

2018 E-Expectations Trend Report

How Digital Engagement Shapes the Way
High School Juniors and Seniors Choose a College



INTRODUCTION

There's a high school student who is a great fit for your institution. She's interested in one of your strongest academic offerings, would mesh with your campus culture, and is a good student who will qualify for scholarships. As she conducts her college search—on her phone and her laptop—she visits web pages, reads emails from your campus, and checks out your social media accounts.

Yet she never really engages with your institution and enrolls elsewhere. Why? Because your digital presence didn't meet her expectations.

Here is the reality for colleges and universities: **students can find out about any campus at any time with a few words in a search box.** They have multiple paths to learn about an institution. They have growing expectations of personalization and gathering information on their own terms in whichever sequence they choose. This means campuses have to be prepared to meet these expectations regardless of how or when students gather information. It requires a robust digital presence where all of those pieces are aligned and focused on delivering a dynamic, engaging experience to students.

The *2018 E-Expectations Trend Report* provides you with insights from high school juniors and seniors so you can engage and inform them wherever they interact with your institution online. This report answers key questions such as:

- 1 **How do students rank admissions resources you provide, from most valuable to least?**
- 2 **What keeps students engaged with your website, and what will undermine their experience?**
- 3 **How do students want to connect with your campus?**
- 4 **Which social media platforms matter, and how do preferences differ for juniors and seniors?**
- 5 **What do students look for first when they visit your website?**

The findings are also categorized by juniors and seniors to show how their needs and expectations evolve during the search process. These key insights align with recommended action steps colleges must take to attract students who are the best fit.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

These results come from a survey of 529 high school juniors and seniors conducted in spring 2018. The survey has a confidence level of 95 percent with a +/- margin of error of 4 percent.



SUPPORTING THEIR RESEARCH

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Which resources matter most to prospective students?

“ I want easy-to-find campus tour dates and program information. ”

Throughout this report, we share additional comments from student respondents.

When students conduct their college searches, which resources do they find the most useful? Students were asked to rank the importance of information resources from most valuable to least.

MOST INFLUENTIAL INFORMATION RESOURCES (Scale of 1–5, with 5 being the most influential)



5 KEY FACTS:

- Both juniors and seniors still value traditional email, print, and phone resources.
- College planning websites are more important to juniors than seniors.
- Cost calculators are critical tools that students use to estimate aid and expense.
- Virtual tours ranked ahead of virtual reality (VR) videos.
- Video has pulled ahead of print for seniors compared to the 2017 E-Expectations study.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



THE COLLEGE WEBSITE IS EVERYTHING

College websites continue to be the top focal point of student search, which makes content and the user experience more important than ever.



CALCULATORS ARE KEY

Students said a cost calculator is a highly valuable resource, especially for seniors. Make yours easy to find and use, and provide dynamic responsive messaging to students and their parents that addresses their eligibility for aid and scholarships.



MIX IT UP

Multiple channels and a varied mix of engagement strategies are key to reach the widest possible number of students.



COST CALCULATORS

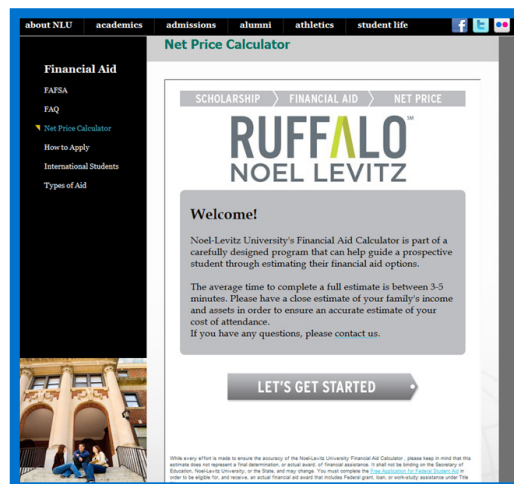
Crunching the numbers matters more than ever

“ I like seeing the net price calculator, but a lot of them are ranges and never include scholarships like the more prestigious President’s or related scholarships. ”

FACT: Calculator results were the most influential resource for seniors, ranking even above websites.



The cost of college is a hot-button issue that gets more intense with each annual increase. Tuition information is the first thing prospective students look for on college websites. Our study shows that juniors and seniors rank cost calculators as essential to their search. In fact, 33 percent of seniors and 35 percent of juniors have completed the cost calculator on their mobile device.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



MAKE IT QUICK AND EASY

Your cost calculator needs to get students and parents to an estimate as efficiently as possible. Pare your requests for information to the minimum needed to provide an accurate estimate. Start to show eligible aid as they enter information instead of saving the complete estimate for the end.



PERSONALIZE IT

This is a golden opportunity to build a relationship by showing students all the possible aid and scholarships they could receive. Make sure your calculator can segment by potential major, academic ability, and other student data that could expand their aid eligibility.



MAKE IT MOBILE FRIENDLY

Mobile responsiveness is a must for calculators, but it's also important to include features like texting where students and parents can receive text messages with links to their results.



Three out of four students cite scholarship information as critical.



CAMPUS VISITS, VIRTUAL TOURS, AND VR VIDEOS

Real vs. virtual—which wins?

“ I want video tours of specific buildings in fields of interest such as science, English, or art. ”

FACT: 66 percent of seniors and 44 percent of juniors made campus visits with parents. Less than half of those viewed VR tours.



Virtual reality (VR) is getting a lot of buzz, but most students and their parents still prefer on-campus visits. Your website should encourage students to schedule a tour and make it easy to do so.

Virtual tours and VR received a thumbs up from nearly two-thirds of students who looked at them. Virtual reality is still new, but no matter how you do it, video content is a powerful influencer, prompting an actual visit or enticing an applicant to take the next step.



Book my tour—make signing up easy



Some prefer laptop or desktop

- **33 percent of seniors and 27 percent of juniors** said they opted to view a website on a laptop/desktop so they can complete a campus visit form.



Some prefer mobile

- **30 percent of seniors and 22 percent of juniors** used a campus visit scheduler on their mobile device.

Virtual tours show promise

Though still rated behind campus visits, video tours and VR are strong motivators and can influence the decision to enroll.

VIRTUAL TOUR



Looked at	Enhanced likelihood of enrolling
54% Seniors	59% Seniors
41% Juniors	63% Juniors

VR VIDEO



Looked at	Enhanced likelihood of enrolling
23% Seniors	56% Seniors
23% Juniors	60% Juniors

KEY TAKEAWAYS



MAKE IT EASY TO FIND CAMPUS VISIT REQUESTS

As with other important calls to action, go beyond links and use visuals to get students to sign up for campus visits. Target parents with messages about visiting campus as well.



CONSIDER THE ROI ON VR

Virtual tours and VR videos were rated on the lower end of the usefulness scale by students, but the majority of those who viewed them found them influential. If it is challenging to get many students to campus for a tour, investing in a virtual one may make sense.



PAID ADS

Click rates are on the rise, spurring interest in programs and offers

“ The best banner ads are creative, colorful, and interactive. ”

FACT: 67 percent of seniors and 68 percent of juniors saw paid ads for colleges and universities, while 41 percent of seniors and 45 percent of juniors CLICKED on paid ads.



We've seen a proliferation of Google search, banners, and retargeting. This activity is creating a more level playing field for colleges and universities. Our research indicates that digital advertising can drive awareness, allow schools to feature offers, and deliver more concise messaging.

WHAT ARE THE TOP 5 SITES WHERE STUDENTS HAVE CLICKED ON COLLEGE ADS?

SITE	SENIORS	JUNIORS	TRENDS SINCE 2017
Google search	56%	76%	Seniors: down from 73% ↓ Juniors: down from 76% ↓
Other social media or blog posts	36%	34%	Seniors: up from 22% ↑
YouTube	28%	29%	↔
Facebook	50%	26%	Seniors: up from 44% ↑ Juniors: down from 37% ↓
Display ad on a web page	25%	26%	↔

Trends
 ↑ Rising
 ↓ Falling
 ↔ No change

Take an integrated approach with digital ads



Looking further into the data, students revealed additional details about the paid ads they saw:

- **40 percent of seniors and 34 percent of juniors** had visited the website for the school before seeing an ad.
- **33 percent of seniors and 36 percent of juniors** were aware of the school but had not visited the website.
- **12 percent of seniors and 26 percent of juniors** had never heard of the school before.
- **13 percent of seniors and 4 percent of juniors** planned on enrolling at the school.

These results show the importance of getting your institution in front of students in other mediums as well so that your ads will have a better chance of resonating with them.

WHY STUDENTS CLICKED ON A PAID AD

REASON FOR CLICKING	SENIORS	JUNIORS
I didn't know about the school and I wanted to learn more	50%	51%
The offer made in the ad was interesting to me	46%	43%
The ad reminded me that I needed to research or do something related to my enrollment	26%	28%
I thought I might find out something new about the school	38%	53%
Thought it might lead to a better website than I have previously experienced for the school	7%	13%

WHAT STUDENTS DID AFTER CLICKING

ACTION	SENIORS	JUNIORS	
Looked at information on a website	81%	81%	
Filled out a form to have information sent by postal mail	12%	19%	Down from 29% in 2017
Watched a video	18%	13%	Down from 28% and 31% in 2017
Filled out a form to receive a PDF brochure	8%	11%	
Registered to attend an event	9%	9%	
Called a phone number offered in the ad	2%	0%	
Nothing	2%	9%	

What does this tell us?

Engagement seems to be about the same, with the notable exceptions of completing inquiry forms (down from 29 percent to 12 percent among seniors) and watching videos, which dropped from 28 percent for seniors and 31 percent for juniors in 2017.

Juniors want ads to help them find new information or provide a better website experience. Thirty percent of seniors and 44 percent of juniors would visit the main website for a school they saw in an ad, even if they didn't click on the ad. Another 60 percent of seniors and 54 percent of juniors would do so, but only if they were already interested in the school.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



ADS ENGAGE AND BUILD YOUR BRAND

With 4 out of 10 students clicking on paid ads, they are an important opportunity to engage with prospects and build your pool. In addition, 30 percent of seniors and 44 percent of juniors would visit a campus website if they saw an ad but didn't click on it, showing ads are also important for building brand awareness.



ADJUST AS STUDENTS ADVANCE

As students move through the enrollment process, have your ads adjust with them. Seniors and juniors will have different objectives and will respond better to messages addressed to where they are.



MULTICHANNEL MATTERS

Only 12 percent of seniors and 26 percent of juniors clicked on ads for institutions they didn't know. Digital is an effective, trackable medium, but it works best in conjunction with a strategically aligned multichannel approach.



IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT

REQUEST-FOR-INFORMATION (RFI) FORMS

Keep forms short and your responses engaging

“ Getting back to me quickly is important. ”

Nothing turns off a potential student faster than a hard-to-navigate site or forms that take forever to fill out. The admissions process continues to become more complex each year as millions of students compete for entry into colleges around the globe. Colleges may love the brand attention, but can lose great applicants when students find the process frustrating.

What are the best practices for RFI forms?

SHORTER IS SWEETER

50% of seniors

and **41% of juniors**

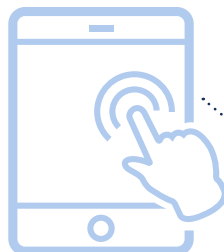
have abandoned a form because of how much information was required.

GET SMART ABOUT SMARTPHONES

75% of juniors

and **seniors**

said they would provide cell phone numbers.



BE MOBILE FRIENDLY

37% of seniors

and **33% of juniors**

completed RFIs on mobile devices.

RFI follow-up

THE TOP 3 WAYS STUDENTS PREFER RFI RESPONSES ARE:



EMAIL



MAIL/PRINT



TEXT

Note: one-third of juniors and seniors preferred to stay on the site and be directed through the admissions process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



SHOW IT

Make your RFI forms visible throughout the site—a link is not enough. Remember that this is the opportunity to start a relationship with a prospective student.



DON'T JUST RESPOND. ENGAGE.

When a student visits and completes an RFI form, move beyond a response or communications flow to dynamic engagement that opens up multiple pathways guiding students on their journey to enrollment. Their response is your opportunity to begin a one-on-one dialogue and deliver content that shows your campus has what they need and is their best choice for college.



AVOID TMI

Students say they are turned off if you ask for too much information. Don't ask for any information you really do not need to keep communicating with them.



COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Illuminate the path

“Give me very detailed instructions on how to apply and all the follow-up steps to enrollment so that I know exactly what to do next.”

FACT: Nearly half of seniors expected a “how to apply” guide to accompany online applications. The number was even higher for juniors.



The Common Application dramatically changed how students apply to college, making it easier than ever for them to apply to multiple colleges. In addition, nearly one-quarter of seniors completed applications on mobile devices, which raises further questions about mobile responsiveness, readability on smaller screens, and application length.

When and how do seniors submit applications for college?

98%

of seniors

have completed applications for enrollment.

20%

of seniors

say parents fill out their application forms.

23%

of seniors

apply via mobile device.

8%

of seniors

report they are required to submit a video.

Notify me



HERE IS WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US ABOUT THE KIND OF TEXT OR SOCIAL APP MESSAGES THEY'D LIKE TO SEE REGARDING APPLICATIONS.

ACCEPTANCE NOTIFICATION



APPLICATION DETAILS



DEADLINE REMINDERS



REJECTION NOTIFICATION



KEY TAKEAWAYS



START WITH “HOW-TO” INFORMATION

Applicants prefer to see guidelines for the application process before filling them out.



HAVE APPROPRIATE NEXT STEPS

Juniors may not be ready for a massive amount of information early in their search process, while most seniors will want to move toward applying and enrolling.



ACCOMMODATE TEXTERS

Include the option for text notices in the application process, especially for upcoming deadlines.



ENGAGE PARENTS, TOO

Not only did 1 in 5 seniors say their parents complete their applications, but 70 percent of seniors and 52 percent of juniors said their parents supported their college research process through activities such as:

- ✓ Looking at college websites
- ✓ Attending campus visit programs
- ✓ Talking with family and friends
- ✓ Reading brochures and mail from colleges



SOCIAL MEDIA

Students turn to visual platforms to learn about #StudentLife

“ Social media is a good place to find out about a college’s culture and how to adapt to it. ”

Gen Z students have grown up in a social media culture. Pew Research has found that younger Americans embrace a variety of platforms that they visit multiple times on a daily basis.¹

However, when it comes to college research, students do not view social media as a top resource the way they do websites or email. Instead, students value social media as a way to see what it will be like to be a student at a campus. They therefore gravitate toward more visual social media channels to tap into those student experiences and campus life.

¹Smith, A. & Anderson, M. (2018). *Social media use in 2018*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

STUDENTS VISIT THESE SITES DAILY



Snapchat

- 67% of seniors
- 69% of juniors
- Trend: ↔



Instagram

- 67% of seniors
- 69% of juniors
- Trend: ↔



YouTube

- 65% of seniors
- 57% of juniors
- Trend: ↔



Twitter

- 34% of seniors
- 32% of juniors
- Trend: ↔



Facebook

- 37% of seniors
- 27% of juniors
- Trend: ↓ used daily by 51% of seniors and 45% of juniors in 2017



Pinterest

- 21% of seniors
- 17% of juniors
- Trend: ↑ slightly from 2017



No social media

- 3% of seniors
- 9% of juniors

Trends

↑ Rising ↓ Falling ↔ No change

WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR INFORMATION ON COLLEGES?



Instagram

- 36% of seniors
- 42% of juniors
- Trend: ↑ from 29% among seniors and 28% among juniors



YouTube

- 39% of seniors
- 37% of juniors
- Trend: ↔



Facebook

- 32% of seniors
- 31% of juniors
- Trend: ↓ 46% of seniors and 39% of juniors said **Facebook** was best for college research last year



Twitter

- 19% of seniors
- 19% of juniors
- Trend: ↔

Follow a college Twitter feed:
56% seniors (up from 49% in 2017), 28% juniors (down from 45%)



Snapchat

- 7% of seniors
- 12% of juniors
- Trend: ↓ Down from 12% among seniors in 2017



No social media

- 16% of seniors
- 14% of juniors

Visited a college Facebook page:

67% seniors, 49% juniors

Liked a college Facebook page:

67% seniors, 61% juniors

TOP 7 TOPICS STUDENTS LOOK FOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- 1 **What social life is like on campus**
(64% seniors, 66% juniors)
- 2 **What it's like to live in the dorms**
(60% seniors, 64% juniors)
- 3 **What it will be like to be in classes**
(57% seniors, 64% juniors)
- 4 **What qualifications I need to have to be accepted**
(45% seniors, 62% juniors)
- 5 **What internships might be a part of my academic program**
(49% seniors, 58% juniors)
- 6 **How I'll pay for college**
(54% seniors, 58% juniors)
- 7 **What I need to do to apply**
(45% seniors, 57% juniors)

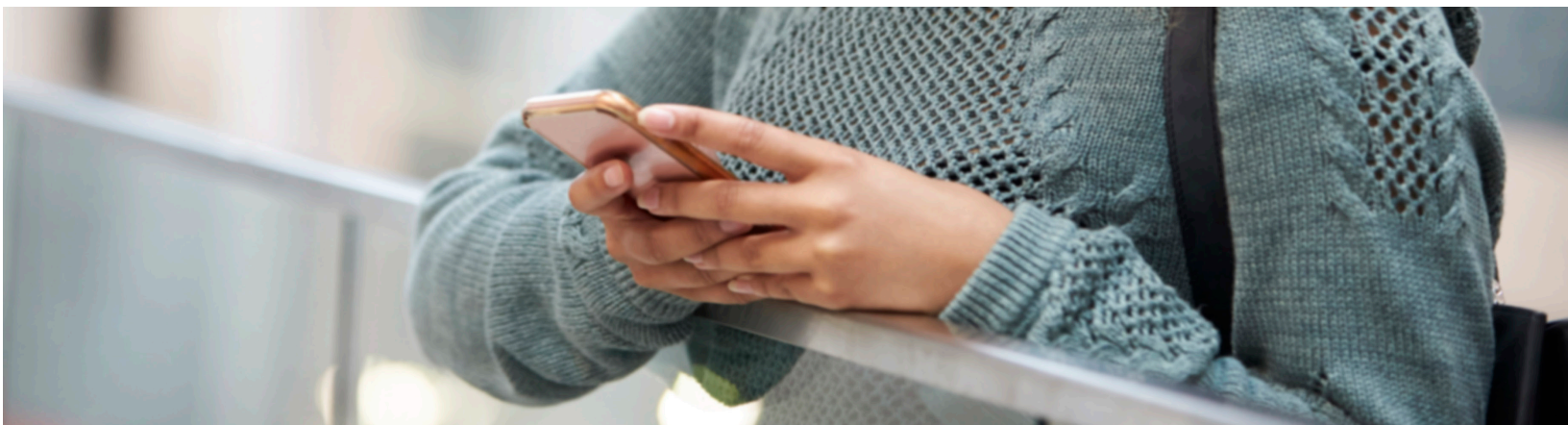
KEY TAKEAWAYS

**FACEBOOK STUMBLER IN 2018**

The number of students using Facebook declined significantly—20 percent between 2017 and 2018. It also continues an existing downward trend. Given that two-thirds of students said they visited a college Facebook page, the channel is still important. But it is more important than ever to use Facebook as a way to engage students and cultivate their interest in your institution. Go beyond simple “likes” to present information they will value and trust.

**A PICTURE SAYS A THOUSAND WORDS**

Communication among Gen Z is increasingly visual, and presenting information on campus life and culture should be done visually. Instagram and YouTube are ideally suited for this, but you can also use Facebook and Twitter to deliver images and video as well. Don't forget parents when coming up with visual content, as they are highly likely to be viewing your social media, too.





EMAIL

The inbox remains a tried and true way to get their attention

“ I look for the humanistic features in the email text. Not a carbon copy of a message every time, but where the dean may have shared a small personal story about his life or something that feels humanistic. ”

Social media may be “cooler,” but email still rules when it comes time to connect with a student. Despite many predictions of its demise, the 2018 E-Expectations study shows email continues to thrive in student search.



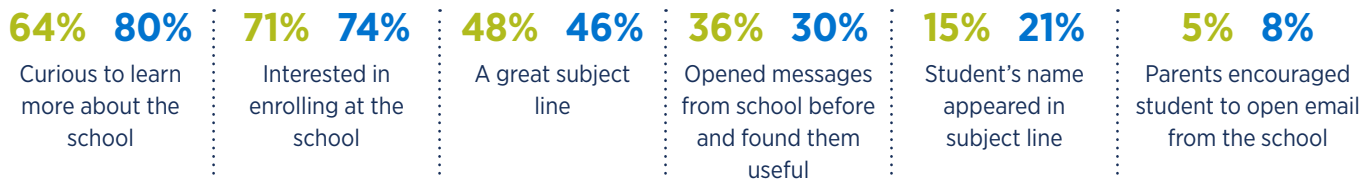
Make sure your emails look great on any screen

Nearly three-quarters of seniors and two-thirds of juniors checked email daily on their mobile devices. Emails need to be responsive for computer screens, smartphones, and tablets.

Email insights

- Email is the third most influential way to communicate for both seniors and juniors.
- Nearly all students use email at least once a week.
- Almost half of juniors and seniors said they get to college websites via email links.

Why will students open an email from an institution?



KEY TAKEAWAYS



YOU'VE (STILL) GOT MAIL

Email has consistently remained a trusted medium that most students will open.



PLAY TO THE SEARCHER

Juniors are in pioneer mode and are open to email from a wide range of schools.



TEST SUBJECT LINES

Half of respondents noted the importance of subject lines in opening an email, so test different messages to find the right subjects for your audience.



TRANSFORM EMAIL INTO A PERSONALIZED JOURNEY

Email is one of the best ways to get a student's attention and guide them on their journey toward enrollment—if the emails feel personal and relevant to what the student has already revealed to an institution. When combined with advanced techniques, such as engagement scoring or behavior analytics, an email flow can become a relevant, dynamic experience for that student.



TEXTING

Best uses of this popular channel

“ I think sending out text messages is more efficient since people are always on their phone and they are more likely to see it. ”

All young people text. True for the most part, but what’s the best way for a college or university to use it? Here’s what juniors and seniors had to say.



The topline on texting

- More than three-quarters of seniors and juniors were open to some form of text communication with colleges and universities.
- Nearly half of seniors and 44 percent of juniors said they would welcome text messages from a school of interest on their mobile device. One-quarter of seniors and one-third of juniors were comfortable receiving messages on apps such as Snapchat or Facebook Messenger.

WHAT TYPES OF TEXT MESSAGES DO STUDENTS FIND INTERESTING?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ✓ Acceptance notification
(68% seniors, 83% juniors) | ✓ General information about academic programs/majors
(38% seniors, 49% juniors) | ✓ Links to social media posts
(46% seniors, 62% juniors) |
| ✓ Deadline reminders
(73% seniors, 75% juniors) | ✓ Check-ins from my admissions representative
(41% seniors, 42% juniors) | ✓ Webinar or live chat invitations
(11% seniors, 15% juniors) |
| ✓ Details about my application, such as missing documents or status
(69% seniors, 74% juniors) | ✓ Photos or videos showing campus life
(22% seniors, 29% juniors) | |
| ✓ Rejection notification
(46% seniors, 62% juniors) | ✓ Links to website content
(18% seniors, 23% juniors) | |

KEY TAKEAWAYS



CLOSE THE GAP

More students said they are open to receiving text messages (nearly 80 percent) than are actually getting them (41 percent of seniors and 66 percent of juniors). Colleges need to catch up and use texting more frequently.



MAKE IT PERSONAL, MAKE IT RELEVANT

Address the candidate by name and send reminders, confirmations, deadlines, and check-ins with admissions counselors.



ENGAGING YOUR WEBSITE

SEARCH AND CONTENT

How students find you and what they look for on your site

“On a college website, I want to understand why the majority of people go there to study, the financial aid they offer, and what kind of success students have after graduating.”

In an increasingly competitive educational environment, and with the sheer cost of a good education, students are increasingly discerning and savvy as they hunt for more information about colleges. They want to know differentiating points: special programs, internship opportunities, and most importantly, the availability of funding and scholarships. The more your website features these hot buttons, the more you'll engage your audience.

FACT: Nearly 9 out of 10 juniors and seniors found colleges through web search.
Other sources included:



- URL (**48%** seniors, **33%** juniors)
- Link from email (**48%** both)
- From print (**22%** both)
- Social media site (nearly **20%** combined)

Juniors in this study showed more interest in major-related searches and location than seniors in 2018 or juniors from the 2017 study.



SEARCH TERMS STUDENTS USE TO FIND YOUR WEBSITE

NAME OF THE SCHOOL



NAME OF THE SCHOOL AND A MAJOR OR ACADEMIC PROGRAM



NAME OF A SPECIFIC MAJOR OR ACADEMIC PROGRAM



NAME OF A SPECIFIC MAJOR OR ACADEMIC PROGRAM AND LOCATION



SCHOOL LOCATION



TOP 10 REASONS CANDIDATES SEARCH YOUR WEBSITE

- 1 **Cost/tuition information**
(88% seniors, 82% juniors)
- 2 **Scholarship opportunities**
(72% seniors, 77% juniors)
- 3 **Academic programs/degrees**
(67% seniors, 77% juniors)
- 4 **Financial aid**
(59% seniors, 55% juniors)
- 5 **How to apply**
(47% seniors, 57% juniors)
- 6 **Student life**
(42% seniors, 53% juniors)
- 7 **Dorm accommodations**
(44% seniors, 47% juniors)
- 8 **Overview of campus life**
(38% seniors, 49% juniors)
- 9 **Unique academic programs**
(37% seniors, 47% juniors)
- 10 **School environment**
(35% seniors, 39% juniors)

TOP 10 ELEMENTS THAT APPEAL TO STUDENTS ON YOUR SITE

- 1 **Easy-to-see programs/degrees**
(42% seniors, 49% juniors)
- 2 **Academic program details**
(32% seniors, 40% juniors)
- 3 **School type, mission, environs**
(26% seniors, 30% juniors)
- 4 **Visual appeal of site**
(23% seniors, 22% juniors)
- 5 **Search ranking**
(24% seniors, 21% juniors)
- 6 **Reader-friendly page**
(27% seniors, 19% juniors)
- 7 **Site navigation tools**
(16% seniors, 18% juniors)
- 8 **Photos of faculty, students, campus**
(16% seniors, 14% juniors)
- 9 **Clear application directions**
(24% seniors, 13% juniors)
- 10 **Virtual tours**
(15% seniors, 13% juniors)

KEY TAKEAWAYS



JUNIOR VS. SENIOR—KNOW THE NUANCES

While both focus on cost, aid, and scholarships, juniors are more likely to focus on majors and campus life.



SEO LEADS THE WAY

Be search savvy so that applicants can easily find their way to academic programs, key faculty, athletics, on- and off-campus living, and important pages such as:

- Admissions
- Financial aid, scholarship, and tuition
- Cost calculator
- Application form and guide
- Contact info for admissions counselors



ENCOURAGE ACTION

Use value propositions, calls to action, live links, RFI forms, and contact information for admissions counselors.



WEBSITE USABILITY

Make your website navigation smooth sailing

“ If their user interface was easy to access and use, I may consider doing more exploring. ”

If your website is too hard to use, you lose—students’ interest, their time, your credibility, and their enrollment. Our research uncovered key areas of frustration as well as things students prefer, such as limited text, easy links, lots of enticing imagery, and searchability.

HOW DO STUDENTS NAVIGATE AROUND A COLLEGE WEBSITE?

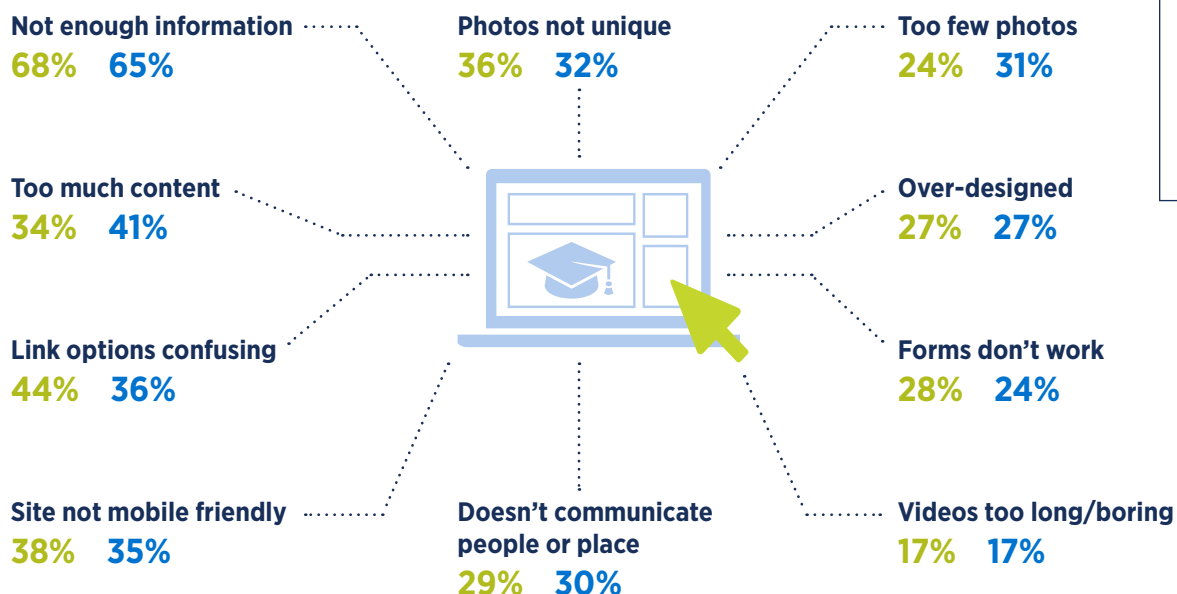
- ✓ **Website links**
(40% seniors, 44% juniors)
- ✓ **Search tool on website**
(20% seniors, 14% juniors)
- ✓ **Links from college planning sites**
(2% seniors, 6% juniors)
- ✓ **Google**
(28% seniors, 27% juniors)
- ✓ **Links from emails**
(9% seniors, 10% juniors)

FACTS:



- Compared to 2017, use of website links doubled from 20 percent for seniors and 22 percent for juniors
- Students prefer onsite navigation tools over general search
- More than a third of students are frustrated when the links don’t make sense

What makes for a frustrating college website?



What action do students take when frustrated by a college website?



Seniors
Juniors

KEY TAKEAWAYS



USABILITY OR LOSEABILITY

Make the user experience a priority: a bad experience will cause 1 in 3 students to go elsewhere and 1 in 10 to drop a campus from consideration.



STUDY THE NUMBERS

Question your assumptions: look at your site's analytics and talk to your users.



SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Set small improvement goals based on study findings. Then implement, measure, repeat.



MOBILE DEVICES

Nearly half of today's college-bound students prefer mobile

“ Schools should make sure their websites are compatible with mobile—and that all the links work on mobile devices. ”

FACTS:



- 83 percent of seniors and juniors have a smartphone
- Seniors: 41 percent do “nearly all web browsing” on a mobile device
- Juniors: 47 percent do “nearly all web browsing” on a mobile device

WHAT FORMS DO STUDENTS COMPLETE ON A MOBILE DEVICE?

FORM	SENIORS	JUNIORS
Cost calculator	33%	34%
Scholarship calculator	28%	34%
Request information	37%	33%
Newsletter mailing list	31%	32%
Campus visit scheduler	30%	21%
Open house registration	21%	11%
Live chat tool	9%	10%
Class registration	9%	7%
Admissions application	23%	6%
Webinar or online event registration	7%	4%
Do not complete forms on mobile device	25%	31%

WHEN DO STUDENTS PREFER DESKTOP/LAPTOP OVER MOBILE?

	SENIORS	JUNIORS
To search the website for specific information	69%	76%
To compare majors/programs	45%	61%
To compare college websites	50%	60%
To complete a form for more information	47%	51%
To bookmark specific pages	36%	48%
To complete admissions application	61%	41%
To use cost calculator	44%	39%
To view site with parents	26%	29%
To compare residence halls	29%	25%
To register for open house/visit	32%	27%
To watch videos	18%	21%
To view site with friends	12%	16%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

**CREATE CONTENT WITH DIFFERENT SCREENS IN MIND**

All digital content needs to be mobile responsive, including any forms you post. However, keep in mind that even with the trend toward mobile, students prefer some content on larger laptop or desktop screens, especially when exploring detailed content like descriptions of major programs. The bottom line is to make sure your web pages and forms display well on all possible screen formats students use.

**KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING**

Make your forms engaging. Have cues such as “Thank you” and “Next page” to get the student across the finish line. Use what you’re learning about applicants to spark their interest in other content about your school.



CHOOSING VIDEOS AND IMAGES

WEBSITE VIDEOS

Bring your campus to life...quickly

“ Show me a day in the life of a student. ”

Our research shows that students are drawn to video content, but there are a few caveats. Videos should be concise and engaging. Students talking about their experiences in class and content on campus life got the highest marks. By contrast, “how-to” video content on applying for admission or financial aid was not as interesting to students.

FACTS: What are students saying about college website videos?



76 percent of seniors and 57 percent of juniors watched a video.

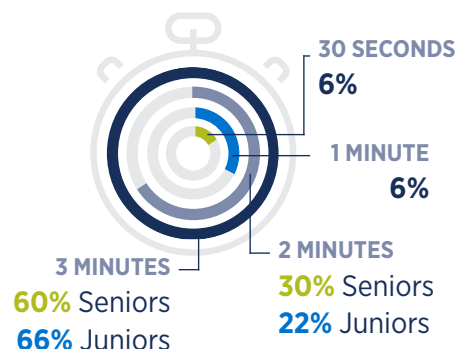
Of those who didn't watch:

- 72 percent of seniors and 60 percent of juniors found no value in content
- 30 percent of juniors said they aren't that far into their college search

Most (nearly 70 percent of seniors and juniors) said they sometimes watch college videos on mobile.

How long is too long?

Here's what juniors and seniors said:



AREAS OF YOUR SITE WHERE STUDENTS LOOK FOR VIDEO CONTENT

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| ✓ Campus/student life
(58% seniors, 66% juniors) | ✓ About
(24% seniors, 31% juniors) | ✓ Athletics
(18% seniors, 19% juniors) |
| ✓ Academics
(30% seniors, 44% juniors) | ✓ Residence halls
(33% seniors, 29% juniors) | ✓ Social media
(12% seniors, 12% juniors) |
| ✓ Admissions
(35% seniors, 32% juniors) | ✓ Financial aid
(25% seniors, 27% juniors) | ✓ Alumni
(5% seniors, 3% juniors) |

WHAT STUDENTS WANT TO WATCH

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ✓ Current students' experience
(59% seniors, 59% juniors) | ✓ Residence halls
(48% seniors, 41% juniors) | ✓ Faculty on their classes
(25% seniors, 28% juniors) |
| ✓ Campus sights, sounds, environs
(55% seniors, 58% juniors) | ✓ Tour of classrooms
(39% seniors, 41% juniors) | ✓ Financial aid tutorials
(21% seniors, 28% juniors) |
| ✓ Campus activities
(54% seniors, 57% juniors) | ✓ Alumni on value of their degrees
(27% seniors, 32% juniors) | ✓ How to apply tutorial
(14% seniors, 22% juniors) |

KEY TAKEAWAYS

**KISS! (KEEP IT SHORT, SIMPLE)**

Stay under two minutes and consider front-loading the video with key information as students may stop watching within 30–60 seconds.

**STUDENT POWER**

Content featuring students speaking about campus life or engaged in activities pulls best. Also popular are views of the campus environs, classrooms, and residence halls. Faculty, alumni, and tutorials are less appealing, but should be included to round out the picture.

**NEW: GET THE PICTURE**

See our latest research of college website photos and what pops for students.



Go to:

RuffaloNL.com/Expectations18



SPOTLIGHT: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Study insights reveal that first-generation students have less support from parents and welcome any and all communication channels available. They want more engagement. They're willing to share their contact information, and they value what your website and Facebook pages can provide as long as it is relevant and targeted to their specific needs.

FACT: There are key differences between first-generation (FG) and non-first-generation (NFG) students.**PARENTS HELP THEM LOOK AT THEIR COLLEGE OPTIONS****WILLING TO SHARE CELL PHONE NUMBER WHEN THEY WANT INFORMATION****COMFORTABLE RECEIVING MESSAGES FROM A COLLEGE VIA TEXT OR APP****AFTER COMPLETING A FORM, PREFER TO BE REACHED BY:****TEXT****OKAY WITH FILLING OUT RFI FORMS****PHONE**

	FIRST-GENERATION	NON-FIRST-GENERATION
Have not visited college Facebook page	50%	31%
Do not follow Twitter feeds from schools of interest	58%	45%
Have not clicked on ad for college or university	65%	53%
Have clicked on email directly from school	78%	67%

KEY TAKEAWAYS



INDEPENDENT THINKERS

First-generation students have to learn more about the college process because this is new territory to their families.



RELATE TO THEIR EXPERIENCE

Make your communications easy for first-generation students to follow, but also make them relevant to their interest. Generic information flows will not engage them and push them to enroll.



YAY TEAM!

First-generation students find college-sponsored materials most helpful—this is your chance to shine!

5 BIG TAKEAWAYS FOR 2018

Taking in all of these findings, what are the bigger strategies for creating a digital presence that truly engages prospective college students and drives them toward enrollment?

- 1 Create layers of engagement.** Multiple channels to deliver key positioning messages and encourage engagement are essential. Relying on a print piece, a web page, or an email message to get your point across is ineffective.
- 2 Connect all of your channels.** Use integrated analytics to assess the impact of your individual campaigns on user engagement across your website and digital channels.
- 3 Show...and tell.** Develop a content strategy that includes video and image concepts along with positioning themes. Provide high-level benefits for specific programs along with images that give users a sense of your campus, facilities, students, and faculty. Inspire students to visit with compelling videos that are less than two minutes so students remain engaged while watching them.
- 4 Continue to experiment with new strategies while optimizing your existing resources.** If you haven't tried paid lead generation through digital advertising or developed a communications flow that includes text messaging, develop some pilots to try out these (now) standard recruitment marketing practices.
- 5 Bring it all back to your website (and then drive them into your CRM).** Remember that users want, need, and expect easy self-service resources from your website. Make sure that it is organized in a way that connects with these users and not your campus org chart. Infuse the site with engagement opportunities that initiate or continue engagement with users through email, social, text, and other interactive channels. Measure, adjust, repeat!

ABOUT THE SURVEY SPONSORS



Ruffalo Noel Levitz is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,900 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, Ruffalo Noel Levitz provides institutions the ability to scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

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