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StarChart™: 2026 Student Success Series — Advising and Degree Planning

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INTRODUCTION AND REPORT SUMMARY

The Tambellini Group, the leading analyst and advisory firm focused on higher education, is pleased to present the *Tambellini StarChart™: 2026 Student Success Series — Advising and Degree Planning*. As institutions navigate unprecedented change associated with societal forces and economic factors, a StarChart™ is designed to help higher education institutions visually navigate their current technology landscape through the lens of usability and innovation—which Tambellini research shows are the two biggest drivers of how institutions make technology investments.

StarCharts are part of Tambellini’s multifaceted approach to helping institutions achieve their best technological state while also leveraging Tambellini’s Future Campus™ Framework. Tambellini’s Future Campus Framework complements the StarCharts, providing additional clarity on an institution’s needs and requirements and ultimately helping to inform and guide modernization initiatives. The Future Campus is Tambellini’s vision of where innovation and cutting-edge technology converge to create a sustainable, leading higher education institution.

This groundbreaking approach builds on more than 20 years of higher education research and proven success, providing relevant and timely contextualized information. Tambellini’s proprietary methodology leverages input from hundreds of higher education institutions, Tambellini analysts and strategic advisors, vendors, implementation partners, and more.

To include an advising and degree planning solution in the 2026 StarChart, Tambellini analysts evaluated solutions based on a specific set of criteria. Tambellini included advising and degree planning solutions that support comprehensive advising or degree planning, are currently being sold in the United States higher education market, and currently in use by at least one higher education institution.

Tambellini StarChart: 2026 Student Success Series — Advising and Degree Planning shows how advising and degree planning solutions scored against a matrix of usability and innovation criteria. The scoring is developed to help guide institutions in their journey to identify the best-fit solution to suit their needs.

It is important to note that placement on the StarChart does not necessarily mean a solution is the best fit for every institution. In fact, the underlying innovation in the approach proves that depending on the orientation of the institution, the same solution can appear stronger to one institution than another.

Higher education student success has evolved, and today there are five critical platform categories, including student advising, degree planning, advising and degree planning, student engagement, and career services. This StarChart, focused on three categories of student success—advising, degree planning, and advising and degree planning platforms—is part of a Student Success StarChart series with an additional publication on student analytics forthcoming.

The Advising and Degree Planning Vendors Evaluated

- Civitas Learning Student Impact Platform
- EAB Navigate360
- EAB Starfish
- Ellucian Student
- Kuali Advisor
- Oracle Student Cloud*
- QuadC Academic Support and Advising
- Salesforce Agentforce Education for Student Success
- Stellic Degree Management Suite
- Technolutions Slate for Student Success*
- Watermark Student Success & Engagement
- Workday Student*

* Oracle, Technolutions, and Workday opted not to fully participate in the vendor survey request for information, which may negatively impact their StarChart placement.

FUTURE CAMPUS IMPACTS

The Future Campus™ Framework is Tambellini’s innovative tool for generating strategic-level conversations and action for appropriate investments and divestments across the four key pillars of people, process, data, and technology. The Framework is scored across ten key higher education workspaces.

Advising and degree planning solutions can affect the following Future Campus workspaces:

Recruit

Advising and Degree Planning supports Recruit by making academic pathways, milestones, and completion expectations transparent earlier, which improves perceived fit and reduces uncertainty for students who want structure. Institutions that communicate program maps and advising support clearly can set more accurate expectations and reduce early program-switching friction. The measurable effect tends to appear in early success indicators and stronger program-level demand signals. “More transparency” surfaces complexity. Institutions need clean, governed program maps or risk confusing prospects.

Retain

Retain is the core Future Campus workspace most directly advanced by Advising and Degree Planning. These solutions operationalize proactive guidance through degree audits, structured plans, alerts, and coordinated interventions that strengthen credit momentum and reduce time-to-degree. Over time, they can materially improve completion and equity outcomes when institutions use planning and engagement data to identify advising gaps and target support earlier, instead of relying on inconsistent advisor practice or student self-advocacy. As advising capacity tightens, institutions will increasingly use planning data to triage need, standardize guidance, and scale support without linearly adding headcount.

Innovate

Advising and Degree Planning supports Innovate by turning planning and progress data into a practical feedback loop for improving programs and student support. When institutions use consistent degree plans, audits, and progress signals, they can pilot changes like guided pathways, broad program pathways, and smarter advising triage, then measure what worked and adjust quickly. That makes the institution more agile because pathway and policy updates can be evaluated with evidence, not just stories or isolated experiences. But innovation needs clear guardrails. Institutions should set decision rights for pathway design and define how exceptions are approved so new approaches do not create confusion or uneven advising outcomes.

NAVIGATING THE TAMBELLINI STARCHART

On the right side of the StarChart, institutions should expect to see the most complete and usable advising and degree planning solutions that have been proven to support institutions of all types and sizes. However, as you might expect, usability comes at a cost, possibly making these solutions cost-prohibitive for some institutions. The advising and degree planning solutions positioned on the left side of the StarChart support less functionality that is typically needed by large and complex institutions, and they have not demonstrated scalability in these larger segments. However, solutions on the left side are more affordable and have been proven to support the needs of small- to mid-market institutions, depending on their requirements.

Usability is evaluated based on the following factors:

- Vendor usability evaluation (customer support, software release cadence, implementation, training)
- Functional solution breadth
- US higher education market presence (demonstrated scalability in the market)
- Presence of 2026 market usability differentiators (ease of use, resources required to maintain the solution, proven in the market – reputation, selections, time on the market, and vendor solution support).

At the top of the Tambellini StarChart, institutions should expect to see products that both demonstrate innovation and possess the capacity for sustained and future innovation. The products on the bottom of the Tambellini StarChart generally have less embedded innovative features and may not have the ability to innovate and sustain that innovation at scale.

Innovation is evaluated based on the following general factors to be further detailed within the product specific StarCharts:

- Vendor capacity for future and sustained innovation
- Innovative functionality within core features
- Presence of 2026 market innovation differentiators (real-time student system integration, mobile accessibility for students, multiple types of analytics offerings, analytics maturity, and student and staff user experience).

Tambellini StarChart Orbits further segment vendor solutions into three categories on the StarChart. The **Commander** category is the outermost orbit located in the top right corner of the StarChart. Institutions should anticipate that solutions in the **Commander** Orbit are market leaders with highly innovative and user-centric designs that set the benchmark for what is possible. The **Navigator** category is located in the middle orbit. Solutions in this orbit demonstrate a balance of innovation and usability with more comprehensive and adaptable capabilities beyond niche specialization. The **Specialist** category is the innermost orbit. Solutions in this orbit represent niche offerings that are more narrowly focused on specific

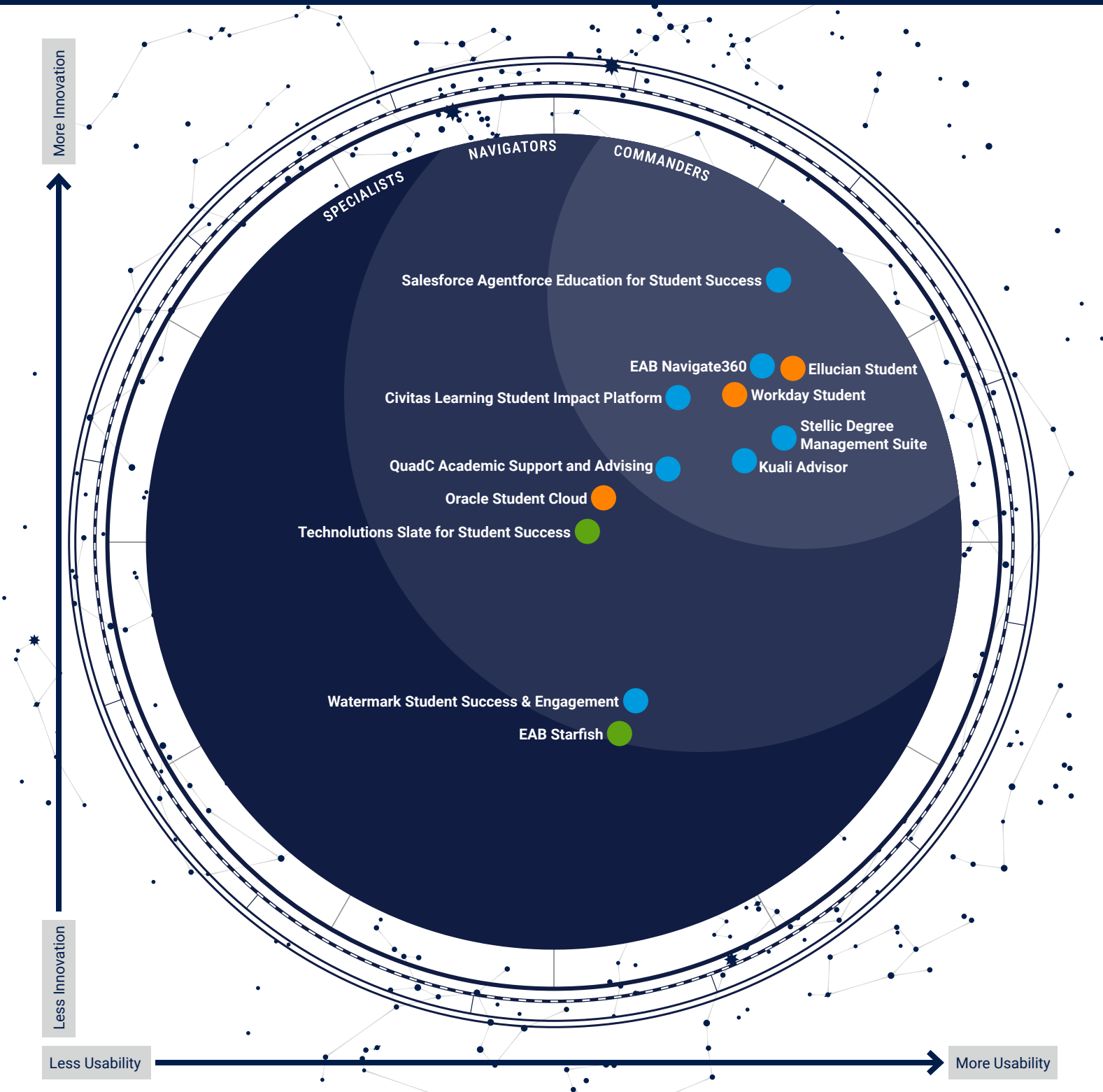
technology and functional needs, providing high-value to its clients and meeting focused market demands.

Tambellini also positions products not yet generally available on the market. These are called **Forming Planets** and their position will reflect our projection for their score once released. A solution that has been announced and is in development will receive an outline of a planet.

An important consideration is that no position on the StarChart is either “good” or “bad” for all institutions. Those institutions with more complex needs and resources are likely to focus on one area of the StarChart, while other institutions with fewer resources and complexity may opt to focus on another area. The StarChart is not aimed at being the sole resource to make a final decision, but rather it provides a point of navigation to help make sense of the market, and down-select to a more manageable number of products to take that next step.

For a more nuanced understanding of the chart and the particular vendor solutions, please contact your Tambellini Client Success Associate to arrange a meeting with a Tambellini Analyst.

StarChart™: 2026 Student Success Series – Advising and Degree Planning



- KEY:**
- Advising and Degree Planning
 - Advising
 - Student Information System (SIS)

Usability measures the degree of ease in using a system and the degree of breadth in suitability for users to accomplish objectives.

Innovation measures the degree of addressing unique challenges and requirements with novel and/or advanced capabilities.

Forming Systems are in development but not generally available. Their positions are a projection.

STUDENT SUCCESS: ADVISING AND DEGREE PLANNING SOLUTIONS EVALUATION INSIGHTS

Advising

- **EAB Starfish** is an advising solution oriented around case coordination, early alerts, and advising workflow management. It has a large market presence, particularly among public two-year and public four-year institutions in the United States. Core capabilities include early alerts, notes, referrals, campaigns, and coordination tools that help staff document interactions and manage follow-up actions. The product is delivered as a cloud solution and is generally designed to integrate with institutional systems for identity, student context, and communications.

The solution differentiates through mature workflows for alerts, referrals, and coordination across support networks, supporting more consistent issue resolution. It is often used for support-focused advising without replacing student information systems or degree audit tools. The current user interface is described as dated and the platform can require significant ongoing maintenance. Product direction appears more focused on supporting and maintaining Starfish's established advising workflows, while EAB's broader roadmap and investment emphasis in this area are more concentrated on Navigate360.

- **Technolutions Slate for Student Success** is an advising workflow system that extends the Slate platform into post-enrollment support processes. Institutions use it when they want a configurable, database-centered environment for appointments, communications, and case management, often aligned to existing Slate usage patterns. Core functionality includes advising appointments and office hours, early alerts, portals, communications, and centralized tracking of student interactions and support cases. The platform is delivered as a cloud service and is designed to integrate with institutional systems, including calendars, to support scheduling and workflow execution.

The solution differentiates through configurability and workflow construction for institutions that prefer to build institution-specific processes and portals within a consistent Slate framework. It also emphasizes self-service scheduling and staff-side case coordination to reduce manual routing and back-and-forth communication. Slate's roadmap includes integrating course catalog information to enable additional degree-planning views for advisors.

Advising and Degree Planning Platform

- **Civitas Learning Student Impact Platform** is a platform combining advising workflows with academic planning tools. It is used by a mix of two-year and four-year institutions, and is presented as a unified environment that combines institution-specific analytics with coordinated student support workflows. Core capabilities include shared student context for advisors, outreach and engagement tools, and planning functions that help students build schedules while surfacing constraints such as prerequisites and course availability. The platform is designed to integrate with institutional data sources such as

the SIS and LMS and bring insights into advising workflows, and includes a SQL-accessible data environment for institutional analysis and reporting.

The solution differentiates through institution-specific modeling and analytics embedded in workflows, including advisor preparation, interaction summarization, and planning experiences oriented toward schedule building and reducing registration friction. Deployments can be modular, with planning and scheduling commonly deployed together. Civitas Learning also offers its Data Lakehouse separately from the full Student Impact Platform for institutions seeking access to its data infrastructure capabilities without adopting the broader platform. Roadmap direction emphasizes conversational and agent-based experiences intended to reduce transactional advising work and speed segment creation and outreach execution.

- **EAB Navigate360's advising and retention CRM** is focused on coordinated support workflows and student engagement across web and mobile. It is widely adopted across higher education and used by a mix of two-year and four-year institutions, including research universities, to support advising at scale. Core capabilities include appointment scheduling, case and referral workflows, advising notes, campaigns, and student planning experiences that support term-based course mapping with guardrails. Navigate360 integrates with key student systems to support data-informed outreach and shared advising context.

The solution differentiates through packaged implementation patterns that emphasize configurable journeys, nudges, and case workflows that can be rolled out in phases to match institutional capacity. It also embeds AI assistance capabilities, including advisor note transcription and staff-side reporting that can be turned into actions such as campaigns. Roadmap direction includes expanded agent-supported campaign execution and continued investment in AI-enhanced workflows.

- **Kuali Advisor** is a degree audit and planning platform where audit results anchor advising workflows and validate degree plans. It is delivered as a cloud application that integrates with institutional student systems to evaluate degree requirements. Core capabilities include degree audit execution, student planning, exception workflows, and advisor dashboards used to review progress and compliance. The system emphasizes interoperability with SIS data and a configurable interface model intended to support institution-specific widgets and reporting views.

The solution differentiates through fast audit runtime and dynamic requirement evaluation, including planning actions that are validated against audit logic to reduce mismatches between planned and applicable coursework. It also emphasizes extensibility through configurable widgets and institution-requested analytics views delivered through implementation partnerships. Advisor is part of Kuali's broader ecosystem of higher education administrative applications, which can be relevant for institutions standardizing on Kuali across adjacent domains. Roadmap direction is focused on expanding Advisor beyond audit and planning into broader advising workflow support, with emphasis on embedded AI, task and intervention management, risk scoring, natural-language analytics, and mobile access.

- **QuadC Academic Support and Advising** is focused on coordinating advising and surfacing early warning indicators across campus support teams. Core capabilities include identifying at-risk students, communication and collaboration tools, and operational support for delivering services. It is used where institutions want a layer to manage services such as tutoring, mentoring, and related support workflows. The platform is delivered as a cloud service and is positioned to align multiple support functions rather than serve as a standalone degree audit system.

QuadC leverages AI as a workflow enabler to help staff act earlier and work more efficiently, including triaging early alerts, managing student cases, and streamlining routine advising activities. The platform's orientation is toward intervention coordination, with features intended to help staff identify risk signals and organize responses across service providers. Roadmap direction for the next 12 months includes improving the user interface within degree planning functionality to support easier use of its AI-built capabilities as well as adding multi-factor authentication.

- **Salesforce Agentforce Education for Student Success** is an advising and degree planning solution that is built on an education data model and workflow automation. It is used by institutions pursuing a broader Salesforce platform strategy, particularly where CRM-style case management and cross-campus workflow orchestration are priorities. Core capabilities include a student-facing view for self-service and next-step visibility, advisor dashboards for workload and caseload management, and a drag-and-drop degree planner. The solution is delivered as a cloud platform with integrations, analytics components, and embedded AI features aligned to the broader Salesforce data layer.

The solution includes preconfigured, role-based experiences and conversational analytics agents intended to support advisors and leaders, alongside unified advising, engagement, and student support workflows. The platform has expanded to include guided scheduler configuration and LMS integration capabilities, adding support for scheduler setup and learning-system connectivity. Over the next 12 to 18 months, Salesforce's roadmap includes additional analytics components, delegated access management, and future degree audit and graduation clearance functionality.

- **Stellic Degree Management Suite** is a degree audit and planning platform with advising workflow modules, positioned as a suite that centralizes progress tracking and multi-term planning, primarily through Progress (degree progress and student planning), Care (advising), and Explore (transfer and prospective-student pathway guidance). It is adopted across a range of institution types and is often implemented where schools want to consolidate advising transactions with audit and planning in one environment. Stellic is delivered as a cloud service and commonly integrates with SIS data and catalog or curriculum sources to keep plans and audits aligned.

The solution differentiates through a modular approach that institutions can phase, typically starting with degree audit and expanding into additional workflows and registration-related capabilities over time. Roadmap direction includes more chat-driven planning features for students, expanded compliance reporting to help students verify requirements, and career and skills modules to link planning with future goals.

- **Watermark Student Success & Engagement** is to coordinate outreach, alerts, and advisor workflows across campus support teams. Among Watermark's customers, small public two-year institutions represent a significant portion. Core capabilities include team-based advising, appointment scheduling, advising notes and tasks, student success plans, milestones, early alert triage, configurable risk thresholds, and multi-channel communications across email, text, in-app, and push messaging. The platform also includes degree audit, what-if analysis, and term-by-term academic planning to help advisors and students track progress and support planning decisions.

The solution differentiates through combining advising workflow management with embedded degree audit, what-if analysis, and term-by-term planning in a single student support environment, giving institutions a connected view of outreach, risk, academic progress, and plan status. The product currently uses configured workflows, rules-based alerts, and staff-led interventions as the primary mechanisms for coordinating support and guiding action. Roadmap items include AI-assisted drafting of advising summaries and next-best-action recommendations.

Student Information System (SIS)

- **Ellucian Student** is Ellucian's current positioning for its student environment as a suite that combines the student information system with adjacent capabilities for advising, degree audit, and degree planning. This approach fits institutions pursuing an ERP-led footprint and coordinated workflows across student records, audit, planning, and registration. Ellucian Student is used across two-year and four-year public as well as four-year private institutions. Ellucian presents advising and degree planning as connected capabilities that use audit results, program requirements, course availability, and student context to support planning and registration decisions.

Differentiation centers on a connected experience across advising, audit, planning, and registration, with workflow and data exchange occurring within the broader Ellucian Student environment. Ellucian also highlights transfer and credential-related functions. Roadmap direction includes AI-supported workflow assistance, such as drafting student communications and other guided actions within the student success workflow.

- **Oracle Student Cloud** is Oracle's cloud-native student information system intended to serve as a system of record for core student lifecycle processes, with advising and degree planning positioned within a broader student administration suite. Oracle Student Cloud is currently deployed in a limited number of two-year and four-year public and four-year private institutions. The platform supports baseline enterprise requirements such as auditability, multilingual support, and integration to campus systems and data platforms. Advising and degree progress functions are present, though several degree planning capabilities appear staged for future delivery rather than broadly established at scale.

Oracle's approach is positioned as SIS-native, with advising and planning expected to sit close to student records, policies, and administrative workflows rather than operating as a standalone point solution. Roadmap emphasis centers on advancing degree planning

and transfer-related functions, including degree audit “what-if” planning and transfer credit mapping.

- **Workday Student** is Workday’s SIS-integrated student system positioned within a unified platform that also spans HR and finance. Workday’s higher education footprint is expanding, and Student is often evaluated as part of a broader Workday platform decision. For Advising and Degree Planning, Workday supports workflows for academic progress against requirements, academic plans including templates, and planning-to-registration tasks intended to keep students on a viable path to completion. The approach emphasizes extensibility through partner-delivered capabilities via Built on Workday, alongside Workday’s AI strategy for workflow assistance and data retrieval.

Differentiation centers on alignment between advising, planning, and operational execution within a unified data model that can support cross-functional service delivery. Workday also describes an agent strategy, including an “agent system of record” concept and student administration-oriented capabilities aimed at reducing manual effort in transcript and transfer processes that constrain degree progress workflows. Roadmap items include transcript processing, transfer credit assist, and student data insights via Workday Ask.

EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

Vendor solutions are positioned on the StarChart™ based on a proprietary algorithm that leverages usability and innovation data points. Usability data points include institutional usability surveys, functional breadth, segment presence, and demonstrated scalability. Innovation data points benchmark each solution's ability to address unique functional and operational requirements and the vendor's ability to sustain the innovation at scale.

Tambellini conducts proprietary, original research, and information used in the StarChart is derived from System Usability Scale (SUS) survey results, vendor surveys, interviews, selection data, and other information sourced from Tambellini Analysts, Advisors, and the Research team as appropriate. Usability is evaluated across criteria categories, including cost, implementation, US market segment presence, functional solution breadth, customer support, software release cadence, implementation, training, and customer experience. Innovation is evaluated across criteria categories, including vendor company and resource profiles, functional solution breadth, integrations, security, partnerships, and capacity for future and sustained innovation.

In 2024, Tambellini introduced three orbits as part of its StarCharts, including Commanders, Navigators, and Specialists. Orbits in this framework represent the path and reach of a solution's innovation and usability in the technological universe. The concept of an orbit allows us to visualize how closely aligned a vendor is with core market needs, as well as the extent to which they impact and are interconnected with the broader ecosystem.

- **Commanders** stand at the forefront of innovation and usability, leading the industry with groundbreaking technologies and user-centric designs. Solutions in this orbit command the highest category, distinguished by their visionary approach and the transformative impact of their solutions. Commanders set the benchmarks for what is possible, pushing the boundaries of technology and usability to new heights. Their leadership is characterized by a consistent track record of excellence, significant market influence, and the ability to anticipate and shape future trends. Commanders not only excel in their offerings but also drive the industry forward, inspiring change and innovation across the technology landscape.
- **Navigators** demonstrate a balanced blend of innovation and usability, guiding their customers through the complexities of the technology landscape with reliable and forward-thinking solutions. Positioned in the middle category, Navigators have successfully expanded their capabilities beyond niche specialization to offer more comprehensive and adaptable technologies. Solutions in this orbit are marked by their ability to steer development and adoption in promising directions, leveraging emerging trends and customer insights to navigate the market effectively. Navigators represent a critical bridge between focused expertise and broader market leadership, offering versatile and evolving solutions.

- **Specialists** represent vendor solutions designed to operate in a specific niche or aspect of technology. While they may not yet showcase broad innovation or high usability across a wide range of criteria, their focused, targeted solutions carve out significant value within their domain. Specialists are recognized for their deep understanding and capabilities in particular areas, making them valuable partners for specific needs. Their concentrated approach allows for specialized offerings that meet distinct market demands.

Tambellini's proprietary algorithm uses more than a hundred data points to position solutions on the StarChart, including information from surveys, vendor briefings, industry knowledge, institutional interviews, and more. All vendor solutions in each StarChart are evaluated using the exact same methodology and algorithm based on institutional criteria deemed most important by higher education. Additionally, Tambellini applies proprietary weighting to every StarChart, to ensure institutional criteria deemed most important in the current year's market, according to our research, has an appropriate impact on the final score. This weighting is applied consistently across all vendors and products in each StarChart. Incomplete information provided by vendors lowers the usability and innovation scores for their products. Tambellini reviews vendor survey responses against our body of research to ensure accuracy.

THE FUTURE CAMPUS

Tambellini's Future Campus™ Framework complements the StarCharts, providing additional clarity on an institution's needs and requirements, and ultimately helping to inform and guide their modernization. Tambellini analysts have identified that resilient institutions prepared to thrive through the changing digital landscape need to address a core set of problems—such as offering in-demand programs and experiences with proven employment outcomes, attracting and enrolling the right students, delivering the right experiences to retain and graduate students, modernizing operations, and right-sizing technical debt—to name a few.

Solving these problems requires a focus on people, process, data, and technology in parallel to propel institutions to the next state—their future campus. The Future Campus is Tambellini's vision and framework where innovation and cutting-edge technology converge to create a sustainable, leading higher education technology ecosystem. Not every institution will successfully make the transition. We are living through a pivotal turning point, forcing institutions to modernize at an unprecedented pace in order to remain competitive.