



New Jersey Institute of Technology
University Policies and Procedures

CREATED: JUNE 2015

Subject: POLICY ON SURVEYS CONDUCTED AT NJIT

Policy Statement

Upon the recommendation of the Task Force for Excellence in the Student Experience, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (hereafter referred to as IRP), hereby sets forth this policy and process for the management of surveys at the university, to prevent over-surveying, to manage the survey schedule, to assure that human subjects are protected, and to improve the quality of surveys administered campus-wide

In general, the following list provides a rough guide of the survey process:

1. Defining the Population Profile
2. Identifying Research Questions
3. Permission
4. Scheduling
5. Designing the survey
6. Survey Administration

Defining the Population Profile

The sampling frame, or population profile, for the survey must be clearly defined and must be the appropriate population for addressing the research questions. As a general rule, the number or responses sought should not be more than required to answer the research questions. In some cases, this will mean the entire population of NJIT students or staff. In many cases, however, a portion of the full population should suffice. We limit the distribution to the necessary population out of respect for respondents' time. If it is not necessary to have a large number of responses then it is not appropriate to request responses from every one.

Identifying Research Questions

The research objectives to be addressed in the survey should be clearly defined and summarized. In many cases, specific questions need not be provided but it is important to have a summary of the research objectives available when requesting permission and scheduling.

Permission

Before administering a survey to a population, and therefore emailing a large segment of that population, it is important to notify and get permission from the senior officer responsible for that population.

- For students, that would be the VP for Academic Support and Student Affairs or the Associate VP for Student Engagement/Dean of students
- For Post-Docs, the Vice Provost for Research
- For Faculty, the President of the Faculty Senate or the Provost
- For Staff, the Vice President for Human Resources

Scheduling

The university maintains a survey planning schedule to protect respondents and promote better response rates for all surveys. All surveys, including student class projects, which expect more than 100 responses, require approval and scheduling. This also applies to surveys administered by external organizations or through survey systems such as Survey Monkey or Qaultrics.

To schedule a survey please contact deess@njit.edu. The email should describe the purpose of the survey, the specific research objectives, number of respondents expected, the sampling frame, the administration method, the length, and the proposed schedule for administration. A copy of proposed survey questions may be requested.

If the survey is conducted for NJIT administrative purposes, approval by the NJIT Institutional Review Board (IRB) is not required. IRB approval or an exemption is required for all other surveys. If approved by the IRB and accepted by IRP, the survey will be added to the survey administration schedule posted at: <http://www5.njit.edu/irp/content/survey-schedule/>.

It is important to adhere to the scheduled administration period to prevent conflicts with other surveys.

Designing the Survey

When designing or planning a survey, the most important step is to clearly define the research question to be answered by the survey results. A survey is most effective if its purpose can be clearly and succinctly stated. Surveys with vague or overly-broad motivations can become too lengthy or difficult to analyze. Also, a survey may not be the best way to answer your question; focus groups are an example of another research method that may be useful in certain contexts.

Once a target question or topic has been identified, we suggest reviewing existing information to see if it is possible to answer your question using data that has already been collected by another office or by the answers to questions on existing surveys. At this point in the process, we encourage you to contact IRP for a survey design consultation. The staff of IRP are happy to discuss how existing data may be used to answer your question or to give you feedback on items in your survey. Also, if you do find that your research question could be answered by an analysis of existing surveyor university data (a particular question broken out by gender, for example), IRP welcomes specific requests for information.

Survey Administration

If your question cannot be answered by existing sources of data, there are multiple options for using a survey to answer your question. We encourage you to come to IRP for advice on which option best suits your needs. The options for survey administration are delineated below.

- Administer the survey yourself.
 - Commercial tools, (e.g., SurveyMonkey) can allow you to create and host a survey yourself.

- Have IRP administer and host the survey for you.
 - Subject to our availability and existing survey schedule, we may be able to assist you with the design of a survey and then host and administer it for you. This service may be subject to a fee.

- Include your questions on a survey already scheduled for administration.
 - In the past, constituencies on campus have appended a limited number of targeted questions to surveys administered to various NJIT populations by IRP. In these circumstances, IRP maintains editorial rights and the right to refuse questions.
 - Regardless of which option you choose, we are always happy to help you form your survey questions.
 - For examples of survey questions, refer to the IRP website , where you can find copies of surveys we have used.

- Anonymity vs. Confidentiality
 - If you choose to administer an anonymous survey, you cannot authenticate it, meaning that you cannot restrict the responses to be one per individual. Keep in mind that even if you do not authenticate or collect identifying information, even collecting IP addresses (as some electronic survey tools do in order to reduce duplicate entries) can compromise anonymity. However, for sensitive subject matters, anonymity may yield more honest responses. At NJIT, most survey data is viewed as confidential, rather than anonymous. We tend to authenticate and collect some basic identifying information. This allows us to analyze responses along a variety of demographic factors, but also gives us the responsibility of guarding sensitive information.

- Incentives
 - Depending upon the population and needs of your survey, it may be desirable to offer incentives to survey respondents. Two guidelines to consider are that the incentives must be positive when possible (i.e. negative consequences for non-respondents are unacceptable, except in some rare administrative surveys.) and should not be relevant to the topic of the survey (e.g., if you are conducting a transportation survey with the purpose of encouraging public transit, free parking passes would not be an appropriate incentive).

- Research with Human Subjects
 - If you or anyone working with the data will be analyzing data that identifies individual respondents, either by name, email address, NJIT ID number, or other unique personal information, then those staff members working with the data should complete human subjects training.

- If the data are to be gathered and used as part of an academic research project, the project will need to be formally cleared with the NJIT Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- If the data are to be used for administrative purposes, it is normally exempt, but the survey must be voluntary and the results kept strictly confidential. Please consult with IRP if you have any questions about IRB requirements.
- Testing the survey
 - It is useful to convene a small group from the population(s) you intend to survey to have them test the survey and survey questions. This can help gauge how the questions you have written will be perceived and answered, and whether the survey is too long or complicated.
- Timing
 - IRP maintains a calendar of approved surveys, available at the IRP website <http://www5.njit.edu/irp/content/survey-schedule/>. Please adhere to the calendar for the timing of your survey, as concurrent surveys targeting the same population lower response rates and overburden respondents.
- Sample vs. Census
 - When planning a survey, it is important to decide if you will need to administer the survey to an entire population (all NJIT seniors, for example), i.e. a census, or to a sample of the population (e.g., 200 randomly-chosen NJIT seniors). This choice can largely be informed by how you want to analyze the results. If you are interested in broad measures, such as overall satisfaction, a sample may suffice. If, however, you want to answer questions about students in Math versus students in Chemistry, you may need a larger sample or a census in order to get enough respondents for your analysis.
- Small cell size
 - It is important to make sure that you do not report results for very small groups of people. For example, if your intended report would break out responses by department, but only 4 people responded from one department, then reporting those responses could jeopardize the privacy of those respondents' answers. The standard practice is to only publicly report cell sizes of 5 or greater.
- Representative sample size

- While a sample needs to be large enough to protect the privacy of the respondents (see above), it should also be large enough for your results to be considered representative. If you are interested in the responses of women in Math, and you only receive 5 responses from women in Math, (out of 20 women in Math, for example) you could not report with confidence that their summary responses are representative of all women in Math. To calculate the minimum sample size to be considered representative within a given margin of error, visit: <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>
- Keep it simple
 - The simpler and shorter a survey, the more likely respondents are to answer all questions and answer them honestly. Longer, more complex surveys can annoy respondents and cause them to abandon the survey part-way or begin to pick arbitrary answers to speed to the end. Also, only ask questions that you need and intend to report.
- Archiving Data
 - Once you have finished gathering your data, please consider archiving the survey instrument, administration details, and record-level responses with IRP. IRP maintains a secure server for NJIT data and reports, and will be glad to archive data collected at NJIT. This can be especially helpful, for example, when a student group changes leadership. If that student group administers a survey and does not archive the data, the results can be lost instead of used to inform future decision making.

Reporting and Analyzing Results

After you have collected the responses to your survey, it will be necessary to analyze the results. Simple analyses can be done using Excel with Pivot Tables, histograms, and graphs, but more advanced statistical analyses will require the use of a statistical software package such as SPSS, SAS or R.

Once your results have been analyzed, we urge you to share the results in a way that makes them accessible to the community surveyed. We have found that by being transparent with our results, the populations we survey can see the value in answering our surveys. For

example, see the IRP Surveys page, where we post overall summaries and results for each question on our surveys.

Conclusion

Our office is happy to provide guidance and assistance with answering your questions using a survey, designing a survey, or how to analyze or present results. Feel free to contact the office of Institutional Research and Planning (tel: 973-596-3110) or deess@njit.edu with any questions.

Effective Date of Policy

This policy takes effect upon adoption, and supersedes and revokes any former survey policies and procedures.

REVIEW:

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