



2017

# Online Giving Trends in Higher Education

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# Online donations to higher education institutions increased by 12% in 2016

Higher education institutions experienced an increase in online giving in 2016 compared to the previous year.

iModules Software compared educational fundraising activity of its clients between calendar years 2015 and 2016 to evaluate trends in advancement at four-year higher education institutions. Institutions included in the analysis used iModules' Encompass platform for online giving collection throughout the 2015 and 2016 calendar years. In 2016, the number of online donations to four-year institutions processed by the Encompass platform increased by 7% over 2015. More significantly, dollars raised online increased by 12%. This represents a year-over-year increase, although this increase was smaller than increases seen in the previous period. Additionally, the size of the average online gift to this group grew by almost 5% in 2016, with an average online donation of \$373.

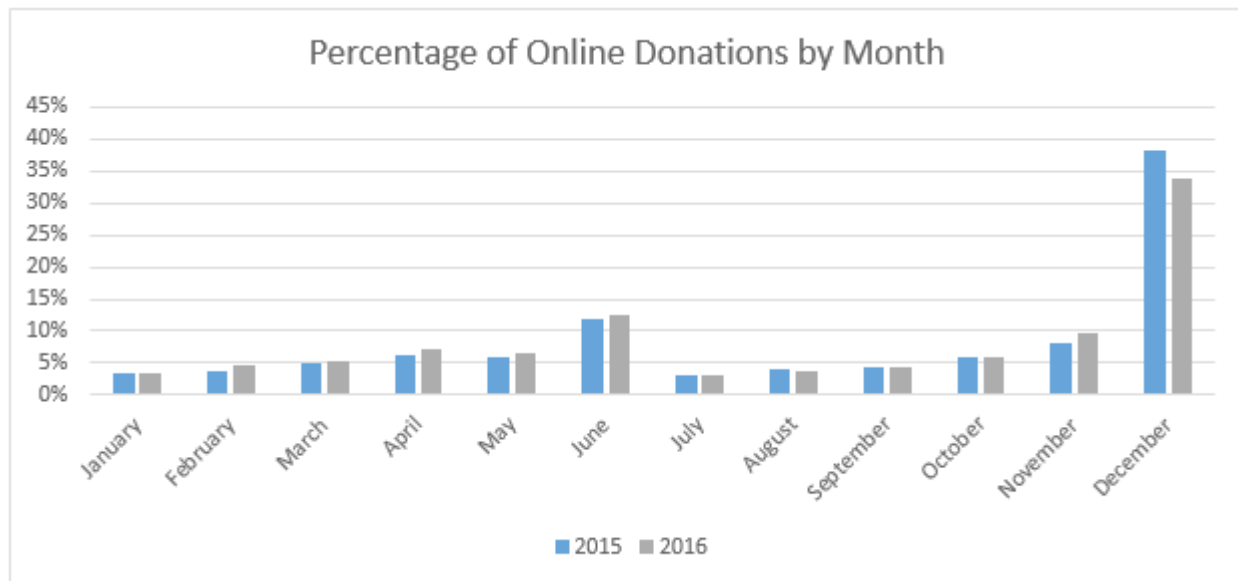
Online Donations	2015 YoY Change	2016 YoY Change
Number of Gifts	18.0%	7.2%
Dollars Raised	24.0%	12.3%

## Giving to public vs. private higher education institutions

In the year-to-year comparison, four-year public institutions outperformed private institutions in 2016, with dollars raised online by public institutions increasing by 14.1%, compared to 11.6% at private institutions. The number of online donations to four-year public institutions increased by 10.1%, compared to 5.7% at private institutions. When looking at the average online gift, public institutions see smaller averages at \$293, compared to \$418 for private institutions. While public institutions had a higher percentage increase of donations, the average gift size at private institutions increased by a higher amount, with an increase of 5.6%.

## Support by month

Overall, monthly giving trends as a percentage of dollars raised stayed similar compared to 2015. December continues to be the month with the highest percentage of dollars raised. In 2016, the month of December accounted for 34% of all donations made online. When comparing giving in November and December in 2015 and 2016, some of the difference can be attributed to Giving Tuesday occurring in November in 2016 and December in 2015.



Giving also spiked in June in both 2015 and 2016, due to the large number of higher education institutions with fiscal years ending in June.

### The continued impact of days of giving and Giving Tuesday on support

On Giving Tuesday in 2016, iModules clients raised more than \$6 million from more than 28,000 donations, representing increases of 17% in donation dollars and 25% in transactions over 2015. iModules clients saw an average gift size of \$213 on Giving Tuesday in 2016.

Giving Tuesday and similar individual days of giving have become a mainstay of higher education fundraising. These micro-campaigns can help small and large institutions increase funds raised as well as the number of donors. The University of Portland (UP) held its first one-day fundraising campaign in conjunction with Giving Tuesday in 2016, with a goal of 100 gifts. Using a combination of targeted email communications, social media posts, and on-campus giving opportunities, UP had a record-breaking day, collecting 258 gifts (158% of goal), totaling more than \$56,000.

Northwestern University has held its day of giving to coincide with Giving Tuesday since 2013. In 2016, Northwestern surpassed its goal of 1,800 donors with 1,961 donors supporting 324 areas of the university, with gifts totaling more than \$500,000 in a single day.

The Sage Colleges launched their first day of giving in 2016 to coincide with its 100th birthday celebration in September. “\$100K in a Day” was announced one week before the event with a “save the date” message, followed by emails leading up to and on the day of the event. The Sage Colleges surpassed its goal, raising more than \$213,000 (213% of goal) from 830 donors ranging from the Class of 1939 to the Class of 2019.

These and many other similar campaigns are successful due to the combination of months of planning, a targeted communications plan, and the incorporation of social media.

## Trends in online giving

Online and mobile giving continues to grow and will remain a significant focus for higher education institutions' giving approach. We'll likely see the following continue in 2017:

- Continued emphasis on making the online giving process seamless and easy, regardless of the device being used to make the gift
- More institutions participating in #GivingTuesday or establishing stand-alone days of giving, with schools highlighting specific initiatives
- The ability for donors to easily support their priorities through crowdfunding-type campaigns, as offering a variety of funds for donors to support increases the likelihood of giving
- Increasing the personalization and segmentation of email communications to further engage current and prospective donors and encourage the next gift by providing constituent-specific content such as previous gift impact, customized ask amounts, and content relevant to the donor

## The importance of an easy giving process

To meet donor expectations it is critical for the giving process to be straightforward and easy to complete on any type of device. Providing donors with a clear idea of the step they are on in the giving process provides clarity and leads to higher conversions. Also, the giving form should focus on gathering only the most important pieces of information. While additional information may be valuable, the added fields may lead to form abandonment.

## Opportunities for growth in online giving

Comparing your institution's data with industry trends can help uncover opportunities for growth in online giving. Institutions seeing a lower than average year-over-year change should consider reviewing their online giving form and solicitation approach to ensure ample opportunities exist for donors to give online. Institutions exceeding the average increase should look for new opportunities to increase the engagement of individuals who are already giving online.

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## About the Analysis

This analysis compared iModules clients actively using the Encompass platform in both the 2015 and 2016 calendar years. This data set included 192 four-year, higher education institutions across the United States.

## About the Author

Mirko Widenhorn joined the iModules team in July of 2013, bringing more than 11 years of higher education experience in alumni relations, annual giving, and student affairs. As a Strategic Consultant for iModules, he works closely with clients on strategic planning as well as performs in-depth analyses of client websites and programming. Mirko is a Drew University graduate and received his master's degree from the College of Europe in Belgium. He is pursuing his doctorate in higher education with a focus on alumni engagement and financial support.

## About iModules

Build and sustain lifelong relationships with alumni and supporters through a platform for fundraising, communication, and engagement built by the educational advancement experts at iModules Software. More than 800 higher education institutions partner with iModules to drive larger gifts, increase event attendance and membership, and improve participation rates through data-driven, meaningful engagement. Learn more at [imodules.com](http://imodules.com). Giving Tuesday in 2016, iModules clients raised more than \$6 million from more than 28,000 donations, representing increases of 17% in donation dollars and 25% in transactions over 2015. iModules clients saw an average gift size of \$213 on Giving Tuesday in 2016.

