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
FIRST GENERATION

- Neither parent earned a bachelor's degree
- Challenges
  - Family cannot provide the cultural capital for the college-going process
  - High debt reinforces the hidden curriculum of college
  - University jarage is a barrier

FIRST GEN SNAPSHOT

- 1 of 6 students in the U.S.
  - 30% Latino
  - 23% African American
  - 18% Asian American
  - 12% White, non-Hispanic
- 85% incomes below $50,000
- 60% female
**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 bits
- Be less formal
  - You’re not being graded, except on whether your students take action!
- Reduce multisyllabic words
  - Yes, you are used to the language 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 lingo)
- Include Revenue in Title Too
- 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
  - See me 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
  - Use "or," "schedule," or "first"
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
- Applying "nudging" principles to message architecture
- Student reads email
- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Approaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oops - you missed your payment deadline!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrench</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerned about your midterm grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
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<td>Uh OH! Your financial aid academic plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automation</td>
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<td>Next steps to complete your financial aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transactional</td>
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<td>Let’s chat about your withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
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<td>You qualify for a new program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelley</td>
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<td>How to keep your student loan payments on track</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit your FAFSA by April 1st</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a reason you haven’t finished your FAFSA yet?</td>
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WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

“Effective messages are student-centered and student-friendly”
“Tone should focus on students and their goals, not rules or policies”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language should be clear to all students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduces multisyllabic words</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Example” –&gt; “Don’t need to”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remove passive voice</td>
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<td>If you are contacted –&gt; “If your advisor contacts you”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translate jargon</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Non-credit bearing” –&gt; “Does not count for credit”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure readability</td>
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<td>Formatting helps ensure grade-level</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
IS YOUR COMMUNICATION INSPIRED?

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

WHAT NEW HABITS WILL YOU START?

INSANITY: DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS.