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The State of Higher Ed Messaging

Mongoose 2025 Benchmark Report for 2-Year Institutions

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01. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the State of Higher Ed Messaging at 2-Year Institutions

Community and Technical Colleges are at the forefront of a communications shift in higher education. Every year, these institutions send millions of messages across multiple channels—guiding students through key moments in their academic journey, from enrollment and financial aid to academic support, transfer advising, and workforce readiness. But as messaging volume grows, so do the expectations of the students being served.



Unlike traditional 4-Year Institutions, 2-Year Institutions support a highly diverse student population—often balancing jobs, family responsibilities, or returning to education after time away. These students don't just need reminders—they need real, personalized conversations that are timely, supportive, and action-oriented.

While CRMs remain essential for managing data and operations, they were not built to support the scale of human-centered, real-time communication that 2-Year Institutions require. Every missed question, delayed response, or disengaged student can have an outsized impact on enrollment, persistence, and completion.

That's why we created **The State of Higher Ed Messaging: Mongoose 2025 Benchmark Report**—to provide Community and Technical Colleges with data-backed insights into what's working, what isn't, and where the biggest opportunities lie. By analyzing millions of real-world conversations, this report reveals key trends in engagement behavior, response rates, resolution success, and messaging strategy.

From optimizing outreach timing to leveraging AI-powered chat and Smart Messages, this report gives 2-Year Institutions the tools to better connect with their students and communities—helping more individuals stay on track, achieve their goals, and feel supported every step of the way.

This report identifies gaps in current messaging strategies and shows how institutions can bridge these gaps with solutions like Mongoose's **Conversation Intelligence Platform (CIP)**. Through AI-powered, multi-channel conversations, Mongoose enables personalized, scalable, and data-driven engagement that ensures today's prospects, students, and alumni feel heard, supported, and empowered to take the next step.

The insights in this report provide Community and Technical Colleges with clear, actionable data on how to optimize their outreach and turn messaging into real impact. Our goal is to help these institutions understand how to make their messaging more effective—not just in terms of response rates, but in driving meaningful outcomes such as higher application completion, improved student retention, and stronger alumni and donor engagement.

Key Questions This Report Answers

To help institutions optimize their messaging strategies, this report explores:

When audiences, such as students or alumni, are most likely to engage (best times and days for messaging)

How different types of messages influence engagement (questions vs. statements, URLs vs. no URLs, images vs. text-only messages)

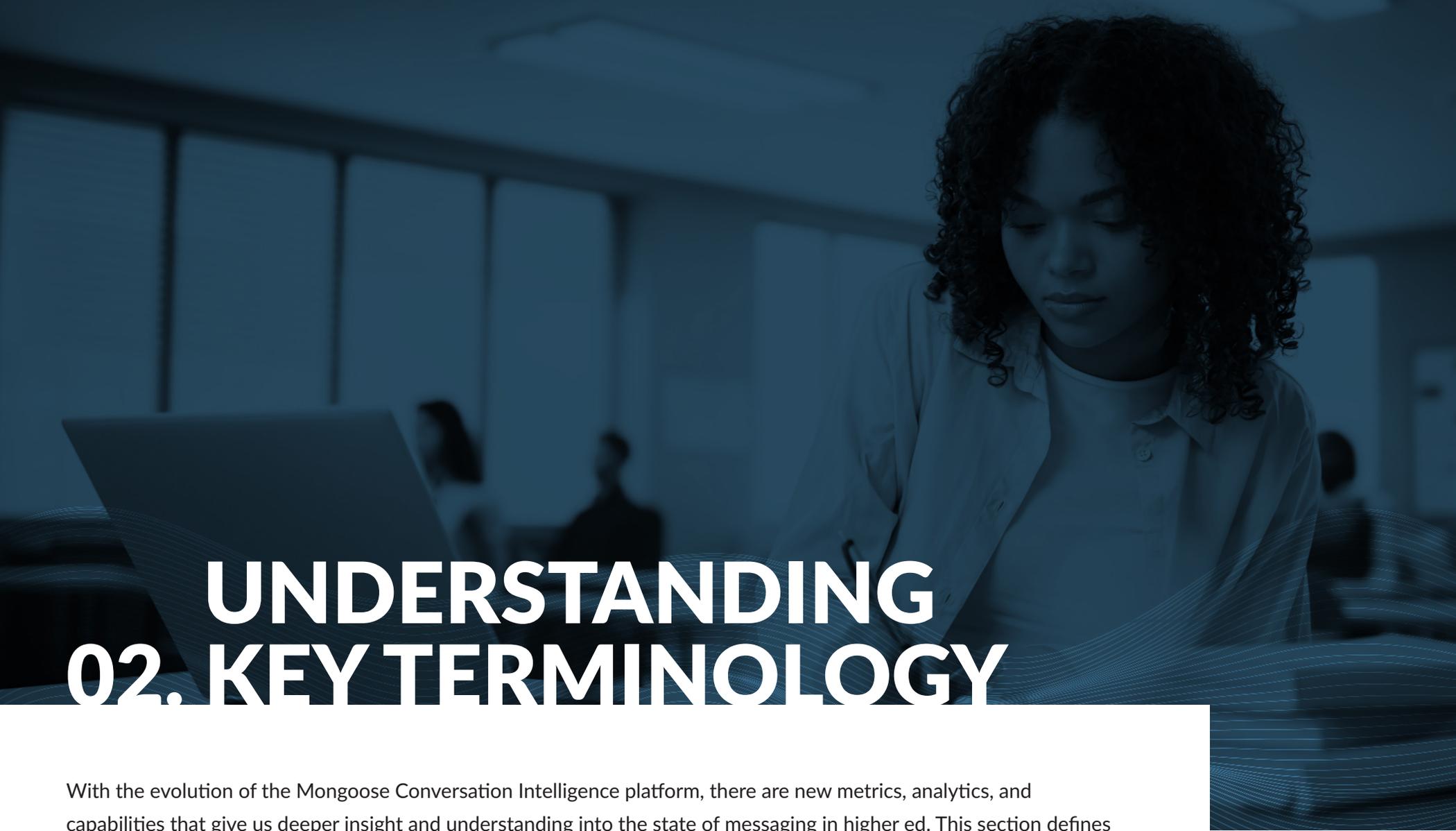
How AI-driven messaging and chat solutions impact student and donor interactions

What message formats work best (length, content, use of Smart Messages)

Which conversation topics generate the most engagement and resolution (and where institutions should invest more resources)

This report provides a roadmap for 2-Year Institutions looking to refine their messaging strategies, leverage AI-powered insights, and drive real engagement at every stage of the student journey.





UNDERSTANDING 02. KEY TERMINOLOGY

With the evolution of the Mongoose Conversation Intelligence platform, there are new metrics, analytics, and capabilities that give us deeper insight and understanding into the state of messaging in higher ed. This section defines some of the terms that may be new to you.



Conversation Intelligence

Conversation Intelligence refers to the ability to analyze and optimize conversations between higher ed institutions and their audiences (students, parents, alumni, etc.) using data-driven insights. It goes beyond simply facilitating messaging; it helps institutions understand what works, what doesn't, and how to improve engagement across all communication channels.

For instance, with **Mongoose's Conversation Intelligence Platform**, universities and colleges can:



Analyze engagement patterns to identify what drives responses and actions.



Turn unstructured conversations into actionable insights, helping teams refine their messaging.



Ensure compliance and consistency in communications across departments.



Scale personalized interactions using AI-driven automation while maintaining a human touch.

The goal is to help institutions move people forward by making every conversation more meaningful, effective, and results-driven—whether it's for enrollment, retention, or alumni engagement.

Sentiment & Resolution Insights

Using its in-house AI model, Mongoose analyzes sentiment, resolution, and engagement across key topics. Institutions gain insights into whether students express positive sentiment (such as appreciation), neutral sentiment, or negative sentiment (such as frustration), enabling data-driven adjustments to messaging strategies.

Mongoose's AI model categorizes conversations based on institutional role:

-  **Admissions & Enrollment teams** have distinct key topics related to application processes, campus visits, and scholarships.
-  **Student Success teams** focus on advising, academic support, and retention efforts.
-  **Advancement teams** track donor engagement, alumni relations, and fundraising.

Resolution of Conversations

Resolution measures the percentage of conversations determined by Mongoose's AI technology to be resolved, based on whether all student inquiries were answered, and is a key engagement metric.

-  **Resolved:** The student's need was met, and no further action was required.
-  **Responded:** The staff member replied, but the conversation remained unresolved, indicating a possible follow-up.
-  **Unresolved:** The inquiry was left open-ended, signaling a potential engagement gap.



Smart Messages

Traditional batch messaging refers to one-way mass notifications sent to large groups without expectation of a response. These messages are typically generic, static, and non-interactive—such as reminders about upcoming deadlines, event invitations, or fundraising appeals. While they can be useful for broad communication, they often fail to drive meaningful engagement because they do not prompt action or foster dialogue.

While informative, this message does not invite a response or provide insight into student interest. Mongoose's **Smart Messages** transform notifications into interactive, two-way conversations that encourage responses and provide real-time feedback. These messages use questions, branching responses, and personalization to foster deeper engagement and gather valuable insights.

By prompting a response, Smart Messages do more than just share information—they create a dialogue, capture interest, and allow institutions to adjust outreach based on real-time student input.

BATCH MESSAGE

Hi Matt! Our Sept Open House kicks off tomorrow morning at 8 am in Hynes Gymnasium — we hope to see you there!

Hi Matt! Our Sept Open House kicks off tomorrow morning at 8 am in Hynes Gymnasium — we hope to see you there!

Thanks, I hope to make it

Sorry, something came up. Is there a next one?

SMART MESSAGE

Hi Matt!, What excites you most about our October 'AI' Open House tomorrow?

- A: Student Club FAir,
- B: AirPods drawing,
- C: AI Lab Walkthrough

C... 🤖

Great! Meet at Mob Hall B #102 at 1, 2 or 4pm!

Wow, that was amazing... did students really already start AI companies there?



Opt-Out Rates

Opt-out rates refer to the percentage of conversations that lead to a contact opting out of future messages. It's important to understand how these are calculated, especially compared to what institutions may see in industry benchmarks or within product dashboards.

Unlike typical message-based opt-out rates (which use total messages sent as the denominator), the rates in this report are calculated based on **opt-outs per conversation**, not per message.

This distinction results in higher percentages and should not be directly compared to standard SMS opt-out rates.

These conversation-based opt-out insights provide a more meaningful lens into disengagement and help institutions better understand which types of conversations or messaging strategies are more likely to prompt students or alumni to unsubscribe.



MESSAGING

03. BENCHMARKS

Effective communication is essential for Community & Technical Colleges (2-Year Institutions) as they navigate the distinct challenges of engaging students in a dynamic, fast-paced academic environment. Unlike traditional four-year institutions, these colleges serve a highly diverse student population with varied needs, including career-focused education, flexible scheduling, and financial aid support.

To address these unique communication strategies, Mongoose analyzed data from 2-Year Institutions separately from 4-Year Admissions, Advancement, and Student Success teams. The insights below highlight key engagement trends and strategies for optimizing outreach.

Best Times to Engage: When Students Reply Most

The timing of a message plays a significant role in engagement.

Best Times of Day for Replies:

1-3 PM and 10 AM-12 PM yield the highest reply rates, aligning with student availability between or after classes.



Fastest Replies:

Response times are quickest between 1-4 PM, while evenings (6-10 PM) see the slowest replies.



Worst Times of Day:

7-9 AM and 5-7 PM show the lowest engagement, likely due to morning commutes and after-school responsibilities.



Day of the Week Matters Less:

- Weekdays see consistent engagement with no major differences in response rates.
- Saturday has **significantly lower reply rates**, suggesting reduced student availability on weekends.



Message Length: Keep It Short for Maximum Engagement

Attention spans are limited, and shorter messages consistently drive higher response rates among 2-Year Institution students.

These shorter messages achieve



the reply rate of longer messages (300+ characters), which have the lowest engagement.

Messages between 50-100 characters receive the highest reply rates.

Keeping messages brief ensures students are more likely to engage. However, once a student is engaged in a conversation, longer, more detailed responses may be appropriate.

The Power of Smart Messages

Mongoose's **Smart Messages**—interactive, response-driven outreach—significantly improve engagement rates compared to traditional batch messaging.

Smart Messages have a **4.5x higher reply rate** than regular messages.

Two-thirds of 2-Year Institutions have adopted Smart Messages, showing strong momentum in this strategy.

Smart Messages allow institutions to reach more students with less effort: Smart Message batches are, on average, twice the size of non-Smart Message batches.

Message Content: What Drives or Reduces Engagement?

Not all messages are created equal. Certain content choices increase response rates, while others cause disengagement.



Messages with questions receive
3.5x the reply rate
of messages without.



Messages without URLs achieve
6x the reply rate
of those with URLs, which take students
away from the conversation.



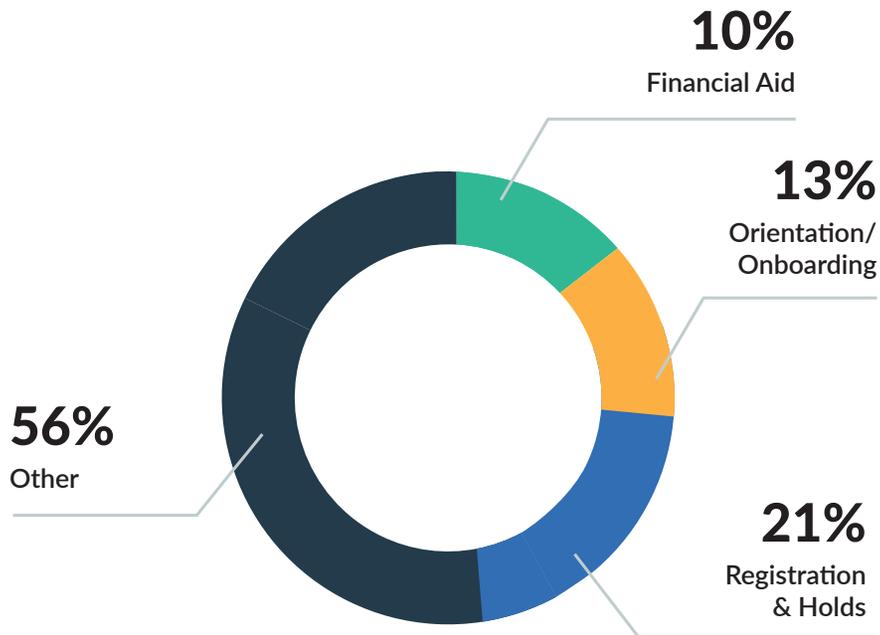
Messages without images have
**1.5x higher
reply rates**
than those with images.

Institutional Demographics: Does Size or Location Matter?
Institution size does not significantly impact engagement rates.

Conversation Analysis: What Students Are Talking About

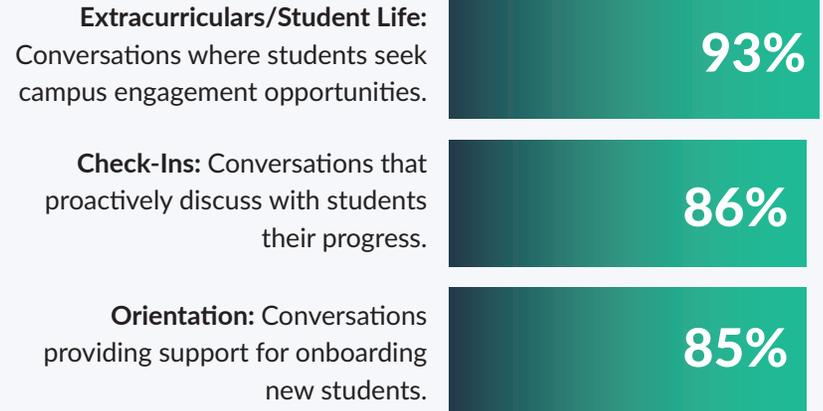
Student conversations at 2-Year Institutions span a wide range of topics, with a more balanced distribution of inquiries compared to other institutional categories.

Most Common Conversation Topics

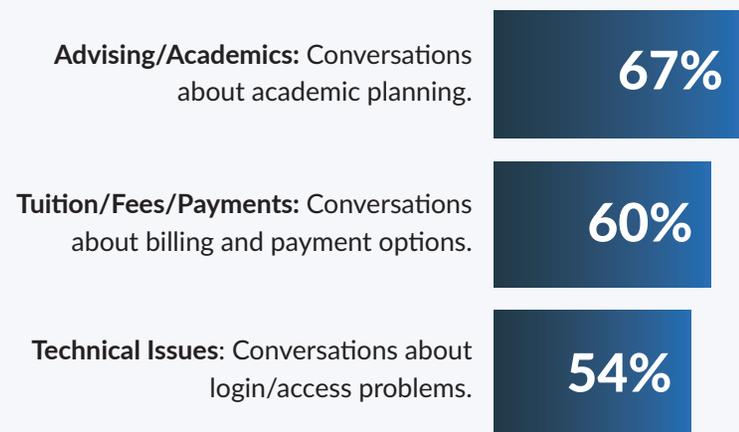


- **Registration & Holds:** Conversations that address registration deadlines, course selection, and account holds.
- **Orientation/Onboarding:** Conversations that support students as they transition into their academic programs.
- **Financial Aid:** Conversations that help students navigate tuition, grants, and scholarships.

Topics with the Highest Resolution Rates



Topics with the Lowest Resolution Rates (High Opportunity Areas)



Conversation Analysis: Digging into Sentiment and Resolution

Understanding how students feel about their interactions with institutions helps improve messaging strategies.

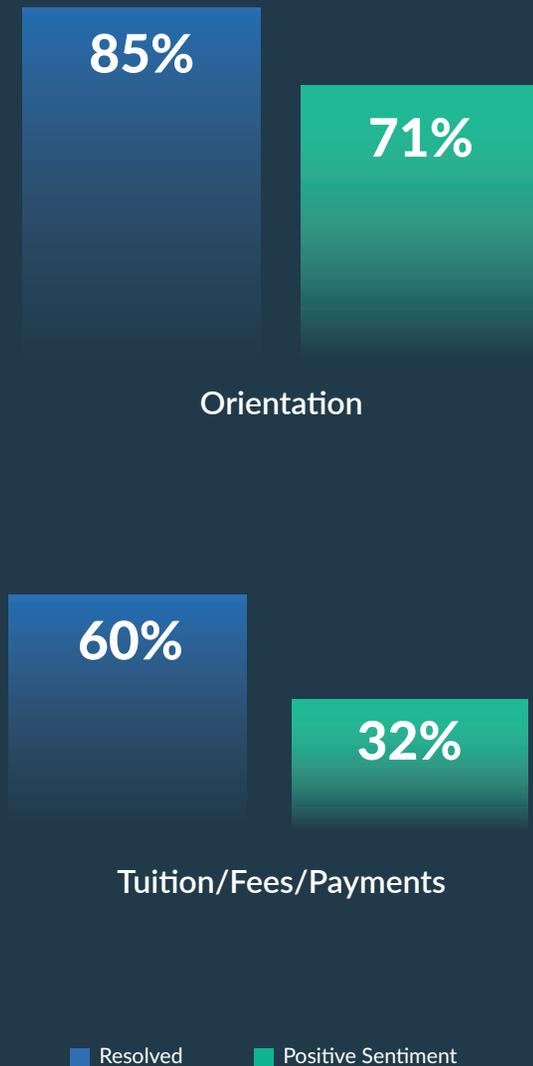
High-resolution categories tend to have high positive sentiment:

- **Orientation (85% resolved, 71% positive sentiment):** Students appreciate structured onboarding support.
- **Career Guidance (70% positive sentiment):** Career-related conversations see strong appreciation, reinforcing their importance.
- **Student Support Services (70% positive sentiment):** Students value clear and helpful support.

Financial and technical support generate the most frustration:

- **Tuition/Fees/Payments (60% resolved, 32% positive sentiment):** Many students struggle with payment concerns, leading to lower satisfaction.
- **Technical Issues (54% resolved, 43% positive sentiment):** Login and platform-related challenges create frustration.
- **Transfer Needs (46% positive sentiment):** Students navigating transfers often face uncertainty, resulting in lower sentiment.

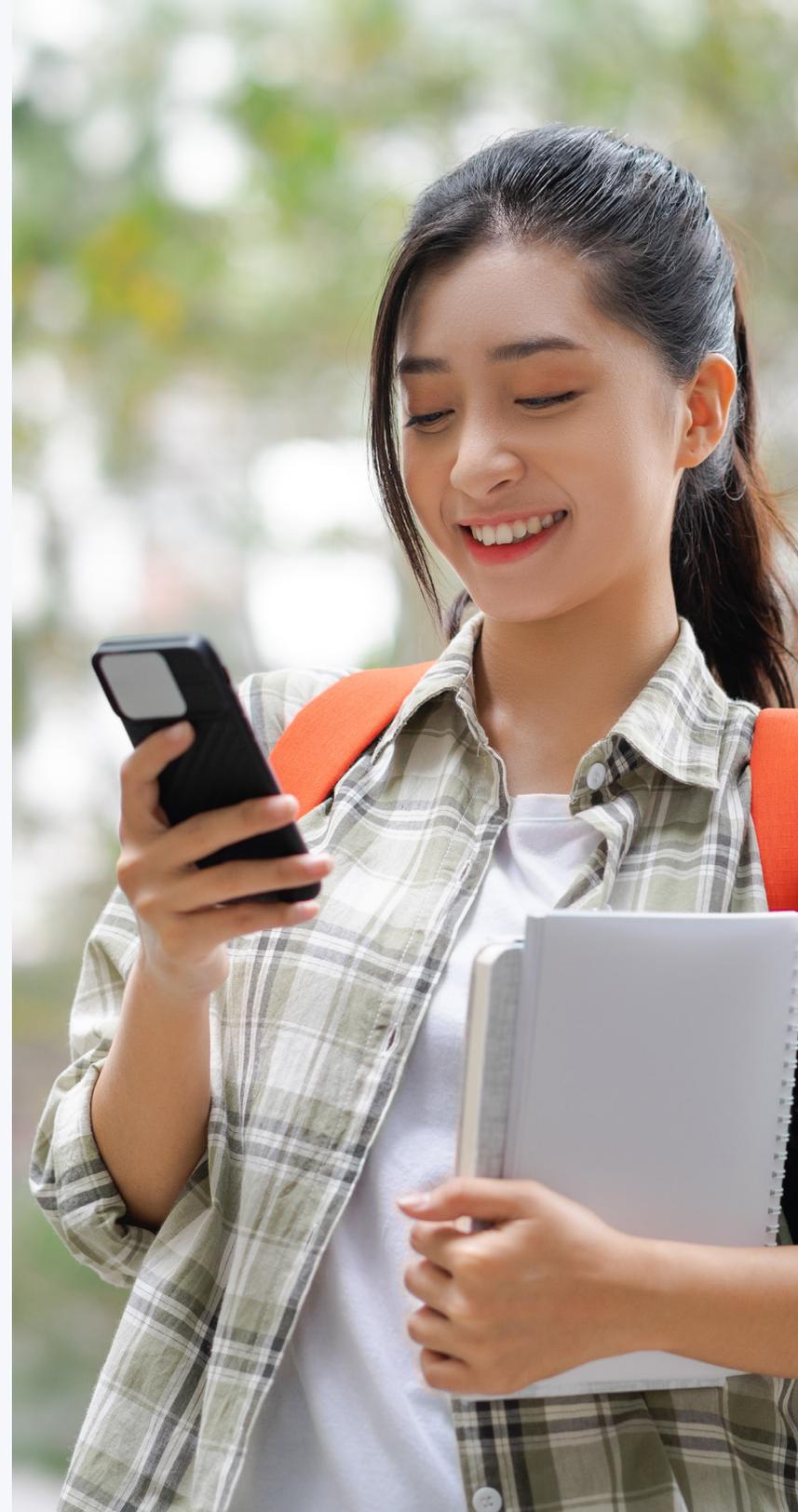
Resolution vs. Sentiment



Opt-Out Trends: When Do Students Disengage?

While opt-out rates at 2-Year Institutions are relatively low, the patterns that do emerge offer clear signals about when and why students disengage from messaging.

- **Neutral and negative sentiment conversations have the highest opt-out rates**, at 1.3–1.4%. This suggests that when a message doesn't feel helpful or personal, students are just as likely to disengage as when they're actively frustrated—highlighting the importance of making even neutral conversations feel positive and supportive.
- **Admissions-related and general topics lead in opt-out frequency**, with 1.5–1.8% of those conversations resulting in disengagement. These messages may feel irrelevant or poorly timed for students already settled into their academic path.
- **Tactical, student-service conversations show the lowest opt-out rates**, particularly in categories like appointments, meetings, payment plans, tuition, and financial aid. These messages are direct, helpful, and action-oriented—exactly the kind of communication students want to receive.



Best Practices for 2-Year Institutions



Optimize messaging timing

Send messages during peak reply windows (late mornings and early afternoons).



Keep it concise

Shorter messages (under 100 characters) drive significantly higher engagement.



Leverage Smart Messages

Interactive, question-driven messages increase response rates by 4.5x.



Focus on high-impact conversations

Orientation and career guidance drive the highest engagement and should remain a priority.



Reduce reliance on links and MMS

Messages without URLs or images consistently perform better.



Use proactive check-ins to boost retention

Check-in conversations show high engagement. Schools should use automated Smart Messages to proactively check on students' academic progress and registration needs.



Improve financial, technical, and academic advising support

Financial aid and technical issues generate significant student frustration. Institutions should also proactively support academic advising conversations by offering clearer guidance and follow-ups.



Enhance transfer student communication

Transfer conversations have only 46% positive sentiment, indicating a need for more transparent, proactive outreach to help students navigate the process.



Invest in student support services messaging

Conversations about student support services generate strong engagement. Institutions should continue promoting access to mental health resources, disability support, and general assistance.



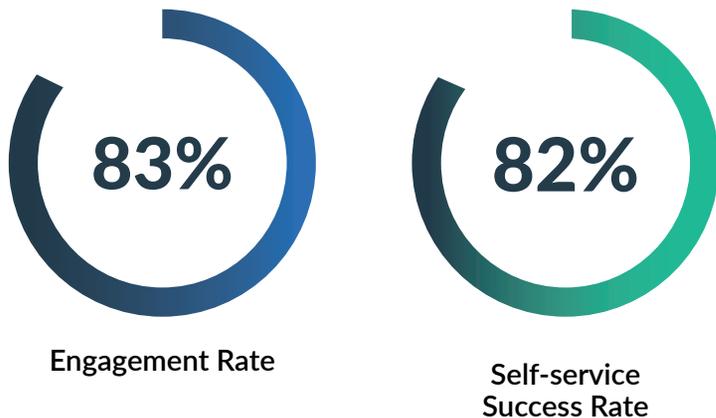
To minimize opt-outs, institutions should prioritize clarity, relevance, and usefulness in every message. Even neutral conversations need a clear purpose and student benefit in order to keep engagement high.

Chat: Key Findings

Chat tools (also known as Chatbots) are transforming how institutions engage with prospective and current students by providing instant, 24/7 support while capturing valuable leads and streamlining inquiries. Mongoose's analysis of 133,311 Chat conversations from 2023-2024 highlights their impact on engagement, lead generation, and service efficiency.

Chat Engagement: A High-Impact Channel

Students and website visitors actively use chatbots to find quick answers, request follow-ups, and navigate institutional resources. Our data shows that Chat tools serve as an effective first-line engagement tool, driving student interaction, self-service support, and lead capture. Institutions that have not yet implemented Chat solutions are missing a major opportunity to improve the quality of service offered to students, while also reducing the workload of staff.



- **83% engagement rate:** The vast majority of visitors interact with Chat.
- **82% self-service success rate:** Most users find the information they need without escalating to a human agent.

AI Chat vs Playbook Chat: Understanding the Difference

We analyzed two types of Chat tool interactions:

- **AI Chat:** Uses AI, training on relevant data, to generate dynamic, context-aware responses.
- **Playbook Chat:** Follows predefined scripts based on visitor inputs.

AI Chat shows higher engagement rates than Playbook Chat:

Live Chat is requested **2.7x more often** in Playbook Chat than in AI Chat

- Suggesting that AI-driven responses more effectively address visitor needs without requiring human intervention.
- Transferring conversations to other teams remains underutilized, limiting the potential for escalating more complex inquiries to the right department.

The Impact of Off-Hours Conversations

Chat plays a critical role in providing support beyond standard business hours, ensuring that students receive assistance whenever they need it.

- **47% of all Chat conversations** occur outside of normal office hours
Engagement rates are even higher during off-hours—**98% of visitors** interact with AI chatbots during these times.
- **Over 30% of all follow-up requests** originate from off-hours conversations, ensuring that students who need additional support are queued for human follow-up.



47%

of chat conversations occur outside of normal office hours



98%

of visitors interact with AI chatbots during off-hours



30%

of all follow-up requests originate from off-hours conversations

Live Chat Utilization: Underused but Still Valuable

Live chat remains an option for students seeking human support, but its overall usage is low when AI or Playbook Chat is available.

Only 6% of all Chat conversations escalate to Live Chat



Lead Capture & Follow-Up Potential

Chat tools are valuable for lead generation, helping institutions collect information from prospective students for future engagement.

- **Average lead capture rate is 25%**, with some Chat tools capturing leads in over 50% of their conversations.
- Many **follow-up requests originate from Chat interactions**, ensuring students receive the information they need even when staff are unavailable.

Chat Best Practices for All Institutions

- **Reduce the burden on staff:** Chat tools significantly enhance engagement and service efficiency.
- **Optimize off-hours Chat engagement:** Nearly half of Chat conversations occur outside of business hours, and engagement is even higher off-hours.
- **Optimize Chat workflows for follow-ups and lead capture:** About a third of follow-up requests come from Chat interactions – ensure Chat tools effectively flag and route follow-up requests to staff.

Cross-Team & Institutional Comparisons: Key Trends & Opportunities

The following section highlights key cross-team comparisons, institutional differences, and actionable insights that can help institutions refine their communication strategies.

Why compare to 4-Year Institutions?

While this report is focused specifically on Community & Technical Colleges (2-Year Institutions), we've included comparative data from 4-Year Institutions—broken down by key departments like Admissions, Student Success, and Advancement—to provide a broader context for understanding what works across higher ed.

These comparisons help highlight where engagement strategies align across institution types—and where the needs and behaviors of students, alumni, and prospects diverge. In doing so, we aim to give 2-Year Institutions not only a benchmark within their own segment, but also a deeper understanding of how their strategies stack up against those used at 4-Year schools.



Messaging Timing: When Engagement Peaks (And When It Doesn't)

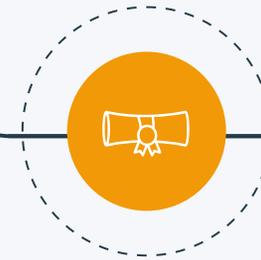
While each institutional area has distinct engagement patterns, there are notable differences in the best and worst times for messaging across teams. Institutions should customize their messaging strategies based on audience behaviors.

Admissions:

The afternoon (1-2 PM) and late evening (8-9 PM) see the highest reply rates—aligning with times when prospective students are taking breaks from school or personal obligations.

Student Success:

The early morning (7 AM) and mid-afternoon (2-3 PM) see peak engagement—suggesting that current students are more responsive earlier in the day than prospects.



Advancement:

Late at night (8-10 PM) and mid-morning (10 AM-12 PM) see stronger alumni and donor engagement—highlighting the flexibility alumni have in responding to institutional outreach.

2-Year Institutions (all areas):

Late morning (10 AM-12 PM) and early afternoon (1-3 PM) see peak reply rates, aligning more closely with student success teams but differing from four-year institutions.

Day of the Week Trends: When to Send Messages

The effectiveness of messaging varies significantly across teams based on the day of the week. Saturday is a universally poor day for engagement across all teams. However, the best days for engagement vary by team, so institutions should align their outreach schedules accordingly.



Admissions

Monday and Thursday see the highest engagement, while Saturday has the lowest (8x lower than Monday).



Student Success

Sunday and Wednesday are the best days for engagement, while Monday and Saturday are the worst.



Advancement:

Unlike Admissions and Student Success, Advancement messages perform equally well on all weekdays, with weekends seeing slightly lower response rates.



2-Year Institutions (all areas)

Engagement remains steady across all weekdays, but Saturdays see a significant drop.

The Impact of Smart Messaging: A Game-Changer Across Teams

Across all institutional types, Mongoose's **Smart Messages** significantly outperform traditional batch messaging, leading to higher response rates, greater efficiency, and stronger engagement across all institutional areas. Institutions that have not yet implemented Smart Messages have a major opportunity to enhance their outreach efforts.

- **Admissions:** Smart Messages generate 3x higher reply rates than regular messages.
- **Student Success:** Smart Messages have 4.5x the engagement rate of regular messages.
- **Advancement:** Smart Messages drive 2.5x more engagement compared to static batch messaging.
- **2-Year Institutions (all areas):** Community and Technical Colleges using Smart Messages see 4.5x better reply rates, and two-thirds of them have already adopted this strategy.



The Future of Higher Ed Messaging

The data is clear: conversations—not just notifications—drive results. Institutions that invest in two-way, interactive messaging will be best positioned to foster stronger relationships, improve outcomes, and maximize the impact of their communications.

Whether it's Admissions teams guiding prospective students through enrollment, Student Success teams providing academic and personal support, or Advancement teams deepening alumni engagement, effective communication strategies are key to institutional success.

“

Mongoose is an incredibly user-friendly system, which is critical for getting staff to actually use it. The integration with Slate and Colleague was straightforward, and the support we've received has been phenomenal. It's become an essential tool for our enrollment and student success efforts.

DUSTIE HAMILTON, DIRECTOR OF ENROLLMENT
SYSTEMS AT MCCLENNAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



APPENDIX

Methodology

Data Sources & Integrity – Messaging Data from Hundreds of Institutions, Millions of Conversations

Mongoose prioritizes data security and privacy. All collected messaging data is aggregated, anonymized, and securely stored. No personally identifiable information is shared or made public. Institutions maintain complete control over their communications while adhering to best-in-class data security practices.

Using Mongoose data from the 2023-2024 academic year, collected from colleges and universities already using our platform, we analyzed key insights on conversational effectiveness and engagement.

Our Text Message Dataset

Mongoose's proprietary dataset includes messaging data from over 600 higher education institutions spanning 4,000+ teams and 19,000 Mongoose users. To ensure meaningful comparisons, we structured our dataset into distinct segments:

Four-Year Institutions: Admissions

- 353 unique institutions
- 24 million contacts

Four-Year Institutions: Student Success

- 171 unique institutions
- 4 million contacts

Four-Year Institutions: Advancement

- 134 unique institutions
- 8 million contacts

Two-Year Institutions: All Departments

- 72 unique institutions
- 7 million contacts

Messaging Data Analyzed

- 16 million+ unique messaging recipients
- More than 80 million text messages

How We Define a Text Conversation

A conversation is a series of text messages exchanged between a recipient and sender within a specific inbox over a rolling 3-day window:

- **Short & Transactional Conversations:** Quick exchanges with a clear resolution.
- **Longer, Ongoing Conversations:** Multi-message interactions that require follow-ups.
- Conversations that are inactive for three days are considered new conversations if re-initiated.

Key Text Message Measures

For this report, we focused on four core metrics and analytics:

- **Engagement Rate:** The percentage of outgoing messages that received a reply, calculated as the ratio of replies to total outgoing messages.
- **Response Time:** The duration between an outgoing message and an incoming reply, tracked only if the response occurs within 24 hours.
- **Resolution Rate:** The percentage of conversations determined by our AI technology to be resolved, based on whether all student inquiries were answered.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** AI-driven analysis of conversation tone, classifying responses as Appreciation (Positive Sentiment) or Frustration (Negative Sentiment).

Our Chat Dataset

In addition to analyzing text messaging trends, Mongoose's dataset includes AI- and playbook-powered chatbot interactions, providing insight into automated engagement, self-service effectiveness, and live chat escalation patterns. This data helps institutions optimize their conversational AI strategies while ensuring students receive timely support.

Chat Dataset Overview

Our chat dataset consists of **133,311 total chat conversations** collected from institutions leveraging our AI-driven and scripted playbook chatbots for student engagement. The data was analyzed to identify engagement trends, self-service success rates, lead capture effectiveness, and live chat handoff patterns.

How We Define a Chat Conversation

A chat conversation is defined as a single session of interaction between a visitor and the chatbot, whether AI- or playbook-driven. These conversations may include:

- **Self-Service Interactions:** Students finding the answers they need through AI-driven responses.
- **Lead Capture Conversations:** Collecting student or prospect contact information for follow-up by institutional staff.
- **Live Chat Handoff Requests:** When a visitor requests to speak with a staff member, transitioning from bot interaction to a human agent.

Key Chat Measures

For this report, we focused on four core metrics and analytics:

- **Engagement Rate:** The percentage of visitors interacting meaningfully with the chatbot.
- **Self-Service Success Rate:** The proportion of conversations that provided visitors with the information they needed without escalation.
- **Lead Capture Rate:** The percentage of chatbot conversations where student contact information was collected for follow-up.
- **Live Chat Escalation Rate:** The proportion of chatbot conversations that resulted in a live agent handoff.



Ready to Transform Your Messaging Strategy?

Higher ed communication is evolving—are you keeping up? Institutions that embrace two-way conversations, AI-driven insights, and innovative messaging tools like RCS and WhatsApp will lead the way in student engagement, retention, and alumni relations.

Mongoose is here to help. Explore the future of Conversation Intelligence and start building smarter, more impactful connections today.

[Book a Demo](#)

hellomongoose.com/book-a-demo

ABOUT MONGOOSE

Mongoose is the leading Conversation Intelligence Platform (CIP), trusted by more colleges and universities than any other platform to send messages to their constituents. We help institutions build trust and empathy through AI-driven insights, turning unstructured conversation data into actionable intelligence. By enabling personalized, compliant, and standards-aligned communication, Mongoose empowers teams to engage at scale, strengthen relationships, and enhance outcomes across the student lifecycle. Thousands of teams at over 1,000 institutions rely on Mongoose to make 100 million connections annually, fostering relationships that drive student success, deepen alumni bonds, and strengthen community ties—all through transformative, conversation-driven engagement.