Surveys are best designed for measuring variables with numerous values or response categories, investigating attitudes and opinions that are not usually observable, describing characteristics of a large population, and studying behaviors that may be more difficult for people to tell someone face-to-face.

The challenge in utilizing surveys for data collection is the possibility of low response rates; as the number of surveys increase, so does the potential for the decrease in overall response rates. Before you do decide to develop a survey as your assessment instrument, consider all other possible assessment methods to ensure you are collecting the right information. Remember the data may already exist through other administered assessments or institutional data accessible in the Student Information System.

Questions to Consider When Considering a Survey

☐ What do you want to measure by using a survey data collection method? This should be based upon your goals.

☐ Will you be surveying the whole population or will a sample be identified?

☐ Will this survey be used at more than one point in time and over the course of time?

☐ What type of instrument will be used? A published instrument or an instrument developed locally? Will it be paper-based or online?

☐ What is the time line for collecting data?

☐ Will there be an incentive?

- Incentives are a way to increase response rates and reduce survey fatigue. Response rates are based on reward, cost, and trust. Incentives are a way to increase the perceived reward, minimize the perceived cost, and increase trust. Incentives can be offered as a drawing or to each participant of the assessment.
- Examples: gift cards, giveaways (PSC apparel, IPAD), prime parking space, etc.
- Is it in the budget?
- Will the incentive bias the responses?

Survey Development

☐ There are typically four types of questions used in surveys

- Open-Ended – Essay or short answer
- Single Answer (Likert scale, Yes or No, Demographic)
- Open Ended
- Multiple Choice

☐ Questions are usually developed to determine four different areas of content

- Knowledge
- Behavior
- Attitudes, Opinions, and Values

- Demographics

☐ Question Phrasing - It is essential to carefully craft questions that will provide useful information that directly relates to the purpose of the assessment. The way questions are written can shape the answer the respondents provide. The following are things to consider when writing survey questions:

- Make sure the questions are clear and concise and are not leading. A leading question is phrased in such a way that suggests to the respondent that the researcher expects a certain answer
    - An example of a leading question: Don't you agree that the food service provided on campus is of quality. A) Strongly Agree B) Agree C) Neutral D) Disagree E) Strongly Disagree)
- Think about synonyms to replace long words and about using combinations of shorter words to simplify specialized words
- Choose as few words as possible to pose a question; participants try to be efficient when reading questions, which can sometimes result in them missing important words
- Always use complete questions in an effort to reduce confusion
- Avoid double-negatives as it creates confusion to what is being asked (e.g. Do you favor or oppose not having the common reading program?)
- Avoid double-barreled questions; questions in which two opinions are joined together, so that respondents must answer two questions at once when their opinions about the two may differ
    - Example: Do you think that students should have more classes about history and culture?
- It is more useful to ask regarding past behavior, as it is usually a clear indicator of future behavior
- Provide aided recall; human memory is fallible, so participants sometimes need help to recall (e.g. listing out and describing events provided during Welcome Week when asking them to name their favorite event).
    - Include memory cues in the questions
    - Provide examples with descriptions
    - Must also be careful with recall as it can restrict what respondents think
    - Provide a list for options
- Demographics
    - should be asked last unless being used as a filter
    - Only ask demographic questions if they are necessary and you plan to use the responses
    - Examples of demographics: gender, ethnicity/race, new or continuing student

☐ Ranges and Scales - the wording and options for the responses for scales and ranges need to be carefully considered as well (e.g Likert Scale; refer to the last page for examples of likert scales):

- Inclusiveness: make sure that the responders are able to select an answer that applies to them (You may ask a question that won't apply to everyone, so they aren't able to answer)
- Clarity: have the scale be clear and understandable

- Use equal number of positive and negative categories for scalar questions; (e.g. very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, very satisfied)
- Keep the length of the scale to 5-point or 7-point; both are comparable, but a 7-point scale can prevent responders from being too neutral in their responses; use a neutral as well as no opinion or doesn't apply
- Avoid asking responders to check all that apply, better to create individual questions; option of check all that apply make it difficult to analyze
- Consistency: use the same scales throughout the assessment (e.g. using a very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied for any question pertaining to satisfaction)

☐ Filter questions, so that participants don't have to ask questions that don't apply to them. In online software, you can add skip logic. (e.g. Did you attend Welcome Week?, if they say no then you can skip all the questions that are regarding Welcome Week)

☐ Never make assumptions about survey participants
- Never assume knowledge of responders, students may perceive things differently (for example, asking them if they are first generation; you will want to classify what you mean by first generation as their maybe different perspectives on the meaning)
- Don't assume characteristics; not everyone will possess the same characteristics
- Don't assume exclusivity; make sure provided answers can apply to all, use of "other" option will help with exclusivity

☐ Consider reliability and validity of the instrument
- Reliability
  - o Will respondents interpret the item in the same way on a different day?
  - o Will the item mean the same thing to all people in the population?
- Validity
  - o Will the item elicit the information you want?
  - o Will the item elicit accurate and relevant data?

☐ Order of questions is important (for interest and to limit attrition)
- Group similar-themed questions
- Do not begin the survey with sensitive questions and demographics
- Make first questions relevant to everyone
- Save open-ended questions for the end
- Make smooth transitions between sections
- Order questions chronologically (e.g. high school, college, post-graduate)

☐ Additional Advice
- Provide a description of your purpose for the respondents; they will want to know why they are participating and how long the survey will take them to complete
- Keep it short

- Be careful with how you force participants to answer questions, as it may deter participants from continuing on.
- Provide directions with questions (e.g. check all that apply)
- Have someone review your survey to provide feedback with no prior knowledge
- Pilot test the survey with a handful of students