



Designing Automated Interventions/ Communications

1. Introduction

Institutions that are underway with analytics-driven interventions often report that they see a change in many students' academic behaviours just through the dissemination of automated interventions (eg emails or alerts in the VLE). This can be a very efficient means of communicating with students as it is possible to reach many at the same time without requiring considerable man-hours. This leaves more time that can be dedicated to assisting students in need of more in-depth support. However, while they can be effective as an initial point of contact, automated communications are not a substitute for person-to-person contact.

2. Communicating the right message

Just alerting students to a potential shortfall in their engagement or performance can be an unsatisfactory, potentially alienating and even counter-productive experience for them. Institutions are strongly advised to take a more holistic approach to automated interventions that are cognisant of the many reasons, both academic and non-academic, that students may seem less engaged than their classmates and are designed to have impact by encouraging students to take action.

3. Three-layered approach

Institutions are advised to take a three-layered approach to automated interventions as follows:

1. ALERT

Let students know that the institution has a concern about them. Students should be informed exactly why they are being contacted (eg that their pattern of VLE activity is consistent with that of students from previous years that have not passed).

Institutions should be extremely sensitive in deciding how to phrase this message. Reflect, for example, on the potential impact of a message that states 'Your grades place you in the bottom 10% of your class' on a student that is trying their best but finds it difficult to keep up and may already be considering early withdrawal or on a Medicine student who is historically accustomed to being top of their class.

An alternate message may be 'At the moment, your level of engagement with your studies indicate that you may be having difficulties. If this is the case, have you considered reaching out for support? Listed below are some of the resources you may want to connect with.'

2. ENGAGE

Reflection and self-motivation are among the key attributes we expect of successful students in higher education. Well-crafted automated interventions provide the opportunity to encourage students to reflect on their part in the



triggers of the interventions and, ideally, to motivate them to take action.

3. **INFORM**

Analytics interventions can give institutions an invaluable opportunity to direct students in need to the targeted resources that exist to support them. Telling students that there is an issue without directing them to the resources that can help could cause frustration and anguish to those who may already be vulnerable. Contact details and opening hours should be listed for every service and, ideally, email addresses should be hyperlinked to make it as easy as possible for students to make contact on the spot.

4. **Sample Topics for Inclusion**

Institutions that have already implemented analytics-led interventions have reflected that many of the issues that are identified are non-academic in nature. Communications should be sensitive of the fact that recipients may be struggling because of personal, medical, social, emotional or financial circumstances. Such communications provide institutions with an opportunity to reach out to vulnerable students and draw their attention to the supports available.

Below are a series of topics you may wish to cover in your communications:

- I'm feeling overwhelmed
- I don't have to start studying yet; the exams are ages away
- I'm feeling lost; I don't understand my course
- I'm not interested in this module. I don't see why it's relevant
- I have other things going on in my life that are preventing me from studying as much as I'd like
- I think I've chosen the wrong course
- I'm not well
- I'm worried about my fees
- I don't like/can't use/can't access Blackboard
- I don't feel a part of the University

Possible useful web sites

- <http://ie.reachout.com/college/> - resource of IAUCC
- <http://pleasetalk.ie/> - list of college supports, student driven
- <http://www.samaritans.org/>
- <https://www.mabs.ie/en/> - Money Advice and Budgeting Service
- <http://www.walkinmyshoes.ie/>

