

SPR SURVEY TEMPLATES: GUIDELINES FOR USE

Introduction

According to the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research (hereinafter referred to as the Ethics Committee), any University survey of former students requires ethics approval. The attached survey templates have been designed to assist units to prepare their self-studies for Systematic Program Review (SPR) by providing a pre-approved template for a student outcomes survey.

In addition to expediting the approval process, these survey templates provide a complete set of tested questions, including both general and program-specific options, so that units can quickly create a questionnaire that serves the needs of their program. Placeholders for additional optional questions have also been included to enable units to obtain alumni feedback on items not strictly required by SPR, such as specific areas of the curriculum, departmental plans, and professional issues.

The SPR survey templates are based primarily on the questionnaire used by the Planning Committee's university-wide Student Outcomes Survey of 1999. Questions were modified, added and deleted as necessary to meet the requirements of the Systematic Program Review process, as specified in the *SPR Guidelines for the Self-Study Report* and the *Graduate Program Review Self-Study Document Guide*. Additional survey instruments were consulted, including twenty different surveys from U of S colleges and departments and several student outcomes surveys from other universities.

It should be noted that Ethics Committee approval is not required for *exit* surveys (of graduating students) or surveys of *current* students that are carried out for the purposes of program management and evaluation. The ethics approval requirement applies only to surveys of individuals who have already graduated.

Relationship to Systematic Program Review

The SPR process evaluates programs on the basis of a standard set of criteria, including quality (as indicated by curriculum, faculty, learning environment, infrastructure and outcomes), demand, efficiency in use of resources, and (for some programs) uniqueness and relevance to the province. Since the focus of SPR reviews is on the programs delivered to students, units are encouraged to seek student feedback on many of these criteria. This type of information may be obtained from a variety of sources including course evaluations, surveys of current students, exit surveys, graduate surveys, focus group discussions, departmental records, and so on.

The SPR survey templates are provided to obtain feedback from graduates. Graduates of a program have the advantage of hindsight in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their program, and are uniquely qualified to say how well their program prepared them for a specific profession, other employment, or further education.

The questions in the SPR templates are designed to obtain information related to specific criteria in the Self-Study Guides. Most of these criteria are in the ‘Student Outcomes’ section (E in the SPR Guide and F in the Graduate Program Guide). At a minimum, an SPR survey of graduates should address the following criteria:

- graduates’ satisfaction with their program; and
- graduates’ ‘success’ in further education, employment, or other endeavours related to the program.

Depending on their choice of survey questions, units may obtain more detailed information on the above criteria as well as information related to additional SPR criteria. The full range of options in the template addresses the following questions in the Self-Study Guides:

A. In the *SPR Self-Study Guidelines* (for undergraduate programs):

Quality of Curriculum:

- Is the curriculum up-to-date and designed to meet the program objectives?

Quality of Faculty:

- Are faculty committed to teaching and the improvement of instruction?

Quality of Learning Environment:

- Is the program delivered within a learning environment that is supportive and intellectually stimulating? Specifically:
 - Do students perceive that their instruction is effective?
 - Are students aware of the objectives of the program?
 - How successful are efforts to promote education equity?
 - Do students receive adequate advice regarding program planning and course selection?

Quality of Infrastructure:

- Is the infrastructure supporting the program adequate? (e.g. staff, facilities and equipment, computer and other information technology resources, library resources, scholarship/bursary funds)

Student Outcomes:

- Are students satisfied that the program is meeting/has met their personal, intellectual and academic expectations?
- How successful are students in entering graduate programs (at the U of S/other universities)?
- How successful are students in obtaining licensure and/or employment in fields related to their program?
- How successful are students in external scholarship applications?

Demand:

- What are the primary employment opportunities for graduates of the program?

B. In the *Graduate Program Review Self-Study Document Guide*:

Quality of Curriculum:

- Is the curriculum up-to-date and designed to meet the program objectives?

Quality of Faculty:

- Are the teaching skills of faculty current and adequate?
- Do the faculty provide intellectual leadership, atmosphere and challenge?

Quality of Learning Environment:

- Do graduate students have an opportunity to evaluate instruction and do they perceive that their instruction is effective?
- Do graduate students participate in the learning environment (e.g. projects, seminars, discussions) and in external forums (e.g. conferences, workshops, invited speakers)?
- How successful are efforts to promote education equity?

Quality of Infrastructure:

- Are facilities and equipment, computing and other information technology resources, library resources, and funding adequate?
- Is the academic unit delivering the program supportive?

Student Outcomes:

- Are students satisfied with the program in meeting their personal, intellectual and academic goals?
- How successful are Master's graduates in entering PhD programs (here/elsewhere)?
- What is the long-term perspective of graduates on the program? What do they say about the graduate courses, course requirements and general graduate curricula?
- Does the program allow students to develop the necessary critical skills and appropriately train them for their subsequent role?
- Are graduates deemed adequate by licensing bodies?
- What is the success rate of graduates with SSHRCC, NSERC, Commonwealth and other scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships?
- Do students in the program exhibit scholarship (e.g. publications, conferences) that is comparable to other programs?

Demand:

- Are graduates employed? Where (Saskatchewan, Canada, other)? Are their jobs appropriate?

Responsibilities of the user

The SPR templates are provided as a service to departments and colleges; the administrators of Systematic Program Review do not bear responsibility for the use made of them. Units using these templates have certain ethical and other responsibilities:

1. *Informed Consent:* The Ethics Committee requires that respondents provide free and informed consent prior to participating in a survey. Each student outcomes survey must begin with an introduction which explains the purpose and procedures of the survey, states that participation is completely voluntary, and describes precautions to maintain confidentiality. If the survey is conducted by telephone, oral consent must be obtained before the interview starts; in the case of mail or e-mail questionnaires, the introduction will be in a covering letter, and only respondents who wish to participate will complete the questionnaire. An approved introduction is provided in the survey template.
2. *Confidentiality:* Units must ensure the confidentiality of all personal information obtained from respondents. Data and responses must be stored, analyzed, and used in a manner that guards against the identification of individuals or the release of identifying information. For instance, responses should not be analyzed in a way that could link an individual to opinions

he or she expressed, and names should not be used in the self-study report without the individuals' explicit consent.

3. *Storage of Data:* Data storage must conform to University guidelines, i.e., the data must be stored in a locked, secure place at the University for a minimum period of 5 years.
4. *Informing the Ethics Committee:* All survey instruments (questionnaires) based on the attached templates must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for information when the instruments are in their final (or near-final) form. See the end of this document for further information.
5. *Resources:* Resources for administering and analyzing student outcomes surveys are the responsibility of the unit conducting the survey.
6. *Use in SPR Self-Study:* Use of these survey templates is entirely optional. Units may feel they have sufficient feedback on graduates' satisfaction and success from existing processes such as course evaluations, exit surveys, discussions with current students, departmental records, and so on; or they may wish to develop their own survey instrument for SPR. However, units which do not use the SPR templates must ensure that they have received Ethics Committee approval for their procedures and survey instrument.

If the SPR templates are used, it is the responsibility of units to decide which particular survey questions to include, how to analyze the results, and how to interpret and present those results in their self-study.

The templates can easily be modified for use in surveying current students for SPR purposes. Such surveys do not require Ethics Committee approval.

7. *Other Uses:* The SPR templates are not pre-approved for any other purposes, such as research or internal reviews. However, units may freely make use of the template questions in designing other questionnaires; there are no copyright restrictions on this survey instrument.
8. *Allowable Modifications:* The templates provide for many types of modification, including:
 - choice of questions (the templates provide a range of options and examples, and users may select any combination of questions)
 - choice of formats (e.g. open or closed responses; circling a number, checking a box, filling in a computer response sheet, ticking a cell in a table, etc.)
 - changes to headings (all headings are optional)
 - changes to the order of sections and sequencing of questions
 - minor changes to the wording of questions to fit a particular program or to suit the order of questions
 - different methods of administering the survey (e.g. mail, telephone, e-mail)
 - program-specific additions and modifications, as noted in the template
 - changes to the introduction to fit particular circumstances, as noted in the template

- units may combine questions from the undergraduate and graduate templates to create one survey instrument.

Some types of changes are not allowed:

- Changes must not contravene guidelines 1 to 7 above. For instance, the introduction must not be changed in a way that prevents respondents from giving informed consent, and the method selected for administering the survey must not compromise confidentiality.
- If entirely new questions are added which do not fit into any of the ‘placeholders’ provided in the template, the survey instrument must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. (This should be a straightforward process unless any of the questions involve sensitive issues, risk, or deception.)

Instructions

1. Determine the type of information you wish to obtain from the survey. Depending on your program’s needs and resources, you may prefer to use a short, very general version of the SPR survey, a more detailed version, or a version with program-specific questions. Pages 2–3 above identify the range of SPR criteria that can be addressed using these templates.
2. Draft a survey instrument (questionnaire) to obtain the information identified in Step 1. Check that the wording and sequencing of questions and instructions are clear.
3. Determine the method of survey administration. Some options are telephone (possibly computer assisted), mail, e-mail, or web. Modify the questions as necessary to suit the medium. The survey may be conducted by the unit itself or contracted out to a professional polling agency.
4. Pre-test the survey instrument with a few volunteers to ensure that the instructions and questions are clear and appropriate to your program’s needs.
5. When the questionnaire and survey method have been finalized (or are close to being finalized), submit a copy of the questionnaire and outline of the methodology to Research Administration. Identify it clearly as “A Student Outcomes Survey for Systematic Program Review of [program name]”.

Any questions?

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