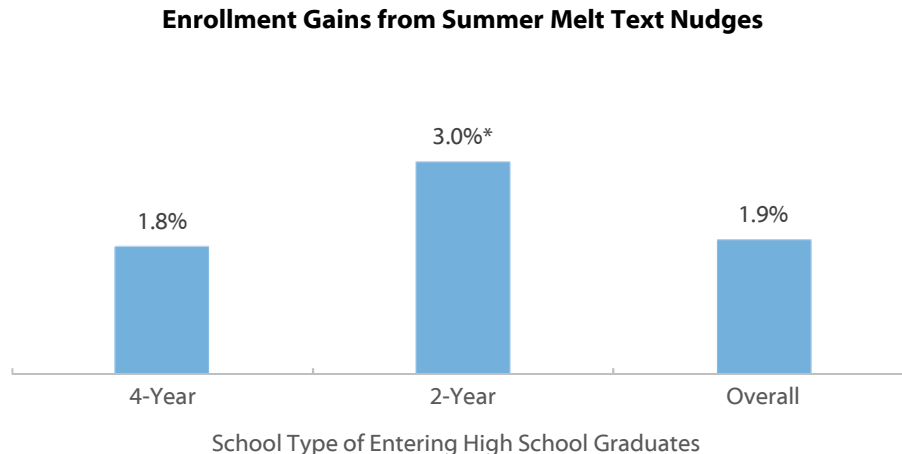


Text Nudges Provide Needed “Summer Melt” Intervention at a Low Cost



At times, colleges want to provide outreach and interventions to a large number of students in order to improve certain outcomes, such as retention and graduation, but often have limited resources. Sending text messages with targeted messaging at key intervals, commonly referred to as “text nudges,” offer an empirically tested method for positively influencing students along a variety of outcome variables. Text nudges have been found to be effective in combatting attrition during the summer following initial enrollment, known as summer melt,** for as little as two dollars per student included in the texting campaign. Text nudges can be more easily scaled to a larger student population compared to more robust interventions such as phone calls or advising sessions, which, while typically effective, tend to be more labor intensive.

Researchers from the University of Virginia and the University of Pittsburgh conducted randomized controlled trials in 2012 at three high schools. The students in the experimental groups received text messages reminding them about college-related deadlines or required tasks (e.g. reminders to access important paperwork and register for orientation). These text nudging interventions were designed to lower the number of college bound high school graduates that fail to matriculate in the fall.

The text nudges were found to be effective for students with moderate GPA’s, students who were enrolling in a two-year program, students enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs, students with unspecified college plans, and students who had not completed the FAFSA. Two-year programs experienced a statistically significant increase in enrollment with an increase of three percent. This suggests that summer melt text nudges are most effective for groups that may have limited access to other quality college information sources and represent a cost-effective intervention, but may be insufficient when used alone for many groups of students.

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

**Summer melt is a term used to describe the occurrence of students indicating their intent to attend a college in the fall but then ultimately not matriculating. Some have defined this term as only including those who did not matriculate at any college while others have defined it as specific to an institution. Students may indicate their intent to attend college through various activities such as expressly saying so on a form to a counselor, paying college deposits, and registering for classes. The activities used to determine intent depend upon the definition being used for summer melt. For the purposes of this study, the researchers used information on students’ expressly stated intentions to attend college and defined summer melt as “the phenomenon that college-intending high school graduates fail to matriculate in college anywhere in the year following high school.”

Source: Summer Nudging: Can personalized text messages and peer mentor outreach increase college going among low-income high school graduates? Castleman, B. and Page, L., Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization (2015), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167268114003217>.

