Survey Design and Administration Best Practices

General Guidelines

- Response rates to online surveys typically range from 30-60%.

- Select only classifications of students, faculty, staff or customers that are appropriate for the topic of study (e.g., full-time vs part-time employees).

- Select the smallest sample size that meets your needs. Creative Research Systems provides a sample size calculator.

- At the beginning of the survey, provide the audience with clear instructions, the purpose of the survey, an estimated completion time, assurance that their answers will remain anonymous, and what will be done with the data collected.

- When applicable, track which individuals have responded to the survey, and only send reminders to those who have not yet completed it.

- Be respectful of those who do not wish to participate. If someone requests to be removed from follow-up mailings, remove them.

- Once you've completed building your survey, send it to a few colleagues for testing purposes. Ask them to time how long it takes to complete the survey and provide feedback on the overall. Check on entries to ensure the answers' format will provide useful data.

- Once the survey is complete and the data is collected and analyzed, let the respondents know what you've learned and what actions you'll be taking as a result.

- With any research conducted, federal human subject regulations may apply. You should contact the LSU Institutional Review Board and review any relevant policies before administering your survey.

Tips for Creating Survey Questions/ Items & Survey Design Best Practices

- Create a smooth and clear navigation through the survey by providing section headings, clear instructions on how to proceed through the survey, and how to submit responses.

- The first questions should engage the respondent and get them into the flow of the survey. Place demographic questions at the end to avoid response bias. Earlier questions can affect how respondents interpret or respond to later questions.

- Group questions that cover similar topics together and use text to introduce each section. Page breaks should be used to break up longer surveys.

- Avoid double-barreled questions. These questions often contain the word 'and.' A survey question should contain only a single concept so you can define what you're measuring.

- Keep your questions and answer choices short, simple and clear. Respondents are less likely to answer if a question is too long or they do not understand how they should answer.

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- Avoid jargon, acronyms, technical terms and obscure phrases. Use simple words and specific language to create questions that yield precise answers.

- Avoid leading and loaded questions (e.g., "Do you agree that…).

- It is recommended to use a 5-point likert scale. The 5 values should be both clear and distinct from each other. The 'distance' between the values should be as 'equal' as possible.

- Avoid using negatives in items (e.g., not, none, never) as well as indefinite qualifiers (e.g., only, just, merely, many, few, or seldom).

- For "Check all that apply" and "Select up to three responses" questions, keep the list from getting too long (no more than 10 answers is a good guideline). If there is a "does not apply" answer, this should be listed first.

- Use "other" as often as necessary as a possible response, but use discretion when giving the option to "describe other (optional)."

- Avoid forced-choice questions. Use options such as "don't know" and "not applicable" sparingly, otherwise it gives respondents an easy way to skip past a question.

- Use page condition (branching) questions as sparingly as possible. They can be more difficult to implement and tend to make analysis more error prone. However, they allow respondents to skip sections that are not relevant to them.

- Include a 'Thank You' statement at the end of the survey.

Additional Resources and Support

LSU Qualtrics website: http://lsu.qualtrics.com (log in using PAWS username and password)

Qualtrics Support & Training: http://www.qualtrics.com/university/researchsuite

Qualtrics Help Desk: 803-374-6682

Resources Used

Constant Contact- Top 12 Survey Best Practices
http://www.constantcontact.com/aka/docs/pdf/Top10SurveyBestPractices.pdf

Nardi, P. M. (2005). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods.* Boston: Pearson.

Oracle- Best Practices for Improving Survey Participation
http://www.oracle.com/us/products/applications/best-practices-improve-survey-1583708.pdf

Wisconsin- Madison Survey Best Practices
http://survey.wisc.edu/BestPractices.html