

Division of Student Development Guidelines for Incentives used in Assessment Efforts

Benefits of Incentives: Offering a drawing for participants to receive incentives has been shown to increase response rates and completion rates for online surveys (Heerwegh, 2006; Goritz & Wolff, 2007; Laguilles, Williams, & Saunders, 2010; Singer & Ye, 2013).

However, incentives are not always required. For programs evaluations, participation is generally high without additional incentives. This is typically the case when assessment takes place immediately following the conclusion of a program (particularly ones in which students have already received food or items).

Please Note: Incentives must be *positive* reinforcement for participation in assessment efforts. Please be mindful of any limitations stipulated by grants.

Number of Incentives to Offer: If possible to offer a small incentive to all participants (such as receiving a cookie for answering 3 quick survey questions at an information table in the student center), it may increase response rate more than offering one or a few larger incentives through a drawing (Schuh & Associates, 2009). With large sample sizes, however, offering small incentives for every participant may not be possible.

Incentive Timeline: Although this is not always possible, offering a small incentive (such as a coupon presented in an email) prior to participation can be more helpful than giving an incentive after participating (Schuh & Associates, 2009).

Specific Items as Incentives: Consider what items your audience may want, and whether the incentive may influence who responds. For example, if the incentive is the best lottery number for next year's on-campus housing process, first-year students will probably be more likely to respond than rising seniors will be (Schuh & Associates, 2009). Possible items to consider include (but are not limited to) an Apple Watch, Bose Soundlink Bluetooth Speaker, Beats Headphones, Rambler Bucks, tickets to theatre performances or sporting events in Chicago.

Gift Cards: Monetary incentives (including gift cards) tend to increase response rates more than giving actual items (Singer & Ye, 2013). However, because of the need for winners of incentives to sign paperwork upon receipt of gift cards, consider whether all students may be comfortable doing so, particularly if the focus of the survey is of a sensitive nature (Schuh & Associates, 2009). Please refer to the University/ Divisional policy on gift cards: <http://www.luc.edu/finance/giftcardpolicy/>

Amount Spent on Incentive Items and/or Gift Cards: DSD recommends that the maximum spent per a single item or gift card should be \$100. DSD recommends that the amount spent on incentives for surveys is related to the sample size in a 10% ratio. For example, for a sample size of 1000 students, no more than \$100 should be spent on incentives.

Food (Often Offered as an Incentive for a Focus Group): The recommended maximum spent per person is \$10. Aim to arrange focus groups with 6 to 10 students in a group. It is often beneficial to host three or four focus groups with different groups of students. If only 4 to 6 students actually show up that day, there is still value in conducting the focus group (Schuh & Associates, 2009).

Communication Plans: Recommendations include the following:

- Along with sharing information about incentives, let students know how/why the assessment findings will be used to make decisions about programs and services.
- When students are told that they have been specially invited to participate in a study, it can help increase response rate (Pedersen Nielsen, 2016). When students feel that they have been recognized in this way, it may serve as an incentive to participate (in addition to any other incentives being offered). This approach should only be used if it is truthful.
- To increase transparency, staff are encouraged to provide information when incentives are received by students. However, maintaining confidentiality may be necessary. Consider an announcement in a newsletter or website thanking students for participating, and either noting who received an incentive, or making a note without using student names. For example:
 - "Thanks to all the students who completed our online survey last month on [topic]. We learned that [2 or 3 key findings that would likely be of interest], and as a result [share at least 1 thing staff will do based on the findings]. Congratulations to Sarah B., Tim J., and D. Jones for being selected through a drawing to receive [incentives]."
 - Please ask students how they want their name reported, or whether they prefer instead be referred to as "a second-year music major" or something similar instead.

References

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