



**Procedures and Guidelines for Conducting Surveys
at Mercy College of Ohio**

Table of Contents:

Section I	
Reason for these Procedures and Guidelines	<u>3</u>
Section II	
Definitions and abbreviations	<u>4</u>
Section III	
Responsibilities and General Protocol for Conducting Surveys at Mercy College	<u>5</u>
Section IV	
Support available at Mercy College for developing, conducting, and analyzing a survey	<u>7</u>
Section V	
Reference Information	<u>8</u>
A. Anonymous, confidential and non-confidential surveys defined	<u>8</u>
B. Does your survey research need approval from the human subjects committee?	<u>9</u>
C. Components for a methodologically sound survey	<u>10</u>
D. Questions in the “Request to conduct a survey”	<u>13</u>
E. Sources used to develop this document	<u>14</u>
F. List of updates to the Protocol	<u>15</u>

Section I: Reason for these Procedures and Guidelines

Surveys are one means of collecting information. The information collected from a survey should enable leaders to make informed decisions. In some situations, surveys can actually produce “data” that leads to the wrong decision. What can cause this?

- Too many surveys can lead to “survey fatigue.” Respondents either fail to answer or provide spurious answers to questions to complete the survey task.
- Biased questions will lead to biased answers. Questions can be inadvertently biased, if they are framed from a different point of view than that of potential respondents.
- Some types of survey questions may make it impossible to analyze data in a way that will provide adequate information for a decision.

“In order for a survey to produce valid and reliable information (upon which to make valid and reliable judgments), the design and administration of a survey must be carried out with fundamental principles of survey design and administration.” *From mccneb.edu*

The purpose of these Procedures and Guidelines is to: *[from University of Toronto]*

- prevent survey fatigue through coordinated sampling methods,
- create a coherent body of knowledge among administrative units across the College, and
- protect confidentiality through standards of practice.

Section II: Definitions and abbreviations

Definitions

- A “*survey sponsor*” is any area of the College that may benefit from or has direct interest in the survey results. The survey sponsor is responsible for the survey content.
- The “*survey administrator*” is the person conducting a survey or the representative of a group that is conducting a survey.
- A “*survey recipient*” is an individual who is a subject/participant of the survey.
- The “*Survey Request Form*” is the “**Request to Complete a Survey**” posted on the “Forms” page of the Mercy College of Ohio website.

Abbreviations

IE: Institutional Effectiveness

IR: Institutional Research

Section III: Responsibilities and General Protocol for Conducting Surveys at Mercy College

Responsibilities

The *Survey Administrator* will:

- Complete and route the *Survey Request Form* to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee with a copy to the *survey sponsor*, if appropriate.
- Complete the Application for use of Human Subjects form and submit the form to the Human Subjects Committee, if necessary. To determine if the application is necessary, refer to the bylaws for the Human Subjects Committee in the Faculty Handbook and the section “Does Your Survey Research Need Approval from the Human Subjects Committee?” in the Reference section of this document.
- Coordinate all activities involved in the design, development, distribution, analysis and reporting of the survey.
- Ensure compliance with all survey guidelines and adhere to proper research procedures ensuring the confidentiality and safety of the survey recipient.

The **Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IE Committee)** will:

- Serve as the “*survey sponsor*” for surveys involving more than one program area.
- Coordinate the schedule for distribution of surveys to minimize *survey fatigue* among those receiving surveys sponsored by Mercy College of Ohio.
- Provide detailed assistance in the design, distribution, and/or analysis of surveys.
- Provide a technical review and make recommendations for new and recurring surveys.
- Approve the item content of surveys when changes are made to an existing survey or when a new survey is created.
- Approve or disapprove requests to conduct surveys administered by the College or by Mercy College students, faculty, staff and/or administration, individually or collectively.

The **Department or Division Manager** will:

- Serve as the “*survey sponsor*” for surveys at the program and/or departmental level.
- Ensure that only authorized surveys are distributed within their area.

The **Office of Institutional Research** will:

- Serve as “*survey sponsor*” for institution-wide surveys and for state, federal, and externally imposed surveys.
- Assist survey sponsors and administrators to identify existing databases and archives that might make conducting a new survey unnecessary.

The *Survey Sponsor* is responsible for:

- Validating the requirement for a survey considering alternative sources of information including the use of existing databases and archival sources.
- Analyzing the cost/benefit of the survey weighing not only the cost to collect the data, but also the impact on the organization.

Procedure for conducting a Survey at Mercy College

1. Complete a *Survey Request Form* located on the Mercy College webpage. Departments who complete required program surveys on a regular basis may file a schedule of such surveys once to be kept on file in the Office of the Director of Institutional Effectiveness. The reason for requiring this information is (a) so that distribution of other surveys is minimized when required surveys are being conducted and (b) a record of the type of data available from the results is part of Mercy College documentation.
2. Submit a completed *Survey Request Form* to the IE Committee and, if different, to the appropriate *survey sponsor* for approval. The e-mail address for the IE committee is IECommittee@mercycollege.edu
3. Forward one copy of the signed *Survey Request Form* to the Office of Institutional Research prior to distributing the survey.
4. Upon approval, conduct the survey.
5. Analyze and document the results.
6. Forward one copy of the final report to the Office of Institutional Research.

Section IV: Support available at Mercy College for developing, conducting, and analyzing a survey

The Office of Institutional Research (IR) also provides support for the design, distribution and analysis of on-line surveys. A summary of the procedure is as follows:

- The *survey administrator* completes the *Survey Request Form* **before** a survey is designed and distributed.
- The IE Committee reviews the request.
- The request is either approved or denied and the *survey administrator* is informed of the decision and rationale.
- If approved, the IR Research Analyst prepares an initial draft of the survey with input from the *survey administrator*. The IE Committee may also be part of the process to reduce approval time.
The IR Research Analyst creates a "Survey Folder" which includes a progress tracking report, creates a "Draft Copy" of the survey, and routes the draft survey to the *survey administrator*, IE Committee, and IR Director for review, comment, and/or approval.
- The IR Research Analyst makes any changes to the draft copy.
- The *survey administrator* or IR Research Analyst conducts a pilot test of the survey.
- Based on the results from the pilot test feedback, the IR Research Analyst makes any necessary changes to the survey.
- For online surveys:
 - When approved, the Director of Institutional Research or designated representative will format the survey in *Survey Monkey* or other appropriate survey website/software.
 - The Director of Institutional Research or designated representative will notify the *survey administrator* and the IR Research Analyst of the appropriate link for the survey database.
 - The Director of Institutional Research or designated representative sends out an email message informing participants (identified by the *survey administrator*) how to participate in the on-line survey.
 - The Director of Institutional Research or designated representative sends out a reminder to the distribution list prior to the sampling deadline.
- The IR Research Analyst analyzes the data and prepares a preliminary report.
- The "Preliminary Report" is routed to the *survey administrator* for review and comment.
- A "Final Copy" is sent to the *survey administrator* for distribution to the survey audience. A summary of the results is sent to the participants.
- Hard copies of the report are filed in a project file.
- The IR Director documents the report and results in electronic form.

The process can take up to five (5) weeks from start to finish. A complex survey could take longer.

Section V: Reference Information

Information to consider when developing a survey and reporting results

A. **Anonymous, confidential, and non-confidential** surveys defined

There are three types of surveys: **anonymous, confidential, and non-confidential**.

Anonymous surveys are those that do not collect any identifying information. Identifying information is anything that could be used to identify a student. Names, student ID numbers, and email addresses are all considered identifying information. Similarly, combinations of data that could be used together to identify a student can be considered identifying information. For example, an anonymous survey could ask for a student's gender, home state/country, major, *or* ethnicity; however, if a survey asks for all four, and the four items could be used together to identify a participant, the survey is no longer anonymous.

Confidential surveys do ask identifying information. These types of surveys are extremely useful, since the identifier can be used to link information from your survey to other identified data (i.e., demographics, previous surveys). This type of survey is also useful for before-and-after studies. By having an identifier, you can explore the ways in which the individuals in your study changed over time. Because confidential surveys contain identifying information, considerable thought needs to be put into a plan to securely store your data in order to keep the responses confidential.

The final type of study, **non-confidential**, is one that collects identifying information with no guarantee of confidentiality. This type of survey is not recommended, as students are much less likely to respond if they do not feel that their data will be kept in confidence.

For all surveys you will need to explain to your participants whether their data will be anonymous, confidential or non-confidential. If you choose to conduct a confidential survey, you will need to further explain how you plan to secure your data and how long you plan to keep your data.

B. Does Your Survey Research Need Approval from the Human Subjects Committee?

If your survey research is a "systematic investigation including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to **generalizable knowledge**," and involves **human subjects**, then approval by the Human Subjects Committee is necessary.

To assess whether your survey meets the definition of "research involving human subjects," please consider the following:

- *Human subjects* is defined as: a "living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual or obtains identifiable private information."
- *Generalizable knowledge* is defined as knowledge designed to derive general conclusions from particulars, and is a goal of most research. An essential consideration is whether it was the original intent of the investigator to contribute to generalizable knowledge. Some activities that involve interactions with humans and data gathering may not fit the definition of research with human subjects, since they are designed to accomplish something else, such as in-house quality improvement. For example, a survey of college students about their university's counseling services may be designed strictly to improve service delivery for students, thus not involve research (However, should the surveyors believe that the results may be generalizable, they should request IRB review BEFORE they initiate the survey.)

Publication of results is sometimes used as a measure of whether research is generalizable, but it is important to note that: (1) not every study will produce results worthy of publication; and (2) there are multiple ways in which results can be made available to others without being published in a peer-reviewed journal (e.g., conference presentations or websites).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ONLINE SURVEYS

- Online surveys should allow "no response" as an option for every question. That is, a survey design where one cannot proceed without answering the question is in violation of the respondent's right to withhold information.
- Sensitive data must be protected as it moves along communication pathways between computers. If using a commercial site (e.g., Zoomerang) the researcher should review the site's security measures for protecting respondent privacy and data confidentiality.
- The researcher's agreement with the commercial site should include specific provisions about how, and for how long, it will store the data.

**Content compiled from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) and the Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR 46*

C. Components for a methodologically sound survey

1. Define the purpose of the survey.

For what decisions will the survey be needed? This will determine question wording and format, survey recipients, and data analysis.

How will things be different if the survey turns out as you expect? – or if they survey does NOT turn out as you expect? If there will be no change, there is no reason to do a survey.

2. Who is the audience for the survey? Who will use the results of the survey?

Participants respond to the survey. The audience is the group of people who will make decisions based on survey results.

3. What survey instrument will be used?

An existing survey: Has it been verified as being valid and reliable? Are the questions appropriate for the purpose and the survey recipients? Will survey recipients interpret questions in the same way as the survey administrator?

Developing a new survey. Developing a new survey takes time, including time for a pilot test of the survey.

Adapting an existing survey. Questions from other surveys may have known validity and reliability. Once a survey or survey question is changed, however, results cannot be compared to previous uses. A change to a question may also change the validity and reliability of the results.

It is recommended that you obtain the advice of someone knowledgeable in survey design when selecting a survey instrument. A statistician, sociologist, or psychologist, with training in administering surveys or statistics, may be resources for designing survey questions.

4. Develop the sampling plan.

All members of a small population may be surveyed.

An appropriate “probability sample” (defined statistically) may be more desirable for some situations such as a large population or when a minority opinion could be overshadowed by responses from the rest of the population.

Consult someone familiar with statistical sampling methods to determine the best sampling method, sample size, and method to select the sample for your survey.

Any statistician has training in sampling processes.

5. Pilot test new surveys

Why is a pilot test needed?

Experts, faculty, and students do not all have the same definitions for words. The previous question in the survey may set the tone for a survey question with unexpected results. A list of “choices” for an answer to a question may not include

choices expected by participants or participants may consider some choices as overlapping.

A pilot test can identify situations like the examples given above and increase the reliability and validity of data collected from the survey.

6. Develop a plan to maximize the response rate.

How will individuals be contacted about the survey?

When is the best time to contact potential participants? Consider “competing” activities and demands on the recipient’s time.

How will you maximize the response rate? If the response rate is too low, the survey “data” does not allow you to draw any accurate conclusions. Those who did not respond may differ significantly from those who did. Generally a 50% response rate is considered minimally adequate and a response rate of 70% to 95% may be necessary to use statistical analysis for data from a small population.

If mail or e-mail surveys are used, all of the following strategies should be considered:

- an advance letter;
- emphasizing survey sponsorship and the benefit to the participant from the collected data;
- personalizing correspondence;
- use of incentives for completion of the survey;
- follow-up contacts or reminders to complete the survey.

7. Procedural details to consider before conducting a survey.

Key methodological issues to be addressed include:

- Procedures to be followed in formatting, reproducing and distributing the survey
- Procedures for assuring the confidentiality of the data
- Data collection, data entry, and internal quality control methods (How the data is collected will affect the time to analyze results and the type of analysis that can be done.)
- Data analysis plan including statistical methodology
- Production of data files and documentation

8. Preparation and analysis of data obtained from the survey.

This includes data quality control procedures, data analysis, and production and documentation.

- ***Data quality control.*** In particular, quality control should address: recording receipt of mail surveys; telephone administration of surveys; handling of respondent information and assistance; coding, editing and keying in or optical scanning of survey data; data tabulation and analysis; and preparation of survey results.
- ***Data analysis.*** The analysis should include simple statistical procedures such as calculations of measures of central tendency and frequency distributions for

specific survey questions. In addition, differences in survey results may be examined using standard statistical tests.

9. Documentation of the survey process and results.

This includes documentation of:

- Survey purpose and objectives
- Response rate which is the number of useable survey responses divided by the total number of survey recipients. Report numbers and percentages.
- Technical methods of survey implementation and analysis
- Data obtained
- Conclusions drawn from the data

D. Questions in the “Request to conduct a survey”

A separate “Request to Conduct a Survey” is available on-line. The form includes a request for the following information:

- Title of Project
- Name(s) of Staff or Faculty Conducting the Project
- Brief Description of the Objective including the type of decision to be based on survey results and with whom the results will be shared.
- Estimated Timeline
 - Development of survey (if not an existing survey)
 - Pilot test (if you are creating a new survey)
 - Approval of survey
 - Distribution of survey and dates of follow-up contacts
 - Collection of results
 - Data analysis and presentation preparation (written report or other documentation of results)
 - Presentation of results
 - Report/Results finalized and filed with Office of Institutional Research
- Description of Survey Recipients, Recruitment Process, and Requested Sample Size.
- What will be done to maximize the response rate?
- What were the results of the pilot test of the survey?
- Will *Survey Monkey* be used?
- How will confidentiality be maintained?
- Who will analyze the data?
- How will the results be reported?
- Please include a copy of your survey questions or interview/focus group protocol. Indicate the source of the questions or protocol

E. Sources used to develop this document

mccneb.edu Definitions

<http://www.mccneb.edu/ir/faq.asp> process for help developing surveys

http://www.mccneb.edu/ir/pdf/survey_protocol.pdf Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Neb. The document **Procedures and Guidelines for Conducting Surveys** was used for the section “Components of a methodologically sound survey.”

Case Western Reserve, <http://www.case.edu/provost/raa/raasurveyneed.html> “Types of Surveys”

Georgia State University at <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwire/approval/irb.htm> “Does Your Survey Research Need IRB Approval?”

F. List of updates to the Protocol

2014 – May – 9 Added IE e-mail address to page 6.