

Survey Item Bank: How to Develop Useful Interfaith Surveys

Surveys allow us to collect a variety of information about our programs. If you need to develop a survey to collect information from students and/or colleagues, the most important part is to understand the type of information you actually need to collect. This guide provides examples and considerations for survey items that measure:

- **Demographics information:** What are effective ways of gathering survey respondents' demographic information?
- **Satisfaction:** To what degree were participants satisfied with various aspects of the program?
- **Learning outcomes:** How much do participants think they learned after participating in the program?
- **Campus climate:** How do students and/or employees perceive various aspects of the campus climate?

Getting started

In this section we provide the dos and don'ts of survey construction. For each of the dos and don'ts we provide an example of a quality survey item and a poorly constructed survey item. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is a good start to collecting quality information about your students.

- You can refer only to the specific sections of the survey bank that you need right now. There is no need to read through the entire survey bank.
- We include a brief description of the type of information collected from each type of survey item, specific considerations in choosing or creating different types of survey items, and examples of survey items to use.
- In addition to this resource, you may also want to review the [Constructing Surveys: A Tip Sheet for Interfaith Educators](#) for more helpful information about when to use surveys and tips for organizing a survey and creating survey items and responses.

Collecting demographic information with surveys

Often, collecting participants' demographic information on your survey is useful in understanding who is responding to your survey and whether there are differences in survey responses across particular groups. If you need to collect this information, below are a few important considerations followed by example survey items you can use.

Only ask for what you need

If you are going to collect demographic information on your survey, only ask for the information that is relevant. If you are not going to use particular demographic categories in reporting your survey results, avoid asking for this information. This practice respects participants' personal information and helps keep the survey length manageable by avoiding unnecessary items.

Where to place survey items that ask for demographic information

Usually, it is preferable to place items that ask for demographic information at the end of your survey for several reasons (*Henning & Roberts, 2016*). First, these items can be perceived as unrelated to the rest of your survey. Second, asking for demographic information can involve reporting sensitive information and may feel intrusive. Finally, answering demographic items is usually a quick process. By the time participants reach the end of the survey, they do not need to spend a lot of time thinking through their responses to these items.

Ensure your demographic survey items and response options are as inclusive as possible

The most inclusive way to ask for demographic information is to use open-ended survey items since participants can respond to these items in their own words (not using pre-determined categories).

What is your race and/or ethnicity? (please specify) _____

However, responses to open-ended demographic items can vary widely, and those analyzing survey responses need to determine how to interpret and report these responses. If you have a small number of survey participants, this is less of an issue. However, if you plan to administer your survey to a larger group of participants, you can use the following example survey items and response categories to collect a variety of demographic information.

Regarding your current worldview, with which of the following descriptors do you most closely identify? (select all that apply)

- Agnosticism
- Jainism
- Atheism
- Judaism
- Baha'i Faith
- Native American Tradition(s)
- Buddhism
- Non-religious
- Christianity, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- None
- Christianity, Protestant
- Paganism
- Christianity, Orthodox
- Secular Humanism
- Christianity, Roman Catholic
- Sikhism
- Christianity, Non-denominational
- Spiritual
- Confucianism
- Unitarian Universalism
- Daoism
- Zoroastrianism
- Hinduism
- Not listed/I prefer to self-describe (please specify) _____
- Islam
- I prefer not to answer

What is your race and/or ethnicity? (select all that apply)

- African American/Black
- Asian American/Asian
- Latinx
- Native American/Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Not listed/I prefer to self-describe (*please specify*) _____
- I prefer not to answer

What is your gender identity?

- Man
- Woman
- Not listed/I prefer to self-describe (*please specify*) _____
- I prefer not to answer

What is your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual
- Gay
- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Not listed (*please specify*) _____
- I prefer not to answer

Are you an international student?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

What is your year in college?

- First year
- Second year
- Third year
- Fourth year
- Fifth year or higher
- I prefer not to answer

What is your current GPA?

- Less than 2.0
- 2.00 – 2.49
- 2.50 – 2.99
- 3.00 – 3.49
- 3.50 – 3.99
- 4.00
- I prefer not to answer

What is your primary academic area of study?

- Arts
- Biological Science
- Business
- Education
- Engineering
- Health Profession
- Humanities
- Mathematics/Statistics
- Religion/Theology
- Physical Science
- Social Science
- Not listed (*please specify*) _____
- I prefer not to answer

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your parent(s)/guardian(s)?

Parent/Guardian 1:

- Does not apply
- Elementary school or less
- Some high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College degree
- Some graduate/professional school
- Graduate/professional degree
- Unknown
- I prefer not to answer

Parent/Guardian 2:

- Does not apply
- Elementary school or less
- Some high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College degree
- Some graduate/professional school
- Graduate/professional degree
- Unknown
- I prefer not to answer

Other useful information about collecting demographic information

When demographic response options are ordered (e.g., year in school, level of education obtained), indicate these in that exact order. Otherwise, it is useful to alphabetize the response options as the examples above illustrate. Include the “Not listed/I prefer to self describe (please specify)” and “I prefer not to answer” response options at the end of the list.

Be sure your demographic responses include a comprehensive list of options and allow students to select multiple responses for demographic categories in which they could belong to two or more groups (e.g., for items related to religious/nonreligious identities, racial/ethnic identities).

It is useful to include a response option that allows participants to indicate that they identify in a way not listed in the provided response options. Refrain from using “Other” for this response option and instead use language such as “Additional category not listed” or “Not listed/I prefer to self-describe (please specify) _____” with a write-in option.

Remember to include a “I prefer not to answer” option among your demographic responses.

Using Surveys to Measure Participant Satisfaction

Often, those delivering programs or events want to understand whether their participants were satisfied with their experience. Participants are often simply asked to rate the extent of overall satisfaction. While doing so allows you to understand the extent of participants' overall satisfaction, you will not know about *which aspects* participants were satisfied or dissatisfied. This limits a program's ability to use that information to make *specific* changes. In addition, from a respondent's perspective, a survey item about overall satisfaction can be interpreted subjectively (*Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000*). For instance, one participant could understand a general satisfaction item to mean satisfaction with the event location. Another participant could respond thinking the item measures satisfaction with the program facilitator.

Tip: To measure participant satisfaction in ways that are both useful for a program and not subjectively interpreted by survey respondents, ask about satisfaction related to specific program elements.

Below are examples of survey items you can use to measure participants' satisfaction with specific program or event elements. **Determine which of these elements are most important** and ask about those; you do not need to use all of these items.

Participants' perceptions of the program content and/or materials

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
The program materials were informative.				
The program materials were easy to understand.				
The program materials included diverse religious and nonreligious perspectives.				

Participants' perceptions of the program delivery and/or facilitation

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
The presenter delivered an organized presentation.				
The presenter was knowledgeable about the topic.				
The presenter effectively answered participants' questions.				
The presenter allowed time for participants to share comments.				
The presenter used language that was inclusive of diverse religious and nonreligious identities.				

Participants' perceptions of the program logistics

Example survey item	No 1	Yes 3
I received adequate advanced notice about this program.		
The event location was convenient.		
Considering when the program was offered during the term, the timing was ideal.		
The date of this event was convenient for my schedule.		
Considering my schedule, the time of day this program was offered was convenient.		

Example survey item	Too short 1	Just right 1	Too long 3
The length of the program was:			

Participants' perceptions of the program's group interactions

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
The program provided enough time to interact with others.				
The program provided enough opportunities to learn from others' views.				
The program was effective in meeting my [descriptor of choice, depending on the program focus] needs.				

Were participants' needs met?

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
The program was effective in meeting my [descriptor of choice, depending on the program focus] needs.				

Were participants' needs met?

Example survey item	Open-ended responses
What was most helpful in meeting your [descriptor of choice, depending on program focus] needs?	
Are there specific needs this program didn't address?	

Participants' recommendations to others

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I would recommend this program to others.				

Comments related to program improvement and/or particularly effective program components

Example survey item	Open-ended responses
Please provide any specific recommendations for improving this program.	
Please provide any additional comments about aspects of the program you felt were particularly effective.	

Using surveys to measure interfaith learning

Outcome Achievement

Do you want to use a survey to measure the extent that students or employees think they have learned as a result of participating in a program? If so, you must effectively translate your program's learning outcomes into survey items.

This process involves creating specific statements that reflect particular types of learning. Translating learning outcomes into survey items can take various forms. Here, we offer two important tips for developing survey items to measure participants' perceptions of their learning.

Translate learning outcomes into audience-friendly survey items

A major consideration when translating learning outcomes into survey items is whether survey respondents will understand what you are asking (Tourangeau et al., 2000). Use language that is familiar to and appropriate for your audience. Ensuring that your survey items are understood by your audience increases the accuracy of the information gleaned from your survey. The examples below illustrate three different learning outcomes and how some of the more difficult concepts within these outcomes can be broken down into survey items that are easier to understand.

Example learning outcome #1: Participants will initiate interfaith dialogue.

If your learning outcome includes a concept that may not be easily understood—like *interfaith dialogue* in the learning outcome above—define it in simpler terms. In translating this learning outcome into a survey item, you can see the example survey item below explains interfaith dialogue in a way that is easier for respondents to understand.

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I initiate conversation with people from religious/nonreligious groups differently than my own.				

Example learning outcome #2: Participants will situate their own worldview within a pluralistic context.

Sometimes, learning outcomes involve multiple words or concepts that might be difficult for a survey respondent to understand. The learning outcome above involves a few different concepts (*situate, pluralistic context*) that must be defined so that respondents can understand them. Notice below how several survey items are required to measure the learning outcome above. The items below first ask about whether someone can explain their own religious/nonreligious perspectives, then whether they can explain how these have evolved. Next, to understand whether someone can place their own religious/nonreligious perspectives in conversation with others', the last two example items ask about aspects of this.

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I can describe my religious/nonreligious perspectives.				

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I can explain how my religious/nonreligious perspectives have changed over time.				
I can describe similarities between my own and others' religious/nonreligious perspectives.				
I can describe differences between my own and others' religious/nonreligious perspectives.				

Example learning outcome #3: Participants will create and sustain formal and informal opportunities for ongoing interfaith action and dialogue.

This learning outcome involves formal and informal opportunities for interfaith action and dialogue. Often, survey respondents cannot distinguish between these different opportunities. To measure this learning outcome, the example survey items below separate formal and informal opportunities and define these concepts in language that is easier to understand.

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I intentionally create opportunities that allow individuals from diverse religious/nonreligious groups to interact with one another.				
I look for ways to talk about religious/nonreligious diversity in settings where this is not the focus.				
I can describe similarities between my own and others' religious/nonreligious perspectives.				
I want to participate in opportunities where religious/nonreligious groups interact with one another.				

Break apart learning outcomes to measure one thing at a time

Learning outcomes can involve multiple types of learning and development. We want to ask about these different aspects of students' learning separately for two main reasons. First, from a program perspective, it is useful to learn about students' perceptions of *particular types* of learning and development. This information is useful in making informed, specific decisions. Second, from a survey respondent's perspective, it is confusing to ask about multiple types of learning simultaneously (*Tourangeau et al., 2000*). To avoid inaccuracies or respondents skipping these items altogether, we need to break apart learning outcomes to measure one aspect of learning at a time. The examples below illustrate three different learning outcomes and how these outcomes can be broken down into separate survey items.

Example learning outcome #4: Participants will consider their own and others' spiritual or religious practices and traditions.

This learning outcome involves one's own and others' religious/nonreligious traditions, which must be asked about separately. See how the example survey items below do this.

Example survey items	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I think about the role of <i>my own</i> religious/nonreligious traditions.				
I think about the role of <i>others'</i> religious/nonreligious traditions.				

Example learning outcome #5: Participants will analyze the role of religion, spirituality, and value-based worldviews in significant current and historical events.

This learning outcome involves multiple concepts (religion, spirituality, and value-based worldviews) that must be asked about separately. This learning outcome also involves historical and contemporary events, which also must be asked about separately.

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
I can describe differences between the definitions of religion, spirituality, and valuebased worldviews.				
I can explain how religion influences current global issues.				
I can explain how religion has influenced past events.				
I can explain how spirituality influences current global events.				
I can explain how spirituality has influenced past global issues.				
I can explain how value-based worlviews influence current global issues.				
I can explain how value-based worldviews have influenced past global issues.				

Measuring Campus Climate

Educators often want to design and/or improve interfaith programming in ways that are responsive to their campus environments. To understand the campus climate, educators can include survey items that ask students, staff, and/or faculty on campus about how they perceive and experience their campus climate for religious and worldview diversity. But we must first understand precisely what climate means. There are several definitions of campus climate. However, Milem, Chang, and Antonio's (2005) campus climate framework explains specific aspects of a campus that influence the educational benefits of diversity. These specific dimensions of a college campus stand to promote or hinder the educational benefits that are possible from efforts that bring together those of diverse religious and nonreligious identities. Surveying individuals about your campus climate can allow you to collect information that includes the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of various individuals on campus across the different aspects of the campus climate described below.

Tip: If you want to comprehensively assess your campus climate for religious/nonreligious diversity, you may want to collaborate with your institutional research area on campus. You may also want to consider administering the [Values, Interfaith, Engagement, and Worldview Survey \(VIEWS\)](#).

If you want to add survey items into your existing survey efforts to understand important environmental aspects related to students' experiences or to understand the needs of those on campus, consider using some of the survey items below. These examples allow you to include survey items that ask about specific aspects of campus.

Perceptions of diversity on campus

To what extent do individuals on campus perceive their campus as religiously/nonreligiously diverse? Use these survey items to find out.

Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
There is religious/nonreligious diversity among the students at this school.				
There is religious/nonreligious diversity among the faculty at this school.				
There is religious/nonreligious diversity among the staff at this school.				

Perceptions of intergroup tension, discrimination, and support

If you want to understand how individuals on campus perceive positive (e.g., affirming, accommodating, accepting) and negative (e.g., divisive, insensitive, tense) aspects of their campus experiences and/or individuals' attitudes toward particular groups on campus, use these survey items.

Aspect of climate	Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
Perceptions of intergroup tension	Individuals from different religious/nonreligious groups have positive interactions with one another.				
	I feel comfortable expressing my religious/nonreligious beliefs on campus.				
	Individuals of different <i>religious</i> groups feel welcome on this campus.				
	Individuals of different <i>nonreligious</i> groups feel welcome on this campus.				
Perceptions of intergroup discrimination	On this campus, I have been discriminated against because of my religious/nonreligious identity(ies).				
	On this campus, other individuals have been discriminated against because of their religious/nonreligious identities.				
	On this campus, I have been discriminated against because of my religious/nonreligious identity(ies).				
	Students at this institution have made insensitive remarks about religious/nonreligious groups.				
	Faculty at this institution have made remarks in class about religious/nonreligious groups.				
	Staff at this institution have made remarks in class about religious/nonreligious groups.				

Aspect of climate	Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
Attitudes toward others	This campus provides opportunities for individuals to learn about different <i>religious</i> groups.				
	This campus provides opportunities for individuals to learn about different <i>nonreligious</i> groups.				

Perceptions of interactions across worldview difference

Do you want to learn about the amount and quality of interactions across religious/nonreligious difference on your campus? Do you want to learn about engagement in formal and informal interfaith opportunities? Use these survey items.

Aspect of climate	Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
Number of interactions with religiously/nonreligiously diverse groups	Individuals from different religious/nonreligious groups interact with one another on campus.				
	In most of my classes, I have opportunities to interact with <i>my own</i> religious/nonreligious groups.				
	In most of my classes, I have opportunities to interact with religious/nonreligious groups <i>different from my own</i> .				
	Outside of the classroom, I have opportunities on this campus to interact with <i>my own</i> religious/nonreligious groups.				
	Outside of the classroom, I have opportunities on this campus to interact with religious/nonreligious groups <i>different than my own</i> .				

Aspect of climate	Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
Quality of interactions with religiously diverse groups.	I am aware of my own religious/nonreligious identity when I interact with individuals from religious/nonreligious groups different than my own.				
	I learn about specific religious/nonreligious traditions when I interact with individuals from religious and nonreligious groups different than my own.				
Effort to engage with others	I feel comfortable interacting with individuals on this campus from religious/nonreligious groups different than my own.				

Perceptions of organizational content

Do you want to learn how individuals on campus perceive campus policies and practices as these relate to religious and nonreligious diversity? Use these survey items.

Aspect of climate	Example survey item	Not at all 1	Very little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite a bit 4
Diversity of curriculum (students)	For my degree, I am <i>required</i> to complete at least one course about religion/spirituality.				
	Religious diversity is a topic that comes up in my classes.				
Diversity of training (employees)	This institution's training for new employees includes information about religious/nonreligious diversity.				
	This institution offers professional development to staff/faculty on topics related to religious/nonreligious diversity.				
Hiring policies	This school prioritizes hiring religiously/nonreligiously diverse employees.				

References

- Henning, G.W., & Roberts, D. (2016). *Student affairs assessment: Theory to practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Milem, J.F., Chang, M.J., & Antonio, A.L. (2005). *Making diversity work on campus: A researchbased perspective*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities..
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L.J., & Rasinski, K. (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

