

An Introduction to CRO for Higher Education

From Click to Commitment

April 2025



A Few Starting Details



- + 45-minute sessions, including time for questions and conversation at the end
- + Session recordings shared with attendees via email at later this week
- + Use the Zoom Chat and Q+A panels to engage with attendees and submit questions
- + Need help? Use Whova's "Ask Organizers Anything" section in the Community Board or email us at conferences@carnegiehighered.com

Presenter



Jack Calderini

Senior Director, Digital Integrations

Archetype Persona

The Inventive and Curious Ranger

- 6 years at Carnegie
- 10 years digital marketing
- 4 years tracking/analytics
- Lover of plants and the outdoors

Agenda

- 1 What is CRO?**

- 2 Why should you consider it?**

- 3 How do you do it?**

- 4 How to get started with it?**



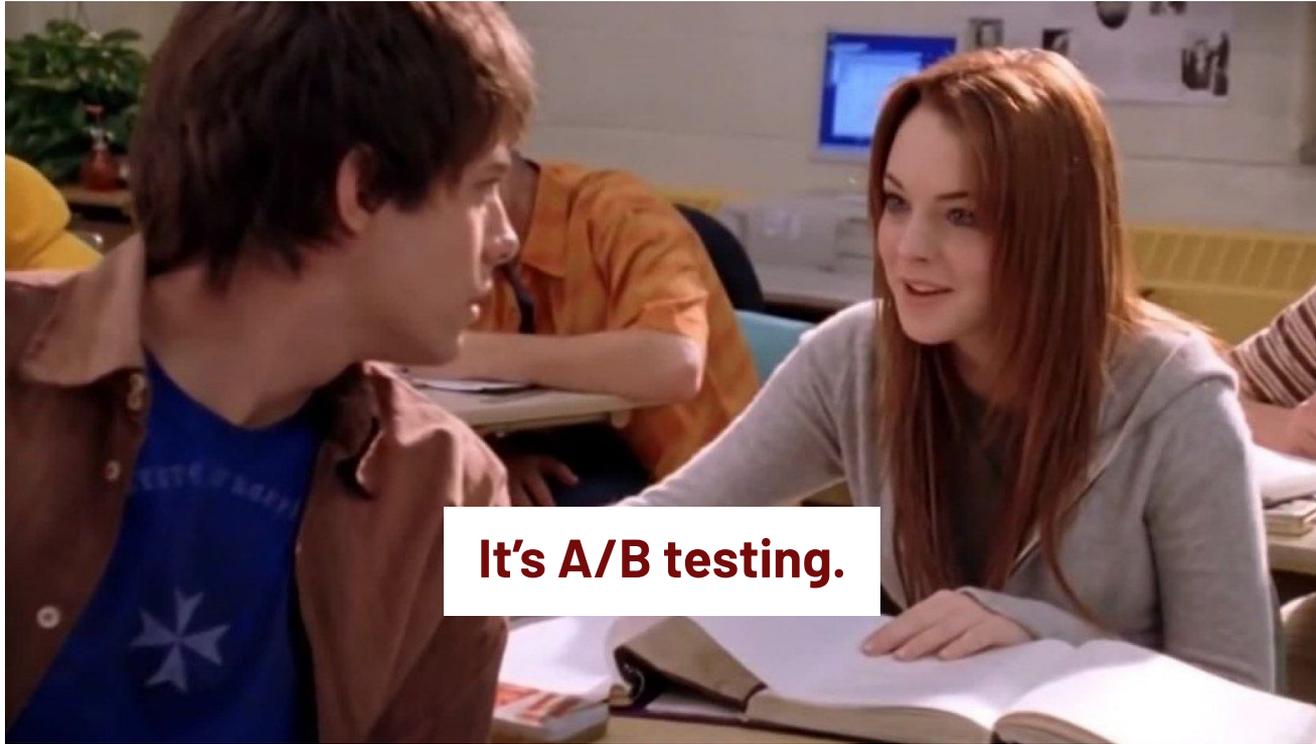


1

What is CRO?

Breaking down the key elements

What is CRO?





Thank You!

Jack Calderini

jcalderini@carnegiehighered.com

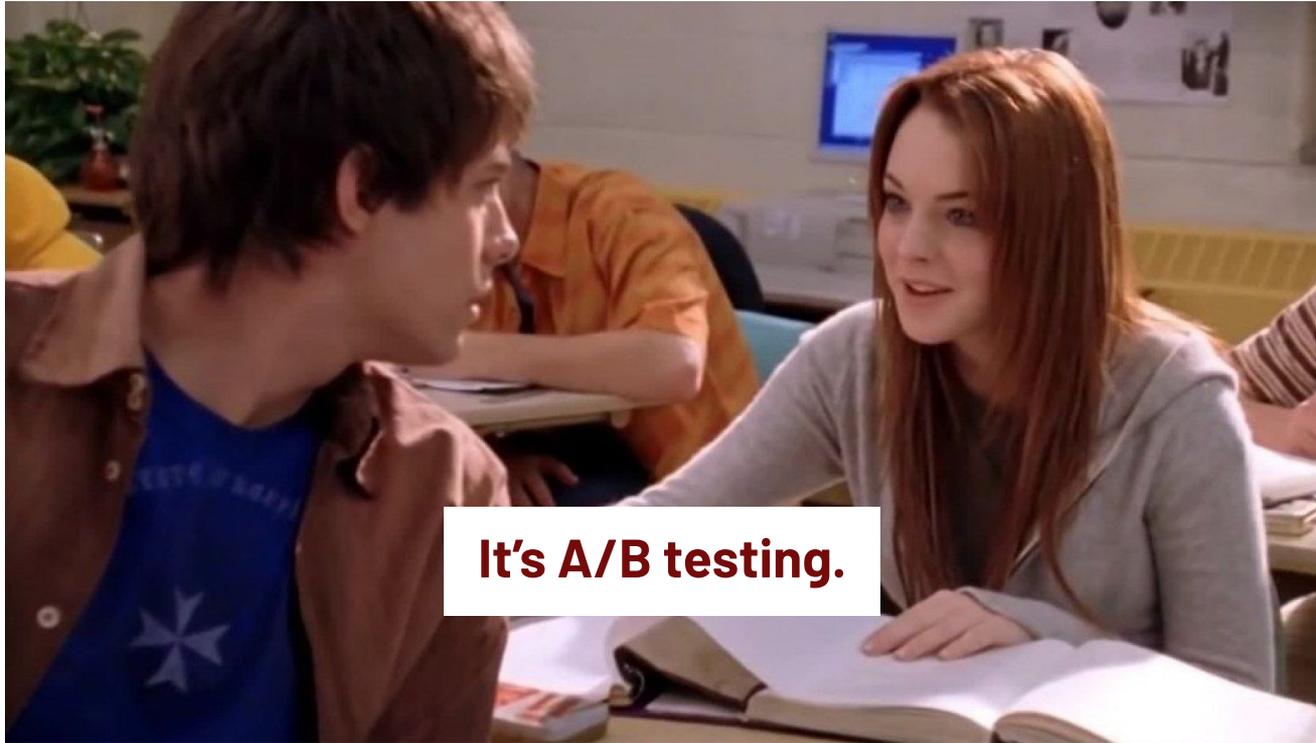
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What is CRO?



What is CRO?

“The iterative process of improving a website or landing page to increase the percentage of visitors who take a desired action, such as filling out a form.

CRO involves analyzing user behavior and intent, running A/B or multivariate tests, and making data-driven changes to elements like design, content, and calls to action.”

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2

Why CRO?

Understand the impact of CRO





1

High Traffic \neq High Enrollment

2

Rising Costs

3

Leaky Funnels

**Traffic Generation
is not enough!**

1

High Traffic ≠ High Enrollment

2

Rising Costs

3

Leaky Funnels

School fairs

Postcards

Out of home

Paid Search

Paid Social Media

Billboards

SEO

Email Marketing

Organic Social Media

Athletics

Yelling at random kids in the street



1

High Traffic ≠ High Enrollment

2

Rising Costs

3

Leaky Funnels

- + Google CPCs up 13% from '23 > '24 vs 9% '22 > '23
- + Loss or uncertainty of funds

Source: [SearchEngineLand](#)

1

High Traffic ≠ High Enrollment

2

Rising Costs

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Leaky Funnels



- + Tend to inform rather than convert
- + Confusing navigation
- + Long, intimidating forms
- + Weak or unclear calls-to-action (CTAs)
- + Poor mobile experience
- + Slow page load speeds



Reading Level	Median Conv Rate
5th - 7th	10%
8th - 9th	13.5%
10th - 12th	9.4%
College/University	6.5%
Professional	6.1%

Source: [Unbounce 2024 Conversion Report](#)

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“Mobile drives nearly 6x more traffic,
but desktop converts 18% better”

Source: [Unbounce 2024 Conversion Report](#)

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Impact of CRO

- ✓ Maximize Existing Traffic
- ✓ Improves User Experience
- ✓ Data-Driven Decision Making
- ✓ Allows non-technical users to make website changes



An Exercise



An Exercise (for real)

- + Put yourself into the *mindset* of a junior in high school looking for college
- + Think about the *program* you majored in
- + Go to your institutions home page (on desktop)
- + Try to find information related to your major
- + Try to request information about your major
- + Try to find application process
- + Try to start an application to your major



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An Exercise: Thoughts

- + Was the information easy or hard to find?
- + Did anything not work?
- + Did you find info about your major?
- + How was it filling out your own RFI form?
- + Did you go straight to the search bar or try to use the navigation?
- + How many extra clicks did you need to get where you wanted to go?
- + When was the last time your website went through a redesign?

- Businesses rarely know how prospects are using their website
- Higher Ed websites tend to focus on informing rather than converting

Added difficulty:
Try this exercise on mobile

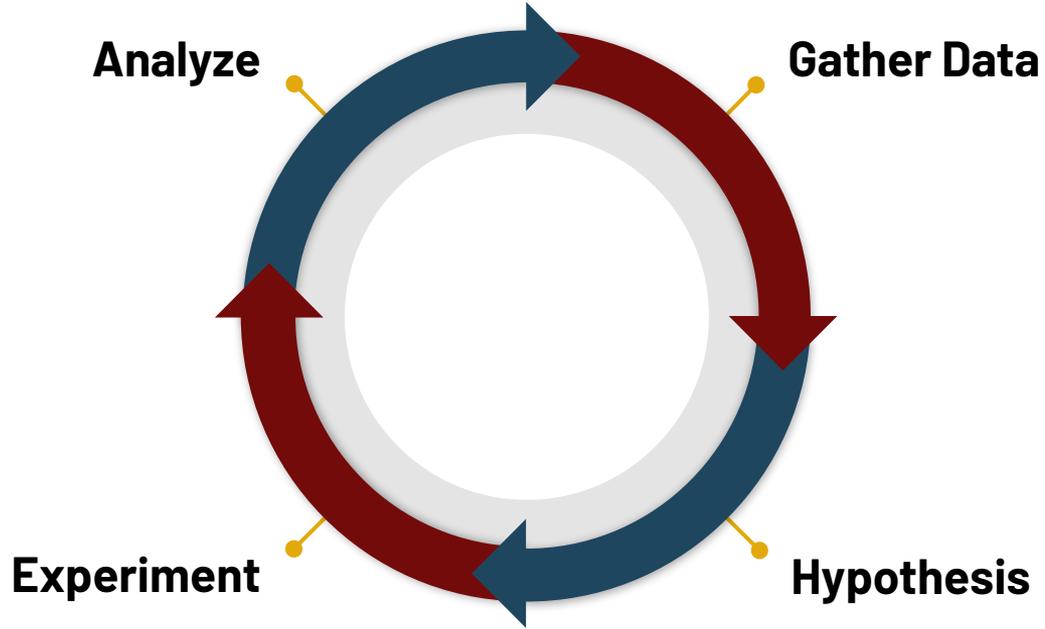
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The CRO Process

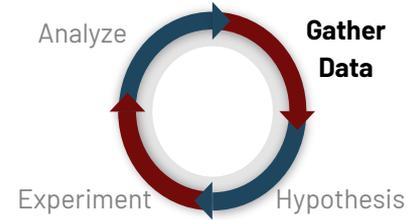
4 key steps in a CRO strategy



The CRO Process



The CRO Process - Gather Data



What is happening and why?

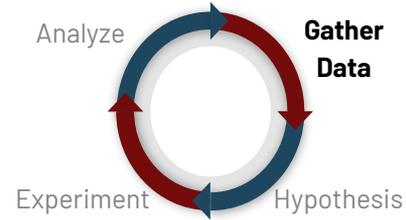
What pages need improvement?

What element can be changed?

- + Web Analytics
- + Heatmaps
- + Session recordings
- + Surveys
- + User Testing



The CRO Process - Gather Data



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+ **Web Analytics**

+ Heatmaps

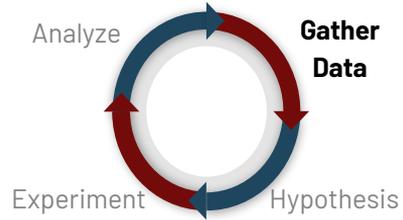
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The CRO Process - Gather Data



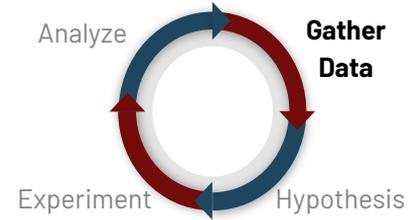
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50%

The CRO Process - Gather Data



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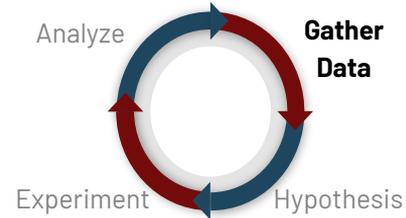
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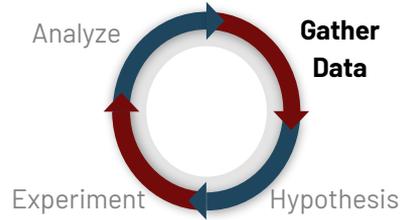
- + Web Analytics
- + Heatmaps
- + Session recordings
- + **Surveys**
- + User Testing

How would you rate your experience with Hotjar's guides?

Hate Love

Next

The CRO Process - Gather Data



What is happening and why?

What pages need improvement?

What element can be changed?

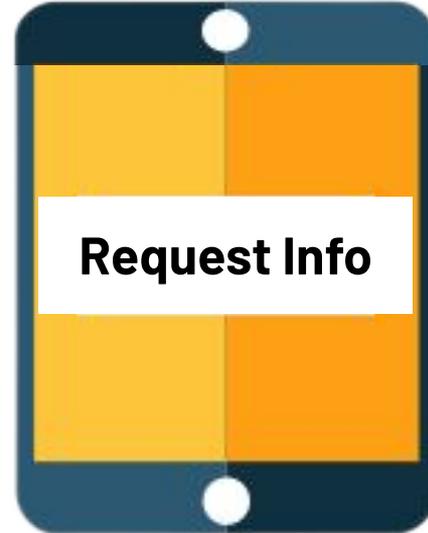
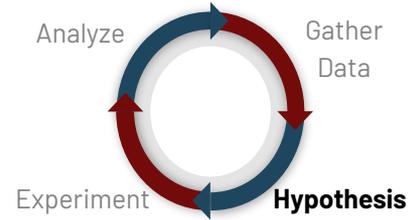
- + Web Analytics
- + Heatmaps
- + Session recordings
- + Surveys
- + **User Testing**

The CRO Process - Hypothesis

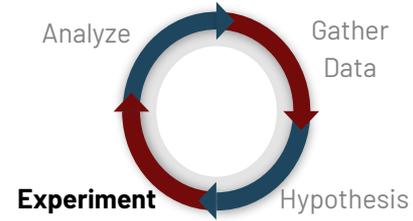
- + Pick your pages & variants
- + Prioritize

By **doing X** we expect to **see Y**

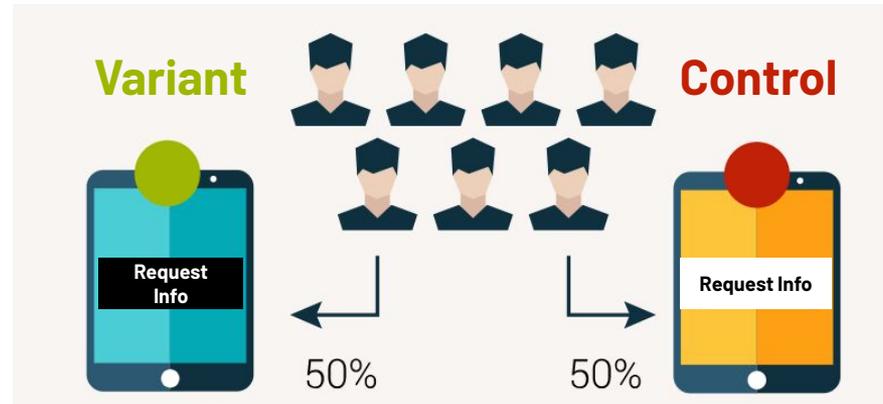
By **changing the background color from yellow to blue**, we expect to **see the conversion rate increase**.



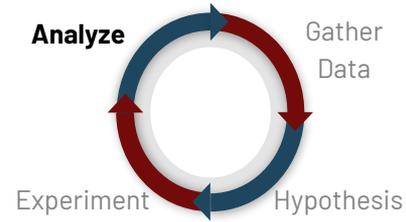
The CRO Process - Experiment



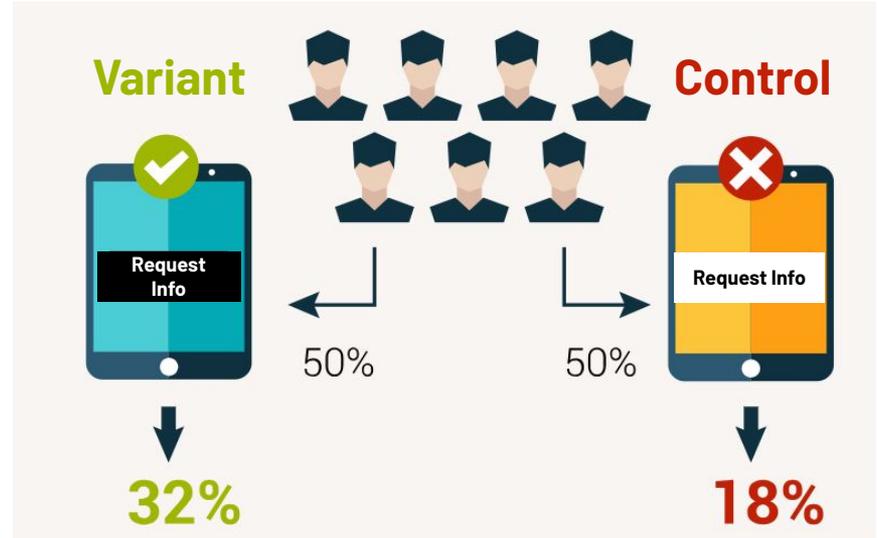
- + Consider time frames & statistical significance
- + Multivariate testing



The CRO Process - Analyze



- + What were the results?
- + What insights can we gain?
- + How can we apply this to other experiments or pages?
- + Failed experiments are opportunities
- + Keep testing!



4

How to Get Started with CRO

Short Term & Long Term Strategies



How to get Started with CRO

Quick Wins

- + Improve CTA buttons
- + Optimize for mobile (slow-loading pages kill conversions)
- + Reduce friction in forms (only ask for necessary info)
- + Make key actions visible above the fold

Long Term

- + Set up tracking & heatmaps
- + Create a culture of continuous testing
- + Align CRO with admissions & marketing goals
- + Work with a CRO partner

Questions & Conversations



**Scan the QR code for a 20% discount on a
12-month Conversion Rate Optimization package**



(we promise this is real)



Thank You!

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