

Memorandum

United States Department of Education
Institute of Education Sciences
National Center for Education Statistics

DATE: January 30, 2017

TO: Robert Sivinski and E. Ann Carson, OMB

THROUGH: Kashka Kubzdela, OMB Liaison, NCES

FROM: Tracy Hunt-White, NPSAS:16 Project Officer, NCES

SUBJECT: NCER-NPSAS Grant Study - Financial Aid Nudges 2017: A National Experiment to Increase Retention of Financial Aid and College Persistence Messages Change Request (OMB# 1850-0932 v.2)

NCER-NPSAS Grant Study - Financial Aid Nudges 2017: A National Experiment to Increase Retention of Financial Aid and College Persistence request was approved by OMB on January 19, 2017 (OMB# 1850-0932 v.1). This memorandum requests a revision to the intervention communication material submitted with that package. Specifically, revisions are requested for the text message scripts. These changes do not change the respondent burden or the cost to the federal government.

Intervention Communication Material

We are requesting changes to the text message scripts for several reasons: 1) to ensure that the 160 character limit is not exceeded; 2) to account for institution-specific information that is not available at the time of intervention; 3) to adjust language for missing data in embedded fields; 4) to provide more information on U.S. Department of Education resources; and 5) to clarify flow of messages and fix typos.

It is necessary to change the original text message scripts to ensure that all texts adhere to a 160 character limit. When the original scripts were written, the lengths of embedded data fields (e.g. student name, financial aid contact information) and some website urls were unknown. Upon learning of the maximum lengths of those fields, the grantee shortened the original message scripts to ensure that no texts were longer than 160 characters. Changes were also made where text referred to additional, institution-specific financial aid forms. Because data about those forms were not obtained in time for the intervention, we changed the message to a general notification to recommend that the student checks with the financial aid office regarding additional forms. Otherwise, the substance of the text messages remains unchanged from the original scripts and no messages were deleted.

As mentioned above, many of the text messages have embedded data fields. However, not all fields are known for each student. Hence, multiple versions of messages have been created to deal with missing data in the embedded data fields. For example, when a school's SAP GPA is missing in the data, the corresponding message would not make sense with a blank space instead of GPA. An alternate version of relevant message has been created to ensure that the substance of the message is communicated without confusing the student.

In order to assist students further, in several text messages we provided additional information about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process. Specifically, we included links to additional U.S. Department of Education sources to answer students' questions and direct them to resources that may help them fill out the FAFSA form.

Finally, several small changes were made to clarify the flow of messages and to correct typos contained in the original text message scripts. These changes are small and spread throughout Appendix A. Similar to the edits described above, these modifications do not change the substance of the original scripts – they are only wording revisions.