

AI invisibility is costing you enrollments.

Being seen in AI answers isn't a marketing advantage. It's enrollment survival.

After our first 2025 AI Search Trends Report, the takeaway is simple: Showing up in AI answers decides who enrolls. This follow-up brief shows what's changed and why programs named in AI grow—while others pay more and get less.



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2025 AI SEARCH TRENDS:
ENROLLMENT IMPACT BRIEF

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Everspring's inaugural **2025 AI Search Trends Report** in May 2025 showed how tools like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews are collapsing the traditional search journey, disrupting paid and organic performance and redefining which programs prospective students see.

But the impact doesn't stop at visibility. It extends to pipeline quality and enrollment outcomes.

This brief goes deeper, analyzing conversion data from more than 100,000 leads to reveal which channels are driving students who actually move forward to start applications. What we found: Students who discover programs through AI tools and organic search convert at 2-3 times the rate of paid channels. These aren't just cheaper leads—they're more qualified, more committed, and further along in the decision-making process.

By the time these students reach your admissions team, they've already done deep research using AI tools. They arrive with specific questions, clear expectations, and a high intention to act.

If your programs aren't showing up in AI-generated answers and at the top of organic results, you're not just losing visibility—you're losing access to your most efficient pipeline.

The window to adapt is closing. Students are making decisions earlier, moving faster, and choosing programs that meet them where they research. The institutions that optimize for AI discovery today will capture tomorrow's most qualified applicants.

I'm looking for a Masters in Accountancy program in Chicago. Do you have any recommendations?

Thought for 23s >

Absolutely—here are strong Master's in Accountancy (or closely related) options in the Chicago area, with quick takeaways so you can compare fast:

- **University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) — M.S. in Accounting (in-person)**
AACSB-accredited, **STEM-designated**, CPA-focused, and steps from the Loop; good fit if you want a full downtown campus experience and recruiting access. [business.uic.edu](#)
- **Loyola University Chicago (Quinlan) — M.S. in Accountancy (MSA, in-person evenings)**
Water Tower Campus (downtown), can study **full- or part-time** and is designed for students from all over the nation and designed for both accounting majors and career-changers.
- **DePaul University — M.S. in Accountancy (online)**
Chicago-based program delivered online; DePaul also offers **Accounting & Taxation & Analytics** if you prefer a niche path. (Great if you're looking for a niche path. [business.depaul.edu](#) +1)
- **Roosevelt University — M.S. in Accounting (MSA, Chicago)**
Offers **tracks** (e.g., professional, forensics, analytics) and certifications; good value and downtown location. [roosevelt.edu](#)
- **Northeastern Illinois University — M.S. in Accounting (MSA)**
Designed for **working-adult students** as well as traditional students.

Thought for 17s >

Great—given you want **online** and you're a **career-changer**, here are the best-fit options from that list, with quick reasons:

1. **DePaul University — M.S. in Accountancy (Online only)**
 - **Built for career changers** (explicitly says it's designed for students without prior accounting).
 - Provides coursework needed to pursue the **CPA** path.
 - Chicago network + recruiting, even though delivery is online. [business.depaul.edu](#) +2
2. **University of Illinois (Gies) — iMSA (Fully online)**
 - Open to non-accounting undergrads; **prerequisite coursework** may be required.
 - Highly regarded curriculum; clear roadmap of core ACCY courses.
 - Delivered via Gies Online/Coursera ecosystem with multiple start dates. [Gies Online | Gies.edu](#) +3
3. **Roosevelt University — M.S. in Accounting**
 - **Online and hybrid** course options; welcomes students with **non-business degrees**.
 - Chicago-based with certification prep (CPA, [down arrow](#) [hers](#)) [roosevelt.edu](#) +1

AI chat = instant shortlist: Students aren't just seeing links; they're getting tailored advice. Here, a prospective student asks about accounting programs and the chatbot ranks, compares, and narrows to best-fit options based on follow-up questions.

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Organic search drives your most efficient pipeline, but only if you're in Google's AI Overview.

Inquiries from organic search convert to application starts at the highest rate of any major channel. To protect this performance, your programs must be cited within AI Overviews that now sit above traditional search results.

3

Paid channels extend reach but can't replace organic efficiency.

If you lose 100 organic inquiries, you will need roughly double the volume of paid search inquiries—or even more paid social inquiries—just to maintain the same number of application starts. Paid investment must be strategic, not a substitute for AI visibility.

2

AI chatbots, specifically ChatGPT and Perplexity, deliver exceptional conversion quality.

While the volume from ChatGPT and Perplexity is relatively small today, inquiries from these channels convert to application starts at rates approaching organic. As these channel grow, it becomes a critical complement to your organic strategy.

4

AI shapes student expectations before they reach your admissions team.

Students enter your funnel with specific questions, detailed comparisons, and high intent because they've done deep research through AI tools. If your programs aren't showing up clearly in those answers, you're not just behind in the conversation—you may have already lost access to your most qualified prospects.

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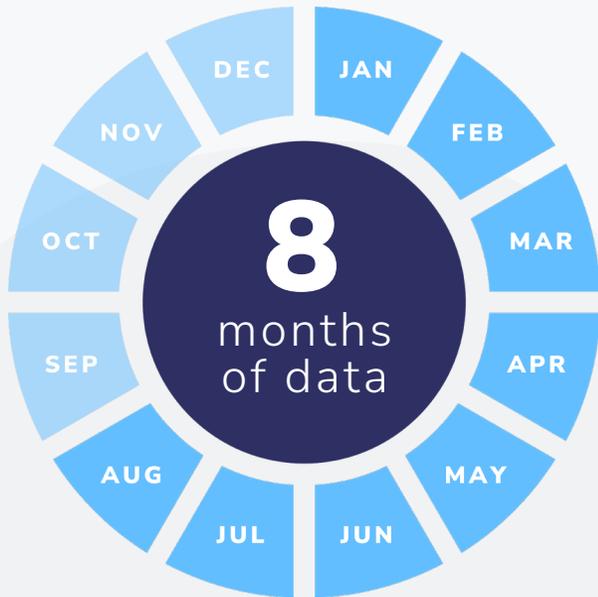
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This report draws on Everspring first-party data to analyze enrollment marketing performance and applicant behavior from January-August 2025, with year-over-year comparisons to the same period in 2024. The dataset includes over 100,000 leads across all channels and more than 10 academic verticals, including business, education, engineering, health, technology, law, and social work.



THE SIGNALS ENROLLMENT TEAMS NEED IN 2025

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INQUIRY CONVERSION BY CHANNEL:

**If You're Not in AI Answers,
You're Losing Enrollments**

Google LinkedIn ✨ AI Overview

 Meta  perplexity

Your visibility strategy is only as good as the enrollments it delivers. AI summaries now dominate the search results where prospective students begin their research—and our data shows these channels don't just drive traffic, they drive applicants.

We analyzed more than 100,000 leads across multiple platforms and channels—organic search, AI chatbots (ChatGPT and Perplexity), paid search, and paid social—to answer one central question: **Which channels produce leads who move forward and apply?** We tracked conversion rates from inquiry (RFI submission) to application start, the critical moment that signals genuine enrollment intent.

The results were clear: Students who find you through AI-generated answers, in both organic search and AI chatbots, are significantly more likely to start an application. These aren't just cheaper leads. They're more qualified, more committed, and more ready to enroll.

Here's what the data tells us about each channel:

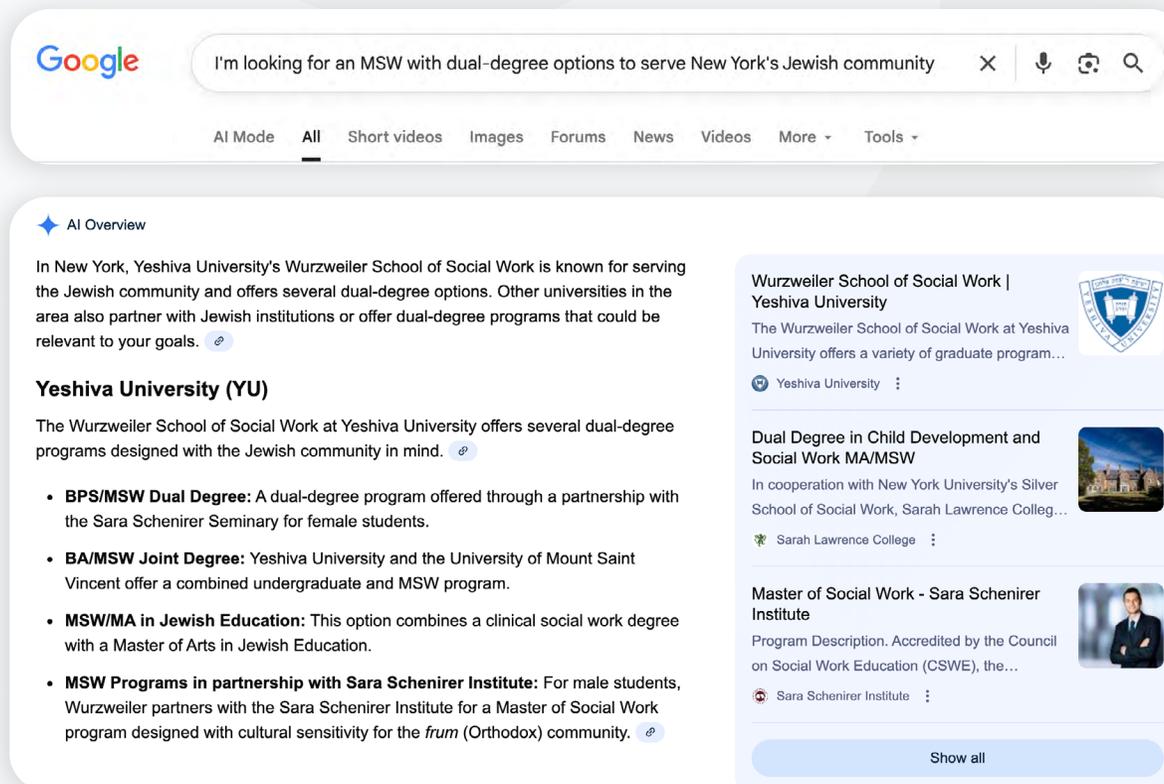
Organic search is your enrollment engine.

Roughly 1 in 4 inquiries from organic search move forward to start an application—the highest conversion rate of any major channel (for now). This makes protecting and growing your organic visibility the strongest driver of application starts and enrollment growth, even as you grow your AI visibility. But, “winning” in organic has changed.

Winning organic now means winning the AI Overview.

On the search results page, AI Overviews appear above traditional search results, which means ranking on “page one” no longer guarantees visibility. To maintain organic performance, you need to be cited within the AI Overview itself. This requires answer-focused content and a sound technical website structure that search engines can easily read and reference.

If you're not in the Overview, you're invisible: Google's AI Overview delivers a complete answer without a click. That zero-click box outranks ads and blue links, so visibility (and performance) shift to being named in the Overview itself.

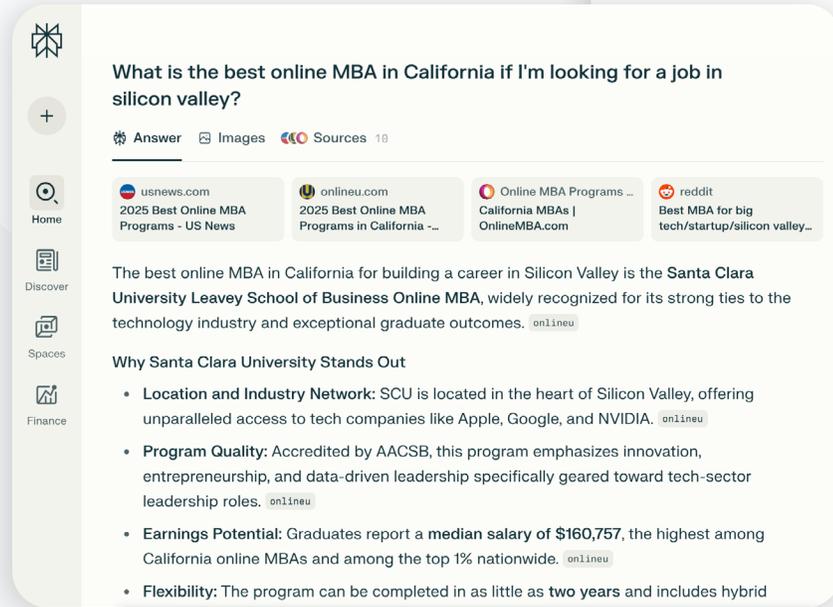
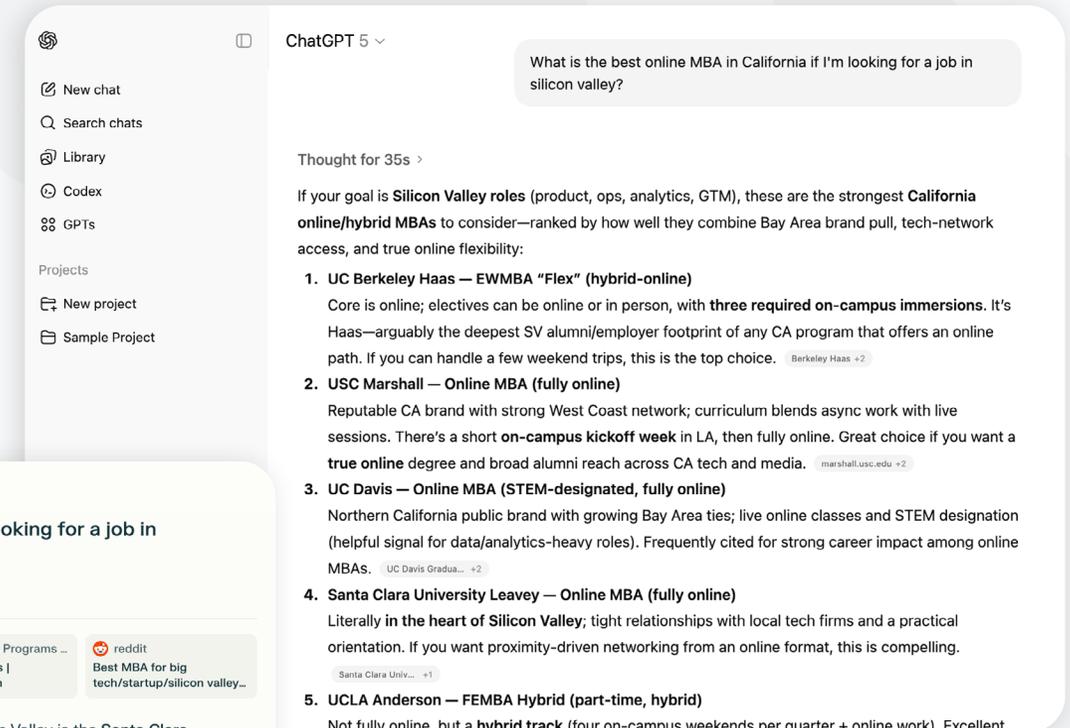


Here's what the data tells us about each channel:

AI discovery is a core channel, not an experiment.

What began as emerging is now essential. While the volume from ChatGPT and Perplexity is lower than organic, it's growing rapidly and delivering exceptional conversion rates.

Inquiries from ChatGPT and Perplexity move to application starts at rates that can reach 3-6 times baseline conversion rates from other channels (specifically, up to 2-4 times the conversion of paid search and 4-10 times the conversion rates of top-performing organic). To show up in AI-generated answers, your website needs to have clear, structured, and **answer-first content** (copy that leads with a direct, concise response to a common question, followed by supporting context or details). This makes it easier for all AI tools, including search engines, to understand, quote, and surface your programs.



To be cited by AI, rethink your content: To be cited, your page must be easy to parse. ChatGPT and Perplexity rank and cite different universities because answer-first structure—definitions, facts, comparisons—beats keywords alone.

Here's what the data tells us about each channel:

Paid search extends your reach but can't replace organic efficiency.

Inquiries from paid search convert to application starts at roughly half the rate of organic inquiries, so every dollar must be carefully optimized toward enrollments, not just clicks. If organic visibility drops, the gap is significant: Losing 100 organic inquiries requires at least 2 times as many paid search leads just to maintain the same number of application starts.

Paid social builds demand before the search.

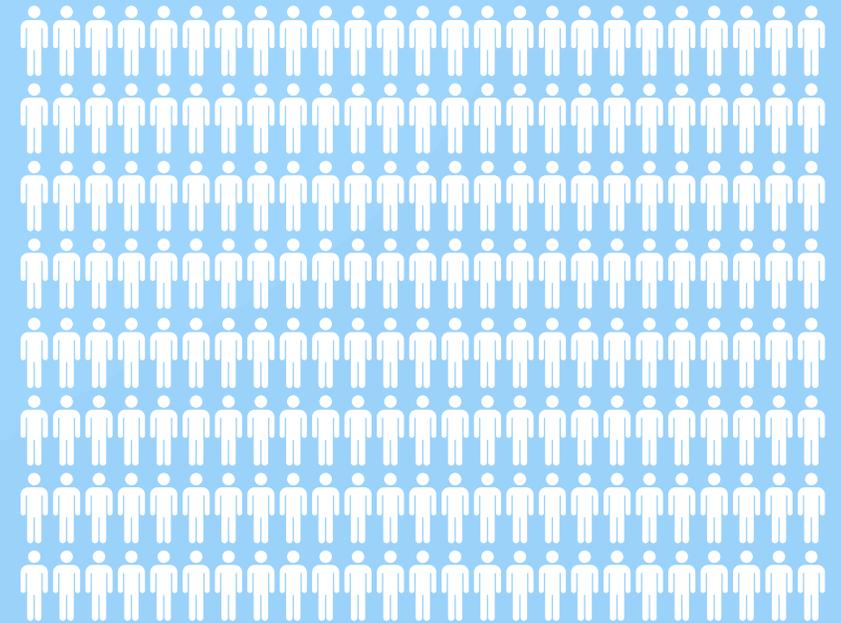
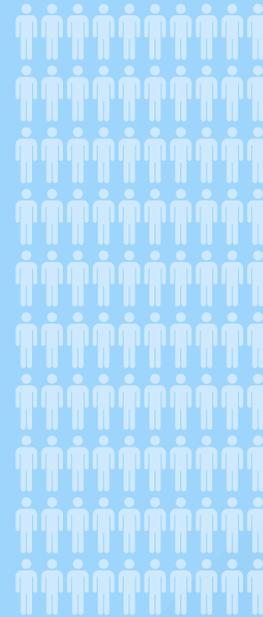
Platforms like YouTube, Meta, LinkedIn, and Reddit create awareness and intent before students actively search. Don't judge paid social ads by immediate clicks alone. Track whether these audiences return to submit inquiries and start applications later in their journey.

What if organic slips?

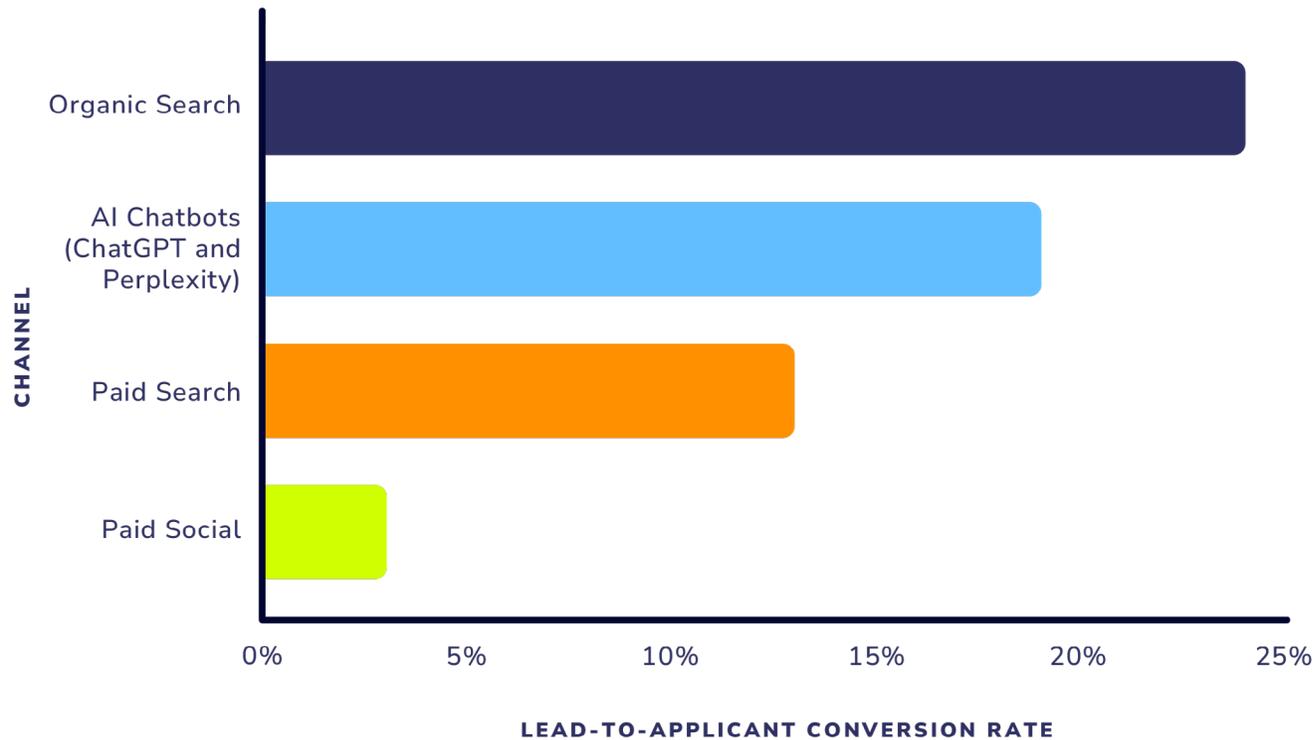
LOSE 100 ORGANIC LEADS



NEED ~2X PAID-SEARCH LEADS TO REPLACE THE QUALIFIED PIPELINE



Lead-to-Applicant Conversion Rates by Channel



The chart shows the stark difference in lead quality across channels.

We tracked conversion rates from inquiry (request for information submission) to application start and found that organic search and AI chatbots (ChatGPT and Perplexity) deliver conversion rates roughly 5-6 times higher than paid social and 2-3 times higher than paid search. The visual makes it clear: When students find you through organic results or AI-generated answers, they're far more likely to move forward and start an application. These high-intent discovery channels don't just drive more traffic—they drive better prospects who are already deeper in their decision-making process.

Inquiry Conversion by Channel

Bottom line:

Students can't apply to programs they can't find. Today, visibility means showing up in AI-generated answers and the first organic Google link beneath the AI Overview.

When you show up in these high-intent moments of self-directed research, you reach students who are actively evaluating programs and ready to move forward. Without these placements, you are not only losing visibility; you're losing access to your most qualified student pipeline. You'll spend more on paid channels to chase lower-intent leads, acquiring students who cost more and convert less.

ADMISSION INSIGHTS:

Advisors Are Meeting AI-Influenced Students

The pipeline implications go beyond conversion rates. **As your admissions team works the inquiries that come through these channels, they're meeting students who have been shaped by AI-assisted research.** Tools like ChatGPT aren't just driving discovery—they're acting as virtual advisors, influencing how students describe programs, compare options, and decide where to apply.

 What can I help with?

Is the online version of the MSW synchronous or asynchronous? How are field placements handled?

+ Search Reason

 Claude

What internship, practicum, or clinic opportunities exist and how competitive are they? 

Claude 3.7 Sonnet v Choose style v

perplexity

Generate questions I should ask during an info session for this program.

Search Research



 Break down the MBA curriculum at the University of Kansas. Which courses are core vs. electives?

Google Search I'm Feeling Lucky

Here are the shifts recruitment teams are reporting as they engage with leads from this new research experience.

Students are finding programs in AI answers.

Students are explicitly naming ChatGPT as the reason they found a program, sometimes noting it appeared first in an AI-generated shortlist. For these applicants, the first impression isn't happening on your website or through a paid ad—it's happening **inside** an AI answer.

Students arrive with AI-generated questions, sometimes verbatim.

Advisors report students arriving with nearly identical questions, often mirroring the structure and language used in ChatGPT responses. Students are adopting AI's framing and bringing specific terminology, comparisons, and expectations directly into the admissions conversation.

AI changes who you compete against, upending the traditional competitive framework.

Because AI results shift based on how prompts are phrased, not on school size or brand prestige, competitive sets are being reshaped. A regional program may surface ahead of nationally ranked institutions when a student filters by geography, cost, or modality. This is changing who institutions compete against and how they're positioned in the minds of prospective students.

Generate questions I should ask during an info session with an admissions advisor

 Perplexity

Assistant steps >

Here are key questions to ask during an info session with an admissions advisor to help ensure you have all the information needed to make an informed decision about your potential school or program:

Admissions Requirements

- What are the minimum academic requirements for admission to this program?
- Are standardized test scores required, and if so, which ones?
- Does the program require letters of recommendation or a personal statement?
- How does the admissions committee evaluate applications—what factors are most important?

Application Process

- What is the application deadline, and are there different deadlines for early or regular decision?
- Is there an application fee, and can it be waived?
- What materials are needed to submit a complete application (e.g., transcripts, test scores,

Ask a follow-up



Admission Insights

Bottom line:

By the time students reach admissions, many already have a clear impression of your institution—shaped by AI. These are high-intent students who have done deep research quickly and know what they’re looking for. If your programs aren’t showing up clearly and consistently in tools like ChatGPT and AI Overviews, you may be left out of the conversation entirely. But showing up isn’t enough. You need to deliver the specific answers they need, fast. AI tools have raised the bar for research quality and speed, and students will move forward with programs that meet them there. The conversion data proves it: these students are ready to act if you give them what they need.

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Optimize for AI discovery, not just SEO

If your content doesn't appear in AI-generated answers, you're missing out on the most powerful source of high-intent leads. To show up in AI answers, write answer-first content, structure pages clearly, and include machine-readable metadata. This ensures that AI tools, not just search engines, can easily parse and surface your programs to prospective students.

In short: optimization now extends beyond keywords to the language AI uses to teach itself about your programs.

2

Rethink your performance benchmarks

Success today requires more than just strong lead volume. Shift focus to lead quality, application conversion, and cost-per-enrollment, or risk overinvesting in channels that no longer reflect true intent or influence. And if your data is not connected to provide insights into these metrics, make that a priority, since you can only manage what you can measure, and visibility into your down-funnel performance will be ever more essential as AI-driven search expands.

3

Equip admissions to engage AI-informed students

Students arriving from AI discovery have done deeper research faster than previous generations of applicants. They come with specific questions, clear expectations, and ready-to-compare details in mind. Your admissions team needs to match that momentum.

This means: providing advisors with the same detailed, answer-first information that performs well in AI tools; training them to recognize and respond to AI-influenced questions; and ensuring inquiry follow-up is fast, specific, and aligned with what students already know. These high-intent leads will move forward quickly, but only if your admissions process meets them at their level of preparation. Speed and specificity now directly impact whether these valuable inquiries convert to applications.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR ENROLLMENT

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What's at Stake for Enrollment

AI is changing who enrolls and how they decide. If you're not visible in AI answers and at the top of organic search results, you're losing access to your most qualified, high-intent pipeline before the enrollment cycle even begins.

IF YOU DON'T ADAPT:

- You'll see fewer qualified applications.
- Your team will work harder for a lower yield.
- Your cost per student will rise.
- You'll compete for lower-intent leads while others capture students earlier in their journey.

The bottom line: If you're not visible in AI answers, you're invisible to the students most likely to enroll. Earn that visibility and you unlock a faster, more efficient path to growth.

THE EVERSPRING AI SEARCH STRATEGY

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Smarter Search. Leaner Spend. Stronger Enrollments.

Visibility inside AI-generated answers isn't optional—it's foundational. Paid media still plays a critical role in driving demand, but only when optimized for the new rules of search, and not as a **primary** driver of awareness or demand.

Everspring is the first in the industry to deploy an AI search strategy with live placements across AI platforms and Google's AI Overviews—and the only partner with an operational AI search framework built for colleges and universities.

Our AI Search Strategy ensures your programs appear where students are making decisions—in AI Overviews, ChatGPT, and Perplexity—so you capture high-intent inquiries that convert at higher rates than paid channels. This lets you use advertising dollars more effectively: instead of relying solely on paid spend to replace lost organic traffic, you strengthen the channels that deliver your most qualified pipeline. The result is better enrollment outcomes at lower cost per application, with paid investment focused on extending reach rather than compensating for missed visibility.

Ready to Reclaim Visibility?

We're not here to replace what you've already built. We plug in where you need the most leverage, whether that's fixing content that's not surfacing in AI, reducing media waste, or connecting the dots between your budget and your actual enrollments.

Don't miss out on what you're missing in AI search.

REQUEST YOUR AI SEARCH STRATEGY BRIEFING TODAY



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