

**MAXIMISING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
ONLINE SURVEY REMINDERS**
**Findings from the 2016 May Graduate
Outcomes Survey.**

Jayde Grisdale

AAIR Forum
Sydney 2016



Online surveys and the GOS

- The Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) measures graduate satisfaction and employment outcomes four to seven months after higher education course completion.
- The GOS employs an online methodology.
- GOS May went out to 199,036 participants
- One study found using meta-analysis that online surveys have on average an 11% percent lower response rate compared to other survey methods (Lozar, ManFreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas & Vehovar, 2008).

GOS and response rates

- Past studies have found prize incentives, pre-notification letters and telephone follow up can help to improve response rates (Pederson & Neilson, 2014; Rao, Kaminska & McCutcheon, 2010).
- The content and tone of survey emails is a relatively low cost design feature to increase response rates.

Survey invitation design features

- Prior research has found changing the wording of survey reminder emails between reminders increased response rates of participants by up to 30 percent (Sauermann & Roach, 2012).
- Commonly used design features include:
 - Altruistic and egotistical appeals
 - Authoritative figure or tone
 - Plea for help
 - Inclusive language

Methodology

- From reminder four participants from the GOS May round that were from institutional study areas that were performing lower were either shown:
 - the same introductory paragraph for the final four reminder emails (control group)
 - Or a varying introductory paragraph (test group).
- Participants were split into the test group or control group by study area and institution.
- Gender within study areas and institutions was not controlled for.

Methodology

- The varying introductory text contained different tones, emotional appeals and were of different lengths.
- The control group was not free of appeals and contained one egotistical appeal and two altruistic appeals.
- Words and phrases such as 'future' and 'if not enough people participate' were considered to be altruistic appeals.
- 'Select group' and 'unique group' were considered egotistical appeals.
- 'Important' and 'Government' were considered authoritative appeals.

Email content review

Personalised greeting

Dear Brittany,

Egotistical appeal

You are one of a very select group of students graduating in a Bachelor of Creative Industries at _____ University. To be able to inform future students about the Bachelor of Creative Industries, we need you and all of your fellow students to complete the survey. If not enough people take part, the data will not be reliable enough to share with future students!



Introductory paragraph

Altruistic appeal

We would therefore like to invite you again to participate in the GOS. Your feedback is valuable and will be used to improve students course experience and measure labour force outcomes.

Prize draw

***** Complete the survey now to win! If you submit your survey before midnight Sunday May 22 you will be entered into two prize draws, and could win a share of the weekly prize pool of \$8,000.*** Hurry - don't miss your chance to win!

To start the survey from where you left off, please click on the link below:

<https://survey.srcentre.com.au/mriWeb/mriWeb.dll?I.Project=SRC1626&i.user1=1&Username=812471&Password=4KU3HH>

Automatic entry

If you are unable to access the survey by clicking on the link, please copy and paste the link into a new browser window.

The [Social Research Centre](#) is running the survey on behalf of The Australian Government Department of Education and Training. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and your responses will be kept confidential. For further information or to contact us with any queries about the survey go to: www.gos.edu.au

Results

- Results were analysed using the number of times participants clicked on the link in the email invitation to start the survey compared to the total number of emails opened.
- Overall, the group that received the varying text was more likely to click on the link in the reminder email than the group that received the static text (0.75% more, $p < .01$).

Results

- Emails two and three had a positive effect on click rates (2.91% more, & 3.14% more, $p < .01$) compared to the control group.

Email 3

I emailed you previously to say congratulations on the recent completion of your studies. I also invited you to contribute to the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) which asks people like yourself about their %%course%% experience and what the future holds. Some of your friends who completed their course have already helped us out but we still don't have enough responses to publish the data on the website (www.qilt.edu.au). Without your important feedback future students will not know what it is like to study at %%E306C**your institution%%. I would be very grateful if you could take the time today to fill in the survey. We will then enter you in the prize draw (and I'll stop sending reminder emails!).

Results

Email 2

We understand that you must be very busy, but it is really important that you complete the GOS since you are from a very unique group of students that studied %%QualName%% at %%E306C%%. If not enough people from %%QualName%% take part your opinion of your course cannot be shared with future students because we will not have reliable data to publish

Results

- Emails one and four had a negative effect (-1.70% less, & -1.24% less, $p < .01$) compared to the control groups.

Email 4

The Graduate Outcomes Survey is one of the most important surveys you will be asked to do about your studies because your feedback feeds directly into the aggregated findings on the QILT website (www.qilt.edu.au). This is a site by students, for students in terms of deciding where to go study for higher education. We can only put findings on the QILT website when enough grads take part for each study area. Your course hasn't got a lot of people in it so your feedback is more important than most! While we give away great prizes to encourage participation, it is about so much more than that and your time is valuable for future students, government and institutions to improve higher education in Australia. As you know, higher ed is one of the most significant decisions to make, so please complete the survey by Sunday to make your opinion count.

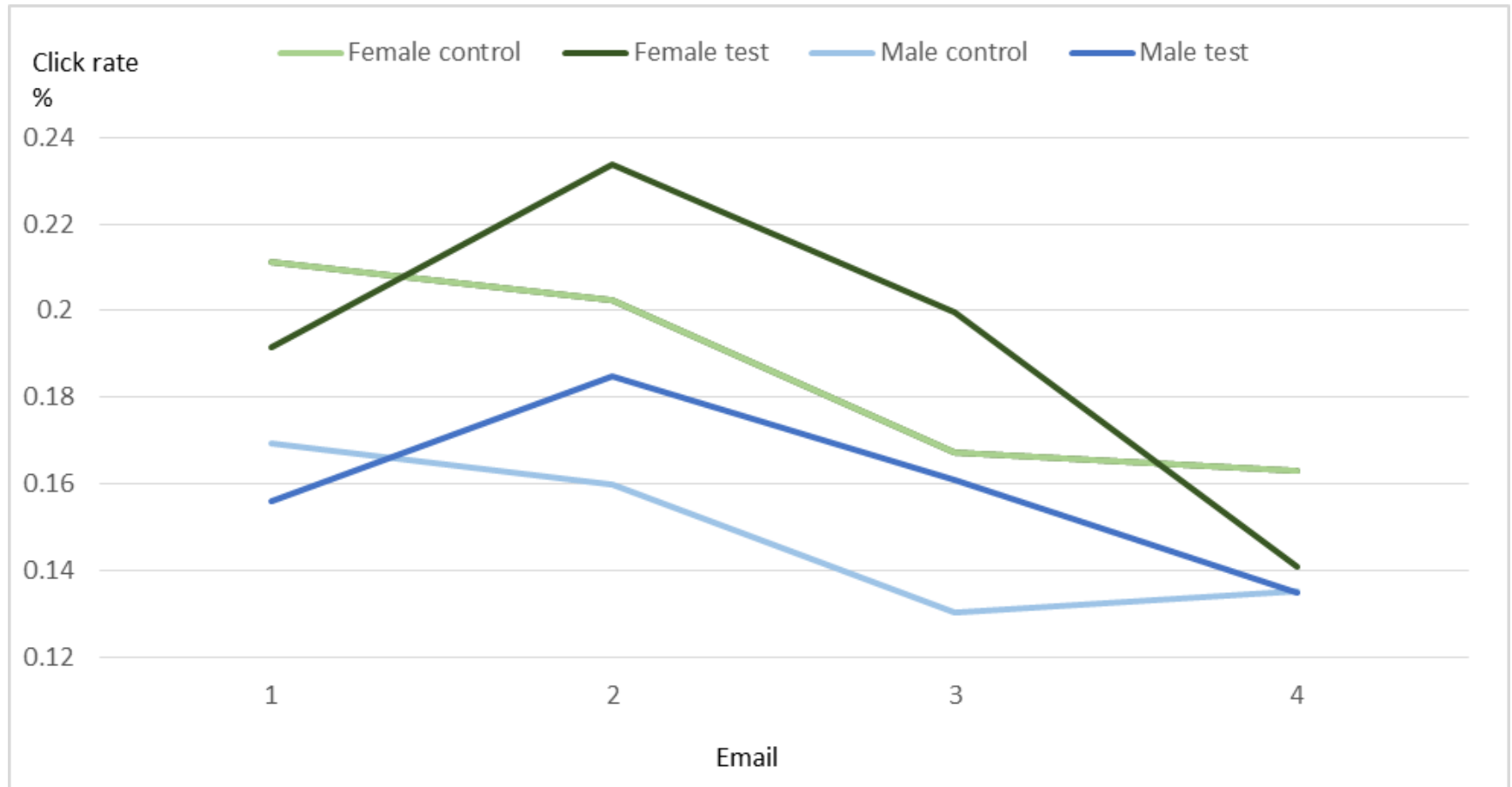
Results

Email 1

Did you know %%QualName**course%% graduates are nationally a small group? That means you are one of a very select group of students graduating in a %%QualName**course%% at %%E306C**institution%%. To be able to inform future students about the %%QualName**course%%, we're super keen to have you and all of your fellow %%QualName**course%% students to complete the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS). If we don't get enough of you taking part in the survey we won't be able to publish data to help future students decide if %%QualName**course%% is the course for them, so please help!

Results

Click through rates between male and female control and test groups



Results

Study area	% Difference in click rate between control and varying groups			
	Email 1	Email 2	Email 3	Email 4
Science and mathematics (n= 2,807)	-1.16	-2.24	1.74	0.72
Computing and Information Systems (n= 1,454)	3.24	4.58	0.59	2.40
Engineering (n= 2,425)	-1.83	3.96	4.07	2.76*
Architecture and built environment (n= 892)	-5.01	3.07	1.75	-3.20
Agriculture and environmental studies (n= 500)	-4.04	0.80	7.86	0.10
Health services and support (n= 1,910)	-1.66	2.02	4.22	0.77
Medicine (n=613)	0.85	0.91	-0.66	1.40
Nursing (n= 2,086)	-0.08	4.04	3.86	-3.37
Pharmacy (n= 251)	2.63	0.54	8.98	-7.26
Dentistry (n= 157)	3.98	-3.79	3.76	-12.70
Veterinary science (n= 98)	0.29	0.23	2.50	0.88
Rehabilitation (n= 441)	4.48	7.25	-2.48	-5.60
Teacher education (n=2,985)	-4.30*	7.32*	3.55	-0.11
Business and management (n= 8,968)	-3.85*	3.71*	2.70*	-2.60*
Humanities, culture and social sciences (n=2,304)	-1.24	-0.77	5.40*	0.94
Social work (n= 418)	-7.05	6.89	7.50	-9.67
Psychology (n=963)	-7.82*	0.64	0.07	-2.76
Law and paralegal studies (n= 1,464)	5.32	2.66	3.87	-3.89
Creative arts (n= 1,434)	2.55	1.34	1.71	0.05
Communications (n= 988)	0.55	10.13*	6.87	-4.62
Tourism, Hospitality, Personal Services, Sport and recreation (n= 107)	7.70	-9.52	-4.21	0.48

**statically significant p<.01*

Email content recommendations

- Vary the text between reminders sends
- A thankful, friendly and understanding tone, the use of 'I' and used no egotistical appeals proved to be most successful.
- Females react less well to factual, colder and authoritative tone
- Keep in mind which features might be more effective for different study areas

Future directions

- It would be beneficial to further isolate different appeals and tones from one another to reduce any interaction effects.
- The control group was not completely free of appeals or tone. Although it may be possible to reduce the appeals and extremity of tone used for the control group one would have to be careful that this would not be damaging to the larger study.
- Caution should be taken in generalising the results of this study to other groups or survey topics.

Thank you for listening!

Questions?

jayde.grisdale@srcentre.com.au