

GRADUATION SURVEY RESEARCH BRIEF: HUMOR IN SURVEY RECRUITMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- **62.7%** of invited undergraduate students opened the Graduation Survey.
- **47.8%** of invited graduate and professional students opened the Graduation Survey.
- Undergraduate students who received humorous subject lines were significantly less likely to open the Graduation Survey than those who received non-humorous subject lines.

SURVEY RECRUITMENT – INCLUDING HUMOR

The Graduation Survey is a survey sent to undergraduate, graduate and professional students prior to each commencement ceremony. The survey aims to gather data about these students' experiences during their time at The Ohio State University.

An experiment was run during the administration of the Autumn 2022 Graduation Survey to try to increase the number of students who open the survey. Students were randomly assigned into two groups: humorous email subject lines and non-humorous email subject lines. The humor group received an email invitation to the survey and reminder emails that had subject lines with a humorous tone, while the non-humor group received an invitation and reminders that had a neutral tone. This brief aims to illustrate the effect that these subject lines had on the number of students who opened the Graduation Survey.

Methods & Results

A total of 2,480 undergraduate students and 582 graduate and professional students were invited to take the Autumn 2022 Graduation Survey. All invited students were emailed an invitation to take the survey, as well as up to six reminder emails scheduled to be sent leading up to the day of the commencement ceremony. Students were not sent reminder emails once they had submitted a survey response.

Students were randomly assigned to either the humor group or non-humor group. The humor group received an invitation and reminder emails that contained subject lines with a humorous tone. The non-humor group received an invitation and reminder emails that contained subject lines that had a neutral tone (see Appendix A for all subject line language). All other aspects of the emails, including email body and timing, were identical.

Open rates were calculated by comparing all recorded responses to the total number of students invited to participate. The recorded responses included every survey submission regardless of completion percentage.

The following tables show the open rates for the survey broken down by humor vs. non-humor group. Significant differences between groups were found for undergraduate students only.

Table 1: Overall Open Rates

	Undergraduate students (n = 2,480)	Graduate and professional students (n = 582)
Opened	62.7%	47.8%
Did not open	37.3%	52.2%

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Table 2: Undergraduate Open Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 1,237)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 1,243)	Statistical Significance
Opened	60.5%	64.8%	*
Did not open	39.5%	35.2%	

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

Table 3: Graduate and Professional Open Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 289)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 293)	Statistical Significance
Opened	47.8%	47.8%	
Did not open	52.2%	52.2%	

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

Conclusion

There were no significant differences in open rates for graduate and professional students in regards to receiving humorous versus non-humorous subject lines. The humor group had significantly lower open rates for undergraduate students. These results led to the decision to not use humorous subject lines for future iterations of the Graduation Survey, including the Spring 2023 version.



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APPENDIX: SUBJECT LINES

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

3 days before commencement

- It's the final countdown (to graduation)

2 days before commencement

- Grad Survey? More like Grad Sur-Yay!

1 day before commencement

- Want to flip the Script (Ohio)? Take the Grad Survey

Commencement

- Take your diploma....and the Grad Survey today

Group 2: Non-Humorous Subject Lines

Invitation

- Take the Graduation Survey

2 weeks before commencement

- Reminder to take the Grad Survey

1 week before commencement

- One week until commencement

3 days before commencement

- Three days until commencement

2 days before commencement

- Don't forget the Grad Survey

1 day before commencement

- Take the Grad Survey before you leave Ohio State

Commencement

- Today is graduation!

