

Naugatuck Valley Community College

Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

Survey Principles and Protocols

Updated on July 31, 2019

The data produced by a survey or any assessment is only useful if the tool is carefully constructed and applied to an appropriate sampling plan. Given these requirements, the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (“OIRE”) suggests the following principles and protocols for designing and administering surveys at Naugatuck Valley Community College (“NVCC”) and reporting survey results.

Principles

1. All surveys should be reviewed by OIRE to ensure that the data produced by them is reliable and relevant to the research question posed. OIRE will also ensure that surveyed populations are not subject to survey fatigue produced by too numerous or redundant requests for information and will be able to provide data if it is already available.
2. Survey samples should be demographically representative of the population as a whole unless a particular subset has been targeted. A small, more representative sample is better than a large sample size. Data produced by a targeted survey should be applied only to that specific subset and should never be generalized to the larger population. Modeling, weighting or other adjustments may be necessary to project the results from a sample to the larger population. OIRE will assist you with these adjustments.
3. Enough samples must be collected to ensure a 90% confidence level for the results. This number expresses how certain you are that the sample accurately reflects the attitudes of the total population. Determining the sample size to achieve this level is based on the total population and the margin of error. This percentage tells you how much you can expect your survey results to reflect the views from the overall population. For example, a 60% “yes” response with a margin of error of 5% means that between 55% and 65% of the general population think that the answer is “yes.” The smaller the margin of error, the more confidence you may have in your results. Please use SurveyMonkey’s sample size and margin of error calculators.
4. Carefully construct questionnaires according to the following best practices:
 - a. Know what you plan to do with your information once you get it; this will help guide your questions.
 - b. Do not ask too many questions. Respondents are less likely to complete long surveys.
 - c. Avoid double-barreled questions. Ask one question at a time. *For example, ask “Which cereal is your favorite?” instead of “Which cereal do you think is the healthiest and most delicious?”*
 - d. Ask direct questions. Use clear, precise and unambiguous language. *For example, ask “How often do you take risks?” instead of “How often are you particularly averse to risky situations?”*
 - e. Do not use absolute words like “every,” “always,” and “all.” Allow for more nuanced opinions.

- f. Avoid leading and biased questions. Specifically, do not embed your own opinion into questions. Also, some descriptive words and phrases may interject bias into your questions or point the respondent in the direction of a particular answer. Scrutinize adjectives and adverbs in your questions. If they're not needed, take them out. *For example, ask "How often do you feel Channel 6 News' weather forecasting is accurate?" instead of "Channel 6 News' weather forecasting is heralded by many as being the most accurate forecasting in this area. In your opinion, how often do you feel Channel 6's weather forecasting is accurate?"*
- g. Use close-ended questions (multiple choice, checkboxes, etc.). Use only 1-2 open-ended questions.
- h. Use a balanced response scale with a definitive midpoint that allows for negative responses. Avoid binary responses such as true/false and yes/no. They produce less informative data compared to response scales which cover the whole range of possible reactions to a question. *For example, "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree."*
- i. Use an easy-to-follow question order and format (e.g., the layout of a mail survey or a web survey on a mobile device). Some visually presented self-administered questionnaires require the respondent to make navigational decisions that can affect the flow of questions.
- j. Collect 8-digit Banner ID (if you'd like to join socio-demographic, academic, financial and/or other variables from Banner to your survey data). If it's an anonymous survey, collect demographic information to determine whether or not the data may be generalized to the identified population.
- k. Clearly state pledges of confidentiality, which is not the same as anonymity. Confidentiality means that respondents can be identified but their identities are not revealed to anyone outside of the study. Anonymity means that there is no way for anyone, including the researcher, to personally identify respondents.
- l. Preview your survey and ask someone to test it.

Protocols

1. Please complete and submit a Service Request Form to OIRE at least 2-4 weeks in advance including but not limited to the following information:
 - a. Survey name/title
 - b. Research objective/purpose (2-3 sentences) (Note: If you're conducting a survey to comply with the terms and conditions of a grant agreement, kindly attach the grant documents.)
 - c. Sampling plan (target population, sample size, selection method, etc.)
 - d. Frequency of survey (one-time, annual or every semester)
 - e. Proposed strategies to maximize survey response and completion rates (e.g., monetary or non-monetary incentives, follow-up/reminder e-mail messages, timing of contact, etc.)
 - f. Survey administration start and end dates
 - g. Contact information of principal investigator
2. Please present and share survey results according to the following standards:

- a. Findings and interpretations should be presented honestly and objectively with full reporting of all relevant findings.
 - b. Individual respondents should never be identified or identifiable in reporting survey findings. All survey results should be presented in completely anonymous summaries, such as statistical tables and charts, and statistical tabulations should be presented by broad enough categories so that individual respondents cannot be singled out.
 - c. Statistical tables should be clearly labeled.
 - d. The survey method should be fully disclosed and reported in sufficient detail to permit replication by another researcher and all data should be fully documented and made available for independent examination so that consumers of survey results have adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results reported.
 - e. All data collected on the usage or performance of any academic unit must be shared with that unit.
3. Research on human subjects must be approved by NVCC's Institutional Review Board ("IRB") and CEO as per community college policies. Additionally, the collection and use of institutional data for any external purpose (e.g., publication, conference presentation, graduate research, etc.) must be approved by the CEO.