Is Your Data Decision-Ready?

A QUICK DIAGNOSTIC FOR SENIOR LEADERS

Higher education institutions rarely struggle with a lack of technology. Instead, the challenge lies in the absence of a shared higher-education strategy for deciding which technologies to adopt, when to adopt them, and how to integrate systems over time.

Over the past decade, institutions have aggressively expanded their digital ecosystems. Most have layered enrollment platforms, advising tools, analytics dashboards, modern learning environments, and, increasingly, AI-enabled capabilities onto existing structures.

Yet when systems fail to connect, the result is a "Franken-stack" requiring manual data reconciliation that forces staff to navigate multiple interfaces. In these environments, leaders often feel constrained by the very tools intended to support them.

Enrollment and Yield

Audit the following benchmarks. Flag any statement that does not reflect a consistent operational reality at your institution.

- ☐ When deposit yield softens in a specific region or population, our enrollment team adjusts outreach strategy within 72 hours rather than waiting for periodic reports.
- ☐ Admitted students who 'go quiet' automatically trigger a personalized intervention from the appropriate department: admissions, financial aid, or advising.
- ☐ Our enrollment dashboards suggest operational actions; they are not mere "rear-view" leadership reports.
- ☐ Staff responsible for yield possess a single, unified view of each student; they do not need to manually aggregate or reconcile data from multiple systems to act on a signal.
- ☐ We can quantitatively identify "melt risk" profiles at the individual level with sufficient lead time before a deposit deadline.

Reflection: Where does marketing and enrollment data hit a dead end before it reaches the people who need to act on it? Identify the manual process that creates the bottleneck.

Student Persistence and Retention

Audit the following benchmarks. Flag any statement that does not reflect a consistent operational reality at your institution.

- ☐ Our success coaches and/or faculty advisors have access to a single-view portal that flags indicators of student disengagement across the LMS, student portals, and registration.
- ☐ Our early alert processes are predictive; they initiate an intervention before a student decides to stop out.
- ☐ Advisors and student success staff spend less than 10% of their time reconciling data across systems to build a complete picture of a student.
- ☐ Responses to financial holds, registration barriers, or academic probation are cross-functional by design, ensuring the student receives a single, coherent plan rather than fragmented departmental emails.
- ☐ We can run a query across our entire enrolled population to identify students matching a specific profile in real time, without a multi-day data pull.
- ☐ Our data encourages staff to celebrate student successes just as much as it highlights risk.

Reflection: Calculate the average "latency period"—the time between a risk signal appearing in a system and a qualified staff member initiating contact. What is the institutional cost of the student experiences that occur within that window?

Operational Efficiency and Scale

Audit the following benchmarks. Flag any statement that does not reflect a consistent operational reality at your institution.

- ☐ Leadership has access to real-time data on a prescriptive platform whenever they need an operational view of enrollment or persistence.
- ☐ Our institution has the structural capacity to add a new program or expand enrollment in an existing one without a proportional increase in administrative headcount.
- ☐ The AI, automation, or analytics tools we have invested in run on a unified, trusted data foundation rather than siloed or inconsistent sources.
- ☐ Staff time is spent primarily on judgment and high-touch student intervention, not on locating, reconciling, or formatting data for others to use.
- ☐ Our technology investments over the last three years have reduced operational friction rather than added to it.

*Reflection: Identify which mission-critical operational decisions are currently made using data that is at least **30 days old.** If that information window were reduced to 48 hours, how would your institutional risk profile change?*

Reading Your Results

Zero to two flags

Your data infrastructure is largely decision-ready. Your primary opportunity is to move from "descriptive" to "predictive" maturity. Focus on scaling these successes and ensuring your systems can autonomously recommend high-impact interventions. You are positioned to lead the market in responsiveness.

Three to five flags

You have meaningful gaps between data and action, indicating “leakage,” where lag negatively impacts student success and revenue. Prioritize the section with the most flags first, determining whether the barrier is technical, procedural, operational, or all of the above.

Six or more flags

Your institution is likely making consequential decisions on incomplete or delayed information across multiple functions. A more systematic assessment of your data infrastructure is warranted before investing further in point solutions.

Working Toward Decision-Ready Data

The most common finding at institutions utilizing this diagnostic is that the necessary data exists. The gap is in the connective tissue: the workflows, integrations, and accountabilities required to synthesize disparate signals into a coherent prompt for action. Without this tissue, data remains a liability (a storage cost) rather than an asset (a driver of growth).

Noodle works with university partners to find audit failure points, determine their cost, and devise solutions. If this diagnostic surfaced questions worth exploring, we would welcome the conversation.

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