



ADULT LEARNER RECRUITMENT

Building Enrollment Advantages amid Market Disruption

New Realities and Strategies for Graduate and Online Enrollment

Today's Presenter



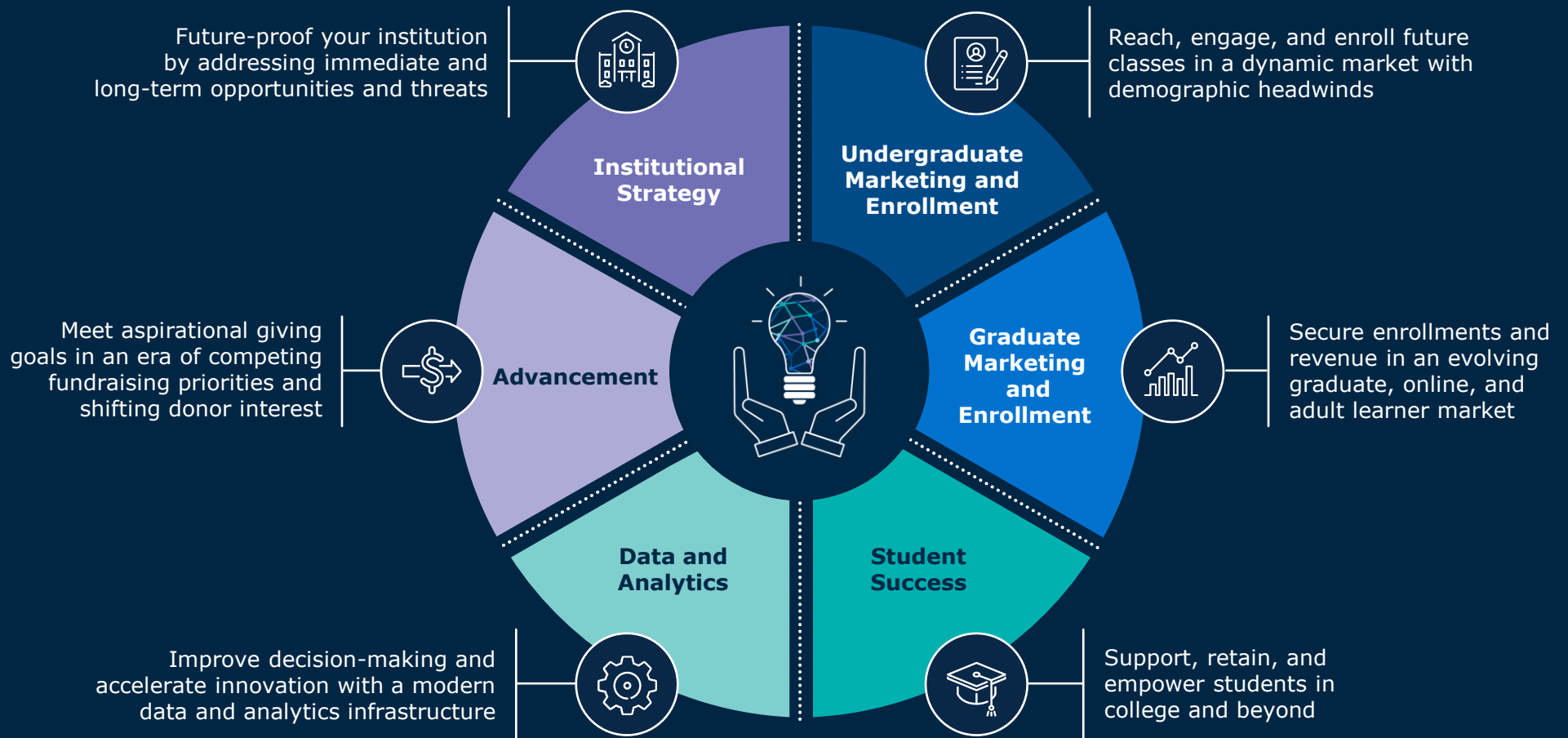
Ryan Leach

Director

EAB Adult Learner Recruitment

RLeach@eab.com

Insight-Powered Solutions for Your Top Priorities and Toughest Challenges



We partner with **2,800+** institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

The Ground Is Shifting Beneath Us

The Pool of Prospective Graduate and Adult Students Is Shrinking



The **demographic cliff** is here.



-10–15%

Nationwide decline in traditional-aged students by the early 2030s

More students are **choosing not to enroll**.



1/3

of 18-to-24-year-olds are not enrolling in college

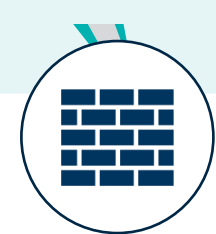
International enrollment is **no longer reliable**.



40%

Decline in interest in studying in the U.S.

The **end of Grad PLUS** will force more students to opt out.



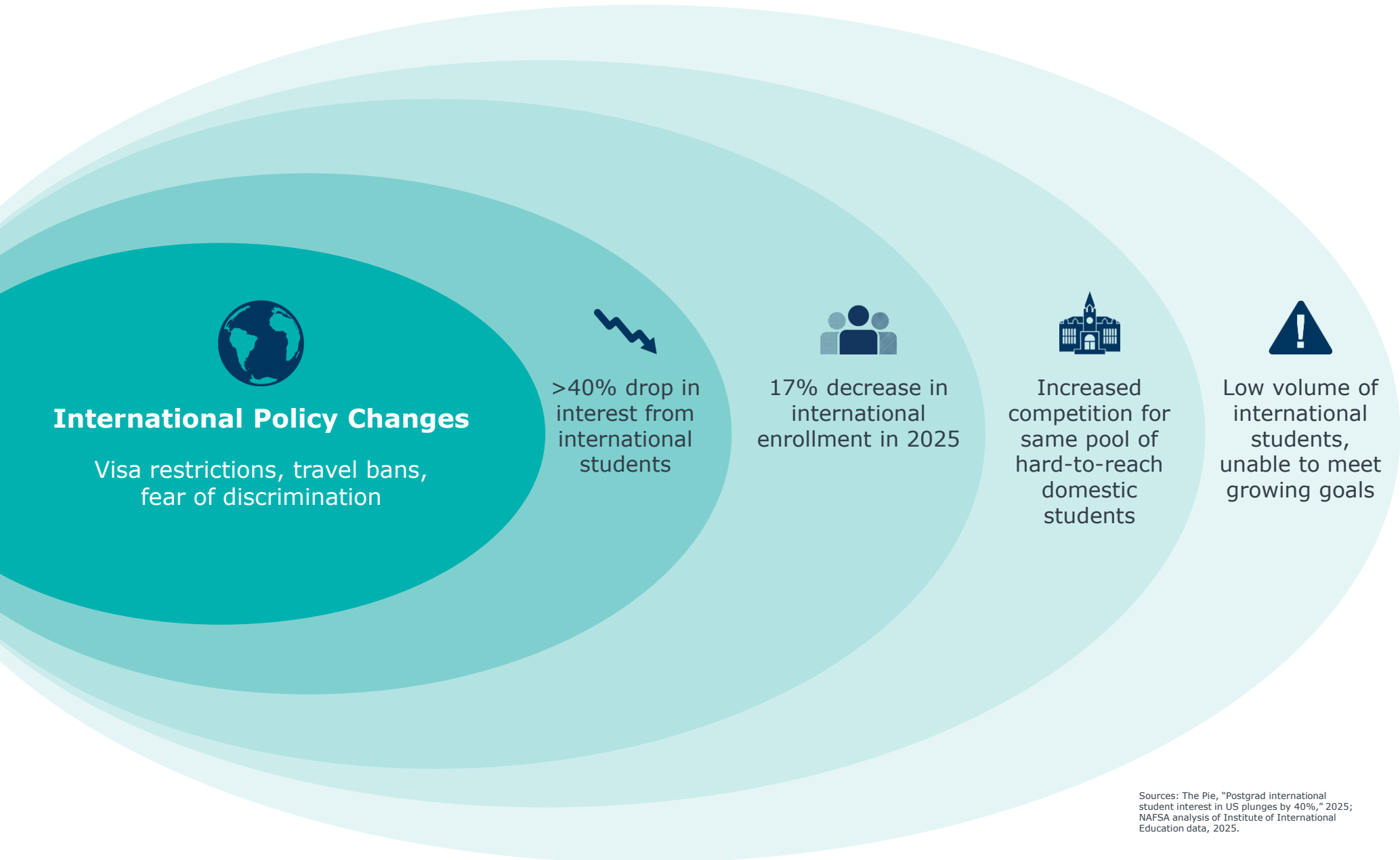
16%

of graduate students rely on Grad PLUS loans

Sources: National Student Clearinghouse; "Global Burdens of Disease Population Projections 2019–2100," Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation; EAB Blueprint for Growth analysis of 2000–2021; Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, "Knowing at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates," 2024; The Pie, "Postgrad international student interest in US plunges by 40%," 2025; Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, "Graduate Degrees; Risky and Unequal Paths to the Top."

No Institution Is Immune from the Impacts of International Policy Changes

More Competition for Fewer Domestic Students



Sources: The Pie, "Postgrad international student interest in US plunges by 40%," 2025; NAESA analysis of Institute of International Education data, 2025.

More Programs Are Competing for Fewer Students

More Competition from Within and Outside of Higher Ed

Proliferation of Non-University Providers



1.03M

Microcredentials and badges offered, 2025



+137%

Increase in microcredentials and badges offered, 2022–25

With More Modest Growth in Higher Ed



750K

Degrees and certificates offered, 2025

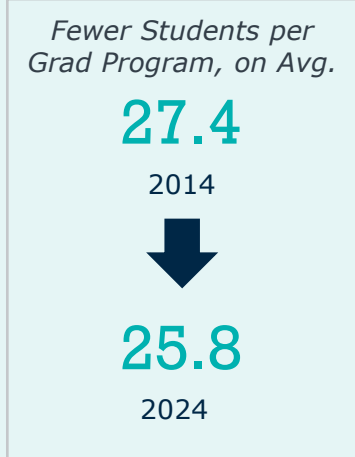
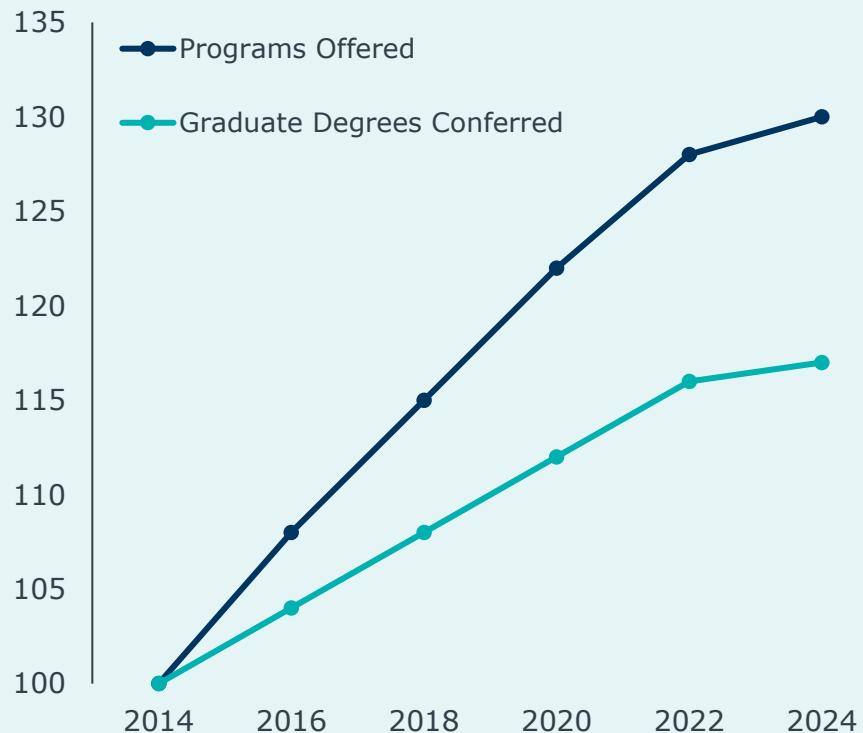


+32%

Increase in degrees and certificates offered, 2022–25

Graduate Program Growth Is Outpacing Student Demand...

Indexed growth for directional comparison (2014=100), 2014–2024



...But Growth Is Uneven And the Gap Is Getting Wider

Program supply grew ~24% over the past decade as institutions added new graduate offerings

Graduate degree conferrals grew more slowly (~17%) and show signs of flattening in recent years

Sources: Credential Engine. (2025). Counting Credentials 2025. Washington, DC: Credential Engine. <https://credentialengine.org/allresources/2025-counting-credentials>; IPEDS (Program Inventory 2014–2022; Degree Completions 2014–2024 provisional)

AI Is Making an Already-Hidden Market Even Harder to Reach

Most Prospective Students Are Already Invisible Until Late in the Funnel

80% of graduate and adult students **research programs in stealth mode**

And Now, AI Is Accelerating—and Scaling—This Behavior

5.3X as many students **used ChatGPT and similar tools for program search** in 2025 as in 2024

75% By 2028, experts predict about 75% of Google searches **will have AI Overviews**

The Result: Institutions Are Paying More to Reach Fewer Students

Fewer Clicks



60%+ Average **decline in organic CTR** when AI Overviews appear

Fewer Leads



94% of adult learners **do not click on paid search links** while researching colleges

Less Traffic



50% Brands unprepared for AI search stand to see up to a 50% **decline in site traffic**

Rising Costs



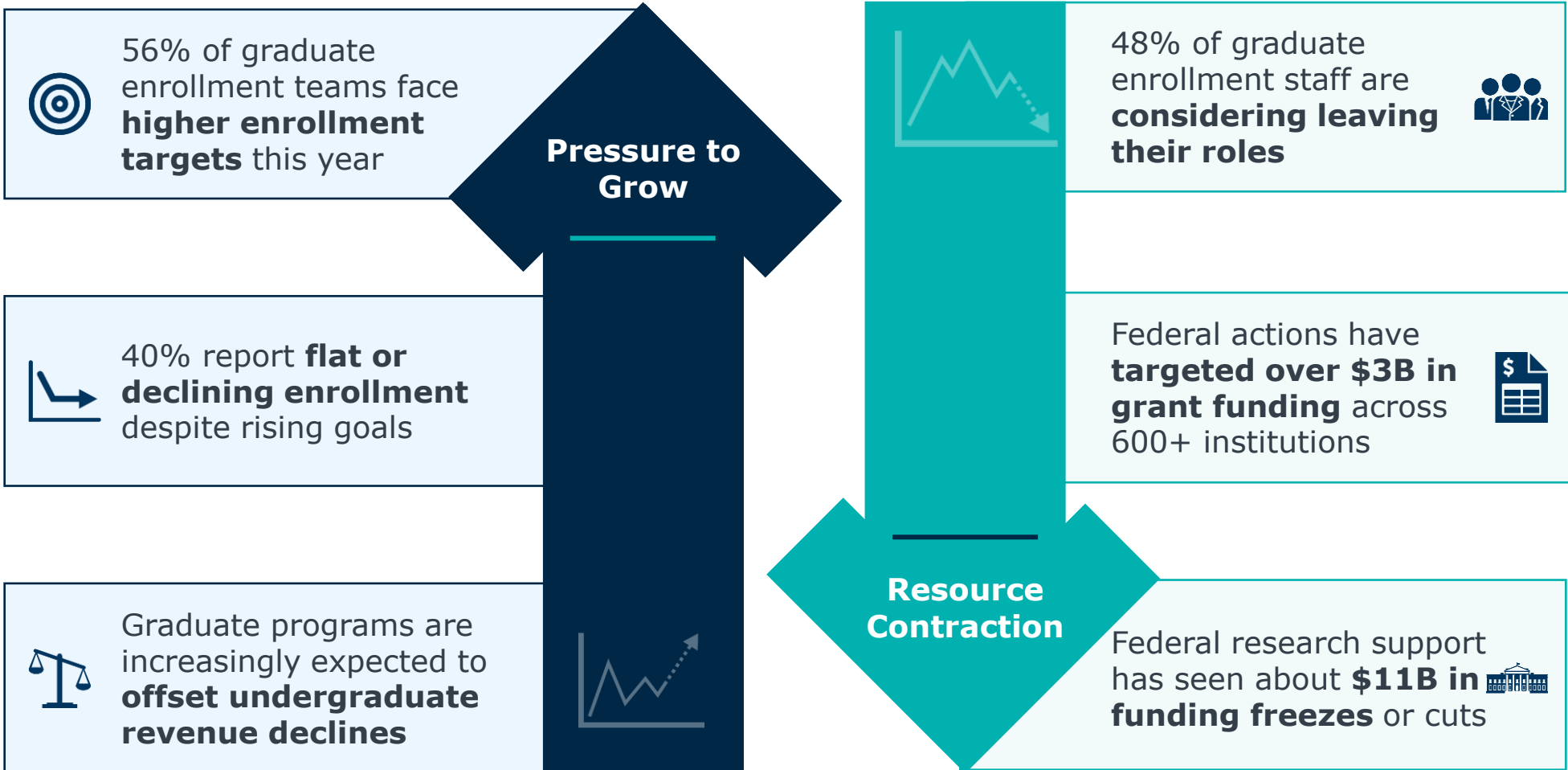
42% Average **increase in Google Ads CPC** in the education industry from 2024 to 2025

Sources: EAB Adult Learner Survey, 2025; WordStream, "Google Ads Benchmarks 2025: Competitive Data & Insights for Every Industry," 2025; McKinsey & Co, "New front door to the internet: Winning in the age of AI search," 2025.

Enrollment Teams Face an Unsustainable Equation

Graduate Enrollment Teams Are Expected to Do More...

...With Smaller Teams, Shrinking Budgets, and Less Federal Support



Sources: EAB and NAGAP surveys, 2025; NPR, "What losing billions in federal grants means for universities, and the nation," 2025; Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Tracking Accountability in Government Grants System" Grants Terminated" report; EAB interviews and analysis.

Entering a New Era of Graduate and Online Enrollment

Then: "Build It and They Will Come"



Now: A Fight for Enrollment Advantage



Next: Institutions Must Act or Risk Falling Behind

EAB Adult Learner Recruitment

Outperform the Market at Every Stage of the Funnel



Curate

Expand and diversify your pool of right-fit students



Cultivate

Customized campaigns to drive students to application



Convert

Improve yield and retention to maximize enrollment potential



Strategize

Identify and build market-ready programs for competitive advantage

What Makes Us Different

Unrivaled Mix
of Proprietary
and Known
Lead Sources

Turnkey, Full-Funnel
Conversion
Engine

24/7, Transparent
Access to
Campaign Data
and Full Attribution

Rigorous Testing to Stay
Ahead in a
Dynamic Market

Proven Impact in a Dynamic Landscape

200+

Partner institutions

40+

Years of higher
education expertise

6:1

Average ROI across
multiyear partnership

18%

Average graduate
enrollment growth



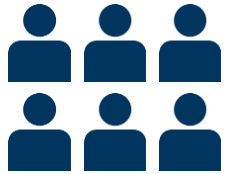
Curate

Expand and Diversify Your Pool of Right-Fit Students

The Opportunities & Challenges of Recruiting Prospective Adult Learners

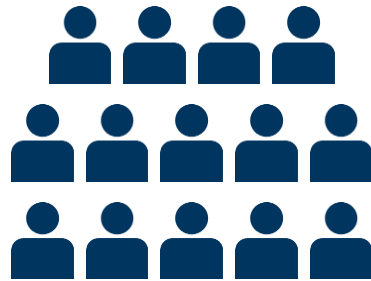
Adults Are a Comparatively Large and Diffuse Market

Anytown, USA, 10,000 Residents



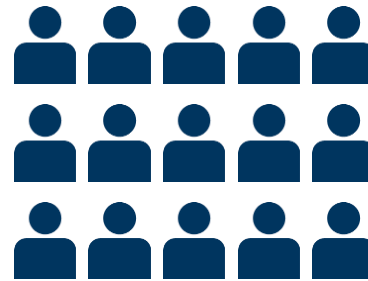
177

High school seniors



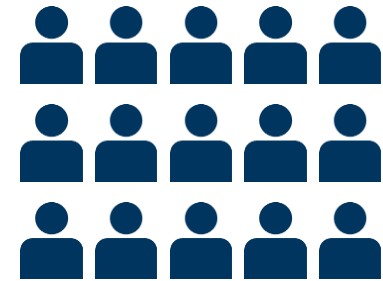
491

Aged 25-34 with a high school diploma but no college



508

Aged 25-34 with some college or associate degree



564

Aged 25-34 with a bachelor's but no grad degree

But Current Tactics Aren't Reaching Them

80%

of adult learner applicants are stealth applicants

37%

of surveyed graduate and adult students researched programs for more than a year

29%

of surveyed graduate and adult learners are opting not to take admission tests

Sources: U.S. Census (2022); EAB Adult Learner Survey (2025).

EAB Proprietary Sources



Consumer Analytics



Conversation Agent



Appily Advance



Virtual Tour

Digital Sources



Paid Search



Paid Social



Organic Web Traffic



First-Party Digital

List Sources



Test-taker lists



Phi Theta Kappa



Third-party and employer lists

Known Sources



Current undergrads



Alumni



Institutional Inquiry Pool



National Student Clearinghouse

EAB orchestrates the lead generation ecosystem into a comprehensive and cohesive strategy unique to your enrollment objectives

How Our Consumer Database Targeting Works

The U.S. Adult Population

▶ 220M+ U.S. Adults in the Database

75% of U.S. adults are in our database

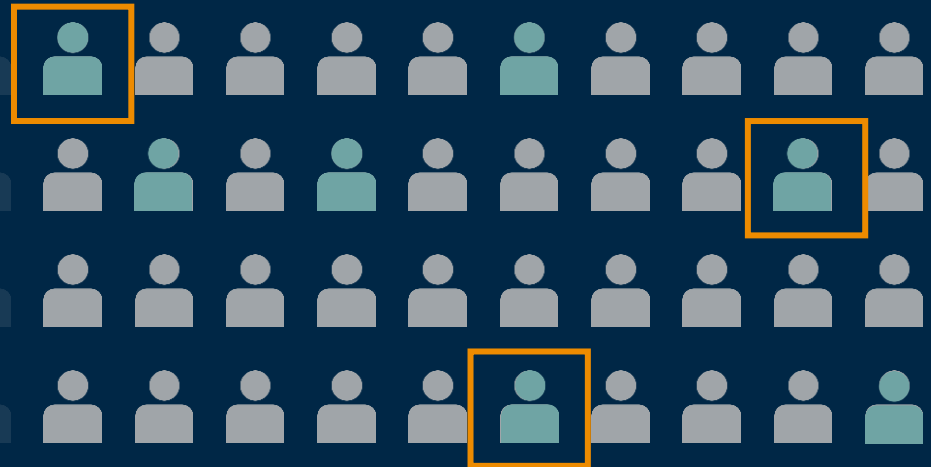
Customized Lead Generation Based on Your Growth and Class-Shaping Goals

Right-fit leads are shared with your team and added to our Student Journey marketing campaigns

▶ Precision Targeting to Find Look-Alike Students

Our data scientists identify individuals who closely resemble your historical students based on 150+ key variables, including:

- Demographic data
- Household composition
- Interests
- Behaviors



Expand Your Pipeline with Cost-Effective, High-Intent Leads

Generate High-Intent Leads for Priority Programs—at Scale



Appily Advance offers high-intent leads, curated from a variety of external and proprietary sources.

Graduate programs

- ✓ Business
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Health Care
- ✓ Nursing
- ✓ STEM and AI

Adult/nontraditional programs

- ✓ Adult degree completion



What Sets Appily Advance Apart



Diversified Reach

Expand visibility to surface high-intent leads you wouldn't otherwise see



Smart Lead Matching

Focus your efforts on students with the highest likelihood to convert



Rich Lead Data

Leverage granular data to ensure your efforts are aligned to your goals

3% Response-to-application rate

27% Appily Advance leads respond **27% faster** than leads from schools' test-taker lists

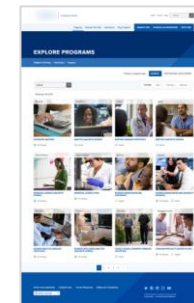
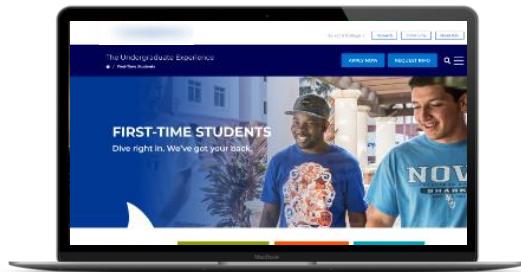
60 Median days from lead to apply

Ensure Your 'Digital Front Door' Is Open



Using AI to Enhance Your Organic Lead Generation Strategy

AI is transforming how students find and engage with your website. From SEO/GEO to authoritative content strategies, **our experts evaluate impacts of AI at every touchpoint**—ensuring your website is a powerful enrollment engine in a new era of recruitment.



AI Visibility Audit, SEO Audit, and Keyword Strategies

Reveal your opportunities to increase search engine visibility, drive organic traffic, and inform content strategy in today's zero-click search environment. Quarterly management and a custom dashboard support optimization.

+72%

Average increase in new users after incorporating SEO/GEO recommendations on key pages



Interactive Best Practices Playbook

Optimize enrollment-critical pages, aligning with SEO/GEO best practices and prospective students' unique search behaviors. Best practice recommendations for audiences, lead capture, Information Architecture, navigation, and accessibility, along with implementation guidance.

+59%

Increase in web-generated clicks after implementing recommendations



Integrated Lead Capture Form

This form is designed to complement your RFI form and capture data on prospective students by offering a specific purpose to engage.

2X

Higher completion rate compared to traditional registration forms

52

Average leads generated with EAB's lead capture form per month

How Can We Help?

I'd like to speak to an EAB expert about...

- 1 Optimizing graduate, online, or adult education **programs for growth**
- 2 **Generating leads** for graduate and online programs
- 3 Developing **marketing campaigns** to reach, recruit, and enroll students
- 4 Updating our **yield** and **financial aid** strategies

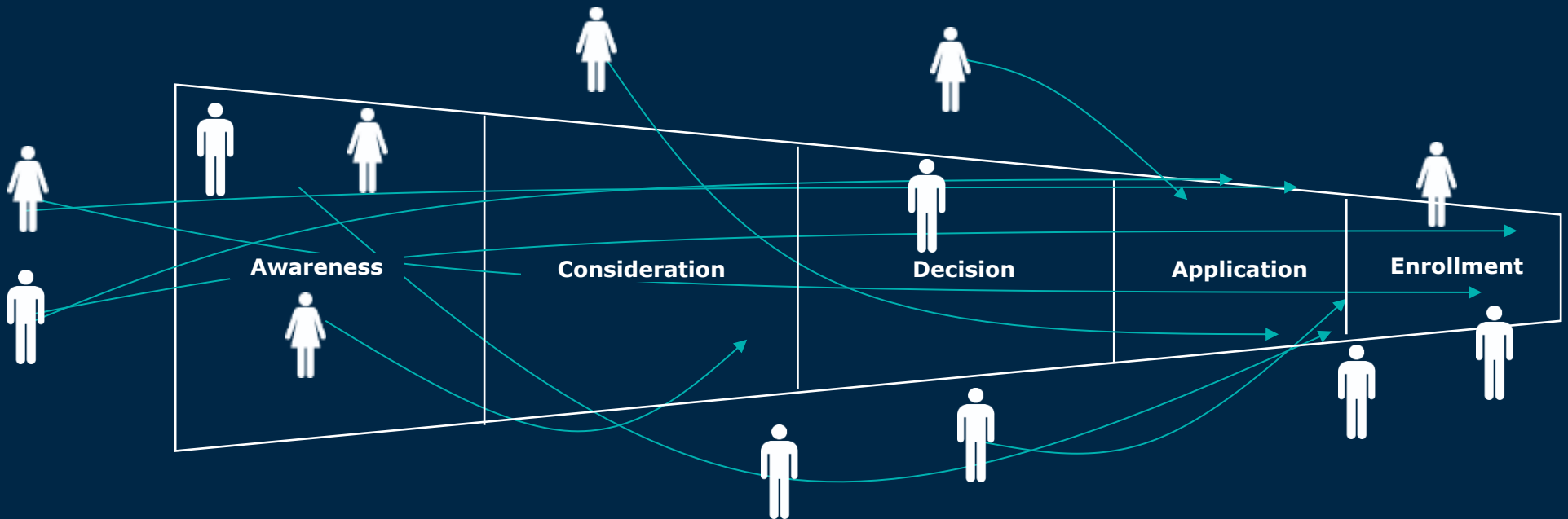


Cultivate

Hyper-Personalized Campaigns to Drive Students to Application

The Complexity of Engaging Graduate Students and Adult Learners

How Do You Recruit Them at Scale When Their Path Is Rarely Linear?



Key Questions Plague Graduate and Adult Learners—and Inform How They Engage with Your Funnel

What options do I have?

9 out of 10

don't know which school to attend when they start their journey

How will I find the right program?

4 out of 10

search for information about going back to school for **more than a year**

If I enroll, will it be worth it?

8 out of 10

cite **outcomes-driven motivations** for earning their degree

How will I pay for school?

6 out of 10

are **worried about how they will pay for school**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

EAB Proprietary Sources



Consumer Analytics



Conversation Agent



Appily Advance



Virtual Tour

Digital Sources



Paid Search



Paid Social



Organic Web Traffic



First-Party Digital

List Sources



Test-taker lists



Phi Theta Kappa

Known Sources



Current undergrads



Alumni



Institutional Inquiry Pool



National Student Clearinghouse

We Orchestrate Cohesive Marketing Strategies Across the Channels That Matter Most

<i>Paid</i>		<i>Owned</i>	<i>Web and Conversion Rate Optimization</i>		<i>Insights</i>
Google Ads	YouTube	Email	Retargeting	Hyper-personalized content	Secret shopping
LinkedIn	Connected TV	SMS	Geotargeting	Optimized Webpages	Micro-surveys
Instagram	Spotify	Chat Agent	SEO/GEO		Analytics
TikTok	Reddit				
Facebook					

Student Journeys as Unique as Each of Your Adult Learners



Allie

Working parent seeking a promotion

Allie's Six-Month Journey

Nudging Needed for a Busy Parent



- Is served MBA U **LinkedIn** ad
- Indicates her concerns about balancing family and work in MBA U's **short survey**
- Engages with **email** about flexible options
- Gets personalized deadline **ads and emails**
- Submits her **application** but then gets busy and forgets to complete it
- Receives **text message** application nudges

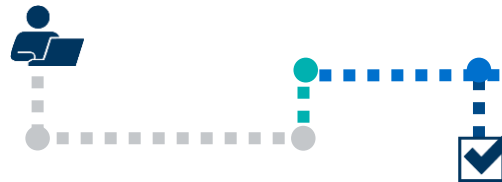


Emma

Gen Z seeking to finish her degree

Emma's Two-Year Journey

From Online Research to Application



- Becomes aware of degree completion programs through **display ads**
- Clicks through to **Apply Advance** to explore personalized resources
- Engages with ABC U **email survey**
- Receives **self-mailer** with information tailored to survey response
- Receives application **discount offer**
- Submits **application**

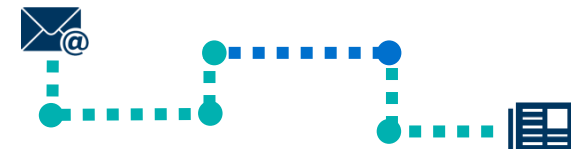


Sam

Engaged alumnus looking to upskill

Sam's Ongoing Journey

Interested, but Waiting for the Right Time

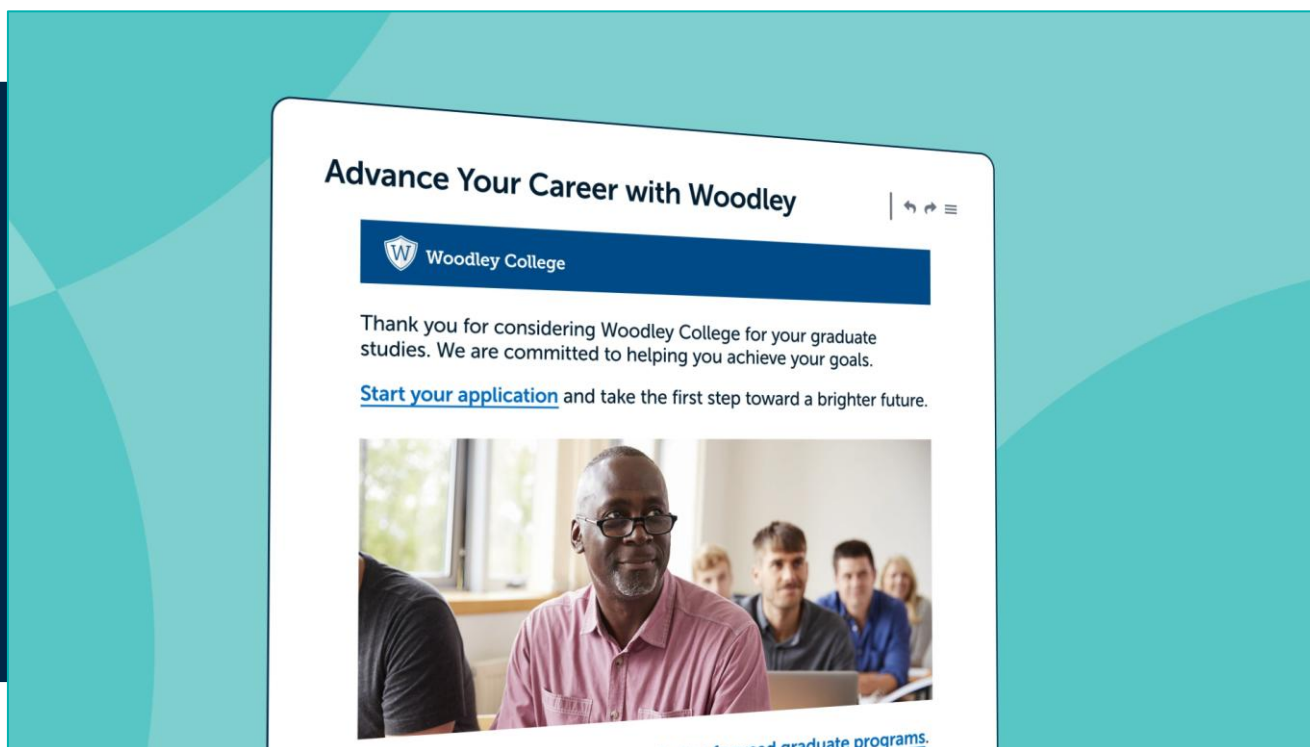


- Receives **emails** from his alma mater
- Registers for the GRE and engages with **social media ads** from his school
- Receives "good luck on the GRE" **email**
- Receives application deadline info and indicates a **future term of enrollment**
- Continues to receive periodic **email updates** from his school



Using AI to Hyper-Personalize Your Recruitment Emails at Scale

Make All Students Feel Like All Communication Is *With*, Not From, Your Institution



90%

of EAB campaign emails can be hyper-personalized using AI

+68%

Percentage of increase in engagement rate when hyper-personalization is used

5 Promising Hyper-Personalized Tactics

1

Super-Granular Segmentation

2

Advanced Trigger Emails

3

Individualized Offers

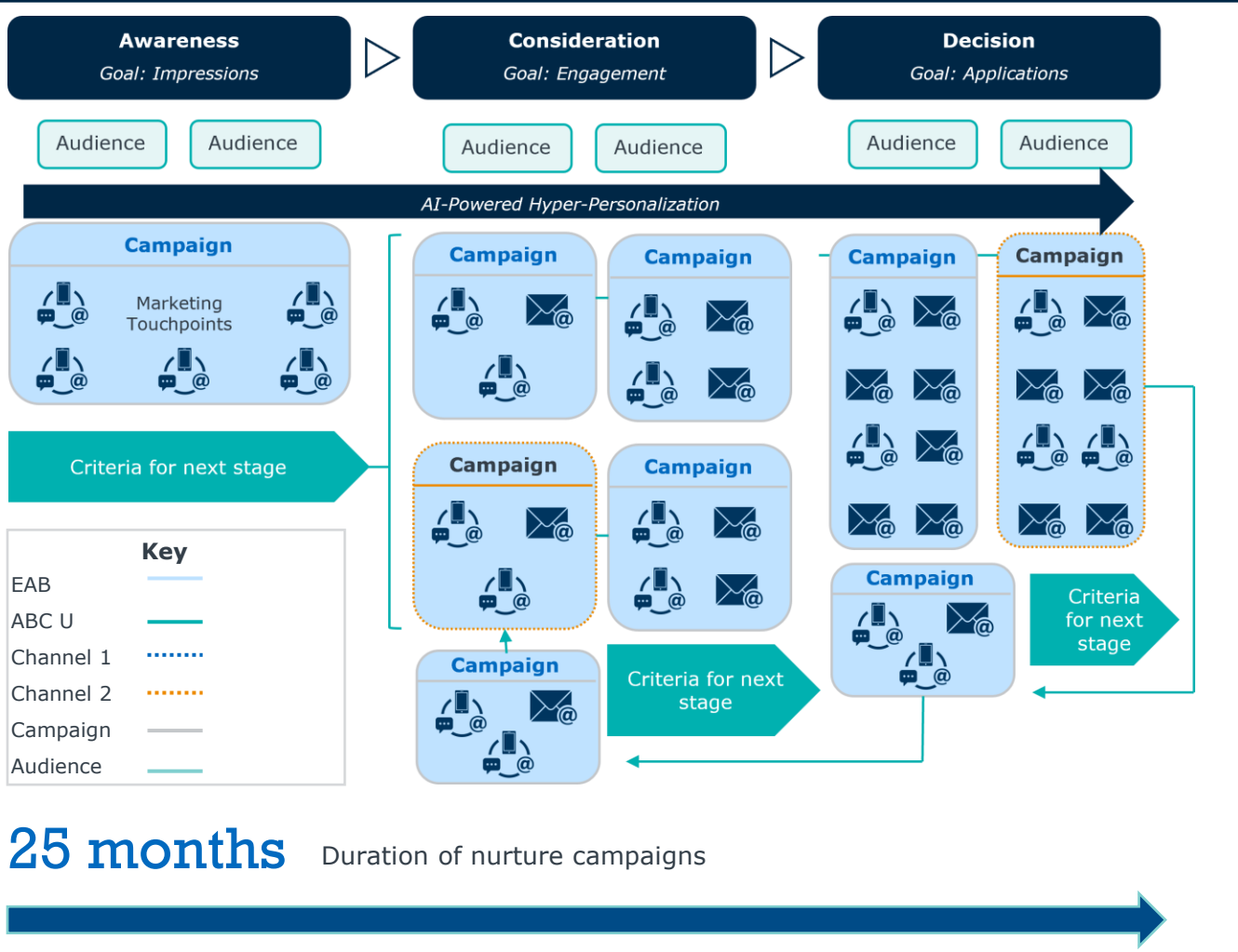
4

Individualized Subject Lines

5

Fully Personalized Email Copy

We Craft a Customized 'Student Journey'



Recommendations Tailored to Your Institution's Goals

- ✓ Audiences
- ✓ Campaign flows
- ✓ Timing and schedule
- ✓ Channels
- ✓ Campaign objectives
- ✓ Messaging strategy
- ✓ Imagery strategy
- ✓ Calls to action
- ✓ Suggested A/B tests

25 months Duration of nurture campaigns

2.6M

New prospective students contacted in FY25

321M

Digital impressions in FY25

Empowering Your Team with Data and Visibility

Our Partner Portal Provides Transparent Access to Campaign Performance Data

Insights Dashboard

✓ Top-of-Funnel Reporting

View funnel conversion by audience sources

✓ Future Planning Views

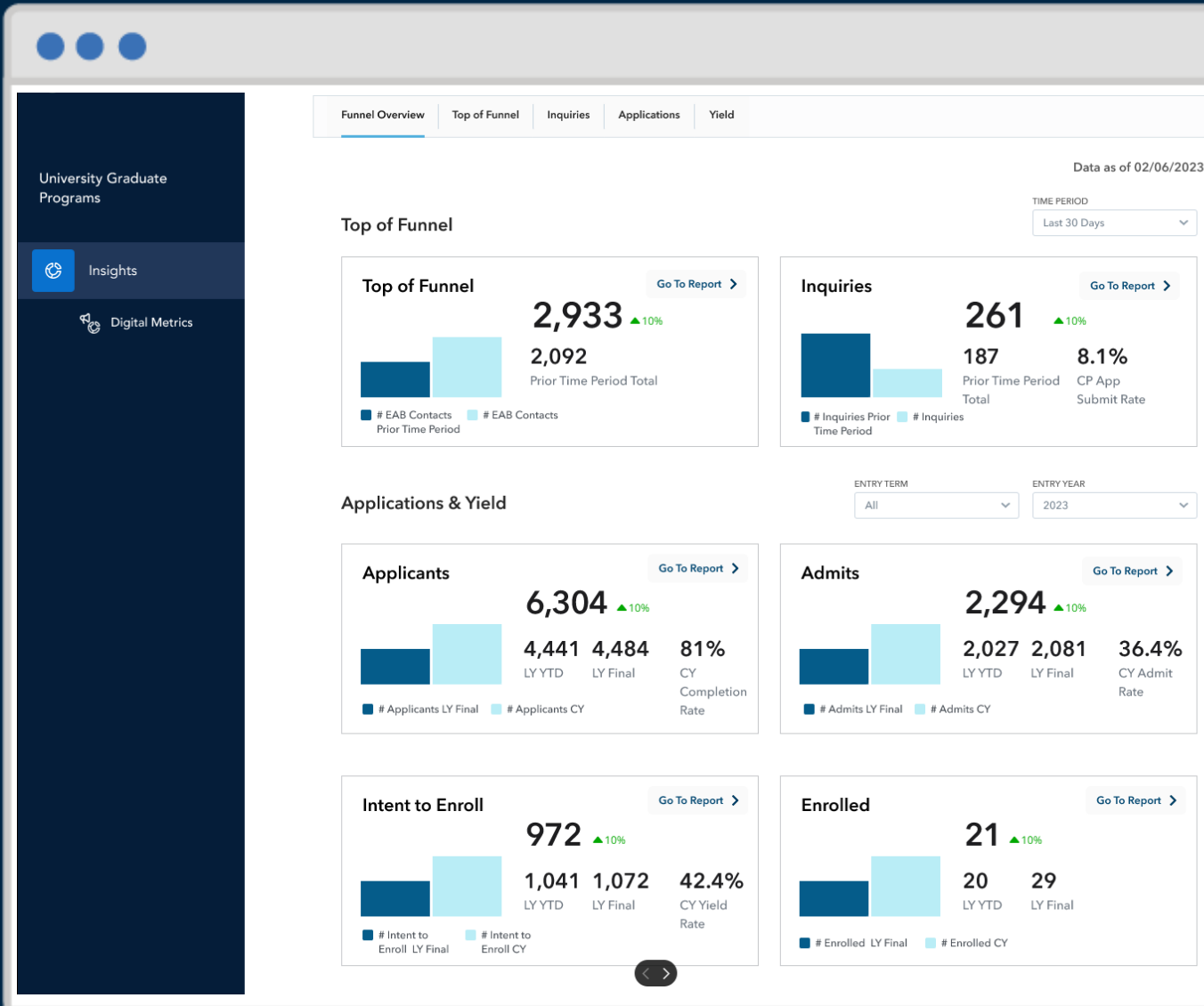
Track future audiences and inquiry builds and compare to prior year

✓ Full-Funnel, Year-over-Year Analytics

We aggregate disparate data sources into one place to help you understand performance

✓ Consultant Access

Access to EAB experts for collaboration on insights and action



Empowering Your Team with Data and Visibility

Understand the Performance, Composition, and Health of Digital Marketing Campaigns

Digital Marketing Insights Report

✓ Proactively Monitor Campaign Health

View metrics such as cost, click-through rate, cost-per-click, and cost-per-mille

✓ Compare Metrics over Time

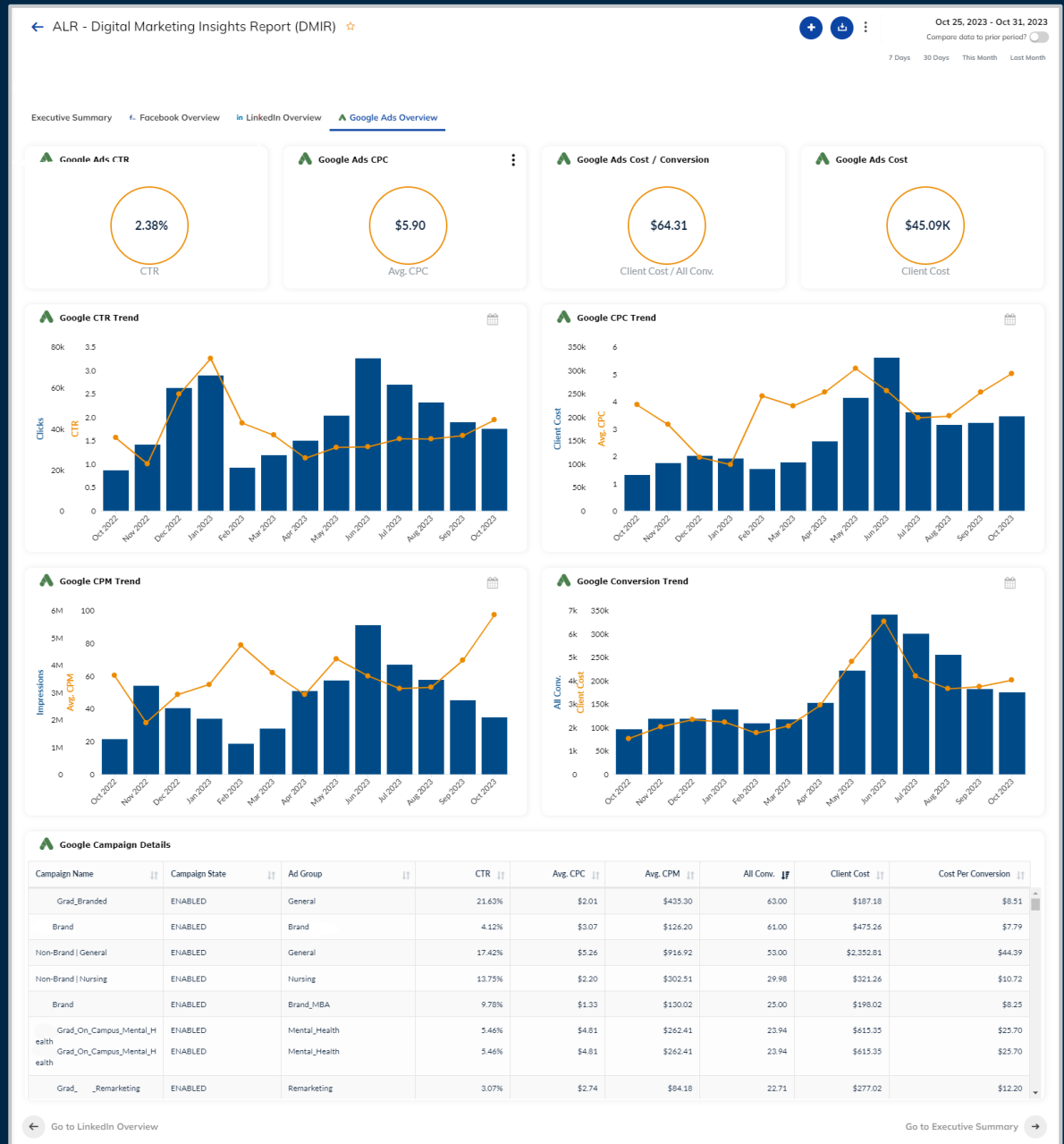
Analyze key metrics day over day, month over month, or year over year

✓ Foster Conversation

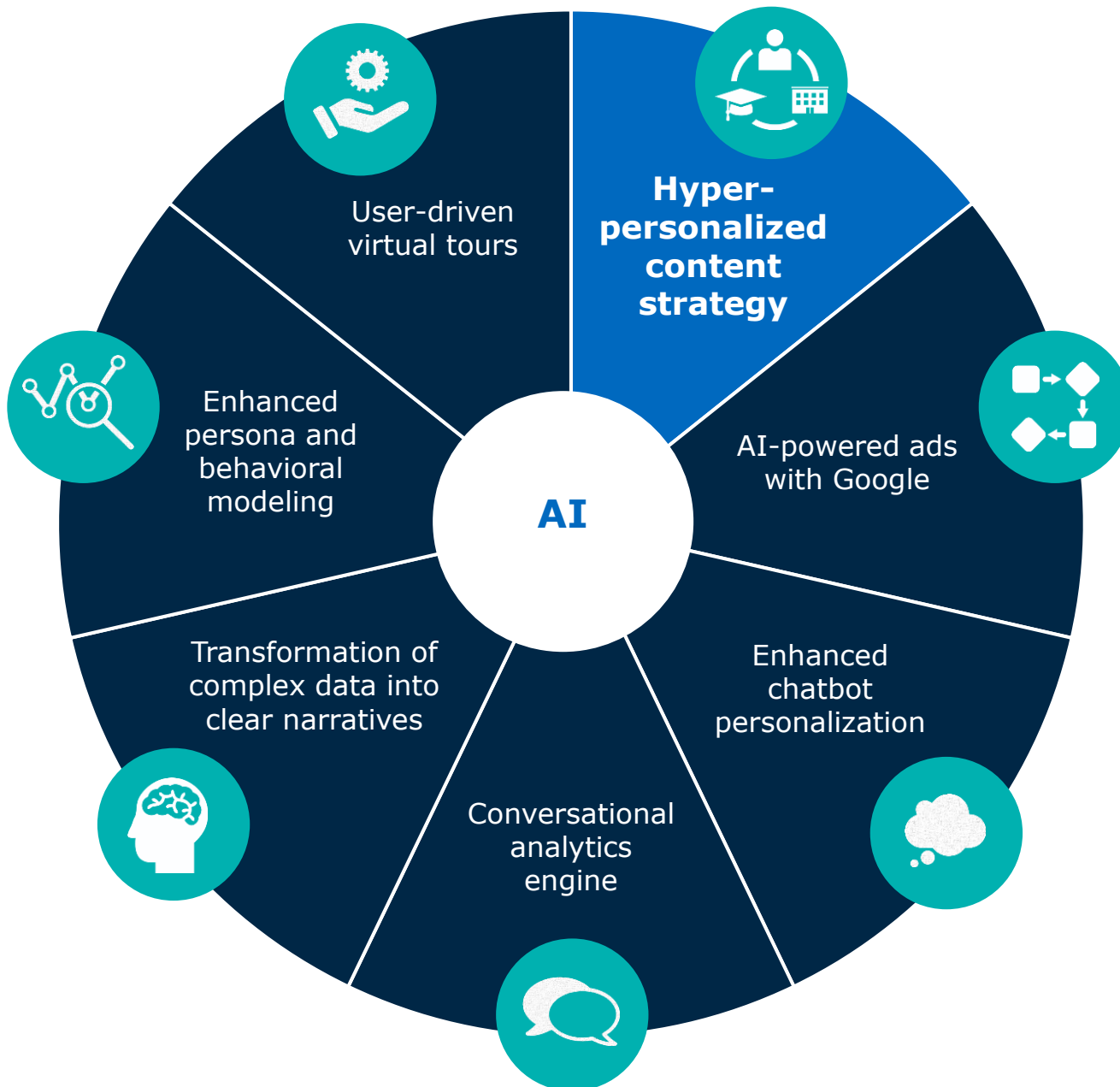
Export digital marketing campaign data to spur conversation on campus

✓ Consultant Access

Access to EAB experts for collaboration on insights and action



Generative AI with EAB



Transformational Results from AI Innovation

15K+ Student queries answered by EAB's AI agents in Fall 2025

68%+ Lift in engagement from AI-driven personalization in our campaigns



Convert

Improve Yield and Retention to Maximize Enrollment Potential

Graduate Enrollment Now Depends on Getting Financial Aid Right

STUDENT REALITY

Cost Is the Primary Driver of Students' Enrollment Decisions

#1

Cost is the top reason prospective graduate and adult **students remove a school from their consideration list**

45%

of surveyed graduate students **expect to have financial aid**, loans, and/or grants to pay for school

INSTITUTIONAL EXPOSURE

The End of Grad PLUS Exposes Hidden Enrollment Risk

Then: Grad PLUS Quietly Enabled Enrollment Growth

2X

Postgraduate degree attainment doubled in the Grad PLUS era

444,000

Students took out Grad PLUS loans in 2023–24

Now: Enrollment Risk Has Shifted to Institutions



Which programs—and which students—are most impacted by changing federal aid policy?



How do we allocate aid to improve enrollment outcomes?



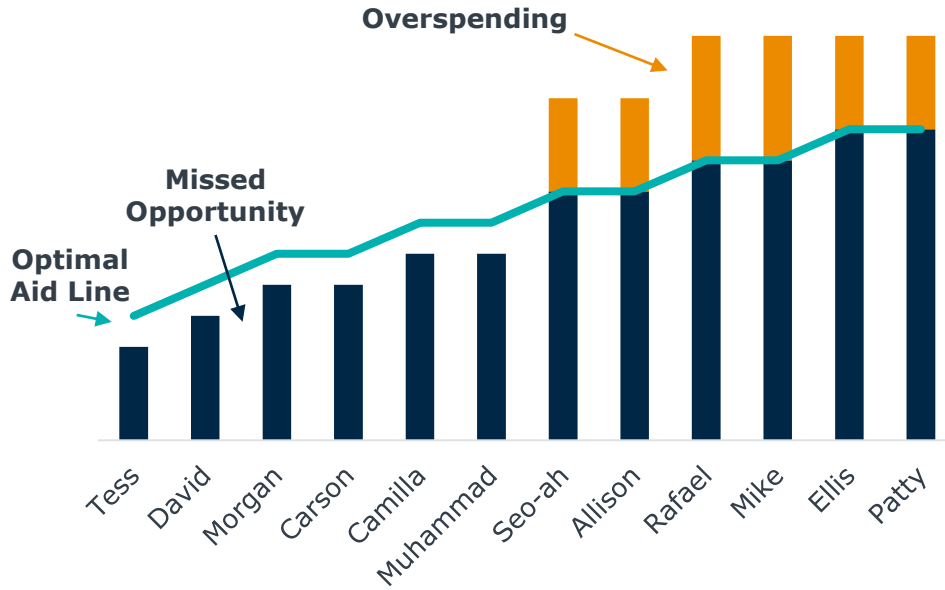
Are our pricing and aid messages clear to cost-conscious students?



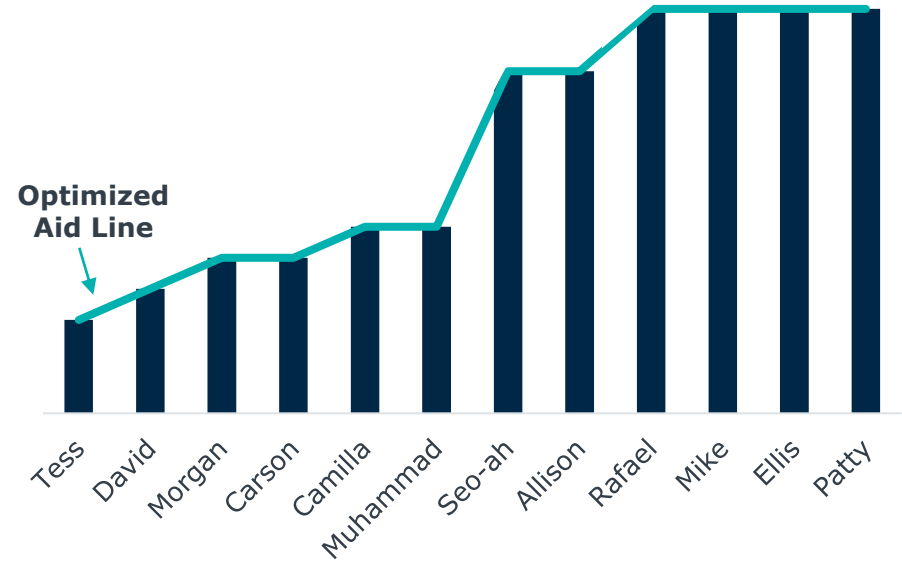
Do we have the data, capacity, and tools to close affordability gaps?

Financial Aid Solutions for a Post-Grad PLUS World

Typical Approach to Financial Aid Allocations



Our Approach to Drive Enrollment, Financial Resilience



EAB Financial Aid Optimization Services

Built on 30+ Years of Dedicated Financial Aid Expertise



Risk Exposure Analysis

Identify which programs and students face the greatest enrollment risk post-Grad PLUS



Customized Modeling

Model enrollment and revenue outcomes across pricing and aid scenarios



Policy Development

Design aid policies aligned to your enrollment, revenue, and access goals



Real-Time Monitoring

Monitor yield, net tuition revenue, and enrollment in real time—and adjust mid-cycle

Maximize Yield of Your Admitted-Student Pool

Identify Student Intentions to Triage and Target Follow-Up Outreach

1 Soliciting Applicants' Feedback

Proprietary approach to surveying applicants on their enrollment intentions (and factors influencing *why*)

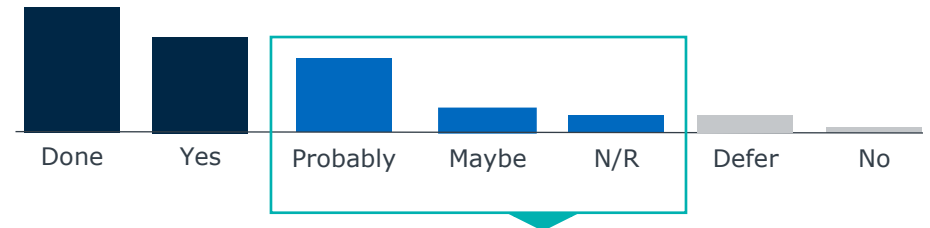


EAB's Survey Campaign

▶ **75%-85%**
average response rate

2 Predicting Who Will Enroll

Likelihood to Enroll by Response to the Question: **"Do you intend to enroll (or deposit)?"**



Customized campaigns based on each student's response

3 Improving Admissions Feedback

Online portal tracks enrollment and deposit progress by the minute



- Track performance indicators
- Discover student intentions
- Triage student follow-up

4 Boosting Competitive Intelligence

Learn from non-yielding students with customized exit survey:

- Identify key competitors
- Understand why a student chose not to enroll
- Reveal insights for more effective messaging



60%-80%

Response rate among non-enrolling admits

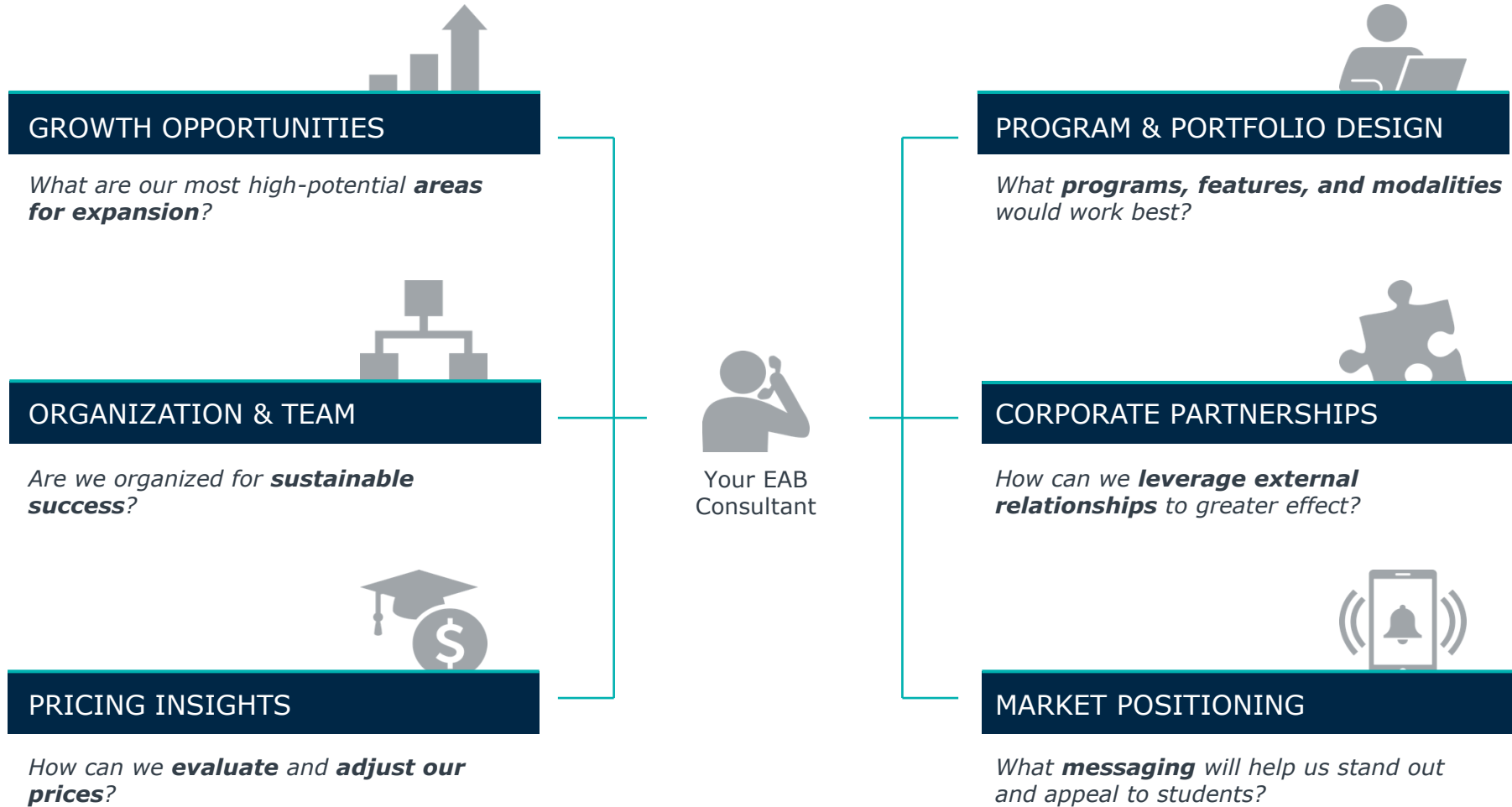


Strategize

*Identify and Build Market-Ready Programs for
Competitive Advantage*

EAB Consultations Provide Customized Guidance

On-Call, Expert Guidance Across Core Areas of Graduate and Adult Enrollment Strategy



A Library of On-Demand Resources, Unlocked on Day One

Employer Partnerships



Marketing to Adult Learners



Organizing for Growth



Credential Innovation



Online Education

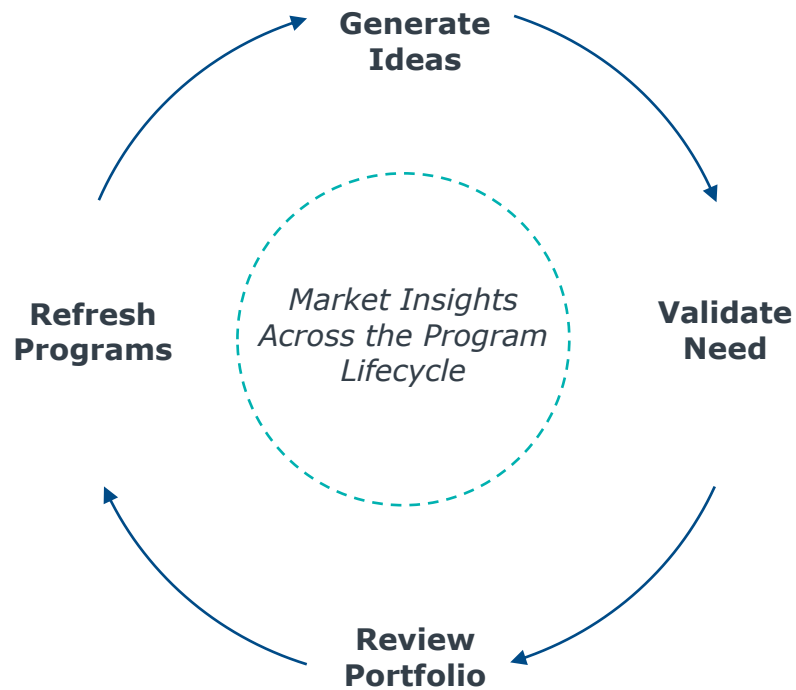


Industry Futures

Custom Analysis to Strengthen Program and Portfolio Growth Strategy


EAB's Market Insights Service


EAB Supports Institutions at Every Stage of Growth





Rich Data Inputs and Expert Analysis Inform Every Answer


We partner with industry-leader Lightcast for real-time labor market intelligence and add analysis of:

 Enrollment and conferral trends

 Competitor program positioning

 Prospect-facing website and inquiry process audits

 BLS projections, Census data

 Peer program curricula

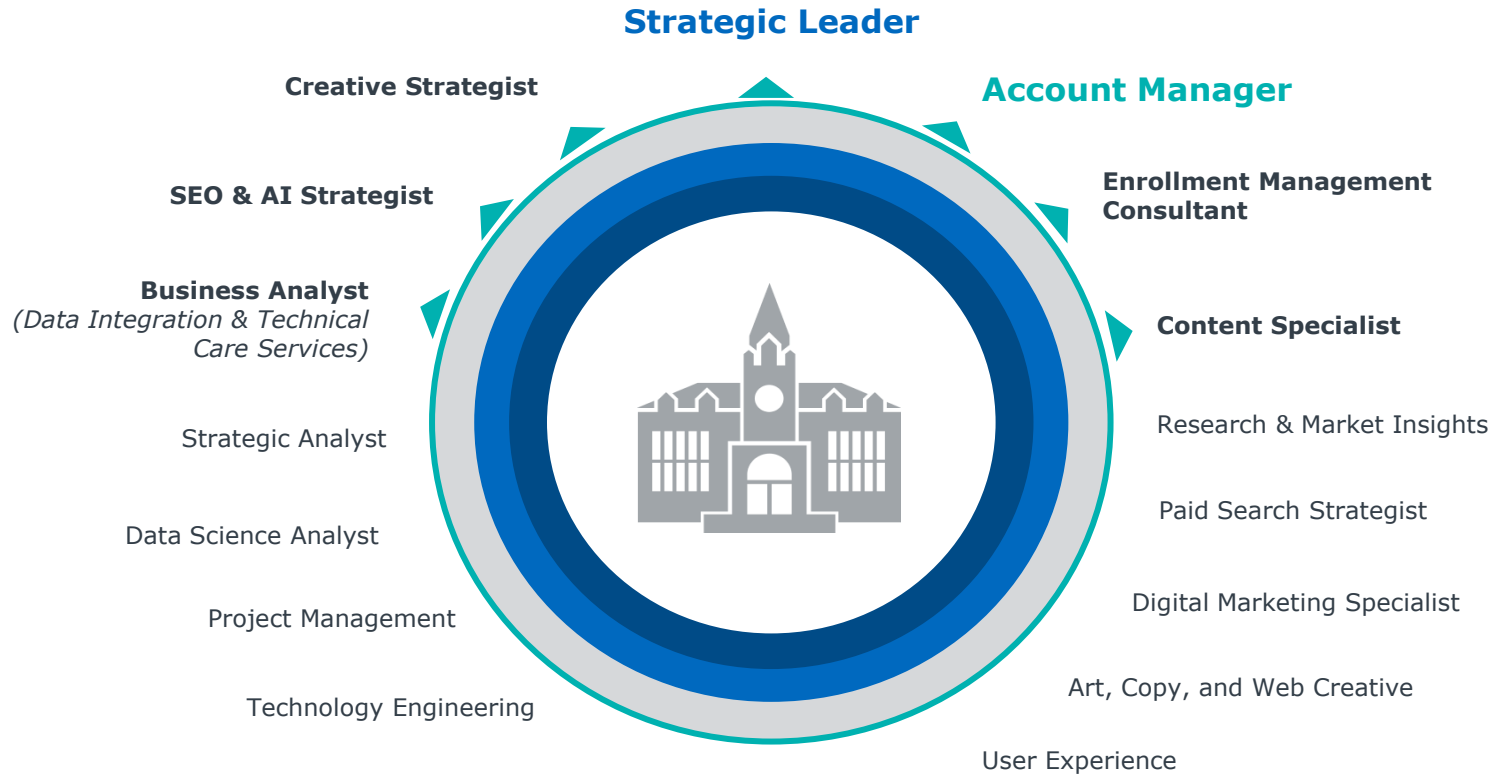
 Industry trends and literature

How EAB Can Support Your Portfolio Growth Strategy

- 1 Surface regional market-aligned program ideas with a [Market Opportunity Scan](#)
- 2 Find your market-aligned existing programs with a [Portfolio Health Check](#)
- 3 Refresh existing programs with a [360° Program Assessment](#)

Customized Support from EAB's Team of Experts

Our Multidisciplinary Team Is Focused on Your Day-to-Day Success



Our Team Has Extensive Experience in Marketing and Higher Education

40+

Marketing and analytics professionals on staff

100+

Researchers dedicated to higher education strategy

15+

Disciplines covered by EAB's team of experts

Our Growth Story

+187%

Growth of Adult Learner Recruitment team since 2017

How Can We Help?

I'd like to speak to an EAB expert about...

- 1 Optimizing graduate, online, or adult education **programs for growth**
- 2 **Generating leads** for graduate and online programs
- 3 Developing **marketing campaigns** to reach, recruit, and enroll students
- 4 Updating our **yield** and **financial aid** strategies

Next Steps Available In Our Post-Webinar Poll

Today's Slides

1

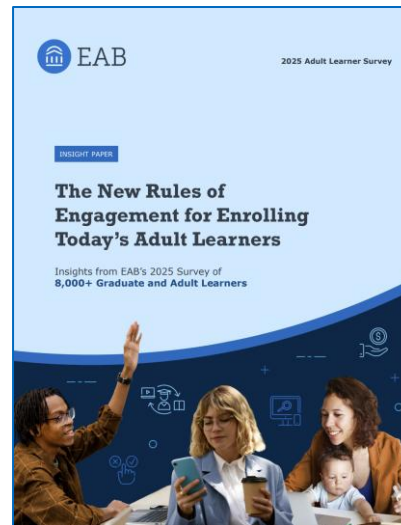
Receive a copy of today's **presentation slides**



Student Mindset

2

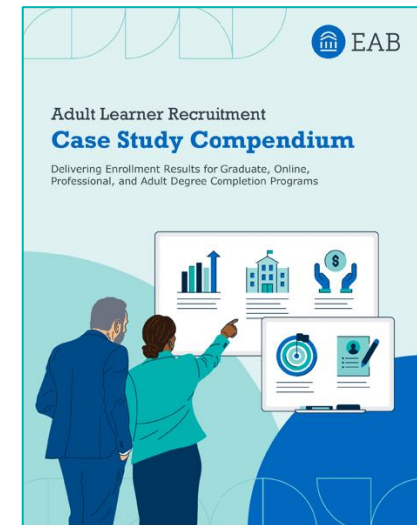
Read our **insight paper** featuring findings from a survey of 8,000+ students



Case Studies

3

Hear how our **partners** are growing graduate, online, and adult enrollment



4

Get the Latest Insights from EAB

Subscribe to the Adult Education blog to receive EAB's latest research and insights on graduate, online, and adult programs

Thank You!



Ryan Leach

Director

EAB Adult Learner Recruitment

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Consider Our Team a Resource

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.



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 @eab  @eab-  @WeAreEAB

ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with more than 2,800 institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and advancement. We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.