

# The Importance of Personalization: From Interest to Application

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#### **Presenters**



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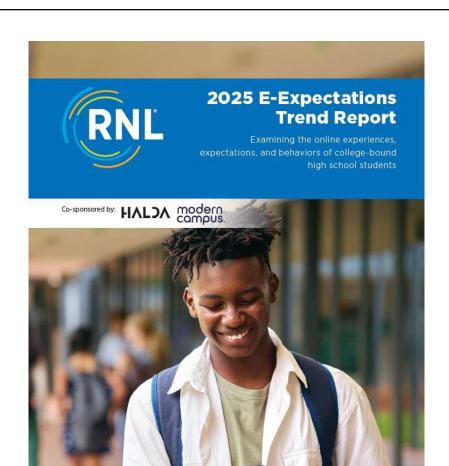
## **Agenda**

- 1. About the Data
- 2. Email
- 3. Websites
- 4. Forms
- 5. Video
- 6. Key Takeaways

#### **E-Expectations Trend Report**

# Responses collected electronically in January 2025

- Study of 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade student behaviors and preferences at every stage of their college search
- Portrait of a generation generation that's both digitally native and refreshingly thoughtful about their digital world
- Data reveals that there is no singular approach to connecting with prospective students
- Suggests need for a fundamental shift in how institutions approach student engagement.
- Demands a thoughtful, integrated experiences that evolve with students throughout their college search journey.
- The imperative is meeting students where they are



#### **Demographics**

#### 1,582 completed responses

Grade		Ethnicity (multiple select)	
9th grade (class of 2028)	8%	Alaska Native*	2%
10th grade (class of 2027)	14%	American Indian*	3%
11th grade (class of 2026)	31%	Asian	8%
12th grade (class of 2025)	47%	Black	29%
		Hispanic	17%
		Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander*	2%
Gender		White	28%
Female	53%	Multi-racial*	4%
Male	39%	Middle Eastern or North African*	3%
Transgender Female*	1%		
Transgender Male*	3%	US Region	
Non-binary/third gender*	2%	Southeast & Southwest	39%
Prefer to self-describe*	1%	West & Rocky Mountains	24%
Prefer not to respond*	1%	Mid Atlantic & New England	13%
		Great Lakes & Plains	24%
First-Generation Status		US residents/International	
Continuing generation	66%	United States resident	89%
First generation	34%	International resident	11%

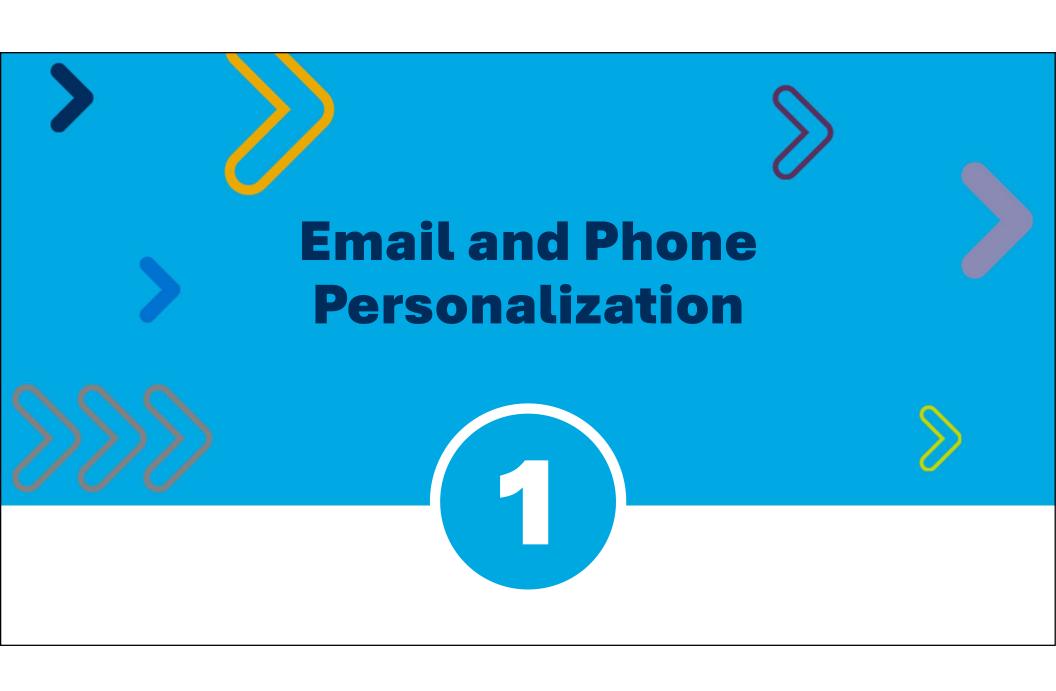
<sup>\*</sup>Not reported



# Personalization: Today's Students Know of Nothing Else

- **Digital natives** who have received customized online experiences that cater to their interests since their earliest days online
- Mindset is shaped by constant connectivity and a fluid, personalized online experience
- They expect **seamless interactions**, and are frustrated (and will navigate away) when they don't receive them
- They readily adapt to new technologies and prioritize engaging online experiences
- They demonstrate a strong awareness of social issues and a desire for brands that align with their values
- They see their online and offline identities as fluid and interconnected

The Class of 2025 prioritizes constant connectivity and a fluid, personalized online experience. They are digital natives who expect seamless interactions, readily adapt to new technologies, and prioritize personalized and empowering online experiences.



# The Data: What Prospective Students Tell Us

#### **How Do Students Prefer to Hear from Us?**

#### **Designing effective communication strategies**

COMMUNICATION	ALL STUDENTS	9TH GRADE	10TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	12TH GRADE
Emails	74%	73%	68%	74%	77%
Printed materials	33%	33%	36%	37%	28%
SMS	33%	34%	26%	32%	36%
In-person (through their admissions staff)	22%	26%	21%	23%	20%
Telephone calls	22%	19%	23%	21%	23%
Videos	16%	13%	22%	16%	14%

#### Why Are We Still Talking About Email?



Weekly Email Usage

**87**% of students use email weekly

95% in 2021



Preferred College Communication

**74**% of students prefer email for college communications

70% in 2021



College Email Utilization

**89%** of students have used college emails in their college planning

88% in 2023



Helpfulness of College Emails

**88**% of students found college emails helpful

82% in 2023

# **Email open rates are driven by interest, but strong subject lines can help**



**32**% respond to compelling subject lines



**27**% open based on positive past experiences



**22**% engage with personalized subject lines

# The Right Subject Line Can Stop the Scroll

Email open rates are driven by interest, but strong subject lines can help

- Personalization -- Using the student's name.
- Urgency or exclusivity -- "Scholarship Opportunities Just for You!"
- Playful or creative wording ("CAWH CAWH" from a school with an eagle mascot)

#### **Student Voices**

"I once got an email that specifically mentioned performing arts, which is the major I'd like to go into."

"They seemed to know personal things about me prior to sending the email."

RNL, Halda, & Modern Campus. (2025). 2025 E-Expectations. Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

# Taking Action: Key Recommendations

#### What Makes Emails Memorable?

#### 1. Personalization that hits home

Use student's name, interests, majors, and grade level to make emails feel tailored

#### 2. Content that captures curiosity

Provide information about programs, financial aid, campus life, and invitations to visit or apply

#### 3. Right message, right time

Tailor emails to grade level - early prep for 9th/10th, campus visits and scholarships for 11th, deadlines and aid for 12th

#### 4. Format, follow-ups & consistency

Use short, visually appealing emails with school branding; send timely follow-ups

# 5. Clear, relevant, and specific information

Provide direct answers about majors, aid, applications, and campus life

RNL, Halda, & Modern Campus. (2025). 2025 E-Expectations. Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

#### 6. Authenticity & real connections

Use a warm, conversational tone; reference past interactions

## 7. Action-oriented & interactive elements

Include clear calls to action, videos, virtual tours, and reinforced next steps

#### 8. Subject lines that stop the scroll

Use personalization, urgency, and creativity to make emails stand out

# 9. Emotional connection & personal touches

Recognize achievements, send birthday wishes, and provide encouraging messages

#### Create personalized engagement with calling

Calling is the most personalized 1:1 experience for prospective students



**55%** 

of Gen Z use their smartphones for **5** or more hours per day

**26%** 

are glued to their mobile devices for *over 10 hours per day* 



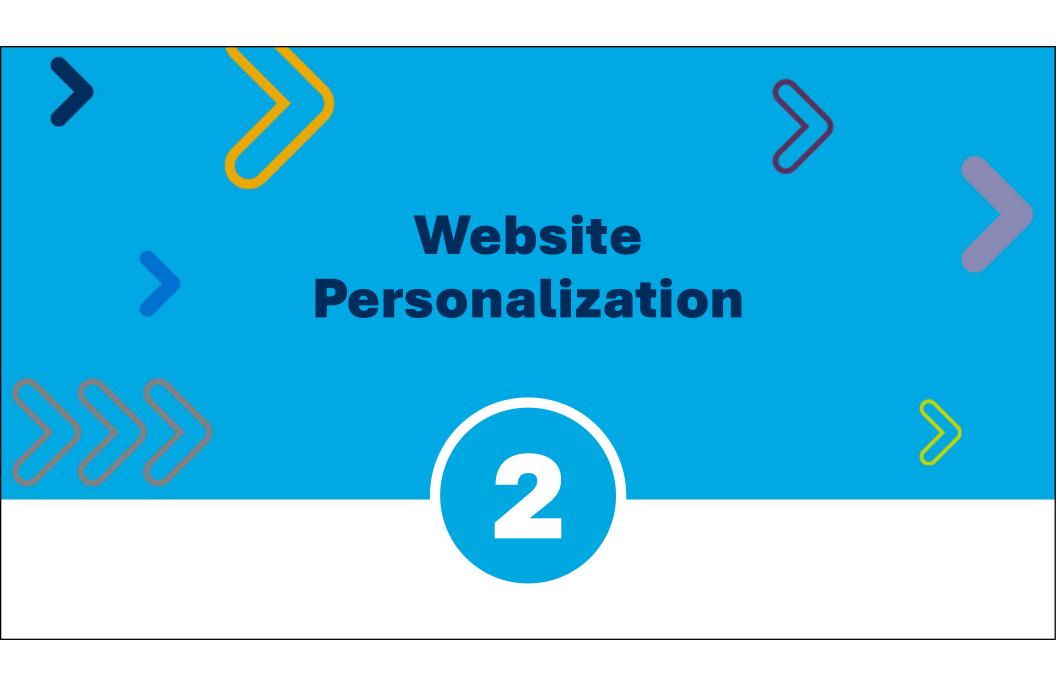
Qualify interest with calling campaigns that assess student interest in enrolling.

#### Increase engagement

with interested students with a fully personalized engagement experience.

#### Make more connections

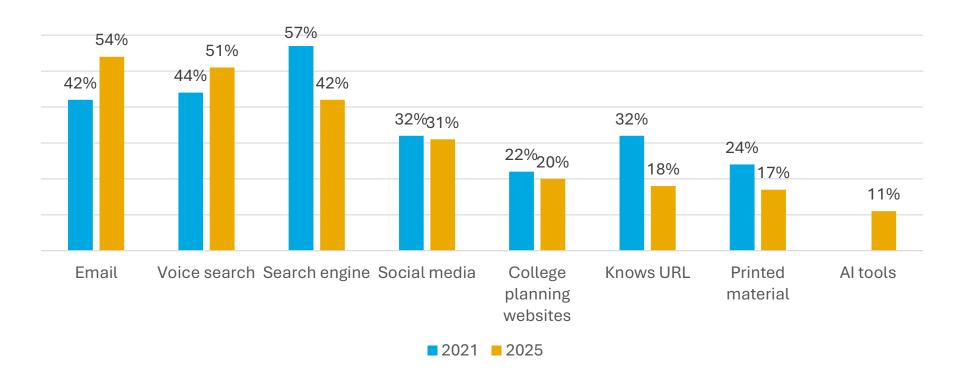
through Visual Caller ID that lets the student know your institution is calling.



# The Data: What Prospective Students Tell Us About College Websites

#### **How Students Find College Websites, 2021-2025**

#### Email makes comeback as top college website gateway



#### **How Students Find Information on College Websites**



45%



Website links

43%



Links in emails

36%



Links found on college planning websites

30%



**Chatbot or digital** assistant

17%

RNL, Halda, & Modern Campus. (2025). 2025 E-Expectations. Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

#### **Top Ten Frustrations with College Websites**

- Difficult to find program Information
- Hard-to-use navigation or hard-to-use links
- Online forms that request too much information

- Confusing admissions process
- 6 Lack of personalized content aimed at students' interests
- Hard to find contact information (email addresses, phone numbers)

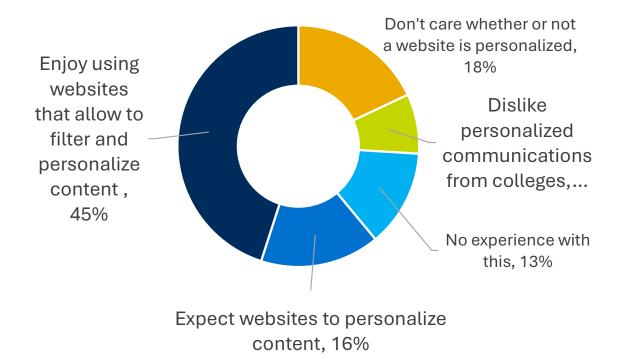
- Lack of job opportunity details
- No website search tool to search for more specific information
- Hard to read website pages

Unclear admission statistics (such as admit rate, student profile, etc.)

#### **Personalization in College Websites**

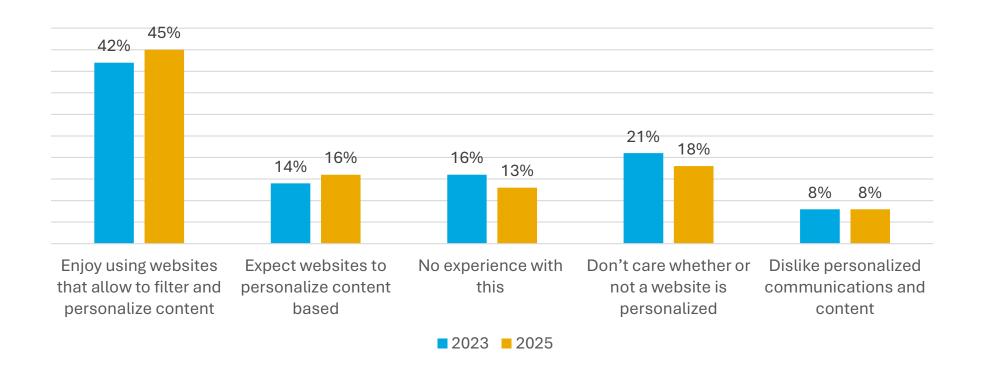
61%

like and expect websites that allow them to filter and personalize content to meet their specific interests



#### **Expectation for Personalization in College Websites 2021-2025**

61% of students now want personalized college websites, from 56% in 2023



# Taking Action: Key Recommendations

#### **Recommendations for Institutions**

#### **Enhancing Academic Pathways & User Experience**

Clearly outline academic programs with detailed descriptions, course requirements, and career outcomes.

Offer step-by-step admissions guides, checklists, and FAQs tailored to different student groups. Spotlight career pathways for each major—include internship options, alumni stories, and job placement rates.

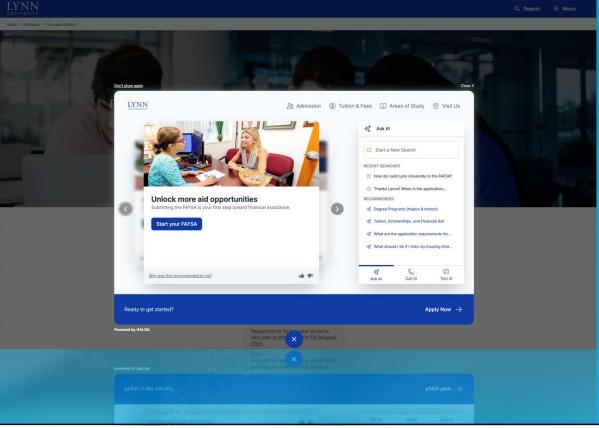
Share program-specific acceptance rates, demographic data, and admissions trends to help students evaluate their fit.

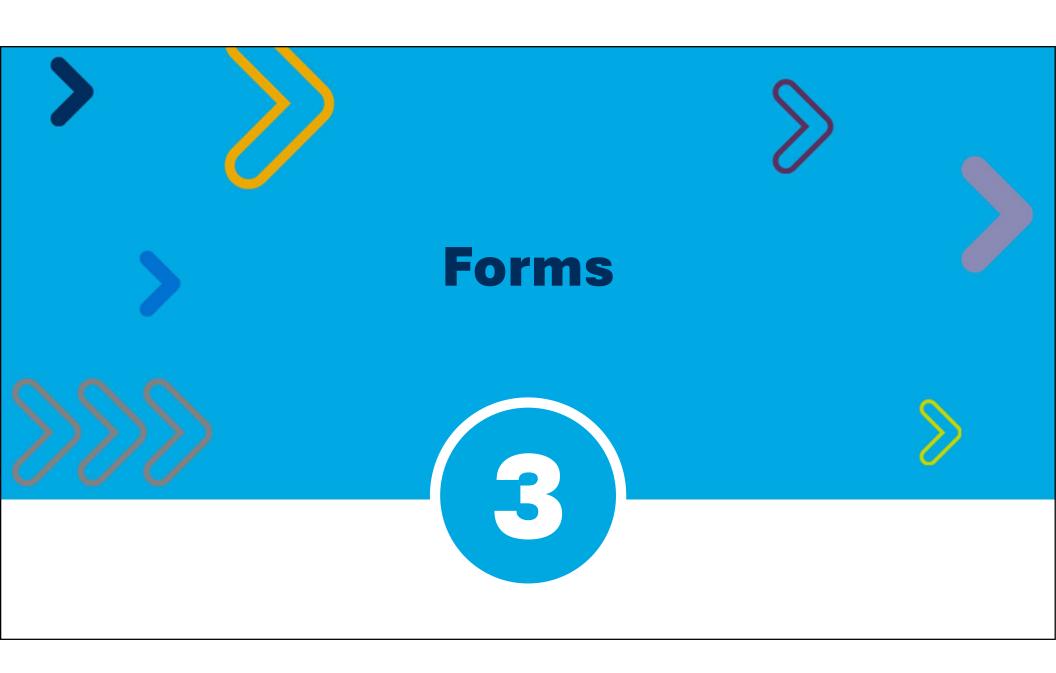
Improve site usability with streamlined navigation, a robust search bar, and no broken links.

Use dynamic content to deliver personalized program suggestions, career options, and events based on individual student interests.

# **Consider Al Powered UX**







# The Data: What Prospective Students Tell Us About Web Forms

#### **High School Students & Forms**

31% of all students will complete a form on a college website as a sign of interest, down from 61% in 2021





#### **Form Completion**

31% of students complete a form on the school's website to get more information

61% in 2021



### Cost/Scholarship Calculator

**12%** complete a cost or scholarship calculator form online

18% in 2021



#### **Athletics Form**

**8%** complete a form on the athletics page of the website

9% in 2021



#### **Frustration with Forms**

17% get frustrated with forms that are too long

7% in 2021

VS1 3

VS1	[@Raquel Bermejo] The subhead should read 31%, correct? (I've updated it formerly read 51%) Vaughn Shinkus, 2025-06-02T13:56:13.860
RB1 0	[@Vaughn Shinkus] I added the regular "form" plus the cost scholarship calculator and the athletics form to get the total 51% that was there. That's why I wrote "some" formmeaning all the forms.  Raquel Bermejo, 2025-06-02T15:11:24.152
RB1 1	I will take the "some" out Raquel Bermejo, 2025-06-02T15:11:40.761
RB1 2	And changed the % from 2021, to reflect just the form %. Raquel Bermejo, 2025-06-02T15:12:24.278

Got it. I'll be sure to note the combined figure as well Thanks, Raquel! Vaughn Shinkus, 2025-06-02T15:28:25.160



# **Information Students Are Willing to Share on a Form**

59% © © © © © © © © © Email Address

47% A A A A A A A A A

46% Major or Programs of Interest

39% RRRRRRRRR

RNL, Halda, & Modern Campus. (2025). 2025 E-Expectations. Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

# Taking Action: Key Recommendations

# Reach Them Where They Are: Modern Student Communication

Email is essential—
remains the #1 channel
for all students. Make
outreach personal and
engaging.

Use texts strategically:
opt-in first, keep
messages brief, focus on
urgent info, and tailor by
grade.

Phone calls and direct mail aren't dead, but should play a supporting role, not the focus.

Enhance digital experiences: clear next steps, robust resources, smart CTAs, and mobilefirst design. Prioritize mobile:
optimize content, add
app-based options,
enable instant responses,
and keep it short.

Level up with video: create grade-specific, decision-focused content, virtual tours, and student stories.

# **Consider Al Powered Forms**

#### WHERE WILL TUCK TAKE YOU?

Chart a path toward your career goals with Tuck in seconds.



What's your target industry post-MBA? \*

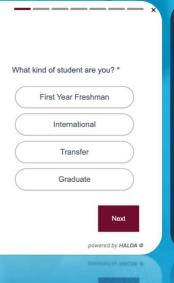
Select one: 
When do you plan to enroll? \*

Select one: 

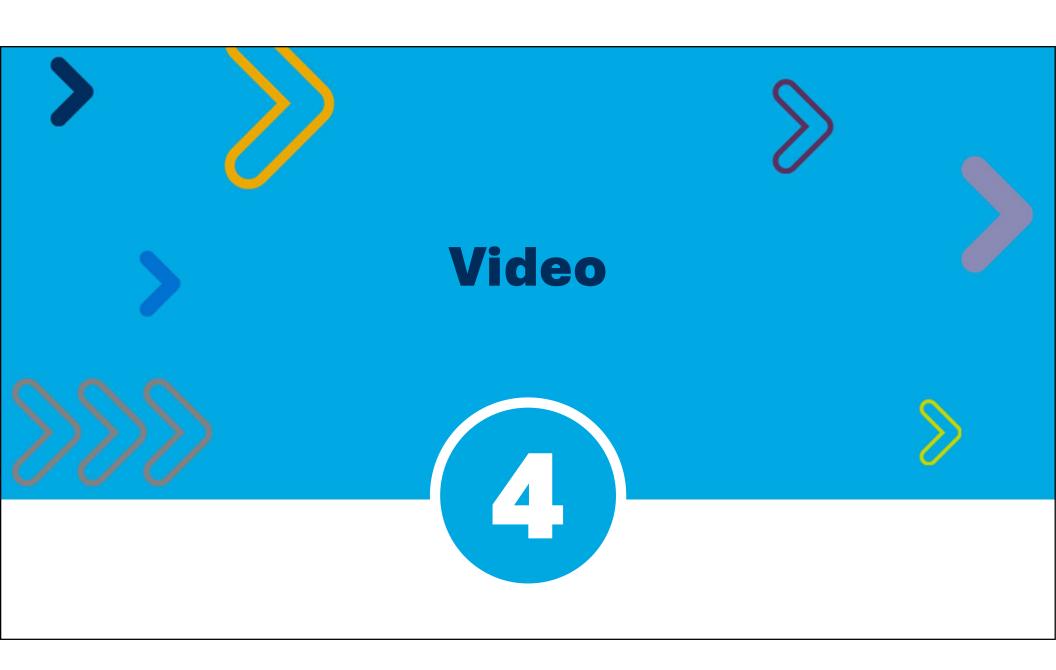
Next

Powered by HALDA ©

Where are you stuck on your application?
Discover if you're admitted in 15 seconds







# The Data: What Prospective Students Tell Us About Video

#### **Key Findings About Videos in College Planning**

#### **Students LOVE videos!**



**83**% have used videos in their college planning

82% in 2023



**84%** find videos helpful when exploring college options

83% in 2023



Lack of videos/photos on a college website is a frustrating issue for **15%** 



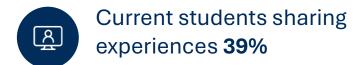
**20%** will watch a video after watching a virtual tour



**16%** wants to receive videos as general information

#### **What Videos Do Students Want?**

#### **Content That Connects**



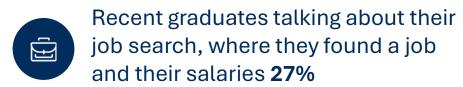


Campus life showcase 33%

Campus, buildings, and classrooms **30**%

Financial aid tutorials 32%

- Residence halls 28%
- Application process guidance 30%



#### **How and When to Leverage Video**

#### Key findings by grade level

### Career-oriented content gains traction in 11th and 12th grades

- Interest in alumni discussing career outcomes rises from 18% in 10th grade to 25% by 11th and 12th grades
- Similarly, faculty videos increase from 22% in 10th to 26% in 12th grade.

### Campus life becomes more important in later years

- Interest in residence hall tours grows steadily, from 21% in 9th grade to 32% by 12th grade
- Campus life videos rise from 31% in 9th grade to 36% by 12th grade, alongside increased interest in campus and classroom visuals (26% to 32%)

### Personalization matters, but dips in middle grades

- Customized videos appeal strongly to 9th graders (34%), dip in 10th and 11th grades (27%-28%), and rebound in 12th grade (32%)
- Younger students seek exploratory content, while older students prioritize specifics.

### Practical guidance becomes critical by 12th grade year

As students approach decision-making, financial aid tutorials rise from 30% in 9th grade to 36% in 12th grade, while application process videos jump from 23% in 10th grade to 31% in 12th grade

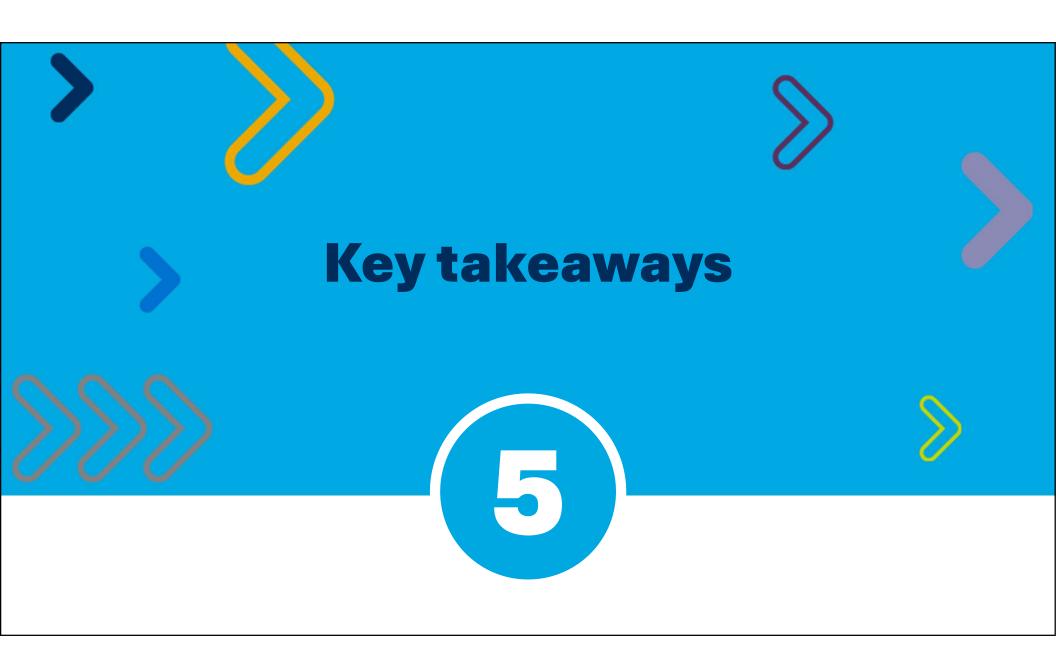
# Taking Action: Key Recommendations

#### **How to Make Video Most Impactful**

#### Leveraging video at all funnel stages

- Prioritize Authentic Student Voices
  - Feature diverse student
  - Let students tell their stories
  - Focus on real experiences
- Showcase Campus Life & Extracurriculars
  - Go beyond the classroom
  - Highlight diversity
  - Use dynamic visuals
- Provide Practical Guidance
  - Break down complex topics
  - Offer step-by-step instructions
  - Address common concerns

- Personalize the Experience
  - Segment your audience
  - Use data to personalize
  - Offer interactive experiences
- Optimize for Different Grade Levels
  - Target younger students with application-focused content
  - Focus on campus life and career prospects for older students



## Top 3 strategies you implement today



## **Thank you!**



**Vaughn Shinkus** 

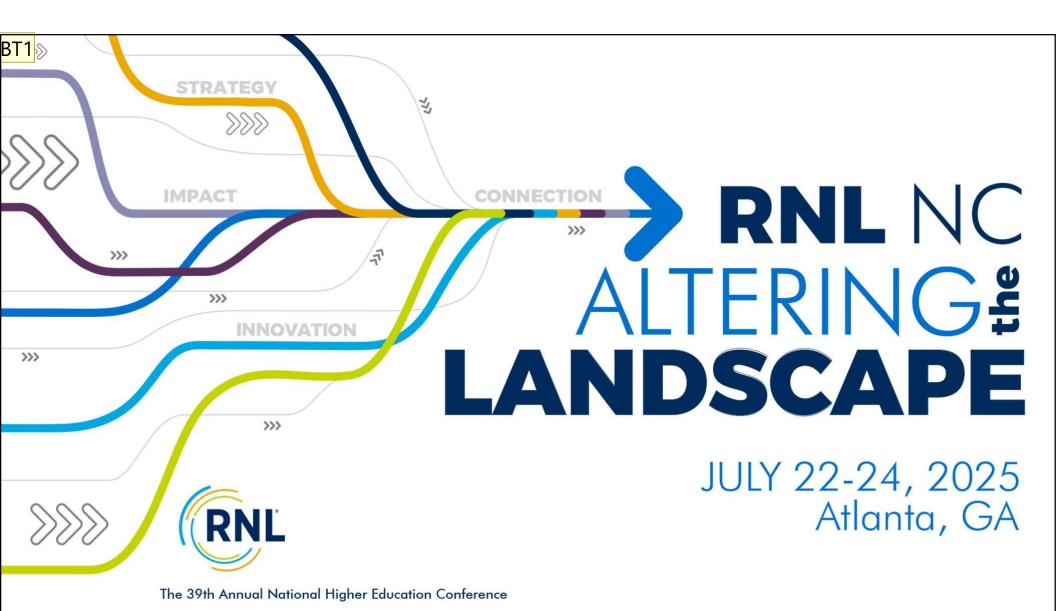
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#### [@Beka Pica] Update to new branding Brandon Trissler, 2025-05-08T20:04:17.717 BT1