

# Putting the Pieces Together



## Successful Survey Design

Presented at the 2006 UMBC Assessment Day Conference

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# Assembling the Edges

- What are you trying to answer?
  - Defining the problem or issue
  - Defining the population to sample
- Sampling—the one time that being “random” is a good thing!



# Assembling the Edges

- What concepts need to be defined?
- What have others done on the topic?
  - Literature review
  - Existing surveys
- Pilot testing can be useful



# Assembling the Edges

- Political Context
  - Who cares?
  - Getting “buy in”
- Human Subjects Issues
  - CACC
    - <http://www.umbc.edu/oir/cacc/index.htm>
  - IRB
    - <http://www.umbc.edu/irb/>



# Keep It Understandable

- Vocabulary levels should fit the audience
- Avoid jargon at all costs
- Provide a point of comparison if trying to evoke a comparison



# Keep It Understandable

- Definitions and qualifiers should be stated up front
- Survey items should have no hidden assumptions



# Keep It Short

- A short concise survey will:
  - Increase your response rate
  - Keep the respondent focused
  - Decrease fatigue & confusion



# Go With the Flow

- Keep it easy
  - Have a simple answer format for your questions
- Keep it simple
  - Format for quick response to control the length of the survey





# Go With the Flow – Part Deux

- Keep it interesting
  - Don't let items get monotonous
  - Have good transition between questions
- Ordering of questions
  - Context effects
- Keep it pretty
  - Pitfalls of skip patterns



# Deadliest Sins of Question Construction

- Double negatives are a no-no!

“Do you disagree that there should not be a tax increase?”

“Do you not believe that there is no use of illegal drugs on campus?”



# Deadliest Sins of Question Construction

- Double barrels are only meant for shot guns...ask for an answer on only one item or dimension
  - “How satisfied are you with the food service received from the Commons’ vendors and Flat Tuesdays?”
  - “How satisfied are you with intramural and varsity sports at UMBC?”



# Memories....

- Avoid making significant memory demands
  - Specify a time range
- Avoid asking for precise responses
  - Provide ranges
  - Provide choices to choose from



# Memories....

- Don't ask for broad generalizations
  - Ask behavioral questions
- Ask about first-hand experiences
  - Questions should be answered from the respondent's perspective



# “Do you smoke marijuana?”

- Avoid sensitive/ uncomfortable questions
  - Income questions should be couched in categories
  - Sensitive material, if necessary, should be left to the end
  - Allow option to get out of the question
  - Assure confidentiality if appropriate



# Other Pitfalls

- Avoid leading or biased questions

“We are considering allowing outside vendors in the Commons. Would you be willing to pay higher student fees to get this service?”

- Ask pros and cons of an issue
- Have two different versions of the question that address each side



# Response Sets

- Minimize neutral responses – i.e., fence sitters
  - 5 point vs. 3 point scale
  - No neutral categories
- Never require ranking of more than five items





# Response Sets

- Make sure categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive

“Which of the following best describes where you are living while attending college?”

“Since graduating from H.S., which other types of schools have you attended other than the one you are attending now?”



# Useful Resources

- Suskie, Linda A. (1996) "Questionnaire Survey Research: What Works", 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. AIR Resources for Institutional Research, No.6.
- Sage Survey Kit: Sage, 1995. Volumes 1 to 9.
- Fowler, Floyd J. (1995) "Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation", Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 38, Sage.



# Useful Resources

- Questionnaires & Survey Design  
<http://www.statpac.com/surveys/>
- Online Survey Design Guide  
[http://lap.umd.edu/survey\\_design/addresources.html](http://lap.umd.edu/survey_design/addresources.html)
- Research Methods & Statistics  
<http://www.socialpsychology.org/methods.htm#survey>
- Conducting Research on the Internet  
[http://www.ifsm.umbc.edu/%7Eepreece/Papers/Online\\_survey\\_design\\_IJHCI04.pdf%20](http://www.ifsm.umbc.edu/%7Eepreece/Papers/Online_survey_design_IJHCI04.pdf%20)
- American Association for Public Opinion Research  
[http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey\\_methods/standards\\_and\\_best\\_practices/best\\_practices\\_for\\_survey\\_and\\_public\\_opinion\\_research](http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/best_practices_for_survey_and_public_opinion_research)
- University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory  
<http://www.srl.uic.edu/srllink/srllink.htm>