

Scaling Enrollment and Persistence at Dutchess Community College with Mongoose

Overview

Dutchess Community College (DCC), a SUNY institution located in New York's Hudson Valley, is committed to building a student-centered enrollment and support experience. In 2023, the college launched a strategic initiative to unify communications across departments and foster stronger student connections throughout the lifecycle, from recruitment through graduation. To support that effort, DCC implemented Mongoose Conversation Intelligence, giving four core teams—**Admissions, Advising, Student Financial Services, and Student Activities**—a shared platform for texting, engagement, and support. The result: higher student responsiveness, better coordination, and a scalable communications model that empowers staff without overloading students.

Challenge

Prior to Mongoose, DCC's communication ecosystem was fragmented. Departments relied on email and tools like Starfish or Slate's built-in texting to reach students. But that approach lacked integration, personalization, and insight, especially for high-stakes interventions around holds, registration, and financial aid. DCC needed a platform that would allow different departments to engage the same student body thoughtfully, without overlapping, spamming, or losing opportunities for impact.

Solution

The college adopted Mongoose Conversation Intelligence as its cross-functional student engagement tool in early 2023, rolling it out across:

- Admissions & Recruitment
- Academic Advising
- Financial Services (Student Accounts + Financial Aid)
- Student Activities

Rather than siloed messaging, DCC now operates as a coordinated network, tracking replies, opt-outs, campaign success, and even sentiment. Mongoose integrates with Slate and Starfish, giving staff visibility into the student journey and empowering them to respond in real-time. **Brian Sondey**, Associate VP for Enrollment and Student Success at DCC, said,

“Mongoose helps us create a spider web of support. We're reaching students with empathy and relevance, not just information.”

BRIAN SONDEY

Key Outcomes

Admissions: Precision Texting Drives Funnel Movement

- 133% increase in texting volume since January
- 10–15% reply rates for campaign-based messaging
- 0.5% decline in opt-outs despite increased sends

Admissions used Slate queries to send targeted nudges throughout the funnel, application status updates, event invitations, and FAFSA reminders. Campaigns were structured to build naturally across a student's journey, which led to high engagement and clear movement from inquiry to registration. **Xavier Velasquez**, Assistant Director of Admissions at DCC, said,

“We've moved from one big blast to thoughtful, weekly nudges. And we're seeing students flow from 'submitted' to 'accepted' and then RSVP to yield events, because of how we're texting.”

XAVIER VELASQUEZ

Advising: Personal Touch Points for Support

- 7% reply rate (up from 6.5%)
- Opt-out rate reduced from 1.5% to under 1%
- Texting used to follow up on Starfish flags, missed appointments, and email reminders

Rather than mass campaigns, the advising team focused on personal outreach to students showing early signs of disengagement. Messages were timed, concise, and deeply tied to success triggers. Brian noted,

“We're not looking to overwhelm students. When they get a text from an advisor, it means something.”

BRIAN SONDEY

Student Activities: Engaging with Smart Messages

- 15,000+ texts sent in 90 days
- Weekly “Activities Informer” texts kept students aware of events
- 1.6% opt-out rate, consistent with expectations for co-curricular outreach

Key Outcomes, Cont.

Mongoose enabled student activities to share upcoming events via smart links, polls, and reminders—without overwhelming students. Plans are in place to experiment with kickoff messages and opt-in interest segments for fall semester events. **Matt Hanlon, Director of Student Activities at DCC**, added,



“We want students to look forward to texts from us, not ignore them. Mongoose helps us build that trust slowly.”

MATT HANLON

Financial Services: Targeted Messaging for Timely Action

- Texting used for payment deadlines, residency documentation, and overdue accounts
- Notable increase in student follow-through after texts
- Engagement often transitioned from text to phone or in-person

Mongoose allowed financial services to deliver high-urgency prompts, without needing to rely on less effective channels like email or robocalls.

Cheryl Verdile, Director of Student Accounts at DCC, said,



“When we text, students respond. They may still call or walk in, but the text is what gets them moving.”

CHERYL VERDILE

Leveraging the Conversation Intelligence Dashboard

DCC is now using Mongoose's updated Conversation Intelligence Dashboard to gain insights into:

- Conversation volume and resolution status
- Sentiment analysis across student replies (joy, confusion, interest, anger, etc.)
- Trending topics like registration, holds, and payment issues
- Unresolved message follow-ups, helping prevent drop-offs

These features allow teams to prioritize high-risk conversations and align messaging around real student needs.

Future Plans

As DCC works toward its 2028 enrollment goal of 5,000 degree-seeking students, it plans to:

- Expand its use of Smart Messages and AI-powered Conversation Intelligence
- Further integrate Mongoose into retention workflows
- Coordinate across departments via shared comms calendars
- Pilot new student engagement strategies based on reply rates and sentiment data



“We don't have 4,500 staff members. But with Mongoose, we're giving 4,500 students the experience of someone who cares.”

BRIAN SONDEY

Mongoose Conversation Intelligence Platform

Learn more

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