

Deloitte.



**The case for a
student-centric campus**

Colleges and universities
must centre on student needs

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Introduction

We're living a period of tremendous upheaval and many sectors, including higher education, are being disrupted. In Canada, institutions are facing increased competition for both domestic and international enrolments, decreasing government funding, a rapidly changing student demographic, increasingly complex student needs, and massive changes in the technology landscape. On top of these challenges, student sentiment of the value of higher education credentials has been waning over the past two decades.¹

Prospective students are questioning the relevance of attending a higher education institution due to increasing costs, inadequate student services, outdated program delivery models, and the relevancy of their programs with respect to future employment opportunities. Furthermore, many of the people who are enrolling are dissatisfied with their experience once they get to campus.

This paper explores these issues in more detail and sets out approaches to become a more student-centric campus.

The case for student-centricity

One of the fundamental challenges is that while student needs and expectations have been shifting dramatically, institutions have not transformed to meet them. Many institutional structures, practices, and policies were designed for a different time. As a result, they are no longer fully aligned with the present-day needs and expectations of students. How can institutions evolve to provide intuitive, impactful support to students? How can they remove barriers and become more proactive than reactive?

Higher education institutions can start by incorporating student-centric principles to support and serve the most important stakeholder on campus: the student. Although the statistics on the previous page demonstrate the severity of the issues institutions are facing, those that act decisively to address them can gain a competitive edge in the sector by attracting and retaining more students. Those that do not will see their enrolment numbers suffer and lose ground in an increasingly competitive landscape.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the possibilities that can be realized by reimagining the campus and prioritizing the issues most important to students. To inform our research, Deloitte conducted a student survey to understand students' expectations and sentiments toward the schools they attend. The current landscape has been developing over several years as student expectations and the technology to address them have evolved. The pandemic has accelerated these shifts to an inflection point. Institutions must decide whether they will act now or get left behind in the outdated, institution-centric paradigm.

This document outlines:

- The definition of a student-centric campus and why it is important
- What students have to say about a student-centric campus
- How your institution can become student-centric

Amid all this disruption, higher education institutions have a tremendous opportunity to better serve their students by viewing their efforts through the eyes of their students and transform institutional strategies and policies to better enable student success.



Figure 1 – The case for student centricity



Canadian students are paying more than ever for higher education

- Increases in tuition have outpaced inflation every year since 1982.²
- Between 1990 and 2018, provincial governments' share of university funding has fallen by nearly half while the cost of tuition, adjusted for inflation, has risen 2.7 times.³
- On average, domestic students are now paying more than \$6,500 per year in tuition at universities⁴ and \$4,275 at colleges.⁵



Canadian students indicate dissatisfaction with the education they are receiving

- More than one-third of graduating students do not believe they received good value for their investment.⁶
- One-third of students who leave their studies do so because they did not like their program or did not feel it fit with their interests.⁷



Canadian students' mental health is suffering

- According to the 2019 National College Health Assessment, 23% of respondents felt "overwhelming anxiety" and 21% felt "so depressed that it was difficult to function."⁸
- More than 10% of respondents in the same survey had seriously considered suicide within the last 12 months and 2% had attempted to take their own life.⁹



Canadian students aren't getting the skills they need to succeed in today's job market

- Just under 30% of employers believe they have the digital talent they require and 89% of executives struggle to find candidates with the right mix of soft skills.¹⁰
- 58% of graduating students in Canada did not feel their studies significantly contributed to the skills and knowledge needed for employment.¹¹

What is a student-centric campus?

On a student-centric campus, each step of the student journey is assessed, developed, and supported by answering a fundamental question: **what do students need?**

This becomes the guiding principle that shapes the design of operations, functions, and offerings, from the student's first enquiry to beyond graduation. Redesigning campus experiences around this principle enables institutions to not only better prepare their students for success, but also create competitive advantages, financial sustainability, and improved reputations in the face of disruption and change.

To be truly student-centric, it is crucial to consider all stages of the student journey. There are, of course, linkages across the stages, and institutions will have their own unique approaches based on their current processes and the students they serve.

Moreover, the student journey varies greatly for different student populations. For example, a full-time student enrolling at 18 will have different needs from a mature, part-time student who is balancing study with full-time employment.

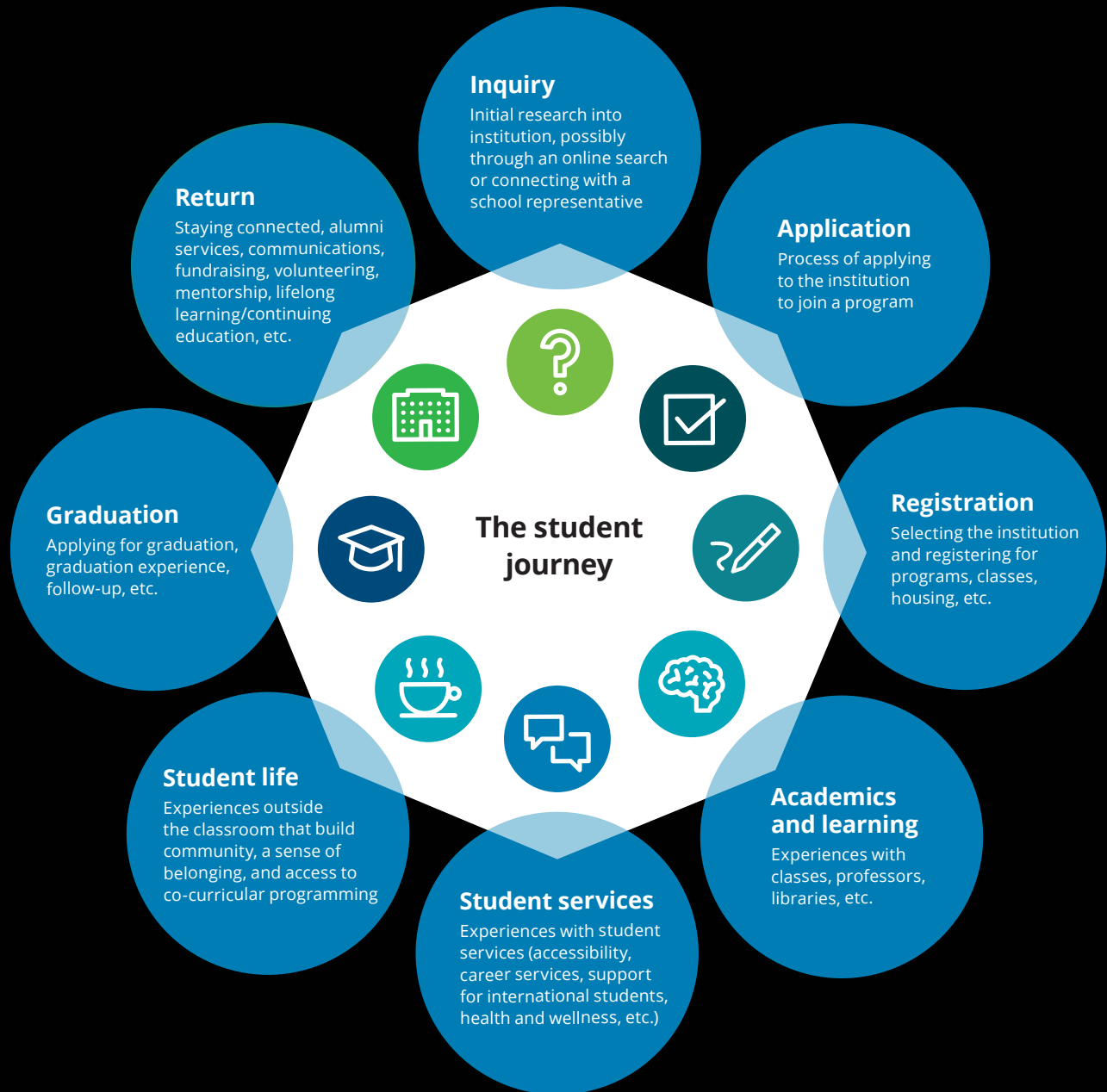
Higher education institutions can no longer make assumptions about who their students are and what they need. Given the diversity of students that institutions serve, understanding their varying needs and what their journeys are has become critical for achieving student-centricity.

Figure 2 – A student-centric campus creates a student experience that delivers:





Figure 3 – Stages of the student journey

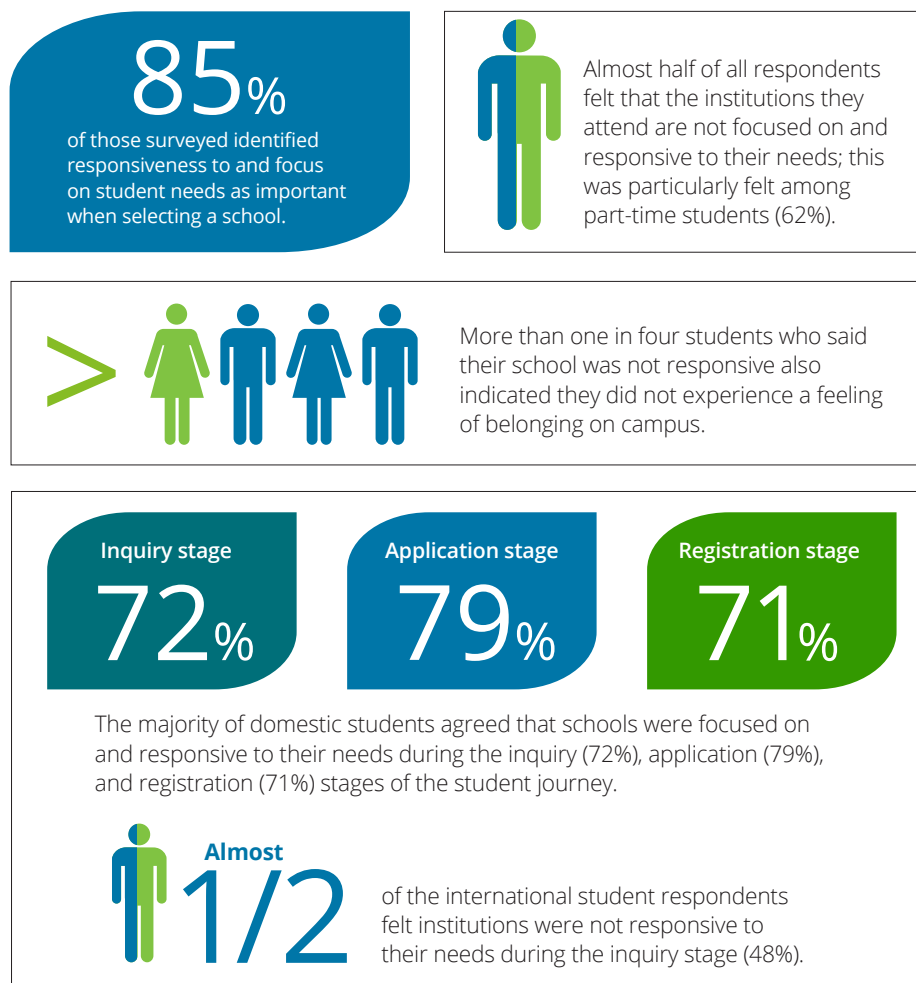


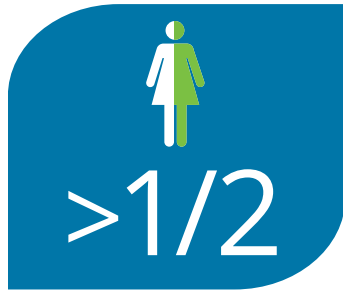
What do students have to say?

An important part of building a student-centric campus is collecting feedback directly from students. To frame the needs of higher education institutions today and explore the case for student-centricity, Deloitte surveyed 230 students in post-secondary institutions across Canada about their experiences and expectations across the student journey, while defining “student-centricity” as a school’s responsiveness to students’ needs.

Here’s what we found:

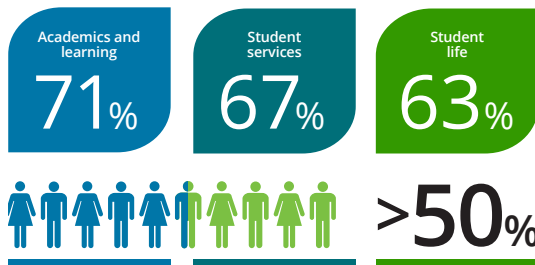
Figure 4
How students currently view the student-centricity of Canadian higher education institutions





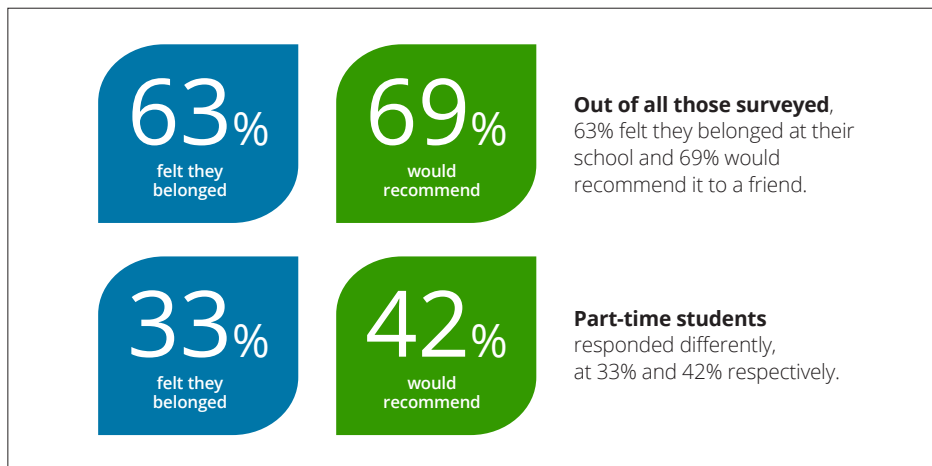
Of the students who indicated that a student-centric campus was important to them, less than half (49%) felt their campus was focused on their needs.

Less than half the respondents agreed that schools were focused on and responsive to their needs during the graduation (43%) and return (39%) stages of the student journey.



The majority of students agreed that schools were focused on and responsive to their needs in academics and learning (71%), student services (67%), and student life (63%).

More than half of part-time students disagreed on all three fronts.



Out of all those surveyed, 63% felt they belonged at their school and 69% would recommend it to a friend.

Part-time students responded differently, at 33% and 42% respectively.

Students identified the following as key areas of improvement:

- Readily accessible mental health support
- More user-friendly institutional systems
- Greater opportunities for mentorship, socialization, and career support

Key implications for institutions

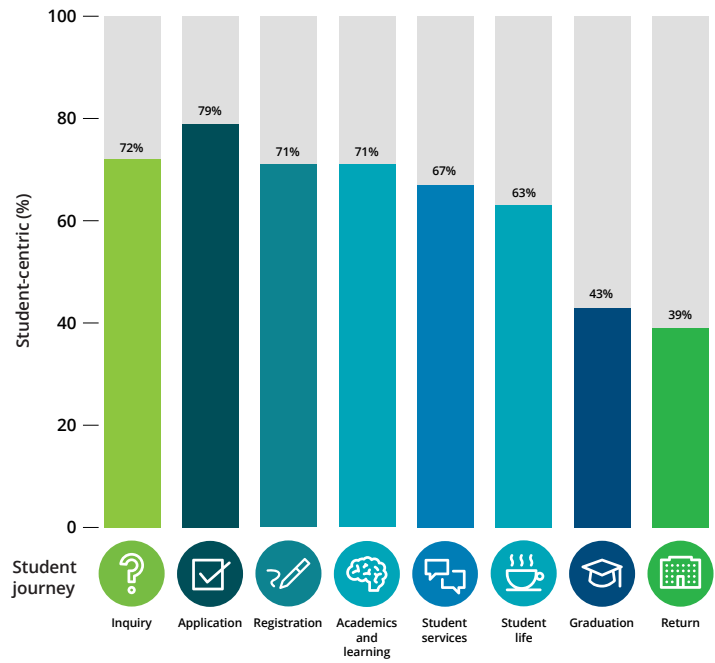
Survey result	Recommended action
Responsiveness is an important factor when students are deciding which school to attend.	Institutions should focus resources and attention on becoming more student-centric. These efforts should be demonstrated through marketing and recruitment in order to attract more students and maintain a competitive funnel.
Institutions are most focused on student needs up until enrolment, and then this focus declines.	Work to become consistently responsive across the student journey to improve the student experience and increase student success.
Part-time students responded less favourably than full-time students on almost all measures.	Institutions need to consider whether their efforts to improve the student experience include focus on part-time and non-traditional learners in addition to full-time learners. As student demographics change, the importance and impact of these learners increases.
Students identified accessibility to mental health support, the need for more user-friendly systems, and greater opportunities for advice and mentorship as key areas for improvement.	Ensure the resources students are offered (health, academic, social, etc.) reflect their desires and needs, and make those resources accessible through user-friendly systems.

More than three out of four Canadian universities reference equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in their institution's strategic and long-term planning documents and 70% have developed or are developing an EDI action plan.¹²

Students want meaningful action and more accountability; as Wisdom Tettey, vice president of the University of Toronto, said,

“Accountability could also come from outside institutions—perhaps via ranking them according to their inclusiveness. I’m hoping that the cost of exclusion will become so high that institutions will be forced to do the right thing.”¹³

Figure 5 – Percentage of students who agreed that the school they attend is responsive to and focused on their needs for each stage of the student journey



How student-centric are Canadian higher education institutions?

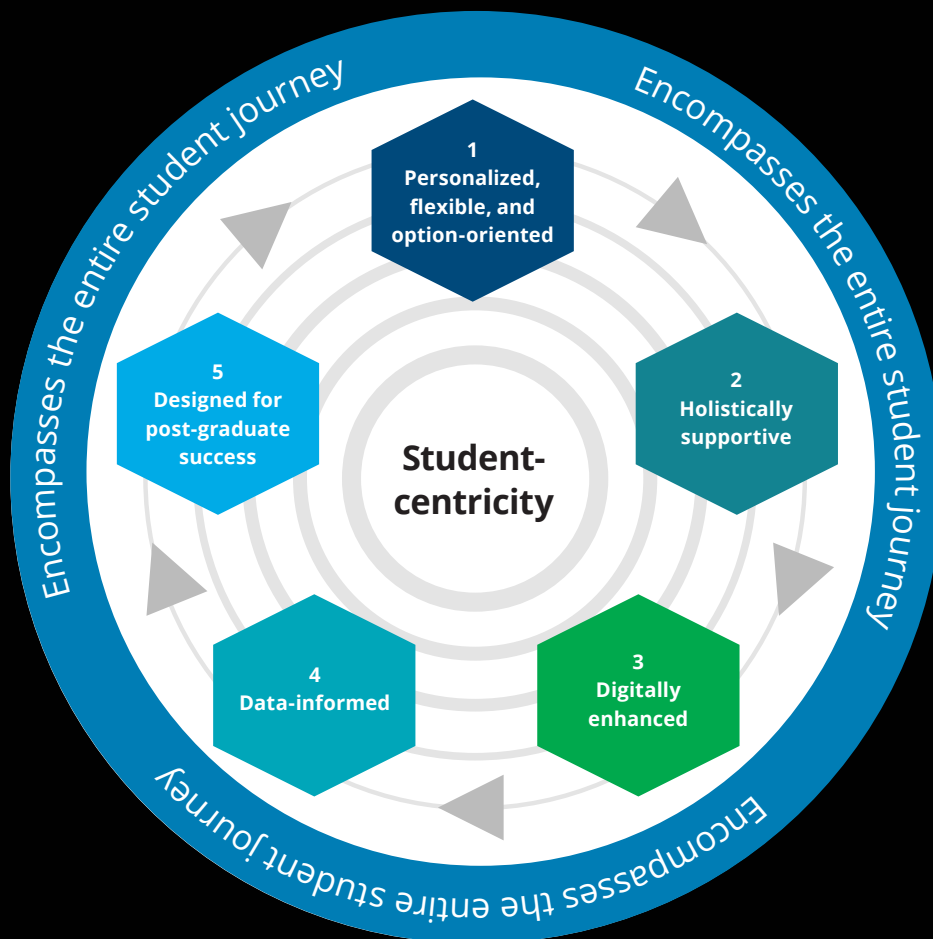
Overall, students would give their institutions a passing grade for the first part of their student journey, but there is work to be done to ensure students are supported as they approach the later stages of their journey.



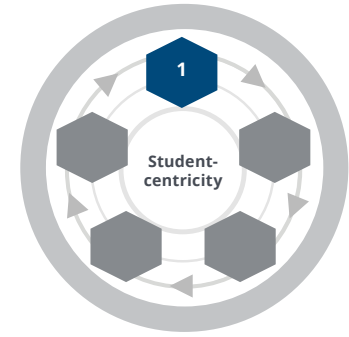
Becoming a student-centric campus

Moving toward student-centricity requires a clear understanding of what it means and what it looks like in action. Deloitte research across the Canadian higher education sector indicates that there are **five key pillars** to achieving this state:

Figure 6 – Becoming a student-centric campus



1 Personalized, flexible, and option-oriented



Student-centric institutions acknowledge that students are diverse in their backgrounds, wants, and needs and, through flexibility and options, provide their students with the ability to tailor their education to support their individual learning and success goals. There are increasing numbers of international, mature, part-time, and upgrading students seeking admission into Canadian higher education institutions; therefore, no single approach to program design and learning models will suffice.

Aiming to be personalized, flexible, and option-oriented pushes institutions to reimagine their current programs and structures and to reframe their policies and systems to provide students with various pathways to success. Instead of determining what a student *should* do within the institution, student-centric institutions provide an open and supportive environment for students to succeed in whatever way they want.

What does this look like in practice?

- **Seneca College** leverages technology to offer a hybrid-flexible model of learning with four types of modules that students can choose from: fully remote online classes; fully in-person classes; hybrid classes, with a predetermined mix of online and in-person sessions; and flexible classes, where students can choose whether they will attend on campus or remotely for each lecture.¹⁴
- **Université du Québec à Montréal** has a new credentials model that offers quicker certifications and allows students to build upon their previous learning, presenting more opportunities for different kinds of learners. Their new 10-course occupational health and safety certificate program, for example, can be taken alone or combined with a major or two other certificates to earn a bachelor's degree.¹⁵
- **Bow Valley College** introduced two new programs in cloud computing and data management analytics that follow the competency-based education (CBE) model. The school assesses incoming students for previously learned skills and creates an individual learning pathway based on the gaps in their education that recognizes work experience and allows students to expand their skills to position themselves in an ever-expanding digital world.¹⁶

- **BCIT, Siemens Canada, and Denesoline Corporation** partnered with the Digital Technology Supercluster to create a virtual, clean-energy training platform for Indigenous communities. Through the program, members of the Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation in the Northwest Territories learn about clean-energy microgrid systems. Drawing on BCIT's experiential learning tools, participants get remote and hands-on learning experiences. Experiential learning experiences like this directly address student expectations that higher education should lead to employment opportunities by preparing students for the workforce.¹⁷

How is this student-centric?

Providing teaching and learning options that fit a learner's unique needs, goals, and lifestyle is key to supporting student success and optimizing the student experience

2 Holistically supportive

A higher education experience is clearly about more than academics and learning. Students are managing new challenges, environments, people, systems—the list goes on and on. As they progress through their learning journeys, it's vital for institutions to support the student's whole self to help them achieve their personal learning and success goals.

A critical component of holistic support is student mental health and well-being. Canadian student survey data continues to show that students feel like they're "getting the runaround" on campus, indicating a fractured experience when it comes to support.¹⁸ To avoid this siloed experience, an integrated, holistic approach to providing services that support students is key to meeting their needs and competing for students in the market. With 17% of graduating students reporting mental health challenges¹⁹, these supports continue to be a priority for students—and they increasingly expect their school to provide them.

What does this look like in practice?

- **Brock University** ranks highly among institutions for mental health supports and works to proactively meet students' needs and reduce barriers to those supports. The school recently launched the My Student Support Program (My SSP) app, which offers students 24/7 access to professional licensed counsellors in five languages and a host of resources, as a pilot project with LifeWorks. Brock also hosts a Wellness Week to shine further light through wellness walks, workshops, and fitness classes that specifically focus on mental and physical well-being.²⁰
- **Confederation College** is exploring approaches to integrating and measuring Indigenous ways of knowing in college classrooms. Phase 1 began in 2007, when the Negahneewin Council gifted the school with a set of seven Indigenous Learning Outcomes (ILOs) to provide all students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with an understanding of Indigenous worldviews. In 2015, Phase 2 built on the lessons learned, leading to the creation of the Indigenous Knowledge Mobilization Packsack, which was tested in four classrooms and continues to be refined and expanded.²¹

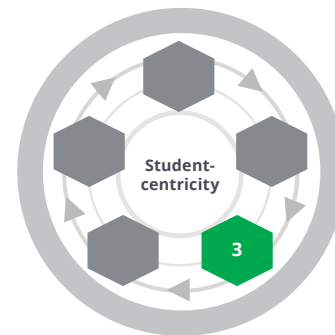


- **McGill University, University of Montreal, Inserm, and Université de Bordeaux** recently published the findings of a project that used artificial intelligence (AI) to identify factors that accurately predict suicidal behaviour in students, opening up new avenues for large-scale screening of students for risk of suicide using short, simple questionnaires in order to refer them to appropriate care.²²
- **Mohawk College, George Brown College, and the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA)** are collaborating to support a new initiative dedicated to the deaf and hard of hearing community across the province. Working together, they will collect and analyze a range of data and use it to enhance employment opportunities and connect with local organizations that have identified labour shortages and want to offer supportive careers.²³

How is this student-centric?

There is demand for increased mental support for students, and for institutions to address the root causes that exacerbate mental health challenges. Being holistically supportive and positioning mental health as a critical component can improve student success.

3 Digitally enhanced



We live in an increasingly digitally enabled world, and the impacts of COVID-19 have forced this shift at an unprecedented rate. Today's students are digital natives and expect positive, personalized, and seamless digital experiences comparable to how they interact and engage in other areas of their lives.

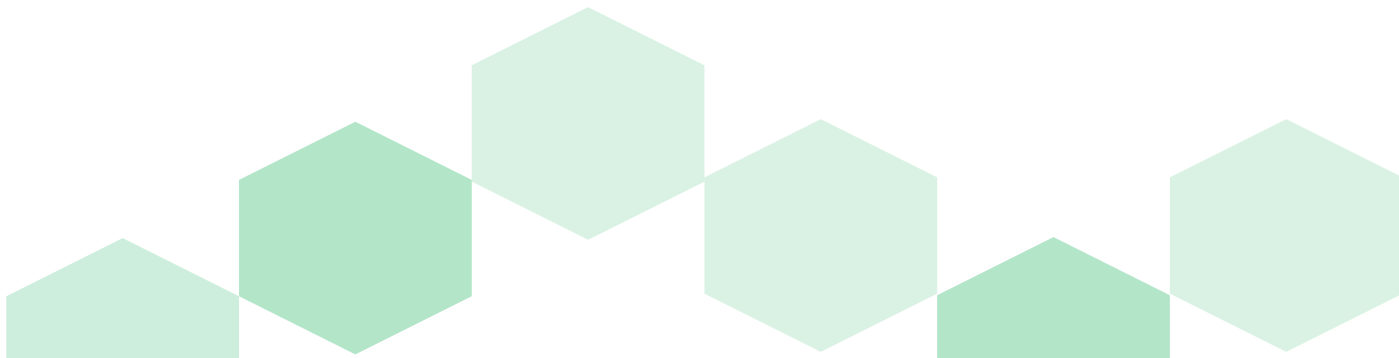
What does this look like in practice?

- **Georgian College** launched a bold digital innovation strategy to improve student learning and service delivery that led to the launch of three pilot projects:
 - College-wide transformation focused on elevating the school's capacity to offer XR (extended reality) to students and employees, including access to a virtual campus
 - Establishing multimedia studios to empower faculty to create original content to enhance teaching and learning
 - A change management process that helps employees understand how to use XR in their work and how it can lower barriers for students who require a modified learning model²⁴
- **College of the North Atlantic (CNA)** partnered with MyCreds to launch a platform that allows students and alumni to access their transcripts and digital credentials virtually. They can also access micro-credential information in a virtual credential wallet. CNA is reportedly the first institution in Atlantic Canada to offer digital credential wallets.²⁵

- **University of Ottawa** partnered with TELUS on an initiative that will transform the campus into a 5G-connected innovation hub, including the creation of two on-campus 5G research labs to immerse students in the world's most advanced digital technology so they can develop important skills for shaping the digital economy of the future.²⁶
- **Concordia University** has launched a collaborative initiative called TEMPO from the faculty of fine arts and the Centre for Teaching and Learning to provide pedagogical and technological support to faculty who teach art and performance online. It offers these instructors access to a range of innovative techniques to design engaging and collaborative online learning experiences, including a virtual gallery space.²⁷

How is this student-centric?

While in-person interactions will remain critical to student success, it is also essential for institutions to enhance and supplement those experiences with the best digital solutions available to improve ease of access to services and ensure they are adaptable and relevant to students.



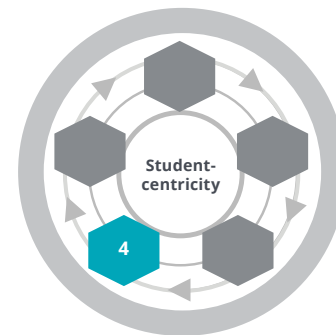


4 Data-informed

Tapping into available data is a key enabler for understanding students and being able to make evidence-based decisions that lead to improved outcomes. Leveraging student engagement data and predictive analytics presents an exciting opportunity to provide tailored support early on and intervene before challenges lead to problems. Data can also be used to inform customized experiences that fit different students' unique needs.

What does this look like in practice?

- **Mohawk College and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario** launched a project dedicated to understanding student retention using both descriptive and statistical modelling. This work led to the development of a predictive model for the overall effects of different advising initiatives, and across students at different risk levels in terms of their likelihood of leaving the college before graduating. These assessments enabled a better understanding of students and will help target support initiatives in the future to obtain the greatest possible improvements in student outcomes relative to the costs of these initiatives.²⁸
- **Bow Valley College** is creating a data-informed culture across the institution with a focus on continuous improvement. By using a data mart and analytics tools, the institution is able to identify problems, respond more quickly, and determine the most impactful changes to enhance the learner experience, thereby enabling student-centricity across the learner journey.²⁹
- **University of British Columbia** has a Learning Analytics Project with ongoing development of tool pilots that use the school's underlying technologies (Canvas learning management system, etc.) to investigate how data-informed



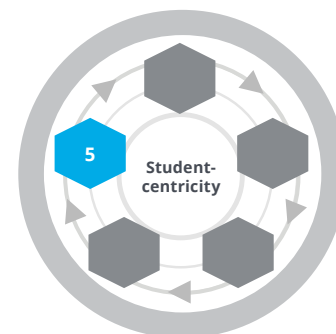
analytics can be used to support students, instructors, and advisors. Foundational to this work is a community engagement plan to empower these stakeholders with data and learning analytics tools to enhance their teaching, learning, student success, and program planning.³⁰

How is this student-centric?

While our institutions have an abundance of student data, many of their core legacy systems of operation (i.e., student information systems) only capture and track campus-centric data and were never designed for shaping and informing student-centric supports. Operationalizing data-informed student success practices that bolster student intervention remains elusive on Canadian campuses, despite many strong use cases available in the United States.^{31, 32}

Collecting the necessary data to improve student outcomes and provide just-in-time analytics to students or those who can support them is key to enabling a data-informed, student-centric campus. This pillar presents the greatest opportunity to create a substantive impact on student-centric support.

5 Designed for post-graduate success



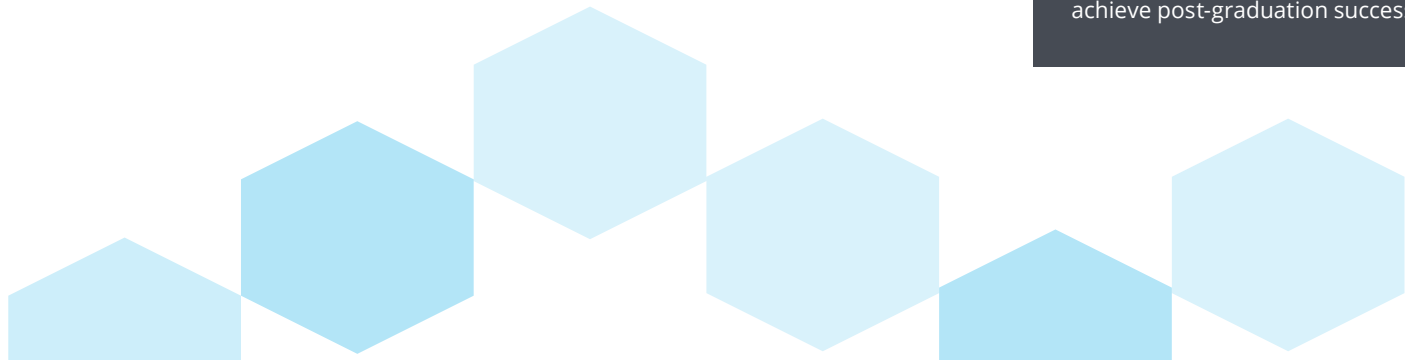
Students are reporting dissatisfaction with the value for money of their education and are less confident that their credentials will lead to their desired career opportunities. In some cases, the sheer time and expense of programs of study create an increased expectation that education will lead to employment. Furthermore, funding is becoming increasingly tied to employment-related outcomes in some provinces. Offering access to career advice and opportunities for research and work-integrated learning are powerful tools for preparing students to achieve their post-graduation objectives.

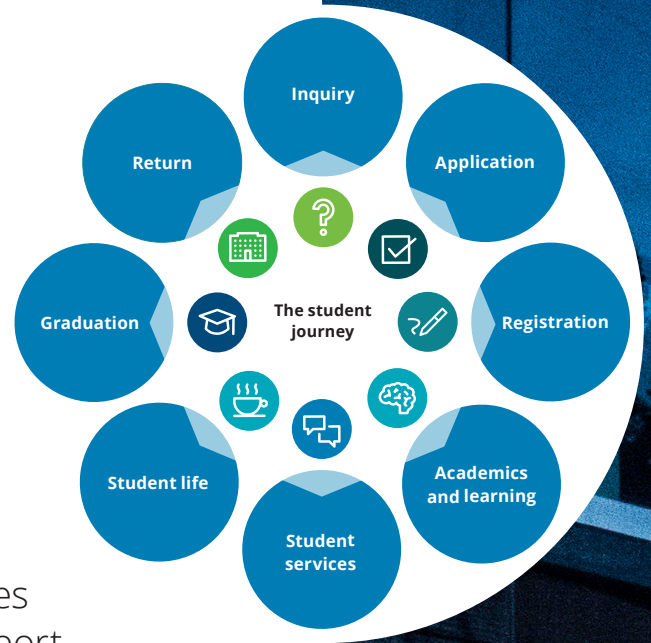
What does this look like in practice?

- **Dalhousie University and University of Toronto** partnered to establish an innovative new model for work-integrated learning, the Creative Destruction Lab—Atlantic. The program matches high-potential startups with experienced business leaders who provide expert mentoring. Students learn how to evaluate, finance, and manage technology businesses through real-world experience.³³
- **Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick and New Brunswick Community College** have announced the launch of a new online skills assessment and development platform to help newcomers to Canada find meaningful employment. In collaboration with other organizations, the platform will assess newcomers' formal training, competencies, and lived experiences against New Brunswick's industry standards to find pathways to employment and fill local vacancies.³⁴
- **Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, the University of Saskatchewan, and several First Nations and Métis communities and community members** co-implemented the Oyateki Partnership to improve the experiences of Indigenous youth as they transition through post-secondary education and into the workforce by transforming Saskatchewan's education and employment systems.³⁵
- **Lethbridge College** is partnering with Liquid Avatar Technologies (LAT) Inc., a publicly traded global blockchain and financial technology solutions company, to launch a first-of-its-kind, work-integrated learning opportunity for students. LAT is providing 9,000 plots of land in its Aftermath Islands Metaverse, a network of spaces where users can create a virtual world parallel to their physical one. Students will develop skills as they work, play, learn, game, entertain, and earn in the metaverse, and gain a greater understanding of digital space and identity.³⁶

How is this student-centric?

It's no longer enough to think about students' needs only while they are studying. Institutions must also pay attention to helping their students achieve post-graduation success.



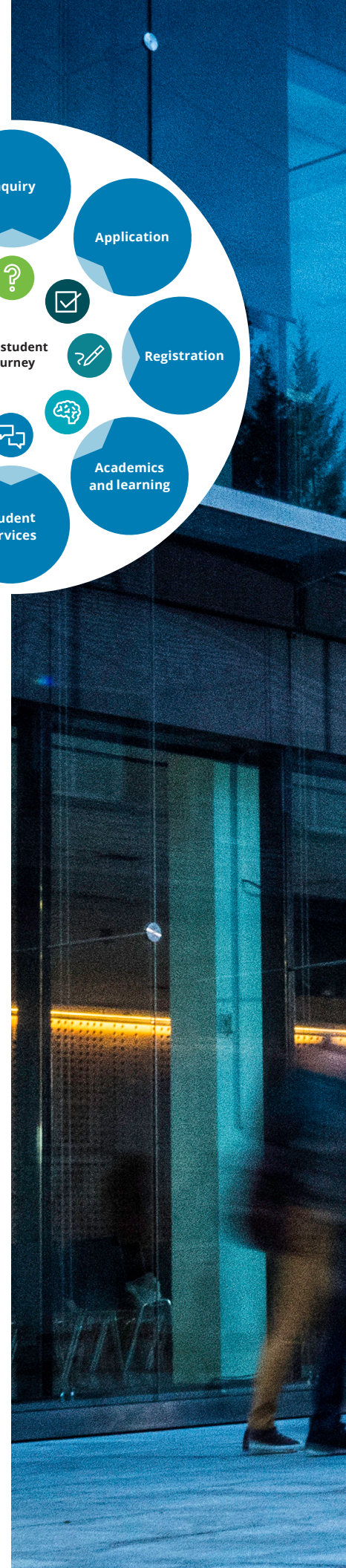


Given their range of needs and all the challenges they can face, it's clear that students need support at all points across their learning journeys.

Institutions have work to do at every step, work that requires purposeful, integrated institutional strategies with commitment and action at all levels— leadership, faculty, staff, administrators, and beyond.³⁷ Successful strategies start with the recognition that “student success does not arise by chance. It requires that institutions commit themselves to intentional, structured, and systematic forms of action.”³⁸

Our survey indicates that students feel institutions are more responsive to their needs in the early stages of the student journey. This is likely a legacy of the attention that has been placed on managing the recruitment process and the competition among institutions for students. Institutions should be reflecting on their relative strengths and weaknesses across the entire student journey to determine how they can make the most impact on both the student experience and their success rates.

Stepping back to consider the bigger picture serves to focus institutions beyond the competitive recruitment phase and encourages greater support for the entire time a student is with them. It allows institutions to reframe the way they develop relationships with their students to ensure their commitment to students' needs reaches well beyond registration and supports fruitful, longer-term connections.





Improving student-centricity

We believe it is essential for institutions that wish to be more student-centric to consider each of the five key pillars for every stage of the student journey. To help them assess where they currently stand, we have developed a maturity model. Any assessment of student-centricity must include student perceptions—institutions can no longer make assumptions about what students want and should consult them at every step.

Figure 7 – How is student-centricity assessed?

To measure student-centricity, each stage of the student journey should be evaluated based on the five key pillars above. They should be considered against three categories: strategy, approach, and results. From this analysis, you will be able to identify future areas for improvement for both the student experience and your success.



Strategy

A clear vision and plan that focuses on improving the student experience and has full leadership support are in place.



Approach

Mature processes that are impacting results and include plans for improvement are in place.

The approach is

- Personalized, flexible, and option-oriented
- Holistically supported
- Digitally enhanced
- Data-informed
- Designed for post-graduate success
- Applied across the entire student journey



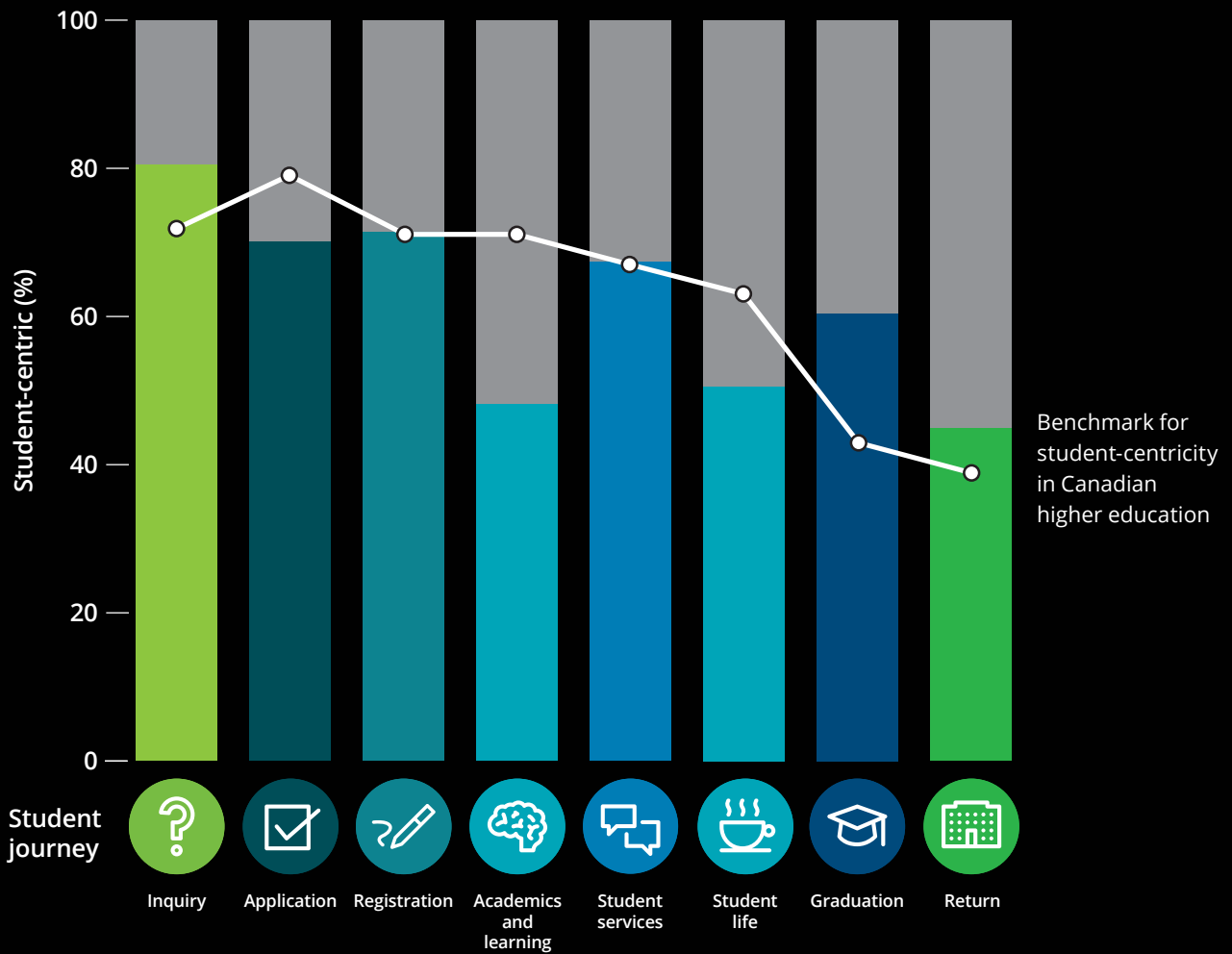
Results

Detailed analytics and evidence that show results are being used to bring about improvement are in place.

Results need to take both success results and student perceptions into consideration.

Figure 8 – This assessment should be taken across the entire student journey. The benchmark for student-centricity indicated below clearly shows that Canadian higher education institutions pay more attention during the application stage and there is much work to be done across the rest of the journey.

Maturity assessment



Human-centred design and moments that matter

Human-centred design (HCD) is an approach to problem-solving that focuses on the human perspective at all steps of the process.

Moments that matter are important milestones in the student journey and can provide insight into areas of momentum and barriers.

To establish institutional objectives that enable student-centricity, institutions need to deepen their understanding of the student experience and reflect on what students really need. To do this, institutions can employ HCD. This approach to problem-solving focuses on the human perspective at all steps of the process. Two key HCD frameworks for higher education are *moments that matter* and *student personas*.

Moments that matter are important milestones in the student journey and can provide insight into areas of momentum or barriers (see examples at right). To go even deeper, institutions can design student personas (see sample persona below), or characterization of a particular student at a moment that matters, and

think about what that student wants, needs, and values. Identifying these moments and considering them through the lens of student personas enables institutions to tailor the best possible experiences for students when they would be most impactful. Connecting these insights to institutional data will help prioritize different elements of the student experience and build processes and objectives from a student-centric perspective.

Figure 9 – Sample student persona

Working-while-learning Wendy

Wendy's story

Working-while-learning Wendy is a working professional who wants to further develop the skills she obtained while completing her marketing diploma at an Ontario college. As she gains in-the-field experience at a local strategic communications firm, Wendy is looking for a bachelor of commerce program that affords her the flexibility to work part time while she completes the degree. Wendy needs a program that offers multiple modalities of learning, hybrid options, and online course formats.

Goals and aspirations

- To earn an undergraduate degree that gives her the skills necessary to further her career
- To find a program that offers the flexibility to work toward the next level while keeping a work schedule
- To access strong networking opportunities for use in her current or future career

Primary challenges

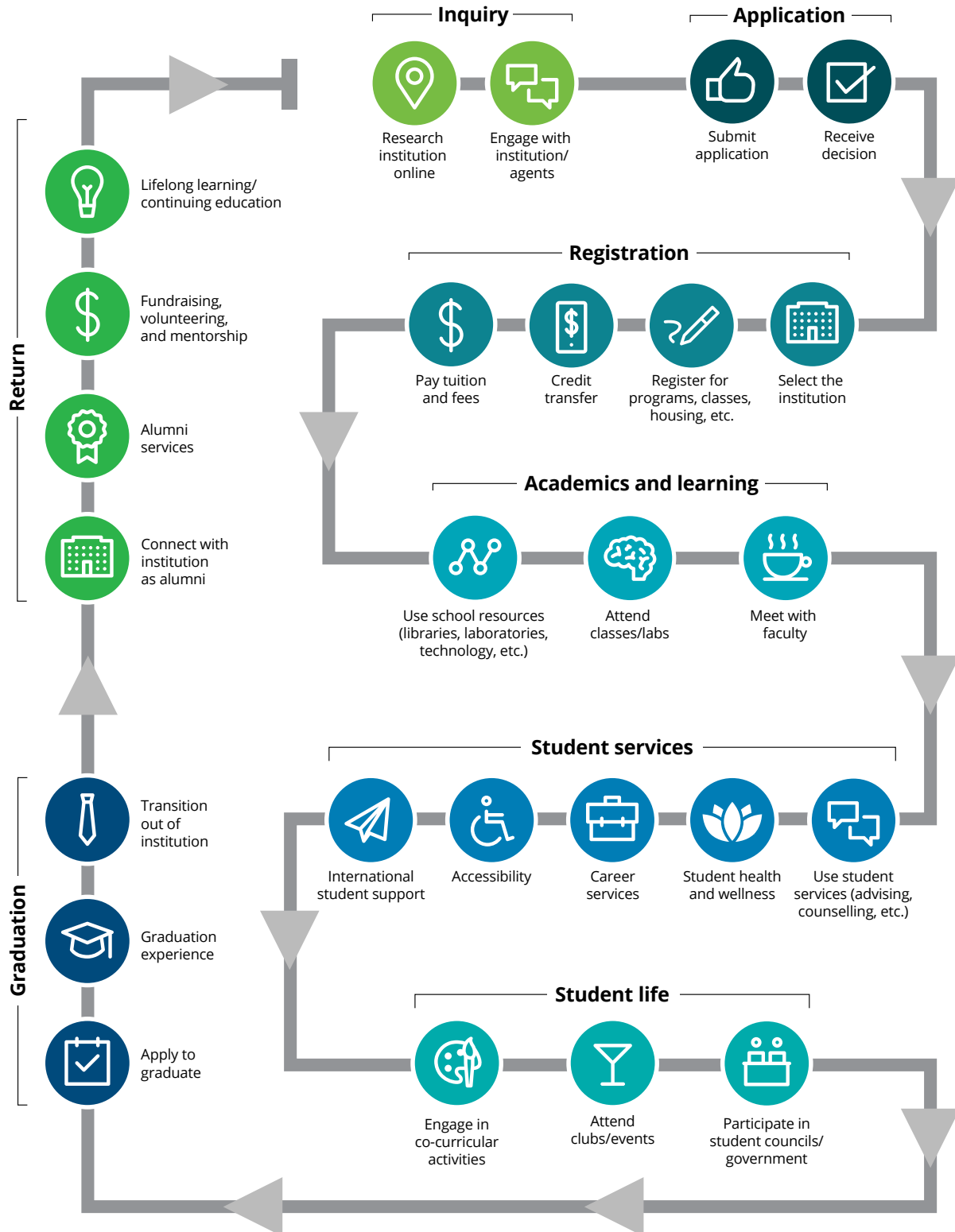
- Integrating the demanding schedule of a university degree into her work and social life
- Navigating the university system, which will differ from her experience obtaining her college diploma



A blue rectangular card representing a student persona. At the top right is a white circular icon containing a silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders. Below the icon, on the left side, are four labels in white uppercase letters: AGE, GENDER, ROLE, and LOCATION. To the right of each label is a white vertical line, followed by the corresponding value in white text: 20-24, Female, Working professional, and Toronto, Canada.

AGE	20-24
GENDER	Female
ROLE	Working professional
LOCATION	Toronto, Canada

Figure 10 - Moments that matter



Conclusion

The case for student-centricity is clear. Our survey of Canadian post-secondary students reveals that more than one in three students don't think they are receiving good value for their investment and one in two don't think their school is sufficiently focused on their needs. There is increased competition for students—and they expect an experience that aligns with what they're used to in their day-to-day lives and provides them with the support they need to be successful.

In higher education, the profile of the student body has become substantively more complex and diversified with different groups having different demands and expectations. Although many institutions have made considerable progress, it is not consistent across all schools and the results vary across stages of the student journey and for different groups of students. Success does not arise by chance, and student-centricity needs to be systemically integrated at each stage of the student journey in a way that is responsive to learners' needs.

All students should be able to expect the same level of support and interest from their institutions regardless of whether they are full-time, part-time, international, mature, or upgrading, and that it will be consistent throughout their experience.

Educational institutions should take the time to consider how truly student-centric they are across all elements of the student journey, and then develop improvement plans to ensure that they can not only be competitive in the marketplace, but also provide an exceptional experience for every student.



Endnotes

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