Supporting the Full Student Journey

The Importance of Retention
Marketing & Communications

Today's Presenters

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Today's Agenda

Student Lifecycle Communication

Personalized Approaches

Journey Mapping

Discussion

Practical Tips + Takeaways

Student Lifecycle Communication

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"The single biggest *problem* in communication is the *illusion* that it has taken place."

George Bernard Shaw

What makes continuing student communication and marketing so *challenging*?

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Decentralized approaches lack coordination.

When departments create their own communication, a 'silo effect' occurs where students are overwhelmed by redundant emails yet miss critical information.

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A strategy based on university priorities is missing.

Without a strategy, a 'first-come, first-served' inbox where non-essential communication may drown out the strategic initiatives meant to drive student success and engagement.

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Faculty and staff are not equipped with tools.

Each individual communicator is doing their best, but this approach drains time and results in a fragmented student experience.

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Resources are dedicated to external audiences.

Marketing budgets and staffing responsibilities prioritize the pursuit of new enrollments while leaving internal student support systems underfunded and lacking capacity.

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2-in-3

Students were **unaware of available student support** resources such as career advising, health services, and peer mentoring.

31%

Of students asked why they aren't involved on campus select **lack of knowledge** about activities or events as their reason.

80%

Of students prefer university communication by **email**.

20%

Of students recall receiving **timely nudges** or reminders about course activities and deadlines.

67%

Of students say they are aware of or wished their institution used **chatbots** on department webpages that answer questions after hours.

What Students are Saying about Campus Communication

Maintaining consistent and coordinated communication with students is the bridge between enrollment and graduation; it fosters a sense of belonging that transforms a cold institutional process into a supportive academic journey.

Source: 2025 Student Voice Survey, Inside Higher Ed

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What's working for student success?

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Structuring with students at the forefront.

A student centered organizational structure replaces disconnected silos with a seamless journey.

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Investing in systems that support student success.

Clearance, proactive intervention, personalized advising, and holistic wellbeing form an ecosystem at the the core of effective student support.

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Prioritizing experiences and culture that align with the brand.

Students' perceptions of institutional integrity depend on consistency between the stated purpose and their lived experiences.
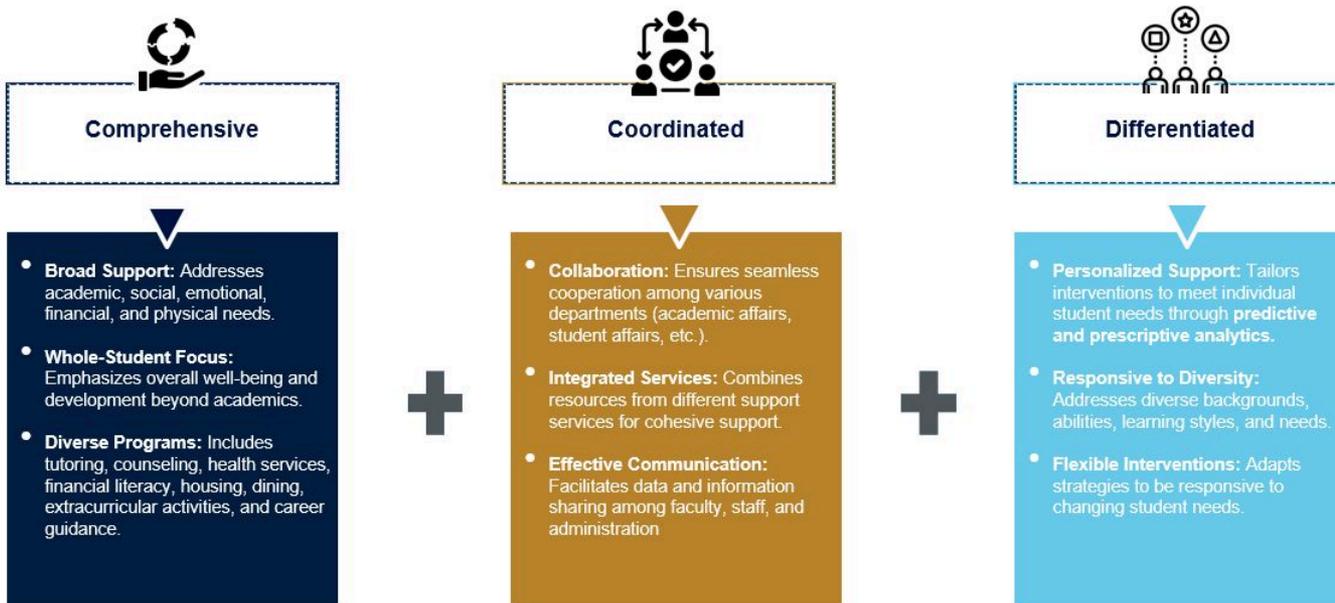
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Creating environments where students know they matter.

A strong psychological sense of community reinforces belonging, a critical foundation for student success.

GS Student Success Model

A Comprehensive, Coordinated, and Differentiated (CCD) asset-based approach to student success designed to support all students by addressing their diverse needs through a multi-faceted and integrated framework. This approach recognizes that student success is influenced by a wide range of factors and requires a coordinated effort from various stakeholders within our educational institution.

Comprehensive

- **Broad Support:** Addresses academic, social, emotional, financial, and physical needs.
- **Whole-Student Focus:** Emphasizes overall well-being and development beyond academics.
- **Diverse Programs:** Includes tutoring, counseling, health services, financial literacy, housing, dining, extracurricular activities, and career guidance.

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Coordinated

- **Collaboration:** Ensures seamless cooperation among various departments (academic affairs, student affairs, etc.).
- **Integrated Services:** Combines resources from different support services for cohesive support.
- **Effective Communication:** Facilitates data and information sharing among faculty, staff, and administration

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Differentiated

- **Personalized Support:** Tailors interventions to meet individual student needs through **predictive and prescriptive analytics.**
- **Responsive to Diversity:** Addresses diverse backgrounds, abilities, learning styles, and needs.
- **Flexible Interventions:** Adapts strategies to be responsive to changing student needs.

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

How do we determine communication priorities for continuing students?

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Start with the student in mind.

Center communication on clarity and ease for students, not departmental structure.

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Align with strategic priorities.

Coordinate efforts so communication supports student success and persistence.

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Distinguish key information by audience and importance.

Replace all student messages with tiered, personalized communication by need and timing.

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Leverage data to continuously improve.

Measure effectiveness and completion of key actions, not just opens and clicks.

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What are the barriers to student success at your institution? In what ways does the approach to communication combat or contribute to those barriers?

Discussion Question

Breaking Down the Student Lifecycle

An audit and evaluation of current policies, communications, protocols, and programs at key intersections of the student lifecycle is critical to student success and supporting student transitions.

New Student Onboarding and First-Year Experience

Emphasizes logistical completion, financial clarity, and social connection; Focuses on building relationships, establishing routine, exploration, and navigating resources (e.g., regular check-ins, "just in time" tailored resources).

Second-Year Experience and Beyond

Focus shifts to academic progression, goal setting, continued involvement/ personalization, and career integration (e.g., high-impact practices, academic planning checks, leadership opportunities).

Countdown to Graduation

Emphasizes graduation logistics, post-graduate plans, successful launch, and final administrative tasks.

Levels of Importance

Emergency/Crisis: To inform community members of an imminent threat, provide life-saving instructions, and activate immediate response protocols.

Critical/Essential: To communicate a significant, time-sensitive change or action required related to logistics, attendance, university business, or a major academic requirement.

Important/Action-Oriented: To share necessary information for academic success, administrative requirements, or participation in programs.

General/Routine: To build community, share successes, offer optional opportunities, or provide background context.

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Personalized
Approaches

Audiences to Consider

First-Time: foundational, high-support information about campus life

Transfers: clear guidance on credit evaluation and specific deadlines

Graduate/Online: professional, specialized, and high-utility information; efficiency over "school spirit" content

Academic Program: customized details by program to emphasize their curriculum and career pathways

Other Special Populations: relevant resources and support channels for various key groups (e.g., international, students with children, military, honors)

Accessibility: careful attention to language, communication modalities and ADA standards

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Considerations for Personalization

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Let the data inform segmentation.

Evaluating student engagement and outcomes by various demographic, academic, and behavioral characteristics can inform effective strategy for segmentation.

Incorporate student interests and insights.

Students are increasingly skeptical of mass emails and scripted marketing; they want to see themselves and their interests reflected. Modern strategy focuses on two-way loops.

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What special populations are you aware of at your institution? What are some of the unique communication needs you have noticed?
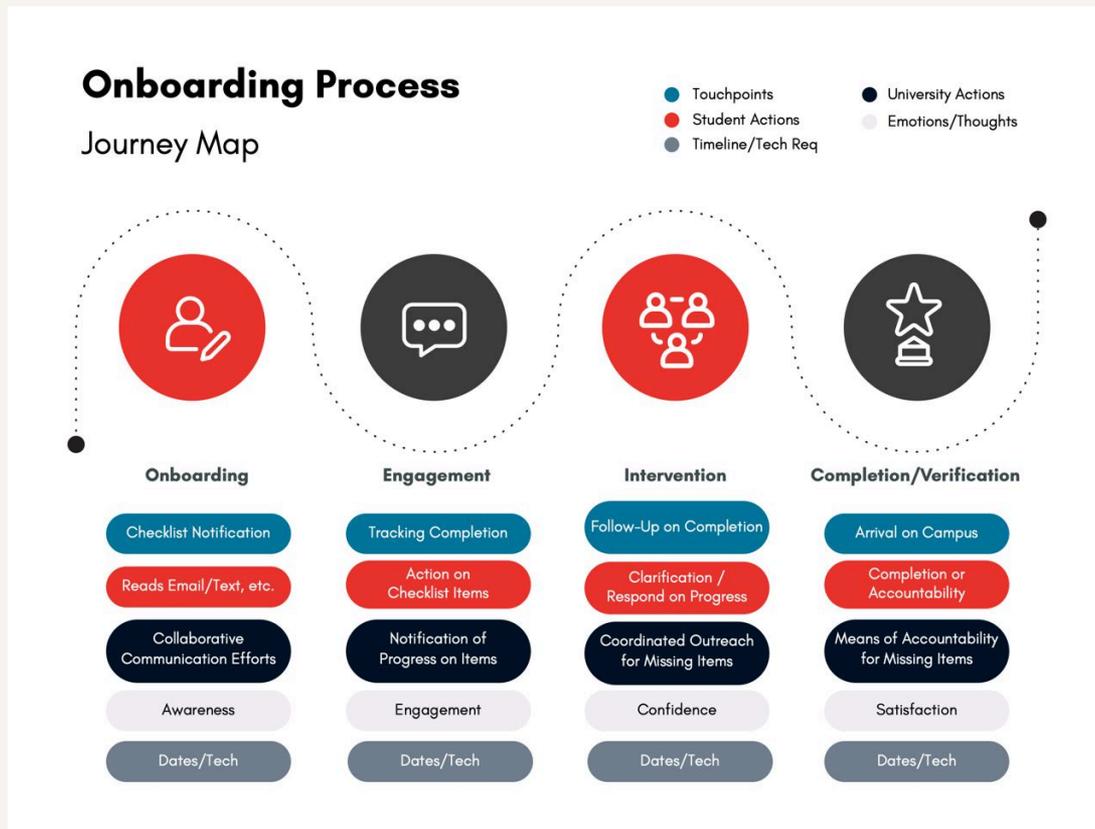
Discussion Question

Journey Mapping

Journey Mapping

A journey mapping exercise can be a great way to understand the student experience and determine how communication can best support the key aspects of the student lifecycle.

What are the essential or important actions we want students to take in a given process? What must we do as a university to prompt or respond to those actions? How do we want students to feel as they take the journey with us? What gaps exist in the current experience to make that possible? How can we improve?

Onboarding Process
Journey Map

Legend:
- Touchpoints
- Student Actions
- Timeline/Tech Req
- University Actions
- Emotions/Thoughts

Onboarding	Engagement	Intervention	Completion/Verification
Checklist Notification	Tracking Completion	Follow-Up on Completion	Arrival on Campus
Reads Email/Text, etc.	Action on Checklist Items	Clarification / Respond on Progress	Completion or Accountability
Collaborative Communication Efforts	Notification of Progress on Items	Coordinated Outreach for Missing Items	Means of Accountability for Missing Items
Awareness	Engagement	Confidence	Satisfaction
Dates/Tech	Dates/Tech	Dates/Tech	Dates/Tech

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Communication Channels + Timing

CHANNELS

Email: For detailed information from an easily searchable name or department

Text: For time-sensitive, essential nudges

Chatbot: For predictable interactive topics (AI)

Phone Call / Audio Message: For critical conversation oriented topics

Social Media and On-Campus Signage: For broader audience announcements; reinforces other messaging

TIMING

Best Days: Thursdays are often best engagement; T/W strong engagement, Mondays are often overwhelming (avoid Fridays)

Best Times: Between classes, lunch hour, mid-afternoon; avoid after offices close for essential information

Open Rates: A review of current email open and click through rates can aid in understanding best days and times, along with tracking actual emails sent.

Nudge Theory: researchers have found that nudges related to time-sensitive or high-stakes tasks, were more likely to encourage student behavior

Communication Tone + Content

TONE

Asset-Based: Focusing on students' existing strengths and lived experiences as the foundation for their success

Empathetic: Recognizing the unique pressures of student life to build a supportive connection

Direct: Getting straight to the point with clear, jargon-free language

Professional-Casual: acting as a relatable mentor rather than a distant authority figure, balancing respect with a relaxed, approachable vibe

Brand Aligned: Bold, Active, Creative, Supportive, Creative, Engaging

Universal Design: language is accessible and inviting to all students

CONTENT

Student Stories: featuring student stories & experiences across the spectrum

Focus on the Why: frontloading the value; ensuring students understand how their time and effort actually make an impact

Action-Oriented:: Defining exactly what the student needs to do next, ensuring there is a clear and simple path to completion (e.g., bullets, consistent format for action step

Subject Lines: using brackets for essential activities [Action Required], under 6 words as a guideline

Surveys: use surveys sparingly and in concert with students engagement; use sampling

ADA Audits: accessibility standards are critical; sending a PDF in the body of an email, etc. can create issues

"Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true."

Charles Dickens

Thank you.

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