

CASE STUDY

How Johns Hopkins University uses student mentor texting for retention

With a voice they can relate to, first-year students at Johns Hopkins are getting the support they need.



Who is Johns Hopkins University?

A private university in Baltimore, Maryland, Johns Hopkins was founded in 1876. The institution is the leading U.S. academic institution in research and development spending with graduate programs that are considered to be among the best in the country.

Johns Hopkins has about 26,000 graduate and undergraduate students.



Guiding first-year students

The Office of Orientation and First-Year Experience at Johns Hopkins helps support first-year students bridge the gap from high school to college. There are a group of student mentors assigned to first-year students to offer guidance through the transition and answer questions. The student-mentors are led by Brittany Claridge, Assistant Director of Orientation & First-Year Experience.

“To help new students manage the transition challenges they face, we employ a variety of tools. Like most, we host an annual orientation program and have ongoing touch-points throughout the first year experience. What we found was that students are not very responsive to or engaged with email. They’re almost always using their mobile phones, and we saw an opportunity to meet students where they are. Most other departments are using email and we wanted to differentiate ourselves.”

- *Brittany Claridge*

Who is Kai?

Kai Abiola is a student at Johns Hopkins and the Special Projects Coordinator for the Office of Orientation. By texting first-year students and helping them overcome obstacles, she's become a bit of a campus celebrity.

Along with the other student mentors in the Office of Orientation, Kai was trained by the staff at Johns Hopkins and serves as a paid employee for her role.



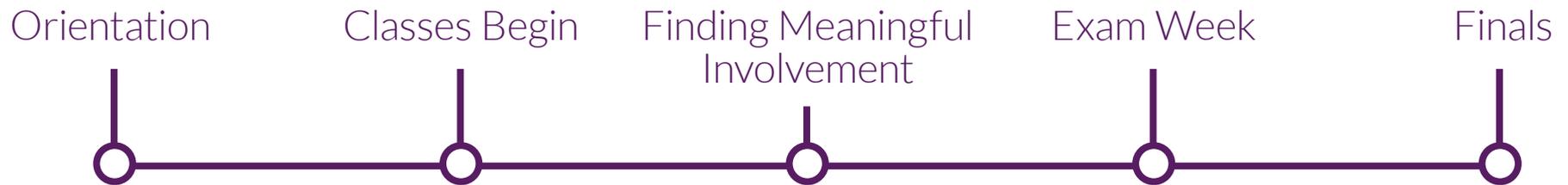
As a student, Kai received guidance from student-mentors when she was a freshman. She feels that unique perspective helps her better communicate with students.

“I get a whole lot of emails from professors and employees. It’s usually a block of words, not really exciting. For me, it’s easier to make more relevant connections. In some cases, I am struggling in that class right alongside a student. One of the students I’m texting is in my Spanish Literature class. First-year students are adjusting to a lot of different things and it helps to encourage them that they will get through this.”

- Kai Abiola

What goes into crafting text messages

The Office of Orientation has mapped out the entire first-year experience. By looking at important milestones and touchpoints throughout the school year, the department can predict the types of questions students might have.



Once the department has formulated communication, Kai has input into tweaking the messages to better relate to students.

Naturally, there can be pushback from an administration on allowing a student to text fellow students on behalf of the institution. There's always a challenge in balancing authenticity and professionalism. The fact that the student mentors at Johns Hopkins are paid student employees provides accountability

Also, with Cadence, Brittany Claridge and her staff have the option to go into the texting platform to monitor messages and ensure they're on point.

"I can go into Cadence and see what Kai is saying. Most other methods of communication don't provide me the same opportunity for accountability or monitoring. That's beneficial. I give members of my student team autonomy, but I'm also here as a consistent resource. I never make them manage a project or individual communication that's over their head."

- *Brittany Claridge*



Impressive metrics on texting

Students want to be texted, as long as the information is relevant. Johns Hopkins Office of Orientation and First-Year Experience saw an uptick in response rates to texts as opposed to emails.

- > Summer email read rates would be about 10%
- > Text message read rates have held steady at 30-40% for any message

“That kind of engagement has been critical to be able to relay back to leadership.”

- *Brittany Claridge*

Johns Hopkins only had 3 students opt out of texting the entire 2020 school year (that’s out of almost 1,000 students).

Ensuring students feel supported

Hello, <NAME>, this is Kai from Johns Hopkins. We wanted to make sure you felt you had enough academic resources to help you make the transition to college. Do you feel properly supported?

This text had a 23% response rate; of those, **86.7% said yes they felt supported.**

Choosing the next student texter

What goes into picking a single person to be the one first-year students turn to when they need help? Johns Hopkins University has a student staff full of candidates to handle the responsibility.

They look for an individual who has initiative and can handle a lot of input from several sources at the same time - basically, a superstar.

“Texting students has been one of the most meaningful experiences since I’ve been on campus. It’s really special to me to get texts from first-year students, knowing that I’ve been there and that they’ve been comfortable reaching out to me and asking for advice. I help them through things. I feel a lot more connected to campus and sooooo many 1st years. I’ve learned more than they have.”

- Kai Abiola

A young man with glasses is smiling and looking down at his smartphone. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange and purple gradient. The text 'Real texts with Kai from real students' is written in white over the image.

Real texts with Kai from real students

Javi! Can you believe that we are over halfway through the semester? Just wanted to wish you good luck on the rest of your midterms! Also, is there anything I can possibly help with?

hehe thank you you're literally the sweetest, uh idk school is hard just trying my best just tired but holding up okay, <3

You've got this Javi! I believe in you, and you are so so so capable! Sending all the positive vibes your way! 💙

A person wearing a blue graduation cap and gown is shown in profile, looking down at a smartphone held in their hand. The background is a dark red and purple bokeh pattern.

Real texts with Kai from real students

Hey Andrea! Will I be seeing you at CQ Conversation soon? Don't miss out on the chance to discuss this year's common question - what is the common good? - with a Hopkins professor, your friends, and other fellow blue jays! Sign up today, and, hopefully, we'll talk soon! ✨

i already did mine!!! it was really fun!!!

thanks for always checking up on me!!! :)

Awesome! I'm so happy to hear that! Also, of course! It's been so great getting to know you these past few months 😊



Real texts with Kai from real students

Okok thank you so much Kai!!!!

You have been so helpful!!

I'm so glad to hear that!



Real texts with Kai from real students

Hi! Once you arrive on campus, you will need to head to Shriver Hall for your COVID test! After your test, you will receive your keys and J-Card.

Thank you so much!

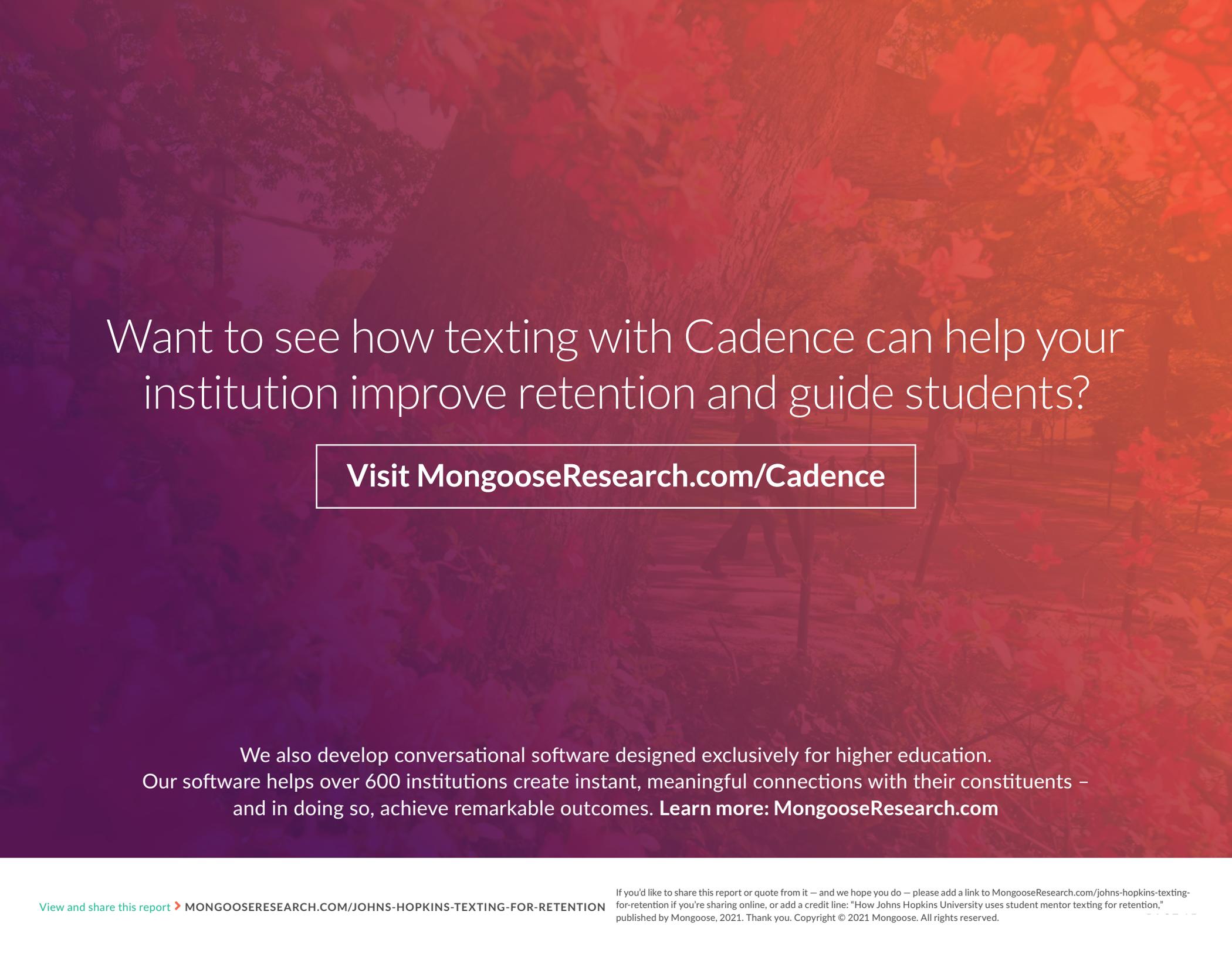
You've been such a great help! I'm very thankful



This level of engagement improves retention and reduces melt.

Ultimately, it's about supporting students and making sure they have everything they need to succeed.

Thanks to the work of the Office of Orientation and First-Year Experience, the first-year students at Johns Hopkins University feel supported.



Want to see how texting with Cadence can help your institution improve retention and guide students?

[Visit MongooseResearch.com/Cadence](https://MongooseResearch.com/Cadence)

We also develop conversational software designed exclusively for higher education. Our software helps over 600 institutions create instant, meaningful connections with their constituents – and in doing so, achieve remarkable outcomes. **Learn more: MongooseResearch.com**