CERP
Computing Research Association
Evaluation

TIPS FOR STRONG RESPONSE RATES
NSF DATA BUDDIES SURVEY

Are you a Data Buddy looking for ways to increase your academic unit's response rates to our survey? Look no further! The Computing Research Association's *Center for Evaluating the Research Pipeline (CERP)* consulted with long-standing academic units who have been successful in obtaining strong response rates (at least 20% or greater) to the Data Buddies Survey (DBS) in the past.

This tip sheet combines practical experiences with empirical research on improving response rates in online surveys such as DBS. Try some of these strategies out for yourself! Feel free to mix and match these tips, selecting strategies that work best for your academic unit and context.

MOTIVATE STUDENTS

Highlight the ease of completing the survey. Research indicates that students are most willing to participate in an online survey if it's designed well, easy to fill out, and able to be completed in less than thirty minutes [1]. These aspects are all true of DBS! In fact, we have shortened the survey, and most students should be able to complete it in 10-20 minutes.

★ ***This tip is especially useful for undergraduate students!***

Incentivize students. Incentives such as drawings or prizes of at least $5 USD in value [3] can help motivate students to participate in the survey. DBS already offers one survey incentive: **200 $25 (USD) Amazon gift cards**. That said, some academic units have offered an additional incentive to motivate students to participate in the survey, and some have even offered extra credit for students' participation! Please reach out to CERP (cerp@cra.org) if you intend to incentivize your students. ***Note: You should contact your local IRB to confirm the use of incentives are allowed within your university.***

Publicize results. Long-standing Data Buddies Partners should consider sharing aggregate-level results as a way to emphasize the value of the survey. ***Showing that their responses lead to tangible results can motivate future participation and demonstrate that their voice matters*****.** New to the project? You can instead offer students a peek into the results once you receive them!

ACTIVELY RECRUIT AND ADVERTISE

Prepare students in advance and send reminders. Students have busy lives, and completing an online survey is likely not a top priority. Alert students that the survey is coming

at least one week prior to distribution and encourage their attention to your recruitment efforts. Send several reminders throughout the time the survey is active.

Create easy entry points. Making the survey easy to access is essential [2]. Promote the survey through your unit's newsletter and/or social media, post QR codes around the department, and create personalized advertising. Units have also been successful taking one day to dedicate the last 15 minutes of class for students to complete the survey before leaving. To avoid survey URL issues, use the custom QR code provided by CERP.

★ ***This tip is especially useful for undergraduate students!***

Get more faculty involved. Encourage faculty to help distribute the survey in their classrooms and around the unit, which helps build rapport and engage students [2]. Higher response rates yield more representative data, which is crucial for the unit's future learning.

EMPHASIZE THE PURPOSE AND VALUE

Communicate the importance of the survey. Stress how the survey benefits the academic unit and the broader computing community (e.g., learning what supports students' persistence). For example, highlight ways the unit has used DBS data in the past to make improvements (e.g., how the department can build community or prepare students for graduate school and their careers). Research shows that students are more likely to participate if they believe their feedback makes a difference and it is on a topic of interest [1].

★ ***This tip is especially useful for graduate students!***

Introduce the Computing Research Association (CRA) to your students. Given CRA's strong reputation within the computing community, introducing students to the organization personalizes the process and encourages them to take the request more seriously [2]. This also helps connect them with the broader computing community, extending the value of the survey beyond their academic unit.

REFERENCES

Interested in learning more? Check out some of these references below, which were used in helping create this resource.

[1] Kunsoon, P., Park, N., Heo, W., & Kim, G. (2018). What Prompts College Students to Participate in Online Surveys? International Education Studies, *12*(1), 69-79. DOI: 10.5539/ies.v12n1p69.

[2] Steinmetz, C., Thompson, S., & Marshall, N. (2020). Surveying international university students: The case of the 5% response rate. *Issues in Educational Research, 30*(3), 1105-1125. http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/steinmetz.pdf.

[3] Sobolewski J., Rothschild A., & Freeman A. (2024). The Impact of Incentives on Data Collection for Online Surveys: Social Media Recruitment Study. JMIR Formative Research, 8. DOI: 10.2196/50240.

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