

THE USE OF THE INTERNET FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES PROFESSIONALS

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The expanding availability of the Internet and e-mail is prompting researchers to conduct survey research by means of these technologies. This research compared the results of mailed and e-mailed surveys with FACS teacher educators. The use of the Internet and e-mail for research has advantages and disadvantages. By eliminating the expenses of postage, printing, and paying someone to transfer data from printed surveys into a database, money is saved. Another advantage is the ease and resultant time savings involved with Internet surveys. Coverage can be more global and responses are more honest. Most disadvantages when using the Internet deal with sampling. The majority of Internet users are reported to be young, white, educated males and sampling is limited to those with access to a computer and online network. However, the use of targeted populations with known e-mail addresses helps reduce or eliminate many of the sampling issues. The target population for this study was FACS teacher educators (N = 235) throughout the United States. Every member of the population was associated with both a postal and an e-mail address. The database was divided into two groups. One group received the survey instrument by mail, the other via e-mail with a link to the survey website. Time and cost expenditures were compared for both forms of the survey. The mailed survey costs were \$326.46. The on-line survey cost \$455.00 (personnel expenses for database creation). Time expenditures were approximately 50% greater for the mail survey. Analysis of the data shows that a greater number of FACS teacher educators returned the mailed survey than completed the e-mail survey. While 51% returned the mailed survey, only 32% of Internet respondents completed the survey. This was a significant difference in return rates. The profiles of the teacher educators were similar for the two groups. There was no statistical difference between the responses of teachers to the two forms of the survey instrument. Using targeted e-mail with a connection to an Internet survey instrument does not appear to be a valid method for conducting research with this population.