

Measuring Your University's Website Performance

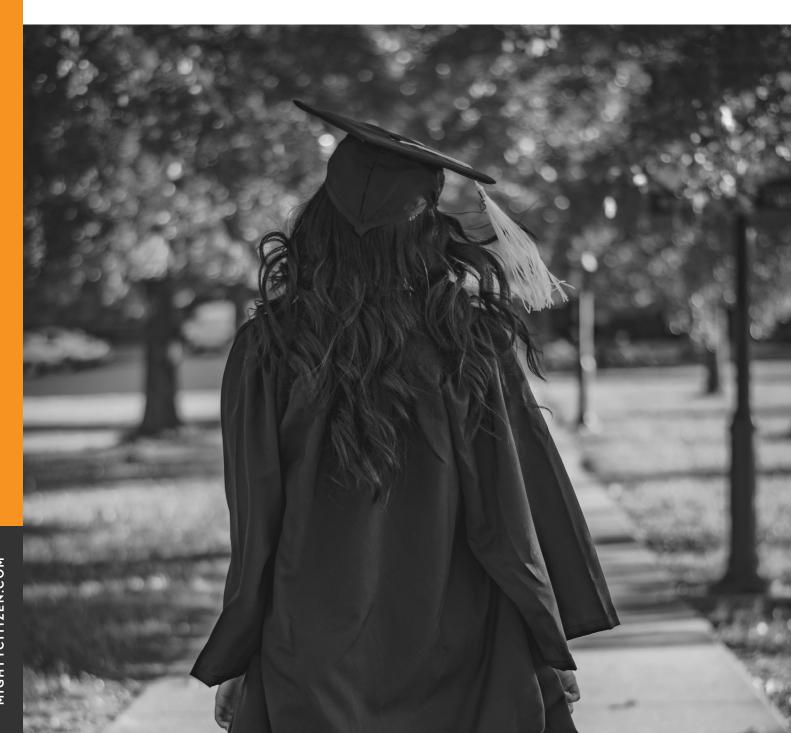


Table of Contents

- Who is Mighty Citizen? / What This Guide Covers
- 5 Set up Google Analytics
- Five Popular Forms Used by Universities
- Measure Homepage Success
- 12 Where Traffic Comes From
- SEO for University Academic Programs
- 25 Get Some Mighty Data

Who is Mighty Citizen?

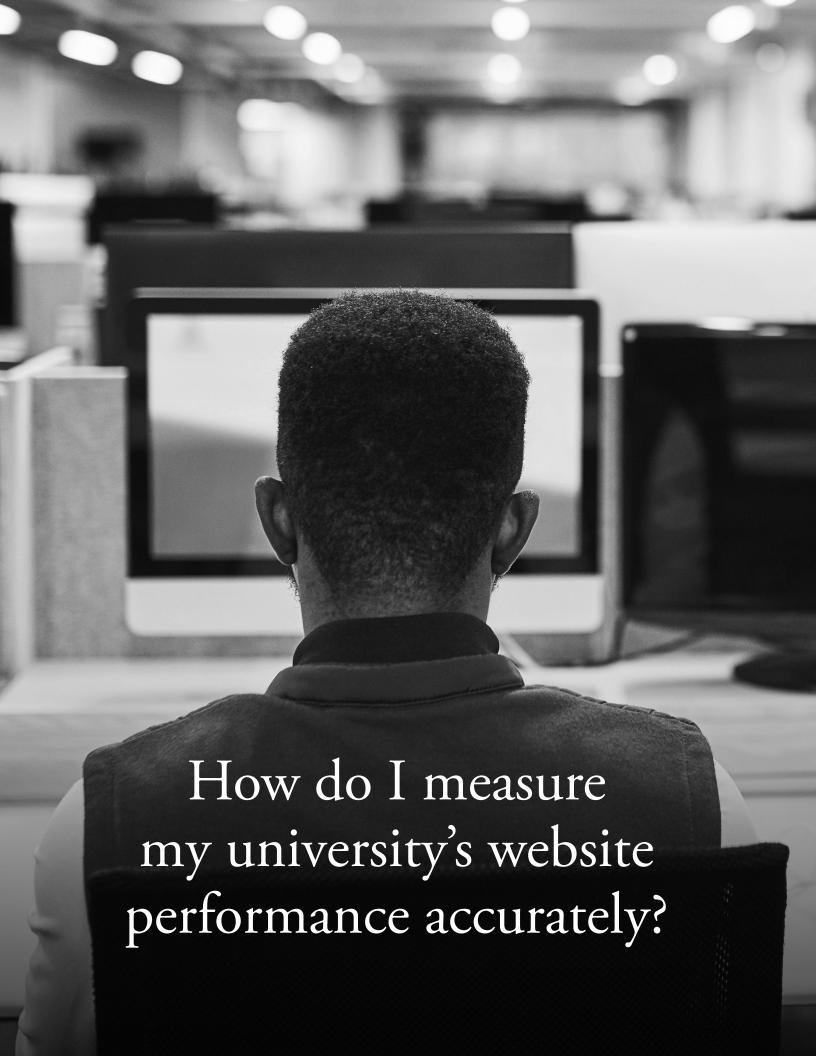
Mighty Citizen transforms mission-driven organizations through branding, marketing, and digital communications. We help associations, nonprofits, governments, and universities increase their impact and revenue by creating deeper connections with their audiences. We marry data with human-centered design to craft brands, build websites, and launch marketing campaigns that improve the world.

What This Guide Covers

This guide details how universities can harness Google Analytics and other tools to evaluate whether their website is supporting their goals.

BY USING THIS GUIDE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Set up Google Analytics for success
- Measure homepage engagement
- Explore where your traffic is coming from
- Optimize your website for search engines



Set up Google Analytics

If you're going to measure your 's website performance accurately, you must first set up Google Analytics (GA) properly.

This guide assumes you already have Google Analytics connected to your main website. If not, please first visit http://bit.ly/2R3MdKI to get started.

Connect Google Analytics to Third-Party Web Platforms

Your university probably uses third-party web platforms to do things like process applications, event registrations, and alumni donations.

Because they're on separate website domains, you must add your Google Analytics tracking code to *every page* of these platforms.

Finding Your GA Tracking Code

You can find your GA tracking code in Google Analytics by going to:

Admin > Tracking Info > Tracking Code

Many third-party platforms simply need your Google Analytics property ID—which looks something like "UA-12345678-01."

Each Third-Party Platform Has its Own Integration with GA

For example: If you're using Eventbrite to manage donor events, search Google for "Eventbrite Google Analytics integration" and follow the instructions. If you don't find anything on Google, contact the platform vendor directly and ask if they integrate with Google Analytics.

Google Tag Manager

Consider using Google Tag Manager (GTM) to manage all tracking codes—e.g., Google Analytics, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, etc.

- Install one set of GTM tracking codes on your website and all third-party platforms and then manage all other tracking codes using the GTM interface.
- Many platforms requiring tracking codes provide instructions for GTM.
- Test your changes before pushing live.

GTM is free, but you'll want to involve your Web development team because setting it up requires technical know-how.

ADD YOUR GA TRACKING CODE

Adding your GA tracking code to *every* page of your third-party platforms could reveal insights like:

- How search engine optimization (SEO) efforts on your academic program webpages lead to campus visit sign-ups
- How well display ads lead to request-for-information form completions on landing pages managed by your marketing automation platform (MAP)
- How email campaigns targeting student prospects lead to completed applications on your admissions platform
- How your efforts to promote open faculty and staff positions lead to completed applications on your job application platform
- How your fundraising email campaigns lead to donations on your donation platform

If a platform does not automatically connect to Google Analytics, this same tracking code can be manually included on every page of the platform. To learn more, watch this Google video (https://bit.ly/2JD3R2H).



2. Set up Tracking for Email Campaigns

Next, connect Google Analytics to your email marketing platform. This will allow GA to deliver a complete picture of your email marketing efforts—including what users do on your website after they click a link in one of your emails.

Website traffic from email is normally registered in Google Analytics as "direct" traffic. However, you want Google Analytics to track your email marketing as its own channel.

See: Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels

For example: If you use Mailchimp, search Google for "Mailchimp Google Analytics" to find instructions for integrating your email marketing platform with your Google Analytics account. If you can't find these instructions online, contact the email marketing platform and ask for help.

Create Conversion & Destination Goals in Google Analytics

To know whether users are doing what you want them to do on your site, you must first create conversion goals in Google Analytics. **Conversion goals are completed actions on your website**—e.g., submitting a form, signing up for an event, logging into an account, etc.

Form completions are among the most popular conversion goals. Most form completions can be tracked as a type of conversion goal known as a destination goal. **Destination goals allow you to record** *where* on your website your users go.

For example: When a user completes a form and is then automatically taken to a "Thank you for contacting us!" confirmation page, that confirmation page is a destination.

Do you know how users are engaging with your content?

About Multi-Step Forms

If a form spans multiple web pages (i.e., unique URLs), it may become more likely that people will abandon the form before completing it.

The "Funnel Visualization report" in GA (**Conversions > Goals > Funnel Visualization**) shows how users move from step to step in the form. You can discover where in the sign-up process users are dropping off so you can make content and architecture changes.

It is especially important to track completions of long forms on mobile devices because visitors may give up if the process is too lengthy or complex. Simple changes—such as reducing the number of fields or removing a field requiring information that is difficult to obtain—can increase your conversion rate and improve user experience.



Five Popular Online Forms Used by Universities

1. Student Applications

Most schools consider this to be the most important form on their website, but there are a number of reasons why it is often difficult to track application submissions.

- Admissions platforms often don't allow you to include Google Analytics tracking code on their multi-page application form, so you don't know when prospects complete applications or where they abandon the form.
- A graduate school or specific program with a
 dedicated website often has to direct prospects
 to the main university website to complete an
 application. It is possible for universities to track
 these user paths with Google Analytics and share
 the data.
- You can track the number of prospects who
 leave your website for platforms like Common
 Application, but it is very difficult to associate
 your website traffic with completed applications
 on these platforms.

2. Student Request for Information (RFI)

Because it is difficult to track student application completions, this is one of the most important forms on your website because it allows you to:

- Capture student prospect contact details before they exit the site.
- Follow up and encourage contacts to sign up for a campus visit or complete their application
- Measure the effectiveness of marketing

3. Campus Visit

Universities often find that campus visit sign-ups are more valuable than RFI form completions because there is greater potential for commitment.

4. Donations

See how your email or other marketing campaigns influence alumni and other donors to submit donation forms.

If you are connecting Google Analytics to your donation platform, you should also search "Blackbauc Google Analytics Ecommerce" (if Blackbaud manages your donations) because some platforms have a built-in integration that allows you to see the dollars associated with completed donations.

For example: If you spend \$2,000 on an online ad campaign that generates 100 donations, you want to know the average donation size. (\$10 per donation is a lot different than \$100 per.) If your donation platform doesn't have a Google Analytics Ecommerce connector, ask your Web developer if it is possible to create an integration of your own.

5. Events

year, keep the destination goal the same in Google Analytics so you can see how event registration trends change from year to year.

Note: The "Contact Us" form is so common and is used by so many people for so many different reasons that it doesn't provide a meaningful metric for website performance.

4. GA Event Tracking

Events is how Google Analytics tracks user interactions that *don't* involve moving to a new webpage. Unless your university has added tracking code to your website to track these events, there is likely no data available in: **Behavior** > **Events** > **Top Events.**

You'll need the help of a website developer to implement tracking code for file downloads, outbound links, and video views. This code is easier to implement and test if you are using Google Tag Manager.

Here are three of the most common types of events tracked in Google Analytics.

File Downloads

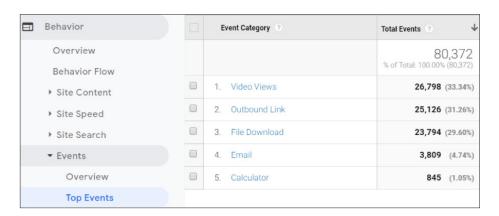
Many universities provide resources in PDF format for academic programs, classes, and more. Tracking downloads in PDF, Word, Excel, and other formats can help you know how people are engaging with this content.

Outbound Links

If you can't link your application, RFI, or event registration platforms to your main website in Google Analytics, it is helpful to know the number of people who exited the site to specific pages on these platforms. This data isn't as valuable as form completion data because we don't know how many of these clicked links resulted in completed applications or registrations. But it's definitely better than nothing.

Video Views

Know how people are engaging with your video content, including the number of users who play and then watch 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% of the video. Some platforms even track the number of users who submit their email address after watching. Google Tag Manager has a built-in trigger that allows you to track YouTube videos easily, and other platforms like Vimeo provide GTM implementation instructions.



Measure Homepage Success

Entrance Path

To learn the top webpages clicked to *from* your homepage, follow these steps in Google Analytics:

- 1. Go to: Behavior > Site Content > Landing Pages
- 2. Select your homepage (often represented as /)
- 3. Select **Entrance Paths** in the sub-navigation
- 4. The **Second Page** metric will display the top pages clicked from the homepage

Check which pages have a conspicuously high or low number of clicks.

This is an easy, helpful way to start exploring your site's effectiveness. If what you see is unexpected, remember that users may value some things differently, they may not understand what information is provided on each of the subsequent pages, or they may have trouble finding what they're searching for from the homepage.

Site Search

When users can't quickly find what they are looking for from your homepage, they will often use your site's search feature.

If your website has site search that reports to Google Analytics, see which terms are getting a lot of search. Go to: **Behavior > Site Search > Search Terms.**What you learn here may reveal important changes you should make to your homepage architecture so users can find what they need more quickly.

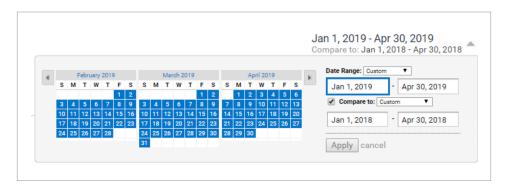
For example: If you have a lot of search for a phrase like "list of Bachelor's degrees," you may want to make sure you have a clear, obvious link to such a page on your homepage.

About Comparing Dates

Comparing data during specific time periods can be tricky. Consider seasonality when measuring website activity.

For example: It's common for universities to see less website engagement during late December and early summer. You will also see spikes in traffic during August, September, and January when students are beginning a new semester.

That's why, in order to evaluate website performance over time, you should consider running reports that compare activity during one period to the *same period the previous year*. In the example below, notice the date ranges are identical, one year apart:



Bounce Rate

Google Analytics defines bounce rate as "the percentage of single-page sessions in which there was no interaction with the page." While it can be useful to know how often people arrive on a webpage and then "bounce" off the site, we recommend looking more closely to determine the *reasons* for the bounce rate. Don't assume that a "high" bounce rate is a bad sign.

For example:

- Do most students who arrive on your homepage immediately log in to your student platform? If Google Analytics doesn't track traffic to this thirdparty platform, these website sessions will be considered bounces because people are technically leaving your homepage to go to another website.
- Is new homepage content affecting your bounce rate? You may find a
 temporary improvement after promoting a link to a popular event or
 news article, which will then return to normal when that link is less
 relevant or removed.
- Does your homepage bounce rate fluctuate at certain times of the year due to traffic seasonality?

Consider Usability Testing

Every site has usability issues, but it's difficult to identify these issues or how severe they are unless an independent researcher walks through your website with real users to recognize strengths as well as opportunities for improvement. Usability testing can help you understand how well you are communicating with prospective students.

There is a real, potentially massive cost to poor website usability, and the process of testing your site with users is an easy way to listen and learn from them.

Where Traffic Comes From

Google Analytics offers a number of standard reports about where your web traffic comes from—i.e., how people find you online. These reports also provide invaluable information about which sources lead to form completions—i.e., RFI and campus visit sign ups.

- In Google Analytics, go to: **Acquisition** > **All Traffic** > **Channels**.
- From there, select relevant form completion goals in the "Conversions" drop-down menu (at the right of the page).

This will create a chart like the one below that shows which channels are best at driving form completions:

Channels	Sessions	RFI Form	Conv. Rate
1. Organic Search	395,106 (82.51%)	9,352 (72.71%)	2.37%
2. Direct	63,507 (13.26%)	2,587 (20.11%)	4.07%
3. Referral	7,347 (1.53%)	286 (2.22%)	3.89%
4. Social	5,696 (1.19%)	222 (1.73%)	3.90%
5. Email	5,234 (1.09%)	195 (1.52%)	3.73%
6. Paid Search	1,157 (0.24%)	104 (0.81%)	8.99%
7. Display	785 (0.16%)	116 (0.90%)	14.78%

In this example, the vast majority of "sessions" (visits to the website)—82.51%—come from regular search engine use. But direct users—i.e., users who type in your school's URL or have it bookmarked—fill out the RFI form at a higher conversion rate than we might expect. It is important to learn more about traffic to these channels so you can fix problems quickly and capitalize on successes.

Organic Search

Organic search refers to users who visit your website by using a search engine and clicking on an ordinary search result (instead of an ad). To view your organic traffic:

- 1. Go to your Channels report: Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels
- 2. Click on: Organic Search
- 3. Click on: **Landing Page** (in the sub-navigation)
- 4. Select the appropriate goal in the **Conversions** drop-down menu (on the right)

Which academic program pages are generating the most organic search traffic, and which are best at leading people to complete your RFI forms? Are searchers completing your forms after landing on any pages of your blog? Which new pages should you create to attract more relevant search traffic?

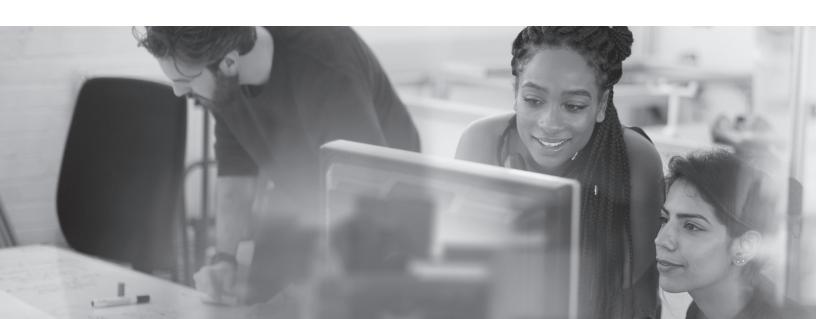
Referral

Click on **Referral** from the **Channels** report to see the top websites referring traffic to your website.

What content on other websites leads to form completions on your site?

For example: If you find that a link on a professional association website is generating a lot of RFI completions for academic programs related to their industry, can you do additional promotion with that association or develop relationships with other associations that would link to your university site?

Click on **Landing Page** in the sub-navigation of the Referral page to see the most popular pages on your site to referrers. Can you create and promote similar content to increase additional relevant referral traffic?



Social Media

To discover the top social media networks driving traffic to your website (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) go to: **Acquisition > Social > Overview**.

See how people engage with your website after clicking links to your content in social networks in: **Acquisition > Social > Landing Pages.**

If you are promoting your content on social media, consider using the following metrics:

Avg. Session Duration

What types of social content keep people on your website longest?

Pages / Session

What types of social content influence people to explore other pages? Can anything be done on your article pages to introduce site visitors to other content so they won't exit too quickly? (This is especially relevant for mobile users, who tend to bounce more often.)

Which articles did you post to social networks that are successfully leading to RFI form completions or applications? Could you write additional articles about similar subjects?

Email

If your email marketing platform is reporting to Google Analytics, go to: **Acquisition > Campaigns > All Campaigns** to find the top performing email campaigns. This report is particularly helpful in understanding the effectiveness of emails that encourage student prospects to apply or alumni to donate.

If an email leads to a large number of applications or donations, dig deeper. Figure out what made that email perform so well. Was it the list you sent it to, the subject line, the timing?



Search and Display Advertising

Google Ads campaigns—i.e., the text ads that appear at the very top of search results—can make your website immediately visible to more people. You'll pay Google *only* when a user clicks on the ad, and then lands on your website. Performance of these ads is measured by conversions (i.e., form completions), not mere clicks.

If you use Google Ads, target them by geography and/or specific academic programs.

Mobile Traffic

Go to: Audience > Mobile > Overview.

Device	Sessions	RFI Form	Conv. Rate
1. mobile	278,844 (58.23%)	5,925 (46.07%)	2.12%
2. desktop	174,159 (36.37%)	6,211 (48.29%)	3.57%
3. tablet	25,852 (5.40%)	726 (5.64%)	2.81%

If the percentage of overall website traffic from mobile devices (i.e., smartphones) is significant compared to desktop visitors, consider investing further in the mobile user experience.

In the Conversions drop-down menu, select a goal. If your conversion rate for RFI form completions is much lower on mobile than desktop, for example, that's a clue that you need to improve your mobile user experience.

Google Analytics reports provide invaluable information about which online sources lead to form completions.

SEO for University Academic Programs

Search engine optimization (SEO) describes everything that can be done to improve the visibility of your website to search engines.

Great SEO usually involves help from an SEO professional because true success is found in the highly targeted, strategic margins. But your school can take these simple steps to improve your visibility in search results right away.

Perform a Quick SEO Test

Go to Google. Search your school's top 10 academic programs, one at a time. Check out the search results—especially the top three. Are you there?

For example: If you search "criminal justice degree" while located in the same geographic region as your university and your school's program **isn't** in the Top 3 spots, prospective students aren't finding you either.

(One of our favorite quotations about SEO is, "The best place to hide a dead body is page two of Google search results.")

The competition for these spots is fierce. Other colleges, online schools, and "college ranking" websites are all vying for those coveted top spots. The good news? Most college webpages are **not** optimized for search engines; so if yours is, you'll jump to the head of the pack.

SEO can become a competitive advantage if you invest in it. It can produce significantly more website visitors, which will naturally convert to more applications and contacts.

The competition for the top Google search spots is fierce.

SEO Tactics

How you organize your academic programs greatly impacts your visibility in search engine results.

Most universities make the same mistake: They organize their academic programs on their website in the same way they're organized in the university itself—namely, by colleges and departments.

Here's a common page hierarchy on higher education websites:



The pages your users care most about—e.g., B.A. in Communications—are buried so deep in your website that Google, naturally, considers them less important. (It's also unlikely that most prospective students will have the patience to click five times to get to the target page, especially on mobile devices.)

For students who are researching potential schools, the department or "college" in which their desired degree sits is not important.

Some universities make the opposite mistake: Including every conceivable program, track, and concentration on a single page that goes on forever (what we call the "long page"). The long page example included on the next page provides a number of challenges.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

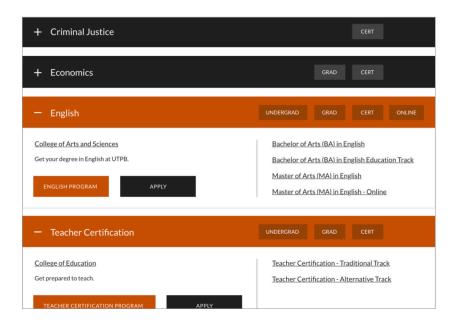
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- Interdisciplinary Studies Education BAIS
- Interdisciplinary Studies Education BSIS
- Accelerated Online Ed Curriculum & Instruction MEd Mathematics
- Accelerated Online Ed Curriculum & Instruction MEd Science
- Accelerated Online Ed Curriculum & Instruction MEd Triple Literacy
- Ed Curriculum & Instruction MEd
- Ed Curriculum & Instruction, Mathematics MEd
- Ed Curriculum & Instruction, Science MEd
- Ed Curriculum & Instruction, Writing Focus MEd
- Mind, Brain, and Education MEd
- Reading Specialist MEd
- Teaching Early Childhood, MEdT
- Teaching Middle Level, MEdT
- Teaching Secondary Level, MEdT

Here's why this isn't good for SEO:

- Nobody is searching for complex or creative department names ("Curriculum & Instruction") or program names ("Mind, Brain and Education") so these pages won't ever receive much search traffic.
- There is no single page that best addresses the university's "Teaching Degrees" so it is unlikely that any of these pages will be visible for this search.
- It is not important for a student prospect to choose between a BAIS degree or a BSIS degree at this point in the decision-making process.

We have designed an alternative to the long page, which links to academic program pages ("Economics Degree Programs," "English Degree Programs," etc.) within an accordion module (see the following page). The academic program page is linked with a button at the left with specific degrees and tracks included in links at the right.



Universities with the best visibility on Google link to their academic program pages in their main menu (so they are visible on every page of the website). This is a significant user experience challenge for universities that don't want their menu bloated with too many links.

Examples of SEO-Friendly University Menus

Here are a few examples of university websites with excellent architecture and strong visibility on Google.

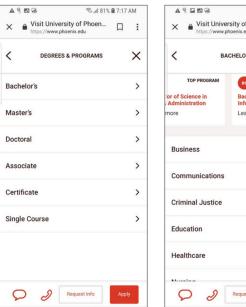
All Programs in Main Menu

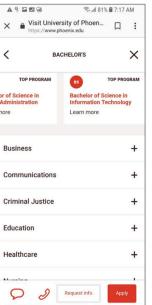
University of Phoenix offers a limited number of degree programs, which are all linked within the Degrees & Programs menu shown below.

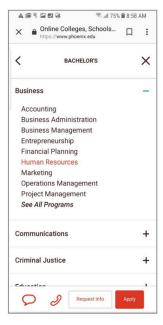


There are a number of reasons why this strategy works well for Phoenix.edu:

- Tabs at the left allow users to view by degree type: Bachelor's, Master's, Certificate, etc.
- Organizing academic programs within larger categories like "Business" and "Education"—helps users find related programs quickly.
- Specific program pages can be optimized for terms like "Business Administration Degree Programs" and "Early Childhood Education Degree Programs."
- These are all links, and because the links are in the main menu (i.e., on every page of the website), Google views them as important.
- Notice how, on mobile devices, the site structure allows University of Phoenix to keep most of their program types, program categories, and specific programs on one screen as users navigate through selections.







 Their calls-to-action are also displayed at the bottom of every screen: chat, call, request info, and apply.

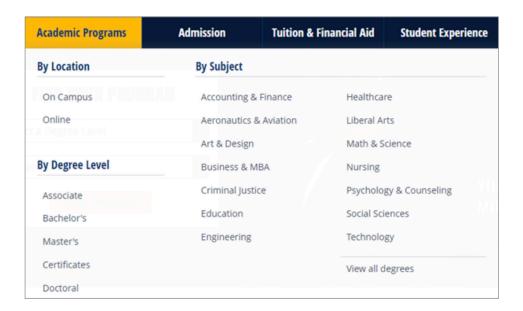
Programs Organized by Categories in Main Menu

Rasmussen College links to their academic programs in the main menu through seven program categories called "Areas of Study"—e.g., Business, Design, Education, etc. Clicking on a program category in the menu opens up links to related programs/degrees in a sub-menu.



Limited Programs in Main Menu

Consider the strategy of Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) as an alternative. They include only 14 of their most important programs in their menu and provide an additional "View all degrees" link.



SNHU also provides a drop-down menu on the homepage with links to their Academic Programs. This tactic isn't as impactful as links in the menu because they are located *only* on the homepage. But it's a decent option if you can't get program links into your main menu.

Content for SEO

Google wants to send searchers to the best, most relevant content on the Internet. Review and promotion sites—like USNews.com, BestColleges.com, TheBestSchools.org, and CollegeChoice.net—often rank in Google's Top 5 for academic program terms because their pages include a lot of relevant content.

Here are recommendations for how to align your website content with how people *actually* search for college information on Google.

Program Pages

Updating academic program content can be a daunting project. For starters, there's a ton of it. And each department/school usually wants control over their own content. Unless you are tasked with updating the content on your entire website (mercy be upon you), consider using one college or large department as a test case—especially if they are motivated to increase applications.

You could also improve the content of programs that have a lot of demand (i.e., search) but aren't available at other colleges in your area. The performance increase of those pages could be significant. It's basic supply and demand. If you can demonstrate that your SEO efforts produced additional traffic that resulted in increased student applications, it will be easier to sell to other departments.

Titling Your Program Pages

Let's say you want to promote your "diagnostic medical sonography" associate's degree and certificate programs. Here are some ways to make your website more visible to search:

- Academic Program page: Create an academic program page—linked to from your main menu—titled something like "Sonography Degree and Certificate Programs." Do *not* simply title the page "Sonography."
- Degree/Certificate page: From your main sonography page, link to dedicated
 pages about each degree and certificate program. Include specific page titles
 like "Diagnostic Medical Sonography Associate's Degree Program."



- Career-focused pages: Students and parents search for (a) specific degrees and (b) what they want to do for a living. On your top-level sonography page, you could also link to dedicated pages about "Ultrasound Tech Certification" and "MRI Tech Certification." (In this case, there is more search for terms like "ultrasound tech programs" than "sonography programs." Keep vocabulary in mind.)
- Major pages (extra credit): Most universities can't get away with this, but
 there is a lot of search for degrees and majors, and it is unlikely that a single
 psychology program page will rank well for both terms. If you can create a
 page about your psychology degrees and a separate page with unique content
 about a psychology major, you could see traffic for both types of searches
 (degrees and majors).

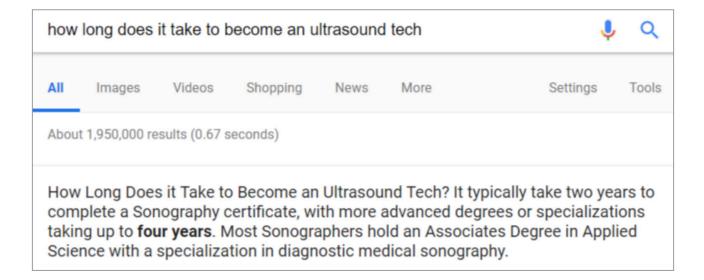
If your program is accredited, or you are primarily trying to target student prospects in your state or large city, make sure to include these words in your content. Include text like "Accredited Ultrasound Tech Certification Program in Texas" in your webpage title tag.

"How to Become" Pages

Because people search by career, consider creating pages that answer five common questions searchers ask about careers. For example: On your "Ultrasound Tech Certification" page, link to subpages with the following titles:

- "How to Become an Ultrasound Tech" could be an overview page speaking generally about the process.
- "How Much Does an Ultrasound Tech Make?" include salary details, preferably for your region.
- "How Long Does it Take to Become an Ultrasound Tech?" include alternatives timelines for full-time and part-time students, and stories from your students.
- "How Much Does it Cost to Become an Ultrasound Tech?" include average costs for the relevant university program.
- "Ultrasound Technician Education Requirements" admittedly, the
 answer to this question could be 1-2 sentences, but include on a separate page
 if more can be said.

If optimized correctly, you may even be found in the featured snippet at the top of the page, which is usually the text Google reads when responding to voice searches on mobile and home devices.



Get Some Mighty Data

This guide should provide the foundation you need to measure (and improve) the performance of your website, but don't be afraid to go further!

Mighty Citizen is a full-service marketing, branding, and digital transformation agency specializing in universities. Learn more online at www.mightycitizen.com.

Our seasoned professionals will help you with:



Google Analytics Consulting, including:

- Selecting the most relevant reports for your school and including them in a performance dashboard that can be shared with your internal stakeholders
- Tracking your main website with third-party software platforms
- Creating conversion goals
- Activating event tracking for file downloads, outbound links, and video views
- Integrating your site search platform with Google Analytics



Branding



Marketing Strategy



Website Redesign



User Research



Search Engine Optimization (SEO), including:

- Keyword research
- Search engine ranking reports
- Advanced optimization consulting



Advertising, including:

- Google Ad Grants campaigns
- Display and retargeting ads



Access free tools and training related to SEO, Google Analytics, content strategy, user research, copywriting, campaigns, and more at www.mightycitizen.com/insights.

Is your university's website doing all it can?

We'll make sure it does.



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