Reversing the Trend of Declining Survey Response Rates: Was it Something We Did?
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Survey conducted as partnership between the Emory University Library System1 and the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness2

Background
Emory University is a private university in Atlanta, GA, with a fall 2012 student enrollment of 14,236 (7,656 undergraduates, 6,580 graduate students) and approximately 3,000 faculty members.
The Emory Libraries include the Main Robert W. Woodruff Library and libraries for Business, Health Sciences, Law, Theology, and Oxford College.
The Library Survey has been distributed annually since 2007 by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness to all faculty and students. The Office provides granular demographic information by matching respondents to their Emory ID.
At the conclusion of the 2012 library survey, the increased survey response rates led to questions about causes of the increase, and those questions generated this study.

Methods

Percent= undergraduate respondents  
Percent= graduate student respondents  
Percent= faculty respondents  
Percent= value of incentive  
Percent= survey length  
Percent= survey abandon rate (all survey modes)  
Percent= survey abandon rate (online survey only)  
Percent= overall satisfaction with Emory Libraries

Our results support research findings that "incentives of substantial, not just token value" boost survey response rates, but "may be differentially effective along demographic lines," and that length has an impact because "college students prefer relatively short surveys."

Discussion
Overall response rate appears to be highest when the percentage of undergraduate respondents is highest, and when the percentage of faculty respondents is lowest. The percentage of undergraduate respondents also increases with the value of the incentive.
Finally, survey abandon rates appear to increase with the length of the survey. The survey abandon rate is the rate at which survey takers start a survey but stop before submitting a completed survey. This finding suggests that respondents may be more inclined to complete shorter surveys than longer ones.

Results
The findings indicate a positive relationship between overall response rate and percent undergraduate student respondents (r = .829, P = .042); contrasted with a negative relationship between overall response rate and percent faculty respondents (r = -.829, P = .042). There was no relationship between percent of graduate student respondents and overall response rate (r = -.003, P = .208).

There was a significant positive relationship between percent undergraduates and the value of the incentive (r = .883, P = .020).

Survey length was positively correlated with both abandon rates: abandon rate (all survey modes) (r = .943, P = .005), and abandon rate (online survey only) (r = .886, P = .019).

Undergraduate Student Responses and Value of the Incentive

Emory Libraries Survey Abandon Rates and Survey Length 2007 - 2012

In the literature