



Experiments in Survey Recruitment and Incentive Strategies to Boost Response Rates

Tori Rehr, Senior Program Review and Strategic Planning Analyst



About CSSL

- Center for the Study of Student Life
- CSSL studies various aspects of the student experience
 - Inform the university of student perspectives through reporting and publications
- Data are collected largely from surveys

Session Overview

1. Challenges of Online Surveying
2. Strategies for Student Engagement
3. Developing a Participant Pool

Challenges of Online Surveys

- Challenges
 - Decreasing response rates
 - Response rates by undergraduate students to the Student Life Survey

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
18.2%	18.7%	16.1%	19.9%	14.4%	13.7%

- Institutional mistrust
- Requires access to and knowledge about technology

Strategies for Student Engagement

- CSSL conducted experiments
 - Investigated both recruitment emails and survey incentives
 - Recruitment outcome – looked at email open rates
 - How can we increase the number of students **opening the recruitment emails OR opening the survey link?**
 - Incentives outcome – looked at survey completion rates
 - How can we increase the number of students **responding to the survey (either partially or fully)?**

CSSL Surveys

- Surveys and their typical open and response rates:
 - Residential Experience Survey
 - All students living in Residence Halls (~7,500 responses, 75% open rate, 47% response rate)
 - Graduation Survey
 - All graduating students (~7,000 responses, 80% open rate, 55-60% response rate)
 - Student Life Survey
 - Random sample (~2,000 responses, 50% open rate, 15% response rate)

Recruitment Strategies for Engagement

- Residential Experience Survey:
 - Recruitment
 - Does a branded graphic increase the email and/or the survey open rate?
 - Results
 - Branded graphics **did not affect** email open rate or survey open rate

APPENDIX A: BANNER GRAPHIC



Residential Experience Survey

 THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

Survey Open Rates	<i>n</i>	%	Sig.
Group A: Banner	3,664	48.1	
Group B: No Banner	3,791	49.6	
<i>Total</i>	7,455		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Recruitment Strategies for Engagement

- Graduation Survey:
 - Recruitment
 - Does a humorous subject line increase the email/survey open rate?
 - Results
 - Humorous subject lines **decreased survey open rate** for undergraduates
 - Humor **increased email open rates** for graduate students but not survey open rates

Group 1: Humorous Subject Lines

Invitation

- Buckeyes understand the assignment: Take the Grad Survey

2 weeks before commencement

- Try not to take the Grad Survey Challenge (impossible)

1 week before commencement

- Roses are red, violets are blue, take the Grad Survey, you'll be glad if you do

Undergraduate	Email Open Rate	Survey Open Rate	Sig.
Humor (<i>n</i> = 1,237)	81.4%	60.5%	<i>p</i> < .05
Non-Humor (<i>n</i> = 1,243)	81.7%	64.8%	
Graduate	Email Open Rate	Survey Open Rate	Sig.
Humor (<i>n</i> = 289)	81.8%	47.8%	<i>p</i> < .05
Non-Humor (<i>n</i> = 293)	50.7%	47.8%	

Recruitment Strategies for Engagement

- Student Life Survey:
 - Recruitment
 - Does the invitation messaging affect the email/survey open rate?
 - 3 Groups: Simple Invitation, Few Represent the Many, and Tangible Outcomes
 - Results
 - Invitation messaging **did not influence** email open rate
 - Emphasis on “Few represent the many” **increased** survey open rate
 - Emphasis on “Tangible outcomes” **reduced** survey open rate

	Email Open Rate	Survey Open Rate	Sig.
Simple Invite (<i>n</i> = 365)	52.2%	15.6%	<i>p</i> < .05
Few Represent the Many (<i>n</i> = 409)	50.2%	17.5%	
Tangible Outcomes (<i>n</i> = 325)	50.0%	13.9%	

Incentive Strategies for Engagement

- Student Life Survey:
 - Incentives
 - Does incentive type affect response rate?
 - 4 Groups: Expensive Physical Item (Watch), Large Cash Deposit (\$25), Small Cash Deposit (\$5), No Incentive
 - Results
 - All incentives **increased** response rates compared to no incentive
 - The expensive physical item had the **best** response rate but not by much

Incentive Group	<i>n</i>	%	Sig.
Group A: Apple Watch	398	19.4%	
Group B: 1 of 12 \$25 BuckID deposits	351	17.1%	***
Group C: 1 of 60 \$5 BuckID deposits	347	16.9%	
Group D: No incentive	233	11.4%	
<i>Total</i>	1,329	100.0%	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$



Incentive Strategies for Engagement

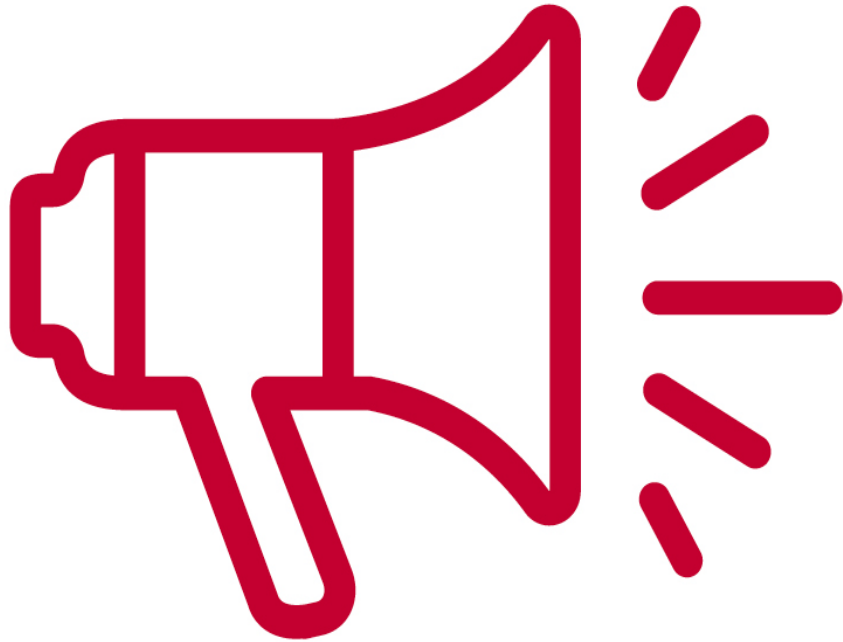
- Student Life Survey:
 - Incentives
 - Does a guaranteed incentive affect survey response rate?
 - 3 Groups: Lottery \$10, Lottery \$50, Guaranteed \$3
 - Results
 - Guaranteed small incentive had the **best** response rate

Incentive Group	<i>n</i>	%	Sig.
Group A: Chance to win \$10 BuckID cash	380	13.4%	
Group B: Chance to win \$50 BuckID cash	438	15.5%	***
Group C: Guaranteed \$3 BuckID cash	520	18.4%	
<i>Total</i>	1,338		







Strategies for Student Engagement

- For Recruitment
 - Branded graphics in invitation **does not** influence email or survey open rate
 - Humorous subject lines **increased** graduate/professional student email open rate BUT *did not affect* survey open rate
 - Decreased survey open rate for undergraduates
 - Emphasis on “the few representing the many” **increased** survey open rate
- For Incentives
 - Offering any incentive **increased** response rate
 - **One expensive incentive** had the biggest impact but....
 - **Guaranteed small incentives** are better than raffles



Developing a Participant Pool

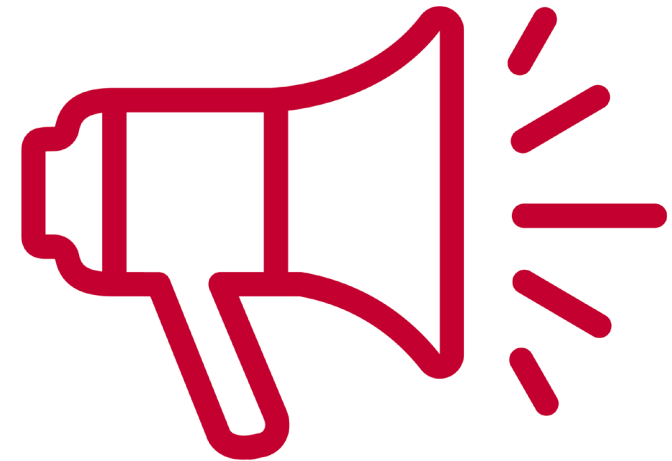
-  What is a participant pool?
-  Benefits and drawbacks
-  Developing a pool
-  Using a pool

Buckeye Insights Research Panel

We need your voice to help make Ohio State a better,
more inclusive campus for all students!

**Find out more about paid
research opportunities.**

go.osu.edu/buckeyeinsights



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF STUDENT LIFE

Thank you and Questions

- CSSL department email:
 - cssl@osu.edu
- Our reports:
 - go.osu.edu/cssl