



QUICK GUIDE TO SURVEYS

Survey: A common method to gather information from people, generally in the form of a questionnaire, which may be distributed in hard copy or online or administered by phone. Survey questions ask people to self-report their perceptions.

Strengths & Weaknesses:

Strengths

- Adaptable to different audiences (students, alumni, employers, etc.).
- Adaptable to many different kinds of research questions.
- Can administer to large groups for a relatively low cost.
- Analysis of responses typically quick and straightforward.
- Reliable surveys are commercially available and can often be customized.

Weaknesses

- Construction of surveys requires expertise, time, and clarity of purpose.
- Low response rates are not unusual.
- Over-surveying can lead to survey fatigue.
- What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know.
- Open-ended responses can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze.

Tips:

- Keep the survey as brief, easy to deal with, and as appealing as possible.
- Ask questions that directly pertain to your research question. Do not ask a question because it would be “nice to know.” Don’t ask a question if you are unwilling or unable to act on the response.
- Pilot test the survey as well as the distribution mechanism.
- Create “buzz” with pre-survey communication.
- Keep it simple!

Notes:



Alumni and Employer Surveys for Program Improvement

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Why alumni and employer surveys?

- ▣ May be required by accrediting bodies (professional/university)
- ▣ Part of a comprehensive assessment plan
- ▣ For program affirmation/improvement, and to gather information on alumni
- ▣ Tendency to rely on indirect measures, such as information from students; need for more direct measures, such as employer surveys



Examples of direct measures

- ▣ Employer surveys
- ▣ Comprehensive examinations
- ▣ Licensing examinations
- ▣ Practicum/internship evaluations and grades
- ▣ Portfolios
- ▣ Community advisory committees
- ▣ Grades for classes, including pass/fail rates
- ▣ Final cumulative GPAs
- ▣ Existing class assignments
- ▣ Skills labs/videotaping

Examples of indirect measures

- ▣ Exit surveys of graduating students
- ▣ Focus groups of graduating students
- ▣ Alumni surveys
- ▣ Course and Faculty Evaluations



Who tends to conduct alumni and employer surveys?

- Alumni surveys:
 - Community college or university
 - College/school
 - Department/program

- Employer surveys:
 - College/school
 - Department/program

Overall assessment considerations

- Assessment Committee
- Develop a comprehensive assessment plan
- If multiple programs, each one should be assessed separately



Overall assessment considerations

- ▣ Program goals and objectives or competencies flow from university mission statement to school/department/program mission statements down to Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in all syllabi
- ▣ For program affirmation/improvement, align items on direct and indirect measures are aligned with program goals and objectives, competencies, etc.
- ▣ You can also ask other questions of interest, but try and keep the instrument short

Alumni and employer survey considerations

- ▣ Timing
- ▣ Contacting alumni and employers
- ▣ What to include
- ▣ Paper vs. electronic
- ▣ "Closing the loop"



Timing and how often

- ❑ Is timing dictated by any external body?
- ❑ Alumni surveys best done on a regular schedule
- ❑ Survey alumni once, or several times?
- ❑ Timing of employer surveys can be tied to alumni surveys or be independent

Contacting alumni and employers

- ❑ Can request alumni mailing addresses from UH Foundation
- ❑ UHF will not provide e-mail addresses but students retain UH e-mail addresses after graduation
- ❑ Want to survey employers who hire your graduates
- ❑ Where will you get employer addresses?



What to include

- Include closed-ended questions to help determine how well program is meeting stated goals, objectives, or competencies
- Include open-ended questions to help determine what exactly is working and what needs to be changed
- For alumni surveys, will you focus on broader program goals, or more specifically at program objectives?

Paper vs. electronic

- For alumni and employer surveys, SSW has had better response rates for mailed surveys than online ones. . .
- . . .but doing online surveys costs much less.
- SurveyShare via UHM
 - Available for free in 3-month blocks (as long as not all licenses are currently being used)
 - Responses are anonymous
 - Data presented in aggregate form and can be downloaded to perform additional analyses
 - <http://www.hawaii.edu/its/surveyshare/>



“Closing the loop”

- ▣ Do the results affirm what your program is doing or suggest that changes need to be made?
- ▣ Have you collected rich enough data that tell you what is working and what could be improved?
- ▣ If small numbers of alumni and/or employers, may need to look for patterns in the data across years
- ▣ The individuals, organizations, communities, etc., who are being surveyed are often left out of the loop