



# Chapter 2

## Methodology and Institutional Characteristics

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This chapter provides details regarding the survey methodology, the profile of the institutions that participated in the survey, and a comparison between the percentage of participating institutions by affiliation, and the national percentages to determine the representativeness of the sample.

### Methodology

The population for the 2006 National Survey was drawn from the electronic version of the 2007 *Higher Education Directory* (Burke, 2007)<sup>1</sup>, which was released in October 2006. Institutions selected to receive an invitation to participate in the study had to be (a) regionally accredited, (b) not-for-profit, and (c) undergraduate-serving institutions.

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition outsourced the administration of the survey instrument to Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI). EBI was responsible for administering the survey via the Web, which included sending initial and follow-up e-mails that requested participation and providing the survey link and general data management.

The initial e-mail (sent November 18, 2006) served three primary functions: (a) notifying the recipient that the Center was conducting the seventh triennial survey “to gather information about the first-year seminars in American higher education,” (b) providing information about the date the survey instrument would be sent, and (c) ensuring that the recipient was the appropriate contact for the survey, and if not, requesting the correct contact information. The initial e-mail was sent to chief academic officers (as listed in the *Higher Education Directory*) or the chief executive officer (as listed in the *Higher Education Directory*) if there was no chief academic officer listed in the directory. If the aforementioned positions were not included in the directory, the chief student affairs officer (as listed in the *Higher Education Directory*) was sent the e-mail. If none of these positions was listed in the directory, the institution was omitted from the study.

The initial respondents had approximately 10 days to reply with the replacement contact information before the next e-mail with the survey link was sent on November 28, 2006. Center staff or staff from EBI updated the database with the new contact information whenever a request was made. After

applying the selection criteria and accounting for not verified (incorrect) or undeliverable (bounce backs) e-mails, the second e-mail with the survey link was sent to 2,646 potential participants.

All verified names in the database received reminder e-mails if they had not responded to the survey by December 5, 2006. Another reminder was sent to any verified recipients in the database who had not responded by December 12, 2006. In addition to sending the survey link, the reminder e-mails provided the deadline information (i.e., December 31, 2006). Although the plan was to end access to the survey by the end of the year, we decided to leave it open for an additional week to catch any late respondents. Thus, a “last chance” reminder e-mail was sent on January 5, 2007 reflecting the new date, and the survey closed officially on January 9, 2007.

Surveys were collected from 968 institutions (a 36.6% response rate). The respondents include 821 institutions (or 84.8%) offering a seminar and 147 institutions (15.2%) not offering a seminar. There were a small number of institutions that failed to reply to the question about whether or not they had a seminar. The responses of these institutions were reviewed and added to the database if they answered questions about the seminar or deleted if they did not. Since not answering the question could mean that they did not have a seminar or that they decided not to participate in the survey, they could not with any assurance be included in the list of institutions that did not have seminars. Chi-square analyses were conducted by type of seminar, institution affiliation (e.g., public/private), institution type (two-year/four-year), institution size, and selectivity.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that although this response rate is good for a web-based survey,<sup>3</sup> the relatively small number of respondents is a limitation. It is impossible to explain why individuals choose not to participate in a survey. However, some respondents expressed frustration with the language in the first e-mail, which may have affected this response rate. EBI referred to the contact information update request as a “survey.” We heard from some potential participants who were confused when asked to respond to the “survey request” in the initial e-mail and then found a request for contact information and not the actual survey link. We suspect that the language might have caused such a degree of frustration in some potential respondents that they decided not to participate. Additionally, a handful of initial contacts, who did not provide us with a more appropriate recipient, complained about the number of reminders they received. This annoyance may have led them to choose not to participate as well. Nevertheless, although the response rate is far from ideal, it is an increase over the last administration (23.7% in 2003).<sup>4</sup>

## Characteristics of Participating Institutions

Of the 968 institutions that responded to the survey, 821 offered first-year seminars. The 821 institutions serve as our sample for the analysis presented throughout this monograph. While the sample contains an approximately equal number of public and private schools, the majority of institutions are smaller, four-year schools. The tables that follow provide the demographic details. (See Tables 2.1-2.3.)

**Table 2.1**  
*Characteristics of Responding Institutions With Seminars (N = 821)*

	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Institutional type (n = 803)</i>		
Two-year	188	23.4
Four-year	615	76.6
<i>Institutional affiliation (n = 667)</i>		
Private	351	52.6
Public	316	47.4
<i>Institutional enrollment (n = 814)</i>		
5,000 or less	553	67.9
5,001 - 10,000	129	15.8
10,001 - 15,000	61	7.5
15,001 - 20,000	35	4.3
More than 20,000	36	4.4

*Note.* Sample sizes vary based on survey responses.

#### *Two-Year Institutions*

Approximately 24% of respondents identified their institutions as two-year schools. The majority (91.9%) were public institutions. As Table 2.2 illustrates, these two-year institutions most often have 5,000 or fewer undergraduate students (60.1%).

**Table 2.2**  
*Undergraduate Headcount at Two-Year Institutions (n = 188)*

Size of student body	Number of institutions	Percentage
5,000 or less	113	60.1
5,001 - 10,000	41	21.8
10,001 - 15,000	23	12.2
15,001 - 20,000	6	3.2
More than 20,000	5	2.7

### Four-Year Institutions

Most survey respondents identified their institutions as four-year schools (76.7%), and the majority were private schools (63.2%). Like two-year institutions, most of the four-year institutions have 5,000 or fewer undergraduate students (71.1%). (See Table 2.3.)

**Table 2.3**

*Undergraduate Headcount at Four-Year Institutions (n = 613)*

Size of student body	Number of institutions	Percentage
5,000 or less	436	71.1
5,001 - 10,000	82	13.4
10,001 – 15,000	37	6.0
15,001 – 20,000	28	4.6
More than 20,000	30	4.9

### Representation of 2006 Survey Respondents

Analyses were done to determine if the respondents were representative of accredited higher education institutions. There are significant statistical differences between all four institutional categories: (a) public two-year, (b) private two-year, (c) public four-year, and (d) private four-year. More specifically, these findings indicate that the survey sample under-represents two-year colleges. Conversely, the survey sample slightly over-represents private four-year institutions and greatly over-represents public four-year colleges and universities. Therefore, while it is not appropriate to draw firm generalizations from the data presented in the following chapters, that qualification does not diminish their value (See Table 2.4). The survey findings continue to be the most comprehensive portrait of the first-year seminar available, and, thus, provide valuable information to readers who hope to gather data to help them design, establish, and institutionalize the seminar on their campuses.

**Table 2.4**

*Representation of 2006 Survey Respondents Compared to National Average by Institutional Type and Size (N = 654)*

Type of institution	Number of institutions responding to survey <sup>a</sup>	Percentage	National percentage by type
Public two-year	114	17.4%*	32%
Private two-year	10	1.5%*	3%
Public four-year	195	30.0*	19%
Private four-year	335	51.2*	46%

*Note.* Figures for the national percentages are from the 2006 issue of *Almanac of the Chronicle of Higher Education* at [chronicle.com/weekly/almanac/2006/nation.htm](http://chronicle.com/weekly/almanac/2006/nation.htm)

<sup>a</sup>The survey totals listed include only those institutions that reported if they were public or private as well as a two-year or four-year institution. Incomplete answers were omitted from this total.

\* $p < .05$

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The names in the 2007 electronic version were compared to the *2006 Higher Education Directory* available in hard copy. Institutions that were not in the 2006 directory (Burke, 2006), but were in the 2007 electronic directory, were omitted from the study for the purposes of consistency. Only United States institutions or those located in U.S. territories were included.

<sup>2</sup>Institutional representatives self-reported their selectivity, noted as “entrance difficulty level” on the survey, as high, moderate, and low. Those selecting moderate and low were grouped together in the analysis.

<sup>3</sup>Research (see Wang, Dziuban, & Moskal, 2001; Gunn, 2002) offers widely different accounts of the average response rate for web-based, e-mailed, and hard copy surveys. The response rate varies by sample, number of questions, topics, etc. For example, higher response rates are more likely with younger populations. It was very common to see web-based education surveys get approximately a 25% response rate.

<sup>4</sup>All the surveys prior to 2003 were paper surveys. The 2003 administration was the first web-based survey. The prior response rates for the seminar survey were: 53.6% in 1988, 43% in 1991, 40.7% in 1994, and 39.9% in 2000. Statistics are unavailable for 1997. The first web-based survey was conducted in 2003 and had a 23.7% response rate.

## References

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