



Encouraging Participation in CIRP Surveys

Student participation is critical to survey success. Simply put, the more respondents you have, the more confidence you have that your results accurately represent your student body. However, many institutions struggle with challenges related to obtaining a satisfactory response rate. HERI's templates for invitation and reminder messages to students emphasize the survey's value for the institution. In addition, efforts on campus can effectively supplement the invitation and reminder messages sent to students.

Factors that Contribute to Higher Response Rates

Each campus surveying students will want to take some time to assess local culture and determine the best way to reach their students. While there is no single method that will increase response rates, research (Dillman, 2007) does indicate several factors that contribute to higher response rates:

- Perceived importance of the survey (value to the student, perceived legitimacy)
- Level of interest students have in the research
- Trust that the data will be used and maintained properly
- Perception of reward for participation
- Minimizing respondent burden

These factors are worth thinking about as you plan your survey administration and promotion. Survey publicity such as flyers and media articles as well as incentives provided for participation can reinforce the message to students that survey results are valued and used on campus. Suggestions for promotional activities frequently used by campuses administering CIRP surveys include:

- Customizing survey invitation messages
- Using incentives (see below for additional information on incentives)
- Frequently reminding students that their responses are confidential
- Using student media—submit an article or editorial; place an ad in the student newspaper.
- Posting notices on the institutional website or course management systems (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle)
- Using Facebook or Twitter to share information and/or selected results during and after the survey administration
- Posting flyers on campus
- Placing signs on campus in high-traffic areas
- Setting up tables in the student center or union with survey information

Do include information about why the survey is important, its purpose, how the results will be used on campus, etc.



Incentives

Incentives can prove to be an effective means of increasing survey response rates. Gift certificates to the campus bookstore, food, money, or an automatic entry into some type of raffle or lottery are all possible incentives. CIRP survey incentives may be structured in a few different ways:

- Offer a small incentive (gift card, T-shirt) to each participant before or as the survey is administered.
- Offer a small incentive (gift card, T-shirt) to each student who turns in a completed survey. Please note that a student should not be penalized if they opt not to answer certain questions or leave a portion of the survey blank.
- Offer a lottery or drawing. Under this plan, students should receive information detailing the odds of winning, the number and type of prizes being offered, and the date of the drawing. Students would be instructed that upon completing the survey, their email address is entered into the drawing or any other instructions you wish to provide to allow students to enter the drawing (i.e., print out the “Thank You” page and bring it to a designated location on campus). If you provide us with Student Name and Student ID prior to administering your surveys, you will have access to Student Name and Student ID in your preliminary data file to track students who have completed the survey.

In the case that you create an incentive plan that differs from the above options, we **strongly** encourage you to check with your local IRB or other appropriate campus personnel to review the structure of your incentive program. There are a number of important guidelines for using incentives in CIRP surveys, including:

- Any incentive program may require local IRB approval. We recommend that you check with your institution’s IRB as soon as you have made a decision regarding incentives.
- Incentives for survey participation should be designed in a manner that maintains the voluntary nature of the survey.
- Survey promotion for incentives should not emphasize the incentives to a degree that minimizes the requirement of survey participation.
- The amount or value of the incentive should not be so large as to appear coercive.
- Each institution that decides to conduct a drawing (i.e., raffle or lottery) should first consult applicable state law to determine whether lotteries are legal.
- The Survey Information Sheet (SIS) covers the rights of participants with respects to all aspects of survey administration **except** incentives. Therefore, if you plan to utilize an incentive for your CIRP Survey, you **must** add this information on the “Welcome” page. The added text would describe, in detail, the incentive program, including the amount that could be won, an estimate of the odds (if you are utilizing a drawing), and how any drawing or other incentive program would be conducted.
- You are able to customize the “Thank You” page to include instructions for students to request the incentive.
- **Reviewing students’ responses to survey questions (other than their names for tracking purposes) prior to data processing is considered a breach of confidentiality.**