

# Crafting the Perfect Message

A/B Testing for Higher Education

May 2025



## Presenters



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#### Archetype Persona

The Creative and Compassionate Host



- Slate user since 2019
- Carnegie since July 2024



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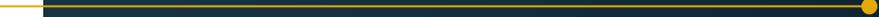
#### Archetype Persona

The Bold and Passionate Advocate



- Slate user since 2018
- Goucher since 2024

# Agenda



- 1 Why A/B Testing Matters**

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- 2 Understanding the Basics**

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- 3 Setting Up + Analyzing A/B Tests**

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- 4 Apply Insights Beyond Email**

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- 5 Questions + Conversations**



## Setting the Stage

# Higher Education Challenges

Several key factors are shaping the current higher education environment. Institutions are grappling with several hurdles and it's more crucial than ever to stand out from the rest.

- + **Increasing Competition:** The fight for limited pool of students is intensifying. Generic outreach won't cut it.
- + **Reaching the Right Students:** Casting a wide net might miss the mark. You need to connect with students who will thrive at your institution.
- + **Information Overload:** Prospective Students are drowning in messages. How can we break through the noise?
- + **ROI and Budget Constraints:** Every marketing dollar counts. Campaigns need to be efficient, and you must maximize impact in communications.



# The Email Conundrum: Overcoming Communication Hurdles

## The Email Challenges in Higher Education:

- + **Low Engagement Rates:** Inboxes are crowded battle grounds. Messages are at risk of getting lost.
- + **Opt-Out Rates:** Irrelevant or poorly targeted emails trigger unsubscribes.
- + **Content Fatigue:** Bombarding recipients with generic, repetitive emails leads to future communications being ignored. (Even the important ones!)

*These challenges emphasize the need for institutions to adapt their strategies, embrace innovation, and adopt data-driven approaches to stand out in an increasingly competitive environment.*



*Visual representation of a prospective student ignoring your generic email.*

# A/B Testing

A methodology for comparing two or more versions of a variable (such as a webpage, subject line, content of an email, or visuals) to determine which performs better for a specific goal.

# A Clearer Path to Effective Communication

A/B testing offers a solution to the higher education communication challenges by providing data-driven insights.

Here's How:

<b>Improves Engagement Rates</b> <small>(may help solve low open/click rates)</small>	<b>Reduce Opt-Out Rates</b>	<b>Combat Content Fatigue</b>	<b>Enhances Personalization Effectiveness</b>	<b>Optimizes Budget Constraints</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimize subject lines</li> <li>Perfect the preheader</li> <li>Refine CTA's (call to action)</li> </ul>	Identifying what content is relevant and what resonates with students to increase email value.	Vary email formats. Experiment with text-based vs. Visual; short vs. long; videos vs. images	Testing different personalization variables (name, major/program, clubs & activities)	Maximize ROI by utilizing reports to make data driven decisions on content.

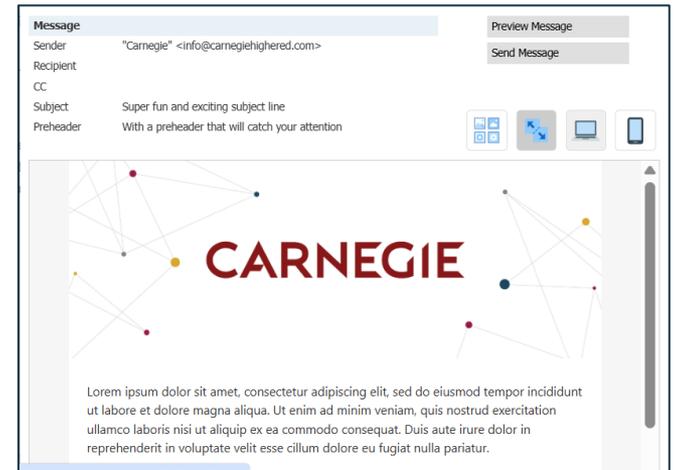
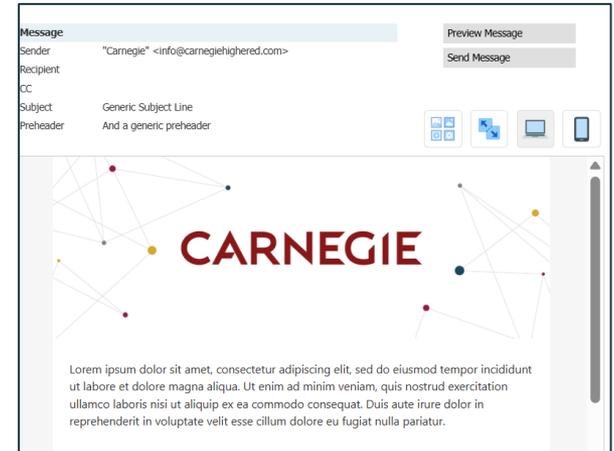
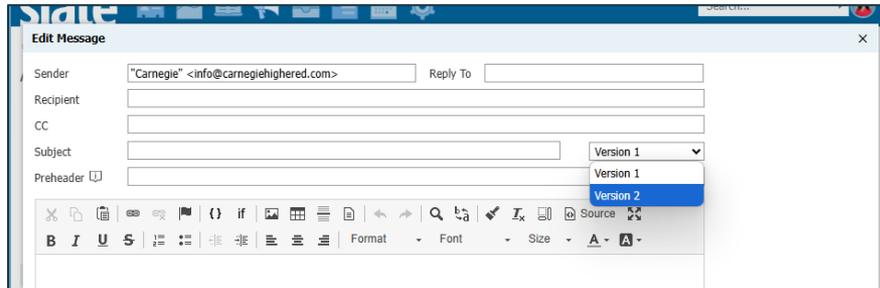
## Setting Up A/B Tests

To ensure meaningful results, follow these key steps:

1. **Define Your Goal:** What do you want to achieve (increase button clicks, event registrations)? Establish a measurable objective.
2. **Determine Your Variable:** What specific element will you test (subject lines, sender name, CTA, images or video)?
3. **Creating Test Groups:** Randomly divide your audience into two groups (Version A vs. Version B).
4. **Define the Testing Period:** Determine how long the test will run (24-72 hours post send)
5. **Track, Measure, and Analyze:** Identify which version performed better based on key metrics and understand *why* it succeeded.
6. **Apply Insights:** Apply to future communications or help drive strategic outreach beyond email.

# Setting Up A/B Testing in Slate

- Create New Message in Deliver
- “Edit Message” and begin crafting the first version and save the message
- Next, select “Version 2” from the dropdown menu next to the subject line and craft the second version of the message to be tested.
- Once complete, save the message. You’ll be able to toggle between both versions of the email by clicking the icon that will appear next to the different preview message modes.



## Setting Up A/B Testing in Slate

- Once your mailings are designed and you're ready to send you'll click on the "Send Mailing" button to configure the send settings.
- These additional highlighted settings will only appear if there are two versions of a mailing created.
- You'll want to determine **how you're going to split the testing**, the **sample size**, the **sample period**, and what **action to take after the sample period**.
- If you go to send the mailing and don't see the split testing option make sure Version 2 has a subject line and a recipient email address

**Send Mailing** [X]

Pre-Flight Checks **No errors have been found. Pre-flight checks identify only the most common issues, so please still review your mailing before sending.**

Estimated Recipients 48,871 recipients eligible for immediate delivery.  
The recipient count is determined from the following lists:  
1. Senior Search (live) - 48,871 recipients  
**This message, if sent, would be delivered to as many as 48,871 recipients. Please double-check your lists before sending.**

Recipient Lists Senior Search  
**Split Testing** Send split test sample [v]  
Sample size 131432 Sample period 24 hours [v]  
Action after sample period Deactivate [v]

Review  This message is ready for review.  
Outbox  Send to outbox and do not deliver automatically.  
Frequency Send mailing once [v]  
Timing Send at a future date/time [v]

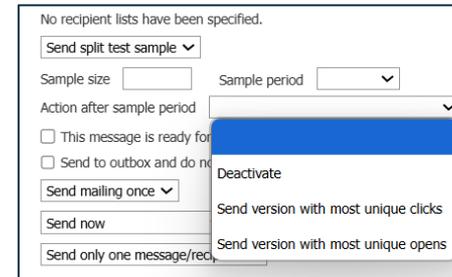
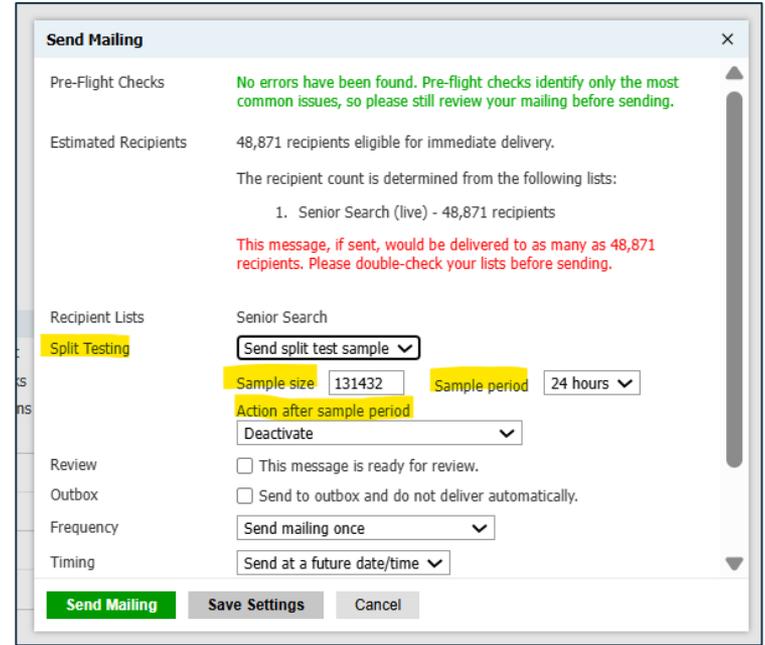
**Send Mailing** Save Settings Cancel

# Diving into Send Settings

Are you A/B testing an email that's part of a drip campaign or a one-off send/ad-hoc?

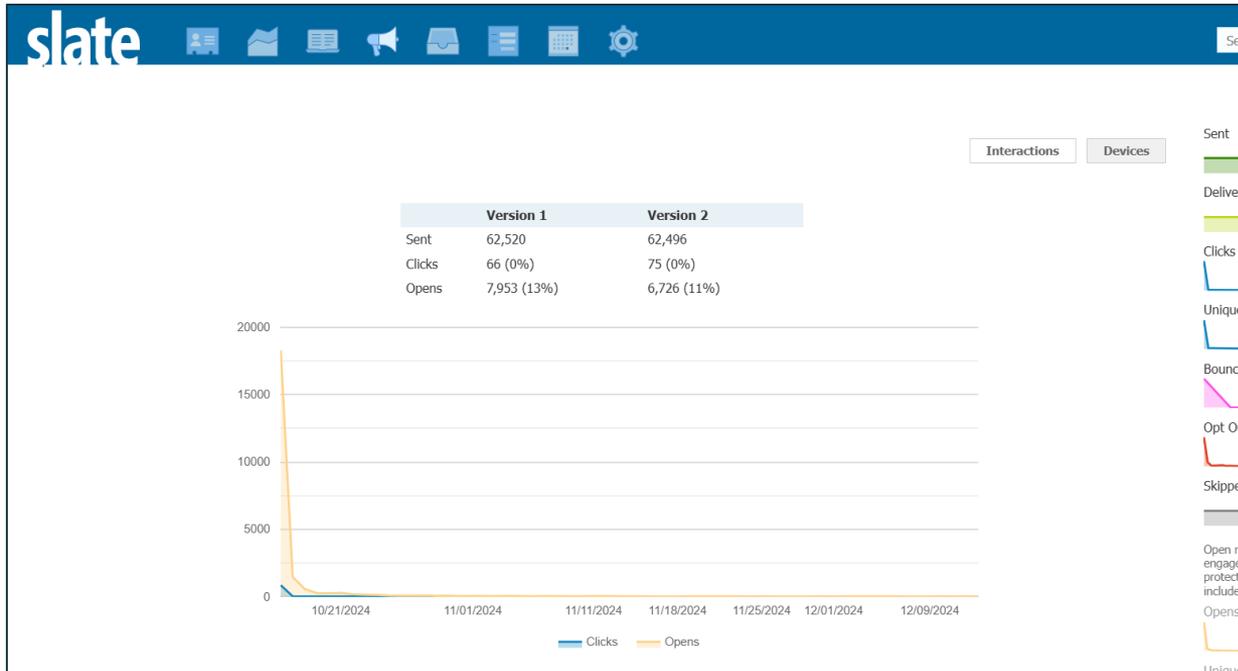
	Drip Email	Ad-Hoc
Sample Size	The size of your entire population	The size of the recipient list
Action After the Sample Period	Either 'Send version with most unique clicks' or 'Send version with most unique opens'	'Deactivate' since this mailing is only being sent one time.

We recommend setting the **sample period** to 72 hours in order to give students time to engage with the email, but it can be adjusted to 48, 24, 12, or 6 hours.



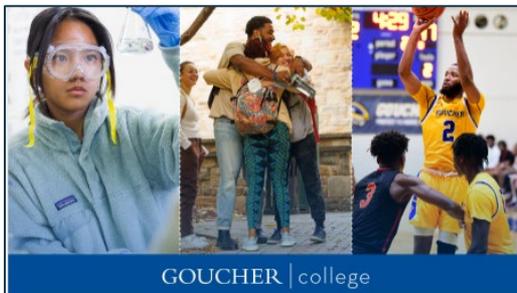
# What Happens Next?

Once the sample period has ended statistics will appear above the email interactions chart. It will display which email version performed better and the breakdown for each sample size.



# Case Study

## Carnegie + Goucher



GOUCHER | college

Right now:

A new class of Goucher alumni just started their first post-graduate fall season as independent adults.

Goucher's class of 2028 just completed their first-year orientation and new student convocation.

What is the common thread between both groups, perched at opposite ends of their education experience? They both are driven to change the world.

When a new group of students joins Goucher College, the goal isn't just to earn a degree at the end of your four years; it's to leave transformed — and transform those around you.

Here, we inspire global changemakers through an [innovative curriculum](#) that fosters a problem-solving mindset in a close-knit campus community — from day one. No matter your major, you'll gain an international perspective that provides the tools to see the world (and yourself!) differently. Take the first step today.

[Learn More About Goucher](#)

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—college—

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Baltimore, MD 21204  
410.337.8000 | [admissions@goucher.edu](mailto:admissions@goucher.edu)



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Goucher College is for students eager to make a difference. Through our emphasis on study abroad, a diverse cohort of students, and an [innovative curriculum](#), you will gain a global perspective while learning to solve the challenges of the present and the future — from day one. Join us on the journey by taking the first step today.

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Baltimore, MD 21204  
410.337.8000 | [admissions@goucher.edu](mailto:admissions@goucher.edu)



# Building the Slate Report

1. Create a new report in Slate
2. Give it a name, assign a folder and realms
3. Add a Data/Chart Part
4. Select a Base – **Message**<sup>1</sup>

**Edit Part**

Status: Active ▾

Name:

Type: Configurable Joins

Category: Related

Base:

- Material
- Message
- Message Dataset
- Message Group
- Message Mailing
- Message Number
- Message Opt-Out
- Message Track

Message	All Messages in an instance. This Base is typically very large and requires multiple filters in order to be queried on successfully.
Message Group	All Message Groups created in an instance.
Message Mailing	All Mailings created using the Deliver tool, including form communication.
Message Number	Information regarding the accounts and numbers that are sending and receiving messages.
Message Opt Out	All opt out messages received.
Message Track	Tracking information from messages and mailings. This Base is typically very large and requires multiple filters in order to be queried on successfully.

<sup>1</sup>(<https://knowledge.technolutions.net/v1/docs/descriptions-of-standard-configurable-joins-query-bases>)

# Creating the Message

5. Join to **Message Mailing**
6. Filter to select your A/B Test Message(s)
7. Set up Columns to track message statistics

**Edit Part**

Status: Active

Name:

Base:

Exports:

Matching Rows: 131,434

Filters:    (  )

[Join Message Mailing](#)

[Message Mailing / Name](#) IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

**Message**
**Edit**

Status	Active
Type	Data/Charts
Base	Message
Filters	<a href="#">Name</a> IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

**Columns**

Delivered

Opens

Clicks

% Open

% Click

# Standing Up the Columns

**Edit Column**

Name

Type

Column Group

Column Width  e.g., 150px, 25%

Column Alignment

Variable Name  e.g., @applicants

**Filters**

Matching Rows 131,434

Filters   (  )

[Join Message Mailing](#)

[Message Mailing / Name](#) IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

**Edit Column**

Name

Type

Column Group

Column Width  e.g., 150px, 25%

Column Alignment

Variable Name  e.g., @applicants

**Filters**

Matching Rows 14,538

Filters   (  )

[Join Message Mailing](#)

[Message Mailing / Name](#) IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

[Status](#) IN Open

# Standing Up the Columns (cont.)

**Edit Column**

Name

Type

Column Group

Column Width  e.g., 150px, 25%

Column Alignment

Variable Name  e.g., @applicants

---

**Filters**

Matching Rows **141**

Filters   (  )

[Join](#) [Message Mailing](#)

[Message Mailing / Name](#) IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

[Status](#) IN Click

**Edit Column**

Name

Type

Column Group

Column Width  e.g., 150px, 25%

Column Alignment

Formula   
Example: @admits / nullif(@applicants, 0)  
 If the denominator might equal 0, include the nullif

Number Format

**Edit Column**

Name

Type

Column Group

Column Width  e.g., 150px, 25%

Column Alignment

Formula   
Example: @admits / nullif(@applicants, 0)  
 If the denominator might equal 0, include the nul

Number Format

# Laying Down the Metrics

8. Create a new row by adding a **Data Table** or Chart

Metric	Delivered	Opens	Clicks	Open	Click
				%	

-  Data Table
-  Chart
-  Section Title
-  Header Row
-  Static Content

9. Configure your Part by adding **Group Exports** and **Subquery Filters**

**Group By**

Exports Export Join

Join Message Mailing

Message Mailing Name

**Filters**

Matching Rows 147,531

Filters Filter NOT ( OR ) Join

Version Exists

10. This data table shows the total messages; add another Data Table to display versions.

Metric	Delivered	Opens	Clicks	Open	Click
Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search	131433	14538	141	11.06%	.97%

-  Data Table
-  Chart
-  Section Title
-  Header Row
-  Static Content
-  Page Break

# Diving into Subquery Filters + Exports

11. In a new Data Table, add **Group Sub-exports** for *Version* and *Status*

**Edit Part** ✕

Status: Active ▼

Name:

Source: Subquery Export

Sort: Metric ▼

Sort Order: Ascending ▼

Limit:

Type: Dependent subquery ▼

Output: Concatenate ▼

Row Separator:  \n = New Line; \t = Tab; \\ = Escaped Backslash

Row Offset:  Row Limit:

Export Separator:

Exports: Export Join Filter

Filter

**Group By**

Exports: Export Join Filter

Join

Join

**Edit Part** ✕

Status: Active ▼

Name:

Source: Subquery Export

Sort: Metric ▼

Sort Order: Ascending ▼

Limit:

Type: Dependent subquery ▼

Output: Coalesce ▼

Row Offset:

Exports: Export Join Filter

Join

Filters: Filter NOT ( OR ) Join

Join Person

## Diving into Subquery Filters + Exports

12. Create a second Part, **repeating steps 1-6**
13. Add a **Column** for each version of your message

### Message

Status	Active
Type	Data/Charts
Base	Message
Filters	<a href="#">Name</a> IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

### Columns

Total	Version 1	Version 2
-------	-----------	-----------

### Edit Column

Name	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text" value="Version 1"/>	
Type	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text" value="Population"/>	
Column Group	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>	
Column Width	<input style="width: 60%;" type="text"/>	e.g., 150px, 25%
Column Alignment	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text" value="Left"/>	
Variable Name	<input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>	e.g., @applicants

### Filters

Matching Rows ...

Filters

Version Version Number = Version 1

# Finishing Strong

14. Add a new **Data Table** to your Part, filtering on your message(s)

15. Group by **Message Status** and a **Sub-export Status**

16. **Save**

**Edit Part**

Row Type:

Null Values:  Show null/missing values

Series Total:  Show series total

Number Format:

---

**Group By**

Exports:

Message Status

Status

---

**Filters**

Matching Rows: 131,434

Filters:   (  )

Join: Message Mailing

Message Mailing / Name IN Carnegie / Ad-Hoc - Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Search

---

Rank

Decision by Rank Confirmed Name

(  )

Join: Applications / Decision by Rank Confirmed Rank Confirmed = 1

Coalesce

Application Status

Person Status

Join: Person

Coalesce

Rank 1 Decision

Applications Status

Join: Person / Applications

# Message Results

1. Open Rate – Version 1
2. CTR – Version 2

Metric	Delivered	Opens	Clicks	%	
				Open	Click
Ad-Hoc #02 Senior Sear...	131433	14538	141	11.06%	.97%
<b>Message Versions / Status</b>					
Version 1	65716	7887	66	12%	.84%
Version 2	65717	6651	75	10.12%	1.13%
Metric	Total	Version 1		Version 2	
<b>Message / Status</b>					
bounce	1193	586		607	
click	141	66		75	
complaint	2	1		1	
open	14538	7887		6651	
optout	282	148		134	
sent	110337	54567		55770	
skip_duplicate	49	28		21	
skip_fail	1360	677		683	
skip_optout	3530	1756		1774	
test	2			1	
Total	131434	65716		65717	

# Message Results

1. Open Rate – Version 1
2. CTR – Version 2
3. Admit Declines – Open Rates
4. Fewer students who remained at Prospect stage opened Version 2

Message Versions / Status / Status					
<b>Version 1</b>	<b>65716</b>	<b>7887</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>.84%</b>
Admit	419	119	2	28.4%	1.68%
Admit Decline	121	49	1	40.5%	2.04%
Awaiting Decision	7			%	
Awaiting Materials	23	7		30.43%	%
Defer	1			%	
Deny	82	22		26.83%	%
Deposit Pending	6	2		33.33%	%
Expected to Attend	50	17		34%	%
Inquiry	36601	7144	59	19.52%	.83%
Prospect	28401	526	4	1.85%	.76%
Withdrew	5	1		20%	%
<b>Version 2</b>	<b>65717</b>	<b>6651</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>10.12%</b>	<b>1.13%</b>
Admit	426	124	4	29.11%	3.23%
Admit Decline	143	47		32.87%	%
Awaiting Decision	5			%	
Awaiting Materials	14	1		7.14%	%
Deny	86	31		36.05%	%
Deposit Pending	5	1		20%	%
Expected to Attend	53	17	1	32.08%	5.88%
Inquiry	36711	6751	70	16.81%	1.13%
Prospect	28264	258		.91%	%
Withdrew	7	1		14.29%	%

# *Slate Suitcase*

059b77d9-9293-49ca-8a5c-3035d0ee7d0a:gch

# Beyond the Inbox

The insights gained from A/B testing your emails can be applied across various communication channels to enhance your outreach strategy.

- **Web Optimization:** Use headlines, CTA's, images and videos on a webpage based on email performance.
- **Social Media:** Use subject lines and body copy for captions or sponsored posts or images and video that resonated with students.
- **Direct Mail:** Use headlines, body copy, CTAs, and other visuals to design an appealing postcard.
- **Texting (SMS):** Optimize CTAs and message tone.
- **Admissions Presentations:** Incorporate insights on effective messaging and visuals from the emails.

# *Questions &* Conversations

# Thank You!

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