

Advanced Degrees of E-Recruitment

The E-Expectations of Prospective Graduate Students

Many university e-recruitment programs are built around enrolling undergraduates, but what about students seeking graduate degrees? These students, having already been through the recruitment process and college experience, have a different set of expectations and goals than their undergraduate counterparts. How can campuses strengthen their connections with prospective graduate students through their Web sites and e-communications?

The answer is to know what those students expect. The E-Expectations: Graduate Edition study surveyed more than 1,000 prospective graduate students about their behaviors — what they are doing on graduate program Web sites and what are their e-communications preferences from those graduate programs.

The study shows that these students seek a connection with the institution, and especially with faculty. They value academic quality, overall value, and their “fit” with the programs. Graduate e-recruitment programs need to provide details about the programs of study, opportunities for aid, value of a degree from that institution, and how to communicate with potential faculty mentors.

Even more, many of these students prefer this information electronically — on the Web and in e-mail — which means graduate programs need to put as much information as possible within a few mouse clicks of their target audience.



The E-Expectations Graduate Respondents

The E-Expectations graduate survey polled 1,069 prospective graduate students in an online survey. The majority of respondents were 22 to 28 years old and seeking master's degrees.

Age

21 years or younger	26.2%
22 to 28 years	46.5%
29 to 35 years	8.5%
35 to 41 years	5%
42 to 48 years	6.1%
49 to 55 years	5.3%
56 years or older	2.4%

Degree Sought

Master's	65.4%
Doctorate	26.9%
Professional (JD, MD, etc.)	3.8%
Other	3.9%

Turning to the Web First

One of the most interesting results of the survey showed a clear preference for electronic communications over print. Given a choice between two answers, two out of three respondents preferred the Web over printed materials.

I would rather look at a Web site about a graduate program than read brochures sent in the mail: 62.4%

I would rather read brochures about a graduate program sent in the mail than looking at a Web site: 37.6%

I would like to receive e-mail messages from people at a graduate program on my list: 62.5%

I would like to receive information in the mail about a graduate program on my list: 37.5%

This doesn't necessarily mean that graduate programs should throw away their viewbooks and other printed materials. However, it appears imperative to provide that information electronically.

What They Want to Know

What information do students want when searching for graduate programs? The respondents ranked the importance of a number of information categories from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). Here were the responses rated 4.00 or higher:

Category	Importance Rank (5=Extremely Important)
Graduate Program Detail	4.77
Assistantship/Scholarship Information	4.62
Financial Aid Information	4.57
Assistantship Opportunities and Information	4.40
Tuition/Cost/Fees	4.38
Length of Time to Complete Program	4.35
Connections with Employers or Career Services	4.18
Details on Faculty	4.03



While cost and financial aid clearly weighed on their minds, the last two responses showed a strong interest in faculty and post-graduate connections.

What They are Doing and What They Expect

What are these students doing online with graduate programs, and are those activities meeting their expectations?

The following table shows the top 10 activities students said they engaged in, as well as the percentage of students who had not done these activities but would like to. In a number of cases, less than half of the students had completed one of these activities, yet many expressed an interest in them. This could signal a gap between the e-expectations of prospective graduate students and what graduate e-communication programs are delivering. In reviewing these activities, consider whether your campus offers them.

Activity	Have done this online	Have not but would like to do online	Offered by your campus?
Submitted a form online to receive more information in the mail or by e-mail	82%	87%	
Read profiles of faculty	67%	90%	
Viewed a virtual tour	53%	82%	
E-mailed a faculty member	52%	84%	
Forwarded a Web page to a friend or family member	50%	48%	
Completed an admissions application online	45%	90%	
Entered information about your interests to see a personalized Web page	40%	66%	
Completed a tuition cost calculator to learn more about how much a school might cost	35%	90%	
Read profiles of alumni	35%	70%	
Read profiles of current graduate students	33%	71%	



Outside of those 10 activities, there were a number of other areas that had a high discrepancy between completion and desire to complete. Again, does your campus offer these features?

Activity	Have done this online	Have not but would like to do online	Offered by your campus?
Completed a financial aid estimator form to learn how much you might receive in aid/scholarships	27%	93%	
Requested a campus visit by completing a form	18%	80%	
Completed a form to RSVP for a campus event	20%	77%	
E-mailed current graduate students from the Web site	13%	71%	
Filled out a form to get a personalized viewbook PDF	23%	66%	
Created a profile that describes your interests to other prospective graduate students	25%	55%	

Instant Messaging, Blogging and Podcasts

E-communications are going beyond Web surfing and e-mail, with instant messages, blogs, and text messaging rapidly gaining popularity. How did these students feel about newer forms of e-communications being used in recruiting efforts? The reaction was mixed, with students showing interest in blogging but not nearly as much in podcasts or chats.

Activity	Have done this online	Have not but would like to do online	Offered by your campus?
Read a blog written by a member of the faculty	16%	72%	
Exchanged an instant message with an admissions counselor or someone from the program	13%	68%	
Read a blog written by a current student	19%	66%	
Downloaded a podcast	6%	41%	
Downloaded a video podcast	6%	38%	
Participated in an online chat event	11%	35%	
Subscribed to an RSS or XML feed	7%	29%	



The E-Expectations survey also asked more specifically about instant messaging and the recruitment process. The vast majority of students said they use instant messaging and would respond to instant messages from college representatives:

Do you currently use instant messaging? Yes 70.5%

Would you consider sending an IM to a college rep through the school's Web site? Yes 75.2%

Would you consider reading and responding to an IM from a college rep if he/she just noticed that you were online? Yes 87.1%

This same attitude carried over to taking cell phone calls from college representatives, but did not extend into receiving text messages.

Do you currently own a cell phone? Yes 93.4%

Would you consider taking phone calls on your cell phone from a college rep? Yes 73.5%

Does your cell phone have text messaging capabilities? Yes 85.6%

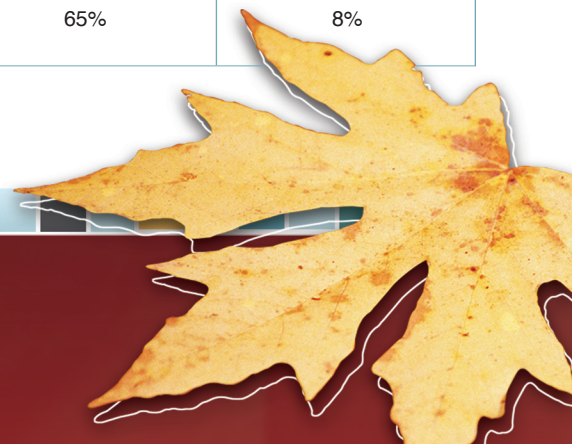
Would you consider taking text messages from a college rep? No 51.7%

When to Contact Them

Many prospective graduate students want to complete a certain amount of research and decision making on their own before even connecting directly with college personnel.

These responses showed when they want to receive certain types of information or make contact with graduate personnel.

	Before Applying	After Applying	Never
Sending a brochure or letter to me in the mail	93%	6%	1%
Sending me an invitation to visit campus	63%	35%	2%
E-mailing me general information about the graduate program	95%	4%	1%
E-mailing me a personalized graduate program PDF	78%	19%	3%
Calling me to talk about the academic quality of the graduate program	67%	27%	6%
Calling me to talk about financing and scholarships	53%	44%	3%
Inviting me to participate in an online chat session	46%	34%	20%
Instant messaging with a representative from the graduate program	48%	32%	20%
Calling me to talk about career development, employer relationships, and networking	27%	65%	8%



Four Strategies to Take Away

What implications does this research have for graduate programs as they recruit prospective students? Here are four things that can help you strengthen your graduate e-communications.

1) Put the “e” in your communications.

More than 60 percent of the E-Expectations: Graduate Edition respondents stressed a preference for electronic communications over print. While this does not mean that print communications should be scrapped, it appears students are turning to the Web first when seeking information about graduate programs. Make sure your e-communications offer comprehensive data about your program.

In fact, many of the online tools sought by graduate students are identical to those identified in the undergraduate version of the E-Expectations research program (www.noellewitz.com/expectations). Institutions devoting resources to undergraduate e-recruitment could adapt those services and features for graduate programs.

2) Offer details on cost and aid opportunities.

When ranking the value of content from graduate programs, four of the top five responses related to cost, financial aid, and assistantships. Furthermore, many students requested online calculators to calculate cost and estimate financial aid. By offering these details and applications on your Web site, you can provide information that’s key to the decision making of prospective students.

3) Connect graduate students to faculty and your campus.

Prospective graduate students expressed a desire to connect with faculty members. Offer opportunities for them to e-mail or contact faculty directly, and if faculty members keep blogs, provide clear links to those on your site.

The respondents also showed an interest in looking at virtual tours. However, on most campus Web sites, these tours are geared toward undergraduates. Consider offering virtual tours specifically for prospective graduate students.

4) Explore new communication options such as blogging and instant messaging.

The survey respondents were overwhelmingly positive about using instant messaging to communicate with graduate programs. If you do not already use it, add it. Blogs also scored high, as they offer a great way to connect with faculty and other graduate students through posts and comments. Encourage faculty members and current grad students to keep blogs and make them visible on your site.



About the Research Sponsors

James Tower

James Tower is a full-service Internet marketing company specializing in recruitment communication services for higher education. Our solutions create human connections with your prospective students. We offer AdmissionsGenie (our Internet recruitment solution); CDs and DVDs; virtual tours; e-mail marketing campaigns; Web site design; content management solutions; and publications.

Noel-Levitz

Noel-Levitz has consulted with nearly 2,000 public and private institutions, helping these campuses and systems reach their goals for enrollment, marketing, and student success at the undergraduate and graduate/professional levels.

NRCCUA

The National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA) conducts the largest in-school college and career planning survey among high school students. Services include student search lists, recruitment publications, and related communications resources.

About the methodology

The E-Expectations: Graduate Edition survey was conducted via the Internet. A list of individuals who had opted in for the study was provided to Noel-Levitz by GradSchools.com. A total of 1,069 responses were gathered in July 2006.

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