Discussion Guide

Optimizing Organic Traffic to Your Website

The Importance of Organic Traffic

SEO is a Process, Not an Event

Getting it "Done"

The Importance of Organic Traffic

Taking Stock…

Q Is SEO part of your institutional enrollment marketing strategy?

The Website is the Way

Top sources used to learn about colleges and universities

1. The college's or university's website
2. Emails from a particular school
3. Videos of campus, classrooms, students, and residence halls
4. Printed brochures about the school
5. Results from financial aid or scholarship calculator

Search Engines Lead the Way: To College

## How do students find a college website?

METHOD	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	10TH GRADE
Use a search engine	57%	57%	63%
Social media	36%	38%	25%
They know and use the URL address to visit the website	30%	24%	20%
Find the link in an email from the college	28%	23%	24%
College planning website	20%	23%	21%
Find the link in something printed	19%	17%	16%

Search Engines Lead the Way: To Grad School

First Step In Search

Other, 12%
Search Engine, 37%
Institutional Sites, 51%
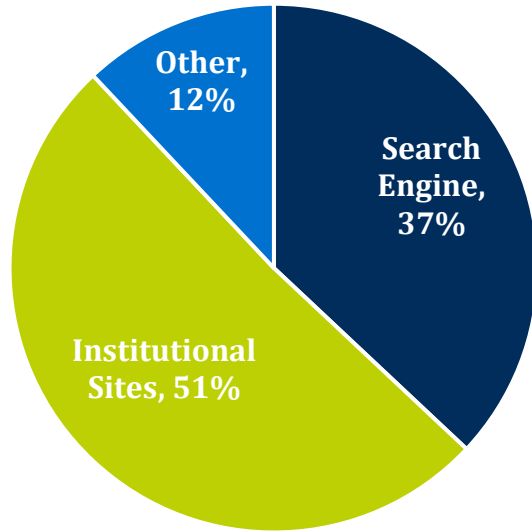
Other Early Steps

Search Engine 51%
Institutional Sites 47%
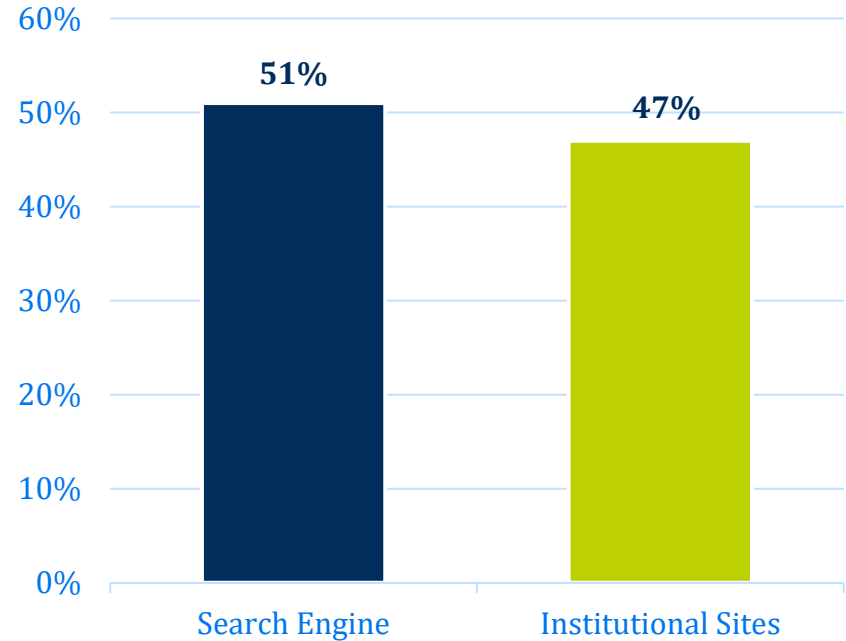
Search Engines Lead the Way: To Online Programs

TABLE 15: SOURCES USED TO FIND ONLINE PROGRAMS OF INTEREST	UNDER-GRADUATE DEGREE	GRADUATE DEGREE	NON-DEGREE
Search engines	89%	85%	95%
College/program search sites	77%	78%	61%
Ads on social media	58%	73%	57%
Someone I know	53%	56%	56%
Ads on websites	54%	52%	46%
Ads on streaming TV	51%	47%	36%
Ads on broadcast or cable TV	46%	50%	39%
Videos on YouTube or elsewhere	44%	48%	48%
Printed materials from institutions	38%	36%	31%

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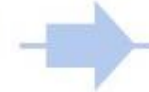# The Path from Web Search to Enrollment

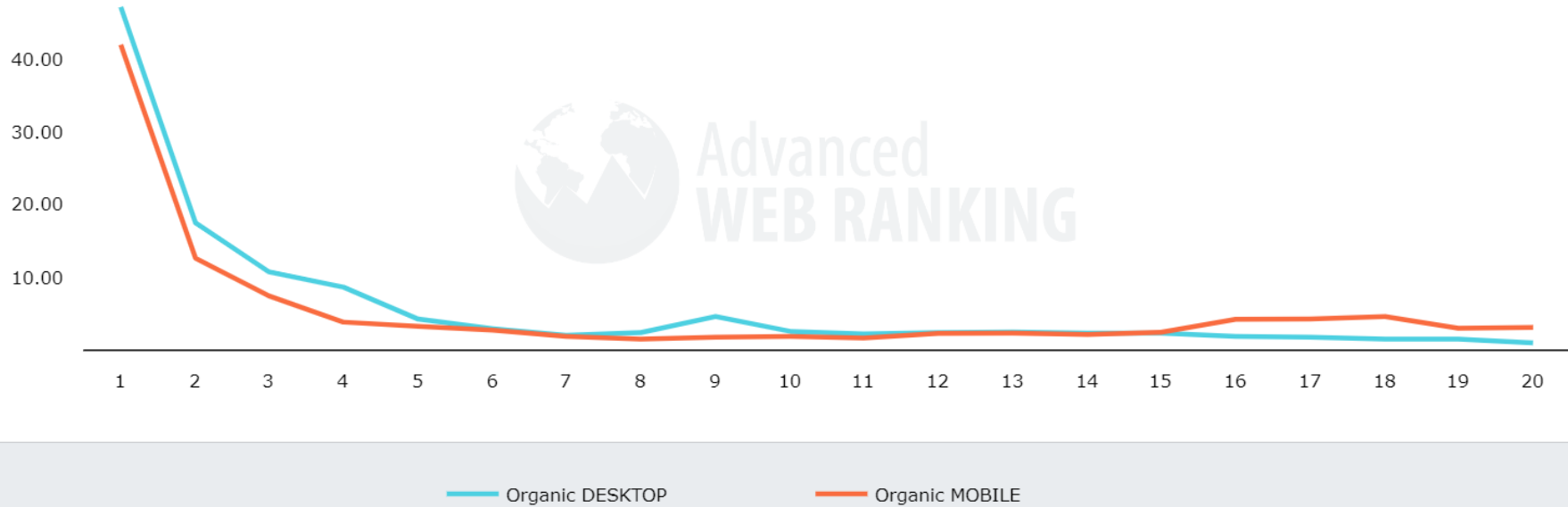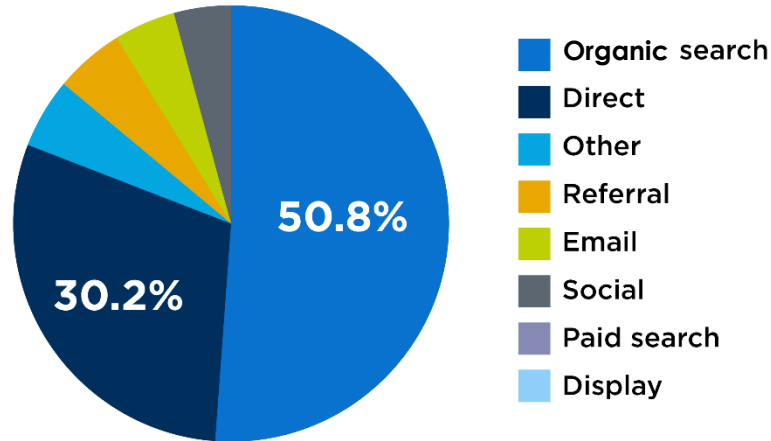**HIGHER SEARCH RANKINGS**

MORE WEBSITE VISITS

HIGHER CONVERSIONS

STRONGER ENROLLMENTS

National click-through rates by ranking position

Legend: Organic DESKTOP — Organic MOBILE

Organic Traffic Drives Enrollment Conversion

TOP CHANNELS

- Organic search — 50.8%
- Direct — 30.2%
- Other
- Referral
- Email
- Social
- Paid search
- Display

Approximately **50%** of all higher education website traffic comes from search engines.

77% of students will use a search engine to access a website EVEN if they know which school they want to look up.

Organic leads are approximately **7X** more likely to convert compared to other sources.

Obstacles to Website Engagement

Top 5 things students find frustrating about college websites

Hard-to-find information about specific majors/programs

Lack of information about job opportunities related to each major

Confusing directions related to the admissions process

Lack of information about admission statistics—how many students like me were admitted to particular majors, etc.

Hard-to-use navigation or hard-to-use links

SEO is a Process, Not an Event

Taking Stock...

Q How often do you think about SEO performance?

Why is SEO an Ongoing Process?

Competitors grow, change, and advance

User behavior changes over time

Search engines continuously modify ranking factors and algorithms

SEO

The online market is constantly changing

Content development is a continuous process

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Search is the Pathway to Academic Discovery

What do students use for their search queries?

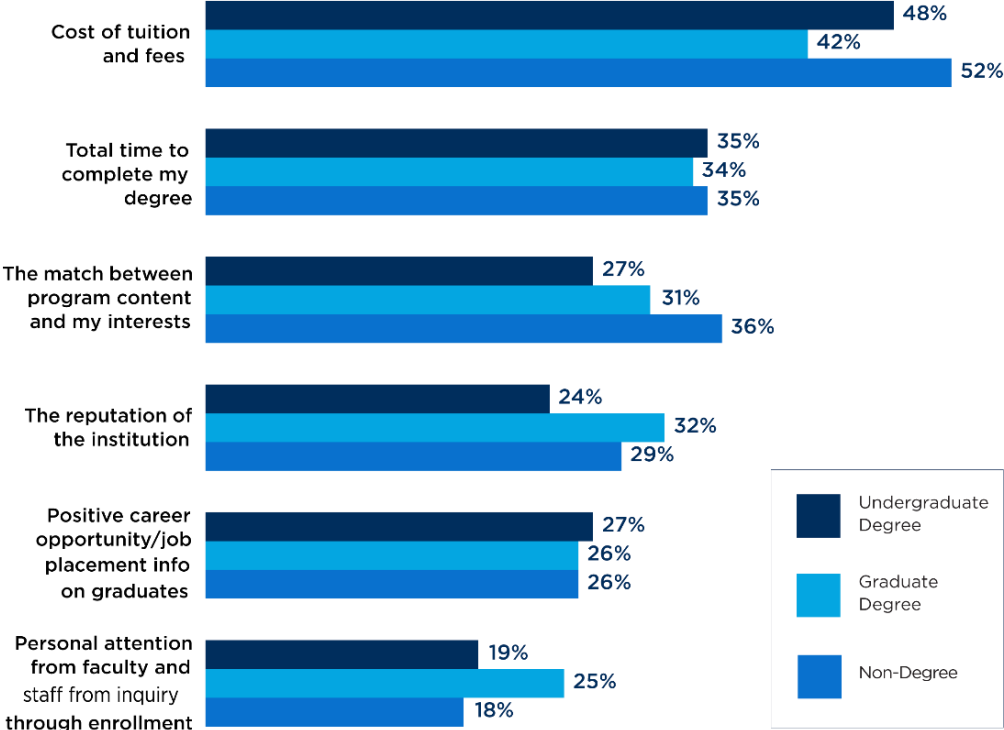| TERMS/INFORMATION	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	10TH GRADE
Name of school	73%	67%	65%
Name of a specific major or academic program	49%	48%	43%
Name of a career interest or general academic area	41%	40%	37%
The location where I want to attend a college or university	37%	34%	35%
College size (small, medium, large)	19%	17%	15%

Evolving Student Information Needs: Undergrad

What information is important to prospective students?

INFORMATION	ALL RESPONDENTS
Scholarship and financial aid information	50%
Cost/tuition information	49%
Campus location, city, and community information	48%
Housing information	44%
Campus and student life information	43%
Academic majors/programs list or course catalog	42%
General college or university overview	39%

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Evolving Student Information Needs: Grad

TABLE 26: MOST IMPORTANT ENROLLMENT FACTORS
(Respondents chose their three most important factors.)

Factor	Undergraduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Non-Degree
Cost of tuition and fees	48%	42%	52%
Total time to complete my degree	35%	34%	35%
The match between program content and my interests	27%	31%	36%
The reputation of the institution	24%	32%	29%
Positive career opportunity/job placement info on graduates	27%	26%	26%
Personal attention from faculty and staff from inquiry through enrollment	19%	25%	18%

Ongoing Algorithm Updates: Page Experience

Ranking factors continue to evolve

March 2021 → Google announces plans to use Core web vitals as a ranking factor

August 2021 → BrightEdge initial research found that for Education related and finance-related queries, there did not appear to be a correlation between higher ranking and better core web vitals

February 2022 → Google formally rolls out the **Page Experience update**

July 2022 → Updated BrightEdge Research on CWV confirms a 27% improvement in Page experience score across the top performing Education sites

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Evolving Search Trends and Growing Traffic

Education searches continue to grow

Education Platforms → Content is still growing with overall demand **131% of pre pandemic interest**
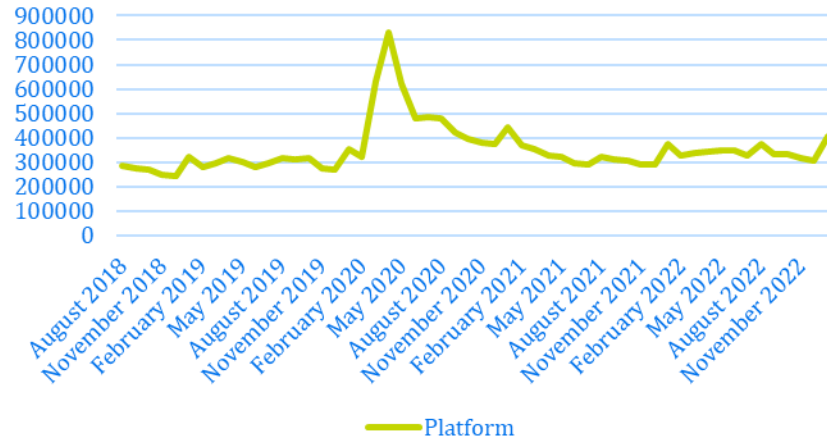
Certifications → Certificate queries have grown by **30%**

Evolving Search Trends and Growing Traffic

Logistical Topics

→ **Time to completion** is a topic that's stabilizing from its peak but still **180%** of January 2019 demand

→ **Tuition** continues to be a growing area of concern for students with **141%** of pre pandemic search demand
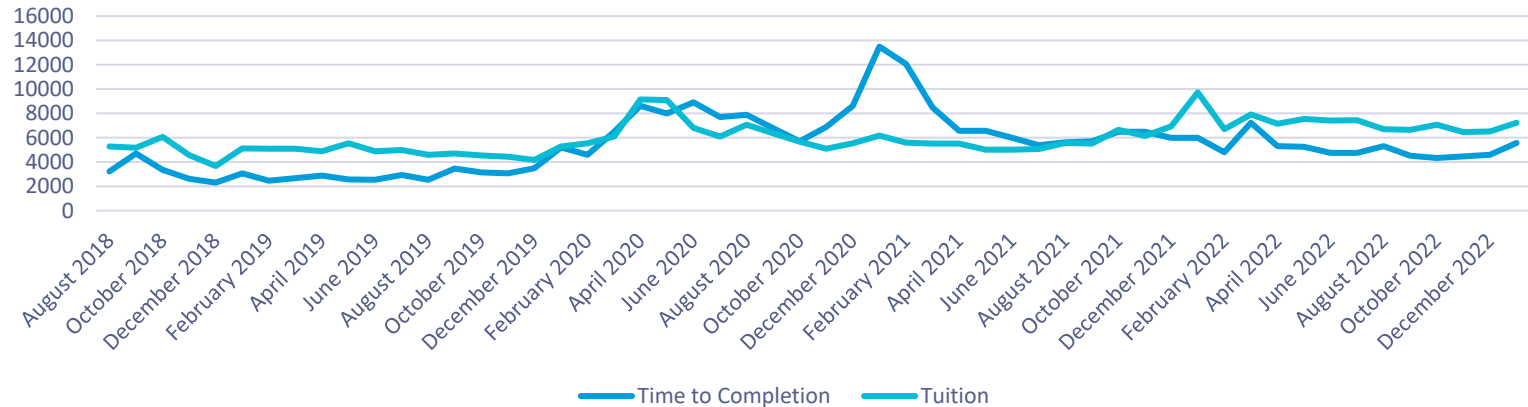
Evolving Search Trends and Growing Traffic

Academic program demand trends

Subjects & Courses

→ January of 2023 is **125% of January 2019 levels**

→ August of 2022 (peak seasonality) was **127%** of Aug 2018 interest
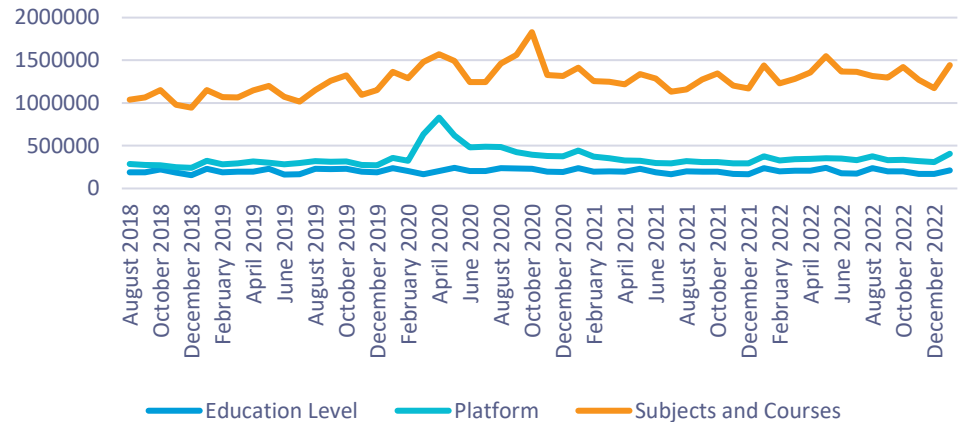
Getting It
"Done"

Organic is Part of an Integrated Media Strategy

Complement and offset investments in paid marketing by growing your organic footprint over time

Paid digital

Organic (SEO)

Lead Generation

Existing Leads & Partnerships

Traditional media

25
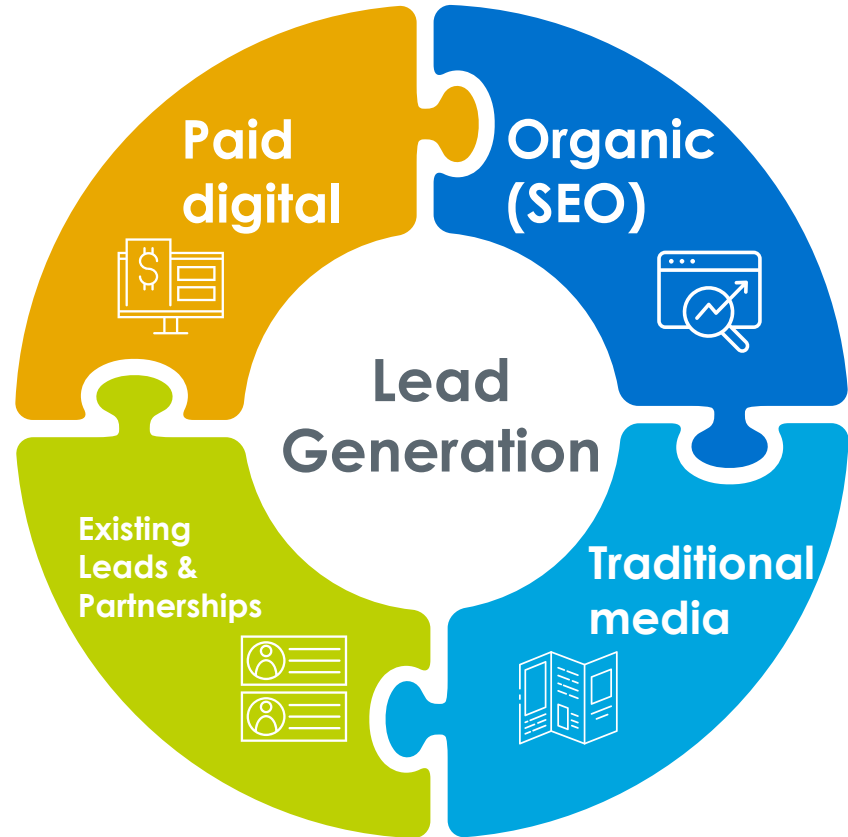
The AI Shift

The elephant in the room

- Rise of **Bing GPT**

- Increasing importance of **user-generated content** – comments, reviews

- **Structured data** (schema) – for careers, jobs, etc.

- **Topical authority** – long-tail content

- Backlinking and **digital PR**

- Use of Chat GPT to **iterate user-focused content**

Getting it Done

1. Ensure your website loads quickly and is free of technical "errors"

2. Develop a "sticky" user experience that engages users, keeps them clicking through your site

3. Pursue a back-linking strategy driven by digital PR

4. Leverage internal linking

5. Develop keyword-driven, benefits-focused content

Strong Content Still Drives Results

Research

Write
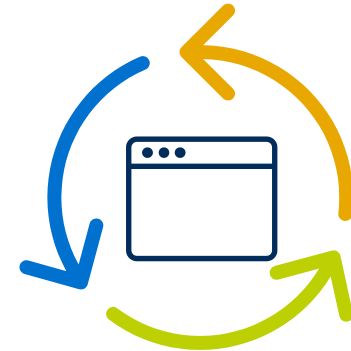
Improve

Choosing Pages of Focus

Focus on pages that will increase new traffic and enrollments

- **Department pages**: Introductory "hub" sections within each department.

- **Program pages**: For targeted degree programs. If combined with paid ads, include these programs for the SEO project.

- **Adjacent content:** Blog/article pages that tie to programs to provide deeper detail and enhance search rankings
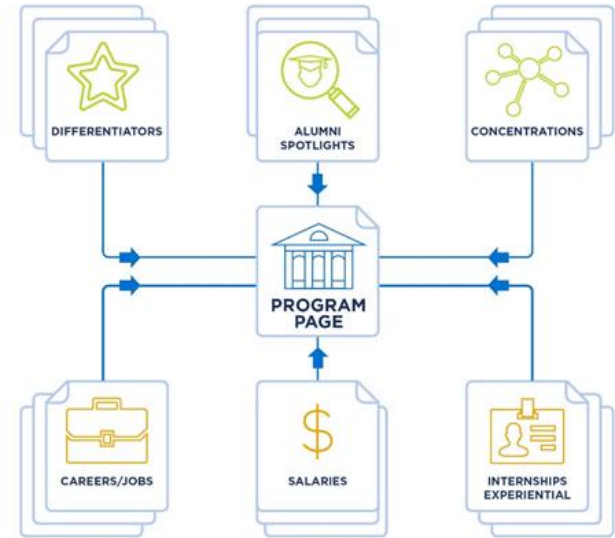
Long-Tail Content

Why Data Science: By the Numbers

100%	**$250K**	**#3**
of surveyed Notre Dame	the amount that highly	out of 50 best

What Can You Do With a Data Science Degree?

If you're wondering what you can do with a data science degree, the data science career outlook is strong. In the past few years alone, the demand for data science skills and data-driven decision making has steeply risen as they become essential tools for organizations that want to do everything they can to ensure success.

Big data and the field of data science present big opportunities for career advancement. Depending on the industry and role you choose, you'll find a wide variety of data science job titles with nuanced job descriptions to match specific skill sets.

Why Data Science at Notre Dame? Get the Skills You Need for a Lucrative Data Science Career

Long-Tail Content Gets You to the Top of the SERP

Data science has the potential to improve the way we live and work, and it can empower others to make better decisions, solve problems, discover new advancements, and address some of the world's most pressing issues. With a data science career, you can be a part of this transformation.

University of Notre Dame
https://datascience.nd.edu › why-data-science ⋮

Why Data Science - University of Notre Dame

? About featured snippets · ⚠ Feedback

Long-Tail Content Also Drives AI Results

Welcome to the new Bing
Your AI-powered copilot for the web

Why should I pursue a career in data science

✓ Searching for: **why pursue a career in data science**

✓ Generating answers for you...

There are many reasons why you should pursue a career in data science. According to Coursera, some of the reasons include:

1. High demand for data science careers
2. Low supply of workers in the data science field
3. Versatility and broad applicability of the data science field
4. Potential to make a lasting impact
5. High degree of job satisfaction
6. Opportunity to solve complex problems and make a real impact on businesses and society
7. Multidisciplinary perspective, drawing on knowledge from experts in various fields
8. Potential to earn a higher salary
9. Gain credibility through real business experience
10. Gain hands-on experience with research that can improve lives [1]

Additionally, as a data scientist, you'll compile, analyze, and extract valuable insights from data which has the ability to do many powerful things such as detect early-stage tumors, optimize shipping routes, improve athletic performance, and detect fraud [2].

I hope this helps! Let me know if you have any other questions.

Learn more: 1. coursera.org   2. datascience.nd.edu   3. indeed.com   +2 more   1 of 5 ●

Website Technical Auditing

Website Technical Auditing

Common errors

🔍 **URLS:** best practices and keywords

🏷️ **Title Tags:** formatting, character length and keywords

📄 **Meta Descriptions:** present, written to entice click-throughs from search results pages

✏️ **H1 Headings:** present on every page and incorporate keywords

🔗 **Internal Linking:** sufficient cross-links to relevant content, incorporating keywords/descriptive words

👤 **Clear calls to action** and enrollment engagement

Reduce Duplicate Content
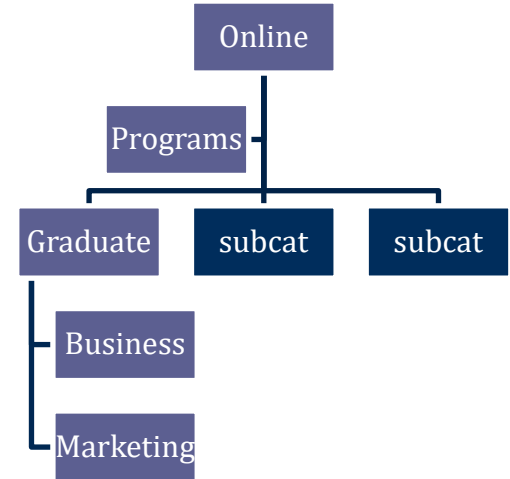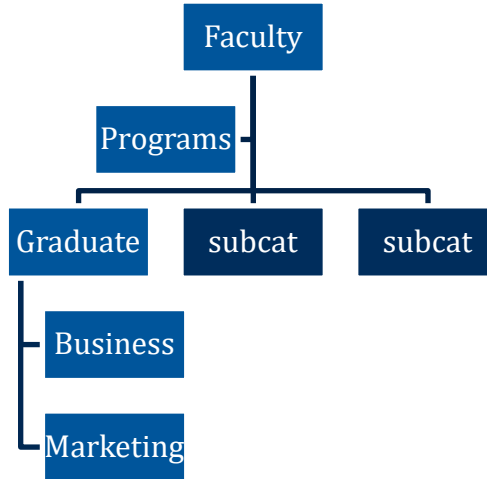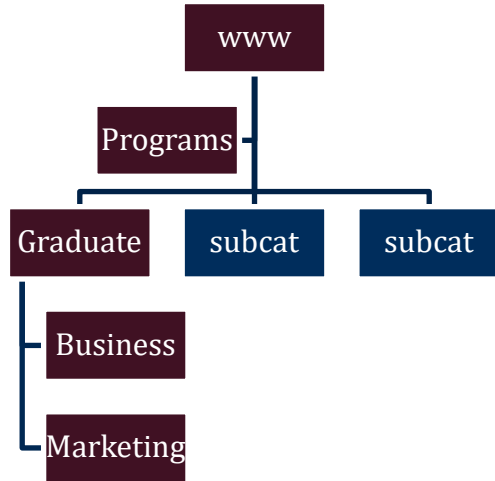
Search engines want to be driven to the *best* page for each search query without having to decide between multiple pages on a single domain

Measure Your Success

SERP rankings, Organic Traffic, Lead Generation

1. Higher rankings in search engine results for keywords and concepts associated with your programs

2. More page entrances originating from organic search

3. Greater enrollment-related site engagement

4. More conversions (inquiries) originating from organic search
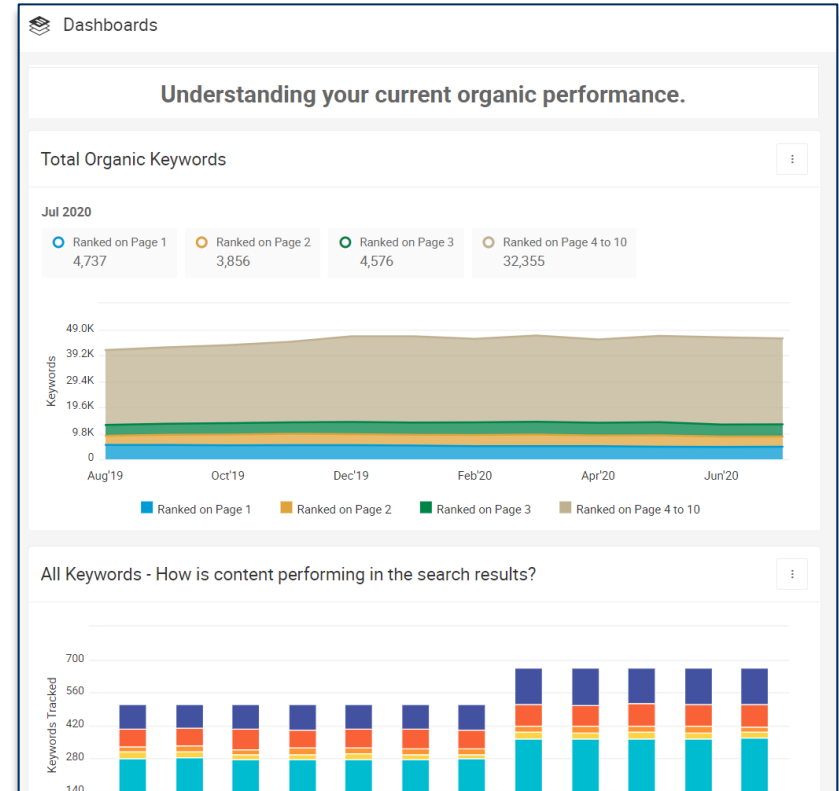
Thank You!

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