



Using Additional Questions with the CSS

Adding Additional Questions to the Survey

Campuses have the option of adding up to 20 additional multiple choice questions and up to 5 open-ended questions of specific local interest at the end of their questionnaires. Information relevant to both types of additional questions is presented first, followed by specific information for each type of question.

We urge you to “pilot test” your additional questions with current students. Many campuses find that students often interpret questions differently than the institution intended.

Although your campus is responsible for developing the local additional questions, CIRP staff is available to review and comment on any of these materials. We would also appreciate receiving a courtesy copy of your additional questions. Please send them directly to heri@ucla.edu.

In addition to drafting, pilot testing, and incorporating your additional questions into the administration of the CSS, it is also important to consult with your local Institutional Review Board (IRB). Your campus may require you to submit any additional items for their review and approval. If your campus believes an additional question to be of a sensitive nature, you must submit that question to HERI for our consideration one month before the CSS administration opens.

Asking Additional Questions of a Sensitive Nature

When designing additional questions, there are special circumstances to consider if you ask students to provide what would be considered “sensitive information” by the federal government. If this is the case, there are additional steps you need to take. CIRP strongly urges you to consider very carefully whether asking for “sensitive information” is appropriate in the context of a general campus climate survey. “Sensitive information,” according to the National Institutes of Health, includes (but is not limited to):

*information related to sexual attitudes/preferences/practices; information relating to the use of alcohol, drugs or other addictive products; information pertaining to illegal conduct; information that, if released, might be damaging to an individual’s financial standing, employability, or reputation within the community or might lead to social stigmatization or discrimination; information pertaining to an individual’s psychological well-being or mental health.*¹

It is up to local officials at your institution, not CIRP staff, to determine if your questions ask for “sensitive information.” If you have decided to ask such questions, you must 1) submit your additional sensitive questions to the UCLA IRB for review and approval before administering the CSS, 2) obtain an NIH Certificate of Confidentiality², and 3) modify the Survey Information Sheet to reflect that there are sensitive additional questions being asked, explain what “sensitive information” would be required to be reported (as explained in the next section) and describe the protections afforded by the Certificate of Confidentiality that your institution will obtain³. The UCLA IRB must also review your modified Survey Information Sheet.

¹ <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/faqs.htm>

² <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/>

³ The NIH Certificates of Confidentiality Kiosk identifies the nature of the information that must be provided to subjects to describe the protections afforded by the Certificate of Confidentiality, and also provides an example of appropriate language. [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/appl_extramural.htm]



Obligation to Provide Referrals

If your additional questions ask respondents to provide “sensitive information” such as drug use, binge drinking, eating disorders, sexual behavior and/or gambling, you must also provide information about referrals to mental health care programs and counselors. For example, if you were to ask about binge drinking, you should also include information about who to contact on or near your campus to address a substance abuse problem, providing an address and phone number. You will need to provide an addendum to the Survey Information Sheet to include this information on the “Welcome” page. This addendum to describe the provision of referrals to mental health care programs and counselors must be reviewed and approved by the UCLA IRB. Additionally, this type of information would be covered by a Certificate of Confidentiality and are not issues that would be reportable to a third party as detailed below.

Obligation to Report to a Third Party and Break Participant Confidentiality

In some states, the law requires researchers to disclose information they have concerning suicidal ideation, child abuse and elder abuse to appropriate third parties. Thus, questions surrounding these areas are not just sensitive but require institutions to break subject confidentiality in order to protect the participant, or others, from harm. If you ask such additional questions, you must provide an addendum to the Survey Information Sheet that you provide to participants to inform them of the researcher’s obligation to disclose any respondent’s intent to harm him or herself (suicide ideation) or others (elder or child abuse). These modifications to the Survey Information Sheet must be reviewed and approved by the UCLA IRB.

Again, CIRP strongly encourages that you consider the appropriateness of such additional questions in a general campus climate survey and recommends against asking about these issues with this survey instrument. CIRP also suggests that you confer with your campus health officials before including sensitive questions and for any necessary referral information.

If you have questions about potentially “sensitive” items that you may be intending to ask as part of your set of additional questions, or would like more information about the process for obtaining approval to include these items, please contact Dr. Kevin Eagan, CIRP Director, at 310.825.1925 or heri@ucla.edu.

Closed-Ended Questions

Close-ended questions may be added at the end of the paper and/or web versions of the survey. At the end of the paper questionnaire (lower portion of page 4) there is a section for the responses to the additional questions. You will need to distribute to your students a sheet containing the additional questions. Closed-ended questions will display on a separate page after the last questions on the web-based CSS. You will have the opportunity to upload your additional questions during the order customization process. Each question permits a maximum of five response options (A through E). *Students may mark only one response option.* Fewer than five response options may be used for any of the questions.

Responses to closed-ended questions will be included in your data file, and the statistics for these questions will be included in your institutional profile report. Because the text of your additional questions and response options cannot be included in your data file or institutional profile report, we strongly suggest retaining a copy with your CSS information.



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Open-Ended Questions (web-only option)

Open-ended questions will display on a separate page, after any additional closed-ended questions you may offer. They cannot be mixed in with the closed-ended questions. You have the option of using a text box (for one word answers) or a text area for longer answers.

Because the text of your additional questions cannot be included in your response file, we strongly suggest retaining a copy with your CSS information.