



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT COLORADO SPRINGS

Survey Research at UCCS

UCCS uses student outcome questionnaires including a Graduating Senior Survey, a Baccalaureate Alumni Survey, a Graduate Alumni Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for assessment purposes. Such questionnaires are used widely to assess behavioral and affective outcomes of attending institutions of higher education. The graduating senior and alumni surveys developed by UCCS have been administered annually for about 10 years and have resulted in a rich longitudinal database concerning learning outcomes, satisfaction with degree attainment, and career placement that can be examined by such demographic factors as ethnicity, age, gender and geographic origin.

Results from these internal surveys are used as an indirect measure of student learning in degree program assessment and general education assessment. UCCS has also participated in NSSE administration three times and the campus is using these results with the national comparisons it provides in general education assessment. UCCS has the ability to combine results from its internal questionnaires with the NSSE results to conduct a relatively sophisticated level of analysis not found at many other institutions.

The appropriateness of this technique is long recognized in assessment literature. Individuals' deeply held beliefs, ideas, and assumptions about life and ways of living directly influence how an individual may behave (Erwin, 1991). Self-report methods, such as surveys, are accepted strategies to assess student perceptions regarding the quality of the educational experience (Sanders and Chan, 1996). According to Gonyea (2005) assessment instruments that collect self-reported data that focus on educational processes, student attitudes and behaviors, and measures of the campus climate are important to institutions of higher education. Most common among these measurement efforts are those that assess dimensions of character and the institutional components that contribute to them (Strange, 2004). The strength of combining student opinion surveys with testing results is found to be an appropriate way to assess general education (Muffo, 2001). Several information sources, including surveys, are among forms of evidence that best depict student learning (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2004). Delany (2005) found that using a graduating senior survey was useful in assessing a college's influence of student competencies and intellectual and personal growth. The usefulness of survey results increases by examining and comparing findings over time (Endo, 1992). Surveying alumni is a common method to determine postgraduate outcomes (Borden, 2005). Borden further confirms that by combining core items that relate closely to campus wide goals and learning outcomes with local items that address program-specific questions enhances the potential for aligning accountability and improvement efforts.

The use of student and alumni survey results at UCCS for assessment purposes is a result of the type of student body the university serves. The age of the average undergraduate is 24 years old,

not 19 or 20 years old as found at more traditional institutions. The typical UCCS graduate student is 35 years old, not 24 or 25 years old. These students are for the most part mature learners who are accustomed to and who expect to be asked about their satisfaction with the education they are receiving. They are forthcoming in offering their opinions and recommendations for improvements based upon their experience as students.

These adult learners also view their college experience as a commodity that is available from any of a number of sources. There are at least 18 higher education providers located in this region. Many more degree programs are available through online education providers. The competition to attract students in this open market environment is highly competitive. These competitors spend considerable attention to obtaining and using feedback from their students in order to gain more of the market share. At UCCS, the main goal of our use of questionnaires is to improve the learning experience of students. It is a goal that has been furthered by the use of survey research.

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