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Insights to Help You Recruit 'Gen P'

Understanding How the Pandemic Altered College Search Behaviors



During the most intense phases of the pandemic, student search behaviors changed dramatically in response to high school and college closures, fears about health and safety, and increased financial hardships on families. With more than a year of in-person recruitment now complete, what are the pandemic's lasting effects on college search?

Explore this infographic for insights from our research on recruiting today's high school students, including key findings from EAB's survey of 20,000+ students.



INSIGHT 1

Mental health concerns are shaping Gen P's college search.

+8%

The percentage of students who've opted out of college because they're "not mentally ready" increased by 8 percentage-points from 2021 to 2023.

+8%

First-generation students are 8 percentage-points more likely to say they've opted out of college for mental health reasons than non-first-generation students are.

TAKEAWAY: Prioritize mental health messaging to families.

Ensure that your marketing communications include messaging to reassure students and their parents about mental health support on your campus.



INSIGHT 2

Students are academically underprepared.

73%

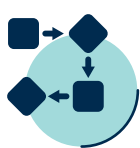
of high school counselors report the pandemic has at least moderately weakened their students' academic preparation.

54%

Students not reading proficiently by third grade are 54% less likely to enroll at a college or university after high school, suggesting pandemic learning loss will likely have long-term effects.

TAKEAWAY: Build strong relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs).

CBOs can help your college recruit and enroll students who've received extra support in high school, setting them up for success in college.



INSIGHT 3

Timing of student search behaviors is shifting.

-27%

percentage-point drop in students who'd started researching college by end sophomore year in 2023 compared to 2019, indicating many students are researching later.

87%

of applicants applied to a test-optional college. Our research suggests that the popularity of test-optional may be contributing to changes in student application behavior and timing.

TAKEAWAY: Use a flexible, responsive approach to marketing.

As the timing of students' search processes becomes less predictable, responsive and multichannel marketing can help you ensure that your outreach content, timing, and channels engage students, even as preferences vary or shift.



INSIGHT 4

Students are eager for in-person events and experiences.

+9%

percentage-point increase in students who'd visited a college campus in 2023 compared to 2021, representing a post-pandemic rebound in in-person events.

-40%

decrease in frequency of virtual events that colleges hosted in 2022 compared to 2021.

TAKEAWAY: In-person is back, but don't write off virtual events.

While students are eager for in-person programming, virtual events offer several distinct benefits, including improving access and equity.



INSIGHT 5

Students have high standards for digital experiences.

81%

of students say a poorly designed college website will negatively affect their opinion of a college.

11%

increase in the percentage of students who've interacted with a college on social media in 2023 compared to 2021.

TAKEAWAY: Virtual and multichannel engagement are key indicators of student interest.

Virtual engagement can shed light on student interest, especially when paired with other data points on multichannel engagement.



INSIGHT 6

Students are questioning the value of a college education.

2.5x

Students were 2.5x as likely to saying they'd opted out of college because it "isn't worth it" in 2023 compared to 2019.

42%

of students say they view college value in terms of "successful job placement upon graduation," making it the top perceived indicator of college value.

TAKEAWAY: Discuss career preparation early and persistently in marketing.

It's more important than ever to convey college value through a strong, multichannel communication strategy for both students and parents. Highlight features that most interest families, including information on job placement, internships, and career services.