What is summer melt & why does it occur?
Revisiting the concept of summer melt

*Summer melt* is a term traditionally used by college admissions officers to describe the phenomenon that students pay a deposit to attend a particular college but do not matriculate *at that college* the following fall.

Here, *summer melt* describes the phenomenon that college-intending students fail to enroll in college *at all* in the fall following high school graduation.
Why does it occur?

...during a period of little access to professional help.
How prevalent is summer melt?
Magnitude of the summer melt problem

Percentages indicate the share of college-intending students that do not enroll anywhere in the fall following high school graduation.

- Boston, MA: 21%
- Providence, RI: 33%
- Philadelphia, PA: 32%
- Fulton County: 22%
- Fort Worth, TX: 44%
- Dallas, TX: 28%
- Albuquerque, NM: 29%
What can I do to reduce summer melt among my students?
Strategies to reduce Summer melt

- HS counselor outreach
- Proactive outreach
- Navigating complexity
- Simplifying information
- Facilitating access to support
- University-based outreach
- Peer mentor outreach
- Text-based information & outreach
Advisors/counselors advertised the availability of summer support to all eligible students prior to HS graduation.

**Control group:**
Did not receive proactive outreach, but received same level of support if initiated contact.

**Treatment group:**
Received proactive outreach from counselor, peer mentor or via text at several points during the summer.

Implemented with over 30,000 students in 13 urban school districts and with university partners since 2011.
Key principle: Be proactive!
Strategies to reduce Summer melt

HS counselor outreach
Summer counselor outreach: Implementation & learnings

- Counselors paid to work over the summer months
- Counselors assigned to caseloads of ~40 students each
- Counselors responsible for:
  - Reaching out to each student approximately weekly
  - Reminding students of key college transition tasks
  - Checking in on questions & progress
  - Providing guidance & support

- Learnings:
  - Text & Facebook messaging more effective than phone / email
  - Many student questions relate to financial aid process
  - Students responsive to the offer of support
Summer counselor outreach: Improved enrollment & persistence

Impact of HS counselor outreach on enrollment and persistence

- Fall enrollment: Treatment 83% vs. Control 78%
- 1st yr persistence: Treatment 81% vs. Control 74%
- 2nd yr persistence: Treatment 72% vs. Control 64%

Impacts largest among students from the lowest-income backgrounds

- Levels of statistical significance: ~ p<0.10 * p<0.05 ** p<0.01
Strategies to reduce Summer melt

- Peer mentor outreach
- HS counselor outreach
Power of peer-to-peer support

Working as a *Bridge to College* coach provided me with the inspiration not to quit. There I was, serving as a role model to other people. What would it look like for me to transfer back to the city? Coaching other kids through the summer made me see how important it was for me to stay at Skidmore, complete my four years, and not give up on myself. I returned, became more involved in activities, and felt more encouraged to succeed myself.

--Yabi Guerrero, Skidmore class of 2014
Strategies to reduce Summer melt

- Peer mentor outreach
- HS counselor outreach
- Text-based information & outreach
Text-based outreach: implementation & learnings

- Text outreach included ~10 messages on topics such as:
  - FAFSA and financial aid award letters
  - Orientation, placement tests, and housing
  - Tuition bill and health insurance
  - Getting to campus for start of the semester

```markdown
Hi Alex! have you signed up for the UM-Boston orientation? Last one is 7/15. Need to register? [http://1233433.org](http://1233433.org). Need help? Reply to talk w/ an advisor.

Hi Alex! Need help w/ the FAFSA? Questions about your fin. aid award letter, or need more aid? Reply to meet with a DISD counselor.
```
Example text responses

**July 2:** “Awwww! Thank you so much!”

**July 2:** “Who’s this?”

**July 8:** “Oh hey! You couldn’t text me at a better time! I was wondering if I can make an appointment with you…I need to update my financial aid with my tax forms and I don’t know how to do it. I need your help!”

Typically only a small fraction of students (~5 percent) opt out of a text messaging campaign whereas a large fraction (~75 percent) engage in the messaging.
Facilitating student-counselor interactions: The **SignalVine** platform

uAspire reminder: Fall bill due 8/7. Do you have a good plan for paying ur bill? Need help? Questions about loans? Text us or visit our walk-in hrs!

I saw what my bill is so is that what financial aid takes care of

Do you know how much your bill is for?

3000 & some change

That doesn’t sound like your fin aid has been applied yet. Did you check your email? Check to see if you have any emails from the aid office.

I figured it out, they need my transcript

Ok that makes sense. Once they received this, the fin aid office may have more papers for you to fill out. Be sure to check your email often and let us know.
Strategies to reduce Summer melt

- HS counselor outreach
- Peer mentor outreach
- University-based outreach
- Text-based information & outreach
Georgia State University partnership

- **GSU context**
  - High rates of summer melt among recent cohorts
  - Majority of incoming students are Pell eligible
  - 1/3 admitted students are first-generation college goers

- **Research collaboration with AdmitHub**
Meet Pounce

- Reminders
- Guided Tutorials
- Surveys
Building Pounce

Separate workflows pertaining to all steps in the GSU college transition process:

- Intent to enroll form submission
- FAFSA submission/verification, accepting loans, paying tuition bill
- Orientation registration & attendance
- Transcript and test scores submission
- Housing deposits
- Immunization records submission
- Placement test sign-up
- Planning for transportation
- Meal plan sign-up
Hey {First Name}, do you plan to park a car on campus?

Yes

Cool! Would you like me to help you get a parking permit?

Yes

Visit bit.ly/parking to see parking fees and rates, and to figure out what option will best fit your needs. To register your vehicle and get a permit, please create an account here: bit.ly/parkpermit.

No

OK. For future reference, visit bit.ly/parking for parking info. For other modes of transportation (shuttles, the metro, bike shares, Zipcar, etc.) go to bit.ly/transit.

No
Hi Mike! Congrats on being admitted to Georgia State! 🎉 I'm Pounce -- your official guide. I'm here to answer your questions and keep you on track for college. (Standard text messaging rates may apply.) Would you like my help?

Can I bring my dog to the dorm?

Fish are allowed in tanks no larger than 10 gallons, but all other pets are prohibited. Visit bit.ly/1SiBe6R to see what you should and shouldn’t bring.

Chatbots

Computer programs that mimic conversation with people using artificial intelligence
Implementing Pounce

- Implemented in Summer 2016
- Integrated with GSU student information system
  - Specific workflows targeted only to students who needed them
- When Pounce couldn’t answer student questions automatically, it forwarded them via email to a campus advisor
- Counselor responses filtered through system to student & were used to update Pounce’s knowledge base – making the system smarter over time
Impacts of Pounce

- Enroll in GSU
- Accept Stafford loan
- Accept loan
- Complete loan counseling
- Attend orientation
- Submit final transcript
- Immunization hold on registration
- Verification hold on financial aid

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Treatment  Control
Thank you!

Lindsay C. Page

lpage@pitt.edu

@linzcpage