
Reimagine the **First Year**
Student Experience:
6 Key Measures to
Improve Your Strategy



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The Ready Education mobile services

Introduction

Student onboarding has become a priority for most higher education institutions, and this requires putting a lot of effort into making new students feel welcome, informed and settled. The first year experience is critical in being able to engage students, to then improve and increase your institution's retention rate and encourage successful student graduation.

How can you improve the first year experience to set your students up for success?

The majority of today's students are digital ninjas. It's becoming impossible to imagine a student experience leaving technology behind. It is a very effective tool to enhance student experience and keep them engaged, especially for new students who are going through a transition from learning dependence to learning autonomy.

How can you **leverage technology to create a support system** that will assist your students throughout the year? This guide includes **proven successful solutions that will upgrade your first-year experience.**



1. Make the best of your open days

Open days are traditionally the best way to give a taste of university life to your future students. It's a chance for them (and their parents) to ask questions, explore the campus, get insights from staff and make some early connections with their potential peers. Maximise the opportunity within your open days to digitally engage your students at an early stage, with **both on campus and online easy-to-implement actions**:



SHOWCASE WHAT MAKES YOUR SCHOOL UNIQUE:

- What's your USP? This is the time for you to show your prospective students what makes your institution different from your competitors. Ensure your prospective students have access to all the great promotional collateral your institution has.
- How well connected is your institution? Show your prospects how their future career is within reach. If you have great industry connections, invite those partners to network with students. Use virtual sessions or chat rooms if in-person sessions can't be arranged.



GET HANDS-ON WITH STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

- Offer a variety of activities to help students retain information: in addition to the standard introduction talks, add seminars, workshops or lab experiments that your prospects can participate in.
- Make sure to include and cater for students who can't attend physically. Run digital events like virtual tours to reach anyone, anywhere and on any device.



RECOGNISE THE POWER OF YOUR STUDENT AMBASSADORS:

- Your student ambassadors are your biggest advocates: make sure to include them in campus tours and advice sessions with prospects.
- Provide your student ambassadors with all the tools they need to be autonomous. Let them do their own thing, tell their own campus stories, write their own script, to make sure they appear genuine and authentic.
- Connect student ambassadors with prospect students to help soften the transition and add a familiar touch before they even arrive at your open days.



ENGAGE PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS POST-EVENT:

- Open days answer many questions, but can create a lot of new ones too. Make sure that during the event, you clearly communicate the different ways students can get in touch after the on-site event.
- Ensure you have easy routes for prospective students to reach you and have their questions answered. Encourage prospects to connect with you, your student ambassadors or your staff through effective platforms (apps, online communities and chats).
- Enable student-to-student connections before the event starts. Use technology to digitally connect prospective students with student ambassadors so conversations can continue long after the open day event has finished.

2. Create a smooth enrollment process

Enrollment management in higher education is complex. Fortunately, digital tools exist and are being developed to help institutions make this tricky process easier and ensure documentation is complete so that the student is ready for day one.

Today, students are used to smooth and intuitive digital experiences with everything accessible from their smartphones, and other devices. They will expect the same from their academic journey. For instance:



Paying fees can be made completely online, with a couple of clicks to enhance student experience, boost the efficiency of the enrollment process and ensure timely payment.



A paperless admission process will make sure students get to apply at the institution most easily and seamlessly by following a few steps.

But this kind of **student-focused** enrollment process is only possible with digital tools. Higher ed institutions will not be able to personalise their approaches and help each prospective student on an individual basis by using traditional strategies. There are technologies that will help you create **automated admission workflows** to anticipate students' needs and deliver the support they require in a timely manner. Also, the use of **synchronous and asynchronous communication channels** will add value to the automated responses by offering clear and smooth answers and solutions to students.

3. Provide your students with a personalised journey from onboarding and beyond

A smooth onboarding process is key to ensuring a successful first-year student experience. Successful onboarding offers students the opportunity to acclimate to **your campus culture** and to learn vital information regarding their student journey.

Because today's students expect personalised mobile access in real-time, mobile technology and applications can positively impact student retention. Students are used to having access to information at any time, anywhere, with a seamless easy-to-navigate user experience. And there is a **growing demand for mobile access to university resources** and an increased **need for personalised interactive digital communications**. This is why we encourage you to:



INVEST IN MOBILE TECHNOLOGY:

- **Bring your onsite online:** introduce a digital campus so your prospects can proactively access everything they need. Include virtual tours, course and accommodation information. Add helpful tips on successful online learning and much more. You can even implement a digital mapping solution to help your students navigate the campus ahead of being on site.
- **Find students where they are:** the safest way to give them access to information - accommodation opportunities, academic and financial support, class scheduling, exam dates, coursework deadlines, student clubs, etc. - is via their smartphone.

- **Automate the onboarding process:** with a mobile app, you can **send the right information to the right student at the right time**. It can be through surveys and notifications, you can send them helpful information via the platform you choose and specific to their personal needs.
- **Customise** how your platform looks and what information is displayed so whether they be online or on campus they continue to build on their sense of belonging.



USE STUDENTS' HABITS:

- For example, create **video content**. Students are familiar with this format, they like it and spend a lot of time watching videos on Instagram or TikTok. You can present some of your onboarding information through videos inspired from social media codes.



4. Facilitate access to information and resources

Your students should be able to find all of the information they need intuitively and quickly. You should, where possible, **centralise and integrate all key systems and resources** ensuring clear signposting of key software or resources.

Implement a **campus-wide solution** that addresses all of your student needs:



PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO JUST ONE ACCOUNT

Single sign-on capability ensures students are able to log in only once with their institutes' credentials to securely access all relevant content. Implementing this will also help reduce password reset requests and enable immediate access from any device.



ENSURE YOUR SOLUTION IS ALL INCLUSIVE

Technology can support diverse student populations. **First-generation**, adult learners, students with additional needs, etc. often face additional social and economic challenges. Mobile access to institution information and resources can help these students succeed despite any obstacles.

5. Promote a campus community

Make it easy for students to connect and engage with their peers. One of the most practical ways to do so is to bring first-year students together in **one easy-to-navigate digital environment**.

A connected campus will help them to develop a sense of belonging, which will lead to higher retention rates and an increase in positive student outcomes. University students with a higher sense of belonging reported an increase in motivation and enjoyment in their studies. Research suggests that **higher levels of engagement can lead to better student outcomes**, including increased usage of resources, better mental health, stronger student connections, greater institutional satisfaction and ultimately higher retention rates.

To increase engagement, we need to connect them to campus activities in a way they are familiar with, and mobile technology seems to be the best solution. Successful campus events will help them feel connected. We know that the planning process can require a lot of time and resources. However, there are **tools** that streamline the process and make promoting an event and tracking attendance simple, straightforward and effective.



6. Support your students in their challenges

Attending university can be stressful, especially the first year. It involves significant lifestyle changes for students who have to adjust to a new environment, interact with many new characters and live away from the familiarity that is home. Assist in this transition by providing them with supportive resources at the time when they need them most, preventing mental health issues and ensuring their well-being.

Utilise technology to help. Implement the right technical solution to enable your team to provide the necessary resources and intervene before any students become at-risk. Address the top issues that lead to student disengagement and other behaviours like anxiety and depression. Based on students' responses to surveys, you should set workflows to automatically connect students with the resources they need, allowing you to intervene much earlier in their outcome. Provide resources your first-year students need such Academic processes, Financial assistance and Health & Wellness tips.

You can read more on this topic in our guide ["How to Support Mental Health and Well-Being in Higher Ed"](#) which lists several ways you can help students face these challenges.



A Final Word

The student experience matters and the first-year is particularly definitive. This has been understood at some institutions for years but there is a much wider recognition of the significance now that positive student experience has been linked to student success. Why? Because lawmakers, parents and students demand it. And a strong student experience means an individual is **connecting, belonging and engaging**.

Research shows¹ that first-year students who intended to return to their institutions scored notably higher on questions about their sense of belonging. Students want to feel they are part of a community. They want to connect with one another and with their professors. They want their institution to guide them through the transition from high school to higher education and from their home to the campus.

This guide will help you work on these three main themes. Choosing the right digital solutions and listening to your **student voice** will help you enhance the first-year experience, ensure student success and improve retention.

¹[*Reimagining the Student Experience, The Chronicle of Higher Education*](#)

The Ready Education Mobile Services

You want to develop a mobile solution within your institution? Find out more on our solutions to take your campus digital.

Who are we?

Ready Education is the leading mobile student engagement platform on a mission to improve student success in higher education worldwide.

Trusted by 715+ institutions in more than 25 countries, we have developed a panel of solutions to build communities, drive retention and help students succeed.

READY Education

**7M+**

Students

**715+**

Institutions

**25**

Countries

**10 Years**

of Experience

How to improve your first year student experience with us?

→ **Prospective and pre-enrolled dashboards**

Provide easy access to frequently requested resources all in one place to improve application numbers and create a **seamless experience** for enrolled students. Host your entire enrollment process for new students via a **pre-enrolled dashboard**, so students know exactly what they need to do before starting university.

We offer various dashboards, including the following:

Prospective student dashboards to:

- Share a digital copy of your prospectus
- Provide information on open days and signpost to registration pages
- Share resources about campuses and the local area
- Post video messages from different departments across the institution
- Share a directory of staff members and important contact information

Pre-enrolled dashboards to:

- Share timetables, reading lists and any other resources to prepare students for the start of term
- Set up tasks for students
- Share information on student accommodation and how to apply
- Introduce student unions
- Share any upcoming events
- Provide information on fees and any available funding

→ **Event management**

Make it easy for students to **browse and register** for events with a secure, streamlined event registration platform that can also collect attendance data.

→ **Workflows and approval processes**

Create dynamic workflows, with a multi-step approval process to guide students through the enrollment journey.

→ **Campus-wide directory**

Create a social directory that displays users within a community to each other, allowing them to **connect and interact**.

Want to know more about our solutions? **Request a demo.**



Ready Education empowers institutions worldwide to build and engage their campus community, improving communications and experiences that increase retention and drive student success.

 **READY Education**

Find out more at:
[readyeducation.com](https://www.readyeducation.com)

Contact us at: **1 (877) 588-7508**
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