Encouraging Participation in CIRP Surveys

Student participation is critical to survey success. Simply put, the more respondents you have, the more confidence you have that your results accurately represent your student body. However, many institutions struggle with challenges related to obtaining a satisfactory response rate. HERI’s templates for invitation and reminder messages to students emphasize the survey’s value for the institution. In addition, efforts on campus can effectively supplement the invitation and reminder messages sent to students.

Factors that Contribute to Higher Response Rates
Each campus surveying students will want to take some time to assess local culture and determine the best way to reach their students. While there is no single method that will increase response rates, research (Dillman, 2007) does indicate several factors that contribute to higher response rates:

- Perceived importance of the survey (value to the student, perceived legitimacy)
- Level of interest students have in the research
- Trust that the data will be used and maintained properly
- Perception of reward for participation
- Minimizing respondent burden

These factors should be considered as you plan your survey administration and promotion. Publicizing the survey by using flyers, social media, school website, and emails, as well as incentives provided for participation can reinforce the message to students that survey results are valued and used on campus. We now offer templates for you to promote your surveys via print or digital options (http://www.heri.ucla.edu/promo-packs.php). Suggestions for promotional activities frequently used by campuses administering CIRP surveys include:

- Send a pre-notification email informing students that they will soon be receiving a request to complete an important survey
- Customize survey invitation messages (refer to Invitation and Reminder Templates)
- Advertise the incentives (see below for additional information on incentives)
- **(NEW!!)** Promo Pack - Print and digital templates provided by CIRP to:
  - Place an ad in the student newspaper or other student media—submit an article or editorial
  - Post notices on the institutional website or course management system (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle)
  - Share on Facebook or Twitter selected results during and after the survey administration
  - Post flyers on campus
  - Place signs on campus in high-traffic areas
  - Set up tables in the student center or union with survey information
- Partner with student government and student-run organizations and share the results with them
- Frequently remind students that their responses are confidential

Do include information about why the survey is important, its purpose, how the results will be used on campus, etc.
Incentives
Incentives can prove to be an effective means of increasing survey response rates. Gift certificates to
the campus bookstore, food, money, or automatic entry into a raffle or lottery are all possible
incentives. CIRP survey incentives may be structured in a few different ways:

- Offer a small incentive (gift card, T-shirt) to each participant before or as the survey is
  administered.
- Offer a small incentive (gift card, T-shirt) to each student who turns in a completed survey.
  Please note that a student should not be penalized if they opt not to answer certain questions or
  leave a portion of the survey blank.
- Offer a lottery or drawing. Under this plan, students should receive information detailing the
  odds of winning, the number and type of prizes being offered, and the date of the drawing.
  Students would be instructed that upon completing the survey, they should print the “Thank
  You” page to serve as a “ticket” in a drawing. Survey instructions should inform students to fill
  out their “ticket” upon completion of the CIRP survey questionnaire and submit it to a
  designated location.

In the case that you create an incentive plan that differs from the above options, we strongly encourage
you to check with your local IRB or other appropriate campus personnel to review the structure of your
incentive program. There are a number of important guidelines for using incentives in CIRP surveys,
including:

- Any incentive program may require local IRB approval. We recommend that you check with
  your institution’s IRB as soon as you have made a decision regarding incentives.
- Incentives for survey participation should be designed in a manner that maintains the voluntary
  nature of the survey.
- Survey promotion for incentives should not emphasize the incentives to a degree that
  minimizes the requirement of survey participation.
- The amount or value of the incentive should not be so large as to appear coercive.
- Each institution that decides to conduct a drawing (i.e., raffle or lottery) should first consult
  applicable state law to determine whether lotteries are legal.
- The Survey Information Sheet (SIS) covers the rights of participants with respect to all aspects
  of survey administration except incentives. Therefore, if you plan to utilize an incentive for
  your CIRP Survey, you must add this information on the “Welcome” page. The added text
  would describe, in detail, the incentive program, including the amount that could be won; an
  estimate of the odds (if you are utilizing a drawing); and how any drawing or other incentive
  program would be conducted.
- You are able to customize the “Thank You” page to include instructions for students to request
  the incentive. If you have sent us your Student IDs, they will be printed out on the Thank You
  page along with your instructions to ensure that the student has completed the survey and is
  eligible for the incentive program.
- Reviewing students’ responses to survey questions (other than their names for tracking
  purposes) prior to data processing is considered a breach of confidentiality.