

Nudging Students to Success

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PURPOSE

Post-secondary environments are filled with expectations, norms and rules that can be difficult for students to understand and follow. One of the ways we can support students in their learning transitions is to strategically provide nudges. This job aid introduces instructors to nudges which can help build a communication path that provides a transparent path for students to follow throughout their education journey.

BACKGROUND

The concept of nudging first emerged in the field of economics but has since spread to other fields such as marketing, public health, and education (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018). A nudge, in the context of post-secondary education, is a strategic and supportive message that “gently nudges students toward actions tailored to their circumstances, easing navigation of the university environment” (Dart & Spratt, 2020, p. 2). Nudges are not intended to make decisions for students, rather “Nudging simply changes the context in which people make decisions—by providing more information, less information, or presenting information in a new way—but does not make the decision for someone” (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018, p. 3).

HOW TO

Nudges can be used to:

- Remind students of important college dates or requirements
- Simplify confusing or complex processes or decisions (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018)
- Support student progression in a course (Dart & Spratt, 2020)
- Normalize actions by sharing examples of how other students have been successful (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018)
- Encourage participation in student life and wellness activities
- Connect students with services and supports

Research on nudging in education has revealed strategies and techniques that are most effective, which are summarized in Table 1.

This information is available in alternate formats upon request. Please contact cli@assiniboine.net.

Table 1: Nudging best practices and examples

Best practice	Example
<p>Personalize the message so that students are more likely to read (Dart & Spratt, 2020; Northern Virginia Community College, 2018). Do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the student's first name; and • Providing details specific to the student. 	<p>Hi Shari,</p> <p>Thank you for sharing with me that you are experiencing challenges focusing on your schoolwork due to stressors at home. I wanted to pass along some supports that may be helpful to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.M.Well Student Association Program: A free counselling program available to Assiniboine students from all campuses, and their immediate family members. I.M. Well provides 24/7 counselling services for mental, emotional, physical and financial health. • Student Success Advisor [<i>add name and contact details</i>]: Their goal is to help students achieve success at Assiniboine by providing them with support, advice, information and assistance whenever needed. <p>Please let me know if you have questions or you would like to send an email connecting you with [<i>Student Success Advisor name</i>]. I am here to support your success.</p> <p>Thank you, [<i>instructor name</i>]</p>
<p>Simplify confusing or complex processes or decisions (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018). Do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking complex processes into more manageable chunks; and • Providing only the information students need to act on now. 	<p>Make it easy for students to find and enroll in the Moodle course with a course access memo that clearly explains how to access and get started in the course.</p>
<p>Elicit a response (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018). Do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking for a response; or 	<p>Hi Patt,</p> <p>I noticed that you did not attend today's required virtual synchronous class. I have posted the slides and handouts from this class in the Class Materials folder in the Moodle course page [<i>hyperlink to the folder</i>]. Please review the</p>

- Providing a direct link materials and let me know if you have any questions. I am for students to act on. here to support your success.

Can you please email me back a yes or no to let me know if you are planning to attend our next class on *[date and time of class]*?

Thank you,

[instructor name]

Be strategic about when the message will be received (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018)

Nudge #1: Start of the Week (whole class)

Monday morning

Good morning class! Today we start Week 3 of the course.

This week you have...*[outline activities and assessments for the week, as well as any due dates]*. To get started on Week 3 *[provide specific direction – e.g., read the module introduction]*.

Nudge #2: End of the Week (whole class)

Hello class! I hope you've had a great week. This is a reminder that Week 3 ends today, and your assignment is due this Sunday at midnight. *[additional details as needed – e.g., direct link to the assignment in the Moodle course page]*.

Nudge #3: Individual Follow-up

Hi Jack,

I noticed that you did not submit this week's assignment *[name of assignment]* that was due on *[date/time]*. I would like to offer you a week's extension to complete this assignment, as it is a requirement to pass this course.

Can you please email me back a yes or no to let me know if you are taking the one-week extension?

Thank you,

[instructor name]

While nudges have been shown to be effective there is a tipping point in which there may be too many nudges which may result in dependence on nudges or students ignoring nudges (Northern Virginia Community College, 2018). There is no number or formula to determine how many nudges are too many. Therefore, we recommend that you use your professional judgement, talk to your colleagues about when and how they are communicating with students, and seek feedback from your students. You can also contact your Faculty Development Coach to discuss further.

REFERENCES

- Dart, S., & Spratt, B. (2020). Personalized emails in first-year mathematics: Exploring a scalable strategy for improving student experiences and outcomes. *Student Success*, 11(2), 1 – 12. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.1543>
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- Northern Virginia Community College. (2018). Nudging students to success: Guiding students from application to graduation. *Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success*, 27(18).

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