

GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL SURVEYS

University of San Francisco

Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support

Overview

The following guidelines are issued by the Office of the Provost through the Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support (OAAS) and apply to all large scale surveys (more than 100 prospective participants). These guidelines outline the process by which surveys can be administered to students, faculty, and/or staff at the University of San Francisco.

These guidelines do not replace approval by USF's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), when applicable.

Goals/Purpose

These guidelines are issued as a way to prevent survey fatigue, the collection of invalid or unusable data, and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents. At a minimum, the guidelines should:

- Increase the quality of the information collected through surveys to ensure that valid and reliable results are obtained and can be used for evaluation, assessment, and planning;
- Help the University to coordinate the timing and populations of surveys to minimize burden on the University community;
- Have applicability to the furthering of the Mission of the University and the enhancement of the student experience.

Guidelines

Any survey administered by any individual associated with the University of San Francisco, with a desired sample of more than 100 students, faculty, and/or staff, is subject to these guidelines. Further, any individual conducting a survey (even those exempted and listed below) must contact OAAS regarding contact information for populations or samples.

Some surveys or questionnaires are excluded from these guidelines (although feedback and review can be provided by OAAS staff upon request). These include:

- One-time surveys for the purpose of event/program evaluation – that is, surveys sent to individuals that participated in a specific, one-time program or event
- Surveys administered within a course or a class
- Faculty research surveys

In general, individuals not associated with the University of San Francisco cannot access the University community (faculty, students, staff, alumni) with surveys or other types of research. Exceptions are only granted by Shirley McGuire, the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

Benefits to the Researcher

OAAS staff are experienced in survey research, design, administration, and data analysis. Meeting with OAAS staff for a review can lead to better or more clearly-written items, a survey that is easier for the survey-taker, and perhaps a more streamlined instrument. In addition, OAAS staff can plan how to analyze the data that are collected and choose a sample of prospective participants. OAAS also welcomes requests for consultation for any research project at USF.

Procedures

In order to achieve the goals listed above, the following steps have been established:

1. Before developing a large scale institutional survey, faculty and/or staff should consult with OAAS. Involving OAAS early may speed up the process of survey development. Questions can be directed to Deborah Panter (dpanter@usfca.edu), the Director of Educational Effectiveness and Assessment.
2. Once the survey is developed, all basic information about the proposed survey is to be submitted to OAAS through USFSurveys@usfca.edu, including: a description of the survey project, a copy of the survey instrument, purpose and intended use of results, desired sample or population, and suggested timeline for survey administration. The purpose of this submission is not to limit or prevent survey administration, but to coordinate the timing, distribution, and to improve the quality of surveys through a review by OAAS staff. Survey respondent email addresses and other information will not be released without this submission.
3. After the request is submitted, OAAS will review the survey for method and design, sampling technique, data collection and will possibly provide feedback to the research (see best practices below).
4. After the review, OAAS will identify the sample or population to be surveyed, release the contact information, and work with the researcher to schedule the timing of the survey. Surveys are recommended to be administered through Qualtrics, the USF-supported survey tool, and to comply with [USF's communication standards](#).

Survey Best Practices

The following is an established list of best practices for surveys, and will serve as the basis for much of the OAAS survey review.

- **Informed Participation:** Provide prospective participants with enough information to make a decision about whether or not they should participate, including the objective of the survey, how the information will be used, how the data will be maintained (confidential, anonymous, etc.), the approximate length of time needed to complete the survey, and whom to contact if they have any questions.
- **Ability to Opt-Out:** Surveys should provide prospective participants with an option to opt-out. This option should remove them from future communications about the survey (i.e., reminder emails).
- **Survey Length:** Overall, the more concise a survey is, the more likely survey-takers will complete it.

- **Item Clarity:** Survey items should be easy to read, understand, and respond to. Common problems with items are confusing or inappropriate response options, items that ask more than one question, or items that are unclear or difficult to understand.
- **Beware of asking for sensitive information:** Because seeking sensitive or threatening information can lead to a survey taker exiting your survey, please be aware of what you ask for and how you ask for it.
- **Using samples is recommended:** Simple or stratified random sampling is a good way to gather information that you can then generalize to your population of interest. Depending on the kind of analysis planned, OAAS can help determine the sample size. By using sampling, the number of surveys sent to any one individual is lower, and hopefully, the likelihood of response is higher.

Definitions

Please use the definition list below as a reference for the statistical and research terms used in these guidelines.

Event/Program Evaluation: For the purposes of these guidelines, event/program evaluation refers to the direct evaluation of a program or event at USF that is only sent to participants of the event. The data from the evaluations is generally collected to gauge participant satisfaction, gain feedback on program delivery, or other program related information.

Population: A statistical term that refers to all possible cases of interest. A population may be all USF undergraduates, all people living in San Francisco, or all people living in the United States.

Reliability: The degree of measurement consistency.

Sample: A subset of a population. There are two types of samples: random and convenient. Random samples are selected by means of strict random procedure. Convenient samples are selected by means of availability. When a random sample is used, general inferences about the population in question can be made.

Survey: A survey refers to any instrument used to collect information from groups of interest.

Validity: The degree to which a test measures what it claims to measure.