The Data Don't Lie:

Best-Practice Marketing and Recruitment Strategies for Graduate Enrollment

LIAISON

Meet Our Presenters

Jim C. Harper, II, Ph.D.

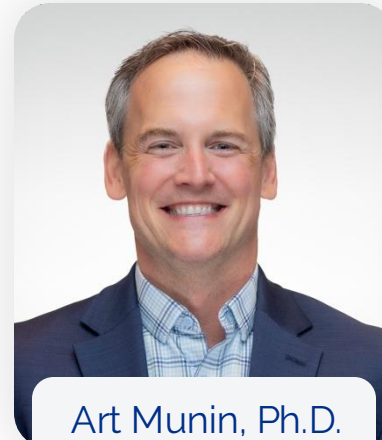*Interim Associate Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies*

North Carolina Central University

Kerry Wilks, Ph.D.

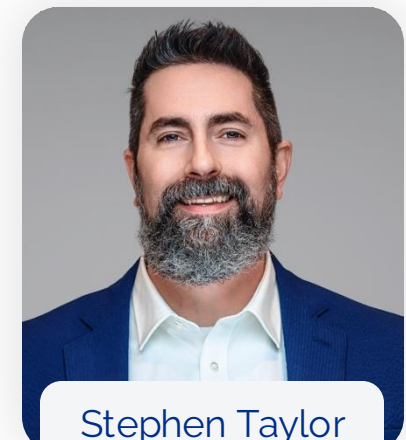*Associate Vice Chancellor of Graduate Studies and Research*

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Art Munin, Ph.D.

Sr. Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management Solutions

Liaison

Stephen Taylor

Vice President, Graduate Enrollment Strategy

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Liaison and WES Launch Partnership to Support Global Student Mobility

October 29, 2025 • 3 min read • Liaison

Liaison and WES are enabling students to seamlessly transition between credential evaluation and program applications by integrating WES's trusted evaluation process into Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS).

[BOSTON, Oct. 28, 2025] – **Liaison**, the leader in higher education application and enrollment solutions, and **World Education Services (WES)**, a globally trusted provider of international academic credential evaluations, have announced a strategic partnership aimed at simplifying and strengthening the international student application process.

This collaboration expands opportunities for international students while streamlining the admissions process for universities, creating a more inclusive and efficient pathway to graduate education.

CAS Community


5 Million Applications Through CAS Last Year

Inquiry Response Project Secret Shopper Research

Methodology

Liaison secret shoppers visited graduate school webpages for all NAGAP-member institutions. For each institution, they:

- Searched for inquiry forms/ways to indicate interest.

- Submitted inquiry forms and logged the date/time of inquiry.

- Tracked responses from each school:

  - Emails: date, time, level of personalization, number received.

  - Print pieces: date received, level of personalization, type.

  - Phone calls: date and type.

All results were compiled four weeks from the respective date of inquiry.
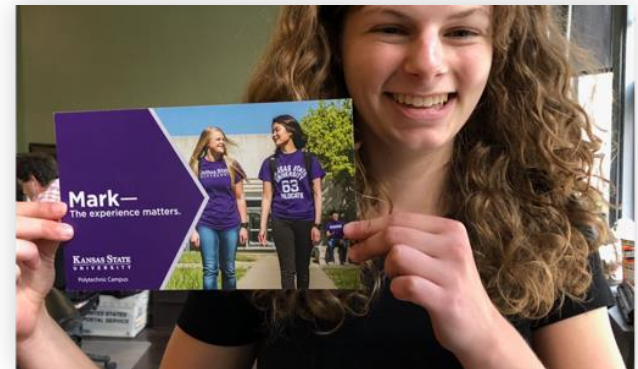
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NAGAP-Member Survey
Methodology

Liaison and NAGAP also surveyed all NAGAP members regarding their perception of how they communicate with prospective students.

- Over 1,100 survey emails distributed

- 18% response rate

- 95% completion rate

Five Keys to Successful Communication

Our study identified five key elements crucial to effective communication:

Enhance Visibility

Respond Quickly

Personalize

Use Multiple Channels

Evaluate and Test

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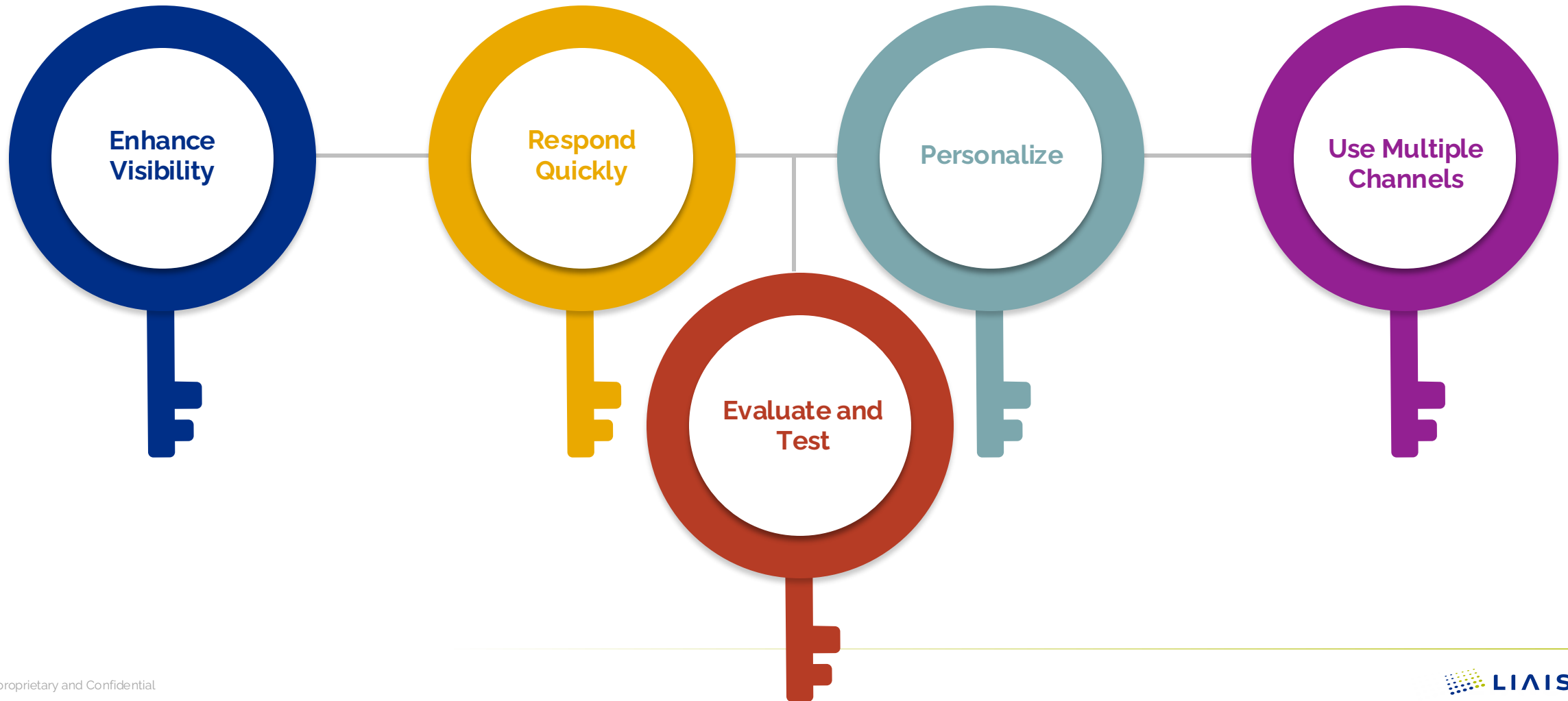
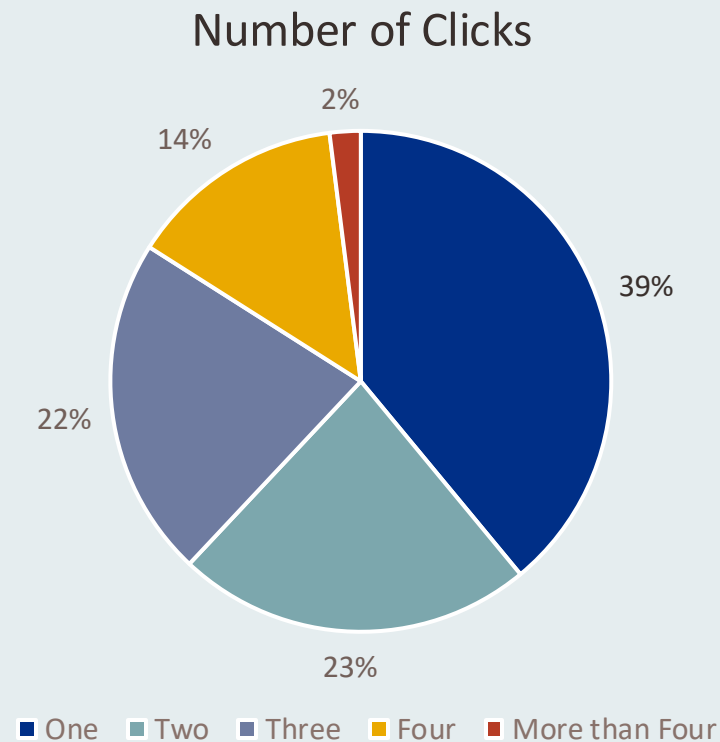# Key #1: Enhance Visibility

How easy is it to find relevant information?

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How Easy Is It for a Prospect to Access Your RFI Form From the Home Page?

55%
of NAGAP members reported:

Students can find the RFI form after one click from the home page.

Number of Clicks

- 39% One
- 23% Two
- 22% Three
- 14% Four
- 2% More than Four
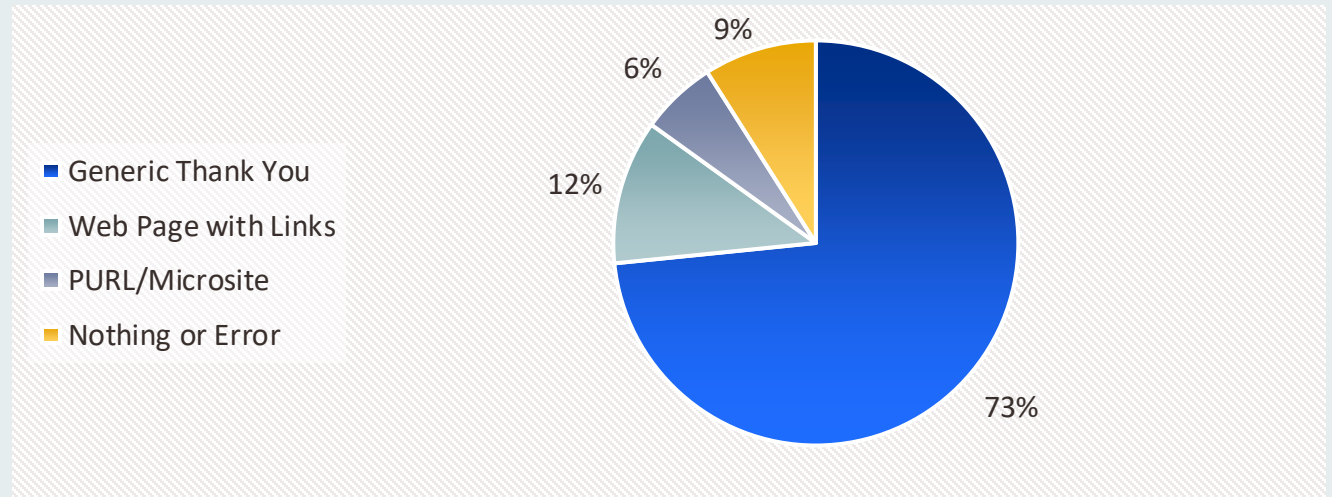
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Enhance Visibility

What Do Prospects See When They Submit an Inquiry Form?

NAGAP-Member Survey

45%
of NAGAP members reported:

Students see a detailed response.

Secret Shopper Data

When RFI Form Is Submitted

- Generic Thank You
- Web Page with Links
- PURL/Microsite
- Nothing or Error

9%
6%
12%
73%

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73% of schools responded to our student inquiry with a generic confirmation message like this:

Thank you for your message. It has been sent.

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Do You Use PURL (Personal URL) or Microsite Pages?

Only 4% of schools have this type of response.

PURL Data

Inquiry to Accepted

- Students who received a PURL were 2.43x more likely to move from Inquiry to Applied.

Accepted to Enrolled

- Students who received a PURL were 3.29x more likely to enroll after being Accepted.

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Key Takeaway

You want to **make a good impression** and **offer ways to continue engagement.**

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Key #1:
Enhance Visibility

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Key #2: Respond Quickly

Strike while the iron is hot.

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Be Fast...Be First!

How do you feel when Amazon says your order will arrive in five days, not two?

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How Quickly Do You Respond to an Inquiry?

NAGAP-Member Survey

62%
of NAGAP members reported they:

Respond within one to 24 hours.

Secret Shopper Data

21% of schools responded in 24 hours

- 25%
- 2%
- 8%
- 65%

■ 0-1 Hours ■ 2-4 Hours ■ 5-8 Hours ■ 16-24 Hours

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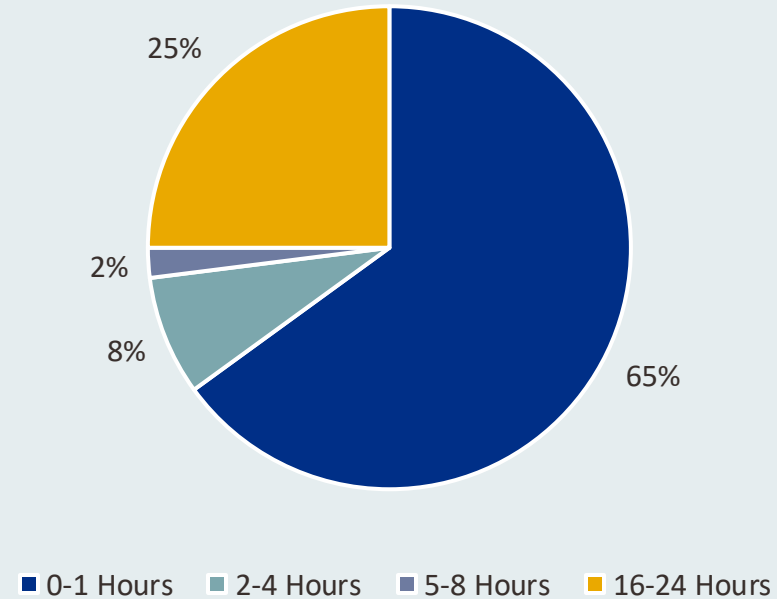
The Non-Response

- Some schools did not respond to a submitted form within 2 weeks.

- Can you guess how many?

71

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What Do Grad Students Say?

60%

said the **speed of communication** from a college influenced their decision to apply.

42%

said they decided to enroll at a school because of the **timely follow-up** they received after their initial inquiry.

25%

of prospective students indicated that they would be more likely to enroll at a school that responded to their inquiries within **24 hours.**

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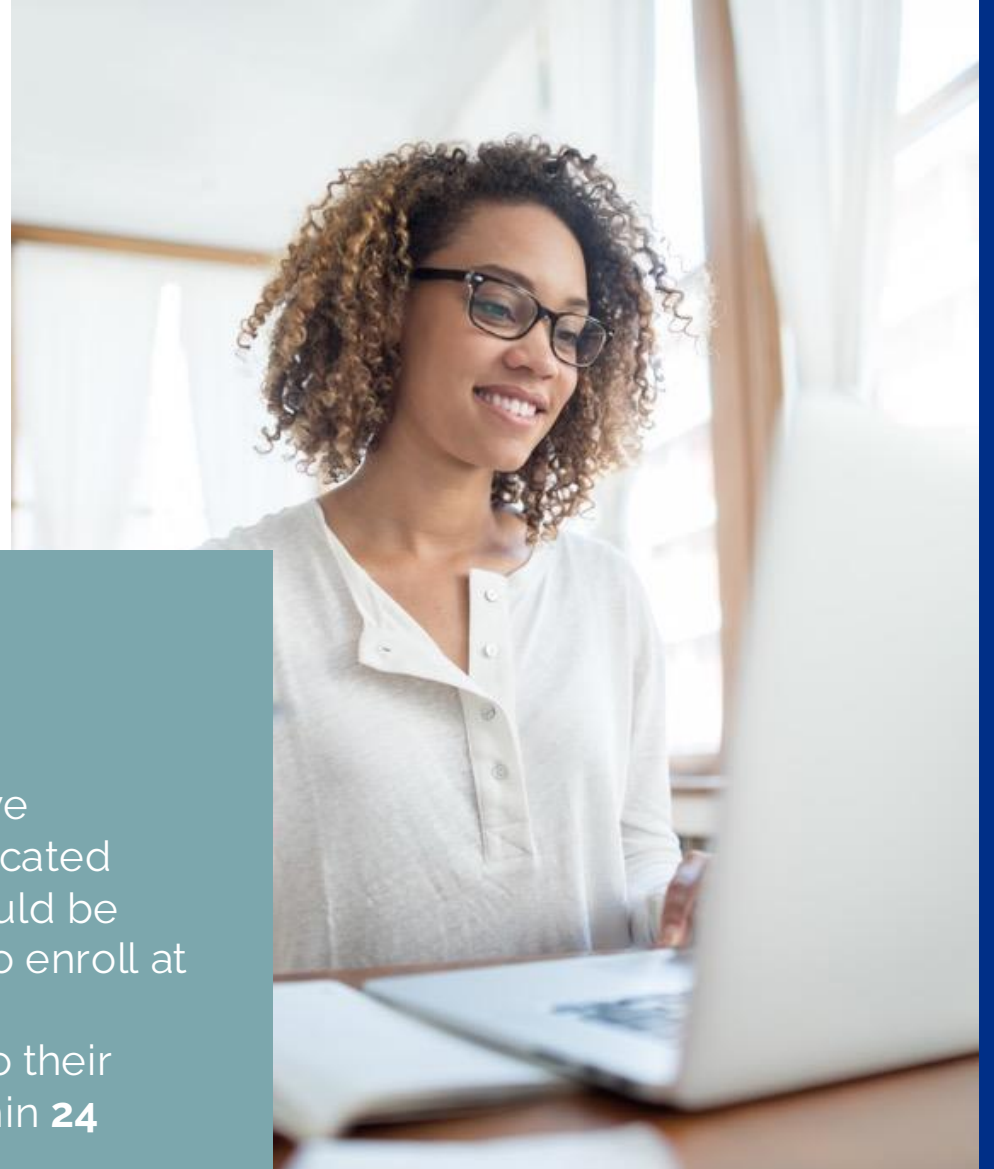
Key #2:
Respond Quickly

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Key #3: Personalize

Give students what they ask for.

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When Recruiting Works!

- We do NOT recruit and retain students when they understand us (the institution).

- We recruit and retain when students see we understand who they are.

How Well Do You Personalize Email Communication?

NAGAP-Member Survey

81%

of NAGAP members reported:

Email responses are personalized.

Secret Shopper Data

Personalization of Email

- 42%
- 30%
- 28%

■ Personalized ■ Full Variable ■ Generic

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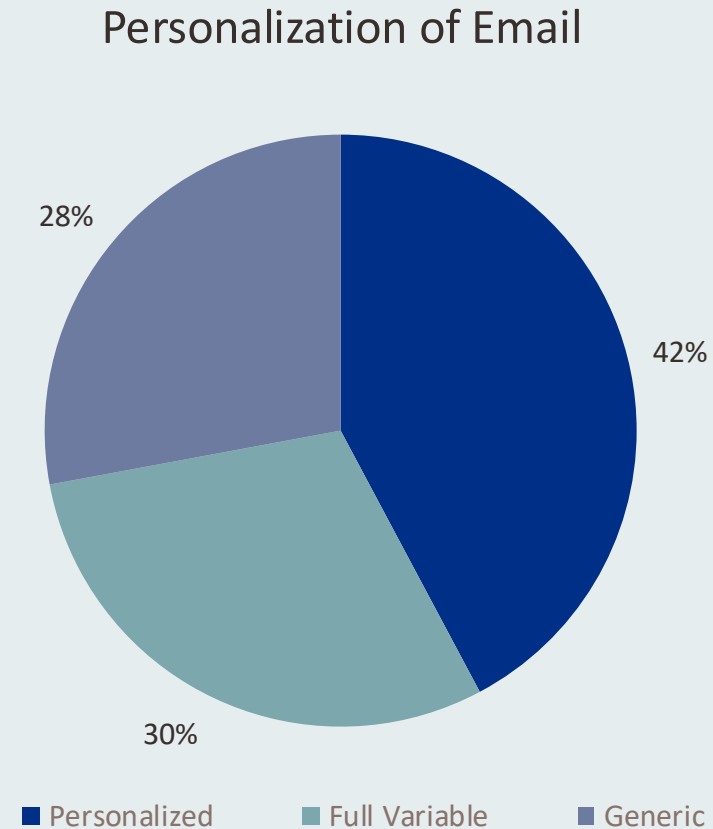
Email Personalization Options

Full variable customization is ideal to create engagement.

FULL VARIABLE

UP TO 5 VARIABLES

PERSONALIZED

NAME AND ONE OTHER VARIABLE

GENERIC

PRODUCT ONLY

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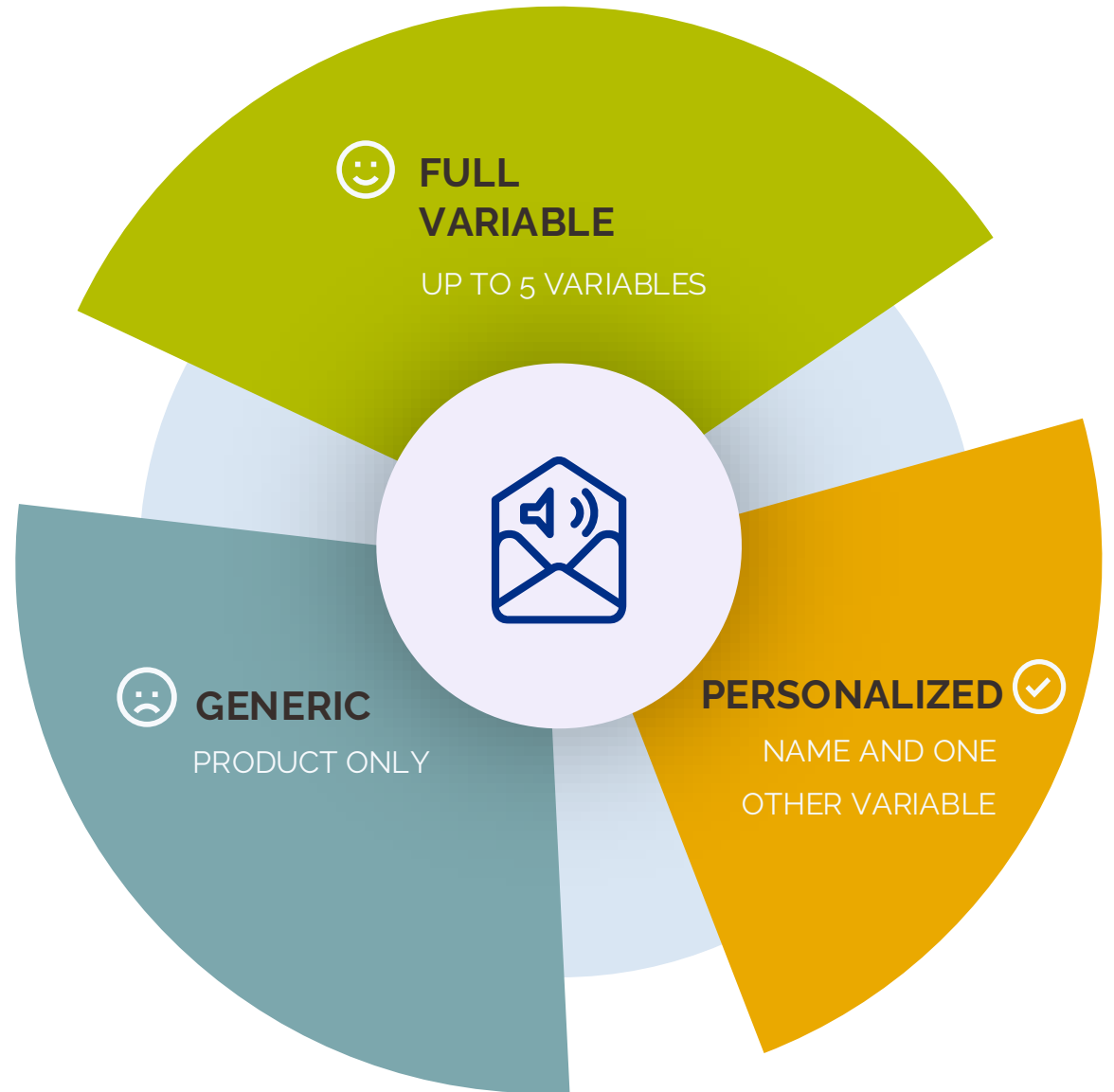
Grad Students Expect Personalization

45% of students interested in graduate studies have a "grad school-bound" mindset. Sending them information they don't want or need has a **negative impact**.

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Heres-My-Info-Grad Inbox ×

noreply+...@formstack.com   Mon, Feb 11, 7:29 AM

to me

Thank you! We've received your submission. One of our counselors will be in contact with you in the near future. If you have an immediate question, please contact us at [redacted] or gps@[redacted]

Thank you for your interest in [redacted] University! Inbox ×

[redacted] University Forms <FormstackSubmissions@b[redacted]du>   Sun, Feb 10, 7:05 PM

to me

[redacted] University

Thank you!

We can't wait to tell you more about [redacted] University. Our staff will be in touch with you soon!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at grad@b[redacted]du or 7[redacted]000.

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

Hello Alex,

Thank you for introducing yourself to us! We're pleased to learn that you're considering graduate study at Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. We'll be sending additional information about our school and your program of interest in the near future.

In the meantime, we have taken the information you submitted and created a personalized microsite (PURL) for you based on your area of interest. Please visit your site to connect with BU and learn more about admissions, financial aid, our programs and other helpful information. We recommend bookmarking your page for future visits.

mywheelock.bu.edu/AlexJames

Don't hesitate to contact us if you have additional questions at this time!

All the best,

Julia Cocca

Director of Graduate Enrollment

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Personalize

- Feature Program-Specific Information

- Employ a Functional and Rational Approach

- Tailor Personalized Content

- Highlight Career Outcomes

- Address Specific Needs

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Key #3:
Personalize

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Key #4: Use Multiple Channels

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True Omnichannel Marketing

It's not just one email, it's a combination of all interactions.

How Many Channels Do You Use to Engage Prospects?

72%

of NAGAP members reported using:

At least two channels.

Channels Used

- 37%
- 49%
- 8%
- 6%

■ One ■ Two ■ Three ■ Three or more

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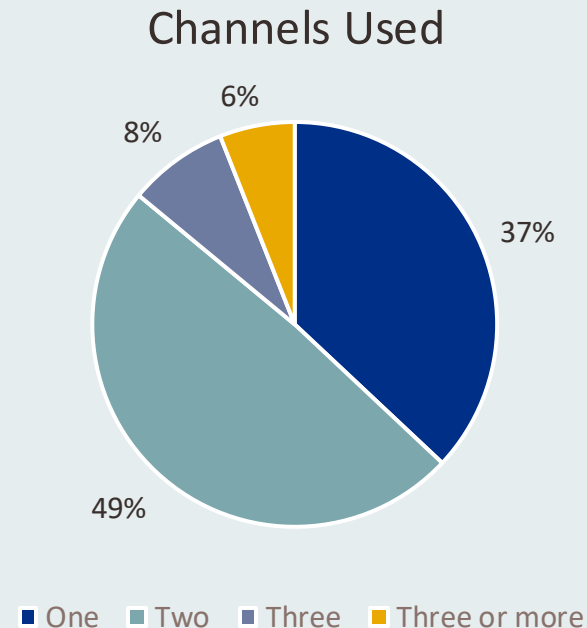
Effective Channels

EMAIL

37% of students at four-year private institutions and 33% at public institutions prefer email for initial contact.

CHATBOTS

42% of students reported positive experiences with school chatbots for immediate answers (and improved engagement).

TEXT MESSAGING

SMS messages have an open rate of nearly 98%, compared to an average email open rate of around 20%.

OTHER EFFECTIVE CHANNELS

SOCIAL MEDIA
including TikTok and Instagram

IN-PERSON EVENTS

VIRTUAL EVENTS

https://callhub.io/blog/education/student-recruitment-strategies/
https://www.higher-education-marketing.com/blog/7-winning-student-recruitment-strategies-to-drive-results
https://www.linkedin.com/advice/3/what-most-effective-channels-sourcing-graduate-candidates
https://topechelon.com/recruitment-software/maximizing-effective-communication-channels-in-recruitment/

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Marketing Problem

The Digital Clutter

We live in an ever-growing stream of information that's available at our fingertips. This has led to an ever-increasing problem of content overload.

4,000-10,000
Advertisements per day

Americans encounter thousands of advertisements each day.

347,300,000,000
Sent and received daily

A staggering number of emails are sent every minute.

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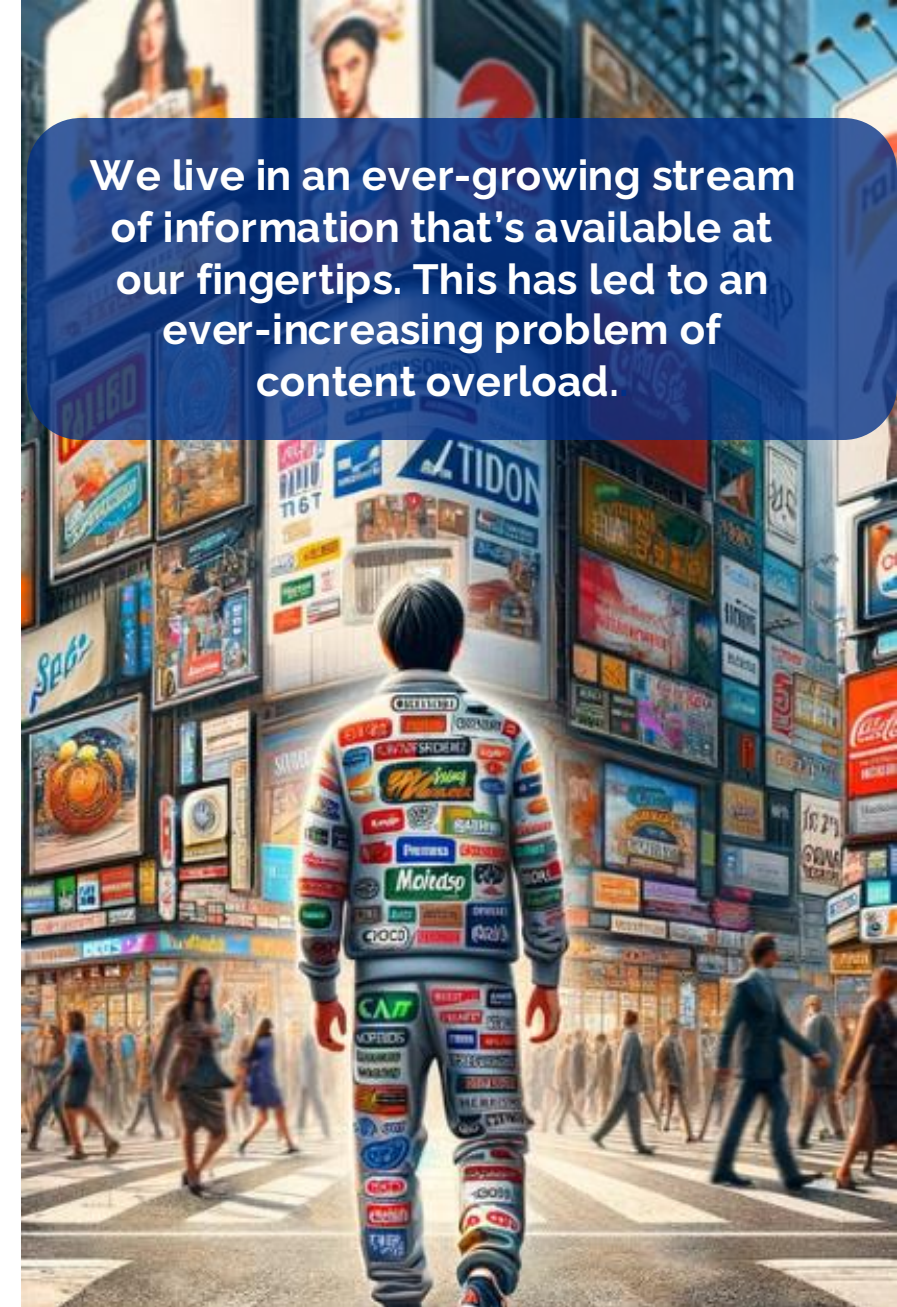
Key #4:
Use Multiple Channels

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Key #5: Evaluate and Test

It's not as good as you think it is.

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Have You Conducted Any Recent Audits of Your Graduate Inquiry Response Strategy?

89%

of NAGAP members reported:

Not sure or no audit conducted in the last year.

Audit Conducted?

12%

30%

59%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Unsure

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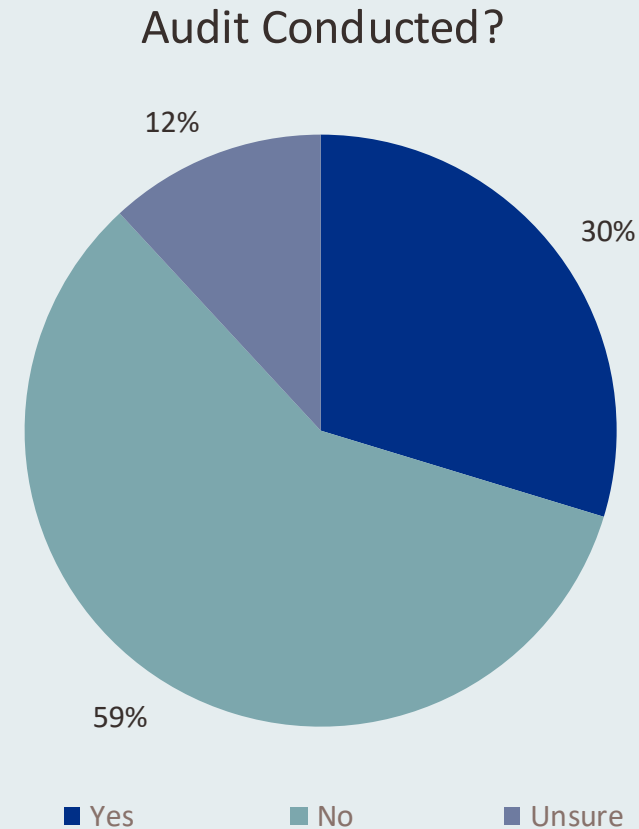
Is Your RFI Form Optimized for Mobile?

NAGAP-Member Survey

66%

of NAGAP members reported having:

An RFI form optimized for mobile.

Secret Shopper Data

43%

of institutions were found to be:

Mobile-friendly.

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We Must Optimize for Mobile

- Mobile devices account for **over 60%** of all website traffic worldwide.

- **92.3%** of internet users access the internet using a mobile phone.

- Students spend **62% of their screen time** on phones. So, if your website doesn't fit well on their small screens or isn't otherwise mobile optimized, you lose their attention.

https://explodingtopics.com/blog/mobile-internet-traffic#mobile-internet-top-stats
https://www.emarketer.com/content/digital-life-of-us-teens

Updating Prospect Communications Regularly Is Essential

Institutions should aim to update their communications at least every three months. This frequency helps keep the information current and reflects any changes in programs, admissions deadlines, or campus events.

Over 90% of students use college websites for research. Many find these sites difficult to navigate, suggesting a significant need for updates and improvements.

https://www.scoir.com/blog/best-practices-for-prospective-student-communications
https://www.ecampusnews.com/campus-leadership/2023/08/03/when-it-comes-to-recruitment-websites-are-key/

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Do You Balance Print Materials With Digital Outreach?

87%

of NAGAP members reported:

Unbalanced. Primarily, or Only Digital.

Balanced Outreach?

- 11% Equal Mix
- 1% Primarily Print
- 62% Primarily Digital
- 1% Only Print
- 25% Only Digital

Legend:
- ■ Equal Mix
- ■ Primarily Print
- ■ Primarily Digital
- ■ Only Print
- ■ Only Digital

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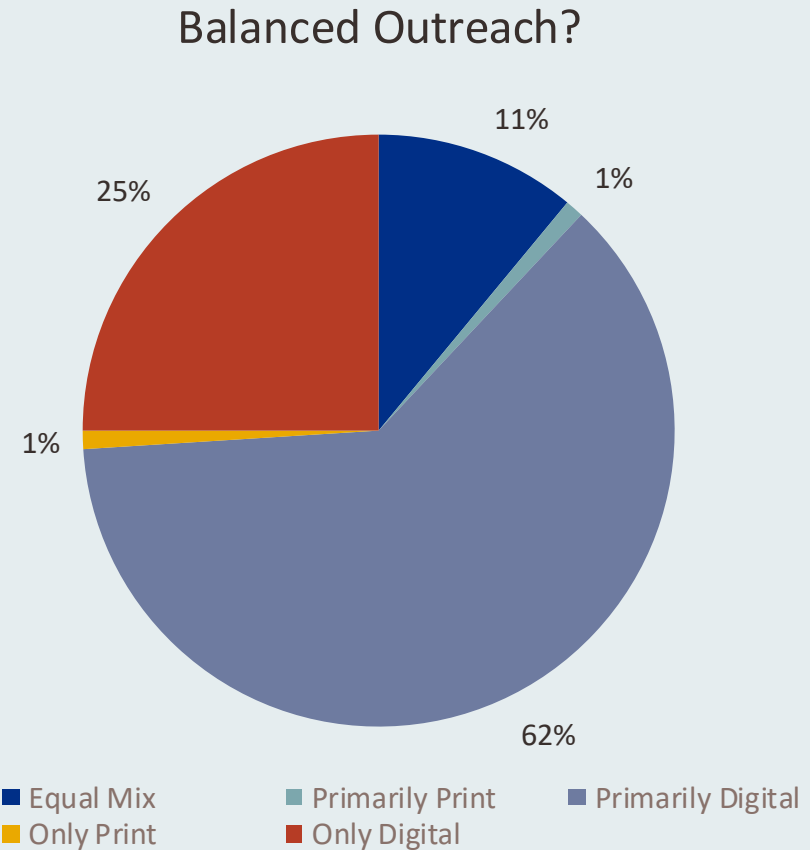
Recommendations Based on Our Data

Ensure that the RFI form is immediately visible and accessible on the homepage.

Display consistent design for call-to-action buttons.

Unify post-submission communication.

Simplify application pathways.

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If You Can Only Take Away One Thing….

A thorough usability review and user testing could help to identify more specific pain points in the navigation process.

Focusing on clearer design, reduced click-paths, and a unified communication strategy will enhance the overall user experience for prospective graduate students.
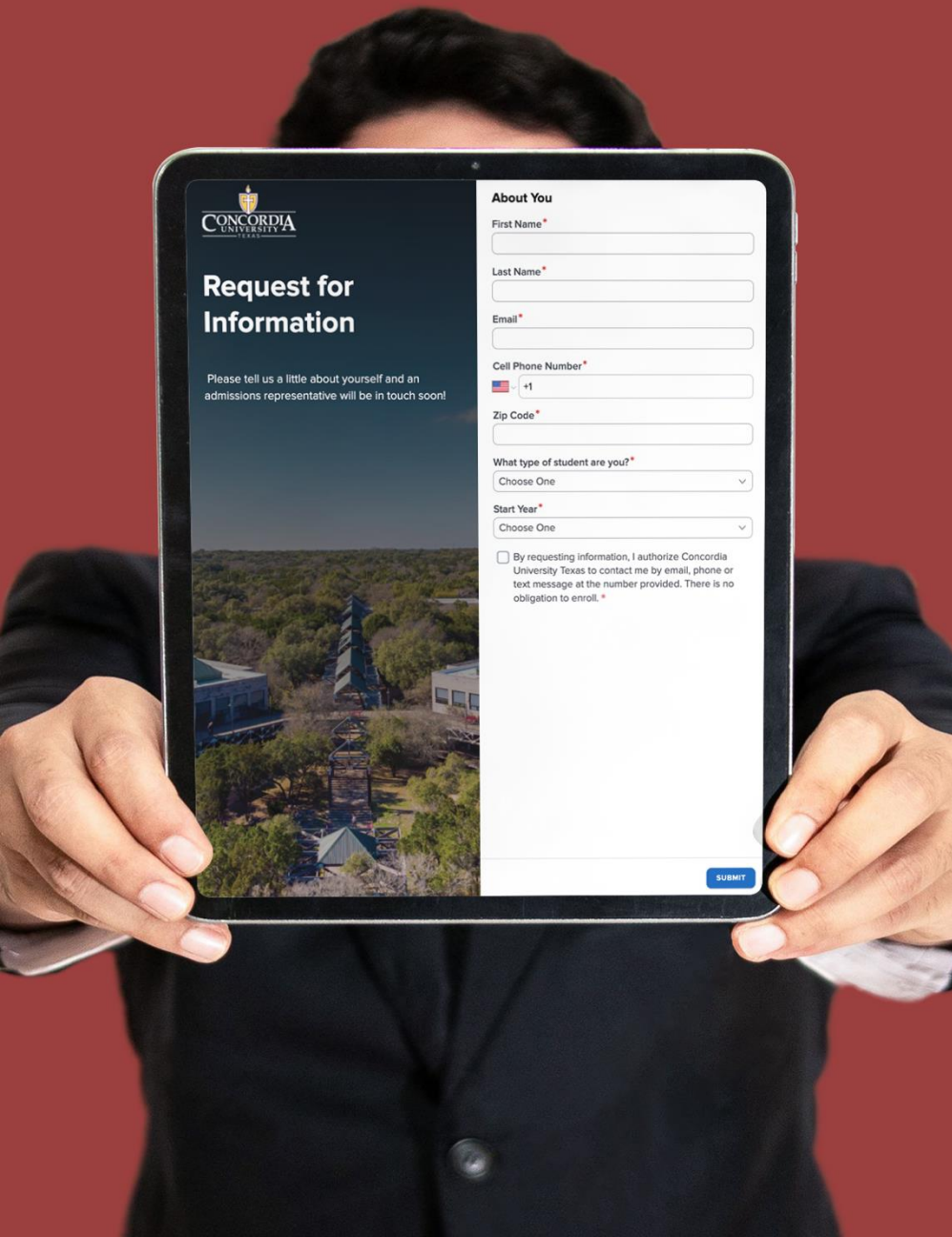
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How Do You Stack Up?

1. Enhance Visibility
2. Respond Quickly
3. Personalize
4. Use Multiple Channels
5. Evaluate and Test

How Did Your Institution Score?

Liaison can share analysis on your institution's inquiry experience upon request.

We can also segment our project data to give you comparisons with other institutions based on region, size, type, etc.

Scan to Request Your Scorecard

LIAISON — Inquiry Response Project

Schools	Average Score	Avg. Channels Used	Avg. Days Response	Avg. Touches	Avg. Emails
432	24.0	1.05	1.10	2.5	3.7

Watertown University

Inquiry Form Score **10**	10 = Found on homepage with no scrolling 5 = Found, but scrolling or clicks required 0 = Not found
Inquiry Form Response Page Score **0**	10 = Full interaction and personal page 5 = Webpage and links 0 = Generic thank you page
First Response Time Rating **10**	10 = Within 24 Hours 7 = Within 3 Days 5 = Within 7 Days 0 = Over a week or not at all
First Response Personalization Score **0**	10 = Highly relevant, name + another relevant factor 5 = Used name only 0 = Generic
Email Count Score **5**	10 = 3-5 Emails over 4 weeks 5 = 6 or more Emails 0 = 0-2 Emails
Print Used **0**	10 = Print received 0 = No printt received
First Print Response Time **0**	10 = Within one week 5 = Within 10 days 0 = over 10 days or not received
Phone Call Personalization **0**	10 = Personal phone call / text received 5 = Phone call / text, generic or recorded 0 = No phone call / text received
Total Number of Touches Score **5**	10 = 10-15 touches over 4 weeks 5 = 1-9 or 16-20 touches over 4 weeks 0 = None or over 21 touches over 4 weeks
Number of Channels Score **2**	10 = 4 or more channels 8 = 3 channels 5 = 2 channels 2 = 1 channel 0 = None

INQUIRY FORM		1ST RESPONSE		ENGAGMENT		TOTAL SCORE
10 of 10	**+**	**10** of 30	**+**	**12** of 60	**=**	**32** of 100

Explore the Student Experience for Yourself.

Scan the QR code to see how a true omnichannel campaign works. You'll receive a personalized microsite, automated email, text message and even a personalized print piece— just like your students will when you engage them with Liaison Enrollment Marketing.

Q&A

Thank You

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