# A Higher Ed Guide for Designing Text Messaging Campaigns

How Modern Colleges and Universities Can Design and Send Engaging Text Messages That Prospective, Current & Alumni Students Will Happily Respond To

# Contents

# Welcome

# Here's the deal: if you're reading this, you'll likely already know that text messaging is the best way to reach students.

The open rate for texts is more than 98 percent vs. a measly 20 percent for email, and 97 percent of adults in the U.S. text weekly.

But to get students to care about, reply to and take action based on your messages, you need a clever plan. Students are used to spam-y, irrelevant messages from companies and scammers. Gen Z is especially skeptical; they don't trust companies to tell the truth.

Whether you're been texting students for years, you're brand-new to the SMS game, or you're just beginning to research the possibility, this guide was designed with your needs and goals in mind.

We've assembled the best-in-the-biz tips and tricks to help you reach more students, have more engaging conversations and see better results.

You'll even find loads of example text messages, ripe and ready for use by academic advisors, registrars, admissions officers, college access staff, Continuing Education leaders, financial aid advisors, student affairs professionals and more.

**Get ready to hit "send"—with confidence.**

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# Establishing Your Texting Style

## Personality & Tone 🎭

Some institutions choose to send texts that are casual, fun and loaded with emojis, GIFs, memes and pop culture references. Others opt for a more formal tone to maintain boundaries between students and staff.

Both options have pros and cons. When establishing your texting personality, consider your institution's brand and campus culture. You can also observe your students' communication styles or ask about their preferences through surveys or focus groups.

Be sure to consider the communication style of whomever is writing your texts. Whether you adapt a more formal or a more casual personality, it should come across as genuine and clear.

Most importantly, make sure every member of your texting team is on the same page. Don't give students whiplash by sending them an easygoing text one day and a stern reminder the next.

Good afternoon, I will visit the academic advising center at 3:00 tomorrow.

**STAFF REPLY**

Great! I look forward to meeting you then.

**CASUAL MESSAGE FROM STUDENT**

heyyy Reid! I'll swing by the AAC tmrw :)

**STAFF REPLY**

Yay! 👍 See you soon.

👅 **SMART EMOJI USE**

Hi Robert, I see you haven't applied to graduate yet. 🎓 Do you have any questions? It's due 4/29. Apply here 👉 [link]

⛔ **EMOJI OVERUSE**

👋 Robert, I 👀 you haven't yet applied to graduate. 🎓😟⛔. Do you have any ⁉️⚠️ It's due 4/29. ⚠️ Apply here 📝🔗 [link]

# Mirroring 🪞

No matter the tone, **students are more likely to respond to text messages that feel personal.**

So, once a student responds, consider mirroring back their language. Researchers have found that in face-to-face communication—both in-person or virtually—people often copy the body language, vocal qualities and attitudes of another person. It is usually done subconsciously and can indicate interest and comradery. Imitating someone's verbal communication style may also make you more persuasive.

Likewise, copying the personality of your students' text messages may boost engagement.

> **Add emojis with ease using Modern Campus Signal Vine**
>
> The platform includes a full emoji keyboard, making it easy to enhance your message with the right 😊, 👍 or 🍕.

# Emojis 😜

Researchers have found that our brains process emojis not as text but as emotional communication. A smiley face emoji, for example, has a similarly positive effect on the recipient as a real human smile. So, including emojis in your text may help further convey your personality and tell each student how much the sender—and by extension, the institution—cares about their success.

Emojis may also help your students quickly connect with your messages, even when they only give your text a cursory glance. MIT Scientists discovered that people can process images in as little as 13 milliseconds!

What's more, in another survey, **78% of respondents said that using emojis makes the sender more likable** and 63% think positive emoji usage increases the sender's credibility.

**But don't overdo it**; emojis may be most effective when they're used sparingly. A majority—59%—of young adults believe brands are "trying too hard" with excessive emoji-dropping. So consider including emojis to emphasize only the strongest emotions or most important calls-to-action; don't pepper multiple emojis into every single message.

# Abbreviations & Acronyms ✂️

First, let's establish some definitions.

## Abbreviation = a shortened form of a word or phrase

**Examples:**
Tmrw = tomorrow
Plz = please
Thx = thanks
Dept = department

## Acronym = an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of multiple words

**Examples:**
TBD = to be determined
FAQ = frequently asked questions
FAFSA = Free Application for Federal Student Aid
LMK = let me know

⚓ **SAVVY ABBREVIATION USE**

> Hi Jayden, don't forget: your SVC orientation is tomorrow. Check-in's @ 9:30 AM on the main quad, here: [attached map]. Can't make it? Please tell me ASAP & I'll help you reschedule.

🔽 **ABBREVIATION UNDER-USE**

> Hi Jayden, don't forget: your Signal Vine College orientation is tomorrow. Check-in is at 9:30 A.M. Eastern Standard Time on the J Albert Smith Arts & Sciences Quadrangle. If you cannot make it, please tell me as soon as possible and I will help you to reschedule.

🔼 **ABBREVIATION OVERUSE**

> Hi Jayden, ur uni orientation is tmrw. Check-in's 9:30 in the morn @ the Q. Can't make it? LMK ASAP to resched.

## To abbrev or not to abbrev? That is the q.

On the plus side, abbreviations and acronyms can help you keep messages short—an obvious advantage for capturing your busy students' attention. Acronyms and abbreviations can also showcase your personality, align with institutional branding and convey a shared sense of culture. In other words, they can help you establish an easy rapport.

But taking your abbreviation game too far might confuse students and lead them to disengage. Abbreviations like "u" and "ur" instead of "you" and "your" may seem unprofessional and lazy. More complex acronyms, such as ICYMI (in case you missed it), LMGTFY (let me Google that for you) and EOD (end of day) may be unfamiliar to some recipients, especially international students and older learners who've never encountered these phrases before.

The same may be true of acronyms and abbreviations specific to your institution and surrounding community. Shortening your school's name is probably safe, as are acronyms like GPA and SAT, which are more recognizable in their shortened forms than their full names. But some students may not be familiar with the acronym for your office, the nickname of the student center or an abbreviation for a student organization. When in doubt, it's best to err on the side of caution; use full names and complete expressions to boost accessibility.

You can also take cues from students. If a learner responds to a message with "NVM" (nevermind) or "OMW" (on my way), they'll likely understand if you use "BTW" (by the way). The same is true of building names and academic lingo; if they use an acronym, that can be your green light to mirror that word or phrase back.

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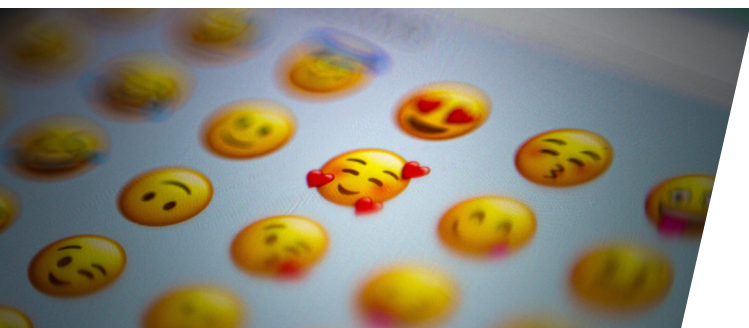
# Creating Engaging Messages

Students will be most likely to respond to your text messages if they are **personalized, relevant, timely and actionable.** Let's explore what each of those qualities mean for you and your modern learners.

## Personalized 💎

🚫 IMPERSONAL MESSAGE

A representative from Signal Vine College is coming to your high school next week.

✅ PERSONALIZED MESSAGE

Hi Karam! 👋 I'm Luke, an admissions rep from Signal Vine College. I'll be at Pawnee High School's college fair next Tuesday, 10-3 pm in the gym. Stop by booth #14 with any questions or just to say hi. I look forward to meeting you!

Using student information in your text messages is an, effective way to personalize each message to each student.

Why bother? Because personalization boosts engagement! Researchers found that text recipients are 75% more likely to engage with companies when communication is personalized.

With the right texting platform, personalizing your text messages is a breeze—even easier than an email mail merge.

## Relevant 🧭

🚫 IRRELEVANT MESSAGE

Course registration begins soon for most students.

✅ RELEVANT MESSAGE

Julian, course registration for second-year business majors opens in 4 days—Tuesday 5/21 at 9 am. Here's the link to register 🔗 [link].

Not every student needs every message. Students will almost certainly tune out if the content doesn't apply to them.

The most engaging text messages are those that are relevant to a student's specific needs and circumstances.

**Make your messages personalized and relevant 100% of the time with Signal Vine.**

Signal Vine seamlessly integrates with CRM or SIS data, allowing colleges and universities of all sizes to segment their audiences and build targeted texting campaigns.

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# Timely ⏰

There are two sides to timing:

☀️ the time of day your message is sent
📆 the timing of your message relative to the task, deadline or event you're texting about

Carefully consider when students will be **most likely to take action** and/or reply to a text—taking into account the day of the week, the point in the semester and, of course, the time of day.

Be sure to also include details about the time of the event or deadline you're promoting.

# Actionable 🤸

When your goal is for students to take a certain action, be sure to state that CTA (call to action) clearly in your message. Include a link to the form—such as to RSVP for an event, register for classes or make a donation—that minimizes the number of clicks the recipient will need to take. Alternatively, you could include instructions for taking an action in person or request that students text you back in response to a clear, quantifiable question.

🚫 INACTIONABLE MESSAGE

Don't forget to enroll!

✅ ACTIONABLE MESSAGE

Elliot, enrollment deposits for Signal Vine College are due in 5 days—by midnight on May 1. Submit yours & learn about financial aid options here: [link]. We hope to see you at SVC! Feel free to text me back with any qs.

## Emphasize your CTAs with Signal Vine.

Today's students expect text messages to go beyond plain text. With Signal Vine, you can include images, videos, links and even GIFs in your replies and pre-scheduled messages. It's as easy as texting through your own smartphone.

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# Setting Goals

✅ **A REASONABLE GOAL:**

Prompt students who've started an Alternative Spring Break application to complete it by submitting their deposit.

❌ **AN UNREASONABLE GOAL:**

Prompt students to read a blog post about Alternative Spring Break, write a 5-page application essay, submit their deposit and faculty recommendations, review the packing list and attend a meeting with the trip's director.

## Keep it reasonable 🎣

Every message that you send should have a specific goal—usually an action that you want students to take or information you want them to process.

**The key is to take it slow.** A student may not know how to prioritize multiple calls-to-action, or they may be intimidated by a massive amount of information sent at once. Design each text with just one goal in mind, ideally something that's measurable.

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# Designing Your Message Tree

Most text messages should fall into one of four categories: Introduce, Nudge, Encourage and Inform. Your campaign can focus on one category or you use a combination of all four. By combining categories, you can create a texting cadence (AKA texting tree) in which **each individual message has a distinct goal.** When combined, your individual message will prompt students to complete a more complex task.

For example, you can text a prospective student several times to move them from applying, to paying their deposit, to filling out FAFSA, and finally, to registering for classes.

## Introduce 👋

Your first text message sets the stage for all future conversations. But no pressure; it's easy to get right. Stick to the basics:

**EXAMPLE**

> Hi Daniela, this is Kim, your advisor at SVC. 👋 I'll be texting
> financial aid info to you this semester. Don't want texts? Text back "stop".
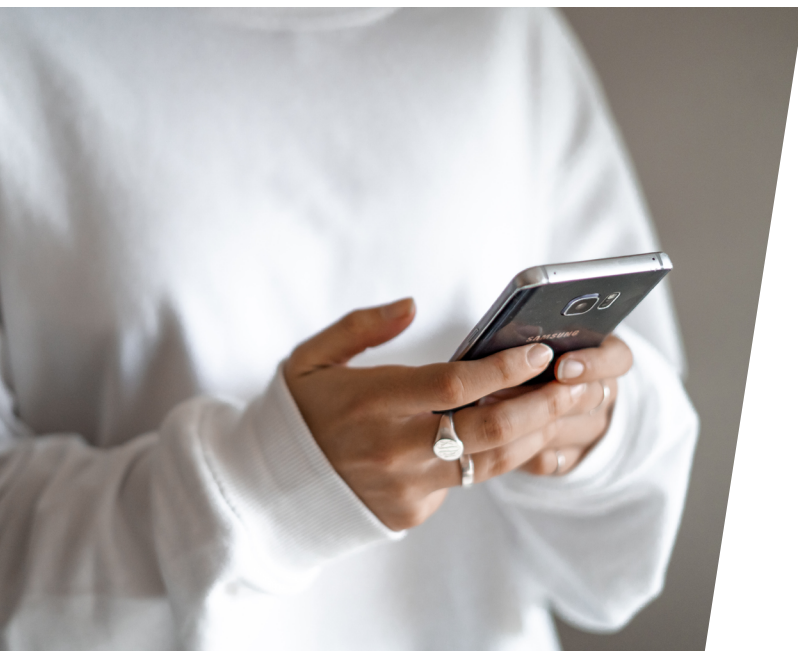
**WHO YOU ARE:**
Introduce yourself, including your name and institution.

**WHY YOU'RE TEXTING:**
Let students know that you'll be sending relevant, timely messages to help them meet a certain challenge or navigate a certain aspect of student life.

**HOW TO OPT OUT:**
The FCC requires you to tell students how they can opt out of receiving your messages.

## Automatically processes opt-out requests with Signal Vine.

The platform recognizes common messages like "leave me alone", "cancel," "unsubscribe" and more... and archives that student from your recipient list—automatically. And if an opted-out student realizes how awesome your messages are and wants to opt back in, you can add them back with a simple click.

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# Nudge 👉

Nudges are deadline-driven messages that prompt students to take action. For some students, text nudges will remind them to complete certain tasks. For others, nudges might inform them of tasks they didn't even know they had to complete.

Ask a question at the end of your nudges to determine how close students are to completing tasks. Students' "yes" or "no" responses might give you more insight than you'd expect.
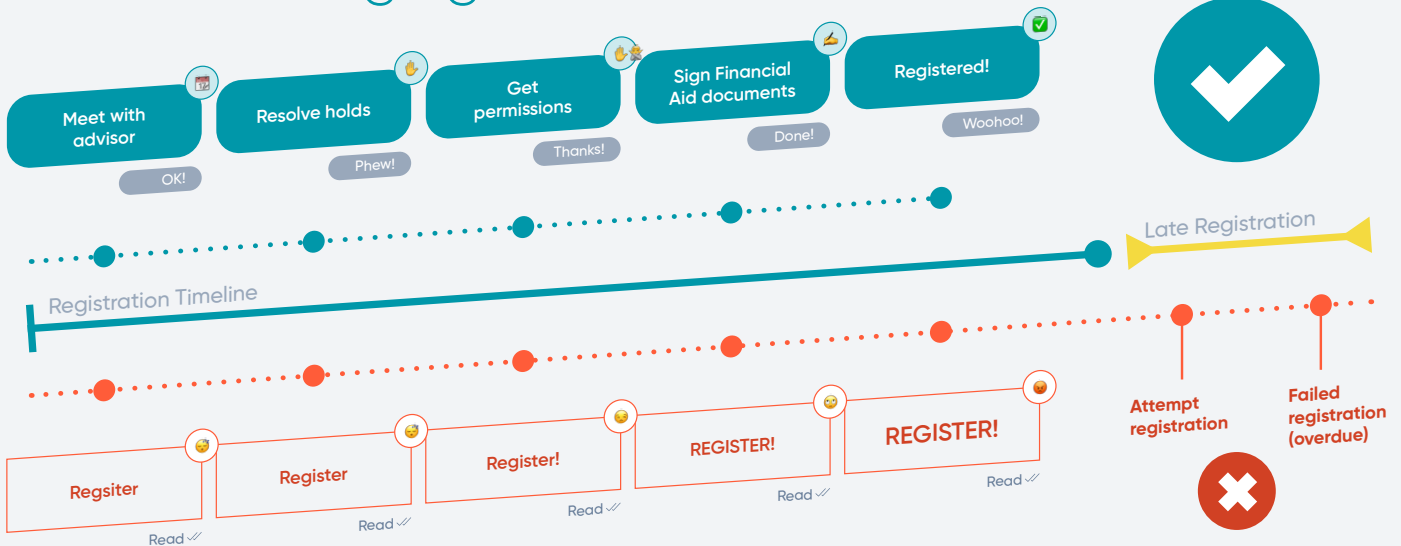
**NUDGE TO REMIND**

Hi Kai, your new student orientation for SVC is at 10am on 9/16. You RSVP'ed yes. Can you still make it?

**NUDGE TO TAKE ACTION**

Hi Grace, new student orientations for SVC begins next week. Do you need help selecting a date? I can help you RSVP. 😊

## Effective Nudging

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Meet with advisor — OK!

Resolve holds — Phew!

Get permissions — Thanks!

Sign Financial Aid documents — Done!

Registered! — Woohoo!

Registration Timeline

Late Registration

Attempt registration

Failed registration (overdue)

Regsiter — Read
Register — Read
Register! — Read
REGISTER! — Read
REGISTER! — Read

## Ineffective Nagging

# Encourage 💪

Not every text needs to be chock-full of information, deadlines and to-dos. Building your relationship with students and **establishing yourself as a source of support** is just as important for earning student's trust and setting them up for lifelong engagement.

Consider **sending occasional texts just to check in.** One smart strategy is to space these messages out three times a semester: toward the beginning, middle and end. You can encourage students to enjoy their first day of class, do well on their exams or savor their upcoming break—just to name a few possibilities that should be relevant to every learner.

Just as with nudging, your encouragement texts should include a question to elicit student responses and gauge how they're doing.

Reach for more than "yes" or "no" responses; this is your chance to dig in deeper and engage learners on a more personal level.

# Inform 📣

Sometimes, you might have an exciting new resource or important information to send to students that's not tied to a deadline. That's okay; **informative text messages keep students in the loop** and help them make educated choices.

Informative texts typically don't need to include questions. They simply share information that students will hopefully find timely, personal and relevant. **This is a good time to send videos, links, PDFs and photos.**

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# Scheduling Your Messages

Hi Rebekah, are you ready to declare a major? You didn't make your advising session. You can reschedule here: [link] or text me back and I can reschedule for you.

☂ PROACTIVE TEXT

Hi Austin, your advising session with me is tomorrow @ 3pm. I know you scheduled it a few weeks ago. Can you still make it?

## Proactive vs. Reactive 🥽

Review your current approach to communicating with students and how well it works.

Do you reach out preemptively, nudging students to complete a task well before the deadline or event? Or do students receive communication reactively, once a deadline is fast approaching or a student has already missed an important date?

You can use either approach—or both!—in your text messaging program, but keep in mind that research supports the **positive impact of proactive text message nudges** on student outcomes.

**Let's consider a financial aid example.**

Would you rather:

💥 Text 300 students **reactively** to notify them of late bills?
☂ Text 3,000 students **proactively** to encourage them to pay their bills as soon as they enroll?

### Be proactive with Signal Vine.

Signal Vine's Virtual Advisor uses higher ed chatbot functionality to respond to common student questions about a variety of topics—with custom answers pre-programmed by you! The Virtual Advisor's AI-powered technology also allows it to accurately judge whether or not it understands each question. It will only respond to questions it feels confident answering and will alert you to the rest.

# Scheduling the Semester 📮

You've assembled your team, set your goals and written your text messages. Next up: **it's time to schedule your messages.**

Scheduling messages in advance keeps you on track, ensures your students receive information and CTAs that are timely and relevant, and saves you time down the road.

# 3 Quick Scheduling Tips 🍡

**TIP #1**

## Send nudges 3-5 days before a deadline.

Sending it any later can overwhelm students and any earlier can cause students to put off and forget about your CTAs.

**TIP #2**

## Schedule your messages around students' schedules.

Young, prospective students will respond fastest before (8 a.m.) or after high school (4 p.m.). Your current, full-time students will respond fastest after 10 a.m., especially around lunch. Adult learners will be more likely to respond outside of work hours, before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m.

**TIP #3**

## Don't schedule more than 3-5 texts per month.

Texting too often may lead to communication fatigue and cause more students to opt out.

## Manage everyday communications with Signal Vine.

Signal Vine's Message Calendar enables you to manage everyday communications with students, coordinate campaigns and avoid sending recipients too many messages at one time. And if your institution uses Salesforce, you can send messages directly through the Salesforce interface.

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# 5 Texting Time Savers ⏳

Adding texting to your communications strategy shouldn't take up a huge chunk of your day.
Using these Signal Vine tips and features will help save time, support more students and optimize your workday.

## Create a bank of FAQs.

Quickly copying and pasting answers to students will not only save you time and energy but also boost consistency across your texting team.

## Set up calendar reminders for your scheduled texts.

Students typically respond to messages within 15 minutes. Staff can block 30 minutes to an hour to manage responses.

## Turn on the auto responder.

If you know you won't be able to answer text messages right away, set up a friendly, automated away message that lets students know when they can expect a response and/or redirects them to a different resource.

## Use Response Management.

Signal Vine's Response Management feature quickly and automatically answers text messages for you based on how students respond to your previous message.

## Get notifications.

Don't waste time checking an empty inbox. Instead, turn on notifications to receive a daily email or a text alerting you of unread text messages.

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# Example Text Messages by Use Case

## Academic Advising/ Registration

👋 INTRODUCE

> Katelyn, this is Amrit, your SV College advisor. 👋You can text me here if you ever have any questions... and I'll occasionally text reminders & tips about important deadlines. Don't want texts? Text back "stop".

👉 NUDGE

> Hi Katelyn, let's set up a time to talk about your current semester + plans for the future. What day next week will work best? Set an appointment with me here: [link] or text back to schedule it.

💪 ENCOURAGE

> Good luck with your exams, Katelyn! You've done a great job this semester. 🥳Do you need any help planning for the fall?

📣 INFORM

> Happy Friday, Katelyn! Quick reminder: Registration for your first optional Winter Term courses opens in 3 days. Learn how it works here: [link]

### Reporting and analytics you need.

Once your messages are out there, Signal Vine gives you the reporting tools and analytics you need to continue improving your texting strategy. Track student engagement, response rates and the overall effectiveness of your campaigns. You'll know immediately what is working and what's not across each touchpoint of the student experience.

# Admissions/Enrollment Management

👋 INTRODUCE

> Hi Erin, this is Meghan from SV College. 👋I'm so excited to see that you've started an application! I'll be texting you next steps. Reply back if you have any questions or text "stop" if you don't want texts.

👉 NUDGE

> Great news, Erin! An admissions rep, Curtis, will be visiting your high school next Tuesday. He'd love to meet with you to help you finalize your application & answer your qs about SV. Can you make it?

💪 ENCOURAGE

> Congrats on your acceptance to SV, Erin!! 🎉We're thrilled for you. 🥳How do you feel??

📣 INFORM

> Erin, have you decided on a college yet? Check out this FAQ for students admitted to SV, here: [link]. I hope you'll join us here in DC. ✌️ Go Tigers! 🐯

# Alumni Engagement

👋 INTRODUCE

> Welcome to the South Florida SVC Alumni group, Toby! I'm Nate. I'll occasionally text you about alumni opportunities that may interest you. Text "stop" to opt out.

👉 NUDGE

> Hi Toby–SVC is just a few thousand dollars away from meeting our Giving Week 2023 fundraising goal. ✌️ Donate by tomorrow @ [link].

💪 ENCOURAGE

> Thanks for contributing to Giving Week 2023! Your donation will help SVC continue to grow. 🚀 I'd love to know: what inspired you to donate?

📣 INFORM

> Toby, South Florida SVC Alumni just published its calendar for the next 3 months. There's an ice cream social, a networking event for business majors like you, and more! 🍦💼Check it out here: [attach pdf flier].

# College Access

👋 INTRODUCE

Hi Diego, this is Ashley from SV Goes to College. I'll be texting you important information & reminders for college, so save this number to your phone! 📱 Want to opt out? Text "stop."

👉 NUDGE

Diego—SV Goes to College is hosting a college fair next weekend! It'll be an awesome chance to meet w/ admissions officers & learn about your options. Can you make it? RSVP by Friday @ [link].

💪 ENCOURAGE

OMG Diego... congrats on putting down a deposit for SVC! 🎉 🤩 I'm here if you have any questions/want any advice about campus life. Have you seen our Instagram page? [link]

📣 INFORM

Have you considered work-study, Diego? It's a great way to help pay for college & learn some awesome news skills. Reply and I'll send more info.

# Continuing Education

👋 INTRODUCE

Hi Alice 👋 this is Meng—I'm an advisor at SVC Continuing Education. Looks like you're interested in interior decorating courses. Do you have any questions?

👉 NUDGE

Alice, Monday's the deadline to register for Introduction to Interior Decorating. ⏳ Learn more & register here [link].

💪 ENCOURAGE

Congrats on completing your first SVC class, Alice! I hope you learned valuable decoration techniques. What other skills are you hoping to learn?

📣 INFORM

Alice—Did you know that the field of interior decoration is projected to grow by 4% next year? 🔼 Learn how our Advanced Interior Decorating course can help you snag one of those openings. Click here: [link].

# Financial Aid

👋 INTRODUCE

Hi Stephan, this is Sharon from SVU Financial Aid. I'll text you tips & reminders to help you pay for college. Don't find texts helpful? No problem! Just text "stop."

👉 NUDGE

Stephan, you haven't filled out your FAFSA yet, but good news: it's not too late. 😅 Complete it by 6/30 at [link].

💪 ENCOURAGE

Stephan, I know financial aid can be confusing. 😬 What questions or concerns do you have right now about paying for college?

📣 INFORM

Questions about renewing FAFSA? That's totally normal! Check out this infographic [attach image] and text me if you have any questions. Enjoy your week, Stephan!

# Student Affairs

👋 INTRODUCE

Welcome to SVC, Nita! 🤗 This is Jodi from the Student Activities office. I'm here to share info about campus events & answer any qs you might have. Feel free to text "stop" if you'd prefer to opt out.

👉 NUDGE

Nita, Have you heard about SV's First-Year Experience Program? It's a great way to keep the fun of orientation going all semester long. The details are here: [link].

💪 ENCOURAGE

First semester = done. 🙌 Congrats!!! How do you plan to celebrate? Attend our annual holiday party, maybe? [attached flier]

📣 INFORM

Did you know that the Career Center has sessions designed just for first-year marketing majors like you, Nita? Text me back & I'll put you in touch w/ the perfect advisor to tell you more!

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# We Have The Tools to Help You Text 🧰

## Higher Education Texting, Made Personal

2:00

[Modern Campus](#) is obsessed with empowering its 1,800+ higher education customers to thrive when radical transformation is required to respond to lower student enrollments and revenue, rising costs, crushing student debt, and administrative complexity.

The [Modern Campus engagement platform](#) powers solutions for non-traditional student management, web content management, catalog and curriculum management, student engagement and development, conversational text messaging, career pathways, campus maps and virtual tours. The result: innovative institutions can create a learner-to-earner lifecycle that engages modern learners for life, while providing modern administrators with the tools needed to streamline workflows and drive high efficiency.

Learn how Modern Campus is leading the modern learner engagement movement at [moderncampus.com](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

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