The Fall 2009 Washington State University Student Experience Survey

The Washington State University Student Experience Survey was a study of the undergraduate experience at WSU conducted nearly annually from 2002-2011 by the Social and Economic Research Center at WSU. Questions varied slightly across the different waves of the study, but in general aimed to assess students’ satisfaction with a variety of aspects of their undergraduate experience. The Fall 2009 Student Experience Survey (F09 SES), the focus of this resource, was conducted between November 2009 and January 2010, using both paper/mail and web modes. The questionnaire contained many student satisfaction questions similar to those included in earlier renditions of the study, as well as an additional set of questions focused on whether and how students had been affected by the recent economic downturn and the university’s resultant budget cuts. This survey also included methodological experiments, which resulted in treatment groups that varied in the use of response mode, contact mode, and use of incentives. This resource includes only one treatment: the web/email-only treatment, which is an example of a survey conducted completely via the web within a population that is known to use the Internet regularly and likely to be more web-literate than the general public population.

The target population for the F09 SES was all undergraduate students currently enrolled at the Pullman campus of WSU. A random sample of 4,300 students was selected from university records. The web/email-only treatment group had a sample size of 700. This treatment only offered the option to respond via the web. No mention was made of the paper questionnaire which was available in some other treatments. This treatment relied solely on email contacts, and did not include an incentive.

All five contacts sent to the web/email-only treatment were email messages addressed to each individual student in the sample by name. All messages contained an electronic link to the survey website. Each of the five contacts attempted to encourage response to the study in varying ways. The web questionnaire was constructed to be visually appealing and easy to use. It included familiar images of WSU landmarks to appeal to the student population. It was designed to be similar in appearance as the paper questionnaire that was utilized in some of the other treatment groups.

The web/email-only treatment obtained a response rate of 21%.

Methodological findings about this study can be found in the following:
