



# The Definitive Guide to Enterprise Text Messaging

 **SignalVine**

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# Introduction

## YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY SPANS THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

It's no secret that it's hard to get ahold of students. They're not reading emails or picking up the phone, and they are definitely not tracking you down for in-person meetings.

At the same time, it's becoming more important to stay in touch with students. College enrollment is down<sup>1</sup>. Student debt is skyrocketing<sup>2</sup>. The future success of your institution and your students depends on your ability to communicate with students from the time they apply to decades after they graduate.

Don't lose hope! There's one way of communicating that's guaranteed to reach students: text messaging.

## TEXTING IS THE NEXT FRONTIER IN STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

Text messaging closes the gap between what your communications team sends and what students actually read. 98% of text messages

are opened and read<sup>3</sup>. Do you open every single email in your inbox? We didn't think so. But students read nearly every text message they receive.

Many of your staff already know that texting is the best way to communicate with their students. Often, these early adopters independently text students through difficult-to-scale, one-way texting systems, or even from their personal cell phones.

Though texting on a one-on-one basis can be useful in the short term, it's not secure and it doesn't scale. There's only one way to effectively reach all of your students in the way they want to be reached.

## THE ONLY WAY TO SCALE IS TO USE AN ENTERPRISE TEXTING PLATFORM

Enterprise text messaging platforms are used by higher education institutions to scale and streamline two-way text messaging. Using a platform moves texting communications to a secure, customizable, and easily managed system that protects the student experience.

## Text Your Way through the Student Lifecycle

Your communication strategy spans the lifecycle of the student.

- 1 Admissions & FYE**  
Get students onboard with the college experience.
- 2 Enrollment Management**  
Nudges applicants toward enrollment.
- 3 Financial Aid**  
Helps students plan for financing their higher education.
- 4 The Registrar**  
Keeps students on track each semester.
- 5 Advising**  
Connects students to resources throughout campus.
- 6 Student Services**  
Supports students throughout their time at college.
- 7 Retention**  
Pushes students closer to graduation.
- 8 Alumni Relations**  
Engages students after they graduate.



# USING AN ENTERPRISE TEXT MESSAGING PLATFORM PROMOTES UNIVERSITY-WIDE SUCCESS

### SECURITY

- Track and log all communications in one system.

### COORDINATION

- Keep tabs on when other departments are sending messages to prevent texting burnout.

### CONSISTENCY

- Ensure all students have the same opportunity to get information and support in their preferred method of communication.

### SAVINGS

- Know exactly how much to budget for text messaging and accurately measure your return on investment.

## THEN

### Security

Staff use personal cell phones to text students. There's no oversight or history.

## NOW

Staff text through a centralized platform. All message history is tracked and archived.

### Coordination

Departments text independently. Students get dozens of texts each day, so they opt out.

Messages are timed across departments so that students don't get overwhelmed.

### Consistency

Only some departments text students. Those students improve. Others are left behind.

All departments text. Students across the institution see measurable achievements.

### Savings

Different platforms cost different amounts. You can't accurately measure ROI.

The overall cost is set before the fiscal year begins. Metrics connect spending to impact.



# Texting in the Student Lifecycle

## ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

*Increase your admissions yield by building relationships early on.*

College enrollment in the United States is declining<sup>1</sup>. Many of those who do enroll are low-income and/or first-generation, and a growing number are adult learners<sup>4</sup>. These nontraditional students often need a little extra help navigating enrollment processes that for years have been designed to serve traditional student populations.

Now more than ever, colleges and universities need to reach out to students early and often to maintain and grow enrollment.

### REMIND STUDENTS OF UPCOMING DEADLINES

86% of students who are texted report that text messages from their institution prompt them to complete unfinished tasks<sup>5</sup>. More applications completed means a bigger applicant pool for you to choose from.

*Director of Admissions  
Community College of Vermont*

### GUIDE STUDENTS THROUGH ENROLLMENT AND REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Your work's not over when decision letters are sent out. Increase your admissions yield by answering questions, sending reminders, and getting admitted students excited to attend your school. Texting students can increase matriculation by up to 11%.<sup>6</sup>

*“Reminding students used to involve dialing the phone, waiting for it to ring, waiting for the voicemail, and finally leaving a voice message. Today, [staff] can pre-schedule reminder text messages. Over time, small time savers like this pay off big dividends... and best of all, this is the mode of communication our students want anyway.”*



### TEXTPERT TIP

Time your text messages well. For complicated tasks, send a weekly text up to the deadline. Easier task? Send a text 3 days before it's due.





# ORIENTATION AND FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

*Improve persistence by creating strong student networks in the first year.*

Starting a new school is scary at any age. Whether it's their first year of college or their first year at your institution, new students are going through a big transition. They need a strong support system. Without it, students will leave your institution and take their tuition dollars with them. Helping students adjust to academic and student life on your campus benefits both of you.

It can be as simple as asking a quick check-in question or offering a friendly ear. Students want to know that you're there for them. Be there.

## ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Nudge students to use campus resources and cheer them on with motivational text messages. Students who get supportive text messages from their institutions attempt and complete more freshman year credits than their peers. Low-income students see the biggest gains.<sup>7</sup>

## GET NEW STUDENTS INVOLVED ON CAMPUS

Students who actively participate in campus activities are more satisfied with their college experiences and experience more positive social, academic, and emotional benefits than their less-involved peers<sup>8</sup>. Work with Student Affairs to text students about upcoming events and connect them to groups with similar interests.



### TEXTPERT TIP



Establish your credibility and start building personal relationships by introducing yourself by name in your first text message to students.

*“Most of my students are a lot more comfortable texting me than actually talking to me, and it allows me to respond to them more quickly and easily than I otherwise could.”*

*Peer Mentor  
Brigham Young University*



# REGISTRAR

*Promote on-time registration by helping students navigate university resources.*

Your job in the registrar's office is a little more behind-the-scenes than most student-facing offices. But that doesn't mean the registrar's job is any less important. You're the gatekeeper for all student records and the ultimate authority on who's eligible to graduate.

Registrar staff deserve a better way to send high-priority information to students. Students get the information they need right away when it's sent in a text, and staff spend significantly less time chasing students down through emails and phone calls.

## INFORM STUDENTS OF DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Getting a degree doesn't need to be stressful. Share graduation and major requirements with students to keep them on track to graduate. 70% of students who are texted say that text messages make tasks like registration feel less overwhelming<sup>5</sup>.

## ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT REGISTRATION

72% of students who are texted say that text messages from their institution prompt them to reach out for follow-up help<sup>5</sup>. Send automated text reminders about approaching registration deadlines, then answer questions one-on-one.



**TEXTPERT TIP** 

Send PDFs, infographics, and colorful checklists to give routine reminders a friendly facelift.

*“It's actually the best part of my day as an administrator because I get to interact with real students and help them get what they need.”*

*Director of Education Outreach, Youngstown State University*



**70% of students** who are texted say that text messages make tasks like registration feel less overwhelming.

**72% of students** who are texted say that text messages from their institution prompt them to reach out for follow-up help



# FINANCIAL AID

*Reduce budget pressure by helping students make informed choices.*

Staying on top of financial aid requirements can be a make-or-break moment for students on the verge of dropping out. The FAFSA is the first step to getting financial aid, but filling it out is a mysterious and complicated process.

It's a lose-lose situation when students drop out of college. Students miss out on the future earning potential of a college degree, and institutions face unpredictable budget deficits.

## EDUCATE STUDENTS ABOUT NEW POLICIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

It's not easy to keep up with financial aid's ever-changing requirements. Text students any time a change is made that might affect how they're paying their tuition bills. Texting students about renewing their FAFSA can lead to a 20% increase in persistence into the second year of college<sup>9</sup>.

## SHARE FINANCIAL LITERACY RESOURCES

Many students borrow money to pay for college, but not all loans are created equal. Helping students understand the borrowing process through informative text messages can reduce high-risk borrowing by 20%<sup>10</sup>.



### TEXTPERT TIP

Create a bank of frequently asked questions and answers so that you can quickly respond to common texts.

*“It was very helpful and convenient to receive assistance through texts, especially when it came to reminders about completing the FAFSA.”*

*Student  
Marshall University*





## ADVISING

***Boost staff capacity by streamlining student-staff communications.***

Academic advisors have the most face-to-face time with students - it's usually required! That doesn't mean it's easy to schedule that valuable time with students or use it wisely.

Advisors bring together resources from all over campus to help each and every student. Text messaging is a powerful way to connect students to these resources either in person or on their phones. Need to discuss a more in-depth topic? Send a text message to set up an in-person appointment. Texting is also a quick way to answer questions and send information about easier tasks without needing a lengthy face-to-face meeting.

### SCHEDULE AND CONFIRM APPOINTMENTS

Advisors that send appointment reminders by text see a 19% increase in the number of advising appointments kept<sup>11</sup>. Less time wasted on no-show appointments means more time to focus on high-priority projects.

### TEAM UP WITH THE REGISTRAR

Texting creates a direct connection between students and staff, and students are more comfortable asking questions via text than by phone or email<sup>5</sup>. With an enterprise text messaging platform, advisors can coordinate with the registrar's office to send informative texts about registration deadlines and degree requirements.



### TEXTPERT TIP



**Schedule reminder text messages for delivery 3 days, 1 day, and 1 hour before your advising appointment.**

***“Just as important as giving advisors a convenient way to communicate with students was giving students a convenient way to communicate with advisors.”***

*Coordinator of Academic Support  
Pellissippi State Community College*



# RETENTION

*Raise your graduation rate by coordinating cross-department communications.*

There are countless financial, academic, and personal barriers to retention. Though some schools have a dedicated retention office, many others tackle retention as an institution-wide initiative. With so many hands in the retention pot, it's necessary to have one system that many people can easily use.

An enterprise text messaging platform makes it easy to connect students to the appropriate offices and staff for personalized support.

## CONNECT STUDENTS TO STAFF AND MENTORS

Students who text with staff and peer mentors report stronger relationships<sup>12</sup>. A student with a deep connection to an institution is a student more likely to stay at the institution.

## NUDGE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE TASKS

Proactively reminding students of upcoming deadlines can lead to higher GPAs and higher rates of registration for the next semester<sup>13</sup>.

*“Texting has made me more available to students, and has made them feel more comfortable reaching out to me, which in turn has made for stronger relationships, more mentoring opportunities, questions answered, and more information spread.”*

*Peer Mentor  
Brigham Young University*

## TEXTPERT TIP



Students will respond to you within minutes of getting your text. Set a calendar reminder for yourself so that you know when to be available.



# STUDENT SERVICES AND STUDENT AFFAIRS

*Encourage students to get involved by strategically sharing resources.*

Student Affairs practitioners work tirelessly to develop programs that students often don't even know exist. It's not that students don't want to participate. They often get overwhelmed by the sheer number of events happening on campus and do nothing instead.

To create and deliver effective programs to students, you need to know what students want. You also need to communicate these programs to students. Check both of these tasks off your list by opening up a direct, two-way channel of communication with students.

## CUT DOWN ON COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD

Students don't pay attention when Greek Life, athletics, religious organizations, the study abroad office, and others each send them an email every day. Working together to send a brief daily or weekly digest of campus happenings spreads your information without overwhelming students.

## GET A HEAD COUNT FOR CAMPUS EVENTS

There's a lot of competition for students' limited time and attention. Stand out from the crowd by sending students information about upcoming events and asking them to RSVP by text.



### TEXTPERT TIP

College students are more likely to respond after 10am and around lunchtime. Schedule your text messages accordingly.



*“We love to text our students about deadlines, events, and opportunities. It's really helping the overall operation of the program and improving our service to the student at the same time.”*

*Director of Education Outreach  
Youngstown State University*





## ALUMNI RELATIONS

*Grow your donor base by nurturing strong relationships with alumni.*

You've enrolled students, helped them pay for college, kept them in college, and celebrated their graduation. Now your former students are fully engaged and primed to give back.

Engaged alumni are more likely to donate to your institution and help recent graduates find jobs. Give alumni the gift of continuing community, and they just might give you something in return.

### INVITE ALUMNI TO EVENTS ON CAMPUS OR IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Higher attendance at alumni events means more opportunities for you to fundraise. Send invitations and collect RSVPs by text to boost attendance and accurately plan events.

### SEND LINKS TO FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

Make it easy for alumni to donate to their favorite campus programs, and make it fun! Text them videos of campus programs, thank-you letters from students who benefit from alumni-funded scholarships, and links to donation pages.



### TEXTPERT TIP

Use a link shortener like [bit.ly](https://bit.ly) to keep your messages brief and track link clicks.



*“What's interesting is no one has said, 'Wow, this is so cool.' Rather, the response has been, 'Well, of course you're going to text me!’”*

*Director of Admissions  
A University in Alabama*



# Conclusion

## TAKE THE NEXT STEP TO ENTERPRISE TEXT MESSAGING

Now you know what enterprise text messaging is and how your institution can use it. What happens next?

Use this checklist to identify key features to look for when evaluating platforms:

### ❑ SECURITY

The platform is FERPA compliant and has the necessary encryptions to protect your student data.

**Bonus Point:** The provider helps you navigate and comply with federal texting regulations.

### ❑ PRIVACY

The platform has multiple levels of user permissions so that you can assign staff to students in their department or caseload.

**Bonus Point:** The platform integrates with your institution's single sign-on (SSO) so that you can internally manage passwords and permissions.

### ❑ INTEGRATION

The platform connects to your student information system (SIS) or customer relationship management (CRM) system.

**Bonus Point:** The platform can integrate with different systems for different departments.

### ❑ AUTOMATION

The platform can send keyword-triggered automatic replies to students.

**Bonus Point:** Text messages can be automatically personalized and targeted to students.

### ❑ MANUAL MESSAGING

The platform is not purely automated. Staff can send text messages to individual students or groups of students at any time.

**Bonus Point:** The platform clearly logs which messages are sent automatically and which are sent by a staff member.

### ❑ DASHBOARD

The platform collects metrics and reports so that you can measure return on investment.

**Bonus Point:** The provider offers suggestions and tips to help you get the best results for your program.

### ❑ CUSTOMER SUPPORT

The platform has a readily available customer success team to help you make the most of your text messaging program.

**Bonus Point:** The platform is used by similar higher education institutions and organizations. Dig in deeper by asking to speak with current customers.

## HAPPY TEXTING!



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## ABOUT SIGNAL VINE

### MESSAGE INTELLIGENTLY.

Signal Vine's enterprise text messaging platform transforms the way you reach and engage students. Nearly 100% of students and families have access to text messaging, making it the most powerful way to communicate with any student at any time. Simple, secure, and easy to scale, Signal Vine's platform quickly delivers high-impact results.

Learn more by visiting [www.signalvine.com](http://www.signalvine.com)

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