Increasing Survey Response Rates

Thank you for joining the Student Life Studies assessment podcast. Our goal is to educate people about assessment resources and topics, so they can more easily incorporate assessment into their daily lives. Feel free to contact Student Life Studies by calling 979-862-5624, emailing sls@tamu.edu, or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Let's get on with today's podcast.

One of the questions we get asked a lot in Student Life Studies is "How do I get a good response rate for my survey?" That's a great question, so I'm going to spend a few minutes providing some useful tips.

Over the years, electronic survey response rates have decreased for a number of related reasons. One, students are over-surveyed, so they experience survey fatigue. It's really easy to delete the email or exit a survey already in progress. Two, related to number one, is that anyone with the internet can send out a survey. But, just because you can doesn't mean you should. Three, some surveys are created better than others. If the survey is not relevant to the potential respondents, or the survey questions are poorly written or there are too many questions, respondents are less likely to take or continue to take a survey. People are busy and don't have time to invest in something that frustrates them.

So how do you overcome those obstacles? Dillman, Smyth, and Christian in their book, *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method,* addressed how to increase the perceived rewards for responding, decreasing the perceived costs, and establishing trust so that the rewards outweigh the costs.

Simple things to do to increase trust and rewards include providing basic information about the survey without being too wordy. Because people generally like to help others, demonstrate how their participation will help you or others in some way. This can be especially true if you are using a sample instead of the population—their responses becomes even more valuable. If you have the ability to do it,

personally addressing email invitations shows positive regard and professionalism. Respondents don't want to feel like they are just a number or getting spam email. Also, be sure to thank respondents and provide contact information if they have any questions or comments. In terms of the survey questions, make them relevant and interesting. And a short, well written survey will get more respondents than a long survey. You might tell potential respondents how long it might take to respond. Hopefully, you can keep that time frame down to about five minutes.

There are also ways to decrease the cost of participation. Make responding as convenient as possible, so provide the actual survey link in the email, without a lot of other steps to go to another website or logging in. Reduce the time to take a survey by organizing questions, using an easy to read format, and decreasing the number of questions. For example, imbedding demographics behind the scenes will decrease the number of questions people have to answer. If you do need to ask personal information, explain why it is important. Language is incredibly important, so you want to avoid subordinating language that will turn off the respondent. Be professional but also in a tone that your audience will relate to. Preparing an email invitation to faculty may be different than one for students.

How do you establish trust so that the benefits outweigh the costs? One, have the invitation come from a legitimate and recognizable source, which could be the director of a department, president of a student organization, or from the department name. Another way to increase the connection is to explain why this is important and how the information will be used for improvement. If respondents do not think their opinion is valued or nothing will ever change, they are less likely to participate. You also want to ensure confidentiality or anonymity, to the level you are able, and the security of information.

Student Life Studies gets questions about providing incentives. We have not necessarily seen a significant increase in participation when incentives are offered, but additional communication to non-respondents does tend to bump up the responses. You have to weigh the cost in money, logistics, and time versus the benefit of using incentives to increase response.

Above all, always consider the respondent when creating assessments. Will they be bored, confused, enthused, engaged? Are you making it easy for respondents to understand the purpose, the importance of their participation, and the use of data for improvement? Remember, Student Life Studies can always elp you in this process.

Thanks for listening to today's podcast. Please let us know if this was helpful or if you have additional questions. You can contact us by calling 979-862-5624, emailing sls@tamu.edu, or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Check out our website at studentlifestudies.tamu.edu for more resources and information. We hope to hear from you.