



How is Technology Supporting Success for Black, Latino, and Poverty-Impacted Students?

Ohio Community College Student Perspectives on Guided Pathways Technology

Report for the Ohio Success Center Prepared by The Ada Center

June 2023

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Project Overview

In 2023, the Ohio Success Center and The Ada Center received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future to better understand how Black, Latino, and poverty-impacted Ohio community college students have experienced the virtualization of Guided Pathways since the onset of the pandemic. Readers may recall a similar study conducted in the turbulently timed Spring of 2020.

In 2020, The Ada Center interviewed 35 students at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Marion Technical College, Owens Community College, Sinclair College, and Stark State College to understand how Black, Latino, and poverty-impacted students were experiencing the pandemic-induced shift to remote learning and instruction. Among other recommendations, student feedback in our 2020 report underscored the following mission critical technology practices:

Students Underscore Mission Critical Practices

Even After In-Person Interaction Resumes, Learners Consider Technology Critical to Their Success

	 Clarify and Help Students Get on a Path	 Help Students Stay on Their Path	 Support Student Learning
Student Must-Haves <i>35/35 students consider "highly useful for their success"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Website provides current and comprehensive information about key deadlines, activities, and courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Digitally accessible point of contact for support, with whom online appointments can be made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consistent usage of digital learning technologies with the ability for meaningful peer-to-peer interaction
Student Nice-to-Haves <i>Majority of students listed as "highly useful for their success"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Personalized electronic degree plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Proactive and tailored communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ User-friendlier technologies

At the time, we heard from students that, pandemic or no pandemic, they had lasting and evolving expectations about how technology could be used to support their success. Fast forward three years, and this feedback has proven to be true. Across February – April 2023, The Ada Center conducted in-depth interviews with students at Central Ohio Technical College, Cuyahoga Community College, Lakeland Community College, and Sinclair College about their contemporary experiences with Guided Pathways Technology.

As was forecast in 2020, we found that students are increasingly reliant on technology in nearly all facets of their day-to-day life and have come to expect a certain user experience each time they engage with a technology product or website. To keep pace

with these evolved expectations, OACC institutions have focused extensively on how to more effectively use technology to support success and equity goals.

This report contains student feedback on critical technology-enabled practices that are relevant to all OACC institutions. As with our prior reports, student feedback is organized according to three consolidated Guided Pathways Pillars: Clarify and Help Students Get on a Path; Help Students Stay on Their Path; and Support Student Learning. Throughout this report, we highlight promising technology-enabled practices as well as areas in need of continued work and focus.

We would like to thank the 42 students that so generously contribute their time and expertise to this project. Each participating student received a \$25 gift card as a thank you for their time; however, each participant also stated they would have provided their feedback without any reimbursement. All participants believe strongly in the importance of leveraging student voice in the design of technology infrastructure.

We would also like to thank Anne Foster and Laura Rittner for their invaluable insight and thought partnership in creating and designing this student-centered project.

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Institution and Technology Profiles

The Ada Center worked with the Ohio Success Center to choose a diverse set of colleges to participate in this project:

Participating OACC Institutions		
Name	Location	Categorization
Central Ohio Technical College	Newark, OH	Small, Suburban
Cuyahoga Community College	Cleveland, OH and Surrounding Areas	Large, Urban
Lakeland Community College	Kirkland, OH	Small, Suburban
Sinclair College	Dayton, OH	Large, Urban

These colleges provided our research team with an institution technology profile, which asked each college to identify the types of software commonly used by students at their institution. The Ada Center received information from each institution on the following types of technology tools:

Technology Category	Representative Examples
Student Portal	Ellucian Self-Service, Unifyed, Homegrown
Student Onboarding Technology	Comevo, Blackboard Learn, Homegrown
Learning Management System	Blackboard, Canvas, D2L, eLearn
Appointment Scheduler	QLess, E2EAdvising, eSARS
Degree Planner	DegreeWorks, My Academic Plan
Early Alert/Case Management System	Civitas Inspire, Maxient, Persistence Plus, Homegrown
E-mail	Gmail, Outlook
Chatbot	Signal Vine, Ocelot, LiveHelpNow
Remote Videoconferencing	Zoom, WebEx
Prospect Management Tool/ Enrollment Management CRM	Ellucian Recruit
Career Prospect Tools	Handshake, Focus 2

Colleges also told our team if a student-facing technology had recently been added at their college, if there were major student success technology initiatives underway but not yet completed, and if there were specific areas of the student experience where it would be helpful to have student feedback on technology functionality. Answers to these questions further enabled The Ada Center to customize our student interview protocol (discussed below) to address top of mind questions among OACC institutions.

Methodology

Across February – April 2023, our team conducted 42 in-depth student interviews and follow-up email exchanges at the four Ohio colleges listed above. The majority of these student interviewees identified as Black, Latino, or poverty impacted. We asked these students to answer questions based on our “Student Perspectives on Guided Pathways Technology” interview protocol, which has been implemented with hundreds of students from over 90 institutions engaged in student success transformation.

This interview protocol gathers student feedback on discrete technology tools by walking students through their unique student journey, asking each student to recount their experience with key activities like college enrollment, connecting with student supports, building a schedule, selecting a program of study, planning for transfer and career, and feeling connected with the community and classwork. For each activity, we discuss how technology has (or hasn’t) played a role, what worked well and what didn’t, and how technology might be used in the future.




Following the culmination of these interviews, our research team analyzed these student experiences and organized them by key themes and technology focus areas. We were also able to analyze this student feedback with the added context of our 2020 research findings and The Ada Center’s broader student technology feedback data set. As we find each time we speak with OACC students, all have overwhelmingly positive things to say about the caring and intellectually curious environment fostered by each of your colleges.

Overall Findings

Our student technology interviews shed light into OACC institution progress on critical student success areas (“Must-Haves”); practices or technologies that can considerably support student success (“Nice-to-Haves”); and new ways that technology can support student success (“Emerging Needs”).

Students Elevate Mission-Critical Practices

Students Note Improvement Since 2020, but New Needs Also Emerge

	 Clarify and Help Students Get on a Path	 Help Students Stay on Their Path	 Support Student Learning
Student Must-Haves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Website provides current and comprehensive information about key deadlines, activities, and courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digitally accessible point of contact for support, with whom online appointments can be made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent usage of digital learning technologies with the ability for meaningful peer-to-peer interaction
Student Nice-to-Haves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personalized electronic degree plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proactive and tailored communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● User-friendlier technologies
Student Emerging Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Optimize website to provide more detailed course schedule, transfer, and career data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent note-sharing and tracking of student support requests and meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhance assignment notifications and promote virtual faculty office hours for asynchronous students

- Signifies that sustained progress has been made
- Indicates an area that needs additional attention
- Highlights a new development for colleges to consider

The remainder of this report further elaborates on each focus area listed in the three Guided Pathways pillars above, concluding with reflections on these findings and the value of student interviews and focus groups.

Clarify and Help Students Get on a Path

Websites Continue to Play an Outsized Role in Getting Students on the Path and OACC Colleges Focus on Improving Their Efficacy

Colleges have made great strides in improving the usability and content of their public-facing websites since 2020. Most OACC students report high satisfaction with their colleges' websites, though there is still some room for improvement with the organization of many OACC institution homepages. In addition, student interviewees provided our research team with additional website content they felt would better clarify the path to student goals and encourage a more seamless enrollment experience.



Nationally, college websites can be a pain point for students, as well as for the faculty and staff tasked with keeping them updated. Most students report it takes five or six clicks on a college's website to access the information they need. The Ada Center has found that unless students can find the information they're looking for within two clicks, they are likely to discontinue their search online.

OACC students told us college websites are still their primary tool for clarifying and getting on a path (and staying on their path) when enrolling at a college. Students explained that college websites are the first place they look for help or answers, even before asking a friend or peer. Almost all OACC students interviewed this year felt that their college's website was their first source of information for enrollment, course registration, career exploration, getting support, and paying for college.

While all OACC institution homepages that we examined in our research ultimately contained comprehensive information on key student questions, students (and our research team's secret shoppers) were not always able to find the information they needed within the two-click metric listed above. Some student interviewees were also frustrated by website redundancies or repetitive calls to action that detracted from their goals or confused them navigationally.

College Websites with Duplicative Links and Repetitive Calls to Action Overload Students and Make Getting on the Path Daunting

START HERE

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

APPLY NOW

CONTACT US

Apply Today

Get Started

Financial Aid

Have Questions?



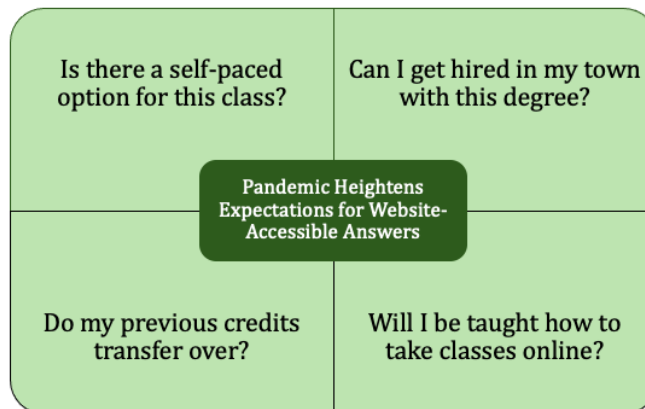
*Click now
to get
started!*



Students report confusion with college websites that contain repetitive information or flashy icons and banners that detract from student focus.

The good news is that addressing these user experience challenges is often a relatively simple fix. The Ada Center highly encourages a small group of content-expert faculty and staff (not just the web team) to review your colleges website for clarity and ease of navigation each semester. A student focus group can assist with determining where streamlining or further edits might be needed.

In addition to this type of navigational feedback on college websites, students also told us about the new types of information they would hope to see on college websites going forward.



Student interviewees told us that available class modality (e.g., in-person, hybrid, or fully remote) was one of their top enrollment concerns and a primary reason for visiting a college’s website. They explained that the experience of the pandemic – with its constant shifts, including institutions suddenly cancelling classes or hosting them online – encouraged them to pay more attention to what the college website shares about the timing and respective modalities of classes being offered. Students also explained how this information helps them better predict whether a class might interfere with their work or familial obligations. In response to this student feedback, The Ada Center recommends exploring how your college’s web-accessible course catalog can be updated to include course modality information.

Student interviewees also asked for more and earlier information about career pathways. While this information has always been made available to enrolled students through various career exploration tools, prospective students are now asking for web-accessible, detailed career pathway information such as how degree programs path to careers in specific geographies and expected pay ranges. We encourage OACC institutions to explore how this information can be better displayed to students earlier in their enrollment journeys. For example, Sinclair’s “Explore Careers” [webpage](#) is one illustration of how to effectively share this career pathway information with prospective students.

EXPLORE OPTIONS

Show Salary and Job Growth Data for:
 Miami Valley Region

Local Zip Code

Minimum Education Required:
 Any Level of Education

Search Careers
 Sales Manager

SEARCH

SALARY BY EXPERIENCE

75th	\$179,940
25th	\$90,193
Entry Level	10th - \$62,845
Senior Level	90th - \$260,939
Mid Level	50th - \$129,116

EMPLOYMENT PROJECTION

2026 2023 2029

AVAILABLE JOBS

399 Jobs Posted in the Last 6 Months

[View Hiring Companies](#)

DESCRIPTION

Plan, direct, or coordinate the actual distribution or movement of a product or service to the customer. Coordinate sales distribution by establishing sales territories, quotas, and goals and establish training programs for sales representatives. Analyze sales statistics gathered by staff to determine sales potential and inventory requirements and monitor the preferences of customers.

RELATED SINCLAIR PROGRAMS

[Business Administration](#), [Business Management](#), [Business Management](#), [Business Management/Digital Marketing](#), [Business Transfer](#), [Digital Marketing Analytics](#), [Digital Marketing Communications](#) and 2 other programs.

[View all related Sinclair programs from this occupation category.](#)

Finally, many students requested that OACC college websites include more information about the expected experience of being an online student. What does it look like to Get on the Path of online education? One student interviewee shared, “My friends and I all signed up for online classes so we could work morning shifts and then not fight a commute to campus. We were not prepared for what it would take to succeed in that environment. I think I’m the only one that stuck with it. Everyone else just burned out.”

Several student interviewees recommended that their college share specific tools or checklists that could help them determine what they would need to do to succeed as an online student. Students at Tri-C noted that the college’s My Online Readiness Experience (“M.O.R.E.”) module on Blackboard was a great at accomplishing these goals:



What is My Online Readiness Experience

Among the abilities students should possess are:

- Send e-mail
- Attach, create, modify, and save electronic documents
- Upload/download files
- Navigate the Internet using any web browser
- Understand and modify browser settings relating to security, pop-ups, and firewall settings
- Create personal video presentations
- Strong organizational skills
- Disciplined time management



By recognizing that even the most tech-savvy students can be intimidated by online learning, colleges like Tri-C help orient new students to the practices needed for success in a new learning environment.

Utilizing Personalized Electronic Degree Plans Still a Challenge for Students

Historically, student engagement with degree planning software has been limited. However, during the COVID-19 crisis, The Ada Center found that OACC students relied extensively on degree plans (when available), as in-person student support became more difficult to access because of the pandemic. Now, students are more familiar with the benefits of personalized degree plans and have come to expect that these tools will quickly and accurately answer their degree path questions.

For example, at COTC, almost all students reported using the college’s degree planning software, Student Planning. Students routinely used Student Planning because they found certain features (such as “Percentage to Completion”) to be gratifying and informative. Intuitive user interfaces also helped students engage regularly with degree planning software, as shown below:

According to students, COTC’s Student Planning tool is graphically intuitive and helpful when planning for transfer or a degree.

However, some students at OACC institutions had more difficulty using their college’s degree planner, leading them to rarely use the tool. Many students reported that these tools displayed out-of-date degree requirements and lacked the ability to search for current classes. In addition, advisors at these schools weren’t always able to detect when these malfunctions occurred, resulting in conflicting guidance from advisors, faculty, the degree planning software, and the registrar’s office.

At other OACC institutions, only a handful of students reported familiarity with a college’s degree planning tool, expressing shock and surprise at such a tool’s existence. Despite this lack of familiarity, when prompted, students thought that the ability to conduct “What If I Changed my Major?” scenarios and the ability to view “Percentage to

Completion” indicators would help inform their short- and long-term course registration decisions. All students told us they wished they could view this information on demand.

To improve student use of degree planning tools, The Ada Center recommends that colleges investigate underlying data integrity issues that may be causing display and capability errors. In addition, we recommend that colleges regularly poll their students to determine if degree planning software is considered reliable and useable. Finally, we recommend that colleges increase e-mail nudging and reminders through other messaging channels to raise awareness about this technology resource.



Help Students Stay on Their Path

Students Report Strong Digital Ties with Student Support Staff

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students initially felt lost without being able to physically walk into the student center for assistance. Student support staff responded by leveraging available technology for online appointments and virtual counseling sessions. That rapid virtualization of student support occurred at the exact moment The Ada Center conducted OACC student interviews in 2020.

This year, students reported that what was once a band-aid approach to virtual student support now feels like a strong digital infrastructure. Almost all student interviewees stated that they knew how to contact their advisor or a college’s advising center through email and phone. This information, they described, “makes me feel like I have a person I can get through to if I need support. It’s about knowing who your people are so if you can’t find what you need on the site or portal or Blackboard, they can help you figure things out.”

When reaching out to support staff, students continue to appreciate the availability of multiple communication channels, like e-mail or phone, enabling them to choose the method that suits their needs. As in 2020, telephone appointments remain the preferred communication method for quick and direct questions, such as course selection, while virtual appointments are more useful for in-depth discussions, such as transfer requirements or in-depth degree planning.

Video Appointments Not Always Necessary

Students Value Privacy and Multitasking Capability of Phone Calls

Students Prefer Phone Appointments...



Multi-Tasking

“I can put my advisor on speaker and register for classes at the same time.”

Zoom Fatigue

“I spend all day on Zoom. If I have a quick question, I don’t need to physically see my advisor.”

Efficiency for All

“It’s easier to do a phone call, especially if I’m on the go. There are too many steps for video.”

...With A Few Exceptions

Screen-Sharing Vital

Teaching students how to use new software capabilities



In-Depth Counseling

Conversations concerning mental health, housing insecurity, and childcare

Peer-to-Peer Connections

Creating community through activities such as career fairs, special programs, orientations

While students reported that online appointment scheduling has become easier and more commonplace, several student interviewees mentioned that their advisor never showed up for their scheduled appointment slot. Upon further investigation, the reason for these no-shows stemmed from a calendar syncing issue between colleges' scheduling software tool and their email/calendar system.

The Ada Center recommends that colleges with newly released appointment scheduling software tools run periodic audits to ensure available appointment booking times are appropriately keyed to a staff members availability; appointments are being logged on all attendees' calendar; and messages are sent to remind all parties about the upcoming meeting. Colleges could also explore how best to inform a student when an advisor will be late for an appointment and how to advise students about next steps if an advisor will be late beyond a certain time threshold.

Proactive and Tailored Communications Capture Student Attention

According to shifts in student feedback between 2020 and 2023, virtual student communications is one major area in which OACC colleges have made significant improvements. In the last three years, many OACC institutions have bolstered their technology infrastructure to enable more timely and personalized student communications. Just as importantly, staff and faculty have committed to using these tools and other practices to improve virtual student connection.

Many students reported a major improvement in virtual communication from faculty members. In addition to messages about coursework, student interviewees shared how their faculty members often sent reminders about non-academic resources, such as a food pantry or updated bus schedules. Faculty were also able to refer students to the appropriate student support staff member when a question was particularly complex or out of a faculty member's expertise (e.g., financial aid questions).

Students also cited creative ways that faculty kept in touch with them. Several students at different OACC colleges reported that faculty used pre-recorded "weekly announcements" to share and address common points of concern from students. Instructors also used these announcements to reiterate their availability via text, phone, or online video conferencing.

Outside of the classroom, OACC staff often sent eye-catching e-mails that were short and to the point, such as this one from Lakeland Community College:

Hello!

You are receiving this email because you have expressed interest in joining a student organization. **Did you know that Lakeland has OVER 40 student organizations?** Whether you're looking to make friends, make progress on your career, or make an impact, our many student organizations provide opportunities for everyone!

Student clubs and organizations typically hold regular meetings, do fun activities, raise funds, perform service to the community, and occasionally take trips to learn more about their interests.

Attached to this email you will find the full list of student organizations and their advisers. To learn more about a club, when it meets, or how to join, contact the adviser listed with that club. **Not seeing anything you like?** Don't worry, Lakeland encourages and supports students interested in creating a new club.

Students appreciated e-mails explaining why they were being sent, along with short calls to action and a PDF with additional explanation.

We also asked OACC students whether they preferred texts or e-mail for important college news. Nationally, student feedback continues to demonstrate a significant difference of opinion on whether students prefer texting or e-mail as a means of communicating important alerts, events, and information directly from a college. We received similarly mixed feedback from OACC students, though student interviewees all suggested that their college could annually update personal communication preferences and contact information to reflect students' first choice for messaging.

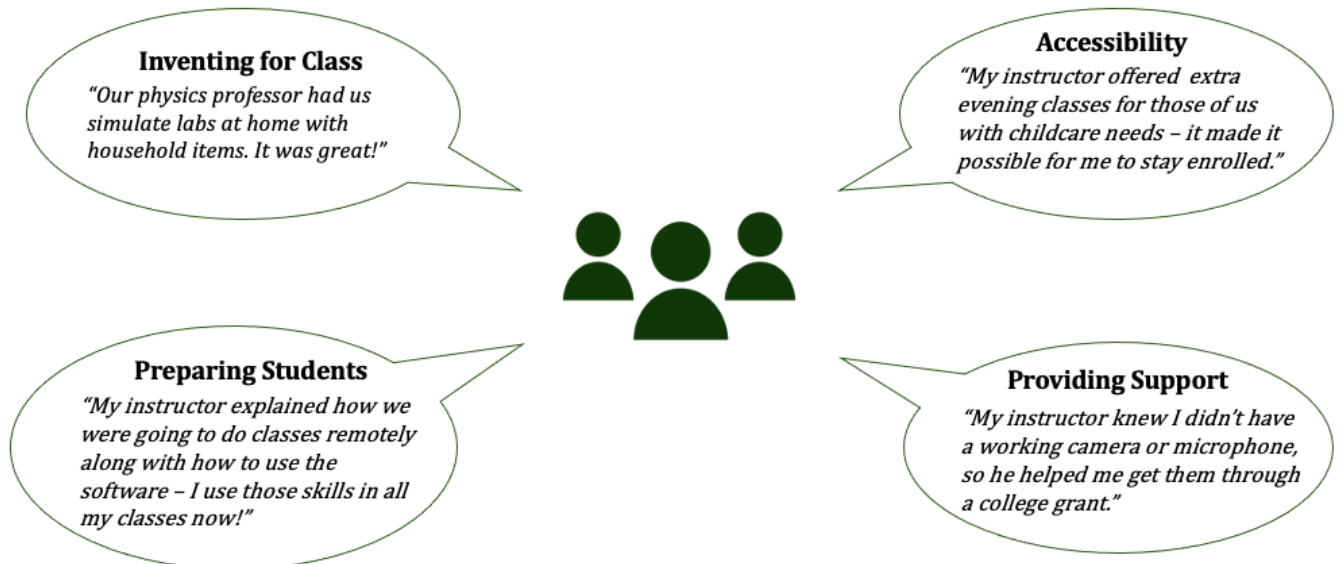
Our research also found that students strongly preferred text message threads that ultimately ask for student input. For example, after asking students if they are aware of a resource like the career center, the next message might inquire about a students' preference for career center operating hours.

Support Student Learning

Faculty Usage of Learning Management Systems Remains Uneven and Students' Expectations Have Heightened Due to Faculty Exemplars

Throughout our interviews, students recounted numerous stories of faculty going “above and beyond” in remote teaching and student support. These students shared examples of instructors utilizing web conferencing tools with ease, while also taking the time to ensure that student questions were being answered (regardless of classroom modality). Students also told us that they always felt comfortable reaching out to their professors with academic and non-academic questions and could do so through a variety of channels. The Ada Center commends OACC colleges for continuing to foster an environment of care for faculty and students that has not lost momentum since the beginning of the pandemic.

Many Faculty Going Above and Beyond to Support Student Learning *Students Share Many Examples of Effective Technology Supported Instruction*



While students generally felt positive about the teaching and learning environment at their institutions, many student interviewees vocalized the challenge of inconsistent digital learning technology use among faculty. For some students, these challenges led to significant academic and financial setbacks. The most common concerns regarding digital learning technology use are listed below:





- Conflicts between deadlines stated by a faculty member verbally in class and those listed in the LMS under “Due Dates.”

- The practice of “locking” all upcoming assignments at the beginning of a term prevents students from proactively balancing their course responsibilities with other life demands (e.g., work, childcare). Locking assignments refers to only allowing students to view one assignment at a time with no forward visibility into what might be expected throughout the course. This practice is particularly problematic for students of color and poverty-impacted students.
- Inaccurate to-do lists on the LMS that do not reflect a course’s current assignments.
- A lack of “guideposting” on when and how to access quizzes on an LMS which, in some cases, might cause a student to lose credit by accessing a quiz too early during the semester.

A common thread in the above issues is a need for academic consistency and clarity for students to achieve success – a theme that is prevalent in national research on student success. Below we’ve re-listed a few critical LMS usage policies borrowed from our broader research on essential student learning practices:

Basic LMS Usage Policies Key for Learning Equity

Students Testify to How Tool Can Help Explain the What, When, and How of Course Success

 <p><i>“When I logged in, my instructor had a ‘Start Here’ orientation page...”</i></p>	 <p><i>“...her syllabus deadlines were uploaded to the calendar, and she’d update them when things shifted...I knew I could trust what was there...”</i></p>	 <p><i>“...and the fact that everything followed a pattern made it easy to plan out my week in advance. I knew discussion boards were always Thursday, homework Friday, grades posted Tuesday...”</i></p>	 <p><i>“And the reminders made me a lot less anxious about missing things while juggling everything else right now...”</i></p>
<p>✓ Set clear expectations about how to use the LMS for a given course, especially the discussion board</p>	<p>✓ Ensure syllabus and assignment calendar match; changes are communicated</p>	<p>✓ Create and post a predictable cadence of assignments</p>	<p>✓ Provide updated and programmable grade and assignment deadline notifications</p>

A Nuanced Interview Observation



First-generation students and those from racially minoritized groups cited consistent usage of the LMS gradebook, assignment calendar, and discussion boards as especially critical to their ability to learn effectively.

“ *It’s really helpful for me to have a clear place to get answers about when assignments are due how I’m doing, and what to expect.* ”

- Pre-Nursing Student ”

Faculty Guideposting Leads to Student Confidence

Stories of What Encourages and Discourages Students from Enrolling in Remote Learning

	Syllabi	Test-Taking	Discussions	Assignments	Grades
 Yes Please	Syllabus is current and aligns with student calendar feature and access to facilities.	Instructor provides students with orientation to proctoring software one week before exam.	Instructor is clear on what qualifies as a “quality” and timely response on discussion board.	Students receive explicit instructions on how and when to submit assignments electronically.	Instructors set expectations for when grades will be shared or uploaded and how to keep track of class performance.
 No Thanks	Syllabus has outdated and conflicting information across features.	Students surprised by mandatory orientation videos and activities that must be performed before taking test.	Instructor “likes” each discussion board response without further feedback.	Students struggle to complete assignments by hand, figure out how to submit their work and interpret conflicting due dates.	Students receive grades on irregular schedule and are confused by cumulative grade computations.

When students need clarity within their teaching and learning environment, The Ada Center has found that students (especially students of color and students within specialized disciplines) value creating their own spaces (i.e., spaces that do not require support from faculty or advisors) for sharing notes and asking questions about a class or degree. Particularly for students enrolled in asynchronous classes, having virtual places to discuss and connect is a helpful tool for student success.

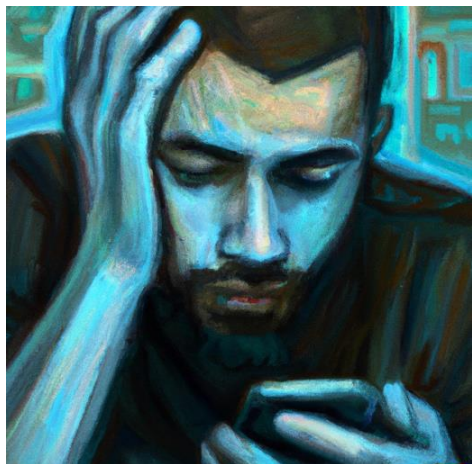
Nationally, students are gravitating to discussion platforms such as GroupMe, Google Chat, or Discord for these conversations. We believe that reflecting on the appeal of these applications might help enhance LMS discussion boards (e.g., encouraging faculty to create General Topic discussion boards to the extent that has not already occurred). These new practices could help students feel more connected to each other while also helping faculty regain valuable information about student interactions and support needs.



Students Continue to Highlight Usability Challenges with Digital Learning Technologies

While student interviewees were generally familiar with how to use and access their college's LMS features, other digital learning technologies were a different story. For example, several students at different schools noted that third-party video platforms (e.g., Panopto) would not permit recording and uploading of videos required for class. This mostly occurred when a faculty member asked students to record a video longer than three minutes for a classroom assignment. Students also highlighted proctoring software as another tool that they wish they understood more deeply (e.g., knowing that these software products will have requirements like ID sharing and taking pictures of surroundings).

Students also had mixed success with accessing assignments and classroom information through their LMS mobile application. We interviewed several students that actively relied on their LMS mobile app to participate in discussion boards, check assignments dates, or view lectures. Some students reported that their college's LMS mobile app worked well, while others were left puzzled by cut-off screens or illegible text.



Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions to the above challenges. For example, video recording software typically requires specific hardware and internet speed and certain LMS tools aren't known for the usability of their mobile apps. The best short-term path to managing this student feedback is to continue to teach faculty, staff, and students the limitations of these technology tools such that their use can be appropriately qualified.

Online Students Request More Assignment Notifications and Virtual Faculty Office Hours

Since 2020, students have gained tremendous familiarity with self-paced learning and have a better appreciation of what to expect in asynchronous online classes. Colleges have met this interest by offering more of their courses online and providing in-depth orientations to prospective asynchronous students about how to succeed in the online classroom.

Despite these advances, many students noted that two major improvements could be made to their online experiences. First, these students asked for more timely notifications of when course assignments are not completed, rather than sporadic reminders of expected progress (e.g., a reminder at the halfway mark of a term). While not every LMS or self-paced learning platform is equipped with late reminder notifications, The Ada Center suggests exploring features such as automatic due date notifications, which can be enabled by faculty, to meet this student request.

Secondly, students requested regularly scheduled online office hours with faculty in their asynchronous courses. While many faculty teaching in a virtual environment create pre-recorded weekly announcements, students explained these type of standing office hours help add personalization to the online experience and allow for more nuanced questions.

Concluding Thoughts

The Ada Center commends OACC institutions for their broad-based commitment to enhancing student success through technology. Our student interviews confirm that not only do students have access to college technology that helps them achieve their educational and career goals, but that their technology experience has markedly improved since 2020. While there are still areas for improvement with technology-enabled practice, many of these areas can be addressed through additional training for faculty and staff on the effective use of college technology and spending more time and resources on data hygiene for existing data systems.

Consistent with past feedback from students, our interviews this year confirmed that investment in sophisticated technologies was far less important than effective usage of key tools such as the LMS and the college website, along with clear communication to staff and students about the limits of technology. While tools such as comprehensive CRMs, Chatbots, and soon, AI-powered navigational tools, can be powerful student success resources, it's still possible to deliver a high-quality virtual experience without these investments.

As a parting reflection, we would encourage OACC institutions not included in this project to conduct their own student interviews and focus groups on technology use. While student feedback shouldn't be the only prerequisite for setting technology priorities, it is an immensely important perspective that helps predict if a technology will be effectively adopted. We hope the insights included here are a good starting point for these conversations.

The Ada Center thanks the OACC institutions listed in this report and their students for the opportunity to gather these insights and reflect on progress made since the pandemic's inception.