

Approaches to offset rising postage costs?

UNI

**University of
Northern Iowa.**

Center for Social &
Behavioral Research

February 10, 2026

Acknowledgements

The Statewide Survey of Adult Attitudes Toward STEM was funded by the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council. The 2025 Iowa Health and Wellbeing survey was funded by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. We thank both for allowing CSBR to conduct additional methodological research during data collection.

Thank you to my various collaborators on different studies in this presentation, including Erin Heiden, Steven Jokinsky, Ki Park, Mechelle Timmons, and Hillary Wehe.

The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Health and Human Services, Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council, or the University of Northern Iowa.

Background

Postage costs continue to increase

Low response rates necessitate more outreach

More affordable postage options may reduce budget implications

Costs and Potential Savings

Postage Class	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL	SAVINGS
Metered Mail – First Class	Typical per-piece rate when mailing directly through a university or internal mail system.	25,000	\$0.76	\$19,000	
First Class (Presort)	Claims to be fast, reliable delivery with the highest service level. Includes forwarding and return of undeliverable mail at no additional cost.	25,000	\$0.672	\$16,800	\$2,200
Marketing Mail aka Standard Class (Presort)	Lower-cost option with claims of a longer delivery window. Forwarding and return services are not included but may be added for an additional fee.	25,000	\$0.432	\$10,800	\$8,200
Non-Profit (Presort)	Treated the same as Marketing Mail but offered at reduced rates. Available only to organizations approved by USPS for nonprofit mailing.	25,000	\$0.240	\$6,000	\$13,000

Studies

- 1: First-class versus standard class postage experiment
- 2: First-class versus non-profit postage experiment
- 3: Inbound tracking

Research Questions

1

Does standard class postage adversely affect survey response rates compared to first-class postage?

2

Does non-profit postage adversely affect survey response rates compared to first-class postage?

Study 1 details and experimental design

Statewide survey on STEM education in Iowa schools

Probability address-based sample (N = 13,000)

Mixed-mode (web and paper)

Two mailers per household (packet and PTW letter)

Overall Response Rate: 7.20% (RR1)

No incentives were offered

Evaluate differences in:

Response rates

Delivery dates

Pre-analysis plan was registered prior to data collection

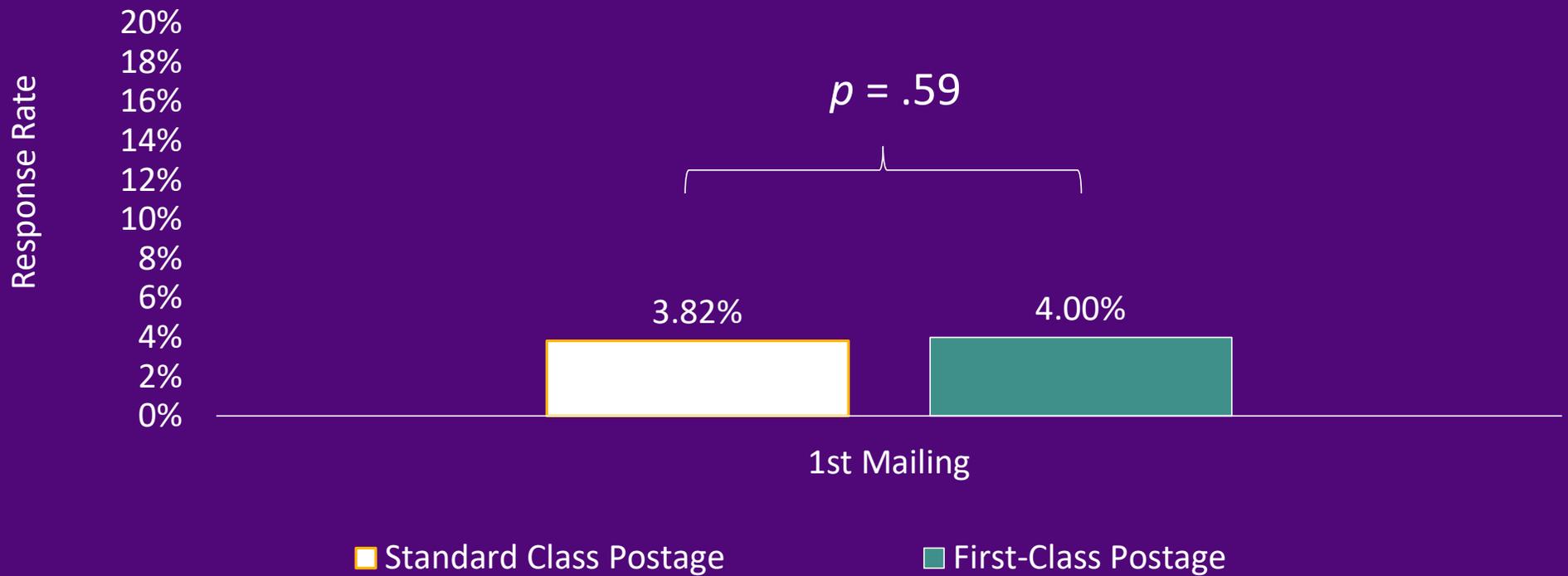
Used indicia instead of stamps

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
UNI CSBR

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
UNI CSBR

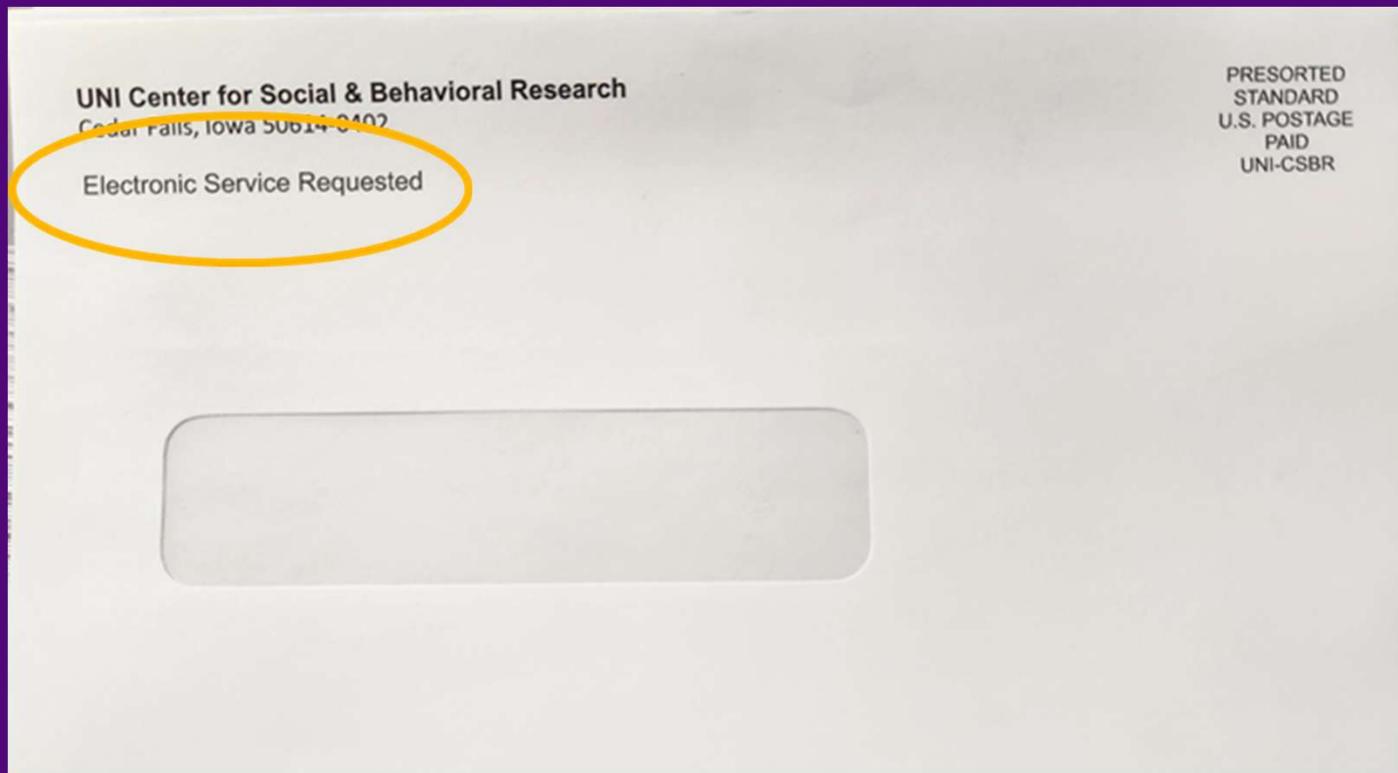
1

12 fewer completes in the Standard Class condition



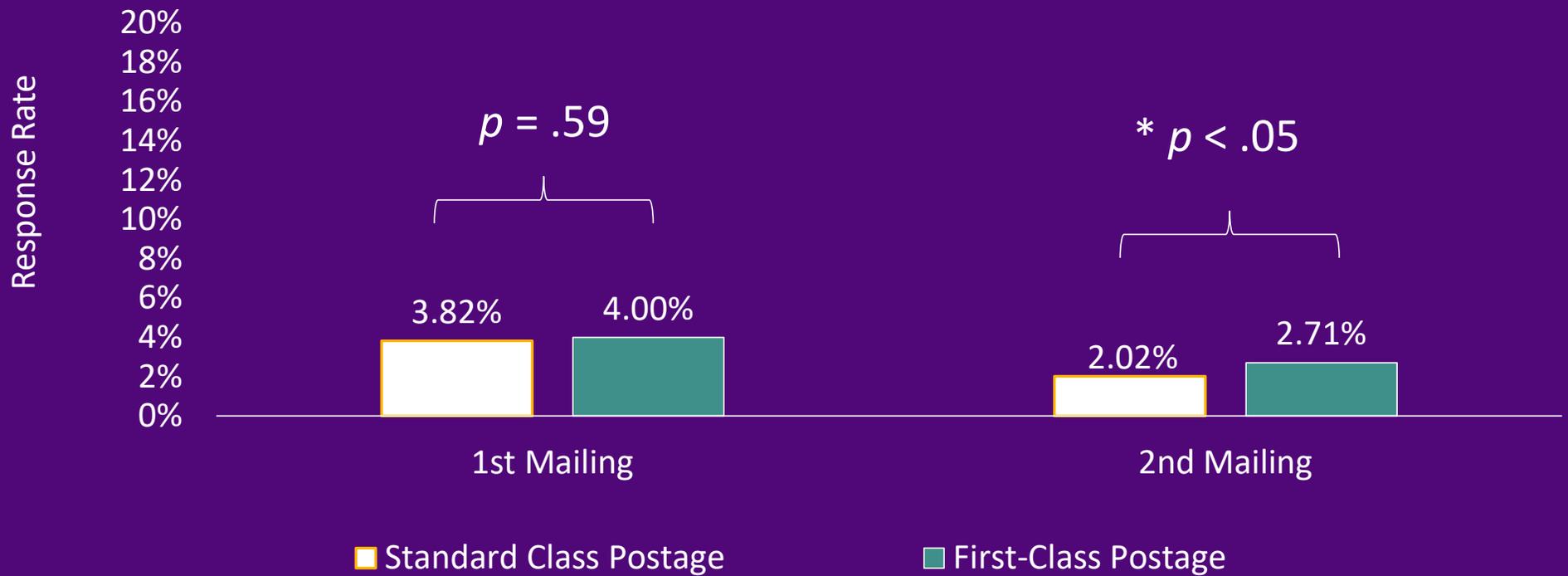
Pre-Analysis Plan deviation

Added "Electronic Service Requested" to Standard Class envelopes prior to 2nd mailing



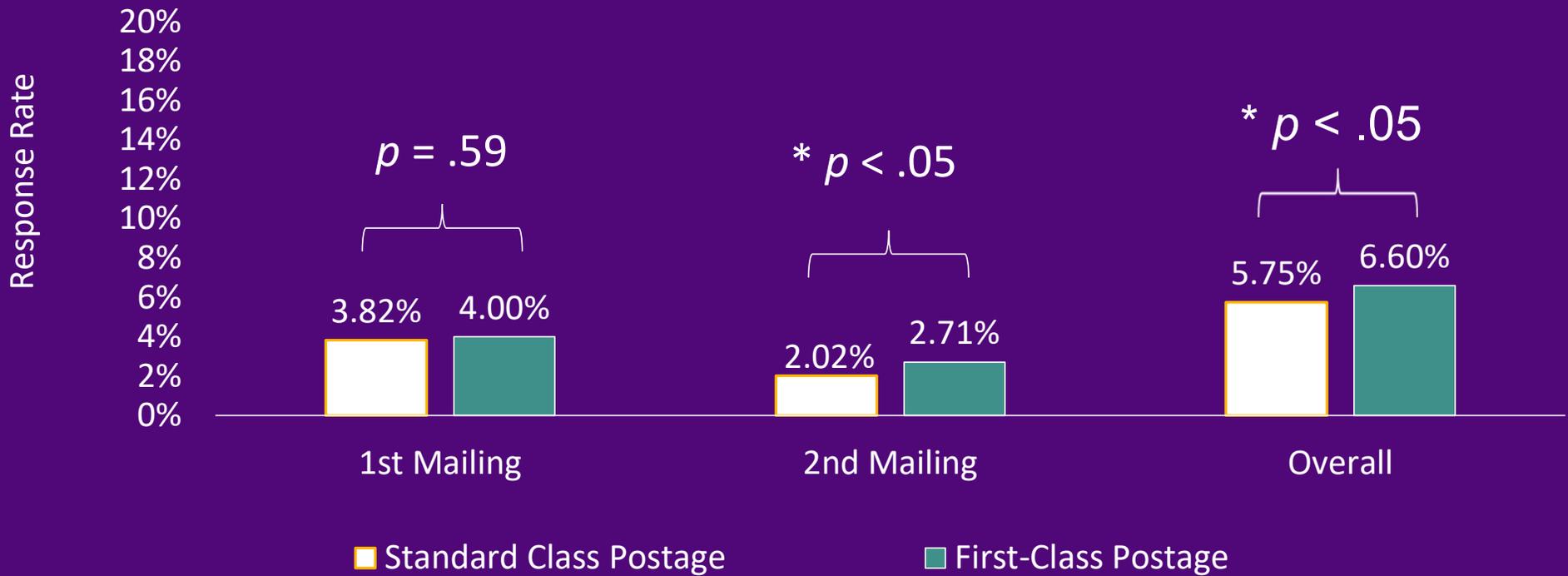
1

Significantly fewer completes for the 2nd mailing



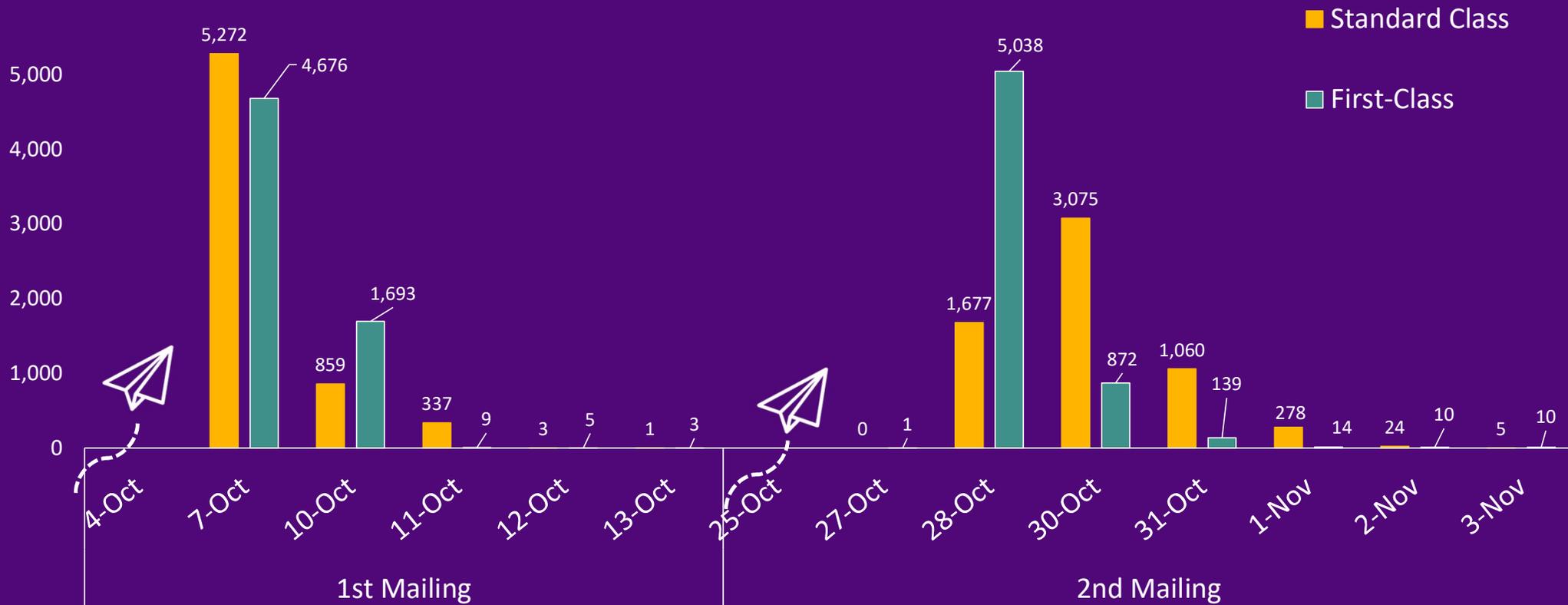
1

Significantly fewer completes combined across the mailings



1

Comparable delivery dates between conditions



Study 2 details

Statewide survey on awareness of state programs, substance use, physical and mental health

Probability address-based sample (N = 28,000)

Mixed-mode (web and paper)

3 mailers per household (packet and 2 PTW reminder letters)

Overall Response Rate: 14.6% (RR2)

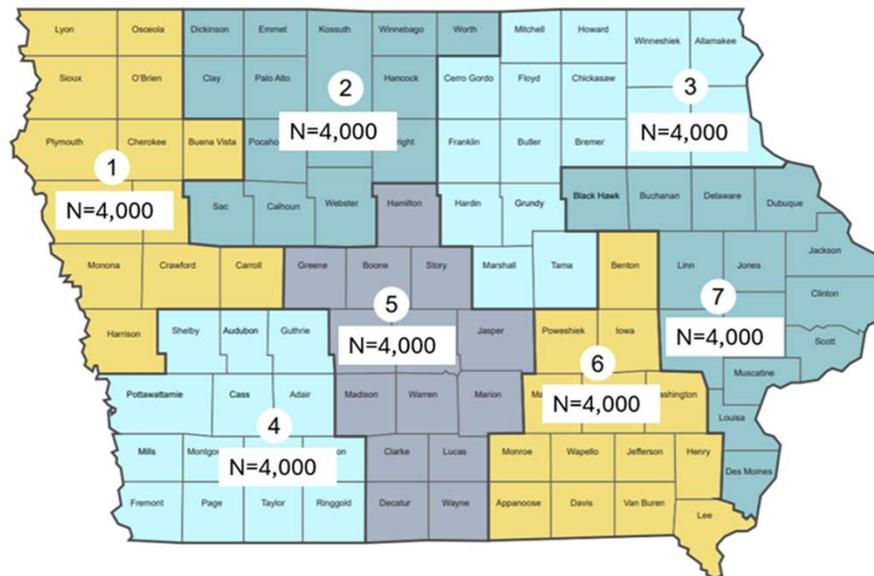
\$5 contingent gift cards

Survey and Experimental design

Survey packets mailed to all addresses using first-class postage

7,000 addresses sent all reminders using first-class postage

Remaining 21,000 sent all reminders using non-profit postage



Envelopes and Indicia

UNI - Center for Social and Behavioral Research
1227 W 27th Street
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0012

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DATAFORCE

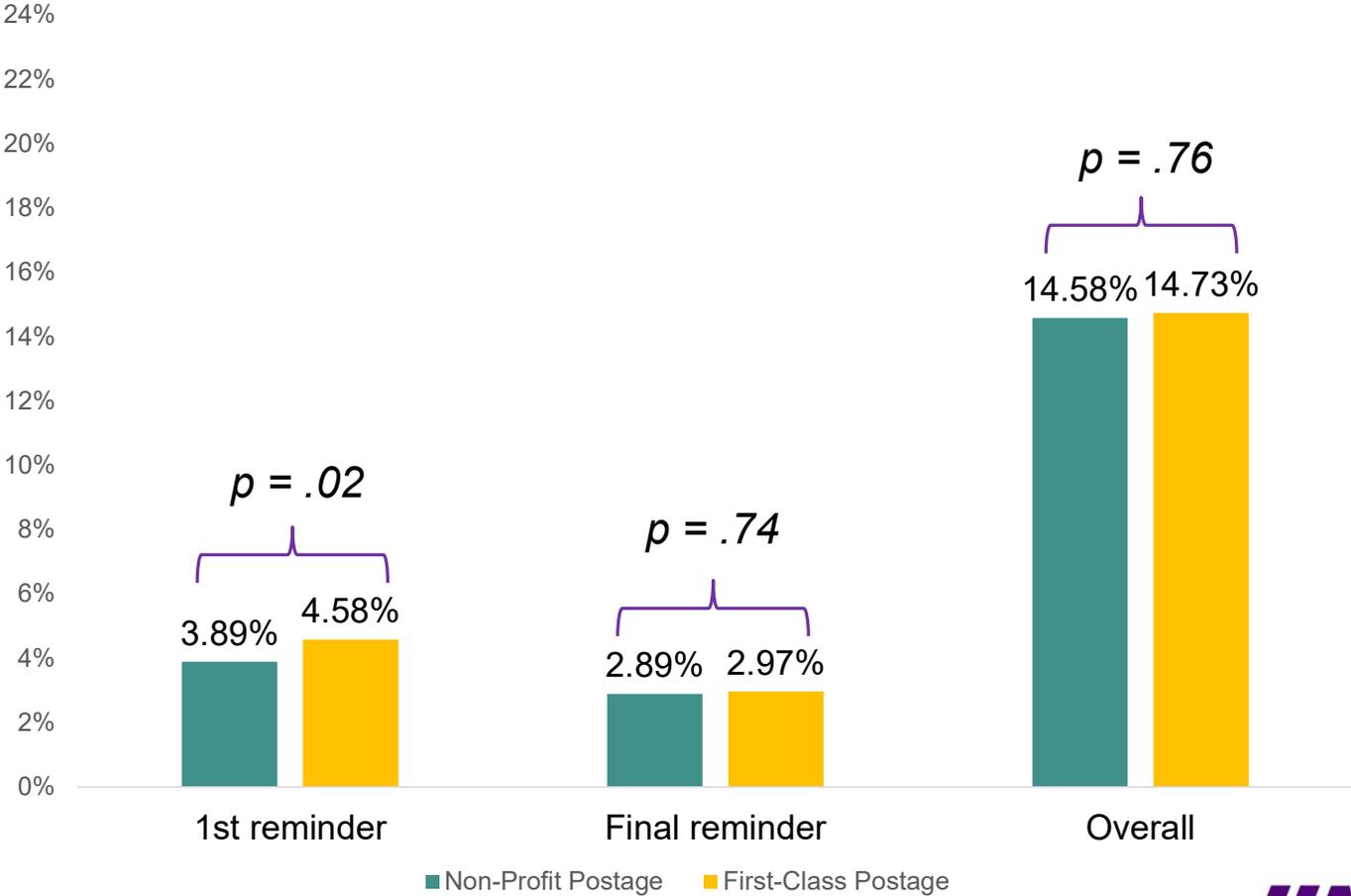
UNI - Center for Social and Behavioral Research
1227 W 27th Street
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0012

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DATAFORCE

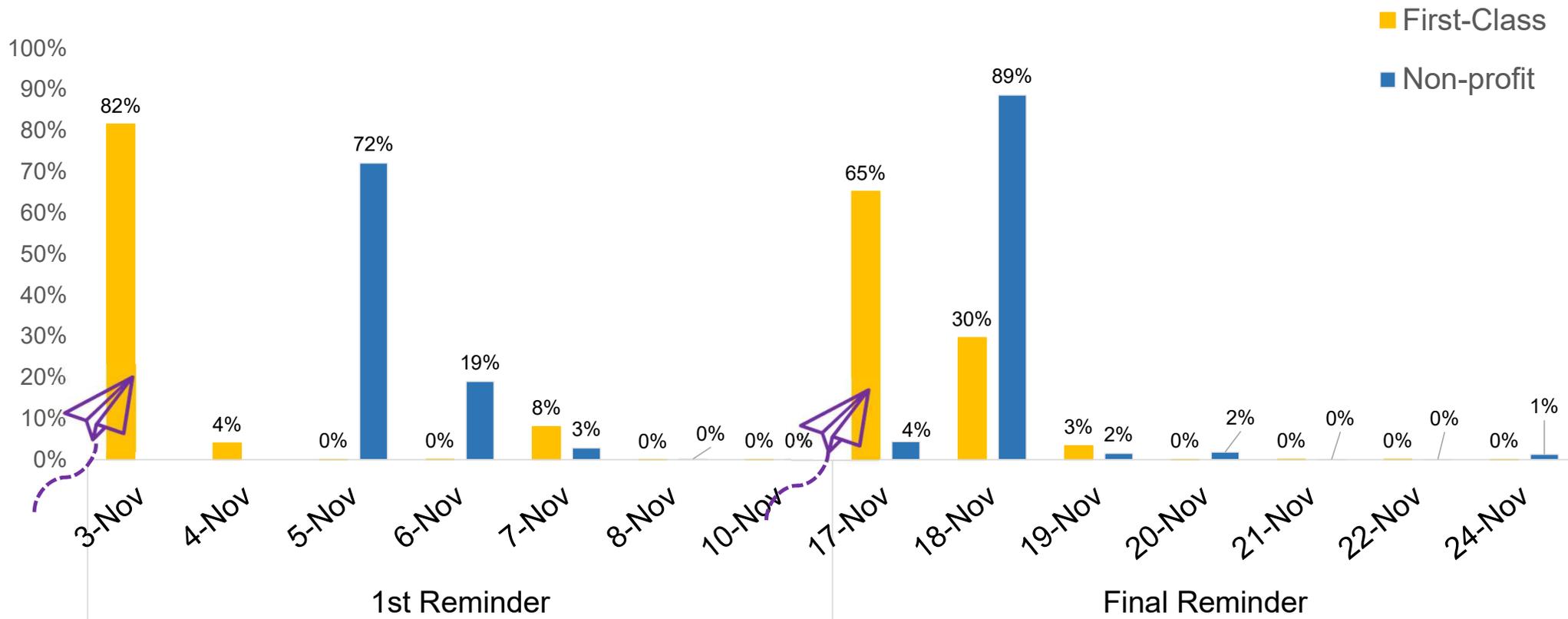
Electronic Service Requested

11/5

Significantly lower response for 1st reminder



Delayed delivery, especially for 1st reminder



Study 3: Inbound Tracking

What is it?

- IMBs are a 65-bar barcode used by the USPS to sort and track mail (USPS n.d.; 2022b)

Benefits of Tracking:

- Insights on mail returns
- Potential cost savings



Endres, Kyle, Steven Jokinsky, and Mechelle Timmons. "The Utility of USPS Inbound Business Reply Envelope Tracking for Survey Data Collection." *Survey Practice* 18 (2025).

Inbound tracking costs

Tracking – fees charged by USPS vendors

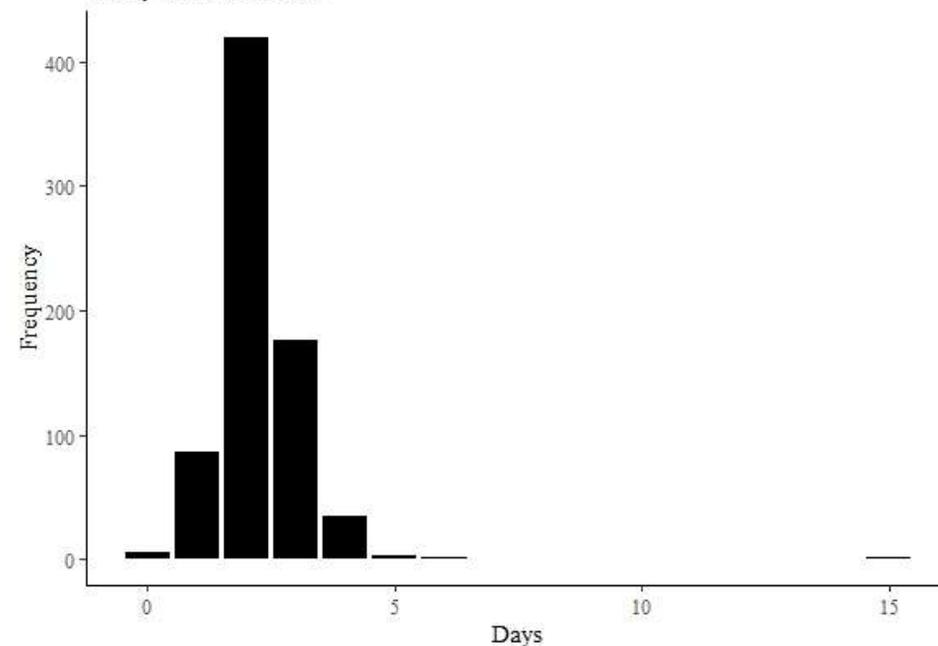
- Vendor setup cost
- Per piece cost (\$0.003 to \$0.02 depending on volume)

Printing – each requires a custom BRE

Labor – additional time to match BRE to survey booklet/cover letter

Total: \$1,373 or ~\$0.086 / packet

Figure 1: Number of Days for Delivery of Inbound Mailers to Survey Research Center



Conclusions

- Standard class postage hurt response rates when messaging needed for undeliverable records was included
- Response rate for non-profit postage was significantly worse than first-class postage
- But overall response rates were not significantly different
- Both have more variability in delivery window than first-class

Thank you!

Comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome.

Kyle Endres: Kyle.Endres@uni.edu