

Best Practices for Achieving a 90% Response Rate for an Alcohol and Drug Survey



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Background

In recent years, departments within colleges and universities, especially alcohol and other drug programs, have been increasingly subject to accountability for the services they provide to students. What are the drinking and drug use habits of our students? Are we reaching the right students and educating them on relevant health topics? Are we providing the right resources? What do students think of our programs? These are all questions an AOD or prevention specialist might ask themselves. With a highly "wired" population like college students, the Internet and email provide a cheap and relatively easy way for college administrators to get answers to those questions through the use of online surveys. In some cases, online surveys offer improved questionnaire formatting, improved data quality, elimination of data entry, reduced processing costs, and faster data collection. But there's a problem with using online surveys - the typical response rate.

TYPICAL RESPONSE RATES



WHY IS A HIGH RESPONSE RATE IMPORTANT?

- 1 The better the response, the better one's ability to make a prediction about the population.
- 2 Low response rates seems to encourage "guess-based decision-making" more than data-driven decision-making
- 3 "Goody two shoes effect" = A high response rate is essential for face validity, which can help break down some of the denial that those who engage in high-risk behaviors have and help them accept the positive (low-risk) norms as real

OBJECTIVE

Our objective for this project was to determine the best practices for avoiding the typical response rates seen in online surveys in recent years so that prevention specialists on college campuses can better understand health behaviors of their student populations and confidently create comprehensive health promotion programs based on data gathered from students.



*We were primarily concerned with online and web surveys for this project because the instrument used in our practical application of best practices was the web-based MyStudentBody alcohol, drug, and sexual violence assessment. Much research has been done to determine the effect of survey design, visual design, survey length, issue saliency, etc. on response rate and those are not discussed in this poster. That is because these have already been taken into careful consideration with the development of the MyStudentBody assessment, which was created by Emil Chiauzzi, Ph.D., with review from several other researchers and with input from other alcohol and drug surveys, such as the AUDIT, RAPI, and Core Survey.

Practical Application



Stetson University is a private college located in a suburban setting in DeLand, FL with an undergraduate population of 2,134. Lynn Stadelman, the Director of Health & Wellness Initiatives, uses the MyStudentBody online assessments and the Essentials course with all incoming freshmen students during the fall semester. Her goal is to educate them about alcohol, drugs, and sexual violence, and collect data about students' reported alcohol and drug behaviors. **The program is not required. However, by using the best practices outlined in this poster, she was able to get a 90% response rate.**

