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 the challenges associated with 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 that surveys their students will want to take some time to assess their culture and determine the best way to reach their students. While there is no single magic bullet 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 the results from the survey are valued and used on campus. Suggestions for promotional activities frequently used by campuses administering CIRP surveys include:
- Customizing survey invitation messages
- 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. Do include information about why the survey is important, its purpose, how the results will be used on campus, etc.
- 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.

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 (music downloads, gift cards) 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. Raffle/lottery tickets can be distributed with paper surveys. Students taking the survey via the web would be instructed that upon completing the survey, they should print the "Thank You" page, and include identifying information to serve as a "ticket" in a drawing. In both instances, survey instructions should inform students to fill out their "ticket" upon completion of the CIRP Survey questionnaire and submit it to a designated location.

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 several important guidelines for using incentives in CIRP surveys. They include:

- 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 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 an addendum to the Survey Information Sheet. This section should be titled "Payment for Participation" and 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. If you are conducting a web administration, this information should be included on the "Welcome" page.

- The names of paper survey respondents can be tracked by campus personnel and the names of web respondents can be acquired during the administration cycle. A <u>complete</u> list of the names of survey respondents can be accessed through the CIRP Web Portal.

- **Reviewing students' responses to survey questions (other than their names for tracking purposes) on the completed paper questionnaires prior to data processing is considered a breach of confidentiality**.

- For web surveys, you are able to request that a unique incentive passcode be added to the "Thank You" page. This can be used to ensure that a student has completed the survey before requesting an incentive at your institution. Each student who completes the survey receives a unique passcode, and a list of passcodes is simultaneously available to campus representatives in the Detailed Web Response Report available on the CIRP Web Portal.