Student Nudging
Best Practices

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Civitas Learning equips your institution with optimized student data to help you uncover insights about your unique students. **Nudges** are simple actions you can take now to help current students improve their outcomes as your institution evaluates and implements longer-term strategies in response to these insights.

Think of a nudge as **a type of outreach that is intended to alter behavior.**

Nudges are small pushes in the right direction that do not require specific 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.

Illume Students and Inspire for Advisors can be used to identify students at risk of not persisting who could benefit from a nudge now. Begin nudge campaigns in Inspire for Advisors using the bulk email and log outreach functionality or download student lists from Illume Students to execute campaigns in other systems.

Review this guide to understand how to create effective nudges that foster a positive mindset and direct students to available academic resources at your institution.

The best nudges are:

1 **DATA-INSPIRED:** Nudging students based on an opportunity identified in institution-specific data has the best chance of positively impacting student success. For example, sending a nudge to a specific group of students because they have a significantly lower than average likelihood to persist at your institution. Or, targeting students based on their individual persistence prediction.

2 **GROUNDED IN MINDSET PRINCIPLES:** Students' mindsets— how they perceive their abilities and their relationship with school— can play a key role in their motivation and achievement. In the research on mindset, students who believe their intelligence could be developed (a growth mindset) outperform those who believed their intelligence was fixed (a fixed mindset). Researchers found that having students focus on the process that leads to learning (like hard work or trying new strategies) could foster a growth mindset and its benefits. Emails that provide specific guidance along with statements of encouragement such as, "I know you can do this," work well. Furthermore, Students who feel like they belong in college, and are an important part of the community, are more likely to be motivated and behave in ways that lead to successful outcomes.

3 **SHORT:** Keep it short… really short. Most students scan and read email selectively - if they read at all. However, the tendency is to send students multi-paragraph tomes that include numerous resources and tips on how to be a successful student. The intention is good, but the results are not. Don't try to tell them everything they need to know in a single email. A few short sentences with one main idea is best.

4 **PERSONAL and AUTHENTIC:** If an email looks, feels, and sounds like a template, it is unlikely to be read. The first part of an email that a students sees is the subject line. The subject line can determine whether or not the student even reads the email. Use nudging best practices in the subject line itself. Make it positive and encouraging and personal and authentic. Keep the language conversational and avoid phrases that seem like they came from a handbook. When appropriate, use the first person and include your "voice" or personality in the email. Emails that have the authentic voice of the sender tend to have the biggest impact on student engagement. Emails sent from a person that the student knows are most likely to be read. An email from a student's professor or advisor is more likely to be read and and taken seriously than from a department or email list.

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5 **POSITIVE** and **ENCOURAGING:** Positive nudges use a combination of urgency, empathy or concern, hope, and encouragement to promote behaviors in students that are likely to lead to success. Avoid language that sounds punitive or might make students feel ashamed. Acknowledging students' effort with a few words of encouragement can make a big difference in how they feel about school and themselves, and in-turn, have a positive impact on their performance.

6 **TIMELY** and **RELEVANT:** Great nudges have the right information at the right time for the right students. Too early and a nudge will be forgotten, and too late there may not be time for the necessary action. Think about the result you want from your nudge and how to align timing with action. Also consider the timing of the nudge in regards to when students are most likely to receive it. For example, students are unlikely to check their email during spring break or just after finals, so there are not ideal times to send a nudge.

7 **ACTION ORIENTED:** Include one call to action in each email. Asking a student to do something specific makes it significantly more likely that they will do it and that it will have an impact. If possible, provide an opportunity or make a request for the student to respond.

The best nudges look like:

Incoming freshman, first week

Subject line: You are at <College> Because We Believe in You

Hi <name>,

I am so excited that you are here at <College>. My name is <name>, and I am your Advisor. I want you to know that you are here because we believe in you. I know you can do this! I'm going to help you map out a plan to achieve your academic goals. Make an appointment with me by clicking this link: (link to appointment scheduling tool)

Incoming freshman, week three, low LMS activity, low persistence prediction

Subject line: I'd Love to Hear About Your Goals

Dear <name>,

How have your first two weeks been? I know that this can be a challenging time as you and our other new students learn to navigate the campus and your classes. You're at <institution> for a reason. Take a moment to remind yourself of the goals you had prior to the start of school. If you are willing to share, I'd love to hear them - just respond to this email.

Incoming transfer student, week one

Subject line: Get Connected to the <institution> Community!

Hi <name>

I am so glad you are here. My name is <name> and I am your advisor. Connecting to the social fabric of campus life is an important part of college - we have lots of opportunities at <institution>. Start by joining our <ex. Facebook group> - click the link and follow the steps to get started.

Subject line: Let's Make a Plan Together for Midterms

Hi <student first name>,

Midterms are <x> weeks away – now is the time to get ready. The first step is to create a calendar and block off your exam times as well as time to study for each class. Do it today! Call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or schedule an appointment (Link to schedule appointments) for help with your planning.

Subject line: Let's Make a Plan Together for Midterms

Dear <student first name>,

Midterms are <s> weeks away - now is the time to get ready. Start by creating a study plan for each of your courses this week. Click here for a study planner and example plans from other students. Feel free to make an appointment with me for help building your plan. I'm here to help you.

Subject line: Feeling Stressed About Midterms?

Dear <student first name>,

Midterms are almost here. I know this can be a stressful time. How are you feeling? I'm here if you want to talk or make a plan. Did you know that all students can receive assistance with tutoring? Here is a link about our tutoring center.

All undergraduate students, low to moderate persistence prediction, not registered for next term

Subject line: Feeling Confused about Selecting Courses?

Dear <student first name>,

It's time for registration and I'm here to help you. Register as soon as possible to get the courses and times you want. I know selecting courses can be confusing, if you want help making a plan for next semester come see me. Make an appointment using this link.

Subject line: Don't Miss Out On the Classes You Want!

Hi <student first name>,

Can you believe it's time for registration? Open registration for next term starts <date>. Take a moment now to schedule an advising appointment with me to discuss your courses for next term. Go to xxxx to set your time. The schedule fills fast, so don't wait!

All undergraduate students, low to moderate persistence prediction, week after midterm

Subject line: You' Are Halfway Done! You Can Do It!

Hi <student first name>,

You are halfway done with this term, and that much closer to completing your degree! Stick with it and finish the term strong. Don't forget that I am here for you. Schedule an appointment here if you are thinking about withdrawing from a class or need help finishing the term.

All undergraduate students, very high and high persistence predictions, high current grades, week after midterm

Subject line: You Are Doing An Amazing Job!

Hi <student first name>,

You are halfway done with this term and that much closer to completing your degree! I know that all your hard work this term will pay off. Keep it up and finish strong!

All undergraduate students, very low and low predictions, academic probation, low GPA, week after final grades submitted

Subject line: You Can Get Finish Your Degree.

Dear <student first name>,

I am checking in to see how you are feeling about the fall term. I know that college isn't easy but I also know that you can do this. I'd like to schedule some time in the next week for us to process your fall term and plan for the next. Will you schedule an appointment here?

I hope to hear from you soon!