3 IT strategies to support student belonging

Creating a sense of community on campus is as important as helping students achieve a high GPA.

College and university students need to feel a sense of belonging with each other, both on campus and online. When they don't, it can have a devastating impact on retention rates. It can also hinder higher ed's most basic mission: preparing the next generation for the future.

A recent analysis of the student experience in higher education across North America and Europe found that the top two reasons students have a poor university experience are:

1. They feel disconnected from other students; and

2. They lack a feeling of belonging.

In contrast, 80% of the students surveyed said technology played a vital role in their success.[1]

"Belonging" can seem like an abstract idea with intangible journey points, but higher ed IT leaders can play a pivotal role in building a stronger sense of community and, in the process, support students as they prepare for their careers.

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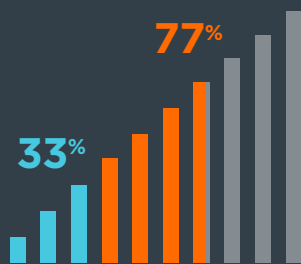
Here are three strategies to do just that:

01. Ease student concerns that they've been left behind.

Today's college students must be proficient with technology they'll use in their future workplace. They're also anxious that their education was negatively affected by the lockdowns of COVID-19.

Prospective applicants look for programs that prioritize their career objectives, and current students seek affirmation that their investment in college will continue to be worth it.

As you reassess your install base for next term, ask whether you have the tools students need to develop key vocational skills. How can you enhance their skill development in collaborative software, coding, AR/VR, and data analysis? Empathy is often an exercise of "show, don't tell."

Having tech in place to answer students' career concerns demonstrates that their community leaders understand them and are there to help.

02. Get devices that keep up with their community involvement.

Powerful devices are needed to run technical software remotely, particularly for students in STEM programs, but every student needs a device that supports their learning outside the traditional campus routine. The right devices — like modern Lenovo solutions powered by Windows 10 Pro and the Intel vPro® platform, which brings business-class performance to the classroom — power students' extracurricular activities and community collaboration rather than obstructing them.

You can contribute to students' sense of belonging in this capacity by providing remote access to onsite workstations, equipping students with durable devices that have a strong battery life and the computing and graphical processing power necessary for complex work, and allowing students to collaborate — whether they're in the dining hall or halfway around the world.

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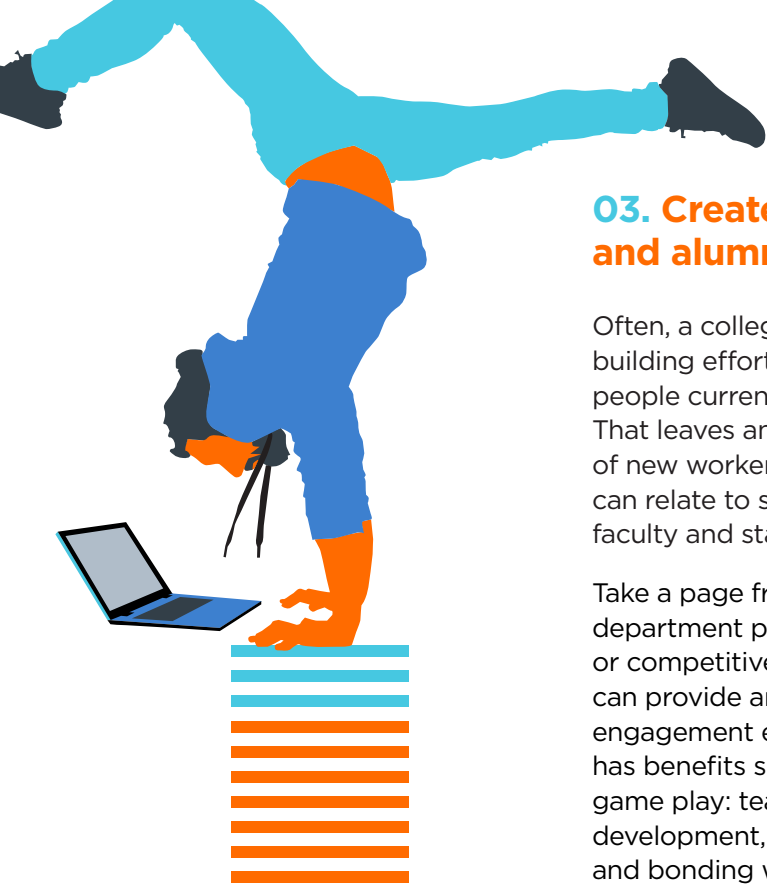
03. Create space for student and alumni connection.

Often, a college's community-building efforts focus on the people currently on campus. That leaves an untapped resource of new workers — alumni — who can relate to students in a way faculty and staff simply can't.

Take a page from the athletic department playbook. Esports, or competitive video gaming, can provide an inclusive, high-engagement environment that has benefits similar to traditional game play: teamwork, skill development, confidence building, and bonding with past players who have since graduated.

Esports have obvious entertainment appeal (even before the pandemic, 90% of teens played video games[3]); however, the devices used for esports support many of the same graphical requirements as STEM software. It's an easy win for developing the technical and interpersonal skills that students need in their future careers.

And the more often they can connect with your alumni, the more opportunities you give them to make a career connection, a mentor, or a new friend.

Lenovo offers solutions that help schools plan and implement esports — like software, monitors, gaming furniture, accessories, esports consulting and comprehensive services, and Legion gaming PCs powered by Intel® Core™ processors and Windows 10 Pro.

70%

of students say their institutions do not provide a student community to connect with alumni.[1]

Choose a partner that understands your community dynamics

Students benefit from learning with tools they'll use once they're hired. Lenovo technology, featuring Windows 10 and powered by the Intel vPro® platform, is used across every industry, in organizations of every size. Moreover, our devices and services bolster efforts to help students in any campus environment feel like they belong. We uniquely understand how varied today's student experiences and expectations are at each institution — and how essential.

Learn more about our smart campus solutions at **www.lenovo.com/Education.**

Sources

1 Salesforce, "Connected Student Report," 2020

2 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021

3 Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media and Technology," 2018

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