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Preparing for the Future of Higher Education

Universities and colleges that can adapt quickly will thrive in a new world of higher education

COVID-19 accelerated many ongoing challenges in higher education, and institutions now face a more uncertain future than ever before. Some of the most pressing trends that leaders are navigating include decreasing student enrollment, declining revenue sources and unpredictable government funding. In addition, officials continue to grapple with immediate questions such as how to optimize hybrid learning models.

The pandemic has also dramatically increased digital transformation efforts in higher education. The effects can be seen in everything from the overall shift to remote learning, to the new ways that departments are connecting and creating more efficient processes. It's safe to assume that least some of these changes will be permanent and move the higher education ecosystem and experience forward.

To thrive in a post-COVID-19 world, higher education leaders cannot expect operations to return to the way they were. Rather, officials must look at the current environment as a catalyst and opportunity to prepare for long-term success. Universities that continue to deliver on their core missions and evolve to improve student experiences will pioneer the future of higher education.

In this eBook, we will examine how higher education institutions can stay agile and create enrollment and revenue opportunities in the face of volatility. Successful universities will embrace change. They will reduce their dependence on government appropriations and tuition by improving efficiencies and developing alternative revenue streams. Innovative digital strategies will empower them to modernize course offerings and services to meet the needs of current and prospective students.

Challenges and opportunities in higher education today

The existing higher-education business model has come up against increasing challenges over the last decade. COVID-19 has made these issues even more pronounced.

Challenges

1/ Students have more learning options than ever before
Higher education institutions must contend with ever-increasing competition as their enrollment declines and online learning options flourish. Today's students have access to everything from free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and microcredentials,[1] to sophisticated online graduate programs. And corporate certification programs provide learners with alternative paths to employment in just months.

2/ Gifts and grants can be unpredictable and risky
Uncertainty and declines in federal and state funding may force universities to raise tuition and cut programs.[2] At the same time, fundraising prospects are in flux as the pandemic and market volatility influence giving.

3/ Raising tuition is not a viable option
Students and their advocates have been fighting tuition hikes for years, and the current crisis has given them more leverage.[3] As a result, universities may be much more limited in their ability to set rates going forward.[4]

4/ Formerly reliable revenue sources are trending downward
Several areas where institutions have invested in alternative revenue have declined.[5] Taking significant hits in particular are those related to room and board and auxiliary services associated with on-campus student and visitor activity (such as athletics and events).

Share of institutions that lost revenue

85%	Tution and fees
93%	Room and board
87%	Auxilliary services
26%	Other
90%	Summer programs

NAICU

5/ The CARES Act did not cover the shortfall
According to NAICU,[6] two-thirds of institutions reported that CARES funding covered less than 25% of combined revenue losses and additional expenses.

What can IT teams do to support higher education's effort to create financial independence?

Ultimately, schools must invest in ways to increase revenue so that they can reduce their reliance on unpredictable support from federal and state appropriations. We will explore three steps you can take on the roadmap to financial independence:

1/ Stabilize enrollment with modernized financial aid and admissions processes.

2/ Establish and enhance effective gift and grants management by automating grant application and receipt, and improving efficiency and donor experience.

3/ Bridge revenue gaps by providing critical infrastructure to launch, grow and monetize alternative revenue streams.

How agreements drive opportunities in higher ed

Each area of opportunity outlined above is powered by agreements. Agreements drive higher education and are present in processes across departments throughout each institution. They range from the admissions forms, to the documents that donors sign when they make pledges.

While many organizations have invested in tools like CRM (customer relationship management), workflow management, and ticketing to support agreements, the agreement process itself continues to be tied to legacy, paper-based, or manual systems. These inefficient procedures can cause slowdowns and significantly hinder progress. You can't reach your true potential for growth without the right agreement structure underpinning your work.

Electronic signatures are central to a digitized and automated agreement process for greater agility, but there's much more to an agreement than signing. A modern system of agreement provides critical support for your institution's transformation efforts in three key ways.

1/ Stabilize enrollment with modernized financial aid and admissions processes

Prospective students are evaluating your institution with new criteria, and forward-looking institutions are using technology and analytics to recruit students and help them to succeed. In addition, student transfers are predicted to increase, and more resources will be required to maintain enrollment.

How modern systems of agreements help attract applicants:

– Meets students' expectations: Students expect a modern, customized and personalized experience when going through the admissions and financial aid process.

– Improves students' perception of prospective schools: 87% of students consider a school's tech savviness before applying.

– Expedites admissions and helps increase enrollment: 66% of students accepted an offer from a school while waiting to hear back from another one, and 82% of these students would have changed their decisions if their first choices had responded to them earlier.

DocuSign primary research 2020

Enrollment decline in 2020

4.4%
decline in undergraduate enrollment

13%
decrease in first-year enrollments

19%
decline in enrollment at community college for first-time students

National Student Clearinghouse Research October, 2020[7]

Application processes impact students' opinions

67%
stated they would reconsider attending after having a poor experience

79%
believe that the application process reflects their future student experience

DocuSign primary research 2020

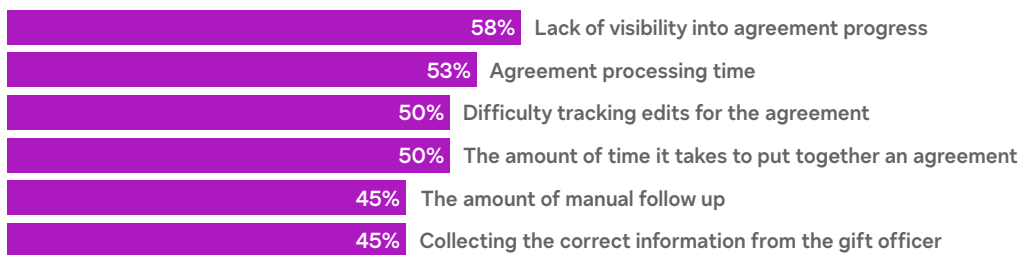## 2/ Establish and enhance effective gifts and grants management

Advancement departments have experienced significant challenges during the pandemic. In-person meetings and events are critical to their success and have mostly been cancelled or shifted to remote settings. According to DocuSign research, 27% of advancement teams report that they expect a shortfall in 2021 fundraising.

However, successful teams are pivoting and seeing success. They're increasing their investment in developing major gift pipelines, creating more "giving day" events that focus on fundraising for specific causes, and using new methods such as crowdfunding.

How modern systems of agreements help transform giving:

– Improve the donor experience: By adopting technology to simplify and personalize digital submission, schools can improve the way donors give through the technology they want to use.

– Reduce the risks associated with pledge management: Prevent costly mistakes, such as sending repeated or incorrect requests, by standardizing and automating agreements. Universities can also automatically flag language in conditional gifts that may limit the institution's ability to use funds.

– Enhance efficiency for overburdened employees: Automate manual tasks and complex workflows to streamline the gift agreement process and reduce the time required from staff. Automation also helps maintain overall business continuity as teams evolve.

– Accelerate agreement processing time: Speed up gift intake processes by enabling advancement teams to quickly identify and address approval and review bottlenecks with greater agreement visibility and reporting.

Percentage of educational institutions that ranked the following as one of their top three frustrations with pledge agreement management

58%	Lack of visibility into agreement progress
53%	Agreement processing time
50%	Difficulty tracking edits for the agreement
50%	The amount of time it takes to put together an agreement
45%	The amount of manual follow up
45%	Collecting the correct information from the gift officer

DocuSign primary research, January 2021

3/ Bridge gaps with alternative revenue streams

For some time now, there's been heightened interest in developing alternative revenue streams to help institutions defray costs and navigate uncertainty.[8] One way to grow alternative revenue and increase efficiency is by building on existing strengths. For example, schools offering executive education programs online or in person are able to take advantage of existing investments in faculty, infrastructure and facilities resources. High performers are focusing on ways that they can provide critical infrastructure to help increase existing revenue and identify new opportunities for funding.

One key revenue opportunity for education institutions is accelerating lead times for university tech transfer and commercialization teams. Bringing a university's inventions to market can be a frustratingly slow and complex process, and latency in disclosures, patents, and licensing agreements can have negative impacts on potential revenue.

To speed up their time to revenue, tech transfer teams can use digital agreements to:

– Aid in meeting disclosure, patent quotas, and the negotiating and processing of licensing agreements by automating manual tasks and orchestrating complex workflows across multiple parties.

– Minimize mistakes and reduce dependence on external legal counsel with preapproved terms, templates and standard workflows.

– Centralize storage and reporting capabilities to support accurate execution on royalty collections, reporting on department revenue contributions and providing insight into agreement trends.

Improving the efficiency of tech transfer and commercialization teams is just one way that universities can boost revenue and speed up slow, costly processes.

Other key focus areas include:

– Offering new opportunities for faculty: MOOC partnerships, boot camps, certificate programs, summer programs, executive education programs and customized corporate training

– Using real estate and facilities in new ways: Event rentals, hotel and conference space partnerships, leasebacks, faculty housing, retirement communities

– Leveraging the university's brand: Merchandising licensing, alumni, parent, community enrichment and affinity programs, athletic subscriptions

– Expanding research capabilities: Sponsored research, disclosure support, incubator training

A new era of higher education requires a new approach to agreements

Volatile environments call for flexible solutions. One way to effectively confront the challenges that higher education institutions face today and in the future is with a modern system of agreement. A modern system of agreement like the DocuSign Agreement Cloud enables efficiencies and speed that support schools' strategic efforts to gain financial independence, bridge revenue gaps, and thrive in a new world of higher education.

The DocuSign Agreement Cloud, integrates with numerous essential higher education technology systems and includes:

– **DocuSign eSignature**: Accelerates the signing process and helps eliminate inefficient manual tasks. With DocuSign eSignature SMS Delivery, participants are alerted immediately via text message when action is required and can sign documents from any device, anywhere.

– **DocuSign CLM**: Dtreamline negotiations, automate workflows and report on agreement status. With DocuSign CLM+ universities can also leverage the power of AI for advanced contract data analysis.

University of Iowa Center for Advancement transforms intent agreements

The University of Iowa Center for Advancement implemented the DocuSign Agreement Cloud to facilitate the donor intent agreement process, among other processes. With DocuSign, the team was successful in not only eliminating many manual steps, but also the use of multiple systems formerly needed to create a single document.

Today, the document creation, routing and approval occurs within DocuSign's contract lifecycle management solution: DocuSign CLM. Once the document has been prepared and has gone through internal approvals, the final document is sent via DocuSign eSignature to the donor. The process takes less time and generates a more streamlined, simplified donor intent document which allows the team to administer the gift more effectively according to donor intent.

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Agreements drive higher education in many ways and are present throughout your institution. Digitizing agreements processes with the DocuSign Agreement Cloud offers improved student and staff experiences, greater efficiencies that reduce cost and complexity, and transparency and insights that accelerate much needed revenue and innovation.

The DocuSign Agreement Cloud can help higher education institutions maintain a sense of urgency and agility that will drive new programs and revenue, meet the needs of today's students, and effectively fulfill their missions now and in the future.

Notes

1   https://hechingerreport.org/more-students-start-earning-stackable-credentials-on-their-way-to-degrees/
2   https://edsource.org/2020/newsoms-proposed-budget-cuts-to-higher-education-force-difficult-choices-ahead/631681
3   https://www.highereddive.com/news/colleges-pull-back-tuition-increases-as-pressure-to-manage-costs-mounts/578336/
4   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/27/tuition-freezes-and-cuts-show-colleges-and-universities-are-face-downward-price
5   http://naicu.imediainc.com/naicu/media/pdf/COVID-19/COVID-Survey-Summary-Release.pdf
6   https://www.naicu.edu/news-events/washington-update/2020/december-10/naicu-survey-shows-impact-of-covid-19-on-campuses
7   https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/
8   https://www.theedadvocate.org/colleges-seek-new-revenue-streams-students-push-back-tuition-increases/