

Assessment101

Assessment Tips with Gloria Rogers, Ph.D.

Surveys and Questionnaires: Do They Measure Up?

The single most used and abused assessment method is the locally developed survey. Surveys are conducted of students, faculty, recruiters, employers, alumni, and advisory boards. Before dropping that survey in the mail (or the cyberworld), have you considered what constitutes an effective survey? The results will only be as good as the planning and quality of the survey instrument. Here are some tips to effective surveying:

- 1) Plan ahead.** Objectivity is very important in survey development. Plan the survey carefully to reduce the likelihood of bias in questions asked or sample surveyed. Focus clearly on the key questions you want answered. If the survey developer does not have experience in survey construction, have the survey reviewed by someone with the appropriate expertise. Decide whether you will need to survey a population (i.e., everyone in the study group) or if a sample (i.e., a purposeful selection representative of the study group) will meet your needs.
- 2) Construct survey items carefully.** There are many different formats available for survey items. It is important to construct items that are clearly understood. Keep items short and to the point. Compound (single items that contain more than one question) or complex questions are confusing and make responses impossible to interpret. Avoid loaded and/or leading questions (e.g., "Do you believe you were well-prepared to enter the workforce?").
- 3) Pilot the survey.** Once the survey has been completed, ask a small group representative of the population to be studied to take the survey. If you are surveying students, have a select few to take the survey. (Of course, pizza is a must!) Then, conduct a focus group to identify any concerns they might have about the survey. If you are surveying alumni, get a group of graduate students who were undergraduates in the program. Be creative in how to effectively "test" the survey for clarity and relevance. For a sample protocol for pilot testing survey items, go to www.abet.org/assessment.shtml.

- 4) Maximize the likelihood of response.** If the survey is being mailed, be creative to increase the likelihood of an acceptable response rate. If the survey is well-planned, it will be direct and clear, and the study group will be appropriate. Keep the instrument short. If the survey must be lengthy, consider creating two versions and giving half to one part of the study group and the other half to the rest of the group, being sure that the demographics of the two groups are the same. Although this will take forethought, it will likely increase the response rate. The same applies to an "on-line" survey, with the added responsibility to be sure that those surveyed have the likelihood of access to the survey and that the survey interface is user-friendly.
- 5) Analyze survey results in an appropriate manner.** Remember, you are not doing social science research in the truest sense. In most cases, descriptive statistics is all that you need to use. You may choose to show your results by cohort groups or for different years, but generally, sophisticated statistical analysis is not required.
- 6) Report and evaluate findings.** Although this step is the least time consuming, it is one of the most important aspects of the process. If it is assumed that the survey instrument has been carefully constructed, pilot tested, administered, and analyzed, then how and to whom the results are reported becomes critical. Reports should be easy for a layperson to read and presented with an executive summary. Statistical jargon should be avoided. Where appropriate, implications of the findings should be clearly articulated. Reports should be made to those most directly affected by the results and who are able to evaluate the findings and take action on any recommendations made.

For more information on how to develop valid, reliable surveys and questionnaires in an easy-to-read, straightforward format, get **Questionnaire Survey Research: What Works?** by Linda Suskie. This resource elaborates on each of the items covered above and has a good discussion of validity and reliability. It can be ordered through the Association for Institutional Research at www.airweb.org/page.asp?page=88.

YourCorner

Board of Directors

The next few Board events are right around the corner, so start marking your calendars! There will be an ABET Board Briefing Teleconference on Wednesday, February 6, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time. This will be similar to the briefing that the Board had in July 2007, when the updates on several Board initiatives were provided. Also, the next ABET Board of Directors' Meeting will take place in Baltimore on Saturday, March 29, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Be sure to begin making your travel arrangements soon!

Commissioners

All of the 2008-2009 accreditation criteria have now been posted at www.abet.org/forms.shtml. Also, a separate link will open each criteria document to the "proposed changes" section.

Institutions

Requests for Evaluation (RFE) are due to ABET headquarters by January 31. The RFE form for new institutions requesting a visit for the 2008-2009 accreditation cycle is available at www.abet.org/request.shtml. The fee schedule for the 2008-2009 accreditation cycle will be set by the ABET Board of Directors in March 2008.

Member Societies

Each commission's Executive Committee will vote on the nominations that your society submitted in December when they meet in San Antonio this month.

Also, if any of your representatives on the ABET Board of Directors is nearing the end of his or her three-year term, keep an eye out for a letter requesting appointments to fill the position(s) being vacated. You should receive it this month.

Program Evaluators

Do you have a colleague who you think would make a great program evaluator? There is now a wealth of information on ABET's website for potential volunteers. Share it with your colleagues and help ABET continue to attract a highly competent and diverse pool of PEVs. Visit www.abet.org/volunteer.shtml.