Designing Effective Surveys

UH Mānoa Assessment Office
April 13, 2012

Outcomes

You will learn

- What information is needed to get started
- How to develop good survey questions
- How to organize and lay out a survey
Program Assessment

Program Assessment → Improvement
Program Assessment → Evolution

Program Assessment = Individual Evaluation

Assessment Cycle

TODAY

Program Outcomes

Improvement Plan
Goals & Mission Statement
Activity Map

Assessment Results
Collection & Analysis of Evidence

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“Direct” and “Indirect”

- “Direct” evidence of student learning
  - Student products, behaviors
  - Reveals what students know and can do

- “Indirect” evidence of student learning
  - Self-reported perceptions, attitudes, beliefs
  - Reveals how and why
  - Note: Indirect methods alone do not provide adequate information about student learning.

Golden Rule of Surveys

Do unto your respondents as you would have them do unto you.
Steps

1. Establish a plan
2. Develop questions
3. Organize and lay out survey
4. Pilot test survey
5. Distribute survey
6. Analyze and aggregate data
7. Use the results

1. Establish a Plan

Start with the end in mind.

☐ What is your assessment question?
☐ Who should take the survey?
☐ When will you distribute the survey?
☐ How will the data be analyzed?
☐ How will the results be used?
2. Develop Questions

Simple  Objective  Specific

2. Develop Questions

- **Closed-ended** questions provide answer choices

How many years after you finished your undergraduate degree did you start your graduate or professional education?

  - Immediately (the following fall or spring)
  - 1 to 3 years later
  - 4 to 6 years later
  - 7 to 9 years later
  - 10 or more years later
  - Not applicable
2. Develop Questions

- **Closed-ended** questions provide answer choices

How satisfied were you with the quality of information provided during the orientation?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Not applicable

2. Develop Questions

- **Closed-ended** questions provide answer choices

I am confident in my ability to function on a team.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unsure
2. Develop Questions

- **Open-ended** questions allow the respondents to write their own answers

  What was the most important thing you learned in the internship?

3. Organize Survey

- **Introduction**
  - Explain who & why
  - Set expectations
  - Thank respondents

- Place instructions at point of need

- **Question order**
  - Start with easy to answer and/or interesting questions
  - Create sequential flow
  - Group similar questions
  - Place personal questions (e.g., demographics) toward the end
Your Turn

- How can the survey questions be improved?
- Read and evaluate the survey questions
- With a partner, revise the survey questions
- Be prepared to share

3. Lay out the Survey

- Embrace white space
  - Group items logically and add space between groups
  - Leave space between paragraphs and margins
- Limit fonts to 3
- Use 1 or 2 emphasis colors
- Avoid reverse text
- Consistent indent and alignment
- For smartphone survey-takers: 1 question per page
4. Pilot test

- Are the instructions clear?
- Are the questions clear?
- Are the response options exhaustive and mutually exclusive?
- Can the respondent easily answer the questions?
- How long does it take to complete the survey?

5. Distribute Survey

Know your audience
- How to distribute
- When to distribute
- When to follow up
6. Analyze and Aggregate Data

Interest in Receiving an Online Alumni Newsletter
Spring 2012 Alumni Survey
(n=922)

- Interested: 77%
- Somewhat Interested: 18%
- Uninterested: 5%
- Unsure: 0%

7. Use Results

- Workshops
- Out-of-class learning activities
- Lab hours extended
- Celebrate success
Golden Rule of Surveys

Do unto your respondents as you would have them do unto you.

Thank You!

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Designing Effective Surveys
Creating Survey Questions
Tips & Examples

General Tips

1. Identify what you want to learn.
2. Remove “wouldn’t it be nice to know” questions. Only include questions that directly shed light on what you want to learn.
3. If you are not sure how or if you will use the survey responses, do not ask the question(s).
4. Remove questions for which a respondent will not have immediate access to the information needed to answer the question (or tell the respondent beforehand what is needed).
5. Remove questions that a respondent may not be willing to answer.

Question Development

6. One issue, skill, ability per question. Split “double-barreled” questions into two questions
   • Problematic: I am confident in my ability to conduct research and report results.
   • Better: I am confident in my ability to conduct research.
   • Better: I am confident in my ability report research results in writing.

7. Avoid double negatives
   • Problematic: I am not uncomfortable being a member of a multi-disciplinary team.
     a) Strongly Disagree  b) Disagree  c) Neutral  d) Agree  e) Strong Agree
   • Better: I am comfortable being a member of a multi-disciplinary team.
     a) Strongly Disagree  b) Disagree  c) Neutral  d) Agree  e) Strong Agree

8. Avoid leading questions
   • Problematic: The Underwater Basket Weaving Department followed expert advice and added a course on research methods. Do you believe the new course on research methods is a good idea?
   • Better: Should the Underwater Basket Weaving Department add a research methods course to its curriculum?

9. Make questions as specific and concrete as possible
   • Problematic: I am confident in my ability to communicate effectively.
   • Better: I am confident in my ability to speak to large groups of engineers.

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Response Construction

10. Response alternatives should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive
   - **Problematic**: How many conferences did you attend this semester?
     a) 1  b) 2  b) 3  c) 3 or more
   - **Better**: How many conferences did you attend this semester?
     a) 0  b) 1  b) 2  c) 3 or more

11. Use balanced scales (i.e., equal number of positive and negative response options)
   - **Problematic**: I am a lifelong learner.
     1  2  3  4  5
     Strongly Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
   - **Better**: I am a lifelong learner.
     1  2  3  4  5
     Strongly Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

When in doubt, ask yourself:
   - What do I want to learn?
   - Does the survey question shed light on what I want to learn?
   - What will I do with the survey responses?
Designing Effective Surveys
Useful Answer Categories

If you want to know how often something occurs, ask for the exact number of times or ask, "how often..." and choose from the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Almost Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Fairly Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>Very Often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you want to find out the degree of people’s feelings, their attitude, or belief, ask “to what extent...” and choose from the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Very Effective</th>
<th>Not Very Prepared</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Prepared</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Effective</td>
<td>Moderately Prepared</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Effective</td>
<td>Well Prepared</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you want to find out people’s intentions or aspirations ask, “do you expect to...” and ask them to choose from the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely No</th>
<th>No Chance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Very Little Chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some Chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Yes</td>
<td>Very Good Chance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
Designing Effective Surveys
Your Turn

How can the following survey questions be improved? On your own, read and evaluate the survey questions. With a partner, discuss and revise the questions. Be prepared to share your revisions.

1. The student is an effective team leader, charismatic, able to communicate with excellent speaking and presentation skills.
   5  4  3  2  1
   Excellent       Poor

2. Online resources are well organized.
   o  o  o  o  o
   Strongly Agree
   Strongly Disagree

3. Do you feel more comfortable talking in an Underwater Basket Weaving class than in other classes?
   _____ Yes  _____ No  _____ No Difference

4. How satisfied are you with the hours and location of our office?
   _____ Dissatisfied
   _____ Satisfied
   _____ Very Satisfied

5. How often do you access STAR during the school year?
   _____ Daily
   _____ Weekly
   _____ Monthly
   _____ Never

6. This year's online conference registration system is an improvement over last year's system.
   _____ Strong Agree
   _____ Agree
   _____ Neither Agree or Disagree
   _____ Disagree
   _____ Strongly Disagree

7. If you have employed UHM graduates, what are their areas of specialization, how would you rate their performance, and how many do you employ? (98 questions before this one)

   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________