

2023: the worst performing year in the history of Search?

A red line graph with a jagged, downward-sloping trend. The line starts at a high point on the left and ends at a low point on the right. A white magnifying glass icon is positioned over the lowest point of the line, which is on the right side of the graph. The background is a dark blue gradient.

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How to survive the decline in Search performance



The world's largest network connecting students with colleges

- **2M** students and a new one joins every 30 sec
- **350+** colleges actively recruiting students
- **Thousands** of student <> college connections made every week



Alina Johnson Accept connection Ignore

Class of '24 Female Parent/guardian info

Bentonville, AR 72713 \$116,660 Median Family Income (\$85,028 National avg.)

Montgomery High school Public • Rural – Fringe

Criminology Careers: Doctor, Criminal Justice

Insights

Persona Explorer

The Explorer is a quintessential liberal arts student; they value a smaller learning environment to help them explore a variety of pathways for their future.

%	Admission chances ?	77%
☆	College affinity ?	98%
🏠	Environment Index ?	36%

I care about Academic rigor Affordability Ease of switching majors

**A note from
Vinay Bhaskara,
CollegeVine Co-Founder**

Hi there,

As the founder of CollegeVine, I am dedicated to empowering colleges to thrive. With that mission in mind, I wanted to share some of the latest data about how student search is performing for institutions around the country.

As you'll see in the report, the latest performance benchmarks are really rough - the Search funnel is **66% less efficient** than in 2018 and **the cost per enrollment has tripled!** Things are only going to get worse from here: name availability in **Search will drop up to 80%** across the next three years due to the Search Cliff.

The decline in search performance is likely a critical risk for your institution. With that in mind, the last section shares some of our key strategy recommendations for how you and your team can deal with the drop-off in search performance.

I'd love to help you and your team plan ahead. You can reach me via email at vinay@collegevine.com, or if you prefer to meet in person, I'll be at NACAC this month.

Sincerely,

Vinay Bhaskara | Co-Founder, CollegeVine



Methodology

To measure the efficacy of Search in 2023, we surveyed admission and enrollment leaders from institutions around the country in early July, receiving responses from **93 colleges and universities**.

We also compared results with a **2018 RNL** report that analyzed funnel performance of **89 colleges and universities**.



93 Colleges surveyed



3,100 students surveyed



2018 RNL Survey - Benchmark



CV sample skews higher yield



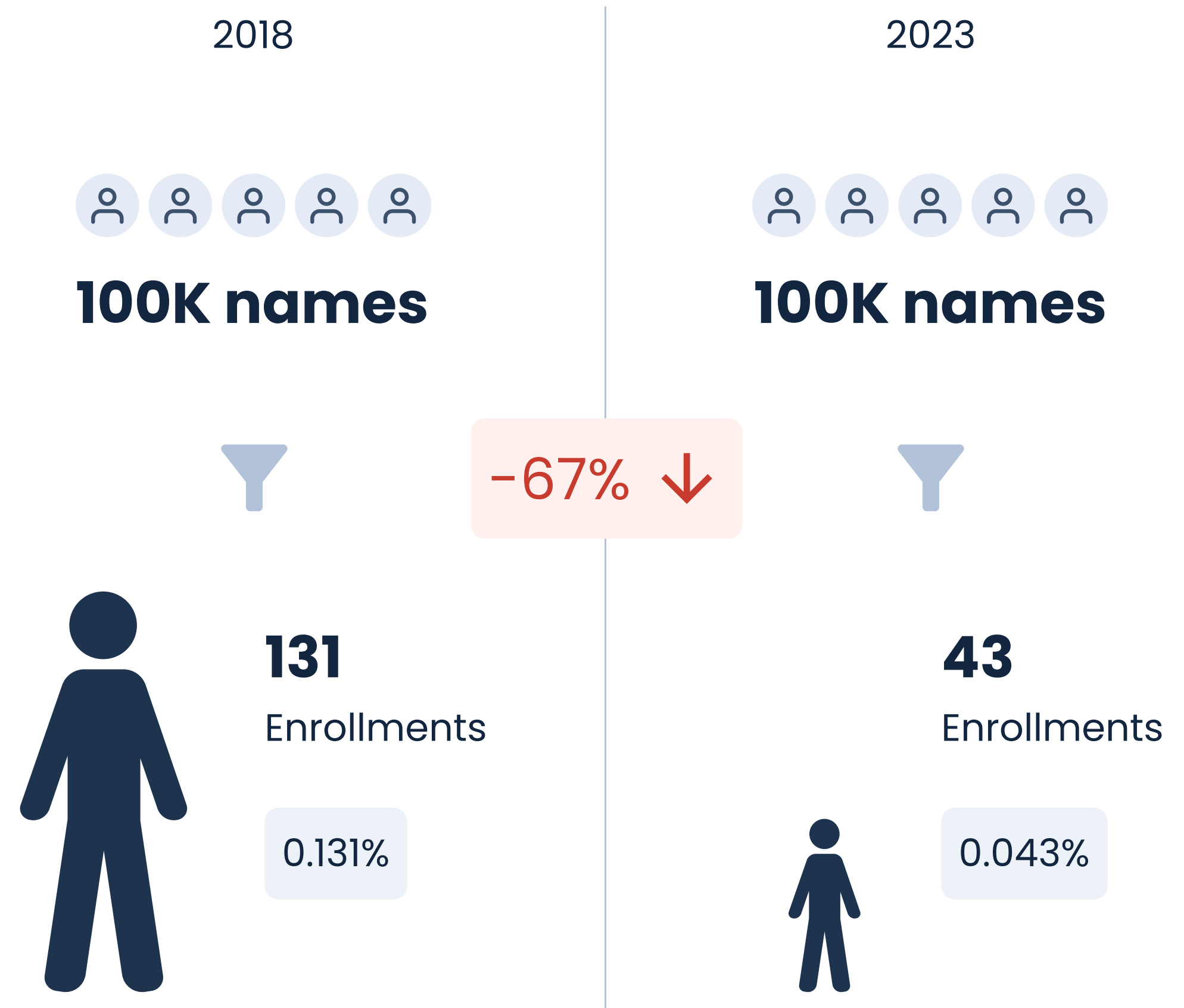
PART 1

**2023 was the
worst year in the
history of Search.**

The Search Funnel: 2018 vs 2023

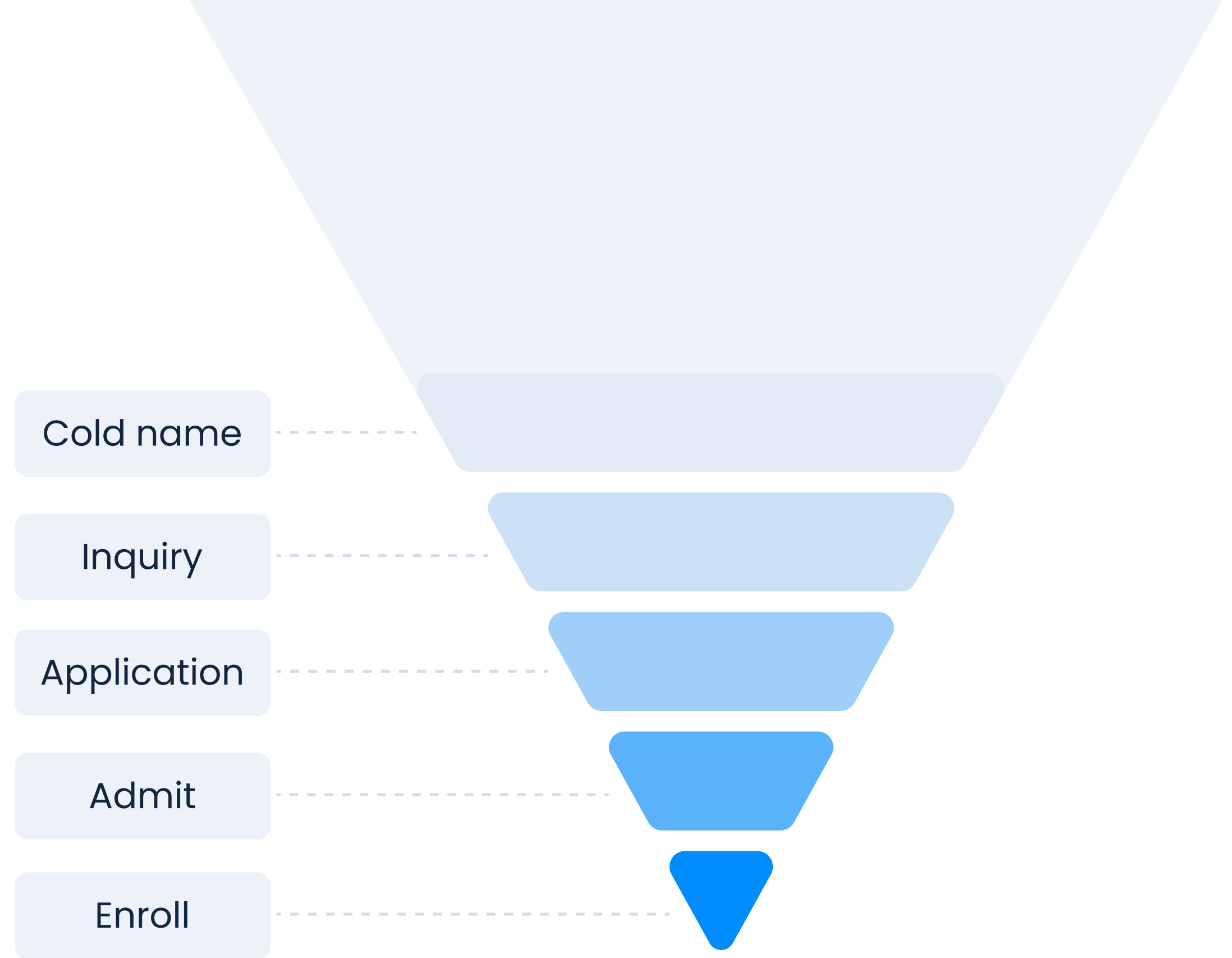
A 2019 report from RNL found that in 2018, the overall funnel rate (from purchased name to enrollment) was 0.131% or 131 enrollments per 100,000 names.

In 2023, the Search funnel was 67% worse, at 43 enrollments per 100,000 names.



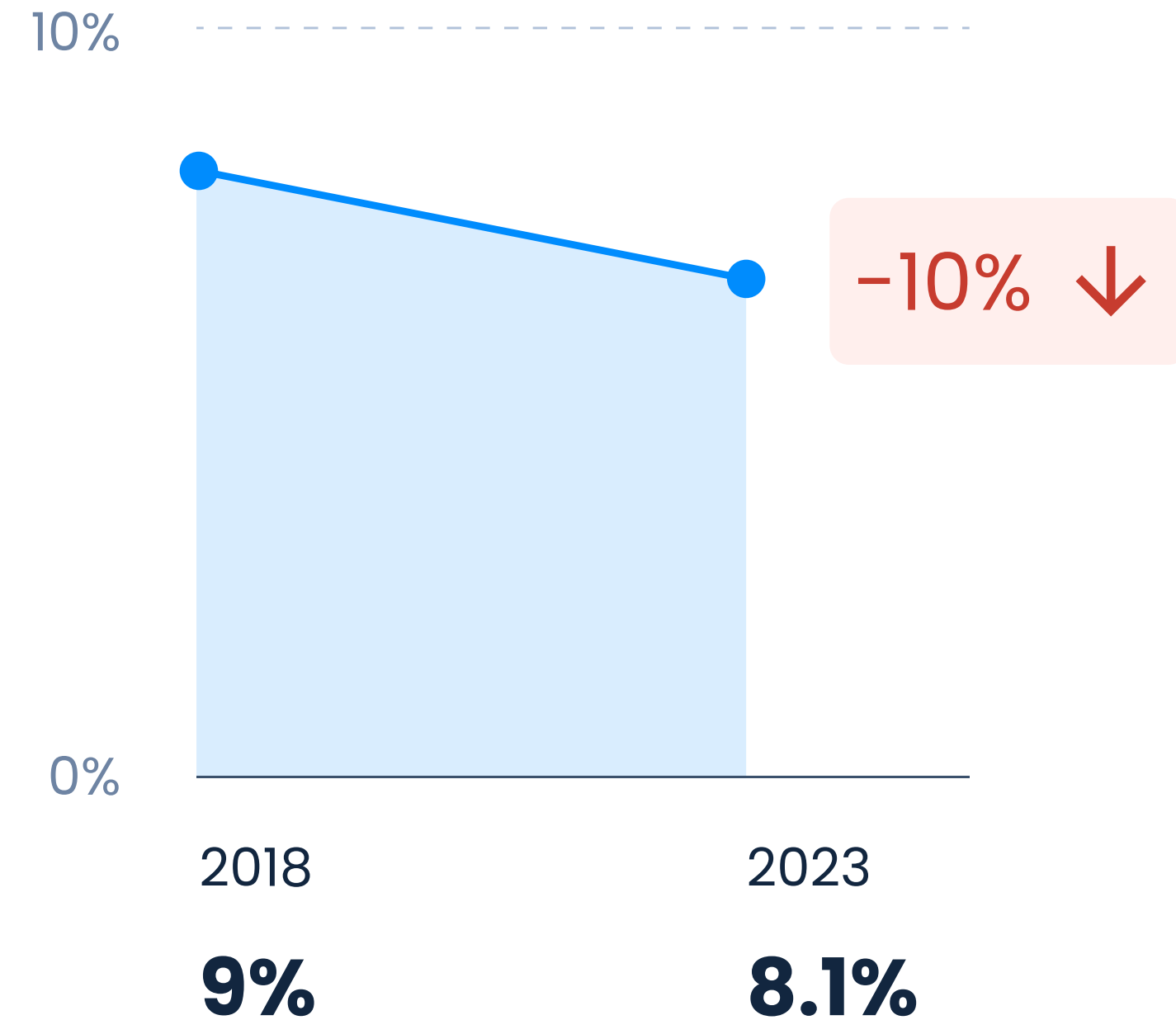
Understanding the Search Funnel

There are five main stages in the Search funnel. In the next few pages, we'll reveal how the performance degraded for each of these steps between 2018 and 2023."



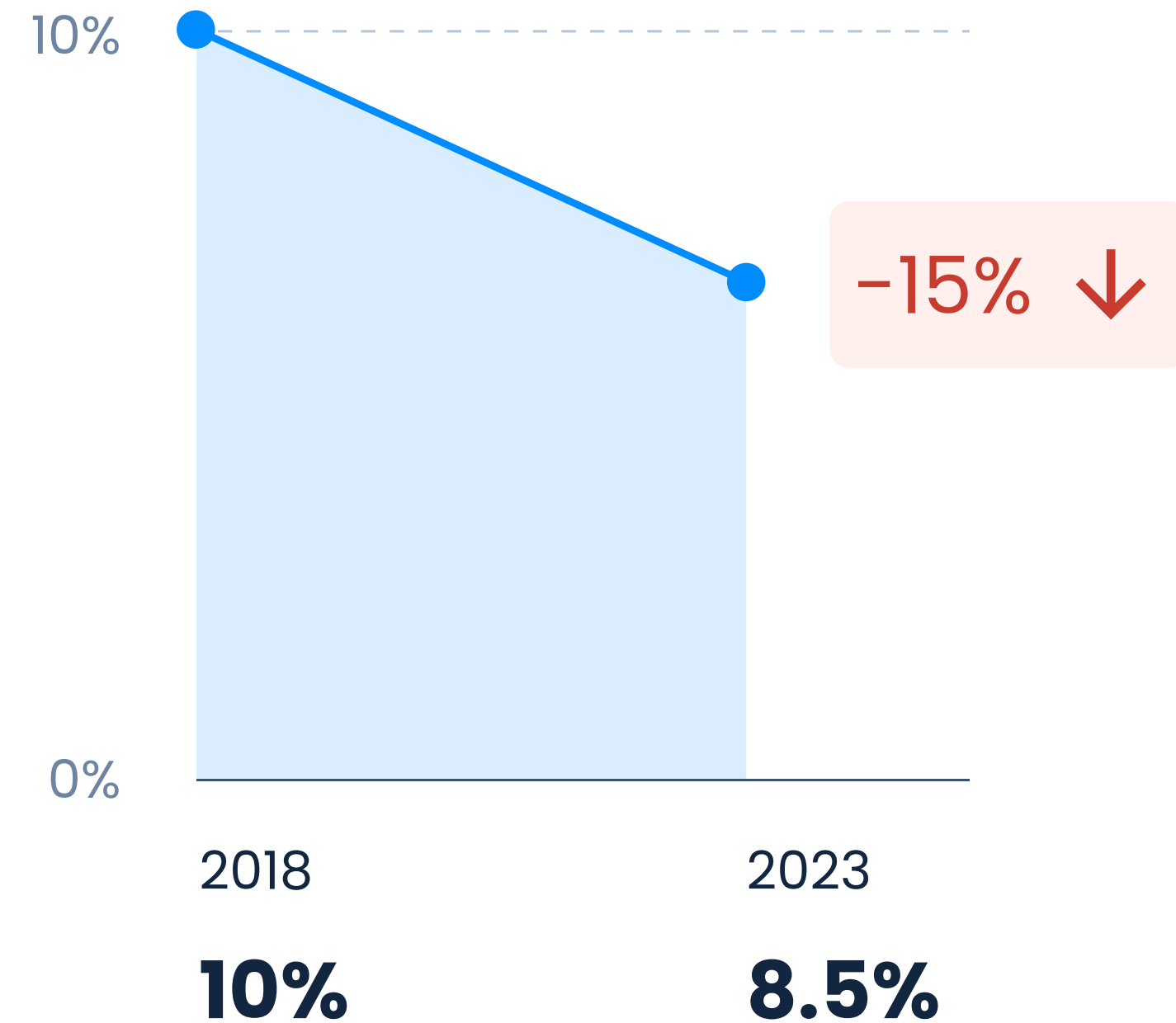
Conversion from name to inquiry is down 10%

The issue starts with converting purchased names into inquiries. The inquiry rate on purchased names dropped from 9% to 8.1% between 2018 and 2023.



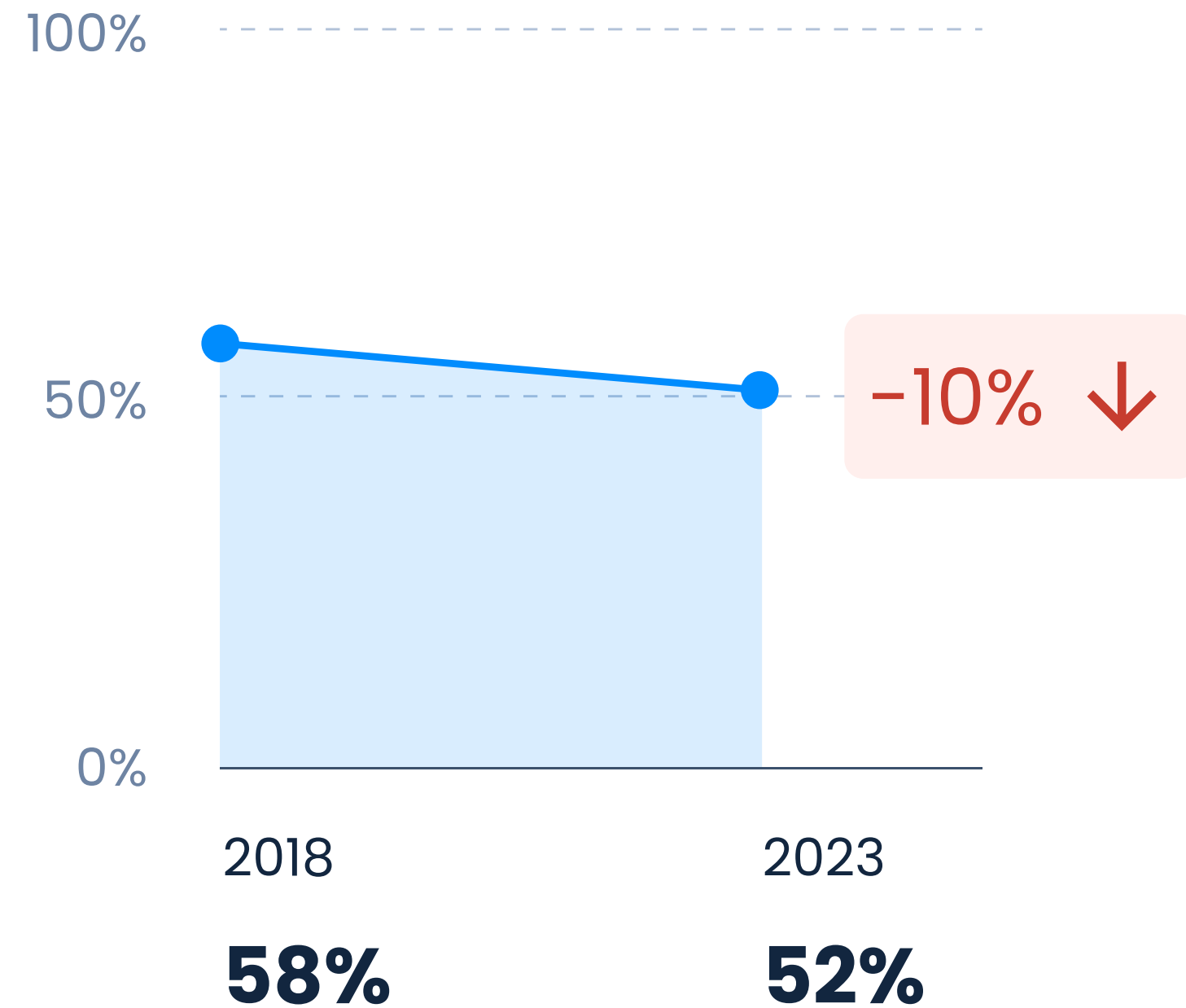
Application rate is down 15%

Encouraging Search inquiries to submit an application has become even more difficult, with the conversion rate dropping from 10% in 2018 to 8.5% in 2023.



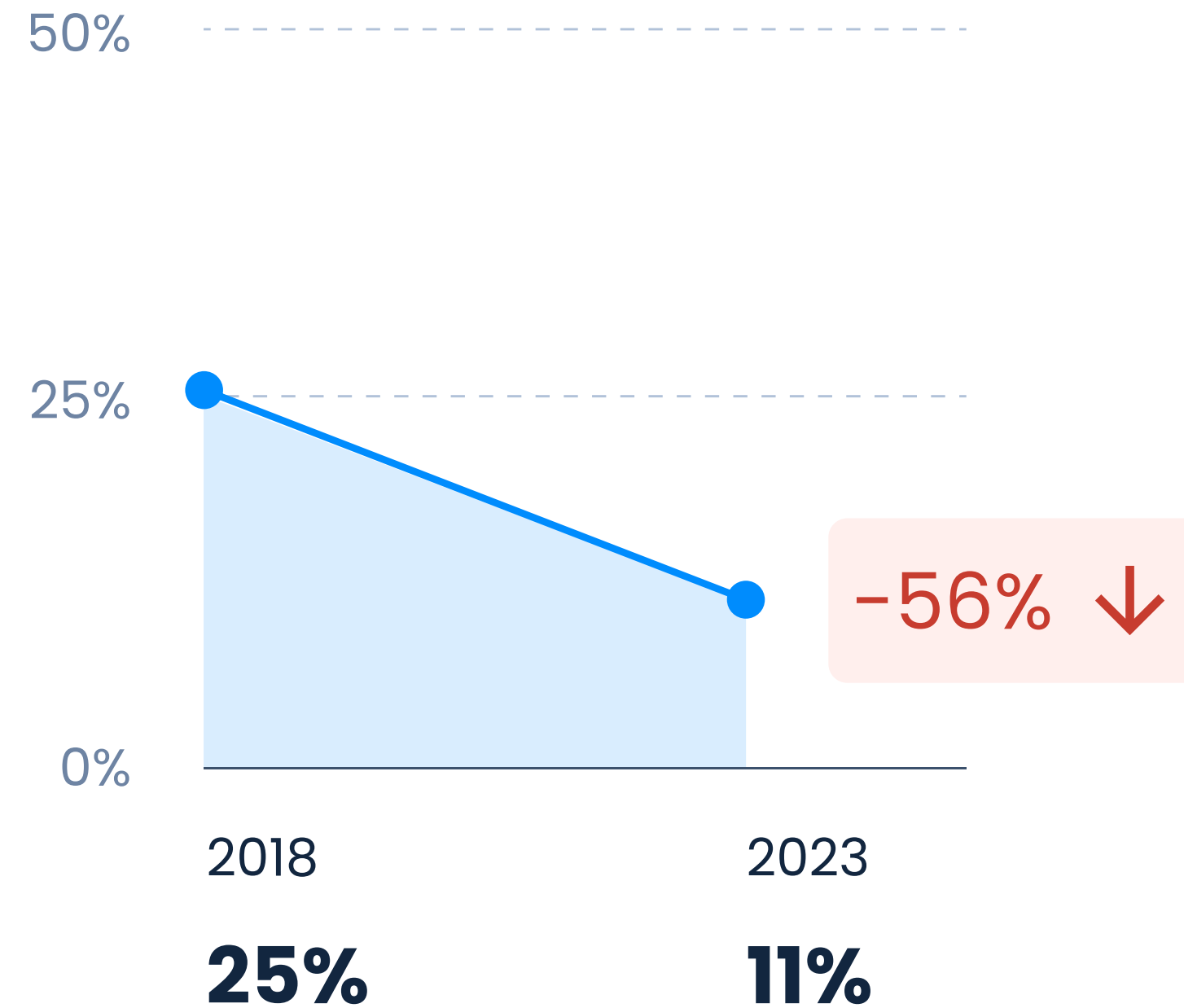
Admit rate saw a similar decline

Admit rates for Search applicants also fell slightly, from 58% to 52%. This is in line with the broader drop in acceptance rates across all colleges and universities in the last five years.



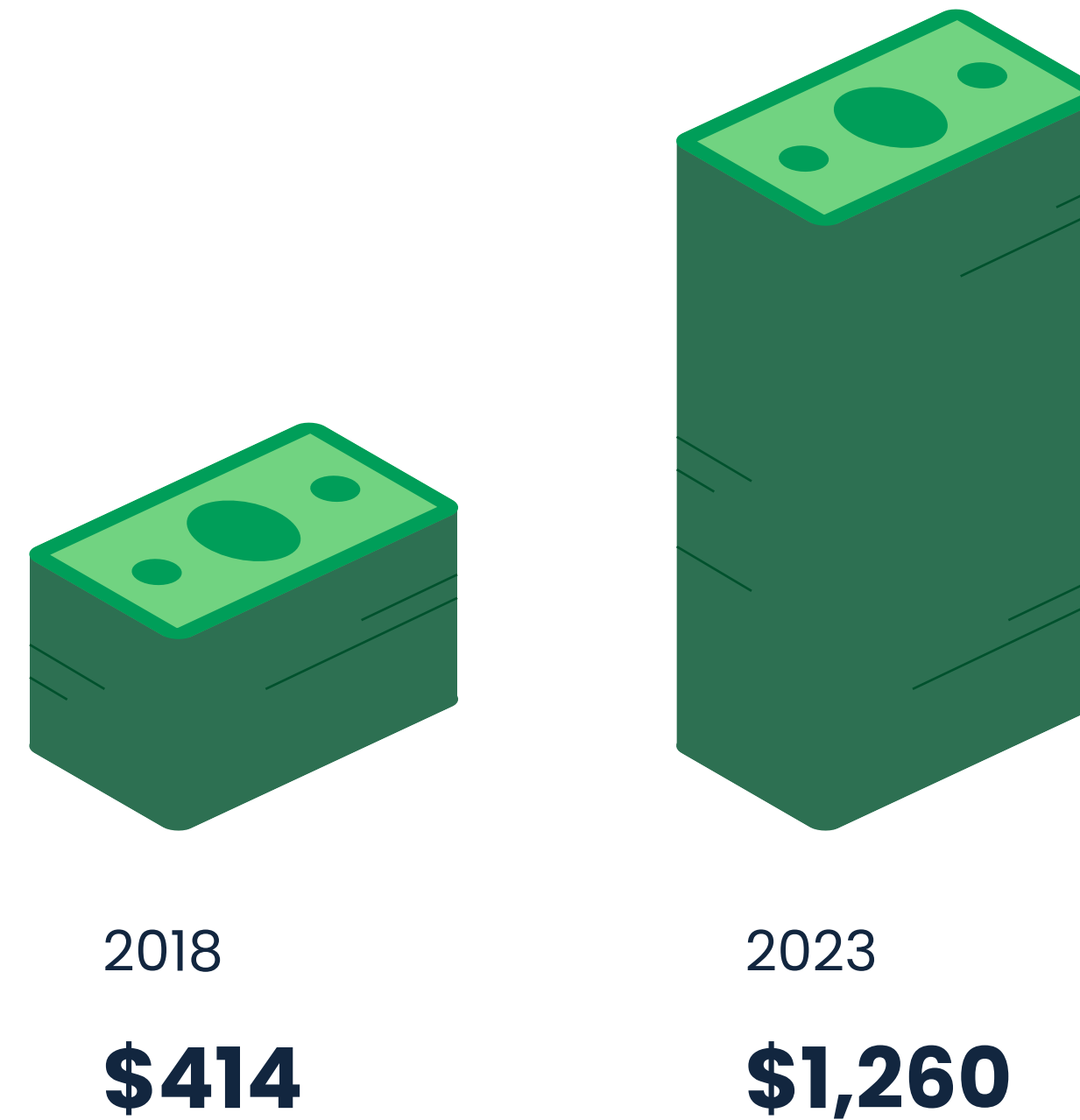
Yield rates were the biggest contributor to performance decline

The largest contributor to declining search funnel performance was yield. The yield rate on purchased names dropped from 25% in 2018 to just 10.9% in 2023.



Search's cost per enrollment is up 3X since 2018

Search enrollments are way more expensive than they were in 2018. The direct cost per Search enrollment **has increased by \$846.**

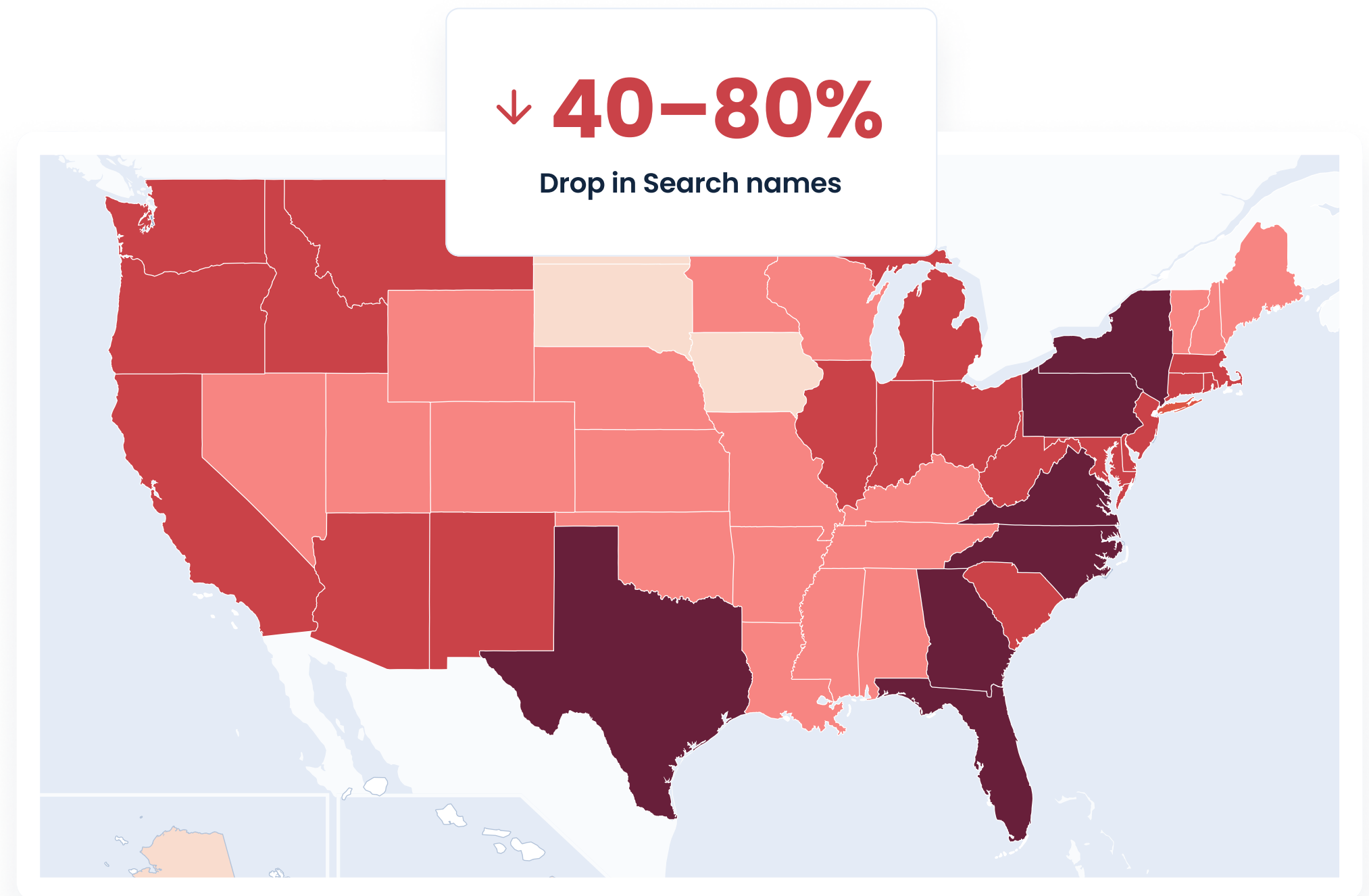


Search will only get worse over the next 3 years

There will be 840,000 fewer 12th grade names in Search by 2027 (-40%), and 700,000 fewer 10th grade names (-80%)
Applying the typical enrollment funnel, that translates to:

- 8.4m fewer inquiries
- 121k fewer enrollments
- \$5.6 billion in lost NTR

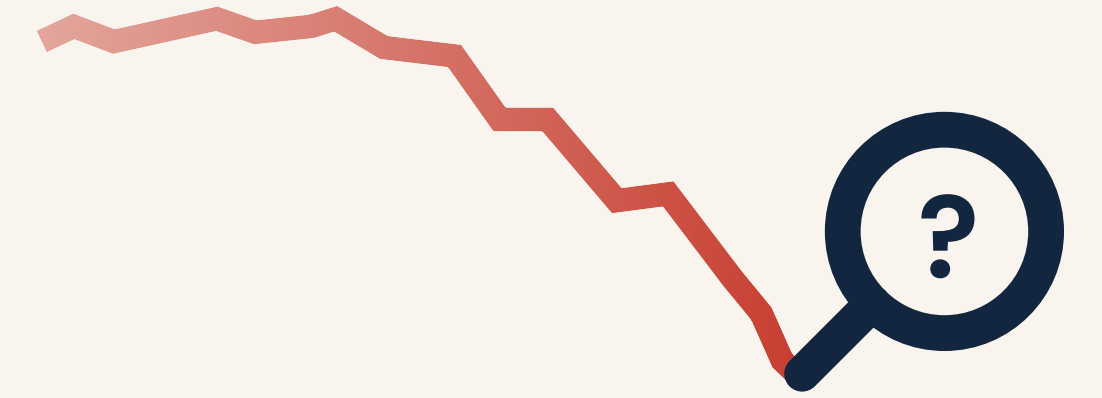
Name availability in Search is projected to drop by nearly 40% over the next four years due to the Search Cliff. That's 840,00 fewer 12th grade names available in Search by 2027.



PART 2

**Ineffective email
and mail are a
major driver**

Contributing factors to the decline in the Search funnel performance:



1.

Too many colleges chasing after the same set of names

2.

Disruption of the traditional recruitment funnel by third party web tools and applications

3.

Inefficacy of the primary treatment mechanisms for Search leads (email and print mail)

Email and print mail are undifferentiated and ineffective



1,456

A median junior received a combined **1,456 emails and print mail pieces** from colleges in the last 12 months.



13.6%

Just 13.6% of students report that the mail they receive from colleges is a strong motivator to **submit an application.**

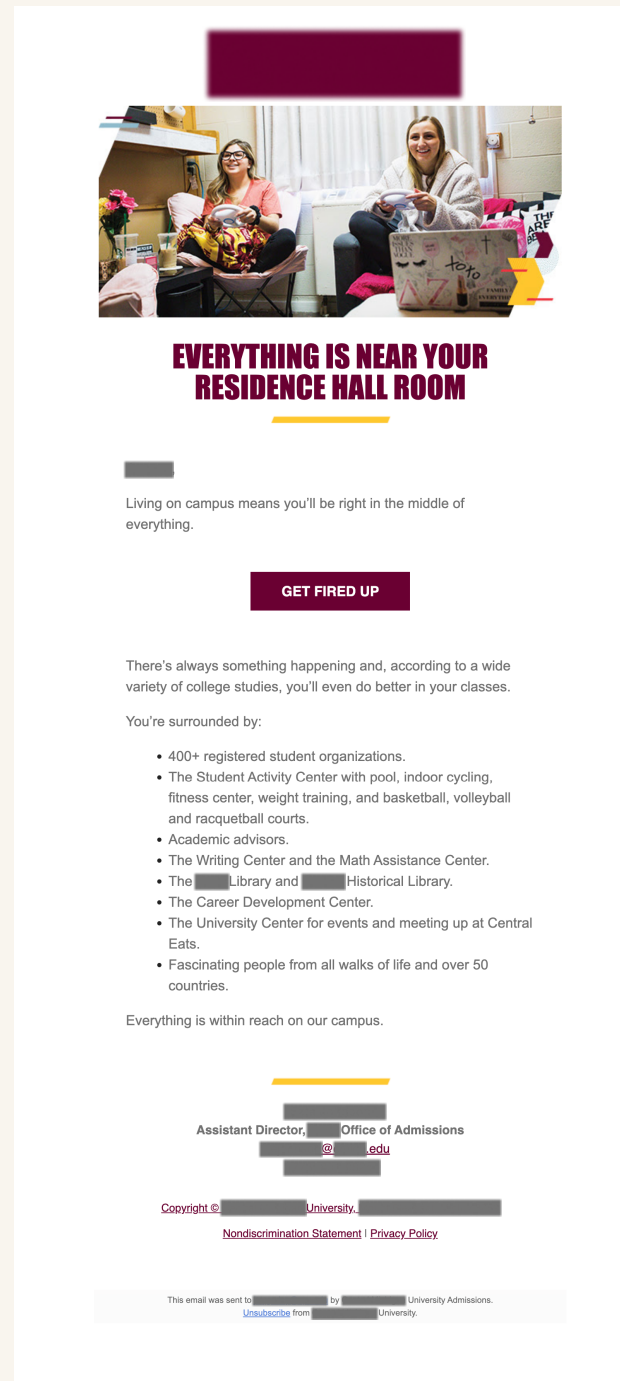


67.8%

67.8% of students report that email they receive from colleges **feels like spam.**

Students find college emails unconvincing and uninspiring

Email screenshots have been redacted to remove identifying information



[redacted],

Living on campus means you'll be right in the middle of everything.

GET FIRED UP

There's always something happening and, according to a wide variety of college studies, you'll even do better in your classes.

You're surrounded by:

- 400+ registered student organizations.
- The Student Activity Center with pool, indoor cycling, fitness center, weight training, and basketball, volleyball and racquetball courts.
- Academic advisors.
- The Writing Center and the Math Assistance Center.
- The [redacted] Library and [redacted] Historical Library.
- The Career Development Center.
- The University Center for events and meeting up at Central Eats.
- Fascinating people from all walks of life and over 50 countries.

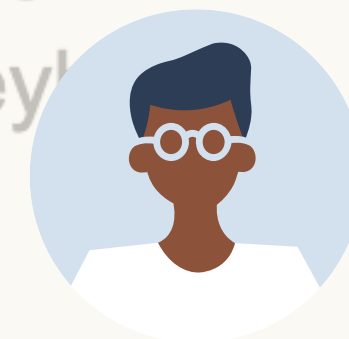
Everything is within reach on our campus.

There's always something
variety of college studies.

You're surrounded by:

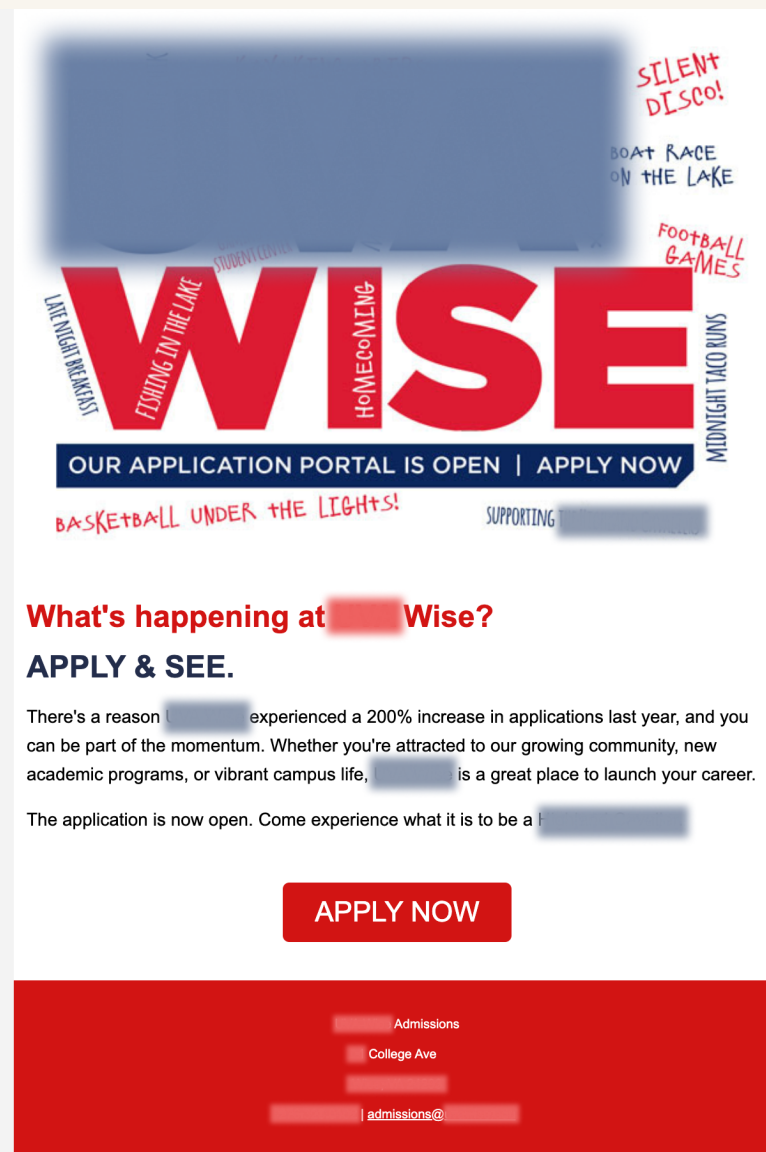
- 400+ registered student organizations.
- The Student Activity Center with pool, indoor cycling, fitness center, weight training, and basketball, volleyball and racquetball courts.
- Academic advisors.

"It needs to be spiced up. The email is just giving out facts that should be commonplace in colleges. Presenting this information as extremely special gives me the idea that they have low standards at this school."



Students find college emails unconvincing and uninspiring (cont.)

Email screenshots have been redacted to remove identifying information



What's happening at [REDACTED] Wise?

APPLY & SEE.

There's a reason [REDACTED] experienced a 200% increase in applications last year, and you can be part of the momentum. Whether you're attracted to our growing community, new academic programs, or vibrant campus life, [REDACTED] is a great place to launch your career.

The application is now open. Come experience what it is to be a [REDACTED]

APPLY NOW

Admissions

College Ave

BASKETBALL UNDER THE LIGHTS!

SUPPORTING

What's happening at APPLY & SEE.

“Phrases like ‘vibrant campus life, academic programs, community’ are banal and excruciating to hear. You must emphasize the unique aspects of the university.”

There's a reason [redacted] experienced [redacted] and you can be part of the momentum. Whether you're attracted to our growing community, new academic programs, or vibrant campus life, [redacted] is a great place to launch your career.

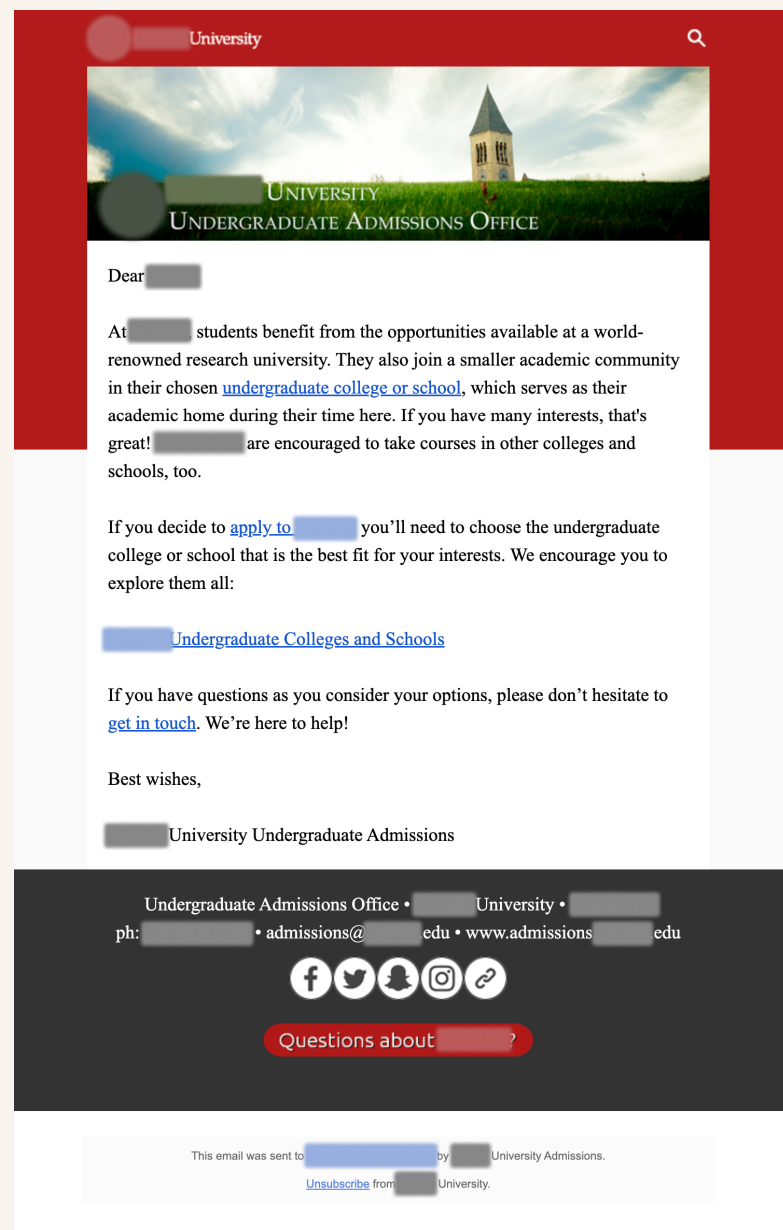
The application is now open. Come experience what it is to be a [redacted]



APPLY NOW

Students find college emails unconvincing and uninspiring (cont.)

Email screenshots have been redacted to remove identifying information



UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS OFFICE

Dear [redacted]

At [redacted], students benefit from the opportunities available at a world-renowned research university. They also join a smaller academic community in their chosen [undergraduate college or school](#), which serves as their academic home during their time here. If you have many interests, that's great! [redacted] are encouraged to take courses in other colleges and schools, too.

If you decide to [apply to \[redacted\]](#) you'll need to choose the undergraduate college or school that is the best fit for your interests. We encourage you to explore them all:

[\[redacted\] Undergraduate Colleges and Schools](#)

If you have questions as you consider your options, please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#). We're here to help!

Best wishes,

[redacted] University Undergraduate Admissions

in their chosen [undergraduate college or school](#), which serves as their academic home during their time here. We know you're excited and great! [We](#) are encouraged to visit all the schools, too.

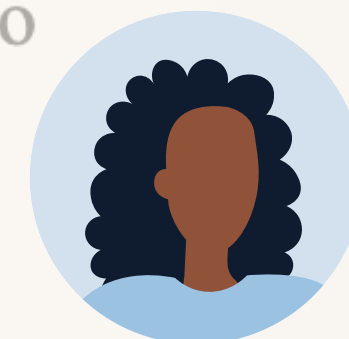
If you decide to [apply to](#) [a](#) college or school that is the best fit for you, please explore them all:

[Undergraduate Colleges and Schools](#)

If you have questions as you consider your options, please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#). We're here to help!

Best wishes,

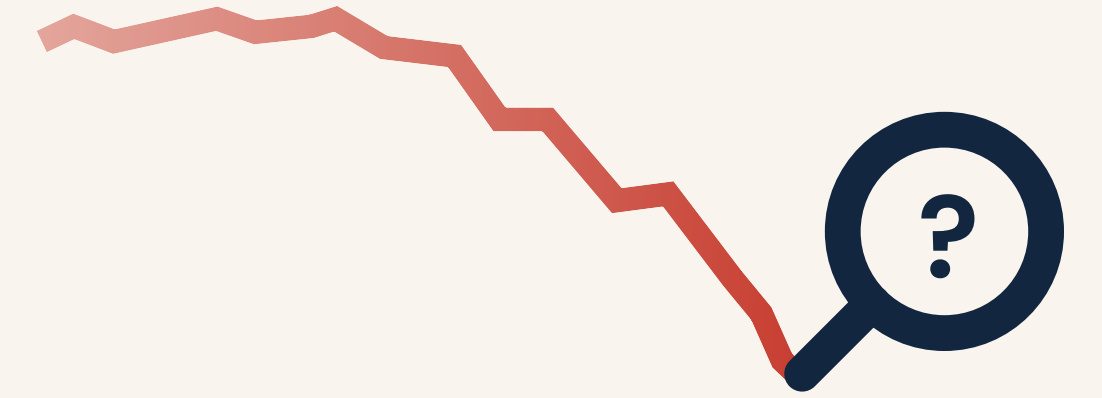
"This email feels disingenuous and it's poorly written, but most of all, it feels like a computer talking, not a person. People want to have conversation, we are social creatures after all."



PART 3

How to survive the decline in Search performance

Surviving the decline in Search Performance



1.

Invest in mid-funnel lead sources

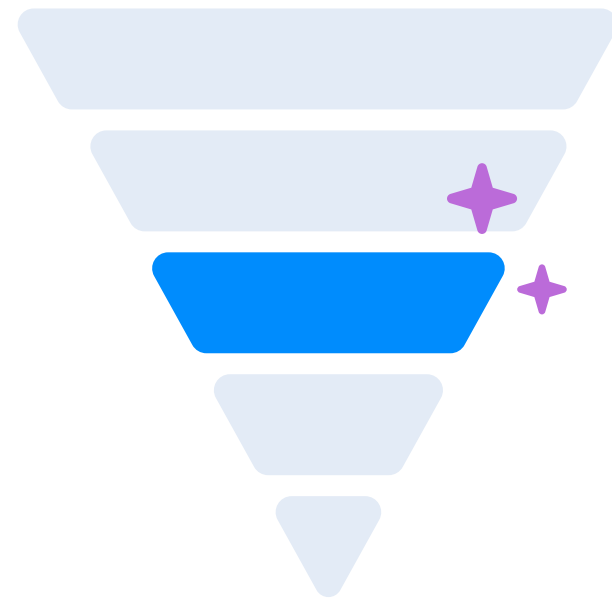
2.

Reach students in the right medium

3.

Use student profile data to personalize messaging at scale

1. Invest in mid-funnel lead sources



With mid-funnel lead sources like CollegeVine, you start your funnel with **8,000 high-intent leads**, not 100,000 cold names. When you start mid-funnel, you can **3x the ROI** of your marketing and recruitment budget

2. Reach students in the right medium



Students are increasingly tuning out email and direct mail outreach. To turn around declining engagement rates, you need to communicate with students where they **want and expect to hear from you.**

3. Switch to relationship-oriented recruiting



Profile and persona data on CollegeVine allow you to send **personalized communication to students at scale**. It's possible to center their interests, goals, and preferences for college without having to write each message by hand.

collegevine

September 2023