CX trends for higher education

Five customer experience trends that are improving communications across America's college campuses and universities

zendesk

Admissions, communications and IT departments all need exceptional CX

With ongoing budget cuts, many institutions of higher learning are grappling with decades-old technology with disconnected data sources. These outdated systems make it difficult for teams to deliver seamless, personal support to members of the community. But a strategic investment in centralizing data and updating old systems allows colleges and universities to focus on its core mission—education.

The customer experience (CX) for higher education has evolved rapidly to mirror consumer trends. With advances in technology, administrators can now easily connect with students, parents, staff, and faculty over their preferred channels, whether social media, chat, text, email, or phone.

With Zendesk, higher education administrators can help meet the increased expectations of their community by providing faster communication, transparency, and convenience—all while staying under budget.

Top CX trends for 2023

The ongoing pandemic has had a lasting impact on higher education. With both students and teachers becoming increasingly comfortable with asynchronous learning, they now also expect to be able to reach internal teams 24/7—and on their preferred channel. Digital support systems need to be agile and adaptable to a fast-changing environment.

Here are the top five trends that are driving these new standards of CX expectations in higher education, according to Zendesk's CX Trends 2023:

1 AI experiences are becoming more evolved and seamless

Every day, chatbots are becoming more natural-sounding in their use of language. Bots are becoming very good at answering simple questions—and are often faster than live agents.

2 Conversational experiences are empowering the community

Students, parents, staff, and faculty now expect anyone they interact with to have full context of their previous interactions. If someone texts, emails, or calls back to an office—they want a new agent to be able to pick up the conversation seamlessly.

3 Students, parents, and faculty are eager for deeper personalization

Members of a school's community want that institution to use the large amount of data they possess to provide a truly personalized experience. Service data can provide insights including ticket volume, ticket time, sentiment, CSAT, channel used to contact, length of time to complete a ticket, and more.

4 The community's well-being and sentiment are reshaping CX

Nearly half of students, parents, staff, and faculty say that their frustration levels have grown over the past year, with 55 percent feeling increasingly stressed, and 52 percent stating that support interactions leave them exhausted. AI-driven technology can help to predict intent and sentiment, which can then help agents smooth ruffled feathers.

5 CX teams are breaking down silos as they become more integrated

To increase efficiency and provide a better experience for the community, data needs to be shared across teams. This way, the experience can be both personalized and immersive.

USC Anneberg:
A success story

The University of Southern California's famed journalism school, USC Anneberg, is noted for its innovation—in 2014, it opened Wallis Annenberg Hall, a 20,000 square foot "laboratory for change" that serves more than 3,400 faculty, staff, and students. But while its media center was state-of-the-art, its support platform was lacking.

"We were using old-fashioned ways to track everything," Ray Barkley, USC Annenberg's operations and budget manager explained. "If we got a specific request from a customer, for example, we would email the staff responsible for solving, and sometimes it was challenging for our customer service center to know what happened with the request."

Barkley and his team upgraded to Zendesk Support, and now enjoys a 98 percent average CSAT score.

"It has really helped us identify how long it takes to resolve a request," Barkley said. "If something will take a week to fix, we want the customer to know that within a day of submitting a request. We're now much better at providing follow-up to customers and setting their expectations."