How to Incorporate Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups into your Assessments
Today’s session:

- How indirect methods of assessment can complement and reinforce direct assessments
- How to employ indirect assessments for best results
- Do’s and don'ts – best practices
- Resources
Assessment: the key questions...

- What is my program supposed to accomplish?
- How well are we doing it?
- How do we know?
- How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
- Do the improvements we make work?

Source: Bresciani, Zelna and Anderson, 2004
Use Multiple Measures

“...our measurement methods are imprecise: none will yield perfectly reliable or valid results. Thus, we must use multiple measures and look for confirming evidence among the collective findings as we seek guidance for our improvement efforts.”

Source: Banta, T.W. Building a Scholarship of Assessment, 2002
Complementary methods

Direct Assessment

- Assess student work
- Do students demonstrate the knowledge and skills that we expect in this degree program?
- Grading rubrics, tests

Indirect Assessment

- Assess perceptions
- What do students (and/or others) experience and perceive about their education?
- Surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups
Benefits of indirect assessment

1. “Shine a light” on areas needing direct assessment or attention
2. Explain assessment results
3. Provide feedback
4. Guide program improvements
5. Build community
Exploring reasons

Use surveys:

- Specific questions or hypotheses
- Specific range of answers
- Want quantifiable results

Use interviews, focus groups:

- When you don’t know why
- Searching for the right questions or hypotheses
- Want ability to follow-up, dig deeper

Source: Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning*, 2004
Whom to ask:

- Students
- Graduating students
- Alumni
- GTAs
- Employers, internship mentors

Source: Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning*, 2004
Survey Development: Pre Planning

- Involve all stakeholders.
- Review existing data.
- Write down purpose and major objectives.
- Look forward to future surveys, develop long term plan.
- Only survey as often as is necessary!
Survey Development: Planning

- Consider and formulate hypotheses to be tested.
- Draft questions, circulate, redraft; borrow if possible.
- Think ahead to results.
- Sampling plan
  - Target n
  - Simple random
  - Stratified: oversamples?
- Survey administration schedule
Writing Questions

- Brevity, clarity, simplicity
- Avoid double barreled, leading and loaded qs.
- Types of qs: attitude, belief, behavior, attributes
- Response sets:
  - Yes/no, true/false (dichotomous)
  - Close ended unordered
  - Likert (ordered)
  - Multiple response
  - Ranking
  - Open ended text (short and long)
- Use tables/matrices for questions with same response set.
- Include other choice.
- Follow up with text qs for negative responses.
- Use quantifiable questions unless qualitative needed.
Questionnaire Design

- Questions and wording 1\textsuperscript{st}; then organize.
- Surveying as conversation.
  - Explain purpose.
  - Start with easy, non controversial questions
  - Organize topically
  - End with most controversial, difficult questions.
- Question and/or list randomization.
- Allow for text comments.
- Use filters/follow-ups.
- Long questionnaires (>100 questions) can impact response rates.
- Pilot test, when practicable.
Survey Administration

- Mode of communication
- Convenience
- Incentives
- Reminders
- Salience
- Confidentiality versus anonymity
Survey Tabulation and Analysis

- How will results be used?
- **Software:** Excel, Mini Tab, SPSS
  - Complete list: https://www.web.virginia.edu/rescomp/SoftwareInfo.asp
- Clean data; run all frequencies and recode as necessary; missing cases.
- Weighting/ensuring representativeness.
- Types of data tabulation
  - Frequencies (simplify e.g. report only satisfied or dissatisfied).
  - Cross tabs to compare groups.
  - Means (for ordered list sig. testing).
  - Regression (multivariate test of effect on independent variable).
  - Summaries of text comments (manual, NVIVO)
- Distribute, discuss results
  - Celebrate positives
  - Address negatives
  - Look to future surveys and address issues.
Focus Group Planning

- Write down major purpose and objectives
- Prepare a brief opening statement that
  - States your purpose
  - Assures confidentiality
- Plan and pre-test questions
  - “What do you think was the best…
  - “Tell me one way you would….
- Write out your questions
Preparing for Focus Groups and Interviews

- Select a representative sample of your students
- Select and train interviewers/moderators carefully
- Arrange for a “recorder” of comments
- Be prepared to hold multiple sessions until same themes emerge
Tips to improve participation

- Explain importance of their contribution
- Keep it as short/brief as possible
- Conduct in a comfortable, non-threatening environment
- Schedule at convenient time and place
- Offer an inducement
- Guarantee confidentiality
- Offer to share results after analysis
Best Practice

- Have a clear sense of purpose
- Be systematic
- Draft, test, revise survey or script
- Aim for a representative sample of students
- Select experienced interviewer/facilitator
- Analyze results and capture lessons promptly
- Share results with decision-makers
Thank You

Questions?

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