

A dark, blue-tinted photograph of graduates in caps and gowns. One graduate on the left holds a rolled-up diploma, and another on the right has their hands raised in a celebratory gesture. The background shows a building with arched windows.

# Demystifying SEO for Higher Education.

*Tips for Colleges & Universities*



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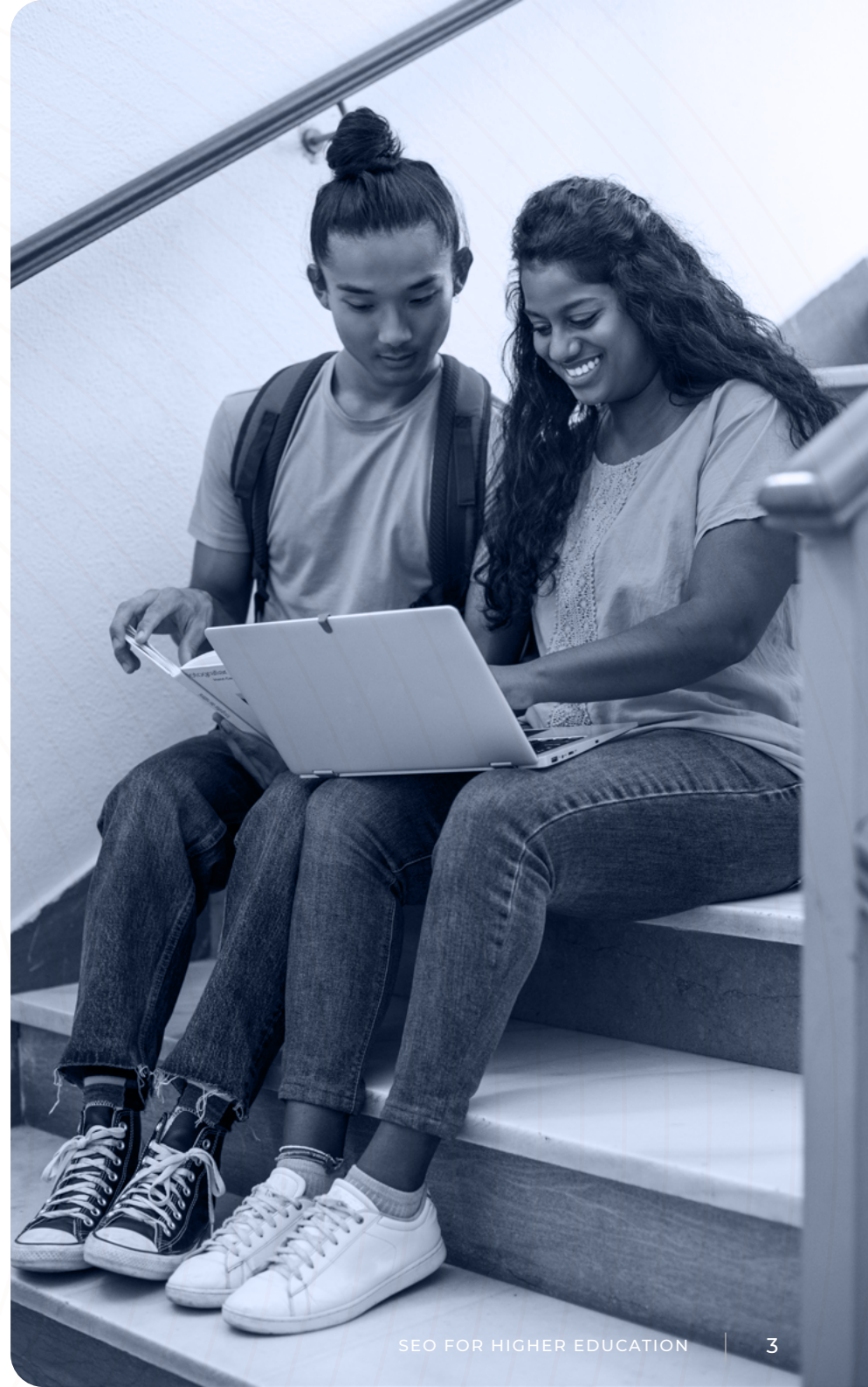




*Students are increasingly turning to online resources to explore their higher education options. To stand out among thousands of colleges and universities, it's essential to shift resources towards developing your online presence. Specifically, search engine optimization (SEO) is crucial for higher education institutions to ensure visibility and attract prospective students.*

*SEO might seem like a long-term investment, but by appearing in local searches for colleges and universities, you'll see an increase in your university site's traffic. Over time, these visits can turn into inquiries and enrollments.*

*Let's delve into the importance of SEO for higher education and its role in the student enrollment journey.*





# SEO 101: The Importance of SEO in College & University Recruitment

*SEO, or search engine optimization, is the process of enhancing a website to improve its visibility on search engines like Google.*

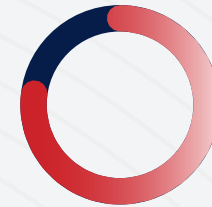
When potential students search for colleges or specific programs, SEO ensures that your institution appears prominently in the search results. This is critical because most users do not look past the first page of search results.

Effective SEO increases the likelihood that prospective students will find and consider your institution. In fact, **76%** of online users who find your university may even drop by to check out the campus within 24 hours.

If you play your cards right, **28%** of these prospective students who come to your campus or inquire may enroll.

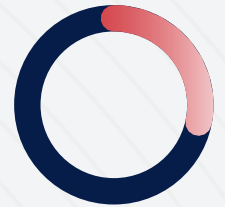
However, you may be wondering why SEO seems to be the answer to dwindling college and university recruitment.

It all has to do with how the internet has shaped school selection and, as a result, student recruitment methods.



**76%**

of online users who find your university may even drop by to check out the campus within 24 hours



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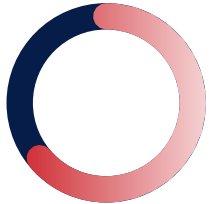
of these prospective students who come to your campus or inquire may enroll

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# The Evolution of Student Recruitment Methods

*As we speak, the internet (search engines, in particular) is the primary resource for students researching their educational options. In fact, 67% of online users turn to search engines when they browse for colleges and universities.*

This shift necessitates a robust online presence to reach and engage with prospective students effectively.



67%

of online users turn to search engines when they browse for colleges and universities



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## The Impact of Digitalization on Student Behavior

*Search engines have revolutionized the college and university search experience. With search engines like Google, many users have adopted a strictly online way of finding and vetting their potential schools.*

Here are several **key ways** in which student behaviors have evolved due to digitalization:



**Online Research:** Over 90% of online activities begin with a search engine. This is true whether what's being searched for is a product or a list of local colleges or universities. This statistic highlights the importance of being on the search engine results pages (SERPs.)



**Multi-Device Usage:** Students use multiple devices to conduct their research, including smartphones, tablets, and laptops. This means that a college's website must be mobile-friendly and optimized for various devices to provide a seamless user experience.

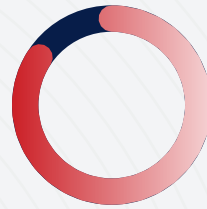


# The Impact of Digitalization on Student Behavior

✓ **Video Content Consumption:** Students consume a variety of content formats, including blog posts, infographics, and social media updates. However, a 2023 Pew Research Center study found that video content is more likely to attract students. Roughly 90% of teens say they use YouTube, making it the most widely used platform measured in the study.

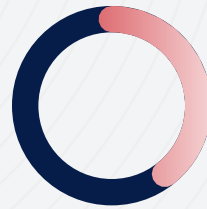
✓ **Frequent Searches:** Search engines have enabled online users to make multiple searches for their next schools. In fact, the average search engine user will make three to four searches at a time.

✓ **The Demand for Quick Information:** With the advent of faster internet connections, students expect to find information quickly and easily. Websites that are slow to load or difficult to navigate can deter up to 40% of prospective students. SEO practices such as improving page load times and ensuring intuitive site navigation are crucial.



82%

of students watched university videos when considering their options.



40%

of prospective students deterred by slow or difficult navigation

By understanding these behavioral changes, you can tailor your SEO strategies to better meet the needs of prospective students. This involves not only optimizing for relevant keywords but also creating high-quality, engaging content that answers the questions and concerns students have during their search process.

With enough clicks and visits, Google's algorithms will take notice, rewarding you with a higher place on the SERPs.

From here, you can expect your university site's visibility to increase — and so too will its traffic and, later on, enrollment.



# The Shift in Student Recruitment

*The old ways of recruiting students have become obsolete. Let's explore how today's methods of student recruitment differ from how it was done before?*



Let's answer this question in greater detail.

## Traditional Methods vs. Digital Methods

In the past, student recruitment primarily relied on traditional methods such as school visits, college fairs, direct mail campaigns, and print advertisements.

These approaches focused on face-to-face interactions and distributing physical materials to prospective students. High school visits allowed admissions officers to connect personally with students and provide detailed information

about their institutions. College fairs offered students the opportunity to gather brochures and speak directly with representatives from multiple colleges in one location.

While these methods are still valuable, they have been increasingly supplemented and, in many cases, overshadowed by digital recruitment strategies.

Digital methods include maintaining an informative and user-friendly website, utilizing social media platforms, running targeted

online advertising campaigns, and optimizing for search engines (SEO.)

These strategies allow institutions to reach a wider audience more efficiently and provide prospective students with easy access to information anytime, anywhere.





61%

of website traffic for higher education institutions comes from organic searches



40%

of website conversions are driven by SEO



23%

of prospective students are using mobile devices to conduct searches

## Student Reliance on Online Searches: The Numbers and Trends

Numerous statistics demonstrate how heavily students rely on online research during their college selection process:



**Organic Search Traffic:** According to Brightedge, **61%** of website traffic for higher education institutions comes from organic searches. This highlights the crucial role that search engines play in driving visitors to college websites.



**SEO-Driven Conversions:** Brightedge also reports that SEO is responsible for **40%** of overall website conversions. This means that optimizing for search not only drives traffic but also significantly increases inquiries and applications.



**Non-Branded Searches:** Non-branded searches, which include queries for specific fields of study, degree types, and general inquiries, are becoming more common compared to searches for specific institutions. This trend suggests that higher education marketers need to focus on optimizing for program-specific and location-based keywords.



**Mobile Device Usage:** The number of prospective students using mobile devices to conduct their university searches has risen considerably, up **23%** in Q2 2022 compared to the previous year. This underscores the importance of providing a smooth mobile experience.

## What These Figures Mean for You

The shift to digital research demands that colleges and universities enhance their online presence.

For this reason, investing in SEO is crucial to improve search engine rankings and visibility, which drives both traffic and conversions. SEO can also improve your university's or college's site, delivering a positive user experience your prospects will enjoy.

Also, given the rise in mobile device usage, your institution must ensure its website is mobile-optimized with fast load times and easy navigation.

All in all, your investment in SEO sets your institution up for better online visibility, higher site visits, and a larger pool of interested applicants.



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# The Importance of Search in the Student Enrollment Journey

*Search engines have become indispensable tools for students in their college discovery process.*

Instead of relying solely on traditional methods like campus visits or brochures, students now turn to search engines to gather information, compare programs, and ultimately make their decisions].

This is why ranking well on search engines is crucial for higher education institutions to attract and engage prospective students.

It's important to engage prospective students early through informative content, and maintain their interest throughout the decision-making process.

If students easily find the information they need at these early stages, they will be more likely to engage/inquire. Drawing students, and their parents, into an engagement relationship with your school relies on you having the right content combined with the right social media, search, and website content that meets both groups where they are.

**For more information about the prospective student journey, [download our Reaching Traditional College Students](#) [whitepaper](#).**



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## Factors That Influence Search Engine Rankings

*Now that you understand the importance of ranking in your student enrollment journey, let's talk about what factors can make or break your site's place on the SERPs.*

According to Backlinko, there are roughly 200 ranking factors.

This can make managing optimizations a struggle even for SEO experts. Nevertheless, you can make great strides with your higher education SEO campaigns by dialing in on the following:

### Keyword Optimization:

- ✓ Identifying and using relevant keywords that prospective students are likely to search for is fundamental.
- ✓ Keywords should reflect specific programs, degree types, and locations.
- ✓ Proper keyword integration into the website's content, titles, meta descriptions, and headers is crucial.



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## Key Takeaways: Rank, Be Easy To Find, and Bump Up Your Student Enrollment.

*The shift in how students find their next schools underscores the importance of search in the student enrollment journey. With that in mind, consider a transition from traditional student recruitment methods to embrace SEO for higher education.*

Don't let your institution get lost in the search results. Start optimizing your website today and engage with potential students more effectively.

From finding the right keywords to improving your website's technical aspects, you can significantly boost your institution's visibility and credibility online. Over time, you can watch your enrollment rates increase.

Take these steps now to ensure your school stands out in the competitive landscape of higher education.



# We're Enrollment Marketing Experts *and we're here to help.*

Advance Education is a digital marketing agency specializing in enrollment marketing for higher education. Through partnerships with traditional four-year universities, community colleges, and technical and career schools, we help institutions level up marketing strategies for student recruitment, as well as alumni outreach.

- 1 Market intelligence and student assessments help us build the perfect targets for your enrollment goals.
- 2 Creative that connects, intrigues and inspires fuels the science of marketing strategy.
- 3 Never-satisfied, results-oriented optimization is what keeps our campaigns on top, delivering continuous ROI aligned with your goals.

Email us at [enrollmentconsult@advanceeducation.com](mailto:enrollmentconsult@advanceeducation.com)

Read more about our work with institutions like yours at [www.advanceeducation.com](http://www.advanceeducation.com)

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I have learned a lot from you and your team in the short time we have worked together. **You have changed the way we do business.** Thanks for all that you have done for this campus.

**CASSANDRA CONNOR, PH.D.**

Vice President, Traditions Campus  
William Carey University

