

## An E-Expectations Trend Report

# The Mobile Browsing Behaviors and Expectations of College-Bound High School Students

The last decade marked a dramatic change in the college search experience as students flocked to the Internet as their primary tool for researching colleges. Institutions had to transform their recruitment efforts to keep up with the online demands and expectations of prospective students.

The proliferation of smartphones is transforming the online college search experience even further. Noel-Levitz, OmniUpdate, CollegeWeekLive, and NRCCUA® (National Research Center for College & University Admissions) conducted a survey of nearly 2,300 college-bound high school students regarding the use of mobile devices to search for colleges. Nearly all of the students (94 percent) said they use a mobile device (such as a cell phone, smartphone, or tablet) at least once per week. But how many use these devices to research colleges, and what do they expect from the college mobile site experience?

## Half of students have looked at a campus Web site on a mobile device

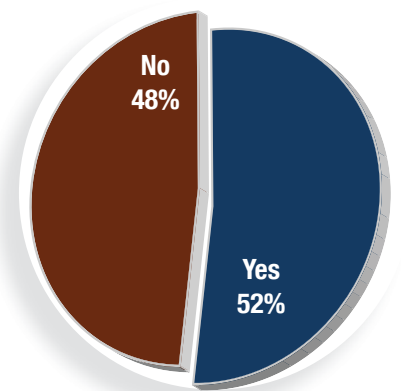
While mobile Web viewing is on the rise, only 4 percent of students who use mobile devices reported looking at college Web sites on an iPad or Android tablet, so for now, that means most are browsing on smaller screens and therefore need to see sites that are optimized for mobile use.

## What content do students want to find when browsing on a mobile device?

Students rated the value of a number of content items on a five-point scale, with five meaning “extremely valuable.” The following six items were considered the most valuable content for mobile experiences:

1. Academic program listing
2. Cost/scholarship calculators
3. A calendar of important dates and deadlines
4. Specific details about academic programs
5. An application process summary
6. Online application forms

Have you viewed a school's Web site on a mobile device?



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It is interesting that details about academic programs and application forms were listed as top content items. It seems unlikely that a student would read lengthy text about program details or complete an application from their phone, but they may want to be able to at least browse that content, search for key items, or forward the application to an e-mail address for further use.

Students also mentioned other mobile content as somewhat valuable:

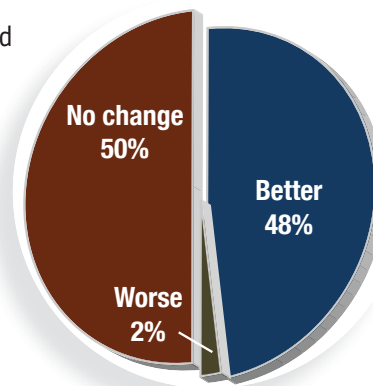
- Forms to receive more information (by e-mail, postal mail, or text message)
- Scheduling interviews and campus visits
- An interactive campus map
- A tour of residence hall facilities
- Videos on student life, academics, and alumni
- Live phone/instant message communications with admissions representatives
- Links to a school's Facebook and Twitter pages

### For many students, the mobile experience is a positive one

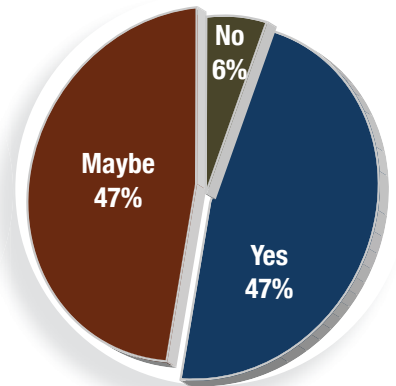
The vast majority of students (93 percent) reported that they were able to find the information they needed while browsing via mobile device. In addition, many found the experience positive and said it improved their opinion of the school.

These findings also highlight opportunities to increase the benefits of a positive mobile experience. By optimizing for mobile browsing and updating mobile content regularly, it is likely even more students would come away with a positive opinion of a school and return to that school's mobile site.

How did the mobile site experience affect your opinion of the school?



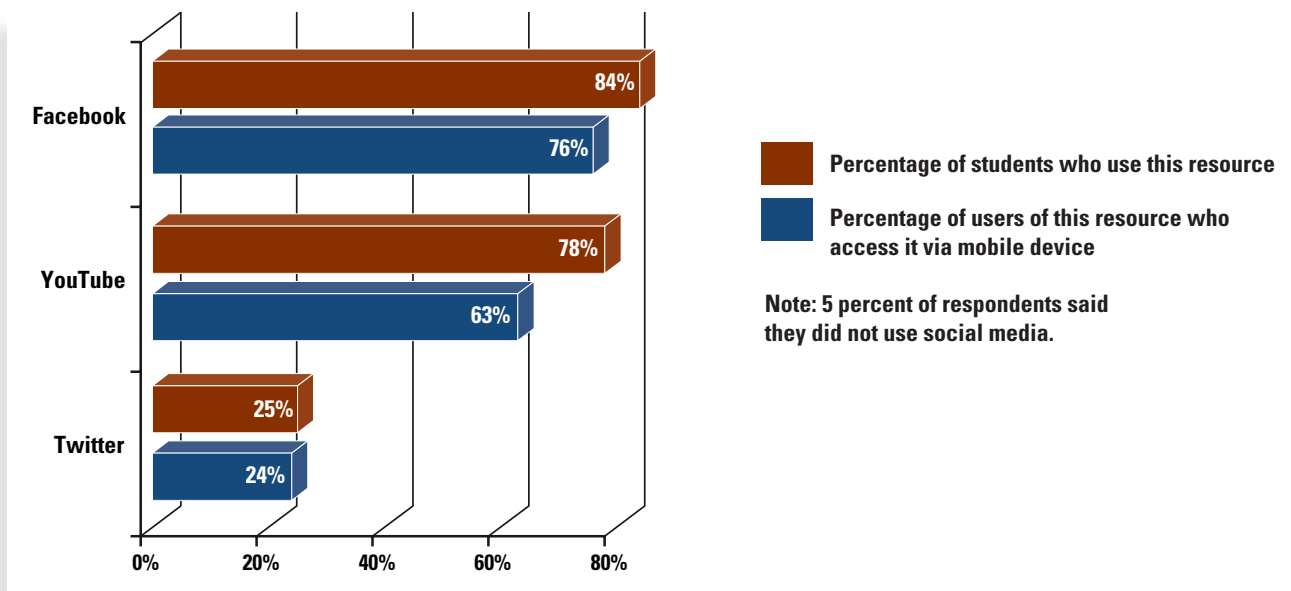
Would you return to the school's mobile site?



### Mobile social media use among high school students

In addition to accessing college sites on smart devices, respondents also discussed their social media use and how much they accessed these resources on a mobile device.

Social media usage: Overall and via mobile device



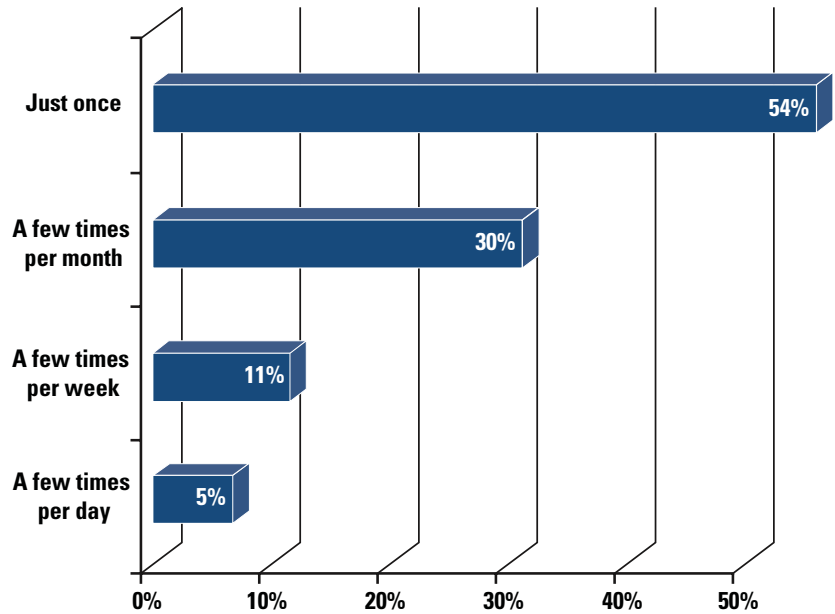
## Nearly half of students have visited a school's Facebook page more than once

With so many students using Facebook, the site has become a focal point for the social networking efforts of many campuses. The good news is that many students are not only looking at the Facebook pages of prospective schools, but doing so multiple times. Altogether, 46 percent of students who looked at campus Facebook pages did so more than once, visiting those pages from a few times per month to a few times per day.

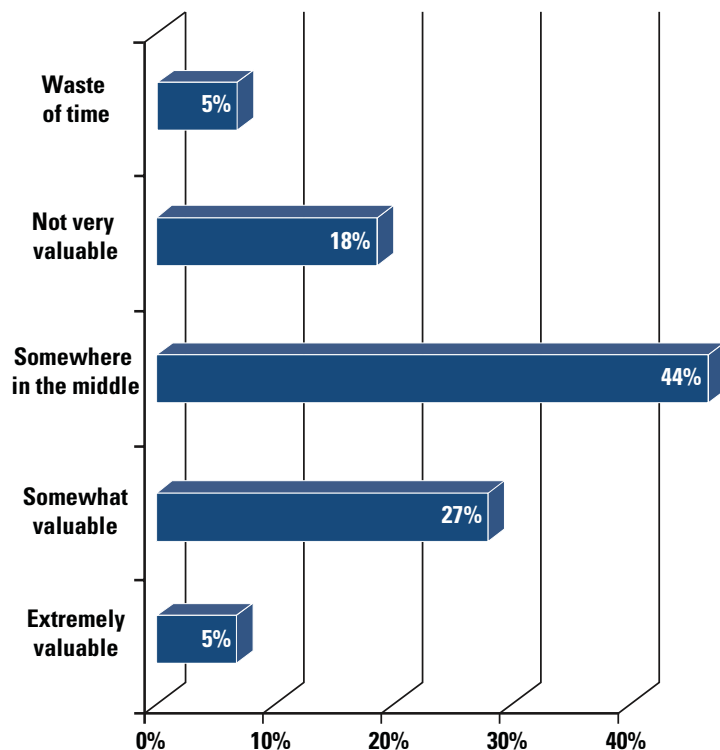
In addition, 50 percent of students said they would "like" a school's Facebook page so postings would appear on their walls. Regarding their future behavior, 83 percent responded they would view the Facebook page of a school they were considering if given the chance.

Students' evaluation of the value of Facebook content was somewhat mixed, however. Much like mobile site content, campuses need to make sure that they are providing value for students who are looking at their institution's Facebook pages. Keeping content fresh and relevant is key to creating a positive Facebook experience for students.

How often do you look at Facebook pages for schools on your list?



How would you rate the experience on your most recent visit to a school's Facebook page?



## Recommendations for campuses who want to reach students using mobile devices

### 1. Provide an experience that is optimized for mobile users

The key for reaching mobile users is to make it easy for them to find what they are looking for. That means establishing a mobile site that optimizes content for smaller devices. Make sure this goes beyond the home page, too, and includes content that students want to find via a mobile device.

Think about content that would also make the mobile experience more rewarding and informative. Having a cost/scholarship calculator, videos about campus life and learning, and live instant messaging are just a few ways to connect with mobile users and give them something more to do than scroll through content.

### 2. Don't worry about apps just yet

Seventy percent of respondents said that they were happy to browse a school's mobile site through their device browser, rather than downloading a mobile app specific to that school. While such applications could allow you to customize and optimize the experience even further, they also would require development and testing that are probably not worth the extra effort. Stick with creating a terrific mobile version of your site instead.

### 3. Make social media worthwhile

Students in this study rated social media lower than all other forms of content they could experience. Nearly a quarter said that campus Facebook pages were a waste of time or not very valuable. This does not mean social media does not have value, but that you have to do more than use it as a bulletin board for your school. Facebook, Twitter, and even YouTube are mediums for interacting with students. If you use these social media to talk *with* students rather than *at* them, chances are you'll see better results from your efforts.

### 4. Test, test, test

With so many platforms available for mobile users, it is very important to make sure that you test your mobile site accordingly. In addition to identifying any compatibility issues, test for content flow. For instance, embedded media may not display on a mobile device the same way it does on a PC or may not display at all.

### 5. Keep your mobile site in sync with your main site

When updating content on your main Web site, make sure you update your mobile site at the same time. In addition, remember to optimize those changes for the mobile experience—you may need to tailor those changes to make them a better fit for mobile browsing.

You may want to consider implementing a content management system (CMS) that can keep your Web and mobile site content in sync if your current system does not do so already.

### Questions about this study? Questions about optimizing a mobile site? Please contact Noel-Levitz

If you have any questions about this E-Expectations mobile study, or want to discuss how you can provide a great mobile site for students, please contact Noel-Levitz. Call us toll-free at 1-800-876-1117 or e-mail [ContactUs@noellevitz.com](mailto:ContactUs@noellevitz.com).

### About the survey sponsors

**Noel-Levitz** is a recognized leader in higher education consulting and research. For nearly 40 years, they have partnered with more than 2,700 campuses to optimize enrollment management and student success through experienced consultation, advanced analytic tools, and campus assessments.

**OmniUpdate** is the leading Web content management system (CMS) provider for higher education.

Their enterprise Web CMS, OU Campus™, empowers institutions to effectively manage and enhance their Web presence and take advantage of the latest Web and mobile technologies.

**CollegeWeekLive** is the leading channel for live conversations with prospective students. Colleges reach high schools they do not travel to, engage students in an online environment they prefer, and improve results at every stage of the enrollment process.

**NRCCUA (National Research Center for College & University Admissions)** conducts the nation's largest educational planning survey among high school students. This valuable program facilitates a key link between the individual educational goals and preferences of students and the vast offerings of colleges and universities.

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