EMORY LIBRARIES

Reversing the Trend of Declining Survey Response Rates: Was it Something We Did?

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Survey conducted as partnership between the Emory University Library System[1] and the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness[2]

Incentives matter
Survey length matters
Assessment matters

Background

Emory University is a private university in Atlanta, GA, with a fall 2012 student enrollment of 14,236 (7,656 undergraduates, 6,580 graduate students) and approximately 3,000 faculty members.

The Emory Libraries include the Main Robert W. Woodruff Library and libraries for Business, Health Sciences, Law, Theology, and Oxford College.

The Library Survey has been distributed annually since 2007 by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness to all faculty and students. The Office provides granular demographic information by matching respondents to their Emory ID.

At the conclusion of the 2012 library survey, the increased survey response rates led to questions about causes of the increase, and those questions generated this study.

Methods

Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficients (r_s) were calculated to identify any relationships between:

overall response rate { percent undergraduate respondents; percent graduate student respondents; percent faculty respondents; value of incentive; survey length; survey abandon rate (all survey modes); survey abandon rate (online survey only); overall satisfaction with Emory Libraries

Our results support research findings that "incentives of substantial, not just token value" [3] boost survey response rates, but "may be differentially effective along demographic lines," and that length has an impact because "college students prefer relatively short surveys." [4]

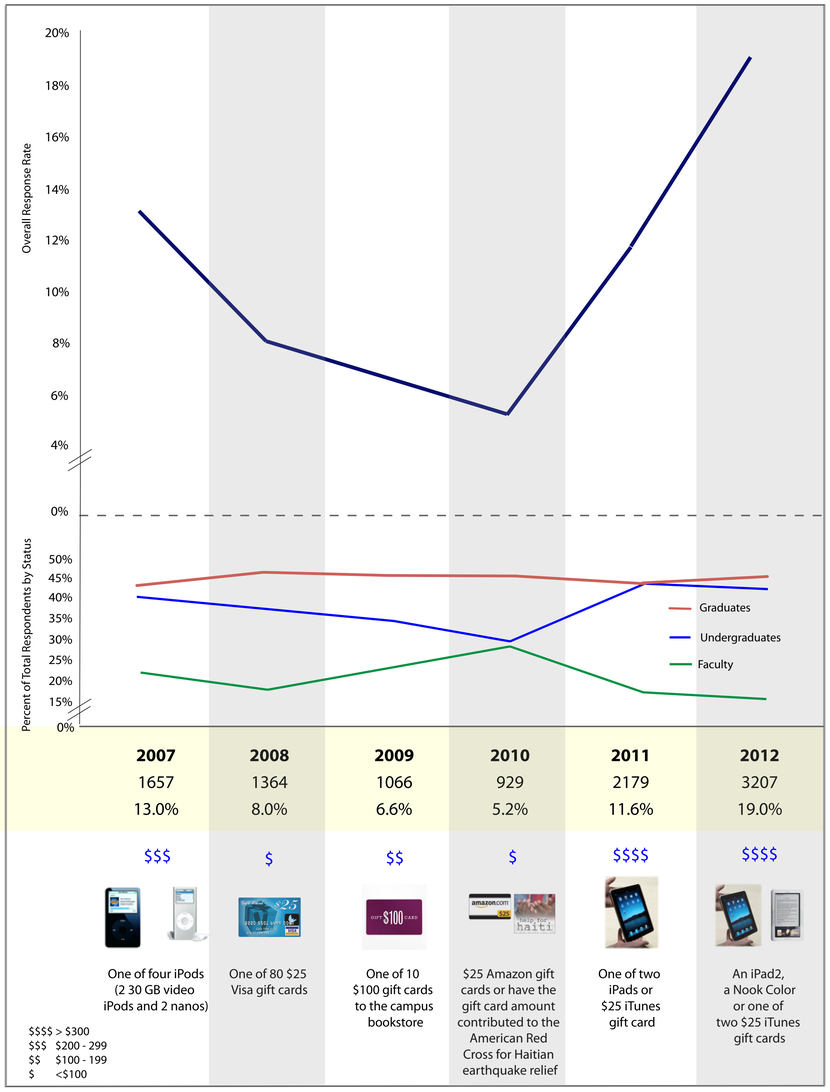
Discussion

Overall response rate appears to be highest when the percentage of undergraduate respondents is highest, and when the percentage of faculty respondents is lowest.

The percentage of undergraduate respondents also increases with the value of the incentive.

Finally, survey abandon rates appear to increase with the length of the survey. The survey abandon rate is the rate at which survey takers start a survey but stop before submitting a completed survey. This finding suggests that respondents may be more inclined to complete shorter surveys than longer ones.

Emory University Libraries Survey Overall Response Rates 2007 - 2012



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Overall Responses	1657	1364	1066	929	2179	3207
Overall Response Rate	13.0%	8.0%	6.6%	5.2%	11.6%	19.0%
Value of the Incentive to the Individual	$$$	$	$$	$	$$$$	$$$$
	One of four iPods (2 30 GB video iPods and 2 nanos)	One of 80 $25 Visa gift cards	One of 10 $100 gift cards to the campus bookstore	$25 Amazon gift cards or have the gift card amount contributed to the American Red Cross for Haitian earthquake relief	One of two iPads or $25 iTunes gift card	An iPad2, a Nook Color or one of two $25 iTunes gift cards

$$$$ > $300
$$$ $200 - 299
$$ $100 - 199
$ <$100

*A closer look at the 2010 survey could provide some insight into these findings. For example, 2010 was the only year in which faculty were eligible for the incentive. Furthermore, 2010 was also one of the years in which the value of the incentive was lowest. Therefore, it could be concluded that faculty response was highest in 2010 because they were eligible for the incentive, and that undergraduate response was low because the value of the incentive was low.

Overall response rate = The number of respondents divided by the total number of possible respondents.

Each user group represents a percentage of those that responded.

http://web.library.emory.edu/assessment

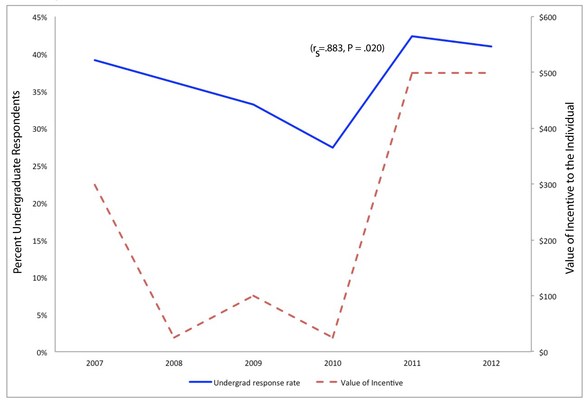
Results

The findings indicate a positive relationship between overall response rate and percent undergraduate student respondents (r_s=.829, P = .042); contrasted with a negative relationship between overall response rate and percent faculty respondents (r_s = -.829, P = .042).* There was no relationship between percent of graduate student respondents and overall response rate(r_s = -.600, P = .208).

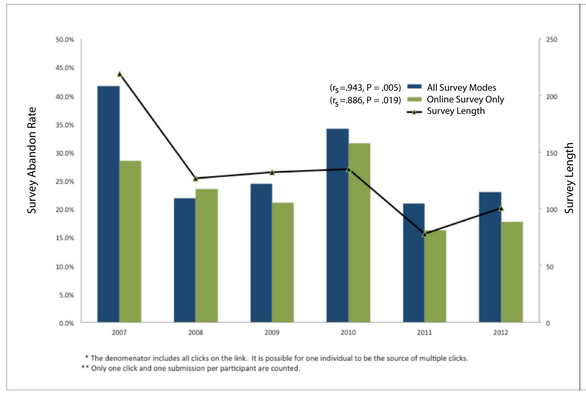
There was a significant positive relationship between percent undergraduates and the value of the incentive (r_s=.883, P = .020).

Survey length was positively correlated with both abandon rates : abandon rate (all survey modes) (r_s=.943, P = .005), and abandon rate (online survey only) (r_s =.886, P = .019).

Undergraduate Student Responses and Value of the Incentive.



Emory Libraries Survey Abandon Rates and Survey Length 2007 - 2012.



In the literature:

[3] Laguilles, J.S. , E.A. Williams & D.B. Saunders (2011) Can Lottery Incentives Boost Web Survey Response Rates? Findings from Four Experiments. Research in Higher Education, (52), 537-553

[4] Porter, S.R. (2004). Raising Response Rate: What Works? In S. R. Porter (Ed.) Overcoming Survey Research Problems (pp 5-22). Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.