
CARNEGIE

LIVE WEBINAR

The 80/20 Rule, AEO, and the Web: *Myth or Methodology*

Thursday, 27 August 2026
Noon to 1 p.m. ET



Housekeeping

1

This webinar will be recorded, and slides will be shared via email later this week.

2

Have a question for our panelists? Drop questions in the Q&A box, we'll have time at the end of the webinar.

3

Closed captions are available. The icon to enable them is in the control panel at the bottom of your Zoom window.

Today's Presenters



Rebecca Hofstetter

VP, AEO and SEO Content



Voltaire Santos Miran

EVP, Digital Experience Design and
Technology

Today's Agenda

The 80/20 Rule, Revisited

Your Uncommissioned Brand Spokesperson

Carrying a Conversation

AEO in Action

Future Trends and AI Sounds

The Recap

Let's check out
your site now!

1

Launch a browser window in Incognito mode and navigate to Perplexity, ChatGPT, or Google AI Mode.

This will reduce the chances of results being impacted by your personal browsing history.

2

Ask a natural, prospective student question.

Ideally, this is a question for which you want your institution to be highly visible.

For example, "What universities offer an undergraduate degree in business administration on the East Coast?"

3

Audit the results of your AI query. You're looking for four things:

- + **Visibility:** Did your school appear? If not, who did?
- + **Citations:** Were you cited? Were your competitors?
- + **Accuracy:** If so, are facts, deadlines, and tuition correct?
- + **Sentiment:** Is the tone positive and on-brand?

How'd your site do?

The 80/20 Rule, *Revisited*

The Historical Paradigm Shift

1

The Pre-Digital Age

Card catalogs, encyclopedias, and classified ads—users had to physically go to where information lived and manually search for that information.

2

AG: After Google

Google revolutionized discovery. Search became a bar, a keyword query, a page of ten blue links, and a click. The traditional search market grew to \$230 billion.

3

2022: AI Paradigm Shift

Conversational discovery across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Google AI Overviews, and AI Mode. The AI search market is projected to reach \$378.9 billion.

4

The Crossover Point

SEMrush traffic models project annual visitors from LLM search to intersect and surpass traditional organic search by 2028–2029.

5

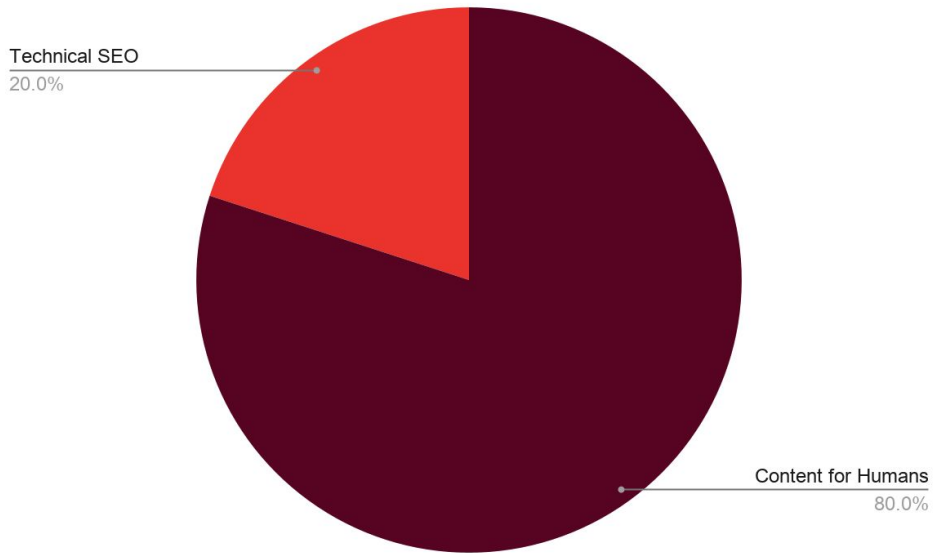
The Zero-Click Reality

Over half of search queries no longer result in a website click. Information is synthesized directly inside the prompt box.

The Old Principle vs. The Emerging Reality

Then

Just write brand-focused content for humans, and you're 80% to where you need to be. We viewed the work as 80% human-centered creation and 20% technical hygiene.

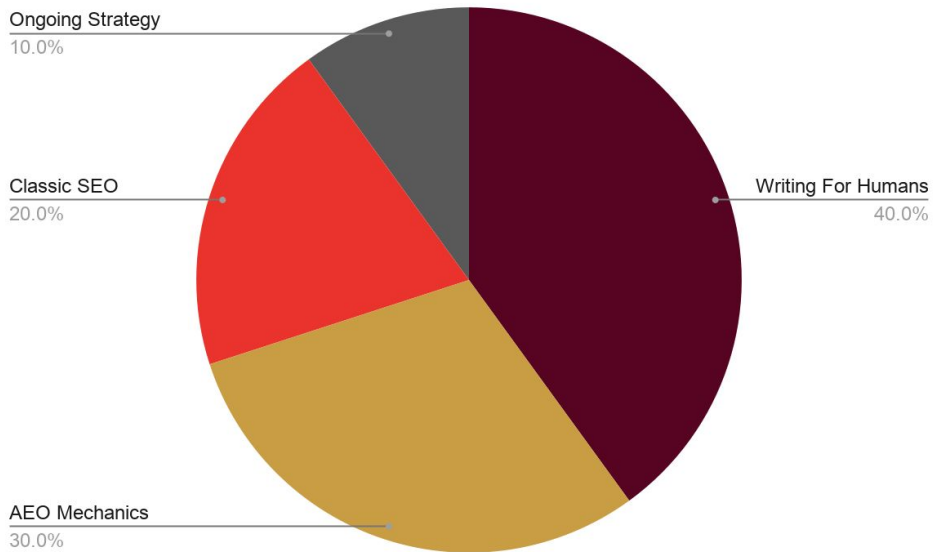


The Old Principle vs. The Emerging Reality

Now

65% of prospective students start their search in LLMs, but only 20% of higher ed content is visible to AI models.

Human-first content without a machine-interpretable architecture is invisible.

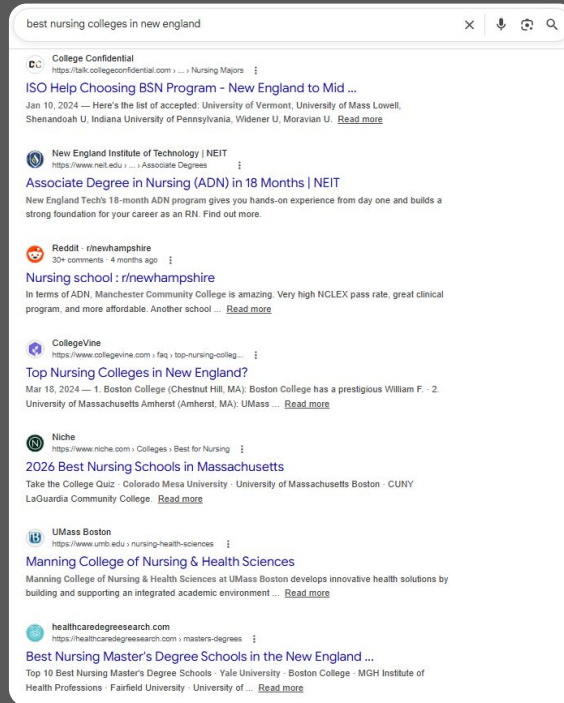


Your Uncommissioned *Brand Spokesperson*

Pillar 1: Content

The Funnel Has Shifted

- SEO was about filling the top of the funnel.
- Students used to perform high-level searches and click through to various institution websites to learn more information early on in their college search process.
- As a result, they might visit the website several times before taking an action, such as filling out a request for information form.



The Funnel Has Shifted (cont)

- Now, those students don't need to click through to various websites to find information. They can have complex conversations right within an AI chatbot.
- School comparisons and program evaluation are happening within LLMs.
- In other words, they are progressing down the funnel, right in an AI search platform, before making it to your website.
- By the time they do make it to your website, it's likely from a branded search, and they are more qualified and ready to take action.

I want to study nursing in the Northeast at an affordable college with strong financial aid and access to nearby hospitals. What schools should I consider?

Here are **excellent nursing programs in the Northeast** that fit what you're looking for — **affordable tuition, strong financial aid, and access to clinical training at major hospitals**. I've organized them by region and highlighted what makes each a great option.

Public Universities with Affordable BSN Programs

New England

1. University of Rhode Island (URI)

- Well-established BSN with clinical mentorship partnerships (e.g., Miriam Hospital).

2. University of Massachusetts Lowell

- Clinical placements through Beth Israel Deaconess, Lowell General, Lahey Health, and VA hospitals — strong hands-on experience.
- UMass Lowell qualifies for financial aid and in-state tuition options.

3. University of Southern Maine (USM)

- Clinical affiliations with MaineHealth and other regional systems.

4. Rhode Island College (RIC)

- BSN program with clinical placements in local hospitals.

5. University of Maine System (e.g., UMaine)

- Nursing programs with regional hospital partnerships through MaineHealth.

The LLM is effectively
serving as an
*uncommissioned
admissions counselor.*

Is it telling your story accurately, or is it hallucinating based on *outdated or fragmented data?*

Carrying a *Conversation*

Are we still
writing for humans?

Yes. But.

We are writing content
that gets filtered through
and presented by LLMs
to humans. So...

What does this mean?



You want to show up in these conversations.

You must have the type of content that can carry a conversation.



You want to show up accurately.

You must monitor **what** is said when you do show up, to ensure it is correct.



You want to show up positively.

You must control the narrative and the sentiment that LLMs are spinning up.

The Single Query vs. Conversational Search



In an SEO world, you optimized for a single query.

That web page showed up, that user clicked through to your website, and there they were on your owned property exploring.



In an AEO world, you are optimizing for a continuous conversation.

That first query is just the start. Behind it, comes a series of follow-up questions. LLMs scour the web and their databases over and over again to answer these questions. You need to be optimized to show up again and again and again.

Writing For Humans, and Writing Much More Content



Collect data on those humans.

What are they searching for? What questions are they asking? Where do they live? How old are they?



Answer their questions.

Build content around their questions and concerns. If they're asking, "What are the differences between a full-time and part-time MBA?" write an article that explores the various considerations.



Tell your story.

Weave your story into your answers. For example, "At Carnegie University, innovation and rigor are core components of all our MBA programs, whether students pursue the degree on a full or part-time basis."

Pillar 2: Classic SEO

The Fundamentals Still Matter



Metadata

Title tags and meta descriptions that are optimized and clearly summarize a page's content.



Header Tags

Strategic use of H tags to create both a visual outline of a page and also help crawlers understand main points.



Internal Links

Pointing users in the direction of other related content and helping crawlers understand which pages inform others.



Site Architecture

Information architecture that signals topic clusters and hierarchies for ease of navigation and crawling.

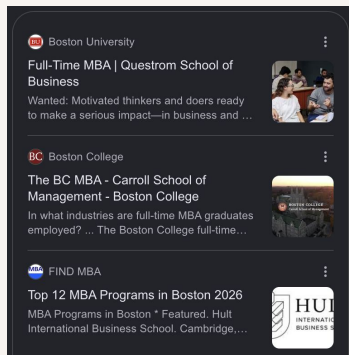
Pillar 3: AEO Mechanics

Layering on New Content Considerations



Rising Importance of Image and Video

- Make sure each page has an optimized header image. Majority of citations include them.
- 30% of Google AI responses include a YouTube video. Optimize account + videos and create new ones consistently.



Technical Factors

- Model collapse - When AI models consume thin or AI-generated marketing copy, unique human nuances are erased, leaving generic summaries.
- Lost in the Middle Effect - LLMs recall the beginning and end of long pages better than what lies in the middle.
- Context Clash - When Page A has updated tuition and an unarchived social post or legacy PDF has old tuition, the AI suffers a "brain freeze" and hallucinates or picks the wrong date.

The New Ecosystem:

LLMs don't just use your website to generate summaries.
They draw upon multiple sources of information, including:



News Outlets

A growing importance on PR. Controlling how and where you are spoken about in media outlets.



Forum Sites

Monitoring and moderating threads on sites such as Reddit and Quora to protect your brand.



Social Media

Make sure information is clearly and accurately shared across platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

AEO *in Action*

Let's use an example

Imagine you're responsible for marketing a community college in New Mexico.

Your goal is to increase institutional awareness and drive enrollment for your School of Energy programs. The local coal mine shut down, and many people in the community who worked there for years are left wondering what to do next.

Some of the prompts and conversations you want your institution to appear in based on those goals include:

- How to start a career in renewable energy?
- What types of jobs are there in energy?
- How to go back to college as an adult?



This was the exact scenario *San Juan College*—a two-year institution in New Mexico—was in when we first began working with them on AEO.



Analyzed site data
and performed
keyword research

Created a listicle
titled *15 Renewable
Energy Careers*

Ensured the article
began with an
optimized image

15 Renewable Energy Careers

February 6, 2025

SHARE



A guide to what different careers in the energy industry are like, including in-demand renewable energy jobs. SJC is an expert in energy career training.



Wondering what types of jobs you can find in today's evolving energy sector? This industry offers diverse opportunities across both established and emerging technologies. Whether you're starting your career or transitioning from another field, working in renewable energy provides stable employment with competitive salaries and room for advancement. Here's your guide to current energy jobs and how these essential roles power our world.

Posed questions
in the form of
headers and
provided responses

What Are Careers in Renewable Energy?

Careers in the energy sector include positions in power generation, distribution, industrial processes, and technology. These jobs include technical roles, engineering positions, and management, plus much more. Salaries vary depending on the exact role, experience level, and region.

Created numbered list of job opportunities with explanations and easy-to-interpret bullets

Renewable Energy Job Opportunities

1. Solar Energy Jobs

Solar energy represents one of the most familiar segments of the energy industry, with career opportunities ranging from hands-on installation work to system design, project management, or sales. These positions often offer career advancement paths as you gain experience.

What you could do:

- Install and maintain solar panels
- Design photovoltaic systems
- Monitor system performance
- Sell solar solutions to customers

Common roles include:

- PV System Designer
- Solar Installation Technician
- Solar Project Manager
- Solar Sales Consultant

2. Nuclear Energy Jobs

Nuclear power continues to play a vital role in providing reliable, carbon-free power around the world. Jobs in nuclear energy, like those with other energy sources, range from hands-on technical work to selling contracts or products related to nuclear energy production.

What you could do:

- Monitor nuclear systems and controls
- Maintain reactor equipment
- Ensure radiation safety
- Manage necessary materials
- Follow strict safety procedures

Optimized existing
program page
content for relevant
degrees and
certificates

Energy Production Foundations Certificate

Get introductory knowledge of the energy industry with the one-year Energy Production Foundations Certificate from San Juan College. This program will help you understand this growing field's basic concepts, processes, and terminology. You should complete the certificate if you are deciding which energy industry sector you want to enter. It is also beneficial if you are a support personnel in the energy industry or want to transfer into that role.

By completing the Energy Production Foundations Certificate, you will have completed the first year of an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree for SJC's School of Energy programs. You'll have the fundamental knowledge you need to earn a degree and advance in your career. Plus, you can even take your courses in-person or online based on your needs.

Why Earn a Energy Production Foundations Certificate?

The energy industry has enormous growth potential, as every part of our lives is dependent upon energy. Demand for energy continues to grow, and there is high demand for diverse workers who can thrive in

Connect with us today!

First Name *

Last Name *

Email Address *

Confirm Email Address *

Would you like to receive text messages from SJC?

☐ Do Not Allow ☒ Allow

Phone Number

Mailing Address

City

Published additional content on an ongoing monthly basis relating to this topic, like this article *How to Start a Career in Renewable Energy*

How to Start a Career in Renewable Energy: A Guide

February 6, 2025

SHARE [in](#) [f](#) [x](#)

Discover your options for training programs in renewable energy. Read our guide on starting or transitioning into careers in renewable energy today.



The renewable energy industry is evolving rapidly in the Four Corners region and across the nation, making it an exciting time to pursue energy careers in multiple sectors, local and national government, technology, and more. These jobs and their advancement opportunities typically require specialized training for those new to the workforce or transitioning careers.

Created supporting content for the intended audience, such as this article *How to Go Back to College as an Adult*

How to Go Back to College as an Adult

March 12, 2025

SHARE   

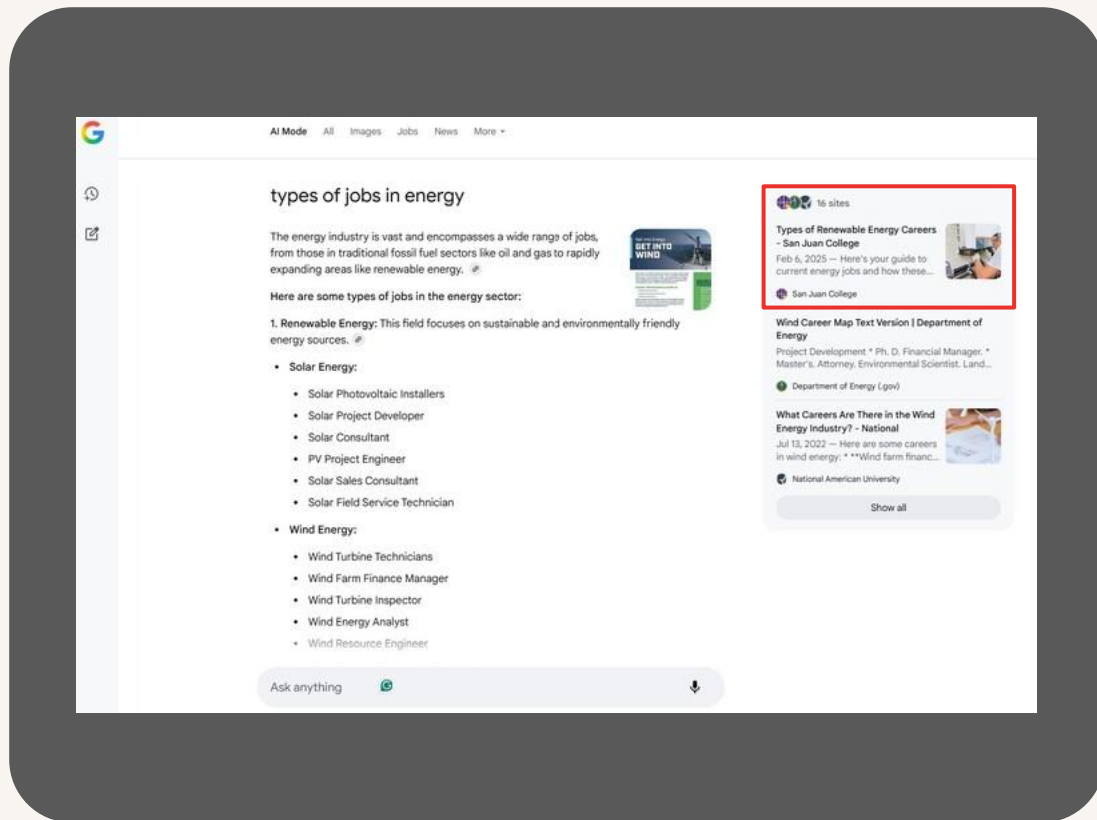
Learn how to return to college as an adult, from credit transfers, balancing responsibilities, financial aid, and finding the right program in our guide.



Whether you pick up where you left off, build on a past degree, or start fresh, returning to college as an adult is exciting and challenging. You're not alone in this journey. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), [over 6.2 million students over the age of 25 attended college in the United States in 2023](#), each with their own story and circumstances. That's 32% of all enrolled students!

Are you wondering if going back to school is right for you? [Read our going back to college frequently asked questions.](#)

Earned SJC citations
in Google AI Mode
for several prompts,
including this one
for “types of jobs
in energy”



Results

+

800% growth

in sessions originating
from LLMs

+

580% increase

in website visitors from
AI search engines

+

3X increase

in keywords surfaced
in Google AI
Mode/Overviews

Future Trends and *AI Sounds*

Pillar 4:

Ongoing Strategy & Governance



Prune Old Content Before the Bots Start Hallucinating

If you publish a program page and abandon it, you are rolling the dice. When details change but your site goes quiet, answer engines do not just wait around—they go hunting through two-year-old Instagram posts or chaotic Reddit threads to fill in the blanks. Keeping your official pages fresh and accurate is the best way to stop AI models from making things up.



Watch Your Reputation, Not Just Your Web Traffic

Showing up in an AI answer is not a win if the LLM tells prospective students your tuition is outrageous or your application process is a nightmare. AI models synthesize your brand identity from the whole web—news outlets, social feeds, and unverified forums. You need to monitor your sentiment regularly, step in when facts go sideways, and actively guide the narrative.



Work Your Content Governance Plan Like a Boss

Sustained AI visibility does not happen on autopilot. Your team has to own the workflow—whether that means running regular schema checks, refreshing program pages, or adding clean transcripts to your YouTube videos. Build a sustainable, repeatable governance plan so your site stays sharp without burning out your staff.

“The next evolution of search is about owning the answer and the ad.

SEO builds the foundation, AEO earns visibility in AI-generated responses, and paid search creates the path to action.

Institutions that connect all three will be better positioned to shape the search experience from discovery through decision.”

Jon Covell
VP, AI Search



The Emerging Opportunity: Connection & Convergence



Own Both the Answer and the Ad

Stop treating paid search, traditional SEO, and as separate line items. They each serve important services in the search journey, and they're better together. When you unify these channels, you control the story, build brand credibility, and capture the conversion in a single breath.



Break Down Your Internal Silos

Running your paid media group and your web content team in separate universes is a mistake. The real-world prompts you track through AEO audits should directly fuel your paid search messaging and landing page strategy, while paid search analytics pinpoint the high-cost degree programs where your website needs stronger organic authority. Launch lightweight pilot projects across teams to foster alignment and collaboration.



Measure Total Influence, Not Just Clicks

The rise of zero-click AI overviews means raw organic click-through rates are down, but the quality of your visitors has never been higher. Students who research through answer engines arrive with deep intent, showing a 29% higher engagement rate on dot-edu sites than average web traffic. Modern search strategy demands measuring your AI share of voice, brand sentiment, and downstream conversions alongside classic web traffic.

The *Recap*

AEO in Action:

Focus on these actions to drive success in AI search.



Your Website
Content
Should Answer
Questions
and Drive
Conversations



Keep Content
Current,
Accurate,
and Relevant



Use Media
to Reinforce
Authority



Build Trust
Beyond Your
Website



Strengthen
the Technical
Foundation

AI Is Rapidly Changing the Search Landscape. To Succeed, Institutions Need to:

Show Up in Decision-Driving Moments

Be present when students ask real questions that influence consideration, confidence, and choice.

Actively Shape Your Narrative

Ensure institutional strengths, values, and programs are clearly understood by AI systems and not just inferred or assumed.

Be Represented Accurately and Completely

Provide clear, current, and credible information so AI-generated answers reflect reality, not partial or outdated signals.

Questions, *Answered*

The *Definitive* Guide to AI Search for Higher Education

Download the **Definitive Guide to AI Search for Higher Ed** to learn how to show up clearly and competitively inside AI-powered answers.

What's inside:

- An Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) Readiness Diagnostic
- Five quick wins you can implement this month
- A year-one roadmap and governance checklist



Carnegie's Definitive Guide to AI Search for Higher Ed

How to master the new digital front door and drive accuracy, authority, and top visibility in AI-powered answers.

CARNEGIE



DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE

Thank You

Ready to take
the *next step*?



LEARN MORE ABOUT AN AEO AUDIT

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