



Advising Students Via Text Message

uAspire's Virtual Advising Work

August 2017

PREPARE ★ AFFORD ★ SUCCEED

Agenda and Outcomes

Agenda

- ★ Introduction to uAspire
- ★ Case Study: uAspire's Texting Work
 - ★ Externally evaluated pilots
 - ★ Current texting programs
- ★ Why Texting Works

Outcomes

Readers will...

- ★ Explore uAspire's programmatic history and success with texting students
- ★ Understand the conditions that make texting an effective means of communicating with students

Who Are We?

- ★ **Our Mission:** uAspire works to ensure that all young people have the financial information and resources necessary to find an affordable path to – and through – a postsecondary education.
- ★ **Our Vision:** uAspire is committed to reaching the day when all young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential by graduating from college, regardless of their families' financial resources or college experience.
- ★ **Our Impact Models:** uAspire is a national nonprofit organization that works to remove the financial barriers to post secondary education by:
 - Delivering college affordability advising services to high school and college students through our Afford and Succeed programs
 - Educating practitioners through our Training and Technical Assistance partnerships
 - Partnering with policymakers to create systemic change in higher education and college affordability

Case Study

uAspire's Summer College Connect Program

Summer College Connect

- ★ Summer College Connect aims to continue uAspire's college affordability advising services for high school seniors into the summer months following graduation.
- ★ The overarching aim was to reduce the summer melt rate among uAspire students.
- ★ Texting was **piloted and evaluated as a randomized controlled trial study** in the summer of 2012.
- ★ uAspire sent 1-2 text messages per week to 2,200 predominantly low-income recent high school graduates.
 - Students were previously served by uAspire's Afford Program, through which they received individual, in person advising from a uAspire College Affordability Advisor based at their high school.
 - College Affordability Advisors work with students to identify affordable college options, maximize financial aid, and make informed decisions about where to attend college and how to pay for it.

Summer College Connect

- ★ Text messages from advisors focused on tasks students must complete over the summer to ensure successful college enrollment, such as
 - signing up for orientation
 - course registration
 - managing loans
 - paying tuition bills
- ★ Program text messages were scheduled and sent in bulk through a cloud-based communication platform. Students received the messages directly on their cell phones.
 - Messages were customized according to each student's intended college (captured on surveys completed prior to graduation)
- ★ Students were able to communicate directly with their uAspire advisor by responding to program text messages.
 - In situations where students' questions couldn't be resolved through text, advisors used email, phone and in person meetings to offer more robust support.

Summer College Connect: Program Goals


Re-establish student-advisor contact after high school graduation



Nudge students on specific tasks to enrollment



Provide customized advising content using data from senior exit surveys



ULTIMATE GOAL: Successful college matriculation

Sample Texting Interaction

Advisor: *"uAspire reminder: Fall bill due 8/7. Do u have a good plan for paying ur bill? Need help? Questions about loans? Text us, or visit our walk-in hrs!"*

Student: *"I saw what my bill is so is that what financial aid takes care of?"*

Advisor: *"Do you know how much your bill is for?"*

Student: *"3000 & some change"*

Advisor: *"That doesn't sound like your fin aid has been applied yet. Did you check your email? Check to see if you have any emails from the fin aid office."*

Student: *"Okay." (7 min later) "I figured it out, they need my transcript"*

Advisor: *"Ok that makes sense. Once they receive this, the fin aid office may have more papers for you to fill out. Be sure to check your email often and let us know."*

Student: *"Okay thank you."*

uAspire Summer College Connect

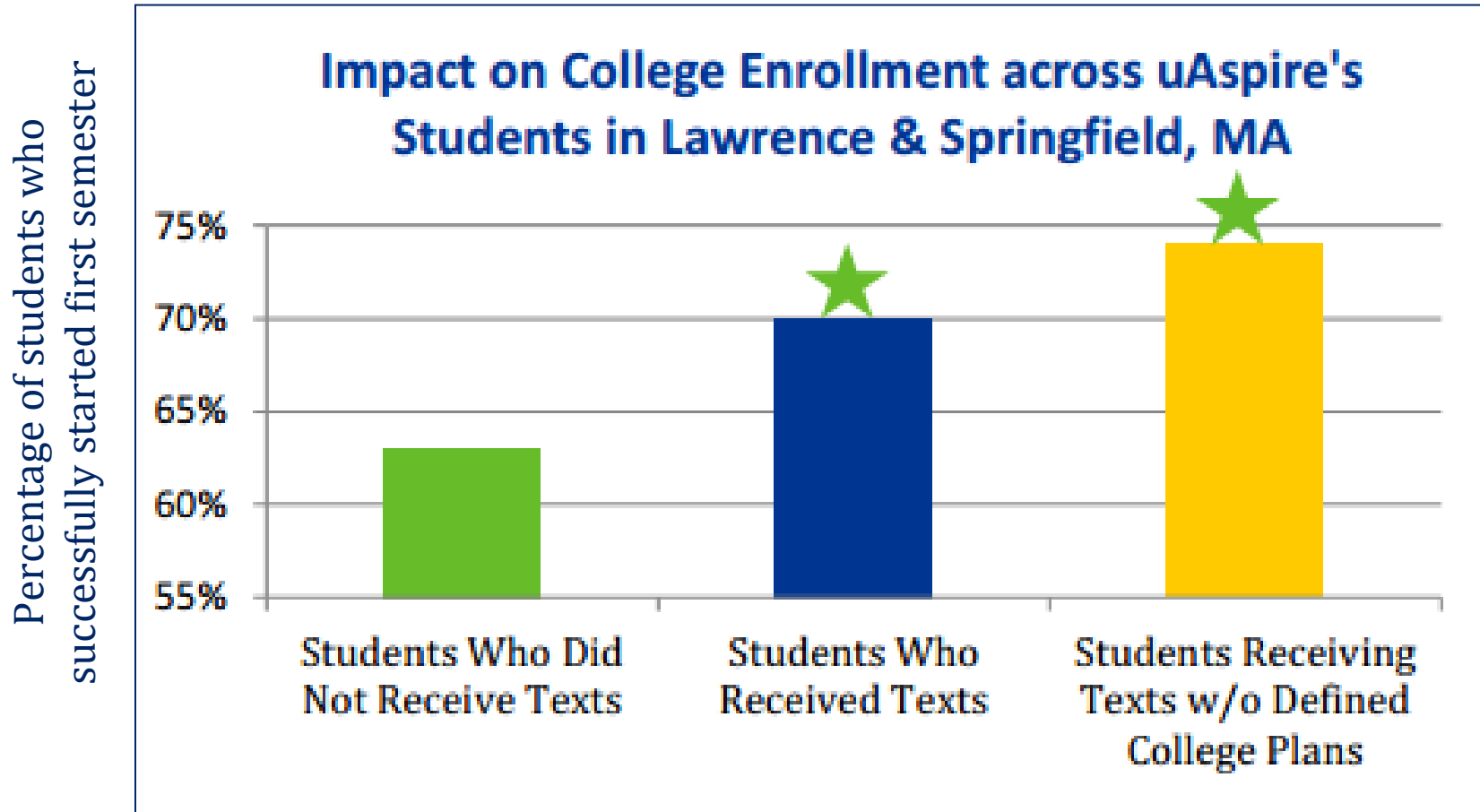
Results and Impact

Student Feedback

“All of the text messages were useful in their own ways. I personally loved that I received a personal text message reminding me of the things I needed [to do] for college.”

-uAspire SCC Student

SCC 2012 Results: Lawrence and Springfield, MA



Results Summary

- ★ A lottery system was used to assign students to either the control group (no texts) or treatment group (received texts).
- ★ Overall, students who received texts were **7.1 percentage points more likely to enroll at a post secondary institution** than those who did not receive texts.
- ★ The impact was even greater **for students who did not have specific college plans at the end of high school: 11.3 percentage points!**
- ★ These results reflect a strong positive impact on reducing summer melt: the program was making a statistical difference.
 - *Since the students were assigned to a group based on a lottery, the students who did not receive texts weren't any different or less motivated to enroll; instead, it was the texting program made the impact on enrollment*

Subsequent Texting Studies

- ★ **2013:** Expanded summer texting across Massachusetts; Added a college group
- ★ **2014:** Added parent texting in Massachusetts; Expanded summer texting across uAspire program sites; College texting grew
- ★ **2015:** Community college pilot: texting + on-campus support
- ★ The results from each study continue to prove the impact of reaching students over text message. **18-25% increase in college enrollment overall!**

Current uAspire Texting Programs

Afford

- ★ uAspire College Affordability Advisors leverage texting year-round to support their in person relationships with students.
 - Individual appointment reminders
 - Personalized follow up on key college affordability tasks
 - Large group nudges and just in time information
- ★ Summer College Connect (SCC) Programming has been fully integrated into the services offered to all high school seniors served by uAspire.
 - Summer 2017 – 4,500 students receive bi-weekly text messages along key summer tasks; 69% of students have texted back.

Special Initiatives – My Brother and Sister’s Keeper

- ★ uAspire Bay Area’s joint work with the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) on the city’s My Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper initiative
 - Google.org committed \$1 million to Spark*SF Public Schools to fund the launch of this partnership.
 - To increase affordable pathways to college for San Francisco’s small African American student population, we are providing dedicated college affordability advising to all 250 African American 12th graders in SFUSD.
 - Students are served through a hybrid program that leverages both in person college affordability advising and robust advising over text message.

Special Initiatives – University of California Office of the President

- ★ The University of California has launched a state-wide partnership with uAspire Bay Area to provide our advising to up to 450 high school students participating in the UC President's Pre-College Scholars program.
- ★ Together, we aim to increase access for underrepresented students to our state's public four-year colleges.
- ★ Students in the program receive robust virtual advising over text message throughout their junior and senior years of high school.
 - Students began receiving program messages October 2016; the program will run through the summer of 2018

Special Initiatives – University of California Office of the President

★ Student feedback after Year 1

“All the information was great. The explanations were very clear and concise. The links for scholarships is also very helpful...reminded me that the college process was going to happen soon, and that I should prepare well.”

“It was like having a constant academic conscience putting college preparation into perspective and reminding me to focus on making sure I'm doing everything right to get there”

Succeed

- ★ uAspire Succeed aims to provide post-secondary students with the financial information and guidance they need to stay in college and complete their degree.
- ★ Through our innovative texting platform and in person advising, advisors supported 3,125 students in 2015-2016 with financial aid renewal and managing college cost.
- ★ In 2016-2017, Succeed advisors supported over 4,100 Boston High school graduates
- ★ Text advising activities include FAFSA renewal, paying college bills, academic progress toward a degree or credential, and knowing current student loan debt amounts.

Why Texting Works

Cognitive-Behavioral Conditions

Cognitive-Behavioral Tendencies

Limited Attention

Planning Fallacy

Procrastination

Social Norms

Identity

Impact on Students

Tendency to put off complex tasks;
When overwhelmed,
tendency toward inaction

Powerful influence on behavior

These conditions contribute to why students struggle with the complex tasks involved with getting to and through college.

Sources: Ideas42 (2014), Castleman (2013)

Communication Conditions

Tech Accessibility

95% of 12-17 year olds have internet access

74% of them use mobile devices to go online

78% of teens have their own cell phone

Most phone subscribers have unlimited texting

Opportunity for Texting Programs

Cell phones and text messaging give college access practitioners an innovative way to deliver services.

Source: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/03/13/teens-and-technology-2013/>

Adolescents are Not Emailing

TEXT DAILY

65%

**EMAIL
DAILY**

6%

Source: Signal Vine

The Opportunity

- ★ Texting offers the opportunity for stakeholders and practitioners to –
 - Meet students where they are – on their phones!
 - Leverage impulsivity by capitalizing on student attention immediately in a text exchange
 - Breakdown complex tasks into manageable bits, and time them according to each student’s need and readiness
 - Overcome cognitive-behavioral pitfalls by nudging via text
 - Offer highly individualized coaching and encouragement in a highly efficient manner

Summary

Summary

- ★ uAspire has implemented randomized controlled trials to test the efficacy of virtual advising over text message with both high school and college students.
 - Texting has proved time and again an impactful service model.
 - Currently, uAspire programs leverage texting either as the primary means of engaging students or as a supplemental tool for enhancing in person advising.
- ★ There are both cognitive- behavioral and technological conditions that create a unique opportunity for practitioners to reach students with efficiency by leveraging texting.
- ★ Effective texting requires thoughtful program set up and mindful communication with students.