

HOW A TOP-10 MED SCHOOL DIGITALLY REMADE ADMISSIONS IN A PANDEMIC TO RECRUIT TOP-TIER TALENT

The David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM) at UCLA created an immersive digital tour and recruiting campaign to virtually engage prospective students and trainees when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented traditional in-person tours and meetings.

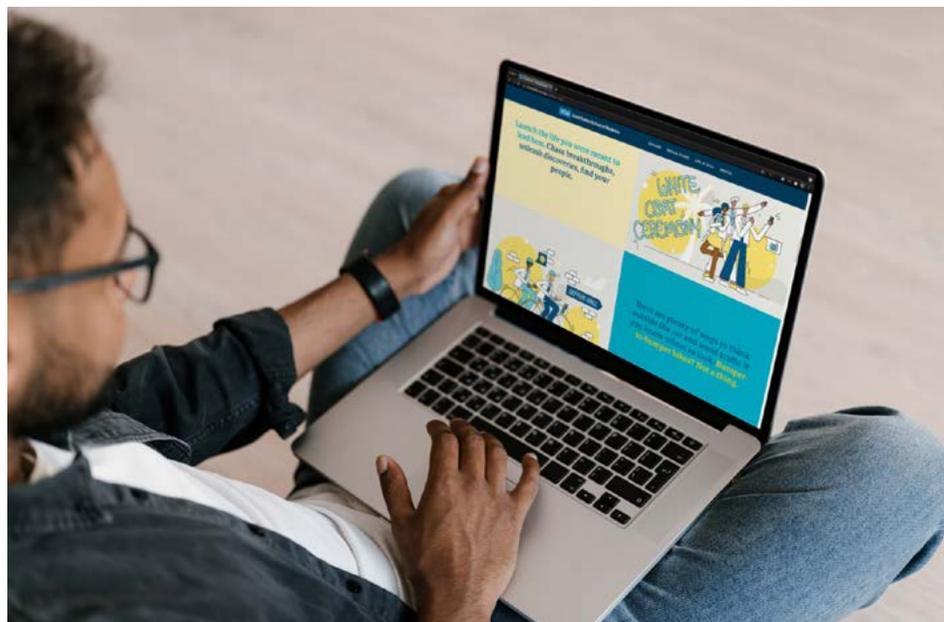
PROBLEM

In March 2020, America shuttered. States issued “stay at home” orders, travel was banned and the NBA’s hardcourts went dark. While many raced to stores to secure toilet paper and disinfectant, medical minds united to ask, “How can we protect our population from this pernicious virus?”

Meanwhile, a top-ten U.S. medical school -- thinking not only about this crisis, but all future crises -- grappled with another question: “How can we recruit the next generation of doctors if we can’t physically welcome them to campus?” The David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM) at UCLA recruits the brightest minds to its medical education programs, training future health care leaders whose scientific breakthroughs drive impact across generations.

Data revealed the on-campus visit was a critical driver in a medical student’s purchase decision.

Could DGSOM convince the top future doctors and scientists to choose UCLA (the #1-ranked public medical school in the U.S.) over Ivy League competitors... if they couldn’t visit our campus?



Website RESIDENTS & FELLOWS



INSIGHT

The David Geffen School of Medicine couldn't replicate the in-person experience by simply moving it online. So, UCLA recreated a new experience entirely, embracing digital platforms to share what makes the UCLA story so special:

That it's not about a degree... it's about a life of impact.

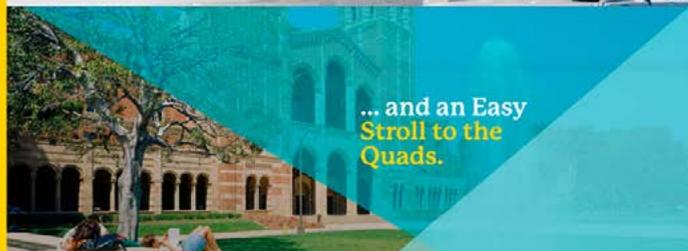
To convey this digitally, UCLA enlisted an Emmy-award winning video partner, built a category-disrupting website, and launched an effective live-chat that inspired 30% of website visitors to speak with an existing UCLA student. The program worked, successfully increasing applications to study at UCLA by 38% (YoY).

In the absence of in-person campus visits which proved critical at converting prospective students into actual ones, leadership built an engaging digital experience that empowered applicants to understand why to choose UCLA. Navigating COVID restrictions and a two-month time-crunch, UCLA sought to tell its story better than any category competitor, by embracing technology to directly link prospective students with current ones.

To understand how we could truly articulate an ownable, differentiated position, the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA ran a competitive audit to pinpoint how other top-10 medical universities were adapting to COVID-19 restrictions. Harvard Medical School created a virtual campus tour, the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine launched a "Prospective Student Resources" page and the UCSF School of Medicine staged online workshops. We recognized an incredible opportunity to go beyond the functional and tell the emotional story of why coming to Los Angeles and choosing UCLA could truly tee up students for their most impactful career both within and beyond medicine. The audit helped us realize we needed to do more than simply say "Apply here." We saw white space in our category and asked ourselves a simple question: how can we empower prospective medical students to know that by coming to UCLA, they'll have found their people and their purpose that will propel them through their lives?

Website

MEDICAL STUDENTS



SOLUTION

With the clock racing and pandemic obstacles thwarting nearly every decision, our collaborative teams developed 37 videos targeted to specific areas of interest for prospective trainees. Our production teams crowdsourced content and created a tiered approach to tap into institutional knowledge from internal teams. We created aerial campus tour videos and welcome videos from the Dean and Vice Dean for Education to articulate the ethos and excitement of what it means to be a student at UCLA.

A VIRTUAL WELCOME

We also created program-specific videos including overviews and tours of 24 individual programs. Current students shot selfie videos in the shelter-in-place safety of their apartments to articulate the essence of our student life. Their passion and excitement for our mission equipped prospective students with a clear reason to choose UCLA over Ivy League competitors, without ever setting foot in Los Angeles. To create a consistent brand experience, we designed animated bumpers, motion graphics and an original score to ensure a cohesive story across all website and social media channels.

WEB FEATURES

To cater to our two distinct audiences, undergraduate medical students and graduate medical students (residents & fellows), our landing page invited each prospective trainee to pick their specific path. But the biggest game changer was crafting the opportunity to directly connect, through a live-chat, with an existing UCLA student or staff member. Each of our unique storytelling tactics and illustrative movements were crafted with data-driven, UX research foundations and user testing.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We initiated month-long campaigns across LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with paid, owned and earned media, driving thousands of views and measurably propelling people to our website to submit their applications.

METRICS

Through data, **flexibility and creativity**, we embraced the constraints posed to us by COVID-19. In alignment with our **equity goals**, UCLA increased the number of low-income students who in previous years may not have been able to fly to Los Angeles. Although we couldn't offer prospective students the traditional experience of an on-campus visit, we embraced our constraints to deliver our **most successful year of admissions** in the history of our school.

By offering an **engaging and accessible** live-chat feature on our website that made it easy for prospective trainees to connect directly with students and faculty, we **successfully converted 30%** of all prospective medical students in the first month of the campaign.

Ultimately, through articulating our "why" and **making it easy** for students to self-select for why UCLA was the right choice for them, we **successfully grew** the total number of 2021 admission submissions by **38%**, from **8,000 to 11,000**.

