

Pathify

MAGAZINE

FROM SURVIVING TO PROSPERING
DISPATCHES FROM THE HYBRID FRONTIER



SPRING
2023

AMPLIFYING THE
TECH STACK AT
CHAFFEY COLLEGE

COVID'S TECHNOLOGY
SILVER LINING

SOCIAL MEDIA
AND THE
HYBRID FRONTIER

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Editor's Dispatch

From Surviving to Prospering: Dispatches from the Hybrid Frontier

Just a few short years ago, experts wondered aloud whether or not higher ed as we know it would make it in the long term. With the emergence of skills-based hiring, and opportunities to quickly earn a certificate for a variety of in-demand jobs at a fraction of the cost, the outlook appeared bleak. Institutions dramatically cut back on spending and layoffs took up much of the higher ed headlines.

But in the last year, something started to change. A number of institutions saw record enrollment numbers as prospective students overwhelmingly returned to higher ed. Institutions took best practices from adopting an entirely online classroom, to making higher ed a more attractive avenue for non-traditional students through hybrid and online options who otherwise would be prevented from pursuing a degree. Today students learn and complete course work from any point on or off campus — they often no longer need to be actually sitting in class to attend school.

The next iteration of higher ed isn't about turning everything virtual. Students want a human connection with faculty, classmates and alumni alike. The institutions that pivoted fastest are no longer in survival mode — they're thriving.

In this issue, you'll hear from some of those institutions in thrive mode, thanks to their willingness to embark toward the hybrid frontier. You'll also hear from experts working closely with the higher ed community on how institutions will win the competition for students by bringing community forward.

The Pathify team is excited to share the latest magazine and the variety of perspectives we've packed in. Have a favorite article? Share your thoughts and feedback on social media.

Adam Miller
Editor, Pathify Magazine



Student Dispatch

Dear Higher Ed Admins,

As a freshman, I'm still adjusting to college life. I live in the dorms on campus, I picked up a part time job in town and I'm living away from home for the first time.

In hindsight, high school was pretty simple: I went to school, I went home. Some homework here and there. Went to the football games, went to the dances. That was pretty much it. College is a whole different world. There is so much to know, things to remember, paperwork and administrative stuff to figure out, events going on, opportunities and resources ready for me to discover and take advantage of. It's hard to imagine trying to navigate all this if my university just emailed me everything. Honestly, I don't read email. I recently found out my grandpa has been emailing me for months and I had no idea. Sorry gramps!

High school provided me with advisors who helped me stay on track and get me through the day-to-day requirements of getting my diploma. When I went to college, it was up to me to schedule appointments, find the cafeteria and get myself to class. Nobody was there my first day of class to keep me from sleeping in.

While I don't have anyone to wake me up in the morning, I'm fortunate to be at a university that gets it. Everything I need is on the MyUSU app and it's probably the most useful tech on a daily basis. It's the starting point for basically anything I need to search for. If I need something, or need to know something, I go to the MyUSU app. Because it sends me push notifications on my phone I'm actually getting the messages that really matter.

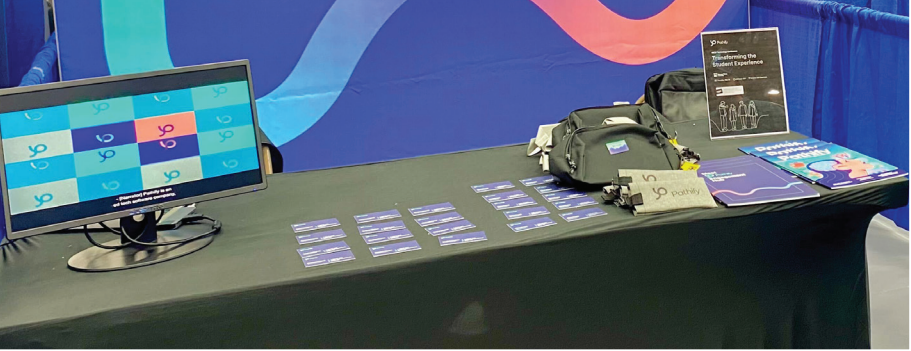
As students, we need help getting through the complicated world of college. My hope for the coming year is that more students get the same support that USU gives me.



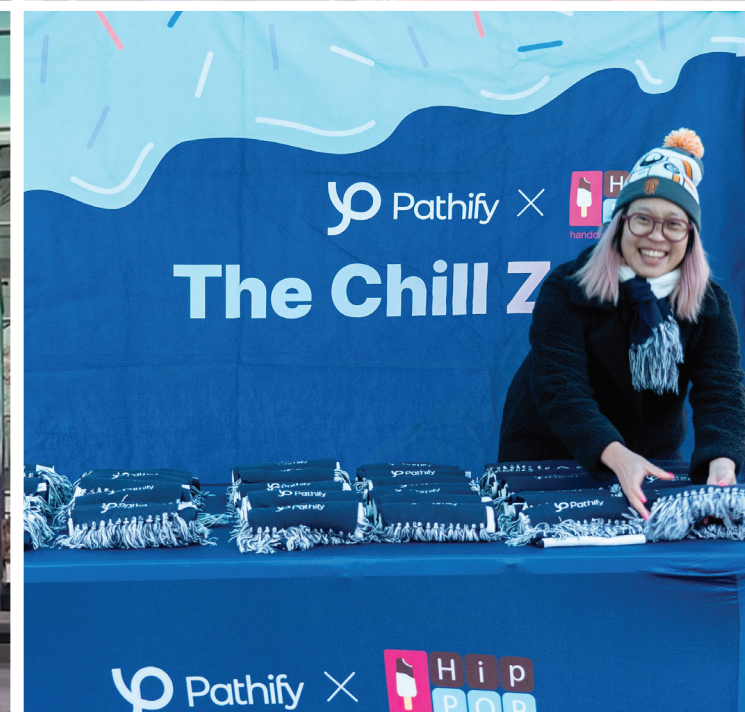
Owen Burnett

Owen Burnett

Freshman, Utah State University



YEAR IN REVIEW



EDUCAUSE '22

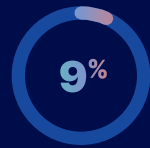


By the Numbers

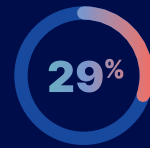
HIGHER ED SENTIMENT

POST-PANDEMIC MODALITY PREFERENCES

Course modality preferences:
mostly online or completely online

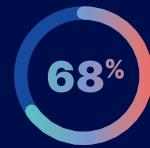


Pre-pandemic



Post-pandemic

Modality preferences
for meeting classmates
for academic work



desire to interact with
classmates online

Source: EDUCAUSE, 2022 Students and Technology Report: Rebalancing the Student Experience

WHAT ARE ADMITTED STUDENTS MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?



Making friends or
fitting in socially

41%



Balancing coursework with
non-academic responsibilities

44%



Ability to pay
for education

41%

Source: Hanover Research, National Admitted Student Survey 2022

RETENTION TRENDS

Retention from 2021 to 2022



retention improvement
over the past year

Top 3 reasons students leave

40% change in motivation,
focus or a life change

19% financial

14% mental health

THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

How much do adults agree or disagree
that education beyond high school
offers a good investment for students?



strongly or somewhat
agree higher education
is a good investment

Top 3 types of institutions with highest
perceived value

81%

public
community
colleges

67%

public four-year
colleges and
universities

67%

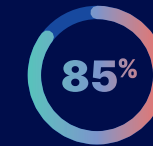
minority-
serving
institutions

Source: Hanover Research, 5 Student Retention Strategies, 2022

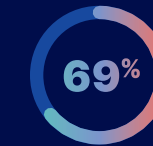
Source: Varying Degrees 2022: New America's Sixth Annual Survey on Higher Education

TECHNOLOGY

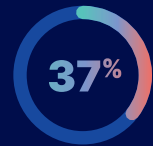
STUDENT PORTAL PERCEPTIONS



of students want input
in their institution's
technological investments



of students say the
portal is somewhat or
not user friendly



of students would like
to see an improvement
in their online portal

Source: College Pulse Insights Survey, 9/27/22

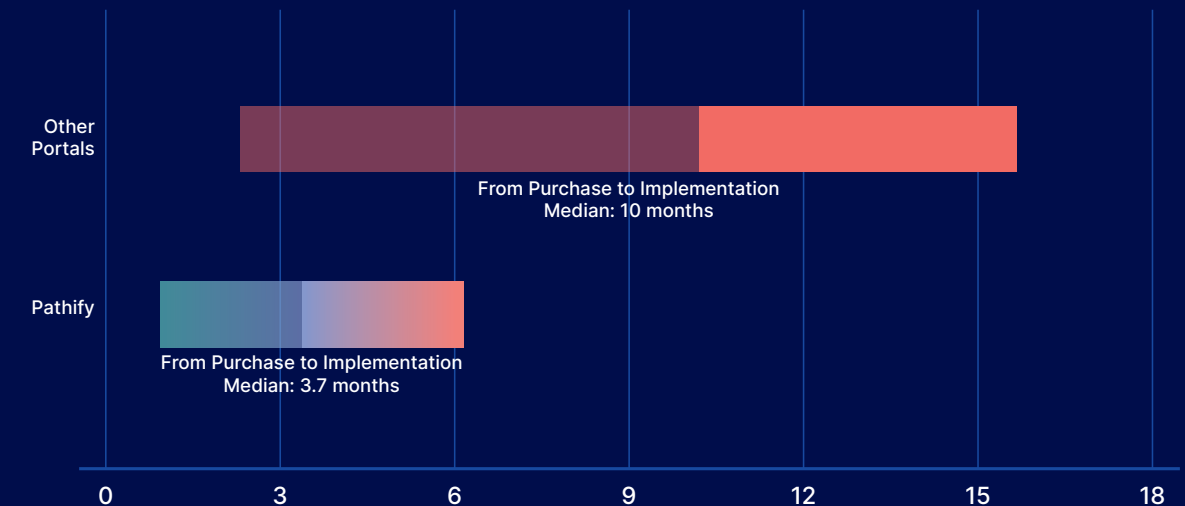
PORTAL IMPLEMENTATION EXPLODED DURING PANDEMIC

300+

student portals implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic,
higher than all implementations from 2015-2019 combined

Source: ListEdTech

TIME TO LAUNCH: PATHIFY VS. AVERAGE PORTAL IMPLEMENTATION



Source: ListEdTech

Amplifying the Tech Stack at Chaffey College

Robert Rundquist

Dean of Institutional Effectiveness

Chaffey  College



When you think of Los Angeles — or Southern California, for that matter — finding accessible higher education typically isn't what comes to mind. Outside of top-ranked institutions University of Southern California and University of California, Los Angeles, it's also home to the UC and Cal State systems. With nearly 900,000 students currently enrolled, there's no shortage of options for students to get a post-secondary education.

The Inland Empire (also known as San Bernardino County) is an exception. Located over 60 miles from most of Los Angeles — an eternity if you dare think about driving that distance in traffic — the options for higher education are much more limited once I-10 leads you out of LA County. UC Riverside and Cal State San Bernardino are viable options, but these schools require potentially long and disruptive commutes.

Many students seeking a higher education experience are first-generation students, with little context of how to navigate the ins and outs of college or university. In other words, without proper support, higher ed just becomes another avenue for stress and insurmountable debt.

Chaffey College seeks to change the narrative for students in the Inland Empire.

Chaffey is home to 29,000 students with high school graduates from as far back as 1982 to as recently as 2022. The institution is conveniently located with three campuses in Chino, Fontana

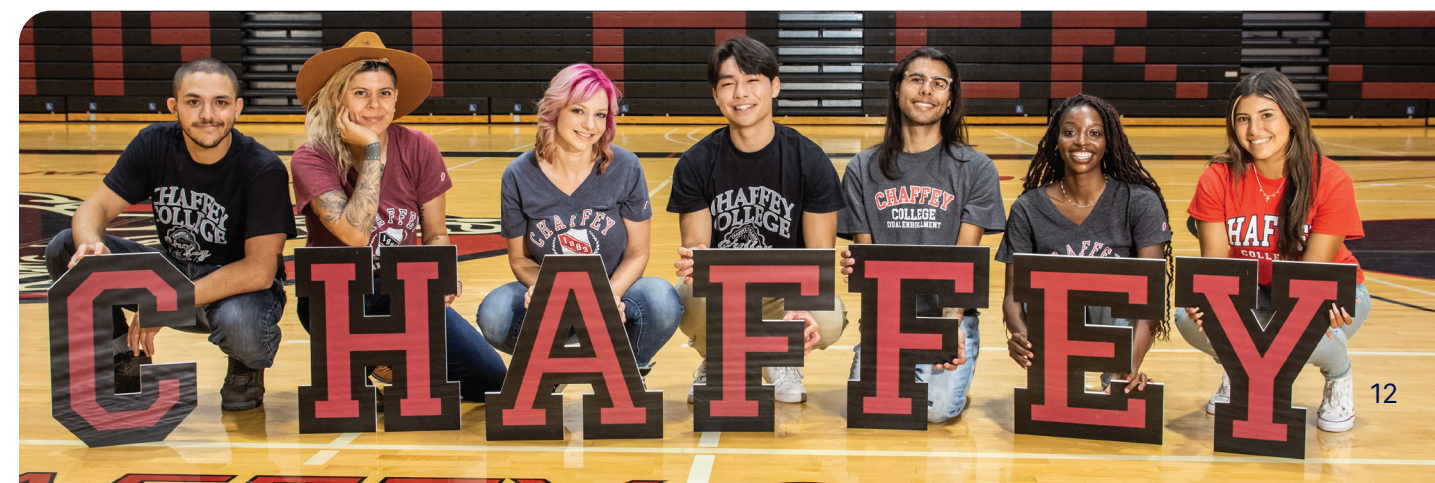
and Rancho Cucamonga, with 28 degree programs to choose from.

Robert Rundquist, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, leads the Guided Pathways program at Chaffey focused on improving the student experience. In the last few years this also means creating an optimal environment for distance learning. Creating an online-first environment was an aspiration for Rundquist's team prior to the pandemic, but the need to pivot the campus online on a dime accelerated that initiative.

Given the circumstances, Rundquist felt Chaffey effectively met their students' needs, but many of those solutions offered new problems for the future state.

"The nature of [the pandemic] was very disconnected, so different programs came up with different solutions to solve their media problems, which I think benefited students, but also created a very wide landscape of technology solutions," Rundquist said. "That's been difficult from an institutional level to make sure we have cohesiveness and from a student perspective it's made navigation difficult and challenging."

As Chaffey looked to turn the page, Rundquist sought a strategy for amplifying his institution's new technology without requiring students to create several logins in order to access these resources. The challenge: create a cohesive student experience through a single pane of glass.



CENTRALIZING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH PATHIFY

In June of 2021, Chaffey selected Pathify to help the institution move its various technology investments into a streamlined user experience on the co-curricular side. Prior to using Pathify, Chaffey achieved the desired result on the academic side by centering the academic experience directly in Canvas.

Chaffey appreciated Pathify's ability to provide a single point of access to students while also allowing the institution to cohesively manage secondary platforms used throughout the student lifecycle. Pathify also played a pivotal role in helping staff better connect with each other and students by surfacing exactly what they need, when they need it.

"What we found with some of those earlier vendors is, although they curated content, they didn't create a lot of the connections," Rundquist said.

Implementing Pathify was an iterative process at Chaffey. Much like previous portals, the Engagement Hub originally stored a variety of electronic resources with links to various services on the dashboard. But with further adoption of the platform, Chaffey collected valuable user data to learn what users wanted most from the Engagement Hub.

After all, the last thing Rundquist wants is to acquire a piece of technology that fades in value over time. And the best chance of preventing this is to create content based on students' desires.

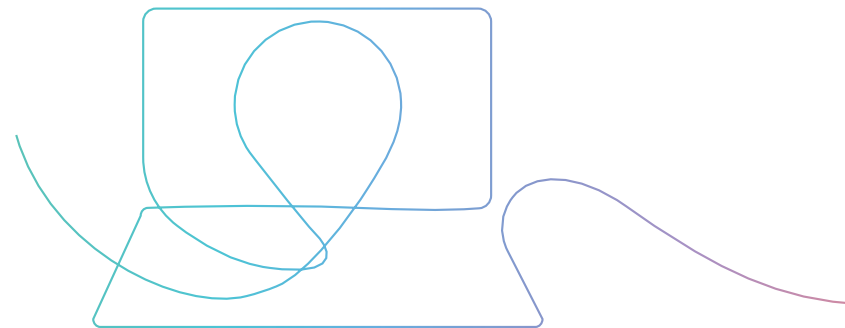
For instance, in the Spring 2022 semester, students searched "payment" and "transcript" more than any other term. This insight showed how students use the Engagement Hub to answer more transactional questions, and provide information proactively on the dashboard. Now, the Engagement Hub is a destination for students whether they're in-person or online.

"I think the insights tell us what students need, but also what they are challenged to find through our current navigation," Rundquist said. "The next iteration of what we're trying to do with Pathify is to figure out how to make the landscape more intentional."

With 60% of Chaffey students being first generation and a large number of adult learners enrolled, the college experiences a variety of unique needs. Therefore, anytime Chaffey implements technology, it needs to be comfortable for learners with varying degrees of technological literacy.

Rundquist says Chaffey accomplishes this balance through Pathify, which highlights where they need to go by prompting notifications and tasks in a can't-miss location.

But what students really appreciated about Pathify was its community focus. Prior to implementation, the only opportunity for online community came through social media networks. Naturally, this created limitations as it required students to belong to a certain social channel and have connections to the right people. Pathify broke down those barriers to creating community and allowed students from all walks of life to intuitively get the social media-like benefits of Groups, including the ability to find relevant content.



"For people like myself, there's a baseline assumption that we can only make those connections in an in-person environment, but for folks more accustomed to technology online and social media, our primary connections to other people often open up bridges to communities or people that they can never meet face-to-face," Rundquist said. "I think students really gravitated to some of those features naturally. That was eye-opening to me because these were functions we never even talked about when we rolled out the Engagement Hub. But they started doing it because there was such a need to connect to people and Pathify made that easy for them."

Despite spending significant time in an online only environment, Rundquist expects Chaffey's campus will take the best of the online and in-person experiences to give students what they need to thrive.

Although several programs require in-person learning, Chaffey prides itself on flexibility so adult learners, commuters and first generation students alike achieve their learning objectives without feeling like they're missing out on the campus culture.

In addition, Pathify gives students an easy mode of communication to connect with academic advisors and faculty on their terms without taking time to drive to a physical office.

"What we're finding as we emerge into the post-pandemic moment is that it really is going to be a truly hybrid experience where students need to seamlessly toggle between in-person services and online services," Rundquist said. "It's not this false binary of in-person versus online, but it's really a fluid exchange and it depends on what their individual needs are."

REFRAMING THE TECHNOLOGY FATIGUE MINDSET

Rundquist gets it. Higher education is well known for its aversion to change, especially when it comes to investing in technology.

“Technology fatigue,” as Rundquist calls it, sets in when institutions adopt a number of different solutions only to find they’re difficult to maintain, require resources the institution doesn’t possess and isn’t well-adopted by students. Institutions suffering from technology fatigue often resist change and have little interest in experimenting with new solutions — even when they dramatically improve the student experience.

According to Rundquist, the genie won’t go back in the bottle. Institutions need to get accustomed to being nimble and making changes as needed to keep pace with industries outside of higher education. In fact, the pandemic proved the potential for what higher ed is capable of achieving.

“In a matter of weeks we completely transformed our institution, so the idea that it’s not possible just doesn’t hold water anymore,” Rundquist said.

There are a variety of reasons institutions resist change. Rundquist believes much of it traces back to the pandemic when departments quickly had to find tools serving as band-aids when trying to go remote.

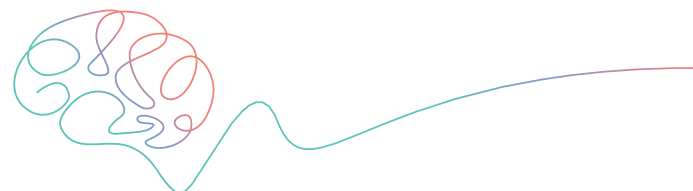
Yet, there usually wasn’t a person charged with ensuring a fit between different platforms. This puts an immense burden on students to become familiar with several different softwares, many of which institutions mandated in order to perform basic tasks. And whether it occurred due to pride, sunk cost concerns or just plain stubbornness, each stakeholder purchased their own point solution and became attached to their platform, regardless of its effectiveness.

“I think every department fell in love with a certain feature of their preferred platform,” Rundquist said. “But then, all of a sudden, you had 20 different platforms. Instead, we really need a more seamless experience for students, because they’re the ones who will be at a disadvantage when we don’t have a real cohesive virtual landscape.”

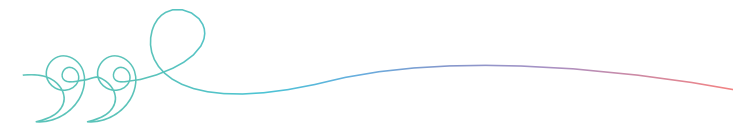
Another important point is streamlining technology doesn’t necessarily mean old software goes by the wayside. One of the major problems with legacy systems isn’t their ineffectiveness, but they provide a poor UX or make information difficult to find. Investing in a system like Pathify helps pull meaningful information forward to help students find what they’re looking for without the treasure hunt.

Implementing an Engagement Hub like Pathify helps Chaffey provide better guided pathways to getting students what they need without eliminating existing services. Adopting new solutions that amplify existing resources ensures institutions protect their investments while continually building on the existing tech stack.

While this may help drop a department’s resistance to change, Rundquist believes a different mindset plays an important role in making change happen. One way for institutions to adapt their attachment to legacy software is to reframe their thinking about how they’ve tried to solve a problem in the past. Rather than dwelling on how much a department already invested in specific point solutions, they should look back at the progress they’ve made and use it as inspiration to continue innovating their campus.



Creating this new frame of reference is exactly what got Rundquist on board with championing Pathify, and he hasn’t looked back since. While he empathizes with the challenges his peer institutions face, he’s hopeful in their ability to shift from the technology fatigue mindset, to actually becoming technology innovators. And Pathify is just one example of how institutions make that leap. ■



“In a matter of weeks we completely transformed our institution, so the idea that it’s not possible just doesn’t hold water anymore.” - Rob Rundquist

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Streamlining the System in New Hampshire

David Blezard

Senior Director of Enterprise IT Systems

University System of New Hampshire



It's hard to go far in the state of New Hampshire and not find direct beneficiaries of the state's University System (USNH). With approximately 32,000 enrolled students across its four institutions and over 90,000 alumni statewide, the system maintains a long history of commitment to student success and excellence.

USNH offers a variety of postsecondary opportunities for in-person, hybrid and online students across five different campuses.

At USNH, David Blezard, Senior Director of Enterprise IT Systems, is part of a team working to change course after assessing the student experience. The institution provides varying levels of technology support across its ecosystem, from legacy systems needing replacement to home grown products with a high degree of personalization.

Like most institutions, the path to a better student technology experience at USNH started during the pandemic. In Fall of 2019, the system had 95% of students enrolled at in-person, traditional college environments. Suddenly, the entire system shifted to being entirely online overnight and USNH had to adapt rapidly.

Today, most of the student body has returned to campus, yet staff and student perceptions of teaching, studying and interacting online have changed permanently. Students maintain high expectations regarding the flexibility offered for real-life circumstances.

"If you can do a class remotely and you've got a situation where there's a medical or family reason and you're going to miss a class or two, what are the options for you to still participate and be involved?" Blezard said.

In addition to new expectations on the curricular side, students want a better experience for accessing different services around campus. Students are tired of looking at what Blezard called "a laundry list of every single thing you could possibly ever use," and instead want guidance on exactly how to find the content or people they're looking for. This lined up with Blezard's desire to create more efficiency for students, at both individual institutions and the system as a whole.

The USNH system is made up of four institutions (University of New Hampshire, Keene State College, Plymouth State University and Granite State College). Sometimes, these institutions

deploy shared resources to give students a unified experience regardless of the campus they attend. Other times, each institution makes its own technology decisions without consideration for how the solution plays out at the system level.

This resulted in several cases of redundant technology, which spurred a system-wide consolidation effort. For example, USNH ran instances of both Canvas and Moodle, which created a disjointed experience for students and administrators.

After collaborating with IT staff system-wide, Blezard's team chose Canvas as the LMS of choice. Next came the student portal, where a variety of solutions existed, but none met the criteria Blezard aimed for.

"None of the schools had a perfect solution," Blezard said. "We had a home grown portal at Plymouth State that was the most personalized solution, but it was unmanageable. It's still unmanageable to this day."

Blezard explained the IT team employed one person who spent his entire day working on the code just to keep the portal functioning. Thinking ahead, Blezard knew the system should do better.

At the University of New Hampshire, the portal wasn't intuitive for students to use. Despite having search functionality, the portal's search was more confusing than helpful.

"While it was searchable and had kind of a nice user interface to it, it really didn't guide you at all," Blezard said. "For instance, if you wanted career services, there would be nice things that came up and one of them would be called, '12Twenty.' Well, I still don't know what 12Twenty is."

CREATING THE VISION

As USNH started its search for a new student portal, it first had to figure out how it wanted students to use and engage with the new technology.

The group charged with selecting a portal wanted something students would access first thing in the morning as a one-stop shop for everything academic and co-curricular. They also wanted the ability to mix centralized resources and campus-specific resources all in one place.

After a lengthy RFP process, USNH landed on the Pathify Engagement Hub as the vehicle to drive the student experience forward. In addition to the ability to deliver everything USNH wanted in a student portal, Pathify's role-based permissions allows the system to create a highly personalized experience while creating granular access roles that applied to specific sets of students.

"If you're a Plymouth State student, you get the things that are specific to Plymouth students and also the things that are for everybody across the system. You don't really see them as different," Blezard said.

This is especially important for employees who are also students at a different institution and require unique permissions.

"If you're a Keene State employee, but taking a grad program at UNH, you get access to Keene State employee things while getting access to UNH links," Blezard said. "Pathify makes sense of what you're receiving access to and guides you to the right set of tools."

Prior to Pathify's implementation, USNH relied on email to get students the resources they needed. However, getting them to read emails remains a struggle.

"There's 10% of students who will read their email and diligently follow instructions and then the other 90% who will do it if they're nagged enough, but some of those students never, ever will," Blezard said.

The Engagement Hub will give the entire New Hampshire system a single place to drive all communications. Pathify will pull announcements and tasks from various systems to give students automated push notifications when actions need to be taken.

Another capability Blezard sees Pathify fitting into the USNH system is creating community through various groups.

For instance, the Master's of Social Work program includes students from around the state who balance other job and family obligations. Until recently, the program attempted to create community through Facebook Groups. But as both an IT professional and someone who values the voice of the student, the arrangement remains far from ideal.

"In general, there are people who just don't want to be on Facebook," Blezard said. "They don't want to use it and then making someone use a tool that isn't within our walled garden doesn't feel right."

Offering students a "walled garden" is exactly what Blezard hopes students experience within Pathify's Groups functionality. In addition to the ability to join various classes and programs, (like a cohort for the popular online Master's in Social Work program), students also join groups for co-curricular or advising purposes.

Pathify doesn't store, share or monetize any student data and keeps information secure so IT professionals like Blezard rest easy when it comes to boosting student confidence in the Engagement Hub.

"Facebook is about advertising, while inside of Pathify, we know that's not happening," Blezard said. "There are no questions you have to worry about."

Blezard also believes Groups will crowdsource feedback, helping students get the most from the platform. It will ensure that as USNH's Engagement Hub continues to mature, the project stays on track towards meeting the vision Blezard sought when selecting Pathify.

BLAZING THE TECH TRAIL FOR STATE SYSTEMS

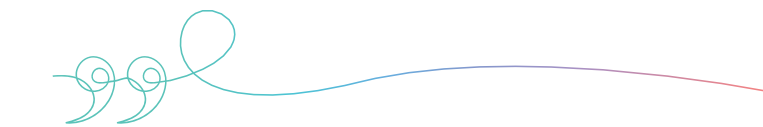
The changing higher ed landscape requires university systems to be nimble and consolidate technology as much as possible. The pinch for efficiency is real, especially as state funding is on the decline.

With the competition for students tightening and students wanting more from their institutions, Blezard believes there's an opportunity to improve support for various student services. While these two ideas seem in conflict with each other, institutions skate a delicate line between being efficient without being too frugal.

Institutions, especially at the system level, need to cut wasteful spending, but not at the risk of turning students away. In today's environment, Blezard says institutions still need to show off their personalization and character.


"Do you need a separate IT office, separate email systems or can you merge them together?" Blezard said. "At the same time you don't want to make it so everyone gets vanilla."

As non-traditional and hybrid students make up a larger population of state systems in an effort to combat the enrollment cliff, streamlining technology in a creative way while effectively engaging students will be critical to gaining a competitive edge. While USNH has more progress to make in meeting its vision, the days of redundant and unhelpful technology are poised to come to an end in 2023. ■






"Facebook is about advertising, while inside of Pathify, we know that's not happening. There are no questions you have to worry about." - David Blezard



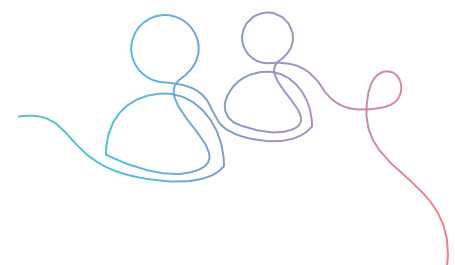

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DUSTIN RAMSDELL





Covid's Technology Silver Lining

Rick Shaw, Chief Information Systems Officer (retired), Antelope Valley Community College District

For most institutions, Spring brings the finalizing of the upcoming year's budgets, and a reexamination of priorities for the upcoming academic year. The latter should include an assessment of current and previous initiatives — even more important with the pandemic's dramatic impact on our systems and how we use technology.

Despite schools and universities returning to full in-person learning, remote learning remains a critical option. As we move forward in this new normal, it is essential to streamline and amplify our tech resources to ensure we meet the new expectations of our students, faculty and staff. From virtual classrooms to online resources and tools, there are now an abundance of options available to help educators and institutions meet student needs. By leveraging these resources intentionally, we will create a more engaging and interactive learning environment. Furthermore, strategies such as increased collaboration and data-driven decisions now must be employed to ensure tech resources are used in the most effective way possible.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

During the pandemic, Information Technology departments became indispensable partners and enablers, leveraging technology to continue institutional missions during the massive pivot. Because physical campuses were no longer an option, remote learning became the only option to continue our mission. Virtual classrooms allowed for more flexibility in scheduling, while providing a range of new options for communication and collaboration. In many cases, they allow students to work on their own time and at their own pace, which is especially helpful for those with special needs or who are working remotely. And restructuring or rearchitecting services made it possible to support a remote faculty and workforce.

STRATEGIES FOR STREAMLINING AND AMPLIFYING TECH RESOURCES

With three years of the pandemic behind us, technology is now at the center of institutional strategic planning. While keeping up with the latest technology is critical, it is also important to evaluate past investments as part of a larger institutional planning cycle. Assess the outcomes of a specific tool. Did they perform as anticipated? Reach out to the targeted audience, or your governance groups to collaborate in evaluating outcomes. Is it, whatever it is, producing as intended or delivering expected results with its targeted population or program? Is the investment made sufficient to meet objectives? Or, if missing targets, is there a better place to apply limited resources? It's not only important to plan for how technology will be used, but how schools leverage data in making decisions about which technologies are worth investing in for potential expansion or may need to be swapped out.



"As we move forward in this new normal, it is essential to streamline and amplify our tech resources to ensure we meet the new expectations of our students, faculty and staff." - Rick Shaw

GREATER RESILIENCY OF RESOURCES

Institutions should be focused on improving the way they store, transfer and access data. The idea that resources need to serve the 24-hour student or institution is now essential. On-premise investment in data centers and hardware is rapidly becoming archaic. Cloud services have become easily accessible and affordable and can be accessed from anywhere. Migration of core resources, your institution's student information systems, single sign-on services, learning management system, degree audit, virtual instructional spaces or your Portal as your single point on the web for all services. In an environment where your students come from anywhere, all services must be accessible around the clock to meet student expectations. On-premise data centers and the staffing to support 24-hour a day monitoring and support, (not to mention the investment for redundancy) have become cost prohibitive. Cloud storage or hosted solutions improve data management, access and provide resilient disaster recovery and business resumption platforms.

LEVERAGING VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS AND ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES

Virtual classrooms and labs, terminal services and virtual desktops — call them what you will — they're now essential in delivering instruction during the height of closures. Many institutions invested a substantial amount of their HEERF (Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds) into classroom and employee audiovisual infrastructure. Now moving forward, virtual classrooms are essential in meeting the expectations of a responsive learning environment. Be it asynchronous online learning to meet the needs of working students or streaming to meet the requirements of synchronous instruction during a brief closure, the virtual learning environment is here to stay. Hosted video and conferencing solutions are also essential in facilitating and managing not only online courses, but remote employees as well. They enable real-time collaboration and communication among students, staff and instructors — making it easier to learn remotely and reduce the need for travel. They also provide collaborative space for students beyond the classroom.

COLLABORATION AND DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Often, larger hosted product suites provide overlapping services with smaller boutique applications. Using data and metrics to drive decisions about how to use these tools improves your organization's productivity. The more you know about your organization and how it uses technology, the better you can use it to your advantage. Is there an eighty-percent solution with one service over another that can provide an opportunity to consolidate? To that end, building an assessment into your projects ahead of time provides a foundation for analysis. What is the matrix by which you will collaborate and determine success, or failure with relevant stakeholders? Having that data, and those measures built with intention, in advance, will help in determining future investment for your institution. Focus on your goals and outcomes. This is especially important in the current state of the pandemic when many of the previously 'typical practices and tools' may no longer be viable solutions.



OUR OBLIGATION

To create the best possible learning environment. The pandemic left a lasting impact on our education system and our institutions. There are expectations this whole new set of services be retained to enhance options to serve students. Resources, however, are not limitless. With a potential recession looming, and HEERF dollars expiring, competition for those resources and investments will become much more contentious. Having data to drive decision-making will aid leadership and governance groups in their deliberations. By building in assessments, we aid in streamlining and potentially amplifying select resources, enabling the best possible learning environment for our current and future students. And in doing so, we create more engaging, interactive and efficient learning environments. ■



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Social Media and the Hybrid Frontier

Kasandrea Sereno

Founder & Executive Director,
Higher Ed Social



It may be hard to believe, but social media is already touching its second generation of college students. Institutions no longer grapple with whether or not they should be active on social media, but instead wonder how they find the resources to create a robust strategy, engaging current and prospective students.

After all, even the beginning of the largest social network, Facebook, originated on college campuses. As the first social media generation of college students matured, their experiences and consumption habits shaped how Generation Z consumes social media. As teenagers just starting new accounts, Gen Z's first friends included their extended family members.

But as they got older, this generation wanted privacy to post content and connect with friends in places not traditionally visible to family. Eventually, Gen Z developed social media fatigue as brands moved in and crowded their sacred spaces within Snapchat and Instagram. As a result, they lowered their usage on certain platforms to get a more intimate experience with friends not visible to the masses. To decrease their social footprint, teenagers opted to private message each other on social apps in place of text messaging.

So what does this all mean for higher ed?

It means institutions trying to hit a moving target with an increasingly savvy group of students (who are your consumers) want to interact with institutions in a way that's in-line with their communication habits. Meeting these challenges requires a shift towards building an internal hub for students who want a social media-like experience within the academic and co-curricular spaces, but with more intimacy than the major networks provide.

Pathify leads the way in creating an alternative community purpose-built for engaging current students while attracting prospects by bringing community forward. The following highlights some of the main challenges facing institutions related to social media and how Pathify helps institutions meet students where they are.

PROBLEM NO. 1: TOO MUCH COMPETING CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Creating content takes time. Creating good content requires a significant investment in tools and resources. It's one thing to create the content, but another to deploy, manage and engage with it once it's out there. Doing social media well requires lots of different skills and on top of it, students have viral cat videos, memes and fun dance moves on TikTok to compete with. Why would they engage with your content?

Instead of trying to compete with what's out there, Pathify's Engagement Hub allows your marketing team to curate content from campus inside the platform where they already engage with you. Of course, any skeptical higher ed professional will surely push back. There are countless times where an institution buys a piece of software they think is "cool" only to find students not using it.

That isn't the case here.

What I'm talking about brings students in by giving them what they need, and a reason to stay with features students like. Digital Wallet offers one of many hooks Pathify leverages to pull students into the platform.

It allows students to use their phone as an all-in-one mobile ID wallet and get into places such as the library or cafeteria without bringing a physical card. This helps drive adoption.

PROBLEM NO. 2: DIFFICULT TO CREATE COMMUNITY WITHIN DESIRED BOUNDARIES

When social media first came out, incoming students jumped at the chance to participate in “Class Of” Facebook groups and various clubs managed their events through there as well. But Gen Z no longer wants to engage on Facebook. They fear the myriad of investigations and bad press around data privacy. However, students not using Facebook lose out on what’s taking place by being disconnected from their classmates.

Students don’t resist being part of a digital community. In fact, quite the opposite; they crave it, especially as first-year students. But this generation wants hard boundaries between them and professors (and acquaintances in co-curricular clubs).

The Groups functionality in Pathify threads the needle when it comes to privacy. It allows students to proudly invite faculty to their club events without revealing embarrassing photos or personal information they’d rather keep private. On the admin side, Groups in Pathify are easier to track and control as an institution than on major social media channels. This is especially important at a time when institutions aspire to do more to monitor mental health challenges on campus.

Pathify’s keyword tracker helps monitor for red flags in a Group to let institutions take swift action as needed. It also calls out potential trouble spots such as plans for potential illegal or unauthorized activity on campus.

As institutions start embracing the hybrid campus model, enabling the creation of intimate communities will play a critical role in both retaining and attracting students. The previous

generation of students obsessed over how many “friends” they had on social media. This generation cares more about the quality of their social media connections. The trend bodes well for institutions investing in creating insular communities within the boundaries of their institution.

PROBLEM NO. 3: NO CONTROL OF PUBLIC INTERACTIONS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

We’ve known for a long time the internet is not a safe space. Institutions don’t control the general public’s involvement with content as they do on campus. This means students are subjected to ugly comments on whatever they post, even when the person behind those comments lives hundreds of miles away.

This is problematic when we feature students in our social posts. The internet is all too often...just mean, and doesn’t prevent anyone from making bigoted or hurtful comments of a student’s appearance on campus. Additionally, students comfortable on campus being who they are (for example LGBTQ+ students may be out to people on campus, but not to friends and family) might not want their picture from an event on social media.

Pathify’s Groups allow students to feel more comfortable being themselves in a social media-like environment and provide a safe space to engage with content. It also lets students promote events to their friends without inadvertently inviting outside trolls to crash the party. Students are exhausted. They’re tired of having to hire security for an event to keep the peace or getting doxxed on social media for bringing in a controversial speaker.



Students want to feel secure being themselves on social media and want you to help them feel safe doing so. When institutions provide an insular environment, it’s not only easier to protect current students, but it’s a great marketing tactic for prospective students. After all, there’s no better way of saying you meet them where they are than by allowing them to see the community you’ve built from the convenience of their mobile device. It gives them a feel for the campus environment while showing them their events will be unimpeded by outside voices.

PROBLEM NO. 4: INSTITUTIONS TREAT SOCIAL MEDIA LIKE BULLETIN BOARDS

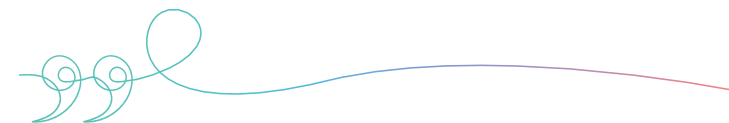
Some institutions have a habit of using social media as a bulletin board. You’ve probably seen the posts where an institution promotes an event or on-campus initiative using Twitter or Instagram, assuming students will automatically see whatever they posted. In fact, this might be a practice you utilize at your own institution. Posting campus announcements isn’t only not ideal, but students might miss it entirely because you’re competing against an algorithm slanted against your institution.

But most institutions don’t have a better option because there’s no robust calendar function for campus events. Most campus calendars work in siloes or are difficult to filter so students struggle to find the events they care most about.

Instead of using your social media channels to provide students with important updates, use them to show the sights and sounds from around campus. Keep social media for how it was designed — to share the highlights of campus life in a person-to-person method while building bonds and relationships between the

institutions and your followers. Social media sells your campus to prospective students while making alumni nostalgic of their time at your institution. It’s great for evoking emotion, but severely lacks in meeting the logistical needs of students.

Filling the void is where Pathify comes in. The Engagement Hub neatly brings together your various calendars with details and imagery pushed directly to particular subsets of students. Plus, with no algorithm to compete with, students will never miss out on campus events and they’ll have the flexibility to add their own events for academic or co-curricular groups.



“They’re tired of having to hire security for an event to keep the peace or getting doxxed on social media for bringing in a controversial speaker.” - Kasandrea Sereno





PROBLEM NO. 5: TOO MANY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Some institutions own as many as 150 different social media accounts — even at smaller schools! Marketing departments take the approach of spray-and-pray for posting to social media accounts rather than being targeted and personalized. Posting on that many accounts isn't only inefficient, but also impractical.

Every new account means splitting the stream of attention and spreading those eyeballs across more properties, diluting engagement and reach. It's simply not worth it. However this doesn't deter many departments from starting multiple accounts across platforms before losing steam and ending up as abandoned properties. Outdated content looks worse than no content. It looks like you don't care. Less is more when it comes to doing social well on campus.

Let social media be what it's designed for and use a platform like Pathify for driving the student experience with targeted, personalized and just-in-time messaging. While your social media presence matters, it should be centralized within the marketing team and not turned into a free-for-all for student communications. Instead, move department-specific communications to a platform like Pathify to alleviate the campus shuffle while breaking down campus siloes and creating greater efficiency.

It's hard to predict what the future of social media will look like. When the past few months resulted in some of the most volatile ever in its existence, it shakes the confidence of even the best marketing departments with a strong handle on social. And that is exactly why it's time to bring some of the more strategic communications to an internal platform where students safely engage with each other while your institution provides target messaging, which will always stay front-of-mind. ■

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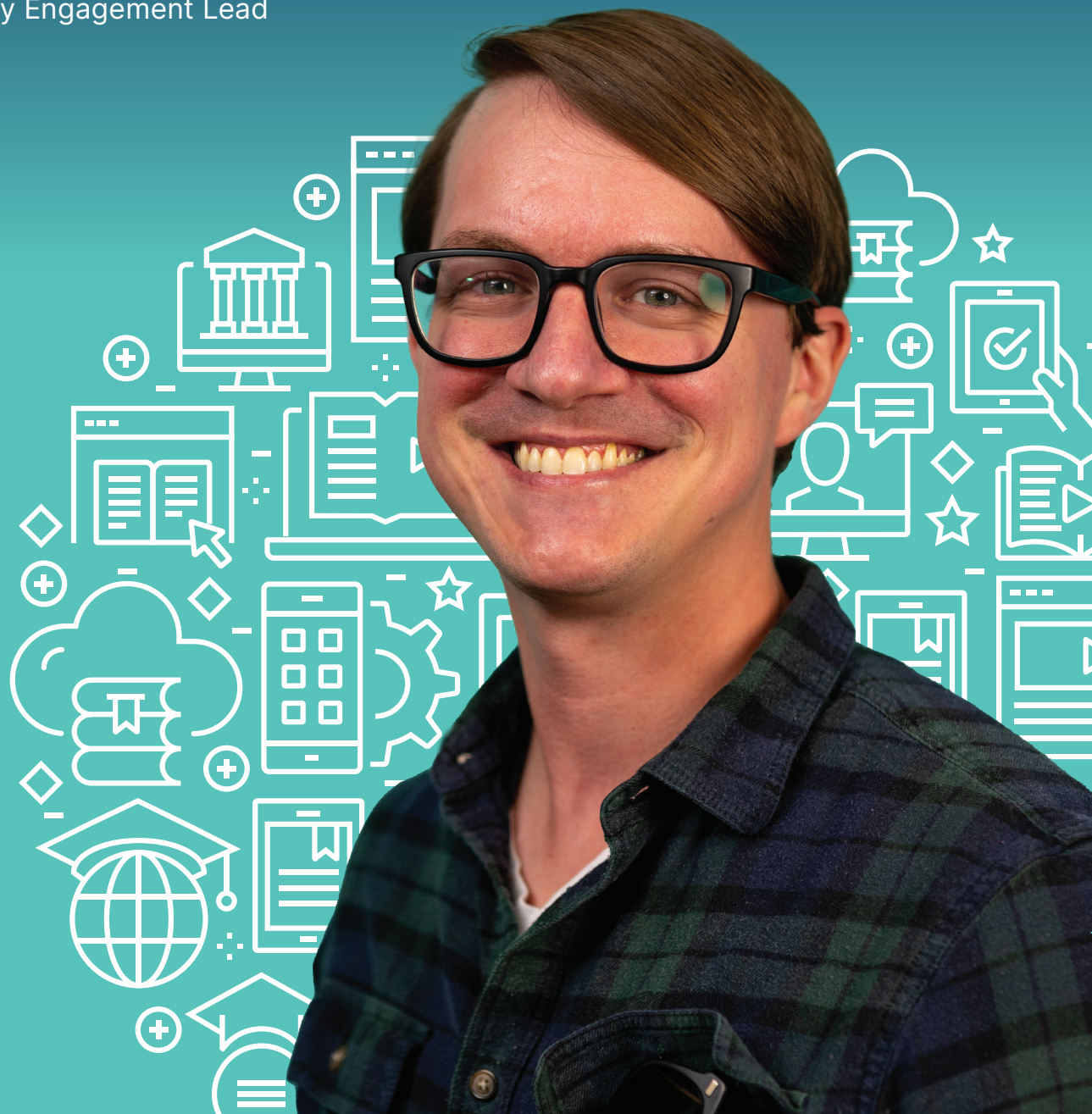
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Right Sizing for the Win

Dustin Ramsdell

Community Engagement Lead



GETTING CREATIVE WITH PHYSICAL SPACES

For a notable example of rethinking physical campuses, we go back to University of Akron. They recently made a large-scale investment in their esports program (competitive video gaming). Akron renovated existing space to reflect its commitment to its gaming community. Students now enjoy a specific area to congregate and build community with their fellow gamers. Before this, students had no physical space to forge new bonds with other students based on their shared interest in video games.

University of Akron now maintains the largest physical arena space of any university in the world as well as one of the best programs in the country. While this took resources to grow and faced scrutiny, this gave Akron an asset to help it remain relevant and sustainable into the future.

Institutions should consider making creative investments. For instance, many students use their own mobile devices or laptops to access class materials. Consider renovating computer lab spaces as esports arenas or virtual reality labs. It's already primed for this use case while potentially creating a much more relevant asset. Also, look for opportunities to rethink older and smaller residence hall spaces. For example, adapt dormitories into staff and faculty offices or meeting spaces for students to replicate a coworking environment, all of which are often in high demand. At the University of Delaware, they remade an old dorm into a student wellness center, expanding the capacity of this often overwhelmed resource.

Right now, higher education finds itself in a unique position, with public scrutiny and economic headwinds combining to create unique challenges. Only half the respondents to a recent New America survey feel it's possible to find high-quality and affordable higher education. This in the wake of decades of society emphasizing college as the pathway to a brighter future.

On the economic side, the trend of college closures continues. Though not at the same rate as the height of 2016, The Hechinger Report stated 35 colleges closed in 2021. They also stated the potential for more closures remains likely with the impending enrollment cliff on the horizon. You're also seeing some institutions, such as the University of Akron in Ohio, make difficult budget decisions. In the last several years, Akron cut 80 degree programs, reduced their athletics teams and laid off hundreds of faculty and staff.

This trend of cutbacks is a sign of the times. Shippensburg University President Charles Patterson noted this recently in a popular Vox article, "deconstruction" will become the watchword as higher ed determines how to reconfigure for the future. This may seem dramatic, but for many institutions — budget dilemmas remain serious. Given the negative nature of "deconstruction," we'll be more optimistic by calling efforts here "right-sizing."

This term means adjusting an institution's physical spaces and digital investments to its goals. It also means adapting to the reality of its scale and student population. For some colleges and universities, this may mean reconfiguring spaces on campus or even forgoing them. For others, it will mean streamlining digital infrastructure to better serve stakeholders.



There is a lot of opportunity for creativity here; especially looking at spaces on campus and setting them up to become more modular and flexible. A lounge space in your student center might transform from a casual sitting room to an open event space for students to use — or even wire it for a large conference room. A classroom could be used for small in-person group discussions or broadcast worldwide for hybrid education experiences. Take a critical lens to your physical assets and start exploring what students want. Then you'll be able to adapt underutilized places into modern amenities.

CREATING EFFICIENCIES THROUGH DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS

From a digital perspective, there are a variety of tools to optimize the limited bandwidth of professionals on campus. A prominent option is utilizing a chatbot, such as Ivy.ai or Ocelot, to automate low level inquiries from students and community members. This eases the massive

influx of emails, phone calls and voicemails frontline service workers on campus deal with. Staff embed these chatbots into web pages and make it accessible via text messaging. For the times when a question can't be answered by the automated assistant, it escalates the issue to the appropriate staff member to respond.

Another way to right-size from a digital perspective is to leverage a portal. This centralizes information rather than force students to constantly bounce between different content, departments and applications. Unwieldy websites for universities and colleges typically bury massive amounts of information and end up as dumping ground for hundreds (or thousands) of links. Empowering students to be more self-sufficient to find answers will delight them, allowing the student to ask more nuanced questions, better pointing them toward goals.

One final example would be to unify student support efforts through one tool. Traditionally called "Customer Relationship Management"

platforms, CRM platforms provide advisors and staff a single place to track all the activities for a particular student. These tools also easily connect with other platforms, including the LMS and SIS. Unfortunately, some campuses end up running redundant CRM platforms across various departments. It is crucial for students as well as for advisors and staff to centralize an institution-wide CRM to share across campus. Having this be a tool that is more accessible allows everyone to work smarter and better together.

A major point with these digital investments is efficiency. They empower students to not wait or rely on staff and faculty for support. They get just-in-time resolution at any time of day. They also allow staff and faculty to focus on where to spend their time and expertise, such as planning for the future and addressing complex issues. Any combination of these strategies will help institutions manage their bandwidth effectively.

EMERGENCE OF "DIGITAL-FIRST" THINKING

What you're seeing emerging in higher education now is what we'll call a "digital-first" mindset as institutions create new strategies. More students study online while institutions with limited resources struggle to find additional funds supportive of hybrid learning. So how will smart digital investments create modern, efficient and delightful student experiences? We will examine the digital-first university in future blog content as higher ed continues to navigate the hybrid frontier.

Right-sizing will look different for every institution. The correct approach will depend on their unique context, history, values and resources. Even so, the question at hand now isn't if colleges will right-size themselves — but how and when. The broader competitive environment for higher ed right now demands improvement. How will your school become more lean and effective for social mobility? ■



“Right-sizing will look different for every institution. It will depend on their unique context, history, values and resources. Even so, the question at hand now isn’t if colleges will right-size themselves, but how and when.” - Dustin Ramsdell

Letter from the Co-Founders

Founder's Dispatch

How external economic conditions impact Higher Ed and the technology companies supporting them

In 2022, the higher education sector faced ongoing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of the global economy. Universities and colleges continued to expand remote or hybrid learning, leading to concerns about student engagement, mental health, and access to education. However, institutions adapted and innovated by investing in new technologies to enhance the student experience.

The growing adoption of hybrid and online education has led to a significant increase in demand for software supporting both online learning and the on-campus experience. This is reflected in the projected growth of the EdTech market in the U.S., which is expected to rise from \$183.4 billion in 2021 to \$404 billion by 2025.

Despite the growing demand for EdTech, the economic conditions in 2022 were generally challenging for technology companies. There was a reduction in funding and investment and a significant decline in valuations for many private and public companies throughout the year.

As a result, many tech companies were forced to reduce their operations and staff, with some shuttering altogether.

In contrast, at Pathify we continued our extremely strong growth trajectory and are in a better financial position with no dependence on external funding, despite ongoing economic concerns. In 2023, we anticipate continued investment in technology and online education, with universities and technology companies that are able to adapt quickly to the new landscape likely to emerge (or maintain) a strong position.

Here's to a strong 2023 for higher ed institutions AND higher ed tech companies. From surviving to prospering!

Chase Williams

Chase Williams
Co-Founder

James McCubbin

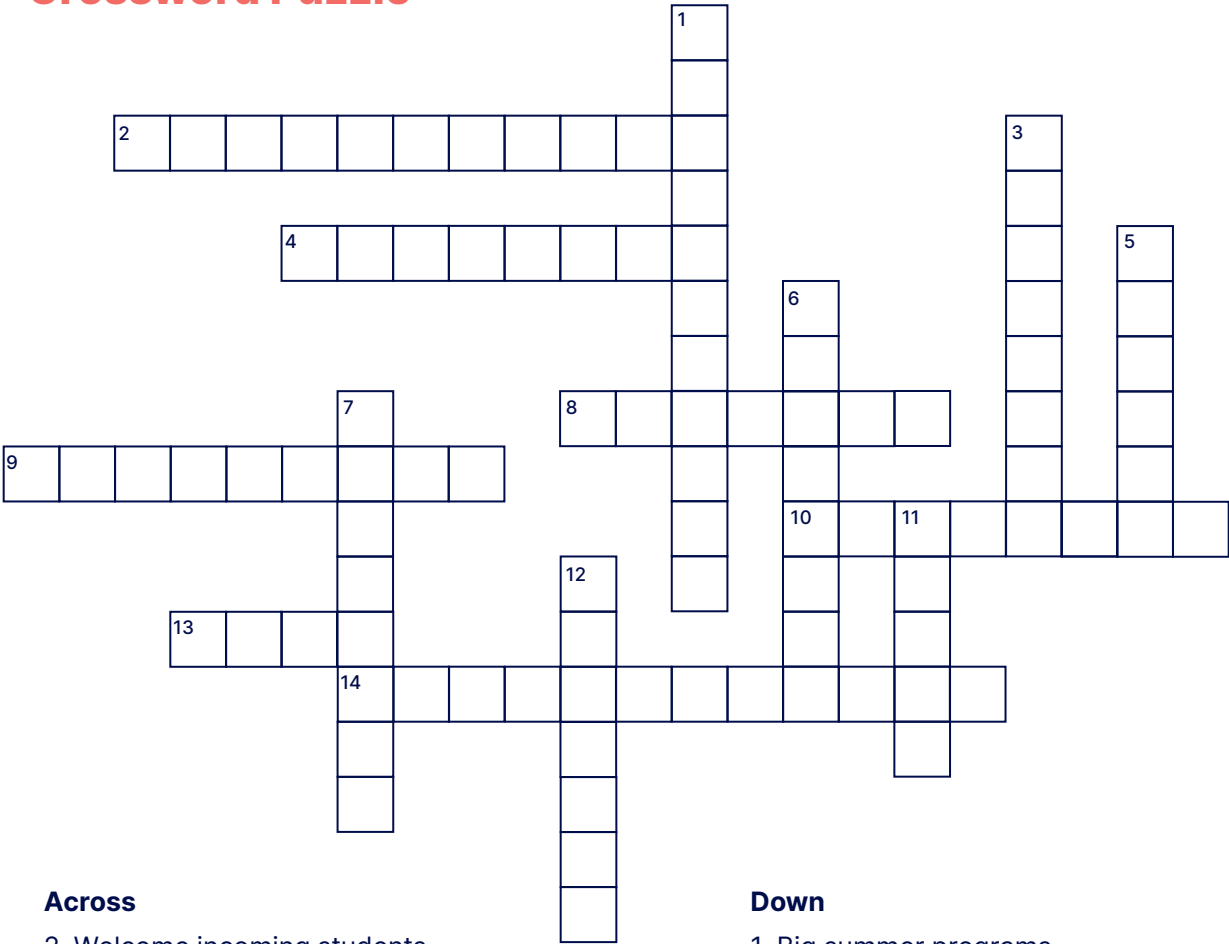
James McCubbin
Co-Founder

James McCubbin (left)
and Chase Williams (right),
founders of Pathify



Brain Games

Looking Forward to Summer Crossword Puzzle



Across

- 2. Welcome incoming students
- 4. Time to fix up campus
- 8. Leave the socks at home
- 9. What everyone does on the last day of class
- 10. Find shade anywhere
- 13. Students not showing up
- 14. Major holiday in July

Down

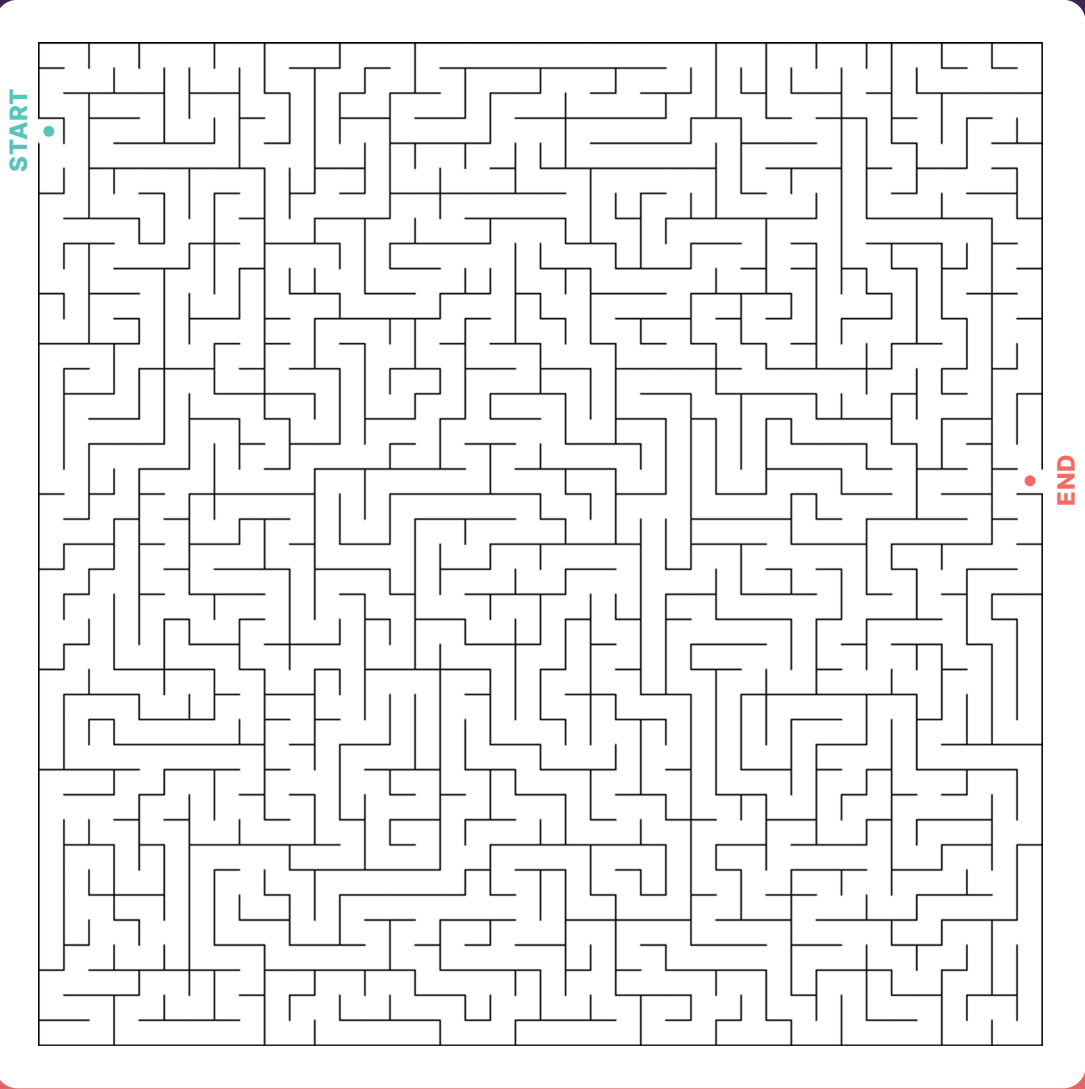
- 1. Big summer programs
- 3. SPF is your friend
- 5. Going somewhere new
- 6. AKA an alum
- 7. Going somewhere for fun
- 11. Put your toes in the sand
- 12. Fancy piece of paper

Higher Education Wordsearch

K I G R J C O S L G Z X O L W
C A P D V Z P D R E W Z D T X
P M E I F E E A K J J S P N T
E W Z R A S D N O I S I C E D
J P G K B U K O P S I G E M H
B U E N A I L A G E R O L E F
J R R T I S V M S S B R E C D
A Z I W J S Q B K R P Q B N K
Q O M Q G X O L Z U S J R E A
N N L L N J H L B O O L A M O
R G B A K U Q Q C T E F T M Z
C K H P K F A M I L Y M I O G
R E C R U I T M E N T K O C L
Z K I T C B I G V L Y L N X W
T W M D D S N N E Q S H Q Y N

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| BREAK | DECISION |
| SPEAKER | CELEBRATION |
| GRADUATION | COMMENCEMENT |
| REGALIA | FAMILY |
| JOB | CLOSING |
| TOURS | RECRUITMENT |

ESCAPE THE MAZE



Scan for
answer
key

The Last Word

Matt Hammond | Chief Revenue Officer



Many of you have had the opportunity (misfortune?) of spending serious time with me on Zoom. I try to pack my calendar each week with a healthy mix of both customer and prospect calls, and I'm almost always there when we approach the end of a sales process, working with schools to come to mutually agreeable commercial terms. On that basis a lot of you probably know what gets me most excited day after day, week after week — and beyond. **Community.**

*I continue to believe Pathify's single biggest advantage when competing with other **Student Portals** remains the fact we include **people** as a key variable in creating a truly connected and **positive student experience**.* Content, resources, tech, social media, announcements, notifications, calendars, email, text — it's a lot — and we personalize and curate that chaos better than anyone. But come on — how can you not layer **people** into this ridiculously complex equation? Because it's too hard?

By connecting people through groups, events, messaging and a whole lot more, Pathify serves as a **digital reflection** of what already makes your institution special — its unique community. And we've been doing this for over four years — **with every SIS** — and scores of customers love scheduling reference calls to prove it. This also explains why years ago we shifted from calling ourselves a student portal to a true **Engagement Hub**.

(As a quick aside — the market embraced the term Engagement Hub! Check out a few other portal company websites — they love the term so much they're using it. A lot. This makes me **very happy**. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness — well I guess we're great. **Oscar Wilde's** words... not mine).

For those of you who haven't had the opportunity (**misfortune?**) to spend serious Zoom time with

me, it should be obvious by now (after 296 words) the concept of community enrichment through technology — *fascinates me*. And now that we're all on the same page, I'll get to the point.

Last year in March, Pathify launched V1 of our **Pathify Community Portal** with the goal of bringing the amazing connection we give students to our customer admin users. This felt like a **no brainer**, and we honestly were so excited we probably rushed it to production a little too quickly. And as the year progressed, we didn't invest the time, effort, resources, or people to truly make it a success. Transitioning from **start-up to growth** company in something like 12 months is sort of like if a 22 year old aged 20 years in 12 months — you're the same person but man don't things look different! Needless to say — a lot of awesome things happened last year, but unfortunately the company that prides itself on community **failed** to make the Pathify Community Portal a priority.

Roughly one year later — **we're ready**. Launching in the first half of 2023, V2 of the Pathify Community Portal will deliver all the great things we initially set out to launch...and a whole lot more based on feedback from both customers and prospects. We're executing a solid, detailed plan in conjunction with a whole host of **customer volunteers**, and I know I speak for a lot of my colleagues when I recognize this as the most exciting project we've worked on in a while.

What should you expect from the Pathify Community Portal? Detailed implementation plans (standard and custom) for new customers, including **enhanced communication** with Training and Strategy Advisors.

A university's worth of digital training and best practice content curated by use-case and feature. Important notifications, release notes, product enhancement announcements, and (at least to start) access to important customer success tools like Canny and Asana. All our frequent virtual events and webinars, including our semi-annual Pathify Summit (and dare I say a few virtual **happy hours**...) And of course. People connection.

Community.

Particularly given the popularity of the new **Recipe Library** (the constantly expanding resource enabling non-technical admins to configure integrations with point and source technologies) the Pathify Community Portal becomes **the forum** for customers to communicate, share best practices — and for those using our Flow middleware — **the space** to swap recipes and all the great things you build and want to share. You asked us for crowdsourcing of great ideas — voilà.

*So now the single greatest advantage Pathify brings to the table for its **customers** becomes including the best community tool in higher-ed tech as one of the key variables in creating a truly connected and **positive customer experience**.*

Please keep the feedback coming — the good, the bad — and even the ugly. Your feedback fuels the **rocket ship**. And if you do find yourself toward the end of a sales process working with me to come to mutually agreeable commercial terms...

Don't be shy — **I'll make it work**.



***"The single greatest advantage Pathify brings to the table for its customers becomes including the best community tool in higher-ed tech as one of the key variables in creating a truly connected and positive customer experience."** - Matt Hammond*



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