# Improving Campus Surveys: Preaching Effective Survey Design and Question Wording

# Description

When designing or helping others design surveys, it is important to spend time developing and evaluating question wording and survey order. The impact of common mistakes can lead respondents to dropout of the survey or bias their responses. This presentation discusses this impact, and discusses best practices to improve surveying from defining the survey's intention to designing questions and survey order. These issues are particularly important when other units on campus design surveys.

#### Overview

- Preaching Design
- Good and Bad Surveys
- Survey Design Flow
- Survey Fatigue
- Common Design Issues
- Measurement
- Common Question Issues
- How to Preach?

## Survey Design Issues

- Focus on Survey Clarification
- Survey Length
- · Solving with Design
- Utilizing Web Survey Tools
- Design Issues

## **Common Question Issues**

- Double-Barrel Questions
- Leading Questions
- Non-Attitudes
- Response Choice Set
- Unclear Response Categories

#### How To Preach?

- Existing Surveys
- Using Online Tools
- Campus Survey Policies
- Advising Units
- Piloting Surveys

#### **Quick Definitions:**

**Survey Fatigue:** A term relating to the *problem* of over-surveying students on the college campus. Fatigue often lowers response and completion rates.

**Question Validity:** When a question measures the 'true' underlying concept. Validity problems result in systematic error.

**Question Reliability:** Produced when a question is repeatedly asked and respondents hypothetically give the same answer each time. Reliability problems produce random error.

**Double-Barrel Question:** Questions that ask respondents to respond to two separate issues within one question.

**Leading Question:** Survey questions that bias the respondent's response choice or bias subsequent question responses.

**Non-Attitudes:** When respondents answer a question, but have no true underlying preference.

**Social Desirability Bias:** When responses do not match true underlying preferences due to social norms.

# **Example Survey**

Question 1: Do you agree with the Oxford MS zoning plan?

[1] YES [2] NO				
Question 2: [1] SA	Would you sup [2] A	port the U.S. sending military [3] Neither A or D	units to train Ir [4] D	aqi solders and bombing ISIS targets? [5] SD
Question 3: When using your campus email, what is your favorite thing about it? [1] The usability [2] The load speed [3] The cost (It is free!!!) [4] It is not Yahoo mail				
Question 4: [1] SA	Do you support [2] A	the government's new anti-A [3] Neither A or D	merican policy [4] D	on individual's rights? [5] SD
Question 5: [1] YES [2] NO	When you were	e in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade did you have nea	t handwriting?	
Question 6: Please agree/disagree with the following statement: Our university should strive to promote diversity on campus.				
[1] SA	[2] A	[3] Neither A or D	[4] D	[5] SD
Question 7: Please agree/disagree with the following statement: I believe that individuals of different races should not have equal opportunities to higher education.				
[1] SA	[2] A	[3] Neither A or D	[4] D	[5] SD
Survey Resources				

# **Published Resources:**

Umbach, Paul. (2005). "Getting Back to the Basics of Survey Research." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 127(3): 91-99.

Asher, Herbert. (2007). Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know. CQ Press.

#### Online Resources:

- http://psr.iq.harvard.edu/files/psr/files/PSRQuestionnaireTipSheet 0.pdf
- http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Survey\_Guide.pdf
- http://oea.uchc.edu/tips\_creating/
- http://www.opia.psu.edu/sites/default/files/insights014.pdf