Institutional Surveying Policy

# CONTENTS

* **Purpose**
* **Administrative Goal**
* **Scope**
* **Background**
* **Definitions**
* **Policy**
* **Process, Resources and Protocols**
* **Further Information**
* **Cross References**

# PURPOSE

This policy defines the conditions under which a survey intended for current Penn State students, faculty, and/or staff must undergo a review and approval process designed to i) improve the quality of information gathered through surveys, ii) to monitor, provide guidance, and adjust, as necessary, the survey activity on our University community, and iii) ensure that the survey, its findings, and the data collected are appropriately available throughout the University.

# ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL

The goal of this policy is to provide information and guidance to members of the University community seeking to survey students, faculty and/or staff in order to ensure appropriate timing within the framework of the academic calendar, avoidance of duplication or simultaneous efforts, and to provide resources and guidance regarding survey administration efforts.

# SCOPE

This policy is framed to provide guidance and direction on surveys used to solicit information from students, faculty or staff. The policy applies to surveys from Penn State community members, including faculty, staff, and students; and from external bodies. This policy is subordinate to existing policies that govern academic research surveying that is done within the scope of academic research protocols or protections, such as those policies and guidelines as defined and prescribed under the jurisdiction of the Vice President for Research; for example, this does not modify or change the oversight required by the parameters of the University’s Institutional Review Board. In addition, the scope of this policy recognizes that there may be contracted third-party survey administrators used by the University, to which this policy applies, with appropriate applications and parameters defined in accordance with any existing policies.

# BACKGROUND

Surveys are often convenient and cost-effective tools used to identify opportunities for improvement, inform decision-making, and to assess programmatic and service offerings. That convenience and desire to gather information may have the unintended consequences of resulting in survey fatigue; survey timing that is not conducive to the academic calendar of the audience intended; the collection of duplicate information from multiple surveys; and, concerns of participants with regard to use, confidentiality and intent of the survey effort.

# DEFINITIONS

University Survey Coordinating Committee

The Executive Vice President and Provost has established a University Survey Coordinating Committee (USSC) to coordinate and approve large-scale survey efforts at all Penn State locations. The Committee is intended to review and approve large-scale survey efforts, taking into account survey intended timing and the respondent burden, and to then provide guidance, as appropriate, to ensure the survey utility and use of the data can be appropriately used, under any defined confidentiality criteria, within the University community. Large-scale surveys that do not receive approval from the Committee cannot be implemented; however the Committee will provide feedback describing the reasons for denial and the survey proposal can be revised and resubmitted. The Provost will appoint the committee co-chairs. To minimize the likelihood that both co-chairs would have a conflict of interest on any given survey, one co-chair will be the Associate Vice Provost for Institutional Research and the other co-chair will be someone from outside of OPA.

Large-Scale Survey

If the answer to one or more of the following tenets is “yes,” then a survey is considered large-scale and falls under the purview of the USCC:

Will the survey be sent to:

1. all PSU faculty, all PSU staff, and/or all PSU students;
2. all faculty, staff and/or students in a single college, campus, or administrative unit[[1]](#footnote-1);
3. 5,000 or more Penn State community members;
4. 10% or more University Park faculty, staff or students;
5. 25% or more of the faculty staff or students at a single campus with enrollments equal to or greater than 2,000;
6. 50% or more of the faculty, staff and/or students at a single campus with enrollments greater than 1,000 but less than 2,000; or
7. 75% or more of the faculty, staff and/or students at a single campus with enrollment of less than 1,000?

Note that the following survey efforts are excluded from consideration of the definition of large-scale: Student Ratings of Teaching Effectiveness; policy-required surveys (such as for performance or administrative reviews and information required for employment or matriculation); surveys required for compliance (e.g., accreditation, required governmental surveys); surveys sent by voluntary associations to their own members; surveys sent to users of a service timed to solicit information about the performance of a facility or service (for example, students visiting a learning center or using campus recreational facilities; solicitation of information to members of a voluntary subscripted e-mail list; and, electronic communications between a faculty member and his/her students.

Additional information and guidance on large-scale surveying can be found on the [USCC website](http://pennstatesurvey.psu.edu/).

# POLICY

Prior to implementation, any large-scale survey, as defined above with regard to intent and exceptions, must be reviewed and approved by the USSC.

# PROCESS, RESOURCES, AND PROTOCOLS

The [USCC website](http://pennstatesurvey.psu.edu/) contains guidelines, best practice information, additional resource and guidance materials, and information on review submission procedures. Procedural details and an online application platform, can be found at the [USCC website](http://pennstatesurvey.psu.edu/).

Surveys that do not fit the definition of large-scale, as defined above with regard to intent and exceptions, are not required to go through the USCC process. However, all University surveys should adhere to the best practices found on the USCC website.

All efforts, including those by third-party survey administrators, must be in compliance with any confidentiality and prescribed Federal, state, contract, or regulatory parameters, including, but not limited to, FERPA, HIPPA, and IRB.

# FURTHER INFORMATION

For questions or additional information, please contact the Office of Planning and Assesment at opa.psu.edu.

# CROSS REFERENCES TO OTHER POLICIES

AD11 – University Policy on Confidentiality of Student Records

AD22 – Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

AD56 – Use of Group Communication Tools to Communicate University Business to Employees and Students

AD69 – Accessibility of Electronic and Information Technology

ADG06 – Appropriate Use of Student Data

BS02 – University Mailing Lists

RP03 – Use of Human Participants in Research

1. Administrative units include: Commonwealth Campuses, Development and Alumni Relations, Educational Equity, Enterprise IT, Finance and Business, Global Programs, the Graduate School, Intercollegiate Athletics, Outreach and Online Education, Research, Strategic Communications, Student Affairs, Undergraduate Education, and University Libraries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)