Recommendations for Identity and Inclusiveness Survey Questions

Skidmore College Office of Institutional Research

Members of the Skidmore community often develop surveys internally as a methodological tool to collect information from various constituents including students, staff, faculty, the community, and alumni. At times, including demographic questions about personal identity can be helpful, if not essential. Questions about identity on surveys can ensure that we are respectful and inclusive when interacting with students, staff, faculty, alums, etc. In addition, when designing and analyzing surveys, we may want to disaggregate data in ways that help us better understand the unique experiences of various identity groups[1].

Purpose

These recommendations are not College or IRB policy. You may choose to not use these suggestions. The purpose is to provide a resource for those designing and deploying surveys that include questions about identity. Identity is complex; therefore, the questions we ask about it can also be complex. We acknowledge that there are tradeoffs the researcher may have to make regarding the number of response options per question and how that influences the ease of analyses for those who don't regularly administer surveys or work with datasets. It is expected that guidance will evolve as identity categories continue to develop and we learn from each other and published research.

Rationale

As a community, we are committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Standardizing questions and data collection ensures that we are serving the needs and interests of everyone. Including identity questions on a survey is one way to be inclusive. Asking a person about their identity in a manner that is based on current practices can help people feel seen and respected. Further, collecting data about identity will be consistent and reliable. Using the same, or similar, categories and responses will lead to more comparable results.

Considerations

- It is recommended that you consult Skidmore's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine whether your study requires IRB review and approval.
- All identity and inclusiveness questions should be:
    - asked at the end of your survey instrument because they usually don't focus on the survey topic, might be less interesting to respond to, and can potentially be sensitive. You generally want to engage your respondents with the most interesting questions related to the research topic first.
    - set as "not required" in the survey design even though we recommend the inclusion of a "prefer not to answer" option. You don't want to frustrate your respondents.
- As you design your study, we encourage you to be deliberate in selecting which identity question to include. Every variable you add will increase the size of the dataset and analyses may become more complex. Further, survey fatigue may occur if respondents become apathetic while completing a lengthy survey.
- Disaggregating data by identity categories, when possible and appropriate, can be a first step in finding and understanding possible inequities and determining how to address them or guide your future research. If you must aggregate, do so responsibly and consider collapsing groups based on the

[1] Thanks to Hobart and William Smith Colleges for their permission to review and borrow from their Identity Questions Policy.

outcomes you are studying[2]. When reporting on your survey results be aware of the risk of having a participant identified. When the population within a response category is small[3], you may have to collapse some responses after data collection if that makes sense.

Limitations

The focus of these recommendations is internal data collection and use. Mandatory external reporting (US Dept. of Education, NCES IPEDS, NYS Dept. of Education, MSCHE, NCAA, etc.) may utilize different questions, response options, terminology, and definitions than those presented here. Skidmore must abide by the guidance of these entities when reporting to them. Similarly, when using a survey instrument from an external vendor, national association, or consortium, the identity questions included and how those are asked are usually beyond Skidmore's control.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be used for any web-based or paper survey on which the survey administrator desires to include one or more of the following identity categories. The questions below are also viewable in Qualtrics. If you prefer to import these questions for your project, you may download the Qualtrics Survey format file (*.qsf file).

- **It is suggested that a disclaimer be included on your instrument before asking demographic questions.**

  We understand that people have multiple and intersecting identities. Consequently, we realize that the descriptions below may not completely embody or accurately represent who you are. We collect these data to better understand the population of people who complete this survey. In these demographic questions, select the categories that best describe your identity or utilize the self-describe option.

- **Gender Identity (Select all that apply):** [Checkboxes][4]

  Agender
  Cisgender
  Gender non-conforming
  Genderfluid
  Genderqueer
  Man
  Non-binary
  Transgender
  Two Spirit
  Woman

[2] BrckaLorenz, A. (2024) Complex Identities: Writing and Using Identity Demographic Questions (IU Center for Postsecondary Research). 2024 AIR Forum Presentation, Denver, CO.

[3] "Reporting frequency counts for small groups does not by itself constitute a disclosure of personally identifiable information; however, the smaller the cell size, the greater the likelihood that someone might be able to identify an individual within that cell, and thus the greater the risk of disclosure. Many statisticians consider a cell size of 3 to be the absolute minimum needed to prevent disclosure, though larger minimums (e.g., 5 or 10) may be used to further mitigate disclosure risk. Minimum cell sizes adopted by individual States range from 5 to 30 individuals, with a majority of States using 10 as their minimum (Source: NACCC's interpretation of NCES 2011-603)."

[4] NCES IPEDS gender categories are limited to Women and Men only. We recommend the use of expanded gender identity response options.

Prefer not to answer
Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
[Textbox]

- **Pronoun(s) (Select all that apply):** [Checkboxes]
  Fae/Faer/Faers
  He/Him/His
  Per/Per/Pers
  She/Her/Hers
  They/Them/Theirs
  Xe/Xem/Xyrs
  Ze/Hir/Hirs
  Ze/Zir/Zirs
  Prefer not to answer
  Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
  [Textbox]

- **Sexual Orientation (Select all that apply):** [Checkboxes]
  Asexual
  Bisexual
  Gay
  Heterosexual/Straight
  Lesbian
  Pansexual
  Queer
  Prefer not to answer
  Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
  [Textbox]

- **Race/Ethnicity (Select all that apply):** [Checkboxes][5]
  American Indian or Alaska Native
  East Asian
  South Asian
  Southeast Asian
  Black, African American, African, or Caribbean
  Hispanic or Latino/a/x
  Middle Eastern or North African
  Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  White
  Prefer not to answer
  Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
  [Textbox]

[5] NCES IPEDS asks ethnicity and race as two separate questions: 1) Are you Hispanic or Latino? Yes/No, and 2) Which of the following racial categories applies to your identity? [select all that apply] - American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White. We recommend the use of an integrated race and ethnicity question and the response options presented here.

- **Disability status (Select any that apply):** [Checkboxes][6]
  - Neurodevelopmental (e.g., ADHD, autism, learning disability, speech, motor)
  - Sensory (e.g., blind, low vision, deaf, hard of hearing)
  - Mental Health (e.g., depression, PTSD, bipolar)
  - Physical (e.g., chronic medical condition, mobility, orthopedic)
  - Intersystem (e.g., alcohol/substance abuse recovery, complex chronic medical condition, traumatic brain injury)
  - Prefer not to answer
  - Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
    - [Textbox]

--OR--

- **Disability status (e.g. neurodevelopmental, sensory, mental health, physical, intersystem):** [Radio buttons]
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer

- **Religious Identity or Affiliation (Select all that apply):** [Checkboxes][7]
  - Baha'i Faith
  - Buddhism
  - Christianity (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, non-denominational)
  - Hinduism
  - Indigenous Traditions
  - Islam
  - Judaism
  - Non-religious (e.g., secular humanism, agnosticism, atheism)
  - Sikh
  - Spiritual
  - Unitarian Universalist
  - Wiccan/Pagan
  - No Affiliation
  - Prefer not to answer
  - Not listed, prefer to self-describe:
    - [Textbox]

- **Are you an international [INSERT SURVEY POPULATION NAME (E.G., STUDENT)]?** [Radio buttons][8]
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer

[6] Categories based on NYSED reporting fields. Another option is a simple yes/no/prefer not to answer question that allows the respondent to note they have a disability without indicating what type. Question created in collaboration with Student Academic Services.

[7] Question created in collaboration with the Office of Spiritual and Religious Life.

[8] NCES IPEDS uses further detail in asking citizenship: Dual U.S. Citizen (U.S. and another country), Permanent Resident, U.S. Citizen, and U.S. Nonresident. We recommend using a simplified "yes/no/prefer not to answer" question as further detail is usually not required for local analyses. Should you need further detail, consider using the NCES IPEDS response options.

REVISION HISTORY

Date	***Revision***
03/23/2023	*The document was initially made available as a resource.*
05/23/2024	*Pronoun(s): consolidated and expanded neopronoun options.*
07/31/2024	*Gender Identity: Added Cisgender, Two Sprit, and separated some cateogies.*

Feedback regarding these recommendations can be directed to the Office of Institutional Research.