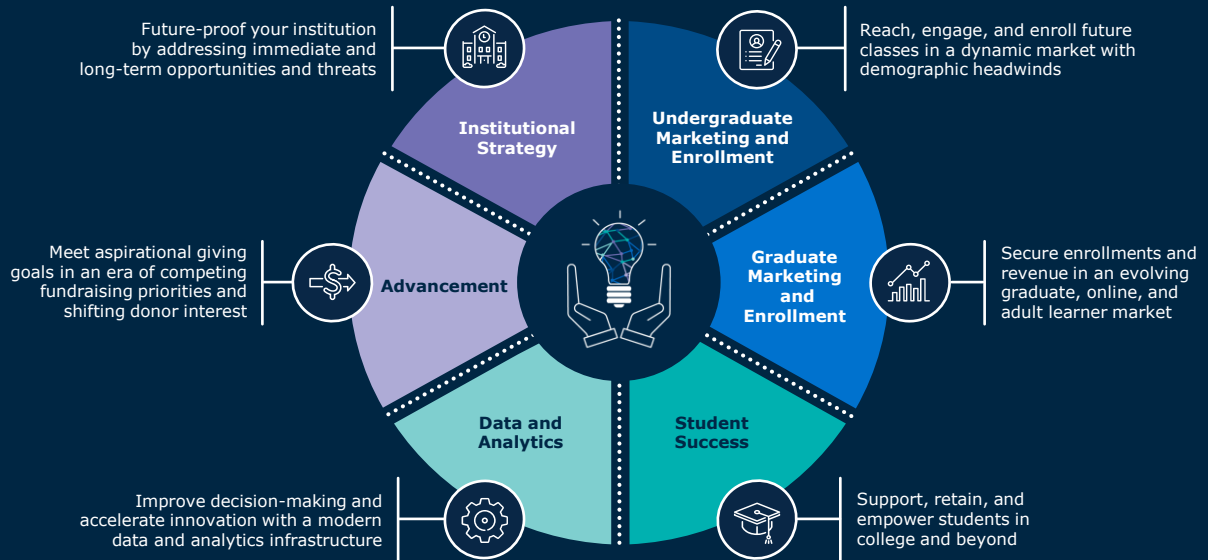# Cracking the Code

Organic Lead Generation for Graduate and Adult Programs

Adult Learner Recruitment

Insight-powered Solutions for Your Top Priorities and Toughest Challenges

Future-proof your institution by addressing immediate and long-term opportunities and threats

Institutional Strategy

Reach, engage, and enroll future classes in a dynamic market with demographic headwinds

Undergraduate Marketing and Enrollment

Meet aspirational giving goals in an era of competing fundraising priorities and shifting donor interest

Advancement

Graduate Marketing and Enrollment

Secure enrollments and revenue in an evolving graduate, online, and adult learner market

Data and Analytics

Student Success

Improve decision-making and accelerate innovation with a modern data and analytics infrastructure

Support, retain, and empower students in college and beyond

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.

Today's Presenters

Alyssa Duvall

Associate Director, SEO and Paid Search Strategy

Sarah Heatwole

Associate Director, Content Strategy

Emily Upton

Vice President

High Pressure to Deliver

Potential for strong financial returns from grad and adult programs creates pressure despite market challenges

100%
of surveyed presidents and provosts prioritize graduate and adult enrollment[1]

Increased Competition

Pandemic-era hybrid and remote modality courses **increased the number of available program options**

2.37%
Average annual growth in graduate programs, compared to just 1.58% average annual growth in conferrals

Limited List Sources

Programs often relying on **declining test-taker lists**, word of mouth, and in-person events

29%
of surveyed graduate adult learners opting to take admissions tests[2]

Stealth Shoppers

Prospects typically research degree and program options online **without "raising their hand"** as a lead for marketing

80%
Stealth shopping rate reported among leaders of professional, continuing, and online units

1) Based on a 2022 EAB survey of presidents and provosts.
2) Based on a 2023 survey of 3,800+ prospective graduate and adult learners.

Schools Must Adapt to Changing Generational Behaviors and Preferences

Millennials

- Fought for expanded tech access
- Social media guinea pigs
- Feel empowered by technology
- Led older generations in technology

Gen Z

- Skilled at searching and skimming
- Expect content to be personalized to them
- Value easy access to information

Gen Alpha

- Will be the fastest to adopt technologies
- Will be the first generation to use AI regularly for search

But There Are a Few Constants Across Generations…
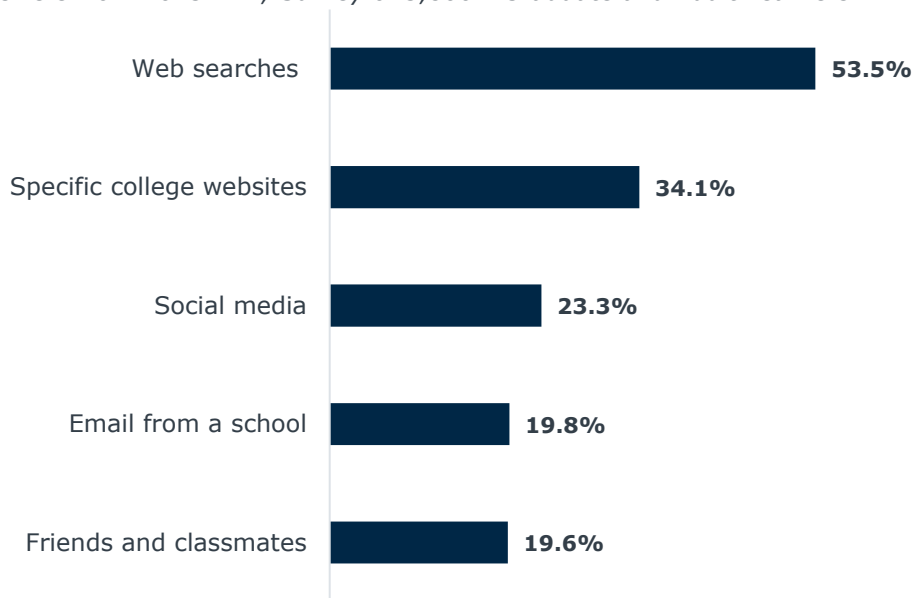
Prefer independent exploration

Seek quick answers

High expectations, little patience

"Which sources of information [did you use/have you used] in your search?"
Top five answers from 2023 EAB; Survey of 3,800+ Graduate and Adult Learners

Source	Percentage
Web searches	53.5%
Specific college websites	34.1%
Social media	23.3%
Email from a school	19.8%
Friends and classmates	19.6%

▷ **Degree completers disproportionately rely on word of mouth in their college search.**

> " Organic lead generation refers to the process of generating more website traffic without having to spend money on paid ads or sponsored content. "
>
> *- MailChimp*

What Are the Benefits of Organic Lead Generation?
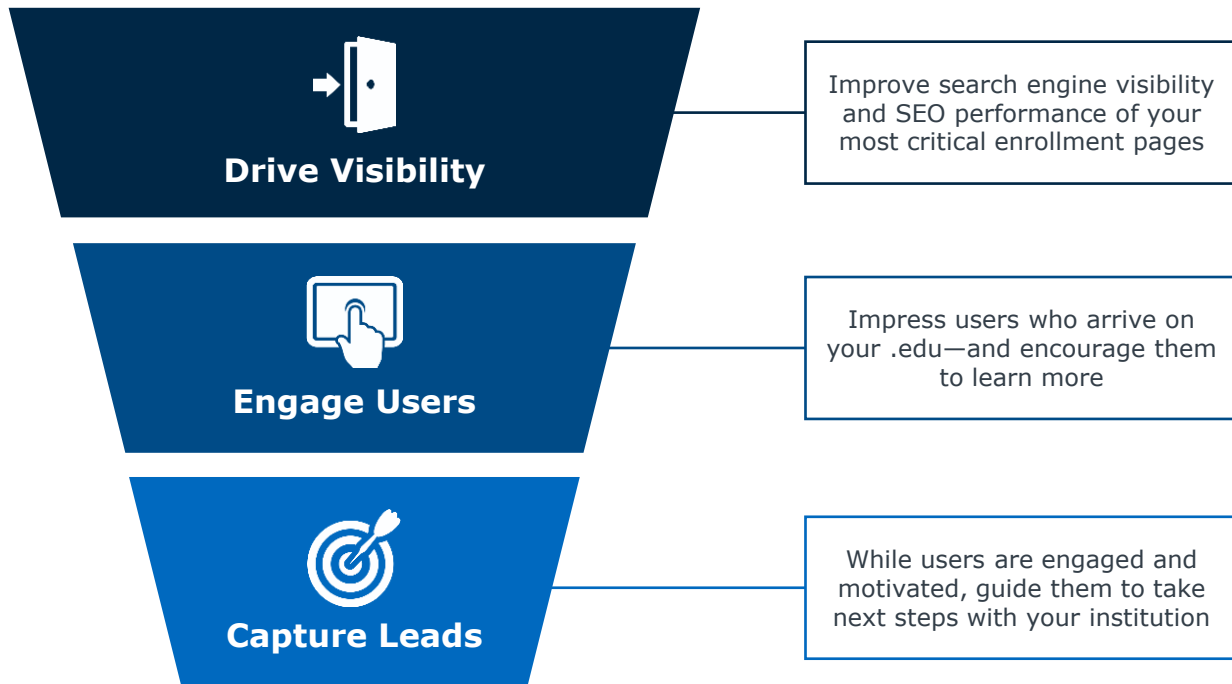
Cost-effective

Increases brand awareness

Builds trust

Generates high-quality leads

Drive Visibility

Improve search engine visibility and SEO performance of your most critical enrollment pages

Engage Users

Impress users who arrive on your .edu—and encourage them to learn more

Capture Leads

While users are engaged and motivated, guide them to take next steps with your institution

Poll

Which of the following choices is the greatest challenge your team faces when it comes to generating organic leads?

- Driving traffic to our university website
- Engaging site users with the right content and information
- Capturing leads from our website
- Other (please feel free to share in the Chat)

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Driving Visibility

2

1 Google's AI Updates Impact Traffic Numbers

Google has implemented several significant AI-driven updates that result in **more content being featured on the search engine results pages**. While Google's AI updates aim to enhance the search experience, they can also impact organic traffic patterns. With users finding the answers to their search queries without going to a website, **less organic traffic is coming into the site**.

2 Measuring Site Engagement Is Key

With less organic traffic coming to the website, it is important to understand if the organic traffic your site does receive is engaging with your content. We have noticed that Google is providing users with information on their results pages but **users who are looking to act will still come to the site to request more info, apply, schedule visits, etc.** This is noted by looking at engagement metrics on the site.

3 Quality of Keywords More Important than Quantity

As we evaluate the keywords the site is ranking for, it is important to understand that **the type of keywords that are ranking is more valuable than the number of keywords**. The goal is to rank for keywords with strong search intent that aligns with the content on your site.

SEO Fast Facts

6 seconds

Before users choose a link from search engine results page

+50%

of searches come from voice queries

1:05

The average engagement time per session for organic traffic on higher education websites

Millennials: Short, Broad Keywords

Google

best mba degree program

Gen Z: Long, Detailed Search Queries

Google

where can I get the best mba degree in virginia for a career in

Effective SEO Can Be Powerful

Attract Right-Fit Prospects

Ensure website content aligns with how students are searching and provides the information they need

Inform On-Page Content

Discovering how organic traffic engages with your site can drive content strategy and linking

Stay Competitive

With competition for rankings growing, organic results are flooded with other insitutions' websites and lead generation sites

Improve User Experience

SEO helps drive users to the most relevant content on your site, improving site experience

45% Average increase in organic traffic after incorporating EAB SEO recommendations on key website pages

The Elements of a Successful SEO Strategy

AUDIT ▶   OPTIMIZE ▶   MONITOR ▶

Identify Opportunities

- What does your site traffic tell you?

- What is your website's visibility in the search engines?

- What are your competitors doing and how do you rank against them?

- What are your on-page and technical challenges?

Align to Your Strategy

Conduct keyword research to identify branded or non-branded keywords that are relevant to the topic of your pages.

Incorporate keywords into:

- Headers

- Body Copy

- Calls to Action and Links

- Title Tags

- Meta Descriptions

- Image Alt Text + Captions

Don't Set It and Forget It

Search engine rankings can change when:

- A website's pages are updated

- New keyword competitors emerge

- Previous competitors optimize their sites

After seeing how the search engines rank a page, you may:

- Re-optimize the page's on-page and code elements

- De-optimize other site pages that are competing for rankings

Poll

What aspect of your SEO strategy are you most focused on to achieve better search engine rankings?

- Optimizing **on-page elements** (e.g., title tags, headings)
- Conducting regular SEO audits to **understand organic traffic** (e.g., engagement rate, new users)
- Fixing **technical challenges** (e.g., broken links, missing meta descriptions)
- **Other** – Please tell us in the Chat
- We are **not currently focused on our SEO strategy**

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Engaging Users

3

Websites Significantly Impact Students' Program Choice...

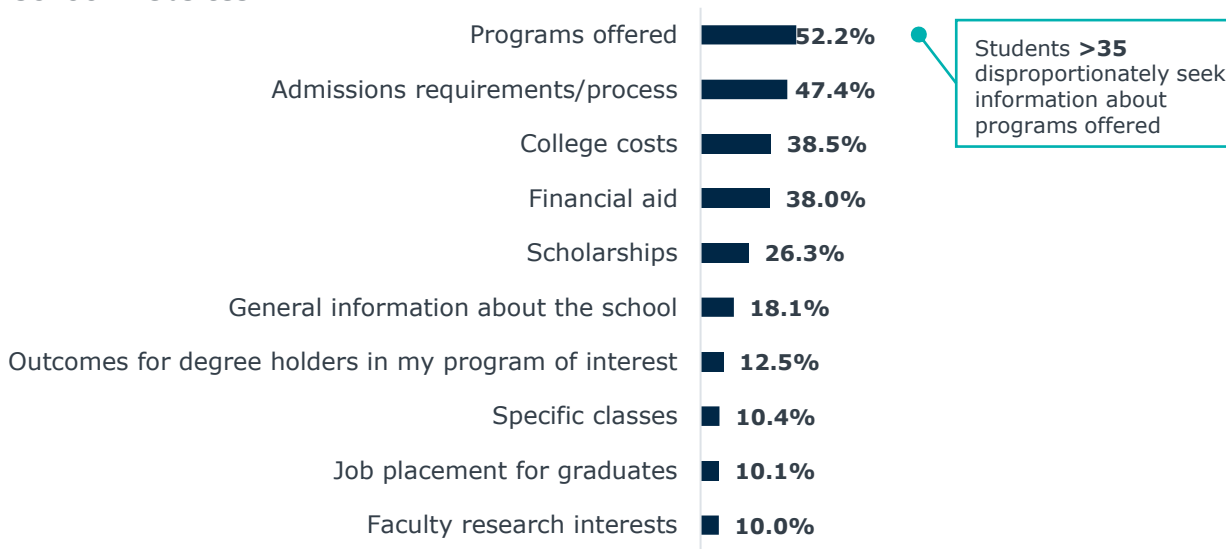**94%** of adult learners make a point to visit websites of all schools they're considering

84% of adult learners say a bad website negatively affects their opinion of your school

72% of adult learners abandon your website if it's not user-friendly

"What information were you most often trying to find when searching school websites?"

Category	Percentage
Programs offered	**52.2%**
Admissions requirements/process	**47.4%**
College costs	**38.5%**
Financial aid	**38.0%**
Scholarships	**26.3%**
General information about the school	**18.1%**
Outcomes for degree holders in my program of interest	**12.5%**
Specific classes	**10.4%**
Job placement for graduates	**10.1%**
Faculty research interests	**10.0%**

Students **>35** disproportionately seek information about programs offered

Degree completers disproportionately seek info about college costs and financial aid.
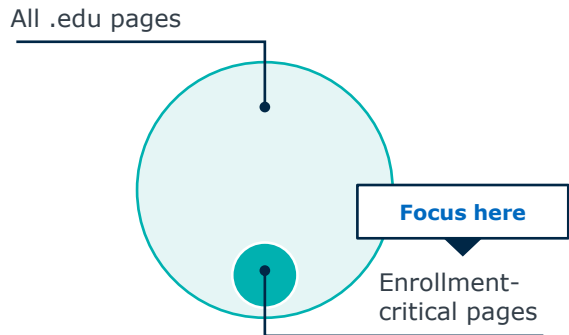
Content Strategy for .edu Pages Where It Will Have the Greatest Impact

Prioritize Key Pages

A Full Web Redesign Often Isn't Necessary

All .edu pages

Focus here

Enrollment-
critical pages

Answer Top Student Questions

Academics + Programs

- Do they have what I want to study?
- Will I get a good job with this degree?
- What and how will I learn?

Student Fit + Experience

- What is the campus culture?
- What resources are available to help me succeed?
- Will I find networking or career opportunities?

Financial Aid, Scholarships, Tuition

- Can I afford it?
- Is it worth it?

Admissions

- Can I get in?
- How do I apply?
- Why should I apply here vs. any other school?

A Customized Playbook to Guide Your Strategy

Topics include:

- **Audience Insights** — Why are students visiting the .edu?

- **IA & Navigation Best Practices** — How should content be organized so humans (and SEO bots) can find it?

- **Suggested Content Strategies** — Page-specific, CMS-agnostic, high-level content recommendations (~5 per student journey)

- **SEO Copy Best Practices** — How to meet user intent and rank in search engine results

- **Additional Lead Generation Tools** — Ideas for additional ways to convert increased visitors to leads

When Evaluating Your .edu, Consider...

Are you findable?

Are you showing up on SERPs when students start doing their research?

Is content relevant?

Do students find engaging content when they click to your site?

Is it organized?

Are they encouraged to continue exploring until they inquire or apply?

Essential Program Pages Elements Include...

- ✓ Program overview
- ✓ Program quick facts
- ✓ **Apply CTA**
- ✓ **Program-specific admissions requirements**

- ✓ **Career and experiential learning info**
- ✓ Tuition and fees
- ✓ Social proof
- ✓ Rankings and statistics

- ✓ Coursework info
- ✓ Related or complementary programs
- ✓ Available concentrations
- ✓ Program contact info

Poll

What content are you most concerned about in your strategic plan?

- Creating **program-specific landing pages** with detailed course information
- Publishing **student testimonials** and success stories
- Implementing **personalized content recommendations** based on user interests and behaviors
- Utilizing data-driven insights to update and **optimize key enrollment pages regularly**
- **Running targeted email campaigns** with content that guides students through the enrollment process
- **Other** – Please tell us in the Chat

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Capturing Leads

4

Building Meaningful Integration Points to Drive Incremental Activity

Integrated, High-Converting Forms That Collect Data While Students Engage

Don't miss your opportunity!

Sign-up to receive email and text reminders for upcoming deadlines.

First Name (required)

Last Name (required)

Preferred Email (required)

Phone Number (required)

☐ I agree to receive text messages...

SUBMIT

Key Benefits

✓ Organic leads flow into marketing campaigns

✓ Offers users purpose for providing information

✓ Simple script installation (embed code)

✓ Custom fields to match your CRM

Early Impact

+50 Average leads per month from active pilot partners

30% More likely to engage with partners' marketing campaigns

Results from Bear University*

Strong SEO and Content Strategy Driving Results

Drive Visibility

- **Total Users:** +16%
- **New Users:** +14%
- **Sessions:** +19%
- **Views:** +26%
- **Clicks:** +27%
- **Impressions:** +27%

Engage Students

- **Engaged Sessions:** +37%

Capture Leads

- **Submissions:** 545
- First-source OLG lead forms account for 17% of Instition A's lead generation

| First Source	Leads	Percentage of Total	Application Rate
Partner Inquiries	2,147	74%	27.2%
EAB Lead Form	482	17%	4.8%
Digital	215	7%	4.2%
GRE	59	2%	6.8%

*Pseudonym

Key Takeaways

Organic lead generation is a cost-effective, impactful source of leads within a **diversified lead generation and nurturing strategy**

Users spend only ~6 seconds before they choose a link from search engine results page	Users apply snap judgments of academic quality, campus experience, and career potential	Many sites simply lack proper placement of CTAs or prompts
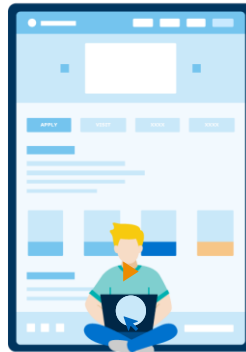
1 **Drive** up your page's visibility on the search engine results page to get users to your site

2 **Engage** and impress users so they want to move forward

3 **Capture** and inspire action toward enrollment

Your Goals and Differentiators

Strategy Transformation

Intelligent Analytics

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PTK lists

NSC

Alumni and UGs

Inquiry Pool

Virtual Tours

Test-Taker lists

First-Party Digital

Appily Advance

Consumer Analytics
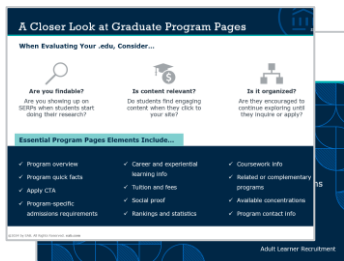
Organic Lead Gen

Paid Search

Interested in More?

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

1 **Generating quality leads** for graduate, online, and adult-serving programs

2 Improving the **enrollment-critical webpages** on our .edu

3 Developing **marketing campaigns** to reach and recruit graduate and online students

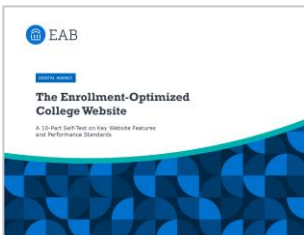4 Holistic enrollment strategies to grow graduate and adult-serving programs

Today's Slides	Self-Assess	Our Latest Research

1

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

2

Take our **self-test** on key website features and functions

3

Register for our **9/18 webinar** featuring new research on the state of the graduate and adult learner markets

4

Get the latest insights from EAB

Subscribe to the EAB Briefing to receive EAB's latest and most relevant content each morning

Q&A

Alyssa Duvall

Associate Director, SEO and Paid Search Strategy

Sarah Heatwole

Associate Director, Content Strategy

Emily Upton

Vice President

Please consider our team a resource—and let us know what content we can share in follow-up via the **exit survey**