

FCAM 2026

The background of the slide features a grayscale photograph of a large, historic university building with a prominent clock tower. The building has multiple stories with many windows and a classical architectural style. Overlaid on the image are several decorative red lines: a thick horizontal line under the 'FCAM 2026' text, a vertical line to the left of the main title, a curved line sweeping across the upper half of the slide, and a horizontal line separating the title area from the speaker information at the bottom.

Responding to a Changing Higher Education Landscape:

*The State of Student Affairs
in Higher Education*



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Pressures Are Coming From Every Direction

Enrollment & Financial Stability

Political & Regulatory Environment

Public Trust, ROI, Workforce
Expectations

Technology & AI

Student Needs & Well-being

Accountability & Evidence



PRESSURE #1

THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IS UNDER SCRUTINY





Is College Worth It?

73% of admitted students still highly value their college degree, yet public confidence in higher education continues to erode. (Hanover Admitted Student)

The central challenge has shifted: institutions must now prove not just access to education, but return on credential. (Deloitte Higher Education Trends)

Cost is no longer the only question. Value is.
And we must demonstrate the value.

(Hanover Research, 2026a)



The Student Affairs Pivot

Beyond Activities to Demonstrating Impact



1. Persistence & Retention

helping students navigate barriers and stay enrolled



2. Career Readiness

developing leadership, communication, teamwork, and transferable skills



3. Belonging & Connection

creating relationships and experiences that connect students to the institution



4. Well-Being

addressing conditions that impact students' ability to learn and persist



5. Learning & Development

creating opportunities for learning beyond the classroom



6. Completion & Post-College Success

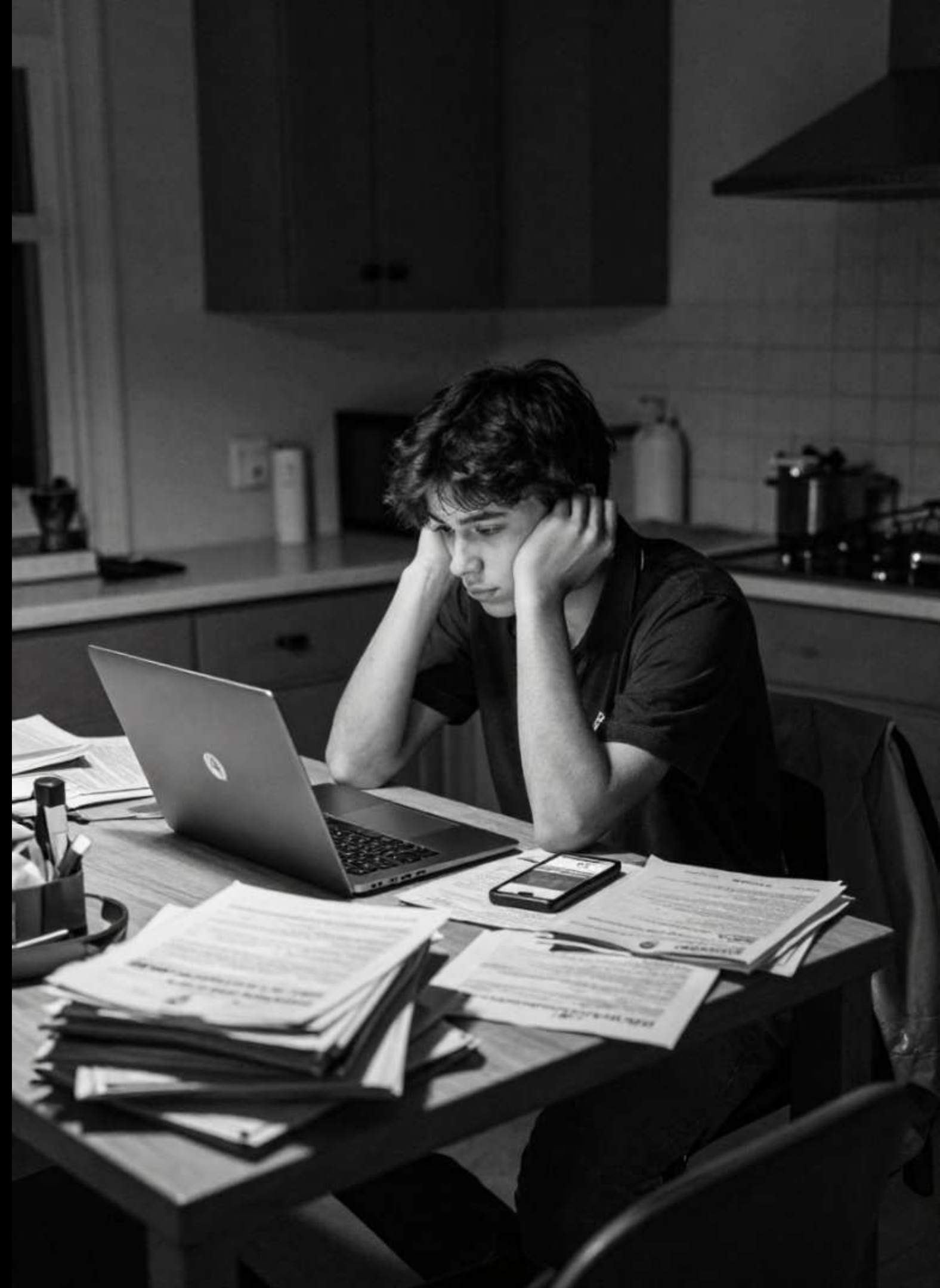
helping students connect their education and experiences to future goals

Expanding How We Define Impact

WE HAVE MEASURED			WE ALSO NEED TO UNDERSTAND		
	Programs offered		Student outcomes		
	Attendance		Depth of engagement		
	Services provided		Barriers addressed		
	Participation		Learning & development		
	Student stories		Evidence + stories		
	Career programs		Career readiness		
	Individual initiatives		Contribution to institutional outcomes		

PRESSURE #2

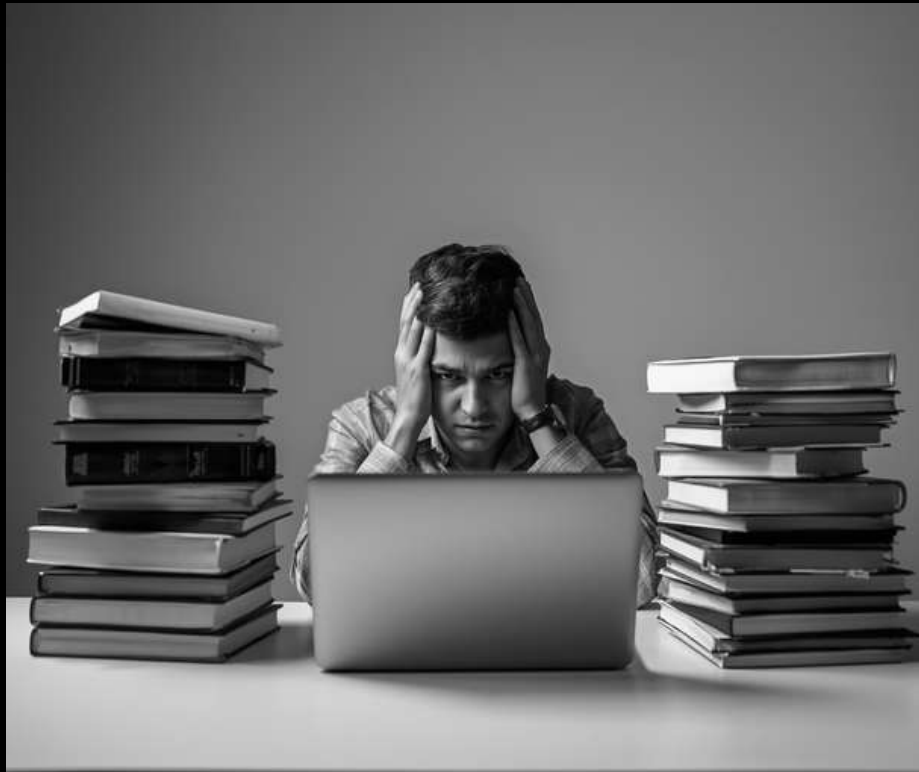
STUDENTS'
LIVES
ARE MORE
COMPLICATED



What Today's Students Are Carrying

Stress, Mental Health & Well-Being

Academic pressure + competing responsibilities + financial strain + uncertainty can compound student stress and well-being needs.



Academic Pressures

Am I prepared to succeed?

47% of traditional aged undergraduates feel very/extremely prepared



Work & Career Pressures

How do I manage today while preparing for tomorrow?

43% are concerned about balancing schoolwork with nonacademic responsibilities.
39% are concerned about getting a good job after completing their program.



Basic Needs

Can I meet my needs and stay enrolled?

1 in 5 students report they probably or certainly could not come up with \$500 in the next month

Basic Needs are Academic Issues



Food Insecurity

Poor concentration



Missed attendance



Declining performance



Threat to persistence



Housing Instability

Disrupted sleep



Chronic stress



Missed class attendance



Threat to persistence



Transportation Barriers

Disrupted access to school & work



Academic & financial strain



Risk of disengagement



Threat to persistence



**Basic needs are not personal problems;
they are academic issues requiring institutional response.**

The Student Affairs Pivot: *From Referral to Ecosystem*



The Old Model

Student problem → referral to office

Siloed response

Student navigates alone



The Emerging Model

Early identification → coordinated support → barrier reduction → follow-up

Well-being as a condition for learning

PRESSURE #3

RETENTION HAS BECOME EVERYONE'S BUSINESS



Students Don't Leave for One Reason

One student, multiple systems

Faculty sees:

*Missing assignments, absences,
declining performance*

Student Affairs sees:

*Food insecurity, housing issue,
relationship crisis, conduct concern*

Financial Aid sees:

Unpaid balances, aid gaps

Advisor sees:

*Schedule problem, lack of degree
progress*



The Student Affairs Pivot: Coordinated Student Success



See the whole
student



Data alone does not improve
outcomes.

Institutional research, student-success leaders, advisors, faculty, and others must translate information into action.

Move from reactive → proactive

Student struggles → Student asks for help → Referral

VS.

Identify Connect Coordinate Intervene Follow Up

Predictive
information

Early advising
relationship

LMS engagement
signals

Faculty
early alerts

Advisor/support
follow-up

The question shifts from 'What's wrong with this student?' to 'What information do we have that tells us where the institution may need to step in?'

Create shared institutional responsibility

Faculty

Student Affairs

Financial Aid

Coordinated Action

Advising

IR/Data

Shared information

Student success

(Downey et al., 2026;
NASPA, 2026d)

What **coordinated success** looks like in practice

Examples of shared responsibility and data-informed action from campus leaders.



Arizona State University



Created the Student Success Analytic Collaborative, bringing together leaders and analysts across the university.



Examines academic, socio-behavioral, and financial barriers alongside academic and career outcomes.



Goal: create a culture of shared responsibility + data-informed action around student success.



Georgia State University



Uses predictive analytics and 800+ risk indicators to identify barriers before they derail student progress.



Alerts trigger proactive outreach and advising, rather than waiting for students to seek help.



More than 250,000 advisor-student meetings have been prompted by the system since implementation.



UT San Antonio



Ruby Team brings together Student Success, Faculty Success, IR Enrollment, Academic Innovation, Student Affairs, and others.



Regularly uses data to identify priorities, coordinate action, and scale successful interventions.



Institutional reported increase in retention and degree attainment



Shared structures

+

shared data

+

shared action

=

measurable student success.

PRESSURE #4

**POLICY &
POLITICS
ARE NOW
OPERATIONAL
ISSUES**



The External Environment is Inside the Institution



80%

of Student Affairs leaders
rate navigating political
and legislative pressures as
VERY IMPORTANT



68%

rate compliance with
state, federal, and
accreditation standards as
VERY IMPORTANT



The rapid pace of political and legislative change...is forcing many U.S. institutions to reevaluate significant elements of their strategic plans.

— Hanover Research, 2026

POLICY AND POLITICAL PRESSURES INCREASINGLY SHAPE:



Enrollment
& Access



Funding &
Resources



Research



Programs &
Services



Student
Experience



Institutional
Strategy

Hanover identifies effects on enrollment expectations, diversity initiatives, research, oversight, student-loan restrictions, student-visa restrictions, government funding uncertainty, and institutional finances.

EVIDENCE FROM HANOVER RESEARCH

Institutions are preparing for reduced federal support and increased policy uncertainty, with downstream effects on research funding, graduate financing, international enrollment, endowment taxation, and workforce planning.

(Clark et al., 2026; Hanover
Research, 2026b; NASPA, 2026a)

THE STUDENT AFFAIRS PIVOT:

AGILITY + TRANSLATION

	AWARE	Understand changing federal, state, regulatory, and institutional environments.	↓
	AGILE	Respond quickly as external conditions change.	↓
	ALIGNED	Coordinate interpretation and response across the student experience.	↓
	CLEAR	Translate change into understandable guidance for students and staff.	↓
	STUDENT CENTERED	Understand how policy decisions ultimately affect the student experience.	↓

“

Hanover describes institutions as operating amid “**converging pressures**” driven by sweeping policy changes and funding uncertainties.

Institutions are making strategic outlooks more **nimble and responsive** to shorter-term fluctuations.



Interpret



Operationalize

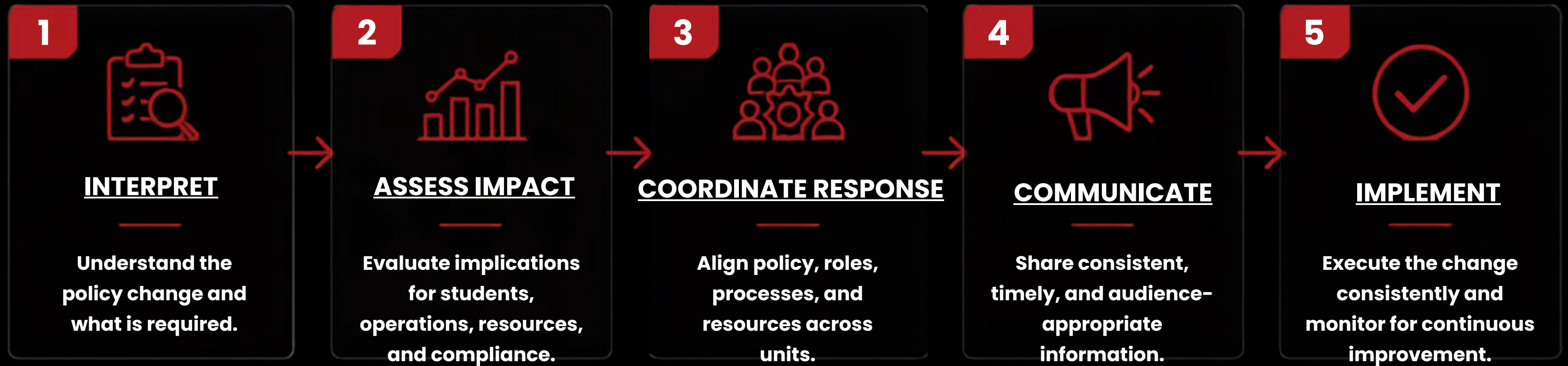


Communicate



Support

POLICY CHANGE REQUIRES INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION



**INSTITUTIONAL
PARTNERS**

Academic
Affairs

Student
Affairs

Legal
Affairs

Human
Resources

Public
Relations

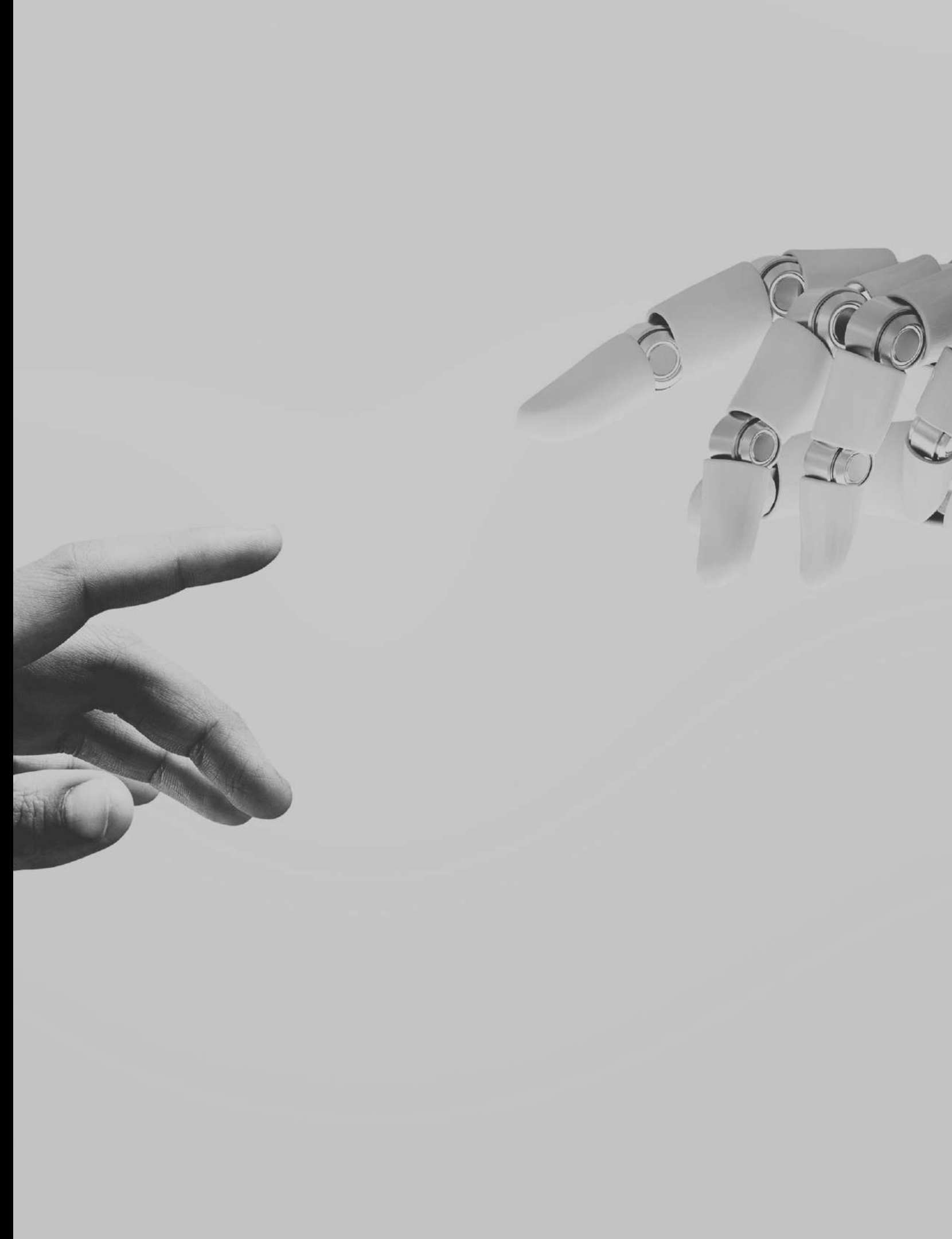
Institutional
Leadership

One unit cannot interpret institutional change independently **and expect students to experience consistency.**

(Hanover Research, 2026b;
NASPA, 2026a)

PRESSURE #5

AI & TECH ARE REDEFINING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE



AI Is Not Just a Classroom Issue

BEFORE COLLEGE

How Students Make Decisions

- Research careers and majors
- Identify and compare institutions
- Determine institutional fit
- Understand admissions requirements
- Estimate costs and financial options

Almost half of incoming students in Hanover's survey had already used AI as part of their college search.

DURING COLLEGE

How Students Learn & Navigate

- Academic work and learning
- Finding information and resources
- Communication
- Career exploration
- Navigating institutional processes
- Building digital literacy

AI is changing teaching, learning, research, and also campus operations, creating a need for institutional frameworks around appropriate use

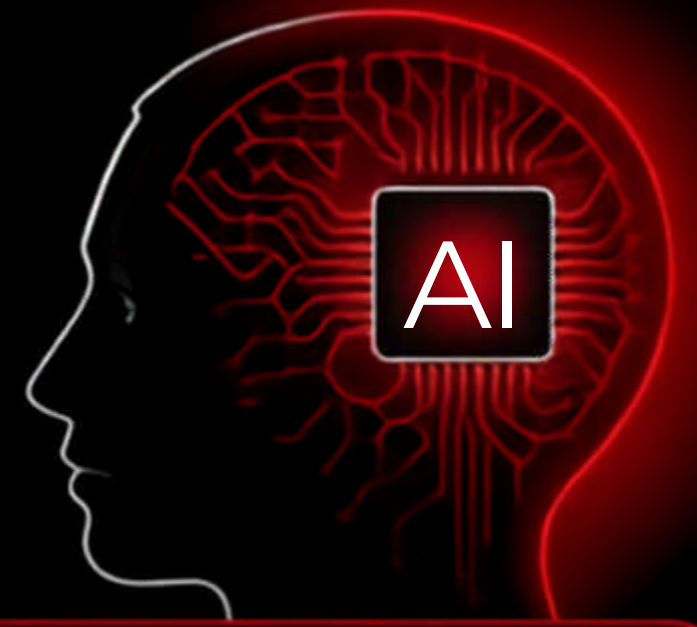
AFTER COLLEGE

Preparing for an AI-Shaped Workforce

- AI literacy
- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Ethical judgment
- Adaptability
- Knowing when (*and when not to*) to use AI

Distinctly human capabilities such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, ethics, and judgment may become increasingly valuable

The Student Affairs Pivot: Navigating an AI Enabled World



EDUCATE

- AI literacy
- Ethical use
- Digital citizenship
- Privacy & data



ACCOUNTABILITY

- Academic misconduct
- Student conduct
- Online behavior
- Policy & due process



SUPPORT

- Early identification
- Resource navigation
- Personalized support
- Human + technology balance



PREPARE

- Career readiness
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability
- Communication & judgment



STUDENT-CENTERED



ETHICALLY-DRIVEN



EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE



FUTURE READY

The most important pivot:

*from Student Affairs Work to
Our Work*

A SHARED MISSION, TWO PERSPECTIVES

UNITED PURPOSE. COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES. STRONGER TOGETHER.



ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



Primary Lens: Learning



Teaches through curriculum



Engages students in the classroom



Partners with students academically



STUDENT AFFAIRS

Primary Lens: Student development

Develops through experience



Engages students across campus

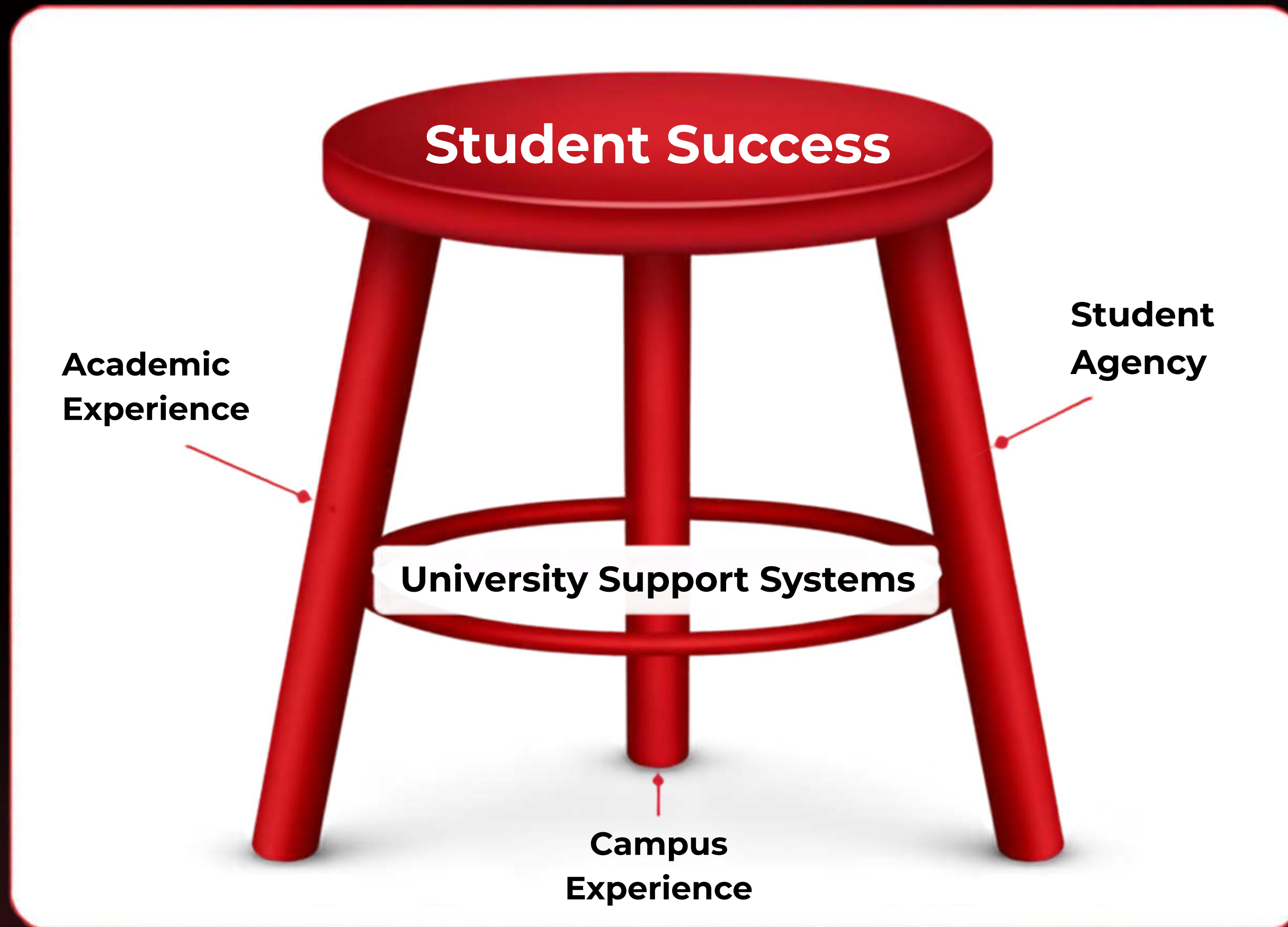
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Partners with students holistically



What is State of the Field Telling us?



The Work Ahead

01



SEE THE WHOLE STUDENT

Academic, personal, financial, career, and engagement experiences intercept.

02



CONNECT THE EXPERIENCE

Help students navigate one institution—not a collection of offices.

03



WORK ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Bring our different expertise together around shared student outcomes.

04



ADAPT TOGETHER

Respond collectively as students, technology, policy, and higher education continue to change.

THE FUTURE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IS INCREASINGLY CONNECTED TO THE FUTURE OF THE INSTITUTION.

(Hanover Research, 2026b;
NASPA, 2026a; NASPA, 2026d)

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Thank You

Questions?



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