

Quick Guide to Senior Exit Surveys for Program Assessment

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider good practices for developing or updating senior exit surveys for program-level assessment. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to develop or update senior exit surveys for program-level assessment. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

For program-level assessment, senior exit surveys can provide valuable feedback from students about their educational experiences, motivations, rationales, and confidence or perceived gains in their knowledge, skills and/or abilities, and give students an opportunity to “weigh in” on their undergraduate experience.

Depending on the program, what feedback is needed/desired from students may vary. Survey questions may include those about curriculum, faculty, offices and services, social opportunities, and career preparation. For program-level assessment, some questions should gather information related to program-level student learning outcomes (SLOs) — for example, senior exit surveys should include questions related to learning in the major and not just satisfaction with classes, services, or the college experience in general.

Types of Senior Exit Surveys

General/Basic

General or basic exit surveys can be short (1-5 questions). Short exit surveys can be useful for programs because they can be completed as part of a regularly scheduled meeting (e.g., in class, as part of an advising appointment, etc.). Questions tend to be broad and ask students for feedback on their overall experiences, or future plans (e.g., work or graduate school). Results from these types of surveys may show programs major “red flags,” or areas that need further attention. Because of their brevity, they generally do not provide information about specific program initiatives or areas of focus.

Whole Student Experience

Many programs want holistic feedback from their students. These types of surveys include questions about curriculum, learning, advising, student services, and students’ future plans, as well as general overall questions. While these surveys can provide programs with a full understanding of their students’ experiences in their program, it can be challenging to get adequate response rates due to survey length.

Curriculum and Learning

Exit surveys can focus explicitly on curriculum and student learning. Questions in these types of surveys emphasize student progress on learning outcomes and perceptions about the set of courses that they took. They can address student perceptions about gaps or redundancies in the curriculum, and ask students for courses that they perceive as being helpful in preparing them for their intended careers. These types of surveys are not meant to replace or duplicate course evaluations. Rather, they allow students to reflect on their curriculum as a whole.

How to Develop or Update a Senior Exit Survey

Step 1: Determine purpose and priorities for the survey. What are the faculty and program trying to learn from their seniors via an exit survey? What have they learned from any current or past surveys? What are the assessment questions that can guide the survey design (priority topics or issues related to curriculum, student learning and related experiences, motivation, etc.)?

Surveys vs Focus Groups. Some assessment questions can be better addressed using a focus group than a survey. When deciding whether to use a survey or a focus group consider the following:

Purposes	Survey	Focus Group
To understand what, how often, to what extent	X	
To understand how or why		X
To get information from many people (100+)	X	
To test a new idea	X	
To get feedback on a new idea		X
To contextualize survey findings		X

Step 2: Consider delivery mode. When collecting an exit survey online, logistical considerations include: Who will manage the survey? How will students be contacted? Will faculty or advisors be involved in promoting? Which campuses will be included?

Step 3: Design the survey. Typical considerations include:

- Clarify assessment purpose and priorities for the survey, and its connection to program assessment
- If applicable, review the program's current survey questions
- You may wish to consider sample exit survey questions from peer institutions offering similar programs in your discipline and/or sample questions ACE has developed through work with other WSU programs
- Consider a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, allowing the program to aggregate some data over multiple semesters or years, while also receiving rich comments
- Consider scales, organization, and flow (use of skipping or branching), and instructions to students
- Consider what kinds of sensitive data might be collected in survey comments and how your program will handle these

Step 4: Share the survey questions with faculty to discuss, refine, and approve. Iterate as needed.

Follow Up Steps

- Plan for a pilot delivery of the survey, updating the program's assessment plan to reflect this project.
- After the first delivery, look at results and refine questions as needed. Review and refine the delivery process as needed.