



COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM
at the HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT UCLA

Information for Campuses Using Additional Questions

Adding Additional Questions to the Survey

At the end of the questionnaire, campuses have the option of adding up to 20 additional multiple choice questions of specific local interest. If you choose to utilize this option, do not forget to include instructions to students concerning how to answer the additional questions.

Each question permits a maximum of five alternatives (A through E). *Students should mark only one alternative.* Fewer than five response alternatives may be used for any of the questions, in which case students should be instructed to choose only among those circles that apply, starting from the left.

Student responses to these optional 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 CIRP Freshman Survey information.

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

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

In addition to drafting, pilot testing, and incorporating your additional questions into the administration of the CIRP Freshman Survey, it is also important to consult with your local Institutional Review Board (IRB). Your campus may require you to submit these additional items for their review and approval. Additionally, 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 administration.

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. HERI strongly urges you to

consider very carefully if asking for “sensitive information” is appropriate in the context of a general 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 HERI, 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 CIRP Freshman Survey, 2) obtain a NIH Certificate of Confidentiality,² and 3) modify the Student Information Sheet for students to reflect that there are sensitive additional questions being asked, explain what “sensitive information” being asked in the additional questions is required to be reported (as explained in the next section), and describe the protections afforded by the Certificate of Confidentiality that your institution will obtain.³ The UCLA IRB must also review your modified Student Information Sheet.

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, and provide an address and phone number. You will need to provide an addendum to the “Survey Information Sheet” (SIS) to include this information. If you are administering a web survey, this information can be included on the “Welcome” page. These types of information would be covered by a Certificate of Confidentiality that your campus would apply for separately. They are not issues that would be reportable to a third party as detailed below. Modifications to the Student Information Sheet to describe the provision of referrals to mental health care programs and counselors must also be reviewed and approved by the UCLA IRB.

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 Report and Break Participant Confidentiality to a Third Party

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 Student Information Sheet that you provide to students to inform students of the researcher's obligation to disclose respondent's intent to harm him or herself (suicide ideation) or others (elder or child abuse). These modifications to the Student Information Sheet must be reviewed and approved by the UCLA IRB.

Again, HERI strongly encourages that you consider the appropriateness of such additional questions in a general survey and recommends against asking about these issues with this survey instrument. HERI also suggests that you confer with your campus health officials before including questions of a sensitive nature 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, Interim CIRP Director, at (310) 825-1925 or heri@ucla.edu.