

## **Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research**

### **Good Practices for Writing Cover Letters and Reminders**

Good communication with your potential respondents is an important part of the assessment process. It can increase your response rates, build trust, and create a positive perception of your organization. There are several strategies to use when developing communication with your audience.

#### **Factors found to increase response rates** (Archer, 2008)

- Personalize email invitations use respondent's first name
- Use several (2-3) follow-up reminders

#### **Recommendations for cover letter and reminders**

*Before creating the cover letter and reminders:*

- Know how you are going to use the data: Program improvement? Student learning assessment? Research article?
- Know your audience: Do they respond well to emails? Do they respond to incentives?
- Be aware of campus events and timing: finals, Spring Break, other surveys collecting data

*Writing the cover letter:* (Saab, 2011)

- Write invitations and reminders that are brief, informal, non-technical and personal, using active voice
- Create eye-catching subject lines (do not use the word "survey")
- Include the organization/department name or recognizable person's name in the "From" line
- Keep important information (instructions, respond by date, link) near the beginning of the correspondence
- Create a sense of urgency and responsibility: Why is the survey important? Why is each individual respondent important?
- Explain how you are going to use the information
- Address confidentiality or anonymity
- Set a deadline for their participation (usually 2-3 weeks)
- Thank respondents for their participation
- Provide contact information in case they have questions or comments
- Include opt-out link in reminders (Student Life Studies can do that for you)
- Legitimize the request by providing contact name, title, and contact information in the signature block

*Reminders:*

- Make each reminder shorter and harsher (Saab, 2011)
- Send 2-3 reminders depending on how long the survey is available
- Remind only the people who have not yet responded to the survey
- Escalate requester's rank with every reminder
- Update the amount of time people are actually needing to take the survey (Student Life Studies can help with that)
- Report the number of people who have responded and how many people you'd like to have respond (Student Life Studies can help with that)

*After receiving survey results:*

- Generate and share results with your audience in a timely manner
- When making changes based on results, share that with participants
- Evaluate if non-respondent bias (*are respondents different from non-respondents*) is a concern:
  - Compare known characteristics of respondents with non-respondents
  - Compare late to early respondents

#### **References**

Archer, T. M. (2008). Response rates to expect from web-based surveys and what to do about it. *Journal of Extension*, 46 (3). Retrieved February 27, 2012 from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2008june/rb3.php>

Saab, S. (2011). Proven strategies for optimizing response rates in course evaluations. Presented at the Association for Institutional Research in Toronto, Canada.

## Cover Letter Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

The [Department/Student Organization] needs your input about \*\*\*\*. The purpose of the survey/assessment is to assess \*\*\*. The results of the survey/assessment will be used to \*\*\*. We have used the results of previous/similar surveys to make the following improvements/changes: \*\*\*.

We would appreciate you taking the time to respond to the survey, which will take approximately \*\* minutes to complete. The survey will be open until [DATE], but we'd love to hear from you before then.

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

You have been chosen for participation because you are \*\*\*. Your participation is very important, confidential, and voluntary. The data will be collected and analyzed by Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research, and results will be reported in aggregate.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [me/another name] at [email] or [phone].

Thank you for your time,

Name, title  
Student Organization/Department  
Texas A&M University  
Telephone number  
Email

## Reminder Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

It's not too late for you to complete the [Department/Student Organization] survey/assessment about \*\*\*\*. The results of the survey/assessment will be used to \*\*\*. We have used the results of previous/similar surveys to make the following improvements/changes: \*\*\*.

We would appreciate you taking the time to respond to the survey, which will take approximately \*\* minutes to complete. The survey will be open until [DATE], but we'd appreciate hearing from you before then.

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

If you do not want to receive any more reminders and do not plan to respond, click here.

Thank you for your time,

Name, title  
Student Organization/Department  
Texas A&M University  
Telephone number  
Email

## Final Reminder Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

This is a final reminder for you to complete the [Department/Student Organization] survey/assessment about \*\*\*\*. Your responses are very important, so we appreciate you taking \*\* minutes to complete the survey before the survey closes on [DATE].

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

Thank you for your time,

Name, title  
Student Organization/Department  
Texas A&M University  
Telephone number  
Email