

Considerations for Consultation with Students

Memorial University Academic Unit Planning

Purpose of this Document

This document is intended to provide guidance for units considering how to engage students in the academic unit planning self-study process. During the development of the self-study for Academic Unit Planning, units should engage faculty, staff, and students for meaningful input. Student feedback is normally acquired through surveys; however, this may not be appropriate for every unit given differing enrolments and available resources.

Three options for consultation -- surveys, focus groups, or town halls -- are presented below. In addition to the approaches discussed in this document, units are encouraged to find creative ways to conduct consultation that will encourage effective student engagement throughout the AUP process.

Survey, Focus Group, Or Town Hall?

For the purposes of student engagement during academic unit planning, units should choose a method that will encourage the most students to participate while offering them the opportunity to provide effective and useful input. When determining which method of consultation is appropriate, units should consider:

- **The majors/minors population size for the unit:** When a survey is sent to the entire population of majors/minors for a unit, only a portion of those students can be expected to respond. A low response rate or small sample size can cause challenges in terms of anonymity of respondents and usefulness of responses. Typically, a student survey will receive a maximum 30% response rate and AUP surveys will typically receive a 10-15% response rate.¹ If a unit expects a small sample size from a survey, they should consider an alternate engagement method such as focus groups or town halls.
- **Type of desired information:** Units should consider what type of information they wish to acquire through student engagement. The [Academic Unit Planning Procedures](#) provide guidance regarding the information that should be included in the self-study report, and units may wish to include additional areas of inquiry based on their specific needs. If a unit wishes to conduct in-depth inquiry with students, it may be appropriate to conduct engagement through a qualitative approach such as town halls or focus groups with the ability to follow-up with probing questions.
- **Timing:** As a unit plans engagement with students, they should consider the timelines for completion of the self-study report.
 - When surveying students, units must adhere to the [Institutional Surveys Policy](#) and the survey(s) must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Survey Oversight Committee (ISOC) prior to administration. Units should allow time to: develop a survey,

¹ Appendix A provides a table of response rates required for 95% and 90% confidence intervals based on population size.

based on the AUP student survey template provided by the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning (CIAP); consult with CIAP on revisions to the instrument; submit the survey to ISOC, receive feedback, and make any necessary changes to the survey; distribute the survey to students with a sufficient timeframe for responses; analyze the survey results; and integrate insights into the self-study report. Surveys of alumni are also required to be administered by the Office of Alumni Engagement, and that Office should be notified as early as possible.

- If conducting engagement through focus groups or town halls, timelines will largely depend on the unit and will not involve other units or committees. This may allow units to conduct focus groups or town halls in cases where there is a short timeframe to collect information. When considering timing of focus groups or town halls, units should allow sufficient time to plan the event(s); promote the event(s); host the event(s); and analyze the results and integrate insights into the self-study report.
- Units should avoid attempting to gather information from students during exam periods or other times in the semester or year when students are less likely to engage with such activities.

Surveys

Student surveys must be administered in alignment with the [Institutional Surveys Policy](#) and must receive approval from the Institutional Survey Oversight Committee prior to administration. The Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning will provide units with a template for AUP student surveys and will work with units to revise the survey prior to submission to ISOC.

Units preparing to conduct student surveys should consider the following items:

- Survey development: This will normally include acquiring the survey template, revising the questions based on the needs of the unit, and consulting CIAP;
- Submission to ISOC, receipt of feedback, and integration of feedback: ISOC will normally meet monthly during the third week of the month, and the deadline for submission of draft surveys is one week prior to the meeting. If ISOC requires changes to the survey, it will most likely be reviewed via email upon re-submission;
- Administration of survey: Units can administer surveys of students themselves or request support from CIAP, and surveys should be live for 2-4 weeks. Surveys of alumni are required to be administered by the Office of Alumni Engagement. Qualtrics is the current approved survey tool for Memorial and should be used for the purposes of surveying students.²
- Integration of survey results into self-study report: CIAP will assist units in the interpretation of survey results, and those results can be integrated into self-study reports prior to the submission of the report.

Given the above-noted events, units should allow at least two months from acquisition of the survey template to receipt of survey results.

² More information on Qualtrics can be found at <https://www.mun.ca/surveysolution/>

Focus Groups

Units with small student populations may wish to engage students through focus groups. Focus groups allow units to engage in in-depth inquiry with students to obtain feedback on specific issues or questions. The ideal size for a focus group is 8-10 participants with a facilitator and a note-taker, and there should be a specific set of questions that the unit would like considered by participants. It is important to engage strong note-takers and independent facilitators. Units may wish to hold multiple focus groups if the participant population is larger than 10. While focus groups allow for in-depth inquiry and are effective for smaller units, it should be noted that it is not possible to attain feedback anonymously.

Town Halls

Town halls offer the opportunity for students to provide feedback in an open setting and in a less structured format than surveys or focus groups. This method may be appropriate for units wishing to acquire open feedback from students in a larger sample than would be appropriate for focus groups. Town halls may also be set up as drop-in events, allowing more flexibility in student attendance. Units should have at least one facilitator and a note-taker and should prepare a semi-structured set of questions to guide the overall conversation while allowing time for students to freely express themselves.

Appendix A

Population Size	Accuracy (+ or minus %) of 5% sampling error; and 95% Confidence Interval	Response Rate Needed	Accuracy (+ or minus %) of 5% sampling error; and 90% Confidence Interval	Response Rate Needed
5	5	100	5	100
9	9	100	9	100
10	10	100	10	100
14	14	100	13	92.86
15	14	93.33	14	93.33
16	15	93.75	15	93.75
20	19	95	19	95
25	24	96	23	92
30	28	93.33	27	90
35	32	91.43	31	88.57
40	36	90	35	87.5
50	44	88	42	84
60	52	86.67	49	81.67
70	59	84.29	56	80
80	66	82.5	62	77.5
90	73	81.11	68	75.56
100	80	80	73	73
125	94	75.2	86	68.8
150	108	72	97	64.67
175	120	68.57	107	61.14
200	132	66	115	57.5
250	152	60.8	130	52
500	217	43.4	176	35.2
1000	278	27.8	213	21.3

Calculations based on the formula $N_s = (N_p)(p)(1-p) / [(N_p - 1)(B/C)^2 + (p)(1-p)]$

N_s = completed sample size needed for desired level of precision

N_p = size of population

P = proportion of population expected to choose one of the two response categories

B = acceptable amount of sampling error; .1 = +/-10% of the true population value

C = Z statistic associated with the confidence level; 1.96 corresponds to the 95% level

Source: Dillman, Don. A (2007), Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method