

UNC SURVEY PROTOCOLS

In recent years, the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) has seen an increase in the use of surveys for institutional planning, assessment, program evaluation and individual research (e.g., individual faculty, student research). Although survey methods are often an efficient and effective method of collecting information, overuse of surveys contributes to lower response rates, which can affect the validity and meaningfulness of each survey. As the use of surveys for institutional and research purposes has increased, a centralized system for managing their use is needed.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this protocol is to describe university procedures regarding survey creation, distribution, and analysis for institutional surveys as well as surveys constructed for the purpose of academic research as defined by the Common Rule (UNC employees and students only).

This guidance is intended to:

- Protect the community members' privacy,
- Monitor survey frequency to avoid survey fatigue,
- Ensure the safety of data collection and usage, and
- Avoid duplication of questions and data.

The process strives to:

- Provide centralized oversight of institutional surveys
- Prioritize the distribution of surveys that benefit the broader interest and goals of the University as a whole.
- Promote good survey design, sampling, and administration that conforms to methodological best practice.
- Reduce survey fatigue and unnecessary survey proliferation.
 - Reduce the collection of duplicate information from multiple surveys.
 - Reduce the number and frequency of surveys administered to the same constituents.
- Promote communication and collaboration between university programs and administrative units with similar data needs.
- Ensure the appropriate dissemination of survey results to internal and external audiences.
- Ensure that survey research is done ethically and respects our community members' time and attention.
- Comply with state and federal privacy mandates (e.g., FERPA, Colorado Privacy Act) as well as with IRB privacy and data security requirements under 46 CRS 45 and UNC institutional policy.

DEFINITIONS

Assessment: As defined by Marchese, 1987, “Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development”.

Institutional Review Board: University body charged with reviewing, approving, and monitoring research activities involving human subjects.

Institutional Survey Committee (ISC): University body charged with reviewing, responding to, and approving applications to conduct surveys of university constituents. The ISC reviews applications for all surveys that are not included on the institutional survey calendar. The ISC also serves as the data governance sub-committee.

Institutional Survey: Survey used to collect data for institutional planning, assessment, program evaluation, and/or accreditation.

Population: All individuals who make up a single group of interest. For example, all first-year students, all international students, etc.

Quality Improvement: A systematic pattern of actions that is constantly optimizing productivity, communication, and value within an organization to achieve the aim of measuring the attributes, properties, and characteristics of a product/service in the context of the expectations and needs of customers and users of that product. QI involves implementing previously proven/tested, planned and systematic activities done to improve or satisfy quality requirements (Institute of Medicine, Virginia Commonwealth University).

Research: As defined by 45 CFR §46.102 “Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge”. Generalizable knowledge can occur through statistical/probabilistic, naturalist, ideographic or other types of standard research methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative.

Research Survey: Survey used to collect data for research purposes only. These surveys are not intended to inform policy or decision-making within the institution.

Sample: Group of individuals from a population who will be surveyed.

Sampling method: Process used to determine which individuals will be selected from the population of interest and included in the survey sample.

Survey: Method of collecting data through a standardized questionnaire. Modes of administration include web-based, electronic surveys, paper-and-pencil surveys, and telephone surveys. A single survey may be conducted for both institutional and research purposes.

Survey Administrator: Individual responsible for the creation, distribution, and oversight of a given survey. This person also serves as the primary contact for the ISC.

University Constituents: All currently enrolled students, employees, alumni, parents, and donors

Research/Quality Improvement Decision Matrix

		Human Subjects Research	Quality Improvement
Benefits		may or may not benefit current subjects	directly benefits a process, system or program; may or may not benefit subjects
Risks		may put subjects at risk (i.e., surveys which ask questions about suicide, illicit drug use or other self-incriminating or embarrassing items)	does not increase risk except for possible subjects' privacy or confidentiality of data
Systematic Investigation	Participant Obligation	no obligation of individuals to participate	use of the program/protocol/intervention by participants being studied is mandatory for QI
	Intent	answer a research question/hypothesis	improve a program, process, or system
Designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge: (probabilistic/ statistical, naturalistic, transferability and analytical generalization)	Design	follows a methodological design that remains unchanged/fixed throughout	adaptive, iterative design, not generalizable (e.g. LEAN methodologies, Six Sigma, Plan-Do-Study-Act)
	Methods of Analysis	quantitative: statistically support or refute hypothesis; qualitative: understand the nature of phenomena	compare program, process, or system to established standards
Dissemination of Results		may have little urgency to disseminate results quickly	results rapidly adopted

Adapted in part from University of Wisconsin-Madison Health Sciences IRBs Comparison of the Characteristics of Research, Quality Improvement, and Program Evaluation Activities.

SCOPE

These protocols apply to all surveys of 100 or more university constituents. ISC will serve as UNC's survey clearinghouse. Unless exempted (see exemption scenarios listed below), survey administrators will need to apply for a full review or abbreviated review if the survey requires student, faculty, staff, or alumni participation. Only surveys having IRB approval may qualify for abbreviated review. Researchers external to the UNC community will not be permitted to conduct unsponsored survey research at UNC.

Individuals and offices wishing to conduct a survey covered by this guidance must first gain approval from their dean or senior department supervisor and then contact the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness who will submit the request to the Institutional Survey Committee (ISC) to review. To ensure samples and surveys can be accommodated, coordination with the institutional survey calendar and review by the ISC must be completed. Appeals to ISC decisions can be requested. The Director of Institutional Research will bring any such appeal to the relevant Cabinet member(s) for further discussion.

Institutional surveys will receive priority when coordinating the calendar. The following timelines for IRE are based on the need to coordinate with all institutional and academic surveys with 100 or more university constituents:

1. Surveys with a sample of 100-299 recruits will require 2-3 weeks of coordination time.
2. Surveys with a sample of 300-499 recruits will require 4-6 weeks of coordination time.
3. Surveys with a sample of 500 or more recruits will require 12 weeks of coordination time.

EXEMPTIONS

The following surveys are exempt from these protocols:

- Surveys of fewer than 100 University Constituents.
- Surveys involving the collection of data from persons who are not, or have not been University Constituents
- Faculty-driven classroom surveys meant to assess teaching and learning
- Faculty/staff organizations (e.g., PASC, CSC, Faculty Senate) surveying their membership
- Employee evaluation surveys
- Workshop or service evaluations administered at the time of service
- Course evaluations
- Surveys conducted within the membership or participants of a student organization, committee, working group, event, or academic department
- Intake questionnaires used to determine program eligibility or participant needs
- Other types of data collection efforts, including web-based forms which function as registration/RSVPs for events or activities, web-based elections, focus groups/interviews, and administrative data collection (e.g., requesting contact information)

COORDINATION OF COURSE EVALUATIONS AND SURVEYS

With rare exception, institutional surveys shall not run during the last two weeks of fall or spring semesters. Additionally, full-term courses and other courses that end during the last two weeks of the semester shall not send invitations for students to complete the course evaluations until the last two weeks of fall or spring semesters.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Through informed consent, respondents must be informed that their responses will be confidential but not anonymous and that their participation is voluntary. Confidentiality indicates that the data is recorded in such a way that it is not immediately identified with the subject that supplied the data. If email addresses, login credentials or other personally identifiable information is captured as part of the survey completion process, confidentiality of the data must be guaranteed by following procedures as outlined in the survey application.

All surveys must comply with the:

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
- GDPR
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
- Colorado Privacy Act
- Belmont Report's Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research and
- American Association of Educational Research Code of Ethics
- Other federal, state and institutional laws and regulations.

DATA SECURITY

The individual conducting the survey is responsible for managing the obtained survey data. When presenting results, released information must not contain any identifiable respondent information. Survey administrators are responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of respondents.

Additionally, by accepting the authorization to administer the survey, individuals understand and acknowledge that they have an obligation to use the data compiled responsibly, ensuring that data is not redistributed to parties inside or outside the UNC community, unless clearly detailed when requesting survey approval. Violation of these obligations may have an impact on the approval of future requests. No survey responses may be stored, hosted, or collected on any technology platform that UNC does not maintain as part of its network. All data collected under an IRB protocol must follow security parameters outlined within the protocol, including relevant storage, encryption, and destruction of data.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

IRB review will be required if the purpose of the survey is for research. Survey approval through IRB does not denote ISC approval and vice versa. If you are unsure whether your survey requires IRB approval, please see UNC's IRB website.

ACCEPTABLE FORMS OF SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Surveys are not to be sent via email attachment, as email is not a secure medium for confidential information. Online surveys developed by UNC Constituents are to be created in the UNC- approved survey tool, Qualtrics, and sent through a UNC-managed email platform. UNC supports one university-wide survey tool with multiple user accounts. Survey data collected through the approved survey tool, Qualtrics, is encrypted and hosted in a secure data center. Other tools such as Survey Monkey and Google Forms do not provide adequate protection for data, and thus are not supported.

USE OF INCENTIVES

Please contact the Office of Finance and Administration for incentive usage guidelines as there may be tax implications. If the survey is for research, The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs needs to be contacted as well.

SANCTIONS

Written notification to the responsible party's supervisor and President's Cabinet Representative will occur if personnel administer surveys that violate this guidance. Violators will need clearance from their representative to the President's Cabinet Representative before they can submit future survey requests.