

*turning knowledge into practice*

# 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

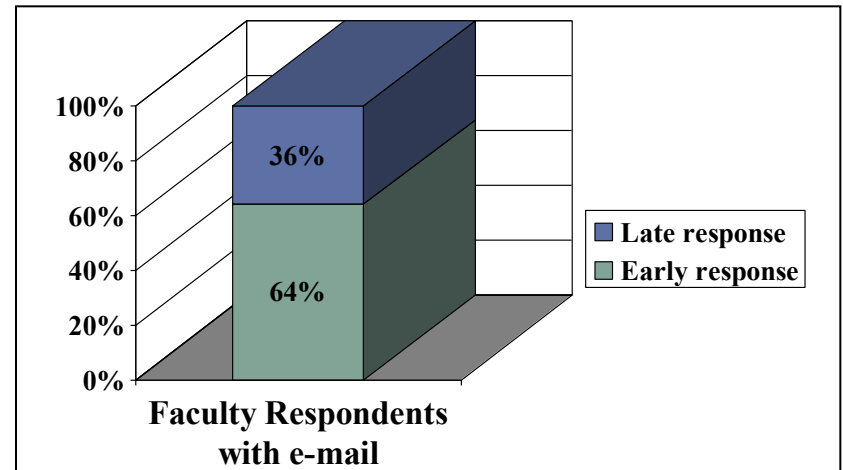
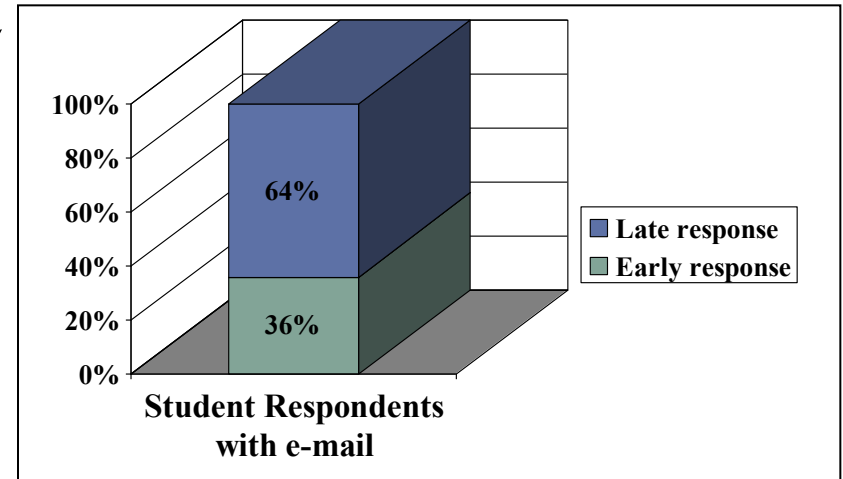
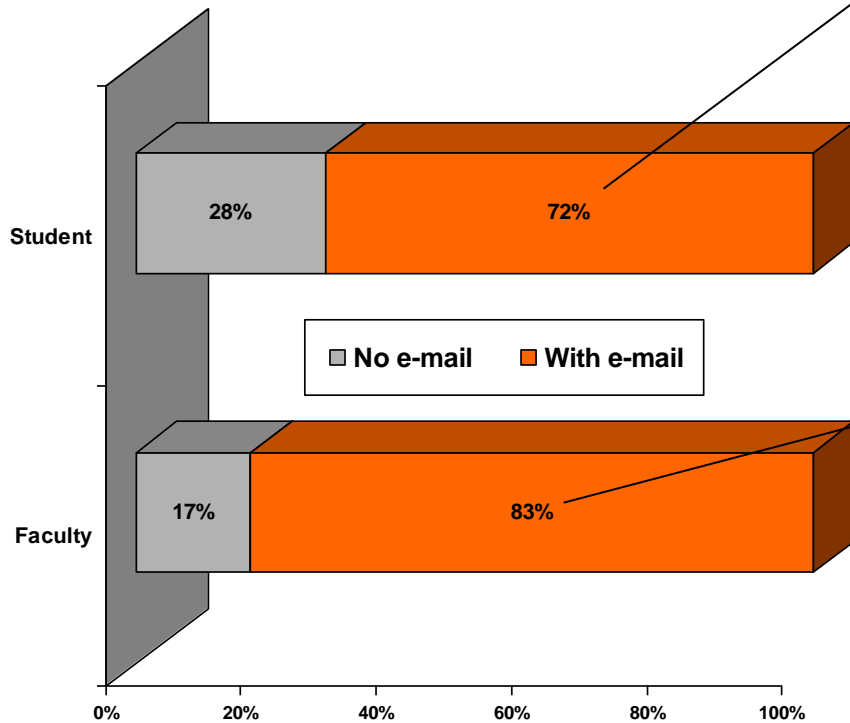
- Personalized emails to help reduce SPAM filtering
- Importance of the study and other pleas
- Link to survey website
  - Username and password to access the survey site
- Incentive offers
- Provided Help Desk phone number

# 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

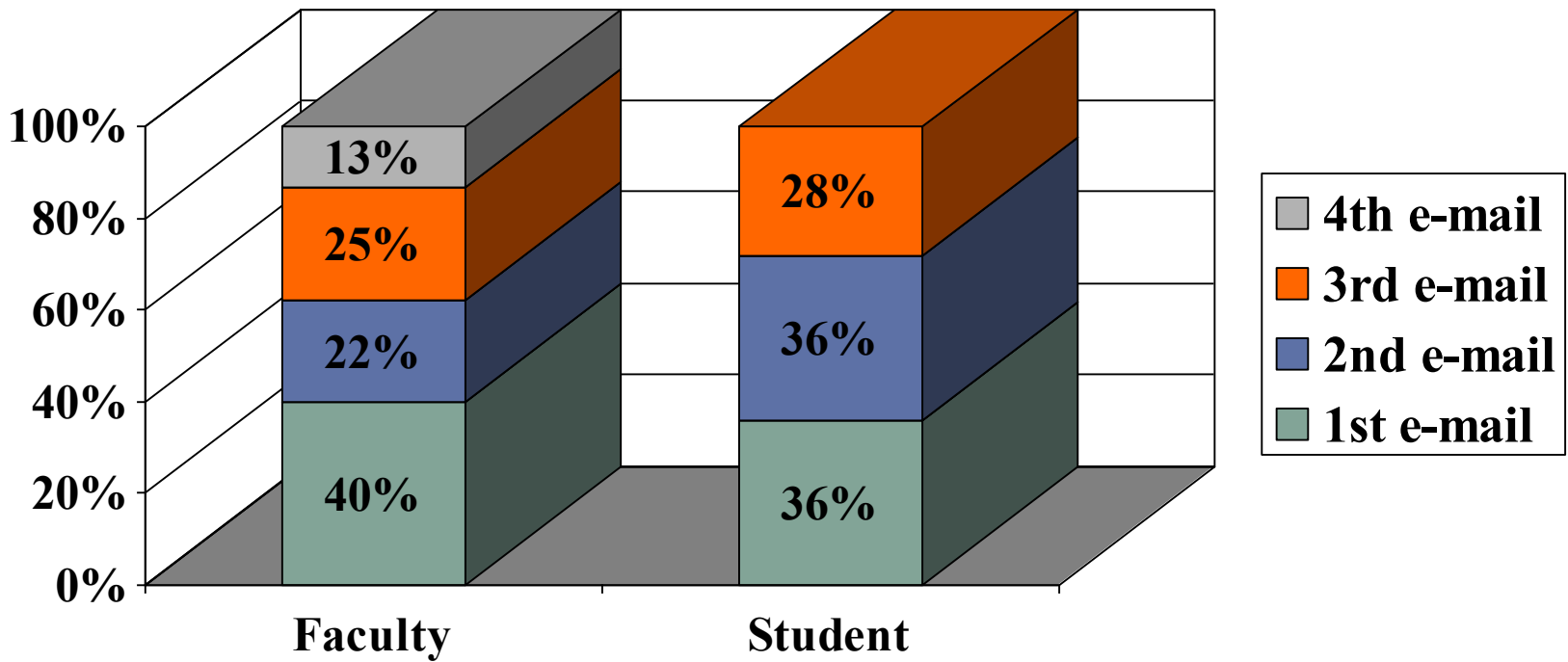
# Respondents with e-mail addresses

All Survey Respondents



# 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

# NLC School listing

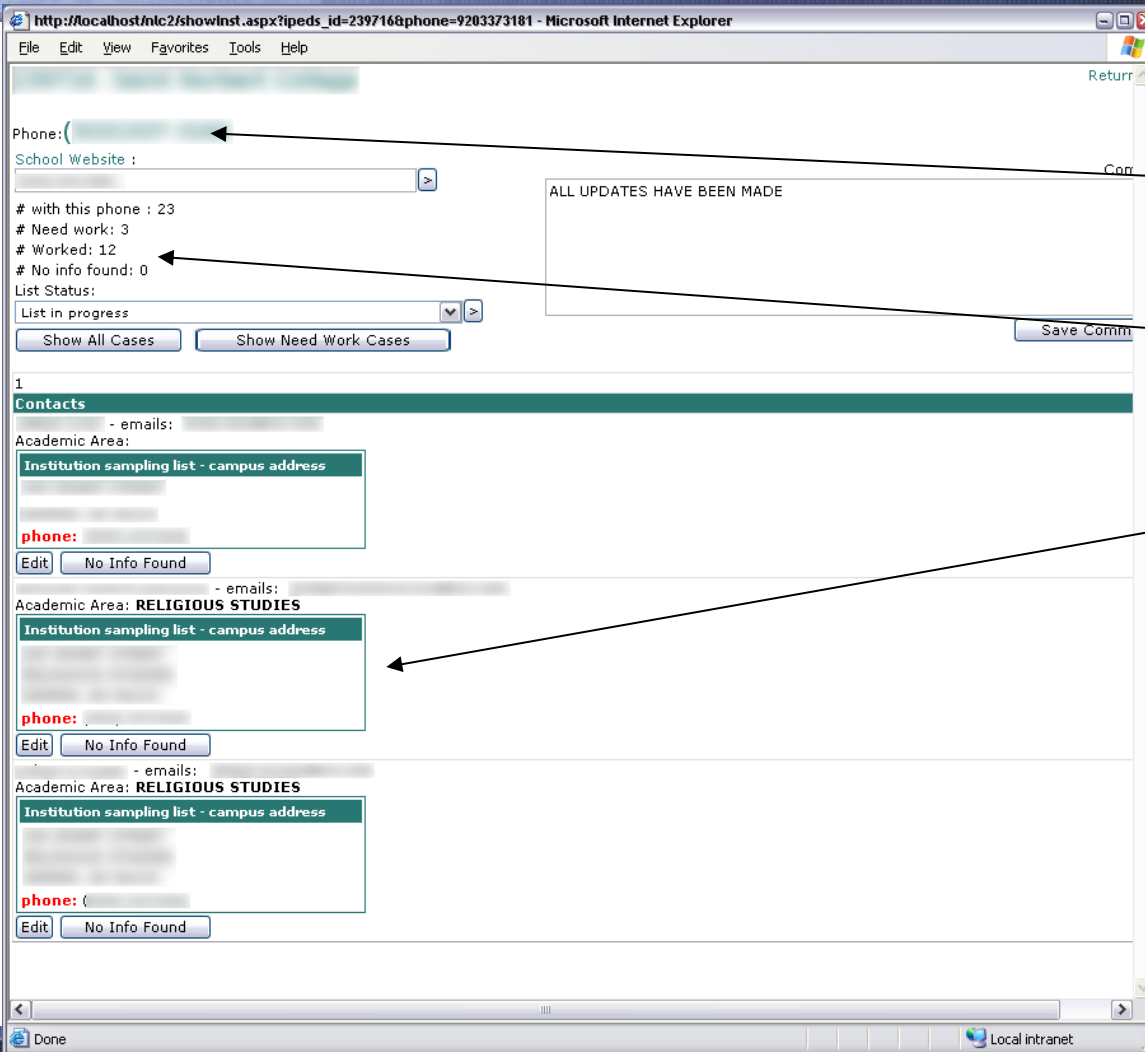
Phone	IPEDS ID	Inst. Name	Dup. Phone Count	Need Work	Total Sampled	Need Comment	Status	Current User	Last Update
			27	1	122		Work in progress	KLASSIFER	preload overnight
			24	1	45		Work in progress	rharrell	preload overnight
			43	1	76		Work in progress	rharrell	preload overnight
			36	1	112		Work in progress	rharrell	preload overnight
			96	1	146		Work in progress	rharrell	preload overnight
			42	1	82		Work in progress	lcotton	preload overnight
			23	3	74		Work in progress	sallen	preload overnight

- 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

emalout - Microsoft Internet Explorer

emalout / NSoFaS

home mailouts bodies

mailouts > Edit mailout

Stuart Allen

Mailout created on 11/5/2004 9:55:50 AM by Stuart Allen

Mailout sent on 11/16/2004 12:18:43 PM

Current Status: Sent

Name: Demo test

Description: Brown bag demo mailout

Sender email: nsosfas2004@rti.org

Server connection string:

sql:  
select 'sallen@rti.org' as email, 'Stuart' as fname, 'Allen' as lname, 100 as amt

callback sql:

Primary key variable: email \*must exist in recordset returned from sql

Email variable: email \*if not provided, "email" column will be used

Info variable: email

Body Selector Variable: \*must exist in recordset returned from sql

Primary: Demo test Body Selector values:

Secondary: Select email body Body Selector values:

Other: Select email body Body Selector values:

Mail Merge Variables

In order for checked items to merge properly, email bodies should be formatted in the following form: <VARIABLE>

EMAIL  FNAME  LNAME

AMT

Edit Review recordset History Cancel Send Test

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?