

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Generation Z, or Gen Z, is the demographic cohort entering universities today. Born between 1995 and the early 2010s, this generation is digitally literate, racially diverse, politically progressive, financially minded, and facing mental health challenges like never before. When we have a clear picture of their mindset, pain points, and drivers, we can engage with this group across digital platforms in more meaningful ways. It's also important to note that Syracuse University and Mambo narrowed down this audience to onsite, full-time students. Non-traditional, part-time, or online students are considered non-traditional students and weren't included in this round of research.

MINDSET

What is the overarching mindset of this audience segment?

- Gen Z decisions are driven by **emotional connections** more than logical arguments (Unibuddy, 2022).
- They are **deeply worried** about the state of the world. Their life has been disrupted by geopolitical conflicts, extreme climate events, inequality, and a steep rise in inflation (Deloitte, 2022).
- As Gen Z look forward to life after college, they want to be **market-ready** when they graduate and ideally even have a job lined up. (University Business, 2022).
- When Gen Z students are empowered to **drive change** within an organization, they feel a heightened sense of belonging, connection, and loyalty (Deloitte, 2022).
- They want to see visible, everyday environmental and sustainability actions (like banning single-use plastics) taken by institutions—and they **want to join** in and contribute (Deloitte, 2022).
- Gen Z prospective students

PAIN POINTS

What are the pain points felt by this audience segment?

- The **cost of attendance** is by far the most significant barrier to enrollment for prospective students (Gallop-Lumina, 2022).
- Gen Z is also experiencing **financial burnout**. Roughly 75% plan to work while enrolled. More than 50% plan to take loans their first year (Niche, 2022).
- Referred to as the loneliest generation, Gen Z has spent endless hours online, which often leads to feelings of **isolation and depression** (IFS, 2022). In fact, the **fear of not making friends** is pervasive for many prospective students (Unibuddy, 2022).
- **Keeping up with the academic workload** and adapting to the new environment are important concerns for Gen Z students (Unibuddy, 2022).
- In recent years, **emotional stress has risen** as a major pain point and concern for prospective students when considering higher education. Top factors include their cost of living, long-term financial

DRIVERS

What motivates this segment to choose a university?

- [REDACTED]
- From their very first online search, **finding the right major and career** focus is top-of-mind for prospective students. They often search online by major or program before searching for specific universities (Unibuddy, 2022).
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Prospective students want to attend a school they can be proud of (Additive, 2023). Gen Zers seriously consider a school's **ranking and reputation** leading up to the application process (Unibuddy, 2022). They are also influenced by school recommendations from family members and friends (Gallop-Lumina, 2022).
- [REDACTED]
- Engaging in **world-class research** is important to prospective students (Additive, 2023). They are highly interested in the quality of a university's facilities and teaching methods (Unibuddy, 2022).

SU FEATURES VALUED BY THIS AUDIENCE

What feature, service, or innovation does Syracuse University offer that is valued by this audience?

- Syracuse University provides financial aid, grants, and scholarships to **83%** of its students.
- Students work **hands-on alongside leading scholars** in a wide range of research fields. This style of education and mentorship prepares them for applied research in their chosen careers.
- Across programs, Syracuse University fosters curiosity and creativity. SU offers 40+ unique career **immersion experiences** that bridge the classroom learning experience with real-world applications.
- Syracuse University's strong **alumni network** helps you advance after graduation. This global network serves as **mentors**, helps secure internships, and opens doors with prospective employers.
- Syracuse University is a top-ranked school and attracts risk-takers and **change-makers** as evidenced by our **notable alumni**.
- Smaller classes are the norm at Syracuse University—many have fewer than 20 students. We value mentoring and **one-on-one support**. Our student to faculty ratio is 15 to 1.
- Our Top 10 ranked Living Learning Communities encourage **connection**

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

How does Syracuse University connect with this segment?

- Syracuse University's website is the top destination for prospective students. They want a user-friendly, well-designed experience. They are also looking for a warm and exciting personality conveyed through the brand. The website experience should **mirror the campus experience**. Place academic majors and programs front and center. Ensure information on financial aid and student outcomes is easy to locate. Optimize for mobile first (Unibuddy, 2022).
- Personalized emails are an important gateway into prospective students' attention. It's essential that these emails are **personalized and high value**. Gen Zers disregard generic emails sent out to a massive database. (Unibuddy, 2022).
- Email is the most important source for **female, first-generation, lower-income, Black, and Latinx** students (EAB: How to Effectively Reach, 2022).
- Campus visits are the best ways to connect with potential students. However, **virtual tours** are the next-best option for many families across the country and internationally with 75% of families having taken a virtual campus tour in 2022. Linking to fun and engaging virtual tours on the homepage is best practice (EAB: 3 Ways Pandemic Has Changed, 2022).
- After the university website, **social media channels** are the second-most important channel for students exploring where they will study (Unibuddy, 2022).
- 82% of Gen Zers use YouTube—making this the **most-used platform** by a wide margin. Most prefer short videos under one minute long (EAB: How to Effectively Reach, 2022).
- **Just 29%** of Gen Zers use Facebook on a regular basis

NEXT STEPS & CTAS

What calls to action resonate with this segment?

- Find your major
- Explore financial aid
- Explore career pathways
- Learn about career outcomes
- Search career pay ranges
- Discover program pricing
- Use price calculator
- Experience the liberal arts
- Learn more about STEM programs
- Compare my top programs
- Send me major-specific information
- Chat with a professor
- Meet our faculty
- Chat with a student ambassador
- Take a virtual tour
- Explore facilities
- Check out university rankings
- Learn about mental health support
- Learn about SU school values
- Read student stories and perspectives
- Meet our alumni
- Explore alumni success stories
- Discover student life
- Experience SU traditions
- Explore Greek life
- Check out local life in Syracuse
- Visit events calendar
- Research study abroad options for my program
- Explore living learning communities
- Read SU in the news
- Explore housing
- Explore application requirements by program
- Apply online now
- Chat with admissions counselor

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS (CONTINUED)

MINDSET

want institutions to **address mental health** and offer support (Deloitte, 2022).

- **Events that shaped the Gen Z identity and mindset:**
 - » Social media
 - » Great Recession
 - » No Child Left Behind
 - » Gun violence
 - » Climate change
 - » Corporate social responsibility
 - » Gender equality
 - » Polarizing politics
 - » COVID-19
- These events help us understand the Gen Z mindset—especially their distrust in society and societal norms, their motivation to protect mental health, their drive for political change, and their need for connection and community.

PAIN POINTS

future, day-to-day finances, the health and welfare of their family, and personal relationships (Deloitte, 2022).

- The uncertainty of **pandemic-related** student physical safety and the **mental health impact** are also a growing concern. This is especially important for international and out-of-state students (Gallop-Lumina, 2022).
- Gen Z adults ages 18 to 25 are the **least likely to trust** higher education compared to any other generation when it comes to pricing and quality of education (Inside Higher Ed, 2022).
- Gen Z individuals distrust the institutional mindset that prioritizes profit over social benefit. They believe organizations have a **responsibility to do good** in the world (Deloitte, 2022).
- When it comes to applying to schools, potential students cite the application cost, length, and requirements as **significant barriers** (Niche, 2022).

DRIVERS

[REDACTED]

- Because mental health is such a top concern for Gen Z students, they are highly motivated by **mental health support** provided by the universities they are considering (Unibuddy, 2022).
- **A genuine sense of school spirit**, strong campus traditions, and an active, diverse, and **fun social scene** are all important drivers for prospective students (Additive, 2023). Sports and clubs are also important for Gen Z students (Unibuddy, 2022).
- [REDACTED]
- The university's **physical location** and a beautiful campus are important factors when prospective students begin narrowing down their university choices (Unibuddy, 2022).
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

SU FEATURES VALUED BY THIS AUDIENCE

and belonging for all students. Choose from a wide range of 30+ LLCs to find your ideal community among like-minded students.

- A welcoming student body as well as **300+ clubs** and organizations for students to join means everyone can find a place to **connect and belong**. SU provides limitless ways to explore and connect diverse interests, individuals, and issues.
- Same-day **mental health counseling** is available along with a 24-hour emergency mental health hotline. University health and wellness facilities offer the Be Well program focusing on the 8 Dimensions of Wellness and regular pet therapy activities.
- The Hendricks Chapel is a **student-centered global home** for religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical life. Within its walls, there is a place for everyone.
- **Faith-based counseling** is a valuable resource at Syracuse University. Chaplains at Hendricks Chapel from a wide array of faith traditions are available to assist students experiencing grief, anxiety, life transitions, and personal identity questions.
- The Office of Engagement Programs at Hendricks Chapel **connects SU students with the local community** of Syracuse. Get involved in service projects, develop meaningful relationships, and make an impact.
- SU recognizes the distinct potential of every student—offering challenging opportunities for students looking for **real-world applicability**. That's why we're rated 8 out of 10 for graduates who are resourceful and responsive to change.

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

(EAB: How to Effectively Reach, 2022).

- 76% of Gen Zers used Instagram followed by 67% for Snapchat. It's interesting to note that **photo-based** apps are more popular with female users while **text-based apps** like Twitter and Reddit are favored among male users (Pew, Teens, Social Media, 2022).
 - TikTok: **Quirky humor** is hugely popular and changing constantly for Gen Z. But it's worth staking your claim on this platform. Many students use TikTok as a search engine—not just entertainment. In total, Gen Z spends 24 – 48 hours per month on TikTok (Unibuddy, 2022).
 - Overall, **influencer marketing** is incredibly effective for Gen Z. And social media is where young people interact with those influencers (Unibuddy, 2022).
 - **College search platforms** like Niche, Common App, Cappex, CollegeXpress, US News & World Report, and College Vine are widely used by potential students in their research phase (Unibuddy, 2022).
 - Net price calculators are also a popular tool for prospective students as they try to gauge the **real-life costs** of attending each university (Niche, 2022).
 - Nearly all members of Gen Z interact with their friends and family through text messages. And when interacting with brands, Gen Zers prefer it for **quick questions and confirmations**. An SMS strategy is an effective tool for reaching this audience.
 - Prospective students want to hear from **current students** throughout their research journey. A student ambassador program can help relieve fears of not fitting in and making friends because students have already formed basic connections before they've even arrived (Unibuddy, 2022).
 - A professor ambassador program is another communication channel that allows prospective students to **connect with professors** before starting classes (Unibuddy, 2022).
- Students also want to talk with student life staff, financial aid staff, and admissions counselors (Niche, 2022).
- Each generation evolves the English language usually after significant **social shifts**. Gen Z is no different. Think: cancel culture, woke, and clapback.
 - When designing messages that will catch the attention of Gen Zers, consider using some of **their own words**. This will feel most authentic and appropriate when the university utilizes current students as social media ambassadors and content creators (Hootsuite, 2023).
 - Students are **two times more likely to enroll** if contacted during their sophomore year (EAB: How to Effectively Reach, 2022). However, the majority of students start their search after their junior year. Typically, the earlier a student begins researching schools, the more schools they apply to. Students coming from higher household income homes (\$130k+) are more likely to apply to 10 or more colleges. Lower income students are more likely to start the application process later and apply to fewer schools (Niche, 2022).

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS: MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIGITAL CHANNELS

VALUE PERCEPTION

- Today's students grew up with huge disruptions from the Great Recession to the COVID-19 global pandemic. As they approach higher education, they must balance the cost of attendance with the perceived value of their eventual career. [REDACTED]
- Gen Z students want to attend a university they can be proud of. [REDACTED]

CAREER OUTCOMES

- Finding the right major, and ultimately, the right career is important to prospective students. [REDACTED]
- Bridging the gap between education and action is a key driver for prospective students. [REDACTED]
- Growing up with financial insecurity has also led prospective students to value an entrepreneurial spirit reinforced by the prominence of side hustles today. [REDACTED]

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- Prospective students are highly interested in the quality of Syracuse University's facilities and teaching methods. Your world-class research is a key driver. But students also are drawn to a collaborative learning environment. [REDACTED]
- The physical location of potential universities is something prospective students take into account. Marketing content [REDACTED]
- After the pandemic, today's students crave the quintessential college experience: school spirit, campus traditions, and a fun social scene. Your digital content [REDACTED]
- Gen Z students live according to their personal values and desire a university experience that aligns as well. Diversity, climate change, and racial justice are issues they care [REDACTED]

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

- Gen Z students take their mental health seriously. [REDACTED]
- *Also applicable to prospective graduate student segment.*
- Because diversity is an important issue for Gen Z, they [REDACTED]