

Graduating Senior/Alumni/Employer Surveys

Surveys that request perceptions by students or alumni are called “indirect measures.” They are not considered sufficient by themselves as evidence that students have reached specific learning goals. However, they can be very useful in measuring other program or institutional goals.

Nichols and Nichols (2005) indicate that research has shown that responses to **graduating senior surveys** do not differ markedly from responses to alumni surveys. In addition, it is much easier to get a high response rate from students who are still enrolled than it is a year after they have graduated. These surveys can be particularly useful in supporting direct evidence if they include questions about the extent to which students believe that have achieved the program goals.

Although **alumni surveys** suffer from several administration issues, they are the only way to investigate experiences of students after they have left the institution. For example, alumni surveys can be used to assess the extent to which students continued learning or provided service to the community, which are frequently goals that institutions are interested in. According to Nichols and Nichols (2005), response rates to alumni surveys can be increased (and less biased) if they are sent out by the program, rather than the alumni association, so that they are not viewed as attempts to solicit contributions. In addition, requests for specific income information should be avoided (ranges are better).

Surveys can be purchased commercially or locally developed. Example organizations that produce surveys include American College Test, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Educational Testing Service and Noel-Levitz. Commercially developed surveys can be used to make comparisons across institutions. However, they are costly and it is difficult to make them look as though they are coming from the institution. In addition, they may not address the program goals of specific programs. A locally developed survey is time-consuming and cannot be used to compare across institutions, but it can be tailored to the specific goals and can include institution-specific identifying information.

The use of **employee surveys** is an excellent way to assess the ability of graduates to transfer their knowledge to the real world. Nichols and Nichols (2005) suggest that strategies for increasing low response rates include keeping the survey short and providing evidence that the student has given permission for his or her supervisor to share perceptions of the student’s work. A program might request permission for such information from the graduate prior to graduation and then attach the permission to the employer survey.

For additional information about attitudinal surveys and student learning assessment in general, see Nichols, J.O. & Nichols, K.W. (2005). *A road map for improvement of student learning and support services through assessment*. New York: Agathon Press.