

A young woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black and white striped shirt, is seated at a desk, looking intently at a laptop screen. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office space with large windows.

# **2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report**

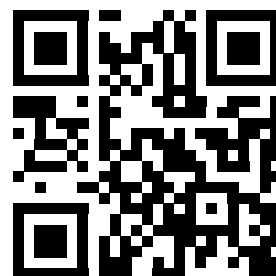
## **Executive Summary**—7 key findings from our full report

## **Read the full report for all 25 findings across eight key areas.**

1. Motivations and Enrollment Factors
2. Selecting an Institution/Program
3. Program Preferences
4. Search Practices and Patterns
5. Inquiry and Contact Processes
6. Personalized Response
7. Paying for Graduate Study
8. Personas

## **Receive the full report when you meet with our graduate enrollment experts.**

Ask for a complimentary consultation and we will share the complete 44-page report with all 25 findings and insights. Plus, we will discuss how you can optimize your graduate recruitment strategies.

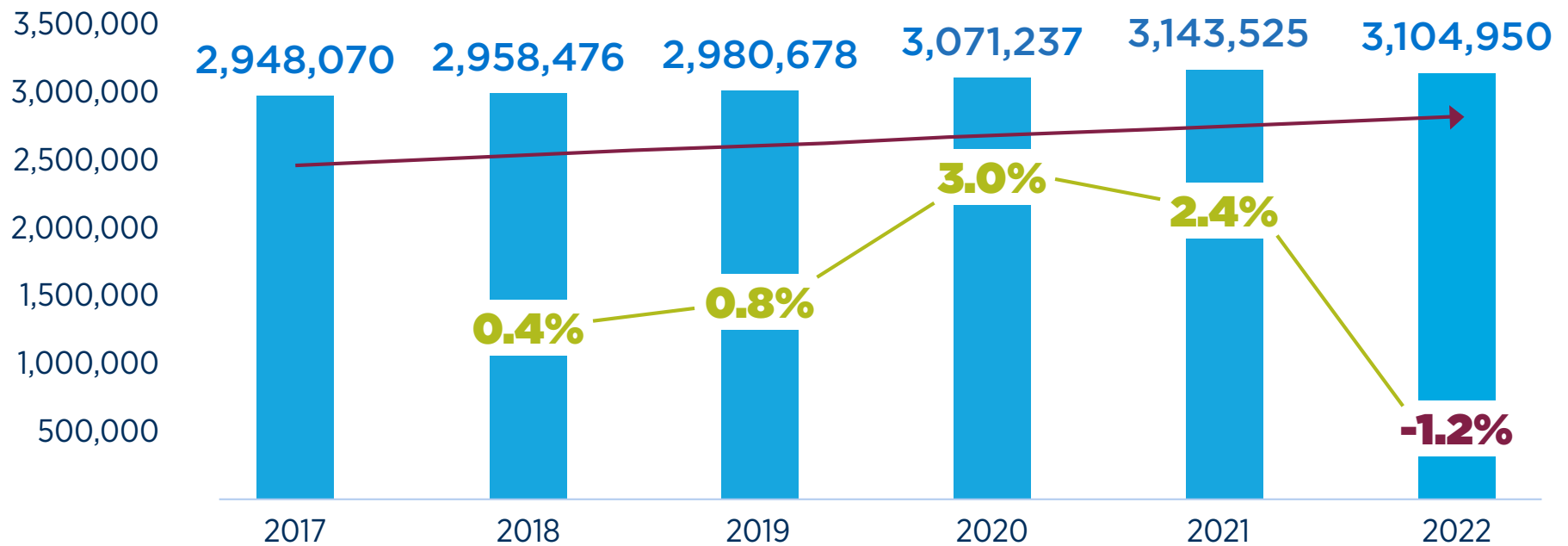


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**This summary is taken from our full report**  
**Contact us for a complimentary consultation**  
**at [RNL.com/GraduateEnrollment](https://RNL.com/GraduateEnrollment)**



# 1. Graduate Education Remains a Path to Growth and Stability



Source: National Student Clearinghouse, CTEE, Fall 2022

The last three years have been a remarkably good period for American graduate education. Since fall 2020, the National Student Clearinghouse reported year-over-year growth for every semester until fall 2022. While fall 2022 reported the first contraction, graduate enrollment remains well ahead of pre-pandemic levels.

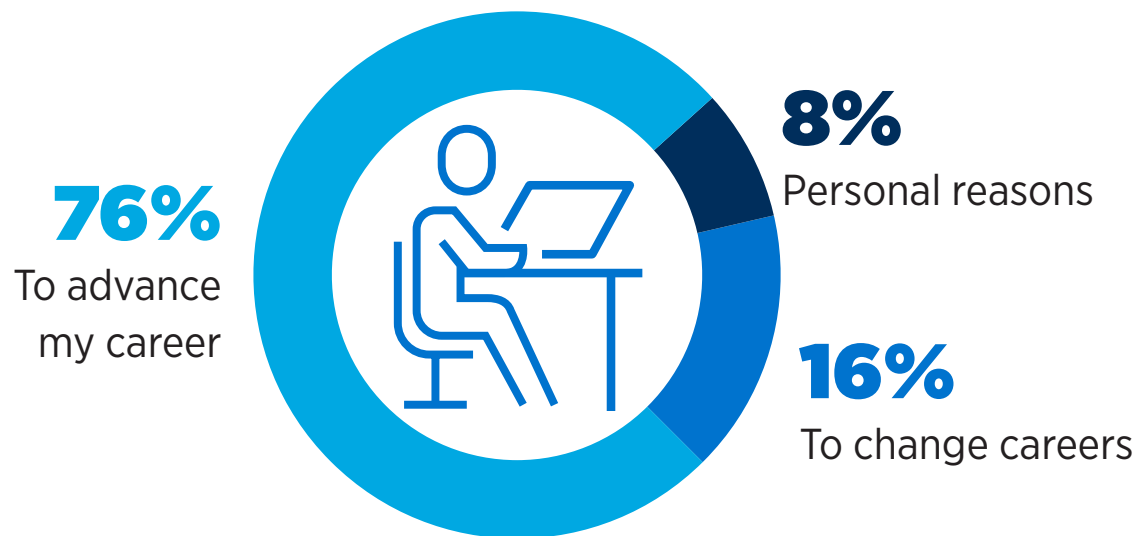
## 2. Graduate Students Want to Advance Their Careers

Enrolling in and finishing a graduate program is a big undertaking, and this is why career-related reasons dominate the primary motivations for enrolling in a graduate program.

As institutions develop marketing messaging and cultivation strategies, motivation is only one of the important components of decision making that savvy institutions and programs need to understand.

The most important aspects in the enrollment decision are also of critical importance.

### Primary Motivation for Enrolling in Graduate Study



### FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:

See rankings of the importance of nine factors in making a decision to enroll in a graduate program.

### 3. Graduate Students Are Applying to More Programs



To how many schools/programs did/will you apply?

**33%**

**1**

**40%**

**2**

**17%**

**3**

**10%**

**4 or more**

Until the early 2000s, graduate programs serving the 75 percent of students 25+ years of age were not competing with other programs. Why? Because their program may have been the only flexible program designed for students juggling multiple work/life responsibilities.

Today, two-thirds of students apply to at least two graduate schools, and more than a quarter apply to three or more. This has dramatic implications for admissions timelines, marketing strategies, and program design.

#### **FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:**

Learn how far students reside from the programs they consider—showing how distance from the prospective student's home has taken on new meaning as hybrid and online programs have taken hold.

## 4. Graduate Students Want Online Options

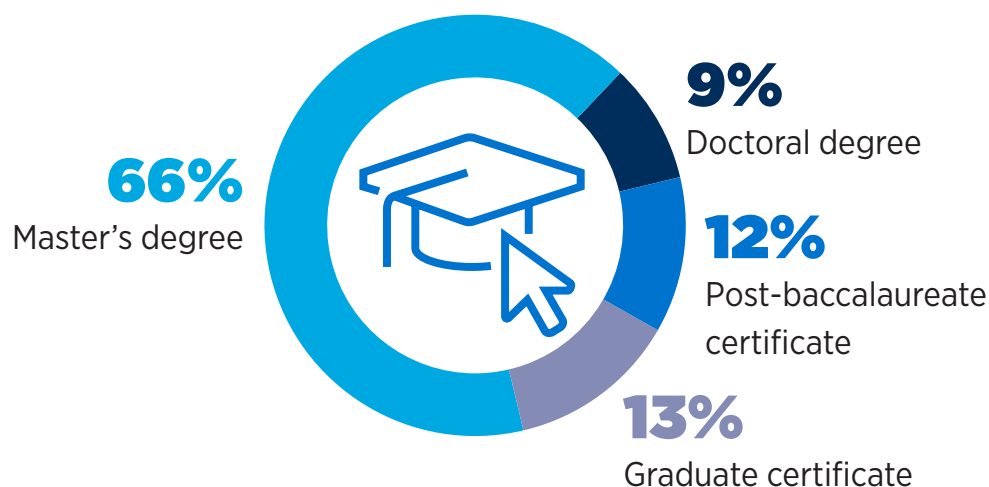
### In which instructional format did/will you enroll in graduate classes?



Changes in the graduate market accelerated as millennials and Gen Z began to overtake Generation X as the primary target of the graduate market. These generations have never known a world that did not include the internet.

This has played a significant role in the expansion of demand for online and partially online instruction, while the rising skepticism of the cost and value of education has played a role in both the rise of both nondegree (but credit-bearing) credentials and the ever-increasing dominance of areas of study that can be directly linked to a job.

### Which type of program did/will you consider or enroll in? (Select one)



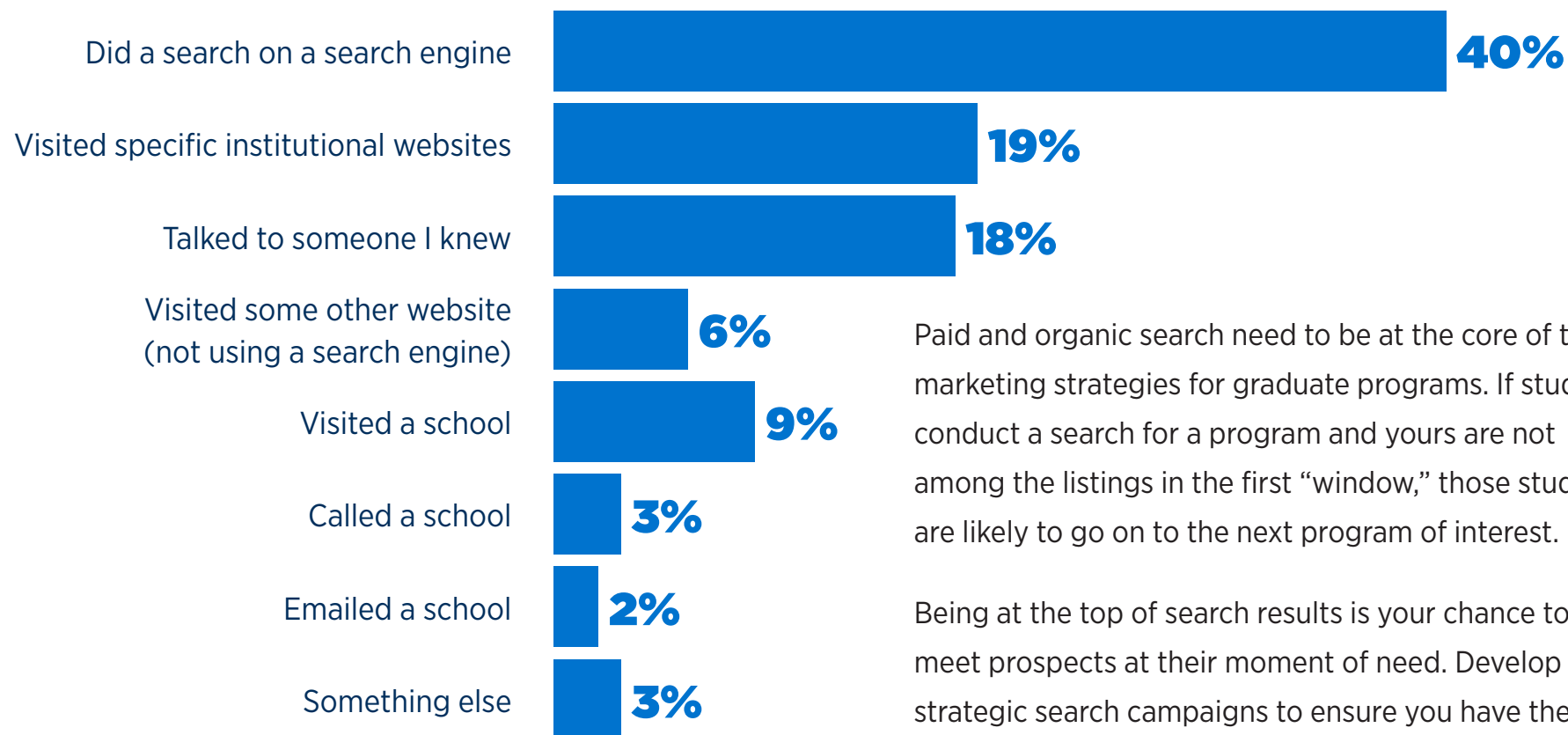
#### FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:

Explore even more data to learn which formats are in greatest demand, at which levels, and in what disciplines.



## 5. The Search for a Graduate Program Often Starts With a Search Engine

What was/will be the first step in your search for a graduate program?



### FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:

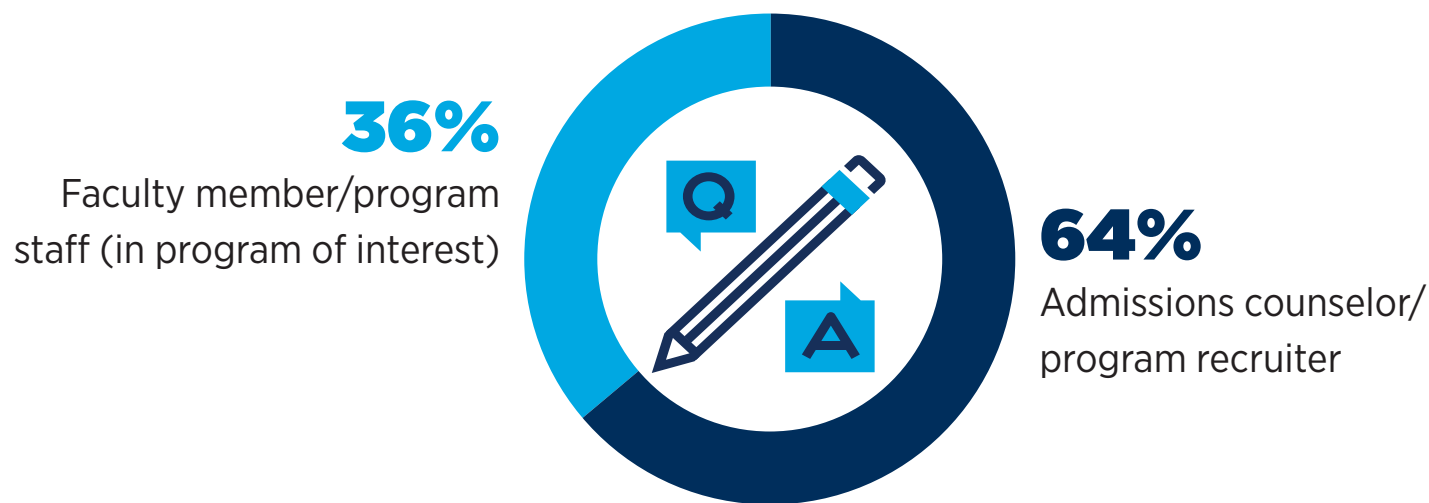
See how prospective students continue their search, the extent to which they actually interact with digital marketing, and why they do so.

Paid and organic search need to be at the core of the marketing strategies for graduate programs. If students conduct a search for a program and yours are not among the listings in the first “window,” those students are likely to go on to the next program of interest.

Being at the top of search results is your chance to meet prospects at their moment of need. Develop strategic search campaigns to ensure you have the right keywords and budget to compete with paid search, and make sure your website is optimized for the organic search results you need.

## 6. Most Graduate Inquiries Want to Hear from a Counselor/Recruiter

Who would you prefer to respond to your early inquiries/questions during your search?



How does the momentum of great messaging and cutting-edge marketing/outreach stop in its tracks? The answer is when institutions do not meet the expectations of graduate students regarding timely response and personalization of content.

For the first time the report presents detail on these factors as well as investigating how graduate students interpret a slow response and what impact it has on their willingness to consider a program.

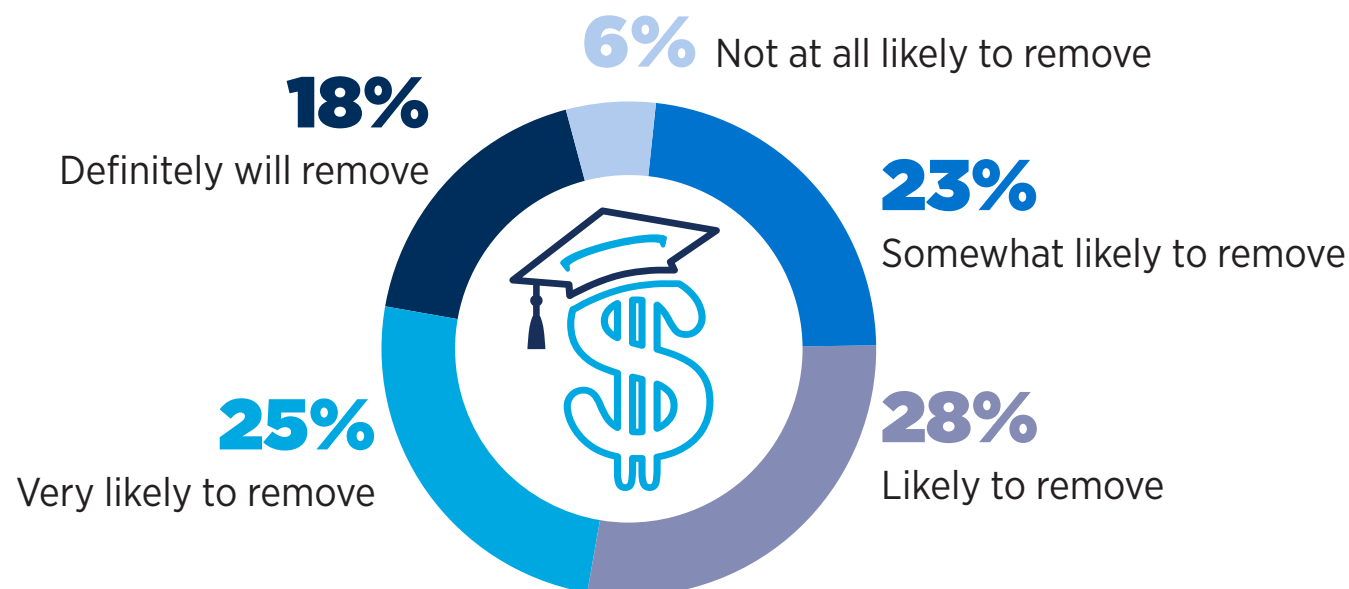
### FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:

Dive into more details on what graduate students expect when you respond, as well as the negative impact a slow response will have on the willingness of a student to consider a program.



## 7. Graduate Students Will Remove Programs They Think They Cannot Afford

How likely would you be to remove a graduate program from your search if the posted tuition costs were higher than you thought you could afford?



This report documents that the cost of tuition and fees was most frequently cited as being important or very important in the enrollment decisions of graduate students. We also document that more than half of graduate students will remove a program from their consideration set if the “sticker price” is more than they think they can afford. Because most institutions cannot lower their tuition, the presentation of tuition information becomes a marketing and positioning issue in order to ensure that your program “stays in the running.”

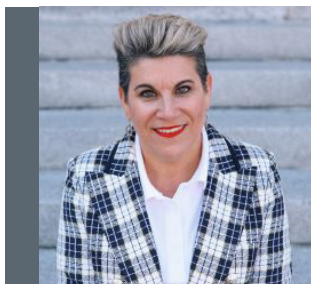
### FIND MORE IN THE FULL REPORT:

Learn how graduate students pay for their studies and whether they limit credits to manage expenses.

## EXPERT INSIGHT: Implications to graduate recruitment from the perspective of marketing planning

The data shared in the full *2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report* serve to guide a wide range of graduate marketing, recruitment, and enrollment strategies. The foundation of next year's successful graduate marketing plan can be informed by the subtext of data throughout the report:

- Referral is underestimated as a potential marketing tool and strategy. Referral can happen in many realms: alumni, current students, faculty, advisors, and other sources.
- Marketing close to the institution's home location (even for online programs) is likely to be a good investment.
- Cost, future career opportunities, and financial aid opportunities are important to emphasize in your messaging, and quality attributes about the institution should be framed around each of these items.
- Both application and enrollment process information and more detailed program information should be presented as clearly as possible and should be made easy to access.
- Look at the data on the program areas with the greatest and weakest demand in order to make the case for developing new programs or sunsetting others.

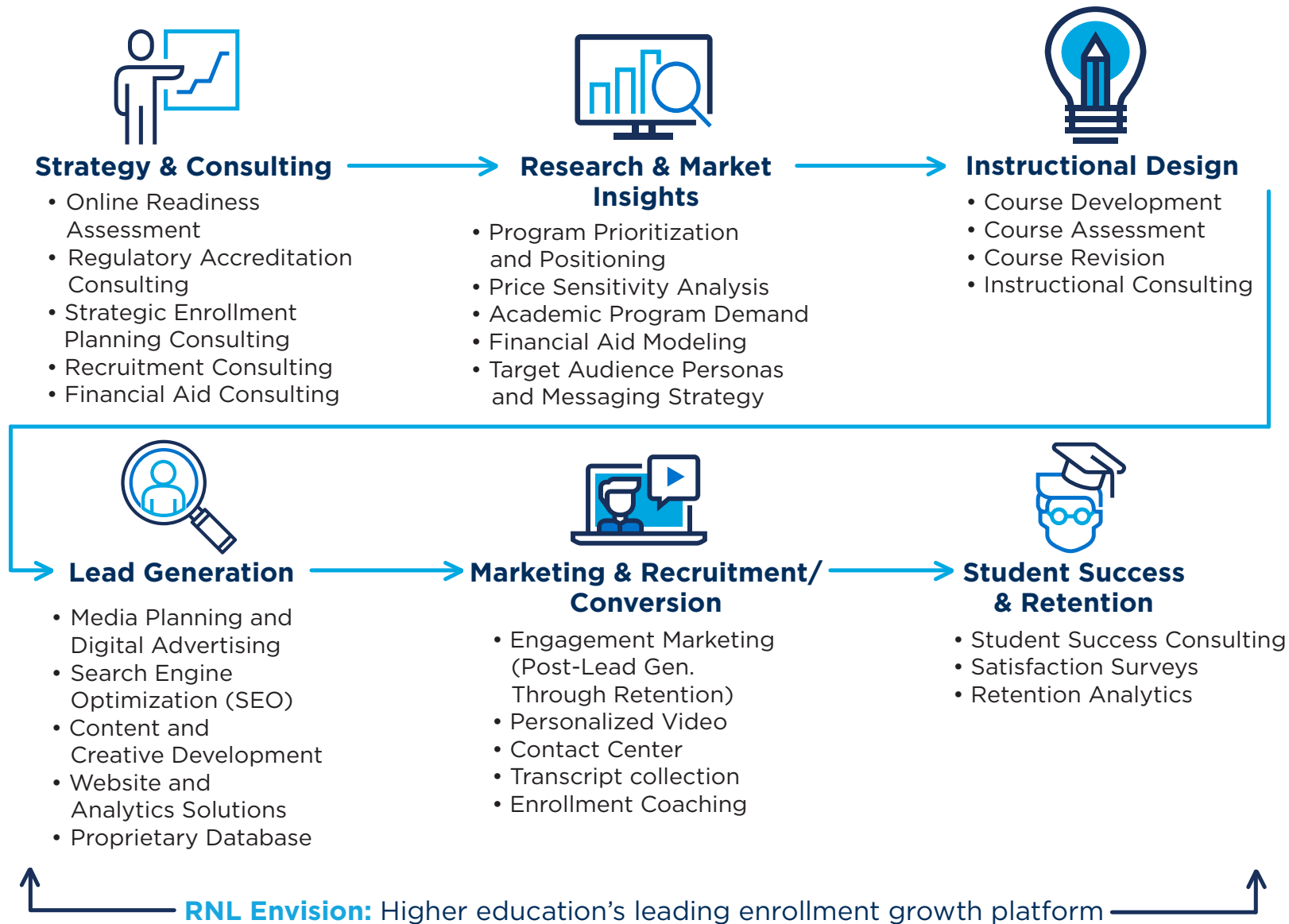


Finally, do not do anything until you have thoroughly examined your own internal data via a robust and honest situation analysis. RNL stands ready to assist you in many capacities to help you interpret, use, and leverage this information as you plan strategies to ensure your graduate programs are well positioned for the future of the institution you serve.

**—Reena Lichtenfeld, Ed.D., Vice President, Consulting Services**

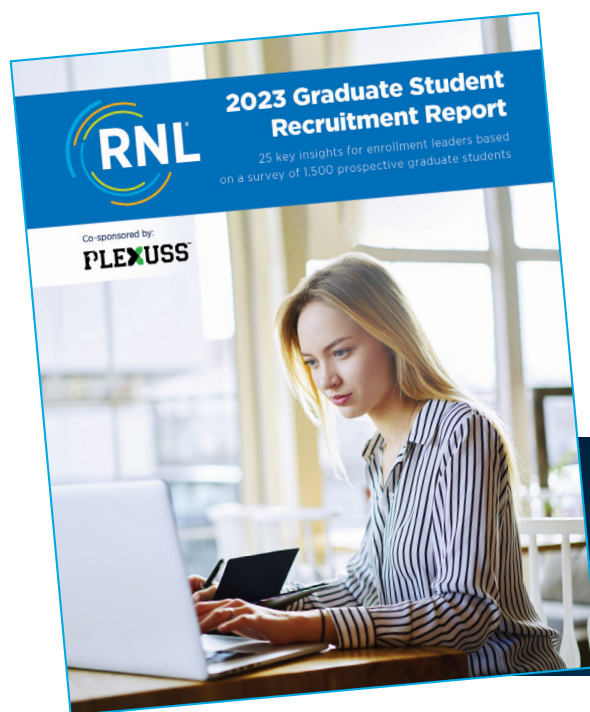
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