

Title: Leading 20,000 Horses to Water: How Behavioral Economics Can Improve Student Success

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Last year, students failed nearly a third of their courses at our college: and fully 38% of students did not re-enroll in spring. There are many factors involved in success, but there is consistent data that student services improve outcomes. Services, from financial aid to tutoring, have been shown to dramatically increase both course performance and student retention. Though there is a large body of evidence that services are effective, the factors involved with their underutilization are less well understood. The purpose of this research is to identify and test methods that may reduce barriers or provide incentives for students to engage with these services.

We will draw on nudge theory, a strand of behavioral economics that examines how small changes in structure, policy, or presentation can dramatically affect group behavior. To provide the most value to the students and the college, we will limit our study to potential low-cost, high-return (PLCHR) factors (such as message placement, social incentives, and visibility of services). This experiment will center on our college's Public Information Office due to its accessibility and high degree of interconnectivity with other departments and to students. We will be taking a qualitative approach, conducting a focus group in which participants will be asked to share their familiarity with and attitudes about college services, then to compare current practices against experimental mockups of PLCHR factors.

References

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