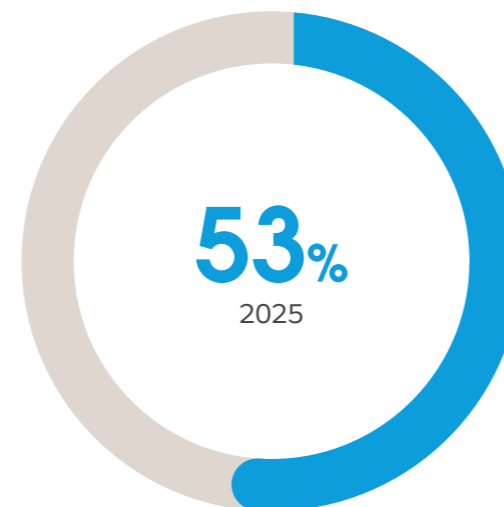
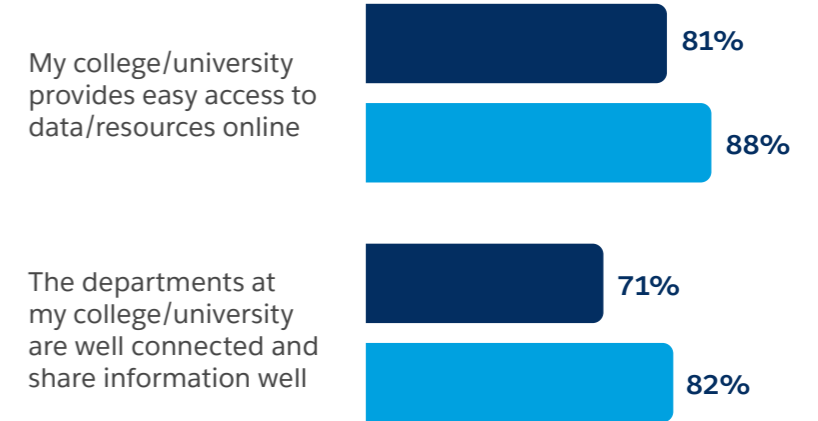
Strong interpersonal collaboration is being undermined by weak systems integration.

Collaboration appears strong

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your college/university?

- Students
- Staff

Base: 1,562 students; 529 Staff



Base: 529 Staff

But system fragmentation is creating operational strain

My institution uses multiple technology systems and it's hard to find the data I need to do my job effectively

“ Staff wish that they could just have one place where they could see...data, the transit applications, and what is coming in the pipeline. I have to spend time digging for information in two or three different systems to get what I need to review.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS, AUSTRALIA



07

Staff Need Real-Time, Actionable Insights

Digging deeper, nearly half of staff (43%) say they lack access to real-time insights on student engagement—highlighting a significant blind spot in supporting the student journey. Moreover, 27% report not having the tools they need to manage that journey effectively.

As AI continues to drive a strategic shift in data use, it is prompting many to rethink their entire data strategy

While data is available in principle, it may not be timely, actionable, or well-integrated across platforms. For institutions to move from responsive to proactive student support, they may need to reevaluate whether their current tech stacks truly support real-time, student-centered engagement.

43%

I don't have access to real-time insights on student engagement

27%

I don't have access to the tools I need to manage the student journey

78%

AI is making us rethink our data strategy

Base: 529 Staff



Staff Recognise That Unified Data Is The Foundation For Effective AI Use But Most Are Still At Very Early Stages

Only a third of staff say they've used integrated platforms and unified data to better understand their stakeholders

But among those who haven't, virtually all of them say they want to—highlighting strong demand for more advanced, connected systems to better engage and serve students.

As institutions work out how to deepen student and stakeholder understanding, the challenge is no longer about convincing staff of the value—it's about enabling access.

Most institutions find themselves 'very far away' from true data integration, held back by siloed systems, budget constraints for upgrading systems, and overly bureaucratic approval chains. Despite obstacles, there is strong agreement that unifying data would unlock major gains in responsiveness, strategic planning, and student experience—and is a prerequisite for meaningful AI adoption.

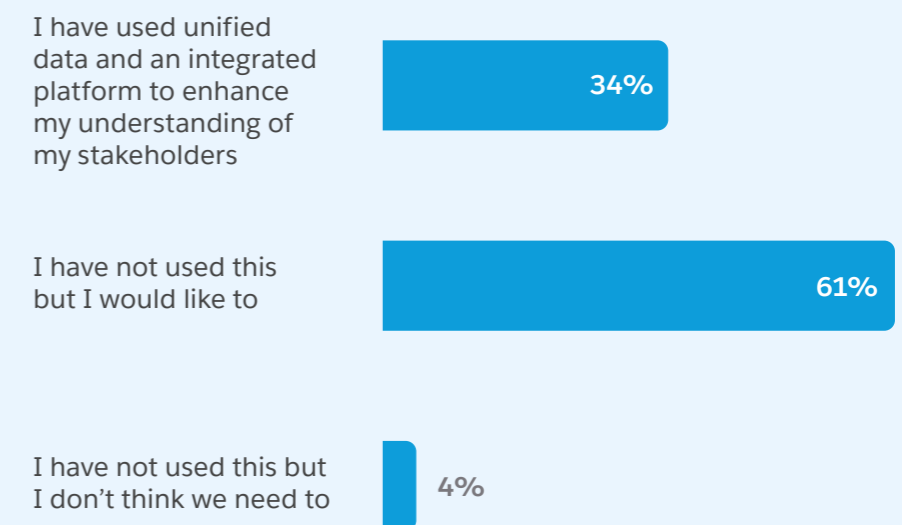
Institutions are recognizing the need to fundamentally shift how they manage, connect, and leverage data across departments.

“ We've had a few failed attempts... various data pipeline projects that have understood the plumbing but haven't managed to actually put the fluids into the plumbing.

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UK

Some staff now use unified data and an integrated platform to enhance their understanding of their stakeholders.

Which of the following best describes you?



Base: 529 Staff

Clear Room For Improvement As Few Institutions See Themselves As Tech Leaders

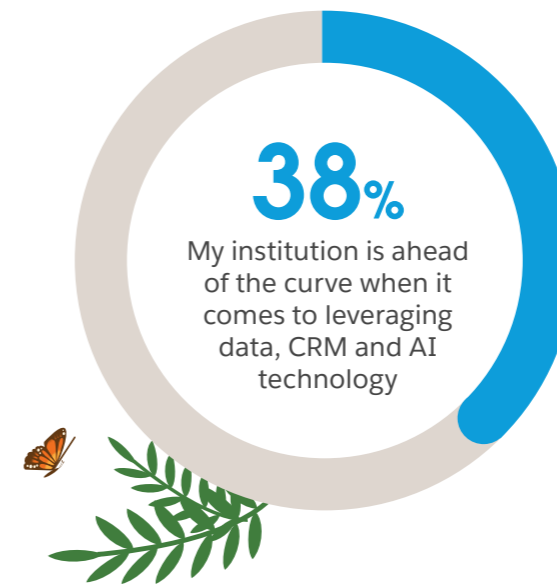
Only 38% of staff feel their college or university is ahead of the curve when it comes to leveraging data, CRM, and AI.

But institutions are thinking big: AI leads the upgrade agenda over the next 3–5 years

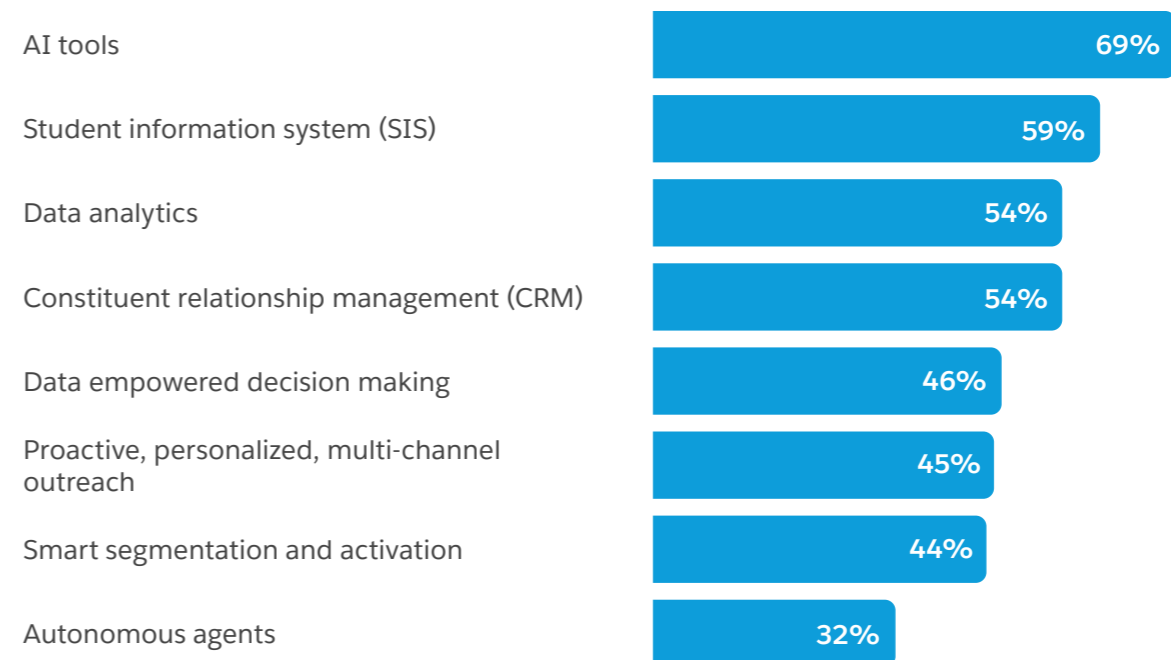
Nearly seven in 10 staff say their institution plans to upgrade AI tools –more than any other technology.

Upgrades to core systems like SIS and CRM also rank high, reflecting a broader digital transformation strategy across higher education.

While staff see clear benefits in autonomous agents, these tools are not yet a strategic focus for institutions.



Planned upgrades in the next 3-5 years:



Base: 529 Staff

07

Which Functions Are Leading the Charge?

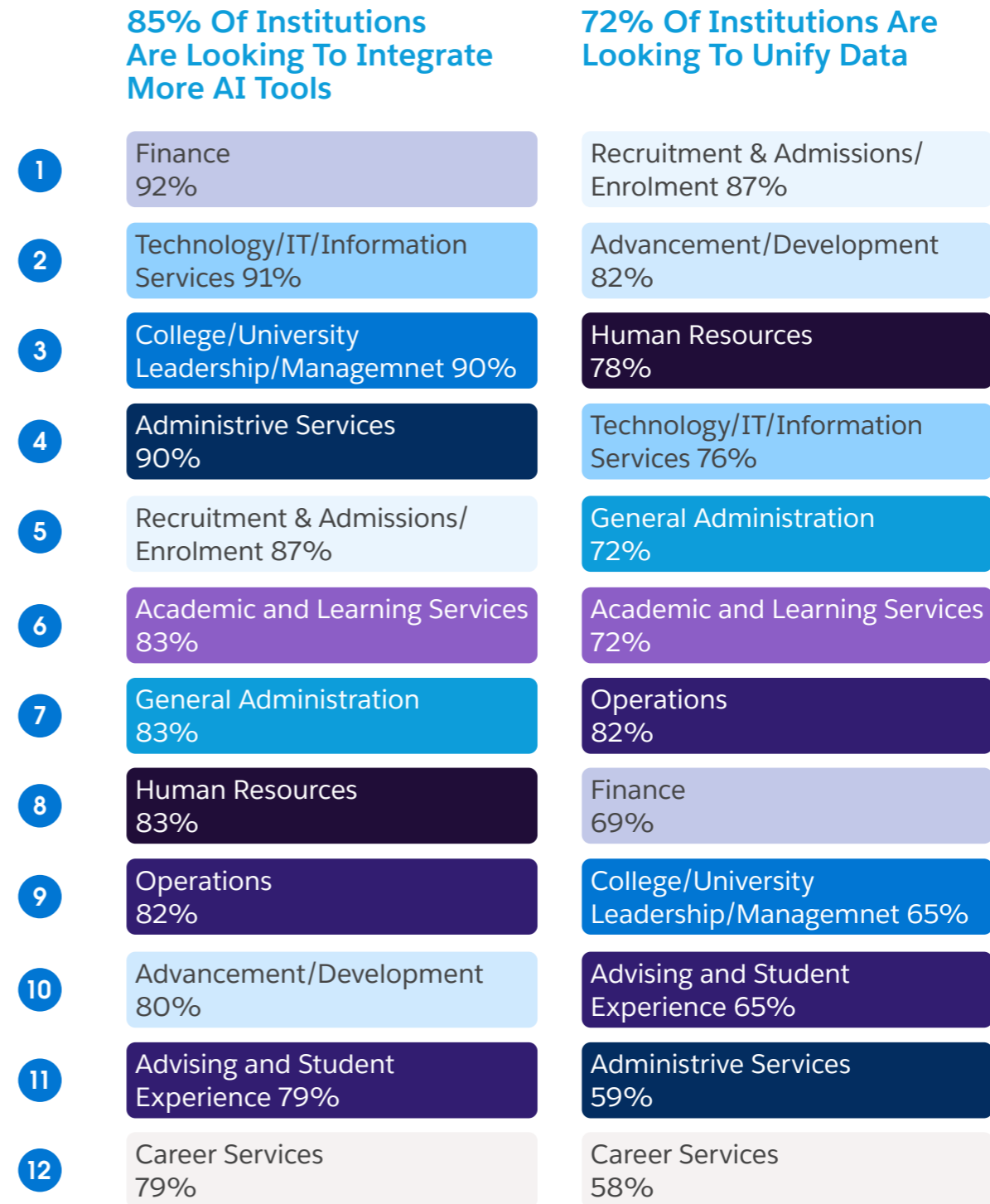
AI upgrades and data integration are high on the agenda across most departments

While AI adoption today is most concentrated in student-facing areas like admissions, engagement, and support, the vast majority of other university and college departments are also planning to take it further. In fact, 85% say they are looking to integrate more AI tools (highest in finance, IT, leadership, and administrative teams). Institutions see AI’s potential not just in front-end functions, but in operational and strategic areas too.

At the same time, 72% of departments are prioritizing data unification—especially in recruitment and advancement—showing a growing focus on backend integration to support more cohesive and efficient operations.

Institutions have a clear intent to scale AI and optimize data systems. The next phase of progress will depend on connecting these tools across departments to unlock their full value.

Departments looking to...



Staff Are Ready And Willing To Go Much Further With AI

But is the race for staff and students to adopt AI outpacing higher education's ability to manage it with confidence?

Most staff believe their institution is using AI effectively, but are also concerned about their institution's ability to implement and use AI properly. Concerns remain around ethical risks, institutional inertia, and technical limits.

Risk aversion means slow implementation

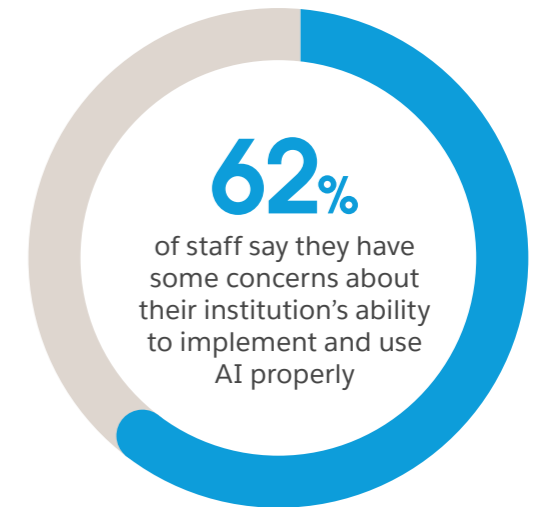
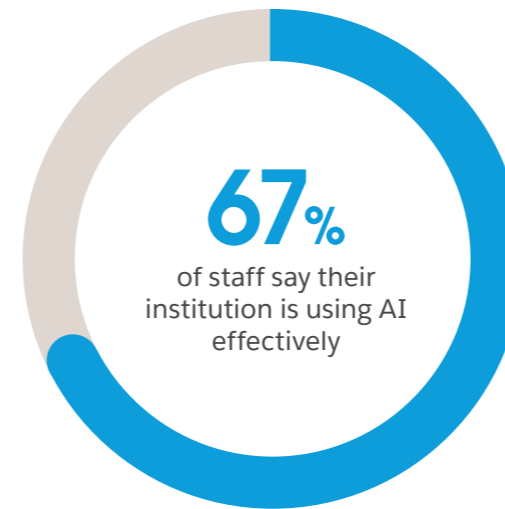
“ Institutions want to have everything packaged up perfectly... so that slows down the taking on of new innovations. Lots of people are using it in pockets rather than at a strategic infrastructure level.

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING INSIGHTS, UK

Staff interest outpacing institutional readiness

“ Change in higher education happens one retirement at a time.

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, USA



Base: 529 Staff

AI Adoption Requires A Mindset Shift

To proceed confidently with AI integration, staff need enthusiastic institutional backing, AI training, an experimental mindset and a clear roadmap for the way ahead

“ You need to have a growth mindset with technologies. They're not going to work all the time. You need to use it to be able to choose what technologies are going to make more sense for your institution.

CEO & PRESIDENT, SPAIN



Look Ahead: Roadmap To AI Integration

The only thing certain for higher education is change, and that AI will continue to play a key role

Institutions that embrace this change proactively and strategically will be best positioned to meet the needs of tomorrow's students and staff.

“If you wait to look through all the risks and possibilities then you're never going to implement it. We're never going to catch up with the speed at which AI is changing and evolving. Institutions are going to have to find the compromise where it's good enough to trial and evolve our approach.”

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING INSIGHTS, UK

- 1 Encourage Culture Change And Mindset Shifts**
Institutions must shift from a risk-averse mindset to one that is flexible, exploratory, and student-centric.
- 2 Embrace Iteration: “Try It, Fail, Learn”**
Adopting AI requires a test-and-learn culture, rather than waiting for perfect systems or strategies. Try it. Learn from it. Don't be afraid to fail.
- 3 Empower Faculty And Staff Through Training And Champions**
Staff emphasized the importance of upskilling and building a coalition of internal advocates.
- 4 Focus On High-Impact, Low-Resource Use Cases**
AI is especially valuable for small or under-resourced institutions trying to scale - the potential impact is so much greater.
- 5 Keep Pursuing Unified Data**
Institutions should challenge internal bureaucracy and democratize access to tools and data.
- 6 Use AI To Augment—Not Replace—Human Relationships**
AI should be used to support meaningful engagement, not automate it entirely. Acknowledge that AI never can, and never should replace the human experience.

Appendix

Student Demographics

	Sample	Gender		Generation				Age Group					
		Female	Male	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomers	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-99
Total	1562	50%	49%	33%	51%	15%	1%	18%	37%	29%	13%	3%	1%
United States	352	42%	57%	25%	56%	17%	2%	12%	39%	31%	14%	4%	1%
United Kingdom	334	49%	49%	37%	45%	17%	1%	20%	40%	21%	14%	4%	1%
Canada	250	47%	51%	42%	49%	8%	0%	26%	37%	29%	6%	2%	0%
Spain	222	49%	50%	24%	55%	21%	1%	12%	29%	37%	19%	3%	0%
Australia	204	54%	45%	27%	54%	17%	1%	14%	42%	26%	15%	2%	1%
Ireland	200	63%	36%	45%	45%	10%	0%	27%	34%	29%	10%	0%	0%

	Sample	Type of Studies			Length of Studies					Transfer Students	
		Full-Time	Part-Time	Executive	Private	First Year	Second Year	Fourth Year	5+ Years	Yes	No
Total	1562	34%	32%	34%	16%	43%	23%	12%	6%	9%	91%
United States	352	34%	33%	33%	15%	46%	20%	13%	6%	15%	85%
United Kingdom	334	41%	29%	30%	16%	46%	27%	7%	4%	5%	95%
Canada	250	32%	34%	34%	16%	39%	25%	13%	7%	8%	92%
Spain	222	28%	27%	45%	14%	33%	24%	18%	12%	13%	87%
Australia	204	28%	39%	33%	17%	47%	21%	10%	5%	4%	96%
Ireland	200	41%	29%	30%	19%	44%	24%	12%	2%	5%	95%

Student Demographics

	Sample	Type of Institution					Type of Degree					
		Online	Private	Gov / Public	Business School	State School	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree / MBA / MD	Doctoral Degree (PhD)	Professional Credential	Executive Education
Total	1562	38%	25%	25%	8%	4%	10%	39%	31%	3%	11%	5%
United States	352	51%	18%	17%	8%	6%	18%	34%	33%	2%	8%	4%
United Kingdom	334	34%	23%	31%	8%	3%	6%	33%	36%	5%	13%	7%
Canada	250	27%	39%	25%	6%	3%	9%	46%	26%	2%	13%	4%
Spain	222	42%	23%	27%	6%	2%	12%	34%	30%	5%	12%	6%
Australia	204	40%	30%	21%	6%	3%	4%	44%	31%	4%	12%	4%
Ireland	200	32%	20%	34%	11%	5%	8%	51%	28%	1%	10%	3%

Staff Demographics

	Sample	Gender		Generation				Age Group					
		Female	Male	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomers	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-99
Total	529	44%	55%	8%	47%	40%	6%	1%	22%	32%	28%	15%	2%
United States	101	55%	45%	10%	41%	38%	12%	1%	24%	26%	28%	17%	5%
United Kingdom	100	41%	59%	13%	35%	45%	7%	1%	22%	25%	31%	17%	4%
Canada	79	43%	57%	6%	56%	35%	3%	3%	23%	37%	22%	16%	0%
Spain	77	31%	69%	6%	55%	39%	0%	0%	27%	34%	26%	13%	0%
Australia	82	67%	29%	6%	49%	38%	7%	0%	17%	38%	24%	17%	4%
Ireland	90	27%	73%	2%	52%	42%	3%	0%	20%	34%	33%	11%	1%

	Sample	Type of Employment		Type of Institution					Time in Current Role				
		Full-Time	Part-Time	Online	Private	Gov / Public	Business School	State School	Less than 1 Year	1 to 2 Years	2 to 3 Years	3 to 4 Years	6 or More
Total	529	96%	4%	15%	35%	26%	14%	10%	8%	25%	28%	22%	18%
United States	101	96%	4%	20%	29%	29%	7%	16%	5%	30%	27%	19%	20%
United Kingdom	100	99%	1%	12%	22%	37%	9%	20%	8%	20%	34%	22%	16%
Canada	79	96%	4%	13%	44%	29%	6%	8%	11%	33%	19%	22%	15%
Spain	77	96%	4%	14%	34%	26%	14%	12%	8%	25%	32%	17%	18%
Australia	82	94%	6%	23%	49%	21%	4%	4%	6%	17%	32%	34%	11%
Ireland	90	96%	4%	7%	38%	19%	44%	1%	10%	26%	23%	17%	24%

Staff Demographics

	Sample	Role / Department											
		Academic Services	Admin Services	Advancement	Advising / Student Support	Career Services	Leadership / Management	Finance	General Administration	Human Resources	Operations	Recruitment / Admissions	Technology
Total	529	18%	7%	12%	6%	5%	8%	7%	9%	4%	7%	4%	13%
United States	101	13%	4%	11%	7%	5%	8%	4%	7%	10%	9%	5%	18%
United Kingdom	100	17%	8%	9%	10%	4%	8%	9%	4%	4%	10%	2%	15%
Canada	79	16%	8%	11%	6%	5%	1%	3%	8%	4%	9%	5%	24%
Spain	77	16%	4%	12%	5%	1%	8%	12%	16%	5%	1%	12%	9%
Australia	82	23%	4%	17%	6%	7%	5%	11%	6%	2%	7%	1%	10%
Ireland	90	23%	17%	10%	3%	4%	14%	3%	13%	0%	6%	2%	3%

	Sample	Job Title														
		Dean	Provost	Chancellor / Vice Chancellor	Pro Vice Chancellor	Deputy Vice Chancellor	President	Vice President	CMO / Head of Marketing	CIO / CTO / Head of Tech	CFO / Finance	Other C-suite	Head of Department	Professor	Associate Professor	Manager
Total	529	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	4%	3%	2%	15%	14%	16%	33%
United States	101	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	6%	2%	1%	23%	10%	12%	38%
United Kingdom	100	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%	3%	4%	3%	3%	18%	11%	13%	39%
Canada	79	0%	1%	3%	0%	1%	0%	3%	1%	5%	1%	1%	13%	9%	15%	47%
Spain	77	5%	0%	1%	0%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	6%	3%	17%	5%	25%	22%
Australia	82	2%	5%	9%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	2%	4%	7%	22%	15%	26%
Ireland	90	0%	1%	2%	7%	3%	0%	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%	10%	28%	16%	27%



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