

The Academic Storytelling Blueprint



How to boost college enrollment through emotional storytelling.

by: Alex Guimoye

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Book a **FREE Story Clarity Session** today and start shaping the stories that turn applications into enrollments, and campuses into communities.

Business Inquiries: (423) 661 - 6040 | alex@blinkstormcreative.com

Welcome

I'm Alex Guimoye, a five-time Emmy® Award-winning filmmaker and Telly Award recipient who has spent nearly two decades chasing one truth: story is the bridge that connects people to purpose.

In higher education, that bridge is everything. Facts alone don't inspire. Spreadsheets don't spark dreams. What moves today's students—what makes them choose one school over another, are the stories that feel alive. Stories that let them see themselves in your classrooms, your campus, and your community.

That's why I created **The Academic Storytelling Blueprint**. It's the same system I used inside a university communications team and the reason that university still hires my studio today.

This is not another marketing manual. It's a roadmap for in-house video teams to break free from cookie-cutter content and craft bold, story-first films that stir emotion, build trust, and drive enrollment. Because when you tell stories from the heart, you don't just attract students... you inspire them to believe they belong.

Every student is searching for a place to belong. Storytelling shows them it's here.

Let's dive in!



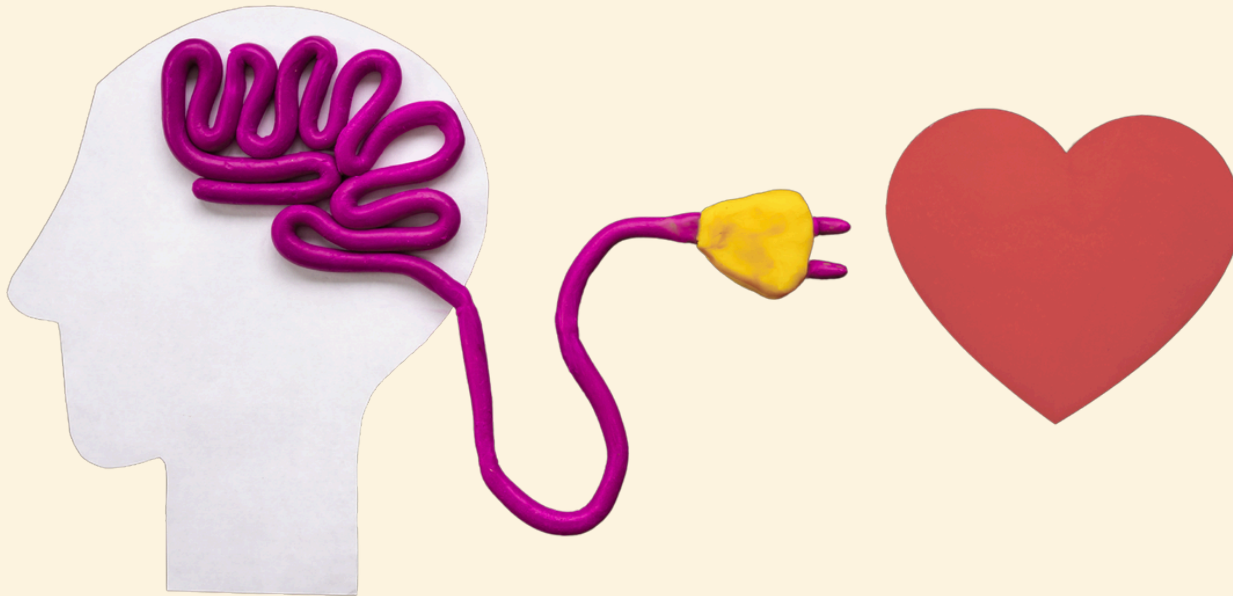
Alex Guimoye

Founder, Blinkstorm Creative

alex@blinkstormcreative.com

The Big Why

Chapter 1.



The Problem: Your Videos Aren't Broken— They're Just Missing a **Heartbeat**.

You've got equipment. You've got a team. You've got talented videographers who can shoot a stunning aerial campus shot and cut it to a trendy track.

And yet...

Your videos still fall flat.

They look good, but they don't move anyone.

They inform — but they don't inspire.

They check boxes — but they don't get applicants to click "Apply Now."

The problem isn't your budget.

It's not your equipment.

It's not even your team.

The problem is story.

Or more specifically: the lack of a clear, emotionally resonant story structure that turns your videos into **enrollment machines**.

The Cost of Corporate



Because nothing says ‘authentic student life’ like a stock model crossing their arms in slow motion.

I've seen it from the inside.

I led story-driven production at Univision, a national television network, and later drove video strategy for the communications team at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Two different worlds — same problem:

Videos that were polished, packed with facts, but empty of feeling. Too focused on information, not transformation.

At both places, talented teams were pouring energy into videos that looked slick but rang hollow. They felt like ads, not stories. They hit the checklist of marketing objectives but completely missed the mark on emotional impact. The result? Content that students scrolled past, engagement that stalled, and countless missed chances to spark the kind of connection that drives enrollment.

My Turning Point

Everything changed when I started building content around one simple idea:

Story-first, emotion-led video wins. Every time.

When we stopped trying to “show everything” and started telling one clear, emotionally resonant story... everything shifted.

Univision

This shift won our team 5 Emmy Awards in just 3 years



University of Tennessee

Our new story-driven approach grew social engagement by 3.2x and admissions reported a 27% boost in inquiries.

The Blueprint

This 4-part system works whether you're a solo video lead or managing a full in-house team. Whether you're creating enrollment promos, student testimonials, or social campaigns.



Find Your Story's Purpose

Answer the **5 questions** that define your story's purpose — then distill them into keywords that filter every decision.



Develop Your Character

Use the **"Big 3 Things"** to choose and shape a student story that emotionally connects.



Build the Story

Follow the **6-step narrative structure** I use to win awards and convert viewers.



Execute with Focus

Apply specific tools and workflows to streamline your creative process.

A silhouette of a person standing on a beach with their arms raised in a 'V' shape, set against a background of waves and a clear sky. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Why This Matters More Than Ever.

Your future students are watching. And they're making enrollment decisions based on how your videos make them feel.

They don't care how many programs you offer. They care about whether your story makes them think:

"This place gets me. I belong here."

When your content makes them feel seen, heard, and inspired... you don't have to push them to apply. They'll want to be part of your story.

And the timing has never been more urgent. The long-predicted enrollment cliff is no longer a forecast. The pool of college-bound students is shrinking, and every school is now competing harder for fewer applicants. The schools that win won't be the ones with the biggest ad budgets. They'll be the ones whose stories make students say, "I belong here."

Let's get started.

In the next chapter, I'll show you how to uncover your story's core purpose — and how 5 simple questions & keywords can make or break your message.

Finding Your Story's Purpose

Chapter 2.

The Most Common Mistake in University Videos

Too often, videos start with the what:

- What's the degree program?
- What's the name of the student?
- What do we need to promote this quarter?

But if you want your video to connect emotionally, you don't start with what. You start with why.

Every great story has a heartbeat — a purpose.
And if your story doesn't have one, neither will your video.

Start with Meaning. Filter Everything Through It.

Why Purpose Comes First

Purpose isn't some abstract idea — it's your north star. It's the lens you use to make decisions about:

- What shots to include
- What quotes to keep or cut
- What music fits the tone
- What CTA to end with
- Even what student story to tell in the first place

Without a clear purpose, you'll end up with a pretty-looking highlight reel that lacks direction. But when you define your purpose clearly and up front, your video becomes focused, emotionally resonant, and persuasive.

The 5-Question Purpose Filter

Here's the tool I use with every team I work with: **The 5-Question Purpose Filter**
Simply answer the 5 questions and distill your 5 purpose keywords.

1

What's most inspiring about this story?

Look for moments that light people up. That give goosebumps. That say something bigger.

2

What makes this story different?

Find the hook. What's the twist that sets it apart from a hundred other campus stories?

3

Who is the audience for this story?

Admissions prospects? Parents? Alumni? Each one requires a different emotional angle.

4

How do we want the audience to feel?

Hopeful? Empowered? Belonging? Inspired? Choose one dominant emotion and build around it.

5

What do we want the audience to do?

Apply? Book a tour? Share the video? Donate? Pick one clear call-to-action.

Example: Applying the 5-Question Purpose Filter

Let's say we're telling the story of Maya, a first-gen college student studying environmental science.

Answers might look like:

- 1. Inspiring:** Maya is the first in her family to attend college and wants to solve real-world climate issues.
- 2. Different:** She created a recycling program in her low-income neighborhood before she ever got to college.
- 3. Audience:** Prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds.
- 4. Feel:** Empowered and welcomed.
- 5. Do:** Apply for early decision.

Now we take those insights and distill them into 5 keywords that guide the whole project:

- **Empowerment**
- **Belonging**
- **Resilience**
- **Action**
- **Impact**

These 5 keywords become our North Star and creative compass. If a line of dialogue, a music cue, or a shot doesn't align with these themes — we cut it. **No exceptions.**

This Step Isn't Optional

If you skip this, your video might still “look good.”

But it won't feel good — not to the people watching, and not to the people you need to reach.

So gather your team, go through the **5 questions**, and define your **5 keywords**. Write them on the wall. Keep them in your edit timeline. Repeat them in your kickoff meetings.



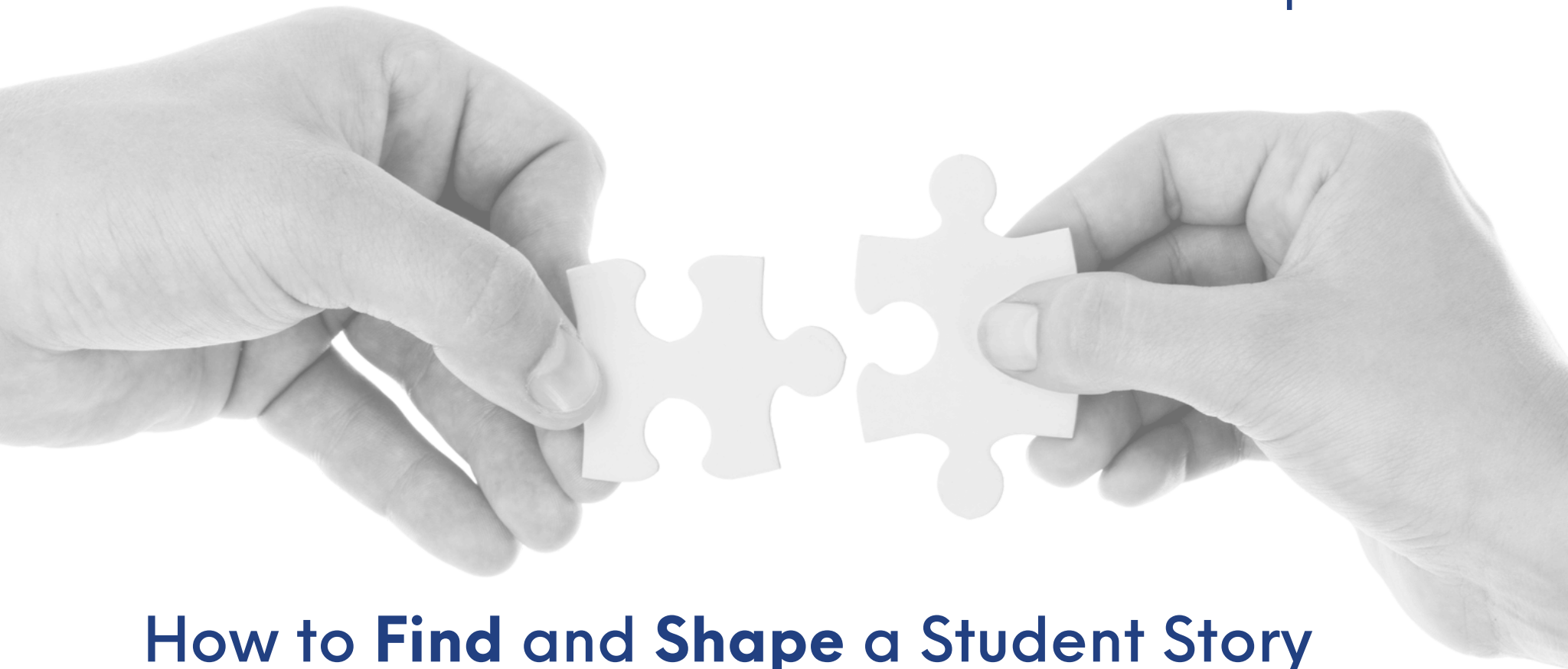
Next up: how to choose the right character — and how to shape them into someone your audience feels deeply connected to.

Let's dive into the most powerful storytelling tool you have: **the character**.



Developing Your Character

Chapter 3.



How to Find and Shape a Student Story That Connects.

Information Doesn't Convert—Emotion Does.

You can showcase your facilities, stats, or rankings. But your audience doesn't remember facts.

They remember faces. They remember: the girl who overcame, the guy who dared to dream, the person who reminds them of themselves.

If you want your videos to work — to move people and motivate them to act — you need to lead with **a strong, emotionally resonant character.**

Introducing: The “Big 3 Things” Framework

When selecting and shaping your character (usually a student), use this simple scoring method:



Desire

What does your character want?



Complexity

Why does the character want what they want?



Uniqueness

What makes this student stand out?

These are the three ingredients every great character needs. Without them, your story will feel flat or forgettable.

Step 1: Desire

What does your character want?

This is the **heartbeat** of your story. It's the reason we care about the character at all.

We're not talking about shallow wants like "get a degree" — we're talking about **deeper desires**:

- "I want to become the first doctor in my family."
- "I want to create sustainable housing in low-income communities."
- "I want to prove to my high school teachers that I can succeed."



Ask

- What is the bigger mission or dream that drives this student?
- What impact do they want to make?

Score it 1-5.

(5 = bold, relatable, and inspiring)

Step 2: Complexity

Why does the character want what they want?

This is where the depth lives.
The layers. The soul.

Anyone can say “I want to help people.”

But when they say. . .

“My sister had a rare disease and I watched my mom give up everything to care for her. That’s why I want to be a nurse”

. . . now we feel it.



Ask

- When did this desire first begin?
- What personal experiences shaped it?
- What’s at stake if they don’t reach it?

Score it 1-5.

Step 3: Uniqueness

What makes this student stand out?

Not just "she's a good student."

What makes her. . .

Memorable?

Inspiring?

Different?

- Maybe it's a rare life experience.
- Maybe it's a surprising passion.
- Maybe it's a combo of traits you don't usually see together.



Ask

- What about this person is totally unexpected?
- What moment in their life would make someone stop scrolling and watch?

Score it 1-5.

How to Choose the Right Character

You might interview several students or get pitches from staff or faculty. Use the **Big 3 Things** to evaluate them quickly.

Create a simple scorecard like this:

Name	Desire	Complexity	Uniqueness	Total
Maya	5	4	5	14
Sean	3	2	4	9
Priya	4	5	3	12

Choose the student with the highest total — but also the one that best aligns with your **5 Purpose Keywords** from Chapter 2.

Important: It's Not About Being Perfect

Don't look for someone with a flawless story.

Look for someone with **emotional resonance**.

We want **real**, not polished.

Vulnerable, not rehearsed.

Human, not corporate.

And once you find that student — everything else in your story becomes easier.

In Chapter 4, I'll show you exactly how to structure their story using my **6-step narrative framework** — from the opening hook to the closing call-to-action.

Let's build the emotional engine of your video: **the story structure** itself.

Building the Story

Chapter 4.



The 6-Step Framework That Turns Character Into Conversion

You've found your character.
You've nailed your purpose.

Now it's time to bring the story to life — in a way that
connects, moves, and converts.

Too many university videos feel like a highlight reel or a student bio.
What they need to feel like is a journey — with conflict, growth, and transformation.

This is where the real power comes in.

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

This framework works for any kind of student story, testimonial, or campaign piece.

Use it as your **script outline**, **edit guide**, and **emotional roadmap**.

1. The Heart & the Hook

This is your **opening**.

You've got 5–7 seconds to get viewers emotionally invested — don't waste it on a logo or drone shot.

Start with the student's desire — what they want and why they want it.

Examples:

- "Ever since I was 7, I knew I wanted to build things no one's ever seen before..."
- "When my grandmother got sick, I told myself I'd find a cure someday..."

Why it works:

Leads with emotion. Humanizes instantly.

Sets up the story as **theirs**, not yours.

Take  Action

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

2. The Obstacle

This is the moment where the **desire runs into a problem.**

- What stood in their way?
- What made the dream seem impossible?
- When did they start to doubt themselves?

This is the **conflict** that gives the story weight.

Examples:

- “But college didn’t feel possible where I’m from...”
- “I didn’t think someone like me belonged in a place like this...”

Take  Action

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

3. The Turning Point

This is the **breakthrough**

- When did they choose to go for it anyway?
- What sparked the decision to apply, enroll, or keep pushing?

Examples:

- “There were no guarantees. No backup plans. Just a stubborn belief that if I didn’t at least try, I’d regret it for the rest of my life.”
- “I clicked ‘submit’ on my application, hands shaking — not because I wasn’t sure I’d get in, but because I finally decided I was worth the shot.”

Take  Action

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

4. The Journey

Now we show the **transformation**.

List **2–3 key events** that represent the growth arc.

- The mentor they met
- The project they worked on
- The challenge they overcame
- The friend who changed their life

Visuals are everything here.

B-roll, music, pacing — this is where the video breathes and builds.

Take  Action

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

5. The Reveal

This is the emotional **climax**.

- What did the journey unlock in them?
- What do they now believe about themselves or their future?

Examples:

- “Now, I get to be the first person in my family to graduate college.”
- “Next year, I’m interning at NASA. And this all started right here.”

This is **your testament** to the power of your school — told through the student, not by you.

Take  Action

The 6-Step Story Arc: From Hook to CTA

6. The Challenge (Call to Action)

Don't leave them hanging.

A great **Call to Action** at this point isn't just a nudge — it's a confident invitation to take the **first courageous step** toward their future.

Now that the audience is emotionally primed — make the ask.

One clear, specific call to action.

Examples:

- "Apply now and start writing your next chapter with us."
- "Walk the campus. Come see what your future could look like."
- "You're exactly where you belong. Apply Now."

Pro Tip: Have the student deliver the CTA if possible. That authenticity will hit harder than a narrator.

Take  Action

A Quick Recap

Here's the full arc again:

1. **The Heart & the Hook** – Desire and backstory
2. **The Obstacle** – What stood in their way
3. **The Turning Point** – The decision to try
4. **The Journey** – Growth and moments of change
5. **The Reveal** – What they discovered
6. **The Challenge** – The call to action

Your Storytelling Checklist

- ✓ **One main character**
- ✓ **Purpose defined (Chapter 2)**
- ✓ **Big 3 character traits rated (Chapter 3)**
- ✓ **6-part arc outlined**
- ✓ **Visuals planned to match emotion**
- ✓ **CTA clear and delivered authentically**

In **Chapter 5**, we'll talk about **how to bring this all together** even if your team is small or your deadlines are tight.

Execute with Focus

Chapter 5.

Most university teams don't struggle with equipment. They struggle with **alignment**, bottlenecks, and last-minute chaos.

If you're serious about story-first video becoming part of your brand — not just a side project — you need **storytelling rituals, workflows, and habits** that make story-first videos a repeatable reality.

1. Bake Emotion Into Your Operations

Weekly "Character Hunt" Slack Thread

- Team members nominate potential students based on **The Big 3** criteria.

Monthly "Purpose Review" Meetings

- Look at what videos connected best and why. Adjust future **5 Keywords** accordingly.

Edit Reviews That Focus on Feeling

- Ask: "What's the emotional arc here?" Not "Is it polished?"

One CTA Rule

- Every video must end with one clear, story-aligned call to action. No more, no less.

Execute with Focus

Chapter 5.

2. Build a Story Library —Not a Content Backlog

Don't just create videos. Build a **library of emotional stories** tied to real student desires, fears, and aspirations.

Create a simple Airtable, Notion doc, or Google Sheet to track:

- Student name + major
- Their Big 3 scorecard (Desire, Complexity, Uniqueness)
- Purpose keywords
- Video links
- CTA used
- Results (engagement, CTR, applications, etc.)

This becomes **a strategic storytelling database** you can pull from for future marketing, alumni campaigns, fundraising, etc.

Your job isn't to make things look better — it's to make people feel something real.

Get the process right, and you'll have an in-house system that produces videos more powerful than any ad agency reel — because they come from inside the heart of your campus.

Case Studies

Chapter 6.

From Commercials to Campus. How Story-First Changed



Everything.

You've learned the framework.
Now it's time to see it in action.

This is the story of how I applied the story-first system in two very different settings — a national television station's production department and a regional university's in-house video team — and transformed the way both organizations approached video.

The tools were different.
The audiences were different.
But the solution was the same:

Emotion first. Story always.

Case Study 1: Univision

Problem: High-End Content That Lacked Soul

At **Univision**, I worked in the production department, where we were responsible for:

- Commercials for clients who bought ad space
- PSAs for nonprofit and community organizations
- Promotional content for the station and its events

We had top-tier gear, a capable crew, and a polished look.

But the content felt flat. Everything looked sharp...

but nothing hit the heart.

Commercials felt like checklists.

PSAs felt like filler.

Promos had no pulse.

We were producing volume — not impact.

Solution: We Let Story Lead

I brought a new approach to the department:

- We stopped writing spots like ads and started crafting them like stories
- We chose emotional moments over generic “features and benefits”
- We applied the **5-Question Purpose Filter** to define purpose before production
- We built character-driven arcs into even the shortest 30-second promos

Results:

- Our department won 5 Emmy Awards in 3 years
- Client satisfaction improved, with more repeat work and praise
- PSAs and promos started making real impact in the community

Case Study 2: UTC

Problem: Informational Videos That Didn't Inspire

After Univision, UTC brought me in to elevate video storytelling for their communications team — planning, producing, and directing strategic enrollment and recruitment campaigns. The problem was all too familiar:

- Videos were clean, but generic
- Too focused on campus features, not student feelings
- Viewers watched... but didn't act

We had students with powerful stories, but we weren't telling them well.

Solution: We Flipped the Script

I brought the same system I'd used in commercial TV into higher ed:

- Started every project with the **5-Question Purpose Filter**
- Chose students based on Desire, Complexity, and Uniqueness
- Built stories using the 6-Step Emotional Arc
- Implemented simple workflows focused on purpose over polish

We stopped trying to “say everything” and started saying one powerful thing well.

Results:

- Social engagement grew by 3.2x — more likes, comments, and shares across social media platforms.
- Admissions team reported a 27% boost in inquiries directly tied to student story-first content.
- Story-driven videos lowered cost-per-lead on Facebook ads by 30%, stretching the marketing budget further.
- And here's the result I'm proudest of: after I left UTC to launch Blinkstorm Creative, the university came back. UTC has continued to hire Blinkstorm for campaign content ever since. When a client re-hires the same storyteller through his own studio, that's the system working.

A photograph of two men sitting at a table in a meeting. The man on the left is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The man on the right is wearing glasses and looking down at a red mug. The background is a modern office space with large windows and plants.

Next Steps

Two Ways Forward:

Now that you have the framework, here's the honest question: does your team have the bandwidth to execute it, or do you need someone who already does?

If you want to build this in-house — **The Story Team Intensive** is a 1-2 week on-site engagement where I train your team live, on your actual footage and your actual projects. Not theory. We'll scope timeline and investment together on your Story Clarity Session.

If you want it handled for you — Blinkstorm produces the story-first video your team doesn't have the time, crew, or bandwidth to make in-house, from a single story asset to a full campaign to a documentary-length film. Starting at \$6.5K.

Either way, start with a free Story Clarity Session — 30 minutes, no pitch, just a diagnosis of where your story is breaking down and which path fits your team.

If you're ready to make storytelling your competitive advantage, I'd love to explore how we can partner together.

Book a **FREE Story Clarity Session** today and start shaping the stories that turn applications into enrollments, and campuses into communities.

Have questions? You can reach me directly at alex@blinkstormcreative.com