

## THE USE OF INCENTIVES

### SUMMARY

The first administration of the Study on Collegiate Financial Wellness (SCFW) surveyed students at 51 public and private, two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities in 2014; 18,795 students completed the survey. This brief discusses how the use of incentives influenced response rates. The response rate for the 2014 administration was 12%, but varied from a low of 4% to a high of 26%.

### INTRODUCTION

Surveys that offer incentives to respondents report higher response rates than surveys that do not offer incentives (Goritz, 2004). Lottery incentives (the chance to win money or a prize) have been found to increase response rates among college students (Laguilles et al., 2011). This brief examines how the use of incentives was related to response rates during the 2014 administration of the SCFW.

### FINDINGS

Schools offering incentives for student participation reported significantly higher response rates than schools that did not offer incentives ( $p < .001$ ). Because all of the schools that offered incentives offered lottery incentives, this report cannot examine the impact of varying types of incentives (e.g., small gift for each participant versus lottery) on survey response rates.

However, our findings indicate that different types of lottery incentives do not make a significant difference in response rates. Schools offered a range of lottery incentives, including but not limited to, gift cards, technology, and apparel. Some incentives were only usable on-campus, others could be used off campus. Some schools offered a few large items as a reward (e.g. an iPad®, a \$500 gift card), some offered several small items, and some offered a combination of the two. Our findings suggest that one type of lottery incentive versus another did not significantly raise response rates.

### IMPLICATIONS

Offering incentives is important when trying to recruit students to take web-based surveys. Our findings suggest that it is not the type of incentive that seems to matter (at least in the context of lottery incentives) but rather that a survey offers an incentive in the first place.

#### References

Goritz, A. (2004) The impact of material incentives on response quantity, response quality, sample composition, survey outcome, and cost in online access panels. *International Journal of Market Research*, 46(3), 327-345.

Laguilles, J., Williams, E., & Saunders, D. (2011) Can lottery incentives boost web survey response rates? Findings from four experiments. *Research in Higher Education*, 52, 537-553.

Response Rates by Incentives

