

WHITE PAPER

2020

The Top 3 Priorities for Registrars during COVID-19



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

Stellic...

Executive summary



COVID-19 has had massive effects throughout higher education, with students, advisors, and leadership alike facing challenges to which they must adapt to in real time. After surveying over 150 registrars during an April 2020 Webinar with AACRAO, we've identified the top priorities of higher-ed leaders during COVID-19 and this report will summarize those results. We will cover the evolving role of the registrar in the age of COVID, best practices to address the challenges of keeping students on track and discuss the top questions on every registrars mind amidst the crisis.

Introduction

This white paper will discuss the evolving role of the registrar, their top priorities, and best practices for keeping students on track during covid-19

Many institutional leaders predict that the higher education landscape will never go back to “normal”. As college admissions report many more inquiries about deferrals from students and parents who are unsure whether their colleges will resume in-person classes, schools are likely to respond with more online flexibility, hybrid classes, and increased usage of their backend systems. Institutions will have to innovate to continue to attract students to their programs and to maintain the value of their degrees for students currently enrolled. Perhaps the most pressing question for institutions right now: how will you keep current students on track to graduate, during and post COVID-19?

After surveying over 150 registrars during an April 2020 Webinar with AACRAO, Keeping Students on Track for Graduation in Crisis Situations, we’ve identified this as the top focus for registrars as they continue supporting students through these challenges to make sure that they are able to minimize impact. In order to do so, the roles of the administration have begun to evolve and require innovative approaches to unprecedented obstacles. In this report we will discuss:

- The evolving role of registrar amidst COVID
- Top three priorities for registrars
- Best practices for keeping students on track
- Top registrar questions during this time



The Evolving Role of the Registrar

Because of COVID-19, there are a number of moving parts, such as course offering changes, exceptions, grading policy changes, and academic calendar adjustments, that make the registrar at the epicenter of the higher education response to the pandemic. Now more than ever, it is increasingly important to rely on registrars to provide the data, insights and analytics needed for institutional leaders to make strategic decisions.

Data such as course demand and student performance is critical to helping institutions make sure students have the resources they need to keep on track towards graduation. This means anticipating the number of students who will need certain courses to graduate and being alerted to students at risk of falling behind or missing requirements. The role of the registrar will be that much more important to institutions in providing this data so leadership can be proactive in getting students to the finish line, rather than reactively making changes and accommodations for students.

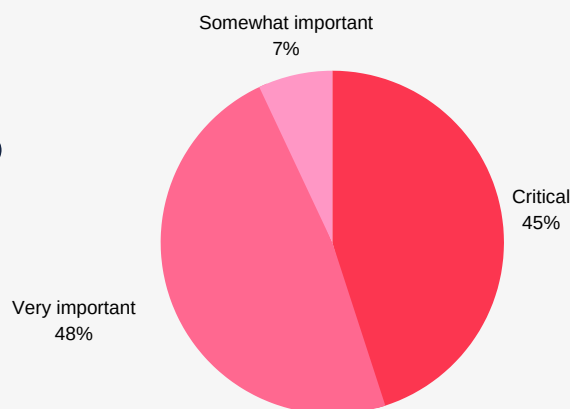
Registrars will work in collaboration with advisors, who share the same focus of keeping students on track despite any disruptions, and both will have a big impact on how higher education tackles and responds to COVID-19. During this time, advisors are going to be critical in keeping students engaged in their degree planning and even courses themselves.

“FROM THE REGISTRAR’S PERSPECTIVE, IT’S BEEN PROVIDING LOTS AND LOTS OF INFORMATION TO ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKERS, SO THAT WE CAN HELP THEM MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS IN THE RIGHT TIME.”


- CASEY HAYES, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING, ELON UNIVERSITY

Role of Registrar During COVID-19

We asked over 150 registrars how critical they believed their role to be in ensuring students' on-time graduation during this crisis.



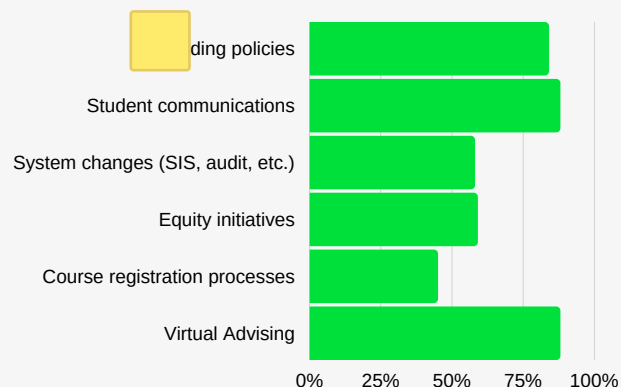
Top 3 Priorities (and Approaches) for Registrars

The next 3 sections will outline the three top priorities for registrars we've heard amongst our  partners and best practices for each



Top Priorities for Registrars

What areas are institutions working on as a result of the COVID-19 crisis?



Priority #1: Keeping Students on Track

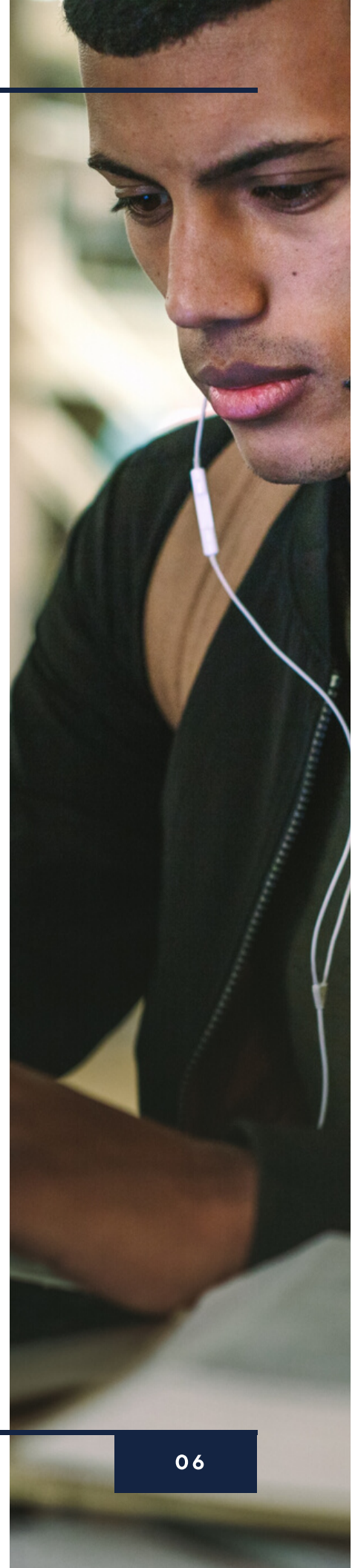
While it is truly impressive how quickly institutions were able to transition to online learning and virtual communications, there are still going to be situations in which accommodations must be made in order to keep students on track to graduate. Top of mind for registrars are courses/majors that cannot be replicated virtually, i.e. those in music majors or core classes that require in-person labs. These prerequisite labs that were canceled or postponed can have a significant impact on a student's graduation plans.

In addition to changes in course offerings and remote instruction, students are faced with external barriers preventing students from graduating on time. Students (and their parents) have lost jobs that fund their education, internships have been canceled, and some students don't have access to computers/internet to continue remote learning. It's important for advisors, faculty, and institutional leaders to provide accessible communication, additional guidance as well as support during these challenging times.

Approach: Student Empowerment

Completing an undergraduate degree in the current environment requires much more than passing a series of courses. Today's college students engage in a wide variety of activities that complicate a student's degree progression such as dropping courses, changing majors or minors, studying abroad, internships and redeeming AP credits. When you add onto that the current climate of changing course offerings, students need support now more than ever in envisioning their best path towards graduation.

This is why it is important to provide students with the tools they need to visualize and adapt their degree progress throughout the evolving college journey. Whether students remain learning remote or not, today's institutions must begin to leverage 2020 technology to address the expectations of today's students who have increasingly complicated requirements and pathways. Paper-based calendars and excel spreadsheets are no longer feasible.



WE RELY VERY HEAVILY ON OUR DEGREE AUDIT AND SO IF WE'RE ALLOWING ALL THE STUDENTS TO TAKE THESE CLASSES AS PASS-FAIL NOW, THAT WAS A BIG CONCERN FOR HOW WE WOULD ADDRESS THAT DEGREE AUDIT ISSUE, THAT NONE OF THOSE COURSES WOULD BE SATISFYING DEGREE REQUIREMENTS."

- CASEY HAYES, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING, ELON UNIVERSITY

Priority #2: Virtual Advising

For institutions who do degree tracking with manual steps, mass exceptions, policy changes and approvals became increasingly difficult. Institutions are prioritizing virtual advising to allow students to have comparable advising support and guidance.

It is important for students and their advisors to be in effective communication with each other when it comes to planning their semester schedules and degrees, which can

be hard in a time where students are not able to walk into their advisor's offices. Zoom can only go so far when it comes to advisors mentoring and guiding students on their degree paths.

While institutions have instituted a number of new pass/fail policies in order to help students stay on track towards graduation, these grading policy changes also have their challenges when it comes to tracking them in SISs and degree audit systems.

Approach Tech-Enabled Advising

Typically, pandemic aside, advisors often have too many students to provide truly personalized support, guidance, and advice. Advisors find themselves spending too much time with students on the administrative aspects of school, like looking at time schedules or academic credit reports.

To combat this dredge of manual work, many universities find that a centralized system and easy to use reporting tools enables them to accomplish institutional success goals.

By connecting degree audit, planning, advising, and analytics systems (i.e. iPASS initiative), institutions gain the ability to easily monitor student progress, foster departmental alignment, plan for demand, and allocate capacity and resources - resulting in a transparent and efficient workflow.

Online advising tools that provide seamless communication between students and their advisors can empower better digital relationships.

Priority #3: Institutional Changes

Continuous changes to grading policies, class offerings, and enrollment make it extremely challenging for institutional leadership to plan the next couple months, let alone entire four year degrees for current and incoming students.

Key challenges for those working with degree audit systems will be mass exceptions, course calendar changes and keeping students engaged during remote and/or disrupted learning.

"WE'VE LEARNED FROM THIS AND WE'VE SEEN THAT ...THERE'S GOING TO BE MORE ONLINE FLEXIBILITY, MORE HYBRID CLASSES, AND INCREASED USAGE FROM THE LMS"

- CASEY HAYES, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING, ELON UNIVERSITY

Approach: Data-Driven Decision Making

With our ever changing landscape, it will be more important than ever that leadership has the tools to drive strategic, big picture decisions based on data. These tools should allow them to leverage data on class offerings and course demand, students' progress term-by-term, and ultimately move the needle on graduation metrics, student engagement, and enrollment. If leadership is provided with real-time insights like this, institutions should be able to minimize the impact of COVID-19 disruptions.

"BY LEVERAGING THOSE KINDS OF TECHNOLOGIES AND REPORTS TO SEE WHERE THE DEMAND WOULD BE AND WHERE STUDENTS WILL BE ON CAMPUS, WE'VE ALREADY STARTED OPENING UP ADDITIONAL SECTIONS AS A CONTINGENCY"

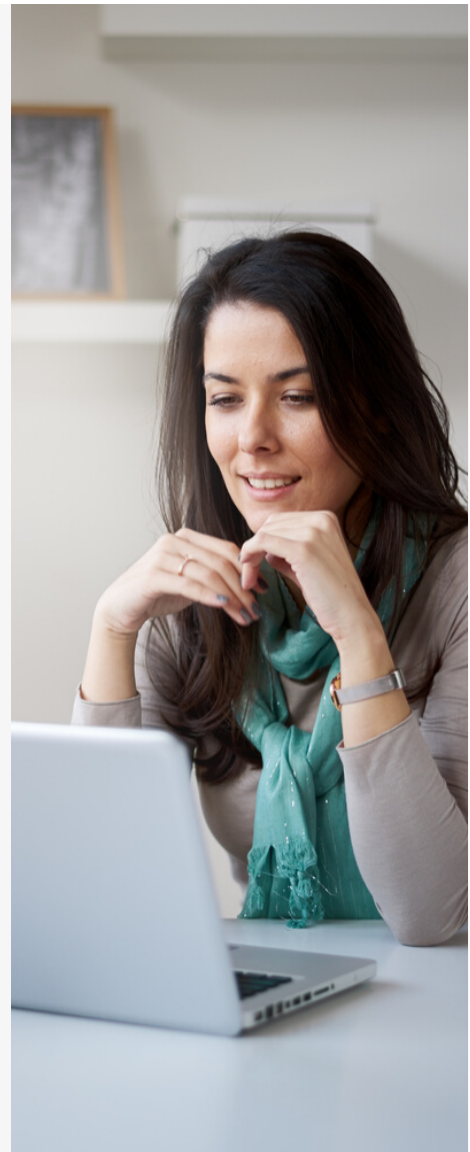
- CASEY HAYES, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING, ELON UNIVERSITY



Top Questions from Registrars

Amongst 150 registrars, these were the top 5 questions on their minds when it comes to handling the changes brought on by COVID-19. If you'd like to schedule a consultative call to discuss best practices on any of these topics, email us at info@stellic.com.

- We ended up cancelling a number of studio and lab courses in Spring, because they couldn't be transitioned to remote delivery in the timeframe we had. Did other campuses experience this, and what are other campuses doing to support graduating seniors who needed these courses?
- How are campuses keeping students engaged in planning efforts for fall?
- I understand the reason for lifting registration holds that were pending advising, but I am concerned that will result in students not meeting with advisors during this extremely critical time. Absent registration holds, how are campuses following up to ensure students do complete their advising appointments?
- Were campuses able to change your grading basis without taking all students out of the class, making the grading basis change and then re-enrolling all the students?
- Is there a really successful technique for keeping students involved and connected with the university and each other?



Key Takeaways



Institutions have had to overcome enormous obstacles, and continue to do so, as they navigate disruptions from the pandemic. There are even schools who previously had no online learning available, who were able to spin up remote classes, procedures and platforms for their students within weeks. The progress that has been made is truly impressive.

The challenges are far from over, however. But, by reducing iciencies and leveraging student-centric policies and technology, advisors, registrars, and other academic leaders can create a positive experience for students as they navigate their path to graduation - both during and post COVID-19.