OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

2021 MARKETING PLAN

Summary

The following pages include a high-level overview of the marketing strategy for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and its 2021 recruitment cycle, as prepared by the Office of Communications for Enrollment Management.

Section I: Context

Audience Terminology & the Pipeline

Many students begin as **prospects**. A student prospect is someone we know about but who has yet to indicate interest in us. As part of the marketing plan, the University of Illinois purchases student data through College Board and other sources.

Students can enter the admissions pipeline as, or convert to become, an **inquiry**. A student is considered an inquiry when they directly express interest in some way. This includes completing a form, attending an event, or signing up to receive emails. Both prospects and inquiries receive email and print information about the University of Illinois.

Once a student completes an application, they become an **applicant**. Applicants are treated very carefully to avoid any hint of a decision. Communication to applicants is limited and tends to be lighter in tone.

Many students enter the pipeline here and are considered **stealth applicants**, since they flew under our radar until applying. Our goal is to better identify stealth applicants earlier in the pipeline and convert them to inquiries.

Students are either **accepted or denied** after a decision has been made on their application. Accepted students go on to receive many communications about all aspects of Illinois, including materials specific to their major and college.

PROSPECT

INQUIRY

APPLICANT

ADMIT
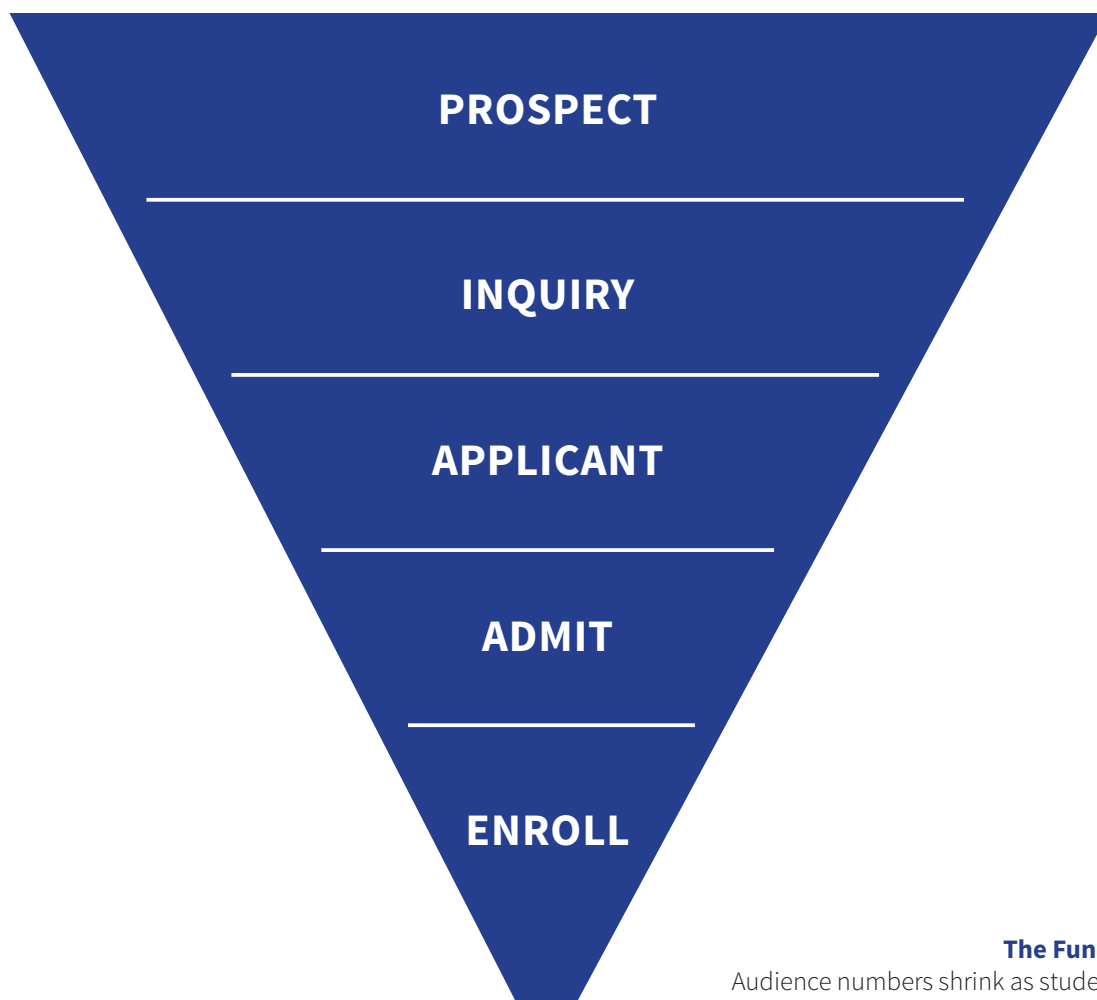
ENROLL

The Funnel
Audience numbers shrink as students
move through the admissions funnel
from prospect to enrollee.

Messaging Throughout High School

Students who become prospects or inquiries as freshmen will receive communications throughout their time in high school. Communications to freshmen and sophomores focus on getting the most out of high school and introduce college preparation ideas. Junior and senior communications talk more heavily about the college application process. All high school students receive information about Illinois.

Key Populations for Recruitment

Freshman students: Mostly current high school students enrolling at a university for the first time

In-state students: Students who have a residency status in Illinois

Out-of-state/non-resident students: Students who have a residency status in other U.S. states

International students: Students who have a residency status outside of the U.S.

Underrepresented minority (URM) students: Students of racial and ethnic minority status, as well as students from low-income or high-adversity backgrounds

Downstate students: Students who are in-state residents and are not from the Chicagoland area

High achievers: Students with high grades and test scores who are heavily recruited by many colleges

Transfer students: Students who have spent time at either a two-year program or another four-year university before coming to Illinois

Decision Research

As students move through the admissions funnel from prospects to inquiries to applicants, messaging changes.

While students are in the awareness stage (sophomores and juniors), they receive content aimed at helping them explore universities and academic interest areas. Awareness-stage content is built around the idea that Illinois can be a resource as students explore schools and programs they might be interested in.

In the consideration stage (juniors and seniors), students are actively exploring a narrowed list of universities or interest areas. During this stage, exploration content transitions throughout the year to marketing content about Illinois.

At the decision stage (late seniors), content focuses on Illinois, including the application and enrollment process. At this point, students have decided where they will apply or have completed applications and are actively making their college choice from a list of schools that includes Illinois.

PROSPECT → AWARENESS STAGE → CONSIDERATION STAGE → DECISION STAGE → ENROLLEE

Figure 1 - The admissions decision process
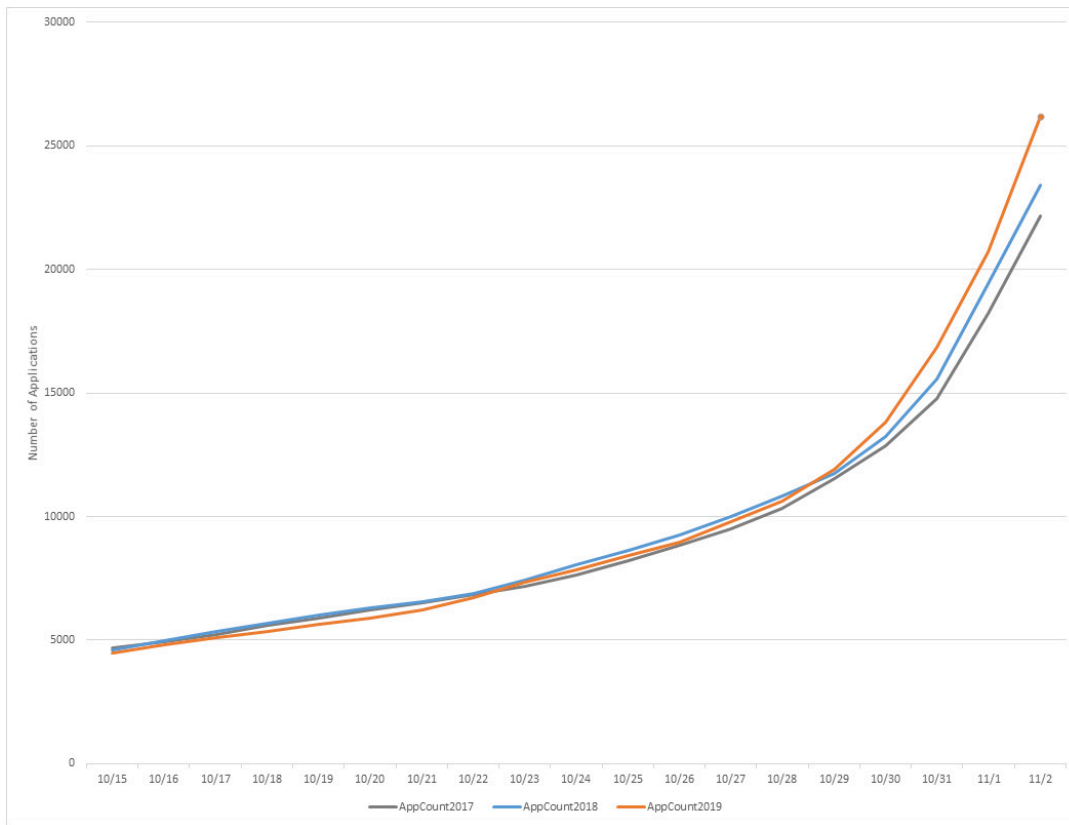
Figure 2 - Total number of applications per day leading up to our early action deadline

Research further tells us that while students do condense their lists, they often don't narrow much until they have to submit applications, and they may still be applying to 10 or more schools.

More students submit their applications closer to the application deadline each year (figure 2), making the application pool harder to predict. Decisions also continue to be made closer to National College Decision Day on May 1, making the incoming class more difficult to predict before they commit.

In-State Context

In-state students make up a significant portion of our incoming classes (70%+), especially compared to some of our Big Ten peers (Figure 3).

However, the in-state population is predicted to shrink rapidly in the coming years, and with it the number of Illinois high school graduates (Figure 4).

These predicted decreases include the African American school-age population (Figure 5). In addition, Illinois, especially the Chicagoland area, has become a fertile recruiting ground for strong universities across the country.

To better position ourselves in-state, we continue to advertise Illinois Commitment, which has helped increase the number of applicants from low-income, downstate, and underrepresented groups.

As in-state populations decrease and the competition increases, boosting out-of-state student numbers also becomes more important. Illinois has continued to invest in international and out-of-state recruitment, with the hiring of regional representatives in Florida/Georgia, New York/New Jersey, Northern California, Southern California, and Texas, as well as an international recruiter. Advertising dollars have also been invested to complement regional recruitment efforts.

	2017 % Residents	2018 % Residents
Rutgers	83.8%	83.4%
Nebraska	75.2%	70.0%
Illinois	73.3%	76.8%
Michigan State	72.2%	77.8%
Maryland	70.3%	60.9%
Ohio State	70.0%	67.1%
Minnesota	63.2%	*Not Reported*
Iowa	46.9%	58.2%
Wisconsin	57.7%	53.2%
Indiana	57.4%	55.5%
Michigan	57.0%	51.0%
Penn State	53.8%	53.0%
Purdue	51.6%	51.4%
Northwestern	26.7%	*Not Reported*

Figure 3 - Big Ten universities ranked by resident student percentage
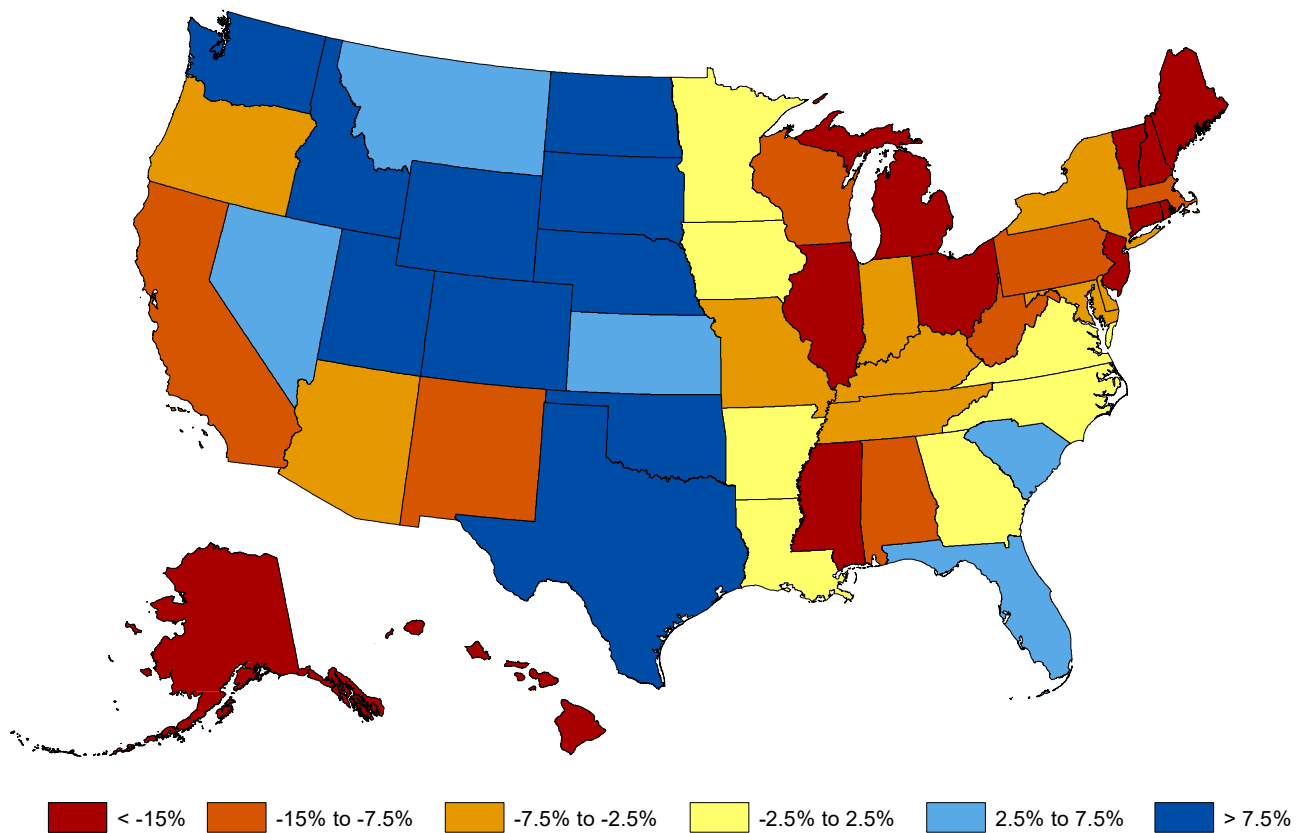
Figure 4 - Projected growth/decline among high school graduates (Nathan D. Grawe, Carleton College)

White non-Hispanic

Hispanic

Asian/Pacific Islander

Black non-Hispanic

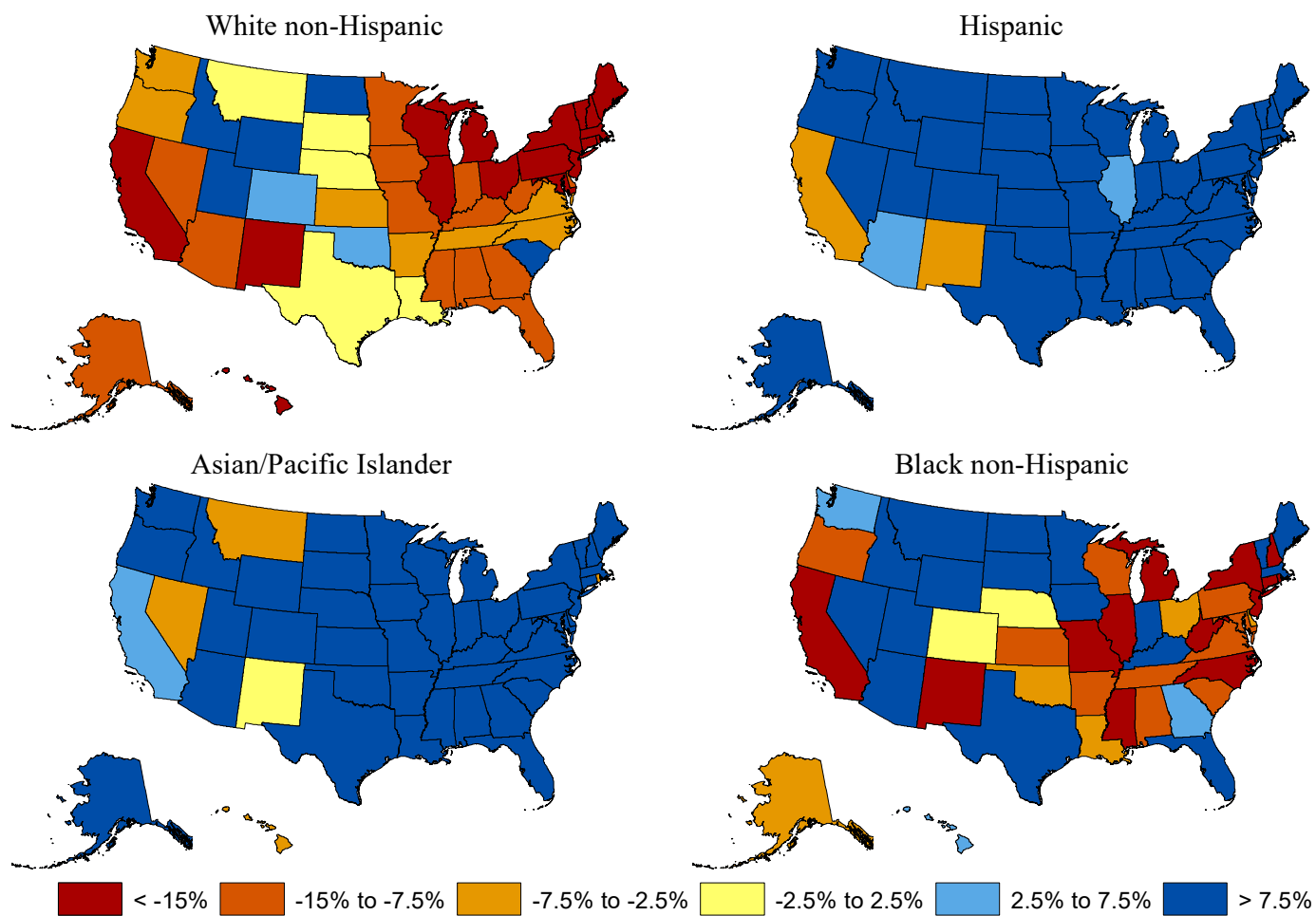|					
< -15%	-15% to -7.5%	-7.5% to -2.5%	-2.5% to 2.5%	2.5% to 7.5%	> 7.5%

Figure 5 - Projected growth/decline in high school graduates by race/ethnicity (Nathan D. Grawe, Carleton College)

Section II: Research

We use the data we collect to study trends about what our audiences like, dislike, and engage with. While much of our data comes from our communications efforts and online platforms, we also create and field surveys of our own. Each year, we send out an accept/decline survey as well as a variety of visit evaluation surveys meant to improve our processes and set baselines for student opinion.

Areas of research for the 2021 cycle include:

- Surveying pop-up form inquiries to better understand this audience
- Holding a focus group with high school students to refine video content
- Researching digital ad concepts to determine balance between general brand messaging and admissions-specific messaging
- Evaluating accept/decline survey results by residency
- Researching stealth applicants to gain insights
- Surveying high school students about YouTube viewing habits

Section III: Marketing Programs

Content Marketing

Content Marketing is a way to showcase key messages and serves as a point for engagement online. Materials include blogs, stories, and videos meant to be shared and found through search.

Objectives:

- Increase incoming website traffic and new prospects
- Boost search-engine uptake
- Build and strengthen brand awareness
- Build trust and rapport with audience
- Showcase authentic student experience
- Explain our story and personality
- Support social media initiatives

Tactics:

- Post blog articles about college search process (non-Illinois specific)
- Optimize titles and pages for search through SEMrush keyword research
- Engage with audience comments and questions
- Post video content to website and social media
- Share articles and stories through social media

Success Metrics:

- Increase search rankings
- Increase organic search traffic
- Have three content marketing pieces in first page of Google search results using in-state keywords

How to Talk to Your Child About College

Illinois Admissions · April 19, 2019 · Add comment · 3 min read

Talking to your child isn't always easy, especially when it comes to something as big as college. Here's some advice to help you and your family better communicate throughout your child's college search process.

Start the conversation.

Whether this comes in the form of an impromptu discussion over dinner or a full-on family meeting, the important thing is to open the lines of communication. This includes sharing your expectations and learning your child's preferences.

For example, does your child have any colleges or majors already in mind? Are you hoping they'll consider other options? Also, who will be paying for what? If you're footing the bill, do you have certain cost restrictions?

Being open and honest with one another now can help you avoid any incorrect assumptions later on.

Listen.

When your child shares their hopes for the future with you, listen to them. Acknowledging that you care about what they're saying and that they are part of the decision-making process is crucial, even if you have differing opinions.

The day your child was born, you probably pictured who they were going to someday become, and you've likely held a lot of hopes and dreams for them ever since. It's wonderful that you care so much. Sometimes, though, you can become so wrapped up in your own hopes for someone else that you may fail to realize their goals are different. Showing your child that you're aware of their goals can go a long way.
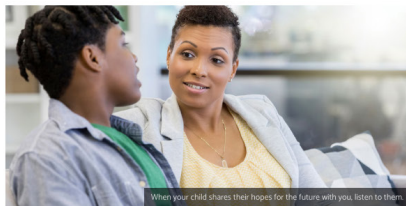
When your child shares their hopes for the future with you, listen to them.

Let your child take the lead.

Although it may be tempting to sign up for college mailing lists in your child's name or to schedule their campus visits for them, allow your child to take charge of their own college search. Not only will this help them feel more empowered, but it will also better prepare them for college itself.

If you feel like your child is less than proactive, try not to stress too much right now. Just because your child isn't doing anything yet doesn't mean they're not thinking about it. And just because your child hasn't told you they've done anything yet doesn't mean they've been sitting idly by. Which leads us to our next point ...

Keep the conversation going.

This doesn't mean that you need to check in with your child weekly—nor do we recommend it unless you want to have one grumpy teenager on your hands. But talk to your child occasionally to see if they've added any new colleges or

Illini 4000

February 11, 2020 · 9 minute read

Before coming to college, Marie and Christina never dreamed they'd spend a summer biking 4000 miles from coast to coast. Four years later, with 8000+ miles between the two of them, they now help other students complete the same journey with one goal in mind: finding a cure for cancer.

The only completely student-run nonprofit of its kind, Illini 4000 bikes across the country each summer for cancer awareness. Christina (top row, second from right), the organization's president, and Marie (bottom row, far right), its director of fundraising, sat down with us to talk more about the important work Illini 4000 does.

What is Illini 4000?

Marie: Illini 4000 is a student-run nonprofit. Our mission is broken into three big things. The thing we're known for is sending a group of students biking across the country every summer to raise awareness for cancer research and patient support services. The second part is raising money for these services throughout the year. Thirdly, while we bike across the country, we document the American cancer experience through the Portraits Project. We interview people across the country about their experience with cancer and how they've dealt with it. And then we'll transcribe those stories or have video interviews, and we'll put them on our website so that other people dealing with cancer can see them.

Blogs, Stories, & Video

Content marketing is designed to engage audiences through organic search and tell stories about campus life without directly addressing actions such as applying.

Digital Advertising

Objectives:

- Build and strengthen brand awareness
- Generate new leads
- Increase exposure and interest beyond the organic
- Drive traffic to the illinois.edu ecosystem
- Encourage actions (explore, sign up, apply, visit, accept)

Tactics:

- Advertise on Facebook, Instagram, and Google
- Target ads by audience (underrepresented, out-of-state, etc.)
- Serve attention-grabbing content, including videos, photography, and unique messaging

Success Metrics:

- Bring all digital ads under $1 per click through testing
- Utilize tracking pixels to refine audiences

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Sponsored

Visit Instagram Profile

illiniview Track and field, Illinois Commitment, and so much more. Learn all about Samuel's journey t... more

Our digital ads are all about variety, including different content, target audiences, and calls to action.

University of Illinois Admissions
Sponsored · 🌐

Four years. Free tuition. In-state students. Family income $61,000 or less. Starting fall 2019. #IllinoisCommitment

ADMISSIONS.ILLINOIS.EDU/C...
Four Years. Free Tuition.   LEARN MORE

👍❤️😠 32   8 Comments 7 Shares

University of Illinois Admissions
Sponsored · 🌐

No Illinois? No cat videos. Students like you make us who we are - a top public university.

ADMISSIONS.ILLINOIS.EDU
Join our legacy.   LEARN MORE

👍❤️😆 169   6 Comments 10 Shares

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

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We want brains! Apply with yours by tomorrow. 🧠

Link in bio.

19

Direct Mail (Print)

Objectives:

- Build and strengthen brand awareness
- Provide keepsake materials (quality admit letters, stickers, magnets, etc.)
- Encourage actions (explore, sign up, apply, visit, accept)
- Educate audiences about Illinois and the application process
- Share stories and brand personality
- Show appreciation and express interest toward students

Tactics:

- Packets
- Self-mailers
- Postcards
- Swag

Success Metrics:

- Assess effectiveness through focus groups, surveys, and test mail groups
- Increase mail sent to African American students

Booklets, Postcards, Magnets, & More

Our direct mail pieces focus on purpose, whether that's informing audiences about our campus and our processes or building our brand.

Email

In-house surveys show that email is the number one way students wish to be contacted by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. It is also one of the most direct methods of communication with our audience.

Objectives:

- Serve as the main driver of our marketing plan
- Assist students with admissions and application processes
- Deliver key messages
- Encourage actions (explore, sign up, visit, apply, and accept, as well as transactional tasks such as sending transcripts, etc.)
- Generate website traffic
- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics:

- Application cycle emails (dates and deadlines)
- Operational emails (status updates and transactional communications such as requesting transcripts, etc.)
- Targeted emails by audience (underrepresented, out-of-state, transfer, etc.)
- Personalized emails from individuals such as admissions counselors
- Content marketing emails (helpful communications, not necessarily Illinois-focused)
- Event emails (invites and reminders)
- Key message emails (brand building)

Success Metrics:

- Increase open rates by 3%, specifically with prospect and inquiry emails
- Conduct A/B tests regularly to refine methods
- Monitor click rates, as many of our emails are designed to drive traffic to online content

ILLINOIS

How to Find the Perfect Illinois Major for You

Our online tool lets you explore your options! For each major we offer, you'll find a program description, what a typical student looks like, related careers, post-graduation stats, and more.

Explore Majors

ILLINOIS

"What I Wish I Knew in High School"

We recently asked our students, "What's one piece of advice you'd give the high school version of yourself?" We hope their answers help as you navigate the halls of your high school.

Read More

ILLINOIS

Chris, you're an Illini!

Accept Your Offer

You've Got Mail

Email is our number one way to communicate with students, and we have dedicated tracks for a wide range of segmented audiences.

Events

Admissions events include on-campus visits, off-campus programming, college fairs, and high school visits. For the upcoming cycle, we hope to set lead-acquisition targets for these events for the first time.

Objectives:

- Provide noteworthy customer service
- Educate
- Generate leads
- Showcase campus
- Build and strengthen brand awareness
- Engage and entertain

Tactics:

- Presentations
- Tours
- Handouts
- Photo ops
- College meetings
- Resource fairs
- Current student Q&A/interaction
- Table display and presentation
- Signage
- Swag

Success Metrics:

- Set lead-acquisition targets for travel and events
- Increase conversions
- Assess feedback through surveys
- Increase off-season visit numbers

Getting Together
Events allow us to meet face-to-face with students and their families. We aim to provide excellent customer service and create positive experiences.

Handouts

Objectives:

- Provide a physical takeaway for later reference
- Complement counselor interactions and presentations
- Help students and families navigate campus visits
- Assist students with admissions and application processes
- Deliver key messages
- Encourage actions (explore, sign up, apply, visit, accept)
- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics:

- Distribute print and swag items at events such as campus visits, counselor articulation, college fairs, and high school visits

Success Metrics:

- Gather feedback through direct interactions
- Assess effectiveness through focus groups and surveys

Important Takeaways
Along with booklets and informational materials, many of our handouts are keepsake items such as socks and pennants.

Search

Many of our marketing programs are designed to generate leads; however, search is specific to name purchases through testing agencies and other college search partners. Knowing that testing companies may no longer be able to sell names or may sell far fewer due to privacy concerns for minors, the search process will likely change rapidly for colleges and universities. After diversifying our lead-generating techniques this past year, we should be well positioned to handle this change.

Objectives:

- Generate leads
- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics:

- Purchase names through testing agencies and search partners such as Cappex, College Board, and ACT
- Maintain search vendor profile pages

Success Metrics:

- Increase conversions (inquire, apply, enroll)
- Keep cost per name low
- Increase average website names per day by 5%
- Increase the number of students providing additional information by 5%
- Decrease the number of stealth applicants by increasing conversions
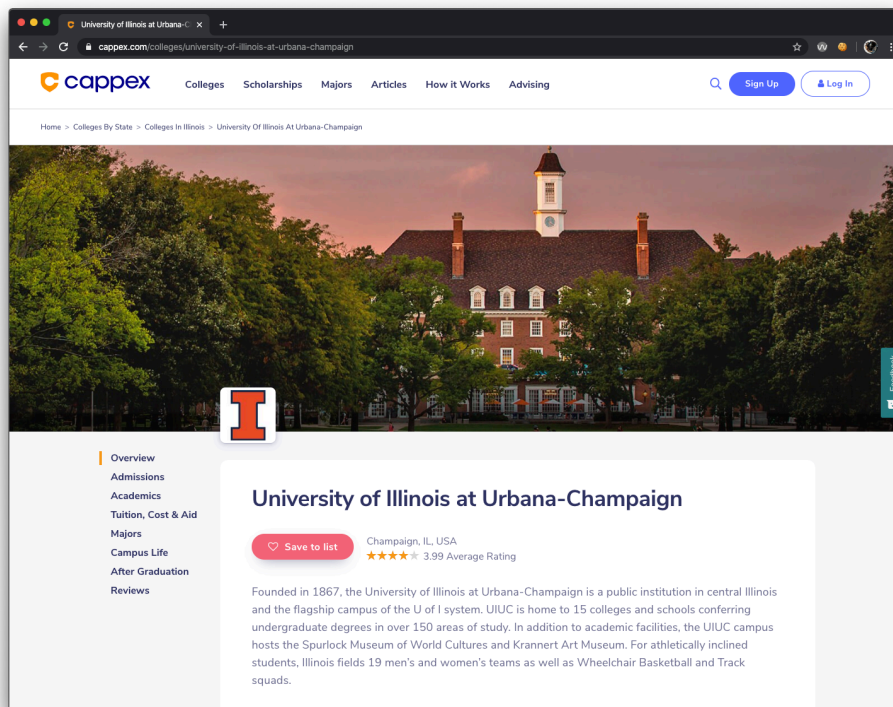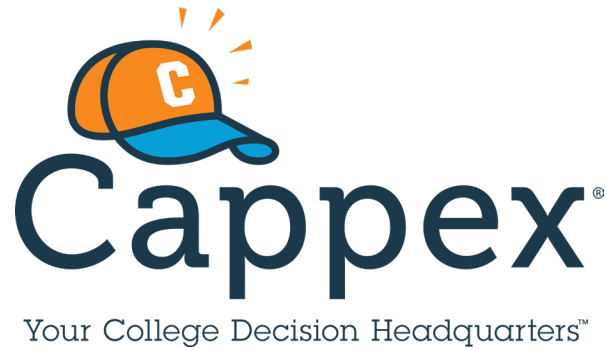
Search Party

College Board and Cappex are two important partners for generating leads. In addition to purchasing names, we maintain campus profile information for students to discover while using these college search platforms.

Social Media

Social media is seen as an advertising platform, as it plays host to a lot of our digital advertising. As an extension of our advertising strategy, free social media engagement is excellent.

Objectives:

- Engage with audiences
- Generate leads
- Share information
- Provide customer service
- Increase followers
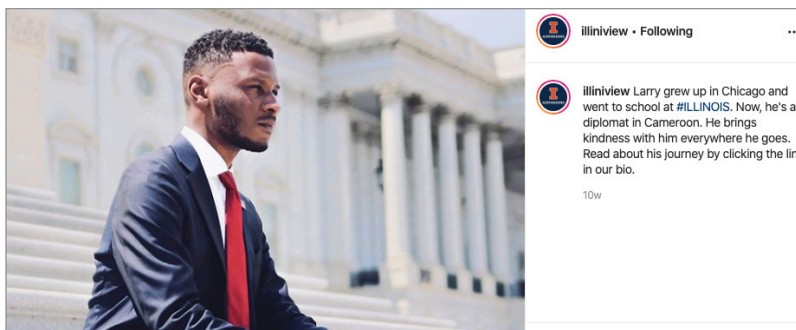- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics:

- Utilize multiple platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter)
- Encourage action (explore, sign up, apply, visit, accept)
- Post engaging content
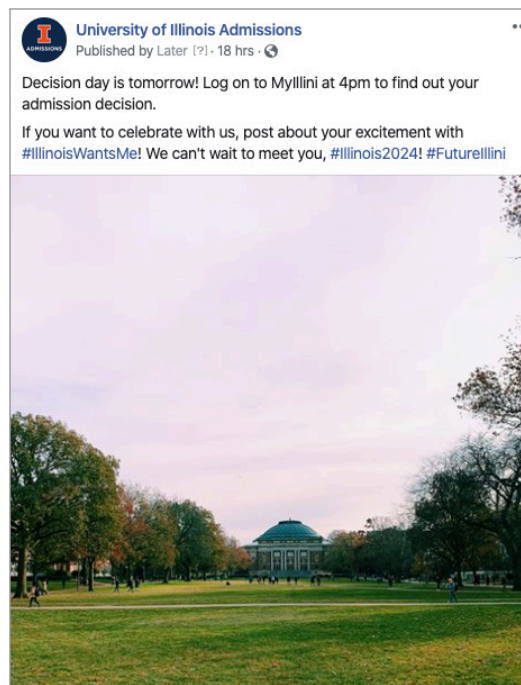- Respond to comments and questions
- Share live video

Success Metrics:

- Reach 12,000 followers on Instagram
- Reach 11,000 followers on Facebook
- Reach 5,500 followers on Twitter

illiniview • Following

illiniview Over 2/3 of undergrads at #ILLINOIS participate in research. Thank goodness we have an entire office for that! Learn more by clicking the link in our bio.

4d

265 likes
4 DAYS AGO

Add a comment...   Post

illiniview • Following

illiniview Larry grew up in Chicago and went to school at #ILLINOIS. Now, he's a diplomat in Cameroon. He brings kindness with him everywhere he goes. Read about his journey by clicking the link in our bio.

10w

Follow Us!
We share stories, stats, and helpful admissions information on our social media channels.

Illinois Admissions
@uofiadmissions

Faith is a young, charismatic environmentalist with a can-do attitude and a beloved Beagle Lab mix named Sam. Now, thanks to Illinois Commitment, she's also an Illini.

journeys.illinois.edu/2020/02/18/a-r...

9:55 AM · Feb 19, 2020 · LaterMedia

1 Retweet   6 Likes

University of Illinois Admissions
Published by Later [?] · 18 hrs · 🌐

Decision day is tomorrow! Log on to MyIllini at 4pm to find out your admission decision.

If you want to celebrate with us, post about your excitement with #IllinoisWantsMe! We can't wait to meet you, #Illinois2024! #FutureIllini

Text Messaging

Text messaging efforts have been minimal up to this point, including several tests built around event/deadline reminders with a primary target of underrepresented populations. We intend to expand the role of text messaging in the 2021 cycle while recognizing that an abundance of texts should not be sent.

Objectives:

- Assist students with admissions and application processes
- Encourage actions (apply, visit, accept)
- Build trust
- Foster one-to-one communication

Tactics:

- Student-to-student communication
- Deadline reminders
- Event reminders
- Targeted messages by audience

Success Metrics:

- Increase the number of prospective student records with mobile numbers attached and increase opt-in percentage

Video Marketing

Students are watching how-to videos and being entertained on YouTube. To meet them where they are, we must create entertaining ways for students to digest information they may need. This year, we will continue to expand our content for YouTube and encourage channel subscriptions.

Objectives:

- Entertain and inform
- Convey information in a more digestible way
- Encourage YouTube subscriptions
- Generate leads
- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics

- Utilize multiple platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram TV, TikTok)
- Promote lead-generation ads
- Answer common questions (counselor videos)
- Showcase student life (Day in the Life series)
- Showcase campus (Touring Time series)
- Encourage action
- Produce CU-specific content

Success Metrics:

- Double the number of YouTube subscribers
- Increase total video views on Facebook by 50%
- Improve video searchability through keyword research

Lights, Camera, Action!
Video is a great platform to communicate, educate, and entertain. Our goal is to use YouTube to bring organic traffic into the University of Illinois ecosystem.

Website

The admissions website (admissions.illinois.edu) is the primary hub of information about the application process, campus life, majors, and much more. Our expanded web ecosystem includes a student story site (journeys.illinois.edu) and a blog (blog. admissions.illinois.edu). Through these additional sites, prospective students receive a more intimate picture of campus through slice-of-life posts and personal accounts from current students.

Objectives:

- Serve as primary authority for admissions and application information
- Generate leads (easy-to-access inquiry forms)
- Provide quality user experience
- Present information in an accessible and easy-to-find way
- Allow for easy navigation and task completion
- Build and strengthen brand awareness

Tactics:

- Majors list with detailed program pages
- myIllini (application and admitted checklist)
- Inquiry forms (expanded and pop-up)
- Visit calendar and registration information
- Landing pages
- FAQs
- Gated content

Success Metrics:

- Increase traffic from all sources via SEO
- Maintain traffic boost from Illinois Commitment
- Increase Journey's traffic by 300% (20,000 unique users)
- Increase action conversions on the site (sign-ups and event registration)
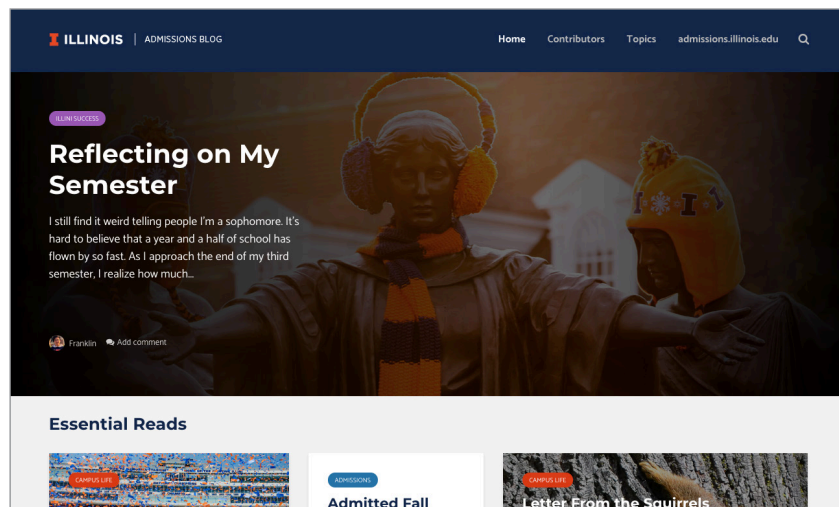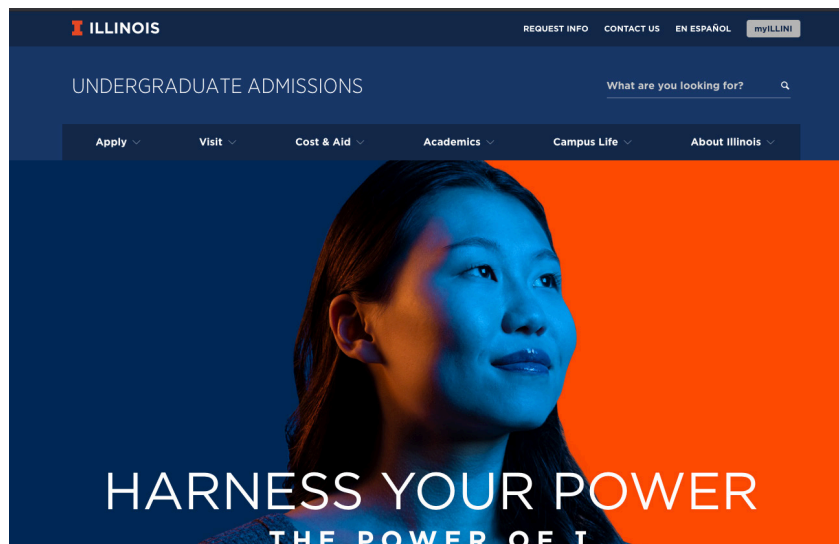
The Hub
Most of our communications direct our audience to the web, where we manage the main admissions site, a student story site, and a blog.

Questions?

If you have specific questions regarding the marketing plan for undergraduate admissions, please email Doug Burgett at dburgett@illinois.edu. We're always happy to help and form new partnerships to improve our efforts.

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