

The Case of Caring University

You work at Caring University, a residential research university on the west coast with approximately 30,000 undergraduate students. Recently, campus leaders have become distressed about reports of problem drinking among your students. Your president has appointed you members of a task force charged with conducting a survey to assess student drinking behaviors. Specifically, the president wants to know what groups of students are drinking irresponsibly and what current interventions are proving successful. The committee has already identified a valid and reliable instrument and now needs to develop an implementation plan. You will implement the survey next fall and have \$5,000 to cover costs.

As chair of the task force, I am uncertain about which mode of collection to employ and have created four working groups to develop an implementation plan for each mode (web, mail, telephone interview, and face-to-face interview). The institution has tried all four modes and has had an average overall response rate of 40%, which varies slightly depending on the mode (web-30%, mail-35%, phone-45%, face-to-face-50%). To help me decide which mode to employ, each working group will prepare a presentation describing their plan for implementing the survey. As a part of the plan, I would like each group to explain the pros and cons of using the assigned mode and to offer a final recommendation about whether the mode should be employed for this study. In your presentation, be sure to include the following:

1. Will you survey the entire population or draw a sample?
 - a. Why or why not? If you recommend sampling, what type of sampling design do recommend?
 - b. How many students will you sample? Keep in mind the effect this has on the level of precision of your statistics.
2. Using the cost estimates provided below, develop a plan of administration that minimizes nonresponse error. You can choose the number of contacts and the use and type of incentive. You will have to make a realistic estimate about the response rate for each wave of your survey, if you choose to have more than one contact. I recommend using 20-25% for the first wave, with diminishing proportions.

Item	Fixed cost	Variable cost (per person)
Letter	-	\$0.45
Postcard	-	\$0.30
Survey via mail (includes return envelope)	-	\$1.50
Data entry for printed survey		\$0.50
Telephone call	-	\$2.00
Web survey (<i>see note</i>)	\$1000	\$0.75
Email contact	-	\$0.05
Prepaid incentive	-	Your decision
Postpaid incentive	-	Your decision
Postpaid incentive (lottery)	Your decision	-

Note that the web survey cost varies per person, but not per contact. In other words, you are only charged \$.75 for each person in your initial sample, regardless of how many times you contact them.

3. What implications does your assigned mode have for coverage, nonresponse (unit and item), data quality (measurement error), and costs?