



2023 Graduate Marketing and Recruitment Practices Report

Findings from a survey of graduate program marketers and recruiters



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8 Key Findings on Graduate Marketing and Recruitment Practices

This report marks RNL's third study of marketing and recruitment practices at the graduate level and documents the current state of both marketing and recruitment operations as reported by the marketing and enrollment leadership of more than 200 institutions. We have surfaced both best practices and practices that are likely insufficient for the time in which we are living. Below we present a set of eight findings that highlight some of the most important data contained in the report.

- 1 The graduate education market is experiencing a “correction” to pre-pandemic incremental rates of growth.** As more institutions prioritize graduate enrollment, shifting it from the periphery to the center of enrollment health, they must meet student expectations and preferences, or they will not “win” the students in the competitive environment in which we are operating.
- 2 Graduate marketing and enrollment leaders consistently report contraction in their classroom programs while reporting modest growth in hybrid programs, with the most growth coming from fully online programs.** Regardless of the size of the institution, nearly 60 percent of leaders surveyed indicate a contraction of classroom enrollment, while upwards of 70 percent report growth in fully online enrollment and 60+ percent report growth in hybrid enrollment.
- 3 More than half of graduate marketing offices are investing marketing dollars in every program they offer.** In an era where strategic deployment of resources is increasingly important, 55 percent of survey respondents indicate that they spend marketing dollars on every program in their portfolio, but only 15 percent allocate those funds equally across all programs. Among both those who spend on every program and those who do not, allocation decisions are made based on enrollment goals and market opportunities.
- 4 Marketing budgets are inadequate for today's degree of competition.** Graduate marketers report that—regardless of the size of the institution or number of programs—average marketing budgets do not exceed \$650,000. Institutions with centralized marketing functions report the largest average budgets, demonstrating that centralized operations can lead to successful advocacy for increased resources.
- 5 Marketing dollars are increasingly spent in the areas that generate the greatest number of leads.** Although past RNL studies have surfaced a mismatch between where graduate marketers are spending their money and the channels and platforms that generate the most leads, this year's survey respondents report a better match than ever before. The challenge remains to ensure that the messaging and positioning used on these channels and platforms reach students where they are looking and match what they are looking for.
- 6 There is a lack of visibility into performance data between graduate marketing and recruitment leaders.** Less than 60 percent of marketers report visibility into the performance of the leads generated once they moved from marketing efforts (top of funnel) to the recruitment and enrollment operation, while only 30 percent of recruitment and enrollment leaders report visibility into the marketing dashboard.

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Half of both graduate recruitment and enrollment operations are decentralized in schools and departments. As graduate enrollment goals increase and the importance of graduate enrollment moves from the periphery to the center of enrollment health, institutions will confront the challenges associated with meeting prospective student expectations through the inconsistent operations, policies, and practices associated with marketing and recruitment operations that are not centralized in institutional graduate operations.

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Graduate recruitment and enrollment operations are closer to meeting the expectations regarding speed and personalization than ever before. More than 80 percent of graduate recruitment leaders reported that they are responding within 24 hours, and more than 50 percent are starting contact with a personalized email—more than in any previous RNL study. But their primary pain points are at the top of the funnel, with 51 percent reporting challenges at the prospect stage and 49 percent reporting challenges at the inquiry stage. Consequently, there is work to be done to improve speedy outreach to meet the expectations of prospective students. Institutions that are not among the best performing are at the greatest risk of losing students to more savvy institutions.

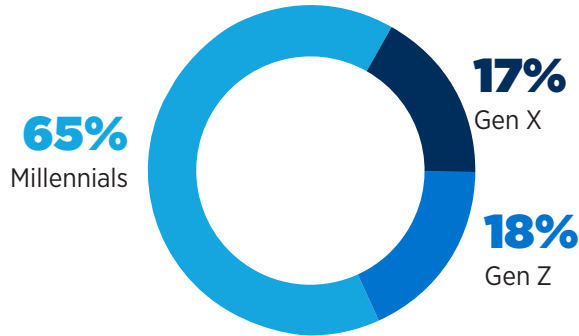
Graduate Education Is a Centerpiece in Enrollment Health

Two years ago, RNL reported “unprecedented rates of growth” at the graduate level each semester since the pandemic began, leading to the conclusion that “graduate enrollment has become fundamental to institutional sustainability.” Earlier this year, in our *2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report*, we reported that after four years of year-over-year growth, fall 2022 data indicated the first contraction (albeit of only .9 percent) at the graduate level. This and other trend data led us to conclude that, “graduate education remains a path to growth and stability.”

Where are we now? How are we doing? These are the themes that we explore in this third report on graduate program marketing and recruitment practices. The National Student Clearinghouse reported in October 2023 that graduate enrollment grew by **.7 percent**, nearly wiping out the previous year’s contraction. Graduate education is likely experiencing a “correction” back to the more incremental growth of the years before the pandemic. We cannot, however, entirely rule out that we are at the beginning of a more profound enrollment shift that will see fewer individuals enroll in credit-bearing/degree-granting graduate programs in favor of new options like boot camps, micro-credentials, or things not imagined. Nonetheless, graduate education has moved from the periphery to the center of enrollment health.

Who are we serving? No matter what the situation, graduate programs are serving a very different audience than just five years ago. They are now serving not one but two generations—Millennials and Gen Z—who have grown up in a customized, personalized world, with the less demanding Gen X comprising less than 20 percent of today’s graduate market. These younger graduate students expect a personalized experience and approach their enrollment decisions using a consumer mindset. As such and given their unprecedented level of choice of program options, they will not settle for a program that does not meet their expectations or match their needs.

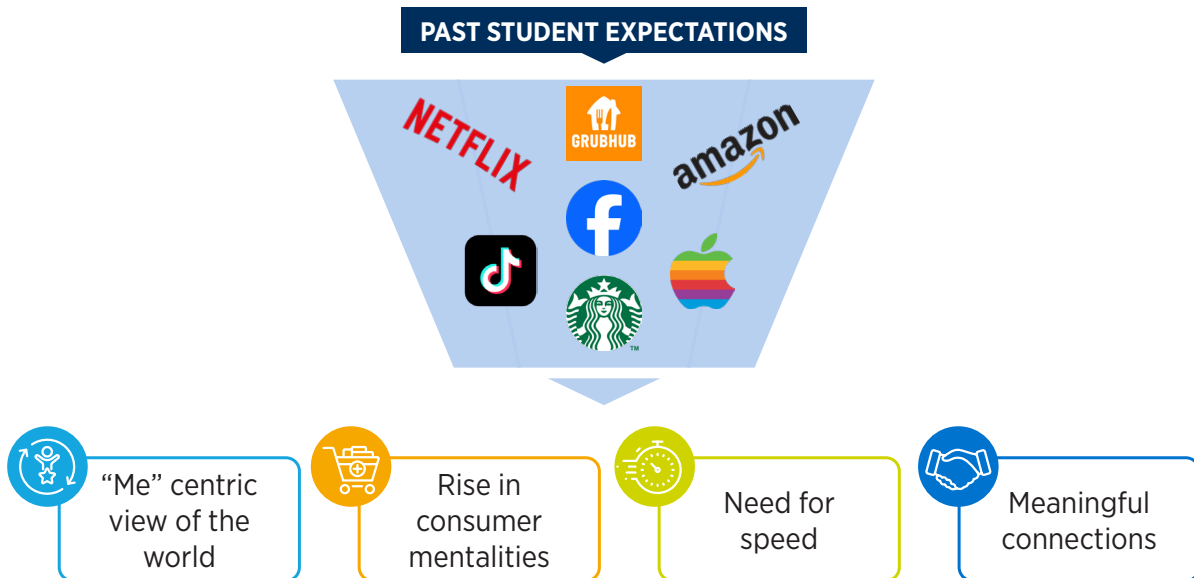
2023 Graduate Students by Generation



Source: RNL's 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

What has caused these changes in expectations? Consider the experiences of people in their 20s and 30s today compared with those of someone in their latter 40s or older (who are far more likely to be managing enrollment, marketing, and academics at a typical institution). They purchase everything from their next meal to new shoes from their sofa and have it delivered with no waiting; they are greeted by name when they pick up their coffee or prescriptions; and their product returns are handled without argument or discussion. All of these “inputs” have resulted in critical shifts in expectations, many of which we will assess from the institutional side in this report.

Student expectations have shifted. Are you ready?



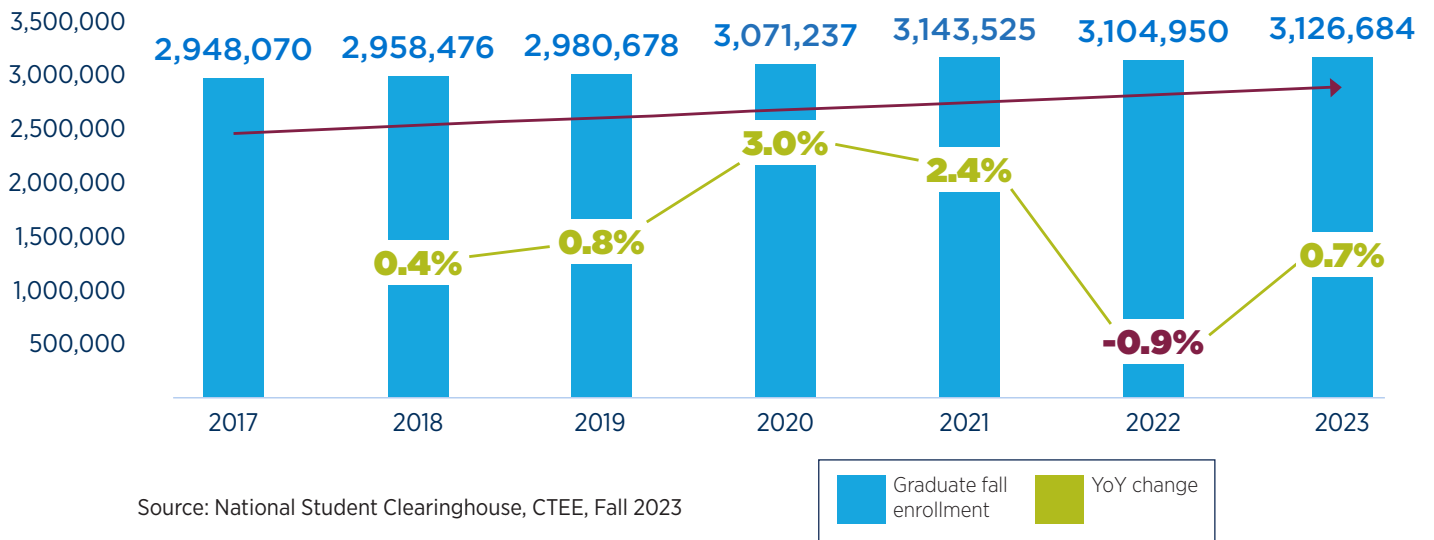
Where does this find us? Whether the graduate education space is static, contracting, or continuing to grow, these new realities mean that programs that are most adept at matching student expectations, demands, and preferences will be the programs that will grow, while those that do not are the most likely to struggle among this demanding population. Throughout this report, our analysis of what graduate marketers and recruiters are doing will be grounded in the data we gathered earlier this year among more than 1,500 graduate students.

RNL experts who work with hundreds of schools and programs each year provide comments throughout this report on how current practices align with student preferences and what institutions may need to do to either capitalize on current strengths or make changes to grow enrollment.

The state of the graduate market

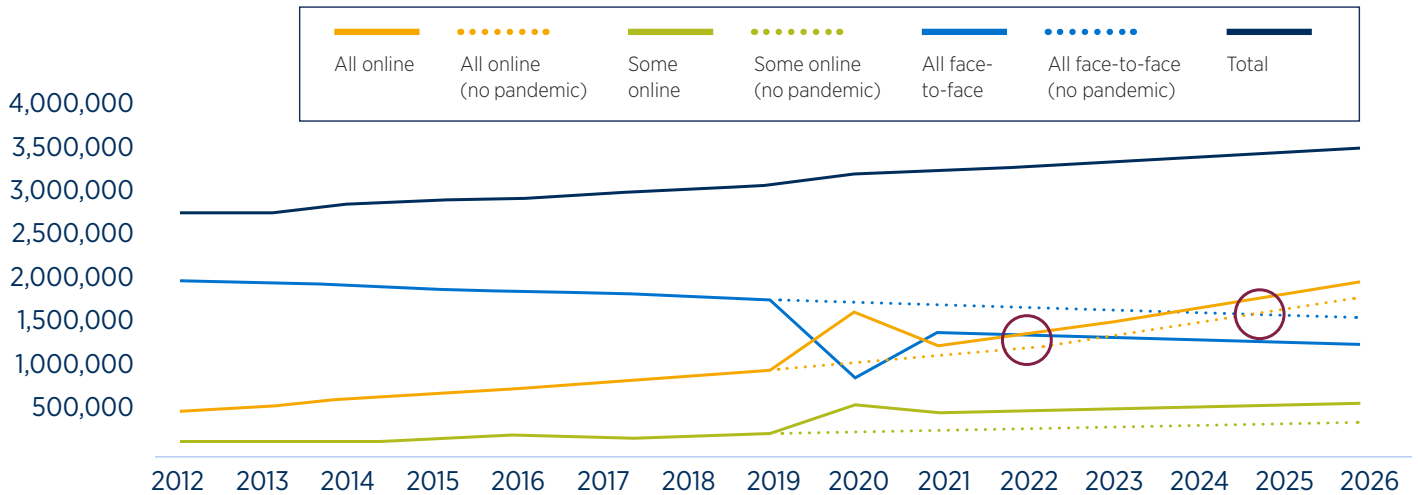
Graduate enrollment is strong: Figure A makes clear that the last three years have been a remarkably good period for American graduate education. Since the fall 2020 semester, the National Student Clearinghouse reported year-over-year graduate enrollment growth for every semester until fall 2022 (while reporting an even greater percent contraction at the undergraduate level). However, in the fall 2022 semester, the first contraction was reported. Considering the 2023 rebound of .7 percent, the 2022 data may indicate a correction to pre-pandemic rates of growth. Whatever the situation, it is clear that institutions that meet student expectations are those most likely to enroll today's students.

Figure A: Graduate fall enrollment trends 2017-2023



Online enrollment is responsible for all growth: In Figure B, graduate student enrollment trajectories by the instructional format are presented with both the pandemic accounted for (solid lines) and without the pandemic (dotted lines). Projected data (all numbers beyond 2021) use pre-pandemic average annual rates of growth by format. Without the pandemic, online students would have out-numbered classroom students by 2025, whereas with the pandemic, this may have occurred as early as 2022. Perhaps more importantly, with net contraction among students opting to enroll in only classroom courses each year since 2012 (royal blue line), all net growth has been driven by additional students who opt to enroll in all or some online courses.

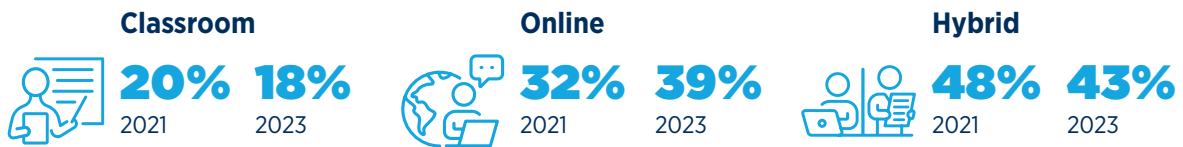
Figure B: Graduate fall enrollment by format, projected to 2026 with and without pandemic



Source: RNL Analysis of IPEDS Fall Enrollment data. Retrieved May, 2023

These data align with findings from RNL’s 2021 and 2023 survey work among prospective and enrolled graduate students. Figure C displays data on instructional format choices among survey respondents. In 2021, 32 percent of graduate students planned to enroll in all online courses. In 2023, that number climbed to 39 percent, while the proportion enrolling in all classroom courses has stabilized at a paltry 18 percent. These data make clear that the pandemic had no negative effect on graduate student interest in fully online study. In fact, experiences throughout the entire “pandemic era” have had a clear impact on many aspects of the graduate student journey and are documented in this report.

Figure C: Graduate student intended format choice



Source: RNL 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

Graduate Operations Overview

This report presents findings from a survey of more than 220 institutional marketing, recruitment and enrollment leaders representing more than 150 institutions across 41 states. The survey was administered online in September 2023 with discrete sections focused on graduate marketing practices and graduate recruitment practices and was designed to portray the current state of operations. This report is not a “best practices” report so much as it is a snapshot of how things are being done today, with RNL expert commentary focused on how institutions can maximize their success.

Data throughout this report are presented by size of institution. This provides a helpful (and interesting) prism through which to identify nuances in how things are done today in graduate marketing and recruitment. Small institutions are defined as enrolling fewer than 500 students, Mid-Sized institutions enroll 500 to 2,000 students, and Large institutions enroll more than 2,000 students.

Discrete and shared roles: Respondents were asked to indicate their primary area(s) of responsibility, and 50 percent indicated that they were responsible for both graduate marketing and recruitment. Thirty-five percent indicated that they were responsible for recruitment but not marketing, and 14 percent were responsible for marketing but not recruitment/enrollment. It is important that operations in which marketing and recruitment/enrollment are not jointly administered keep open communication, and (perhaps more importantly) have easy access to each other’s data dashboards or other performance-tracking tools.

AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY	ALL
Graduate marketing	14%
Graduate recruitment/enrollment	35%
Both marketing and recruitment/enrollment	50%

Type of institution: The overall distribution of public and private institutions is well balanced, but Large institutions are considerably more likely to be public than private, while Small institutions are considerably more likely to be private. This highlights the strengths and challenges at both size institutions. The advantages of public institutions (e.g. cost and visibility) can be suppressed by challenges also related to their size (e.g. bureaucracy, inertia, governance, etc.), while the advantages of Small institutions (e.g. nimbleness and personalized attention) can be also suppressed by challenges also associated with their size (e.g. cost, visibility, inertia, etc.)

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	ALL
Public	45%
Private non-profit	54%

Program levels available: Nearly all institutions offer master’s programs, a number that has grown in the last two years (a 2021 RNL poll indicated that more than half of graduate schools planned to add new master’s programs in the aftermath of the pandemic.) Sixty percent of respondents (most frequently Large institutions) also offer doctoral programs, and even more offer credit-bearing graduate certificates. While the breadth of offerings has long been the hallmark of healthy and high-quality institutions, in an era in which increasingly sophisticated marketing has become essential to enrollment growth, this breadth can complicate as much as support success.

PROGRAM LEVELS OFFERED	ALL
Master’s degrees	94%
Doctoral degrees	60%
Professional doctoral degrees (MD, JD, etc.)	22%
Post-baccalaureate certificates (awarding credit)	32%
Graduate certificates (awarding credit)	66%

Number of programs: In past RNL studies, respondents were asked to indicate the total number of graduate programs available at their institution. Given the pervasiveness of decentralized marketing and recruitment operations at the graduate level, we decided to ask a more specific question “*How many graduate programs are YOU responsible for?*” The remainder of the questions in the survey focused on those programs for which the respondent is responsible. This has resulted in a far better understanding of the differences (and similarities) between centralized and decentralized operations.

NUMBER OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS (RESPONDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
<5	40%	30%	30%	30%
6 to 10	37%	42%	21%	23%
11 to 15	22%	39%	38%	11%
16 or more	14%	41%	45%	35%

Recent enrollment history

Nearly all institutions, regardless of size, indicate that they have experienced enrollment changes over the last three years, with all sizes reporting contraction among classroom programs (by as many as 66 percent at Mid-Size institutions). However, institutions of all sizes also report enrollment growth among both their partially online (hybrid) programs and fully online programs. The proportion of institutions that report growth in their online programs was particularly striking with as many as 74 percent of Mid-Size institutions reporting growth.

Note that these percentages represent the proportion of institutions selecting the choice, not the percent of growth.

Three-year enrollment change

SMALL INSTITUTIONS	CLASSROOM	PARTIALLY ONLINE	ONLINE
Decreased	57%	10%	8%
No change	9%	13%	13%
Increased	25%	62%	71%
Do not offer	9%	15%	9%

MID-SIZE INSTITUTIONS	CLASSROOM	PARTIALLY ONLINE	ONLINE
Decreased	66%	17%	18%
No change	9%	16%	5%
Increased	19%	60%	74%
Do not offer	6%	8%	4%

LARGE INSTITUTIONS	CLASSROOM	PARTIALLY ONLINE	ONLINE
Decreased	61%	9%	12%
No change	10%	16%	7%
Increased	26%	64%	73%
Do not offer	3%	12%	7%

Marketing Graduate Programs

Five things graduate students said that programs should do.

1. More than 90 percent of students use a search engine as their first or second step.
 - 40 percent of graduate students indicate it is their first step, 52 percent more say it is their next step.
2. Four of the top five ranked ways students learn about programs of interest are digital, but more than one-quarter also use traditional sources.
 - “Consult someone I know” is the only top resource among graduate students that is not digital.
3. 60 percent of students click on digital ads during their search.
 - They most frequently click because they know the institution/program and it is a reminder to take the next step (35 percent).
4. You are actively competing with other programs—not just inertia.
 - Only one-third of graduate students apply to a single program.
5. Your “audience” may be more local than you think.
 - 65 percent of graduate students live within 50 miles of where they enroll.



Source: RNL's 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

It has never been more important for institutions to effectively market their graduate programs. With more institutions than ever seeing graduate enrollment growth as a path to enrollment health, prospective students have more choices than ever before. For this reason, we asked graduate marketing leaders about their current operations, tactics, and strategies, and then analyzed their responses by Small, Mid-Size, and Large institutions in order to see how things may differ.

Centralized or decentralized operation?

To what extent are graduate marketing operations centralized? As institutions have seen graduate education move from the periphery to the center of enrollment health, this has become a critical question. A uniform and consistent strategy, guided by student expectations, can best be accomplished in centralized operations, so the decentralization of the marketing function (and the recruitment function) in the various colleges or schools is increasingly risky.

When graduate offerings were on the periphery of the enrollment growth strategy, leaving them in the hands of the schools and colleges worked adequately, but as marketing strategy and tactics moved from creating interesting ad copy and placing in newspapers to tweaking copy and tactics to get the most out of the ever-changing algorithm (to say nothing of the increasing importance of such programs to meeting overall institutional goals), decentralized operations have become increasingly challenging.

We asked our respondents to indicate “where they sit” within their institution—and then asked that all subsequent responses focus on those programs for which they are responsible.

1. More than half of graduate marketing operations have been centralized.

MARKETING OPERATION: CENTRALIZED OR DECENTRALIZED	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
ALL graduate programs (in an institutional marketing office)	32%	38%	28%	33%
ALL graduate programs (in a graduate marketing office)	29%	21%	13%	20%
ALL graduate programs within a specific school/college	26%	28%	36%	30%
One of more specific graduate programs (within schools or colleges)	13%	13%	23%	16%

Marketing budgets

How much is being spent on graduate program marketing? Do all programs get a “piece of the pie?” If not, how do institutions decide which programs get marketing dollars? Understanding how institutions are doing all of this has become critical as institutions decide how to spend ever-more scarce funds.

The challenge: Over the last decade many institutions increased their graduate enrollment by adding new programs rather than growing enrollment in those they already had. As the market grew, so did the importance of “differentiation” in attracting students. This reality resulted in even more—often very unique and specific—programs. This shift has resulted in the fracturing of the graduate program market. In 2021, IPEDs data indicate that more than 1,100 different program subjects produced degrees, but the 10 largest produced 32 percent of all degrees.

With this in mind, we asked a series of questions starting with “do you allocate marketing dollars to each program?” and culminating with the total amount spent in the current year.

2. More than half of institutions continue to allocate marketing dollars to every program offered.

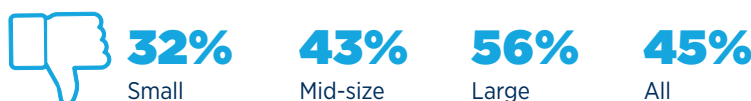
While this may be less challenging for smaller institutions with a limited number of programs, it may present a challenge to larger institutions with more programs on which to distribute funds.

Are marketing dollars spent on every graduate program?

YES



NO



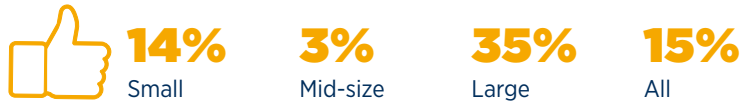
3. Among institutions that allocated marketing dollars to every program, the vast majority do not distribute funds equally.

As graduate program enrollment has become of increasing importance to enrollment health, fewer institutions than ever are spreading marketing dollars evenly across all programs, but Large institutions are still more prone than others to avoid controversy by distributing funds evenly.

Do all programs get equal share of the marketing budget?

(among 55% of institutions at which all programs get marketing dollars)

YES



NO



4. Enrollment goals, followed by an understanding of a market opportunity, most frequently guide the allocation of marketing dollars at institutions that spend on every program.

Small and Mid-Sized institutions are very similar in their approach, but Large institutions are less likely to be guided by a “market opportunity” and more likely to be guided by past program performance. Combined, these two findings may indicate that Large institutions may be more prone to missing new opportunities and clinging to fading opportunities.

HOW ARE MARKETING DOLLARS ALLOCATED AMONG ALL PROGRAMS? (AMONG 85% OF INSTITUTIONS THAT DO NOT SHARE EQUALLY TO ALL PROGRAMS)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Enrollment goals	83%	79%	82%	81%
Market opportunity	78%	72%	45%	69%
Past program performance	50%	55%	64%	55%
Value to institutional mission	50%	48%	45%	48%
“Political” dynamics on campus	6%	10%	36%	14%
Something else	22%	10%	9%	14%

5. Enrollment goals and market opportunities also guide the allocation of marketing dollars at institutions that do not allocate to every program.

Among the 45 percent of responding institutions that do not allocate marketing dollars on every program, they most frequently make those decisions on the basis of enrollment goals. Institutions should ensure that those goals are at the program level, rather than for all graduate programs. This will help to eliminate the use of “past program performance” and increase the use of “market opportunity” in determining a program’s marketing allocation.

HOW ARE MARKETING FUNDS APPORTIONED AMONG PROGRAMS RECEIVING ATTENTION? (AMONG THE 45% OF INSTITUTIONS WHO DO NOT USE MARKETING FUNDS ON EVERY PROGRAM)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Enrollment goals	60%	91%	64%	75%
Market opportunity	60%	70%	59%	64%
Past program performance	50%	52%	41%	47%
Value to institutional mission	10%	35%	18%	24%
“Political” dynamics on campus	20%	35%	27%	29%
Something else	10%	4%	14%	9%

Implications for institutions

The competition for resources at colleges and universities has always been fierce and often politically charged. Within the traditional undergraduate student space, marketing and recruitment dollars typically live within the office of the VP of enrollment management and are spent in centralized marketing (and recruitment and enrollment) operations. That centralized function is one with clear visibility into the trends, challenges, and opportunities at this level. This structure allows enrollment leadership to thoughtfully plan how to maximize the resources of the institution as it seeks to meet and exceed enrollment targets. Marketing resources are also typically spent to promote the institution and to attract “undergraduate students” rather than “social work students” or “business students” or “English literature students.” This is one of the reasons that a centralized operation is common at this level.

Graduate marketing and recruitment leaders often lead decentralized operations in a particular school or for a specific program. They have to balance the desires of faculty, program directors, and deans when developing the marketing plan. The primary challenge for institutions today as graduate enrollment expansion has become “mission critical” is how to either migrate those operations to a central function (to improve “efficiency”) or ensure that the myriad existing decentralized operations have sufficient consistency and effectiveness in attracting students to meet the institution’s goals.

The research shared in this report that indicates that Small and Mid-Sized institutions are most likely to be investing marketing dollars in every program. A greater proportion of larger institutions had a smaller percentage that spent on all programs suggesting the path to growth may not be an equal investment in marketing dollars across programs.

—Aaron Mahl, Senior Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships

Read about Aaron’s background at the end of this report.

How much is being spent?

As marketing strategies and tactics have become more digital over nearly the same period as graduate offerings have exploded in number, the expense of effectively marketing such programs has also exploded. While some may have thought that these digital resources would reduce expenses (less paper, fewer billboards, etc.) the opposite has been true. Not only has the increase in the number of competing programs driven up the bidding on keywords, but the ever-changing algorithms have forced institutions to invest in more channels, platforms, and tracking mechanisms and the hiring of more sophisticated digital marketers to ensure they keep up with what is needed for success.

With all of this in mind, we asked respondents to indicate how much money they had to spend on the graduate programs for which they are responsible in the current year.

6. No matter how you slice it, graduate marketing operations do not have sufficient resources to effectively compete in a complicated and tight market.

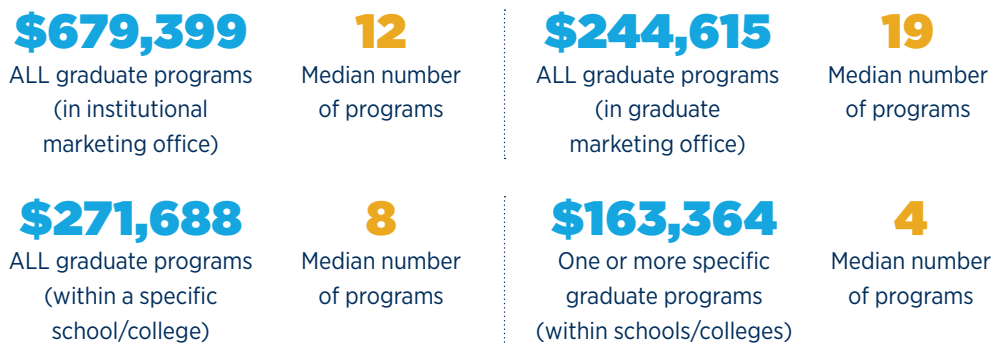
Whether by size of school or by number of programs under management, the largest average allocation did not exceed \$700,000. Average marketing spend per program ranged from \$12,874 to \$56,616.

While it is unsurprising that Large institutions have larger average budgets than Small and Mid-Size institutions, it is noteworthy that institutions at which graduate marketing has been centralized have the largest total and per program allocation.

Average marketing spend for current year (by size of institution)



Average marketing spend for current year (by centralization of operation)



Implications for institutions

As I consult with campus partners and meet with people at conferences, workshops and other events, the consistent theme is how underfunded graduate programs are when it comes to marketing and recruitment. Overall, the amount(s) budgeted by institutions to drive enrollment growth in the graduate arena is bordering on unrealistic—and particularly for the enrollment goals being imposed alongside the increasing competition in the space. These data show funding that is not even close to keeping up with ad spend costs, let alone the cost to develop campaigns and maintain search engine optimization. Honestly, it hardly provides the institution with a means of effectively managing the funnel from lead to enrollment.

RNL estimates that the cost to enroll a graduate student can be between \$3,500–\$5,000 per student. You can easily see the chasm between current versus desired state. The averages highlighted in this report range from \$20K–\$60K a program. When the recommended ad spend—as part of digital lead generation—is normally between \$10K–\$20K per month/program (depending on the program), any of these averages could not even cover more than half a year of ad spend alone.

What should schools do? Institutions need to reevaluate market dynamics pertaining to marketing costs and trends. Marketing for graduate programs has increased tremendously. Universities need to take on more of an investment mindset in order to “catch up with the times” so that they can come closer to being competitive. In addition, schools should evaluate revenue generation from undergraduate and graduate programs and see if resource allocations are proportional to that revenue generation. In many cases, these are nowhere close to proportional—with the traditional undergraduate operation receiving the lion’s share of financial (and other) resources.

All programs are NOT alike. Programs should not receive investment at the same level across the board. Market research should provide the needed intel to identify programs with greater enrollment and revenue growth potential versus those that have less demand/potential. Financial resources should then be prioritized to the programs with the greatest potential, while other programs receive a more modest amount to maintain current status.

The graduate market is only getting more competitive, while the marketing costs continue to also increase. Ignoring the fact that the cost of being competitive and doing business in the graduate space is going up will only relegate programs and schools to losing market share, enrollments, and, therefore, revenue!

—Charles Ramos, Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships

Read about Charles’ background at the end of this report.

How are marketing funds being spent by broad channels?

RNL's 2023 survey of graduate students documents that search engines—both organic and paid listings—are the primary starting point for almost all graduate students. A similar 2021 study revealed that four of the five most common graduate program information sources are digital. But we also found that between 25 and 35 percent of graduate students still rate traditional sources as effective and useful.

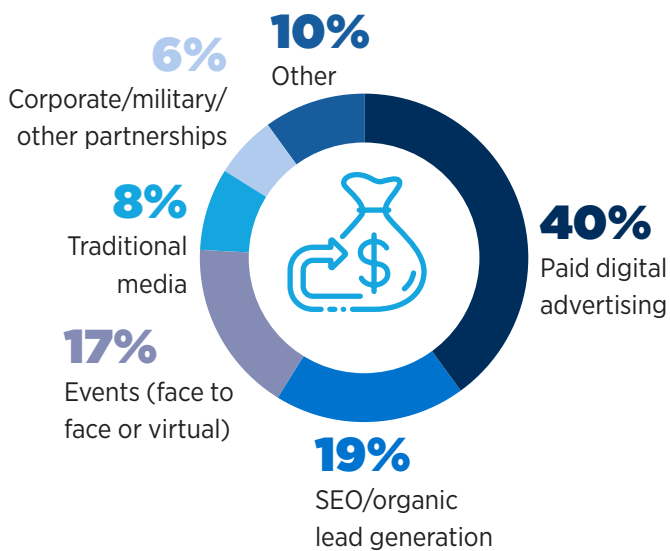
With this in mind, we asked respondents two questions. First, how are your marketing dollars allocated across various broad channels? Second, in what proportions do your leads and inquiries come from among these broad channels?

7. Across all sizes of institution, paid digital advertising gets the largest share of the graduate marketing budget, but this source does not produce a commensurate proportion of their leads.

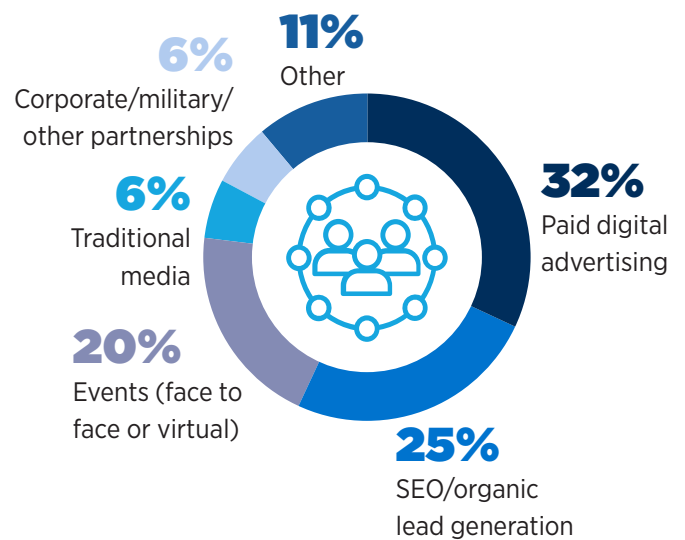
While all institutions spend the most on paid digital advertising, institutions of the various sizes differ in how they allocate the rest of their budget. Organic SEO gets nearly twice the funding at Small and Mid-Size institutions than it does at Large institutions. Large institutions are dedicating more to events than either Small or Mid-Size institutions. While SEO doesn't get the amount—and may not need the same proportion—as paid digital advertising, it is uniformly the second largest source of leads, and, according to RNL research, as much as seven times more likely to convert to an enrollment.

SMALL INSTITUTIONS

How are marketing funds allocated across broad channels?

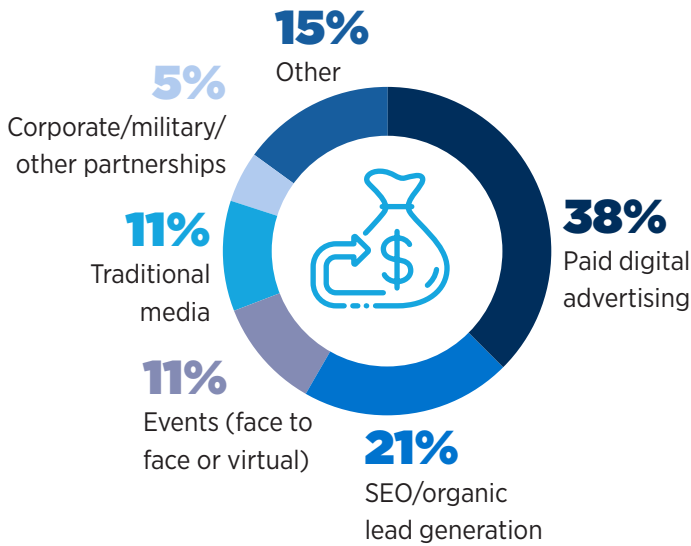


Where do leads/inquiries come from across broad channels?

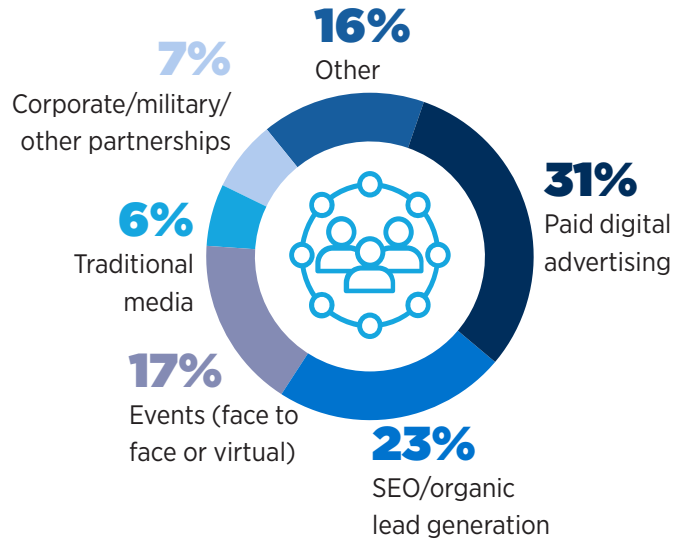


MID-SIZE INSTITUTIONS

How are marketing funds allocated across broad channels?

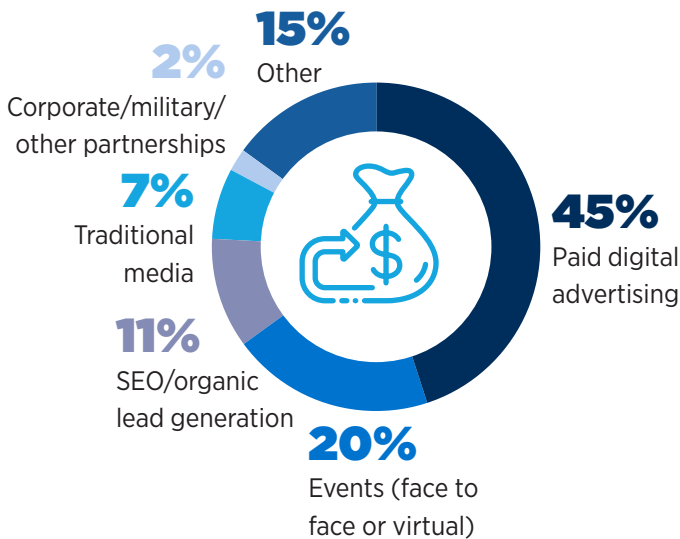


Where do leads/inquiries come from across broad channels?

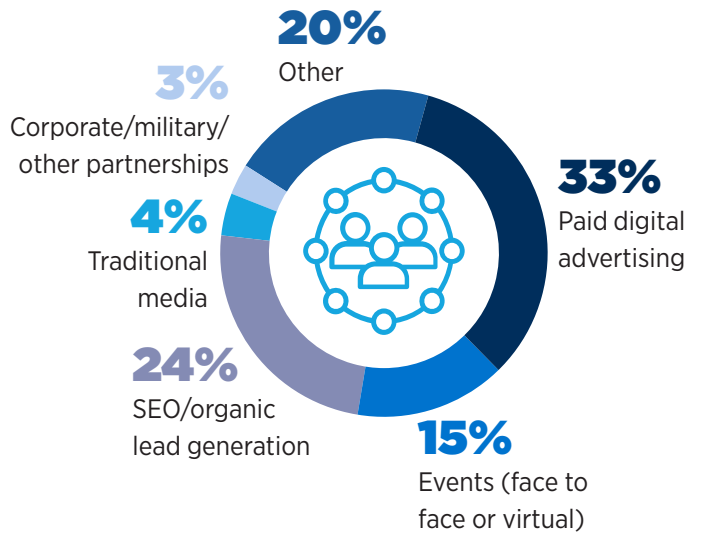


LARGE INSTITUTIONS

How are marketing funds allocated across broad channels?



Where do leads/inquiries come from across broad channels?



What specific strategies are being employed most frequently?

The specific tactics employed in marketing graduate programs are perhaps the most important aspect for us to understand—for marketers, peer sentiment on which tactics are most effective in driving leads is vital. With that in mind, we asked first which tactics they were using, and then among them, which single tactic they would select as the most effective in producing leads.

8. Social media ads are the most frequently deployed marketing tactic, but only deemed as the most effective in producing leads by Small institutions.

Although uniformly cited as the most frequently used marketing tactic, social media ads on consumer sites like Facebook (as opposed to professional social media like LinkedIn) are only rated as being the most effective by Small institutions. Mid-Sized and Large institutions think that paid search ads are most effective. Although 90 percent of graduate students tell us that they start their search on a search engine, organic search is only rated as most effective by about 20 percent of respondents. This may be due to basing the rating on the number of leads produced rather than the likelihood of those leads converting to enrollment. Finally, institutions should think carefully about why they are using tactics that they—and none of their peers—think are among the most effective things they do to market their programs.

WHICH CHANNELS ARE YOU USING AND WHICH ARE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR GENERATING LEADS?	SMALL		MID-SIZE		LARGE	
	USED	MOST EFFECTIVE	USED	MOST EFFECTIVE	USED	MOST EFFECTIVE
Ads on consumer social media (Facebook, etc.)	89%	30%	88%	23%	79%	19%
Organic SEO	82%	19%	85%	23%	79%	22%
Paid search ads (Google, etc.)	86%	15%	88%	31%	74%	41%
Retargeting ads	71%	22%	77%	13%	71%	13%
Ads on professional social media (LinkedIn, etc.)	79%	7%	73%	0%	68%	0%
Direct mail campaigns	46%	4%	58%	8%	41%	3%
Newspaper/Magazine ads	46%	0%	56%	0%	38%	0%
Ads on billboards, buses, or other outdoor signs	43%	0%	42%	2%	35%	0%
Ads on broadcast radio	39%	4%	27%	0%	29%	0%
Ads on streaming TV	14%	0%	27%	0%	18%	0%
Ads on streaming radio	21%	0%	21%	0%	21%	0%
Ads on broadcast television	18%	0%	19%	0%	18%	0%
Ads on podcasts	11%	0%	19%	0%	9%	0%

9. Large institutions are dedicating significantly more resources to brand awareness than other size institutions—and are already the most likely to be known in their community/region.

Both Small and Mid-Size Institutions dedicate the majority of their budgets to program-specific advertising, with institutional brand awareness a distant second. Large institutions do focus the most attention on program-specific marketing but spend 10 percent more on institutional brand awareness than Mid-Size institutions and 20 percent more than Small institutions. This likely represents a mistake given that the typical institution’s student audience is within 50 miles and the regional public institution is likely to be quite well known already.

HOW ARE MARKETING DOLLARS BEING ALLOCATED BY AREAS OF FOCUS?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Specific program information	62%	55%	46%	55%
Institutional awareness (brand identification)	20%	30%	39%	29%
Open houses and other events	18%	15%	15%	16%

Implications for institutions

All decision making on how marketing funds are allocated has to start with a clear understanding and review of the institution’s enrollment goals. Graduate marketers then must tailor their approach to the best ways to meet those goals through the strategic allocation of the resources they have (while also advocating for the resources that are honestly necessary to achieve the goals). Marketers should keep the following factors in mind to drive decisions on strategy and tactics:

- 1. Campus’s specific needs:** Depending on campus profile, is there a need or inclination to build more awareness and brand equity, or are you already “there” and therefore should the focus be purely on lead generation for enrollment goals (or do you need both)?
- 2. Prospective student’s persona:** Developing student personas for each program is essential to the effective leveraging of marketing funds regardless of the channel. An understanding of the prospective student’s persona(s) for your program(s) plays a significant role in the allocation itself. Some personas will fit one channel/platform, but not another. The personas help curate a media strategy to reach and resonate with the mature adults who are busy working professionals, the younger individual fresh out of undergraduate study, or many other student personas.
- 3. Channel mix:** In terms of channels at each stage of the funnel, keep in mind that there is meaningful alignment between each stage of the marketing funnel and the diversified portfolio of channels that most effectively pushes prospective students forward. The awareness, consideration, inquiry, and finally the application and enrollment stages all may call for different channels/platforms or differing uses of these channels. Marketers should understand how these channel offerings best maximize engagement and generate high-quality applications. This is the path to consistently optimizing budget allocations between channels for the best Return on Ad Spend (ROAS).
- 4. Tactics:** The most effective marketing efforts encompass social, search, display, retargeting, video, and digital out-of-home, as well as Connected TV, audio (such as radio and podcasts), and Native. This magnitude is no exaggeration, and it demonstrates the complexity of successful marketing strategy today. With the right blend of these tactics, marketers can ensure that their program(s) become a part of prospective students’ daily life and so are present when it’s time to decide to enroll.

5. Budget: While there is never enough money spent, marketers have to work within the parameters of what they have available. The total allocation drives the decision-making process because every channel serves its purpose and has varying levels of engagement and intent to convert. The goal through allocation should be twofold: 1) qualified inquiries, and 2) at a reasonable cost per acquisition. The budget needs to be distributed with the ROI in mind.

Based on all these criteria, graduate marketers should mindfully allocate their budgets across channels and tactics. However, it should not stop there. The allocations are never on “cruise control.” Instead, it takes a marketer’s thoughtful approach and time dedication to analyze campaign results, optimize the channels and budget, maximize return on ad spend and generate high-quality leads that convert into enrolled students.

—Anuja Siraj, Director of Digital Strategy, RNL

Read about Anuja’s background at the end of this report.

Measuring performance and return on investment (ROI)

As the cost of marketing has risen, so has the need for marketers to make an effective case to senior leadership for additional marketing dollars. The fact that resources seem to have become increasingly scarce at the same time that marketing costs have skyrocketed has resulted in more sophisticated tracking of ROI. Perhaps the best thing about the rise of digital media over traditional is that it is so much easier to assess its performance and ROI. If internal systems are set up in the correct manner—or if you are working with a strategic partner like RNL that offers complete visibility into such things—every lead can be tracked to its source, thereby allowing for the assessment of just how effectively each marketing dollar has been used.

With this in mind, we asked marketers not only how they measure ROI, but also the extent of their visibility into marketing performance.

10. Institutional assessment of performance, regardless of size, is focused on meeting enrollment targets more than other metrics.

Large institutions were less likely than Mid-Size and Small to focus on meeting enrollment targets/goals and more likely to focus on the number of leads produced and the cost per lead. Quality of leads is linked to meeting enrollment targets, so it is not surprising that more marketers did not select this. Still, both number of leads and cost per lead (as opposed to cost per enrollment) may be signs that there is a disconnect between the marketing and recruitment/enrollment operations at the institution. The relatively small proportions that selected either cost per lead or net revenue targets may indicate that monetary ROI is still not driving the majority of decisions. Finally, Large institutions were 10 percent more likely to cite “happy stakeholders” as a measure of their success, which may be a sign of operating on the basis of “internal politics” rather than actual ROI.

HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR MARKETING SPEND?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Meeting enrollment targets	87%	85%	74%	82%
Number of leads	55%	69%	71%	65%
Quality of leads	55%	65%	56%	59%
Cost per lead	35%	44%	53%	44%
Net revenue targets	32%	29%	21%	27%
Happy stakeholders (faculty, administrators, etc.)	29%	29%	41%	31%

11. Forty percent of institutional marketers have no visibility into the performance of their leads after they generate them.

Mid-Size institutions are most likely to have this visibility, putting them at an advantage in ensuring that the decisions they make are based in data rather than instinct.

Do you have visibility into the performance of your leads within the funnel?

YES



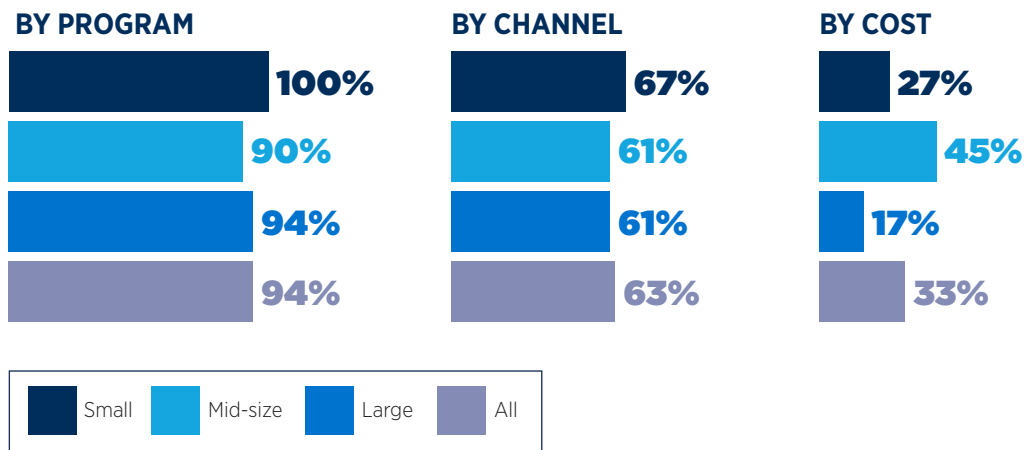
NO



12. Among institutions with visibility into funnel performance, almost all can see how leads perform by program, but significantly fewer can assess performance by cost or marketing channel.

Marketers who cannot assess performance based on the marketing channels they deploy are at a severe disadvantage, and the ever-increasing pressure to demonstrate return on investment can only fully be understood with access to performance data by cost associated with each lead.

What does that visibility include?



13. Among institutions with visibility into the funnel, that visibility extends all the way to enrollment for more than 80 percent of institutions.

This provides marketers, even if they are currently not doing so, the ability to focus greater attention and analysis on both cost per enrollment, net revenue targets, and other metrics that will make institutions more resilient in the future.

WHERE DOES YOUR VISIBILITY END?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Before application	0%	3%	6%	3%
At application	7%	17%	6%	11%
At enrollment	93%	80%	89%	85%

14. One in five institutions does not require their marketing operation to assess the ROI of the tactics they are deploying.

Among the 80 percent of institutions that are tracking ROI, the largest share does so on a monthly basis. Small institutions are most likely to not be tracking the ROI of their marketing efforts (27 percent) while Mid-Size institutions are most likely to be doing so.

HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU EVALUATE THE ROI OF YOUR MARKETING?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Real time	7%	15%	9%	11%
Monthly	30%	23%	35%	29%
Semi-annual	23%	21%	18%	21%
Annual	13%	19%	15%	16%
Other	0%	6%	3%	4%
We don't evaluate ROI	27%	17%	21%	21%

Cost per enrollment

Only 32 of our 200+ respondents were able to provide an estimate of cost per enrollment (CPE) for the programs for which they are responsible. Among this set of respondents, the average cost incurred for each successful enrollee across their graduate programs was \$4,825. This statistic is of increasing importance as more and more institutions seek to maximize the return on every dollar that is spent to enroll a student. While cost per lead has been a more common measure of the success of marketing efforts, ever-advancing tracking efforts—and full-funnel reporting—now allow for an understanding of these costs at the enrollment level and are likely the most valuable in assessing the ultimate effectiveness of the marketing spend.

Implications for institutions

Tracking marketing performance and CPE isn't a nicety or a bonus insight—it is critical for healthy and successful institutions to monitor their performance and get the most out of their marketing resources. By understanding funnel performance and CPE, institutions can identify which programs and marketing channels are most cost-effective and make adjustments to their strategies accordingly.

While institutions are doing well at tracking performance toward enrollment goals, more institutions need to add a focus on measurement of the quality of their leads (i.e. the conversion of their leads to enrollments) and the cost per lead (an important indicator of ROI, albeit not as important as CPE).

Nearly half of Small and Large institutions do not have visibility of their leads once they are generated (see Item 11). This is a sobering insight and one that needs to be addressed, as it means that these institutions are not able to assess the value of the work done at the top of the funnel. Perhaps the greatest “miss” in these data is the proportion of institutions that do not have visibility into their performance by marketing channel and by cost, while nearly everyone has visibility by program.

The timeliness of the marketing reporting, Item 14, further reveals the challenge of marketing performance. If an institution or program does not have access and transparency into their marketing efforts, adjustments and improvements cannot be made in enough time to impact the enrollment outcomes.

Once institutions have a good understanding of their CPE and a wider and deeper view into all they do, they can use this information to improve their marketing and enrollment strategies. For example, institutions can:

- Invest in marketing channels that are most cost-effective. This may involve reducing spending on channels with a high CPE and increasing spending on channels with a low CPE.
- Review their enrollment process for inefficiencies. By identifying and addressing inefficiencies, institutions can reduce the cost of enrollment without sacrificing quality.

—Nate Mouttet, Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships, RNL

Read about Nate's background at the end of this report.

Use of AI in marketing efforts

How are graduate marketers applying artificial intelligence (AI) to their marketing efforts? Although AI is on everyone's mind, only 10 percent of graduate marketers are actively using AI in their work today—with Large institutions being nearly twice as likely than smaller institutions to be doing so. When asked how they are applying AI to marketing operations, the bulk of responses focused on leveraging AI to generate or enhance ad and promotional copy.

Are you using AI in your marketing efforts?

YES



11%
Small

4%
Mid-size

18%
Large

10%
All

NO



89%
Small

96%
Mid-size

82%
Large

90%
All

How we are using AI

- SEO, content creation, and data analysis
- Content writing and optimizing ad copy
- Ad copy ideas
- We offer a master's program in AI Engineering
- For idea generation around messaging and writing marketing plans
- Content generation
- Optimizing re-marketing

Recruitment and Enrollment

With the yearly expansion in available graduate offerings across the country, students no longer have to “settle” in any way when they choose their program. They continue their search at the click of a mouse if the content is not a match, if the format is not what they want, or if the contact they receive from their first touch is not what they expect.

With this in mind, programs that have been developed with student needs and expectations in mind—timely, relevant, quality, and flexible programs—can be stopped in their tracks if the recruitment process does not match their expectations. This makes aligning recruitment, cultivation, and enrollment processes with student expectations among the most important things that institutions must now focus upon. For this reason, we asked an extensive set of questions to graduate marketing leaders in order to assess the current state of operations, tactics and strategies, and how they (may) differ at Small, Mid-Size, and Large institutions.

Five things graduate students said that programs should do.

1. You are actively competing with other programs—not just inertia.
 - Only one-third of graduate students apply to a single program.
2. You are competing with local institutions even if they are not your identified “peer institutions.”
 - 65 percent of graduate students live within 50 miles of where they enroll.
3. Two-thirds of graduate students expect a response to their initial inquiry and other follow-up questions within 24 hours.
 - Twenty percent expect a personalized email, text message, or phone call within 3 hours—and another 20 percent expect it within minutes.
4. Nearly half of graduate students think that a slower than expected response is an indicator that they are not important to the institution/program.
 - Forty percent also think that a slow response is an indicator that the institution is not equipped with adequate support services.
5. More than 60 percent of graduate students will likely or definitely enroll in the program that responds to their inquiry first.
 - Nearly 80 percent will likely definitely enroll in the program that admits them first.



Source: RNL's 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

Centralized or decentralized teams?

To what extent have graduate recruitment operations been centralized? As graduate education has moved from the periphery to the center of enrollment health, this has become one of the most important aspects of ensuring that such operations are aligned with student expectations and enrollment success. The notion that the recruitment function (and the marketing function as well) could or should be “housed” in the various colleges or schools offering such programs was often the result of the fact that these programs were first added not to meet enrollment goals, but rather to add to institutional prestige (and rankings.)

As career-focused master’s programs began to proliferate, the sponsoring schools continued with this model, sometimes enrolling hundreds of students with their own resources. Program and department staff were used to wearing multiple hats, so taking on recruitment responsibilities came naturally. This worked for many years for many institutions, but as the student generations have changed, so have expectations for a direct link with the recruitment operation. When prospective students were comfortable waiting days or weeks for a response to an inquiry or question, charging someone who had dozens of other responsibilities with responding may have worked.

Today’s students view their recruitment and enrollment experience in much the same way as they view any other consumer experience. They are used to uniform, quick, and personalized contact. The only way that graduate schools and programs can ensure—rather than suggest—such uniformity, timeliness, and personalization is to have the people that are doing the work all under the same leadership.

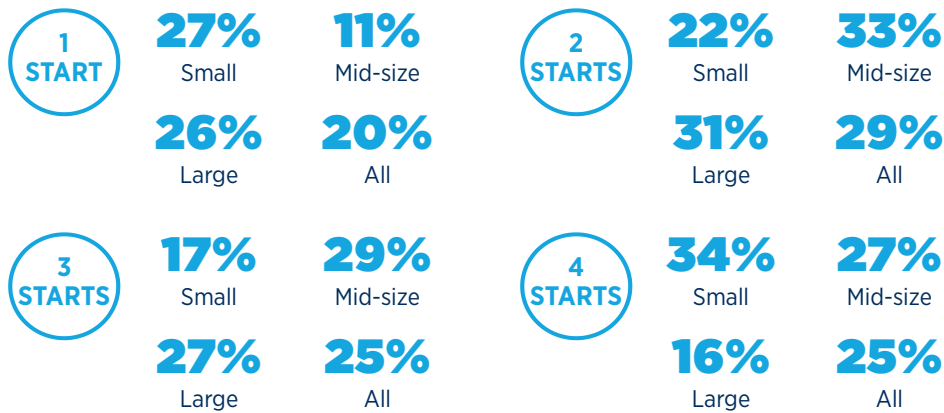
With all of this in mind, we asked our respondents first to indicate “where they sit” within their organization, and then asked that all subsequent responses focus on those programs for which they are responsible.

15. Only about half of graduate recruitment operations have been centralized.

RECRUITMENT OPERATION: CENTRALIZED OR DECENTRALIZED	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
ALL graduate programs in an institutional admissions/ enrollment office	23%	14%	17%	18%
ALL graduate programs in a graduate admissions/ enrollment office	33%	31%	25%	30%
All graduate programs within a school/college	35%	32%	40%	36%
One of more specific graduate programs within a school or college	8%	23%	17%	17%

16. Half of graduate recruitment teams handle more than the two traditional starts per year.

How many starts per year?



17. The typical recruitment team is comprised of both full-time and various types of part-time employees, manages two programs, and processes about 100 applications per year.

Interestingly, Mid-Size institutions report slightly larger typical team size, entirely due to larger numbers of part-time help. For the purposes of subsequent analysis, we derived a “revised” typical team size by counting all part-time/student positions as a .5 headcount. This allows for high-level analysis of workload.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE ON YOUR RECRUITMENT/ENROLLMENT TEAM? (AVERAGE)*	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Full-time employees	3	7	7	5.6
Part-time employees	1	2	1	1.3
Student workers	1	2	1	1.3
Total team members	5	11	9	8
Revised total team count (counting part-time and student staff as .5 headcount).	4	9	8	6

*Note: This analysis relies on these numbers representing team members who share (equally) responsibility for recruitment and admissions processes for all of the programs managed by this team.

18. At the typical institution, each team member is responsible for approximately two programs.

Because part-time staff (and student workers) may not have specific or exclusive responsibility for programs, the average number of programs may be somewhat higher if concentrated on only full-time employees.

HOW MANY PROGRAMS IS THIS TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR? (AVERAGE)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
	8	12	13	11
Typical program load per team member (using revised total team count above)	2	1.33	1.6	2.2

19. At a typical institution, each team member handles 226 applications per year

Using the same revised total team count, we see that the typical team member handles between 121 and 277 applications each year depending on the size of the institution. The propensity of both Small and Mid-Size institution to process fewer than 500 total applications drives the aggregate typical number of applications down to 75 across all responding institutions.

HOW MANY GRADUATE APPLICATIONS DOES THIS TEAM PROCESS ANNUALLY?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Less than 500	57%	33%	21%	36%
501-1,000	30%	33%	18%	27%
1,001-2,500	13%	25%	16%	18%
2,501-4000	0%	6%	21%	10%
More than 4,000	0%	3%	25%	10%
Median number of applicants (weighted)*	595	1,090	2,212	1,357
Typical number of applications per team member (using revised total team count above)	149	121	277	226

*Note: Weighted averages are calculated by multiplying the percentage of schools in each application range by an estimated midpoint value for that range. These products were then summed to yield a weighted average of applications for each school size category. This method provides an approximate indication of where the median number of applicants might lie.

Implications for institutions

For anyone delving into the landscape of graduate admissions, you will quickly realize that application management is no simple task. It varies significantly among institutions of different sizes, and it's crucial to look beyond the numbers to appreciate the intricacies involved. What do these numbers truly tell us? What don't they tell us? Let's dive deeper.

1. Decentralization of application review: One major consideration is the management of the review process. Who is responsible for scrutinizing applications? At some institutions, this is done by a graduate admissions or graduate programs office. Conversely, others decentralize the process, distributing applications to program directors, faculty, or other analogous roles. Depending on the approach, the weight and distribution of workload can be significantly different. A centralized model might mean that a single office is handling the bulk, whereas a decentralized model might spread the load among various departments or individuals. Keep in mind that a decentralized approach typically takes longer for decisions to be made (see later in this report) and will likely disappoint your applicants.

2. The reviewer's role: You also must consider the role of the reviewer. Are they purely processing and distributing? Are they the ones diving deep into the content of the applications? Or perhaps a hybrid of these roles? The exact nature of this role can influence both the efficiency and depth of the review process.

3. Frequency of enrollment terms: Different institutions have different numbers of enrollment terms throughout the year. The frequency and number of terms are likely to influence the periodic intensity of application review. More terms can potentially mean a more consistent, spread-out workload, while fewer terms might lead to occasional spikes in application numbers. Think through what this means for the efficiency of your team and their productivity.

4. Graduate admissions role: What is the core responsibility of the graduate admissions office in application management? This may be the most important thing for the enrollment leader to ask, understand, and ensure that all other campus stakeholders understand. Are they the first line of defense, filtering applications before they reach the specific departments? Or perhaps they play a more supportive, supplementary role? This dynamic can significantly impact the application processing speed and quality. It is becoming increasingly clear that centralized processes, in which admissions operations are empowered to (at least) review applications and offer admission to applicants who are clearly qualified, are often “winning” the student (based on RNL's student expectations findings.)

5. Centralized vs. decentralized operations: Beyond the review process, we know that the overall operational model of the graduate admissions office varies considerably. A centralized approach typically means that all operations, including inquiries, document processing, and decision dissemination, occur from one central hub, while a decentralized model often indicates multiple touchpoints for applicants, with different departments or units handling specific segments of the application journey. Either one can work, but the decentralized operation is increasingly likely to not meet graduate student expectations for timeliness (and personalization).

It's evident that while numbers provide a snapshot, the true narrative of graduate application management is woven with various operational intricacies. It's essential for stakeholders to understand these nuances, ensuring they appreciate the complexity and effort behind every application processed, and every decision made. It's not merely about numbers; it's about the people, processes, and strategies that make graduate admissions a dynamic and ever-evolving domain.

—Reena Lichtenfeld, Vice President, Consulting Services, RNL

Read about Reena's background at the end of this report.

Responding to inquiries

If timely response to inquiries and questions has become the “make or break” for many students, the manner in which recruitment operations do this moves from being somewhat important when the student audience was primarily Gen X (who grew up waiting for any number of things) to extremely important now that the student audience is primarily composed of Millennials and Gen Z (who have grown up rarely waiting for anything). With this in mind, graduate recruitment leaders were asked about who responds, how they respond, and when they respond.

20. Full-time admissions counselors or recruiters are by far the most common stakeholders to respond to initial inquiries and other questions.

This aligns well with student preferences surfaced in RNL’s 2023 survey of 1,500 graduate students, in which 64 percent of graduate students indicated that their preferred point of contact is a recruiter or admissions counselor, while only 36 percent prefer a faculty member or other program stakeholder (in a binary choice). These data also represent significant progress since RNL’s 2020 study of graduate recruitment leaders in which nearly half of respondents indicated that “whoever is available” was the most likely to respond to inquiries.

WHO RESPONDS FIRST TO EARLY INQUIRIES/QUESTIONS?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Admissions counselors/recruiters	89%	91%	77%	85%
Program leaders/coordinators	22%	25%	46%	32%
Faculty members	16%	14%	25%	18%
Graduate students/grad assistants	9%	11%	18%	13%
External call center	4%	2%	5%	4%
Other	2%	2%	5%	3%

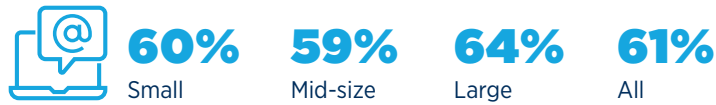


21. The initial response method of the typical institution is most frequently an automated email.

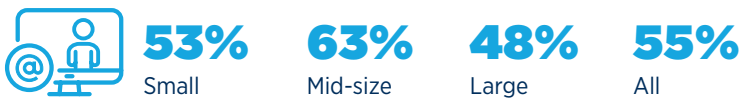
Note that Mid-Size institutions most frequently respond with a personalized email. Recruitment leaders were able to select more than one method, and for that reason it is likely that a mix of automated and personalized emails are being used. An automated email is not necessarily a non-starter for graduate students (RNL research reveals that fewer than 15 percent of graduate students completely oppose this method, but less than 5 percent prefer it). The automated email can be an effective “placeholder” for small teams with limited extended office hours, but this only works if the automated email promises a personalized response within the next 24 hours—and the campus follows through on this.

What is the first thing done after an inquiry?

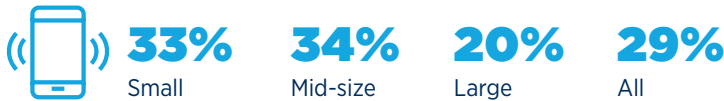
AUTOMATED EMAIL



PERSONALIZED EMAIL



PHONE CALL



TEXT MESSAGE



SOMETHING ELSE



22. More than half of recruitment operations are responding to inquiries and questions within the same business day of receipt.

While many recruitment operations are not configured in a manner that allows for instantaneous response, it is almost assured that some of your competitors are. Given that upwards of 60 percent of graduate students indicated a likelihood of enrolling in the program that responds to them first—even if it is of a lower quality—timely response is critical.

The goal of “same day” can be a first-step goal for recruitment operations that are building capacity. Why? Because the day that a student makes first contact is the day they are thinking about their graduate studies. If you can get back to them that day—the day they are thinking about it—you are likely to move them along. If you wait until the next day (or later), they may no longer be thinking about it as they juggle their other work and life responsibilities. You may lose them for a week, a month, or a year.

WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL RESPONSE TIME FOR THAT FIRST CONTACT?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Within minutes	20%	14%	18%	17%
Within an hour	9%	12%	7%	10%
Within same business day	27%	26%	24%	25%
Within 24 hours	27%	42%	35%	35%
More than 24 hours	18%	6%	16%	13%

23. Recruitment operations most frequently struggle with maintaining forward momentum among their prospective students at the top of the funnel.

Half of recruitment leaders say they struggle at both the prospect stage and inquiry stage, while only about one-third indicate challenges with mid-funnel stages where proper cultivation should ensure the completion of applications, and then encouraging admitted students to actually enroll. Top-of-funnel challenges may be the result of gaps between the marketing operation and the recruitment operation, which must work together not only to generate inquiries, but also to generate qualified leads that are less likely to fall out of the funnel in the early stages.

AT WHICH STAGE(S) IN THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS DO YOU ENCOUNTER GREATEST CHALLENGES IN MOVING STUDENTS FORWARD?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Prospects: Generating initial interest and engagement with potential students	61%	49%	44%	51%
Inquiries: Building on inquiries to create a strong desire to apply	52%	51%	44%	49%
Applicants: Encouraging applicants to pursue admission actively	32%	38%	44%	38%
Admits: Inspiring admitted students to choose you over others	36%	30%	44%	36%
Commits: Ensuring committed students follow through and enroll	45%	31%	31%	35%

Implications for institutions

As mentioned above, when you overlay the results of the *RNL 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report* which indicates the preferences of the prospective students with these data, some gaps emerge.

Between 32 percent and 61 percent of institutions struggle with engaging top-of-funnel students to move toward application (see above). And students are split between needing academic information (like program details) and application information (like deadlines, requirements, processes). In fact, when asked who should give the student the information they need, counterintuitively, 59 percent of students wanted admissions staff to share academic information, and 32 percent wanted academic staff to share admissions information. This demonstrates the vital importance of cross-training all stakeholders involved in the admissions process and having a carefully constructed communication flow.

Even more importantly, institutions may see the importance of ensuring that academic leaders are aware of and held responsible for strategic enrollment goals. No longer can academia sit on the sidelines and wait for students (and admissions staff) to fill their programs. Nor can the academic teams be designated as first responders to inquiries if they cannot meet the timeframes required. More than 85 percent of prospective graduate students expect to hear back from the institution after their very first inquiry within 24 hours. We now see that up to 94 percent of recruitment operations are meeting this challenge! So academic teams must have visibility to the CRM, be trained on responding to inquiries, and should be held to meeting the desired quick response time (just like admissions staff should be). It is important that all responders can see contact details for the prospective students, since we know that the students expect a multichannel approach of emails, phone calls, and text messages from the school.

A comprehensive strategic enrollment plan that has buy-in from across the organization, along with a well-designed communications architecture and enrollment-focused consulting and training, can set up the university for success in meeting graduate student expectations.

—Holly Tapper, JD, MBA, Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships, RNL

Read about Holly's background at the end of this report.

Ongoing communication

The challenges cited above regarding keeping early inquirers interested and engaged throughout the funnel can be mitigated by communications flows that prescribe regular communication through a variety of channels aimed at reaching prospective students “where they are.” This can and should include a mix of personalized email, text messages, phone calls, direct mail (yes, it is making a comeback), and even a non-personalized email every once in a while. The goal should be to not only maintain contact—which keeps the prospect’s higher education ambitions front and center of their minds—but to provide relevant and useful content as part of that pursuit of engagement.

RNL’s 2023 study of 1,500 graduate students asked how graduate programs can best personalize the content that is included in messages during the recruitment process. The number-one ranked aspect of effective personalized communication was not content, but (believably) using the student’s first name. After that, the next highest ranked preference was for specific information about their program of interest. Our 2021 study also indicated that useful information about the enrollment process—consistent with their stage in the process—was also attractive to prospective students.

24. Ongoing communications flows/plans are likely overusing non-personalized email, while underusing both text messages and direct mail, and not using phone calls as frequently as they should be.

Interestingly, personalized email appears to be being applied widely and at the correct pace—once per week. Although direct mail may not need to be used more than once or twice in the process, the fact that more than half of recruitment operations are not doing this may put them at a disadvantage.

WHICH METHODS ARE INCLUDED IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS FLOW AND HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU USE EACH METHOD?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Non-personalized email				
Not used	10%	13%	19%	14%
Daily	2%	0%	6%	3%
Weekly	24%	42%	26%	32%
Every two weeks	39%	22%	19%	26%
Monthly or less	25%	23%	30%	267%
Personalized email				
Not used	0%	0%	8%	3%
Daily	2%	11%	14%	10%
Weekly	35%	35%	26%	32%
Every two weeks	30%	24%	22%	25%
Monthly or less	33%	29%	30%	30%
Text message				
Not used	33%	32%	59%	41%
Daily	5%	5%	7%	5%
Weekly	14%	24%	13%	18%
Every two weeks	14%	15%	4%	11%
Monthly or less	34%	24%	17%	25%
Phone calls				
Not used	7%	18%	37%	21%
Daily	2%	7%	11%	7%
Weekly	15%	28%	7%	18%
Every two weeks	22%	16%	9%	16%
Monthly or less	54%	31%	37%	40%
Direct mail				
Not used	50%	46%	61%	52%
Daily	2%	2%	2%	2%
Weekly	0%	5%	2%	3%
Every two weeks	5%	7%	0%	4%
Monthly or less	43%	41%	35%	39%

Implications for institutions

Optimizing ongoing communications with prospective students is a vital component that complements and enhances marketing strategies. A well-calibrated communications flow serves to nurture the leads generated through initial source channels, keeping the institution top-of-mind and progressively moving the prospects through the enrollment funnel. In that regard, getting the communications “right” is a strategic imperative that can significantly amplify the effectiveness of all marketing endeavors.

While personalized emails are being employed across the board, non-personalized emails are not as consistently utilized, especially by larger institutions. Institutions are also underutilizing texting, phone calls, and direct mail as valuable engagement channels. This suggests a need for recalibration to ensure a balanced, multichannel approach that addresses the preferences and needs of prospective students at various stages of the enrollment funnel. Here are some recommendations to consider:

1. Integrate with marketing efforts—Ensure that the communications flow is tightly integrated with inbound and outbound marketing strategies. The messaging should be consistent across all channels to reinforce brand values and offerings.
2. Adopt a multichannel approach—Given that prospective students have diverse communication preferences, a balanced multi-channel strategy is essential. This should include a mix of personalized and non-personalized emails, text messages, phone calls, and direct mail.
3. Extend personalization—While personalized emails are effective, the principle of personalization should be extended to other channels. This could involve using the student’s name and providing information tailored to their specific interests and stage in the enrollment process.
4. Focus on timely content—Deliver content that is not only relevant but also aligns with the informational needs of students at their specific stage in the decision-making and enrollment process.
5. Harmonize with marketing metrics—Establish KPIs that align with inbound and outbound marketing metrics to holistically evaluate the success of your communications strategy.

—Dr. Shane Pruitt, Executive Consultant, Enrollment Consulting Services, RNL

Read about Shane’s background at the end of this report.

Evaluating success and ROI of enrollment efforts

As the cost of recruiting graduate students has risen, so has the need for recruitment leaders to make an effective case to senior leadership for additional resources. The inverse relationship between increasingly scarce resources and the accelerating costs associated with “winning” the student in a competitive environment has resulted in a need for more sophisticated tracking of ROI. This tracking starts at the marketing stage (see the first section of this report for more information) and then continues during the recruitment and cultivation stage. Ideally these two phases can be brought together in a “full funnel” reporting mechanism. (RNL’s version is called Envision, and it helps institutions track the return on every dollar invested in both marketing and recruitment.)

With this in mind, we asked recruitment leaders about the methods they have available and use to assess performance, which one(s) they think are most effective in advancing their success, how they view these data (dashboards or otherwise), and how frequently they review their data.

25. Recruitment leaders most frequently use Conversion Rate Analysis to assess the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts and initiatives.

This is distantly followed by Retention and Success Metrics, which is a strong indicator that growing numbers of recruitment operations are embracing the concept that retention is a critical element of the enrollment process.

More concerning may be the fact that only half of recruitment operations are gathering student feedback to inform their processes. This can be as simple as having recruiters regularly ask prospects and students key questions and as complex as administering a survey to incoming students about their experiences. In either case, these efforts are a first-hand way to ensure that recruitment processes are aligned (or continue to be aligned) with student expectations.

WHAT TOOLS OR METHODS DO YOU USE TO EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Conversion Rate Analysis: Tracking conversion rates at various stages of the recruitment funnel to identify strengths and weaknesses	81%	70%	77%	76%
Retention and Success Metrics: Evaluating how well recruited students are retained and succeed in their academic journey, linking recruitment strategies to long-term outcomes	58%	60%	45%	54%
Student Feedback: Gathering feedback from students to understand their experiences and perceptions of the recruitment process	56%	52%	55%	53%
Event Effectiveness Assessment: Evaluating the success of recruitment events, such as open houses, webinars, or college fairs, through attendance, engagement, and follow-up metrics	47%	50%	57%	51%
Social Media Analytics: Analyzing engagement, reach, and effectiveness of social media campaigns used in recruitment	42%	52%	49%	48%
ROI Measurement: Calculating return on investment for different recruitment channels and campaigns to determine cost-effectiveness	37%	48%	43%	44%
Time-to-Decision Analysis: Measuring the time taken from application to admission decision, identifying any delays or inefficiencies in the process	16%	43%	55%	40%

26. Recruitment leaders most frequently indicate that Conversion Rate Analysis is the most effective in enhancing their success and growth.

It is interesting that with the increased focus on demonstrating ROI to senior leadership at so many institutions, this is relatively infrequently done, and even less frequently cited as the most effective tool to refine strategy. These findings are similar to those in the marketing section and may indicate a greater need at both stages to focus on measuring return on investment by both marketing channel and recruitment strategy.

MOST EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT TOOL OR METHOD	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Conversion Rate Analysis: Tracking conversion rates at various stages of the recruitment funnel to identify strengths and weaknesses	43%	45%	46%	45%
Retention and Success Metrics: Evaluating how well recruited students are retained and succeed in their academic journey, linking recruitment strategies to long-term outcomes	26%	28%	10%	21%
Student Feedback: Gathering feedback from students to understand their experiences and perceptions of the recruitment process	12%	10%	12%	11%
Time-to-Decision Analysis: Measuring the time taken from application to admission decision, identifying any delays or inefficiencies in the process	2%	9%	13%	9%
ROI Measurement: Calculating return on investment for different recruitment channels and campaigns to determine cost-effectiveness	12%	3%	8%	7%
Event Effectiveness Assessment: Evaluating the success of recruitment events such as open houses, webinars, or college fairs, through attendance, engagement, and follow-up metrics	2%	3%	6%	4%
Social Media Analytics: Analyzing engagement, reach, and effectiveness of social media campaigns used in recruitment	2%	2%	4%	3%

27. Recruitment leaders most frequently use KPI dashboards to monitor the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts.

Working toward goals is an effective method of meeting those goals, but if one of the goals is not to maximize the use of every dollar spend, then there may be missing pieces in the enrollment puzzle. It is also somewhat concerning that very few recruitment leaders are monitoring a marketing dashboard. While a distinct operation and set of responsibilities, it is increasingly important that marketing and recruitment operate in tandem in order to squeeze the greatest return out of every effort (and dollar).

WHAT TYPES OF DASHBOARDS DO YOU USE TO MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RECRUITMENT PROCESSES?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Key Performance Indicator Dashboards (application numbers, acceptance rates, yield rates)	68%	75%	70%	72%
Marketing Dashboards (website traffic, social media engagement, advertising ROI)	16%	39%	30%	30%
Operational Dashboards (time-to-decision, recruitment channel effectiveness)	18%	34%	19%	25%
Forecasting/Projection Dashboards	11%	18%	9%	13%
Strategic Dashboards (benchmarking against peers, tracking multi-year enrollment goals)	9%	16%	13%	13%
Financial Dashboards (spending, cost-per-lead, budget allocation)	9%	15%	2%	9%
Do not have dashboards.	25%	16%	25%	22%

28. The 75 percent of recruitment leaders who have access to performance dashboards most frequently look at these data on a weekly basis.

HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU REVIEW DASHBOARD OR OTHER PERFORMANCE DATA?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Daily	16%	25%	10%	17%
Weekly	52%	43%	44%	46%
Monthly	16%	18%	23%	19%
Less than monthly	13%	5%	10%	9%

Implications for institutions

The traditional static budget model is outdated, particularly in the realm of graduate student recruitment where specialized needs demand agile resource allocation. A dynamic budgeting approach, grounded in real-time performance metrics, allows for swift resource reallocation to maximize ROI. In today's competitive landscape, a one-size-fits-all strategy is rarely effective. Recruitment and marketing teams should meet at least monthly to analyze data, planning for refined message segmentation and targeted outreach to high-yield prospects. This level of data-driven precision is not just beneficial but essential for optimizing investment and achieving strategic enrollment goals. Consider the following recommendations in this area:

- 1. Take an ROI-centric approach**—ROI should be a central focus. Institutions must develop ROI metrics not just for overall recruitment but also for each recruitment channel and tactic. Customer relationship management (CRM) software can help in this regard to track both performance (e.g. conversion rates) and operational (e.g. time-to-decision) goals.
- 2. Prepare for dynamic resource allocation**—With scarce resources, it's essential to be agile in reallocating budgets based on real-time performance metrics. Set the expectation that expenditures will be fluid dependent on evolving outcomes and impending needs, not on what was pre-allocated at the beginning of the cycle.
- 3. Leverage all available data**—Stay disciplined to regularly reference external benchmarks like application numbers and social media engagement not just at other institutions but alongside similar areas of study in departments next to your own. This information should influence how much of an in-cycle strategy swing is necessary.

—Dr. Shane Pruitt, Executive Consultant, Enrollment Consulting Services

Read about Shane's background at the end of this report.

Reconsidering events

Prior to the pandemic, many recruitment leaders thought that the secret to getting a prospect to enroll was to get them to an event—an open house, an interview, a campus tour, anything that would get them on campus. With the advent of the pandemic, these efforts were refocused on virtual open houses, interviews, etc. These had been tried prior to the pandemic and the conventional wisdom was that they just didn't convert at the same rate. This was the primary challenge when in-person events were no longer an option.

Interestingly, although recruitment leaders have widely reported that virtual events are less effective in moving prospects toward enrollment, RNL's 2021 study of 1,500 prospective graduate students indicates that graduate students themselves believe that virtual events are just as effective as face-to-face in moving them forward, in fact even more so. While about 75 percent indicated that face-to-face events helped them move forward, about 82 percent indicated that virtual events were effective in doing so.

So why the disconnect? This is likely related to the expectation of today's graduate students for ongoing, personalized communication. At one point, "all" it took to make prospective students more likely to enroll was getting them to attend an open house. Today, it's not only about getting them there but continuing to cultivate them as they multitask their way through their lives. This is another example of the notion that there is no "set it and forget it" in higher education today.

29. While all types of institutions have seen increased participation in virtual open houses and virtual interviews, in-person open houses (on average) have seen contraction, and in-person interviews have seen no change in the last two years.

Working with employers for recruitment purposes seems to have waned considerably, with nearly half of institutions indicating that they do not do these activities.

HAVE YOU SEEN CHANGES IN THE SUCCESS OF YOUR RECRUITMENT EVENTS OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
In-person open houses				
Increased participation	36%	21%	31%	29%
No change	11%	20%	19%	17%
Decreased participation	32%	41%	27%	34%
Do not offer	20%	18%	23%	20%
Virtual open houses				
Increased participation	48%	38%	48%	44%
No change	20%	33%	32%	29%
Decreased participation	18%	18%	8%	15%
Do not offer	14%	10%	12%	12%
In-person interviews/meetings				
Increased participation	20%	16%	14%	17%
No change	41%	46%	45%	44%
Decreased participation	25%	28%	16%	23%
Do not offer	14%	10%	24%	16%
Virtual interviews/meetings				
Increased participation	57%	47%	38%	47%
No change	32%	40%	46%	40%
Decreased participation	9%	8%	2%	6%
Do not offer	2%	5%	14%	7%
Corporate events				
Increased participation	14%	20%	6%	14%
No change	30%	36%	27%	31%
Decreased participation	16%	19%	6%	14%
Do not offer	40%	25%	61%	41%

Implications for institutions

One of the correlations that we do not know here is whether universities that are recruiting for in-person programming are also using in-person open houses and interviews, or a mix of in-person and online. We can assume that programs recruiting for online enrollment are using the virtual options. And the programs reporting no change in their in-person operations may be recruiting for more traditional campus-based programming.

Consistent with the data indicating that all institutions have seen an increase in virtual open houses, RNL has seen enrollment growth at schools that choose to include virtual event capabilities (and other virtual cultivation tools) available from their website. Prospective students can create their own viewbook by navigating through experiences and visual information on the site. They can interact with campus map components and attend virtual events on the same platform. Colleges that integrate these virtual opportunities see improved results in moving students through the funnel, especially during the yield phases.

RNL partners who have capitalized on growing corporate relationships and recruiting from these events have seen increased enrollment from this source. Seeing that most of the institutions surveyed here do not offer corporate events shows an opportunity for improving this recruitment channel. Strategies in this area will carry over into program design, skill development, discounting tactics, and digital geofencing to target employees of the designated companies. This is especially important if the market research for your programs indicates anticipated job growth in the next few years tied to particular programs and industries.

—Holly Tapper, JD, MBA, Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships

Read about Holly's background at the end of this report.

Admitting students

RNL's 2021 and 2023 studies both indicate that the programs that admit graduate students first often win the student. In fact, nearly 60 percent of graduate students indicate they are very likely to or will definitely enroll in the program that admits them first. This makes current practices focused on admitting graduate students of critical importance to enrollment success.

Across all sizes of graduate schools, recruitment leaders indicate that admissions decisions are made by multiple stakeholders including admissions staff, program faculty, and other program leaders. As with almost any process, the more people involved, the more time it typically takes. Nearly 40 percent of graduate operations put the admissions decision in the hands of program academic directors or faculty, while just 5 percent rely on admissions staff to make these decisions.

30. The majority of institutions involve multiple parties in making admissions decisions.

WHO MAKES ADMISSIONS DECISIONS?	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
A mix of these stakeholders	45%	59%	60%	55%
Academic program directors/coordinators	18%	25%	23%	22%
Program faculty	25%	11%	17%	17%
Admissions department	11%	5%	0%	5%

31. About one-quarter of rolling admission graduate programs indicate that they make admissions decisions within three days, a considerable improvement over past studies in which this question was asked.

Large institutions are most likely to take more than two weeks to make admissions decisions (40 percent), while Mid-Size institutions are the most likely to extend into the two-week window.

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL AMOUNT OF TIME UNTIL STUDENTS ARE NOTIFIED OF ADMISSION? (ROLLING ADMISSIONS)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Within 24 hours	10%	7%	12%	9%
2-3 days	22%	18%	9%	16%
4-7 days	15%	16%	28%	19%
8-14 days	20%	27%	12%	20%
15-30 days	17%	18%	28%	21%
Longer than a month	17%	14%	12%	14%

32. Fixed admission programs take considerably longer to make admissions decisions, most notably at Large institutions.

Nearly half of Large institutions report that admissions decisions take longer than a month—more than double either of the other size institutions. In contrast, Small and Mid-Size institutions are twice as likely as Large institutions to admit graduate students within three days.

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL AMOUNT OF TIME UNTIL STUDENTS ARE NOTIFIED OF ADMISSION? (FIXED ADMISSIONS)	SMALL	MID-SIZE	LARGE	ALL
Within 24 hours	16%	13%	8%	12%
2-3 days	16%	21%	8%	15%
4-7 days	13%	23%	5%	14%
8-14 days	13%	15%	16%	14%
15-30 days	25%	13%	16%	17%
Longer than a month	19%	17%	47%	27%

Implications for institutions

In light of these discoveries, institutions should seriously consider optimizing their admissions procedures, strategically distributing decision-making duties, giving precedence to rolling admissions whenever possible, and guaranteeing transparent and prompt correspondence with candidates. It is particularly critical that Large institutions investigate the factors contributing to delays and seek strategies to expedite the process while maintaining quality standards.

Ongoing benchmarking and advancement initiatives have the potential to boost the efficiency and effectiveness of the admissions procedure. Furthermore, institutions should expand their purview beyond in-house solutions in this age of sharp technological progress. Incorporating AI and third-party partnerships into a simplified process will provide even greater benefits by increasing the speed and accuracy of the admissions process, ultimately providing simultaneous benefits to both applicants and schools.

Similarly to how a streamlined vessel navigates placid waters with greater velocity, an admissions process that employs a streamlined and effective decision-making framework experiences comparable advantages. The act of minimizing the number of stakeholders engaged in admissions processes can be compared to eliminating extraneous barriers, enabling colleges and universities to navigate the enrollment process with increased efficiency and accuracy.

—Chelsea Hoffman, Vice President, Graduate and Online Partnerships

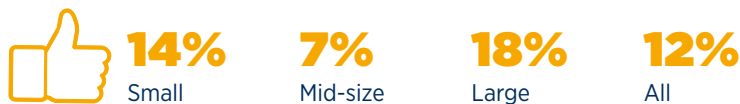
Read about Chelsea's background at the end of this report.

Use of AI in recruitment efforts

How are graduate recruitment operations applying AI to their marketing efforts? Although on everyone's mind, only 12 percent of recruitment leaders indicate their teams are currently using AI in their recruitment and enrollment operations. Large institutions are the most likely to be doing so. When asked what specifically they are doing, the most common application is in a chatbot.

Are you using AI in any of your recruitment/enrollment operations?

YES



NO



Please describe how you use AI in your recruitment efforts:

- Use AI to help write copy for drip campaigns
- Use a platform that can create template content based on the questions students answer
- To help with communication copy
- Content writing, primarily (blogs, etc.)
- Use of a chatbot for general information
- Use a chatbot for inquiries in programs
- Offer a master's program in AI Engineering
- Content generation
- Use AI to generate some general content about the field and industry
- Generating content for emails
- Use a chatbot to greet visitors
- Content creation
- Use AI to help draft emails and other communications with prospects
- Drafting communication plans, recruiting plans, and text for emails and text messages

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About the RNL Contributors



Scott Jeffe: Scott Jeffe is the principal researcher for this report. He is vice president of graduate and online research at RNL. Over more than 25 years, Scott has worked with nearly 400 institutions in 40+ states to apply market data to strategic decision-making in relation to graduate, adult undergraduate, and online programs. In these experiences, he has developed expertise in how institutions can align with student demand while upholding institutional mission and values. He is a co-author of RNL's *Strategic Enrollment Planning: A Dynamic Collaboration* (3rd Edition), as well as being the principal researcher for RNL's *2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report*, *2022 Online Student Recruitment Report*, *2022 Online Program Marketing and Recruitment Practices Report*, *2021 Graduate Marketing and Recruitment Practices Report*, *2021 Graduate Student Recruitment Report*, *Serving the Underrepresented: A Review of Graduate Student Data*, *the 2020 Marketings and Recruitment Practices for Graduate Students Report*, and dozens of RNL blogs and articles.



Chelsea Hoffman: Chelsea Hoffman is an experienced enrollment leader and an expert in enrollment strategies that harness technology. She works with institutions to propel the success of their graduate and online programs, optimize their recruitment efforts, assess the enrollment potential of academic programs, and achieve their enrollment goals more efficiently. In multiple leadership roles over her 14 years at Columbia Southern University, she directed major shifts that led to transformational success. This included optimizing program and course offerings, engaging faculty, and integrating systems to streamline enrollment and student support.



Reena Lichtenfeld: Reena Lichtenfeld, EdD, brings more than 20 years of experience in higher education administration to RNL as vice president for consulting services. Her areas of expertise include graduate, undergraduate, and online admissions; strategic recruitment and enrollment management/planning; and policy, accreditation, governance, and compliance. Dr. Lichtenfeld is a results-driven passionate higher education professional who brings a broad spectrum of proven tools and strategies to the table. Prior to joining RNL, she served as assistant dean for enrollment management at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development (TN).



Aaron Mahl, PhD: Dr. Aaron Mahl has worked with dozens of campuses to optimize their enrollment practices and financial aid policies. Previously, Aaron served as chief admissions officer at Trinity International University (IL) where he championed a collaborative and data-driven approach to student recruitment. Aaron's work at Trinity included developing and executing a strategic recruitment plan and revolutionizing the campus visit and event strategy.



Nate Mouttet: A career higher education enrollment leader, Nate Mouttet helps RNL providers adopt growth and scale solutions to stabilize or expand their graduate and online programs. Nate is an expert in graduate and online program marketing, program development and delivery as part of larger strategic enrollment planning. He helps RNL partner institutions adopt new technology, data-driven strategy, and key services to enhance the entire student lifecycle and maximize success. Nate served as vice president for enrollment management and marketing at Seattle Pacific University from 2014 to 2022 and as vice president at North Park University from 2010 to 2014.



Shane Pruitt: Dr. Shane Pruitt brings 15 years of recruitment and enrollment experience to his role as the executive consultant in RNL's Enrollment Consulting Services, Shane has a proven track record of successfully implementing data-informed enrollment strategy as an on-campus administrator, EdTech consultant, and higher education subject matter expert for a leading management consulting firm. His areas of expertise include undergraduate, graduate, and professional programming; enrollment data analysis and interpretation; and external partnership-building and pipeline development. He previously served as director of student recruitment and advising at University of Georgia.



Charles Ramos: Charles Ramos offers 25 years of experience as an enrollment professional and consultant. He has effected positive change that has equated to increased enrollment and sustainable revenue growth in the undergraduate, graduate, online and nontraditional markets for over 100 institutions across the United States and Canada. He started his career at Saint Louis University, where he began building his enrollment management expertise. Through time spent at RNL and ACT, Inc., he has been deeply immersed in consulting in the areas of recruitment, retention and strategic enrollment management.



Anuja Siraj: Anuja Siraj is a strategic visionary and hands-on digital strategist with over 10 years of experience leading and transforming digital marketing vision and strategy, driving new customer acquisition, and generating revenue growth. As director of digital strategy at RNL, she collaborates with RNL's leaders and experts, campus partners, and cross-functional teams to deliver digital marketing projects that are fully aligned with the goals of our college and university partners. She oversees RNL's digital marketing strategy across channels for these projects, leveraging data analytics for insights and decision-making.



Holly Tapper: Holly Tapper developed a unique perspective on the essentials of building and growing online and graduate enrollment as a university administrator leading successful graduate programs, with extensive experience in online learning over more than 17 years. She was director of online operations at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, where she had a track record of success. Under her leadership more than 20 online programs produced more than \$15M/year. Previously, Holly also served as dean of graduate programs at Globe University/Minnesota School of Business, overseeing programs across 30 campuses that generated \$14M/year in revenue.

About RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,500 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, ensuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL helps institutions scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

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