



GUIDED PATHWAYS

How to improve Guided Pathways through automation, AI, and texting

What are Guided Pathways?

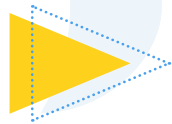
If you have any connection to the realm of higher education, it's likely you've heard the term "Guided Pathways." Many colleges and universities, both two-year and four-year, have implemented Guided Pathways either in part or campus-wide. But what exactly are they? The American Association of Community Colleges defines them:

The Pathways Model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market.¹

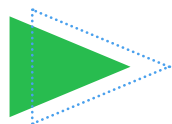
Education leaders have devised a list of four essential practices in the Guided Pathways model:¹



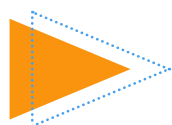
To help students choose their path and begin the journey on it. Part of this means giving students access to remedial classes if needed.



To make the path to a postsecondary credential visible and traversable for students through a combination of program maps and transfer pathways.



To keep students from straying off the path. This requires a strong advising process aided by technology to help students make the best decisions as well as providing academic and non-academic supports.



To check that students are progressing successfully. This means implementing effective teaching practices for each student's learning style and providing students with applied learning experiences (like internships).

What is required from institutions to implement the Guided Pathways model?

While some institutions already have some tenets of the Guided Pathways model in their work, a complete integration of the Guided Pathways model requires both hard work and changes for most institutions. However, these changes are worth it. One study found that **more than half of all students who participated in a Guided Pathways program either earned a credential or transferred to another institution within 5 years.**²

Another study analyzed the results of a set of 9 colleges in 3 states that committed to employing Guided Pathways. These schools varied widely in size and context. The 185,000 students who participated in these Guided Pathways demonstrated that they were more prepared to...⁵

- 🎓 Find careers
- 🎓 Align their interests and goals to a matching program of study
- 🎓 Choose courses that count toward their desired credential
- 🎓 Come to class prepared
- 🎓 Choose to participate in co-curricular activities that enhance what they're learning in the classroom
- 🎓 Reach out for help when it's needed
- 🎓 Persist through and complete their program

How texting can enable better outcomes

We've seen the research that proves that text nudges are effective in helping students make informed decisions and act toward turning those decisions into achievable goals. This creates a compelling argument to use text nudges as part of the Guided Pathways model.

Texting can comfortably exist alongside the four essential practices in the Guided Pathways model. It can aid in the implementation and successful execution of a Guided Pathways model in several ways:

1. **Texts allow students to have open communication with college staff** through the medium they are most likely to prefer.
2. **Text nudges from college staff help students stay on track.** They remind students of key deadlines and milestones and can also be used to encourage students to stay on track and focused toward their end goal.
3. **Texts can be used to alert students of relevant co-curricular activities** and to encourage them to participate in them.
4. **Texts can be automated to check in with students at every step** to make sure their questions are answered and that they are feeling good about their progress.

Implementing Signal Vine in a Guided Pathways model

The Signal Vine platform is a great addition to the Guided



Pathways model. The platform allows users to schedule messages ahead of time or send Quick Messages as needed. Messages can even be event-triggered, such as when a student's GPA decreases. With the platform's profile fields for students, texts can be personalized. Its two-way messaging capabilities allow students to text questions as they have them to get the help they need. But the main feature that's perfect for the Guided Pathways model is **Blended Messaging®**.

Blended Messaging® is Signal Vine's approach to texting. It gives staff the ability to segment texts based on student profiles so each student receives targeted, relevant information. Further, automatic responses can be programmed for questions through Signal Vine's Virtual Advisor tool, thus freeing up staff time while still ensuring that students get the right information they need to persist along their pathway. This makes it possible for staff to focus on students who need additional support while keeping the door always open for students to reach out.

For example, in the text conversation to the right, a programmed message is sent to a student, asking if he was able to register for classes okay. When the student didn't respond, an automated follow-up message was sent to check in. When the student asked a question that required a response from a human, the system automatically flagged the message, capturing the attention of the staff member who ultimately responded. When the student asked a common question, the Virtual Advisor stepped in to provide an automated, yet thorough, response.



From the student's perspective, he spoke to a real human throughout the entire conversation. From the staff member's perspective, little effort was required for the student to get the information he requested. **The Signal Vine platform, with its Blended Messaging® technique and the Virtual Advisor tool, builds the bridge for proactive communication between advisors and students.**

Criticism of Guided Pathways

Indeed, there are critics to Guided Pathways. One major criticism from college leaders is that their colleges are simply not equipped with the right resources to make Guided Pathways an institution-wide endeavor. They feel that these pathways are too ambitious for their staff to take on.³

Signal Vine helps combat this problem. **Through automation, targeted messaging, and triggered messaging, Signal Vine frees up staff time.** For example, an automatic message can be programmed to target first-year students who have not yet registered for classes. If students fail to respond that they plan to register, a triggered response can be sent automatically by the system to nudge students to take action, thus helping to keep them on track to earning their credential. With this approach, staff time is reserved for those students who need the extra support while all students still receive the information they need to make informed decisions.

Student perceptions

Overall, students who enroll at a college with an implemented Guided Pathways model are fond of it. They praise the personalized guidance in keeping them on track to their educational goals. Many students also appreciate being able to see their degree plan mapped out by semester to know what lies ahead and when they will complete their coursework for their credential. Guided Pathways also helped some students stress less about whether they were meeting the requirements because all of their required steps were mapped out for them.⁴

One more common sentiment among students participating in the Guided Pathways model was the importance of having an advisor at hand. Students want an interactive, collaborative advisor who is available for questions and concerns.⁴ This illustrates the importance to students of having an available, accessible advisor. **Signal Vine works to support this relationship, giving students and advisors access to each other whenever it's needed.**

Signal Vine: Making Guided Pathways easier

The Signal Vine platform helps to solve a major problem of the Guided Pathways model for many institutions. Through automation and message scheduling, Signal Vine helps develop and grow the involved relationship of advisors in the advisor/student relationship. Further, students who need assistance can easily reach out to their advisor for help. Responses to the most frequently asked questions can be programmed into the platform, making it even easier for students to get the information they need fast without heavy involvement from staff. Simply stated, **Signal Vine makes it possible for institutions to put a personalized twist on messages that are sent to large numbers of students, making scaling the Guided Pathways model easier than ever.**

Sample calendar for automated text nudges

JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
Registration nudge	Beginning of semester check-in	Extracurricular/ internship nudge	Midterm check-in	Near end-of-semester check-in/ motivation Fall break reminder	Finals check-in Winter break reminder
			FAFSA nudges		
			Registration nudges for spring semester		
JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
Beginning of semester check-in Final FAFSA nudge	Extracurricular/ internship nudge	Midterm check-in Summer job opportunities	Spring break reminder Near end-of-semester check-in/ motivation	Finals check-in "Good work on persisting through the year."	
		Registration nudges for fall semester			
Targeted nudges	Check-ins	Reminders			

Note: Want to create a comprehensive, timely message schedule for students as they persist through their educational journey? Check out our [Nudging Students Through the Academic Life Cycle](#) ebook, available at signalvine.com.

Sample personalized text nudges

Hi **[first name]**! It's **[counselor name]** from Signal Vine University. I noticed you haven't registered for classes yet. Do you need help?

Hey **[first name]**, the semester is well underway. How are you feeling about your classes this semester?

[first name], did you know that Acme Design Company offers paid internships for graphic design majors? This might be a perfect opportunity for you! Check it out: [AcmeDesignCo/internships](#).

[first name], congrats! You've made it halfway through the semester. How are you feeling about midterms?

[first name], can you see it? It's the light at the end of the tunnel! We're just a few weeks away from finals week - you're almost there! Do you feel prepared to ace your finals?

[first name], it's almost time for fall break. Remember campus will be closed from November 21 - 28. Hope you have a good (and well-deserved!) break!

Hi **[first name]**! It's that time of year again - time to get FREE money for college! Get started on filing the FAFSA at [fafsa.gov](#). Let me know if you have questions!

Hi **[first name]**, are you ready to register for next semester's classes? Text me back and let me know when we can sit down and talk about next semester!

[first name], the end of the semester is almost here! That means finals are upon us. How are you feeling about finals?

[first name], you've worked hard all semester, so I'm sure you're ready for a break! The last day of the semester is Dec. 15, and we'll be back Jan. 7 for next semester. Enjoy your break!

[first name], you made it through your first year! I'm so proud of you - and you should be proud of you, too! Great work this year.

Targeted nudges

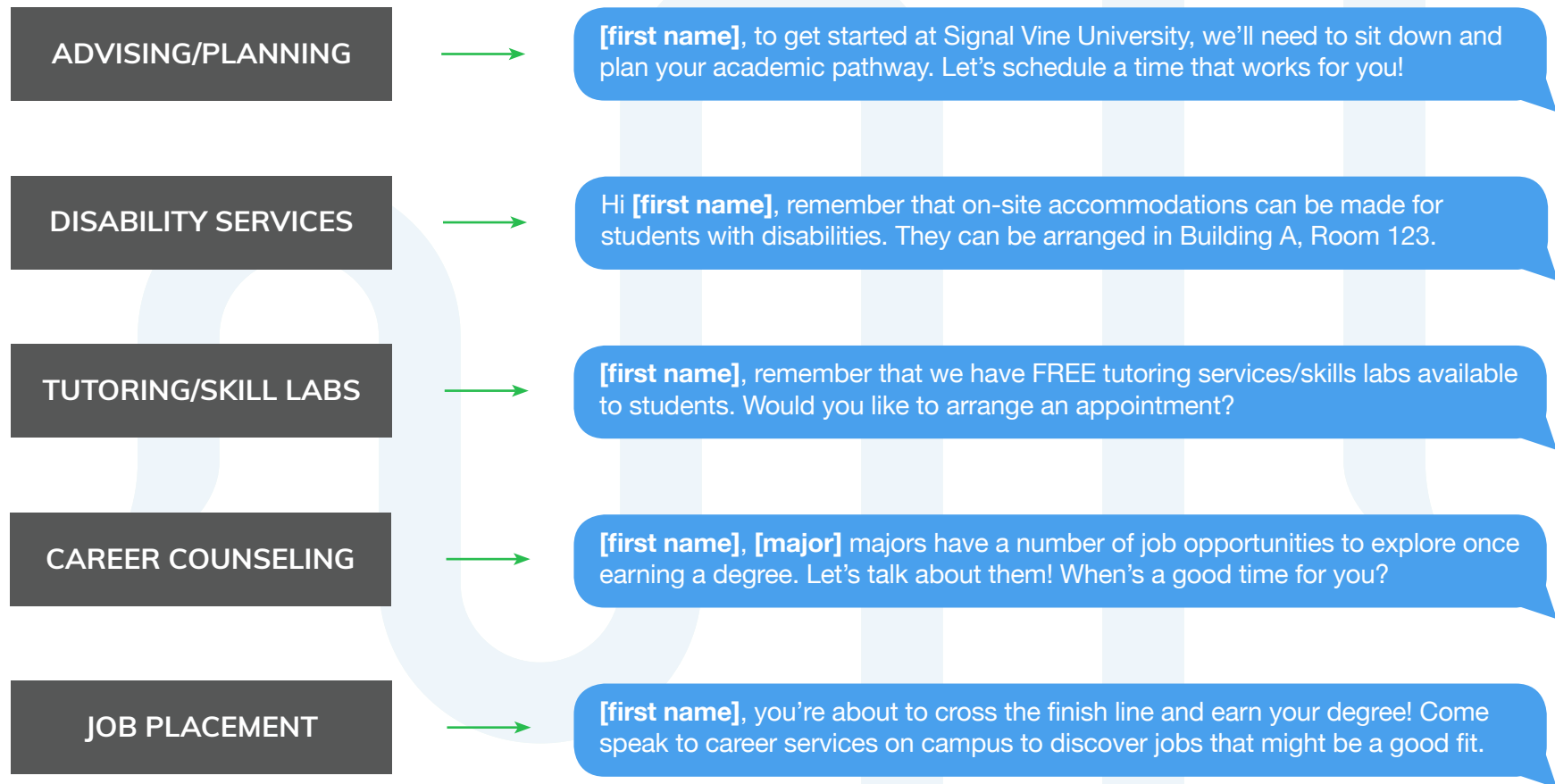
Check-ins

Reminders

Sample text-infused Guided Pathway

ACADEMICS - STANDARD MESSAGING

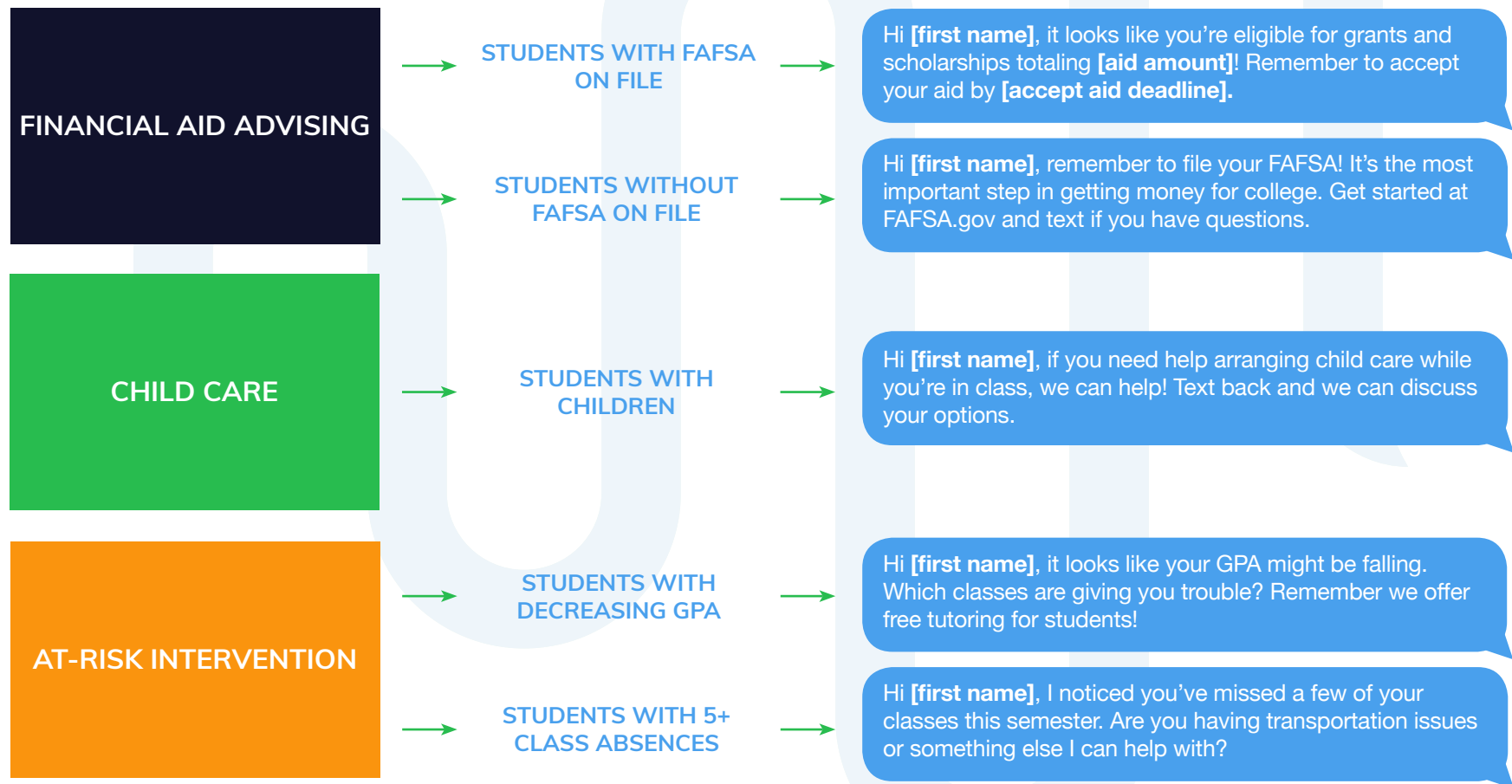
Below are text messages that most students will benefit from receiving as they travel along their Guided Pathway.



Sample text-infused Guided Pathway

ACADEMICS - TARGETED MESSAGING

Other students might benefit from more targeted, personalized messages. The Signal Vine platform will target students based on the requirements you set in a scheduled message, pulling from each student's profile fields to determine who to send the message to.



References

- [1] Community College Research Center and the American Association of Community Colleges. *What is the 'Pathways Model?'* January 12, 2018.
- [2] Jason Young. *Student Advising Models and Guided Pathways.* April 27, 2017.
- [3] EAB. *What we can learn from Guided Pathways skeptics.* June 1, 2017.
- [4] John Fink. *What Do Students Think of Guided Pathways?* June 2017.
- [5] Completion By Design. *Building Guided Pathways: Practical Lessons from Completion by Design Colleges.* August 18, 2016.



www.signalvine.com