

GRADUATION SURVEY RESEARCH BRIEF: HUMOR IN SURVEY RECRUITMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- Undergraduate students who received humorous subject lines were significantly less likely to open Graduation Survey emails than those who received non-humorous subject lines.
- Graduate and professional students who received humorous subject lines were significantly more likely to open Graduation Survey emails.
- Undergraduate students who received humorous subject lines were significantly less likely to open the Graduation Survey link.

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 emails, and the number of students who open the survey links. 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 emails and the number of students who clicked the Graduation Survey link.

Methods

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. 13,480 emails were sent to undergraduates and 3,117 emails were sent to graduate and professional students in total.

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.

Email Open Rate

Email open rate was defined as the percentage of instances the email invitation and/or reminder emails were opened, regardless of if they continued to open the survey. Email open rates were calculated by comparing the number of initial instances of opening the email invitation and/or reminders to the total number of emails sent. Only the first instance of opening an email was counted. All instances of initial email opening were included, regardless of if prior emails had been opened by the student. Emails sent to students who were added late to the list of graduating students were not included in these calculations (data for these students were not available).

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

Table 1: Overall Email Open Rates

	Undergraduate emails (<i>n</i> = 13,480)	Graduate and professional emails (<i>n</i> = 3,117)
Opened	67.3%	64.5%
Unopened	32.7%	35.5%

Table 2: Undergraduate Email Open Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 6,884)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 6,596)	Statistical Significance
Opened	65.7%	68.9%	***
Unopened	34.3%	31.1%	

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

Table 3: Graduate and Professional Email Open Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 1,568)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 1,549)	Statistical Significance
Opened	66.6%	62.2%	*
Unopened	33.4%	37.8%	

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

Link Click Rate

Link click rate was defined as the percentage of people who opened the Graduation Survey link. Link click 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. Students who were added late to the list of graduating students were included in these calculations. Link click rate was also analyzed by college for undergraduates only.

The following tables show the link click rates for the survey broken down by humor vs. non-humor group. Significant differences between groups were found for undergraduate students. When broken down by college, significant differences were found for the College of Medicine and Fisher College of Business.

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Table 4: Overall Link Click Rates

	Undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 2,480)	Graduate and professional students (<i>n</i> = 582)
Clicked	62.7%	47.8%
Did not click	37.3%	52.2%

Table 5: Undergraduate Link Open Rate

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

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

Table 6: Graduate and Professional Link Open Rate

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

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

Table 7: Undergraduate Link Open Rate – College of Medicine

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 34)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 47)	Statistical Significance
Clicked	35.3%	61.7%	*
Did not click	64.7%	38.3%	

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

Table 8: Undergraduate Link Open Rate – Fisher College of Business

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 203)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 220)	Statistical Significance
Clicked	41.9%	53.2%	*
Did not click	58.1%	46.8%	

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

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Response Rate

Response rate was defined as the percentage of people who recorded a Graduation Survey response that met the threshold for analysis. Response rates were calculated by comparing all recorded responses that met the analysis threshold to the total number of students invited to participate. Students who were added late to the list of graduating students were included in these calculations. Response rate was also analyzed by college for undergraduates only.

The following tables show the link click rates for the survey broken down by humor vs. non-humor group. Significant differences between groups were found for undergraduate students. When broken down by college, significant differences were found for the College of Medicine and Fisher College of Business.

Table 9: Overall Response Rates

	Undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 2,469)	Graduate and professional students (<i>n</i> = 582)
Responded	59.6%	41.4%
Did not respond	40.4%	58.6%

Table 10: Undergraduate Response Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 1,234)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 1,235)	Statistical Significance
Responded	57.0%	62.3%	**
Did not respond	43.0%	37.7%	

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

Table 11: Graduate and Professional Response Rate

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 289)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 293)	Statistical Significance
Responded	40.8%	42.0%	
Did not respond	59.2%	58.0%	

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

Table 12: Undergraduate Response Rate – College of Medicine

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 34)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 47)	Statistical Significance
Responded	35.3%	57.4%	*
Did not respond	64.7%	42.6%	

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

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Table 13: Undergraduate Response Rate – Fisher College of Business

	Humor (<i>n</i> = 203)	Non-humor (<i>n</i> = 220)	Statistical Significance
Responded	35.5%	47.7%	*
Did not respond	64.5%	52.3%	

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

Conclusion

The humor group had significantly lower email open rates for undergraduates, and significantly higher email open rates for graduate and professional students.

There were no significant differences in link click rate for graduate and professional students (both overall and grouped by sex), and male undergraduate students between the humor and non-humor groups. The humor group had significantly lower link click rates for undergraduate students overall. In addition, the humor group had significantly lower link click rates for undergraduate students within the College of Medicine and Fisher College of Business.

For response rate, there were no significant differences for graduate and professional students. The humor group had significantly lower response rates for undergraduate students overall. In addition, the humor group had significantly lower response rates for undergraduate students within the College of Medicine and Fisher College of Business.

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!