

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

INCLUDING FIRST GENERATION FAMILIES

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WHY WE ARE HERE

- Goal of Communication:
 - Influence attitudes & impact behaviors
- Problem:
 - Students feel over-communicated with & under-informed
- Solution:
 - Transform our communication from merely informative to engaging and inspiring



THE METHOD AND THE MADNESS

Website • Email • Letter • Social Media • Face-to-Face • Phone
 Presentation • Information Table • Poster/Ad • Text • App • Live
 Chat/Instant Message • Postcard • OneStop • Automated Call Campaign
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 Postcard • OneStop • Automated Call Campaign • Email • Letter • Website



FIRST GENERATION

- Neither parent earned a bachelor's degree
- Challenges
 - Family cannot provide the cultural capital for the college-going process
 - Need help navigating the hidden curriculum of college
 - University jargon is a barrier

FIRST GEN SNAPSHOT

- 1 of 6 students in the U.S.
 - 38% Latino
 - 23% African American
 - 19% Asian American
 - 13% White, non-hispanic
- 85% incomes below \$50,000
- 60% female

New
RULES OF COMMUNICATION

1. Forget the old rules
2. Embrace multi-modal
3. Be interesting and unique
4. Translate jargon
5. Call them to action with your CTA



FORGET THE OLD RULES

- Students are accustomed to tweets – 140 characters or less
 - Paragraphs are out; use digestible bites
- Be less formal
 - You're not being graded, except on whether your students take action!
- Reduce multisyllabic words
 - Yes, you are still an institution of higher education, but now students can understand you so that they CAN earn their education



EMBRACE MULTI-MODAL

- One-size-communication does not fit all
- More time invested, but for a bigger payout
- Strategic with each mode
 - Different audiences = different strategy



BE INTERESTING & UNIQUE

- Make your subject line do more work
- Get to the point quickly
- Remove passive voice
- Try humor (except with SAP Suspensions and Return to Title ID)
- **Relevant, authentic, transparent, and participatory**

TRANSLATE JARGON

- Institute a "banned words and acronyms" list
 - If you didn't know it before your first day in financial aid, don't use it
- Aim for the "No Gobbledygook Award"
 - If you were talking to them in person, what would you say?
- Use Gunning-Fog Index
 - Use no more than grade 10






CALL THEM TO ACTION

- Include only one CTA when possible
- Lead with CTA in subject line
- Offset CTA with bold, colored text, or buttons
- Convey sense of urgency
 - "Sign up," "Schedule," or "Pay"

EMAILS:

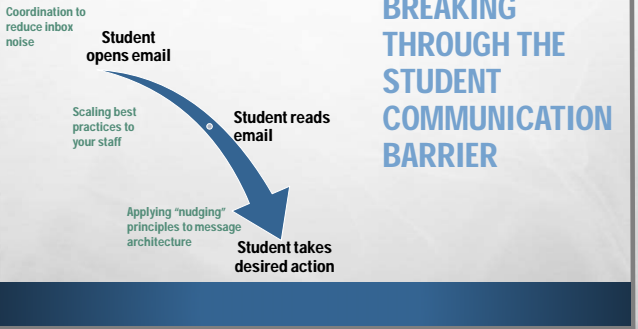
THE TALE OF THE HAND-CRAMPED STAFF WHO WROTE THEM 20 YEARS AGO
AND THE STUDENTS WHO DON'T READ THEM



WE BECAME SPAM...

- **72%** Treat emails from student organizations as SPAM
- **54%** Don't always read emails from university or academic department
- **35%** Don't always read emails from their advisor

BREAKING THROUGH THE STUDENT COMMUNICATION BARRIER



Coordination to reduce inbox noise

Student opens email

Scaling best practices to your staff

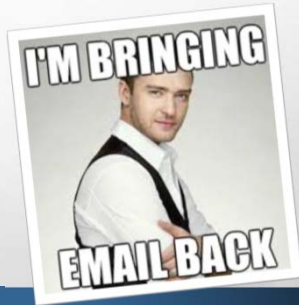
Student reads email

Applying "nudging" principles to message architecture

Student takes desired action

EMAIL STRATEGIES

- Make your subject line do more
- Write for your audience
- Don't ignore your CTA
- Audit your communications



MAKE YOUR SUBJECT LINE DO MORE

"A good first impression drives higher open rates"

- Mixpanel Blog

Effective Approaches	
Catchy	Oops - you missed your payment deadline!
Direct	Concerned about your midterm grades
Urgent	URGENT: Your financial aid academic plan
Authoritative	Next steps to complete your financial aid
Conversational	Let's chat about your withdrawal
Mysterious	You qualify for a new program!
Guiding	How to keep your student loan payments on track
Action-oriented	Submit your FAFSA by April 1 st
Questioning	Is there a reason you haven't finished your FAFSA yet?

WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

"Effective messages are student-centered and student-friendly"

"Tone should focus on students and their goals, not rules or policies"

"Language should be clear to all students"

Reduce multisyllabic words

"Exempted" →
"Do not need to"

Remove passive voice

If you are contacted →
"If your advisor contacts you"

Translate jargon

"Non-credit-bearing" →
"Does not count for credit"

Ensure readability

Gunning Fog Index measures grade level

IS YOUR COMMUNICATION INSPIRED?

- Write a subject line for the 2018-2019 FAFSA
- Write a SAP warning email



WHAT NEW HABITS WILL YOU START?

