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Non-response Rates to Individual Items on the IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction Forms

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In this study, we asked what effect survey length has on student non-response rates to individual items on IDEA's *Diagnostic Feedback* (DF) and *Learning Essentials* (LE) forms. Because the DF has more items than the LE (41 vs. 19), users sometimes ask whether the non-response rates to individual items are higher on the DF. Item non-response can be a concern when a substantial proportion of students within a class do not respond to all of the survey questions, and those students have characteristics—*related to what is being measured*—that differ from respondents who completed all items on the survey (Dillman, 2007).

Our approach was to analyze individual student ratings of classes contained in the 2015-2016 IDEA-CL database. Specifically, we computed item non-response rates in individual ratings of 298,209 students enrolled in 36,629 classes who used the DF, and 39,899 enrolled in 5,120 classes who responded

to the LE. Tables 1 and 2 show item response rates on the 41-item DF and the 19-item LE. The last item on each survey is an open-ended question for students to write comments.

The DF asks students how frequently the instructor used each of 19 teaching methods and how much progress they made on 13 learning objectives. Students also are invited to respond to six items about themselves and the course, two single-item summary questions, and the open-ended question for written comments. As shown in Table 1, the response rates to the first 19 questions were all 100%. For the 13 learning objectives, it dropped slightly to 99.2%, and for the six student and course characteristics it was 99.0%. So, approximately 99% of the students who responded to the DF answered all 40 forced-choice questions. A little over half (52.9%) offered written comments.

Table 1
Item Response Rates on the Diagnostic Feedback Form (N = 298,209)

Items	%
Teaching methods (Items 1 - 19)	100
Progress on learning objectives (Items 20 - 32)	99.2
Student and course characteristics (Items 33 - 38)	99.0
Overall summary measures (Items 39 - 40)	99.0
Comments (Item 41)	52.9

On the LE, students rate the progress they made on 13 learning objectives, respond to three questions about themselves, provide judgments on two overall summary measures, and offer written feedback if they desire. The non-response pattern for the LE was very similar to the DF (see Table 2). Of those who responded to the

survey, 100% answered all 13 learning objectives, and 99.2% responded to the three questions about themselves and the two summary measures. Again, slightly more than half (53.5%) provided written comments.

Table 2
Item Response Rates on Learning Essentials Form (N = 39,899)

Items	%
Progress on learning objectives (Items 1 - 13)	100.0
Student characteristics (Items 14 - 16)	99.2
Overall summary measures (Items 17 - 18)	99.2
Comments (Item 19)	53.5

To summarize, about 99% of students respond to all forced-choice questions regardless of whether instructors use the DF or LE. Non-response bias most likely, then, imposes very little threat to student responses on individual items, and should not affect overall teaching evaluations. We can most likely conclude the missing responses occur when students elect not to advance to the next page in the survey.

References

Dillman, D. A. (2007). *Mail and Internet surveys: The tailored design method* (2nd edition). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.