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Salesforce Empowers Higher Education Institutions To Successfully Guide Students Through Recruitment, Enrollment, And Graduation
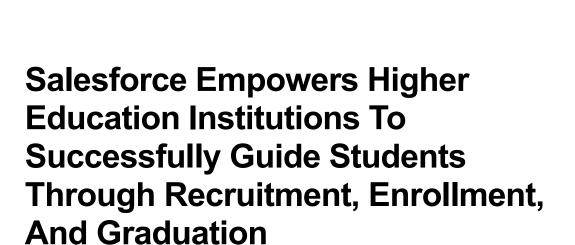
A Forrester Total Economic Impact™ Spotlight Commissioned By Salesforce

Salesforce Empowers Higher Education Institutions To Successfully Guide Students Through Recruitment, Enrollment, And Graduation

Salesforce provides educational institutions with an enterprise-level CRM platform to capture 360-degree views of prospective students, current students, and graduates, encompassing the entire student lifecycle.
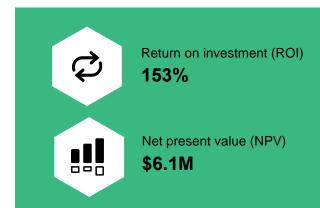
Salesforce commissioned Forrester Consulting to interview 10 representatives across seven higher-education institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia to conduct a Total Economic Impact™ (TEI) study and better understand the benefits, costs, and risks associated with Salesforce for Education.[1]

This spotlight will focus on the value of Salesforce for Education in improving recruitment, admissions, enrollment, and student experiences at the interviewees' institutions.

2023 HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT MARKET OVERVIEW

In 2020, enrollment in higher education declined significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and postsecondary enrollment remains below pre-pandemic levels in 2023. Notably, this reduction is not driven by a lack of interest in higher education: [2]

- In a recent Gallup-Lumina State of Higher Education report that surveyed 12,000 US adults between the ages of 18 to 59, 47% of survey respondents reported considering enrolling in higher education in the past two years.

- Sixty-one percent of respondents who attended some higher education but have not completed a degree reported that they are considering reenrollment.[3]

Return on investment (ROI)
153%

Net present value (NPV)
$6.1M

Financial barriers and access to financial aid and funding were the most common higher education enrollment inhibitors for survey respondents, which indicated the importance of higher educational institutions connecting prospective and reenrolling students to financial resources.[4] Higher education institutions have an opportunity to leverage enterprise-level CRM platforms to direct students to the resources that will keep engaged and on a path to graduation.

INVESTMENT DRIVERS

Interviewees in the Forrester study aimed to achieve institutional objectives and create environments that empower students to ask and receive answers for admission- and enrollment-related questions, strategize with advisors and peers for academic improvement and excellence, and receive personalized communications related to student interests and career paths throughout the student lifecycle.

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However, the legacy technology their institutions used did not help them meet these objectives. Without a centralized platform to track student data in the prior environment, the interviewees struggled with the following experiences:

- **A lack of resources led to incomplete execution of student recruitment campaigns.** Several interviewees said that their institutions did not have the resources in their prior environments to collect and track data to gain insights that would have fortified recruitment efforts. For two interviewees from a community college district, prospective students who showed interest in attending the college received no follow-up communications. This was simply because the process required employees to manually enter students' names and contact information into a spreadsheet. This task was not prioritized amidst capacity constraints.

- **Impersonal communication led prospects to abandon enrollment.** Before using Salesforce, academic counselors at the interviewees' institutions were unable to see notes left by the staff who recruited the student, and prospects were left feeling dismissed or unheard during the recruiting process. In an environment of dropping enrollment rates, any barriers to successful enrollment were particularly harmful to organizational success.

- **Strategies to improve student experiences were stymied by siloed data.** Interviewees described environments divided by disparate tools across departments and budget centers, which contributed to a lack of visibility into holistic student data across departments. Interviewees struggled to democratize staff access to student data. Each interaction between a student and different departments or budget centers needed to be accessible to inform respective staff of the student's needs, which are often cross-departmental.

- **Low student satisfaction with processes and administrative tasks.** At each point in the student journey, whether enrolling in a class, seeking academic counseling, or initiating the process to graduate, students lacked a single point of entry or a clear resource to direct questions towards. Students instead had to navigate confusing webpages and piece together their own answers to administrative questions. Inconsistent messaging and disorganized information made the student experience even more difficult. The associate vice president of enterprise systems said: "Students aren't organized like that. If they're having academic troubles, they don't know to look at the academic research pages buried under student affairs and then look at the chemistry department — which is buried under the college page — and then look at the school nursing health studies. They just know [they need help with] their academic health."

> **"There were not any good and easy ways to share [information], so any information was used as a sword and a shield [as if to say]: 'This is my data, and I hold onto it, and my data makes me look good and you look bad.' We battled towards creating the narrative about what's actually happening at the university."**
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> *Associate vice president of enterprise systems, private university*

WHY SALESFORCE?

To solve these challenges, the interviewees' institutions prioritized creating a 360 view of prospects and students. These interviewees chose to adopt Salesforce for Education with the following goals:

- **Scale data management and service performance across student services.** Interviewees' institutions recognized the need to move away from point solutions and manage the student experience with an enterprise-level, omnichannel solution to deliver seamless experiences at scale. The senior product manager IT in the US said to Forrester: "[We chose Salesforce] to scale performance. We know we're going enterprise-wise. ... [We asked] central IT how [to] address our constituent feedback relative to university service, which was not necessarily favorable. We quickly realized that to do that, you need a central technology tool database that can be leveraged to provide service to our students."

- **Create a connected, seamless journey from recruitment to graduation and beyond.** The senior product manager IT also cited the ability to improve student satisfaction as driving their institution's Salesforce selection, saying, "In order to provide a singular, cohesive service, we needed a CRM to be able to provide a single point of service for our enrolled students and our prospective students, all driven by service." The head of digital solutions at a public university in the UK mentioned that their institution's original goal included assisting students with disabilities and learning needs, which warranted an entirely new solution as current tools did not support this long-term goal. The head of data systems and applicant engagement at a different public university in the UK told Forrester: "I don't want there to be five students of the same name in the system and to not understand which journey

applies to each of them. I want to understand and start to build that 360 view of our constituents."

- **Partner with an established leader in commerce.** Several interviewees expressed the sentiment that existing solutions for nonprofit or educational institutions did not meet the needs of a complex, multidepartmental college or university. The associate vice president of enterprise systems at a private university in the US said: "Salesforce in particular offered a commercial solution. We were finding [that] tech built for higher education or tech built for nonprofits was far inferior. But tech built for commerce and for the marketplace had a level of ease of use, sustainability, scalability, and UX/UI that we were really looking for. So, we were one of the early adopters in the higher-education space of Salesforce at the enterprisewide level." Interviewees' institutions sought to create a more robust, data-driven, and automated approach to student recruitment and admissions with a tool that is on par with for-profit organizations.

> **"Leveraging Salesforce has facilitated our increase in retention rates, graduation rates, enrollment rates, conversion rates, [and] service. It's not the only thing, but it definitely has impacted all the success rates that we measure here."**
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> *Senior product manager, IT*

KEY RESULTS

Results of the Salesforce investment for the interviewees' institutions include:

- **Improved and personalized marketing and advertising campaigns.** Tracking orientation and prospective student visitation day check-ins within Salesforce enabled prospect segmentation based on student interests and previous engagement and more effective and personalized communications. The CRM manager in the UK shared, "We now know [students] have engaged and expressed interest, and it changes our messaging in the communication journey. There's a big difference between somebody who might be thinking of attending [and] who hasn't been to campus and visits versus someone who has [visited] because there's a tangible difference in their [experiences] and, therefore, we want to communicate and work [with those experiences]."

  The head of digital and marketing automation in the UK said: "We use [Einstein] to put our constituents into four different segments depending on how engaged they are: the loyalists, selective subscribers, window shoppers, and win-back [constituents]. We know that the dormant win-back ones are the least engaged. By identifying that with Salesforce, we're better able to deliver different follow-up communications, so we focus our resources on different ways."

Reduction in applicant drop-out rate for a public university:

98.6%

Targeted ads with Salesforce led to cost-effective campaigns with better results. As an outcome of consistent, targeted messaging, the head of digital and marketing automation in the UK observed an uplift in top-of-funnel engagement with prospective students, noting that this was an indicator of reduced funnel leak: "If we take our undergraduate inquiry journey, which is the top of our funnel, we've now shown over 100% improvement to engagement, which is significant for us. That metric gives us confidence that we're connecting with more prospects considering us at an early stage. We have a hypothesis that the earlier we can build relationships with people, the better we can connect, maintain stickiness, and lose fewer people in the funnel. Salesforce is at the heart of that."

- **A reduced applicant drop-out rate.** A single admissions system within the Salesforce platform reduced applicant drop-out rates significantly for one interviewee in particular. The chief digital officer in Australia said: "Now, we've got a single view of recruitment and admissions [and] similar handling of the student experience all within the Salesforce platform. In the past, students might have seen different systems at play, different messages, different user interfaces. Now, there's so much more commonality. [Prior to using Salesforce], we had 70% of applicants drop out in the application process. Now, that's down to under 1%."

- **A simplified student experience through clearer and more accessible messaging.** With Salesforce, institutions could easily send consistent and targeted communications to students to help them locate and access the information they needed when going through academic processes. The vice president of planning, research, and institutional effectiveness and the director of CRM from the community college in the US noted that before using Salesforce, 100% of questions that students

asked during the enrollment period pertained to enrollment steps. This question type decreased to 33% of questions after the Salesforce implementation.

- **A more engaging student environment.** Salesforce offered interviewees' institutions visibility into the entirety of student lifecycle, allowing them to build individual student journeys and identify and address points of friction within each journey. In doing so, Salesforce automated some manual processes previously done by employees, such as discerning between multiple students with the same name.

  A 360 view of students also served a key purpose of supporting academic health. Salesforce empowered institutions to build on information gathered during the recruitment process and guide students through their academic lifecycle, which enriched the student experience with a connected platform linking them to advisors and peers. The head of data systems and applicant engagement at a public university shared: "We've got a student success hub. Now, we're in phase one: Getting current students in. That then gives us the opportunity to increase that 360 view of that student because they were with us as they came into the recruitment and application stage, and now we have them as current students. We can continue to build on that view of that student now that they're here. Other people across the campus can utilize that data in order to advise them better on cases that they're working with them on."

- **Higher student retention.** By reducing friction in day-to-day student interactions with their university and creating more engaging environments, fewer students chose to leave due to dissatisfaction. Additionally, smoothing the financial aid process helped prevent leakage, as issues with financial aid were a major cause of dropout rates for new or reenrolling students. One way institutions simplified this process was simply meeting student inquiries related to financial aid with timely responses. The IT senior product manager noted that with Salesforce, students received responses to their financial aid and enrollment inquiries in 24 hours, a process that previously took seven days.

"We've been able to increase our response rate from a service perspective; therefore, better customer service leads to retention. We can get students engaged. We can get them get their financial aid questions answered so that they can then finalize their financial aid, get their money, and then know that they can afford tuition for the university and enroll."

— Senior IT product manager, public university

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

For more information, download the full study: "The Total Economic Impact™ Of Salesforce For Education," a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Salesforce, April 2023.

STUDY FINDINGS

Forrester interviewed 10 total representatives at seven institutions with experience using Salesforce and combined the results into a three-year financial analysis for a composite institution. Risk-adjusted present value (PV) quantified benefits for the composite institution by Year 3 include:

- 15% improvement in first-year retention rate.

- 5.5% post-pandemic return-to-school enrollment.

- 12% productivity improvement for administrative and academic teams.

- $1.6 million of legacy environment savings.

- 10% increase in fundraising contributions.

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Appendix A: Endnotes

[1] Total Economic Impact is a methodology developed by Forrester Research that enhances a company's technology decision-making processes and assists vendors in communicating the value proposition of their products and services to clients. The TEI methodology helps companies demonstrate, justify, and realize the tangible value of IT initiatives to both senior management and other key business stakeholders.

[2] Source: The State of Higher Education 2023 Report, Lumina Foundation, 2023.

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

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