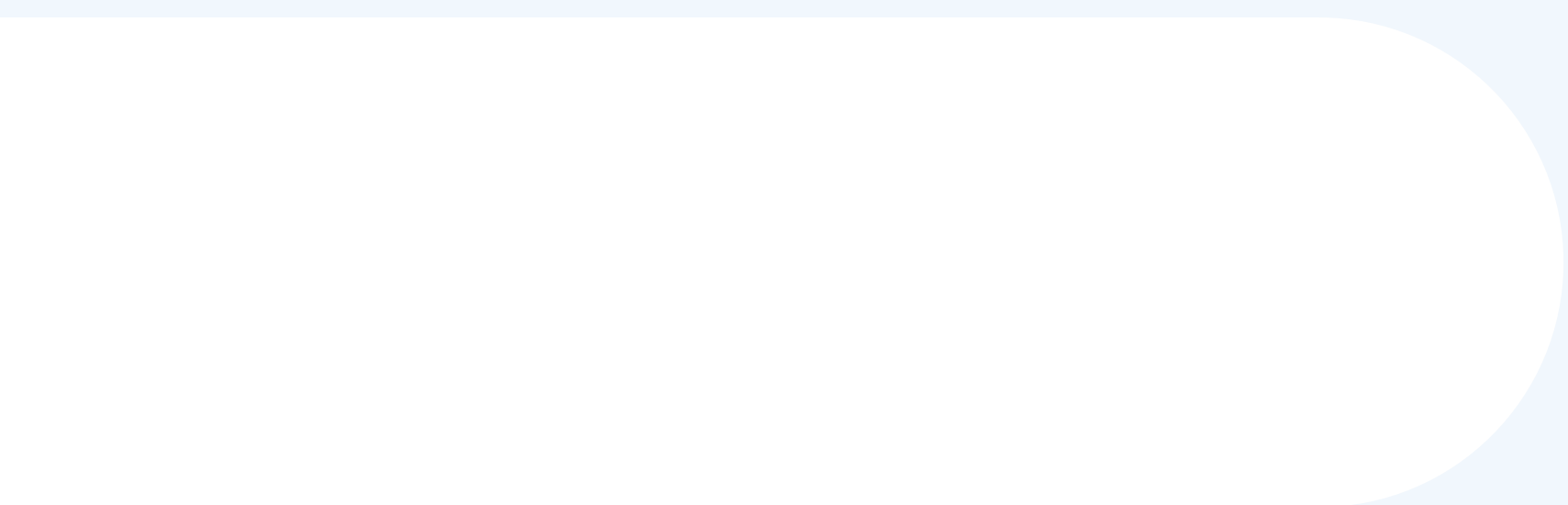


Smarter Student Journey Mapping: 5 Essential Steps for Success

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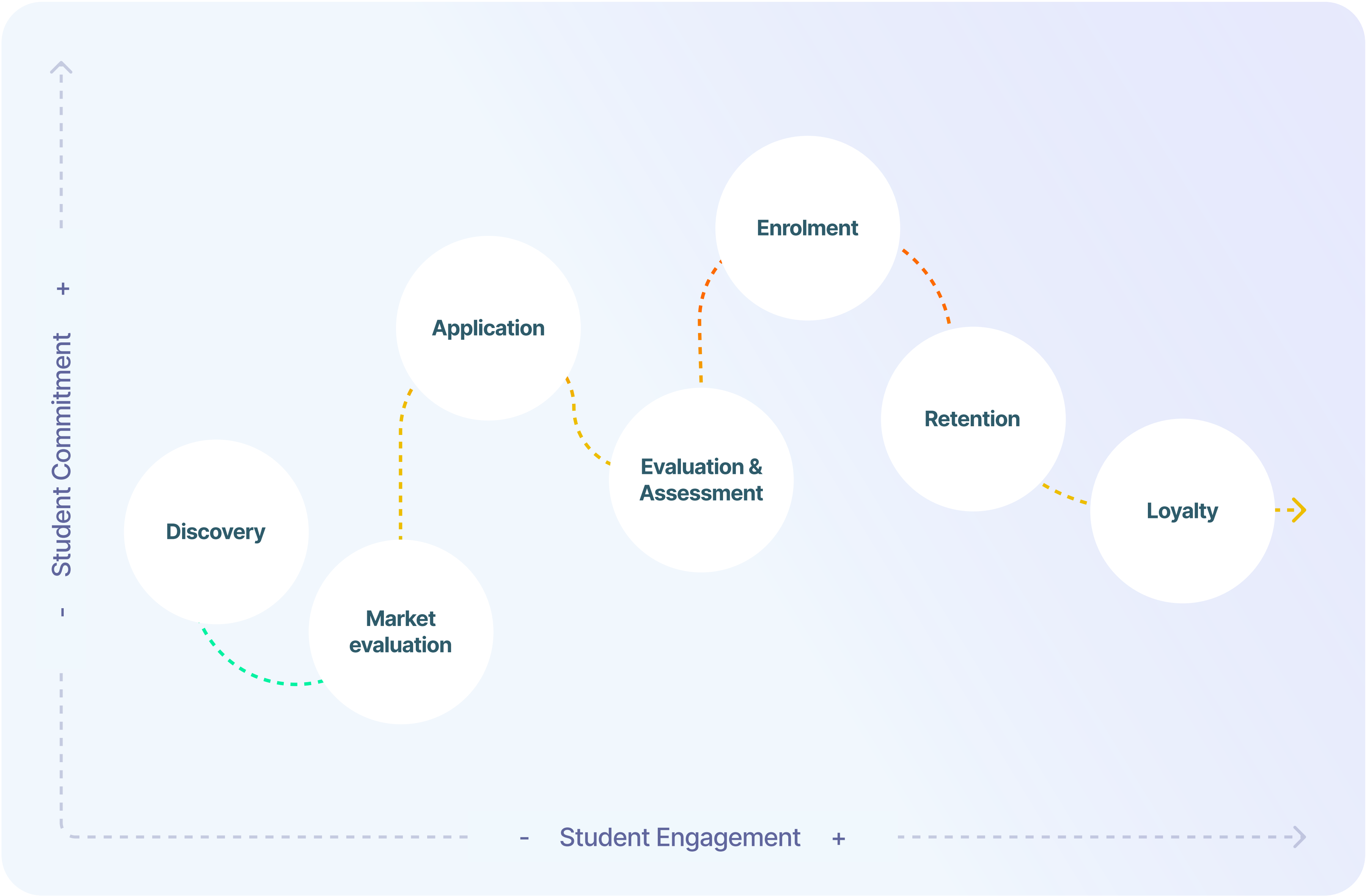
What is student journey mapping?

Attracting the right students and boosting enrolments depends on a deep understanding of their journey.

Student journey mapping provides precisely that insight. It's a strategic process of analysing the experiences of prospective students as they interact with your institution, from initial interest through to enrolment and beyond.

By meticulously mapping this journey, you gain a comprehensive understanding of student motivations, needs, and potential pain points. This empowers you to identify opportunities to enhance engagement, personalise communications, and optimise the entire student experience. Student journey mapping enables data-driven decision-making, moving beyond assumptions to pinpoint areas of strength and areas for improvement.

This may involve streamlining the application process, refining communications at key touchpoints, or tailoring your messaging to resonate with specific student segments. Ultimately, student journey mapping is a powerful tool for creating a seamless and compelling experience that attracts high-calibre students and drives sustainable enrolment growth.





Why is student journey mapping important?

Student journey mapping gives universities powerful insights into their prospective students, allowing admissions teams to improve the student experience and boost enrolments.

Consider a leading European business school struggling to attract top international MBA candidates. Despite digital marketing efforts, applications are lagging. Through student journey mapping, they discover key friction points: a difficult-to-navigate mobile application portal, unclear visa and payment information, and impersonal communication.

With this discovery, they revamp the portal for mobile and multiple languages, centralise clear visa and payment guidance, and implement a CRM for personalised email nurturing. The result? A surge in international applications, higher conversion rates, and increased enrolments. This success stems directly from mapping the student journey and addressing those critical pain points.



The 5 Key Elements of Every Student Journey Map

A comprehensive student journey map considers five interconnected elements: Personas, Stages, Touchpoints, Mindsets, and Opportunities. Let's explore each in detail.

1 Personas

Effective personas go beyond demographics details. They are rich, multi-dimensional representations of your ideal student profiles, incorporating their motivations, aspirations, anxieties, learning styles, and preferred communication channels. Developing these nuanced personas requires leveraging diverse data sources, including your student management system, market research, social media insights, and even direct interaction with prospective students. This detailed understanding allows for targeted recruitment and personalised engagement.

2 Stages

While a general framework of stages (e.g., exploring, consideration, application, enrolment, engagement, advocacy) is useful, it's crucial to recognise the non-linear nature of the modern student journey. Prospective students often loop back, revisit stages, and interact with your institution across multiple touchpoints simultaneously. Your journey map should reflect this fluidity and capture the dynamic interplay between stages.

3 Touchpoints

Today's student interacts with universities across a diverse range of touchpoints, both online and offline. These include, but are not limited to, your website, social media, virtual events, personalised email campaigns, mobile apps, online communities, student testimonials, live chat, and word-of-mouth referrals. Mapping these touchpoints and understanding how students engage with them is essential for optimising communication and creating a seamless experience.

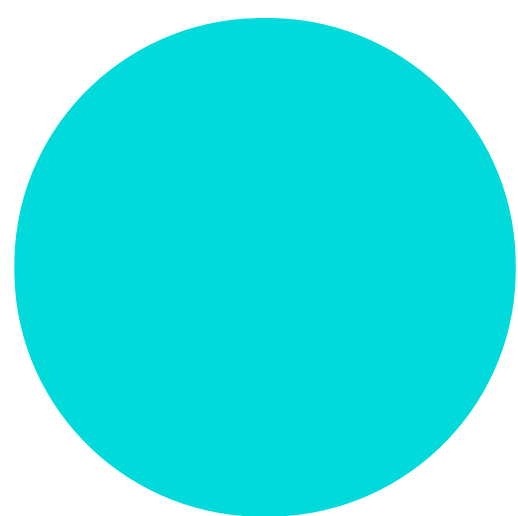
4 Mindsets

Understanding student mindsets is crucial, and it's not a separate element but rather integrated throughout the journey. What are prospective students thinking and feeling at each stage and touchpoint? What are their key concerns and aspirations? How can your institution address these and build trust? Mapping mindsets allows you to craft messaging and experiences that resonate deeply with your target audience.

5 Opportunities

Identifying opportunities is not a one-time activity but an ongoing process. Continuously analyse your student journey map to identify areas for improvement, innovation, and differentiation. How can you streamline processes, enhance communication, personalise interactions, and ultimately, create a more compelling experience that drives enrolment growth, student success, and long-term engagement? This is a cycle of continuous optimisation, informed by data and insights.

How To Create Your Own Student Journey Map



Step 1: Understand Who You're Designing For

Effective student journey mapping starts with truly knowing your target market. Go beyond basic demographics and delve into the motivations, aspirations, anxieties, and decision-making processes of your ideal student segments. Where do they get their information? What are their career goals? What are their hesitations?

Use robust market research, including specialised firms, social media analytics, website data, and direct engagement with prospective students. Develop detailed, multi-dimensional personas – it's essential to have multiple, each representing a key student segment. These personas should be living documents, refined as you learn more. Critically, personas inform and are informed by the journey mapping process.

Each persona then has a tailored student journey map, reflecting their unique needs and experiences.

Step 2: Map the Real Journey – Not Just the Ideal One

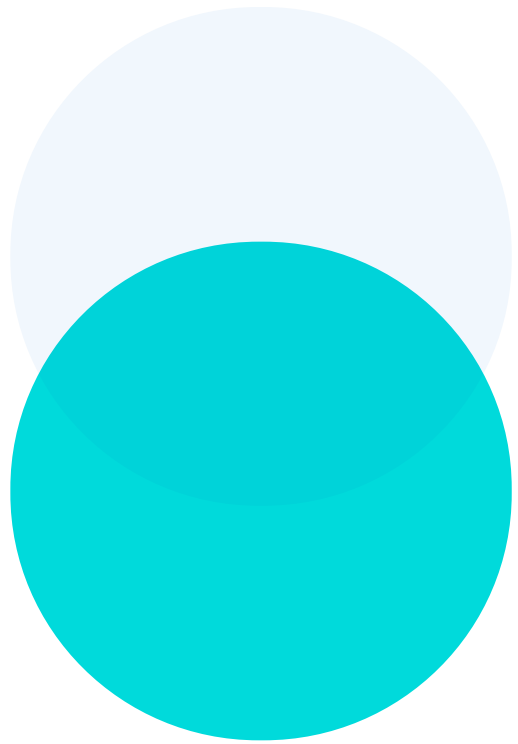
Mapping the stages of the student journey requires a nuanced understanding of how prospective students interact with your institution. While a general framework is helpful, it's crucial to move beyond a linear progression and recognise the dynamic, often non-linear path students take.

Exploration: This initial stage encompasses more than just awareness. Prospective students are actively exploring their options, researching programmes, investigating career outcomes, and forming initial impressions of your institution's brand, culture, and values. They're not just passively discovering; they're actively seeking information.

Consideration: During this phase, students delve deeper, comparing institutions, weighing factors like programme fit, career prospects, financial aid, and student experience. They engage with multiple touchpoints, including online reviews, social media, virtual events, and interactions with current students and alumni. This stage is highly personalised, as students assess how well your institution aligns with their individual goals and aspirations.

Application: The application process itself is rarely a single step. It often involves multiple stages, from initial enquiry to document submission, interviews, and portfolio reviews. For international students, this can be further complicated by visa applications and language requirements. A smooth, user-friendly application process is crucial for converting interest into enrolment.

How To Create Your Own Student Journey Map



Enrolment: Enrolment marks the beginning of a new phase, not the end of the journey. Onboarding, orientation, and initial academic experiences play a vital role in student success and retention. This stage is about setting students up for success and building a strong foundation for their academic journey.

Engagement: Student engagement is an ongoing process that extends throughout their time at your institution. It involves academic support, extracurricular activities, community involvement, and personalised guidance. Cultivating a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for growth are essential for student retention and satisfaction.

Advocacy: Graduation doesn't sever the relationship; it transforms it. Alumni become advocates for your institution, sharing their experiences and influencing future generations of students. Nurturing these relationships through alumni programmes, networking events, and continuing education opportunities fosters lifelong loyalty and builds a strong community.

It's important to remember that these stages are interconnected and fluid. Students may move back and forth between them, and their experience will be shaped by their individual needs and motivations. Therefore, it's crucial to analyse your institution's specific student journey, using data and insights to understand the actual path students take, rather than relying solely on a generic model.

Step 3: Identify and Personalise Every Touchpoint

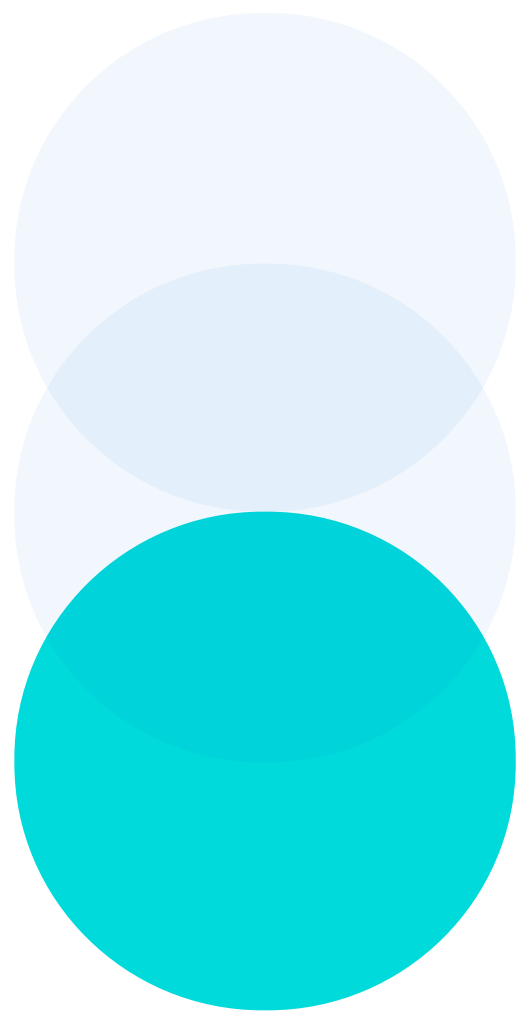
Touchpoints are all the places prospective students connect with you, online and offline. Think holistically.

Consider all digital touchpoints: website (and its usage), social media (and communities), virtual events, webinars, online forums, student blogs/vlogs, podcasts, live chat, SMS, personalised email campaigns, mobile apps, online brochures, user-generated content, even online reviews. Prioritise mobile-first design.

Include traditional touchpoints: campus visits, open days, brochures, prospectuses, calls, recruiter meetings, and interactions with current students/alumni.

Touchpoints aren't stage-specific. Students engage with your website multiple times, and social media during consideration and enrolment. Map how they interact and when, recognising these dynamic, simultaneous interactions. Personalise these touchpoints for engaging, relevant experiences.

How To Create Your Own Student Journey Map



Step 4: Map Emotions, Not Just Actions

Effective journey mapping requires understanding not just what prospective students do, but also how they feel. What are their hopes, anxieties, and hesitations? What excites them? What frustrates them?

Weave this exploration throughout your journey mapping. Use social media listening, analyse online reviews, conduct focus groups and user testing, and engage directly with prospective students. Don't just ask what they think; explore how they feel.

Translate these insights into action. Create a more empathetic experience. Address pain points, highlight aspirations, and personalise communication to resonate emotionally. Design touchpoints that build trust and connection.

Step 5: Optimise and Evolve – The Journey Never Stops

Your student journey map isn't the finish line; it's the starting point. Analyse it to uncover opportunities to enhance the applicant experience and optimise recruitment.

Where are the friction points? How can you streamline processes, improve communication, and personalise interactions? Perhaps students need more guidance. This might mean interactive online resources or personalised consultations.

Identify your strengths. What resonates? Amplify them. How can you leverage them to attract more of the right students? Perhaps personalised welcome emails are a hit. Expand that personal touch.

This is ongoing. The student journey evolves. Regularly revisit and update your map. Continuously analyse data, gather feedback, and innovate. Leverage new technologies. This ongoing analysis and optimisation are key to staying ahead.

Improve Enrolment Numbers With Student Journey Mapping

Student journey mapping isn't just a good idea anymore – it's vital if you want to stay ahead in higher education. It's how you truly get to know your prospective students, understand what makes them tick, and create an experience that genuinely resonates. And that's the secret to attracting the right students and seeing your enrolments flourish. It takes effort, sure, but the payoff – a thriving student community and sustainable growth – is more than worth it.

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