

How to Use Communications to Drive Student Engagement

Brad Schick

Regional Director, CampusLogic

Heidi Sisson

Account Development Director, CampusLogic

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campuslogic



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Regional Director, CampusLogic



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Account Development Director, CampusLogic

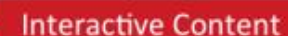
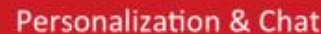
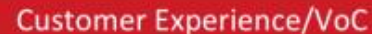
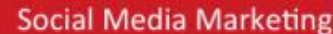


- The problem – noise, competition
- The Rule of 7
- Communication channels
- Top 5 channels to optimize
- Group activity!

A woman with long dark hair is looking thoughtfully at the camera, her hand resting on her forehead. She is wearing a light-colored sweater. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom or office setting. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. There are decorative orange curved lines in the top-left and bottom-right corners, and a series of blue bokeh lights in the top-right corner.

**Communicating effectively with
students is exceedingly difficult.**

Mobile Marketing



A lot happens in just one second.

82,659 YouTube
Video Views

2,881,840 Emails
Sent (a lot are
spam)

8,846 Tweets



86,998 GB of
Internet Traffic

971 Instagram
Photos Uploaded

80,599 Google
Searches



Students are overwhelmed

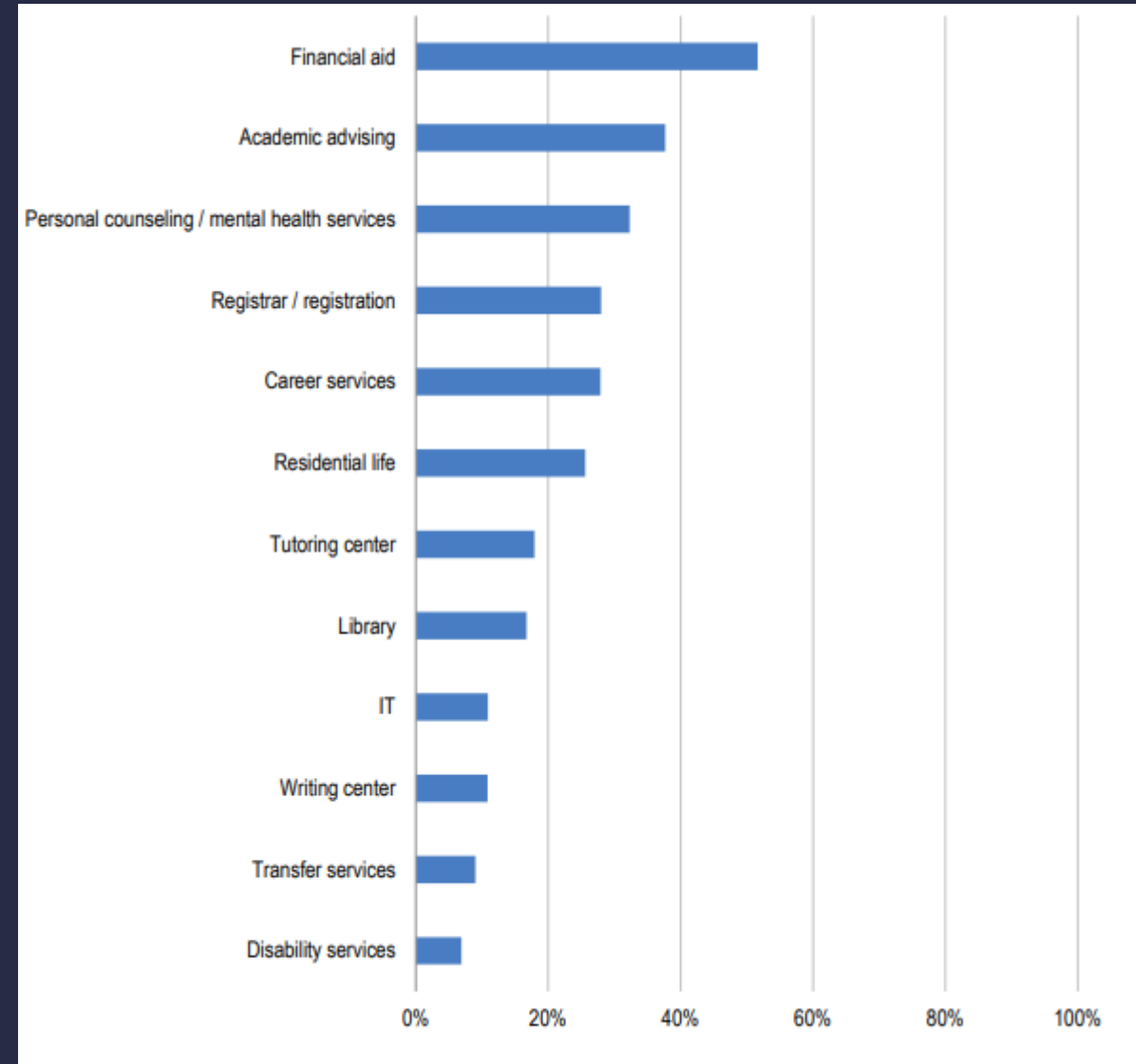
- Family
- Grades
- Employment
- Health
- Living Expenses
- Military Deployment
- Relationships
- Employment
- Bills
- Peer Pressure

Student Survey

Student Experiences During the Pandemic Pivot

Students were asked would you like to hear more from any of the following offices or departments at this college or university about current services and resources?

They were instructed to select all that apply.



A woman with curly hair is shown in profile, looking off to the side. She is wearing a white earbud and holding a smartphone. The image has a blue overlay with white text.

How do you break through?

Multiple Channels, Consistent Messaging, Persistence



The Rule of 7

Students need to see your message
at least 7 times to take action

A smiling woman with curly hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a patterned tie, is holding a smartphone in her left hand. She is looking up and to the right with a joyful expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and buildings. A semi-transparent blue oval is centered over the image, and a white abstract line swooshes across it from the left. The text is overlaid on the blue oval in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

Relevant Financial Aid Communication Channels



Optimize Mobile and Online Channels

- The average college student brings 7 internet-connected devices to campus.
- 60% of Gen Z'ers won't use an app or website that's too slow. 62% will close out of a site that's too hard to navigate.
- 77% of Gen Z'ers say they want relevant information from their colleges via text.



5 Channels to Optimize & Personalize

- Email
- Social media
- Smartphones: texting & phone calls
- FinAid website (external-facing)
- Student portal



A person is working on a laptop. Their hands are visible, typing on the keyboard. A coffee cup is on the desk next to the laptop. A small potted plant is in the background. The image has a blue overlay and curved orange lines in the corners.

#1

Email

Pros

- Unlimited word count
- School branding
- Can be customized and automated
- Analytics and testing available

Cons

- So. Much. Spam.
- Long emails no one reads
- Inboxes are crowded
- Students have multiple email accounts



45%
of all emails are
spam.

Email Tips

1 Content Counts

- Keep things short and sweet
- Use subheads to guide readers
- Avoid embedding forms - link to them instead
- Don't overdo it on fonts, styles, colors

2 Optimize your email for mobile devices

3 Use analytics

- A/B test where possible (subject line, time of day)
- Monitor analytics and refine

4 Avoid spam filters

- Use recognizable sender name
- Keep email send list clean
- Stay up to date with ISP practices and anti-spam laws

5 Subject lines matter

- Try to stay around 30–45 characters max
- Questions get higher open rates
- Avoid all caps, exclamation marks in headlines



#2

Social Media

Pros

- Students already use these channels
- 75% of students use social during college search
- Students will engage, but they want to initiate
- Usually free and easy to set up
- In-channel analytics

Cons

- Many platforms to consider
- Highly public channels, must be monitored
- Students expect immediate answers
- Responding & monitoring takes staff time

Student Social Habits



Social Media Tips

• Facebook

- Tell a story, show faces, people, outcomes
- Be conversational
- Focus on providing info, not on generating likes or shares
- Link back to relevant FinAid resources
- Provide your social media team with talking points and guidelines on who to direct questions to

• Twitter

- Say something worth listening to in 280 characters
- Visuals help you stand out
- GIFs are eye-catching and give your feed variety
- Use for immediate information dissemination: systems down, office closures, deadlines approaching
- Include relevant hashtags #FinancialAid #FAFSA



#3

Text/SMS

Pros

- Instantly & directly delivered to students
- Students can communicate with you, anytime, anywhere
- People tend to read all their texts; they don't read all their emails
- 77% of Gen Z students say it's ok for schools to contact them via text

Cons

- Must keep message short
- Some students may be wary of receiving unsolicited text messages—get their buy-in
- Regulations exist around communicating in this format—be informed

Student Social Habits

99%

open rate

4,000

texts a month

Texting Tips

- Keep things short and direct
- Identify yourself and your reason for texting
- Include a CTA (call to action)
- Provide an opt-out process
- Text during hours your students will consider 'normal', but know they'll likely respond at all hours

A man with glasses and a plaid shirt is sitting cross-legged on the grass, using a laptop. A brown messenger bag sits on the grass next to him. In the background is a building with large windows. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter and decorative orange and yellow curved lines in the corners.

#4

School / FinAid Website

Pros

- A well-designed, informative website allows students to find information easily
- Websites can be branded
- Websites can house an expansive array of information in multiple formats
- Robust analytics available

Cons

- Poor user experience causes visitors to disengage
- You have to actively drive students to visit the website

Website Trends

72%

of mobile users say a
mobile-optimized website is
important to them, according
to Google

Website Tips

- In the USA, **94% of people with smartphones search for local information on their phones.**
- Make sure your site is mobile optimized here:
<https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>
- Use other channels to drive traffic to your website: email, social
- Website visitors will usually stick around for 59 seconds max—but the first 10 seconds matter most. Make info easy to find, scan, navigate.
- Meet ADA Standards for Accessibility design

A man with short blonde hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt over a striped t-shirt and a large headset, is sitting at a desk and typing on a silver laptop. The background shows a modern office with large windows and a desk lamp. The image has a blue overlay and decorative orange curved lines in the corners.

#5

Student Portal

Pros

- Primary point of contact between students & school; secure, personalized
- Often can target unique messaging by student ID
- Visitors are already in “school mode” when they log into the student portal
- Secure, single-sign-on (SSO)
- Analytics available, *sometimes*

Cons

- Portals aren't viewed as the most engaging channel by students
- Portals can offer a disjointed, clunky experience if not maintained
- Controlled by IT

Design matters.

75%

of users judge your
credibility on design and
user experience

Student Portal Tips

- Target messaging by student ID, driving engagement
- Request high-visibility portal spaces to pass along timely information: Landing pages, right rails, banners
- Mobile optimize your portal <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>
- Request analytics on student usage
- Pay attention to least-visited pages, links that are not clicked on, high bounce pages
- Monitor FinAid streams and groups

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk in a library, working together. The woman on the left is smiling and looking at the camera, while the woman on the right is looking down at a document. They are both holding pens and appear to be writing or reviewing papers. A laptop is open on the desk. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter and a white curved line graphic.

Putting it all together: Missing Paperwork Exercise

Missing Paperwork



Missing Paperwork

Social

Don't get dropped from class! Is all your paperwork in? #FinAid
Scarier than zombies? Verification paperwork. We can help. [Learn more >](#)

Text

"Psssst, we need paperwork from you. Check your email / login for more info. Your FinAid Dept. [\[link\]](#)"

Email

Subject Line:[First Name] Missing paperwork may keep you from class

Website

Callout Box on FinAid page: [Owe Us Paperwork? Next Steps Here >](#)

Portal

Please file your missing paperwork immediately! [More info >](#)

Thank you

Brad Schick, Regional Director, CampusLogic

Brad.Schick@campuslogic.com

Heidi Sisson, Account Development Director, CampusLogic

Heidi.Sisson@campuslogic.com

campuslogic