

STUDENT LIFE SURVEY RESEARCH BRIEF: SURVEY RECRUITMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- Students were significantly more likely to participate in the survey if recruitment messaging emphasized that they were representing many other students with their response (17.5% response rate).
- Students who received messaging about how the data were used previously had the lowest response rate (13.9%).

SURVEY RECRUITMENT

The Student Life Survey (SLS) is an annual research project that explores the involvement, engagement and sense of belonging of students at The Ohio State University. A total of 7,000 students were included in a recruitment experiment on the 2022 SLS; 1,099 students responded for a response rate of 15.7%.

Scholars note that as web surveys have become an increasingly popular method for conducting research about higher education environments and student outcomes (Saleh & Bista, 2017), response rates have declined (National Research Council, 2013). Therefore, it is important for higher education researchers to better understand the factors that encourage strong response rates across diverse student populations. The aim of this brief is to illustrate how Ohio State students responded to different recruitment messages designed to encourage their participation in the SLS.

Methods & Results

All 7,000 students selected for the experiment were randomly assigned to one of three recruitment conditions, meaning each student saw one of three possible invitations to participate (Groups A, B and C; see appendix for language used in each condition). Each group comprised approximately 2,333 students. Students were not made aware of these different recruitment conditions.¹ Using results from a prior in-office experiment, all recruitment materials included the student's preferred first name in the subject line of each invitation and reminder email. For students in Group A, the invitation and reminder emails asked them to participate in an important survey and emphasized that their responses would be valuable. For students in Group B, the invitation and reminder emails emphasized that they were a select few asked to represent many other students by responding to the survey. For students in Group C, the invitation and reminder emails included tangible examples of how previous data collected were used by Student Life in the past to improve services.

The following table presents the different conditions as well as the associated response rates. The differences in response rate between groups was statistically significant. Those in Group B were 1.3 times more likely to participate in the survey than those in Group C and 1.1 times more likely to participate in the survey than those in Group A. There was not a significant difference in likelihood of participation between Group A and Group C.

Incentive Group	<i>n</i>	%	Sig.
Group A: Simple invitation	365	15.6%	
Group B: Few represent the many	409	17.5%	**
Group C: Tangible outcomes	325	13.9%	
<i>Total</i>	1,099		

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

¹ This study and design was approved by The Ohio State University's Institutional Review Board.

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Conclusion

Students were slightly more likely to participate if they were told that they were part of a select group that would be representing the entire student body in their responses. Those who received other recruitment messages (i.e., an invitation expressing the value of the participation or an invitation with examples of how the data were used previously for change in Student Life) were slightly less likely to choose to participate. These findings should inform future efforts concerning survey design and choice of recruitment messaging.

References

- National Research Council. (2013). *Nonresponse in Social Science Surveys: A Research Agenda for the Future of Social Science Data Collection*, Committee on National Statistics. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Saleh, A., & Bista, K. (2017). Examining factors impacting online survey response rates in educational research: Perceptions of graduate students. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, 13(28), 63-74.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LANGUAGE

Group A: Simple invitation

Subject line: [Preferred first name], take this short survey on your Ohio State experience

Hi [preferred first name],

Tell us about your experience as an Ohio State student!

I am writing on behalf of Dr. Melissa Shivers, Senior Vice President of the Office of Student Life, to invite you to take the annual Student Life Survey. Taking part in this research project will give you the chance to provide us with feedback about your Ohio State experiences and improve the services offered to our Buckeye community.

Your input is incredibly valuable, and your responses are confidential. If you choose to participate, you will be entered into a raffle to win one of 20 \$25 BuckID deposits.

The survey takes just 10 minutes or less. Please select the link below to participate.

[link]

If you have questions, please contact us at SL-surveys@osu.edu.

Sincerely,

Group B: Few represent many

Subject line: [Preferred first name], make your voice heard about the student experience at Ohio State with this short survey

Hi [preferred first name],

Tell us about your experience as an Ohio State student!

Each year, we send out the Student Life Survey to just 10% of Ohio State's student body. By taking part in this research project, you are serving as a representative for your fellow students. Your feedback will help inform us about students' experiences at Ohio State and help improve the services we offer to our Buckeye community.

Your input is incredibly valuable, and your response is confidential. If you choose to participate, you will be entered into a raffle to win one of 20 \$25 BuckID deposits.

The survey takes just 10 minutes or less. Please click the link below and use your voice to make a difference.

[link]

If you have questions, please contact us at SL-surveys@osu.edu.

Sincerely,

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Group C: Tangible outcomes

Subject line: [Preferred first name], make a difference with this short survey

Hi [preferred first name],

Tell us about your experience as an Ohio State student!

This brief survey will give you the chance to provide us with feedback about your Ohio State experiences and improve the services offered to our Buckeye community. The results from this research project will be used to create tangible improvements in your student experience.

Your input is incredibly valuable, and your response is confidential. If you choose to participate, you will be entered into a raffle to win one of 20 \$25 BuckID deposits.

The survey takes just 10 minutes or less. Please select the link below to help make a difference at Ohio State!

[link]

Your response to this survey will help make real, observable differences on campus. Here are just a couple of examples of real changes made based on responses from surveys like this:

- When Dining Services surveyed students about what they most wanted from dining operations during the pandemic in 2020, students asked for the salad bars to open up again in the facilities. Dining Services brought the salad bars back thanks to the student feedback.
- Buckeye Careers is now offering Grad Expos, which is an opportunity to meet with and learn about graduate and professional programs all over the country, in both autumn and spring semesters thanks to feedback from last year's Student Life Survey.

If you have questions, please contact us at SL-surveys@osu.edu.