

# Global Trends in Higher Education Digital Transformation

# Executive Summary

Liferay and Canam Research partnered together to understand how digital innovation is happening in universities, surveying institutions across the globe to gain insights from Administration, Faculty, and IT on their views, needs, and pain points.

## Key observations:

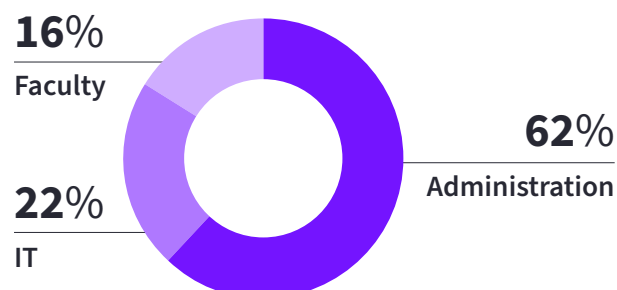
- Digital transformation is critical for a university's success, but factors like **outdated legacy systems, silos, and internal resistance to change make innovation challenging**.
- Universities have some confidence in the effectiveness of their own tools for supporting staff and students, but **not for other audiences like lifelong learners and alumni**, even as institutions try to increase their lifelong learner classes in tandem with improving the overall higher-education experience.
- **Improving digital experiences is a top priority for universities**, with many planning to implement new tools and technology within the next 12 months. Improvement areas of focus include creating a more user-friendly interface, increasing mobile responsiveness, and moving students through the user journey more effectively.
- Overall, respondents felt their digital tools and systems were only moderately effective across the board, **providing an opportunity for universities to update their digital systems in order to improve experiences, communication, and workflows for everyone**.

## Introduction

What does digital transformation in higher education look like around the world? That's the question driving the research collected here.

Across the three main departments of Administration, Faculty, and IT members, we heard from a variety of roles including Student Services, Alumni Services, HR, Registrar, Change Management, and Curriculum Planning.

### Department Affiliation



# Current State of Digital Transformation

Here are a few survey insights into what's going on at universities with digital transformation right now:

**66%**

66% of IT respondents say **their intranet, extranet, and websites are partially integrated into one system**, with only 16% of respondents describing their solution as completely integrated.

**23%**

Only 23% of respondents say **their current digital tools and systems very effectively support their students**.

**90%**

**The most common portals are for student services (90%), admissions (89%), and maintaining the library (77%).**

## Drivers for Digital Transformation

Key motivators for implementing digital transformation include:

**Increasing engagement.** 66% of respondents said that digital transformation plays a major role in engaging staff and students.

**Increasing journey movement.** 40% of respondents use internal portals and emails for document and content sharing to help prospective students travel from awareness to registration.

**Increasing non-traditional enrollment.** 67% of respondents want to increase lifelong learner/adult learner classes and enrollment.

## Challenges and Barriers

Those in the higher education sector face a number of difficulties unique to the field that slow the pace and sometimes even the implementation of digital transformation.

Here are the top three these respondents identified:

- 60%** **60% struggle with outdated legacy systems**, with many of them citing integration as a key issue.
- 53%** **53% face an uphill internal battle, with other teams resistant to change.**
- 45%** **45% are concerned about the substantial upfront investment** needed for digital transformation as well as ROI concerns.

Notably, the Administration is more concerned with outdated legacy systems, lack of skills and talent, and upfront investment than either IT or Faculty, and the IT department puts a higher emphasis on the problem of data management and privacy.

## Technology Adoption Trends

Despite the challenges, the landscape of higher education is fertile ground for transformation, even and perhaps especially for some of the latest technologies emerging now.

Trends that forward-thinking universities should watch out for include:

- **Personalization opportunities using artificial intelligence.** Campus Technology notes that institutions may use AI “to identify moments when students require just-in-time interventions to support them during their learning journey.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Decision-making enhanced by more sophisticated data integration.** Integrating systems that were previously siloed means more accurate data that institutions can use.
- **Better support systems for students and staff.** Institutions can use technology like virtual study sessions and faculty office hours or digital mental health services to ensure students get support when they need it.
- **The importance of change management.** Major institutional changes require shifts in people’s behavior at every level, underscoring how critical the implementation of rigorous change management processes is during new technology adoption.
- **The rise in immersive learning.**<sup>2</sup> Institutions will continue expanding their thinking beyond the classroom, using technology for virtual and augmented reality learning experiences that engage students.

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1 14 Technology Predictions for Higher Education in 2023

2 Top 4 Higher Education Technology Trends to Watch in 2024

# User Experience and Engagement

Interesting insights emerged from the survey about the most important factors in improving students' overall digital experiences.

The survey found that:

**56%**

56% of respondents agreed that a **user-friendly interface is the top improvement needed.**

**43%**

43% of respondents thought that the **second highest priority should be mobile responsiveness.**

## Future Outlook

Given the vast albeit sometimes intimidating opportunities technology has presented the realm of higher education, many institutions have big plans for the next year:

**67%**

67% of respondents plan to **improve workflows and processes.**

**34%**

34% will be focusing on **digital transformation initiatives.**

**24%**

24% will be implementing a **digital experience platform.**

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey as well as predicted trends for higher education, we recommend institutions take the following practical steps:

- **Invest in the right technologies now, if you haven't already.** The pace of digital transformation, even if slower in higher education than elsewhere, will only accelerate, and students will flock to institutions they feel can support them on and offline.
- **Look for strong integration capabilities in your technology.** Even though only 20% of institutions will be targeting integration this year, the lack of integration came up as a pain point again and again.

- **Align with internal teams on the importance of digital transformation.** Because convincing other departments or individuals can be challenging, it's crucial to adopt change management processes and make the case that institutions that don't succeed at digital transformation now may get left behind.

## Conclusion

Post-pandemic, the growing pains for higher education have been particularly sharp, as the survey results demonstrate.

Although the survey highlighted substantial hurdles institutions face in implementing digital transformation, many opportunities still exist to aid in creating lifelong learners from that first “awareness” touchpoint in the beginning.

## About Liferay

Liferay and our partners help the higher education sector meet their unique digital engagement challenges by creating innovative, student-centered experiences on our cloud-powered Digital Experience Platform (DXP). Learn more at [www.liferay.com](http://www.liferay.com).

### Appendix

Note: These results have been collected across two different surveys conducted in Australia and the United States, with the results averaged together for a more holistic picture.



Liferay helps organizations build for the future by enabling them to create, manage, and scale powerful solutions on the world's most flexible Digital Experience Platform (DXP). Trusted globally by over a thousand companies spanning multiple industries, Liferay's open-source DXP facilitates the development of marketing and commerce websites, customer portals, intranets, and more. Learn how we can use technology to change the world together at [liferay.com](https://liferay.com).

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