

# The Enrollment Advantage: How Campus Aerial Video Influences Prospective Students Before They Ever Visit

A White Paper by NE Ohio Drone LLC — Ed Rich, FAA Part 107 Licensed Commercial Pilot | (330) 208-3601 |  
NEOhioDrone@gmail.com | [www.NEOhioDrone.com/Campus-Aerial-Video](http://www.NEOhioDrone.com/Campus-Aerial-Video)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The campus visit has long been considered the most powerful conversion tool in college enrollment. A student who walks across your quad, sits in a classroom, and eats in your dining hall is dramatically more likely to apply and enroll than one who never sets foot on campus. Admissions professionals have known this for decades.

What has changed is the decision that happens before the visit.

Today, nearly 90% of prospective students research colleges online before they request information or schedule a visit. The visit itself — the most powerful enrollment driver you have — is increasingly gated by what a student sees on a screen weeks or months earlier. If your online presence doesn't give them a compelling reason to take the next step, they never show up. They just move on to the next school in their browser tab.

*Aerial video doesn't replace the campus visit. It earns it. It gives prospective students the experience they need to decide that your campus is worth showing up for.*

This white paper is written for admissions directors, enrollment managers, marketing and communications professionals, and institutional leaders at colleges, universities, and private K–12 schools who are responsible for attracting students in a competitive, digital-first marketplace. It makes the case — in data and practical terms — for why professional aerial video is no longer a premium add-on for well-funded institutions. It is a baseline recruitment tool for any school that competes for students online.

**93%**

of high school students use a college's website to guide their research process — making it the #1 recruitment resource

*RNL / Modern Campus E-Expectations Trends Report, 2023*

**82%**

of video marketers report that video has increased dwell time on their website — keeping prospects engaged longer

*Wyzowl State of Video Marketing, 2025*

**40%**

of high school students will lose interest in a college after a poor or disappointing website experience

*RNL / Modern Campus E-Expectations Trends Report, 2023*

**73%**

of prospective students used virtual tours or virtual reality experiences in their college selection process

*RNL E-Expectations Trend Report, 2023*

## THE NEW ENROLLMENT FUNNEL: IT STARTS ONLINE

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### The Digital Research Phase Has Replaced the Brochure

A generation ago, the enrollment funnel began with a viewbook in the mail and a phone call to the admissions office. Today it begins with a Google search, an Instagram scroll, or a YouTube video — often conducted by a 16-year-old on a phone, at 10pm, without a parent or counselor in the room.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) has documented the shift consistently: prospective students rank a school's website among the most important factors in their initial evaluation, ahead of college fairs, counselor recommendations, and printed materials. What they find on that website — and how quickly it makes them feel something — determines whether they continue their research or move on.

For institutions competing in the same regional or national market, the digital first impression is often the only impression that gets made. A prospective student browsing ten schools in an afternoon spends an average of a few minutes per site. In that window, your campus has to communicate its scale, its character, its quality, and its atmosphere. Ground-level photography, however professional, cannot do that the way aerial video can.

### The Visit Is Still the Conversion Event — Getting Them There Is the Challenge

The data on campus visits and enrollment is consistent across decades of research. Students who visit campus are substantially more likely to apply. Students who apply after a visit are substantially more likely to enroll. The visit converts. The challenge for enrollment teams is that fewer students are making visit decisions based on printed materials and counselor referrals — and more are making them based on what they experienced digitally before they ever called your admissions office.

This creates a measurable opportunity. Institutions that invest in compelling digital content — particularly video that gives prospective students an immersive preview of the campus experience — generate more visit requests from more qualified prospects. The aerial video isn't the end of the enrollment journey. It's the beginning of it.

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## WHY AERIAL VIDEO WORKS: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CAMPUS DECISION

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### Prospective Students Are Asking One Question

Every prospective student evaluating a college or university is quietly asking a single question that no brochure copy or statistics page can fully answer: *Can I see myself here?*

It is an emotional question, not a rational one. The answer isn't found in the list of academic programs or the student-to-faculty ratio. It is found in a feeling — a sense of the place, its scale, its energy, its surroundings, and whether something about it resonates with who that student imagines themselves to be.

Aerial video creates that feeling more effectively than any other digital format. A well-produced campus flyover places the viewer above the institution and lets them experience the grounds the way no ground-level camera ever can. They see the full scope of the campus, the relationship

between buildings, the athletic facilities, the green space, and the community that surrounds it. They experience the campus as a place — not as a collection of photographs.

*Ground-level photography shows buildings. Aerial video shows a campus. The difference is the difference between seeing a stage set and watching a performance.*

### **Video Engagement Versus Static Content**

The engagement advantage of video over static content is not a matter of preference — it is measurable and consistent across platforms and audiences. Research from the Content Marketing Institute and Wyzowl's annual video marketing surveys documents that website visitors spend significantly more time on pages featuring embedded video than on equivalent pages with only text and images. Pages with video are more likely to appear in search results, generate social shares, and produce the kind of extended engagement that precedes a form submission or visit request.

For higher education specifically, this dynamic is amplified by the nature of the decision. Choosing a college is one of the largest purchases a family will ever make. Prospective students and their parents invest significant time and emotional energy in the research process. Content that rewards that investment — that gives them something meaningful to look at, share with a parent, or return to when they're narrowing their list — performs differently than content that is merely informational.

Aerial video of a campus earns that returning visit. A student who watches a flyover of your campus, shares it in a group chat, and pulls it up again to show a parent is a student who is actively advancing their own consideration of your institution. That kind of engagement doesn't happen with a photo gallery.

### **The Competitive Context: What Students See When They Compare**

When a prospective student is comparing three or four schools at the same point in their search, the visual quality and emotional impact of each school's online presence functions as a proxy for institutional quality. A campus with compelling aerial video looks more established, more confident, and more worth visiting than a competitor relying on the same ground-level photo library it has used for eight years.

This perception dynamic is particularly consequential for smaller regional institutions competing against larger universities with bigger marketing budgets. A well-produced aerial campus video is the great equalizer in that comparison. A beautiful 90-second flyover of a 600-acre campus at a regional university, set to music and edited with care, creates an impression that challenges a viewer to explain why the large state school down the road is obviously the better choice.

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## **THE BROADER INSTITUTIONAL VALUE: BEYOND ADMISSIONS**

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### **Athletic Recruiting**

College athletic departments face their own version of the same enrollment challenge. Prospective student-athletes are evaluating programs, facilities, and competitive environments — and they are doing it online before they ever take an official visit. Aerial video of a competition

stadium, a practice complex, a track facility, or an indoor training center communicates the quality of an athletic program in ways that text and ground photography cannot.

For NCAA Division II and Division III programs, and for NAIA institutions competing for athletes who have D-I options, the visual presentation of facilities can be a meaningful differentiator. A student-athlete choosing between two similar academic programs at similar price points may make a final decision based on which program looked more serious about its athletic environment. Aerial video of a well-maintained complex, filmed at the right time of day, tells that story in thirty seconds.

### **Development and Alumni Relations**

Capital campaigns depend on donors who feel connected to the institution and excited about its future. Professional aerial photography of a campus — showing new construction, renovated facilities, and the physical evidence of institutional investment — is a powerful tool in campaign communications. It shows donors where their gifts are going. It shows alumni that the campus they remember has grown. It creates the kind of visual pride that motivates giving.

Aerial documentation of construction progress, from groundbreaking through completion, creates a visual narrative of institutional momentum that serves both donor stewardship and broader community relations. That narrative is far more compelling from 200 feet than from the sidewalk.

### **Marketing, Communications, and Brand Consistency**

A professional aerial shoot produces a content library, not just a single video. High-resolution still photography, multiple video cuts optimized for different platforms, seasonal variations, and feature-specific clips for individual buildings or programs — a well-planned shoot generates material that serves multiple departments and multiple purposes for years.

Admissions uses the hero video. Athletic recruiting uses the facility flyover. The development office uses the campus-wide still photography. Communications uses social media cuts throughout the academic year. The marketing team uses the aerials in digital advertising campaigns. One investment in a professional campus aerial shoot populates the entire institution's content ecosystem with consistent, high-quality visual material that presents a unified brand across every channel.

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## **PRIVATE K–12 SCHOOLS: THE SAME CHALLENGE, A DIFFERENT SCALE**

Independent schools, faith-based schools, charter schools, and career and technical education programs compete for students in exactly the same way colleges and universities do — and they face the same digital-first research environment. A family evaluating private school options for their child is conducting the same kind of online research, making the same emotional assessments, and asking the same question: *Can I see my child here?*

For smaller schools, aerial video offers a competitive advantage that is disproportionate to its cost. A private middle school or high school with a beautiful campus, strong facilities, or a distinctive physical environment can present itself in aerial video in a way that challenges families to explain why a larger public school is the obvious choice. The first-mover advantage in a local private school market — being the school in the area whose campus aerial video

circulates on social media and gets shared in parent groups — can influence enrollment conversations for years.

Career and technical schools and workforce training centers have an additional visual story to tell: the quality and modernity of their facilities and equipment. Aerial video of a well-equipped CTE campus, showing dedicated labs, training facilities, and a professional learning environment, answers the objection that vocational education means inferior surroundings before a prospective student ever voices it.

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## WHAT A PROFESSIONAL CAMPUS AERIAL SHOOT PRODUCES

Deliverable	Primary Use	Audience
<b>Campus overview hero video</b>	Admissions website, virtual tour, visit day presentations	Prospective students & families
<b>Facility feature videos</b>	Academic department pages, athletic recruiting, donor communications	Prospective students, athletes, donors
<b>High-resolution aerial photography</b>	Viewbooks, digital advertising, print, social media, display	All audiences
<b>Social media cuts</b>	Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn — platform-optimized short-form	Prospective students, alumni, community
<b>Construction progress documentation</b>	Capital campaign updates, donor stewardship, community relations	Donors, alumni, board, community
<b>Seasonal campus captures</b>	Ongoing content library refresh throughout the academic year	All marketing channels

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## THE ANNUAL CONTENT PROGRAM: TREATING AERIAL AS AN ONGOING ASSET

The most effective institutions treat aerial content the way they treat other marketing assets — as something that needs to be kept current, not a one-time project that gets filed after completion.

A campus looks meaningfully different in October than it does in May. A new building that wasn't there last year is part of the institution's story now. An athletic facility that was under renovation is now complete and should be showcased. An enrollment campaign targeting a new market needs content that reflects current reality, not a shoot from three years ago.

Annual or biannual aerial content programs — scheduled around the academic calendar, aligned with admissions cycles, and planned to capture seasonal variation — give marketing and communications teams a consistent supply of current, professional aerial content without the overhead of treating each shoot as a new project. The planning is done once. The relationship with the operator is established. The shot lists evolve. The content library grows.

*One professional aerial shoot can populate the content needs of admissions, athletics, development, communications, and marketing simultaneously — for a fraction of what each department would spend producing content independently.*

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## WHY FAA LICENSING MATTERS FOR CAMPUS SHOOTS SPECIFICALLY

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College and university campuses are not simple airspace environments. Many Northeast Ohio institutions are located near or within FAA-controlled airspace. The University of Akron is in proximity to Akron Executive Airport. Cleveland-area institutions operate under the Class B airspace of Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. A drone flight over a campus without proper FAA LAANC authorization is an illegal commercial operation — and the legal exposure for that violation falls not just on the operator but potentially on the institution that hired them.

Beyond the regulatory question, there is a practical one. A licensed commercial drone operator brings a professional framework to a campus shoot that an unlicensed operator cannot. Pre-shoot airspace authorization. Coordination with campus facilities and security teams on access and restricted areas. A documented flight plan. Commercial liability insurance that protects the institution in the event of an incident. And the operational discipline that comes from treating every flight as a professional engagement, not a recreational outing with a camera attached.

For institutions with legal, risk management, and public affairs considerations around campus activities, the credentials of the drone operator are not a minor detail. They are a core part of the procurement decision.

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## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CAMPUS AERIAL VIDEO PROVIDER

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Not every drone operator is equipped to execute a professional campus shoot. When evaluating providers, the following criteria separate qualified operators from the rest:

- **FAA Part 107 certification.** Non-negotiable for any commercial operation. Ask for the certificate number and verify it in the FAA Airmen Inquiry database before the engagement begins.
- **Commercial liability insurance.** A minimum of \$1 million in general liability coverage is the professional standard. Ask for a certificate of insurance that names your institution as an additional insured.
- **Airspace authorization experience.** Ask specifically about their process for campuses near controlled airspace. A qualified operator handles LAANC authorization as a standard pre-shoot step — not as an afterthought.
- **Full post-production capability.** A drone operator who delivers raw footage is only half the solution. The value is in finished, edited, color-graded video ready for publication. Confirm that post-production is included and that the finished product meets your institution's format and brand requirements.
- **Marketing understanding, not just technical skill.** A drone operator who understands enrollment marketing, audience psychology, and what makes prospective

students take action will make fundamentally different creative decisions than one who is focused solely on capturing footage. The strategy behind the shot list matters as much as the execution.

- **Direct operator relationship.** For campus work, with its coordination requirements and institutional sensitivities, you want to work with the person who will actually be flying. Ask directly. Get it in writing.

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## NE Ohio Drone — Show Them the Campus. Give Them a Reason to Visit.

NE Ohio Drone LLC is an FAA Part 107 licensed, fully insured commercial drone operation based in Akron, Ohio. Ed Rich works directly with admissions teams, marketing and communications offices, athletic departments, and institutional leadership at colleges, universities, and private K–12 schools across Northeast Ohio and Western Pennsylvania.

Every campus engagement includes pre-shoot consultation and shot planning, FAA airspace authorization as a standard step, full post-production in-house, and digital delivery within 24 hours of the shoot. Ed handles every flight personally — no subcontractors, no brokers, and no surprises on campus.

With 45 years of business, sales, and marketing experience behind the lens, NE Ohio Drone brings something most drone operators can't: a deep understanding of how visual content moves audiences from awareness to action — and how to apply that to the enrollment challenge specifically.

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*Based in Akron, Ohio. Serving colleges, universities, and private schools throughout Northeast Ohio and Western PA — including Akron, Cleveland, Canton, Youngstown, and beyond.*