Spring 2023

Assessing and Addressing Survey Non-Response in National Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities

John Nugent, Ph.D.   Sanjeewa Karunaratne, MPA, MSR, LLM
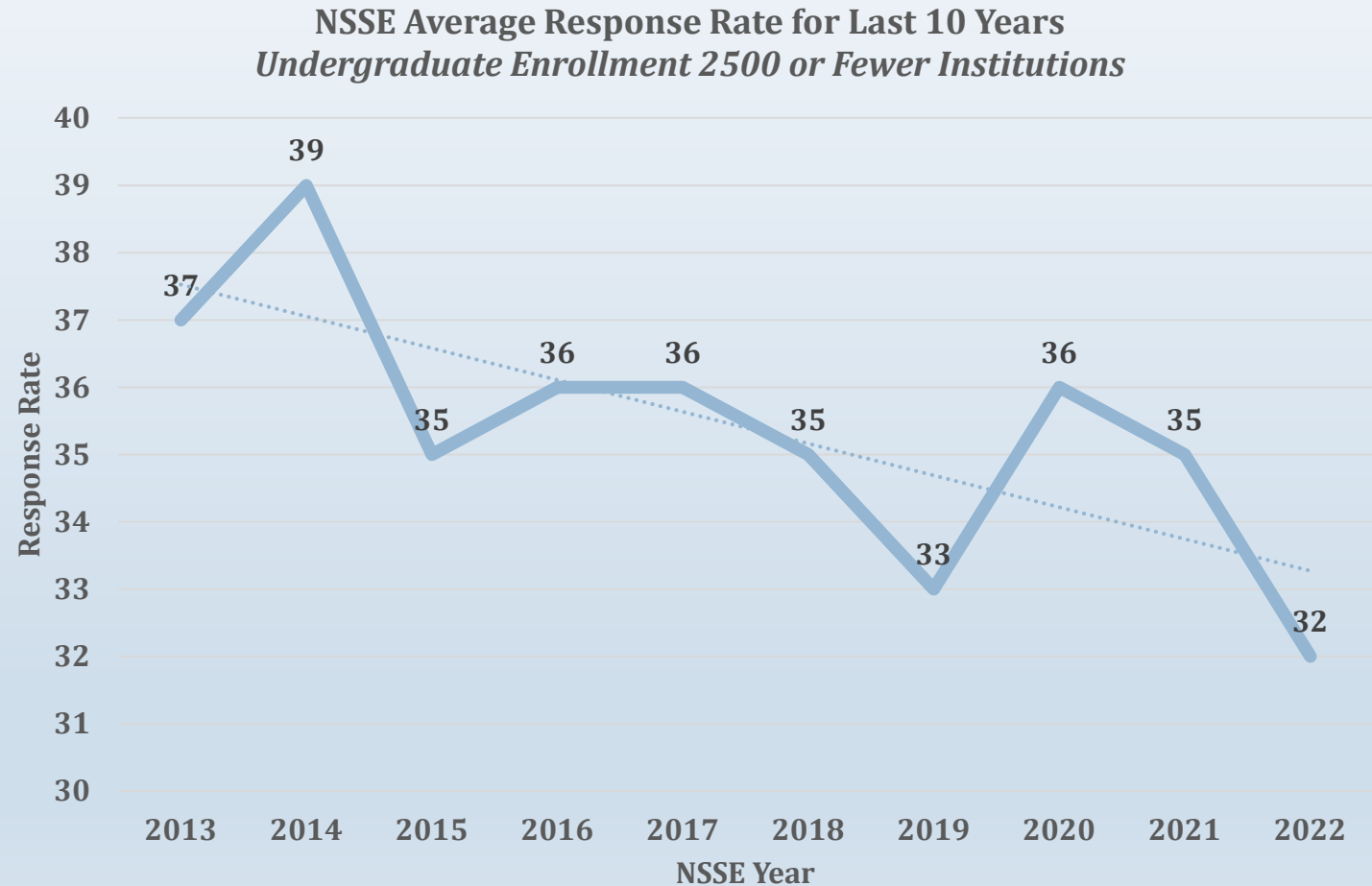
CONNECTICUT
COLLEGE

Have you struggled getting survey responses?

- National trends
- Experiences on your campus
- Lots of possible explanations

NSSE Average Response Rate for Last 10 Years
Undergraduate Enrollment 2500 or Fewer Institutions

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Overview Report Table 2

What's the big deal about non-response?

- Data-driven decision making requires reliable survey findings

- Usually, we are trying to learn something about an entire population from the responses of just a subset of that population's members

- Nonresponse bias

  "Nonresponse bias can occur when the people who complete the survey (respondents) differ from people who do not complete the survey (nonrespondents)." – U.S. Census Bureau

  "[T]he experiences or outcomes of those who don't respond could wildly differ to the experiences of those who do respond. As a consequence, the results may then over or underrepresent a particular perspective." – Qualtrics

- We're concerned about this on our campus and wanted to better understand the nature of nonresponse. Who **aren't** we hearing from on our surveys?

About the survey

- Administered online April 4 to May 15, 2023

- Sent to head of department in institutional research or registrar's offices at national liberal arts colleges and universities (201); 18 invalids (13 no contacts, 5 bounced)

- Response rate

	Finished		Total	Response Rate
	Yes	No		
Contact_List	117	66	183	36.1%

- Six sections:

Methods Results Best practices Application Future research Conclusion

Methods

- Lit review; five focus groups; pre- and post-testing; three reminders; one postcard

- Incentive to participate ($15)

- Survey disposition

- Partial completes

Total emails sent	Bounced	Started	Finished	Completion rate	Breakoff	RR with Partial completes	RR
188	5	112	66	58.9%	41.1%	61.2%	36.1%

Methods : Reminder postcard to partial completers

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Dear Brian,

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Connecticut College recently sent an email requesting your participation in **a brief 10-minute survey** regarding response rates in undergraduate surveys. Your input is essential for the success of this study, and we will share the results report with you once the work is completed.

If you haven't had a chance to complete the survey, there is still a chance to do so until the extended deadline of May 15.

The survey has been approved by the Connecticut College Institutional Review Board. Your participation in the survey is voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential. **As a token of our appreciation, you will be included in a drawing for one hundred $15 Amazon gift cards**. Your chance of winning a gift card is more than 50%.

Best wishes for the rest of the academic year,

John Nugent and Sanjeewa Karunaratne
Office of Institutional Research and Planning
Connecticut College

Scan this QR for the survey!

Break-off Rate (1-CO) = 41.1%

Assumption?

May not be collecting demographic info or not easy to tabulate respondent and non-respondent demographics

Methods : Respondents v Non-Respondents

		Contact_List		Finished	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
OVERALLRANK	0-20	22	12.0%	11	16.7%
	21-40	21	11.5%	8	12.1%
	41-60	16	8.7%	6	9.1%
	61-80	17	9.3%	7	10.6%
	81-100	20	10.9%	10	15.2%
	101-150	45	24.6%	15	22.7%
	151-201	42	23.0%	9	13.6%
	Total	183	100.0%	66	100.0%

Table 1.1 - Population and Respondent Sample by 2023 US News Ranking

Results

- Response rates reported in the most recent undergrad surveys in 2021-22

		Response Rate					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
	0-25%	5	7.6	7.6	7.6		
	25-50%	32	48.5	48.5	56.1		
	50-75%	18	27.3	27.3	83.3	Over 50% RR	43.9%
	75-100%	11	16.7	16.7	100.0		
	Total	66	100.0	100.0			

- Over 50% response rate reported in the following surveys

Senior survey or graduating student survey (internal)	12	41.4%	First-year or freshman survey (internal)	2	6.9%
HEDS New Student Survey	3	10.3%	End of First Year Survey	1	3.4%
HERI-CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS)	3	10.3%	HEDS Graduating Student Survey	1	3.4%
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	3	10.3%	Internal Student Satisfaction Survey	1	3.4%
COFHE Senior Survey	2	6.9%	Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (NSL)	1	3.4%

# Results : Female and Male - population V. survey respondents

Male Diff by Overall Response Rate

Female Diff by Overall Response Rate
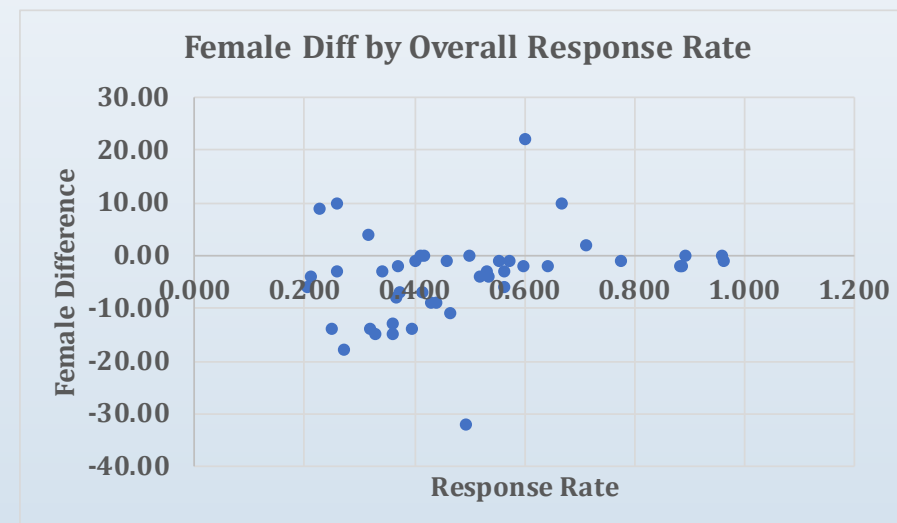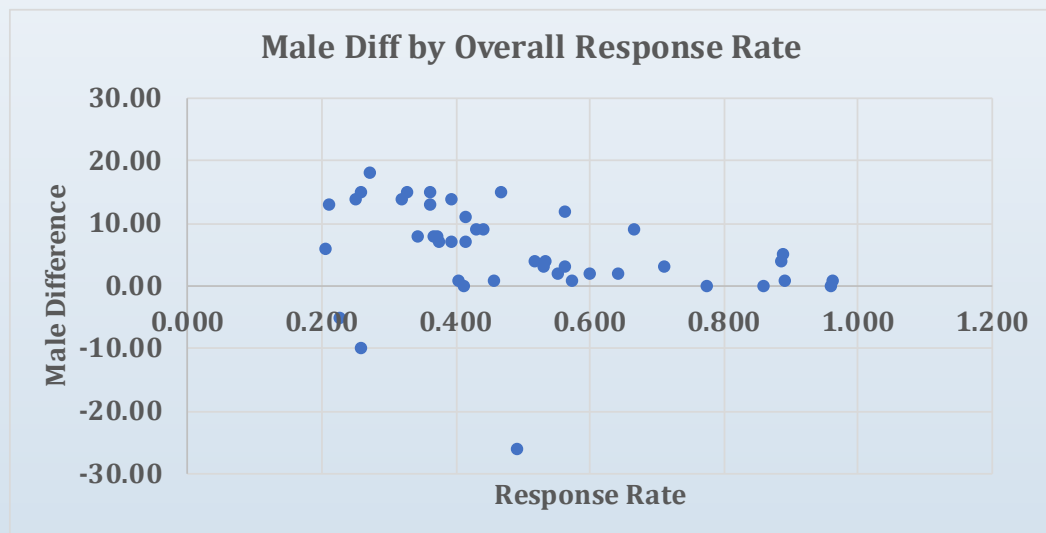
		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences							Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df		
Pair 1	Male - Female	-24.65217	16.64694	2.45446	-29.59571	-19.70864	-10.044	45	0.000	0.000

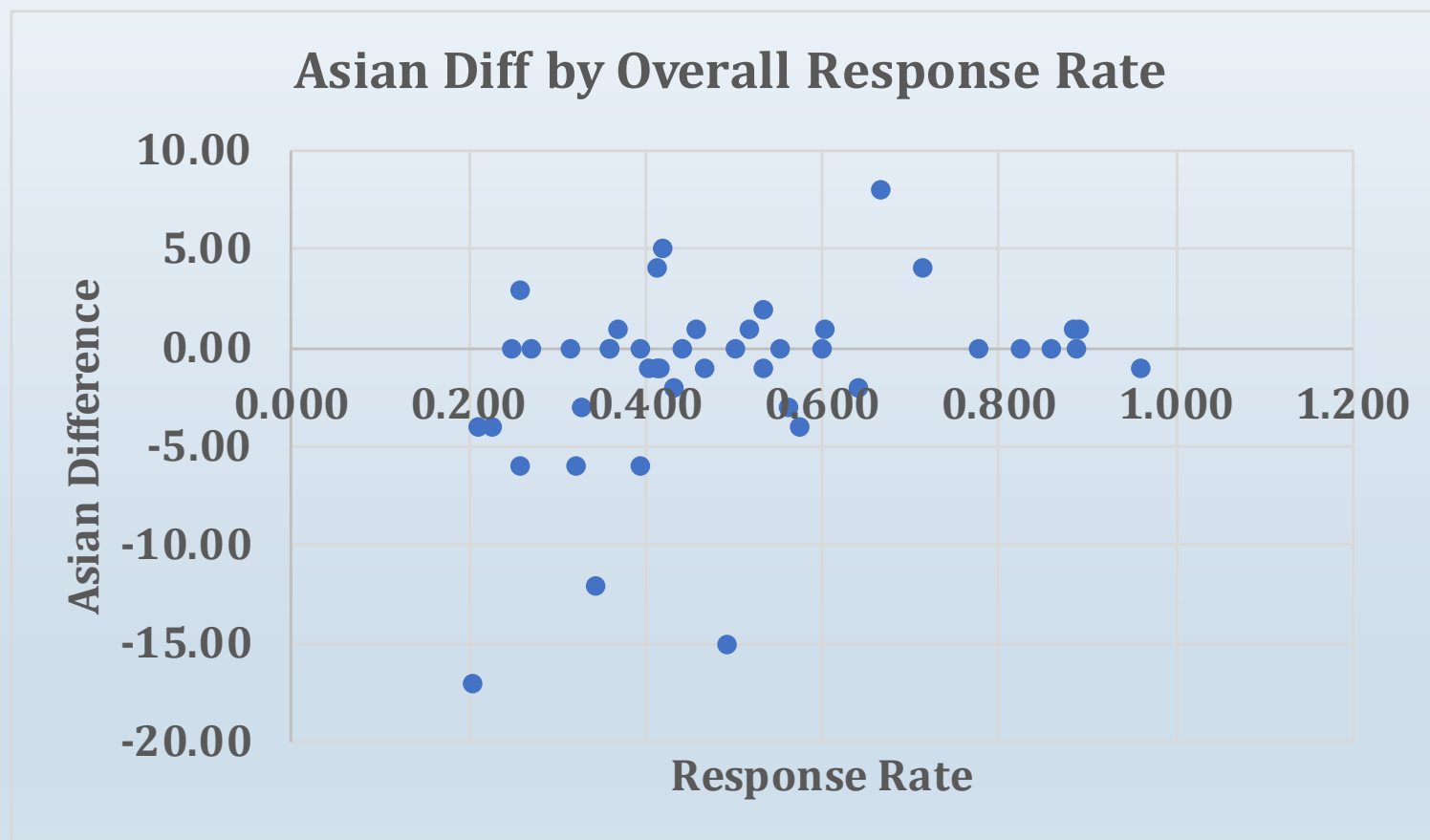Statistically significant difference in male and female response rates

9

Hisp/Latino Diff by Overall Response Rate
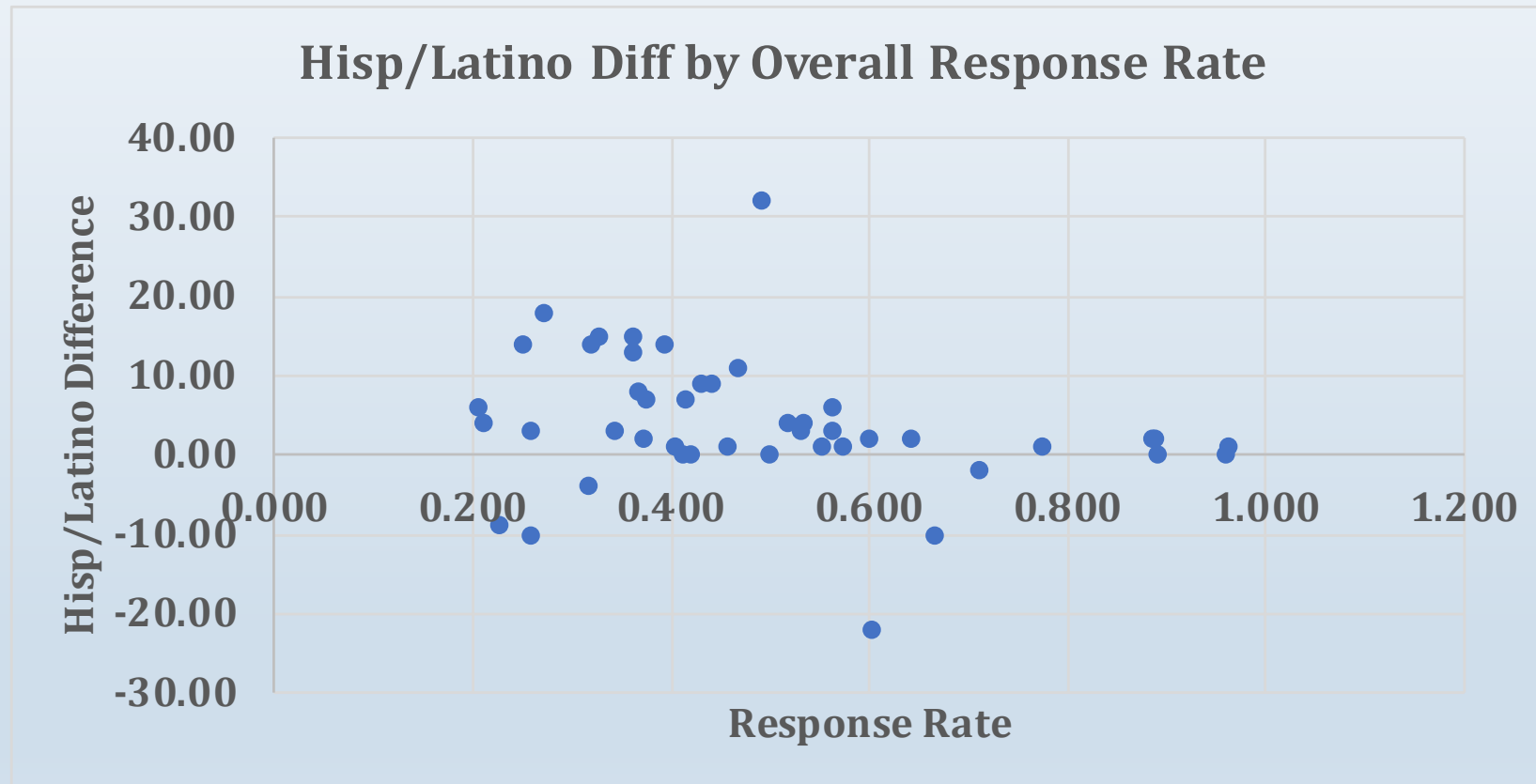
Results : Asian - population V. survey respondents

Asian Diff by Overall Response Rate

Results : Black or AA : population V. survey respondents

Black/AA Diff by Overall Response Rate
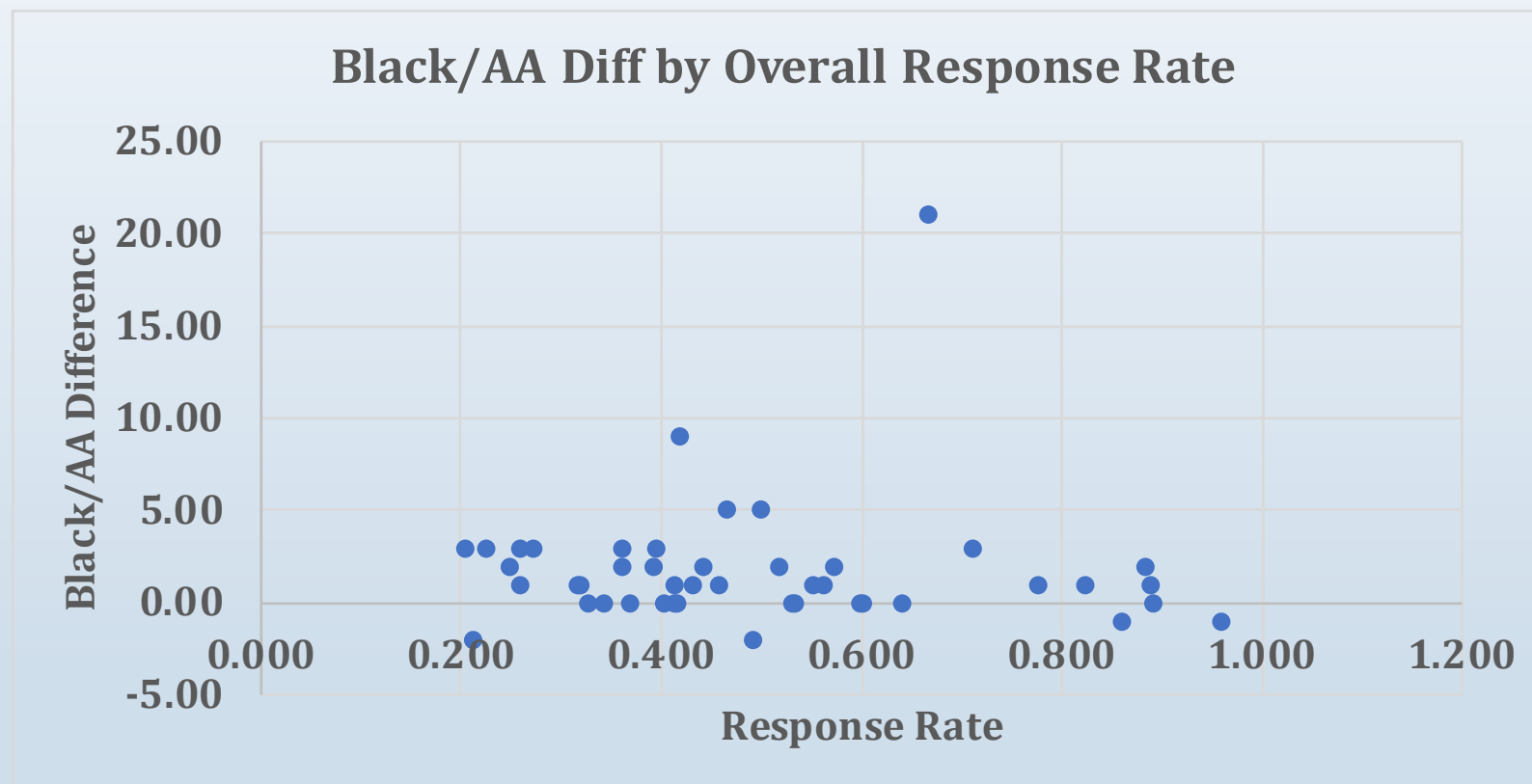
Results : A word about reminders

Three or four	56.9%

Total # of Reminders
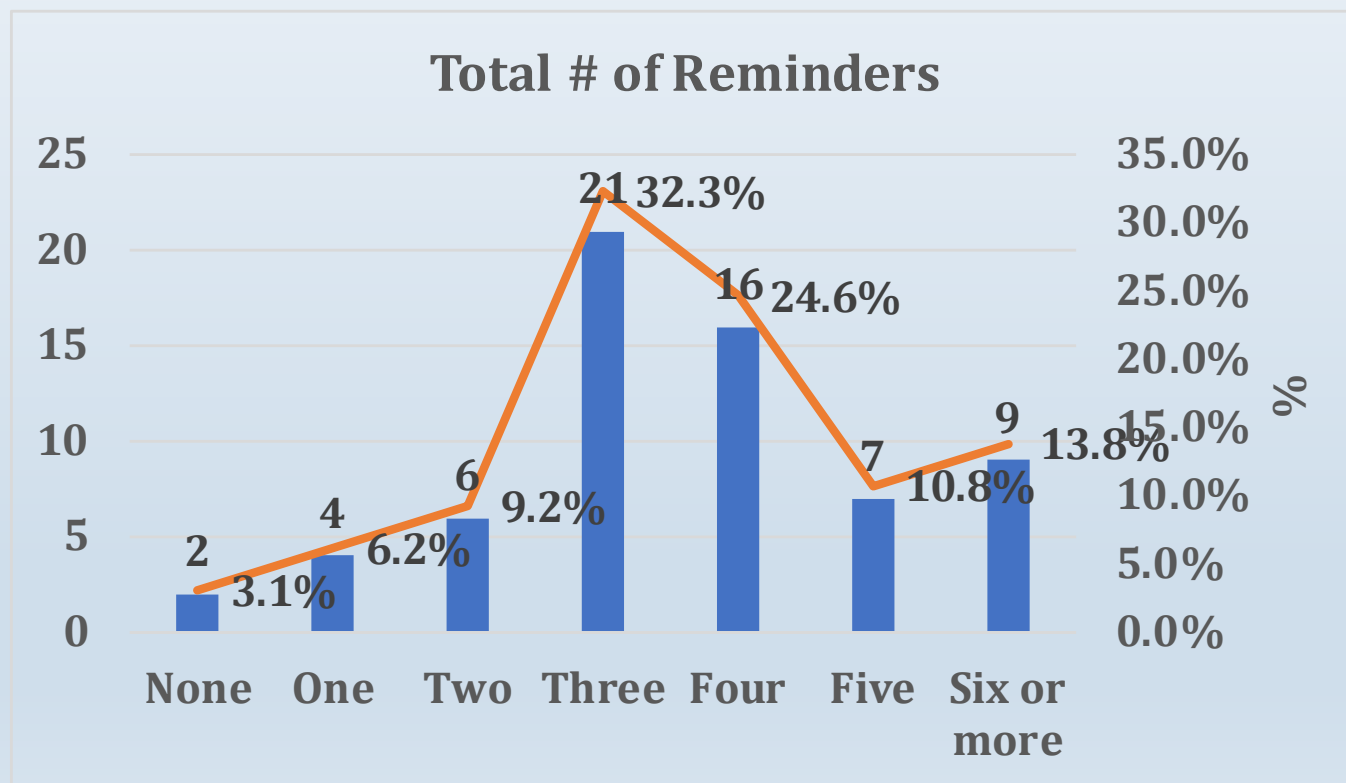
Pearson Correlation	1	-0.158
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.208
N	65	65
Pearson Correlation	-0.158	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.208	
N	65	65

Best practices

- We asked respondents to name one practice they think helps improve response rates

SURVEY CONTENT, 4%

INCENTIVE, 13%

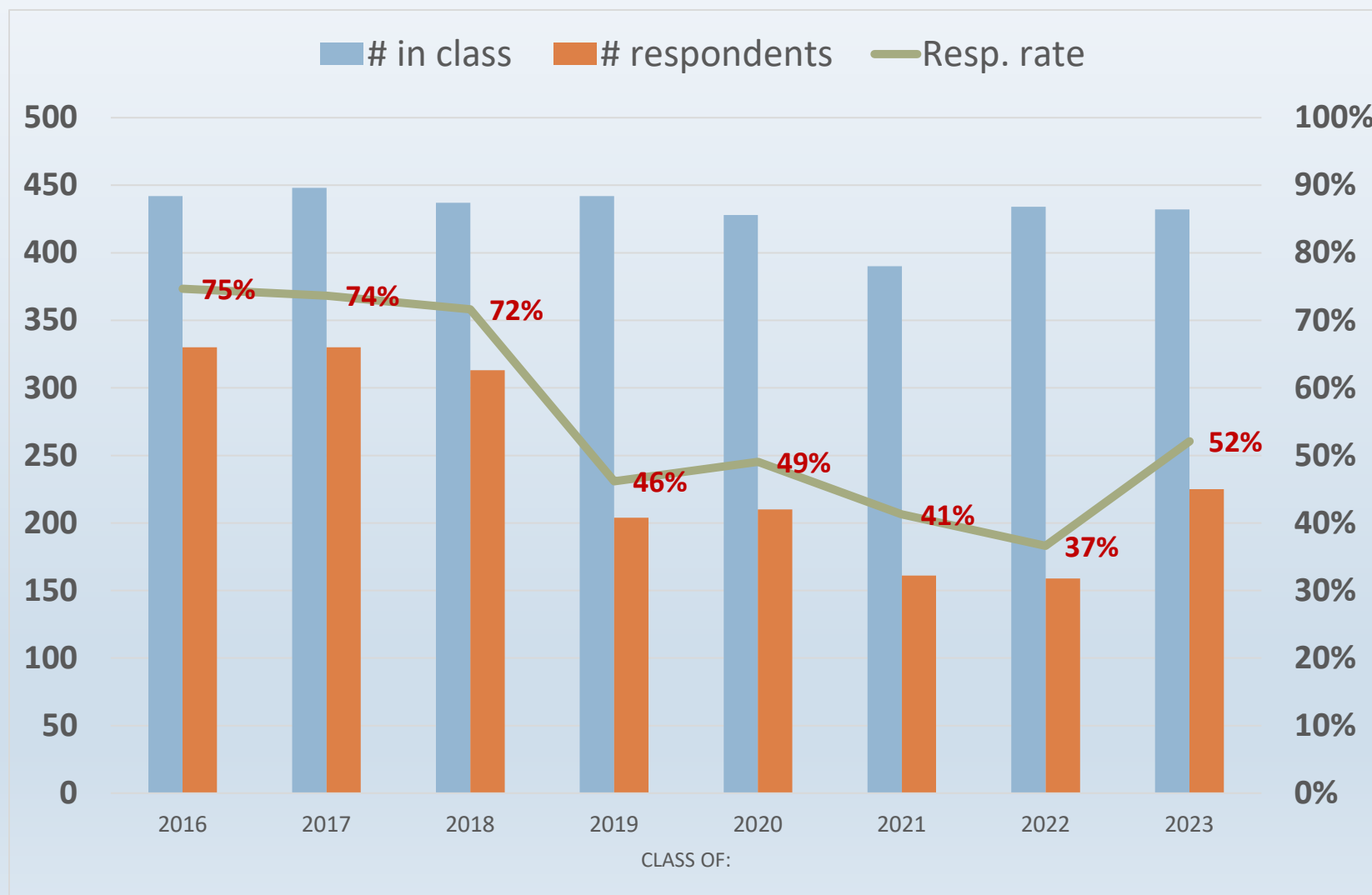SURVEY TIMING, 15%

MARKETING / COMMS, 68%
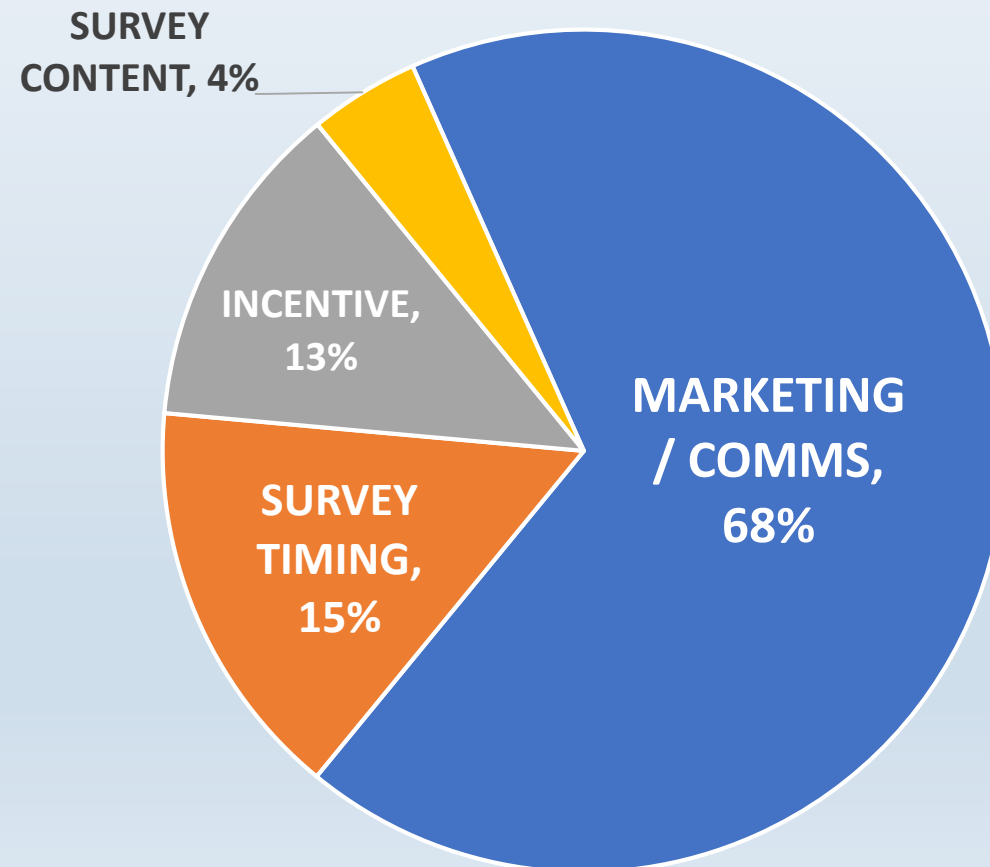
Best practices – Top responses

- Ask people in various roles on campus to announce survey and encourage its completion -- coaches, faculty, student support offices, etc. [*n*=17]
- Explain how the data will be used; point to concrete changes that happened as a result of past survey responses [*n*=8]
- Embed the survey link in student learning management system/portal (increases views and makes it clear it's not a phishing attempt) [*n*=7]
- Set aside time in classes, events, practices, work shifts, etc. to complete survey (proctored time) [*n*=7]
- Big incentive [*n*=7]

Application : Our Spring 2023 senior survey

Legend: # in class, # respondents, Resp. rate

Response rate values by class of: 75% (2016), 74% (2017), 72% (2018), 46% (2019), 49% (2020), 41% (2021), 37% (2022), 52% (2023)

CLASS OF:

We've faced declining response rates in recent years.

This year, we did most of the things that respondents suggested, plus:
- Pre-tested the survey with a couple of students for clarity, length, and desirability of incentives
- QR codes on posters and in campus emails
- Mix of incentives

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Future research

- Survey a larger variety of institution types
- Ask about a larger variety of student types to check for nonresponse (athletes, first-generation students, etc.)
- Look for response-rate differences in different kinds of surveys – in-house surveys vs. large national surveys like NSSE or CIRP, general surveys vs. those with very specific topics, etc.

Conclusions

- Good survey research is pretty hard. It's easy to do low-quality surveying on our campuses, but with some extra planning and smart approaches, results can be improved.
- Institutional research office is a natural location for promoting collaborative survey excellence on your campus.
- Sometimes **not surveying** is the right thing to do.

Big shout out to Conn's Center for the Critical Study of Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE)!

Thank you!
Any comments or questions?

Contact the Office of Institutional Research and Planning with questions or for more information.

ir@conncoll.edu