

20



25



# The State of Higher Ed Messaging

Mongoose 2025 Benchmark Report for 4-Year Institutions

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 01 / INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
Understanding the State of Higher Ed Messaging	3
Key Questions This Report Answers	5
<b>CHAPTER 02 / UNDERSTANDING KEY TERMINOLOGY</b>	<b>6</b>
Conversation Intelligence	7
Sentiment & Resolution Insights	8
Resolution of Conversations	8
Smart Messages	9
Opt-Out Rates	9
<b>CHAPTER 03 / MESSAGING BENCHMARKS</b>	<b>10</b>
Admissions	10
Student Success	21
Advancement	27
Chat: Key Findings	33
Cross-Team & Institutional Comparisons: Key Trends & Opportunities	35
The Future of Higher Ed Messaging	38
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>39</b>





# 01. INTRODUCTION

## Understanding the State of Higher Ed Messaging

Higher education is in the midst of a communications revolution. Every year, institutions send millions of messages across multiple channels, shaping critical moments in the student journey—from recruitment to retention, from alumni engagement to fundraising. Yet, as outreach volume increases, so do the expectations of students, prospects, alumni, and donors.



Not long ago, prospective students may have been content to receive glossy mailers, and current students and alums to receive emails, voicemail or SMS messages reminding them to register for classes, check their grades, or make annual donations. But today, attitudes have changed: Prospects, students, and alums expect messaging that stokes genuine engagement. This means **real conversations** that are timely, relevant, personalized, and **empathetic**.

And while CRMs provide a crucial foundation for student data management, they were not designed to provide **empathy at scale**. These systems excel at organizing records and workflows, but they don't facilitate real-time, interactive conversations that build relationships and drive action—without increasing workloads for already stretched teams.

Every unanswered question, delayed response, or disengaged student represents a missed opportunity. Institutions that fail to evolve their messaging risk losing not just prospective students but also current students at risk of attrition and alumni whose giving potential remains untapped.

That's why we created **The State of Higher Ed Messaging: Mongoose 2025 Benchmark Report**—to provide institutions with data-driven insights into what works, what doesn't, and where there's opportunity for improvement. By analyzing millions of real-world conversations across Admissions, Student Success, and Advancement teams at 4-Year Institutions, we've uncovered clear trends in engagement, response behavior, and resolution rates.

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 institutions with clear, actionable data on how to optimize their outreach and turn messaging into real impact. Our goal is to help universities and colleges 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 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 frustration (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

### Admissions

Effective communication is essential for Admissions teams seeking to engage prospective students, increase application completion rates, and drive enrollment. Mongoose's analysis of real-world messaging data from Admissions teams reveals clear patterns in response behavior, offering actionable strategies to improve outreach effectiveness.



# 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:

1-2 PM and 8-9 PM see the highest reply rates, aligning with common breaks in student schedules.

## Fastest Replies:

Students respond quickest in early to mid-afternoon and after dinner—mirroring peak reply rates.



## Worst Times of Day:

7 AM and 5-6 PM have the lowest engagement, likely due to early morning routines and evening transitions.

## Day of the Week Matters:

- **Best Days:** Monday and Thursday yield the highest engagement.
- **Worst Day:** Saturday sees the lowest response rates, with reply rates 8x lower than Monday.



## Message Length: Keep It Short for Maximum Engagement

Attention spans are limited—shorter messages consistently drive higher response rates.

50-100 character messages perform best achieving,



higher reply rates than longer messages.

Messages over 250 characters have the lowest reply rates.

Keeping messages concise is critical to capturing students' attention. However, once a student is actively engaged in a conversation, longer, more detailed messages may be appropriate.

## The Power of Smart Messages

Mongoose's Smart Messages—interactive, response-driven outreach—significantly outperform traditional messaging.

Smart Messages generate **3x higher reply rates** than non-Smart Messages.

Messages that ask a direct question with a clear call to action see **3x higher engagement** than generic messages.

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  
**2x the replies**  
of messages without.



Adding a call-to-action  
(e.g., multiple-choice  
options) increases reply  
rates even further—  
**up to 3x.**



Messages with URLs have  
**5x lower  
reply rates**  
than those without, as they  
pull recipients away from the  
conversation.



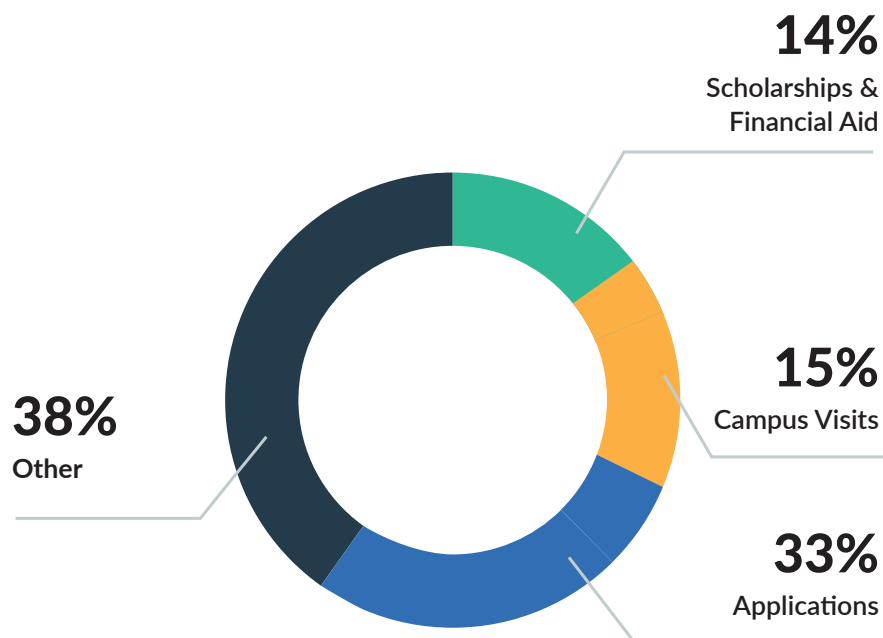
Messages without images have  
**1.5x higher  
reply rates**  
than those with images.

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

# Conversation Analysis: What Students Are Talking About

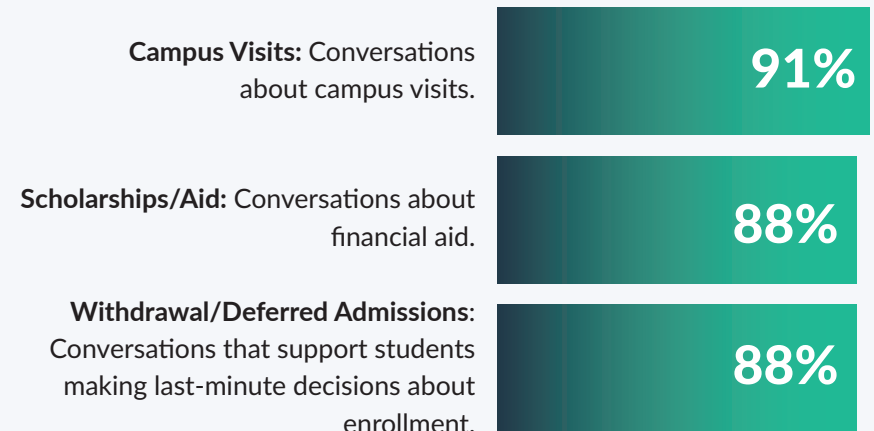
Prospective students engage in conversations across a range of topics, with certain categories driving the highest engagement and resolution rates.

## Most Common Conversation Topics

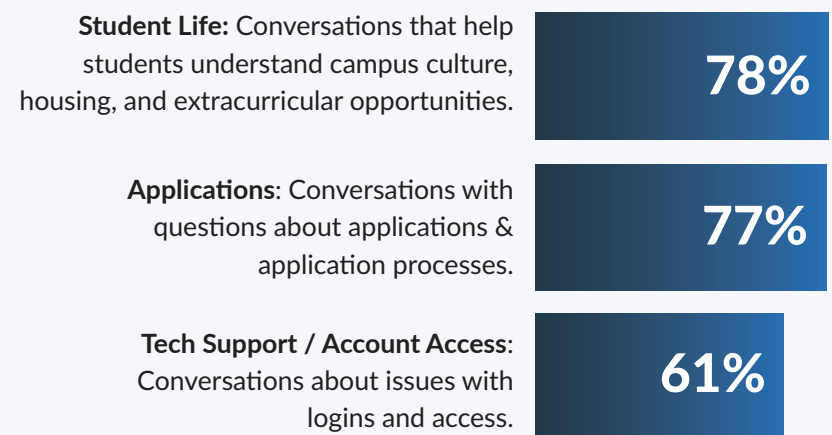


- **Campus Visits:** Conversations about campus visits.
- **Student Life:** Conversations that help students understand campus culture, housing, and extracurricular opportunities.
- **Withdrawal/Deferred Admissions:** Conversations that support students making last-minute decisions about enrollment.

## Topics with the Highest Resolution Rates



## Topics with the Lowest Resolution Rates (High Opportunity Areas)





## Conversation Analysis: Digging into Sentiment and Resolution

Admissions conversations cover a wide range of topics, from campus visits to financial aid inquiries. While some—such as event coordination and student life—have high resolution rates, other critical areas like financial aid and applications remain unresolved at higher rates. Understanding the relationship between sentiment and resolution can help Admissions teams refine their messaging strategies to better engage students and support enrollment outcomes.

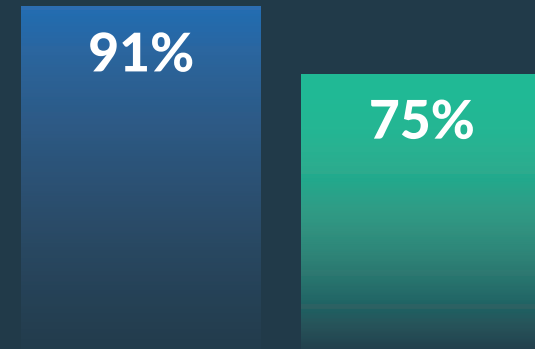
Complex admissions processes have lower resolution rates:

- **Scholarships & Financial Aid (78% resolved, 70% positive sentiment):**  
While most students appreciate financial aid guidance, these conversations often require follow-ups, leading to a lower level of resolution.
- **Applications (77% resolved, 64% positive sentiment):**  
Application-related conversations frequently involve multiple steps, deadlines, and document submissions, contributing to longer resolution times.
- **Tech Support / Account Access (61% resolved, 50% positive sentiment):**  
Login and access issues generate frustration, leading to the lowest sentiment among all categories.

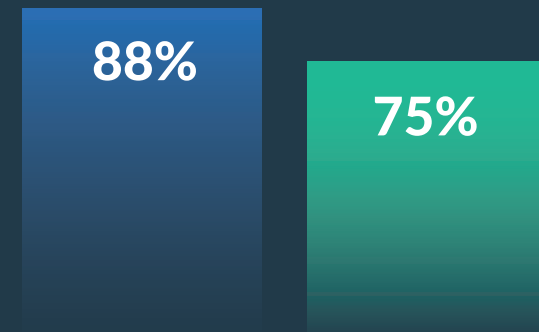
Even difficult conversations maintain relatively high sentiment:

- **Withdrawal/Deferred Admissions (66% positive sentiment):**  
Although these discussions often involve difficult decisions, students still appreciate clear guidance and support.

### Resolution vs. Sentiment



Campus Visits



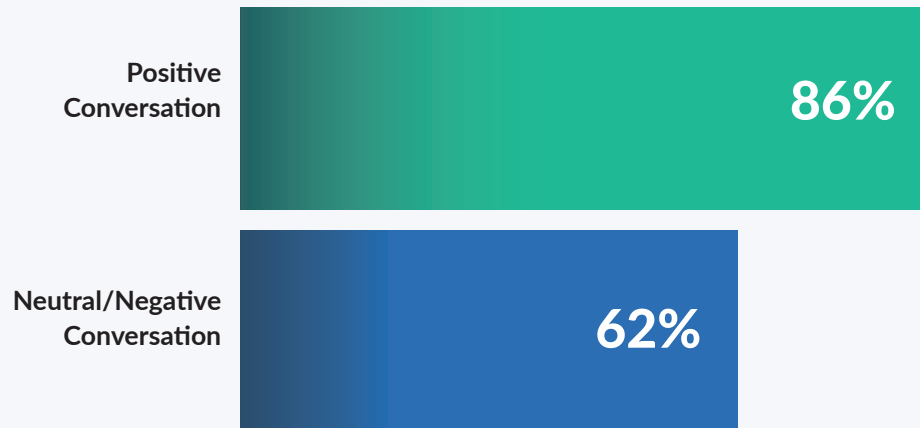
Student Life

■ Resolved ■ Positive Sentiment

High-resolution topics tend to have high positive sentiment. Conversations related to **Campus Visits** and **Student Life** demonstrate that students value interactions that help them connect with campus experiences and student engagement opportunities.

## How Sentiment & Resolution Impact Engagement

Our data shows that students who have a positive first conversation are far more likely to continue engaging with Admissions teams:



86% of students who start with a positive conversation go on to have multiple conversations.

62% of students who start with a neutral or negative conversation still continue engaging.

Whether a first conversation is fully resolved or not does not significantly impact whether a student returns for a second conversation—what matters is responding and engaging in a meaningful way.

From an engagement perspective, neutral conversations present the biggest opportunity for improvement. While negative conversations remain steady at around 6%, neutral conversations drop from 30% in a student's first conversation to just 20% in later interactions.





# Opt-Out Trends: When Do Students Disengage?

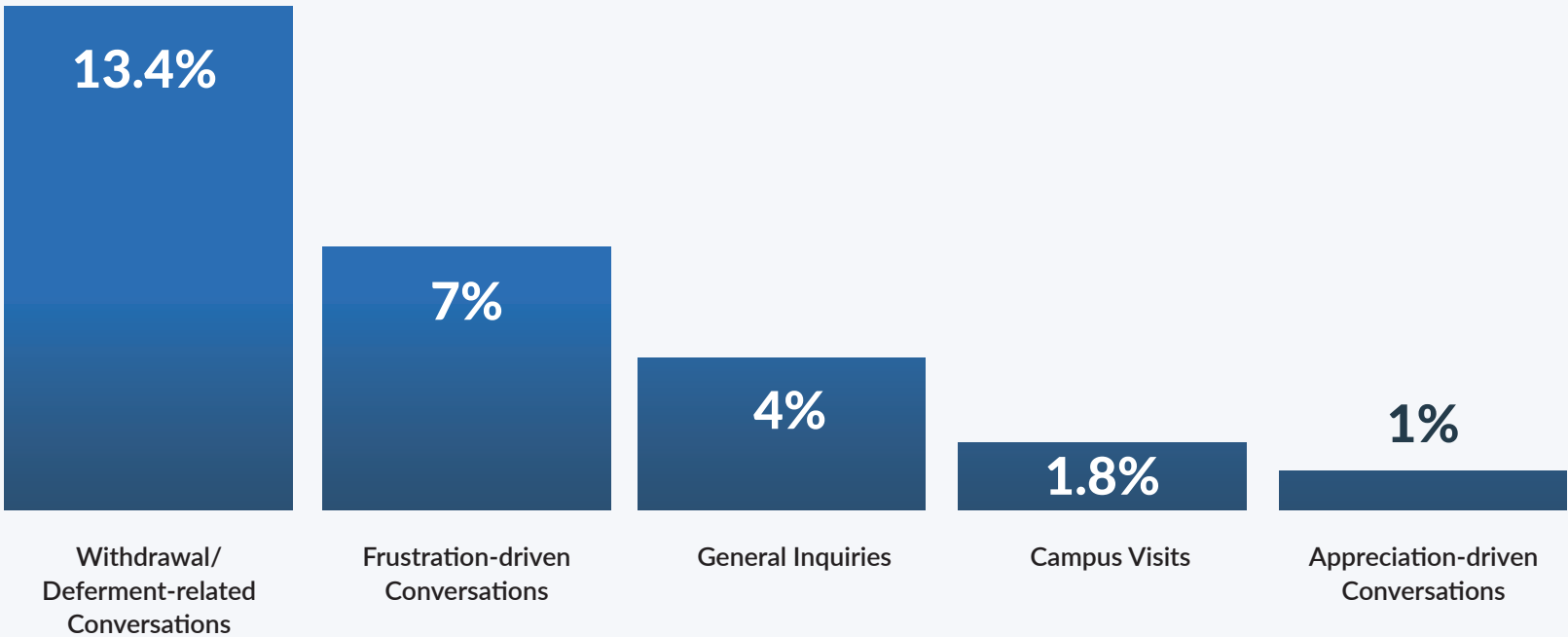
**Withdrawal/Deferment**-related conversations see the highest opt-out rates (13.4%), largely because students have already made a decision.

**General Inquiries** (4%) and campus visits (1.8%) have significantly lower opt-out rates.

**Frustration-driven conversations** lead to a 7% opt-out rate, whereas appreciation-driven conversations result in fewer than 1% opt-outs.

Frustration doesn't necessarily cause disengagement, but institutions should focus on maintaining positive engagement for continued student interaction.


Opt-out rates vary by conversation type and sentiment



# The ROI of Messaging: Conversations vs. Notifications

Our research found that Admissions teams that optimize for conversations—rather than relying solely on notifications—see dramatically better enrollment outcomes across the entire funnel.

Yes, notifications work: students who receive reminders and alerts are **3.7x more likely** to take key enrollment actions than those who receive no messaging at all. But the real return comes when those messages turn into conversations.



Students who engage in two-way conversations—even brief ones—are **7.5x more likely to take action** than those who receive static notifications.

Students who engage in two-way conversations—even brief ones—are 7.5x more likely to take action than those who receive static notifications. And that difference compounds over time.

This is one of the biggest differentiators for institutions that use Mongoose. We’ve not only helped institutions deliver messages, but also track which messages turn into conversations—and which of those lead to results. This visibility into “what happens after the message” is something many schools don’t yet have access to in their systems today.

And the impact is clear: whether your biggest opportunity is driving campus visits, FAFSA completion, or reducing summer melt, it’s conversations—not just alerts—that will move the needle. One-size-fits-all blasts might get information out, but it’s the follow-up conversation that drives action—especially when a student is navigating personal, complex decisions.

If institutions can optimize for more conversations, all the pieces fall into place. Each interaction helps a student overcome a small hurdle—whether it’s confirming their visit, asking about aid, or understanding next steps—and together, those conversations unlock outcomes.

Outcome	Notification Impact	Conversation Impact
Application Completion	7x increase	34x increase
Enrollment Yield	2x increase	4x increase
Campus Visits	9x increase	45x increase
FAFSA Submissions	10x increase	13x increase

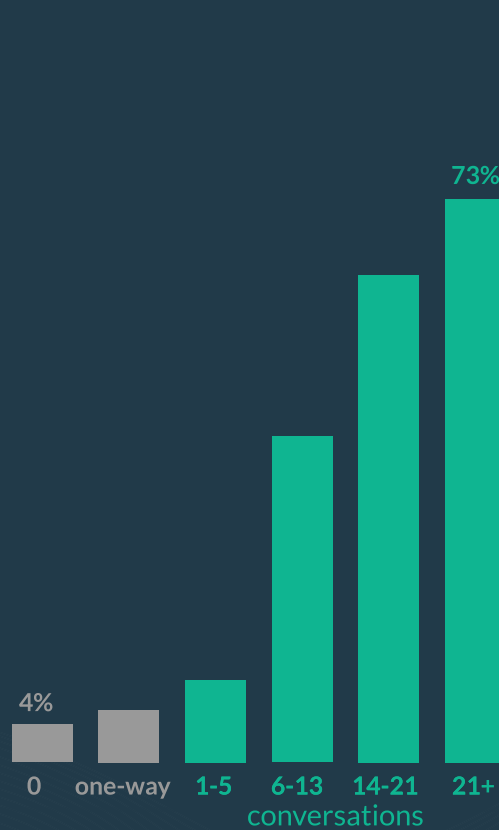


# The Number of Conversations Matters

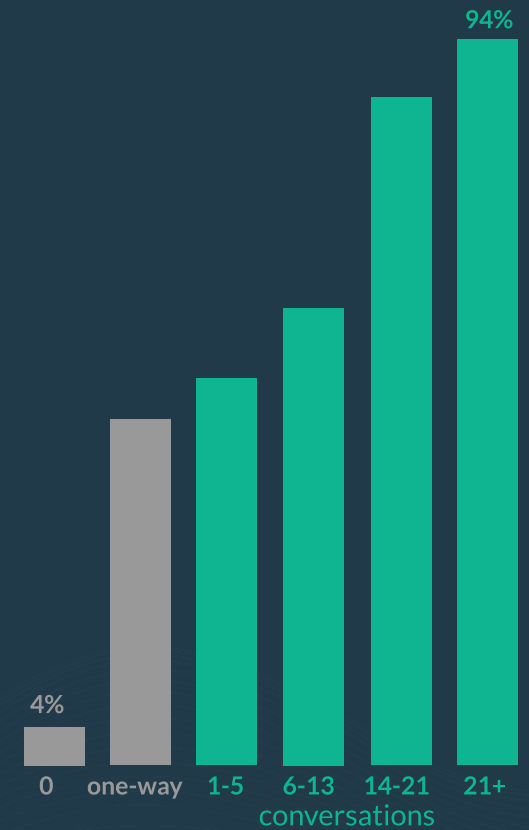
The more conversations recipients and senders have via text message, the better the outcome.



Enrollment Yield Rate



Campus Visit Rate



FAFSA Completion Rate

*\*Based on an analysis of 300,000 text conversations, as the volume of conversations increases, so do conversion rates.*

# Best Practices for Admissions Teams



## Optimize messaging timing

Send messages during peak reply windows (afternoons, early evenings, Mondays & Thursdays).



## Keep it concise

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



## Leverage Smart Messages

Interactive, question-driven messages with a clear call to action triple response rates.



## Focus on conversations, not just notifications

Engagement is 7.5x higher when students interact in two-way messaging.



## Limit links & MMS

Messages without URLs or images consistently perform better.



## Improve financial aid & application support

These categories have high student engagement but low resolution rates—optimizing these conversations can significantly impact enrollment.



## Convert neutral conversations into positive ones

Schools should work to reduce neutral sentiment by responding quickly, using empathetic language, and ensuring staff training focuses on key student concerns.



## Improve response to unresolved conversations

Hundreds of thousands of admissions inquiries remain unanswered; optimizing response times and message clarity can significantly impact application completion rates.



**Address tech support frustrations:** Students struggle with account access issues, leading to lower engagement. Schools should ensure login and platform support are easily accessible and efficiently handled.

# Student Success

Student Success teams play a critical role in guiding students through academic challenges, support services, and career planning. Mongoose's analysis of messaging data from Student Success teams reveals clear patterns in student engagement, providing actionable strategies to enhance outreach and improve student outcomes.

## Best Times to Engage: When Students Reply Most

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

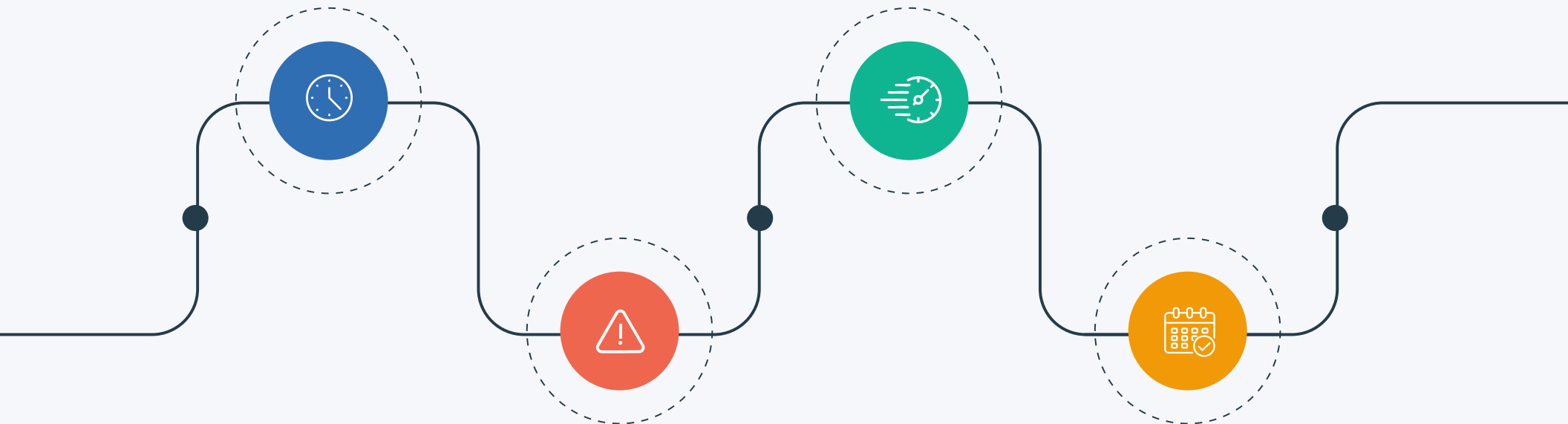
### Best Times of Day for Replies:

7 AM, 2 PM, and 6 PM see the highest reply rates, aligning with when students are most available for outreach.

### Fastest Replies:

Fastest replies occur between 2-4 PM and 11 AM-1 PM. Mornings and evenings tend to see slower response times.

Monday has the fastest response time, while weekends have the slowest—3-4x slower than weekdays.



### Worst Times of Day:

11 AM, 5 PM, and 8-10 PM have the lowest engagement, likely due to mid-day class schedules and late evening wind-down periods.

### Day of the Week Matters:

- **Best Days:** Sunday and Wednesday yield the highest engagement.
- **Worst Day:** Monday and Saturday have the lowest response rates.





## Message Length: Keep It Short for Maximum Engagement

- Messages between 100-150 characters receive the **highest reply rates**.
- These shorter messages have **2x the reply rate** compared to longer ones (300+ characters), which perform the worst.

Keeping messages concise is critical to capturing students' attention. However, once a student is actively engaged in a conversation, longer, more detailed messages may be appropriate.

## The Power of Smart Messages

Mongoose's **Smart Messages**—interactive, response-driven outreach—significantly outperform traditional batch messaging.

- Smart Messages generate **4.5x higher reply rates** than regular messages.
- 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.

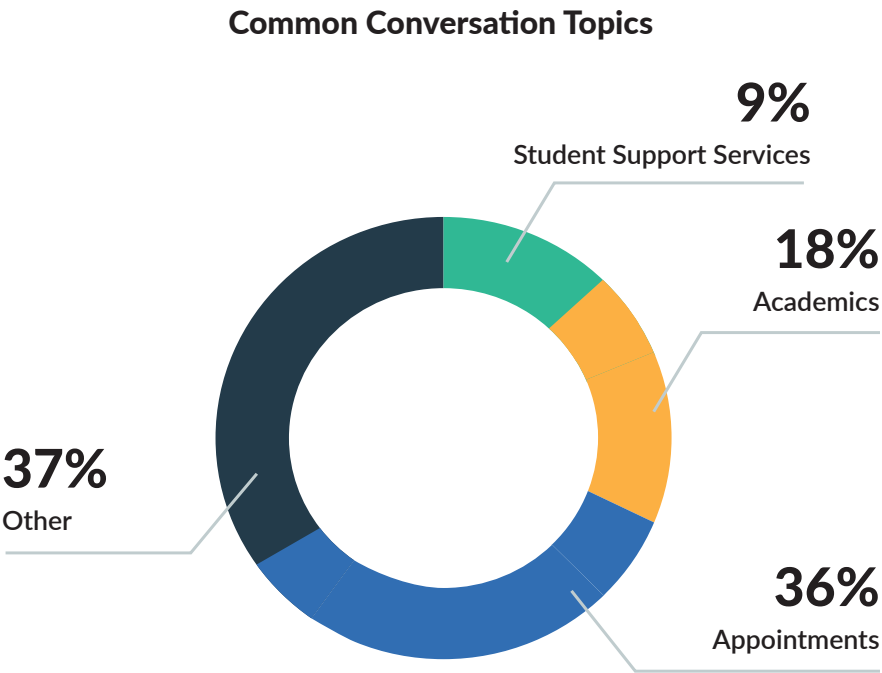
- Messages with questions receive **3x the replies** of messages without.
- Messages that include a URL have **significantly lower reply rates** as they direct recipients away from the conversation. Messages without URLs receive **6x the reply rate** of those with URLs.
- Messages without images receive **twice the reply rate** of those with images.

### Institutional Demographics: Does Size or Location Matter?

Institution size does not significantly impact engagement rates.

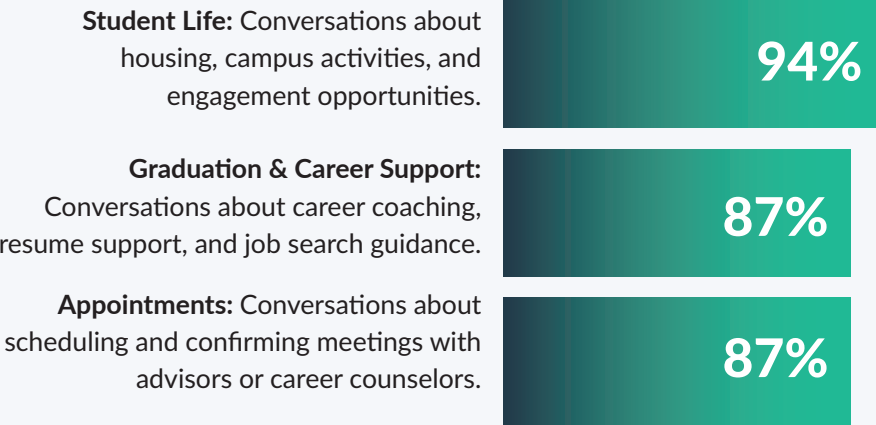
# Conversation Analysis: What Students Are Talking About

Student Success conversations span a wide range of topics. Understanding these topics allows institutions to prioritize outreach strategies that drive the greatest engagement and resolution rates.

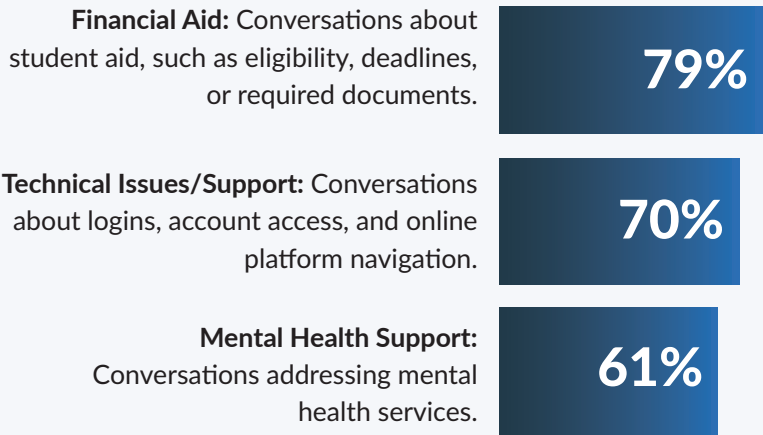


- **Appointments:** Conversations to schedule and confirm advising meetings, academic check-ins, and career coaching sessions.
- **Academics:** Conversations about coursework, tutoring, and class registration.
- **Student Support Services:** Conversations about campus resources like disability services, mental health support, and general student assistance.

## Topics with the Highest Resolution Rates



## Topics with the Lowest Resolution Rates (High Opportunity Areas)



# Conversation Analysis: Digging into Sentiment and Resolution

Student Success teams handle a diverse range of student inquiries, from academic support to personal challenges. While topics such as student life and career planning see high resolution rates, more complex issues—including financial aid, technical support, and mental health—often remain unresolved at higher rates. Understanding sentiment across these conversations provides valuable insights into how institutions can improve student engagement and support.

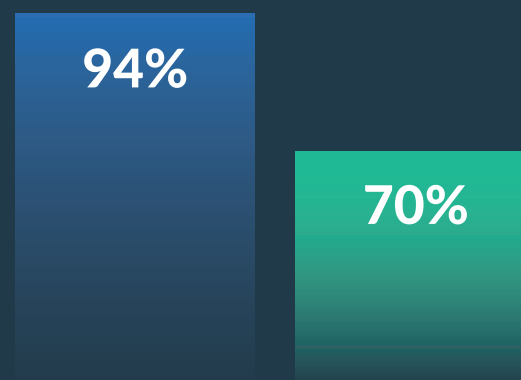
Complex student support conversations have lower resolution rates::

- **Financial Aid (79% resolved, 61% positive sentiment):** Financial aid inquiries often involve multiple steps, leading to more follow-ups and student uncertainty.
- **Technical Issues/Support (70% resolved, 50% positive sentiment):** Logins and account access remain common pain points for students, reflected in lower sentiment and resolution rates.
- **Mental Health (61% resolved, sentiment data not specified):** Mental health conversations require sensitive, ongoing support, leading to lower resolution rates.

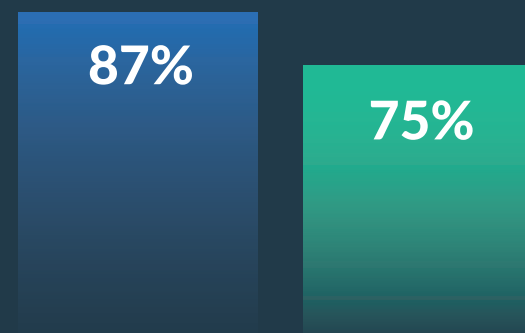
Even difficult conversations maintain relatively high sentiment:

- **Withdrawal/Deferred Admissions (66% positive sentiment):** While these conversations deal with major academic transitions, students appreciate clear and supportive communication during these critical moments.
- **Academics (64% positive sentiment):** Students navigating coursework and academic concerns generally express appreciation for guidance but may need further support to resolve their issues fully.

## Resolution vs. Sentiment



Student Life



Graduation & Career Support

■ Resolved ■ Positive Sentiment

High-resolution categories tend to have high positive sentiment. Conversations related to Student Life and Graduation & Career Support demonstrate that students value guidance on campus involvement and long-term planning.



# Opt-Out Trends: When Do Students Disengage?

**Neutral sentiment conversations** have the highest opt-out rate at 2.5%, compared to 1.2% for negative conversations and just 0.7% for appreciative ones.

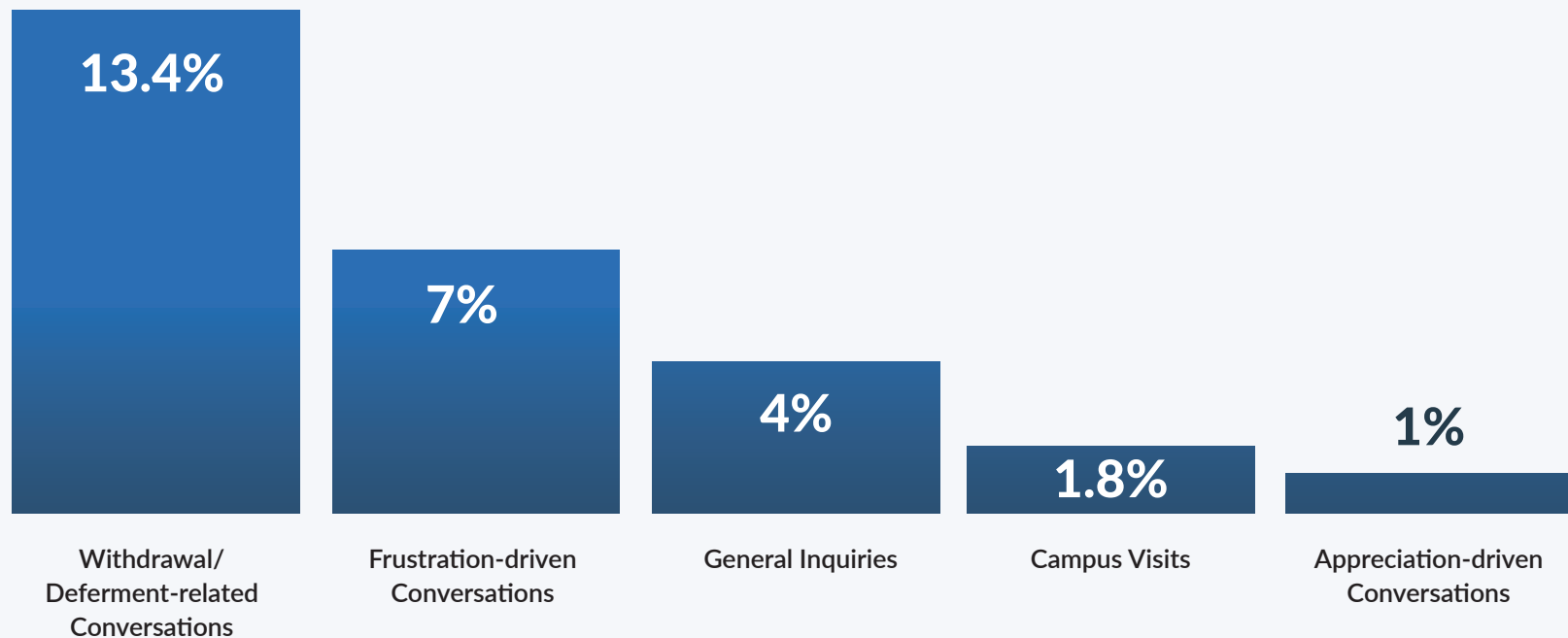
**General Inquiries** see the highest topic-based opt-out rate, suggesting that broad or non-specific messages lead to disengagement.

High-need topics like **Mental Health** (0.2%), **Student Support Services** (0.8%), **Academics** (0.8%), and **Financial Conversations** (1.0%) see significantly lower opt-out rates.

**Appointment-related conversations**—despite being high volume—also see a low opt-out rate of just 0.8%.

Students aren't opting out because they're upset—they disengage when the message doesn't feel relevant or helpful. Personalized, support-driven outreach keeps students engaged and moving forward.

Opt-out rates vary by conversation type and sentiment



# Best Practices for Student Success Teams



## Optimize messaging timing

Send messages during peak reply windows (mornings, mid-afternoon, early evenings).



## Keep it concise

Shorter messages (under 150 characters) drive significantly higher engagement.



## Leverage Smart Messages

Interactive, question-driven messages with a clear call to action improve response rates by 4.5x.



## Focus on conversations, not just notifications

Engagement is 7.5x higher when students interact in two-way messaging.



## Limit links & MMS

Messages without URLs or images consistently perform better.



## Prioritize career & graduation conversations

These conversations have the highest resolution rates and the strongest positive sentiment (87% resolved, 75% positive sentiment), reinforcing their role in student success.



## Convert neutral conversations into positive ones

Institutions should work to reduce neutral sentiment by responding quickly, using empathetic language, and ensuring staff training focuses on key student concerns.



## Address unresolved financial aid & tech support issues

These topics have lower resolution rates, signaling a need for clearer guidance, better staff training, and proactive follow-ups.



## Improve mental health support response strategies

Mental health inquiries remain the most unresolved. Institutions should ensure that these messages are met with empathetic, well-informed responses and referrals to the right campus resources.

# Advancement

Engaging alumni and donors through meaningful communication is critical for Advancement teams seeking to strengthen relationships, drive fundraising efforts, and increase event participation. Mongoose's analysis of real-world messaging data from Advancement teams highlights key engagement patterns and provides actionable insights to improve donor outreach and retention strategies.

## Best Times to Engage: When Alumni & Donors Reply Most

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

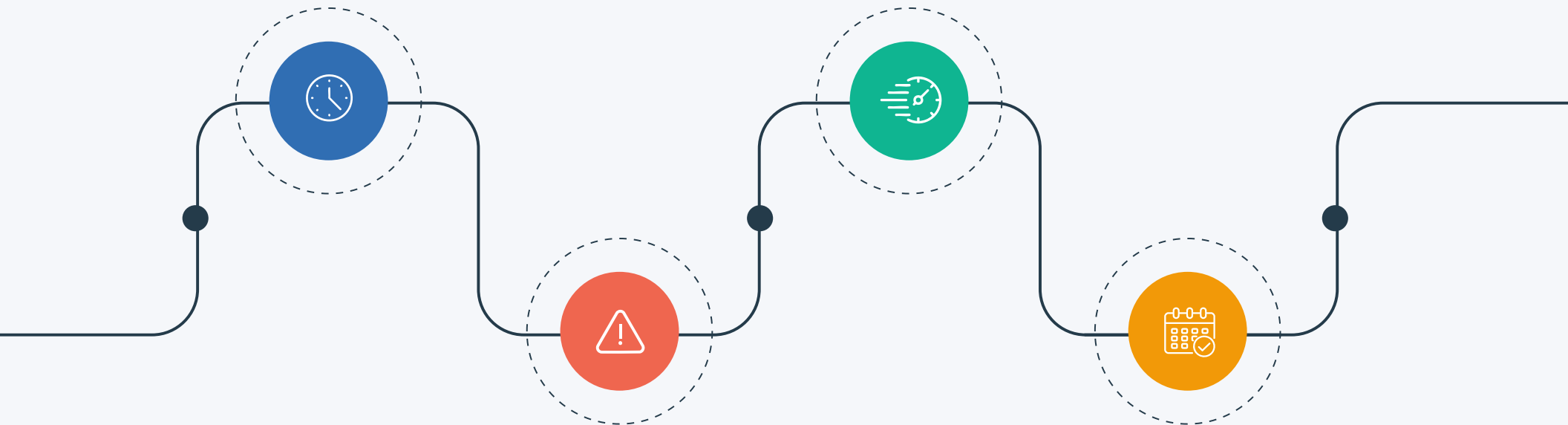
### Best Times of Day for Replies:

8-10 PM and 10 AM - 12 PM see the highest reply rates, indicating that alumni and donors are more likely to engage during late morning and evening hours.

### Fastest Replies:

Fastest response times occur between 10 AM - 3 PM. The slowest response times happen in the evening, between 7-10 PM.

Earlier in the week sees the fastest replies, with Sunday-Tuesday ranking highest, and Saturday has the worst response times.



### Worst Times of Day:

7-8 AM and 6-7 PM show lower engagement, likely due to early morning routines and dinner-time schedules.

### Day of the Week Matters less:

A weekdays perform equally well, meaning Advancement teams have flexibility in choosing when to send outreach.





## Message Length: Keep It Short for Maximum Engagement

- Messages between 100-150 characters receive the **highest reply rates**.
- These shorter messages have **2x the reply rate** of longer messages (300+ characters), which perform the worst.

While brevity is key, once a donor or alumnus is engaged in a conversation, more detailed responses may be appropriate.

## The Power of Smart Messages

Mongoose's **Smart Messages**—interactive, response-driven outreach—significantly outperform traditional batch messaging.

- Smart Messages generate **2.5x higher reply rates** than regular messages.
- **About half of Advancement teams** currently use Smart Messages, highlighting a strong opportunity for growth.
- 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 equally effective; Advancement teams should be strategic about content choices:

- Messages with questions receive **2.5x the replies** of messages without.
- Messages that include a URL have **significantly lower reply rates** as they direct recipients away from the conversation. Messages without URLs receive **2.5x the reply rate** of those with URLs.
- Messages without images receive **1.5x the reply rate** of those with images.

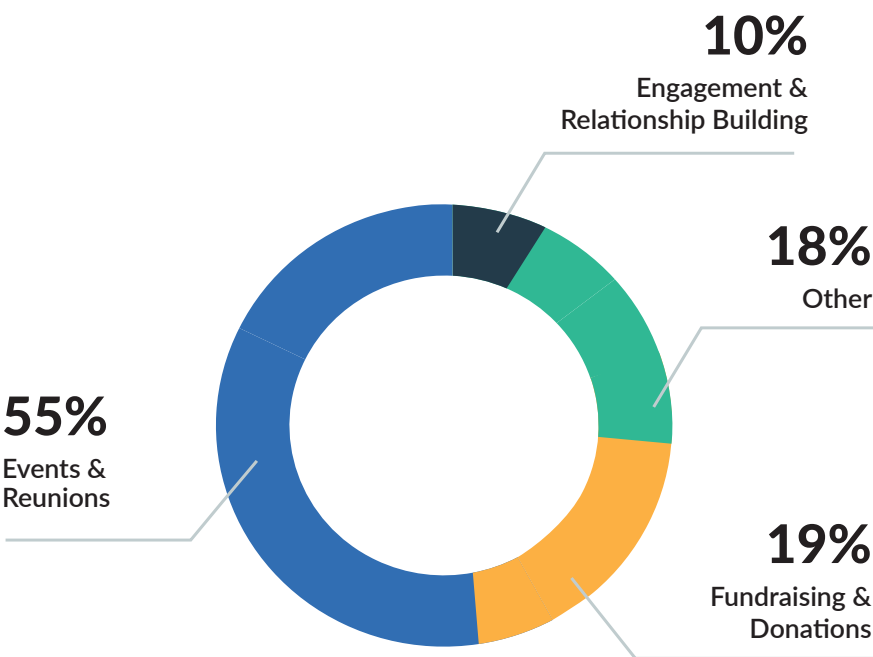
### Institutional Demographics: Does Size or Location Matter?

Institution size does not significantly impact engagement rates.

# Conversation Analysis: What Alumni & Donors Are Talking About

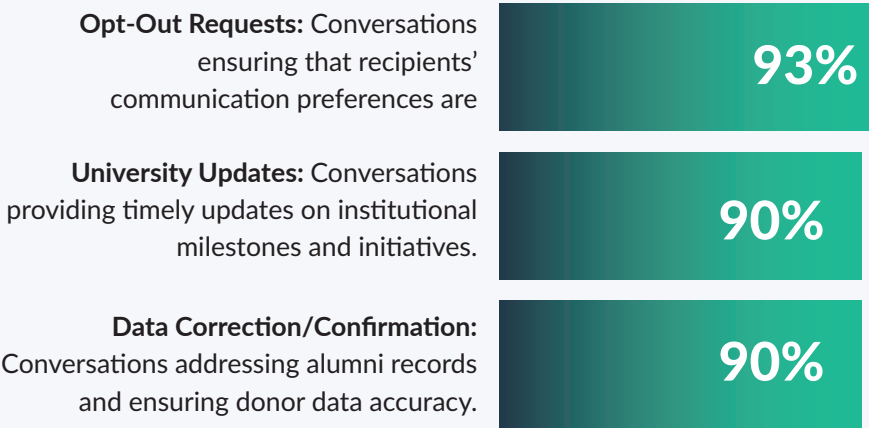
Advancement conversations span multiple areas, with some categories seeing much higher engagement and resolution rates than others. Understanding these trends can help institutions tailor their outreach strategies.

Common Conversation Topics

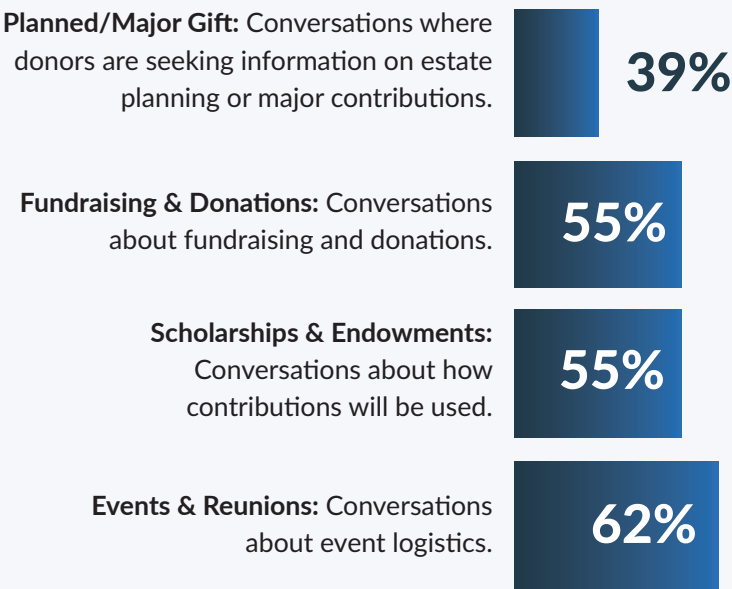


- **Events & Reunions:** Conversations coordinating alumni reunions, homecoming events, and networking opportunities.
- **Fundraising & Donations:** Conversations about annual giving, capital campaigns, and donor pledges.
- **Engagement & Relationship Building:** Conversations focused on strengthening alumni connections through university updates and personalized outreach.

## Topics with the Highest Resolution Rates



## Topics with the Lowest Resolution Rates (High Opportunity Areas)



# Conversation Analysis: Digging into Sentiment & Resolution

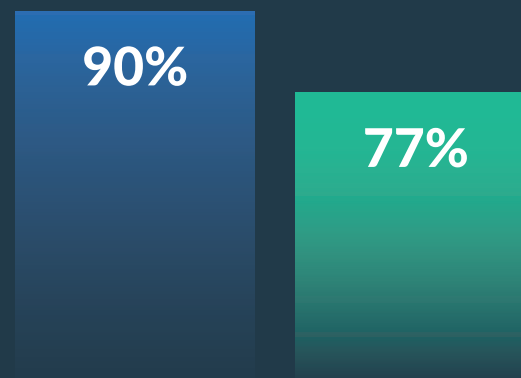
Advancement conversations span a range of topics—from quick data updates to deeper, relationship-building interactions. While transactional tasks like opt-out requests and alumni record corrections see high resolution rates, strategic outreach for events, donations, and planned giving reveals more nuance.

Importantly, resolution in Advancement should be considered differently than in other areas. A conversation marked as “unresolved” doesn’t necessarily reflect a service failure—it may simply mean the staff member reached out, and the donor didn’t respond or declined to engage. That still provides value: the institution learned something about the contact’s preferences or intentions, and can tailor future outreach accordingly.

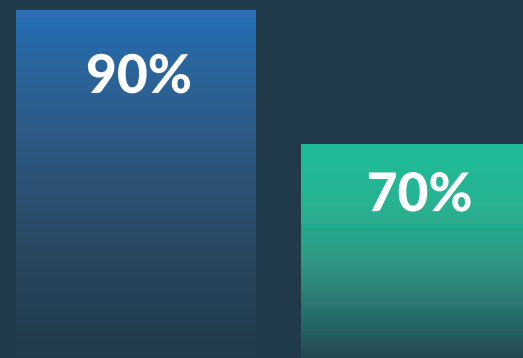
In fact, many of these “unresolved” conversations offer high ROI in the form of clarity—knowing who’s not interested can be just as important as knowing who is.

- **Fundraising & Donations (55% resolved, 52% positive sentiment)** show a mix of appreciation and friction—likely due to solicitation frequency or unclear asks. While some conversations lead to gifts, others result in valuable insights about donor intent.
- **Events & Reunions (62% resolved, 50% positive sentiment)** present opportunity for improvement. Frustration may stem from logistics or lack of follow-up, but even non-committal responses give staff insight into interest levels.
- **Planned/Major Gifts (39% resolved, 37% positive sentiment)** represent a much smaller slice of conversations—just 0.05% of all Advancement interactions. This isn’t a sign of failure, but a signal that major gift engagement is still in early stages. There’s significant opportunity here to proactively grow relationships with high-potential donors through thoughtful, sustained conversation.

## Resolution vs. Sentiment



## Data Correction



## University Updates

■ Resolved ■ Positive Sentiment

Data Correction and University Updates consistently yield high resolution and positive sentiment—showing that alumni appreciate institutions that maintain accurate records and provide meaningful updates.



# Opt-Out Trends: When Do Alumni & Donors Disengage?

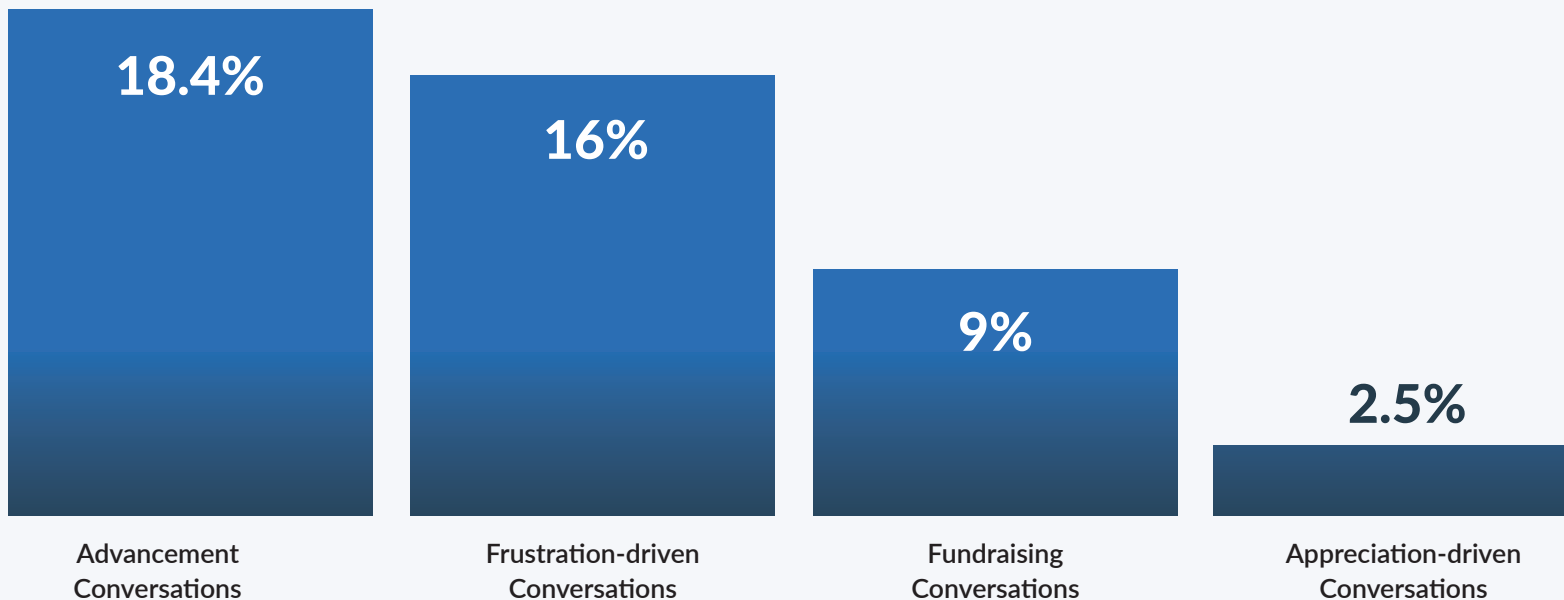
Advancement is the only team where opt-outs are actively tracked due to their relatively high frequency.

- **Opt-out requests** account for 18.4% of Advancement conversations, the highest across all teams analyzed.
- **Fundraising conversations** drive the next highest opt-out rate (9%).
- **Alumni engagement and relationship-building conversations** have some of the lowest opt-out rates.

- **Frustration-driven conversations** result in a 16% opt-out rate, whereas appreciation-driven conversations lead to only a 2.5% opt-out rate.

Alumni and donors are more likely to opt out of fundraising communications, but engagement-based outreach maintains strong retention. Institutions should focus on balancing solicitation with meaningful relationship-building efforts.

Opt-out rates vary by conversation type and sentiment



# Best Practices for Advancement Teams



## Optimize messaging timing

Target outreach during peak reply windows (late mornings, evenings, and weekdays).



## Keep it concise

Messages under 150 characters drive significantly higher engagement.



## Leverage Smart Messages

Interactive, question-driven messages improve response rates by 2.5x.



## Focus on relationship-building, not just donation asks:

Engagement and personalized outreach yield better long-term donor retention.



## Limit links & MMS

Messages without URLs or images consistently perform better.



## Reframe “resolution” as insight

In Advancement, an unresolved conversation isn't a failure—it's often a signal (e.g., a “no” to a gift or RSVP) that still provides value. Staff should treat clarity and preference discovery as progress.



## Grow major gift engagement early

Planned and Major Gift conversations are just 0.05% of total outreach, but represent massive opportunity. Focus on proactive, multi-touch strategies to build these relationships over time.



## Refine fundraising follow-up strategies

Fundraising & Donation conversations see moderate resolution and higher frustration. Donor fatigue may stem from generic asks—tailor messaging to donor history and interests.



## Enhance event-related messaging

Events & Reunions conversations (62% resolved, 50% positive sentiment) can benefit from clearer logistics, expectations, and timely follow-ups to reduce confusion and increase turnout.



## Double down on high-performing categories

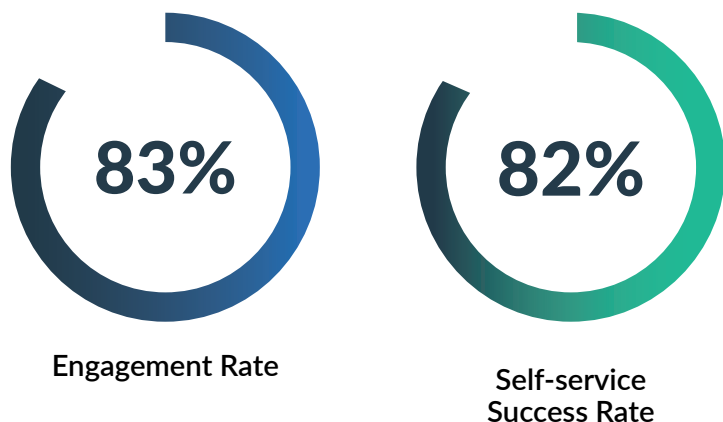
University Updates and Data Corrections yield high resolution and sentiment—continue using these to maintain goodwill and reinforce your brand as organized, responsive, and transparent.

# 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 2-Year Institutions?

While this report is centered on 4-Year Institutions—specifically across Admissions, Student Success, and Advancement teams—we analyzed Community & Technical Colleges (2-Year Institutions) separately to reflect their distinct communication strategies and student populations.

Despite the differences in mission and student needs, comparing these groups side-by-side reveals shared challenges and best practices that are valuable across institution types. By including insights from 2-Year Institutions, we're able to highlight trends that transcend institutional structure, and better understand where tailored strategies can make the biggest impact.



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

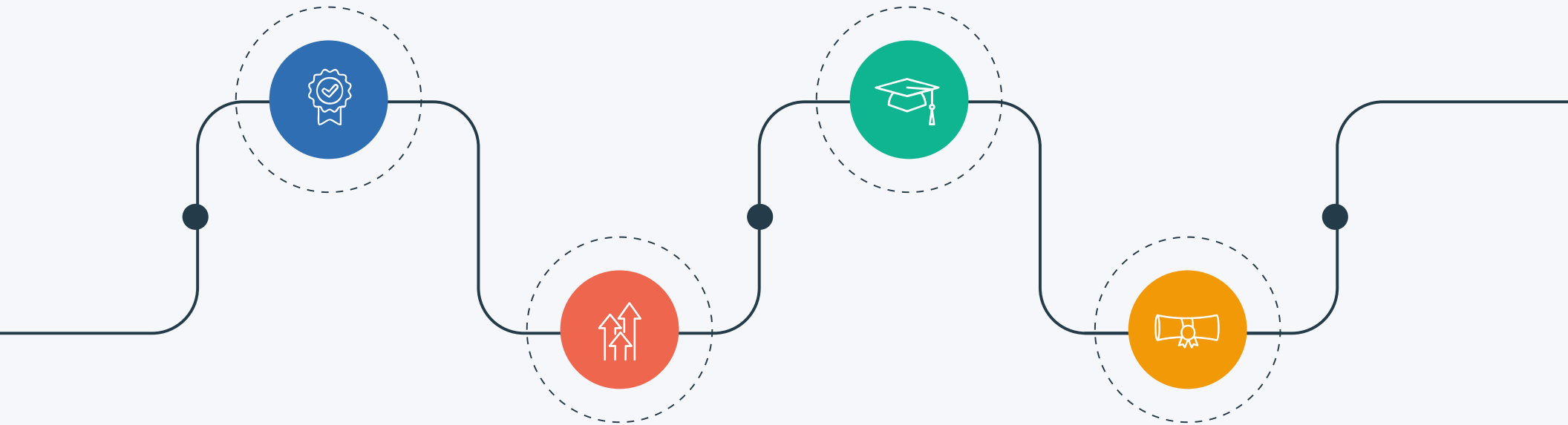
While each institutional area has distinct engagement patterns, there are notable differences in the best and worst times for messaging across teams. Institutions should customize their messaging strategies based on audience behaviors.

## 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 has saved us so much time and allowed us to connect with our alumni in a way that feels personal and meaningful. It's been an essential tool for us, and we're excited to see where it takes us next.

EMILY REID, DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT  
AT BRENAU UNIVERSITY

“

Mongoose has been a game-changer for us. It's flexible, intuitive, and incredibly effective at helping us connect with students and counselors. We're excited to continue building on its capabilities to support our growth.

ALEX GALBREATH, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS AT  
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY - CASCADES





# 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](https://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.