

The Complete DAM Buying Checklist for Higher Education

Your Strategic Guide to Selecting the
Right Digital Asset Management Platform



Introduction

Why Higher Education Needs Purpose-Built DAM

Higher education institutions operate differently than other verticals. Your digital asset management platform needs to handle:

- **Academic and admissions cycles** with tight, non-negotiable deadlines
- **Institution-wide teams** coordinating across admissions, communications, athletics, academics, and alumni relations
- **Massive visual libraries** with thousands of assets across multiple departments, schools, and campuses
- **Complex rights management** for photographer contracts, student and faculty consent releases, and media agreements
- **Multi-channel distribution** from official institutional websites to social to alumni and partner environments
- **Real-time collaboration** between creative services, academic departments, and executive and board stakeholders

This checklist will help you evaluate DAM platforms based on what actually matters for higher education operations – not generic enterprise features that don't address your specific challenges.

How to Use This Checklist

As you evaluate DAM vendors:

- **Check each requirement** that applies to your institution
- **Star critical must-haves** that are non-negotiable
- **Take notes** on how each vendor addresses your specific needs
- **Compare responses** across platforms using this standardized framework

Scoring Guide:

- **Essential (Must-Have):** Platform cannot be considered without this
- **Important (Should-Have):** Strong preference, willing to compromise if other areas excel
- **Nice-to-Have:** Differentiator between otherwise equal platforms

Section 1

Higher Education-Specific Asset Management

Campaign Organization

- ☐ **Organize assets by academic year and semester** (Fall 2025, Spring Admissions 2026, etc.)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Hierarchical categorization** (Institution → School/College → Department → Campaign)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Link multiple assets to a single initiative** (campus photography, event coverage, student stories, videos, awareness content)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Messaging and branding variant management** across schools, departments, and special campaigns

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Archive past academic years and campaigns** while maintaining searchability

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Support** for campus event documentation, research communications, and behind-the-scenes imagery

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Higher Education-Specific Metadata

- ☐ **Custom metadata fields** for institution-specific attributes:

- School, college, or department name
- Student, faculty, or subject name and consent status
- Campus location and region
- Campaign name and academic term
- Academic program or discipline
- Fiscal year attribution
- Funder, donor, or grant affiliation
- Ethical use and usage restrictions

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Controlled vocabularies** for consistent naming (e.g., “College of Engineering” vs. “Engineering Department”)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Student and subject information tracking** (name, consent status, usage terms, FERPA compliance flags)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Photographer and creative credit management**

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Student success story and alumni spotlight tagging** for admissions-facing and fundraising assets

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Visual Search & Discovery

- ☐ **Visual similarity search** (find similar campus moments, locations, or compositions)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Color-based search** and filtering (brand colors, school and department palette variants)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Advanced filtering** by multiple attributes simultaneously (department + content type + campus + term)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Saved searches** for frequently used queries (e.g., “Engineering Fall2025 Student Life Approved”)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 2

Workflow & Collaboration

Multi-Department Coordination

- ☐ **Role-based access control** for different teams:
 - Communications and creative services (upload/edit capabilities)
 - Legal and compliance (view/approve)
 - Admissions and enrollment (approved assets only)
 - Academic departments (discipline-specific materials)
 - Regional and satellite campus teams (location-specific assets)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Department-level permissions** (give school or department staff access to relevant initiatives)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Asset approval workflows** with multi-level review (communications → department leadership → compliance)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Comments and annotation tools** directly on assets

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Version control** to track asset iterations (raw edit, final, audience-specific variants)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Campaign Launches & Academic Deadlines

- ☐ **Project-based asset organization** (Commencement, Homecoming, Admissions Open Day, Annual Fund Launch, Research Publication)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Scheduled publishing** for embargo releases (press, donor, partner, and prospective student-facing content)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Deadline tracking** and reminders for asset deliverables

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Task assignment** for editing, translation, and multi-campus adaptation

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Multi-Campus & Partner Team Support

- ☐ **Multi-language interface** for international students, faculty, and global audiences

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Campus or school-specific asset variations** (different messaging and branding by location or academic unit)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Institutional brand consistency tools** (approved logos, fonts, color palettes accessible to all schools and departments)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 3

Digital Channel Integration

Website & Enrollment Platform Integration

☐ **Integrations with higher education and enrollment platforms:**

- Slate (Technolutions)
- Salesforce Education Cloud
- Ellucian Banner / Colleague
- Custom platforms via API

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Multiple image variants per campaign** (thumbnail, hero, gallery, student story)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Automated image resizing** for different digital channels

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Synchronization** with student, alumni, and constituent databases

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Social Media & Content Marketing

☐ **Direct publishing** to social platforms or integration with social management tools

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Student ambassador, faculty, and partner content management**

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

CMS & Marketing Automation

☐ **Content management system integration** (WordPress, Drupal, Contentful, etc.)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Alumni and advancement platform integration** (Blackbaud, Salesforce, etc.)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 4

Rights Management & Legal Compliance

Photographer & Creative Contracts

- ☐ **Contract attachment** to assets (photographer agreements, student and faculty consent and image releases)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Usage rights tracking** (internal only, public-facing, donor restrictions, time limits)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Expiration date alerts** for time-limited usage rights

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Automatic watermarking** for non-approved or restricted assets

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Brand & Compliance Protection

- ☐ **Unauthorized use prevention** (secure access, download tracking)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **FERPA compliance** support for assets featuring identifiable students

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Embargo management** for pre-announcement content (rankings, research announcements, campaign launches)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **Asset download auditing** (who downloaded what, when)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

- ☐ **External portal** for controlled sharing with media, donors, and partner institutions

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 5

Technical Requirements

File Format & Quality Support

- ☐ **RAW file support** (CR2, NEF, ARW, etc.) for original campus photography
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **High-resolution image handling** (100MB+ files)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Video format support** (MP4, MOV, ProRes for documentary, lecture, and campaign footage)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Design file support** (PSD, AI, INDD for admissions, fundraising, and academic materials)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **3D/AR file storage** (GLB, USDZ for virtual campus tours and immersive prospective student experiences)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Performance & Scale

- ☐ **Storage capacity** for your asset volume
 - Current needs: _____TB
 - 3-year projection: _____ TB*Priority:* ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Upload speed** for large batch imports (post-event, commencement, or research documentation)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Search performance** with thousands of assets
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Concurrent user support** (how many team members can work simultaneously?)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Security & Compliance

- ☐ **Encryption** (in transit and at rest)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **SOC 2 compliance**

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **GDPR compliance** for international students and operations

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **FERPA compliance** for student data and identifiable assets

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Two-factor authentication**

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Single sign-on (SSO) support** – including integration with institutional identity providers

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Regular security audits** and penetration testing

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Backup & Disaster Recovery

☐ **Automated backup** schedule and retention

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Geographic redundancy** (multiple data center locations)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Disaster recovery SLA** (recovery time objective/recovery point objective)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Asset versioning** and recovery (restore previous versions)

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 6

User Experience & Adoption

Interface & Usability

- ☐ **Intuitive interface** that non-technical staff and faculty can navigate
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Mobile access** (responsive web or native app)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Bulk operations** (upload, tag, download, approve multiple assets at once)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Drag-and-drop** functionality for uploads and organization
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Customizable dashboards** by role/user
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Asset Sharing & Distribution

- ☐ **Shareable links** with expiration dates
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Password protection** for sensitive shares
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Branded portals** for external partners (media, donors, alumni, and partner institutions)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Lightbox/collection creation** for assembling asset packages
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Download format options** (original, optimized, specific dimensions)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Training & Support

- ☐ **Onboarding program** for implementation
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **User training** (live sessions, recorded tutorials, documentation)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Customer support hours** and response time SLA
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Dedicated account manager** or customer success contact
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Regular platform updates** and feature releases
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 7

Analytics & Reporting

Statistics System

- ☐ **Asset download reports** by department, campaign, and academic term
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **User activity reports** (who's accessing what, when)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Asset lifecycle tracking** (from upload to archive)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 8

Cost & Business Model

Pricing Structure

- ☐ **Transparent pricing** (no hidden fees)
 - Base platform cost: _____
 - Per-user fees: _____
 - Storage costs: _____
- ☐ **Scalability of pricing** as your institution grows
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Contract flexibility** (annual vs. multi-year, exit terms)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Implementation & Migration

- ☐ **Implementation timeline** (how long to go live?)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Migration support** from existing systems
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Data migration tools** (automated vs. manual)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Metadata preservation** during migration
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Total Cost of Ownership

- ☐ **Initial setup costs**
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Ongoing maintenance** requirements and costs
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Additional fees** (overage charges, add-on features)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have
- ☐ **Internal resource requirements** (IT support needed?)
Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Section 9

Vendor Evaluation

References & Case Studies

☐ **Higher education institution references** at similar size and scope

▪ Requested references: _____

☐ **Case studies** demonstrating higher education sector success

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

☐ **Peer reviews** and industry recognition

Priority: ☐ Essential ☐ Important ☐ Nice-to-Have

Decision Matrix

Category	Weight (%)	Vendor A (1-10)	Vendor B (1-10)	Vendor C (1-10)
Institution-Specific Features	%			
Workflow & Collaboration	%			
Digital Channel Integration	%			
Rights Management & FERPA	%			
Technical Requirements	%			
User Experience	%			
Analytics & Reporting	%			
Cost & Value	%			
Vendor Stability	%			
TOTAL WEIGHTED SCORE	100%			

Next Steps

After completing this checklist:

1. **Schedule demos** with your top 3 vendors
2. **Request live walkthroughs** of higher education-specific features
3. **Talk to reference customers** in the higher education sector
4. **Negotiate a trial period** to test with your actual workflows
5. **Involve key stakeholders** from communications, academic departments, admissions, legal, and IT
6. **Calculate total cost of ownership** over 3–5 years
7. **Review contracts** carefully (exit terms, data ownership, SLAs)

About NetX

NetX provides enterprise digital asset management solutions trusted by leading colleges and universities worldwide. Our platform is built to handle the unique demands of higher education: academic and admissions cycles, multi-campus teams, expansive visual libraries, complex student consent and rights management, and seamless enrollment and advancement platform integration.

Ready to see NetX in action?

Schedule a personalized demo focused on your specific institution's workflows and challenges.

This checklist is provided as a strategic resource for higher education institutions evaluating DAM platforms. For more information about how NetX addresses these requirements, contact our team.