

# Understanding and Designing Interventions for Pivotal Moments

Natalia Alvarez Diaz and Annie Yi

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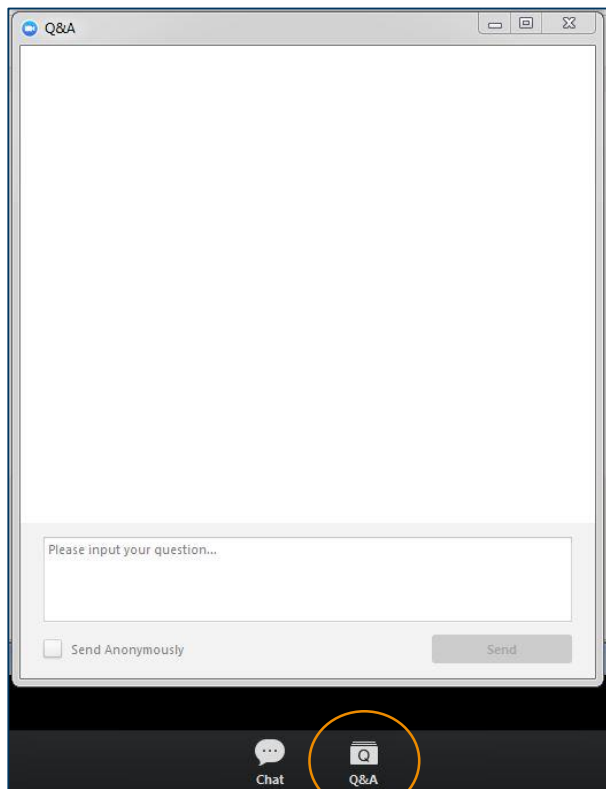


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# Today's Presenters



**Annie Yi**

*Associate Director*

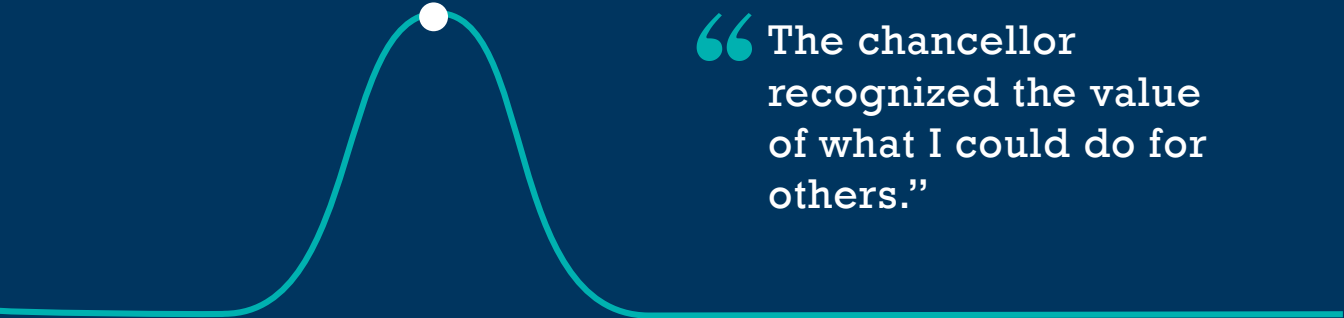
Ayi@eab.com



**Natalia Alvarez Diaz**

*Associate Director*

Nalvarez@eab.com



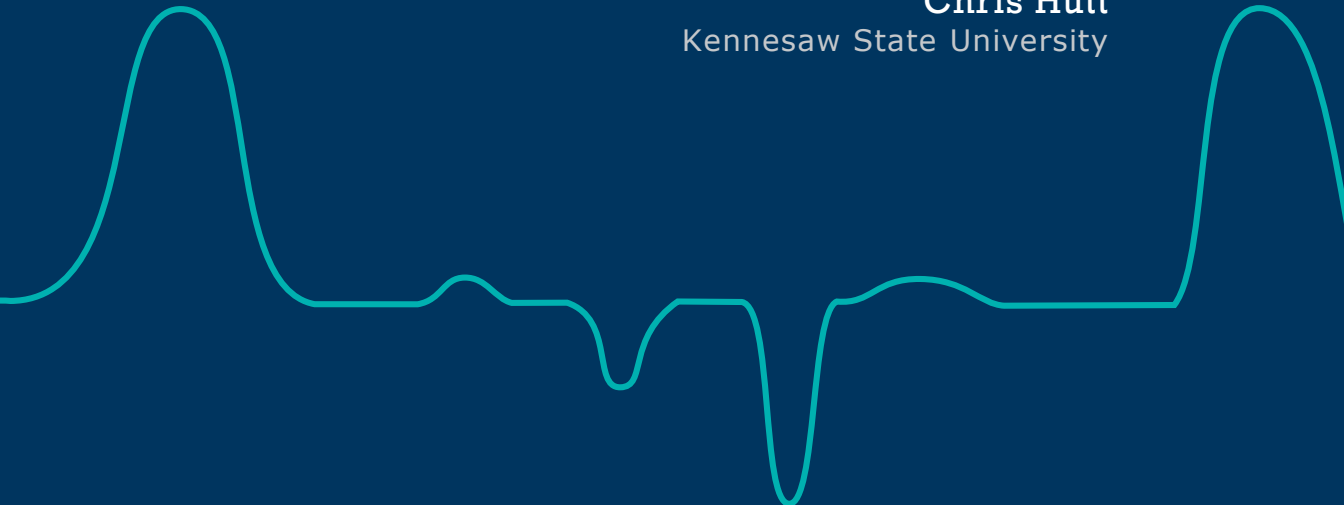
“The chancellor  
recognized the value  
of what I could do for  
others.”

“ I didn't have  
housing and had to  
sit out that  
semester.”



“A lot of those pivotal moments  
aren't recognized as pivotal to  
students in the moment.”

Chris Hutt  
Kennesaw State University



# Pivotal Moments in Your Words

## What We Learned from You

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Pivotal moments are **complex decisions** students must make at key points of transition.

They are **variable** and **individual** to the student based on demographics, institution, program, and experience.

Successful navigation of Pivotal Moments can make the difference between **success** and **failure** for students.

# Divergent Views of the Same Moments

## Identifying Student Stumbling Blocks



### The Administrator Sees...

Financial aid is directly correlated to persistence—it should be a top priority.

Withdrawing from a course can jeopardize financial aid, academic status, visa eligibility, etc.

Selective majors are well-regarded, but they aren't the only path to a fulfilling career.



### The Student Thinks...

"Financial aid? It's up there on my to-dos, along with the activities fair and getting my accounts set up."

"I'm not doing as well as I thought I would in this class. I'll save my GPA by dropping it..."

"I have always dreamed of being an engineer. If I don't get into the major I don't know how I can continue on!"

# A Roadmap for Our Pivotal Moments Journey



✘ *Schools do a poor job of raising student awareness of Pivotal Moments.*



**Elevate** Pivotal Moments to Your Students

✘ *Students lack context for the downstream consequences of their decisions.*



Provide **Insight** into Decisions at Pivotal Junctures

✘ *When students stumble, their sense of belonging and ability may deteriorate.*



Restore **Pride** for Students who Fall off Track

## Understanding and Designing Interventions for Pivotal Moments



**Elevate** Pivotal  
Moments to Your  
Students



Provide **Insight**  
into Decisions at  
Pivotal Junctures



Restore **Pride** for  
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Track

# Lost in the Deluge

Students Struggle to Understand Which Messages Are Important and Relevant



*"Sign up to meet with your academic advisor"*

*"Have you applied for financial aid yet?"*

*"See you at the student activity fair"*

*"Important announcement for engineering students"*

*"Resources for students like you"*

## Key Failures

- ✗ Information front-loaded at the start of term or college and not at the relevant time
- ✗ Difficult for students to assess the relative importance of different moments
- ✗ Institutions share information, rather than ensuring understanding or follow-through

# Elevate the Moments That Matter

## Three Key Principles for Improving Communications



**Prioritize** and **personalize** messages about key milestones



Consider the **timing** and relevance of the messages



Provide **follow-through support** at moments when students are likely to stumble

# Maximize the Visibility of Important Moments



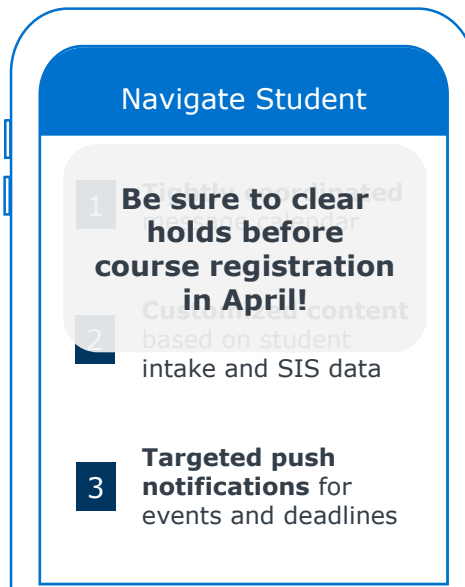
The University of Vermont

## Disciplining Campus Messages



- Form cross-disciplinary student communications team
- Develop an official university communications calendar with only essential messages
- Meet weekly to review planned communications

## Streamlined Messages Elevate Important Milestones



## By the Numbers

**29**

Push notifications annually

**86%**

First- and second-year student adoption rate

# Some Moments Remain Exceedingly Complex

Critical Moments Like Financial Aid Prove Challenging and Consequential



## The “Melt” Problem

**23.1%**

First-time students who don’t return between orientation and census

## The Consequences

**500+**

Students who “melted” each fall and did not enroll at any college

## Disparate Impact

**8.4%**

Percentage-point difference between African American and white student melt-rate

## Investigating the Causes



Anti-melt task force analyzes the financial status of students who didn’t return



Students who did not come back explained they couldn’t pay for college because they did not fill out their financial aid forms in time

# Orientation Shifts Focus to Financial Readiness

## Case Managers Connect with Students and Create Accountability



1

### Orientation Checklists

- CCD issues checklists to each student that shows personal progress on onboarding requirements
- Completed tasks already checked off



2

### Case Manager "Checkout"

- To receive ID, students must review their checklist with case managers, with financial aid focus
- Recruiters assume case manager role in their off-cycle



3

### Case Manager Follow-Up

- Case manager call to follow up on missing documents or requirements
- Case managers track students with missing requirements in Navigate Watch List

### Results

8.6%

Percentage-point decrease in student melt rate from Fall 18 to 19

**9.1%** percentage-point decrease in melt rate for African American students

**16.1%** increase in first-time student enrollment

## A Troubling Asymmetry

Students Lack Insight into Programs  
Designed to Help Them Succeed



High institutional investment

of time, resources, and  
mindshare

Minimal student awareness

of the function, importance  
of early alerts

# Helping Students Help Themselves

UNCC's Week Four Campaign Educates Students and Prepares Them to Act

## Demystify Early Alerts



Language focused on "how to prepare for rain or shine"



Campaign assets include

- Emails
- Quick Polls
- Lawn signs
- Table tents
- Video



## Provide a Clear Course of Action

*If you receive an early alert message*

- 1 Take it seriously, especially if you get more than one**
- 2 Meet with your instructor**
- 3 Meet with your advisor**

## 4 Weeks In ...

What's your academic forecast?

**Worried  
about Rain?  
Act Now.**

[ucaae.uncc.edu](http://ucaae.uncc.edu)

**CONNECT with Advisor or  
Visit Advising Center.**



## Promising Indicators of Campaign Impact

**500+**

Responses to Quick Poll about early alerts

**300**

Additional students served via advising campaigns in fall 2019 compared to fall 2018

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**Elevate** Pivotal Moments to Your Students

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Provide **Insight** into Decisions at Pivotal Junctures

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Restore **Pride** for Students who Fall off Track

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# Some Cautionary Tales

## Students Lack Context for Long-Term Consequences of Today's Decisions

### Two Case Studies



Name: Natalia  
Age: 21



Attempted to drop 2  
courses and focus on  
independent study



Did not realize visa  
eligibility requires a  
certain credit threshold



Name: Annie  
Age: 19



Took campus job in  
art gallery for  
flexible schedule



Canceled shifts  
during exam week to  
focus on finals



Fired from job

# Imbue Student Decisions with Insight

Empower Students to Learn More About Themselves and Their Goals



My **past behavior** is connected to the **outcomes** I see.



I can **prepare for my future**.



Others can **help me get there**.



**Dig into the behavioral science.** Download the Nudge Whitepaper on [eab.com](https://eab.com)



# Articulate Consequences of Course Withdrawal

## SMART Check Process Outlines Options and Allows for Intervention



To withdraw from a course, students complete an interactive online SMART checklist form

Make a **SMART** choice, consider



*Checklist form excerpt:*

<b>S</b>	SAP
<b>M</b>	Money
<b>A</b>	Academic Record
<b>R</b>	Repay
<b>T</b>	Time to Degree

- No, I am not an international student or athlete
- Yes, I receive financial aid
- I understand that withdrawing and losing three credits will cost **\$1,492**
- I understand a withdrawal will be noted on my transcript
- I understand my cost and time to degree may increase



Alternatively, students meet with enrollment representative

- Walk-in sessions take 30 minutes
- Students learn the academic and financial impacts of withdrawal, tailored to their situation

### Impact

# 1,150

Online SMART checks from Jan to Nov 2019



WAYNE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

# A Cadence for Prompting Insightful Conversations

## Personalized, Human Contact Cuts Through the Noise



### Single Point of Contact (SPoC) Objectives



Socialize the implicit “rules” of college in a timely manner



Provide two-way personal contact to help navigate challenges



Gather student data not available in other information systems



Prompt personal reflection about goals and behaviors

### SPoC Communications Timeline

*(excerpted)*

1 week  
before  
classes

“Are you able to arrange your transport, work schedule, and other responsibilities so you aren’t stretched too thin?”

3<sup>rd</sup> week

“What is your favorite class? Why?”

Post-  
midterms

“Have you checked your midterm grades? Do you want to make any adjustments to how you’re approaching your work?”

# ‘So Easy, Even a Busy President Could Do It’

Email Templates, Calendars, and Watch Lists Simplify SPoC Workflow



## Ready-to-Use Assets and Tools



**5 email templates**  
and **timeline** for  
outreach



Navigate **Watch Lists**  
enable caseload  
monitoring



**Training on**  
**referrals** for  
different offices

## By the Numbers

**202**

FTIC students in  
pilot cohort

**~18**

Administrators  
serving as SPoCs

**15**

Hours per month  
commitment



**11%**

Increase in fall-  
to-fall retention

# Creating Meaningful Moments Goes Both Ways

Crystallize for Faculty the Impact They Can Create for Students



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
FULLERTON

## Meaningful Faculty Interactions Are a Missed Opportunity

"Both formal and informal faculty-student contact...were frequently the best predictors of student persistence."

- Umbach and Wawrzynski

**14%** Graduates who strongly agreed that they were supported by professors who cared

## Honor Moments with a Faculty Luncheon

Create form in student portal for **faculty nominations** outside of teaching



Organize **annual luncheon** to honor Faculty Advisors of Distinction

Read aloud the **students' entries** (150—200 words)



Print **nominations in booklet** for attendees to take home

# Model the Very Best Moments Faculty Can Spark

“Professor Woo emphasizes that everyone has a story and that it is important to tell it. She **treated everyone’s story with reverence** and respect.”

“When applying for my first internship, Dr. Bein was the one mentor that worked with me to fill out the paperwork and **ensure that everything was in order** for my cross country trip.”

“Through the tough times and tears, Professor Miller’s **encouragement and guidance** continued to get me through. Because of her I’ve got that second wind to push through.”



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**Elevate** Pivotal Moments to Your Students



Provide **Insight** into Decisions at Pivotal Junctures



Restore **Pride** for Students who Fall off Track

# 'Getting Back on Track' Easier Said Than Done

## What Happens if a Student Falls Into a 'Pit'?



Stumbles often framed in punitive terms or as failure



Students experience shame, isolation, and a diminished sense of belonging



Options to recover are unclear

# Reframe Failures as Opportunities for Growth

Helps Students to Turn Moments of Failure from Pits to Peaks

## Strategies to Reframe Moments of Failure

### 1 PROVIDE A CLEAR PATH TO RECOVERY

Focus communications on clear path to recovery, and remind students of their ability succeed

### 2 CONNECT THEM TO OTHERS

Connect students to other members of the community who have successfully navigated a moment of failure

### 3 CONVERT FAILURE TO OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

Aid students to self-reflect and to feel a sense of pride and confidence about their journey

*“I feel proud of myself. I know I can accomplish what I set out to do, and I know where and who to go to for help.”*

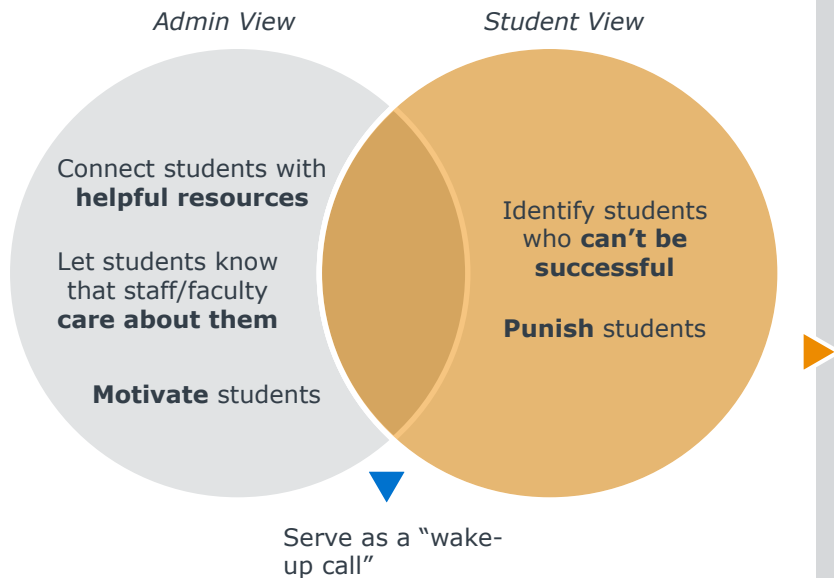
*“I feel ashamed and alone. I don't know how to fix this and am considering dropping out.”*



# The Message You're Telling Is Not What They Hear

## Delivering the Tough News of Academic Probation

### "What Is the Purpose of Probation?"



### What Students Say



*"I felt like a failure when I got my probation."*

*"I felt incredibly alone. No one seems to struggle, or at least not to that degree. I felt like I couldn't tell anyone."*

*"For some time after getting the letter, I felt that I didn't belong. I had already felt that way coming in, but that letter seemed to confirm that."*

*"Being put on probation was hell."*

# Reduce the Shame and Stigma Behind Probation

## Reframe Academic Recovery with the Student Perspective



### CTC's Principles for New Academic Probation Letter



**Frame probation as a process not a label**



**Communicate "you're not the only one"**



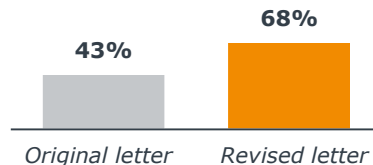
**Acknowledge range of nonacademic reasons**



**Offer hope for returning to good standing**

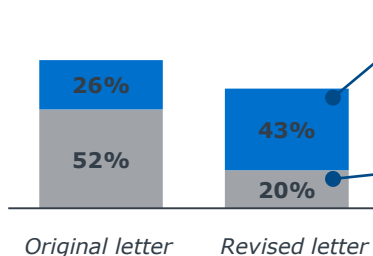
### Impact on Student Behaviors and Outcomes

*Within Three Weeks*



Students who visited their advisor

*One Year Later*



Students off probation

Students with a more severe academic status

# Past Students' Experiences Show a Way Forward

Probation Becomes an Opportunity for Growth



## UD Website Shares Student Perspectives on Probation

...I just wasn't prepared for the way college works, **how much reading** some professors assign, or the **fancy language** some people use. When I ended up on probation, **I felt like a failure, like I didn't belong...**



**Outline specific reasons**

**I met with my advisor**, went to drop-in tutoring every week at the Center for Academic Enrichment, and started spending more time at the library. Now, I'm on track to graduate and **I know that I deserve to be here just as much as anyone else.**



**Offer hope for returning to good standing**

# Flip the Script on Failed Major Admissions

## Volunteer State Sends Proactive Acceptance Letters for Other Programs

### Help Students Navigate Uncertainty by Proactively Offering Alternative



Categorize each major based on student movement



Identify most common major transfer destinations of “donor majors”



Send recruitment letter from sister program the month acceptance results are released



5% retention goal for recruitment letters

### Use Letter to Highlight New Program Acceptance



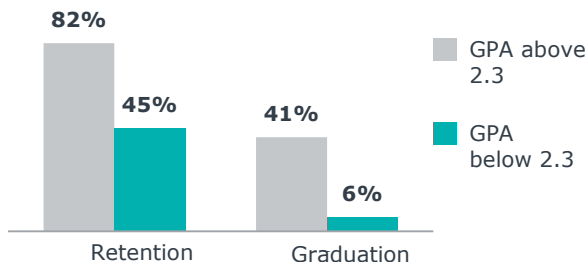
#### *Acceptance Letter, Alternative Program*

- ☒ Congratulate student for acceptance into new program
- ☒ Explain why the student would be a good fit for the program
- ☒ Highlight different degree and certificate options
- ☒ Invite student to an open house to learn more about the new program
- ☒ Provide student with advisor contact information

# Help Vulnerable Students Find Their Footing

## Summer Boost Program Assists Low GPA Students with Course Correction

### Retention and Graduation Rates Drop Precipitously for Students with Lower GPAs



### Typical Remediation Process

- Advisors encourage students to repeat course(s) for which they earned a low grade
- Depending on institutional policies, the student may replace the higher grade on their transcript
- No additional support or guidance

University of the Virgin Islands

### Summer Boost's Approach to Academic Remediation



- ✓ Not major- or course-specific
- ✓ Designed for students with a <2.3 GPA in their first 24–30 credits



- ✓ Free for students; funded via grants and private donations
- ✓ Five-week, full-time, on-campus program



- ✓ Pairs students with a peer academic coach and with Center for Student Success advisors

# Cement Academic Performance and Self-Efficacy

## Instead of Remediation, an Opportunity to Stretch Students' Abilities



### Competitive Admissions

Staff identify eligible students and invite them to apply. They then interview all applicants to determine fit.



### Noncognitive Skill Development

The program curriculum emphasizes creativity, innovation, research, problem-solving, and self-efficacy skills.



### Clear Path to GPA Improvement

Students work with peer coach and academic advisor to prepare to retake any course in which they have a C or below.



### High Expectations from Faculty

The program requires students to complete and present a research project in front of prestigious faculty.

University of the Virgin Islands

### Summer Boost Program Impact

# 32%

Percentage-point higher persistence rate compared to all other UVI students

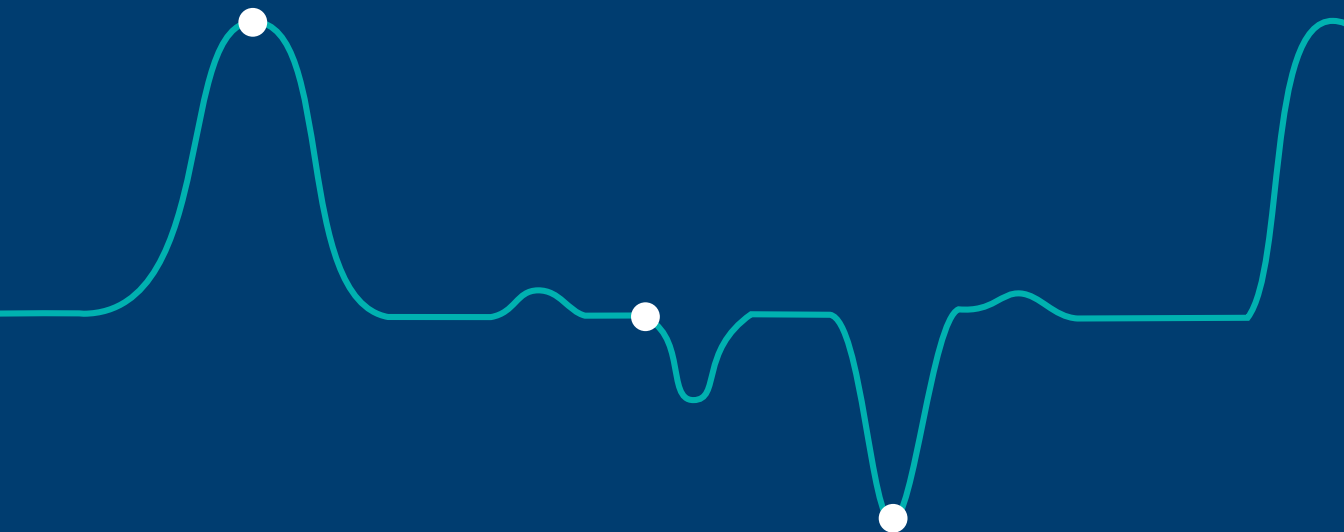
# 12%

Percentage-point increase in participants' credit completion from the spring to fall term

# 4

Additional students retained

# Our Challenge for You



Elevate Pivotal  
Moments to Your  
Students

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Provide **Insight**  
into Decisions at  
Pivotal Junctures

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Restore **Pride** for  
Students who Fall  
off Track

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