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Website Optimization

Developing + Optimizing High-Performing Program Pages

DIGITAL WORKSHOP | MAY 2024

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PRESENTER

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- AVP, Content and SEO
- New Englander, former adjunct professor of English
- The Confident and Adventurous Seeker

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Agenda

1. Building a Program Page Ecosystem
2. Understanding Search Behavior
3. Structuring Content

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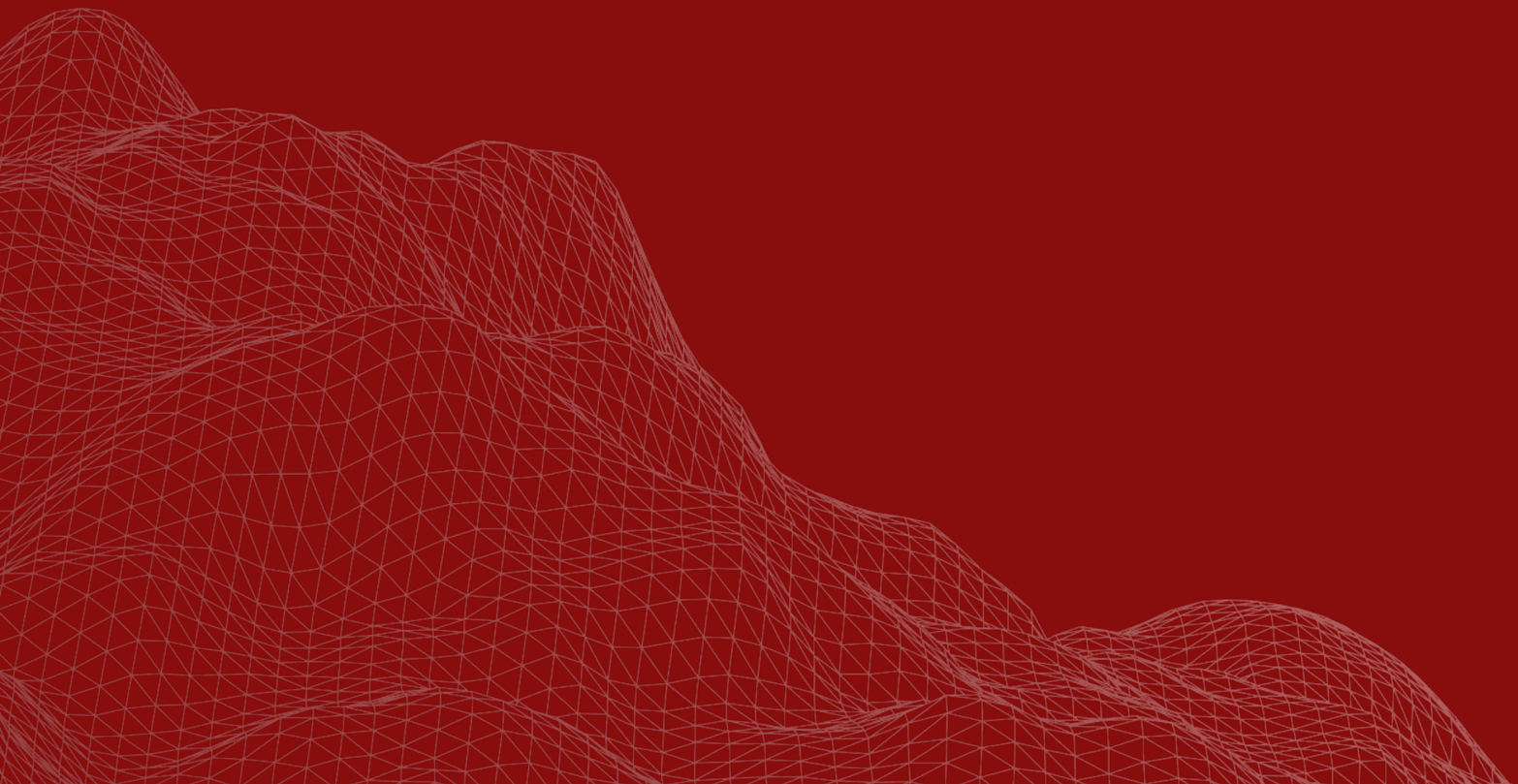
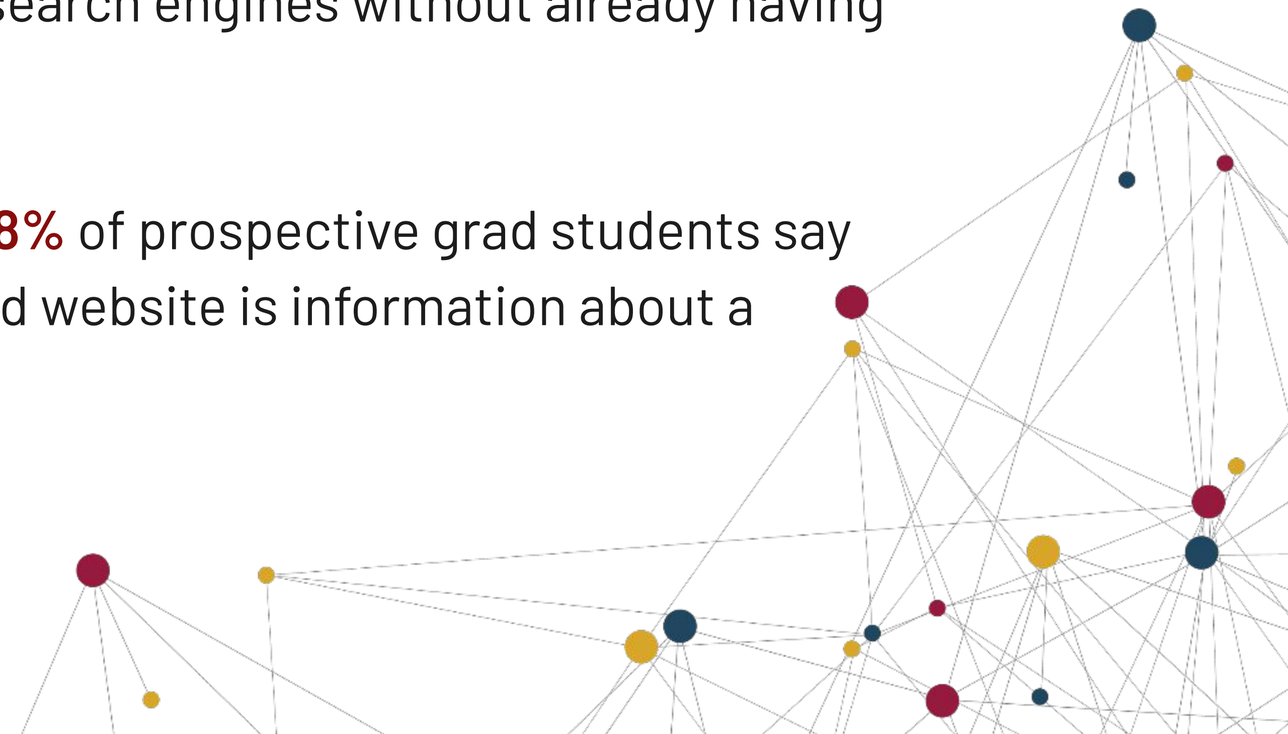
Building a Program Page Ecosystem



Why are program pages so important?

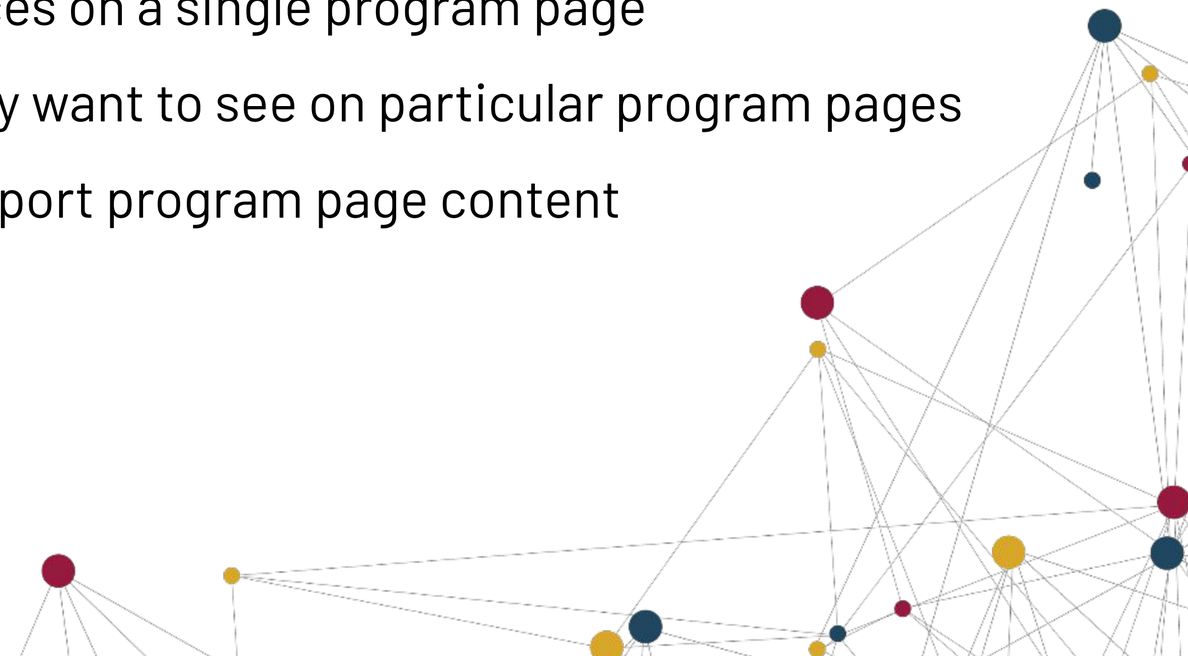
- Program pages are some of the most important content on your website, both for SEO and user experience.
- **82%** of prospective undergraduate students and **73%** of graduate students say they begin searching for schools in search engines without already having an institution in mind.
- **51%** of prospective of undergrads and **48%** of prospective grad students say the first thing they look for on a higher ed website is information about a specific major.



Where are we falling short with our approach?

Many institutions still follow outdated practices:

- Keeping content short on these pages because “students won't read a lot of content”
- Making the language on these pages too dry or technical
- Trying to speak to too many different audiences on a single program page
- Not researching what topics students actually want to see on particular program pages
- Not building out additional child pages to support program page content



Program Page Ecosystem

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT A PROGRAM PAGE STRATEGY, WE ARE *NOT* JUST TALKING ABOUT ONE PAGE.

- It's **no longer enough** to have only one page on your website devoted to a program.
- You need multiple pages, **exploring different topics**
- Meet prospects **at different stages** of their college search journey
- Send a signal to Google that **you are an expert on this topic**—from an SEO perspective

Program Page Ecosystem

Bachelor's in Business Administration Degree - **On Campus**

Bachelor's in Business Administration Degree - **Online**

Finance concentration

Economics concentration

Business Administration Admissions Requirements

Business Administration Curriculum

Business Administration Faculty

What careers can I get with a business administration degree?

Business Administration Alumni Profile

THINK ABOUT THE PROGRAM PAGE ECOSYSTEM WITH GOOGLE AI OVERVIEWS

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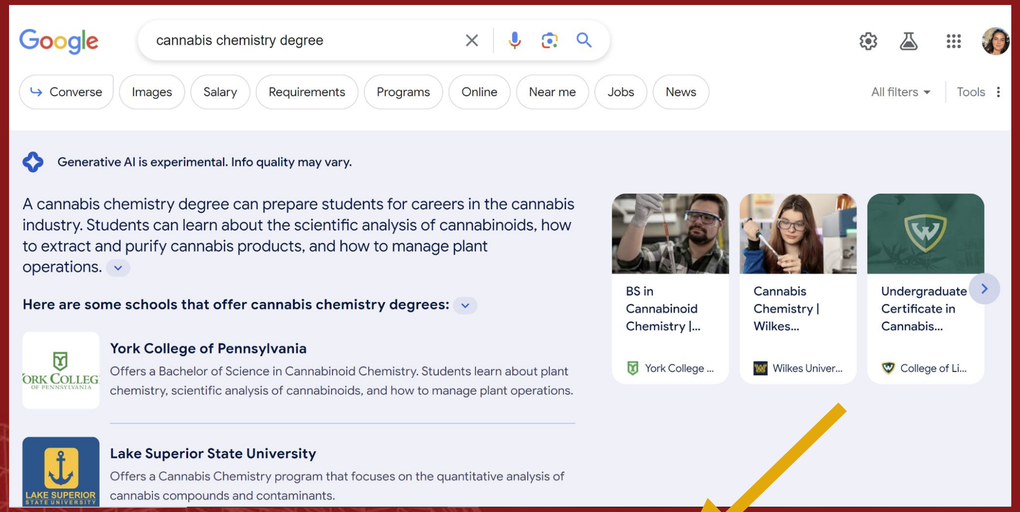
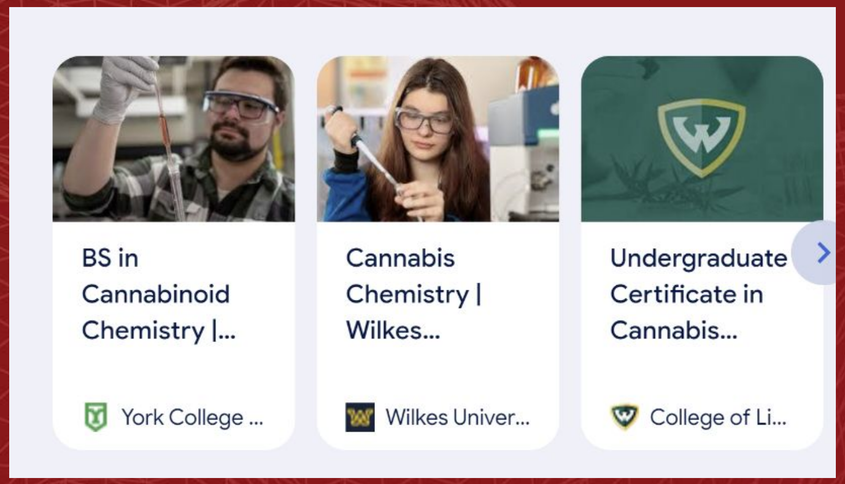
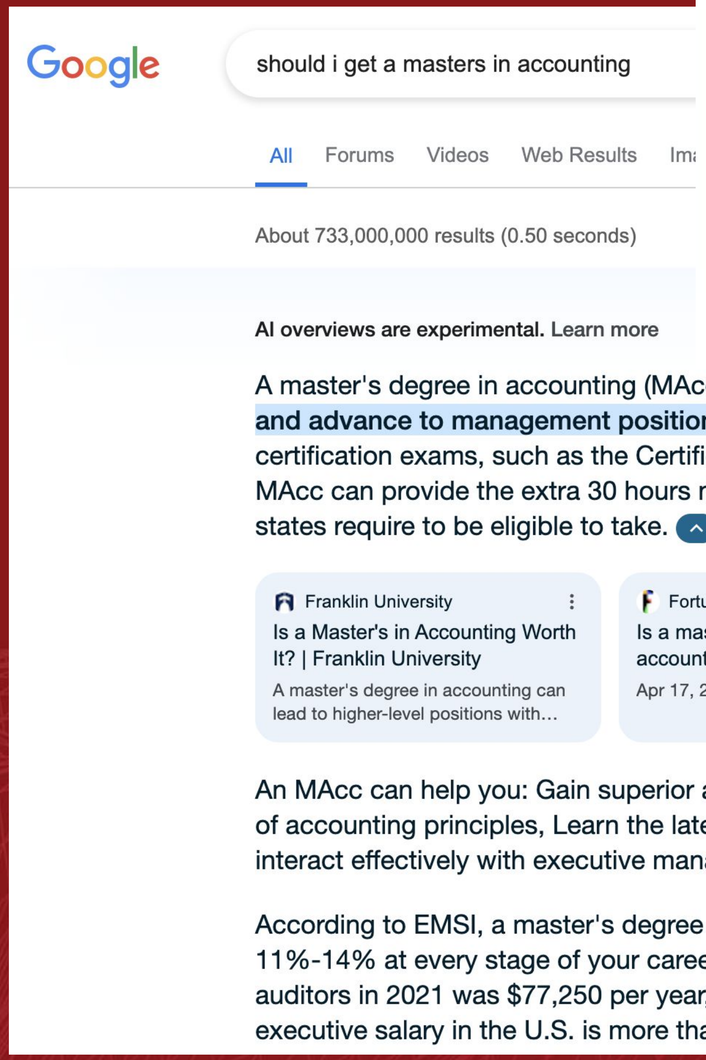
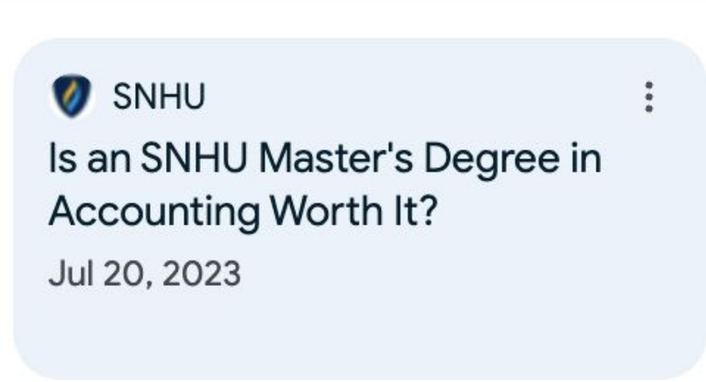






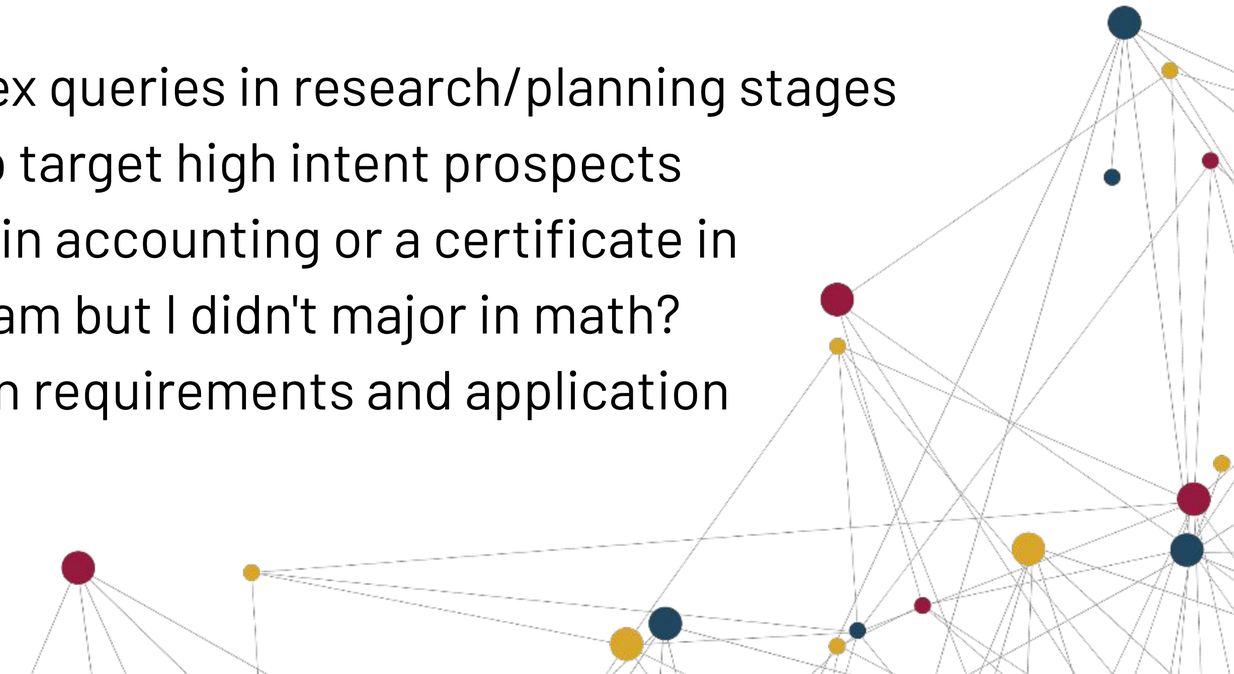


Search Behavior Evolution

+ Search is becoming much more conversational and specific
  - Tech behind AI Overviews allows the search engine to continue to tailor content based on previous queries through follow-up questions

+ People will change how they search and adapt different phrasing
  - Queries will get longer, “head terms” will be less prominent

+ AI Overviews will appear for the most complex queries in research/planning stages and end stages of college decisions, great to target high intent prospects
  - **Top of funnel:** Should I earn a master’s in accounting or a certificate in accounting if I want to take the CPA exam but I didn't major in math?
  - **Bottom of funnel:** RN to BSN admission requirements and application components for Ithaca College



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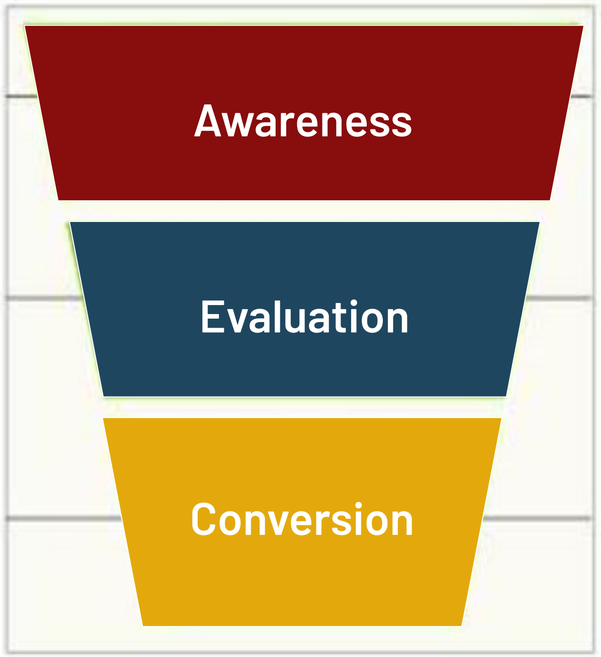
Student Search Behavior



+ Higher education has a very **long "buyer's journey."** Prospective students typically take years to decide where they want to pursue a degree. They visit your site many times throughout that journey.
+ Throughout that journey, their **search behavior evolves** as they narrow down their focus.
+ Your website should have content that **speaks to your audience at each stage**.

Meeting Prospects at Different Stages of the Conversion Funnel

Awareness

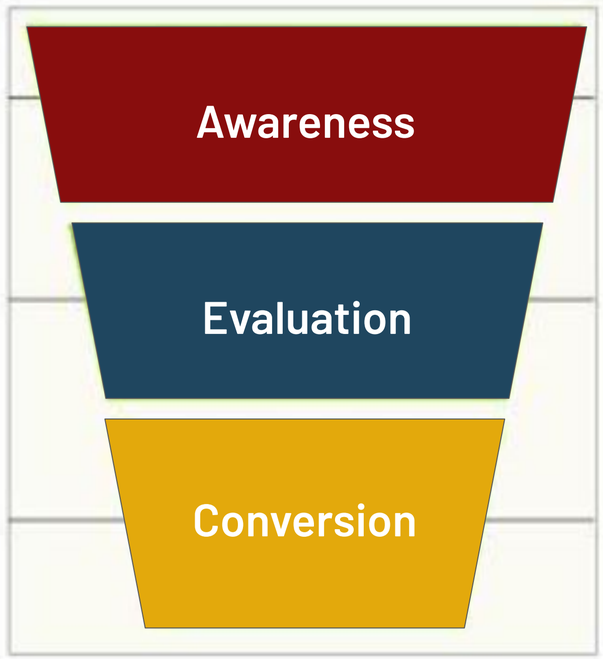
+ USERS REALIZE THEY HAVE INTEREST IN A PROGRAM, BUT NOT SURE WHAT IT IS OR WHERE TO APPLY

Evaluation

+ COMPARING OPTIONS
+ DECIDING IF THE PROGRAM FITS THEIR NEEDS

Conversion

+ KNOW THAT THEY WANT TO APPLY BUT NEED MORE HELP (FAQS, REVIEWS, INSTRUCTIONS)



+ “What careers can I get with a business administration degree”
+ “Why study business administration”

+ “Business administration programs in texas”
+ “Business administration degree vs. finance degree”

+ “Brand name” reviews
+ “bachelor’s in business administration admissions requirements”

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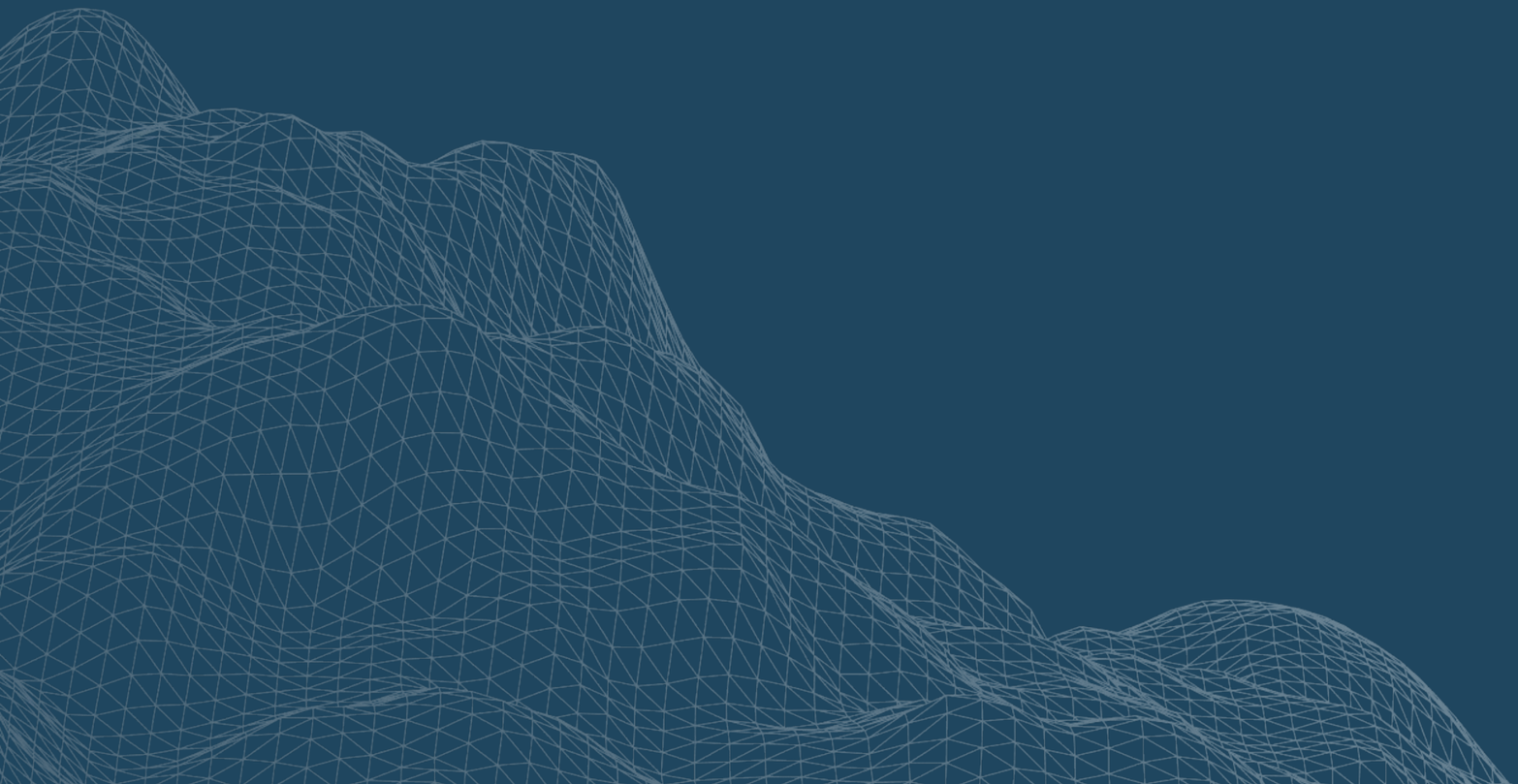
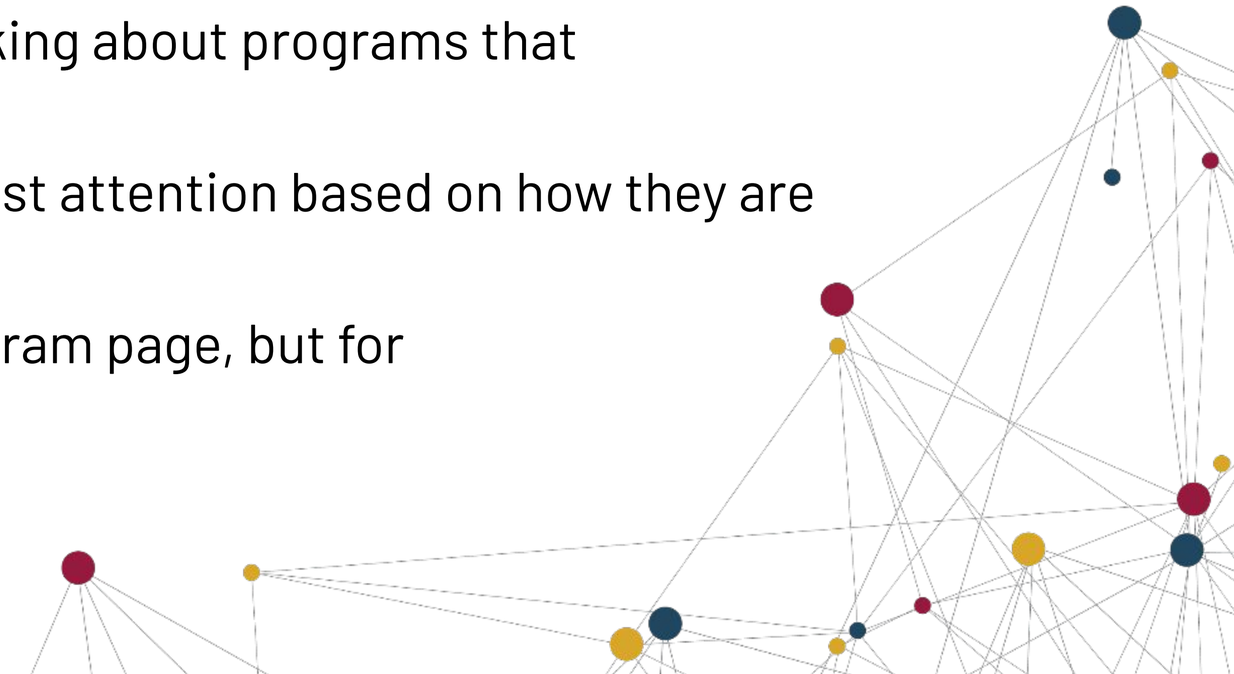
Understanding Search Behavior



Keyword Research

- Keyword Research is not just about identifying words and phrases to plug into your content, it's about understanding the psychology of prospective students. Identifying what questions they are asking about a program and what matters to them. Your content needs to illustrate an understanding of these needs.

- You can use first- and third-party data to:
  - Figure out questions prospects are asking about programs that you are not answering.
  - Figure out what programs need the most attention based on how they are already performing.
  - Develop a strategy not just for the program page, but for supporting pages as well.



Google Search Console

- Google Search Console (GSC) is a completely free tool that provides data on how your website appears in Google organic search results.

- It's a great way to see how your website currently performs in organic search results. You can use this data to create a proactive content strategy that meets your audiences' needs.

Google Search Console

GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE DATA

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Filtering for all keywords with the word “degree”

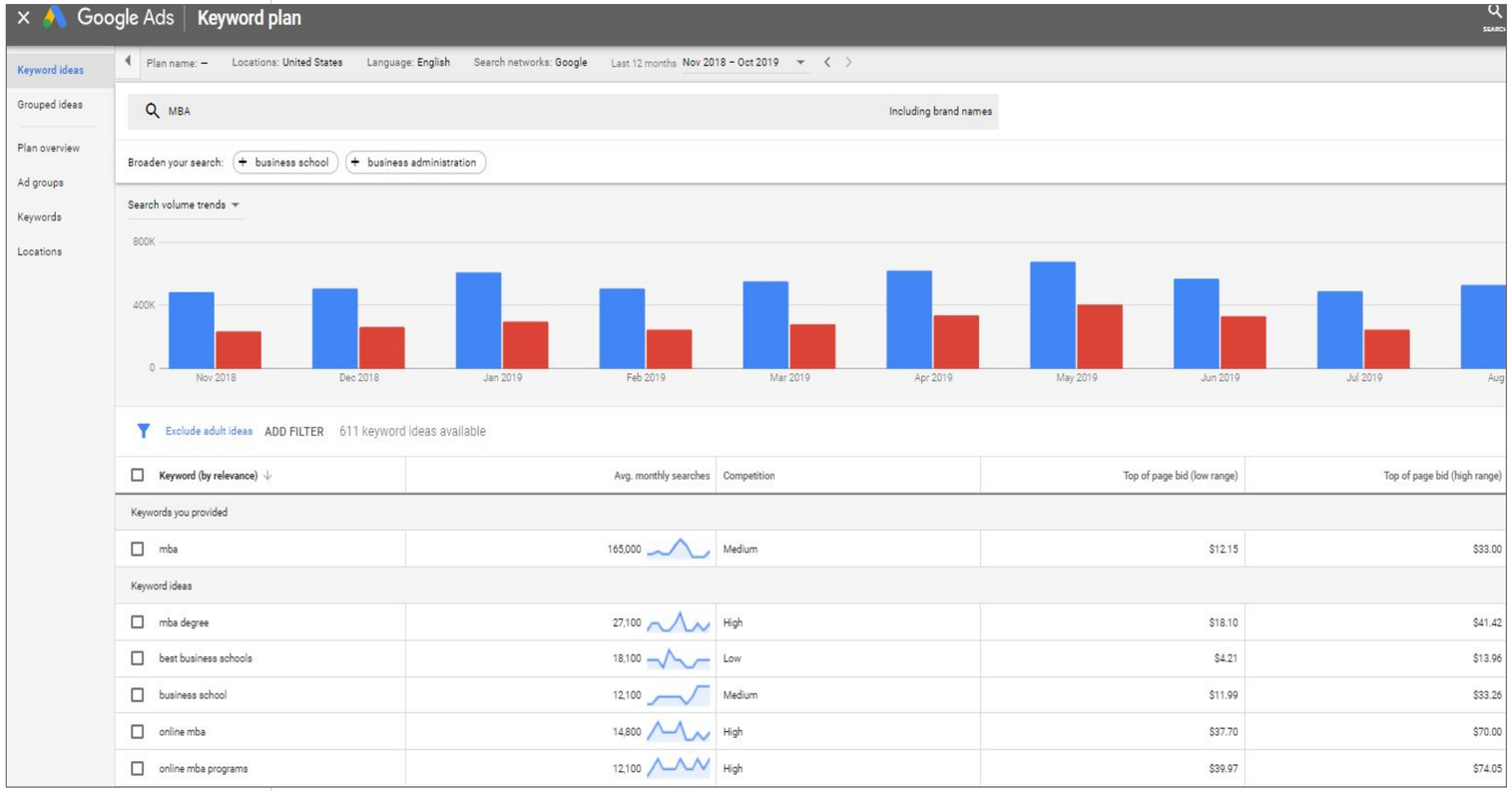
Top queries	↓ Clicks	Impressions
psychology degree	10	3,693
online bachelor degrees texas	10	502
online civil engineering degree texas	10	71
kinesiology degree	9	1,849
online biology degree texas	9	122
texas online degree programs	8	701
nursing degree online texas	8	36
online information technology degree texas	8	24
bba degree	7	1,446
msn mba dual degree	7	1,283
texas online degree	7	1,092
online kinesiology degree	7	956

Filtering for all keywords that the English major page has shown up for

Top queries	↓ Clicks	Impressions
what can you do with an english degree	201	6,034
what can i do with an english degree	105	2,507
what to do with an english degree	68	1,846

Google Keyword Planner

+ DATA FROM GOOGLE, GIVING SEARCH VOLUME FOR KEYWORDS ON GOOGLE
+ ORIGINALLY A PAID PPC TOOL, BUT GREAT FOR SEO RESEARCH
+ PROVIDES RELATED KEYWORDS OUTSIDE OF YOUR SEARCH
+ CAN SEARCH UP TO 10 KEYWORDS AT A TIME



Answer the Public

- Helpful in revealing what type of questions people are searching for online related to your keywords or topic
- Useful for expanding your content, meeting the needs and concerns of your audience
- Great tool to discover long-tail keywords for thought leadership content
- Free to use but has a daily limit for searches

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Keywords	Search Vol.	CPC
can mba in finance become ceo	10	-
does mba degree matter	-	-
can i get mba degree online	-	-
can i have two mba degree	10	-
what can mba degree do for you	1.9K	$14.43
can you get 2 mba degree	-	-
can mba be done after degree	-	-
is mba a dying degree	-	-
can you get two mba degrees	10	$21.94
is an mba degree really worth it	-	-

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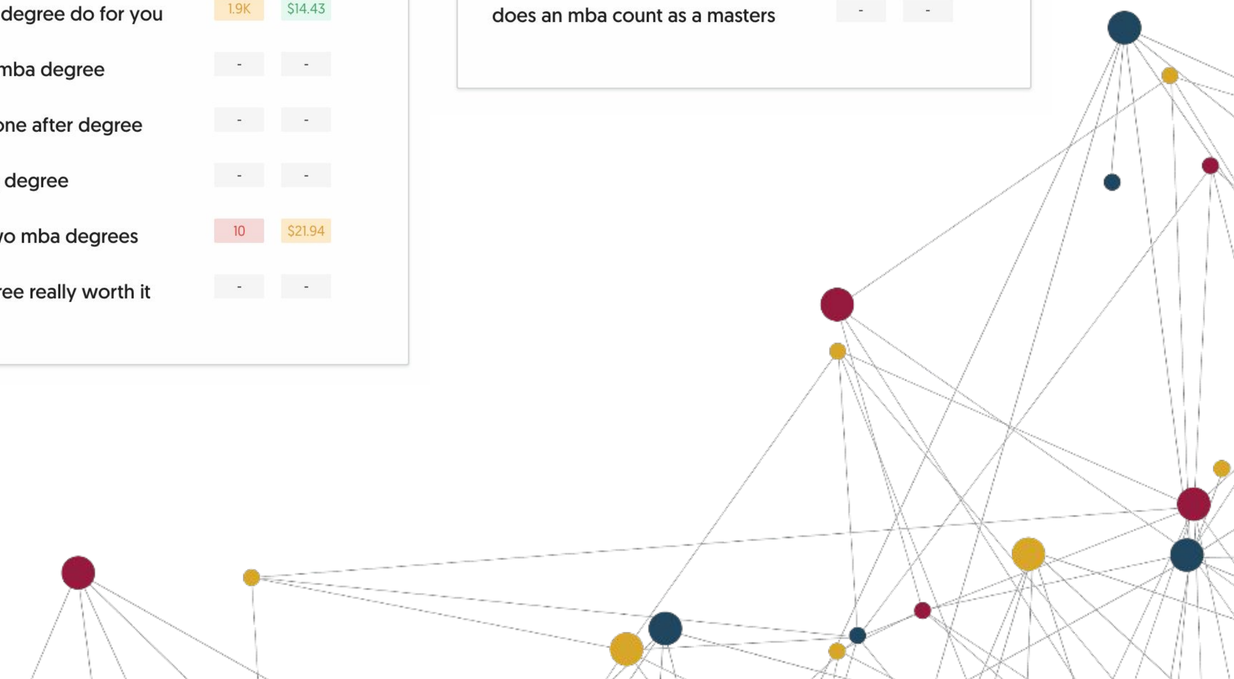
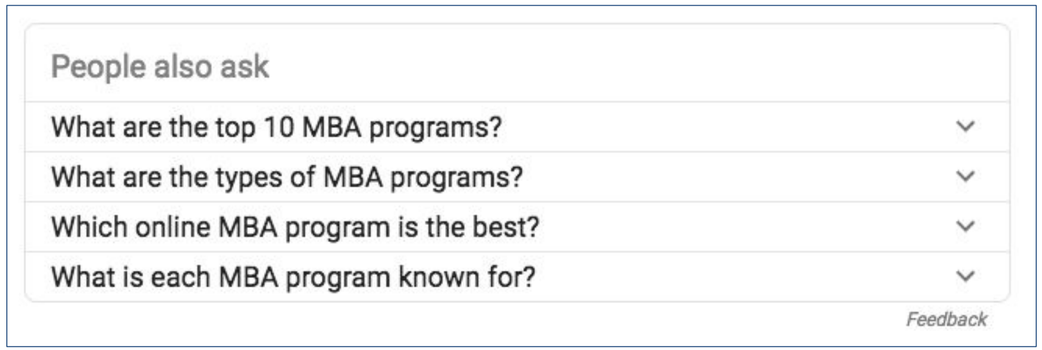
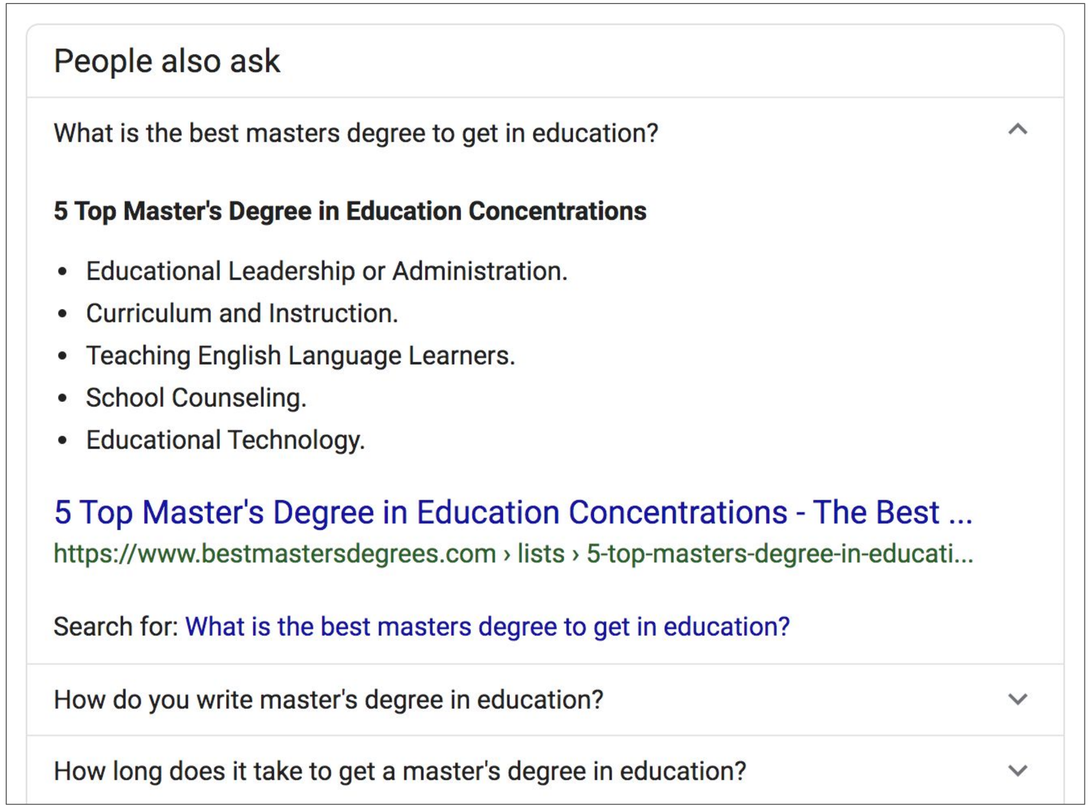
Keywords	Search Vol.	CPC
is mba degree	10	-
is an mba degree really worth it	-	-
is mba a dying degree	-	-
does an mba really make a difference	30	$36.82
does an mba count as a masters	-	-



Search Listening—People Also Ask

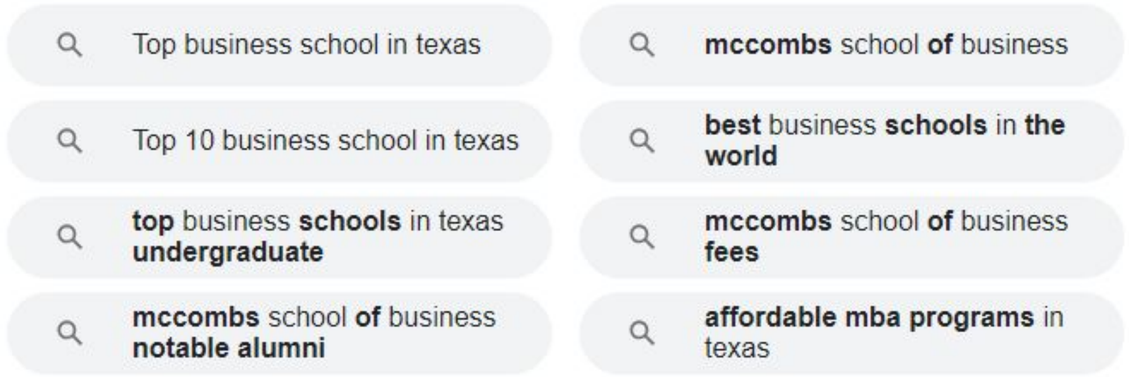
- Perform a Google search for a keyword you are interested in targeting, and see what the “People Also Ask” section contains to get ideas on what you should include in that piece of content.





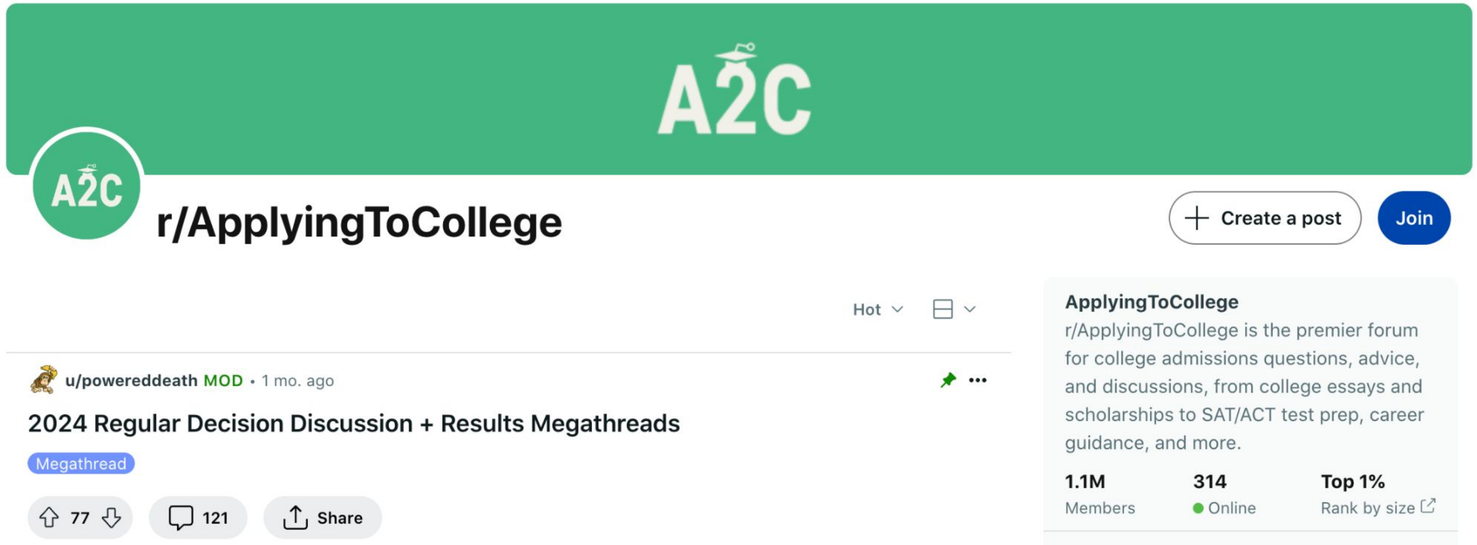
Search Listening—Related Searches

- Perform a Google search for a keyword you are interested in targeting and see what the “Related searches” section contains to get ideas on what you should include in that piece of content.



Social Listening

- Social listening refers to “the activity of monitoring and analyzing social media content that is related to or relevant for one's product or brand, as a means of improving customer outreach, product development, etc.”
- In addition to standard social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), you should also look at forum sites such as Reddit and Quora.
- Social listening can help you better understand your audience.



Making a Keyword List for Each Program

Top Keywords

- The most essential keyword(s) you are targeting, essential to the overall content of the page
- **Short-tail keywords**: typically less than 3 words, generate higher number of SERP results, more generic, less specific
  - Nursing degree
  - Bachelors in nursing
  - BSN program

Secondary Keywords

- Additional, important keywords that are relevant to the overall content, help to supplement and build out robust content
- **Long-tail keywords**: longer form, includes more information, generate lower number of SERP results, gives insight into the specificity of your audience, reveals higher intent
  - nursing degree how many years
  - is nursing degree worth it
  - bachelor of nursing degree online
  - how much nursing degree cost

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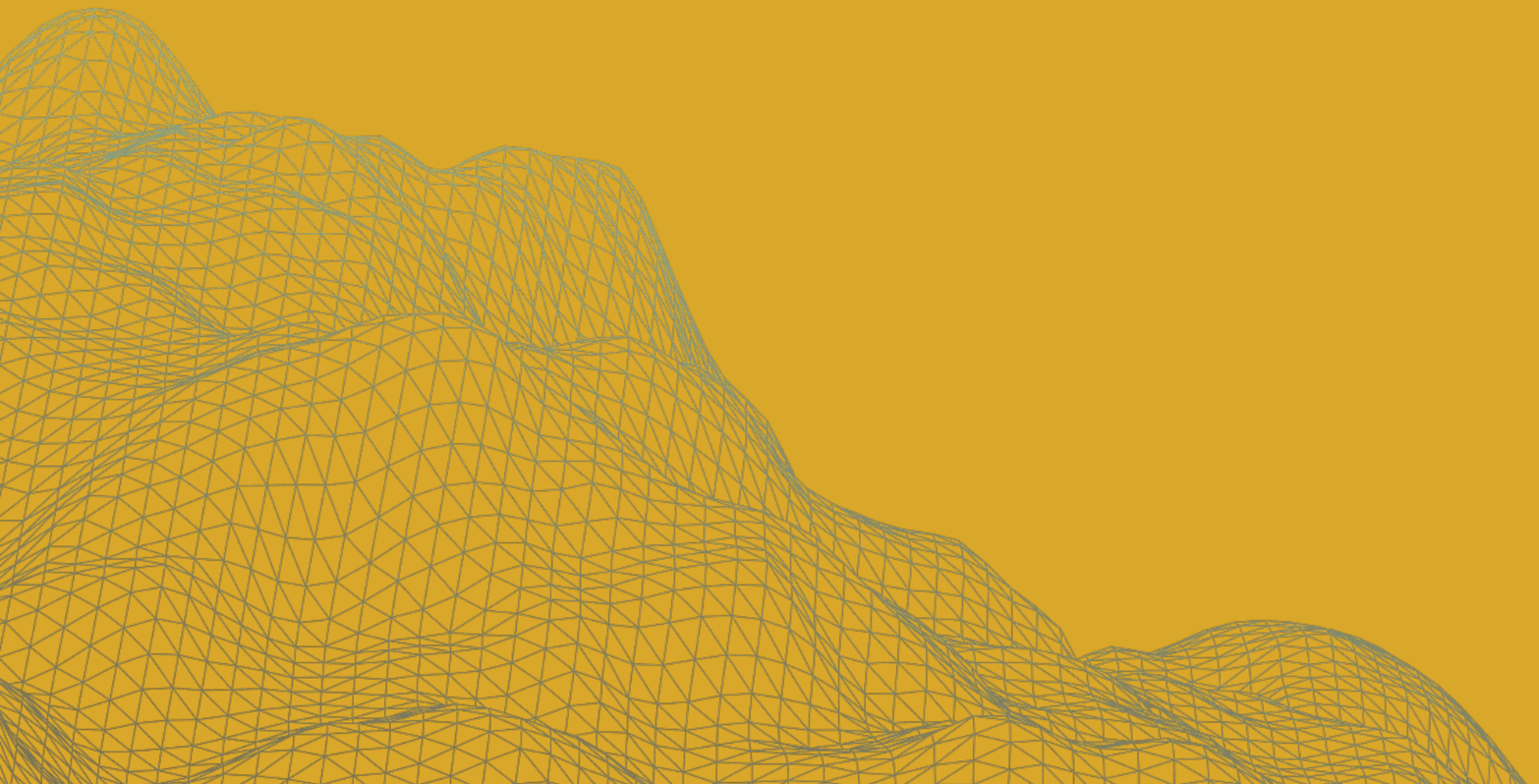
Structuring Content

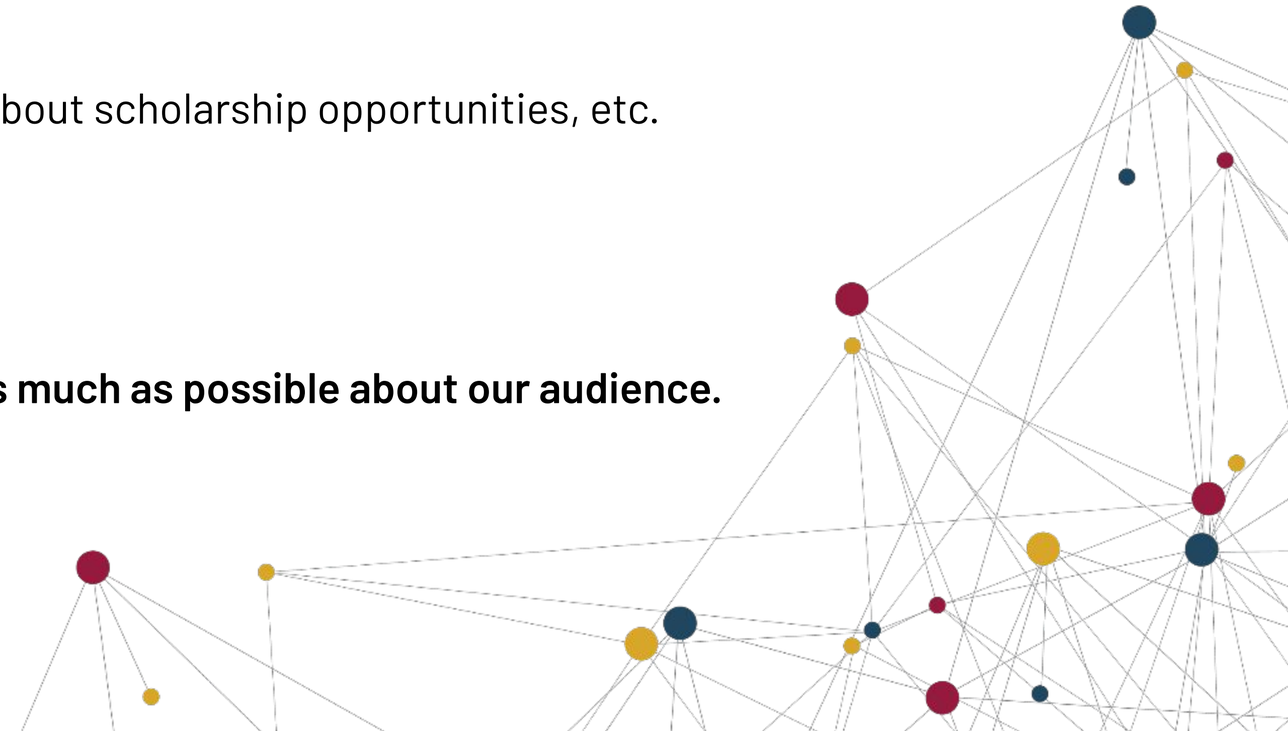


Identifying Your Audience

Before you begin writing a new piece of content or get started on revising an existing piece of content, you want to define your intended audience for the page:

+ Who are they?
  - Age, education level, geography, professional experience, etc.
+ What are their needs?
  - Finding the right degree program, learning about scholarship opportunities, etc.
+ How do they speak?
  - Tone, level of sophistication, etc.

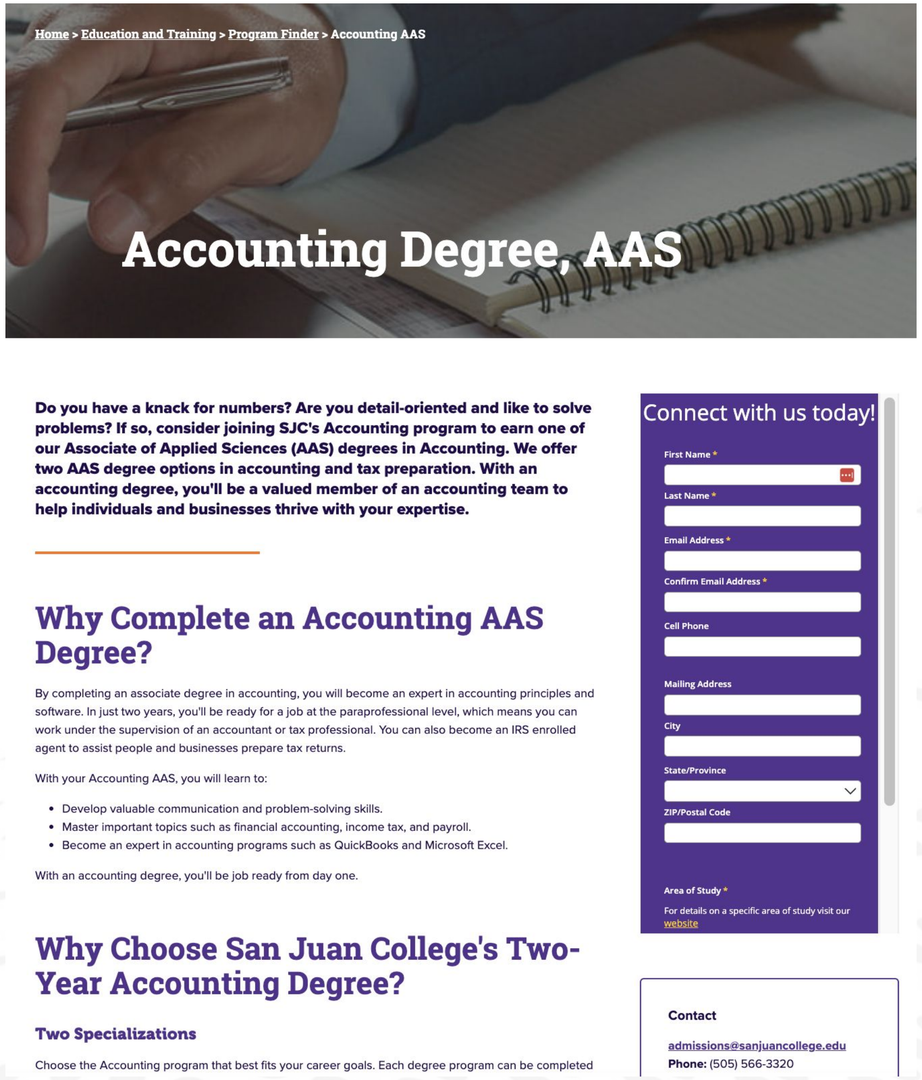
To create strong, purposeful content, we need to know as much as possible about our audience.



General Program Best Practices

- The content of each program page is going to differ based on the needs of each unique audience. For example, what matters to a engineering student will be different than what matters to an English student. Your keyword research is going to guide you for each program.

- However, there are some universal topics you want to ensure to cover across all program types.



Baseline Best Practices for Program Page Content

- The degree level and program format should be clearly stated at the start of the page
  - “Master of Arts in English degree program” instead of the vaguer “English graduate program”
- Clearly state campus locations where the program is offered and different delivery formats available
- Content sections to include:
  - Program overview
  - Learning objectives
  - Curriculum overview
  - Career outlook
  - Admissions overview
  - Closing call-to-action (CTA)

Examples of Supporting Pages

- Pages for each concentration or specialization
- Pages for each delivery format (on-campus, online)
- Admission requirements
- Curriculum
- Faculty
- FAQs
- Student/Alumni Profiles
- Thought Leadership/Evergreen content

EXAMPLES: THOUGHT LEADERSHIP/EVERGREEN CONTENT

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WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF RESTAURANTS LOOK LIKE? INSIGHTS FROM HOSPITALITY EXPERTS

WHAT IS A HORTICULTURIST?

JANUARY 13, 2023

What does a horticulturist do? How do you become a horticulturist?

Horticulturists are professionals trained in the science of plant cultivation and production who work to oversee and improve the growth of quality food plants, ornamental plants, and medicinal plants.

These knowledgeable professionals are essential to growing and maintaining flowers, trees, shrubs, and crops. They work directly with seeds, soil, and plants in settings ranging from private and public gardens to plant nurseries to large-scale food, medicinal, and decorative plant-growing operations.

Horticulturists know how to help plants thrive

Why STEM Needs the Humanities and Social Sciences

Learn how Caltech bridges STEM, the humanities, and the social sciences to shape students who think critically, communicate clearly, and make ethical decisions.

Why STEM Majors Should Take Humanities and Social Science Courses

In a world increasingly reliant on the power of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), the question arises: Is there space for the humanities and social sciences? For Caltech and its many researchers, the answer is an unequivocal "yes."

COMMUNITY

Coding, Cow-Print Tablecloths, and Community at Reed

Discover how Reed's welcoming campus helped Julian Jacklin, a first-generation student, thrive in his major and work to create an equitable community.

October 6, 2023

Writing Process—Narrative Structure

Narrative structure refers to the way in which a piece of content is organized and presented to the reader or audience. Your page should unfold in a logical order, with each section building upon the information presented in the section before it.

Generally speaking, each page should have:

- An Introduction section
  - Introduces the topic of the page and provides the reader with a reason to keep reading
  - Includes a creative hook that gets the reader emotionally invested

- An body section
  - Broken up into several subsections exploring subtopics and weaving in target keywords.

- A conclusion
  - A brief summary that wraps up the entire page's content and purpose.
  - Includes calls-to-action.

Writing Process—Word Count

- It is a *myth* that users don't like or want long-form content. They do seek out long-form content, but it *must be helpful, properly structured, and broken into digestible sections.*

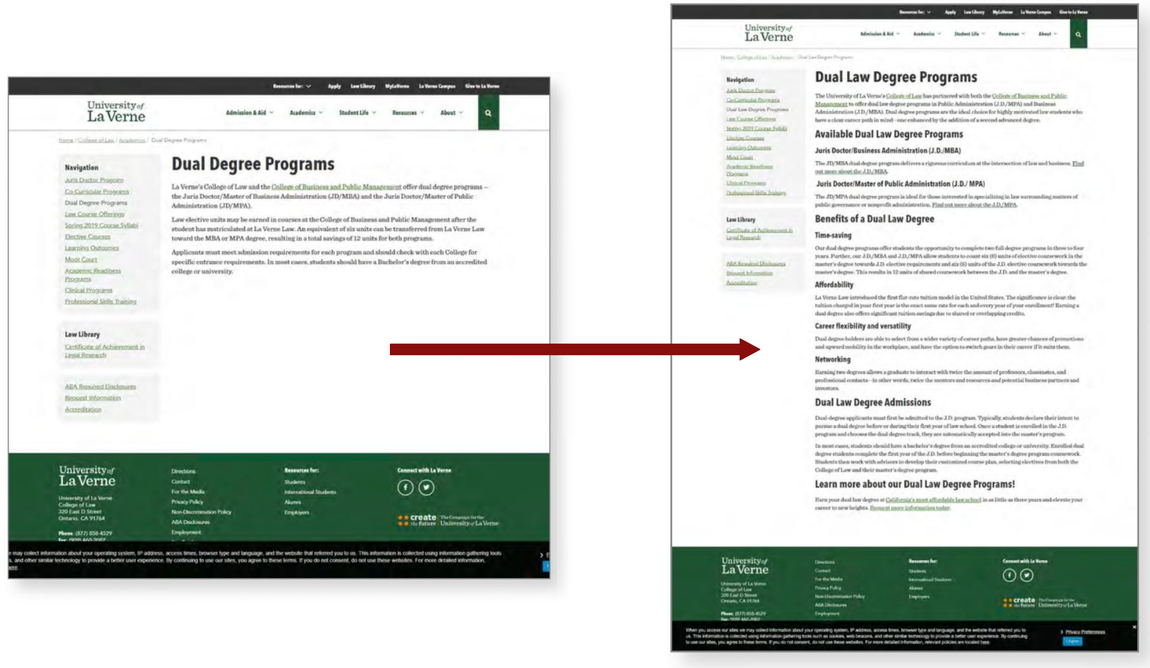
- Good content *should* be longer to engage readers, answer questions, and encourage actions.

WHAT NOT TO DO

If I had been astonished at first catching a glimpse of so outlandish an individual as Queequeg circulating among the polite society of a civilized town, that astonishment soon departed upon taking my first daylight stroll through the streets of New Bedford. In thoroughfares nigh the docks, any considerable seaport will frequently offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts. Even in Broadway and Chestnut streets, Mediterranean mariners will sometimes jostle the affrighted ladies. Regent Street is not unknown to Lascars and Malays; and at Bombay, in the Apollo Green, live Yankees have often scared the natives. But New Bedford beats all Water Street and Wapping. In these last-mentioned haunts you see only sailors; but in New Bedford, actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh. It makes a stranger stare. But, besides the Feegeeans, Tongatobooarrs, Erromanggoans, Pannangians, and Brighggians, and, besides the wild specimens of the whaling-craft which unheeded reel about the streets, you will see other sights still more curious, certainly more comical. There weekly arrive in this town scores of green Vermonters and New Hampshire men, all athirst for gain and glory in the fishery. They are mostly young, of stalwart frames; fellows who have felled forests, and now seek to drop the axe and snatch the whale-lance. Many are as green as the Green Mountains whence they came. In some things you would think them but a few hours old. Look there! that chap strutting round the corner. He wears a beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat, girdled with a sailor-belt. Here comes another with a sou'-wester and a bombazine cloak. No town-bred dandy will compare with a country-bred one—I mean a downright bumpkin dandy—a fellow that, in the dog-days, will mow his two acres in buckskin gloves for fear of tanning his hands. Now when a country dandy like this takes it into his head to make a distinguished reputation, and joins the great whale-fishery, you should see the comical things he does upon reaching the seaport. In bespeaking his sea-outfit, he orders bell-buttons to his waistcoats; straps to his canvas trowsers. Ah, poor Hay-Seed! how bitterly will burst those straps in the first howling gale, when thou art driven, straps, buttons, and all, down the throat of the tempest. But think not that this famous town has only harpooneers, cannibals, and bumpkins to show her visitors. Not at all. Had it not been for us whalemen, that tract of land would this day perhaps have been in as howling condition as the coast of Labrador. As it is, parts of her back country are enough to frighten one, they look so bony. The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in, in all New England. It is a land of oil, true enough: but not like Canaan; a land, also, of corn and wine. The streets do not run with milk; nor in the spring-time do they pave them with fresh eggs. Yet, in spite of this, nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses; parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they? how planted upon this once scraggy scoria of a country? Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered. Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea. Can Herr Alexander perform a feat like that? In New Bedford, fathers, they say, give whales for dowers to their daughters, and portion off their nieces with a few porpoises a-piece. You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles. In summer time, the town is sweet to see; full of fine maples—long avenues of green and gold. And in August, high in air, the beautiful and bountiful horse-chestnuts, candelabra-wise, proffer the passer-by their tapering upright cones of congregated blossoms. So omnipotent is art; which in many a district of New Bedford has superinduced bright terraces of flowers upon the barren refuse rocks thrown aside at creation's final day. And the women of New Bedford, they bloom like their own red roses. But roses only bloom in summer; whereas the fine carnation of their cheeks is perennial as sunlight in the seventh heavens. Elsewhere match that bloom of theirs, ye cannot, save in Salem, where they tell me the young girls breathe such musk, their sailor sweethearts smell them miles off shore, as though they were drawing nigh the odorous.

Writing Process—Word Count

- In order for a page to rank highly in Google search results, it must have at least 300 words. However, longer content consistently ranks better and garners greater engagement.
  - The average first-page result on Google contains 1,890 words
  - Content with 1,000+ words consistently receives more shares and links
- We recommend aiming for a 500 word per page minimum.



Writing Process—What are Header Tags?

- Header tags refer to the different types of headers found on a web page. Header tags are important components of user experience, accessibility, and Google's ranking algorithm.
- There are many different header tag designation types, but the most prominent ones are H1 and H2.
- Header tags need to be tagged with the appropriate designation in the backend of your site's content management system (CMS.)

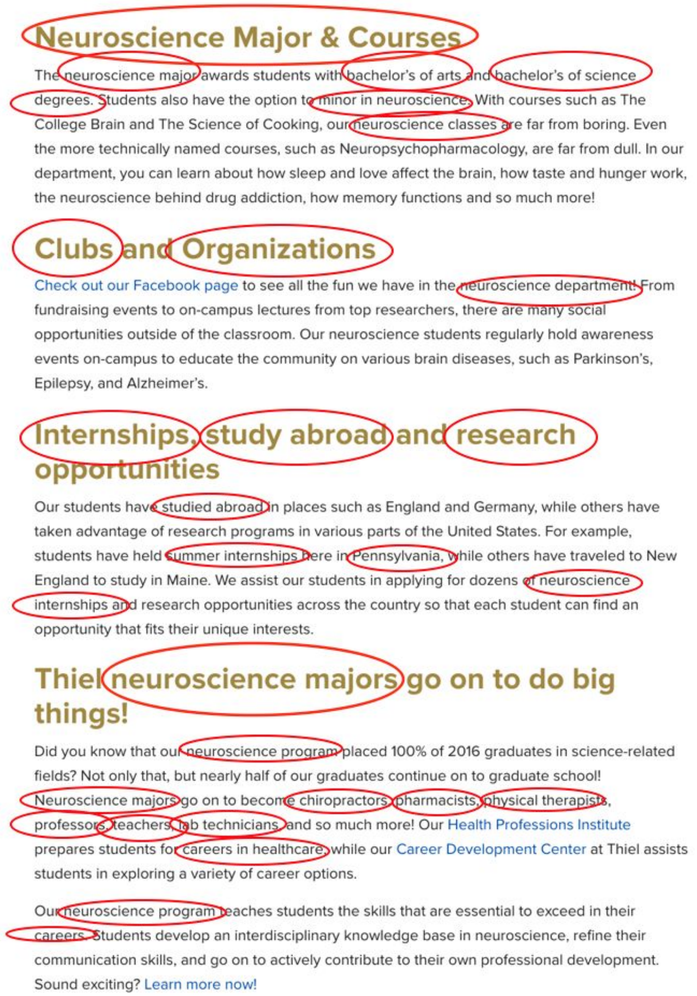
Writing Process—Header Tag Examples

- In this example, you can see that header tags simply appear as headers and subheaders on the front-end of the site to users.

- You can also see how utilizing header tags, shorter paragraphs, and bullets can make a piece of content skimmable and easy to digest. Users will read long content if it is logically structured.

Writing Process—Keyword Weaving

- The keywords you are trying to target for your page should be naturally woven into header tags and body copy. It is important not to “keyword stuff” or else the content will sound spammy to users and get you penalized by Google.



Neuroscience Major & Courses

The neuroscience major awards students with bachelor's of arts and bachelor's of science degrees. Students also have the option to minor in neuroscience. With courses such as The College Brain and The Science of Cooking, our neuroscience classes are far from boring. Even the more technically named courses, such as Neuropsychopharmacology, are far from dull. In our department, you can learn about how sleep and love affect the brain, how taste and hunger work, the neuroscience behind drug addiction, how memory functions and so much more!

Clubs and Organizations

Check out our Facebook page to see all the fun we have in the neuroscience department! From fundraising events to on-campus lectures from top researchers, there are many social opportunities outside of the classroom. Our neuroscience students regularly hold awareness events on-campus to educate the community on various brain diseases, such as Parkinson's, Epilepsy, and Alzheimer's.

Internships, study abroad and research opportunities

Our students have studied abroad in places such as England and Germany, while others have taken advantage of research programs in various parts of the United States. For example, students have held summer internships here in Pennsylvania, while others have traveled to New England to study in Maine. We assist our students in applying for dozens of neuroscience internships and research opportunities across the country so that each student can find an opportunity that fits their unique interests.

Thiel neuroscience majors go on to do big things!

Did you know that our neuroscience program placed 100% of 2016 graduates in science-related fields? Not only that, but nearly half of our graduates continue on to graduate school! Neuroscience majors go on to become chiropractors, pharmacists, physical therapists, professors, teachers, lab technicians, and so much more! Our Health Professions Institute prepares students for careers in healthcare, while our Career Development Center at Thiel assists students in exploring a variety of career options.

Our neuroscience program teaches students the skills that are essential to exceed in their careers. Students develop an interdisciplinary knowledge base in neuroscience, refine their communication skills, and go on to actively contribute to their own professional development. Sound exciting? Learn more now!

Writing Process—Linking

There are two types of links you can include in your content:

- **Internal links** point to other pages on your website and provide an avenue for users to stay engaged on your site.
  - Concentration pages
  - Admissions requirements
  - Applications
  - Event registrations
  - RFI forms
  - News articles
  - Blog posts
- **External links** point to outside websites and should be reserved for prestigious websites such as other higher education sites, government sites, and highly reputable news sources.

Writing Process—Calls-to-Action

Always include a call-to-action on a web page— typically at the beginning or end of the body copy.

- Request information
- Attend an event (open house, info session, shadow day, etc.)
- Learn more about our programs
- Start an application / Apply now
- Explore study abroad opportunities
- Take a virtual tour of our dorms

Metadata

- Metadata refers to a page's back-end title and description that only appears in select places:
  - Search engine result pages
  - Social media posts
  - Browser tabs
- Metadata is an important part of Google's ranking algorithm, as it is one of the signals the search engine relies on to understand what a page is about.
- Metadata is also incredibly important for user experience. It is often the only information a user sees about a web page in search results, and therefore you want to ensure that it is enticing enough to make users want to click through to your website.

Metadata

Title Tags

+ Length: 50-60 character limit (or what will fit in a 545 pixel display)
+ Recommended format: Primary Keyword | Brand Name
  - Your institution name should always appear in the title tag.

Meta Descriptions

+ Length: 150-160 character limit
+ Recommended format: One sentence summarizing the page's content, incorporating in primary and secondary keywords as you can. Second, shorter sentence containing a call-to-action.

Let's Recap

- Think beyond one single program page
- Use keyword research not just for SEO purposes, but to get inside the heads of your prospects and identify what content is needed
- Create content that is valuable to your audience that can also be found on Google

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Questions?

Resources

Look out for our new blog and webinar on Google's SGE/ AI Overviews on carnegiehighered.com

This presentation referenced data from the following reports:

SEO + Website Impact on Prospective Undergraduate Students' College Search

SEO + Website Impact on Prospective Graduate Students' College Search

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Thank You!

carnegiehighered.com