Choosing the Right Assessment Method
Student Surveys

Definition:

Surveys can be quantitative or qualitative in nature and ask individuals to express their perceptions of their own attitudes, behaviors, and/or learning. Surveys may be conducted online (at LBCC surveys can be conducted through the online platforms SurveyGizmo or Moodle) or in paper form. Surveys, while qualitative or quantitative, may be useful to ascertain program themes and concerns. Types of surveys that are appropriate for program level assessment include the following:

- **Alumni Surveys:** Surveying alumni is a useful way to generate data about student preparation for professional work, transfer, program satisfaction, and curriculum relevancy. As an assessment supplement, alumni surveying provides departments with a variety of information that can highlight program areas that need to be expanded or enhanced.
- **Employer Surveys:** Employer surveys can provide information about the curriculum, programs, and students that other forms of assessment cannot produce. Through surveys, departments traditionally seek employer satisfaction levels with the abilities and skills of recent graduates. Employers also assess programmatic characteristics by addressing the success of students in a continuously evolving job market.
- **Student Exit Interviews/Surveys:** Students leaving the college are interviewed or surveyed to obtain feedback. Data obtained can address strengths and weaknesses of the program and/or assess relevant concepts, theories, or skills.
- **Student Perception Surveys:** Programs might consider utilizing student perception surveys to determine students’ perceptions of what they learned throughout the program and their experiences throughout the program. These types of surveys should be administered during a student’s final semester at the college.

Advantages:

- Useful in describing the characteristics of the student population.
- Makes larger samples feasible for data analysis.
- Can yield important data on the perspectives of students, alumni, and employers that can be useful in improving programs.
- Can cover a broad range of topics, while asking only a small time commitment from participants.
- Results can be easily interpreted.
- Can cover areas of learning that might be difficult or costly to explore through other, more direct assessment measures.
- Can provide access to individuals that would otherwise be difficult to reach by other types of assessment efforts (i.e., alumni, employers).


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Disadvantages:
• Social desirability may lead to answers that are less reliable. Whenever we ask individuals for information, they typically answer in ways that will make them look good.
• Results tend to be influenced by the wording of items, salience of the survey, and organization of the survey questions.
• Frequently rely on volunteer samples which tend to be biased and receive low response rates.
• Closed ended questions may not allow participants to express their true feelings.
• Survey items that are created without previous testing may be unreliable and not valid.

Ways to Reduce Disadvantages:
• Never make a survey too long. Survey fatigue is a common problem with survey research and when surveys are too long individuals may stop filling out the survey completely or may answer questions quickly without reading the questions, leading to inaccurate results. Surveys should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.
• When possible use survey measures that have previously been statistically proven to be reliable and valid. These measures are typically found in peer-reviewed published studies in education or psychology-related journals.
  o The Educational Assessment Research Analyst has many measures utilized in these studies that can measure students’ perceptions of a variety of academic variables. Contact Jennifer Holmgren (jholmgren@lbcc.edu) for access to these materials.
• If you choose to create your own survey questions:
  o Create items that are clear and unambiguous.
  o Avoid double-barreled questions. Double-barreled questions ask a question that has more than one part (e.g., a question might ask a participant to agree or disagree with the following statement “The US should abandon its space program and spend the money on domestic programs.”)
  o Use short questions or statements. Respondents are often unwilling to study an item in order to understand it.
  o Avoid using negative items. Respondents will often overlook the word “not” and answer on that basis.
  o Avoid biased terms. Biased terms are any properties of a question that may encourage respondents to answer in a certain way.
• Use cognitive interviewing: Allow a small sample of students or employers to take the survey before conducting the survey on a larger scale. Have students write comments about the questions so that researchers can determine whether or not more information or clarification needs to be added to the questions.
• Offer incentives for students to complete the surveys, such as extra credit or gift cards.