



EAB

DIGITAL AGENCY

Navigating Search Visibility in the AI Era

Four Tools to Ensure Your .edu Remains
Competitive and Discoverable



Executive Overview

Protect .edu Search Visibility and Market Share in the AI Age

AI is reshaping the student search journey. **Forty-six percent** of Gen Z students are already using AI tools during their college search, often relying on instant, or “zero-click,” answers instead of clicking through results. At the same time, **79%** still look to your website as their top source for information, underscoring the essential role your .edu plays in guiding student decisions.

But the [rules of search visibility](#) have changed. AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google’s AI Overview surface what they deem the “best” answers, even when those answers are outdated or inaccurate. If your website’s key enrollment content isn’t well-structured and current, your institution may be misrepresented—or not appear at all—on AI search tools. Schools with [clear, trustworthy .edu content](#) gain a distinct enrollment advantage in the AI era, while others risk falling behind.

In this guide, we’ll share four tools to help your institution protect search visibility, capture student attention, and convert interest into enrollment in an AI-powered landscape.

What's Inside:

	Tool 1: Understand the Terminology	3
	Tool 2: Learn the Core Elements of AI Search Visibility	4
	Tool 3: Enhance Keywords for AI Search	5
	Tool 4: Audit Your .edu Search Visibility	6
	Resources and Next Steps for You	7



Turn .edu Search Visibility into Enrollment Impact

[EAB’s Digital Agency](#) helps colleges and universities build enrollment-focused content strategies that drive visibility in both traditional and AI-driven search. Grounded in user behavior, higher ed best practices, and your brand voice, our approach turns interest into enrollment action.

Learn more: eab.com/digital-agency

Tool 1: Understand the Terminology

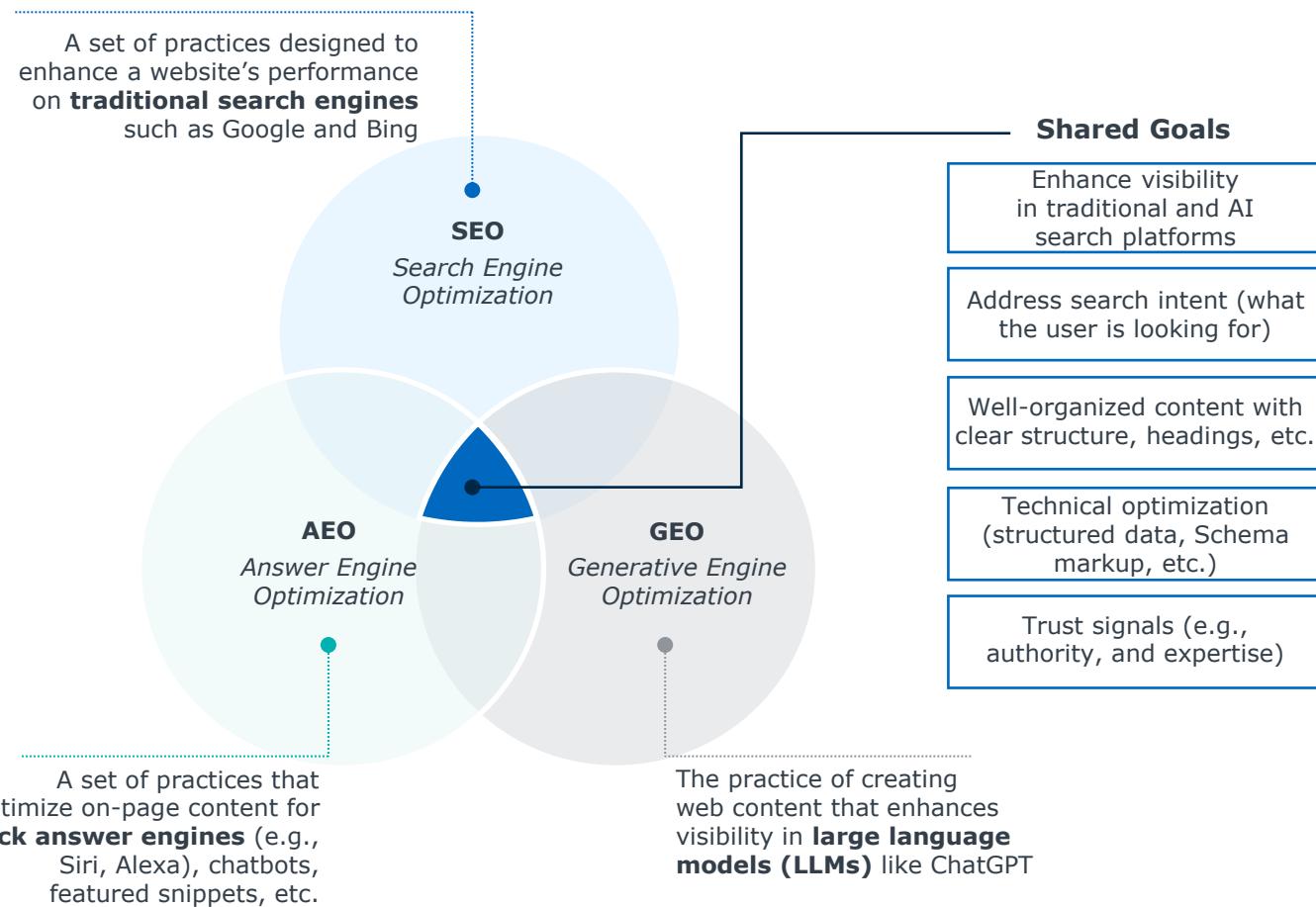
As search evolves, so does the language we use to describe it. Marketing and enrollment leaders are familiar with Search Engine Optimization (SEO), but newer terms like Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) and Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) are quickly entering the conversation. Understanding these terms ensures your .edu stays visible no matter how students search. Without that visibility, you risk losing prospective students to competitors.

Below, you'll find definitions of emerging search terms, along with key similarities and differences that can help your institution build authority across platforms and stay ahead.

A Simple Guide to the "EOs"

Many Acronyms, One Concept:

Ensure AI Tools and Search Engines Can Find and Understand Your Content



Tool 2: Learn the Core Elements of AI Search Visibility

Large language models (LLMs) and answer engines [work differently than traditional search](#). Platforms like Google rank pages based on technical signals such as site speed and mobile-friendliness, along with content relevance and authority. But AI tools like ChatGPT analyze *content* directly for meaning, context, and credibility to generate answers. This shift raises the bar for content clarity and trustworthiness. That means higher stakes: [Website content must be sharper than ever](#) to protect visibility, brand authority, and enrollment outcomes.

Follow the practices below to ensure your institution gets found, featured, and chosen across both traditional and AI-driven platforms.

Tips for Staying Visible in AI Search



Content Quality and Relevance

- Write simple content** with clear headings to improve readability and appear in AI Overviews or snippets.
- Match content to real search queries** using natural language.
- Keep content fresh.**



Structured Data and Schema Markup*

- Use Schema** to define key content types so search engines understand your pages. Examples:
 - Program pages: Course, EducationalOccupationalProgram
 - FAQs: FAQPage
- Add HowTo Schema** for steps like applications, enrollment.



Technical SEO Health

- Ensure your site is **mobile-responsive**.
- Ensure your **URLs are clean and accessible**.
- Check **site speed**.



Topical Authority

- Group related articles and pages around key topics (e.g., Nursing > Admissions, Licensure, Outcomes)
- Use **internal linking** (to other pages on your site).
- Use **backlinking** (links to credible external sites).



Trust Signals

- Show that your content is credible by adhering to these examples of "E-E-A-T" principles:
 - **Experience:** firsthand quotes
 - **Expertise:** Content from subject-matter experts
 - **Authority:** Awards, partnerships, and external links
 - **Trust:** Privacy policies, contact info, etc.



On-Page Optimization

- Use title tags and meta descriptions**, helpful summary-style language with keywords.
- Follow accessibility best practices** (e.g., clear text, fast load times).
- Include clear calls to action (CTAs)** and navigation.

*Schema Markup is code that helps search engines interpret your content so it can be found more accurately in search results and AI answers.

Tool 3: Enhance Keywords for AI Search

Strong keyword strategy has always been central to search visibility, but [AI is changing how keywords are interpreted and surfaced](#). Instead of relying only on short, generic terms, AI platforms prioritize context, intent, and specificity, mirroring how students naturally ask questions. For example, today's students are more likely to search for "part-time online MBA programs for working professionals" as opposed to "online MBA programs."

Use the checklist below to align your enrollment-critical content with the right keywords and ensure it remains discoverable across both traditional and AI-driven search platforms.

Guide to AI-Friendly Keyword Optimization

1	Assess your site's current visibility	We have completed an AI search visibility audit <input type="checkbox"/>	See page 6 for more on what to assess.
2	Conduct keyword and competitor research	We use the following to conduct keyword and competitor research: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Google autocomplete and related searchesQ&A platforms such as Reddit or QuoraWebsite analytics like Google Search Console (GSC)AI-powered keyword research to brainstorm questions and niche content ideasSEO tools such as Semrush, Ahrefs, or BrightEdge to analyze keyword search trends, competitor data, and user intent	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Under the GSC "Performance" report, check the "Queries" section to see exactly how students are searching for you.
3	On-page optimization	We follow SEO best practices to ensure on-page content is AI-ready (e.g., meta titles and descriptions, heading tags)	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Content writing	We use clear, simple, jargon-free language in a conversational tone	<input type="checkbox"/>
		We write for "search intent," answering key student questions in the way they ask them	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Our content is accessible	<input type="checkbox"/>
		We use long-tail keywords	<input type="checkbox"/> Learn more about long-tail keywords.
5	Technical SEO	We use keywords that include our institution's name (branded) or are topic or subject-based (non-branded)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		We use semantic keywords for LLM readability	<input type="checkbox"/> Semantic keywords are "conceptual" keywords related to the central topic. They provide context about your content to LLMs.
		We follow technical SEO best practices (e.g., mobile responsiveness, clear sitemap, clean and accessible URLs)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		We use Schema Markup on key content types	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tool 4: Audit Your .edu Search Visibility

Before you can improve your strategy, you need to [know how your institution is showing up in search results](#). Keyword optimization is still critical, but visibility now depends on much more, as AI tools like Google's AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Bing Copilot, and Perplexity deliver answers without a click.

Explore EAB's approach to auditing search visibility. See where your .edu appears in traditional and AI results, how your brand and programs are represented, and which gaps to address to protect enrollment.

A Look Inside EAB's Search Visibility Audit

Review Each Element	Typical SEO Audit	EAB Search Visibility Audit	Areas of Focus
On-Page SEO Best Practices	✓	✓	SEO
Page and Traffic Analytics	✓	✓	
Organic Keyword Ranking	✓	✓	
Search Console Analysis	✓	✓	
Technical Errors and Issues	✓	✓	
Competitor Keyword Analysis		✓	Competitor and Higher Education Analysis
Organic Competition Discovery		✓	
Program Page Optimization		✓	
Google Featured Snippets Analysis		✓	
Analysis of AI User Behavior		✓	AI Visibility
AI Traffic Performance		✓	
AI Prompt Analysis		✓	
HTML Structure Review		✓	
Schema Markup Check		✓	
Indexing Across AI Platforms		✓	
Content Summary		✓	

EAB's Search Visibility Audit goes beyond traditional SEO tools by showing how your content performs across AI search platforms like ChatGPT, Google AI Overview, and Perplexity. The audit highlights visibility gaps on your enrollment-critical pages, surfaces the long-tail keywords your prospects are using, and benchmarks your performance against key competitors. You'll get clear, actionable insights based on your enrollment goals, so you know exactly where to focus and what to fix.

AI tools add efficiency, but real results come from expert insight that keeps your strategy accurate, competitive, and built to deliver enrollment outcomes.

More Resources to Help You Stay Visible in an AI-Powered Search Environment

► [Enrollment-optimize your website](#) (insight paper)

► [Is your .edu ready for AI search?](#) (on-demand webinar)

► [909% boost in AI Overview presence](#) (case study)

EAB's Digital Agency

AI-Ready .edu Optimization for Enrollment Growth

Turning Your .edu into Your Most Powerful Marketing Tool

User-Centric Website Content Strategy

Transforming .edu from content warehouse to marketing engine

Enrollment Marketing Best Practices

Backed by data from 1B+ student interactions and 25K students surveyed annually

AI-Forward Search Optimization for Higher Ed

Expert strategy aligned to search intent and AI visibility

What Sets Us Apart



Experience across **all institution types and tech stacks**



Authoritative content strategy backed by best-practice research



Search and UX insights to inform **ongoing optimization**



Workshops and **professional development**

Proven Expertise

100+

Partner institutions served

200+

Combined years of enrollment marketing experience

360°

Website strategy in a single team

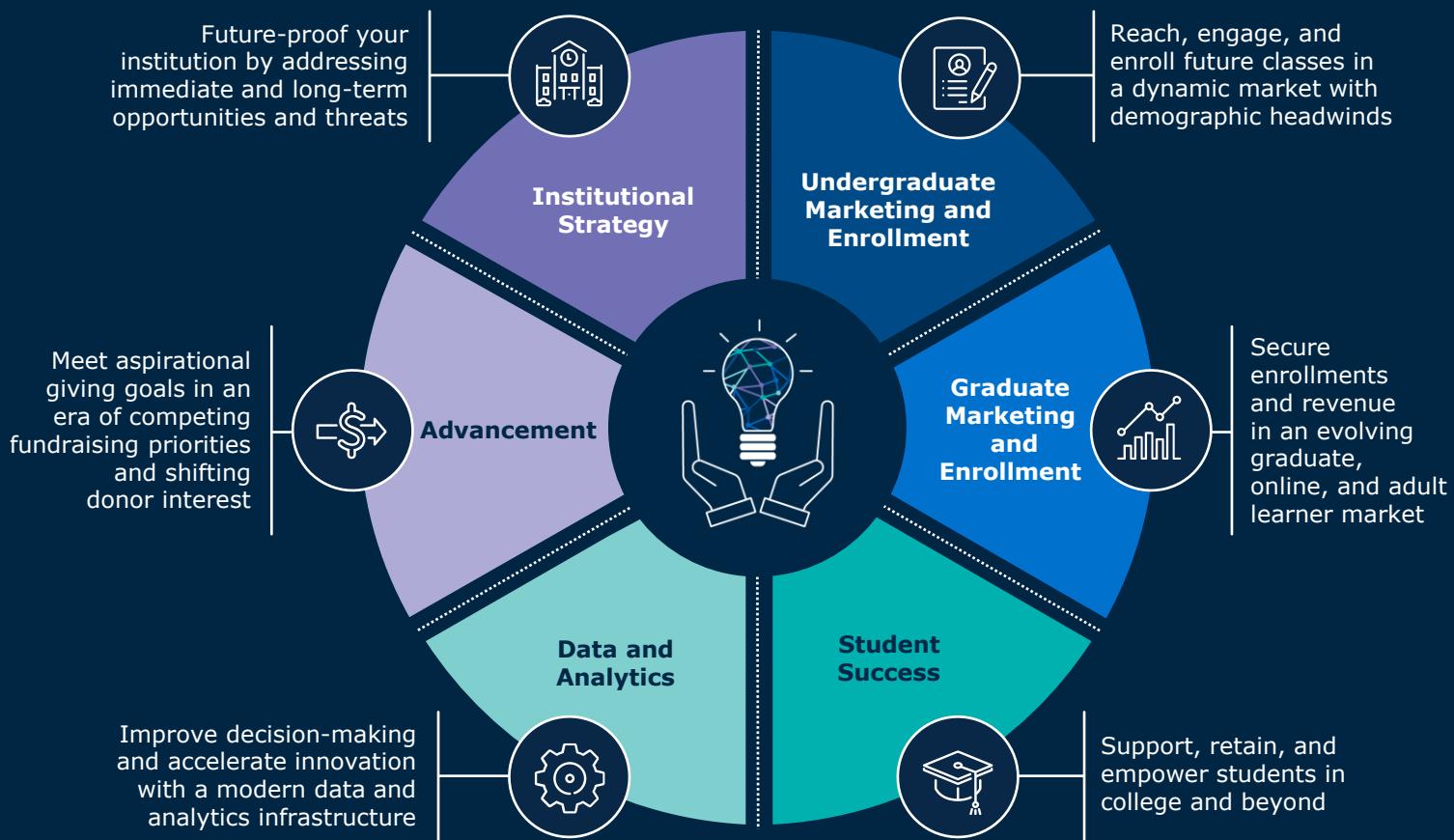
To learn more, visit eab.com/digital-agency or email LexRubyHowe@eab.com.



EAB

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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.