

HIGHER EDUCATION: PRACTICAL WAYS TO BUILD AN OPT-IN LIST



INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, text messaging has played a huge role in changing the traditional college experience. The communication tool is opening doors for improved education, safety, social life on campus, career opportunities for the future, and more. Today's average college student no longer uses email as their primary source of communication. In fact, open rates for emails have fallen to about 15%, where text message open rates are soaring at 99%. And 90% of these texts are read by the recipient in under three minutes!

Although the evidence supporting the power of texting is made clear, a question we are often asked at TrueDialog is, "Do students actually want to receive text messages from campus administrators?" Well, according to Cappex, 77% of students do want relevant information from their university via text.

If you are a higher education organization, building on ongoing dialog with prospective students, enrolled students, and alumni can be a challenge. Specifically, how do you go about capturing their interest and growing your mobile opt-in database?

Here are a few tried and true ways to encourage students to subscribe to your SMS/Text campaign.

1. ENGAGE WITH PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

According to a study by St. Mary's University in Texas, texting prospective students who have opted-in has nearly tripled application rates, as well as doubled overall enrollment rates. Universities are reaching out to prospective students during their decision process to further their relationship, by making the prospective student feel valued, and keeping the university top-of-mind. Texting is being used to pass along application deadline information, reminders of admission events and useful information about the university.

However, ensuring that a relationship between the prospective student and university has been established prior to texting is crucial. Purchasing phone number lists from third parties is always prohibited. So, how do you establish a relationship first and get permission to text prospective students? Promote your keyword where prospective students are proactively inquiring or showing interest in your university.

A few places to promote your keyword for prospective students are:

- On your application forms.
- On your admissions page on your website.
- On your banner display at college fairs.
- On brochures requested by the prospective student.
- During your Open House events (on your Open House registration forms).


2. CREATE AN ONBOARDING SUBSCRIPTION FORM

One of the easiest ways to capture subscribers is to include a subscription form with the onboarding material for new students. New students will likely want to be exposed to information as they become acclimated to their new environment, so this tactic tends to be a successful way to quickly gain subscribers.

As a best practice, create a subscription form that categorizes different types of messages, and allow students to select which they'd be interested in. For example, categories could include:

- **STUDENT LIFE:** Social events, sporting matches, fraternity/sorority announcements
Example: "New student meet-and-greet tonight, Aug. 31st at 7PM ET."
- **STUDENT RETENTION:** Class registration, financial updates, enrollment due dates
Example: "Tuition is past due. Please remit payment to avoid penalty."
- **CAREER:** Job fairs, recruiting opportunities, guest speakers
Example: "Business recruiters on campus next week. Schedule your interview by clicking here."
- **ALUMNI:** Reunions/events, campus updates, fundraising
Example: "Alumni Night at football game Oct. 15th at 8PM ET."
- **CAMPUS SAFETY:** Emergency announcements, closures, delays
Example: "Shots fired in student union. Buildings locked down. Shelter in place."

Also, be sure to include a field at the bottom that allows students to customize how frequently they want to receive texts.

 <hr/> <p>TEXTING TIDBIT</p>	<p><i>In a study by St. Mary's University in Texas, the yield rate of texting students to attend the university was 42%, compared to 26% of all accepted students.</i></p>
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3. REMIND STUDENTS DURING EVENTS/AROUND CAMPUS AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Once students get involved around campus, many will seek to be notified on information pertaining to the events they enjoy. Promoting your texting abilities around campus can be an effective way to grow your opt-in database.

Keep in mind, if you're going to solicit opt-in registrations with a medium that's not online, subscribing must be quick and easy. College students are on-the-go, and they may not want to bother with obstacles to access the subscription page, or lengthy forms. Creating a keyword, or a unique word/phrase that people text to a shortcode to join a list, is a great way to combat that issue.

A few ways to remind students around campus are:

- Include a column with a checkbox on sign-in sheets at events that asks permission to send updates about related events.
- Include signage in places students gather, such as the cafeteria or student center.
- Run a promotion during a sporting event, such as a free coupon to the concession stand.
- Have professors ask students to sign-up for classroom notifications during the first lecture.
- Have offices that take appointments, such as the Career Center, Counselling, and Financial Aid, ask students if they'd like appointment reminders.

Also, integrating your SMS feed into your social media channels is a great way to give nonsubscribers a taste of what they're missing out on. Choose your texting stream that is most broad in nature, such as Student Retention, and have these texts auto-post. Include a blurb to entice people to subscribe to receive these messages directly to their cell phone, along with your keyword.

CONCLUSION

Remember, building a mobile database takes time, but everyone starts somewhere. Be patient as you wait for your list to grow, and focus on being resourceful to those who have opted-into your program. Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool, so if your subscribers have good things to say about your messages, others may be influenced to join as well.

Lastly, remember to make sure your text messages are compliant. It is legal to text your students and alumni, however, your message should only include information that pertains to what they subscribed for. For more information on the legality of texting your students, download whitepaper, "[Higher Education: Regulations to Know Before You Text](#)".