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

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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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Amazon</th>
<th>Visa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronx Community College</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borough of Manhattan Community College</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaGuardia Community College</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe Community College</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Virginia Community College</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce College District</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensborough Community College</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.4%</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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