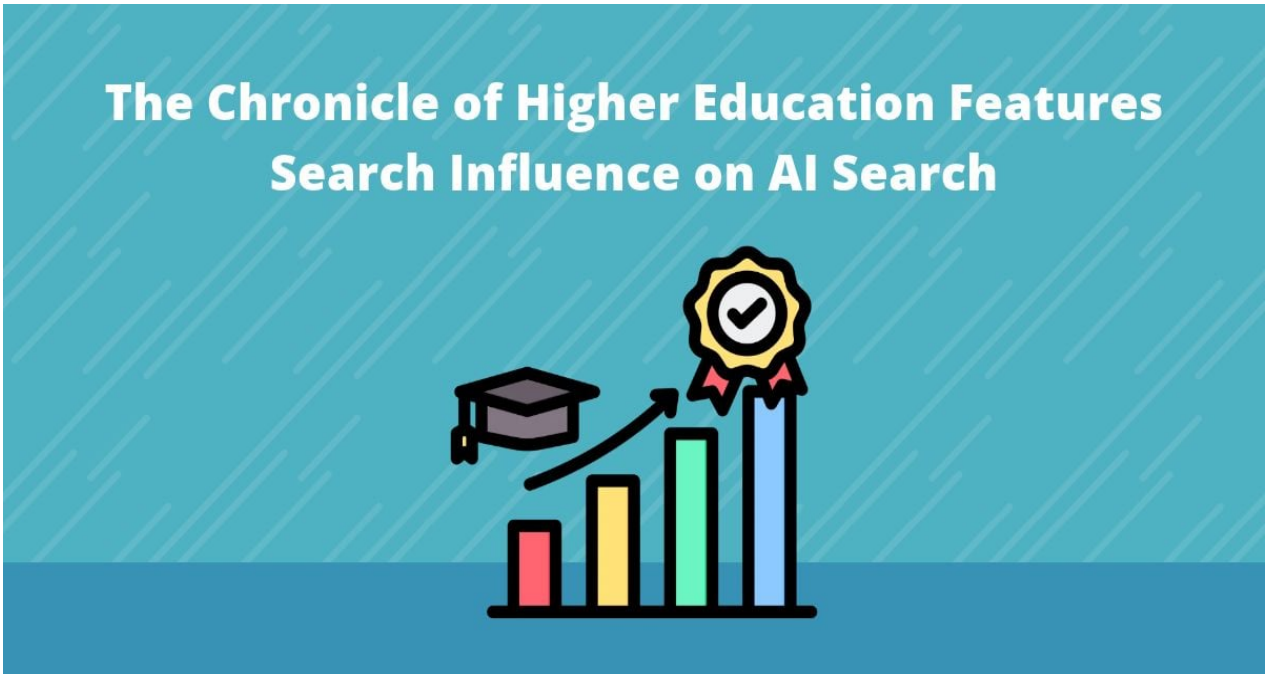


Search Influence and UPCEA Featured in The Chronicle of Higher Education on AI Search

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NEW ORLEANS, LA - November 09, 2026 -
The Chronicle of Higher Education interviewed Paula French of Search Influence and Bruce Etter of UPCEA on how colleges can get noticed by AI, in its November 2 Daily Briefing newsletter. French is director of sales and marketing at Search Influence, and Etter is senior director of research and consulting at UPCEA.

Founded in 1966, The Chronicle of Higher Education serves what it describes as millions of educators, administrators, researchers, and policymakers. Its Daily Briefing newsletter, written by Rick Seltzer and Beckie Supiano, ran the interview under the heading "How to Win Prospects and Influence AI." The newsletter noted that colleges seeking online attention have to account for prospective students using AI tools such as Claude and ChatGPT, as well as searching for programs on Google.

The Chronicle's interview highlights findings from How Prospects Search in 2026, the second annual study from UPCEA and Search Influence on student search behavior. According to the research, 80% of respondents say they are likely to use search engines to research programs, while 54% say they are likely to

use AI-powered tools. Thirty-five percent use AI to determine the best program for their goals.

The study surveyed 1,057 qualified adults ages 18 to 60 who are interested in continuing and online education, with fieldwork from May 5 to 14, 2026. It found that 39% of respondents use AI search daily, up from 24% a year earlier, and 83% read AI-generated overviews when they appear. Sixty-four percent say being cited as a source makes them trust an institution more, up from 56%, and 56% consider three or fewer programs before applying.

"Consideration sets are already quite small to begin with, and if your brand, program, institution isn't ready for that, you might be eliminated even if you have the best program, just based on how some of these learners are searching," Etter told the Daily Briefing.

In the interview, French said AI search changes how prospects find niche programs. "[AI search] has the ability to connect a prospect with a very niche program in a way that Google simply never could," she said. Prospects may not know how to search for a specific program, but they can describe their current work and career goals. "AI engines have a way to kind of match these specific things about this person and what they're looking for with those specific things about your program," French said.

Etter said .edu sites carry built-in trust and that learners look for details such as program cost and outcomes, which are often not visible. Building program pages that both learners and AI tools can easily understand is a practical place to start.

French explained that AI tools run many deeper searches, known as fan-out queries, when they compile an answer, so institutions need a presence across related prompts. University websites play a large role in the answers, followed by other publicly available sources. Social media, top-10 lists, comparison pages, and media sources are also cited frequently.

"Even before you touch your site, you want to understand where you are today," French said. She recommended keyword and prompt research, followed by tracking AI visibility to set a baseline. From there, institutions can optimize their own websites and reinforce the same message elsewhere on the web.

The full interview appears in The Chronicle of Higher Education's November 2 Daily Briefing, available to subscribers.

For more information about Search Influence's AI search services for higher education, visit https://www.searchinfluence.com/.

About Search Influence

Search Influence is a woman-owned, ROI-focused digital marketing agency that helps drive prospects into and through the marketing funnel with analytics-backed strategies, including organic and AI SEO and paid digital advertising. Founded in 2006, Search Influence?s core purpose is to optimize potential. The agency collaborates with well-regarded brands and institutions both nationally and locally in New Orleans. Clients include Harvard University, New Orleans & Company, and Audubon Nature Institute.

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Search Influence

Search Influence, a national SEO and digital advertising agency since 2006, delivers demonstrable ROI for clients. Specialties include SEO, Paid Advertising, and Analytics. In-house experts collaborate with clients for results. Also an informative blog.

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