CollegeBoard

Overcoming Non-Response: Lessons Learned Migrating to a Web-Based Platform

Association for Institutional Research Conference

San Diego, California

May 29, 2005

Ellen A. Sawtell

esawtell@collegeboard.org

The Numbers

- Over 1 million students graduate each year having taken the SAT®

- When students register to take the SAT, they are asked to fill out a 43-item questionnaire

- In the mid-1990s, web registration for the SAT began

- By 2002, 44% of the graduating cohort registered on the web

The Population & The Instrument

- The SAT is primarily taken by juniors and seniors in high school

- The SAT[1] is a test that measures critical reading and math reasoning

- The SAT questionnaire includes questions about:

  - high school coursework and activities

  - college preferences and aspirations, and

  - demographic information

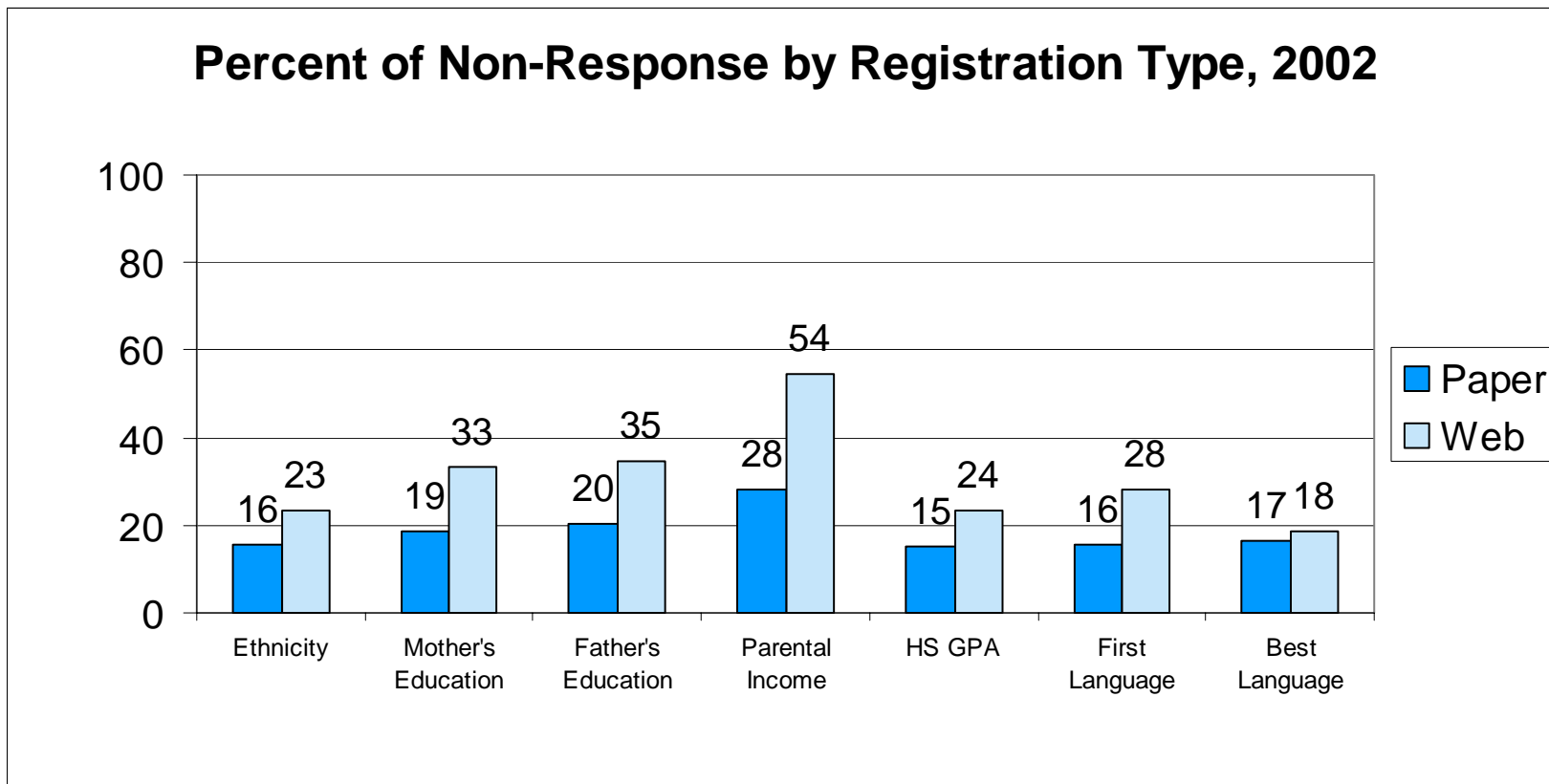[1] through February 2005

CollegeBoard

Reports on the Cohort

- Summary reports are produced based on the graduating class of seniors

  - If you last took the SAT as a junior (in January 2005) your scores will be part of a summary report on all seniors graduating in 2006

- Issue-Time lag for results

  - Impact of questionnaire modification in 2003 has impact on about 75% students

Web increase → Non-response increase

- Key questions in which non-response caused the most concern:
  - Ethnicity
  - Mother's Education
  - Father's Education
  - Parental Income
  - High School GPA
  - First Language Spoken
  - Best Language Spoken

Web increase → Non-response increase

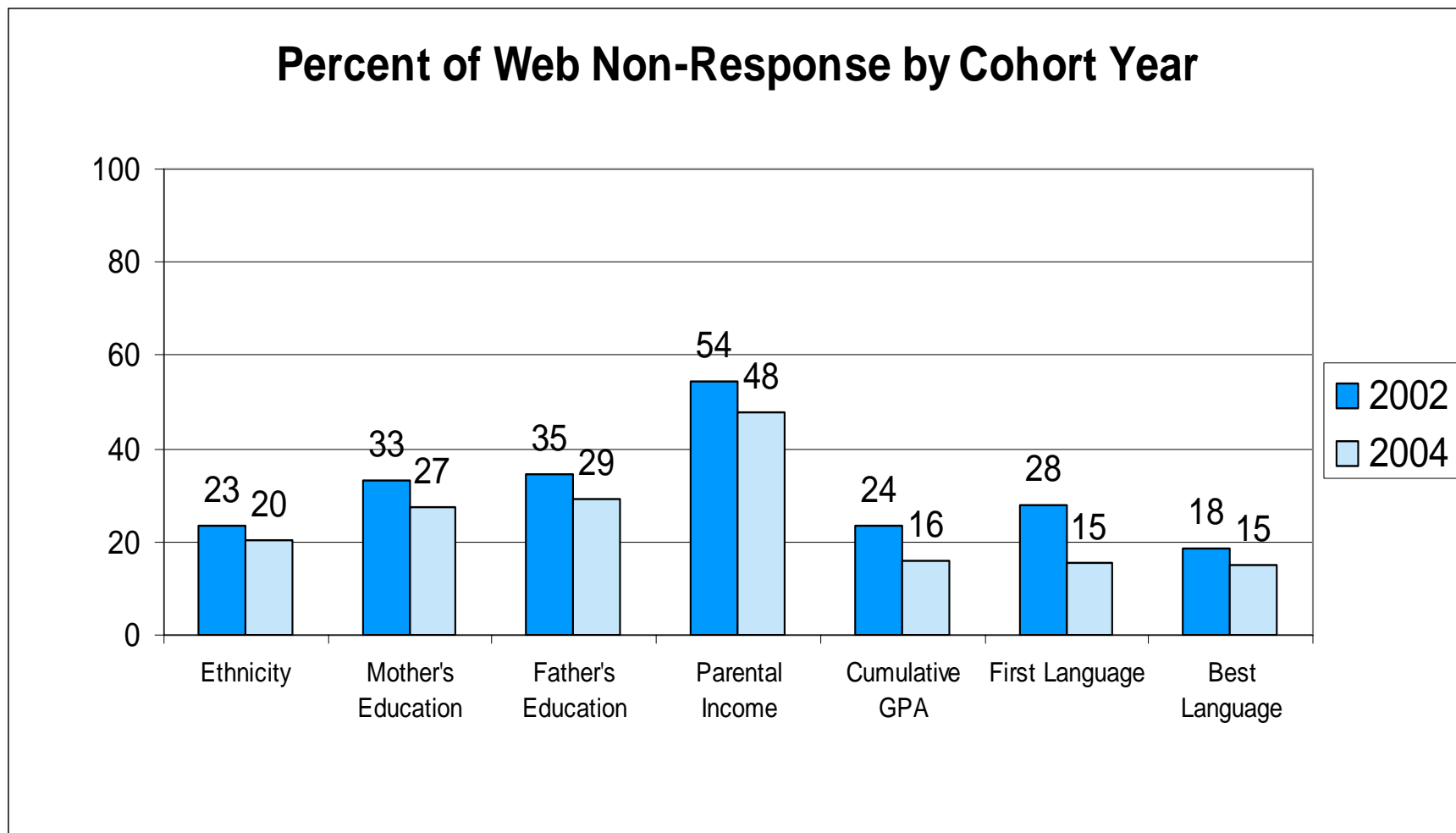Percent of Non-Response by Registration Type, 2002

Intervention

- In 2002-03, a committee met to identify which questions are needed most for scoring, test validity, and equity

- In May 2003, questions on the web were reordered, moving seven key questions to the beginning

CollegeBoard

Intervention

- Noted 'for research only' on parental questions

- Removed option for students to 'Reset' or respond 'I don't know'

- Added "I do not wish to respond" option

- Removed 'Cancel' option to exit

- Required all first-time web registrants to go to questionnaire

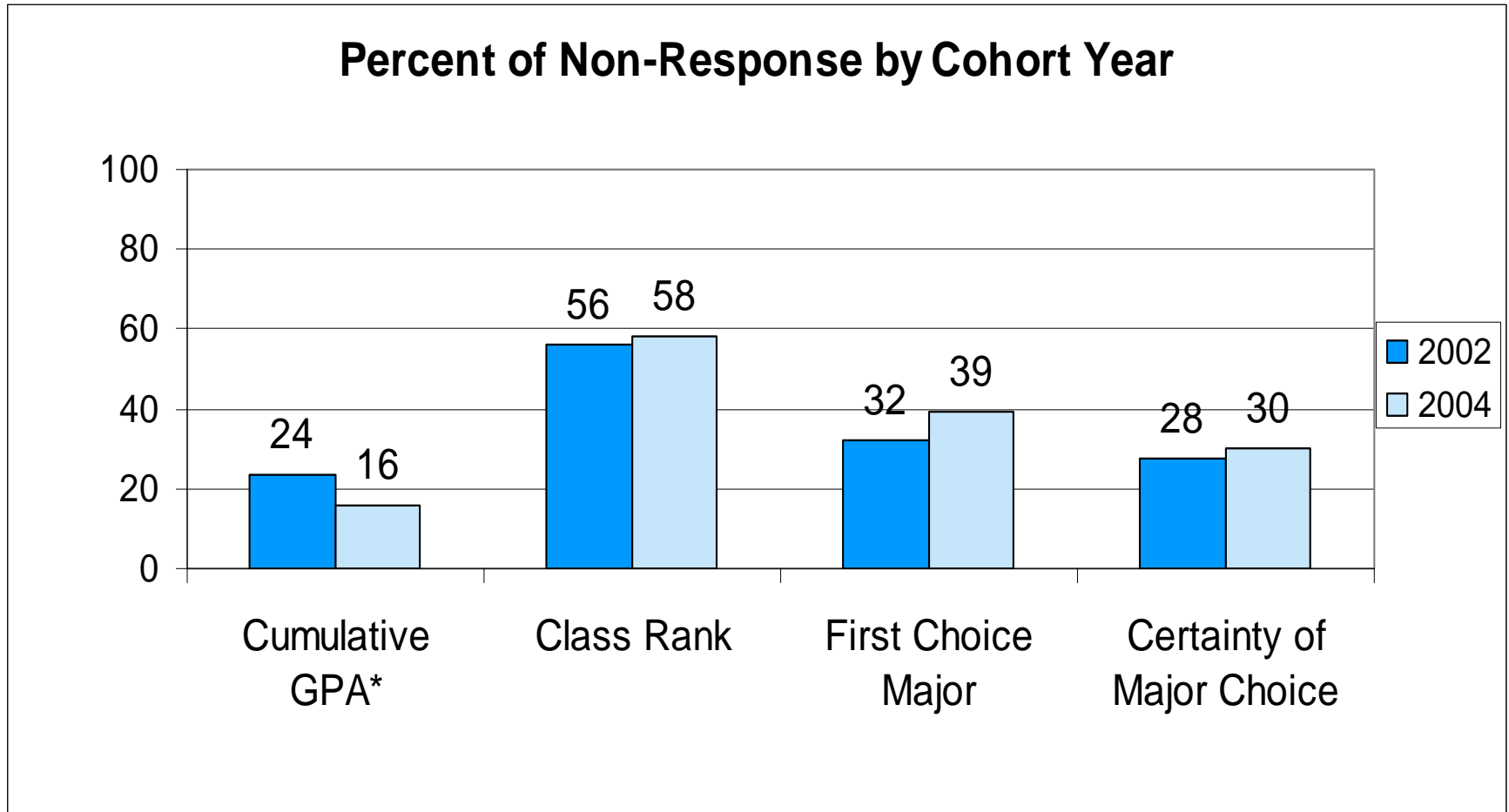- If respondent left 'key questions' blank, question reloads

Non-Response in Key Questions[2]

Percent of Web Non-Response by Cohort Year

[2] GPA moved from item #1 to #5

Non-Response in Questions that moved back[3]

Percent of Non-Response by Cohort Year

[3] Questions that moved to accommodate key questions; does not include 4 alternate major questions

*GPA moved from item #1 to #5

CollegeBoard

connect to college success™
www.collegeboard.com

What's a Researcher To Do?

- When you have so much to ask:

  - Identify items of most importance and ask them first

  - Identify core questions and link answers over time with unique identifier

  - Explore feasibility of adding 'I do not wish to respond' and/or reloading question once

Future Research

- Review non-response percent in the 2005 cohort

- Current effort underway to see if the question prompt is contributing to non-response in the ethnicity question

- Explore ways to match students as they come to the website to answer the questionnaire a little at a time

Questions, Comments, Suggestions

- Please forward any questions, comments, and suggestions to: esawtell@collegeboard.org