



**Vela Institute**  
Illuminating Education

# STUDENT SUCCESS **AGENCY**

## **Student Success Agency Service Evaluation:**

### **South Texas Pilot Study of Post-Secondary Enrollment**

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## About Vela Institute

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Vela Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing access to evaluation, analytics, and data tracking to education partners to improve student and community outcomes. Established in 2017, Vela Institute accomplishes its mission through applied research, data analytics, and the use of evidence-based practices.

This external evaluation of South Texas SSA was conducted at the request of Student Success Agency.

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Project Background.....	6
Project Data.....	7
SSA Usage.....	9
Figure 1: SSA Engagement by Contact Type and Activity Category.....	9
Figure 2: Average Monthly Texts by Type and Activity Category.....	10
Figure 3: Average Monthly Calls by Type and Activity Category.....	10
SSA Usage and Post-Secondary Enrollment.....	11
Figure 4: PSE Categories for Total Sample.....	11
Figure 5: PSE breakdown by PSE Categories.....	11
Figure 6: SSA Participation by PSE .....	12
Figure 7: SSA Participation by PSE .....	12
Figure 9: Additional SSA Engagement and PSE: Engaged Students.....	13
Conclusions and Next Steps.....	14





## Executive Summary

This project examined a convenience sample of 788 students in two South Texas High Schools who had shown an initial interest in engaging with the Student Success Agency (SSA), graduated in 2017, and for whom SSA had information about the students' post-secondary enrollment (PSE). The overall goal of the project was to describe SSA program usage and determine the relationship between SSA engagement and PSE.

**Students in the sample were categorized into three groups:**



### Non-Participant

Students who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, but never engaged or interacted with an SSA agent.



### Disengaged

Students who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, signed up with an agent, had some interactions with their SSA agent, but ultimately stopped their engagement with their SSA agent prior to the end of the performance period. (September 2015-January 2017).



### Engaged

Students who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, signed up with an agent, and interacted with their SSA agent through the performance period

## Examination of SSA usage revealed that text messaging was the most prevalent means of communication between students and their agents.

Results also indicated some student-agent contact via telephone calls and virtually no communication through email. An examination of the usage for the engaged and disengaged SSA students revealed that the average number of text messages exchanged between engaged students and their agents steadily increased between September 2015 and November 2016, while the average number of text messages for disengaged students steadily declined during that same period.

## In examining the relationship between SSA program usage and PSE, it was found that both engaged and disengaged students were more likely to have PSE compared with students who did not participate in SSA.

Results also revealed that engaged SSA students were more likely to have PSE compared with disengaged students. These effects were strongest for students enrolling within the first year of graduation from high school, at 4-year institutions, and at public institutions.

When examining if more interactions between engaged SSA students and their agents lead to PSE, results revealed that additional engagement was generally related to higher PSE. Specifically additional text message and telephone contacts were associated with higher PSE in the fall semester immediately after high school graduation, enrollment in 4-year institutions, and enrollment in public institutions. Additionally, higher levels of student-initiated text exchanges were associated with higher PSE, specifically enrollment in 4-year and public institutions.

It is important to note, that these analyses are correlational and additional analyses are needed before implying causation. However, data from the current project provide encouraging results for the SSA program and student engagement with SSA agents. Together, these results suggest that continued interaction and engagement with SSA agents can lead to positive PSE outcomes.

A photograph of two young men sitting at a table, looking down at something on the table. The man on the left is wearing a grey hoodie and has a red bottle of juice next to him. The man on the right is wearing a tan jacket and has large black headphones around his neck. Both are smiling and appear to be engaged in a collaborative activity.

## Project

## Background

Each year thousands of dollars and countless hours are directed toward college access outcomes and specifically enrollment in post-secondary education (PSE). With the significant amount of energy and resources supporting access initiatives, it is important to understand what is contributing to PSE.

This project examined a convenience sample of 788 students in two South Texas High Schools who had shown an initial interest in engaging with the Student Success Agency (SSA), graduated in 2017, and for whom SSA had information about the students' post-secondary enrollment (PSE). The overall goal of the project was to describe SSA program usage and determine the relationship between SSA engagement and PSE.

Given the observation nature of the data, the lack of demographic student data to use as control, and the correlational methods used to generate the results, the results presented demonstrate the nature and strength of the relationship between SSA program usage and PSE but do not demonstrate causation. However, the association between SSA program usage and PSE can begin to be established using the current project's data and will provide empirical support for the potential link between SSA engagement and PSE.



Project

Data

SSA provided Vela with a sample of 788 students in Harlandale High School and McCollum High School who had initially shown interest in engaging with the SSA.

SSA also provided Vela with information regarding the student's engagement with an SSA agent through text message, telephone calls, and emails. More specifically, SSA provided Vela with monthly counts of student-agent contacts from September 2015 to January 2017 for these three mediums.

The extent to which the students in the current sample interacted with an SSA agent varied. Thus, SSA provided Vela with information that categorized the student sample into the following activity categories:



### Non-Participant

**158 students** who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, but never engaged or interacted with an SSA agent.



### Disengaged

**104 students** who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, signed up with an agent, had some interactions with their SSA agent, but ultimately stopped their engagement with their SSA agent prior to the end of the performance period.



### Engaged

**526 students** who initially showed interest in engaging with SSA, signed up with an agent, and interacted with their SSA agent through the performance period (September 2015-January 2017).

Finally, SSA provided Vela the raw PSE data, which they obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse. The data allowed Vela to create several categories of PSE that were used as the criteria for the impact analysis. These categories were:



Enrolled  
Fall

Students who enrolled in any post-secondary (PS) institution in the fall semester immediately after high school graduation.



Enrolled  
1st Year

Students who enrolled in any PS institution in either the fall or the spring semesters immediately after high school graduation.



Enrolled  
2-Year

Students who enrolled in a 2-year PS institution in either the fall or the spring semesters immediately after high school graduation.



Enrolled  
4-Year

Students who enrolled in a 4-year PS institution in either the fall or the spring semesters immediately after high school graduation.



Enrolled  
Public

Students who enrolled in a public PS institution in either the fall or the spring semesters immediately after high school graduation.



Enrolled  
Private

Students who enrolled in a private PS institution in either the fall or the spring semesters immediately after high school graduation.

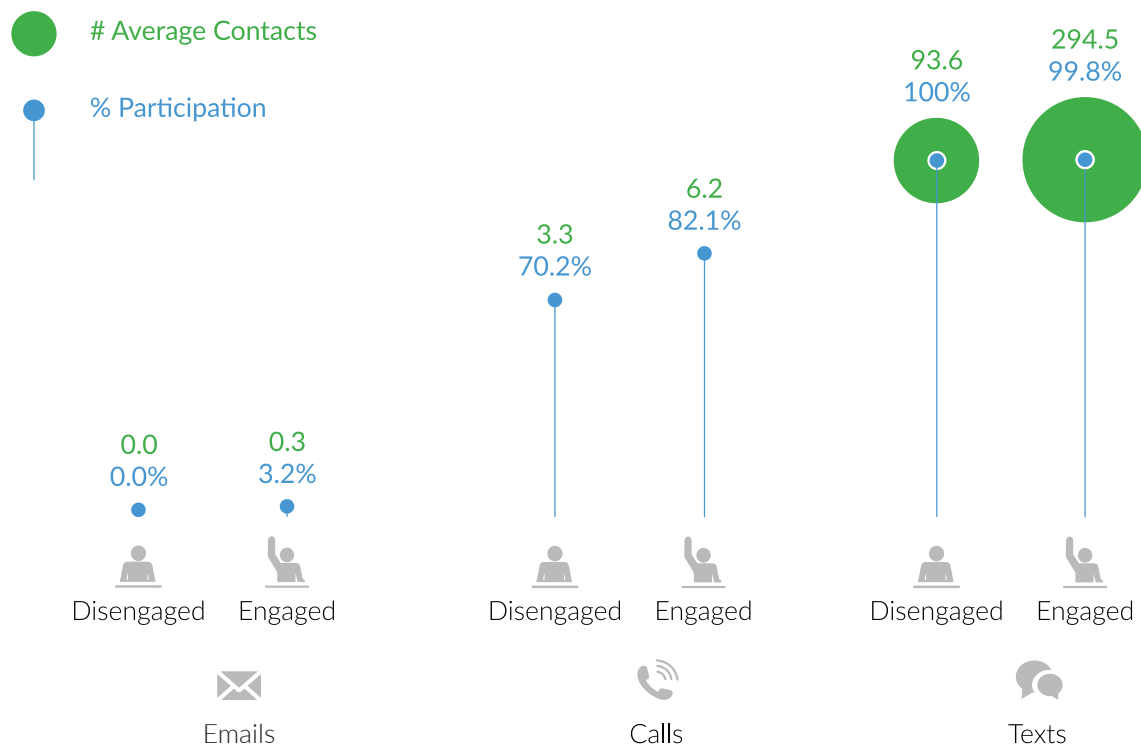




The first priority of the project was to describe program SSA usage, aggregated by interaction type, and who initiated those interactions. The engaged and disengaged activity categories were used to disaggregate the usage patterns (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

While both Engaged Students and Disengaged Students preferred texting, Engaged Students were in more frequent contact with SSA.

Figure 1: SSA Engagement by Contact Type and Activity Category



**Notes:** Contacts between students and SSA mentors during the entire performance period (i.e., Sept 2015 to Jan 2017).

**Percent:** Represents the percentage of student contacts using a specific medium (i.e., text, phone call, or email) during the performance period.

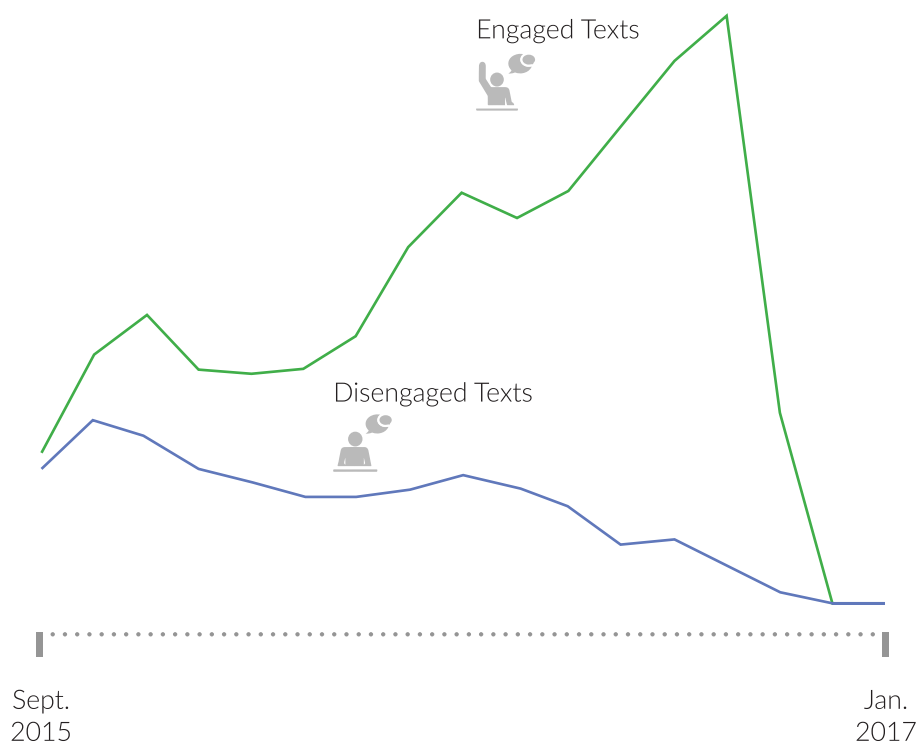
**Average:** Represents the average number of contacts using a specific medium (i.e., text, phone call, or email) during the performance period.

## Notable Results from Figure 1

- Text messaging was the preferred method of contact
  - o Almost all SSA students received at least one text message
  - o The average number of text messages sent was much higher for engaged students
- While most students had at least one phone call from their agent, SSA students tended to use texting instead of interacting with the agent through phone calls
  - o The majority of SSA students had at least one phone call with their agent
  - o The average number of phone calls over the performance period was relatively low, but engaged students had a higher average number of phone calls.
- Email was not the preferred method of contact for students or SSA agents
  - o 3.2% of engaged and 0% of disengaged communicated via email
- SSA agents were fairly consistent in being proactive with contacting their students
  - o Agents tended to be a more proactive when calling their students
  - o Agents also initiated the majority of text message communications
- Students who remained engaged were more likely to initiate conversation with their agents
  - o Lower average percentage of mentor-initiated text contacts for engaged students (64.4%) compared with mentor-initiated text contacts for disengaged students (78.1%)

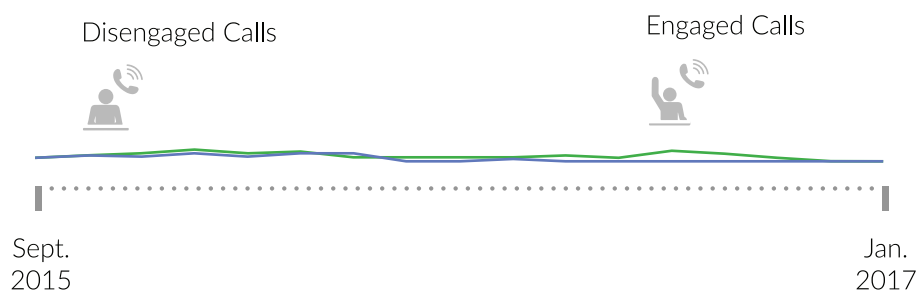
Texts between SSA mentors and Fully Engaged students steadily increased over the performance period whereas texts from Disengaged students steadily decreased.

Figure 2: Average Monthly Texts by Type and Activity Category



Phone calls remained relatively low for both activity categories, but Fully Engaged Students still had more average monthly phone calls than Disengaged Students.

Figure 3: Average Monthly Calls by Type and Activity Category



**Notes:** Results are the average number of contacts between students and SSA mentors during the performance period (i.e., Sept 2015 to Jan 2017). Due to extremely low usages, email contacts were not included in these figures.

### Notable Results from Figures 2 and 3

- The average number of text messages exchanged between engaged students and their agents generally increased between September 2015 and November 2016
  - The average number of text messages exchanged between disengaged students and their agents steadily declined over this same period
- Telephone contacts between engaged and disengaged students remained low and relatively steady over the performance period



## SSA Usage

## and Post Secondary Enrollment

The second priority of the project was to determine relationship between SSA engagement and PSE. Analyses also explored if additional engagement with SSA agents, type of engagement, and who initiated the contact for engaged students was related to PSE.

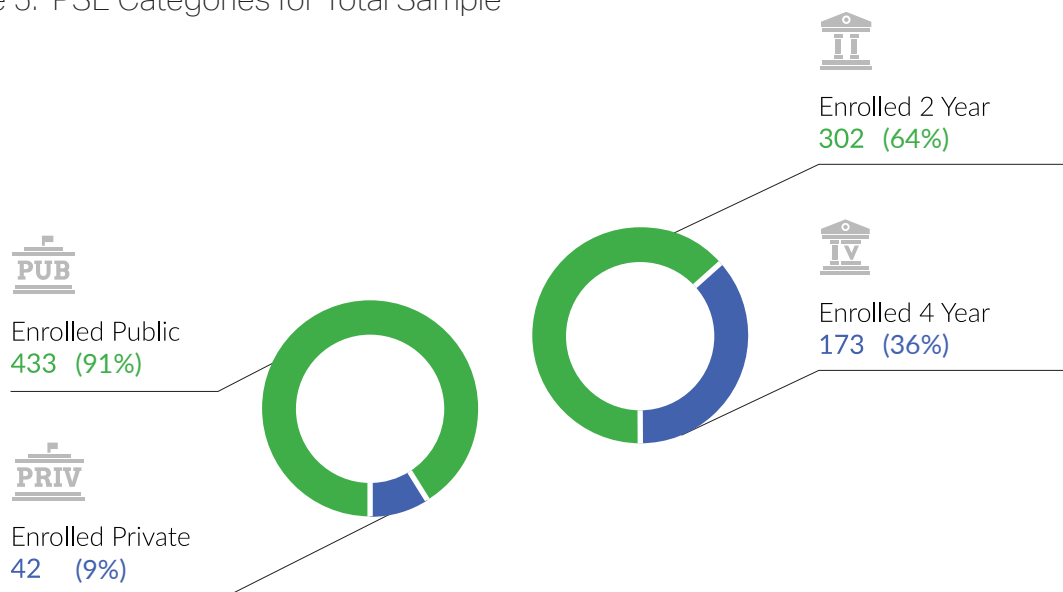
### Most students who enrolled the first year enrolled in the fall.

Figure 4: PSE Categories for Total Sample



### Most students enrolled in public and 2-year institutions

Figure 5: PSE Categories for Total Sample



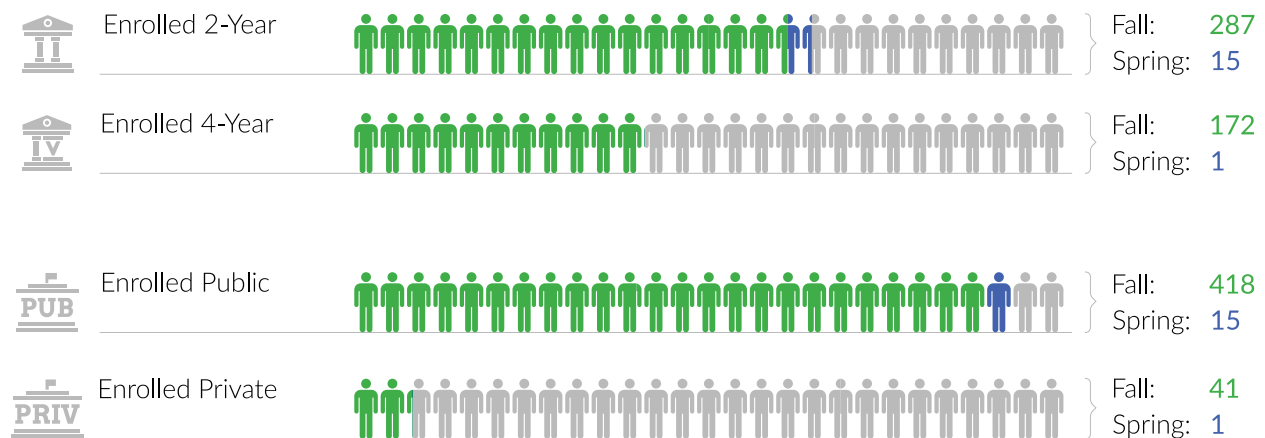
Note: Results above are the overall PSE categories for the student in the overall sample (regardless of activity category).

### Notable Results from Figures 4 and 5

- Most students (58.2%) had PSE in the fall semester after high school graduation
  - Only 16 students waited to enroll in PS until the spring semester after high school
- More students attended 2-year PSE institutions (38.3%) compared with 4-year PSE institutions (22.0%)
- Most student attending PSE attended public institutions (54.9%) compared to private (5.3%)

### Most Students who enrolled in the spring went to 2-Year and Public schools.

Figure 6: PSE: Breakdown by PSE Categories



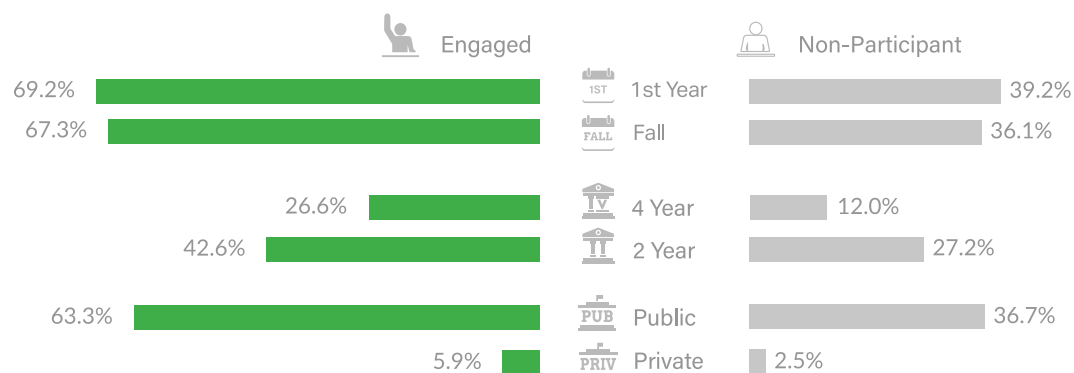
Note: Results above are a breakdown of the number of students in the overall sample (regardless of activity category) subdivided by the various PSE categories

### Notable Results from Figure 6

- Most students who waited to enroll in the spring semester after high school graduation went to 2-year (15 students) and public (15 students) PSE institutions
- All 42 students attended private PSE institutions attended a 4-year PSE institution

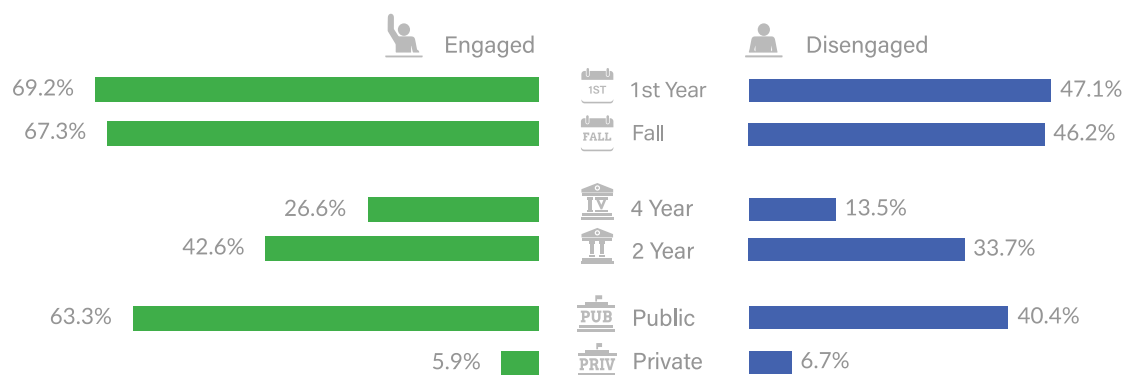
### Fully Engaged students had higher rates of PSE than Non-Participants.

Figure 7: Post-Secondary Enrollment for Disengaged Students vs. Non-Participants



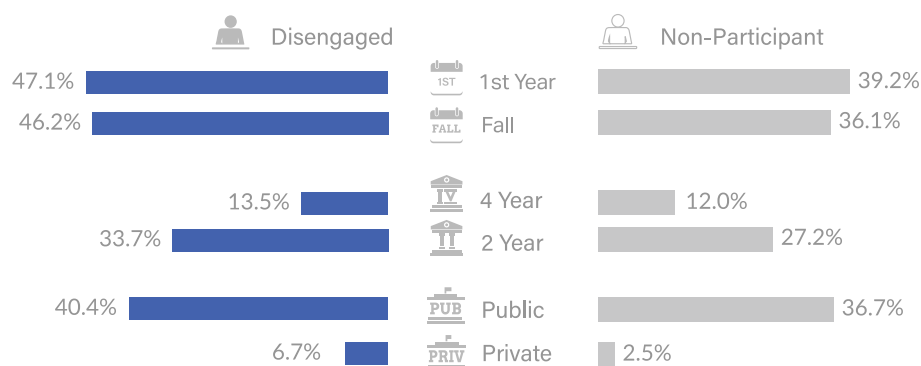
### Fully Engaged students also had higher rates of PSE than Disengaged students.

Figure 8: Post-Secondary Enrollment for Disengaged Students vs. Late Engaged



### Disengaged SSA students had comparable rates of PSE as Non-Participants.

Figure 9: Post-Secondary Enrollment for Disengaged Students vs. Late Engaged



Notes: results in figure represents the percentage of students that had PSE in the respective PSE category for the respective SSA activity category.

### Notable Results from Figures 7 through 9

- Engaged SSA students tended to have higher PSE rates compared with disengaged and students that did not participate in SSA
  - o These differences were largest for PSE the fall after HS graduation, PSE during the first year following HS graduation, and enrollment in public PSE institutions
- Disengaged students were slightly more likely to enroll in private PSE institutions compared with engaged students, but this difference was negligible





### Engaged students were more likely to have PSE than Non-Participants.

Figure 10: Compared to Non-Participants, Fully Engaged Students were...



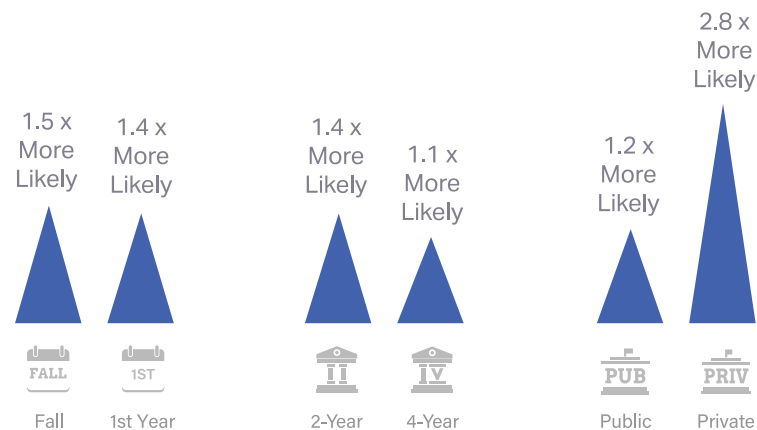
### Engaged students were also more likely to have PSE than Disengaged.

Figure 11: Compared to Late Engaged Students, Fully Engaged Students were...



### Disengaged students were more likely to have PSE than Non-Participants.

Figure 12: Compared to Non-Participants, Late Engaged Students were...



### Notable Results from Figures 10 through 12

- Students who engaged with an agent were more likely to have PSE compared with students who did not participate in SSA
- Engaged students were more likely to have PSE compared with disengaged SSA students

Table 1 presents the result of the analyses that were used to examine if additional engagement with SSA agents, type of engagement, and who initiated the contact for engaged students was related to PSE.

Table 1: Additional SSA Engagement and ENROLLMENT: Engaged Students

	Text		Calls	
	Total Contacts	Student Initiated	Total Contacts	Student Initiated
Enrolled Fall	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<i>0.05</i>
Enrolled First Year	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<i>0.03</i>
2-Year Enrollment	<i>0.03</i>	<i>0.03</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<i>0.07</i>
4-Year Enrollment	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<i>-0.04</i>
Public Enrollment	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.04</i>
Private Enrollment	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<b>0.11</b>	<i>0.00</i>

#### Notable Results from Table 1:

- The number of text and telephone contacts between SSA agents and students was positively related to higher:
  - o Fall semester PSE
  - o First year PSE
  - o Enrollment in 4-year PSE institutions
- Additional engagement between students and SSA agents was generally related to higher PSE
  - o Additional text message contacts between engaged SSA student and agents had a stronger relationship with PSE outcomes compared with additional telephone contacts
- Higher levels of student initiated text exchanges were associated with higher:
  - o PSE in the fall semester
  - o First year PSE
  - o Enrollment in 4-year PSE institutions
  - o Enrollment in public PSE institutions



## Conclusions and

## Next Steps

Overall, the results suggest that engagement with an SSA agent were positively related to PSE outcomes. While both disengaged and engaged SSA students generally had higher enrollment rates compared with non-participants, one of the most encouraging finds was that engaged SSA students had higher PSE rates compared with disengaged SSA students. A further encouraging finding is that additional engagement with SSA agents was positively related to 4-year PSE for engaged SSA students. Together, these results suggest that continued interaction and engagement with SSA agents can lead to positive outcomes.

As noted in the project background, these analyses were correlational and additional analyses are needed before implying causation. The next steps to providing stronger empirical evidence for the positive effects of engagement with SSA and SSA agents would be to plan a study that uses a randomized-control trial (RCT) to randomly assign groups of students to engage or not engage with an SSA agent. This type of RCT study with proper controls would provide the strongest level of empirical evidence for the positive impact that SSA engagement has on student outcomes. However, these types of studies are often difficult to design, so a quasi-experimental design employing some type of statistical control group (e.g., using propensity score matching) would provide enhanced evidence of the positive effects on student outcomes of engagement with an SSA agent.

Despite these potential limitations, the results of the current project do provide some encouraging results for SSA engagement and student interactions with SSA agents. The findings that engaged students had higher PSE rates compared to non-participants and disengaged SSA students is encouraging. Further, the finding that additional interactions with SSA agents for engaged SSA students generally lead to higher PSE enrollment provides evidence that SSA agents are helping to guide their mentee to positive PSE outcomes.