The Effectiveness of E-mail in Obtaining Respondents for Web-based Surveys

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NSoFaS 2004 Background

- **National Study of Faculty and Students**
  Client: NCES (National Center for Education Statistics)
  Study combines NSOPF (National Study of Postsecondary Faculty)
  and NPSAS (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study)

- Self-administered web instrument: preferred method of response.

- Methods of contact:
  e-mail, postal letter and phone call

- Respondent timeframes:
  Early response, no incentive and non-respondent

- Faculty Sample: 35,629
  (Full scale ran from 02/04 – 09/04)

- Student Sample: 109,213
  (Full scale ran from 03/04 – 08/04)

Why use e-mail?

- E-mail access common among sample population

- Easier to quickly contact large audiences vs. snail mail and phone

- Simple survey access

- Reduce call center costs

- Less intrusive than phone call

How did we obtain e-mail addresses?

- Faculty:
  - Participating schools: 976
  - NLC (NSoFaS List Completer) Application:
    Polling school websites if < 75% with e-mail addresses
    Provided ~4,300 extra e-mail addresses

- Student:
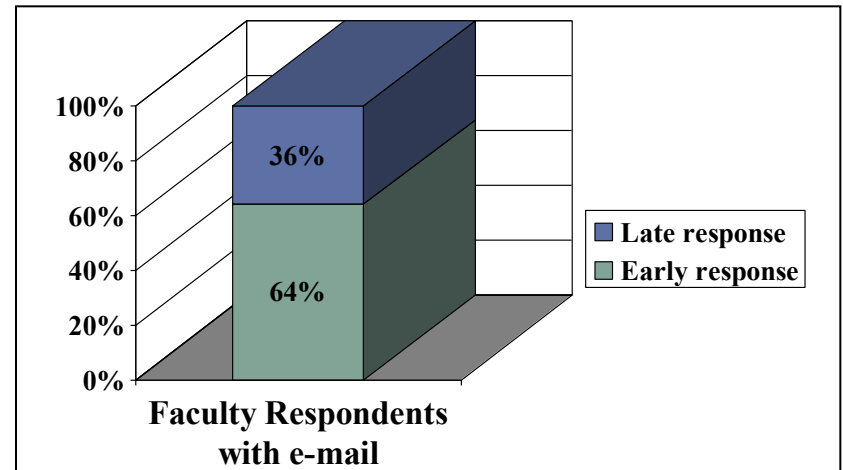 - Participating schools: 1,364
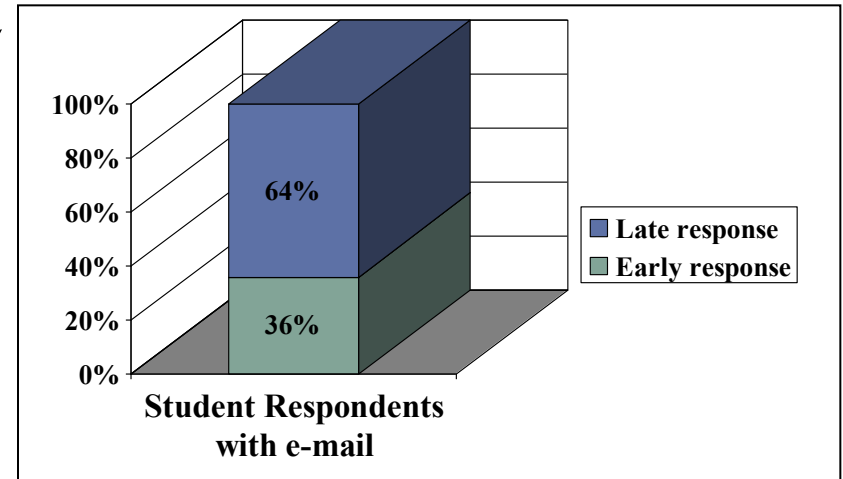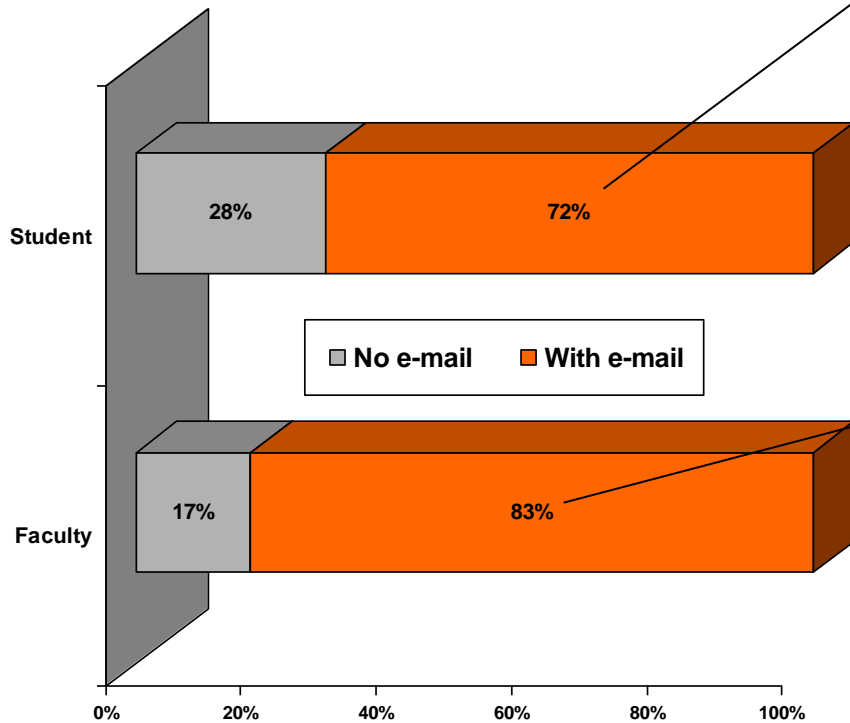
E-mail message contents

- Personalized emails to help reduce SPAM filtering

- Importance of the study and other pleas

- Link to survey website
  - Username and password to access the survey site

- Incentive offers

- Provided Help Desk phone number

E-mail schedule during early response

- Cases sampled on a flow basis

- Early response periods:
  - Faculty - 4 weeks
  - Student - 3 weeks

- Staggered schedule based upon early response period
  - Initial e-mail sent when case is sampled
  - 2 weeks before early response period end
 - 2 days before early response period end

- IRB approved

Respondents with e-mail addresses

All Survey Respondents

Student: No e-mail 28%, With e-mail 72%

Faculty: No e-mail 17%, With e-mail 83%

Student Respondents with e-mail
- Late response 64%
- Early response 36%

Faculty Respondents with e-mail
- Late response 36%
- Early response 64%

Respondent e-mail schedule results

When respondents completed during Early Response
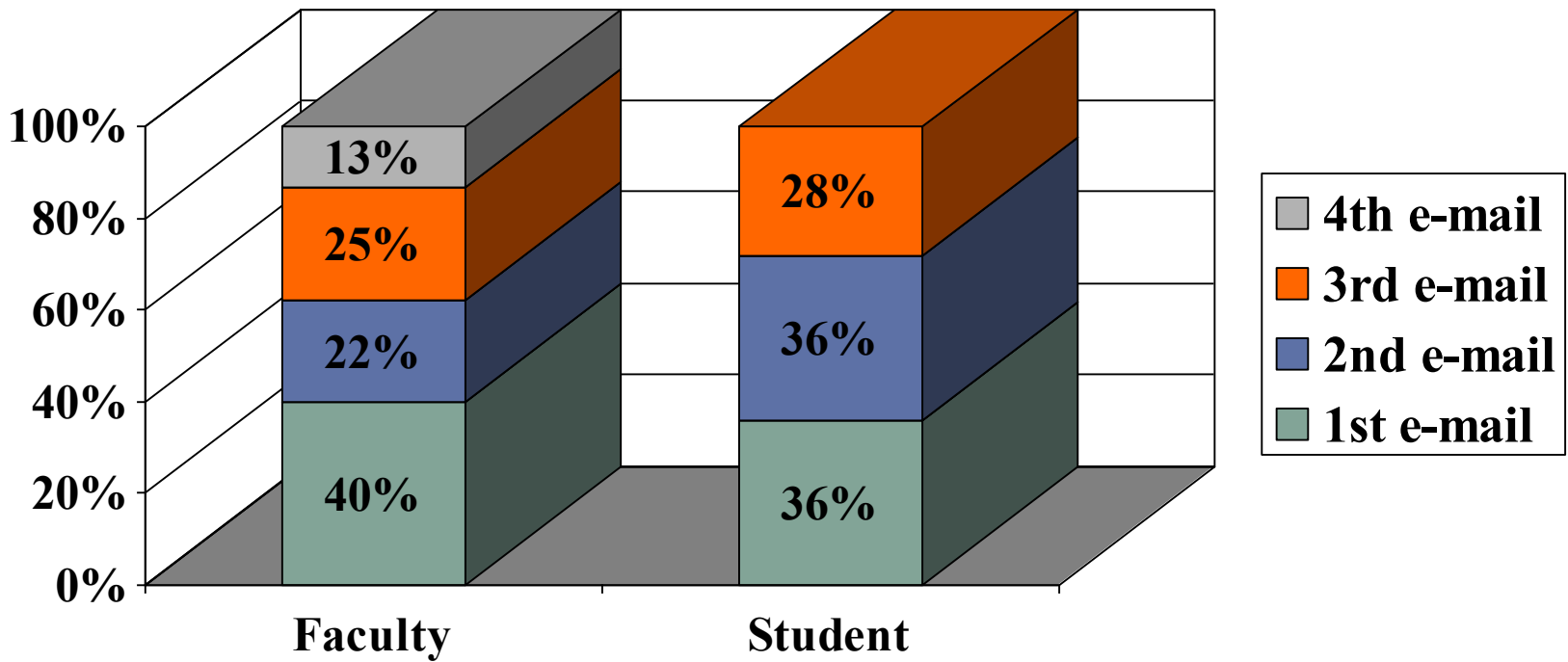
How effective was it?

- Students:
  - 36% Early response: very effective in volume

- Faculty:
  - 64% Early response
  - e-mailing extremely effective

- Sending multiple e-mails is effective
  Last minute reminder e-mail is important.

- Encountered little hostility from e-mails

Tool used to obtain e-mail addresses

- **Web Application: NLC (NSoFaS List Completer)**
  - Used by internal Tracing staff
  - School list is sampled and entered into the DB
  - If e-mail coverage is < 75%, school is flagged for NLC
  - Each school within NLC is presented with sample member counts, who is currently working the school and other school data.
  - Clicking school presents all sample member information from the school and school's contact information (website, phone number)
  - Website pops up in another window for directory searching
  - Sample member information (phone, e-mail) is added into NLC for each school
  - Once information search is complete or exhausted, school is marked for sample member release and initial e-mails are sent
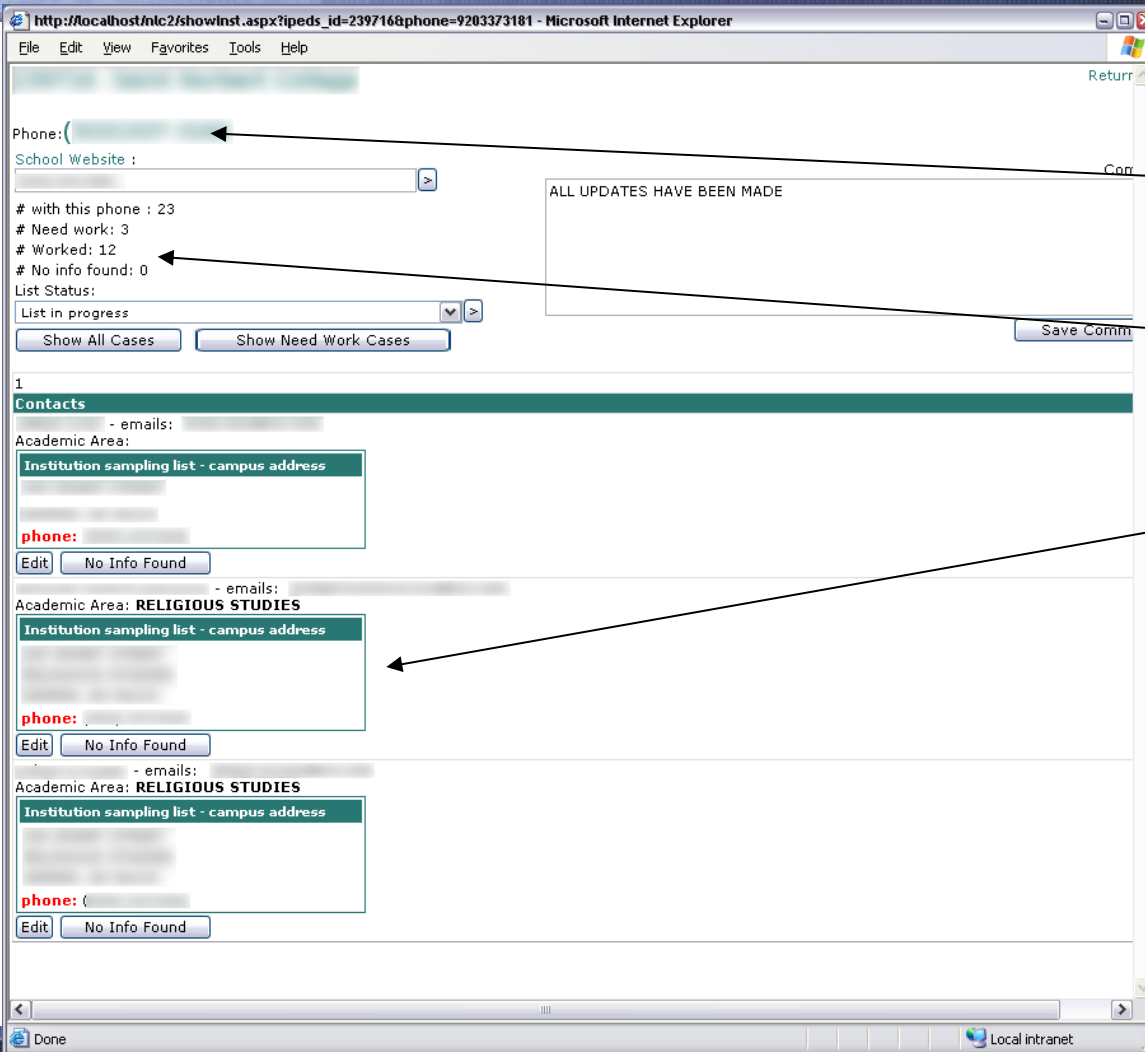
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NLC School listing

- School data
  (phone, IPEDS ID, name)

- Sample member counts
  (Dup. phone, Need work, total sampled)

- Status Information
  (Status code, current user, last updated by)

NLC School updating

- School data
  (phone, IPEDS ID, website)

- Sample member counts
  (# that need work, # already
  worked, etc.)

- Sample member data
  (current e-mail, address,
  phone #)

NLC results

- ~4,300 extra e-mail addresses harvested using the NLC tool

Tool used to send e-mails

- **Web application: e-mailout**

  - Setup mailout templates and e-mail bodies

  - Customize each aspect of an email
     (Body, subject, sender, etc.)

  - "Document-merge" style of filling email body contents from SQL-query based data.

  - Ability to perform SQL actions after each email is sent.

  - Record history of each email sent.

  - API access for automatic batch processing

E-mailout properties

- Sender e-mail address
- DB Connection String
- SQL statement
- Callback SQL statement
- Primary key variable
- Email variable
- Information variable
- Body Selector variable
  - 3 different e-mail bodies selectable
- Merge variables

E-mailout results

- Over 300,000 e-mails sent to faculty and students

Future plans

- Customizing links in each e-mail to accurately measure e-mail schedule effectiveness

- Bounced e-mail processing to update sample member database

- HTML e-mail bodies will be added

Thank you for attending

- Questions?