



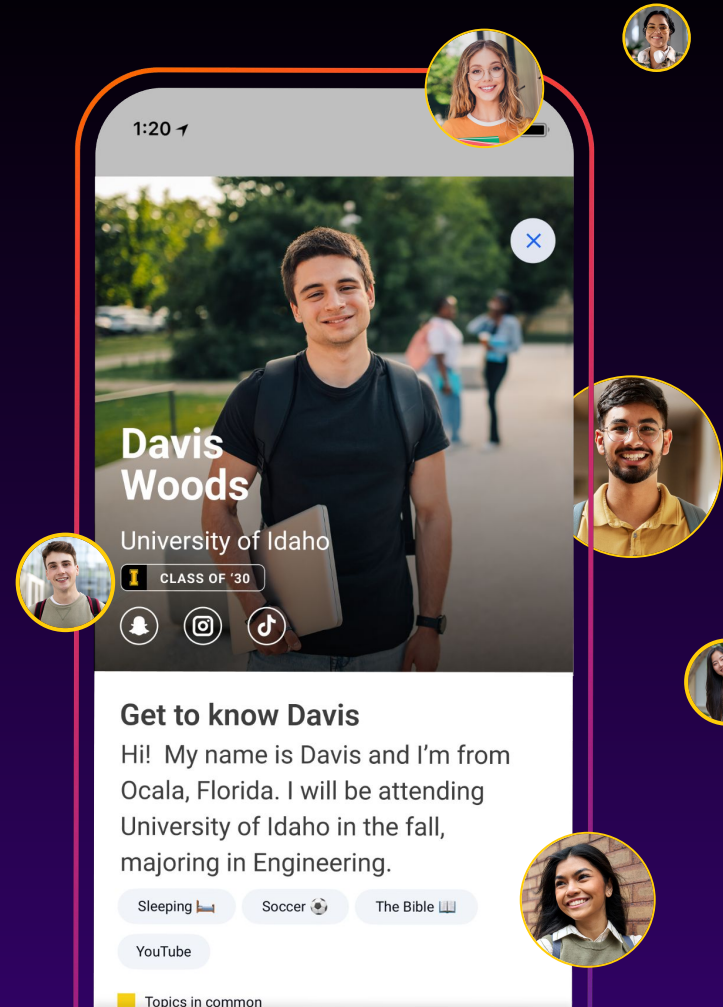
Student Pulse Surveys

Inside the student mind:

Trust, belonging, and the college decision process

Insights from our **Gen-Z** audience

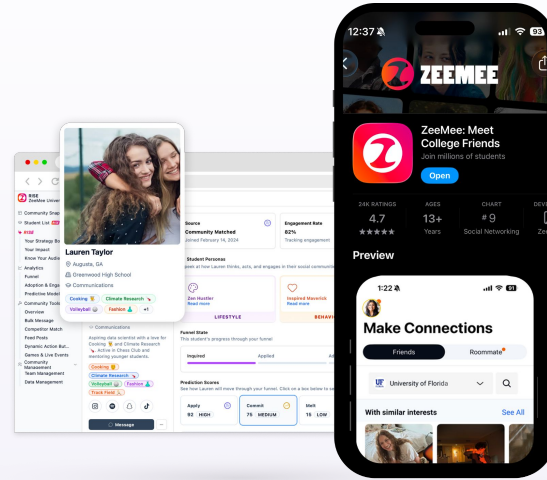
In partnership with:  University of Idaho



About



We help millions of students navigate their college selection journey and choose the place that is right for them, as well as giving access to the most unique data and interactive tools, to help colleges drive students through the enrollment funnel.



300+ college partners | **2.6M** students
Top 10 social app | **4.7★** App Store rating

Backed by a team with a combined 200+ years of enrollment experience



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Our Student Pulse Surveys

Every month we ask students some of the most important and burning questions related to their college admissions process.



This month:

What builds trust and confidence in the college decision process?

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TLDR;

Students are balancing two needs:

Making an independent, informed decision and feeling personally reassured and socially confident.

When those don't align, the decision feels overwhelming.



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Colleges that focus only on facts and rankings are missing half the picture.

Students also need emotional reassurance, real peer stories, meaningful connections, and a sense of belonging before they can commit with confidence.

When institutions combine clear information with **authentic human connection**, students feel both informed and secure, and that's what turns interest into commitment.



From our students...

"What resources help make you feel most confident about choosing a college?"

"Websites like Reddit, Instagram, or ZeeMee where you can hear from actual students in the college and their opinions."

"Days visiting campus with others who are planning to enroll."

"Probably real student reviews, job outcomes after graduation, and how affordable it is. I like knowing it's actually worth it long-term, not just sounding good on paper"



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Takeaway #1

Students trust colleges for **facts**, but peers for **validation**

- **94%** of students say they **trust** information provided directly by colleges when making their college decisions.
- **79%** of students say they **rely** on information from their peers when making college decisions.
- The distinction between “trusting” and “relying” is important. Students trust colleges for facts, but rely on their peers for validation.





Takeaway #2

Connection lays the foundation for **belonging**



- Once students feel connected to a college, they seek deeper experiences to confirm their connection - often through campus visits, in-person experiences, and ultimately their admission decision.
- **57%** of students report already feeling connected to at least one person at a college they are considering.
- **42%** of students say that their sense of belonging to a college increases after they have visited campus.



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Takeaway #3

Belonging is not assumed, it's uncertain and actively stressful

- **68%** of students say they worry about making friends when they think about going to college.
- **87%** of students expect to have at least one friend or familiar connection before arriving on campus.



Takeaway #4

AI is a **support tool**, not a relationship builder



- Students see **AI as most useful for practical, information-driven needs** such as deadlines and application steps, answering financial aid questions, and giving academic program information.
- On average, roughly **50%** of students reported being comfortable using an AI assistant for tasks like deadlines, financial aid and academic information.



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Takeaway #5

Students aren't rejecting AI, but adoption hinges on **trust** and **clear value**



When asked:

"I would feel comfortable interacting with an AI assistant to get personalized answers about a college if it felt helpful and trustworthy."

Students said:

- Strongly Agree/Agree: **36%**
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: **36%**
- Disagree/Strongly Disagree: **28%**

Students are split on AI, with the **biggest opportunity in the undecided middle.**

Earning their trust through clear, helpful, and transparent experiences will drive adoption.





Strategic Recommendations



Recommendation #1

Make individual connections personal through micro-matching

Create “micro-matching” experiences that go beyond showcasing a student and instead show **their** individual peers.

Match prospects with peers who reflect their background, interests, or goals, such as:

- “First-gen? Meet 3 students who were in your exact shoes”
- “From out of state? Talk to someone who made the move from {{State}}”

Recommendation #2

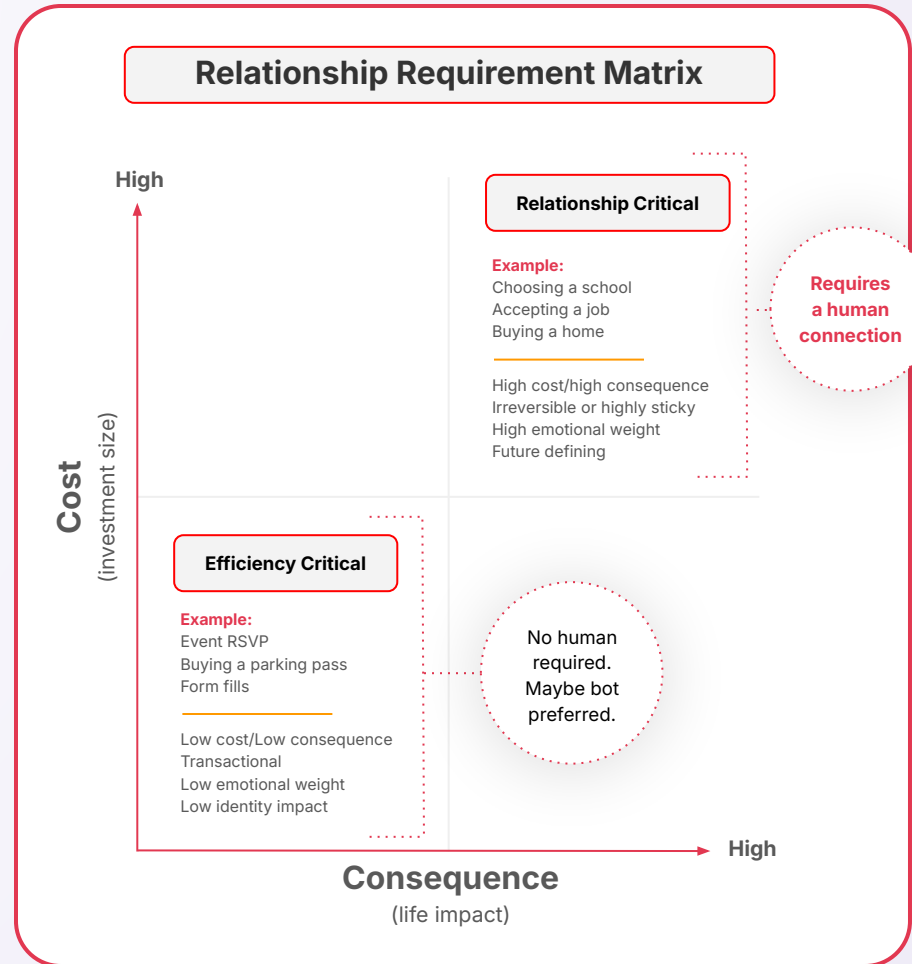
Pair key institutional facts with real student voices to build credibility and emotional connection

- When highlighting academics, include a quote from a student in that program
- When sharing outcomes, add a recent graduate story
- When promoting campus life, show authentic student experiences instead of only polished marketing

Recommendation #3

Use AI as a transactional tool

- Focus AI on helpful, clear tasks like deadlines and next steps to build trust first.
- The **Relationship-Critical Matrix** is a great guide for this. It classifies decisions by cost and consequence, helping you determine when to lean on AI versus human connection.
- Low-stakes, transactional tasks are “Efficiency Critical” and ideal for AI, while high-cost, irreversible, or emotionally significant decisions are “Relationship Critical” and better handled by people.



Recommendation #4

Build early digital connection and turn it into in-person belonging through campus experiences

- **Prioritize early, low-barrier connection moments** such as chats with current students, short-form video content, and interactive Q&As. Then intentionally guide students toward higher-impact belonging experiences like campus visits, admitted student events, and personalized visit days.
- When interest signals appear, prompt campus visits earlier in the funnel and position them as a key turning point in the decision journey. **Frame visits as the moment when “this starts to feel real,” not just an informational tour.**

Find out how you can support the
decision making process by
creating connections through
community with ZeeMee

sales@zeemee.com



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