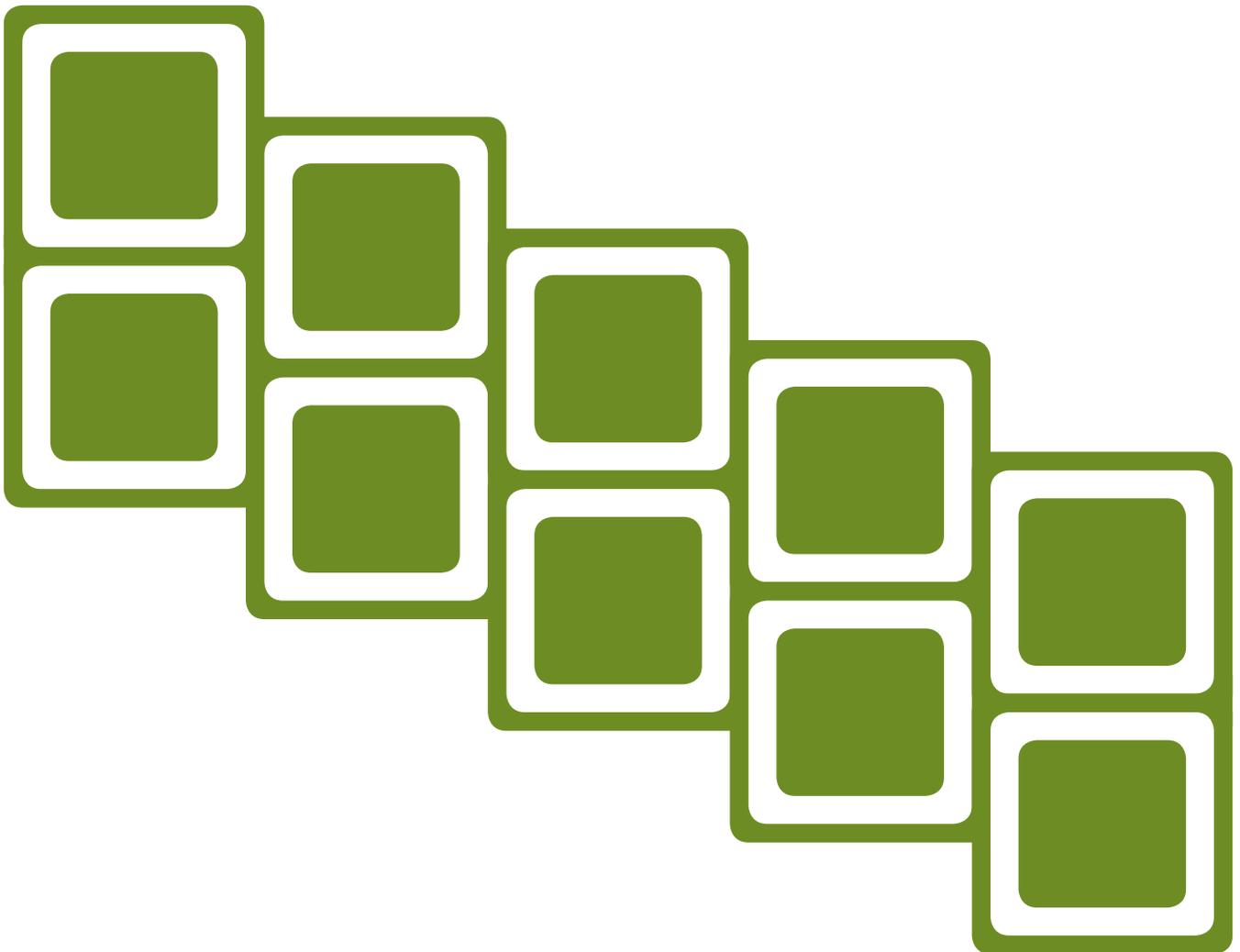


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Summer Surveys: Findings from the 2015 NAASS Pre-Conference Questionnaire

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Abstract

Surveys are commonly used to gather valuable summer student and faculty feedback. These ideas can encourage us, as summer session administrators, to refine our summer programs and to create opportunities to help students succeed in their academic goals. This paper summarizes key findings from the authors' 2015 North American Association of Summer Sessions (NAASS) Pre-Conference Questionnaire, which assessed the use of surveys by summer session administrators. Results were presented at the NAASS annual conference in Montreal, Quebec, in November 2015.

While many colleges and universities regularly survey their summer students and faculty, most published papers have reported on the results of these surveys (Fish & Kowalik, 2009; Grobsmith, 1996; Keller, 1982; Savory, 2007; Smith, 2011) rather than on the efficacy of surveys to inform best practices for summer session courses and programs. The 1997 issue of *Summer Academe* contains a survey synopsis listing descriptions of surveys conducted by North American Association of Summer Sessions (NAASS) members from 1992 to 1997. Topics included marketing, reasons for attending, student satisfaction, effectiveness, needs assessment, and quality (Horner, 1997). As with the previous articles, Horner's synopsis focuses on the results of the surveys, rather than the use of surveys in general. An exception is Kowalik's 2005 paper focusing on the process used to develop two consistent and reliable survey instruments (Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Motivation Inventory and Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Institutional Choice Inventory), beginning with literature reviews and correspondence with summer session directors, followed by developing prototypes that were then vetted by a panel of summer session administrators to "enhance face validity, appeal, understanding, and ease of self-administration" (p. 47).

The purpose of the authors of the Pre-Conference Questionnaire was to gain insights into survey use by NAASS member institutions in order to better understand general survey usage within summer session departments and units, including motivations, challenges, and barriers that members experience when surveying their summer students and faculty. The intent of this paper is to share self-reported data on the use of surveys and provide information for continued research and education that could further the understanding of uses and best practices.

Survey Methodology and Administration

SurveyMonkey was used for the questionnaire development and administration. The questionnaire asked about institutional type and use of surveys for credit programs and courses during summer session in 2015. Included were questions about tools, administration, experiences, and best practices. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for additional answers and comments.

Twenty-three questions attempted to assess the use of surveys for summer sessions, including a set of questions that evaluated the reasons for non-usage. A skip-logic feature was used so that the number of questions visible depended on the individual respondent's answers to previous questions. The maximum number of questions visible was 20; the minimum was 6.

In September 2015, the NAASS executive secretary sent an invitation to participate in the survey to all NAASS institutional representatives. The email contained a web link to the survey and a request to forward the link to the most appropriate person at their institution. One email reminder was sent before the survey was closed in mid-October.

Results

Of the 192 institutional representatives contacted, 50 responses were received for a response rate of 26%, representing 20 private and 30 public institutions. Forty-four percent had fall 2014 enrollments of 20,000 or more students, 26% between 10,000 and 19,999 students, and 18% between 5,000 and 9,999 students. The remaining 12% enrolled fewer than 5,000 students.

The questionnaire found that 73% of the responding institutions used surveys to evaluate their summer 2015 credit courses and programs. Twenty-seven percent of respondents, of which 77% were public, indicated that they did not conduct summer session surveys in 2015.

Survey Types and Response Rates

Respondents were asked to identify the types of surveys they conducted in 2015, including student and faculty satisfaction surveys, course evaluations, faculty evaluations, interest surveys (e.g., students' interest or non-interest in attending summer session or course preferences), marketing surveys, and institutional summer session surveys. An "other" option allowed participants the opportunity to provide more information on the type of surveys they conducted. Respondents were also asked for the average response rate by survey type. As Table 1 shows, summer faculty evaluations (59%) and faculty satisfaction surveys (51%) had the highest average response rate among all survey types, followed by course evaluations (34%). In contrast, institutional summer session surveys and comprehensive summer session student surveys (i.e., students' satisfaction, as well as interests and marketing efforts), with 13% and 18% respectively, had the lowest response rates. The small sample size must be considered in discussions on data interpretation.

Table 1: Response rate to 2015 summer session surveys by NAASS member institutions, by survey type.

Survey type	N*	Response rate				Weighted Average
		0–25%	26–50%	51–75%	76–100%	
Summer faculty evaluations	7	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	59%
Summer session faculty satisfaction surveys	2	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	51%
Summer course evaluations	11	1 (9%)	3 (27%)	5 (45%)	2 (18%)	34%
Summer session marketing surveys	6	4 (67%)	1 (17%)	0 (0)	1 (17%)	29%
Summer session student satisfaction surveys	8	5 (63%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	28%

Survey type	N*	Response rate				Weighted Average
		0–25%	26–50%	51–75%	76–100%	
Interest surveys (e.g., in future summer programs)	7	6 (86%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	23%
Summer session student comprehensive satisfaction / interest / marketing surveys	10	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18%
Institutional surveys containing questions about summer session	2	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13%

*N = number of institutions

Survey Administration and Responsibility

Summer surveys can be administered by a variety of departments, especially when multiple surveys are conducted. Respondents were asked to check all departments administering summer surveys at their institutions from a list that included the summer session office, assessment office, faculty development, provost’s office, marketing department, institutional research office, and individual departments and colleges. Although the numbers differ between public and private institutions, the results show that the administration of surveys lies most often within the summer session office, followed by the provost’s office.

At private institutions, 75% of the respondents stated that the summer session office administers their surveys. Others reported that the responsibility lies with the provost’s office (38%), the research office (25%), or the marketing department (13%). At public institutions, 67% indicated that their summer session office administers the surveys, 27% responded that the responsibility lies with the provost’s office, and 7% indicated that the research office and the marketing department administer the surveys.

Respondents were asked to provide the title of the person within the summer session office who administered the surveys. Directors or executive directors (56%) have the primary responsibility for surveys, followed by marketing specialists (31%), program managers and coordinators (19%), research associates (19%), vice presidents or vice provosts (13%), deans (6%), and communications specialists (6%).

Incentives

Most responding institutions (59%) did not use incentives in administering their summer session 2015 surveys. Of the 41% that did use incentives, 89% were public and 11% were private institutions. The most-mentioned incentives were gift cards (e.g., Walmart, Amazon, iTunes, campus

bookstore, local restaurants) and cash cards, while a few institutions entered respondents into drawings for electronic devices such as tablets and iPad minis. At one institution, students who completed the survey could view their grades earlier.

A cross-correlation of the incentive question with the overall response rate shows an interesting result. The absolute overall survey response rate of the institutions that did not use incentives to students for completing surveys in 2015 was about 10% higher than the rates of those that did. Again, the small number of respondents and the corresponding large statistical margin of error should be kept in mind.

Survey Tools

Respondents were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with nine survey tools on a five-point scale: Client Heartbeat, Google Forms, PollDaddy, Qualtrics, QuestionPro, SurveyGizmo, SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, and pen and paper. SurveyMonkey and Qualtrics were most often used and received the highest average rating (4.5 out of 5) among all survey tools. Pen and paper were also commonly used, but the average satisfaction of 2.8 was considerably lower than that of the online tools.

Sharing the Results

The majority of institutions that used surveys in 2015 shared their results with academic deans (78%), faculty and academic departments (72%), and vice president or vice provost (61%). Of these institutions, 44% indicated that they shared the results with a director or executive director, 28% with an associate or assistant director, 17% with the university chancellor, and 17% with students. Only 11% of the respondents shared their survey results with their university president. One third of the respondents that answered “other” provided the results to their academic senate or vice president for enrollment management. These data are not straightforward to interpret because job titles and responsibilities often differ among institutions.

Most institutions did not share their results publicly. Of the 17% of responding institutions that publicly released their survey results, email or posting on the university’s or the registrar’s website was mentioned. Private institutions appeared more likely to widely share their survey results than public institutions. Thirty-three percent of private institutions publicly released their results compared to 8% of public institutions.

Survey Challenges

The questionnaire asked participants to check all the challenges they experienced while surveying summer session. Low response rates ranked the highest at 43%. Respondents also felt challenged by the time required to analyze the survey (38%), and by analyzing open-ended questions (38%). Keeping the survey short (24%), technical issues (24%), the time required to develop surveys

(19%), and user-friendliness of survey tools (14%) were also selected. Twenty-four percent of respondents wrote “other” challenges including the design of appropriate survey questions and data access issues. Only one respondent experienced no challenges while surveying summer session 2015.

Advice from Respondents

Respondents were provided the opportunity to share advice about conducting summer session surveys. Eleven answers were received. One respondent recommended working with the information technology department to minimize technological issues that may arise in online surveys, especially if the user is attempting to send an email to all students using the university system.

Ideas offered for increasing response rates included keeping surveys short, using survey logic tools when possible, personalizing email invitations, and sending reminders to those individuals who have not completed the survey. One respondent suggested using open-ended questions as a way of obtaining information the first time a survey is used and if the time for in-depth analysis is available.

NAASS members were also invited to share their most useful survey questions. Most of the respondents evaluated motivational factors, obstacles, student experiences, summer scheduling, and marketing. Questions submitted by respondents include:

- “Regarding your decision process to take a summer class, what were some of your obstacles or concerns?”
- “Why did you take a course this summer?”
- “How did you hear of Summer Sessions?”
- “Would publishing the course schedule sooner affect your decision whether to attend summer earlier?”

How Survey Results Improved Summer Programs

Fourteen survey respondents (28%) provided examples of how previous surveys prompted changes to certain aspects of their summer programs. These included offering scholarships and extending evening and weekend library hours. One institution created a summer activities board in response to complaints about too few activities in summer. Some departments increased their course offerings and began offering more major courses. One respondent answered that surveys helped evaluate the effectiveness of various marketing campaign components. Survey results have provided departments with quantitative and qualitative data about student demographics and improved their scheduling to provide a more student-centric summer schedule.

Survey Barriers

Of the total respondents, 27% did not conduct summer surveys in 2015. Staffing issues (62%) and time issues (38%) appeared to be the major barriers. Some respondents indicated that the responsibility for summer session surveys lies in another department (23%) and that past low response rates (23%) kept them from continuing to use surveys. Other reasons for not conducting surveys included department and union decisions.

Although barriers were evident, respondents who did not conduct surveys in 2015 indicated they would like to conduct surveys in the future. They expressed a desire to learn more about survey types (69%), ideas for question design (62%), efficient data analysis (62%), recommendations on best tools (54%), and methods to increase survey response rates (38%).

Study Limitations

There were several limitations of the questionnaire that impacted the overall response rate and, conversely, the non-response bias. First, the timing of the questionnaire overlapped the request to participate in the Joint Statistical Report. Second, members of the Western Region were invited to participate in a survey sponsored by the Western Association of Summer Session Administrators (WASSA). The questionnaire response period overlapped the WASSA annual conference. Finally, limitations were also caused by the methodology. As discussed, NAASS institutional representatives received a web link to the survey via an email from the executive secretary. Because of this approach, targeted reminders to non-respondents were not possible.

Recommendations

NAASS members should be reminded of the Kowalik-Fish survey instruments as a possible way to ease constraints on institutions struggling with constructing and administering surveys. Widespread use of these instruments could provide institutions with valid and tested survey methods without the need to create them, and these instruments could also set industry standards for surveying summer students, thereby allowing for inter-institutional comparisons.

Many survey best practices are available on the Internet, including advice on length, breadth, timing, use of incentives, and question construction. Although these resources, along with electronic communications, make surveys more accessible than ever, students and faculty are often inundated with electronic messages that present even greater challenges to the rate of return. Therefore, further studies would be useful on specific aspects of surveying, such as a comparison of survey tools, suggestions for best practices in structuring survey questions, an analysis of timing, and an understanding of how survey results effect change in the quality of summer programs. Results from these studies as well as conference sessions, webinars, and other opportunities for NAASS members to share best survey practices are recommended.

Conclusion

The 2015 Pre-Conference Questionnaire shows that summer administrators use survey results in order to create opportunities that assist students in achieving their academic goals. While many NAASS members are challenged with time constraints, resource barriers, and construction of survey questions, webinars and conference sessions can provide valuable opportunities for members to exchange ideas on how to implement successful surveys. Despite the challenges, most respondents see the benefits of surveying their students and faculty in order to enhance their summer programs.

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