

USING THE LEARNING SPACES SURVEYS

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I am delighted that you may want to use my learning space surveys. These online surveys are meant to help you bring specific NSSE learning behaviors to bear on the design of campus learning spaces. They do this by asking students and faculty to identify which of twelve specific learning behaviors are personally important to them, to say whether the campus provides space that fosters the behaviors they regard as important, and to identify those spaces.

The easiest way to see the surveys and a sketch of the research project of which they are a part is to look under the Current Projects tab of my Web site, www.libraryspaceplanning.com. You will find there links to the online versions of the surveys and to the article, "Designing for Uncertainty," which reports on what was learned at one liberal arts college that used the surveys. Depending on how respondents answer the questions, the online surveys employ many skips. Paper versions of the surveys are available if you want to see them in all their tedious detail.

The surveys are part of an ongoing research project. I do not charge for the use of them or for the time I spend in analyzing survey responses, except for the cost of my subscription to SurveyMonkey. I do want to own the copyright to any construction and/or analysis of the data that I do, with the understanding however that each participating institution is licensed to use data generated on its own campus and my analysis of its own data in any way it chooses. Every institutional user of the surveys would have access to information about other institutions using the surveys through my analysis of the data, subject to the need to guard the anonymity of the data sets. There are a number of other things to consider in using the surveys. All of them will cost something in terms of the institution's staff time. Some of them might also involve cash outlays, and I marked these with an asterisk (*).

- 1) The surveys build on 12 specific non-classroom learning behaviors, 10 of which figure in the NSSE and CCSSE benchmarks of effective learning practice. Are there other learning behaviors about which you want to inquire, behaviors that might be closely tied to outcomes that are particularly important to your institution? An example may help clarify this question. The institution reported on in my "Designing for Uncertainty" essay takes its Christian mission very seriously and is exceptionally successful with it, judging by its NSSE data relating to spiritual growth. Yet something as fundamental as this is not at all evident in my survey data. If I were doing the survey over, I would want to explore whether there are specific learning behaviors that one could link in meaningful ways to what is particular to that institution and its mission.
- 2) *If your institution does not participate in the NSSE or CCSSE surveys of students and faculty, you might consider doing so. The analysis of my learning spaces surveys is much enriched by reference to the institution's and to trans-institutional NSSE or CCSSE data.
- 3) The decisions that institutions make in deciding on capital projects are of course highly contextual. My surveys in effect ask institutions to step back, for the moment, from a host of critically important issues (such as competitive advantage, health and safety issues, program

expansion, donor interest, etc.). It asks how the many capital investments competing for institutional attention might be tied to learning behaviors that the institution itself sees as central to its mission and is strongly motivated to invest in because of that centrality. Is this a meaningful proposition? That is, does it actually make sense to try to bring specific learning behaviors and their link to institutional mission into play, along with all the other issues that govern decisions about capital projects? If it makes sense, is there an institutionally appropriate way to do this? When should it be done? And would doing it make any difference to the outcomes of decisions on capital projects?

- 4) How students relate to the campus and the environment for learning it creates is a key factor in understanding the results of my surveys. How should student demographics, especially as regards residential and commuting students, figure in the surveys?
- 5) Different groups of faculty (e.g., tenure track and adjunct faculty, full-time and part-time faculty) may have quite different experiences of the campus. What faculty demographics are of interest to your institution?
- 6) What institutional review of this project, which involves human-subjects research, is necessary and appropriate? Note please that securing this review is a critical timetable issue.
- 7) When should the surveys be administered, so as to facilitate the highest possible rate of response, minimize student and faculty fatigue with such survey instruments, and provide information that is timely for planning for your institution?
- 8) Will the entire student body and all faculty members be invited to respond to the surveys? Or will a simple or stratified random sample be used, or cluster sampling?
- 9) What is the mechanism for inviting students and faculty to respond to the online surveys? I am assuming some kind of e-mail contact. From whom should the invitation come? What kind of follow-up or reminders would be appropriate and consistent with the anonymity we should guarantee to respondents? At the institution reported on in my paper, the invitation came from the chief academic officer and there was (I believe) no follow-up. That resulted in a high rate of response among faculty and a modest response among students.
- 10) *What incentives, if any, to respond to the survey might be offered? At an institution where some of my questions were adopted for use, the library offered a drawing among student respondents for an i-Pod. That helped to generate a nearly 60% return among students. Are there incentives that would be appropriate for your institution? What and how many of them should be offered?
- 11) *I have only an elementary competence (if that!) with statistics, with the result that I can offer only a simple-minded statistical analysis of the survey data. It would be great if there were someone at your institution knowledgeable in statistics with whom I could share the survey data with the purpose of seeing if we could get more out of them by a more sophisticated analysis.

I'm grateful for your interest in my learning spaces surveys and look forward to hearing whether the surveys may be useful to planning at your institution.