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Using Behavioral Science to Improve Student Outreach

PRESENTED BY

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Dedicated to:

• **Learning what works** to improve higher education programs and social policies.

• **Strengthening** programs and policies through demonstrations and evaluations.

• Conducting large-scale, **rigorous evaluations** to improve outcomes for college students across the country.

• Providing **technical assistance** to schools, programs, and organizations.
Open-Access Webinars

• Getting Promise Students Through the First Year: Lessons from the Detroit Promise Path and Beyond

• Using Behavioral Science to Improve Student Outreach

UPCOMING WEBINAR: Adult Promise Programs

• Co-presented by SHEEO
• October 30, 1-2PM EST
Webinar Objectives

• Learn how **behavioral science** is being used to improve the design of social programs, especially in the higher education space.

• **Learn to apply** behavioral techniques (SIMPLER framework) to help you improve student outreach and communications.

• Take home some **practical tools and resources** to help you craft intentional and responsive student messaging.
Important Housekeeping

• All lines have been muted to reduce distracting background noise
• Send questions or comments in the question box
• Poll questions at a couple points in the webinar
• Email additional questions to promise@mdrc.org
CABS & Behavioral Science
• Center within MDRC that combines expertise in **behavioral science** with MDRC’s expertise in social policy.

• **Tests behaviorally informed solutions** in the field using random assignment and rapid cycle evaluation designs.

• MDRC has **over 20 projects** that use lessons from behavioral science, including several in the higher education domain.
What is behavioral science?

• Studies how people **actually behave**

• Draws on research from psychology and economics, among others, about **decision-making** and **action**

• Allows us to change how we approach problem-solving by being more reflective about **predictable patterns of behavior**
Key insights from behavioral science

- Prioritizes the user’s perspective (e.g., students).
- Actions may not reflect intentions.
- Small changes can have large effects on outcomes.
A “behavioral” view of decision-making

**Traditional**
- Receive information
- Understand and absorb
- Conduct cost benefit analysis
- Conclude and execute choice

“Rational agent” that economic models of decision-making are based

**Realistic**
- Information presented
- How many decisions have you made today?
- Are you around people?
- Are you under stress?
- How much time do you have?
- Did you make a choice or do nothing?

**Choice made (maybe)**

**Action completed**

Applies psychology to behavior to explain decision making
The SIMPLER Framework
Developing SIMPLER solutions

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project

- Funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) of the Administration for Children and Families
- Conducted and evaluated 15 interventions in 7 states
- Each intervention used a systematic approach called “behavioral design”
- The SIMPLER framework was developed to summarize key concepts that are relevant and useful across contexts
Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment

- Study involving 10 Ohio community colleges
- Aims to increase the number of students who enroll in summer courses
- One way: behaviorally informed messaging campaign to students that included emails, postcards, and letters
- Increased enrollment in summer courses by 5 percentage points (a 21% increase!)
- *Funded by Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation*

Text Ed Demonstration Project

- Uses two-way text messaging to improve college access among non-traditional students
- Study involving 18 Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) across the country
- Implements an automated and personalized text messaging system designed to help participants navigate the FAFSA and successfully enroll in college
- *Funded by the U.S. Department of Education*
CABS SIMPLER Framework

We’ll email this to you at the end of the webinar!

For more details, see the final report of the BIAS project: Nudging Change in Human Services: Final Report of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project
Social Influence

Persuasion by society, peers, or a person of influence can affect people’s decisions and actions. People tend to follow what they think other people are doing.
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Implementation Prompts

Encouraging people to plan the steps they will take to complete a task can move people from intention to action.
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Make Deadlines

Framing a future action as important and urgent by setting a due date discourages the tendency to prioritize today’s needs over tomorrow’s.
Hi, Liza. You recently shared with our EOC your plans to apply to BU. Remember that financial aid helps pay for school. Next step: Complete your application! **Due date: October 31.** I’ll send a checklist of things your application may require.

**Make Deadlines**

Framing a future action as important and urgent by setting a due date discourages the tendency to prioritize today’s needs over tomorrow’s.
Personalization

Efforts to personalize information or give customers personal assistance through a difficult task can improve outcomes.
Dear Camielle,

I took some time to review your financial aid package and want to make sure you know that you have grants available for summer courses. Based on my review, you have up to $2,908 from your Pell Grant (which you do not have to pay back) that you can use for summer courses.

Personalization

Efforts to personalize information or give customers personal assistance through a difficult task can improve outcomes.
Loss Aversion

Humans tend to prefer avoiding losses to achieving equal-sized gains, relative to a reference point. Framing the same policy or opportunity as a loss can drive behavior more strongly than framing it as a gain.
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Humans tend to prefer avoiding losses to achieving equal-sized gains, relative to a reference point. Framing the same policy or opportunity as a loss can drive behavior more strongly than framing it as a gain.

Liza – Financial aid is available to help you pay for school. You may qualify for tuition assistance & CASH in grant aid - money you don’t pay back. Applying for aid can take time. The more you get organized now, the easier it will be. Don’t leave $$ on the table!
Reduce complexity through, for example, defaults, simplification, removing hassles, and color-coding.
I took some time to run a degree audit for you. According to our system, you are a Business Management major. Here are a few courses you still need for your degree that are offered this summer:

- MATH 1160 Statistical Concepts
- BADM 2204 Principles of Marketing
- ECON 2206 Principles of Macroeconomics

Reduce complexity through, for example, defaults, simplification, removing hassles, and color-coding.
Reminders reduce mental effort by providing a cue that the task still needs to be completed.
No Reminders: More mental effort to complete a task

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Reminders reduce mental effort by providing a cue that the task still needs to be completed.
Reminders: lead to stronger results

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Registered for summer?

*Registration Deadline*

Reminders reduce mental effort by providing a cue that the task still needs to be completed.
Social Influence
Implementation Prompts
Make Deadlines
Personalization
Loss Aversion
Ease
Reminders
Q&A

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The SIMPLER Framework

- Social Influence
- Implementation Prompts
- Make Deadlines
- Personalization
- Loss Aversion
- Ease
- Reminders

FURTHER READING

- Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment
- Text Ed Demonstration
- Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project Final Report
- Nudging for Success
- Summer Nudging
Thank you for joining!
Promise@mdrc.org