

SURVEY FATIGUE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Fatigue is defined as the increased feelings of disinterest by respondents in regard to taking or completing a survey (Stiles, 2016). This executive summary examines campus survey fatigue experienced by students. Campus survey fatigue can be divided into two types:

1. **Fatigue prior to survey.** Students can become overwhelmed by the large number of requests that are issued by various departments in the university.
2. **Fatigue during the survey.** Students start the survey, but too many questions, poorly designed surveys, too many open response questions, and/or questions that are not applicable to the students result in students losing interest. In this case, students often quit the survey without completing it.

IMPACT OF SURVEY FATIGUE

Research has shown that one of the most frequently reported effects of survey fatigue is a decrease in overall response rate (Van Mol, 2017). Students may become bored or weary after several requests and may stop responding. Another observable effect is a decrease in data quality. Students suffering from survey fatigue during the survey may not take enough time to answer questions thoughtfully. This degradation of data quality results in fewer insights from the survey.

6 STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING CAMPUS SURVEY FATIGUE

1. **Coordinate institution-wide surveys**
2. **Coordinate student samples**
3. **Ensure good survey design**
4. **Ask fewer questions**
5. **Send reminders**
6. **Share results and actions**

Research suggests several strategies for avoiding student survey fatigue:

1. **Coordinate institution-wide surveys.** There is no hard and fast rule for how often students can receive surveys before survey fatigue kicks in. But research indicates that generally, the fewer surveys, the better (Davies, 2019). Oftentimes, different departments on campus are interested in similar data. If campus surveys are coordinated, then the institution can ensure that surveys do not duplicate questions and that all survey responses are disseminated to appropriate departments. A coordinated survey effort also ensures that departments are working with the same data, and therefore, results are consistent campus wide. Finally, a coordinated effort can ensure that survey requests are properly timed so that students are not inundated with several simultaneous requests.

(see additional strategy details, next page)

PERC PROMISING PRACTICES

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2. **Coordinate student sampling** – Having a centralized sampling effort ensures that no student is overburdened with multiple survey requests while other students with similar demographics are not asked to participate at all. Seeking a similar load among all students is a good way to limit survey fatigue.
3. **Ensure a good survey design** – A poorly designed survey is a quick way to increase survey fatigue in respondents. There are several centers and departments on campus who employ survey design experts. All surveys disseminated from the institution should be reviewed by a survey design expert to ensure that the pitfalls of a poorly designed survey are avoided.
4. **Ask fewer questions** – Items 1-3 will likely result in fewer questions. However, the condensing of questions should be considered separately as well. Surveys should only ask the questions that will garner the most information for the intended purpose. Students are more likely to be engaged in surveys that take a few minutes of their time (Camacho, 2020). If the survey is perceived as both quick and enjoyable, so much the better.
5. **Send reminders** – Response rates for web-based surveys benefit greatly from reminders (Van Mol, 2017). Overall response rates may increase by as much as 25% over the course of 3 reminders. Best practices include limiting the reminder to students who have not yet responded.
6. **Share results and actions** – When students see that their responses are being used to improve an institution, they are more likely to participate in the next survey. Some researchers have concluded that people experience survey fatigue more from lack of perceived action rather than multiple surveys (Mastrangelo, 2018).

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