COVID-19
Mattering Nudges

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Driving Student Success Through Nudges

A **nudge campaign** built upon data-informed insight can connect the right student to the right resource at the right time, effectively leveraging institutional resources to increase students' persistence.

Nudges are small pushes in the right direction that do not require prescribed actions, but encourage certain behaviors. When students are presented with a nudge sent from a trusted person at your institution, they have the freedom to make their own choices with information about behaviors we know are more strongly associated with positive persistence and graduation outcomes.

– Kuh, George D., et al. *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

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About the Nudge Campaign

Opportunity

The events surrounding an uncertain environmental event such as the COVID-19 outbreak can disrupt students' personal, professional, and educational lives. As institutions rapidly change their processes to limit community exposure to the virus, students may experience feelings of uncertainty or anxiety. How do we keep them on a path toward graduation in the midst of this unprecedented change?

Nudges can support institutions' efforts by directing students to resources and encouraging engagement in their educational communities. At this time—more than ever—students need to know that their institutions are committed to supporting them and that they have the available resources to do so.

Goal

The purpose of this nudge campaign is to encourage students affected by the COVID-19 outbreak to take advantage of institutional services that can support their educational progress and aid in their mental and physical wellbeing. The campaign also aims at supporting students who may be managing new ways of learning using distance technologies. As institutions move to online instruction, students may need support with challenges that come from both unfamiliar technology and sudden feelings of isolation. Institutions can make a powerful difference by reaching out to students to acknowledge those feelings and provide them with positive reinforcement and information about services and support.

Student Subpopulations

The primary target student group for this nudge campaign is all of the students enrolled at your institution, because all of them will be affected in some way by the COVID-19 outbreak. All students will welcome encouraging messages confirming their importance to your educational community. Similarly, all students will need to know about changes to processes in your services and support.

You can also use this nudge campaign to direct individual students to specific resources based on what you already know about their educational intentions and persistence predictions. Students moving to online curricula, for example, may need access to information on how to use your institution's Learning Management System (LMS), whereas students already learning online will not. In particular, students who were already less likely to persist may need more directive language as they begin this transition. They may also benefit from intensive communication techniques that encourage them to use services and engage with your institution's community.

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Owner

The owner of your nudge campaign is the person you make responsible for sending nudges to students and receiving and acting upon their replies or delegating the needed responses to others. Choose the most appropriate person at your institution to send the nudges, keeping in mind that warm messages from trusted institutional leadership may be particularly important to students at this time.

Strategy

A nudge campaign is intended to encourage student behaviors that lead to an increased likelihood of success. To have an impact on students' likelihood to persist and graduate, the nudge must elicit actions that increase the chances that students will meet their educational goals.

This nudge campaign is a series of communications designed to engage students during uncertain times. Each nudge is intended to build on the one before it. The campaign includes four nudges to be sent to all students: (1) an initial message to be sent immediately, (2/3) follow-up messages to be sent as the current term progresses or concludes, and (4) a message to be sent to returning students as the next term begins. The nudges in this campaign build on the following principles:

- *Mattering*
- *Empathy*
- *Normalizing*
- *Belonging*

A nudge can reinforce positive behaviors by requesting that students think or behave in ways that will likely improve their educational outcomes. A nudge that asks a student to do something specific is more likely to have an impact than one that is vague. Don't overwhelm students with a long list of resources or choices. Include just a small number of actions per nudge, aimed specifically at eliciting a desired behavior from the target student population.

The recommended action for each of the four nudges included in this campaign is for students to actively engage in your LMS community and reach out to their advisors, counseling services, and campus resources for support.

Each nudge should speak to both the head and the heart, that is, to both the proven benefits of engaging in the recommended action and the mental and emotional barriers that may restrain the student from participation. Each nudge should include concrete instructions for accessing the recommended resources, especially if your institution's processes have recently changed.

The next pages of this document contain templates for the four suggested nudges.

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We Are In This Together

Initial messaging: *Focus on helping students feel safe and supported during this uncertain time.*

Subject Line: We are in this together

Dear [STUDENT'S FIRST NAME],

As we at [NAME OF INSTITUTION] work together to support our entire campus community, many students feel overwhelmed and uncertain about their health and safety, both immediately and looking forward. I want to reassure you that you are not alone. Your health and wellbeing as you progress toward your educational goals are our top priority.

[CALL TO ACTION]
Our community is strong, and when you need support, we are here for you. I hope you will take advantage of the resources available to you:

- [RESOURCE]
- [RESOURCE]
- {RESOURCE}

If these resources aren't what you need, please reach out to your advisor for additional assistance. In addition, I ask that you continue to keep up to date with rapidly changing conditions by checking our campus website frequently for the latest news [appropriate URL].

Again, remember, you are not alone. You are part of a caring community that's here to make sure that you are safe and supported.

[SIGNATURE]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

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Learning Online Doesn't Mean Learning Alone

Continued messaging: *Focus on students who may feel isolated in online courses.*

Subject Line: Learning online doesn't mean learning alone

Dear [STUDENT'S FIRST NAME],

As you know, [NAME OF INSTITUTION] has moved all of your courses online as part of our actions to ensure the health and safety of our entire community during the coronavirus outbreak. During this uncertain time, I want to make sure you stay on track toward your educational goals.

If online learning is new to you, I want to make sure you know that it doesn't mean learning alone. [NAME INSTITUTION USES FOR LMS] creates many opportunities for you to interact and engage with your instructors and fellow students. Staying involved is key to keeping you grounded and on track toward graduation!

[CALL TO ACTION]
I encourage you to do the following:

- If you experience issues using [LMS NAME] or any other technology in support of your learning, please contact our technical help desk at [CONTACT INFORMATION] during business hours (INSERT HOURS]).
- If you need any additional assistance, reach out to your advisor for help.
- Log into [LMS] often—at least once a day—to stay up to date with all of your classes.
- Set aside specific times to study, and create a study space for yourself in your home, just as you would for in-person classes and on-campus study.

Again, remember, studying online doesn't have to mean studying alone. The [NAME OF INSTITUTION OR MASCOT] community is right here with you.

[SIGNATURE]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

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Just Checking In

Additional follow-up messaging: *Remember, students may encounter additional challenges over time and need additional support even if they may not voice it. Consider reaching out in a second follow-up message to encourage students who may feel disengaged or are struggling to finish the term.*

Subject Line: Just checking in

Dear [STUDENT'S FIRST NAME],

We've been through a lot during this COVID-19 outbreak, and I'm proud of the [NAME OF INSTITUTION] community for banding together to share our experiences.

Remember that we're here to help you navigate all that is happening while staying on track toward your educational goals. If you find it challenging to remain focused on finishing strong, please reach out to:

- [CONTACT] at [CONTACT INFORMATION]
- [CONTACT] at [CONTACT INFORMATION]

We are here for you, and we want to support your learning and success.

[SIGNATURE]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

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With the Crisis Behind us, a New Term Begins

Messaging for returning students: As the new term starts, some students may perceive others as thriving while they struggle. A message to returning students can reassure them that your institution's community is still behind them.

Subject Line: With the crisis behind us, a new term begins

Dear [STUDENT'S FIRST NAME],

All of have been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, an experience we never expected to face.

In this difficult time, I have been amazed by the strength of the [NAME OF INSTITUTION] community. As the new term begins, please know that you are not alone. If you are struggling to focus on your course work or educational goals, we are here for you, and we're ready to support you and help you get back on track.

Please consider participating in [RESOURCE], or contact your advisor to learn more about the other services and support available to you. We have come this far together, and we're eager to help you thrive as you continue your journey at [NAME OF INSTITUTION].

[SIGNATURE]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]