

The Enrollment-Optimized College Website

A 10-Part Self-Test on Key .edu Features and Performance Standards



Honing your most important recruitment tool

Survey research shows that a school's .edu site is the primary source of information about schools students are considering. Accordingly, few other factors have as great an impact on students' impressions of you.

Unfortunately, many schools have struggled to keep up with the innovations that have transformed website design in recent years. This is understandable. Website modifications, challenging under any circumstances, are doubly so when it comes to higher education, due to the organizational complexity of colleges and universities.

EAB's new white paper, "The Enrollment-Optimized College Website," cuts the challenge down to size by helping you identify targeted interventions that can rapidly and meaningfully improve the performance of your .edu. This infographic shares highlights from the diagnostic toolkit around which the white paper is built.

75+ additional self-test questions included in the white paper

Ensuring maximum online visibility for your institution

1	Search engine optimization Are you doing all you can to ensure that college-bound students are finding you online?	Keyword Optimization	We compare ourselves to our competitors	We compare our search-rank performance for key enrollment-related queries (e.g., colleges in our state offering our most strategically important majors) with that of our competitors; we rank at least as high as they do for these queries.
		Infrastructure	Our enrollment team has SEO experts	We have staff proficient in identification of SEO-relevant web page errors, including technical errors, navigation problems, and issues related to content quality; keyword and share-of-voice analysis; and assessment of mobile web-page load time (ours and competitors').

Effectively engaging key audiences

2	Content Are you addressing questions students care about most, in a format they favor?	Messaging	We never show "unbuffered" cost information	Information on cost of attendance, financial aid, and other topics that might trigger student concern over debt never appears without value information adjacent to it (including, for example, information on outcomes).
		Formats	We use advanced multimedia formats	Our enrollment-active pages use highly interactive and immersive media that combine different formats (photos, text, video, etc.), leveraging the unique strengths of each and giving users with different learning styles maximum opportunity to engage.
3	Information architecture Can prospective students quickly find the information that matters most to them?	Site Organization	Our website is organized with prospective students in mind	The organization of our website mirrors the interests and priorities of prospective students and their parents. All enrollment-active pages feature navigation elements specific to key audiences (prospective students and parents) and enrollment-critical topics.
		Troubleshooting	We take multiple approaches to understanding navigation problems	We analyze data from the following sources to identify information prospective students are looking for and to reveal problems they are having finding it: user testing, Google Analytics, surveys, and queries submitted by students via our site's internal-search feature.
4	Mobile optimization Is use of your website equally engaging on all device types?	UX Standards	It is easy to see and interact with our site on a phone	Anyone looking at our site on a phone can find content on key enrollment topics in under 30 seconds from anywhere on our site. Pinching and zooming are never required to view content on our enrollment-active pages or to perform key actions.
		Editorial Focus	Our enrollment-active pages focus on essentials	We pare down material included on our enrollment-active pages to the absolute essentials, to improve ease of navigation on phones and to help avoid cluttering mobile layouts. This process is informed by clear criteria we have about which content matters most, and why.
5	Website analytics How effectively are you using website data to boost audience engagement?	Data Capture	We capture website interaction at the level of the individual user	Our information systems capture data on individuals visiting enrollment-active pages on our website; data on their interactions with our website across successive visits is attached to their records, creating a detailed profile that evolves over time.
		Prospect Identification	We can tell which visitors to our site are prospective students	We use data and analytics (e.g., pixel tracking) to identify students from our prospect pool among anonymous visitors to our site.
6	User testing How well do you understand what students like and don't like about your site?	Frequency	We regularly evaluate our website via user testing	We ask key audiences, including both prospective students and their parents, to user-test our website's enrollment-active pages at least once per year and whenever major changes to our site are planned. Our test groups reach across a full demographic spectrum.
		Facilitation	We train our facilitators	Our testing is facilitated by individuals who have at least basic familiarity with related best practice, including how to design effective testing prompts.

Cultivating a capable and responsive web team

7	Personnel Does your organization have the right staff to ensure optimal website performance?	Enrollment Team	Our enrollment team has sufficient website expertise	We can easily and reliably execute the following functions for enrollment-active pages on our school's website: front-end development, CRM integration, content creation, search engine optimization (SEO), content strategy, and website analytics. If sufficient capacity cannot be secured from institution-level staff, it is provided "locally" by enrollment-team staffers and/or contractors.
8	Organizational effectiveness Are you doing all you can to ensure efficient and impactful cross-departmental collaboration?	Stakeholder Engagement	We use evidence to engage academic department heads	We use data to help secure the cooperation of academic department leaders when making changes to enrollment-active academic-program pages, including percentage of academic-program page traffic originating on the admissions page; benchmarked engagement metrics for academic program pages, including bounce rate; and qualitative feedback on academic-program pages gathered from prospective students.
9	Performance assessment Do you know how effectively your website is serving your enrollment goals?	Enrollment-Active Pages	We track and report key performance metrics on a monthly basis	Traffic metrics we track include daily page views (total, unique, and percentage new users) and sources of traffic (organic, email, referral, etc.); engagement metrics we track include bounce rate, average time on page, and percentage of users retained; and technical metrics we track include average page-load time and percentage of pages with critical errors.
10	Systems infrastructure Do you have the right systems in place to support optimal website performance?	Connections Across Systems	Our systems talk to each other	We have built out automated data connections between our content management system (CMS) and the other systems we use to gather, store, and analyze data on prospective students, including our customer relationship management (CRM) system. These connections enable us to associate all data on our interactions with a particular student to a single record for that student.