Survey Development Best Practices

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Included below are general and college-specific tips to help you develop surveys.

Critical questions to consider before beginning

What is a survey?

A survey is a method of collection data from a population of interest. The purpose of a survey is to collect quantitative or qualitative information, usually through the use of a structured and standardized instrument. Well-designed surveys can provide meaningful information and insights to inform and guide future decisions. At SLCC, survey instruments are important tools used to gather information from faculty, staff, students, and alumni to inform improvement efforts and guide development towards meeting the goals of the college.

What do you want to know?

This is not a question about ALL the things you could possibly ask (a brainstorming activity), but a fundamental exploration of what is important to know (not just interesting) to advance your work. Understanding the core purpose of your survey should guide every step of the process, from determining target audience, the questions posed, the distribution method, and how results will be reported.

Who are you going to ask?

Knowing who your participants are will help determine the kinds of questions asked and the distribution method. A sample is a good tool to use. It is a subgroup of individuals selected from a larger population, typically chosen at random, to represent the views or behaviors of that broader group.

To request a random sample of SLCC students, please fill out the Data Request Form.
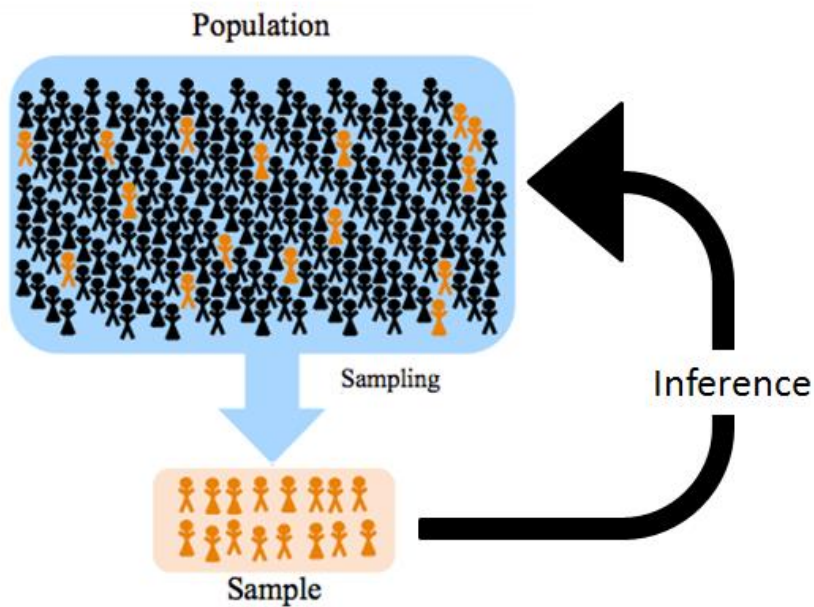
How do you plan to use the data collected?

Begin with the end in mind. What possible implications for policy and practice will result from your data? Who will want to see and use the information gathered?

Is there existing data that might already provide helpful information?

Data is already collected from every corner of the college. Is there anything you are planning to ask in your survey that already know or can find from another source?

Is a survey the best option for you?

Surveys are just ONE way to collect data. They may seem like a quick and easy solution, but may limit you in the types of information you can gather and the depth you can reach. Would a focus group, direct observation using a rubric, or another option better serve your core purpose?

Survey Design

Develop Good Questions

Writing strong survey questions is essential to creating a successful survey. The wording you choose can be the difference between collecting accurate, useful data—or misleading results.

We encourage you to explore this helpful article from Qualtrics for guidance: How to Write Great Survey Questions (With Examples) – Qualtrics

Obtain feedback

Once you have a draft of your survey, it's important to gather feedback before launching it. There are several ways to do this and using more than one is often most effective. You can ask a trusted colleague on your team to review it, and you can also receive feedback from the DSA team when you submit your Survey Request Form.

Sampling

A sample is a subgroup of individuals selected from a larger population, typically chosen at random, to represent the views or behaviors of that broader group. Sampling allows researchers to generalize without surveying the entire population.

In most cases, surveying an entire population (e.g., all SLCC students) is not recommended. Doing so can lead to low response rates and survey fatigue, which negatively affects data quality across the College. This is why selecting an appropriate sample is essential.

To request a random sample of SLCC students, please fill out the Data Request Form. Since this involves accessing student contact information, all requests must comply with Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines.

Length

Considering the length of your survey is important. The shorter your survey, the more likely students will complete it. It is best if the survey takes less than 5 minutes to complete. Consider the types of questions you are asking as well; open-ended items tend to take more time to respond to than multiple response questions.

Responses Rates

Having a high response rate is important for being able to "trust" the data you collect. Low response rates introduce bias into your results and make interpreting them with accuracy challenging. With the move to conduct more surveys online, students are being asked to complete more surveys than in the past, and response rates are dropping. In general, you should strive for your survey to have at least a 25% response rate (of course, what is considered "acceptable" will vary according to target population and survey purpose).

Incentives

Low response rates can lead to reduced effective sample sizes and can decrease representativeness of the target population. Offering some form of incentive is a common practice used to maximize survey participation. If providing monetary incentives, it is best to do electronic gift cards. Incentives need to be under $50 otherwise it is taxable, even for students. For specific information about how much you can offer, check with your department. You will need to provide a name, S#, and email address so those receiving incentives can be accurately accounted for. Please note, SLCC employees are not eligible to receive monetary incentives for participating in survey research.

Qualtrics

The following links can help you get started using the Qualtrics Survey System:

Creating a project
Question Types on Qualtrics
Applying skip logic
Applying display logic
Distributing a survey
Contacts and mailing lists
Sharing a survey
Survey results and reporting
Qualtrics Community Discussions

Additional Qualtrics guidance

We provide additional guidance you may find helpful regarding email distributions, invitation and reminder texts:

Template email

Hello ${m://FirstName, Student},

Your opinion matters to us! We'd like to hear about your recent experiences. Please click the link below to take a brief survey:

[Paste here the link to the survey that qualtrics give you one you open compose email}
(e.g ${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey})]

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
[Paste here the URL that qualtrics give you one you open compose email}

(e.g ${l://SurveyURL})]

By participating, you'll be automatically entered in a drawing to win one of **X $ GIFT CARD** (if applicable).

Please complete the survey by **[INSERT DEADLINE DATE]** to ensure your feedback is included.

Thank you for your time and input,

[Your name or Department]

If you do not wish to take part in this survey
please follow the link to opt out of future emails
regarding this survey:
[Paste here the link that qualtrics give you one you open compose email]

If you have questions or need help accessing Qualtrics, or creating your survey send an email to
surveyresearch@slcc.edu and someone from our team will assist you

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