Leveraging Behavioral Science to Move Students to Completion

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What is behavioral science?

And how can it be leveraged to improve student outcomes in higher education?

- **Behavioral science:** The scientific study of human behavior and decision-making.

- Our cognitive biases affect how we interpret all forms of communication.
  - *Takeaway for Higher Ed: To more effectively communicate with students, we must understand how they think and make decisions.*

- **Nudge:** A subtle intervention or environmental change that can influence behavior and help people make better choices.
  - *Takeaway for Higher Ed: This can be as simple as a text message or e-mail reminder.*
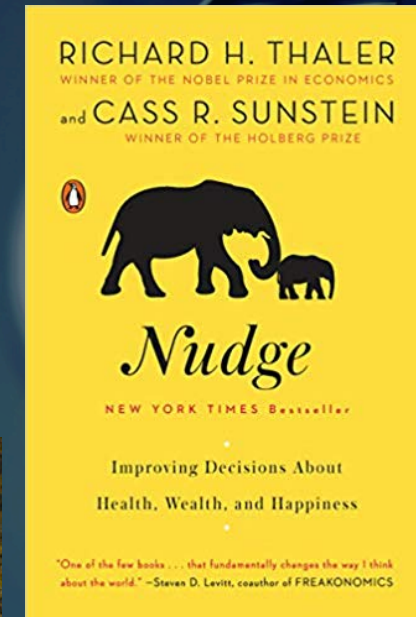
# Why are communicators using behavioral science?

Developing a comprehensive communications campaign to convince students, parents and teachers that earning a credential beyond a high school diploma is critical to success.

Persuading Opportunity Youth (ages 16-24) who are disconnected from work and/or school to engage in education and workforce training so they can find meaningful employment and give back to society.

Our Process: Behavioral Communications Summit

Behavioral science plays a key role in communications planning.

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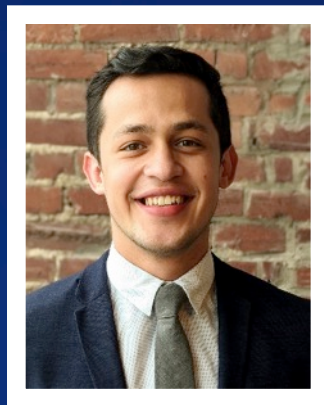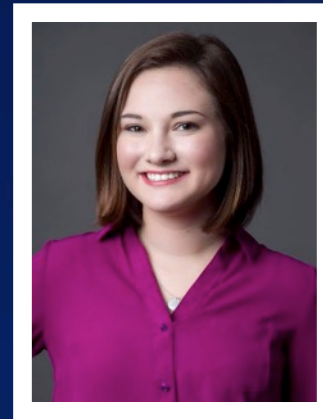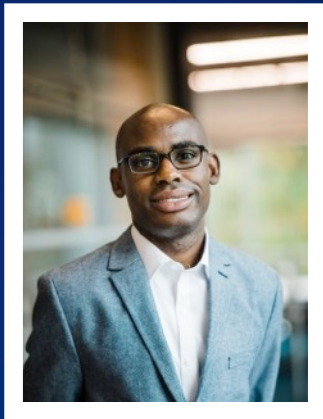
Behavioral Communications in Action

Nudging for FAFSA
Arizona State University

- **Problem:** At ASU, only 18 percent of students filed the FAFSA by the priority deadline in 2014.

- **Goal:** To increase the number of ASU students that apply for FAFSA by the priority deadline.

- **Action:** A series of eight emails were sent to students and parents over eight months to encourage students to apply for aid before the March 1 priority deadline.

- **Behavioral Tactic:** The emails encouraged students to talk with their parents about required financial information and broke the process down in bite-sized, manageable tasks.

- **Result:** The e-mails fueled a **72 percent increase** in early FAFSA admissions. When both students and parents received the e-mails, **50 percent** filed for the priority deadline, securing an average of **$269 to $643** in financial aid

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Hi Alissa,

The FAFSA is now available. With FAFSA Mythbusters, we debunk three common myths and help you stay on track for the **March 1st priority deadline**. It could mean thousands more dollars in your financial aid package.

FAFSA Myths Debunked

Myth #1: Most students don't qualify for financial aid.	Fact #1: Over 80% of students at ASU receive financial aid.
Myth #2: You only have to file the FAFSA once for college.	Fact #2: You must re-file the FAFSA every year if you wish to continue receiving aid.
Myth #3: Your financial aid is always available to you, regardless of when you apply for it.	Fact #3: Apply by March 1st to get all of the money you're eligible for. On average, students who apply before then get twice the amount of aid!

Submit your application by the Sunday March 1st priority deadline. Here's what you need to do now:

[✔] Get ASU's college code — it's 001081.

[ ] Retrieve Your PIN.
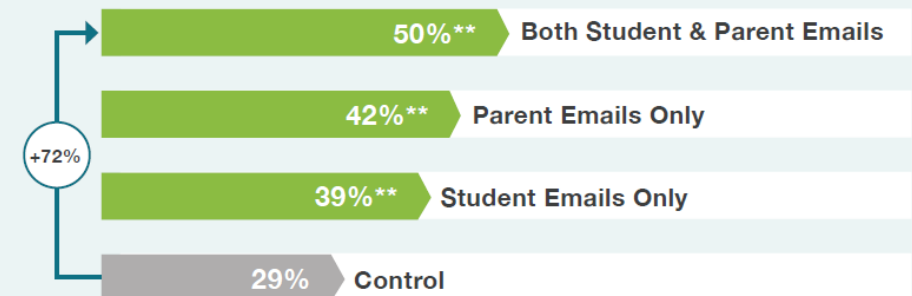
[ ] See this graphic to figure out if you need your parents' financial information.

Sincerely,

Mellissa Pizo
Executive Director
Financial Aid and Scholarship Service

P.S. Please feel free to reach us at 480-965-3355, via online chat or at our office locations (open Monday from 9 A.M. — 5 P.M., and Tuesday — Friday from 8 A.M. — 5 P.M.).
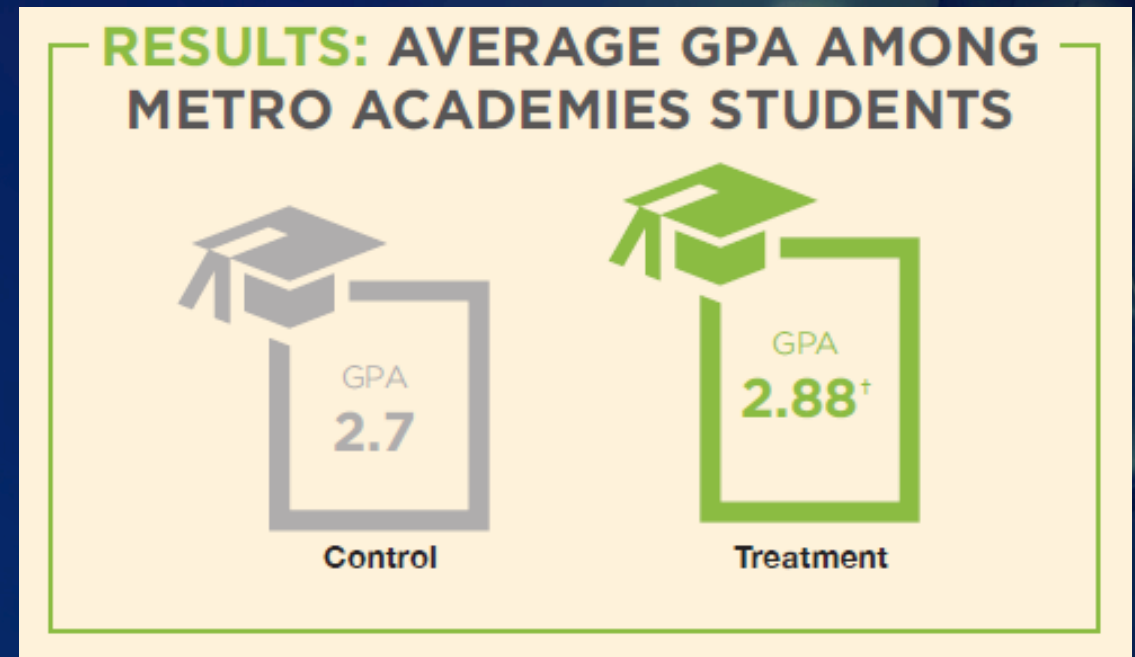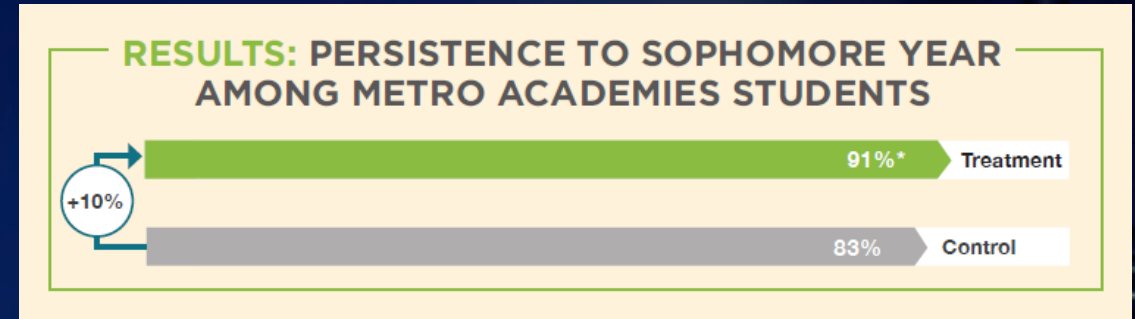

RESULTS: NUMBER OF PRIORITY FAFSA FILERS

+72%

50%** Both Student & Parent Emails

42%** Parent Emails Only

39%** Student Emails Only

29% Control

** = significant at 99% level

Fostering A Sense of Belonging
San Francisco State University

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- **Problem:** 18 percent freshman students at SFSU were dropping out after their freshman year.

- **Goal:** To reframe SFSU students' view of college life and help them find their place in a university community, with the ultimate goal of increasing retention rates from freshman to sophomore year.

- **Action:** SFSU created a 3-minute video of older students/alumni describing their own struggles in college and paths to success, followed by a survey and series of text messages/e-mails that reinforced the students' response to the video.

- **Behavioral Tactic:** The effort showed students the challenges they faced were not unique to them, nor a sign of failure.

- **Result**: **91 percent** of participants returned for their sophomore year, and their GPAs increased by **7 percent**, from 2.7 to 2.88.

RESULTS: PERSISTENCE TO SOPHOMORE YEAR AMONG METRO ACADEMIES STUDENTS
+10%
91%* Treatment
83% Control

RESULTS: AVERAGE GPA AMONG METRO ACADEMIES STUDENTS
GPA 2.7 Control
GPA 2.88† Treatment

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Preparing Disadvantaged Students for Success
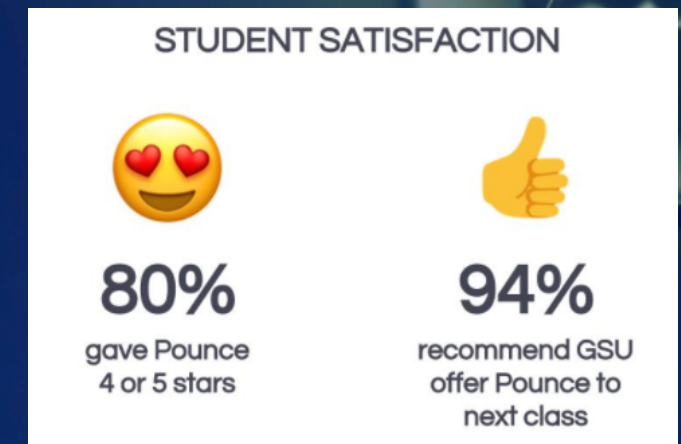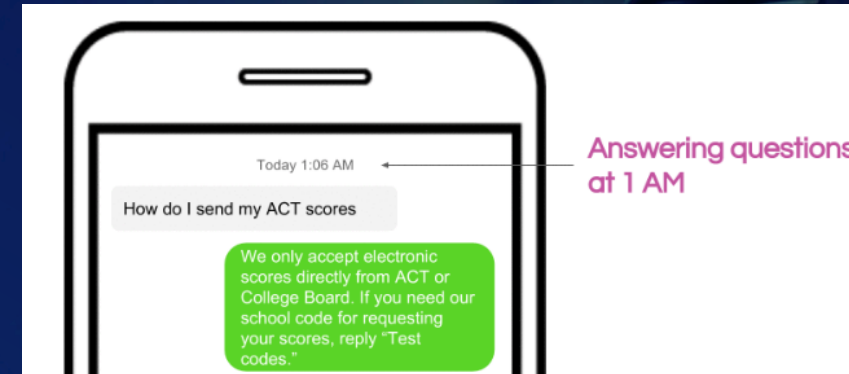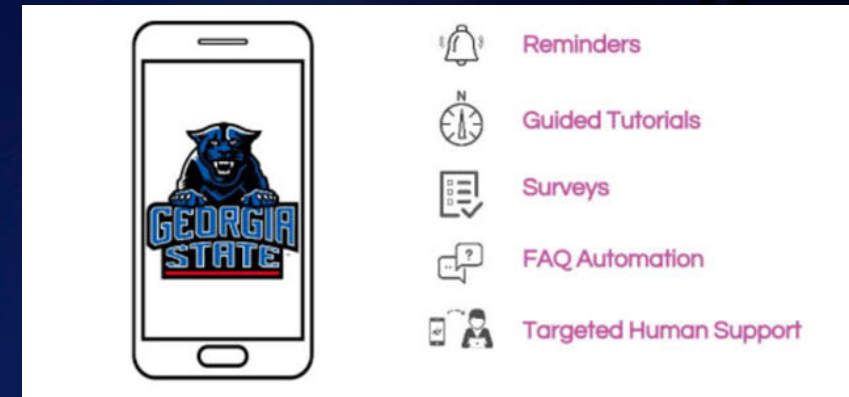
University of Michigan

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- *Problem:* Low admission rates and poor performance—and therefore low representation—of racial-ethnic minority students in the Ross School of Business undergraduate program due to a lack of college readiness.

- *Goal:* To help students from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed in their academic pursuits at the Ross School of Business, and the University of Michigan more broadly.

- *Action:* The Preparation Initiative (PI) is a proactive advising program that provided students the academic, professional and personal tools that are necessary to thrive in class and campus life.

- *Behavioral Tactic:* PI engaged with students from the moment they arrived on campus, teaching core learning strategies and keeping consistent engagement through their acceptance into the Ross Business school and until they completed their degree.

- *Result:* As a result of PI, graduation rates rose by **15 percent**, and **GPAs also increased**—making students more competitive for high paying jobs upon graduation.

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Fighting Summer Melt
Georgia State University

- *Problem:* Many incoming college students—particularly low-income and students of color—drop out before the academic year even begins. This is called "Summer Melt."

- *Goal:* To provide students timely academic advising and confront academic and personal challenges that can lead to students dropping out the summer before their freshman year.

- *Action:* GSU created Pounce, a text-based, AI-powered chatbot that answers specific questions on nearly any subject, from student aid and orientation to scheduling for classes and more. Pounce's database holds over 2,000+ prepared answers and can forward questions to a staff member to answer by hand when it's stumped.

- *Behavioral Tactic:* Pounce's responsive text messages reach are a reliable and reach students on a familiar platform to help them easily navigate a complex system.

- *Result:* Over a three-year period, **37% fewer** first-year students who used Pounce dropped out before the start of the academic year.

Reminders
Guided Tutorials
Surveys
FAQ Automation
Targeted Human Support

Answering questions at 1 AM

Today 1:06 AM

How do I send my ACT scores

We only accept electronic scores directly from ACT or College Board. If you need our school code for requesting your scores, reply "Test codes."

STUDENT SATISFACTION

80%
gave Pounce 4 or 5 stars

94%
recommend GSU offer Pounce to next class

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Unchartered Territory
The path forward for behavioral science in higher education

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• *Building Community in Online Education*

  • *Challenge:* Social Identity Threat in MOOCs: The fear of being seen as less capable because of one's group.

  • Using messages to help students recognize that their part of the larger education community.

  • *Solution:* Fostering sense of community and belonging by communicating with students that they are not alone.

• *Improving the Student Experience*

  • *Challenge:* Ensuring that as Chatbots expand, they continue to provide accurate and personalized support, while obtaining buy-in from all stakeholders.

  • Need for compelling messaging to ensure stakeholders are bought into the idea of interacting with chatbots to gain information .

  • *Solution:* Chatbots allow staff members to focus on other priorities that impact student experiences.

• *Tackling Sexual Assault At The Door*

  • *Challenge:* Universities struggling to combat sexual assault on campus.

  • Spreading awareness and acceptance of active consent on campus is crucial to reducing incidents of sexual assault.

  • *Solution:* Provide consent pledges at entry of social events to foster shared understanding of active consent.

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Questions?

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