

SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

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 efforts taken to achieve a high response rate from students. The response rate for the 2014 administration was 12%, but varied from a low of 4% to a high of 26%.

INTRODUCTION

Response rates for web-based surveys are often low. One meta-analysis of survey response rates suggests that the average web-based survey has a response rate of 34 percent (Shih and Fan, 2008); yet response rates among college student populations are often much lower. While technological advances in survey distribution have made it easier to canvas more potential respondents in a shorter period of time, it is also easy to ignore survey invitations. Low response rates do not necessarily mean that the responses are not representative of the target population, but many researchers agree that increasing response rates for these surveys is important. What are some strategies to increase response rates?

There are many factors that influence survey response rates, they include:

Factors that Influence Response Rates	How the SCFW Aims to Improve Response Rates
Is the topic relevant to the respondent?	Financial wellness is a key concern of college students
Is the sponsor trustworthy?	The Ohio State University, a well-known and regarded university, administers the survey
Is the survey too long?	The survey takes 15 minutes, on average
Is the survey easy to read?	The survey is written at an 8 th grade reading level and was tested with undergraduate students
How are respondents contacted? And how frequently?	Respondents are emailed a total of 4 times, and emails can be customized to come from someone at the student's home college or university

IMPLICATIONS

The SCFW aims to increase response rates by considering multiple, known factors that influence response rates. Additionally, the SCFW encourages all participating institutions to offer incentives for students who complete the survey. Other research conducted on the SCFW data finds that offering incentives is significantly associated with higher response rates.

References

Shih, T., & Fan, X. (2008). Comparing Response Rates from Web and Mail Surveys: A Meta-Analysis. *Field Methods*, 20(3), 249-71.