# Program Assessment Tool Kit:

## A Guide to Conducting Interviews and Surveys

**Created for University of Wisconsin-Madison Faculty and Staff**
**by LEAD Center Researchers**
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**Pilot Edition, Summer 1998**

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# FOREWORD

As UW-Madison moves forward with strategic planning and outcomes assessment activities across campus, we are fortunate to have this Tool Kit from the LEAD Center. The Tool Kit provides guidance in the use of interviews and surveys, two of the many important assessment methods that are in wide use across campus. We encourage you to make use of this Tool Kit as your program explores the use of interviews and surveys as a part of its assessment activities.

Please note that the authors of the Tool Kit invite you to provide feedback so they can improve it in future editions.

For general information on other student outcomes assessment techniques, you are invited to the UW-Madison Outcomes Assessment web site located at:
http://www.wisc.edu/provost/assess.html

Eden Inoway-Ronnie
Chair, University Assessment Council

# Section 1
# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

This tool kit was developed for University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty and staff who are involved in program assessment activities within their departments or majors. It is a complement to a document prepared by the University Assessment Council[1] which gives a broad overview of assessment directions and accreditation requirements as well as an introduction to a variety of assessment techniques. The Tool Kit has the goal of being a useful and user-friendly resource framed around pertinent questions that might be asked by faculty or staff involved in program assessment. It is an evolving document developed through the LEAD Center's experience with majors, departments, schools, and colleges at UW-Madison. In particular, the document emphasizes the use of interviews and surveys because these are the primary tools selected by the academic units with whom we have worked and these are the tools for which the LEAD Center offers some expertise. We offer special thanks to the departments with whom we've worked for providing us with the opportunity to learn more about program assessment.

Because the issues and assessment needs that each program faces are unique, we provide checklists and open-ended worksheets primarily as ways to get started. We do not believe that "one tool fits all." We expect that you will select and modify items to fit your own needs. The value of this tool kit will be measured by its usefulness to you and your colleagues involved in program assessment.

**The audience of the tool kit**

This tool kit is primarily for UW-Madison faculty and staff who want to assess the quality and effectiveness of their programs of study, curricula, degrees, or majors. Persons outside of UW-Madison may also find the kit useful, but must recognize the assessment process outlined is placed into the assessment environment at UW-Madison and designed with UW-Madison guidelines and parameters in mind. We recognize that users of this kit will have varying degrees of experience and types of expertise. This kit is intended to serve as a very basic introduction to program assessment. As such, some of the information in it may not be useful to those with more experience. The resources section at the end of the binder includes more sophisticated sources of information for those who have prior experience with program assessment. It is our hope that this kit will also "grow" with your program as you conduct and refine your own assessments.

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[1] "Using Assessment for Program Improvement: A Resource Manual for Academic Departments," January 1997, by the University Assessment Council and the Office of the Provost. University of Wisconsin-Madison. The reader is referred to their website at http://publications/provost/assess/manual.

**How to use this "Tool Kit"**

This tool kit was developed to guide you through a program evaluation by presenting key aspects of the entire process. It is important to note that many sections are interrelated and need to be understood in the context of the whole. As such, we do not advise taking individual sections out of context but recommend that you review the Tool Kit from start to finish and then select those sections or items that fulfill your program needs. Throughout this document we use the terms assessment and evaluation interchangeably, although we recognize they are sometimes used as separate and distinct terms.

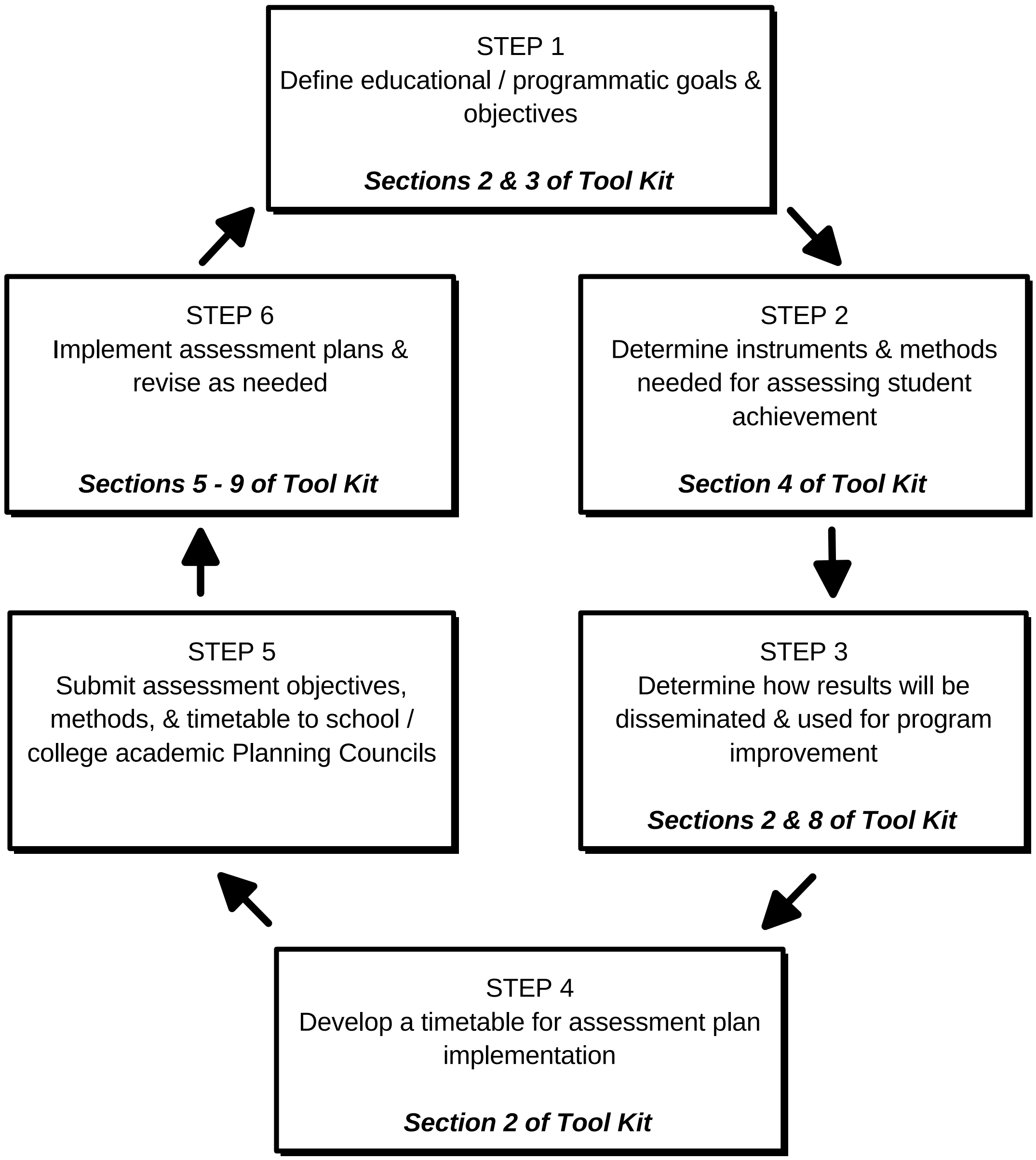
The remainder of this kit is organized into nine sections. With the exclusion of Section 10 on resources, each section provides a brief description of the topic, an overview to the section, and worksheets or checklists that engage you in the process of implementing a program evaluation. The worksheets provided in the kit are designed so that they can be copied as needed. They appear on colored paper. In some of the sections we also include a "sample." We hope that over time this kit will serve as a central location in which a program can store all of its evaluation-related materials, including items such as program goals, evaluation records, and results, thus keeping assessment information readily available for accreditation-related site visits and for future evaluators.

The Tool Kit is organized by steps in the assessment process. These are:

- Section 2 suggests some "Questions for Assessment Planners" to ask as they begin the process of program assessment.
- Section 3, "Setting Objectives," includes a brief discussion of the value of setting educational goals for a department or program and offers tips on defining objectives so as to make them measurable as well as acceptable to a diverse group of faculty members.
- Section 4, "Selecting Assessment Tools," discusses the pros and cons of various types of assessment tools, from surveys and interviews to standardized exams and portfolios.
- Sections 5 and 6 discuss "Surveys" and "Interviews" in more detail, and cover issues such as wording questions, gathering data, and analyzing responses. These sections also include worksheets for tracking surveys and interviews as they are being conducted.
- Section 7 presents some of the "Ethical Dimensions" of conducting program assessment.
- Sections 8 and 9 describe various methods for "Reporting Results" and "Acting on Results;" both emphasize making program assessment a practical, valued, and above all, useful undertaking.
- Clearly, no tool kit can provide all of the information needed for conducting a program assessment. Therefore, the final section of this tool kit lists a number of valuable resources where you can find additional information on various stages of the assessment process. It includes web sites, articles, books, and resources at UW-Madison.

We understand the process of evaluation to be cyclical, and as such it can become part of a plan for continuous improvement. The diagram on the following page illustrates components of this process and identifies the stages in the cycle where this tool kit provides resources.

Developing and Implementing a Departmental Assessment Plan
For Programmatic Improvement



**We value your feedback on this tool kit**

Please let us know how this kit works for you! You can send us your feedback via e-mail or campus mail to the address listed below. Specifically we are interested in what aspects of the kit you find most useful, what seems unimportant, and what you would like to see included in future editions. Since we see this as an evolving document that can be improved and expanded over time, we appreciate any comments you can share that will help us improve this took kit for you and others involved in program assessment.

To order additional copies or to comment, please contact:
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# Section 2
# QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSMENT PLANNERS

There are two steps that you should take before you begin an assessment project:

- determine the parameters of the project (who's doing it?, why?, for whom?, what resources are available?)
- take stock of what information the department, college, and university already have available

The following pages present questions that the department members responsible for assessment should consider.  Keeping a written record of the answers to these questions will ease reporting to administrators and accreditors, and will also facilitate handing off the assessment project to your successors.

## WORKSHEET FOR PLANNING YOUR ASSESSMENT

1. Why are you conducting this assessment? Who or what initiated the assessment?
   ❍ Dean ❍ Department Committee ❍ Whole Department
   ❍ Department Chair ❍ Accreditation Criteria ❍ Other ____________

   Briefly describe the impetus for this assessment: ____________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

2. Who will conduct the assessment? Internal or external evaluators? Whole department or a committee? A combination of the above?
   ❍ External Evaluators ❍ Whole Department ❍ Department Committee
   ❍ Department Chair ❍ Other _____________________

   Name(s) and Title(s) or Affiliation(s) of Evaluator(s):
   1. ____________________________________________________________________________
   2. ____________________________________________________________________________
   3. ____________________________________________________________________________
   4. ____________________________________________________________________________
   5. ____________________________________________________________________________

3. Who will own the resulting data and reports?__________________________________________

4. How often will assessment be undertaken?
   ❍ One Month ❍ One Semester ❍ One Year
   ❍ One-Time Assessment ❍ On-Going Assessment (Annual, for instance)
   ❍ Other ______________________________________________________________________

5. How much money and what resources (staff time, photocopying costs, etc.) are available?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

6. Given that a major goal of the assessment is determining if the department's goals relative to earning degrees in the major are being met, what do you hope or expect to learn from the assessment?
   - ❍ To assess students'/alumni's content knowledge.
   - ❍ To assess students'/alumni's general preparedness.
   - ❍ To assess students'/alumni's perceptions of program quality.
   - ❍ To assess employers' perceptions of program quality.
   - ❍ Other

______________________________________________________________________

7. From whom do you plan to gather data?
   ❍ Undergrads ❍ Graduating Seniors ❍ Graduate Students ❍ Alumni
   ❍ Undergrads Who Left the Major ❍ Employers ❍ Other ______________

8. For each of these individuals do you have:
   ❍ Accurate and Complete Address List ❍ State/Country of Residence
   ❍ Gender ❍ Age ❍ Ethnicity
   ❍ GPA ❍ Time and Credits to Graduation ❍ # of Graduates Per Year
   ❍ Post-Graduation Plans (Graduate School or Employment) and Success Rate

9. Is there information that you are <u>required</u> to gather? ________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________

10. At this present time, what kinds of information would be most beneficial? _____________
    ______________________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________________

11. What types of information are you already gathering (through tests, exams, student records, certifications, portfolios, existing questionnaires, standardized tests, etc.)? _____________
    ______________________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________________

12. Will any of the information you currently gather be helpful to answer your present questions and concerns?
    ______________________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________________

13. Is there information that the university gathers that might be helpful in answering your present questions and concerns? (E.g., through ISIS, student record data.)
    ______________________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________________

14. Do you want information on the following categories (many of which may be out of the control of your department)?
   - ❍ Courses offered by other departments? ❍ Specific courses and/or professors?
   - ❍ Services offered at the college or university level such as advising or career services?
   - ❍ Other

________________________________________________________________

15. For your students or alumni <u>as a group</u>, do you have:
   - ❍ approximate number of graduates of your program per year?
   - ❍ typical post-graduation plans (graduate school, employment, military service, etc.)?
   - ❍ success rate of graduates at obtaining employment or being accepted to graduate school?

16. For students and graduates in your field <u>as a whole</u>, do you have:
   - ❍ approximate number of graduates in the U.S. per year?
   - ❍ typical post-graduation plans of U.S. graduates?
   - ❍ success rates of U.S. graduates?
   - ❍ average starting salaries of U.S. graduates?
   - ❍ typical career paths of U.S. graduates?

   Of the data that is NOT readily available, which will be needed for the assessment? Where can it be found? Who will find it? (See bibliography for a list of information resources.)

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

17. Who is the audience for what the assessment finds?
   - ❍ Department Chair ❍ Department Committee ❍ Whole Department
   - ❍ Dean/Administration ❍ Accrediting Agency ❍ Employers
   - ❍ Other _____________

18. What can and will you do with the results of the assessment?

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

Given your answers above, become familiar with the types of evaluation tools (discussed in Section 4) in order to choose a tool that best suits your present needs.

# Section 3
# SETTING OBJECTIVES

Setting objectives for the program or major being assessed is a crucial, but often neglected, starting point. If a department has well-written and well-thought out objectives, or goals, measuring them becomes relatively easy. In essence, program objectives tell you, your fellow faculty members and your students what your program values and what it expects students will achieve by the time they graduate. For those departments who don't have agreed upon written objectives already in place, this section provides some questions designed to stimulate ideas about what your objectives might be, a checklist of what to do with those objectives, and some sample program objectives from UW units. For departments who do have written objectives in place, this section provides a stimulus to revisit and refine them. A bibliography in Section 10 refers to sources of additional information on the usefulness of objectives and on how to go about preparing them.

## Tips about setting objectives

- Start brainstorming the department’s objectives before focusing on the accrediting agency’s objectives – it’s important that the objectives be goals that <u>your</u> faculty can support.
- It may be useful to include the full faculty in brainstorming ideas for the objectives list, but especially in large departments, it’s inefficient to have the full faculty involved in “wordsmithing” the list – refer this duty to a small committee and return to the full faculty for final approval.
- If a committee has already prioritized the objectives and refined the language, explain that to the department, and don’t ask the full faculty for “comments” – ask them whether they can live with the list. If they <u>can’t</u>, ask them to suggest alternatives.

# WORKSHEET FOR SETTING PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

❍ **With fellow faculty, brainstorm a list of goals for graduates of your program.**
- What makes your program distinct or different from its peers/competition?
- What makes your graduates marketable, valuable?
- How would you define/describe your graduates' abilities?
- What will your graduates know or be able to do once they graduate that they couldn't do when they began your program?
- What would you tell a prospective student that your program can/will give him/her?

❍ **Sort and prioritize the list of goals you produced.**
- Which of the goals can the majority of the department faculty support?
- Which of the goals are the highest priorities?

#1 ____________________________________________________________

#2 ____________________________________________________________

❍ **Compare the list with the objectives suggested or required by your accrediting agency(ies) and with your college or school.**
- Are any of the college's or accreditors' objectives missing from your list? If so, can you either add them or justify why you cannot?
- Are any of your objectives in conflict with those of the accrediting agency or your school? If so, can you find a way to bring them in line with each other?

❍ **Refine the language of each objective.**
- Is each objective clear to someone who is not a specialist in your area, but is interested? Would it make sense to a college sophomore or to a colleague in another department in your college or school?
- Is each objective written in such a way as to be measurable? In other words, can you think of at least one way to tell whether a student has reached that objective?

❍ **Get departmental approval for the objectives.**
- Can each faculty member in your department approve of the wording and ordering of the objectives?

❍ **Distribute the final list of objectives to both faculty and students on a regular basis.**
- Are faculty encouraged, expected, or required to link their course objectives with these department objectives?
- Are students encouraged, expected, or required to know what the program objectives are?

❍ **Make a plan for updating the objectives on a regular basis.**

## SAMPLE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES
## Department of Industrial Engineering

## SAMPLE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

**Goals for Botany Major**
Department of Botany
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Broad education in plant biology**

Graduates should be proficient with the knowledge covered by courses at all levels of organization including molecular, cellular, organismal, and ecological.

**Rigorous training as a plant scientist**

Graduates should also be familiar with science related content outside the Botany Major.

**Research Capability**

Graduates should have the ability to formulate relevant biological questions, generate hypothesis, devise experiments and interpret results.

**Literacy**

Graduates should be capable of communicating in clear scientific prose and of reading and critically evaluating scientific literature.

**Numeracy**

Graduates should be capable of using quantitative methods of analysis and modeling.

**Computer Literacy**

Graduates should be capable of using computers in such areas as data processing, database searches, and word processing.

**Documentation**

Graduates should be capable of establishing and maintaining a laboratory and/or field notebook.

# Section 4
# SELECTING ASSESSMENT TOOLS

There are a variety of ways to collect information to answer specific questions about your program or major. We refer to these different data-gathering techniques as "assessment tools." The tools you select should be consistent with the type of information you seek. In some cases, several tools may be needed to address a breadth of issues. Using a variety of tools is often beneficial because the information gathered by some tools can be compared with information from other tools (this allows one to confirm findings from one source with another source), or can deepen your understanding about issues raised in one method. Some researchers purposely use a variety of different tools to see if they reveal similar findings and to supplement and deepen understanding about the information – this is one form of "triangulation." One example of a mixed-methods design is described below:

1. Use a focus group with subset of the sample to identify issues; then develop questionnaire based on issues identified.
2. Distribute questionnaire to the entire sample.
3. After analysis of responses to questionnaire, conduct personal interviews with a subgroup of the sample to explore issues in greater depth.

A primary UW-Madison Assessment Council report[2] presents types of assessment divided into "Direct" and "Indirect" Indicators of Learning. We highly recommend you review this report which provides short summaries for each of these types of indicators.

- Direct Indicators of Learning are assessments used directly with students for the primary purpose of assessing student learning, student achievement, and performance such as:
  1. Capstone Course Evaluation
  2. Course-Embedded Assessment
  3. Tests and Examinations
  4. Portfolio Evaluation
  5. Pre-test/Post-test Evaluation
  6. Thesis Evaluation
  7. Videotape and Audiotape Evaluation of Performance
- Indirect Indicators of Learning are tools that do not assess student achievement per se, but which provide important information about the program. Indirect indicators commonly involve self-reports through surveys or interviews of students, alumni, or employers on their experiences and perspectives about a program. These indicators include:
  8. External Reviewers
  9. Student Surveying and Exit Interviewing
  10. Alumni Surveying
  11. Employer Surveying
  12. Curriculum and Syllabus Analysis

[2] "Using Assessment for Program Improvement A Resource Manual for Academic Departments," (January 1997), The Assessment Council and the Office of the Provost, UW-Madison.

This tool kit focuses on the use of surveys and interviews as these have been the primary indirect indicators used by departments at UW-Madison with whom we have worked. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of a few selected types of tools are presented in the following table. Your decision about the tools you select depends in part on your answers to questions in Section 2. the purpose of and available resources for conducting the assessment.

**Assessment Tools - Advantages & Disadvantages**

| Tool | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| **Survey**<br>In-class Questionnaire | Inexpensive. Can be quickly administered to group. Best suited for simple and short questions. Can reach every participant. | No control for misunderstood questions, missing data, untruthful responses.<br>Not suited for exploration of complex issues. |
| **Survey**<br>Mail Questionnaire | Comparatively inexpensive. Can attempt to reach participants over a wide geographical area. | No control for misunderstood questions, missing data, untruthful responses.<br>Not suited for exploration of complex issues.<br>Sometimes low response rate.<br>Takes times to receive responses. |
| **Interview**<br>Telephone questionnaire or interview | Relatively inexpensive. Best suited for relatively short and non-sensitive topics. Can attempt to reach participants over a wide geographical area. | Sometimes difficult to reach audience (especially alumni). Usually requires a sample of respondents. Not suitable for lengthy questionnaires and sensitive topics.<br>Respondents lack privacy and anonymity.<br>Interviewer requires skills. |
| **Interview**<br>Structured in-person Interviews | Interviewer can probe evasive answers and explore topics in depth, and clarify questions. With good rapport, may obtain useful open-ended comments. Usually yields richest data, details and insights. Best if in-depth information is wanted. Permit fact-to-face contact with respondents. | Same as above. Often time-consuming to analyze due to volume and qualitative nature of data.<br>Interviewee may distort information through recall error, selective perceptions, desire to please interviewer. |
| **Interview**<br>Focus group Interviews | Useful to gather ideas, different viewpoints, new insights, improving questions design. | Must take a sample. Limits time that each individual has to contribute. Lacks individual privacy, thus could reduce accuracy of results. |
| **Tests/Standardized certifications** | Provide comparative information across populations. May be relatively easy to administer. | Available instrument may be unsuitable for population. Tests may contain unfairness or bias. Developing and validating new project-specific tests may be expensive and time consuming. Test may be narrow in scope and thus not allow student to demonstrate complexity of understanding. |
| **Portfolios** | Gathers information from variety of sources over time. Usually respondent self-reflects and rates own work. Requires development of clear criteria for judgment. | Without clear criteria, judgment is subjective. |

*This table is modified from the *User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation: Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology Education*, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication, National Science Foundation. Exhibit 5.

## WORKSHEET 1 FOR INDICATORS CURRENTLY IN USE

**Assessment Efforts in ___________________________**
**Date: ______________**

### Undergraduate Programs - Direct Indicators

A indicates "Active use"
P indicates "Plans to use"

| | National Exams | Local Exams | Capstone Course | Embedded Testing | Student Portfolios | Review Theses | Performance Evaluation | Pre & Post Tests |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Year 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Year 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

Notes:

Why did you choose these tools?

**Assessment Efforts in the ____________________________**
**Date: ________________**

### Undergraduate Programs - Indirect Indicators

A indicates "Active use"
P indicates "Plans to use"

| | Student Surveys | Exit Interviews | Alumni Surveys | Employer Surveys | External Reviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1 | | | | | |
| Year 2 | | | | | |
| Year 3 | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Notes:

Why did you choose these tools?

## WORKSHEET 2 FOR INDICATORS CURRENTLY IN USE

**Assessment Efforts in the ____________________**
**Date: ______________**

### Graduate Programs - Direct Indicators

A indicates "Active use"
P indicates "Plans to use"

| | National Exams | Local Exams | Capstone Course | Embedded Testing | Student Portfolios | Review Theses | Performance Evaluation | Pre & Post Tests |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Year 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Year 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

Notes:

Why did you choose these tools?

**Assessment Efforts in the ___________________________**
**Date: _______________**

### Graduate Programs - Indirect Indicators

A indicates "Active use"
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| | Student Surveys | Exit Interviews | Alumni Surveys | Employer Surveys | External Reviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1 | | | | | |
| Year 2 | | | | | |
| Year 3 | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Notes:

Why did you choose these tools?

# Section 5
# SURVEYS

Surveys are an excellent way to gather information that describes, compares, or explains knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. This section includes a worksheet on survey creation and a worksheet on survey analysis.

We have found that *THE SURVEY KIT* by series editor Arlene Fink is an excellent resource for conducting surveys. We highly recommend that you acquire and study this resource and therefore we do not attempt to supply information in much detail regarding surveys. *THE SURVEY KIT* contains 10 volumes, each focusing on a specific aspect of conducting a survey. This kit includes volumes on asking survey questions, conducting self-administered and mail surveys, interviews by phone and in person, designing surveys, how to select a sample for surveys, how to measure survey reliability and validity, how to analyze survey data, and how to report on surveys. We think it provides some of the more sophisticated information about using surveys that can guide your survey development. *THE SURVEY KIT* is available through SAGE publications at the address below:

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Rd.
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320
email: order@sagepub.com

**Tips on surveys**

- Allow enough time – plan for time needed to conduct first mailing, receive the first set of responses, conduct follow-up mailing, receive follow-up responses, input data, conduct analysis, and create report.
- Before using a survey, pilot it on a small sample of a similar audience. Then modify unclear or poorly worded questions or delete those questions that do not seem to elicit worthwhile information.
- Plan to do two mailings. The follow-up mailing can add up to 1/3 more responses.
- Keep the survey as short as possible.
- Sending surveys on colored paper can increase your return rate.
- Make sure the return date and sender address is bold, big and clear on the survey.
- Use a short cover letter on the survey from the department chair. Personalize the letter so that the students, alumni or employers recognize they have valuable information to contribute.
- Use incentives to increase return rate - Response rates can be improved if you give a pizza coupon when the survey is returned or enclose a card that becomes part of a drawing to win a prize. When planning these techniques, plan them in a way that keeps the anonymity of the respondent. Anticipate an average return rate of about 20% unless you do something exceptional as an incentive.
- Identify one person to keep records and do follow-up mailings.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR USE IN SURVEYS OR INTERVIEWS

*Do not attempt to use all of the questions below on a single assessment. These questions are intended to provide help in brainstorming questions. This list is by no means complete, nor is the wording of each question set in stone. To use this form, select which categories of questions your assessment will include, then decide which questions or types of questions will best elicit the type of information you need. Modify and tailor questions to fit your program needs.*

QUESTIONS ON "DEMOGRAPHICS:"

- ❍ Name
- ❍ What is your specific area of interest within the overall field?
- ❍ Are you completing a minor, double major, or specialization option?
- ❍ What types of companies are you interviewing with and why did you choose those types? (e.g., service, manufacturing, consulting, design, other)
- ❍ Have you been working while in school? How many hours per week? Summer/school year? In what field?
- ❍ How many hours per week do you typically spend on coursework outside of class?
- ❍ How many semesters has it taken you to graduate? How many credits have you taken?
- ❍ Has working during school affected the quality of your classwork or the time it's taken you to graduate? For better or for worse? What recommendations do you have for other students who are considering working while in school?

QUESTIONS ON THE PROGRAM OVERALL:

- ❍ How do you feel about your choice of major? What encouraged you to select your major?
- ❍ What, if any, changes in your undergraduate program would have helped better prepare you for work as a _______________?
- ❍ Are there areas of your undergraduate program that you feel will not be useful to you? What are they?
- ❍ What topics do you feel will be most useful to you and why?
- ❍ What did you expect of the program when you began your major?
- ❍ Do you feel that the curriculum has met your expectations (in preparing you for your professional future)?
- ❍ Do you think the program has equipped you for a typical day on the job? What do you think a typical day would be like?
- ❍ What do you think you learned in your undergraduate program that will assist you in your first job?
- ❍ Please give an overall rating of how well your undergraduate education prepared you for your professional career. [A scale of possible answers would follow this question.]
- ❍ Who or what drew you to this major? (Prompt: national reputation of department, scholarships, etc.)
- ❍ How do you feel about your choice of major? Was it what you expected?
- ❍ Think of a fellow classmate who didn't stay in the program. What kept you here (in the department or at the university) when others left?
- ❍ If a cousin of yours were to consider this program, what kind of advice would you give him/her?

- What are the strengths of the program?
- What aspects of the program could be improved?

QUESTIONS ON COURSES AND PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS:

- During your undergraduate study, what subject areas, if any, would you have liked to study more? Why?
- Which courses were most valuable to you and why?
- Which courses were least valuable to you and why?
- Which courses were most difficult for you and why?
- Which courses were most interesting to you and why?
- What is your opinion of the number of credits required for a bachelor's degree in this program?
- If a change was made in the number of credits or in the required courses, which courses would you eliminate or reduce?
- What do you think of the balance of fundamentals courses, core courses, elective courses, liberal studies courses, etc.? If you would shift the balance, what changes would you make and why?
- Has your opinion of the program requirements changed since you've been on the job?
- Do you have a sense of how the various course requirements fit together to make a "program" as opposed to a series of individual courses?
- How could the department improve the course requirements or balance of courses?

QUESTIONS ON CO-OPS AND OTHER SPECIAL COURSEWORK:

- Did you participate in a co-op (or internship or other special course)? If so, where?
- If you completed a co-op, did you find it valuable? Why?
- How do you rate the value of co-op experience? Why do you rate it this way?
- How, if at all, could your co-op have been improved? Be as specific as you can.
- In what ways, if any, did your co-op experience influence your choice of career?
- If you went to graduate school, in what ways, was your graduate school experience influenced by your co-op experience?
- Given your experience in the capstone design course, which aspects of the program best prepared you for work as a ___________________?
- Given your experience in the design course, are there areas in which you feel unprepared for work as a _________________?
- Do you know how to learn about those areas on your own?
- Did you take an independent study course?
- If you completed an independent study, how do you rate it? Why do you rate it this way?
- How, if at all, could your independent study have been improved? Be specific as you can.
- In what ways, if any, did your independent study experience influence your choice of career?
- If you went to graduate school, in what ways, if any, was your graduate school experience influenced by the independent study?
- Did you participate in a summer lab? (Or other course unique to your department)
- If yes, please rate the value of the summer lab in particular and comment on why you rated it this way.
- Do you have suggestions for improving the program's special coursework?

QUESTIONS ON NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS:

- Do you think you've gained the skills necessary to be an effective team member on the job? What are those skills? Which parts of the program helped you gain those skills?
- Do you think you've gained the skills necessary to communicate effectively (orally and in writing) on the job? Which parts of the program helped you gain those skills?
- What are the most important qualities or skills that a person working in this field should have? Why? (For example: working independently, creative thinking, problem solving, time management, communication, working in a team, intellectual curiosity, confidence in field, ethical responsibility).
- Which skills would you like to see the program encourage or improve on?
- What skills would you like to develop that you haven't yet?
- How, if at all, would you change the way the department helps students develop their non-technical skills?

QUESTIONS ON LEARNING STYLES:

- How do you learn best? (Lecture, lab, homework, teamwork, computers, visual aids, reading, etc.)
- What types of courses have helped you learn best?
- First I want you to think about how you learn. (Lecture, homework, in a group, alone, by applying what you learned to real life) Then, think about your last two years in the program. Overall, what were the best ways for you to learn? What helped you make connections with the material?
- In which courses did you learn the most? What was it about those courses that was so effective?
- Do you think teamwork is an effective way for you to learn? Why or why not?
- Can you think of ways the department could better address your style of learning?

QUESTIONS ON ADVISING AND MENTORING:

- How do you rate the quality of career advising you received?
- How could career advising be improved? Be as specific as you can.
- Did you have someone or some group who "took you under their wing" or who acted as a mentor? ( Prompt: Formally or informally? Was it someone within your department?)
- What advice would you give to incoming students? To other students in the department?
- Do you have suggestions for strengthening the advising or mentoring process?

QUESTIONS ON POST-GRADUATION PLANS OR EXPERIENCE:

- What are your plans for the future? What are your long-range career goals?
- Do you plan to go to graduate school? When? Why or why not? In what field?
- Do you plan to begin working immediately after graduation? Why or why not? In what field?
- If you plan to switch fields after graduation (or if you switched before graduation), what influenced your decision? Could the department have done anything to convince you to stay in the field?

- Do you plan to remain in the state (or country)? Why or why not?
- Since graduation, have you taken continuing education or industrial short courses? What subjects have you studied? Why?
- Please write a short description of the type of work you do in your present position.
- Do you supervise the work of other engineers?
- (Especially for supervisors:) In your view, what deficiencies in preparation do people beginning work in this field have?
- If you have attended or completed graduate school or are currently in graduate school, please rate how well your undergraduate education prepared you for graduate study.
- How well did your training prepare you to compete within your field or current area of employment?
- How does your educational preparation compare with that of peers in your field from other schools?
- Rate how well your education prepared you in the following areas and also rate how useful these areas have been in your career. [A chart listing the program courses would follow here.]
- If you rated any of the above topics as “very prepared” or “ poorly prepared,” please comment below on why.
- If you rated any of the above topics as “very useful” or “not useful” please comment below on why.
- How could the department have better prepared you for your job or for graduate school?

WRAP-UP QUESTIONS:

- Any other comments on the program or “messages” you’d like the faculty to hear?
- What suggestions do you have for addressing the limitations you’ve described?
- From your answers above, are there particular issues you’d like to emphasize or be sure we include in our report?
- Is there anything we haven’t covered in this interview/survey that you’d like to mention?

## CHECKLIST FOR CONDUCTING SURVEYS

❍ Is your survey easy to read? (on lightly colored paper, large print, legible font and photocopy quality)

❍ Does the survey include information at beginning and end about when and where survey should be returned?

❍ Have you enclosed a stamped and addressed return envelope?

❍ Does each question ask only one question at a time?

❍ Do you have a system for recording the names and both old and new addresses of surveys which were returned-to-sender?

❍ Do you have a system for recording response rates?

❍ Have you kept a copy of the original mailing list?

❍ If you are doing a second mailing, has it been at least two weeks since the first was sent? (Ideally, you should wait two weeks before sending a second mailing)

❍ Have you changed the return date on the second mailing of the survey?

❍ Have you used another color paper on the second mailing of the survey?

❍ Have you updated your records with return-to-sender information?

❍ Have you established a way to enter the data?

❍ Have you established a way to conduct the analysis?

.

**WORKSHEET FOR CREATING A SURVEY**

1. What information do you want to tell the participant about returning the survey? What can you provide the participant to aid this process?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. What background or demographic information do you need to collect? *(Examples: Name [current and past], address, phone)*

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

3. What information do you want to collect about participants' academic career or work experience? *(Examples: Years attended, locations, degrees earned, numbers of jobs, job descriptions)*

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

4. What are the broad topics you are interested in learning about? *(Examples: Integration of curriculum, learning preferences, preparation for work)*

A.______________________________ B.____________________________
C.______________________________ D.____________________________
E.______________________________ F.____________________________
G.______________________________ H.____________________________

5. What are the particular dimensions of the topics you are interested in? *(Examples: Parts of the curriculum that seem extraneous? Particular projects or classes that help students learn best? Ways alumni feel they were not adequately prepared for the world of work?)*

Topic A ______________________________ Topic B ____________________________

______________________________ ____________________________
______________________________ ____________________________
______________________________ ____________________________
______________________________ ____________________________

Topic C ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

Topic D ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

Topic E ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

Topic F ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

Topic G ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

Topic H ______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________ 

______________________________

7. Are there relationships between topics you would like to learn about? *(Example: Is there a relationship between advising and time-to-degree?)*

______________________________ + ______________________________

______________________________ + ______________________________

______________________________ + ______________________________

8. Are there topics you would like to know the value of in participants' views? *(Example: Strengths and weaknesses of internships? Value of co-op?)* What specific dimensions of the topic are you interested in?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

## WORKSHEET FOR SURVEY ANALYSIS

1. What is the demographic profile of your sample? For each category, list the sub-categories below the heading. Add or change categories to fit your needs.

| | Number in total population | Percent in total population | Number in sample | Percent in sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | | | |
| **Ethnicity** | | | | |
| **Gender** | | | | |
| **GPA** | | | | |
| **Year-in-School** | | | | |
| **Other** | | | | |

2. If your survey has open-ended questions, can the responses be grouped into like categories? If so, what are they?
A.____________________________________________________________________
B.____________________________________________________________________
C.____________________________________________________________________
D.____________________________________________________________________
E.____________________________________________________________________

3. For each of the categories listed above, what are the varying comments/perspectives/issues?
A.______________________________________________________________________________
B.______________________________________________________________________________
C.______________________________________________________________________________
D.______________________________________________________________________________
E.______________________________________________________________________________

4. Are there responses that relate to each other? *(Do not look at grouping of questions on survey, but at responses)*

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

5. Are there dimensions to the program that respondents feel are strengths? Why?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Weaknesses? Why?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER FOR SURVEYS

[Department's Return Address]

[Date]

Dear [Dept. Name] [Senior or Alumnus/a]:

The UW-Madison [Department Name] is conducting a self-assessment of its [undergraduate/graduate] degree program in an effort to improve the education that our students receive. Your opinions and comments about our program are important to us. We hope you will take about fifteen (15) minutes to complete and return the enclosed survey.

All responses will be held confidential. The surveys will be read and analyzed by [name of office or individual], and any reports produced as a result will not contain any identifying characteristics of individual respondents. The original surveys will be available only to [name of office or individual]. [Name of office or individual] will prepare a report for the department based on these surveys, and a [copy or summary] of that report will be available to you [via a department mailing, newsletter, etc.]. [Insert description of department's plans for responding to the survey findings.]

Please complete and return the survey to [name & address in bold] by [date in bold]. A stamped, addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. If you have any questions about the survey or the department's self-assessment, please feel free to contact [name of office or individual] at [address, phone number, or e-mail].

We recognize how busy you are and appreciate your time and feedback. Thank you for assisting us in our efforts to improve the [undergraduate or graduate] program.

Sincerely,

[Department Chairperson or Representative]

Encl.: Survey & Stamped, Addressed Envelope

## SAMPLE THANK-YOU POSTCARD FOR SURVEYS

| | |
|---|---|
| We have received your completed survey – Thank You!<br><br>We appreciate your assistance in our efforts to improve the [undergraduate/graduate] program and welcome your additional comments at any time.<br><br>A [copy or summary] of the survey results will be available [when and how].<br><br>[Department Name] | [Student or Alumnus/a Name and Address] |

# WORKSHEET 1 FOR SURVEY TRACKING

Department: ______________________________

Date: ____________________________________

| ID # | Last Name, First Name | Month & Year of Graduation | # of Semesters to Graduation | # of Credits to Graduation | GPA in Major | GPA Overall | Male/Female | Ethnicity | In Sample or Not? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *123* | *Sample, Chris* | *May-93* | *11* | *132* | *3.245* | *3.125* | *F* | *Native Amer.* | *yes* |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Lowest Value in Range | | | | | | | | | |
| Highest Value in Range | | | | | | | | | |
| Averages | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals & Percentages | (total # of students) | (total # of years) | | | | | | | |

# WORKSHEET 2 FOR SURVEY TRACKING

Department: ________________________________
Date: ______________________________________

| ID # | Last Name, First Name | 1st Mailing Address | 2nd Mailing Address | Updated Address, if any | Included in 1st Mailing? (Date) | Included in 2nd Mailing? (Date) | Survey "Returned to Sender" | Completed Survey Returned (Date) | Data Entry Completed? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *123* | *Sample, Chris* | *321 Bradford Ln. Madison, WI 53706* | *456 Marshall Rd. Eau Claire, WI 55555* | *321 Bradford Ln. Apt. A Madison, WI 53706-0321* | *3/4/98* | *3/20/98* | | *4/1/98* | *yes* |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | (total # of names) | | | | (total # mailed) | (total # mailed) | (total # returned) | (total # received) | |

RETURN RATE = _____ Received out of _____ Mailed = _____%

# Section 6
# INTERVIEWS

This section summarizes many of the important points you should consider as you use interviews to evaluate your major, program, or department. It presents some broad guidelines which can be applied to a variety of interviewees whether they are current students, graduating students, alumni, or employers. The section also gives general background information about conducting interviews in various formats such as individually or in groups, over the phone or face-to-face, and tape recorded or not. The section discusses these formats, poses questions to consider when planning interviews, provides checklists and worksheets for conducting interviews, and discusses methods for analyzing interviews.

## Thirteen questions to consider prior to interviewing

These questions are inter-related and should be considered as a whole instead of in a linear way. (see worksheet at the end of this section that is guided by these questions.)

*1. What is the purpose of the interviews?*
Evaluators/Personnel who will be conducting the interviews need to communicate clearly with all stakeholders (faculty, deans, staff, and students) that the purpose of the interviews is <u>program assessment</u> and not to evaluate teaching or a specific course *per se*. The use of interviews as a data collection method begins with the assumption that the participants' perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit, and that their perspectives are important to the success of the program.

*2. Who will do the interviews?*

a. Who, within your department or unit, will conduct interviews? The interviewers you select should be interested in the project, have time to participate, and be willing to cooperate with others to follow an interview plan over a specific timeframe. In each case, the interviewer should be a person with no past, present, or likely future authority over the student/alumni and one who is capable of facilitating an open discussion without passing judgment on student responses or leading the student to make specific responses.
b. If possible, a small group of interviewers (two to four) should collaborate on the interview process. Using multiple interviewers allows interviewers to be assigned to interviewees they do not know. It also provides a range of interviewer backgrounds which can broaden the interpretation and understanding of the findings (this is one form of triangulation).
c. It is important that one person act as a "point person" for the entire interviewing process. This person will coordinate all of the activities and serve as a conduit for information and communication.

*3. Should we conduct individual or group interviews?*
Some factors to consider when contrasting individual and group interviews are shown later in this section in a table titled: "Which to use: Focus groups or In-depth interviews?" To be useful, individual interviews generally need to be at least 30 minutes, preferably 45 minutes to

one hour.  Group interviews usually run from one hour to one and one-half hours.

*4. How many interviews should be conducted? Should we select a sample?*

You need to conduct enough interviews so that similar responses or patterns begin to occur. This can usually be accomplished by fifteen to twenty individual interviews. Because some people may choose not be participate in the interviews and others who do agree may not actually show up for the interview, we suggest that you may need to ask about 25 people to participate in order to accomplish 20 interviews.

Since most programs do not have resources to interview every student, alumni, or employer, you will likely need to ask a sample to participate in the interviews. Some suggested ways to select a sample to interview are presented below.

- *Invite a percentage:* If you want to select 25 students out of 50, for example, you can choose every other name on the student roster.
- *Invite everyone in the targeted group:* You can ask everyone (through posters, e-mails, or phone calls) in the program to participate in an interview. Then wait to see how many respond and confirm interviews with the first 25 who respond to your request. This is an efficient way but may not allow for a very representative sample.
- *Invite a representative sample:* For a sample to be representative of the entire population, your sample should reflect proportions of the entire population based on criteria you identify as important. These criteria will vary for different groups, however, some of the most commonly used criteria to select a sample are: gender, ethnicity, GPA, length of time in program. For example: An entering class in the School of Pharmacy had 100 students who were 60% female, had an average GPA of 3.2, and half had completed their first two years at UW-Madison. In their sample they purposely selected a sample of twenty students who were 60% female, had a range of GPA's above and below 3.2, and half of whom had attended UW-Madison for 2 years.

*5. How should we invite students/people to interview?*

Many departments have been successful at inviting students by e-mail and by telephone. Now that most students have e-mail access, this seems to be a good medium because it is easy for the respondent to respond. Allow several days for people to check e-mail messages. Telephone contact is tedious and often requires back-and-forth messages. If you plan to do phone interviews, call the student and ask if they will agree to an interview, and then set a convenient date and time that you can call them back.

*6. Should we use a written pre-survey?*

Most programs we have worked with report that it is beneficial to use a short pre-survey that students either complete quickly at the beginning of the interview or bring with them completed to the interview. It provides a good beginning point for the interview discussion and conserves interview time that might otherwise be spent collecting this background information. Pre-surveys can be mailed out, faxed, or students can pick them up at a central location prior to the interview. (See example of a pre-survey at the end of this section).

*7. Should we provide questions to interviewees ahead of time?*

Interviewees report that it is helpful to have the questions ahead of time. Providing questions ahead of time may take away any anxiety about interviewing that some interviewees may feel. It also allows interviewees time to prepare thoughtful answers which can improve the quality of the responses you receive. Questions can be sent to the interviewees over e-mail at the same time you confirm the interview time or made available at the main departmental office.

*8. When should we interview?*

An agreed-upon timetable that details the time frames for the interview process should be created. If possible try to conduct all interviews within a concentrated two-week long to one-month long period. Student interviews should be done early to mid-semester, and be completed by about the 11th week of the semester. Toward the end of the semester students are less likely to participate. Try to avoid interviewing during holiday seasons such as Christmas and Easter when people are extremely busy, or during summer when many people take vacations. If you are conducting phone interviews, it may be necessary to make calls in the evenings. We suggest that you schedule one-hour blocks for interviews with half hour <u>between</u> interviews (e.g. interview from 11:00-12:00, schedule next interview to begin at 12:30). Also try to schedule no more than three interviews in one day for the same interviewer as the focused nature of interviewing can be tedious and tiresome.

*9. How can we practice interviewing?*

It is useful for people who are not experienced at interviewing to practice one or two interviews prior to conducting real interviews. Practice allows the interviewer to become familiar with recording equipment, to practice setting a person at ease, to practice pacing so the interview is completed in the allotted time, and to try out questions that may be sensitive or difficult to ask.

*10. Where should interviews be conducted?*

Ideally you should choose an infrequently used private location and minimize interruptions. The location should be private and quiet enough to hear respondents, and one that is comfortable, easily accessible, and can be equipped with audio recording equipment. If a group of interviewers are collaborating, it is useful to choose a location where you can leave equipment in a box. Seating arrangements should encourage involvement and interaction and break down status and power relationships that may often exist when faculty interview students. If possible place seats side-by-side instead of having the interviewer sit behind a desk. Group interviews are best done around a table so that everyone can see and hear each other.

*11. Should we tape record or not?  Should we transcribe or not?*
There are three approaches to recording interview data, each with advantages and disadvantages as described below.

**Approaches to Recording Interview Data: Advantages and Disadvantages**

| Approach | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| **Tape record and transcribe verbatim**<br>Word-for-word transcription is completed.  This requires resources and time, but is valuable when respondent's own words and phrasing are needed. | Completeness and the opportunity it affords the interviewer to remain attentive and focused during interview.  Allows other interviewers to read the transcript and collaborate together on analysis. | Amount of time and resources needed; inhibitory impact tape recording has on some participants. It is essential that interviewees are assured of confidentiality and permission to tape is obtained. |
| **Take notes, tape record, but do not transcribe**<br>This approach draws on the notes taken by interviewer.  As soon as possible after the interview, the interviewer listens to the tape to clarify certain issues and to confirm that all main points have been included in the notes. | Recommended when resources are scarce, and when the results must be provided in a short period of time. Note expansion saves time and retains all the essential points of the discussion. | Interviewer may be more selective or biased in what he or she writes. |
| **Take notes but do not tape record**<br>Interviewer takes detailed notes during the interview and draws on memory to expand and clarify the notes immediately after the interview. | Useful if time and resources are short, results are needed quickly, and evaluation questions are simple. | The interviewer must frequently listen, talk, and write at the same time, a skill that is hard for some to achieve. Where more complex questions are involved, note taking alone does not allow one to document all of the intricate relationships and descriptions. |

12. *How can we assure confidentiality and anonymity?*
Please see Section 7 which summarizes issues related to ethics and the use of a consent form.
A goal of interviewing is to gain adequate information about your program.  Most interviewees are more inclined to participate in interviews if they know that what they say will remain anonymous, if they believe that there will be no negative repercussions to their opinions, and if they are assured that their interview tape will be used for analysis purposes only.  Some ways to address these issues are to use a consent form, assign ID numbers instead of student names to the audiotapes, remove the tapes from the interview area promptly after the interview, and design the analysis phase so that only the transcriptionist or interviewer listen to the tape and only one or two people actually read transcripts.  After analysis, completed audiotapes and typed transcripts should be stored in a safe location.  Although the use of a consent form is optional when doing program assessment activities, it is considered good practice to ensure that  procedures were communicated in an open manner and to notify interviewees about process and confidentiality.

*13. What problems might we anticipate?*
Some problems you might anticipate are summarized below.

| **Problem** | **Description/Solution** |
|---|---|
| Interviewee does not show up | Some interviewees will not show up, or if you are doing phone interviews, will not be available at the time you have arranged to call them. It is appropriate to try to re-schedule the interview, but discontinue efforts after one more contact. |
| Interviewee is very uncomfortable talking about issues or becomes emotional | Depending on the types of questions, it is possible that interviewees may be uncomfortable discussing certain topics or some may become emotional and cry or withdraw. If this occurs, tell the interviewee it is OK. If you are taping, offer to turn off the tape recorder, and offer to take a few minutes break. Ask if the interviewee would like water. Take a break from questioning or ask if you should proceed. |
| You run out of materials | Have extra materials: copies of questions, paper and pencil, consent forms, batteries, blank tapes. |
| Interviewee confides important information | It is possible that the interviewee may reveal information related to issues such as harassment, unethical, or illegal activity. In the event this occurs, refer the student to the appropriate office or counselor. A list of these references is provided in the resource section at the end of this kit. |
| Equipment Fails | Equipment failure happens. Have extra equipment on hand. Encourage interviewers to take some written notes and check the tape recorder during the session. After the interview is completed, the interviewer should also check the tape. If the machine did not work, the interviewer can create a written summary based on notes while the discussion is still fresh in the interviewer's mind. |

## Developing interview questions

Section 5 includes a worksheet on developing questions which may also be valuable in developing interview questions. However, interview questions differ from survey questions in that they should be open-ended rather than limited "yes-no" type questions. Their purpose is to elicit perspectives and opinions from the interviewee. Ideally, interview questions will be developed with input from a cross section of stakeholders such as: faculty, deans, staff, and students. For example, The Department of Botany used a committee that represented a cross-section of the department: two faculty, two academic staff, and one graduate student. This group brainstormed questions related to issues that were of particular concern within the department. Some of these questions related to the senior thesis requirement of the department and others related to the newly-created departmental student learning goals. Drafts of interview questions and the short survey were distributed to faculty, discussed at a faculty meeting, and then modified based on faculty input.

## Tips on Interviewing

An interview, rather than a paper and pencil survey, is selected when interpersonal contact is important and when opportunities for follow-up of comments are desired. In-depth interviews are characterized by extensive probing and open-ended questions. In-depth interviews are particularly appropriate when seeking an understanding of complex or highly sensitive subject matter. Typically the interviewer works from a list of questions or issues that are to be explored and probes areas of particular interest. The guide helps the interviewer pace the interview and makes the process more systematic and comprehensive.

Interviewers should seek to encourage open responses. It is important for an interviewer to capture respondents' perspectives in their own words. An interview is like a guided conversation in which the interviewer becomes an attentive listener. In contrast to a normal conversation, an in-depth interview is not intended to be a two-way form of communication and sharing. The key to being a good interviewer is being a good listener and questioner. It is not the role of the interviewer to put forth his or her opinions, perspectives, or feelings.

<u>Tips related to personal interaction and environment</u>

1. Put person at ease through small-talk and connect to them as a person, use lay-person's speech (e.g. Gee it's cold, did you get here OK? Did you get a chance to eat lunch? Did you have trouble finding the place?)
2. Introduce yourself, de-emphasize rank and status and get close to the student and at their eye-level.
3. Describe the purpose of the interview - for program improvement, not faculty evaluation; explain who will see report. State that their viewpoint and experience is unique and very important, and there is not right or wrong answer to the questions since each student's experience is different.
4. Explain confidentiality, no names will be used and identity will be safeguarded.
5. Explain the nature of report which will be created - e.g., we will interview 25 students and a committee of five will merge together their ideas to identify common issues and themes
6. Ask for permission to tape-record. Whether they agree or not, they should sign consent form. If the interviewee does not agree to record, continue the interview, but take detailed notes. Tape-recorder should be near person and unobstructed. To achieve a good quality tape recording try to:
   - avoid talking over people
   - pause and wait while a train or ambulance is passing
   - place tape recorder an equal distance between the interviewer and respondent – sit as close to respondent as comfortable for both persons.
   - if respondent has a thick accent or tends to mumble, try to repeat important points they make for clarification
   - include a note to the transcriptionist that spells out any frequently used names, abbreviations, acronyms, or professional and technical terms.

7. Keep materials accessible. A box of materials containing the following items can be kept in the interview room if the room can be locked when not in use.
   - master lists of the interview questions
   - blank surveys for students to complete prior to interviews, if applicable
   - blank human subject consent forms
   - tape recorders plus batteries or outlet
   - paper and pens
   - blank audio tapes
   - a list of student names and assigned ID numbers
   - a sign saying "Interview in Progress" and adhesive tape to post the sign on the door
   - general instructions that summarize the interview process

Tips on Asking Questions

1. The interviewee should do most of the talking. You want to get their ideas and perspectives, not expound on your own. If students ask you questions about steps or requirements, answer these questions only after you have explored their understanding about these.
2. Be receptive to all student response. Be aware of your own body language (frowns, smiles, laughter, gestures). Avoid showing surprise at answers and avoid negative or positive gestures or responses to student comments.
3. See interviewing as a spiraling conversation. View the questioning process as a structured, but not linear, flowing conversation. The written questions are a starting point only -- use follow-up questions to focus and probe deeper. Examples of deeper probes: "Tell me more." "Tell me why you feel that way." "Why do you think that happened?" "Why was that important?" "Can you give me another example of what you mean?"
4. Paraphrase by repeating ideas using interviewee's words (if possible) to check out what you hear. Examples: "It seems like you are saying ____. Is that what you mean?" "When you described that event you used the word 'frustrating.' Tell me why you use that word?"
5. Avoid leading questions or giving your own opinion: Examples: "Oh yeah, that was my favorite class. What about you?" "That was a stupid requirement, wasn't it?" "I can't believe they made students do that."

## Tips about how to analyze the interviews

Although interviews can provide a wealth of information, the analysis of interviews is challenging because responses are usually quite varied, interconnected, complex, and flow throughout the entire interview. Your task throughout the analysis is to look for common and recurring ideas, issues and themes across the set of interviews, as well as try to recognize the range of the perspectives that interviewees raise. When doing analysis, one must continually attempt to put aside your own perspective and be guided by what the interviewees said.

Whether or not you work alone or with a small committee to conduct the analysis, and whether you work from verbatim transcriptions or written notes, the process of analysis is generally similar to that described below:

1. If interviewers used notes, have each one collect their notes together. If transcripts were

completed, distribute these to the people who will complete the analysis. If you used several interviewers and had the interviews transcribed, a way to distribute these to people identified as "first" and "second" readers is described below:

Divide transcripts equally among the analysis committee to ensure that each transcript will be read by two readers who did not conduct the particular interview. Identify a primary reader and a secondary reader as shown in the example grid below. Both first and second readers read the transcripts in the same way, but the first reader is the main one responsible for understanding the perspective of the student who was interviewed and synthesizing that information, although the second reader should expand on the thoughts of the first.

**EXAMPLE -- Distribution list for analysis of transcripts in Department X**

| Student | ID # | Interviewer | First Reader | Second Reader |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0032 | A | B | C |
| 2 | 4127 | B | A | D |
| 3 | 6219 | C | D | A |
| 4 | 0002 | D | C | B |

2. Read through transcripts/notes for each interview and do the following:
   Write a key word or phrase in the margin to capture the topic (such as advising, labs) and also write a few words to summarize the perspective. Note both positive and negative factors. Highlight or underline student comments or phrases when these provide a good example of the perspective or provide a clear illustration of the interviewee's perspectives. If you have time after reading the interview, make a short summary of the issues and perspectives at the very end of the transcript. Re-read as needed.

3. Identify common issues and themes, cluster, and re-group. The committee should hold lengthy meetings to review and summarize the perspectives presented in each transcript. The two readers in a blackboard or flip-charts full of comments. Patterns and common issues and perspectives will begin to be noticeable. The committee should cluster or group these issues or try to capture the range of opinions if there is no common opinion expressed. A continual process of re-grouping and synthesis should occur. Quotations from interviewees that represent the prevalent perspectives can be identified.

4. Create a summary report. See Section 8 for a discussion of types of information that should be included in the report.

## WORKSHEET FOR SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS
## in Department of _____________

**Week of _____________________**

| **Date** | **Interviewer** | **Times available to conduct interview** | **Scheduled Interviews Time, Location, Student Name** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *9/3-Monday* | *A* | *10:00-1:00 or 3:00-5:00* | *12:00-12:45, Room 512, Lisa Jones* |
| | B | | |
| | C | | |
| | D | | |
| *9/4- Tuesday* | A | | |
| | B | | |
| | C | | |
| | D | | |
| *9/5-Wednesday* | A | | |
| | B | | |
| | C | | |
| | D | | |

## Which to use: Focus groups or In-depth interviews?

| **Factors to consider** | **Use focus groups when. . .** | **Use in-depth interview when. . .** |
|---|---|---|
| Group Interaction | Interaction of respondents may stimulate a richer response or new and valuable thought. | Group interaction is likely to be limited or nonproductive. |
| Group/peer pressure | Group/peer pressure will be valuable in challenging the thinking of respondents and illuminating conflicting opinions. | Group/peer pressure would inhibit responses and cloud the meaning of results. |
| Sensitivity of subject matter | Subject matter is not so sensitive that respondents will temper responses or withhold information. | Subject matter is so sensitive that respondents would be unwilling to talk openly in a group. |
| Depth of individual responses | The topic is such that most respondents can say all that is relevant or all that they know in less than 10 minutes. | The topic is such that a greater depth of response per individuals is desirable, as with complex subject matter and very knowledgeable respondents. |
| Data collector fatigue | It is desirable to have one individual conduct the data collection; a few groups will not create fatigue or boredom for one person. | It is possible to use numerous individuals on the project; one interviewer would become fatigued or bored conducting all interviews. |
| Extent of issues to be covered | The volume of issues to cover is not extensive. | A greater volume of issues must be covered. |
| Continuity of information | A single subject area is being examined in depth and strings of behaviors are less relevant. | It is necessary to understand how attitudes and behaviors link together on an individual basis. |
| Experimentation with interview guide. | Enough is known to establish a meaningful topic guide. | It may be necessary to develop the interview guide by altering it after each of the initial interviews. |
| Observation by stakeholders | It is desirable for stakeholders to hear what participants have to say. | Stakeholders do not need to hear firsthand the opinions of participants. |
| Logistics Geographically | An acceptable number of target respondents can be assembled in one location | Respondents are dispersed or not easily assembled for other reasons. |
| Cost and Training | Quick turnarounds is critical, and funds are limited. | Quick turnaround is not critical, and budget will permit higher cost. |
| Availability of qualified staff | Focus group facilitators need to be able to control and manage groups. | Interviewers need to be supportive and skilled listeners. |

Source: *User-friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations*, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication, National Science Foundation. August 1997, p. 3-11.

## WORKSHEET FOR PLANNING INTERVIEWS

1. Who will be interviewed?
   ❍Current students ❍Graduating students ❍ other:______________________
   ❍ Alumni ❍ Employers

   Summarize the purpose of your interviews:
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________

2. Who will conduct your interviews?
   Who will conduct the analysis of your interviews? (show "A" next to name)
   1) ____________________________________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________________________________
   4) ____________________________________________________________________

3. Who will conduct individual, group or phone interviews and how many will be conducted?
   ❍ Individual interviews: How many?______
   ❍ Group interviews: How many groups?______ How many in a group? ______
   ❍ Phone interviews: How many?______

4. Describe how you will select the sample to interview.
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________

5. Describe how you will invite people to participate in interviews.
   ❍e-mail ❍phone call ❍other:_______________________________________

   Describe how interviews will be scheduled (Who will send e-mail or call?):_____________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________

6. Describe the time-frame during which the interviews will be conducted:________________
   ________________________________________________________________________

7. Where will interviews be conducted?___________________________________________
   (Consider: Privacy. Can site be locked?  Can materials be stored at site?  Who has key?)

8. Which of the following processes will be followed:
   - ❍ tape record and transcribe verbatim – Who will do the transcription?______________
   - ❍ tape record and make expanded notes, but do not transcribe
   - ❍ do not tape record, but take detailed notes

9. How will confidentiality and anonymity be assured?
   Will a consent form be used? ❍ yes ❍ no If so, attach form.

   How will tapes be marked to keep anonymity?_________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

   How will tapes and transcripts be stored after use? _____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

10. Will there be a written pre-survey? ❍ yes ❍ no
    If yes, develop this survey and attach.

    If yes, how will the survey be distributed to interviewees? _______________________
    ______________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________

11. Will interviewees be provided with the questions ahead of time? ❍ yes ❍ no
    If yes, how will these be distributed to interviewees? ___________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________

12. If appropriate, what plans have been made to practice interviewing?__________________
    ______________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________

13. What problems may arise while administering the survey?  Are there plans to address these problems?  If so, what are they?______________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________________________

## CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

**Preparing for Interviews**

❍ Develop questions
❍ Develop consent form
❍ Develop pre-survey if applicable
❍ Practice interviewing
❍ Identify interview site
❍ Schedule interviews
❍ Plan environment
❍ Prepare equipment/materials box
❍ Make plans for transcription and identification on tapes

**Conducting interviews**

❍ Put "Interview in Progress" sign on door
❍ Review consent form with interviewee, ask permission to tape record, get student signature
❍ If a written survey is completed, review completed written survey for take-off into questions OR Ask student to complete written survey quickly before asking interview questions.
❍ If permission has been granted, begin audio tape
❍ Conduct interview
❍ Near beginning of interview, check to see that tape is recording
❍ At end of interview, thank interviewee
❍ Turn off audio tape
❍ Remove "Interview in Progress" sign.
❍ Tape recorder, blank consent forms, extra surveys and lists of questions remain in box.
❍ If using ID numbers write number on audio-tape and record on master list that the person showed up.
❍ Put tape and written survey in identified location for delivery to transcriptionist or data entry.

## SAMPLE GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEWS

**Introduction and Purpose**
"Good morning. I am _______ (introduce self). The purpose of this interview is to get your perspectives about MAJOR/DEPARTMENT. We are especially interested in your experience and your suggestions. This is not an evaluation of specific faculty, so we hope you will focus on the program/major/department. I am not here to share information nor to give you my opinion. Your perspectives are what matter. There is no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel about the topic."

**Permission to tape**

FOR INDIVIDUAL: "If it is OK with you, I would like to tape record our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be attentive to the conversation with you. All of your comments will remain anonymous. No one but the transcriptionist will listen to the tape, and others involved in summarizing the report will not know your name. I will be interviewing approximately [*number*] people, and compiling a report, but there will be no reference to individuals. If you agree to this interview, please sign this consent form."

FOR GROUP: "My colleague [*name of colleague*] will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I have already explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is anonysmous. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. I will try to give everyone a chance to give their opinions about each topic. However, I would appreciate it if only one person talks at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit. Now let's start by everyone sharing their name and a sentence of background about yourself."

**Ask Questions (see your list of questions)**

**Closure**
"Thank you for coming and giving your precious time to help us improve our programs. If you think of further information you would like to share, I can be reached at ____. We hope to have this report completed by ______. I wish you success in your program/summer."

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY

*This form is intended to serve two functions. First, it provides background and a taking-off point for the respondent's comments during the interview. For example, it may be important to know that a student who clearly understands the purpose of the various program requirements has been working in the field throughout school. Second, the form can be used to identify areas to pursue in an interview. For instance, an interviewer may want to question why a full-time student took seven years to complete an undergraduate degree.*

Student Name________________________________ Date:______________

1. When did you enter the ______ major? Semester 1 ____ (Year) Semester 2____ (Year) Summer____ (Year)

2. What type of bachelor degree as you working toward? (Circle one) BA BS

3. How many semesters has it taken you to reach graduation? ________________________

4. How many credits has it taken you to reach graduation? __________________________

5. Have you been a full-time student?
   - ❍ Yes, throughout school.
   - ❍ No, I've always been part-time.
   - ❍ Sometimes full-time, sometimes part-time.

6. Check the statement below which best represents your path in college:
   - ____ I have studied or plan to study all of my coursework at UW-Madison.
   - ____ I transferred into UW-Madison from another institution. If so, how many semesters have you been at UW-Madison? _________________________
   - ____ Other: Please comment: _______________________________________________

7. Students in the ______ major can take several foundation courses or sequences before they take upper level courses (e.g., in biology students can take Biocore or 151-152 or a different choice). What foundations sequence did you take? (circle one below)

   Biocore 151-152 Other:___________________________________

8. When do you plan to graduate? (Circle semester and year)

   Spring Summer Fall 1998 1999 2000

WORK EXPERIENCE

9. Did you complete a co-op or internship?
   - ❍ Yes. With what company/school? ________________________________________
   - ❍ No.

10. Have you been working (other than co-op) while attending school?
    - ❍ Yes, approximately _______ hours per week during the semester.
    - ❍ Yes, approximately _______ hours per week during the summer.
    - ❍ No.

11. If you have been working, has your work been related to your field of study?
    - ❍ Yes, I've been working in (which field?) _________________________________
    - ❍ No.
    - ❍ Some yes, some no (which field?) ________________________________________

12. How many hours a week do you typically spend on coursework outside of class? _________

POST-GRADUATION PLANS

13. What are your post-graduation plans? (If you are planning on both employment and graduate school, please indicate which you plan to do first.)
    - ❍ Employment in (what field?) _________________________________________
    - ❍ Graduate school in (what field?) ______________________________________
    - ❍ Undecided

    **If Graduate School:** How well prepared do you feel you are for graduate school?
    _____Not Prepared      ______Prepared      _____Well Prepared

    **If Employment:**

    A. Do you have a job lined up after graduation? ____Yes ____No
    If yes, what type of job is it?______________________________________________

    B. How well prepared do you feel you are for employment?
    _____Not Prepared      _____Prepared      _____Well Prepared

    C. What type of employers are you interviewing with? Check all that apply.
    ❍ Consulting ❍ Design ❍ Manufacturing
    ❍ Service ❍ Other ________________________________________

14. Do you plan to remain in the state/country after graduation?
    ❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Undecided

## ADDITIONAL SAMPLES OF PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY QUESTIONS

### SAMPLE #1

As a result of your major in [*list program name*] at UW-Madison, do you think the program adequately provides opportunity for the development of the program goals shown below?

| | RATING | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PRIMARY PROGRAM GOALS** | **Superior** Provides numerous opportunitie s | **Good** Provides adequate opportunitie s | **Fair** Provides limited opportunities | **Poor** Provides insufficient opportunitie s |
| **Goal 1** | | | | |
| **Goal 2** | | | | |
| **Goal 3** | | | | |
| **Goal 4** | | | | |
| **Goal 5** | | | | |
| **Goal 6** | | | | |
| **Goal 7** | | | | |

### SAMPLE #2

| | I FEEL WELL PREPARED IN THIS AREA. | I HAVE NO STRONG FEELINGS EITHER WAY. | I FEEL UNDER-PREPARED IN THIS AREA. |
|---|---|---|---|
| TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE | | | |
| DESIGN SKILLS | | | |
| COMMUNICATION SKILLS | | | |
| oral | | | |
| written | | | |
| TEAM WORK SKILLS | | | |
| CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITIES | | | |
| AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM: | | | |
| math & natural science | | | |
| core courses | | | |
| electives | | | |
| computer science | | | |
| technical communication | | | |
| liberal studies | | | |
| OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | | | |

**SAMPLE #3**

| | I LIKE THIS PART OF THE PROGRAM; DON'T CHANGE IT. | I HAVE NO STRONG FEELINGS EITHER WAY. | I SEE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THIS AREA. |
|---|---|---|---|
| PROGRAM STRUCTURE OVERALL | | | |
| # of credits required | | | |
| time to graduation | | | |
| formal advising | | | |
| informal mentoring | | | |
| TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION OVERALL | | | |
| lectures/discussion | | | |
| lab work | | | |
| group work | | | |
| homework | | | |
| SPECIALIZATION OPTIONS OVERALL | | | |
| construction eng & mgmt | | | |
| environmental eng | | | |
| surveying | | | |
| AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM OVERALL | | | |
| math & natural science | | | |
| core courses | | | |
| electives | | | |
| computer science | | | |
| technical communication | | | |
| liberal studies | | | |
| co-ops | | | |
| OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | | | |

**SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Department of Botany**
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**

**Exit interviews with seniors (undertaken February 1997)**

INTRODUCTION

1. When did you declare botany as your major?
2. Did you come to the UW knowing that you wanted to be a botany major, or is that something you decided once you were here on campus?
3. Did you consider any other majors? If so, why did you decide to major in Botany?
   (Prompt: advisor? Specific interest? reputation of department? scholarships?)
4. What introductory biology course or course sequence did you take? How was it that you came to choose that sequence?
5. What is your specific area of interest within botany?

CAREER PLANS

6. What do you plan to do after receiving your bachelors degree?

7. What are your long-term career plans?
   (Prompt: continuing education - what major, why, where)
   (Prompt: employment - what field, why, where)

8. Do you think your undergraduate program has equipped you with the skills and knowledge you are likely to need to pursue your career plans?

   The following four questions all start with the following phrase:
   Of the courses you have taken, are there any courses required for the botany major which you consider to be:
   9. Most worthwhile? Most valuable? Why?
   10. Worthless or not relevant? Why?
   11. Most difficult? Why?
   12. Most interesting? Why?

13. The botany major requirements specify that students take courses in five out of six areas within botany. Have you found that to be an advantage or disadvantage and why? Do you feel there should be more flexibility in choices or do you agree that the design is adequate?

14. We strongly encourage/require our majors to get some sort of research or field experience either as a 699 project or a thesis. Did you (or do you plan to) do some sort of research or field project?
    If answer is NO, then: Why did you decide not to?
    If YES: How valuable do you think it was?

ADVISING

15. Do you feel that you received adequate advising prior to your decision to declare botany as your major? Why? Can you suggest ways to improve the advising system?

16. Do you feel that you received adequate advising after declaring botany as your major? Can you suggest ways to improve our departmental advising system?

17. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the botany department? Why or why not? Do you have any suggestions related to this?

GENERAL

18. Taken as a whole, how would you assess our undergraduate program?

19. What do you consider to be some of the strengths of the botany major?

20. What do you consider to be some of the weaknesses of our program?

21. Can you suggest specific ways in which our undergraduate program might be strengthened or improved?

22. Are there any concerns suggestions, or comments you would like to make about the program that haven’t already been discussed?

**SAMPLE INVITATION TO STUDENTS TO INTERVIEW**

Note: Can be e-mailed or summarized over the phone

*** * * * * * * ***

Dear graduating senior in _____________,

The Department of ____________ is involved in activities to evaluate and improve its curriculum and majors. As part of this, I would like to hold individual or group interviews with as many graduating seniors as possible sometime between [*dates*]. The interview can be arranged at a time convenient for you (Mondays through Fridays between 8:30 and 5:00). Because you are a senior who is about to graduate, your opinions and suggestions are very important to help improve your program. The interview will last about 45 minutes and participation is voluntary. There are four people who will conduct the interviews which will take place at [*identify location*]. With your permission we would like to tape-record the interview. Only I and the transcriptionist will listen to the tape. If you do not want your interview taped, that is also OK. All student names and identities will remain confidential. The discussion questions will be provided in advance so that you can think about them ahead of time. I hope you will assist us by giving your feedback and sharing your opinions about your program.

PLEASE RESPOND BY [*date*].

IF YOU CAN PARTICIPATE in an interview, please e-mail me with your first, second and third choices of dates and one-hour time frames that will work for you between the dates [*enter dates*]. I will quickly respond to you with the specific time and a room location.

IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO INTERVIEW, please e-mail me with “No thanks.”

Thank you in advance for a quick response and for your participation in this important improvement process.

## SAMPLE OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW RECORD

**Department: ____________________________**
**Year: ______________**

INTERVIEWER NAME: ______________________________________________

INTERVIEWEE NAME/CODE #: ________________________________________

DATE OF INTERVIEW: ______________________________________________

CONSENT FORM SIGNED? *Yes* *No*

DATE TRANSCRIPTION ORDERED: ____________________________________

NOTES:

## SAMPLE OF THANK-YOU POSTCARD FOR INTERVIEWS

| | |
|---|---|
| Thank you for taking the time recently to be interviewed as part of the department's self-assessment study.<br><br>We appreciate your assistance in our efforts to improve the [undergraduate/graduate] program and welcome your additional comments at any time.<br><br>A [copy or summary] of the interview results will be available [when and how].<br><br>[Department Name] | [Student or Alumnus/a Name and Address] |

# WORKSHEET FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Department: ______________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________

| ID # | Last Name, First Name | Address/Phone | 1st Attempted Contact | 2nd Attempted Contact | Unreachable but contact info OK | Disconnected or Incorrect Contact Info | Declined Interview (Reason?) | Agreed to Interview | Date/Time Scheduled | Interview Completed | No Show | Consent Form Signed | Transcript Completed | Updated Address Info |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *123* | *Sample, Chris* | *sample@aol.com 608/555-5555* | *3/4/98 left phone msg.* | *3/7/98 reached via e-mail* | | | | *yes* | ####### | *yes* | | *yes* | *yes* | *715 555-5555* |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | (# of names) | | | | (# unreachable) | (# incorrect info) | (# declined) | (# agreed) | | (# interviewed) | (# no shows) | | | |

SAMPLE SIZE = Interviewed out of possible = %

# Section 7
# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No matter which type of assessment tool you use, there are several ethical dimensions to conducting a program assessment, and a little forethought can prevent some awkward situations later.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Both students and alumni are more likely to contribute openly and honestly if they can be assured that their responses will not harm them in any way. Surveys can be returned anonymously (though it will be necessary to collect enough demographic data to determine the representativeness of the sample). Interviews can be conducted confidentially by non-department members, or can be conducted by a single department member or group who will not reveal the identities of the interviewees.

Although it is not required that a department contact the campus human subjects research committees for approval of program assessment research, departments may still wish to provide a consent form for participants, especially in interviews, where the identity of the interviewee may be harder to conceal. A sample form is included at the end of this section. For additional guidance on obtaining consent, departments can contact their local human subjects research committee.

**When Students Confide In You**

Occasionally, when conducting surveys or interviews, a student or graduate will reveal sensitive information such as an instance of sexual harassment, unethical behavior, or even illegal activity. Although these revelations may be rare, anticipating and planning for them can make them easier to deal with if they do arise.

*How broadly will unfavorable findings be reported?*

If students make disparaging comments about an individual professor, will the information be circulated to the rest of the department? If alumni report on a shortcoming of the department, will this information be forwarded to deans or other administrators?

- Make the purpose of the assessment clear up front. Program assessments request information on the program rather than on individual faculty. (However, students often fail to make this distinction, and often cannot make the distinction when discussing the individual courses that make up the program.)
- The best assessments are those in which the informants can be completely honest. But such openness can have limits; i.e., the full assessment report need not be made broadly available. A small (but trusted) committee can determine how much and which information should be distributed to the whole department, and the (trusted) department can determine what to report to administrators. (Clearly, this system will work only when faculty and administrators trust that findings are being addressed even when they are not reported.)

*What to tell the student?*
When a student has revealed sensitive information, the first concern should be to determine whether the student wants or needs help, and in what form.

- Do they want to report the incident officially? (Do they think they are doing so by telling you?)
- Do they want or need to talk about the incident further, perhaps with a counselor?

*Whom to tell?*
Section 10 of this Tool Kit lists some campus resources where students can be referred.

*When to break confidentiality?*
If a current or former student reveals information about a situation that is not only sensitive, but potentially unsafe or illegal, when can or should you break confidentiality?

- If you are promising confidentiality, you may want to stipulate conditions under which you will be obliged or willing to break that confidentiality.

**Responding to the Findings**
Finally, when students or alumni respond to your request for information by taking the time and effort to contribute their opinions, you have an obligation to consider their responses seriously. For more on how to do so, see Sections 8 and 9.

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENT CONSENT FORM**

Department: ______________________________

Year: ___________

The ___________________ Department is conducting an assessment of its undergraduate/graduate degree program. You are being asked to take part in an interview concerning your experiences as a student in/graduate of that program. In all, we expect your participation to take no more than one (1) hour to complete.

With your permission interviews will be audiotaped. Your participation is voluntary. The audiotapes made during telephone interviews and transcripts of both telephone and e-mail interviews will be available only to __________________, who will use them to obtain accurate accounts of the interviews. All of your responses will be anonymous. Any reports produced as a result of this study will not contain identifying material.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or benefits associated with participation in this interview. Your participation is completely voluntary; you may stop participating at any time prior to the completion of the project.

If you have any questions about your interview or the program assessment process, you may contact __________________________ at the following address or phone number: _________________________________. Copies of this form are available from this address as well.

I have read the above and give my consent to participate in the study.

_____________________________________________ __________________

Signature Date

_____________________________________________

Print name

# Section 8
# REPORTING RESULTS

In order for evaluation efforts to inform the process of change, results from evaluation activities will likely need to be made available to numerous players in the educational system. Findings can be presented in a variety of ways although written reports are the most commonly used format for disseminating evaluation findings. It is important that the evaluator know the potential audiences of the report and can tailor the findings in a way that is accessible to each interested party. It may be the case that the evaluator does not know the answer to many of the questions listed below. If this is the case, ASK! Most often people welcome the opportunity to explain their needs and interests. This section includes worksheets to help guide you in creating a report.

## Some guiding questions about reporting results

Before you begin writing a report, you may want to revisit some of the planning work you have done. In addition, you may want to step back from the evaluation and consider the big picture of what it reveals. Some of the important questions to revisit and new questions to ask include the following:

*What were the original goals for conducting the evaluation?*
Most programs conduct assessments for improving their program as well as meeting requirements for accreditation or certification. It is important to keep these goals in mind while writing a report of the findings so that the data is presented in a way that is aligned with the purpose of the evaluation.

*What issues/topics received many responses?*
One of the ways an evaluator gains understanding of a phenomenon is by considering the quantity and nature of the comments relating to various dimensions of an educational program. In addition to noting the frequency with which participants address a topic, it is equally important that evaluators note the descriptions of topics and issues. It may be the case that two out of twenty-five participants experience discrimination. At first glance that may not seem like a major issue since only two had the experience. However, if those two are the only two men in a group of women, and if their discrimination related to their gender, then it is a significant finding.

*Who are the audiences that would be interested in evaluation results?*
Different audiences will be interested in different aspects of the evaluation. Policy makers and administrators may be interested in program-level issues, such as whether the number of credits/course required is adequate, or whether a course should be added or deleted. Faculty, department leaders and program planners may be interested in whether the methods of instruction in a program or course are facilitating learning. Students and alumni may be interested in whether their voices were appropriately represented.

*How is the audience going to use the data?*

In deciding how to report the results of an evaluation, it is important to consider how the findings will be used. If the results will be distributed to a funding source, a more detailed description of the findings may be required. In contrast, if a department would like to present findings to its faculty at a retreat or planning session, a summary of the findings on overhead slides may be more appropriate.

*What are your resources to do reporting?*
While it may be that a formal report would most benefit the audience it may also be that the available resources are not adequate for such a task. Or it may be that an interested party would like to present some of the results at a conference. It is important to budget adequate funding for reporting results early on in the planning process. Note that a common pitfall of new evaluators is to leave inadequate time to report on results.

*Who owns the product?*
Clarifications about who owns the results of the evaluation should be made prior to the time results are being disseminated. It may be the case that someone other than the author/evaluator wants to reproduce some of the findings.

*What do you do with "sensitive" information?*
It may be the case that some of the results suggest dissatisfaction or difficulty with some aspect of an educational program. While reporting on "sensitive" findings may be challenging, it can be done in a way that opens the door for improvement. Names and places should be made non-identifiable by using XXX's to fill the space and other information that reveals identity should be eliminated. Comments that express dissatisfaction can be phrased in terms of "limitations" or "areas for improvement."

## Key components in the report

Consider the following major parts of a final report.

*Introduction*
In many cases if there is not an abstract or executive summary, people interested in the results of a program evaluation will read only the introduction and the conclusion of a report. The primary purpose of an introduction is to set the stage for the remainder of the report by highlighting the purpose of the evaluation and the intended audiences for the findings. The introduction is also a place to clarify contextual issues surrounding the study and discuss its limitations. It also should provide a brief "reader's guide" to the report by listing what will discussed in each section.

*Methods*
This section is where methods of data collection are described. Included in discussion of methods are the types of instruments or protocol used (such as survey), the procedure by which data was collected, the number of respondents and/or issues with responding, and representativeness of sample. This section also provides a brief discussion of the analysis process.

*Findings/Themes*

This section is where the findings are described and analyzed and usually comprises the bulk of the report. The interpretation of the findings is as important as the presentation, and is perhaps the most sophisticated aspect of doing an assessment. In writing a report on the findings, it is important that the writer provide a guide for the reader in terms of relating the findings to the questions. One way to organize the report is around the survey or interview questions. Another way to organize a report is based on the major issues addressed through responses. In either format, both quantitative and qualitative data can be used and interwoven to create a thorough picture of the findings. If the primary methodology is interview or open-ended survey, it is important that the report represents as authentically as possible the voice of the participants. Tables and charts can be used to present quantitative data in an organized and readable fashion.

*Conclusion*

This is the section where the evaluator can synthesize different findings from the evaluation. In summarizing the overarching findings, it is important to not introduce new material, but rather focus on what has been presented before. Depending on your situation, it may be appropriate to make recommendations based on the summary. Most often it is not appropriate to make recommendations unless otherwise advised to do so by the coordinator of the evaluation.

*Appendices*

This is the place to attach copies of instruments, protocol, and other reference materials that will help the reader understand the questions asked and other relevant content.

**WORKSHEET FOR REPORTING RESULTS**

**Before you begin consider the following questions**

1. What are your resource constraints for writing a report?

2. To whom should the results of the evaluation be given?

3. How will the results be used? *(Examples: Internal feedback, documentation for accreditation)*

4. Who will have rights to reproducing the product?

**Introduction**

1. What was the purpose of the evaluation? What issues/ topics were evaluation planners interested in?

2. Are there contextual issues surrounding the evaluation that the reader should know about? (*Examples: Accreditation review coming up in one year; major changes in the program)*

**Methods/sample**

1. What instruments were used? *(Attach copy in Appendix)*

2. What steps were taken to ensure confidentiality?

3. What was the sequence of events for data collection?

4. Were there difficulties in garnering participation? If so, what was done to encourage participation?

5. Compared with the whole, how representative was the responding sample?

| | Number in total population | Percent in total population | Number in sample | Percent in sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | | | |
| **Ethnicity** | | | | |
| **Gender** | | | | |
| **GPA** | | | | |

**Findings**

1. What were the four biggest issues/topics that arose from the evaluation? (*Example: Career advising is limited)*

2. Were there any "sensitive" issues that arose during the assessment?

3. If you used multiple instruments, how does the information compare between instruments?

**Conclusion**

1. What are the key points you want the reader to leave thinking about?

2. Based on the findings, do you have any recommendations?

## SAMPLE ASSESSMENT REPORT TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Section 9
# ACTING ON RESULTS

Evaluation results are most likely to influence decision making when evaluators and top administrators agree on the goals of the assessment and perceive information about outcomes as an important source of feedback about organizational effectiveness (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1977). The degree to which evaluators involve others in the process may affect the degree to which interested parties act on results. Generally, the higher the level of participation, the greater the involvement in acting on results. It is important to involve all the potential stakeholders (administration, faculty, staff, students) in deciding how to act on results. The evaluator can play a crucial role in facilitating action from findings.

In creating a plan to act on evaluation findings there are a number of potential challenges to be aware of because they can affect participation.

**1. Gaps between evaluators and faculty/staff/administrators.** These gaps can be in understanding of assessment objectives, communication about the process, and language that can be alienating.

**2. Faculty resistance.** Faculty may resist if asked to devote effort to evaluation when it is not rewarded with release from other responsibilities or if they do not understand the purpose of the evaluation. Some faculty are hesitant to participate in evaluation activities because they assume the evaluation will be a personal critique of their teaching rather than an evaluation of the entire program. The evaluator should clarify that the purposes of program evaluation are to look at the program as a whole.

**3. Costs.** Administrators may be wary of evaluation costs. One way to gain support is to use as much existing data as possible. Find out what is available through campus records, etc.

**4. Timing and follow through.** Evaluation activities scheduled during busy times are likely to be met with resistance by participants who are already busy. In addition, if there is no follow-through with the findings, participants may feel that their time was wasted and be less inclined to participate in the future.

**5. Consider the work culture.** On a final note, it is important to consider the culture in which you are working. People will be more inclined to participate and act on evaluation activities that are intended to improve educational programs if the social environment in which they are working is one that supports and rewards high quality teaching and effective learning.

## WORKSHEET 1 FOR ACTING ON RESULTS

This worksheet is intended to begin the process of acting on results. Ideally, it should be completed by those who will be involved in the change process. Once the changes are underway, or at a designated time (such as the time identified on the timeline), faculty, staff and administrators should revisit this plan and make necessary revisions. Worksheet 2 is intended as a follow-up guide.

| **Topic or issue to address** | **Action Statement** | **Time-line** | **Responsible Party** | **Indicators of Success** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Example: Inadequate curricular advising* | *Provide faculty training in requirements* | *Will complete round one by end of fall semester* | *Faculty chairperson and dean of college* | *Each incoming student will be assigned an advisor, will meet for ½ hour each semester to discuss courses.* |
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## WORKSHEET 2 FOR ACTING ON RESULTS

| Topic or Issue to Address | Actions Achieved | Barriers to Completion | Revised Timeline | Revised Indicators |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Example: Inadequate curricular advising* | *Designed training curriculum* | *Department chair on sabbatical* | *Same* | *Faculty trained by associate chair* |
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# Section 10
# RESOURCES

This section lists a variety of resources. It contains the following: campus-based assessment resources; campus-based resources for student/alumni data; campus-based resources to which students can be referred; names of faculty and staff experienced with assessment processes; Internet resources on assessment; national sources of statistics and indicators; and literature focused on assessment.

## CAMPUS-BASED ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

**Assessment Council - Office of the Provost**
Contact: Eden Inoway-Ronnie
Rm 150 Bascom Hall
ph# 265-5975; email: inoway@mail.bascom.wisc.edu

**Creating a Collaborative Learning Environment (CCLE)**
Contact: Kathy Sanders or Chris Carlson-Dakes
Rm 271 Bascom
ph# 263-4259; email: ccle@macc.wisc.edu

**LEAD Center**
Contact: Susan Millar
1402 University Avenue
4th Floor
ph# 265-5943; email: smillar@engr.wisc.edu

> *The LEAD Center maintains a library of assessment and evaluation literature and resources that can be searched by interested faculty and staff of the UW-Madison. LEAD Center researchers can assist with identifying relevant resources and can be hired to help programs conduct assessments.*

**Office of Quality Improvement (OQI)**
Contact: Kathleen Paris
Rm 195 Bascom Hall
ph# 263-6856; email: paris@mail.bascom.wisc.edu

**Testing and Evaluation (T & E)**
Contact: Allen Cohen
Rm 366 Educational Sciences Building
ph# 262-5863; email: cohen@tne.edsci.wisc.edu

**University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC)**
Contact: James A. Sweet
Rm 2412 Social Sciences Building
ph# 262-2182; email: sweet@ssc.wisc.edu

## CAMPUS-BASED RESOURCES FOR STUDENT/ALUMNI DATA

**Office of the Registrar**
Contact: Dorothy Weidner
60 A. W. Peterson Building
750 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53706

**Office of the Dean of Students**
75 Bascom Hall
500 Lincoln Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608-5700

**Office of Budget, Planning and Analysis/Data Digest**
100 Bascom Hall
Madison, WI 53706
http://www.wisc.edu/obpa

**Graduate School**
http://www.wisc.edu/grad/

## CAMPUS-BASED RESOURCES/ADVOCATES FOR STUDENTS

**Campus Assistance Center**
263-2400
420 N. Lake Street
Madison, WI 53706
www.wisc.edu/cac

**University Health Services**
***Clinical***
262-3016
1552 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53706

***Counseling***
262-1744
905 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53706
www.uhs.wisc.edu

## FACULTY RESOURCES

Wayne Becker, Professor
Department of Botany
Rm B115 Birge Hall
262-5833
wbecker@facstaff.wisc.edu

Sarah K. A. Pfatteicher, Director of Assessment
College of Engineering
1402 University Avenue
265-5925
spfatt@engr.wisc.edu

Barbara Duerst, Clinical and Experiential Instructor
School of Pharmacy
Rm 5241 Chamberlain Hall
262-5703
bld@pharmacy.wisc.edu

Wendy Way, Professor
School of Human Ecology
Rm 120 Human Ecology Bldg.
262-1963
wlway@facstaff.wisc.edu

> *If you would be interested in having your name included here in future editions please contact Dianne Bowcock (see Section 1, pg. 4)*

## NATIONAL SOURCES OF STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Chronicle of Higher Education, annual Almanac issue (appears in late summer)

Digest of Education Statistics and The Condition of Education, each produced annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education)

Science & Engineering Indicators, produced annually by the National Science Board (National Science Foundation)

## INTERNET RESOURCES ON ASSESSMENT

**UW-Madison, Assessment Council: http://publications/provost/assess/manual**

**Alverno College: http://www.alverno.edu**

This is the home page of Alverno College, Milwaukee. Alverno's ability-based learning program is internationally recognized and is mentioned in almost all of the web sites on assessment. Provides information on Alverno's eight abilities, which include communication, analysis, problem solving, valuing, social interaction, global perspective, effective citizenship, and aesthetic response. NOTE: To find assessment information in this site, follow the easy-to-find links.

**American Association for Higher Education: http://www.aahe.org**

An excellent higher education assessment resource site. Provides information about current publications; the AAHE Assessment Forum (the primary national network connecting and supporting higher education stakeholders involved in assessment); and articles about assessment from the AAHE Bulletin.

**Assessment and Evaluation on the Web: http://ericac.net/INTBOD.STM**

This site covers everything from pedagogy in educational measurement to assessment organizations.

## LITERATURE FOCUSED ON ASSESSMENT


**Apps, J. W. (1985). Improving practice in continuing education. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass.**

*Provides a philosophical bent and engages the reader in a process of reflection about the teaching of adults. It provides a guide for conducting a critical analysis of programs.*

**Banta, T.W., Lund, J.P., Black, K.E., Oberlander, F.W. (1996). Assessment in practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.**

*A very thorough all-purpose guide to assessment. Uses case studies to illustrate concepts.*

**Caffarella, R. S. (1995). Program planning for adults: a comprehensive guide for adult educators, trainers, and staff developers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.**

*Focuses on planning educational programs for adults. It is designed to lead the reader through the process of planning a program and includes a chapter on evaluation relating to program planning.*

**LeCompte, J.P., & Preissle, J. (1993). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research. (2nd. ed.) San Diego, Academic Press.**

*An excellent introductory book. It is a scholarly book well-grounded in philosophical, theoretical and empirical literature (and has a 30-page bibliography). It is a methodological book and chapters are structured around primary procedural topics (researcher role, sampling, data collection, analysis).*

**Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1989). Designing qualitative research. Beverly Hills: Sage.**
*Easy to read. It uses examples of actual research studies as examples of pragmatic challenges that arise in designing and conducting qualitative inquiry.*

**Merriam, S.B., & Simpson, E. L. (1995). A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults. Malabar, FL: Krieger.**
*Guides the reader through all the various steps of conducting an evaluation or research study and provides information about the various philosophical frameworks which underpin choices about methods and analysis. Also addresses ethical issues*

**Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A source book of new methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.**
*Provides a format for analyzing and reporting qualitative data.*

**Patton, M.Q. (1997). Utilization-focused evaluation: the new century text. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.**
*Both practical and theoretical. It focuses on how to conduct program evaluations with each chapter containing a review of relevant literature and actual case examples.*

**Patton, M.Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Beverly Hills: Sage.**
*Provides an overview of all major aspects of qualitative design and analysis, with an evaluation focus.*

**Struass, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory principles and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.**
*Describes analysis strategies in grounded theory studies. Easy to read.*

**Wolcott, H. F. (1990). Writing up qualitative research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.**
*Easy-to-read practical advice for writing up findings from qualitative studies.*

**Worthen, B. R., Sanders, J. R., and Fitzpatrick, J.L. (1997). Program evaluation: alternative approaches and practical guidelines. NY: Longman.**
*Presents a variety of approaches to doing program evaluation with practical guidelines for planning and implementing program evaluations. Also discusses analyzing and reporting on findings.*