

# **“Response rates on a dime: Reflections after two consecutive administrations of the NSSE”**



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# Session Outcomes

- Recognize some strategies campuses might use to conduct a response rate campaign;
- Identify some social relationships that might be important to leverage in order to maximize the number of first-year and student responses;
- Understand that successful response rate campaigns differ according to campus culture and mission.



# About Binghamton University (State University of New York)



- Approx. 15,000 students;  
12,000 undergraduates;  
3,000 graduates
- One of four “university centers” of the SUNY system
- Participant in VSA & US News and World Report NSSE report
- Fourth year of participation in the NSSE (2001, 2002, 2007, 2008)

# Our Initial “Latest” Experience

- President & Provost felt, given current state of affairs with regard to assessment, that it was worth administering the NSSE
- We wrote an invitation letter from the provost with the subject line, “Message from the Vice President of Academic Affairs: Binghamton University wants your feedback!”
- Organized raffle for 4 iPod Nanos, 10 \$50 Sodexo gift cards, 20 \$25 iTunes gift cards, and 50 Binghamton University t-shirts
- We worked with associate deans to get the word out to senior students (and some first-year students to a certain extent)
- We worked with our director of first-year programs, her staff, and “discovery assistants,” who often have first contact with first-year students, to get the word out
- We sent regular updates to associate deans and director of first-year programs about status of response rate campaign

# Lessons Learned—Positives

- “Managing the numbers is the secret to success” was an important aspect of the campaign, especially when the numbers were semi-public
- We realized that this was as much of a social process as it was a methodological process



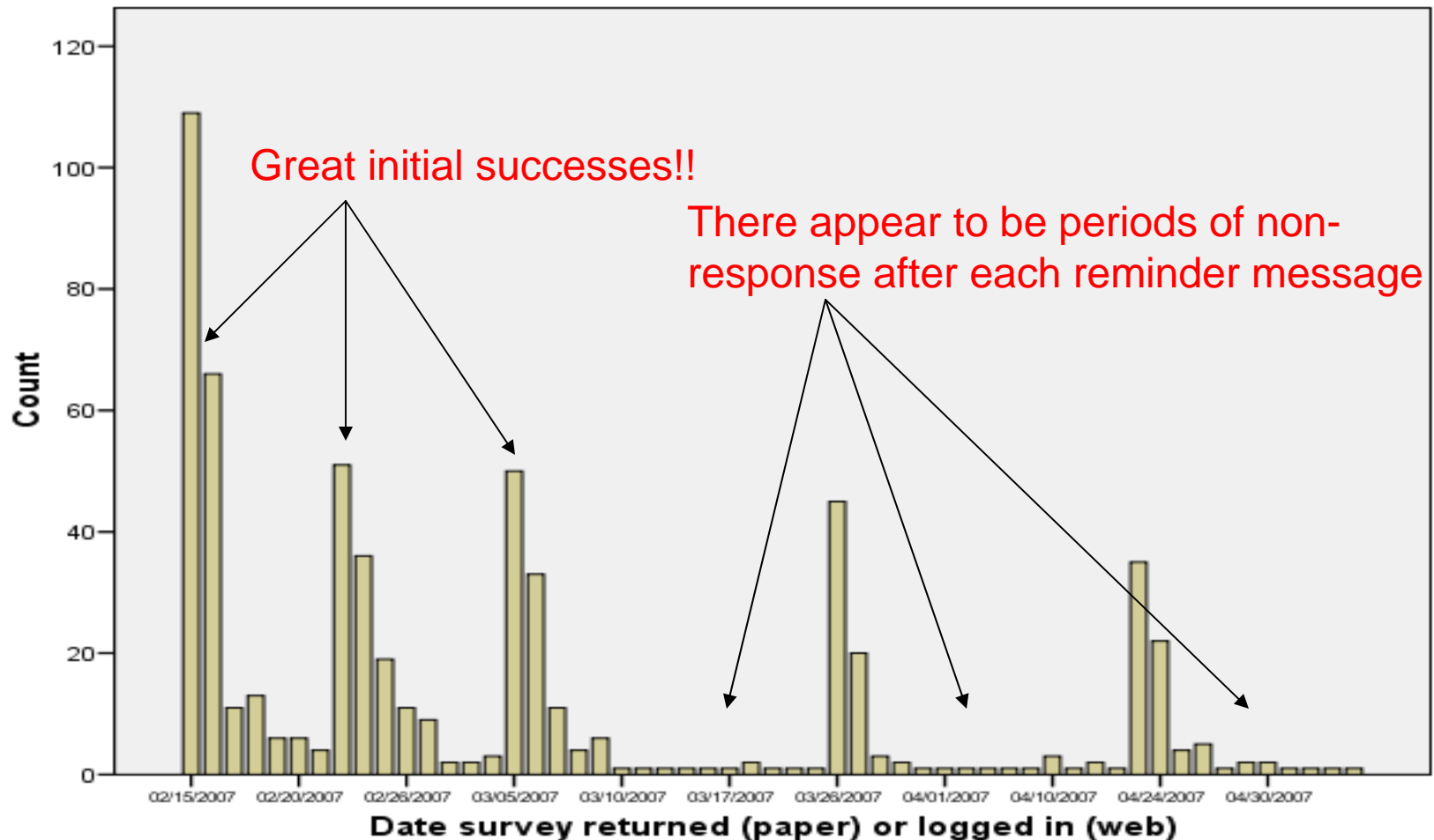
# Institutional Lesson #1: Feeding Information Back to Principal Parties Motivates Them to Increase Turnout

	<i>Total first-year students</i>	<i>Total responded</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
CCPA	20	6	30.00%
Harpur	1396	538	38.54%
Watson	254	78	30.71%
SOM	203	84	41.38%
Decker	26	15	57.69%
	1899	721	37.97%

	<i>Total senior students</i>	<i>Total responded</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
CCPA	105	44	41.90%
Harpur	1090	344	31.56%
Watson	186	68	36.56%
SOM	222	83	37.39%
Decker	130	55	42.31%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1733	594	34.28%

Suggestion—Create basic response rate chart, and send to principal parties on a regular (weekly) basis. For us, feedback to associate deans enabled us to gather more tips about how to get the word out. Feedback also created environment of curiosity regarding the results

# Institutional Lesson #2: Assessing How We Were Doing By Tracking Response Rates on a Regular Basis Is Always Essential



We generated a basic histogram over time of how many students responded to observe if anything was going wrong. Depicted above is a “regular” distribution, where the number of responses lags over time. The question becomes—Can we do something about the “lag?”

## Institutional Lesson #3: Tracking Overall and Effective Response Rates Helps Us to Discover How Effective Each NSSE Email Campaign Was

2007 NSSE Response Rates--First Year Students			
	Total Responded	Response Rate	Effective Response Rate
2/18/2008 to 2/22/2008	344	17.83%	17.83%
2/23/2008 to 3/04/2008	133	6.89%	8.39%
3/05/2008 to 3/23/2008	108	5.60%	7.44%
3/24/2008 to 4/20/2008	95	4.92%	7.07%
4/21/2008 to 5/17/2008	43	2.23%	3.31%

2007 NSSE Response Rates--Senior Students			
	Total Responded	Response Rate	Effective Response Rate
2/18/2008 to 2/22/2008	215	11.99%	11.99%
2/23/2008 to 3/04/2008	133	7.42%	8.43%
3/05/2008 to 3/23/2008	115	6.41%	7.96%
3/24/2008 to 4/20/2008	83	4.63%	6.24%
4/21/2008 to 5/17/2008	75	4.18%	6.01%

Effective response rates = number responded during a specific cycle divided by number who have yet to respond.

Response rates = number responded during a specific cycle divided by number selected in the NSSE sample

# Lesson Learned #1: Subject Lines Were Not as Effective as We Would Have Liked

**From: Mary Ann Swain**

**Message from the Vice President of Academic Affairs: Binghamton University wants your feedback!**

Name of our provost; but do they know who she is?

Nice, but would the student care?

Does anyone know what a VP of Academic Affairs does? A provost?

# Lesson Learned #2: Incentive Campaign Did Not Work for Us

Prize	Result
iPods	Gave all away, but had to cajole one student to come in and pick it up
Sodexo cards	Had to give half away
iTunes gift cards	Had to give most away
t-shirts	Had to give most away

We learned that incentives did not work unless students got an immediate payoff of some kind:

- IRB process was burdensome
- Very legal—on another survey of this kind, a student called the wording “frightening”
- Students did not find it particularly meaningful to have “a chance” to win, with not a significant chance for a future payoff

# 2008 Campaign



- SUNY initiative caused us to participate again the next year;
- We had shared results with deans, faculty senate committees, etc.
- Although 2007 campaign resulted in a response rate of 36%, we wanted 40% or higher
- Conversations with key players indicated that incentive campaign seemed alright at first, but (upon reflection) did not seem to work for us

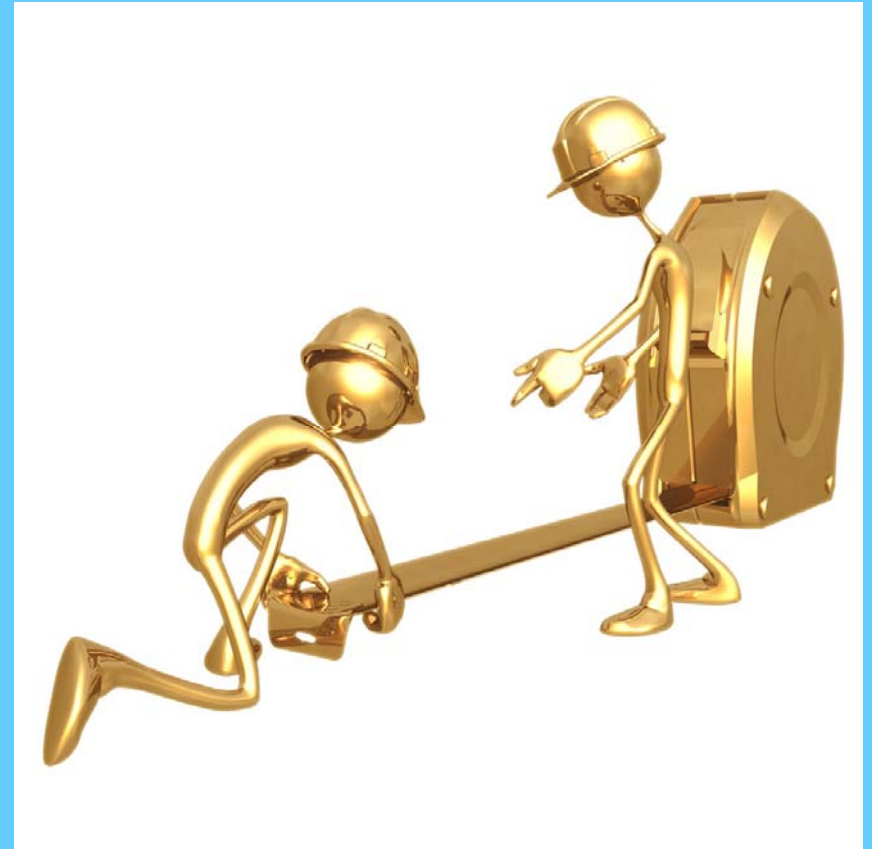
# Strategic Planning—What We Decided To Do

- Leverage social relationships from both “top down” and “bottom up;”
- Communicate importance of higher NSSE response rate to faculty senate and school/college leaders;
- “Toss” incentives (if anything, we didn’t have a budget for it)
- Reduce time between students’ reception of message and actual student completion of survey



# Planning a Response Rate Campaign

- **Foundations stage**
- **Preparation stage**
- **Administration stage**
- **Follow-up stage**



# Step One: Foundations Stage

1. Find key administrators who can make key decisions about who might meaningfully participate in response rate campaign
2. “Snowball”—ask administrators to name people who would most meaningfully assist
3. Meet with identified individuals—individually and collectively—to strategize about what should be included in the campaign
4. Discuss strategy often with key people

# Step Two: Preparation Stage

Include key parties in these discussions, and consider the following:

1. Subject line wording—does it “catch” one’s eye
2. Letter—is link in a prominent place?
3. Timing—not only should vacation and break dates be considered, but also Mondays and Fridays (at least for our campus!) should be considered
4. Incentives—should there be any?
5. Planning response rate campaign, but--How to get the word about the survey without violating IRB guidelines??
6. How to minimize “distance” (time and space) between student getting invitation, and student accessing electronic survey

# Subject line Wording

**From: Lois DeFleur**

**From President DeFleur: Help BU Improve Student Experiences**

Everyone probably knows the name of the president

IT ensured that replies would not flood president's email

"From President DeFleur" placed in subject line to underscore importance

Starts with action verb, and appeals to students wanting to help

Contacted marketing to review wording

# Timing: Key Semester Dates

- **Calendar System (Semester or Trimester/Quarter)**
- Semester **Class and Break Dates**
- **Spring Semester: 01/28/2008 - 05/16/2008**
- **2008 Longest Break: 03/21/2008 - 03/30/2008**
- **2008 Secondary Break: 04/18/2008 - 04/21/2008**

Important: Make sure to define these carefully

# Timing: Key Dates

Materials	Deadline	Submitted	Initial Submission	Processed	Mail Date	Maile d?
Pre-survey Announcement (optional)	09/27/2007					
Invitation	09/27/2007		<u>10/11/2007</u>	<u>11/02/2007</u>	02/18/2008	→ Monday
Follow up	09/27/2007		<u>10/11/2007</u>	<u>11/02/2007</u>	02/29/2008	→ Friday
Reminder 1	11/01/2007		<u>11/01/2007</u>	<u>01/08/2008</u>	03/11/2008	→ Tuesday
Reminder 2	11/01/2007		<u>11/01/2007</u>	<u>01/08/2008</u>	04/01/2008	→ Tuesday
Final Reminder	11/01/2007		<u>11/01/2007</u>	<u>01/08/2008</u>	04/16/2008	→ Tuesday
Image File (optional)	09/27/2007		<u>11/01/2007</u>	<u>01/03/2008</u>		
Population File	11/01/2007		<u>10/31/2007</u>	<u>01/02/2008</u>		

For us, it was important to time announcements about the NSSE right before invitations, follow-ups, and reminders were to go out.

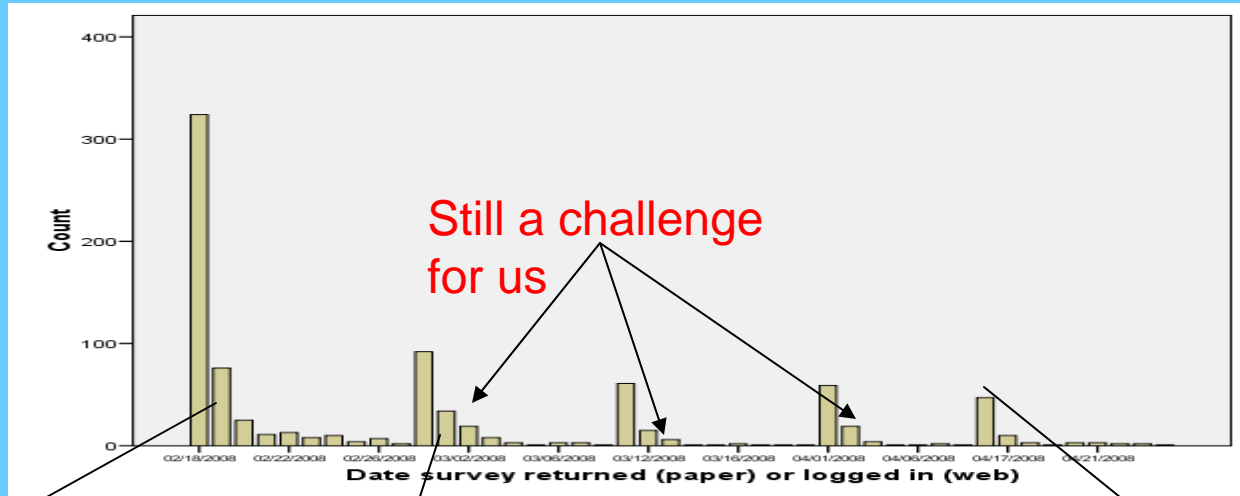
# NSSE IRB Protocol

NSSE IRB Protocols and Response Rate Strategies	
Not Allowed (Coercive)—Implied message that the <b>MUST</b> complete the survey	Allowed (Non-Coercive)—as long as all are told that they <b>ARE NOT REQUIRED</b> to complete the survey
College and school advisors identifying <u>individual students contacted to participate in the NSSE</u> , and then contacting them	College and school advisors sending reminder messages to <u>all</u> students via a listserv indicating that they may receive an invitation to respond to the NSSE
Putting flyers in residence halls, on the doors of <u>specific students chosen to respond to the NSSE</u>	Putting flyers in residence halls (even on doors of <u>all</u> students) reminding them that they might receive an email invitation to complete the NSSE
Residence hall directors selecting <u>specific students from a list of NSSE "non-responders"</u> and encouraging them to respond to the NSSE	Residence hall directors announcing to <u>all</u> students that they may receive an invitation from "the president" via email to respond to the NSSE
Faculty contacting <u>individual students selected to respond to the NSSE</u> , and encouraging them to complete the survey	Faculty announcing in class to <u>all</u> students that some students may receive an email invitation from "the president" to respond to the NSSE

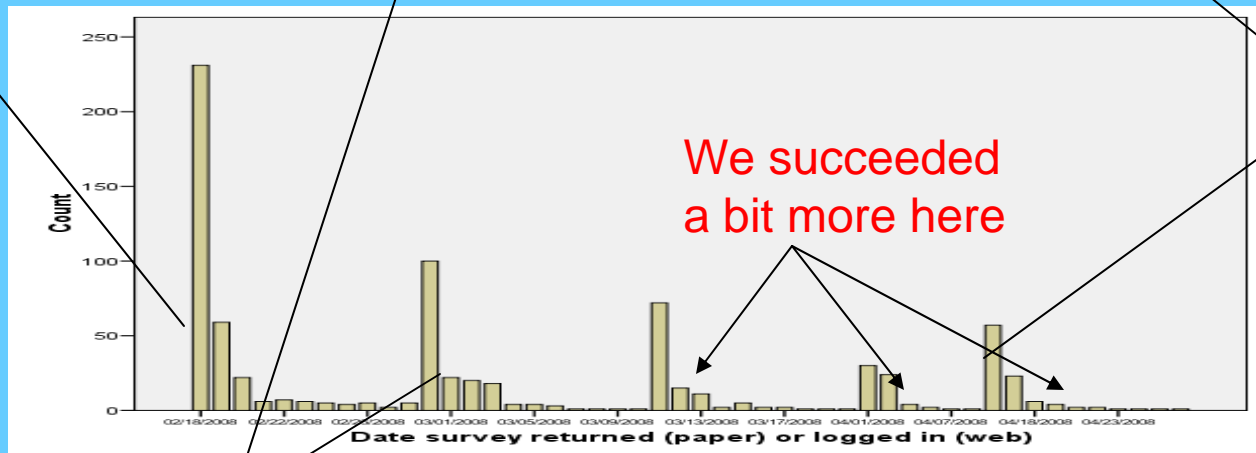
# Step Three: Administration Stage

- Monitor, Monitor, Monitor
- Measure performance, and share with key partners—over pizza, lunch, etc.
- Ask which subgroups, through measurements of performance, can be assisted in getting word out about the survey

# Monitoring First Year and Senior Response Rates Over Time-- Trends



Final try occurred after one last push to get word out about survey



Only first 2 emails came from president, but even second email yielded good number of responses

Number of initial responses increased a great deal

# Example of 2008 NSSE Response Rate Monitoring Instrument

2008 NSSE Response Rates						
	<i>Total first-year students</i>	<i>Total responded</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Comparison to 2007 Response Rate</i>	<i>Comparison to 2007 Final Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Goal (40%)</i>
CCPA	46	20	43.48%	144.9%	144.9%	105.26%
Harpur	1291	579	44.85%	116.4%	116.4%	112.21%
Watson	300	154	51.33%	167.2%	167.2%	128.33%
SOM	212	101	47.64%	115.1%	115.1%	118.82%
Decker	39	27	69.23%	120.0%	120.0%	168.75%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1888	881	46.66%	122.9%	122.9%	116.53%
	<i>Total senior students</i>	<i>Total responded</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Comparison to 2007 Response Rate</i>	<i>Comparison to 2007 Final Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Goal (35%)</i>
CCPA	109	45	41.28%	98.5%	98.5%	115.38%
Harpur	1105	461	41.72%	132.2%	132.2%	119.12%
Watson	222	98	44.14%	120.7%	120.7%	125.64%
SOM	258	116	44.96%	120.3%	120.3%	128.89%
Decker	135	70	51.85%	122.6%	122.6%	145.83%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1829	790	43.19%	126.0%	126.0%	123.24%

Colleges and schools really got the word out!

High return rate compared to 2007

# Step Four: Follow-up Stage

- Thank you notes (emails) and frequent feedback are critical
- Share results
- Debrief & recognize successes

# Lessons Learned—What Appeared Impactful

- Not all response rates campaigns are alike
- The subject line and whom the initial emails came from were critical
- Creating “buzz” before the initial reminder was sent out was also critical; public relations is part of the game
- Timing
- General announcements from people students trust—faculty, advisors, residence hall directors/assistants, tutors
- Flyers in dorms and in computer labs
- Forming a community of support enabled us to address issues immediately
- Monitoring and follow up were important aspects of the campaign

# Lessons Learned—What Did Not Appear Useful

- Incentives—they operated secondary to social and professional relationships supportive of responding to the NSSE
- The actual text of the initial invitation and reminder messages—students do not tend to read
- Newspaper articles, general flyers, such as table tents
- Response rate marketing efforts that do not seem to encourage potential respondents to go to their computers right away

# Tips for Organizing a Campaign

- Meet with administration and discuss campaign
- Plan a time schedule of rolling the campaign out
- Meet with key people who can get the word out about the NSSE—discuss timing
- “Managing the numbers is the key to success”
- Feed your contacts (with information, feedback, pizza, etc.)

Questions? Comments?