UNIVERSITY ACTIVITIES ORGANIZATION: SPRING SURVEY

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A Research paper

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Chapter 1

At Bowling Green State University, the University Activities Organization functions as the premier programming board on campus. According to their mission statement, they aim to provide "diverse, entertaining, quality events that instill pride and lasting memories in the hearts of BGSU students." Overall, what this means is that they are the ones that bring events to the university. A few examples of this are the movie series, the pub series, bringing speakers to campus, as well as the annual spring concert.

The spring concert is the biggest event of the year. Many students on campus know of the University Activities Organization because of this show. It is typically put on in the month of April and the artists vary from year to year. Some artists they have brought in the past are Ludacris, Reel Big Fish, O.A.R., The Donnas, OK Go, Jason Mraz, and Dashboard Confessional. Since these are some fairly big names, a lot of work has to go into choosing which artist(s) to bring each spring. The University Activities Organization's budget is only so big, so that makes it hard to get the bigger artists that the students want.

This is where the annual UAO Spring Survey comes into play. Each year, the University Activities Organization puts together a survey to try and figure out the best artist to bring. With approximately 20,000 students on campus, it makes it impossible to please everyone. This survey is supposed to be a way for them to get an idea of what the majority of the students want to see.

They have come up with many different versions of this survey. Some of them were longer and some were shorter. Overall, they just wanted to show the students the

size of artists they could afford and find out which artist would fit in that slot the best that year.

The survey is usually worked on for about a month or so before actually using it. A lot of hard work and effort goes into this survey since the outcome is so important. A committee is typically formed to work on this and put it all together. After finalizing the survey, it is brought in front of all the UAO directors for them to take a look at. Once approved, copies are made and for about another month, the survey is active.

At this point in time, the directors do their best to get as many non-biased opinions as they can. What does this mean? This means that they simply try to get opinions from all types of people all over campus. One way of doing this is by presenting the survey to entire classrooms at a time. Since there are between twenty and thirty directors, many different classrooms can be covered. Another way students can access the survey is online. The survey is put on the University Activities Organizations' website where students can type in their name, student ID number, and make their selections. This makes it easier than ever for the students to express their interests.

Prizes have been introduced in recent years to try and entice students to take interest in the survey. The grand prize is typically something like an iPod, which almost all students would love to have. Smaller prizes have been introduced in the past as well. UAO will do just about anything they can in order to better their events for the students. If this means giving back while collecting information, they will do just that.

The University Activities Organization's Spring Survey is not perfect though. Each year, unique problems take place and sometimes the data collected does not benefit them in the way they had hoped. Back in 2005, many names were on the page long

survey in order to show the students what types of artists they could afford. This seemed to give the students false hope. Rather than going by the genres that the artists were listed under, they selected the artist they wanted to see the most, thinking it was a good possibility. This was not the intent of the survey. The intent was simply to show possibilities that could be afforded.

When all of the data was collected, UAO was unable to get a whole lot out of it. Basically, they had a lot of names that students wanted to see from all different genres. Fortunately, that year they were able to come up with an artist and had a sold-out show. The survey definitely did not help with that though. That only happened because of the hard work that took place after the survey when the directors worked overtime while trying to deliver a show the students would never forget.

The following year, in 2006, they decided to simplify the survey. The survey became half a page long and simply had the students check off which genre they liked the best. In parentheses, under the genre, were names of a couple artists they could afford. This format seemed to work much better. The data that was collected was a lot more to the point and was easily understood. That is when a different problem arose.

In 2006, the students at Bowling Green State University decided that they wanted to see a hip-hop show. A few years before, UAO had brought them Ludacris, a famous rap artist. That was the kind of show they wanted to see. Since the University Activities Organization was able to do it once, why would they not be able to do it again?

This is where politics came into play. After weeks of research, debating, and hard work, the board of directors was able to come up with a list of hip-hop artists they could afford. Typically, this would be the point where bids would be made. A bid would be

made for the artist at the top of the list, they would wait to hear back, if it was declined, they would then move on to the next name on the list and so on. That is not was happened this year though.

When the university took a look at the list, they became concerned with the artists' lyrics. Hip-hop is a genre in which profanity is typically used, drugs and alcohol are sometimes mentioned, and other things as well that follow the same suit. This brought on an entire censoring process. The directors had to look through the lyrics of all the artists and get rid of the artists that said these explicit things. Needless-to-say, there were not many artists left. In fact, the list became so small that there was no concert that year and they put on a comedy show instead.

Many students and directors were not happy with this. One of the questions asked was that if they university bookstore was allowed to sell the artist's CDs, why could the artist not come and perform? Although many argued against the university about this with many different points being made, it did not make a different. The university has standards and they are going to stick with them. This does not explain though, why they even allowed the genre of hip-hop to make the initial list. If it was going to be a problem for these artists to perform, the university should have put their foot down at the very beginning. These were all things students and directors were thinking and wondering.

So after look back at simply the past two years of surveys, there are obviously some problems that need to be worked out. The form of the survey still does not seem to be as accurate as it should be. The communication between the University Activities Organization and the university needs to be clearer. More students on campus need to know about the survey and be able to voice their opinion. This survey is a vital part in

choosing which artist to bring to the university each year, so more time and dedication needs to be put into it.

Chapter 2

When trying to figure out how to conduct a survey, many things must be taken into consideration. What kind of audience do you have? How many people do you have to work with? Most importantly, what do you want to get out of the survey? In order to get the most out of a survey, the best bet is to look at what other people have done.

One publication to look at is F.J. Fowler's "Survey Research Methods." This publication is a good tool in order to learn how to survey properly. It goes over why you would survey as well as different types of surveys. An example of this would be sampling. Samples are not perfect, but you can make estimates from samples and sampling errors. This book even goes as far as explaining how to properly conduct Internet surveys and get accurate results (Fowler, 2002).

Leiter, Thompson, and Tomaskovic-Devey's "Organizational Survey Nonresponse" journal entry is very helpful to look at. The journal focuses on organization surveys. According to it, organizational surveys can have fairly low response rates, which can result in biased samples. It then goes through and explains different techniques on how to try and make your samples as valid as possible by scheduling at the respondent's convenience, convince them of the importance of the project, etc (Leiter, Thompson, and Tomaskovic-Devey, 1994). Overall, it is a good source to look at before conducting a survey for an organization.

One source to look at, actually talks primarily about organizational surveys conducted on the Internet. Simsek and Veiga put together a journal entitled, "A Primer on Internet Organizational Surveys." While Internet surveys are still rather new, they have changed quite a bit since they were first introduced. The number one thing people tend to be concerned about while taking surveys online is their anonymity and confidentiality. They must feel comfortable while taking the survey or else they will not do it. The surveys must be easy to find as well. Rather than simply having a web address to type in, an idea would be to have it added on search engines such as Google or Yahoo. That way, if someone types in a search string that relates to the survey, they will see it and hopefully take it as well (Simsek and Veiga, 2001).

One source found while researching actually came from a journal published at Bowling Green State University. Jeffrey M. Stanton wrote an article entitled, "An Empirical Assessment of Data Collection Using The Internet." In this journal, he talked about a test survey that was conducted. There were two identical questionnaires created. One of them was filled out in a paper format and one was available online. The online survey got fifty hits while one hundred eighty one people took the paper survey. When comparing the results, they found that the survey conducted online actually had "fewer missing values than the paper and pencil data." Not only is the online survey easier to get results from and fill out, but it also seems to be more accurate (Stanton 1998).

The book entitled, "Designing and Using Organizational Surveys" is an excellent one to look at when creating surveys. It gives seven steps to creating an effective organizational survey. The steps include pooling resources, developing a world-class survey, communicating objectives, administering the survey, interpreting results,

delivering the findings, and learning into action. There will not be a ton of detail

provided here since there are so many steps, but they are all equally important when

putting together a survey. There must be clear, strategic objectives set from the

beginning so you know exactly what you are trying to find out. These, as well as other

parts of the survey, are best when created by a survey design team, rather than just an

individual. One last big topic covered in this book is that communication is key.

Communication is important within the organization, the group putting together the

survey, and the survey itself. If the individuals taking the survey do not understand part

of it, the results could be affected (Church and Waclawski, 1998).

   "How to Conduct Organizational Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide" is another

great book to look at when putting together a survey. As mentioned in the title, it gives

the authors' opinions on what steps should be taken. One section that is rather handy is

"Developmental Interviews and Focus Groups." It talks about how to go about

interviewing people and how focus groups can actually be better because they get

information from multiple people at a time. All surveys work better when more of them

are filled out. More surveys simply mean more results. When putting together the

survey, one must take into consideration what type of questions will bring the most

accurate results: closed-ended or open-ended. Closed ended questions "provide response

alternatives from which survey respondents must choose." In other words, they are

multiple-choice. Open-ended questions are just the opposite. They are questions where

the respondent is to actually write out their feelings to the question provided (Edwards,

Thomas, Rosenfeld, and Booth-Kewley, 1997).

A journal article entitled, "Response Rates for Mail Surveys of Nonprofit Organizations: A Review and Empirical Test" had some very interesting information and results. A study was done where surveys were mailed out in three different ways: questionnaire complexity, use of Federal Express versus standard mail, and the use of monetary incentives. The objective of the study was to find out which way generated the most returns. Interestingly enough, the questionnaire complexity and the use of monetary incentives did not generate any difference in returns. The one that did was the use of Federal Express to deliver the survey. It actually had a measurable positive effect (Hager, Wilson, Pollak, and Rooney, 2003).

David J. Solomon wrote a journal entry entitled, "Conducting Web-Based Surveys." This entry covered various aspects involving having surveys online. One concern that he mentioned was that significant numbers of people either do not have the Internet or choose not to use the Internet. This is definitely a problem if your audience falls in that category. The studies he looked at even showed that Internet-based surveys did not have as good of a response rate as paper surveys. In order to get that number up, a few things can be done. Sending personalized email cover letters actually got more people to take the survey. Follow-up reminders and pre-notification of the intent to survey helped as well (Solomon, 2001).

Chapter 3

All of the information mentioned in the previous chapter could become very helpful to organizations, such as the University Activities Organization at Bowling Green State University. While they have done a great job at putting together the surveys and

choosing musical artists, there is always room for improvement. The data they have collected throughout the years has not always been exactly what they were looking for so some changes need to be made. In order to figure out what the changes are, the survey needs to be evaluated.

Sampling is the number one process UAO uses in order to determine what artist to bring. This is quite obvious because there is no way for them to communicate with every student and faculty member on campus. When they go to use their sample data, they must take into consideration sampling errors and come up with a good estimate (Fowler, 2002). That seems to be one of the things missing from their survey; sampling errors. Do they take the sampling errors into consideration? Or do they simply use the raw data collected?

There are other types of errors that can occur when using an organizational survey. Biased samples can be another problem (Leiter, Thompson, and Tomaskovic-Devey, 1994). With the University Activities Organization only having between twenty and thirty directors, they simply cannot reach out to enough people. When each director passes out the surveys in a classroom, each of those individuals has a certain characteristic that is the same, which is why they are in the same class. They need to make sure that they are doing their best not to be biased or else their results will be off after collecting all the data.

In the past, UAO has put the survey on the Internet. It seems to be a good idea because it is available to those students/faculty members who are not physically contacted by the directors. A problem with this could be that the individual who wants to take the survey cannot find it or maybe they do not feel comfortable putting their

information online when taking it (Simsek and Veiga, 2001). Both of these things could offset the data collected by the survey. It has also been proven that some people simply choose not to use the Internet and that not all people have access to it (Solomon, 2001). For these people, the paper survey would be best.

At the same time though, studies have shown that online surveys are actually more accurate than paper surveys (Stanton 1998). This gives UAO something else to look at. They are currently primarily focusing on their paper surveys and the online version is a secondary option. Would focusing more on the online survey be beneficial to them? Perhaps it would get them more accurate results like shown in the studies.

Something else that should be looked at is simply the planning of the survey. The book entitled, "Designing and Using Organizational Surveys" has an entire list of steps to take when putting one together. Is the University Activities Organization using steps like mentioned in the book? If not, what steps do they take instead? A survey team should be the ones putting it together and while they do, they must keep communication open (Church and Waclawski, 1998). How do they do that? Do they use e-mail, discussion boards, or phone calls between meetings?

When they are putting the survey together, the survey team should take a close look at the questions they are asking. What kind of questions are they? Looking at the past, there are been times when the questions were too open and times when they were too closed. A happy medium must be found. Both open and closed-questions can be good, but it just depends on what kind of results are being looked for (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, and Booth-Kewley, 1997).

UAO has obviously chosen to do a survey to get their information regarding what artist(s) to bring to campus. What if they decided to go a step further and put together focus groups? The nice thing about focus groups is that responses are given from multiple people at the same time, maximizing the results (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld,

and Booth-Kewley, 1997). Have the directors ever thought about doing something like that? Would it help them? It is definitely an idea to look into.

One last idea to look into would be different ways to get the paper surveys to the students/faculty. Currently, the University Activities Organization has the directors pass them out and have people take them around campus. Is this the best way to get them out to the public? Have they ever looked into mailing them to the students on campus? One of the studies showed that mailing surveys via Federal Express produced a lot of returns (Hager, Wilson, Pollak, and Rooney, 2003). While this is not an option for UAO, there are other ways they could utilize this data. All students enjoy getting mail in their mailboxes, especially those living on campus. If the directors in UAO have not looked into this option yet, it may be a good idea to do so.

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