

A photograph showing a male teacher in a white shirt leaning over a desk to assist a young Black male student in a dark blue hoodie. They are looking at a computer monitor. Other students are visible in the background, some at computers and one standing. The scene is set in a bright, modern classroom or computer lab.

Digital Innovations

Keep At-Risk Students In School

Colleges and universities face new challenges in helping “at-risk” students succeed. Digital tools can be the key to keeping these learners on track to graduation, but existing technology on many campuses may not be capable of responding effectively to the needs of an increasingly diverse and digitally experienced student population.

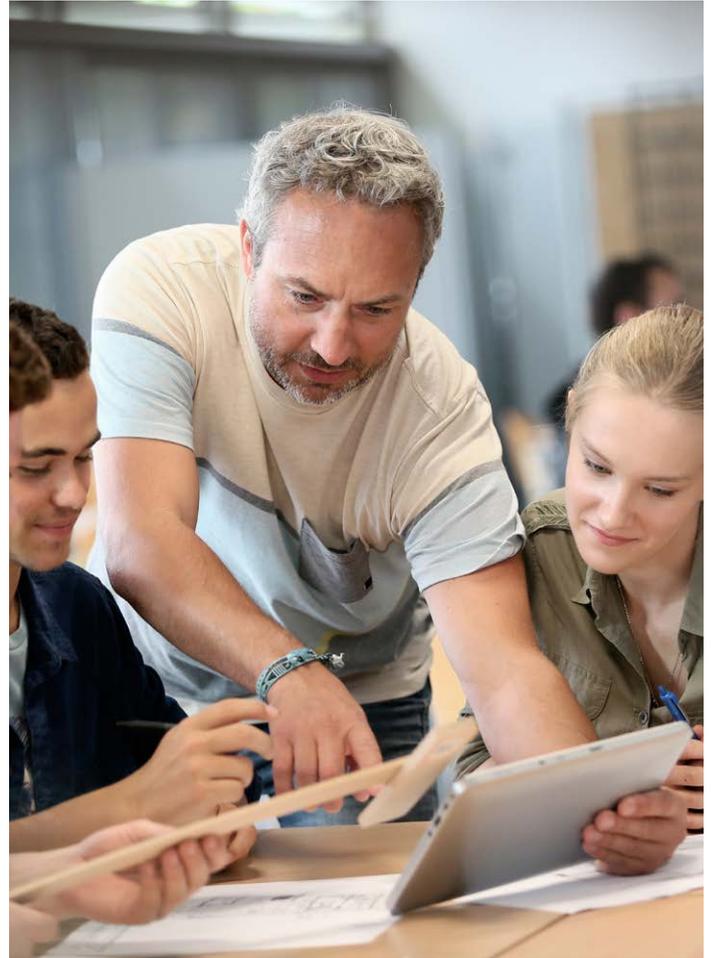
According to [a report from Stanford’s Center for Opportunity Policy in Education](#), digital tools are fundamental for supporting students with special academic needs. Replacing standard information systems with new, innovative and responsive [digital tools](#) can improve student retention and boost graduation rates. Institutions must offer more than just educational value to remain competitive.

Who is “at risk”?

Just about any student can be “at risk” of poor academic performance, dropping out or failing to meet graduation requirements. However, certain groups face special challenges. The typical college student of years past – young, full-time, career-oriented – now shares classrooms with a growing population of learners generally labeled “non-traditional.” They may be older and returning to education after a long absence, working full-time or combining studies with raising a family.

The outside demands on these non-traditional students create academic obstacles that might be too much for standard course delivery and academic support models. Working students may not be able to register, speak with counselors or get financial aid during weekday hours. A young mother working toward her degree may miss classes because of her children’s health issues. A returning student may be overwhelmed by the demands of a heavy course load.

Even the profile of the typical student is changing, as more minority and lower income students enroll. Some students are the first in their family to go to college; other students are not native speakers. Some may not be prepared for the academic rigor of their new environment. New, user-friendly digital tools can help keep these students in school and on track toward graduation – but many schools are operating with outdated systems that limit their effectiveness.



Campus systems must meet changing needs

In many education institutions, student information systems and course delivery tools are part of an outdated methodology that can no longer respond to the demands of today’s digital world. The growing globalization of education and increasing digital sophistication of today’s learners mean that these establishments may be missing opportunities to support their current students and recruit new ones.

A comprehensive framework of innovative digital tools can improve outcomes for at-risk students in three key ways:

1. Providing tools for students to manage their educational careers.
2. Supporting counselors and advisors searching for ways to assist at-risk students.
3. Providing innovative ways for faculty to deliver courses and enhance teaching.

Digital tools to open doors

Student portals. Flexible and responsive student portals give students the tools they need to self-manage many aspects of their college careers anytime, anywhere. Student information systems allow students to register, manage classes and contact counselors and advisors when needed. With a single student account, students can access online tutorials, sign up for training and workshops and monitor their academic progress.

Digital tracking tools. New digital tracking tools allow counselors and advisors to identify at-risk students promptly for early intervention. Monitoring students' progress toward graduation can help counselors identify students who are struggling, making inappropriate course choices or missing graduation requirements. These tools also help financial aid advisors to find scholarships and other kinds of funding that might help a student stay in school. They can provide management of student loans and tuition payments.

Course delivery tools. Online course delivery, along with hybrid online/classroom offerings, has been a part of the digital landscape in education for years. But traditional schools must now compete with fully accredited online institutions that offer students a complete college degree without ever setting foot on a campus – an attractive prospect for today's digitally savvy student seeking a way to balance work, family and school.

Innovative course delivery tools can help campuses accommodate the needs of both students and faculty members. Students will appreciate the flexibility of on-demand, internet-based courses, while faculty members can use these tools to deliver online courses and tutorials, increase interaction with students and connect students with academic support services.

Degree audit tools. Providing students with a clear understanding of what they need to do to progress towards graduation is a primary component of an effective student success program. Helping your students make good academic choices can lead to improved completion rates and time to degree outcomes – measures increasingly demanded by higher education constituents across the board. Comprehensive advising and self-service tools help your students navigate your institution's curriculum requirements and keep them motivated and informed in order to graduate on time.

In-classroom digital tools. New digital tools can also boost the effectiveness of traditional classroom-based courses, with presentation and multimedia packages available right from the podium. With these tools, educators can tailor teaching strategies to meet the needs of a diverse population of students with different academic skill levels and offer additional resources to those who need extra help.





Technology for the future of education

Whether traditional or not, today's college students are accustomed to using sophisticated digital technology in their personal lives, and they expect to find the same kind of tools in the colleges they attend. Institutions that are willing to exchange existing student information systems for today's new tech are better equipped to grow enrollments, enhance the academic experience for all students and help at-risk students stay on track to graduation.

To find out how Unit4 can help you to keep your students on track for success, **visit**

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