

How to get more Jurors to the courthouse

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Citizens inclined to ignore a jury duty summons are more likely to respond when reminded that failure to appear could result in fines or jail time, according to a UC Riverside study.

In a paper — “GOTJ: Get Out the Juror” — completed in fall 2011, UC Riverside political science professors Kevin Esterling and Shaun Bowler and retired Riverside County Superior Court Judge Dallas Holmes detail an experiment in which postcard reminders were sent to 4,000 [citizens](#) who had been summoned to appear for jury service in Riverside County. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Riverside County Superior Court.

Some prospective jurors received no postcard, and others received a postcard that contained one of three messages: a reminder that a summons had been sent; an explanation of the importance of jury service; and a description of possible penalties for failure to appear.

While all three reminders improved the response of prospective jurors, enforcement postcards reminding citizens that they face fines or jail time for not appearing were most effective, authors Esterling, Bowler and Holmes wrote. The study found that one additional prospective juror arrived at the courthouse for every 10 postcards mailed.

“Getting citizens to show up at the courthouse for jury duty is a perennial problem for courts,” they said, noting earlier studies that found as many as 35 percent to 40 percent of citizens summoned do not respond. That can have a profound impact on the ability of courts to

schedule trials and impedes the ability of litigants to obtain a trial by a jury that represents the local community, they added.

Many court systems have attempted a variety of reforms to the summons process and to the jury system to make jury service more pleasurable — or at least less of a burden — including providing child care, increasing juror pay, improving parking options, enabling wireless Internet access, allowing economic hardship excuses and instituting one-day-one-trial policies, the report noted.

“Judges and court administrators report that the most effective means for improving juror yield center on visible and coercive efforts to enforce summons responses, often in the form of a sheriff’s deputy knocking at the door of non-responders,” the authors said. “However, this form of summons enforcement is expensive to implement, typically results only in token efforts and risks creating negative attitudes toward jury service among those who are at the receiving end.”

Postcard reminders are cost-effective, less intrusive, and can substantially improve juror response rates, they concluded.

Provided by UC Riverside

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