
Policy for Conducting Surveys at Pepperdine University

With the regional accreditors and federal government requiring demonstration of evidence-based decision-making, increasing numbers of Pepperdine departments are surveying the University community. In response to this, the University has established a policy and procedure for conducting surveys within the University community. For the purpose of this document the “community” will be defined as **all students, alumni, staff, and faculty**. The need for a policy is threefold: to protect the community members’ privacy, to monitor survey frequency to avoid survey fatigue, and to ensure the safety of data collection and usage. When conducting surveys, data policies established by the information technology department must also be followed. These include, but are not limited to: [Information Classification and Protection Policy](#); [Records Management Policy](#); and [Standard for Granting Access Rights to Administrative Systems](#). Those who administer surveys are expected to follow these guidelines closely, understanding their obligation to protect participants’ confidentiality and to comply with all legal and professional obligations, as noted in the [University’s Code of Ethics](#).

Policy

All requests to gather University data for **external use** must go through the [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#), **as well as** the dean of the respective school and/or program.

What is a Survey?

For the purpose of this policy, a survey is defined as the gathering of information through questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups to make inferences about a population. This policy applies to surveys that are administered by Pepperdine community.

Types of Surveys

There are many types of surveys used for data collection. Examples include:

1. National surveys offered through professional organizations that seek students’ perceptions and attitudes.
2. Internally developed “homegrown” surveys that ask for community perceptions and attitudes.
3. Program- and activity-level surveys asking for community opinions about programs.
4. Surveys conducted to evaluate or compare programs, practices, curricula, methods, or outcomes for use solely by the institution.
5. Institutional surveys asking community members to report their attitudes, opinions, and perspectives (e.g., climate surveys).

IRB Approval

This policy does not replace the necessary approval from the [Human Subjects Committee/IRB](#).

Dean or Vice President Approval

Depending on the target population, **the respective school and/or program dean, vice president, or their designated representative must be informed in advance and provide permission for the survey to be administered**. Surveyors will need to provide evidence from the respective administrator in order to survey their students, faculty, staff, and/or alumni. However, there are times when permission is *not required*. This is when a survey:

- a. is used to collect data strictly for internal uses and involves fewer than 150 people;
- b. asks for feedback from clients at the point of service (e.g., after a function or program);
- c. is a course evaluation form; or
- d. is used to collect information for administrative purposes (e.g. scheduling).

Student Research

Students conducting research should defer to their faculty sponsor to determine if IRB and dean approvals are needed. However, it is recommended that student research on sensitive subjects, or conducted on sensitive populations, be submitted to the IRB for review and should receive internal approval from the appropriate dean. While IRB review is *generally* not required for students engaging in journalism activities, student researchers should consult with their faculty advisor and/or the appropriate IRB chairperson for confirmation in advance.

Survey Calendar

University's surveys needed for accreditation and institutional research purposes typically occur during the spring term; thus, surveyors are encouraged to consider surveying during other times of the year (please see the [OIE Survey Schedule](#)). The University encourages surveyors to also consider shortening surveys where possible, and to plan data collection during a time that will not increase survey burden among the Pepperdine community.

Survey Approval

The University regularly administers large national surveys to the Pepperdine community. Thus, surveyors are encouraged to request customized reports prior to collecting primary data, as these reports can be used to answer and evaluate many different aspects of the student experience, faculty and alumni perceptions, and diversity and climate. In addition, reports also include national benchmarks for comparative purposes. For more information, please contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (ois@pepperdine.edu).

If current University survey data does not meet the data needs of the surveyor, requests will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- a. Is the purpose of the survey clear, and is it explained to the prospective participants?
- b. Does the survey provide information useful for planning or improving services and/or improving community members' experiences?
- c. Is the survey well-designed and of an appropriate length? Does it follow sound survey methods and practices? Are the questions easily understood and interpreted?
- d. What is the target population? Will the entire population or a sample be surveyed?
- e. What actions are being taken to ensure the confidentiality of the responses?
- f. When will the survey be conducted? What is the optimal timing to ensure it does not interfere with other University surveys and activities?
- g. How will the results be used?
- h. Will the findings be disseminated to appropriate University audiences? Who will have access to the information and will it help them make better decisions as a result?
- i. Has the IRB approved the project, if required?
- j. Can the proposed survey be combined with other planned surveys?
- k. Does the survey follow the University's policy for collecting and managing data?

The following checklist can assist with reviewing surveys. This list is not exhaustive but meant to serve as a guide for the most critical areas to consider.

- Survey outcomes cannot be ascertained from current University data (e.g., OIE).
- Survey does not compete with other University surveys/research projects.
- Survey has been reviewed by IRB (if applicable).
- Survey does not contain sensitive material; or, sensitive material was reviewed by the IRB.
- Survey results will not be shared publically (e.g., posted on a website, shared through social media, submitted for publication, presented at a conference); or, survey has received IRB approval and can be shared publically.
- If applicable, student has a faculty sponsor/supervisor.

Collecting and Storing Data

Survey administrators must securely store data and use data only for the designated and intended purposes.

Survey administrators must agree to adhere to University policies for handling data. Data containing participant names, identifying information, email addresses, or other confidential information **must be saved in an encrypted format** that belongs to the University, and these data should be disposed of when the survey is completed.