



ITHAKA S+R

# What Does It Take? Evidence-based strategies for student survey engagement

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Library Assessment Conference  
January 21, 2021

# Today's presentation

- What we knew: risks and risk mitigation
- What we didn't know (but now know): email addresses and incentives
- New pandemic considerations

What we knew

# Risks of low engagement

## Low response rates can...

- Lead to non-response error
- Decrease generalizability and representativeness of results
- Make it challenging or impossible to analyze findings by particular subgroups



# Survey communication strategies

## Personalization

- Customization of specific fields in communications

## Message content

- Messages kept brief and to the point but include key info on participation
- Varying the subject line and the signatory of subsequent messages

## Distributing messaging

- Vary the day of the week and time of day that messaging is distributed
- Avoid distributing messaging during holidays or breaks
- Striking the right balance on the number of messages sent

What we didn't know  
(but now know)

# Project background

## About the project

- Objective: A/B email address types and incentive offerings
- Population: Community college students in the U.S.
- Partners: Seven community colleges
- Timeline: Fielded in Fall 2018

Email addresses

# A/B testing: Email addresses

## Collecting contact info

- Each institution provided:
- An institutional email address
  - An alternative email address that was not from the institution

## Selecting email address

- Based on a number of unique factors about each institution, an institutional or non-institutional email address was selected for each contact

## Analyzing results

- We then compared rates of response among both email address groups to determine which group yielded the highest response rates

# Email results

Institution	Sample Breakdown	Response rates by email type	
		Institutional email	Non-institutional email
Bronx Community College	About half institutional and half non-institutional email addresses	7.3%	<u>8.6%</u>
Borough of Manhattan Community College	About half institutional and half non-institutional email addresses	7.9%	<u>15.6%</u>
LaGuardia Community College	Almost entirely institutional email addresses	<u>7.3%</u>	4.9%
Monroe Community College	All institutional email addresses	<u>19.5%</u>	0%
Northern Virginia Community College	Almost entirely institutional email addresses	<u>11.2%</u>	10.5%
Pierce College District	Two-thirds of sample non-institutional email addresses	<u>33.8%</u>	5.6%
Queensborough Community College	Two-thirds of sample non-institutional email addresses	9.4%	<u>13.8%</u>

# Email recommendations

## Considerations

- What email address type is best to use will vary by each institution
- Campus culture around email use should be taken into consideration
- Using an institutional email address can improve message deliverability

## Other alternatives

- Other channels can be used in addition to or instead of email
- When there is no clear policy on contacting students via email, students can randomly be assigned to an email address type

# Incentives

# A/B testing: Incentives

## Weighing incentive options

- Amazon versus Visa \$100 gift cards
- Hypothesized that these incentives would not disproportionately influence participation

## Incentive process

- Students randomly assigned to Amazon or Visa
- Incentive piped into survey communications
- Separate anonymous form to enter the raffle

## Distributing incentives

- 5 Amazon and 5 Visa gift card winners per each institution
- Amazon winners received a unique gift code; Visa winners mailed physical gift card

# Incentive results

Institution	Response rates by prize type	
	Amazon	Visa
Bronx Community College	7.4%	8.3%
Borough of Manhattan Community College	11.6%	12.1%
LaGuardia Community College	7.2%	7.3%
Monroe Community College	19.1%	19.8%
Northern Virginia Community College	10.8%	10.5%
Pierce College District	14.0%	15.0%
Queensborough Community College	12.0%	12.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>

# Incentive recommendations



- Resonates with students
- Distributed digitally
- No additional costs or labor
- No further information needed



- Resonates with students
- Distributed in-person or physically mailed
- Requires additional costs and labor
- Requires collecting additional info for mailing

# New pandemic considerations

# Research during COVID-19

## Challenges to consider

- More challenging to reach students during the pandemic
- Students are grappling with a variety of personal and professional challenges

## Strategies to practice right now

- Recognize humanity
- Make it even easier to participate
- Ask questions that are actionable

Thank You

# Contact



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