



eCAMPUS NEWS  
eBOOK



**Adobe Acrobat Sign**

## The Payoff of Going Paperless in Higher Education

Automated workflows and e-signatures can save institutions time and money—while enhancing staff and student experiences.

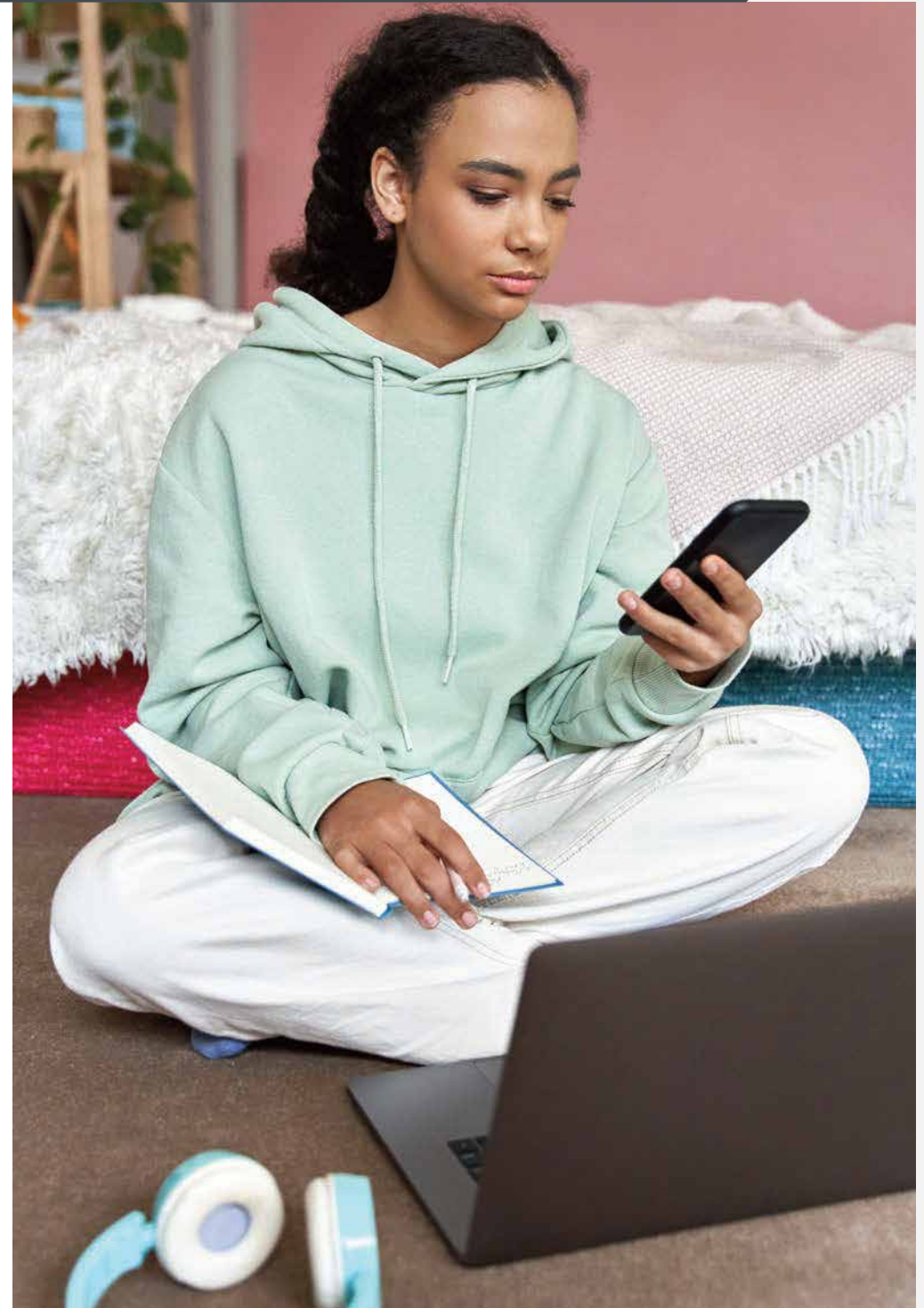
## The Emerging Need for Digital Workflows

COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation on college campuses nationwide. One key change to emerge from the pandemic has been the use of digital workflows and secure electronic signatures for completing required paperwork while campus buildings were closed.

Colleges and universities were in various stages of digitizing their back-office functionality prior to the pandemic. Many institutions had replaced paper-based forms with digital versions, but collecting signatures still often required a lot of paper shuffling. Students, employees, contractors, and others would frequently print out documents, sign them, and then return them in person or via email—or even fax.

The pandemic has exposed the inefficiencies in these manual workflows. “When we’re all spread out, it’s much more difficult—and we have to do a better job of moving students’ work around and getting things signed off,” says Steven Baule, an assistant professor of leadership education at Winona State University in Minnesota. Manual workflows “take time,” he notes, “and we have to move really slowly.”

Replacing these manual processes with [paperless workflows](#) that are secure and compliant can improve the experience for students and employees, while saving institutions time and money. Although many colleges have added solutions for digitizing their back-office workflows in response to the pandemic, adoption varies widely from one campus to another—and even from department to department.



## Adobe Acrobat Sign Webinar Series Recap

Recently, eCampus News and Adobe hosted a series of webinars on automated digital workflows.

This interactive eBook summarizes the content from these webinars and includes video highlights. It outlines the benefits of moving to secure digital forms and automated processes in more detail, and it reveals how colleges and universities can build on the progress they've made during the pandemic in transitioning to a digital office environment.

By implementing proven change management strategies and thinking through fundamental knowledge management questions, institutions can achieve true digital transformation of their back-office functionality.

**“When we’re all spread out, it’s much more difficult—and we have to do a better job of moving students’ work around and getting things signed off,” says Steven Baule, an assistant professor of leadership education at Winona State University in Minnesota. Manual workflows “take time,” he notes, “and we have to move really slowly.”**

### Webinar Series Speakers



**Dr. Steven Baule**  
Assistant Professor of  
Leadership Education,  
Winona State University



**Rico D'Amore**  
Director of Academic  
Services Technology,  
Benedictine University



**Brian Kelly**  
Director of the Cybersecurity  
Program, EDUCAUSE



**Roman Klinkovich**  
Senior Leader of Engineering,  
Adobe



**Chitra Mittha**  
Director, Education Institutions  
Marketing, Adobe



**Peter Mosinskis**  
Deputy Chief Information Officer,  
California State University Office  
of the Chancellor



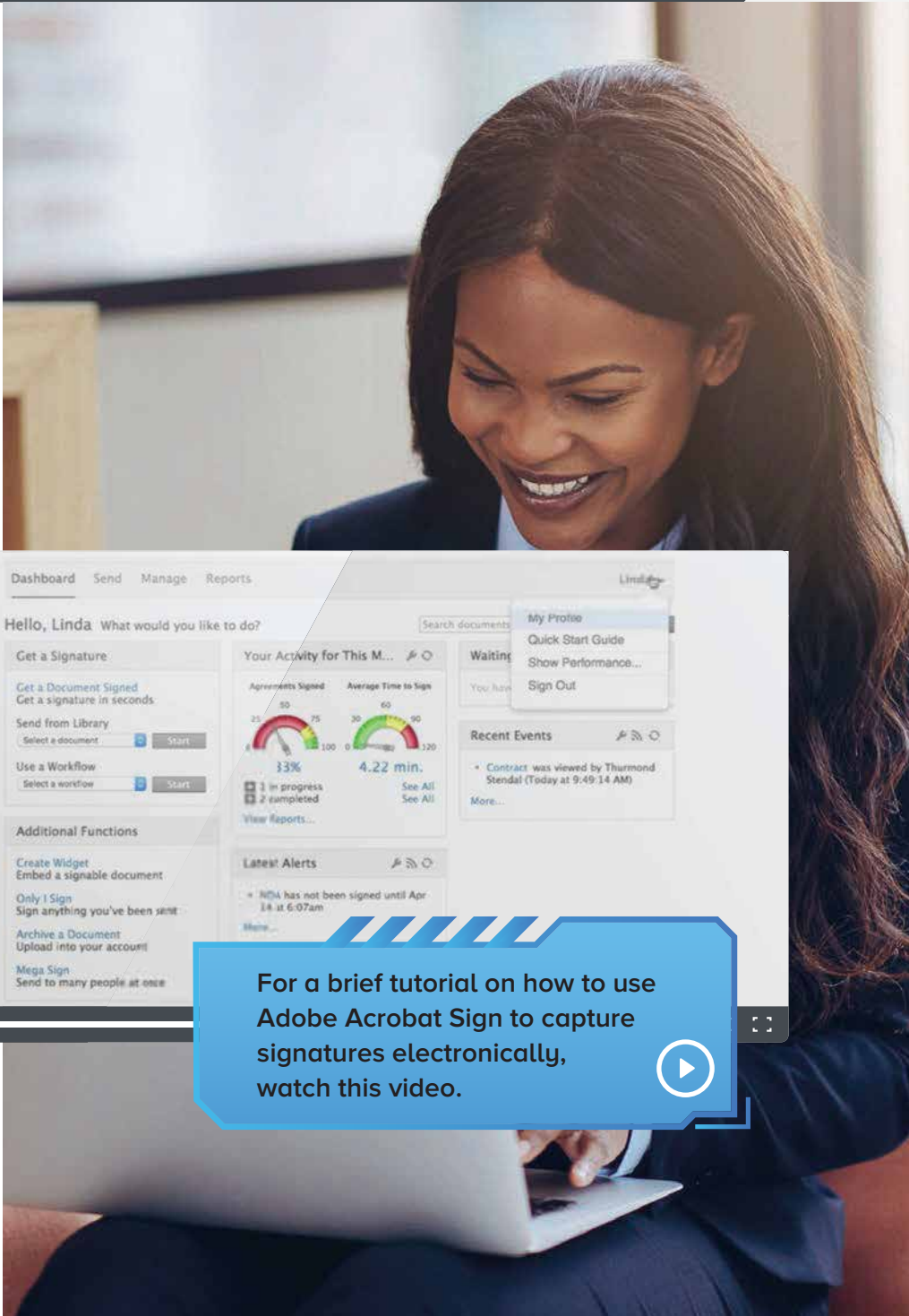
## How paperless workflows work

As the pandemic has made clear, distributing forms and collecting signatures using manual processes is time-consuming, costly, and inefficient. With an automated solution such as [Adobe Acrobat Sign](#), however, users can send documents to be signed electronically. Electronic signatures are secure, legally valid, trusted, and enforceable in almost every industrialized country in the world.

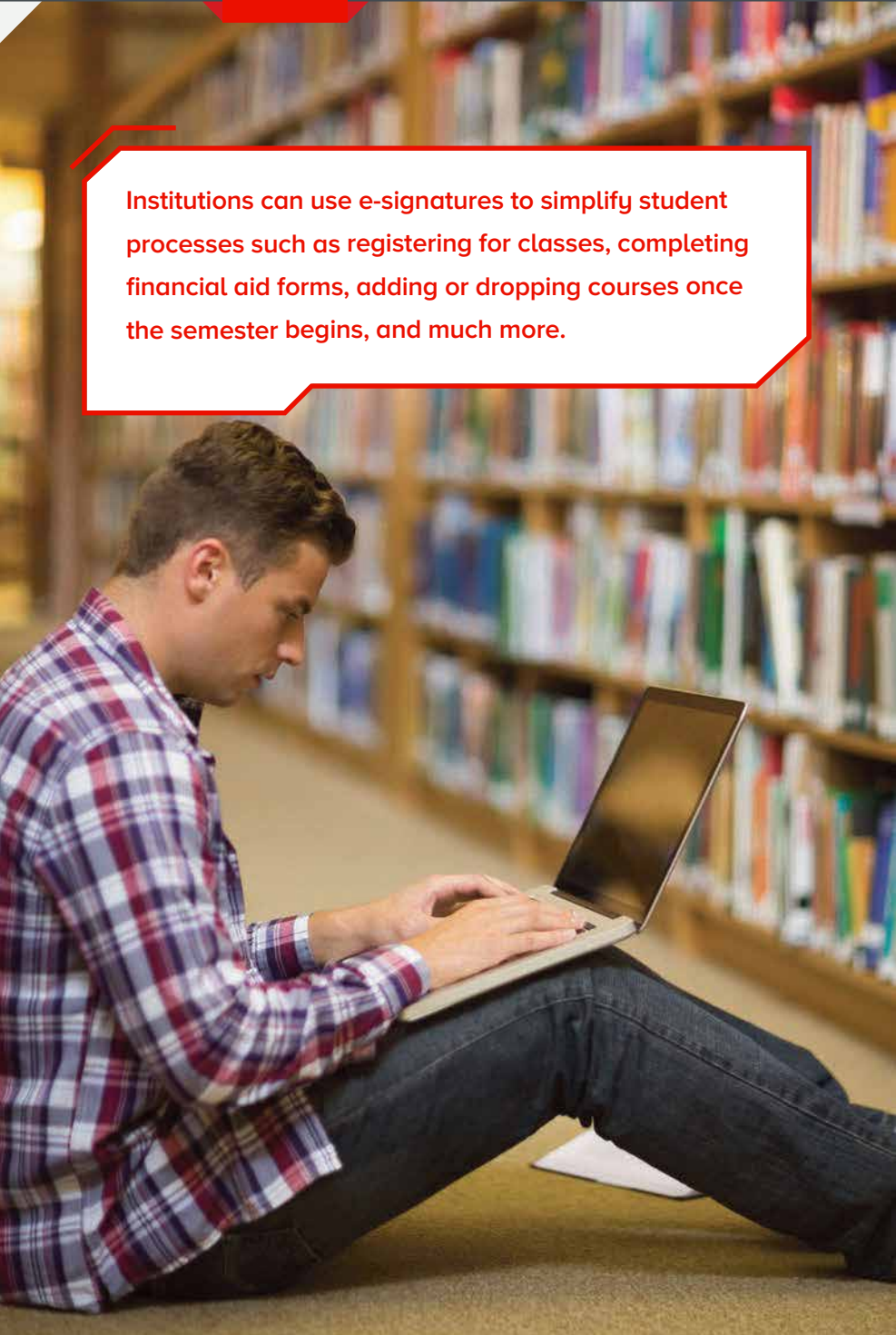
This e-signature process occurs instantly in three easy steps: Users upload the document, type in the signer's email address, and hit send. Signers simply click a link to review and sign the document electronically from within a web browser on their computer or any mobile device—with no downloads or signups needed. Institutions can also create and host forms online using [Adobe Acrobat Sign web forms](#).

The Adobe Acrobat Sign platform enables administrators to track and manage the status of all digital forms and documents, send signature request reminders, cancel requests, and view a detailed audit trail for any transaction. It also works with many other software programs already in use among colleges.

As Microsoft's preferred [e-signature solution](#), for instance, Adobe Acrobat Sign integrates seamlessly with Microsoft applications: Users can create, edit, and sign documents without leaving the Microsoft 365 environment.



The image shows a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blazer, smiling as she looks at a laptop. The laptop screen displays the Adobe Acrobat Sign dashboard. The dashboard includes a navigation bar with 'Dashboard', 'Send', 'Manage', and 'Reports'. Below the navigation bar, there is a greeting 'Hello, Linda' and a search bar. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'Get a Signature' with options for 'Get a Document Signed' and 'Send from Library'; 'Your Activity for This Month' with two gauges for 'Agreements Signed' (33%) and 'Average Time to Sign' (4.22 min); 'Waiting' section; 'Recent Events' showing a contract viewed; and 'Additional Functions' with options like 'Create Widget', 'Only I Sign', 'Archive a Document', and 'Mega Sign'. A blue callout box with a play button icon is overlaid on the bottom right of the dashboard, containing the text: 'For a brief tutorial on how to use Adobe Acrobat Sign to capture signatures electronically, watch this video.'



Institutions can use e-signatures to simplify student processes such as registering for classes, completing financial aid forms, adding or dropping courses once the semester begins, and much more.

## What forms and workflows can you digitize?

Streamlining workflows using digital forms and electronic signatures can build efficiencies throughout higher education. While the potential use cases are nearly endless, here are some examples that serve to illustrate the power of back-office automation for colleges and universities.

### ***Student administration***

Institutions can use [e-signatures](#) to simplify student processes such as registering for classes, completing financial aid forms, adding or dropping courses once the semester begins, and much more.

### ***Hiring and onboarding employees***

The paperwork that's required when colleges and universities hire a new employee can be overwhelming. E-signatures and automated processes can simplify this process while helping HR departments track and manage compliance. That's especially critical at a time when staffing shortages are hindering the ability of colleges and universities to deliver exceptional service to students—and each day that a position goes unfilled can be costly.

### ***Financial administration***

E-signatures can shorten the procurement process, from seeking approvals to the signing of contracts—which expedites the delivery of needed services to students and employees.



## Key benefits

As higher education leaders have seen firsthand during the pandemic, it's not convenient to send paper forms back and forth, collect physical signatures, and track form completion status—especially when buildings are closed for any reason. Moving these processes to a secure, automated digital environment can...

### **Save time.**

Independent research confirms that secure digital forms and workflows can save users time. [A third-party analysis by Forrester Consulting](#) indicates that reducing the steps it takes to get a manual signature saves employees 1.5 hours per transaction, on average. Over the course of three years, this adds up to an average of 125 hours saved per user.

### **Save money.**

With manual processes and paper-based forms and documents, institutions spend a significant amount of money on paper and shipping costs each year. The Forrester Consulting analysis revealed an average cost savings of \$21.50 per transaction in switching to fully digital workflows.

### **Improve the staff and student experience.**

With digital workflows, stakeholders can complete and sign forms using any internet-connected device, including a smartphone. This makes the process more convenient for faculty and staff who are on the go, especially those who aren't tethered to a desk all day. It also helps institutions meet students where they are, which is increasingly online using their phones.

By deploying Adobe Acrobat Sign, organizations can...



Adopting digital workflows helps colleges meet changing consumer expectations, notes Chitra Mittha, director of marketing to educational institutions for Adobe. “We have reached a time when, as consumers, we expect certain digital experiences,” she observes. For instance, consumers now expect to be able to complete most transactions online—and that applies to signing documents as well.

Streamlining administrative workflows can enhance the student experience, which is a key strategy for recruiting and retaining students. With colleges nationwide [facing declining enrollment](#), anything they can do to attract and retain students is a welcome development.



**Listen to Winona State University's Steven Baule as he explains the need for colleges to make registration and other processes as easy as possible for students.**





## Secure, compliant data management with every transaction

Data privacy and security are top-of-mind issues for campus leaders, as they should be. Many forms and documents within higher education contain the Social Security numbers and other personally identifiable information for students or employees. If stakeholders aren't confident in the security of digital workflows, they won't be inclined to adopt these processes.

A common concern about signing and submitting documents electronically is that it's not as secure as obtaining a manual signature. In reality, it's even more secure.

Adobe Acrobat Sign is certified compliant with the world's most rigorous security standards, such as ISO 27001, SOC 2 Type 2, and PCI DSS—technologies widely used in the banking and credit card industries. In addition, role-based permissions are built into the platform. Users can specify who has access to certain documents, and only authorized users can view them.

With Adobe Acrobat Sign, staff members don't have to run to the printer or the fax machine worried that somebody else could grab a confidential document. The system requires authentication to help ensure that only the person who needs to sign a document can see it.



Listen to Brian Kelly, director of the EDUCAUSE Cybersecurity Program, as he explains how modern digital workflows are actually more secure than legacy systems and processes.



Contrast that with the security of paper-based forms, where anyone can view the documents if they're left out in the open—and data can also be retrieved from a printer, copier, or fax machine by anyone with the technical know-how.

To learn more about the security of digital documents and workflows within Adobe Acrobat Sign, visit the [Adobe Trust Center](#).

**“Technology is the easy part in some sense. It's the people and the processes that determine whether a digital transformation will be successful,” Adobe's Mittha says. “This is where IT departments really have to take leadership and be a champion for guiding the process and supporting that transition.”**

## Transitioning seamlessly to a paperless campus environment

The adoption of electronic signatures and automated workflows within higher education depends on users embracing the technology and being comfortable with it. This, in turn, requires campus leaders to focus on educating users and establishing sound policies for how documents will be shared and stored.

“Technology is the easy part in some sense. It's the people and the processes that determine whether a digital transformation will be successful,” Adobe's Mittha says. “This is where [IT departments](#) really have to take leadership and be a champion for guiding the process and supporting that transition.”





## 3 ways to overcome resistance and achieve full adoption

Here are three ways that colleges and universities can move beyond the use of electronic signatures as a short-term response to the pandemic and ensure that they become a permanent, everyday feature of campus operations.

### 01

#### Establish clear knowledge management practices.

“Data archival and retrieval are key components of the digital document journey,” Mittha says. “Technology can only get you so far.” How an automated system is implemented, and the policies that govern its use, play a key role in an institution’s success—and these policies are unique to each institution.

Some key questions for leaders to answer include:

- Where should documents be stored?
- How should they be named so the right people can find them?
- Who is authorized to request someone’s e-signature?
- Who has permission to view the documents?
- How long should digital documents be retained?


“You can store documents in a SharePoint drive or in Teams or Dropbox,” Mittha says, “but if the file hierarchy isn’t set up in the right way, you won’t be able to retrieve them.”

### 02

#### Engage reluctant or late adopters.

“I think the resistance (to using technology) has generally decreased over the course of the pandemic,” says Peter Mosinskis, deputy chief information officer at the California State University (CSU) Office of the Chancellor. “People have naturally become more comfortable with processes and tools, and they’ve had to adapt to a different way of doing things. There’s an increase in awareness of the power of these tools for digital transformation.”

That said, there are still many employees who are resistant to change. Engaging with them and demonstrating how their use of automated tools will free up time for them to do what they truly love can help get them on board.

 Listen to Adobe’s Chitra Mittha as she describes how to secure the buy-in of reluctant or late adopters.



### 03

#### Help users feel comfortable with the technology.

“Walking users through the process and making sure they’re comfortable with it is also essential for getting them to buy in. Colleges and universities that are most successful in leading digital transformations combine bottom-up and top-down leadership approaches to encourage technology adoption,”

 says CSU’s Peter Mosinskis.



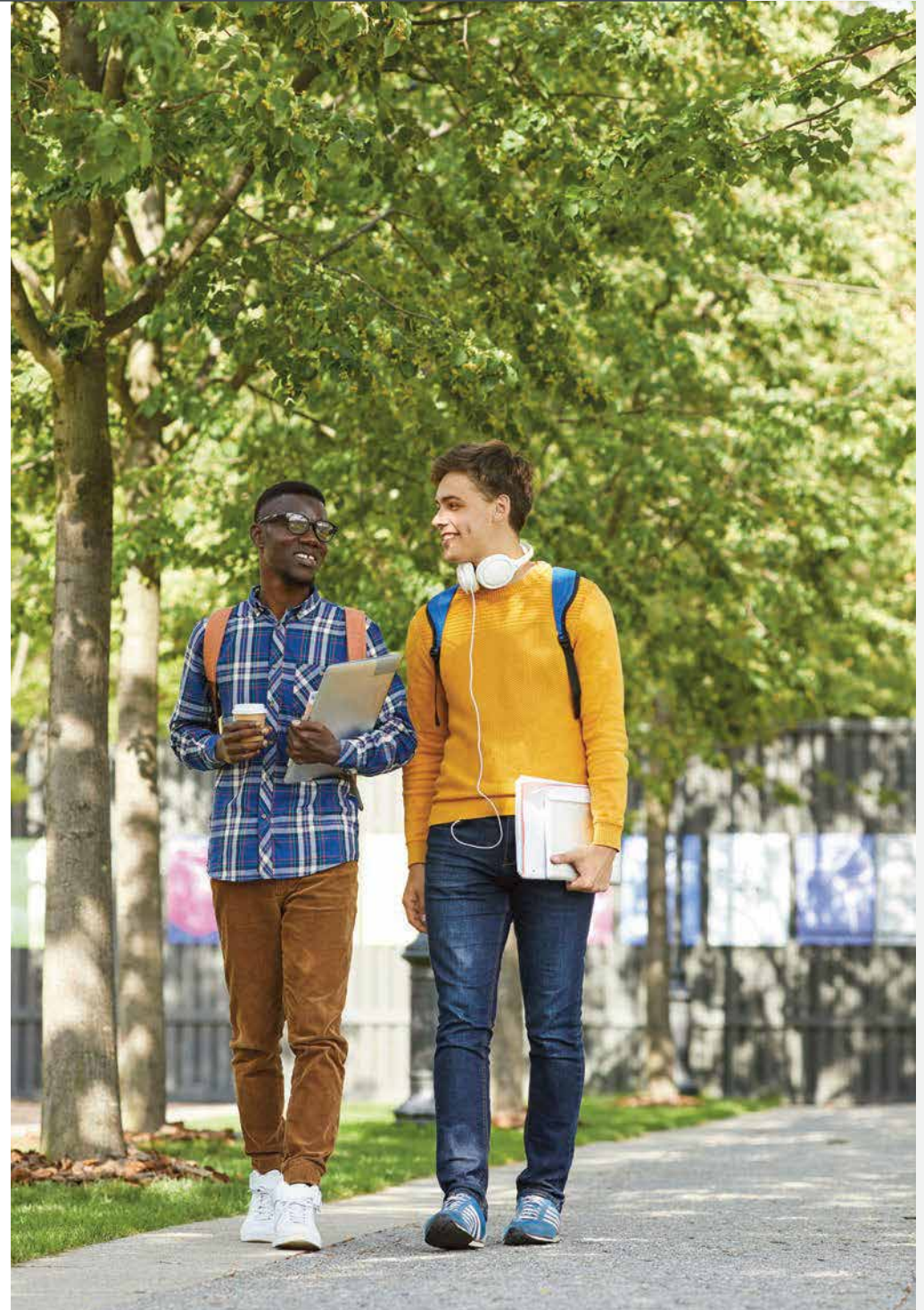
## The final word

The pandemic has brought about dramatic changes in higher education. Now, leaders have a key opportunity to build on these changes by transforming their practices and streamlining operations for the long term.

Replacing manual forms and processes with electronic signatures and fully digital workflows can protect the data on those forms more effectively, while saving time and money and improving the experience for everyone involved. This could also help colleges and universities improve student satisfaction at a time when recruitment and retention are of critical importance.

To ensure widespread adoption of these tools and practices, campus leaders must focus on proven change management strategies, such as establishing clear knowledge management policies and engaging reluctant users.

For more information about how Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Acrobat Sign can improve efficiency within higher education, visit [AcrobatForEducation.com](https://AcrobatForEducation.com).





## Adobe Acrobat Sign

Adobe Acrobat Sign helps schools go paperless, which revolutionizes the business of running an institution. Use Acrobat Sign to create seamless workflows that are simple for staff and students to complete and can save your school both time and money. Reduce errors, increase security and compliance, and foster operational resiliency. From HR, finance, and procurement forms, to student-facing forms like IEPs and device consent forms, paperless workflows powered by Acrobat Sign create digital experiences in schools that make life a little easier for the entire campus community. **For more information, visit [AcrobatForEducation.com](https://AcrobatForEducation.com).**

### Additional Resources

**Back-Office Innovations in Higher Ed  
Part One: Devising a More  
Dynamic Workflow** (Nov. 4, 2021 webinar)

WATCH NOW 

**Back-Office Innovations in Higher Ed  
Part Two: Creating Secure,  
Compliant Workflows** (Dec. 1, 2021 webinar)

WATCH NOW 



eCAMPUS NEWS

**This eBook was produced by eCampus News**, the leading online platform that delivers daily technology news and information to higher education administrators, educators, and technology professionals, and dedicated to the advancement and wise use of technology to improve teaching and learning for all. eCampus News offers ed-tech decision-makers a wide range of informative content—including newsletters, webinars, case studies, white papers, websites, and more—that provide in-depth coverage of the latest innovations, trends, and real-world solutions impacting the education community. **Explore more at [www.eCampusNews.com](https://www.eCampusNews.com).**