

Writing and Designing a Survey to Assess your Program or Service

2013 NASPA Annual Conference

Introductions

- Who are we? Center for the Study of Student Life
- Who are you?
 - Institution
 - Assessment/survey experience
 - What do you want to take away from today?
Why did you choose this Pre-Con workshop?

A need for survey-writing training:

- Survey questions are often poorly written
 - Results:
 - Frustrated or confused survey respondents
 - Inaccurate data collected
- NASPA has declared Assessment and Research a competency area for its professionals. Learning the skill of designing an excellent survey is an important step in this competency area.

Our goals are that you:

- Understand more about surveys in general
 - When/why to use, Survey types, scales, reliability, validity, cognitive interviewing, sampling, response rates, measuring outcomes, writing with post-analysis in mind
- Understand the common mistakes of survey writing
- Practice writing survey items
- Walk away with tangible resources
- Walk away with an excellently written survey in your hand (or iPad, or laptop...)

Before you know what's good, you need to know what's bad

(Sorry if you get frustrated while taking this. They are all based on mistakes we COMMONLY see in our office)

Sins of Survey Research

Handout – go over

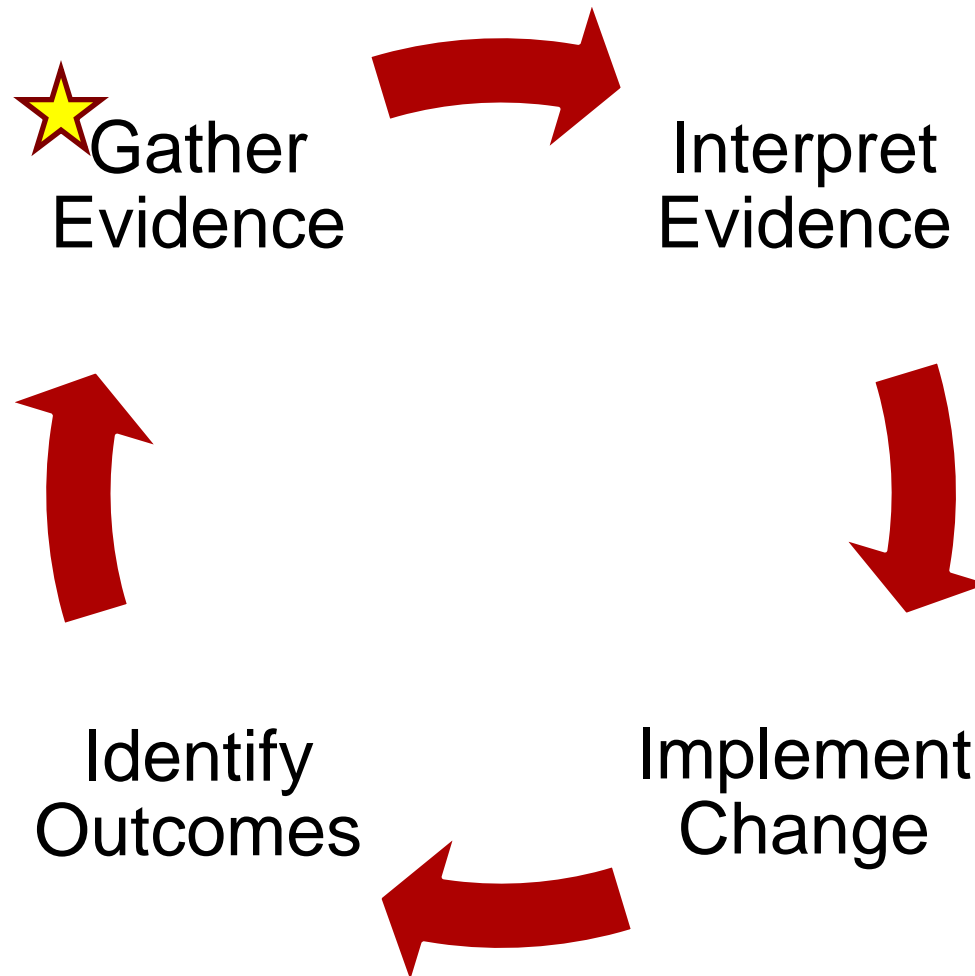
Before you know what's good, you need to know what's bad

- Small group work (2-3 people)
 - Each group takes 5 items on the survey
 - What was the problem? Fill out chart
 - Refer to handout to name the problem
- Report back to the group what was wrong with each item

Break

See you back here in 10 minutes!

All about Surveys



Adapted from: Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

All about Surveys

- A survey is **not** appropriate when:
 - We are asking in-depth questions
 - We don't know much about the topic
 - The population being studied is a small group of people

All about Surveys

- **Advantages:**
 - Can portray the distribution of certain characteristics of a group
 - May find or predict connections between variables
 - Less intrusive than an interview or focus group
 - Can achieve unbiased representation of population with the right sampling technique

All about Surveys

- A survey **is** appropriate when:
 - The topic is sensitive and anonymity is needed
 - Population is very large
 - If you need to collect a lot of data at once
 - If time is a factor (doing surveys correctly, however, requires more time and effort than you may think)

All about Surveys

- **Disadvantages:**
 - Unable to probe more deeply into questions / more at the surface level
 - May consider having some open-ended items in the survey for items that you want to get below the surface on

Mixed methods may paint the best picture

All about Surveys

- **Have a focus**
 - What outcomes do you want to measure?
 - What research question do you have?
 - What does the literature say about this topic already?
 - What surveys items are used in the literature?
 - Outline your survey before you start writing items
 - Eliminate any items that you don't plan to use data from (or things you can't change)

All about Surveys

- **Reliability:**

- Do results stay consistent year to year?
- Are results consistent with other data from the literature?

- **Validity:**

- Internal/External
- Construct/threats to construct validity

All about Surveys

- Sources of Error

Survey Scales

- Verbal Qualifiers handout
 - Deciding which scale to use will help you ask the question on the survey.
- Discussion about Likert-type scales
- Midpoint discussion
- Scale vs item (measuring a construct)
- Survey vs. Instrument
- Reliability Score $> .6$

Keep data analysis in mind

3 Examples to illustrate:

- You are expecting to find relationships between 2 items
 - Consideration: Put these items on the SAME scales so you can run a correlation test later
- You want to look closely at GPA or amount of student loan debt
 - Consideration: Ask these items open-ended so you can work with more accurate averages (putting these in categories will limit your ability to work with means, averages, correlations)
- You are expecting the answer to be complex
 - Consideration: Ask this as an open-ended so you can do qualitative analysis

Cognitive Interviewing

Asks the survey-takers to talk their thoughts aloud

- Do you think people would be honest in their response?
- Was that hard to recall?
- Do you think this is too personal to ask?
- What do you think this question is asking?
- Are there multiple ways to interpret this?
- Are the scale options clear?
- Do you have an opinion about this? Is your behavior consistent enough to answer this?

Sampling

- Stratified
- Convenience
- Population vs. Sample
- Random Sample

Improving Response Rates

Hand out resources

Advanced Survey Concepts

- **Cognitive load:** the degree to which taking the survey is psychologically taxing. How much information must be processed at once. Also, longer surveys should have less of a cognitive load for each question.
- **Demographics:** put at the end of a survey
- **Operationalize:** the way that we define abstract concepts to make them measurable.
- **Formatting:** make the survey neat and appealing. It should look professional; people will give their time to legitimate-looking sources.
- **Routing:** It's possible to alter the way participants are guided through an electronic survey based on their responses.
 - Example: if you have a section of questions all revolving around eating on campus or having a meal plan, but many of your respondents are not on a meal plan, you might want to ask whether they have that before putting them through that battery of questions.

Activity: How would you fix it?

Asked to parents about Student Health Insurance:

“How is your student covered?”

(Problem: What if they have more than 1 student?)

Activity: How would you fix it?

- If you did not compare costs, why not?
 - Lack time
 - Complicated
 - I pay little or no premium cost for my student coverage
 - I am satisfied with the current coverage

(Problem: Neatness. Turn all into complete sentences)

Activity: How would you fix it?

- As a result of the Scarlet, Gray, and Green Challenge, I practice more sustainable behavior in a given month (daily, most days, sometimes, rarely, never)

Problem: There are many types of sustainable behaviors. Break this out into multiple items on a scale.

Communicating Results: **WHY**

Main Question: *Why is communicating data so important?*

- Increases commitment to assessment
- Increases value of assessment
- Helps celebrate your successes
- Gives more evidence than anecdotes

Communicating Results: **HOW**

Main Question: *What avenues can we use to communicate our results?*

- Reports
- Briefs
- Audio/Visual
- Handout or poster
- Newsletter
- Assessment Conference
- *Assessment corner* of a director's meeting

Sample Report

Life Skills

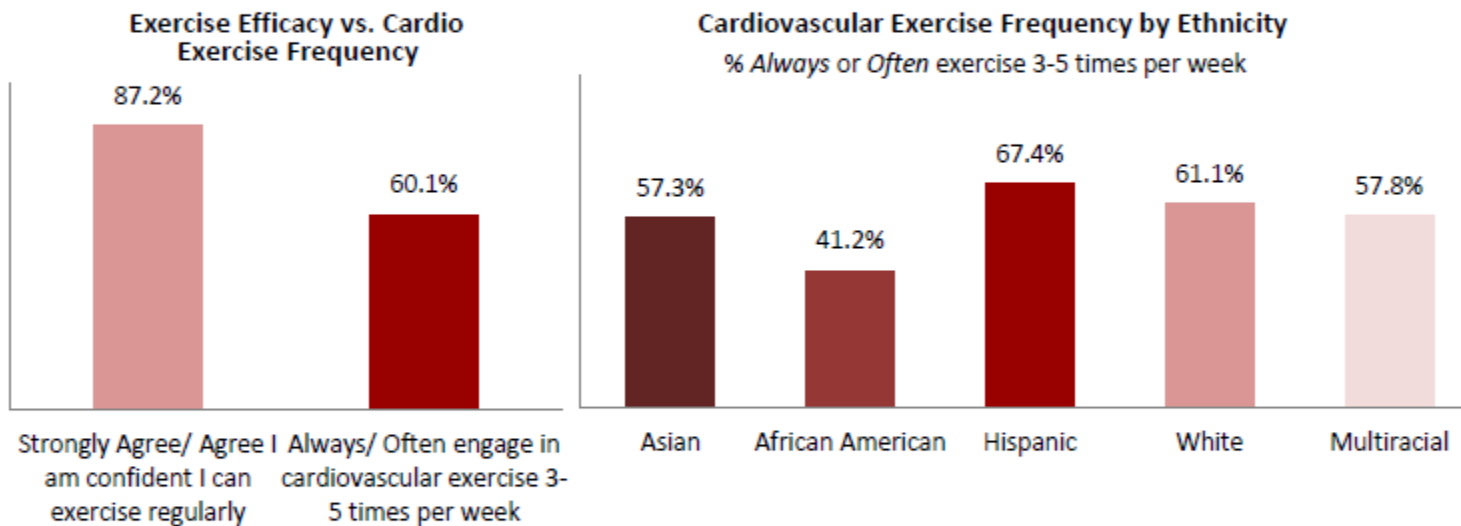
Life Skills: To what extent did your Residence Hall Experience POSITIVELY INFLUENCE the following...

	Not at all	Very Little	Little	Moderately	Significantly	Completely
My time management skills (e.g. classes, work, activities, social life, etc.)	10.1%	9.9%	14.7%	26.7%	18.6%	6.1%
Understanding that my level of wellness (e.g. sleep, diet, exercise, etc.) impacts my personal and academic success	8.5%	7.8%	12.7%	27.0%	22.0%	7.8%
Consideration of various majors/minors of study or other academic-related opportunities	12.7%	10.0%	16.2%	25.1%	16.3%	5.4%
Giving thought to my career goals and my life after graduation	12.3%	9.7%	15.0%	24.5%	17.1%	6.8%

It's not just **what** you communicate,
but **how** you communicate it.

EXERCISE

Research has found a relationship between mental health and exercise self-efficacy (Sidman et al., 2009). The data indicate that exercise efficacy, or confidence in one's ability to exercise, is moderately correlated with the ability to cope with stress ($r = .321$). As apparent in the graph to below, however, high exercise efficacy does not always translate into action. Bray and Born (2004) found that exercise decreases significantly from high school to the first two months of college. Future studies should examine barriers to exercise among incoming first-year students to counter this trend. Significant differences in exercise frequency exist among ethnic groups.



Less than half of students reported frequently engaging in strength training (44.4%) and stretching (45.5%). Students who reported they frequently engaged in cardiovascular exercise reported positive behaviors in other wellness areas more often than students who reported that they exercised infrequently.

	Students who exercise frequently	Students who exercise infrequently
Feel belonging in community	83.9%	60.7%
Rarely feel lonely	79.9%	58.8%
Practice good budgeting	80.1%	59.2%
Maintain annual physical exams	91.6%	67.2%
Depressed over the	12.3%	22.4%

Communicating Results: **WHO**

Main Question: *Who are your audiences and stakeholders?*

Internal:

- Your department

External:

- Your constituents
- Your supervisor
- Your institution, Board of Trustees
- Other peer institutions
- Conference
- Media (local newspaper, school newspaper)

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Communicating Results: **WHAT**

Main Question: What is your message? How will your data be used to enhance your message?

What specifically do you want each to know?

What are the main message points you want to get across?

- Successes
- Improvements
- Neutral information

Practice Writing

- Divide into small groups: 10 minutes
 - Re-write sections of the “Bad Survey” given what you just learned about
- Feedback: 15 minutes
 - Share your best re-write
 - Share which one was the most difficult for your group to re-write

Resources

- <http://cssl.osu.edu/training/>
 - Basics of Designing a Survey

Let's work on your surveys!

- 15 minutes of quiet work time
 - Draft items of a new survey
 - Keeping analysis in mind
 - Re-write items
 - Work on the design/flow of the survey
 - Any routing that should happen?
 - If you need additional work:
 - Write your invitation e-mail, sampling, etc.
 - Do sections of your survey require any descriptive text?
 - What is your post-survey plan?

Thank You!

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Any other questions?

Any feedback for us as facilitators for future workshops?

THANK YOU for attending!