PROJECT PLAN

2015 Student Opinion Survey (SOS)
State University of New York

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The SUNY State-Operated and select four-year institutions plan to survey a sample of undergraduate students during the 2015 spring semester. The goal of the project is to determine how well campuses serve undergraduate students. The project will employ sound sampling techniques and utilize appropriate controls to protect the privacy of students participating in the survey.

**GOAL AND USE**

The goal of the SOS is to evaluate various programs, services and facilities provided to undergraduate students. Campus and System administrators use this information to identify areas of strength as well as those that may require additional study or attention.

Additionally, the Chancellor and System officials have used the findings (1) to assess overall campus performance and (2) to evaluate the campus president. Summarizations of the SOS are included in the Chancellor’s Report Card without identifying specific institutions.

The responses to survey questions are not disclosed or used to make any judgments concerning individual students. Indeed, student participation in the SOS is voluntary.

The 2015 SOS is the eleventh System-wide administration of this survey over the past thirty years. The last administration was in spring 2012. Since many of the same questions have been asked over the years, the SOS is a rich source of information charting change and improvement in the SUNY System.
BENEFITS OF THE SOS

Undergraduate students are the primary customers of the State University and the programs, services, and facilities provided to these students form the core mission of the State University. While SUNY’s colleges and universities are highly complex institutions with many varied missions, understanding how undergraduate students view programs, services, and facilities is fundamental in evaluating how well SUNY’s colleges and university performs their mission.

Further, surveys such as the SOS are essential elements of Middle State’s accrediting standards, and as such, contribute to a climate of continuous improvement. At the present, SUNY’s campuses are engaged in a variety of assessment initiatives. The SOS is part of a growing body of information informing these imperatives and establishes benchmarks for charting progress over time.

Viewed in this context, the SOS is of high value to decision makers at all levels, and the 2015 SOS comes at a fortuitous time given the State’s difficult financial circumstances.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The first SOS instrument was developed more than 30 years ago in collaboration with the American College Testing, Inc. (ACT). The survey was extensively revised in 2003 to improve the focus and reduce the length of the survey. For the 2015 SOS, a committee of campus and System representatives met in September 2014 to review the questions and format of the survey. Minimal changes were made to the survey questions to maintain continuity with previous administrations.

The 2015 SOS is designed to be completed in 20 to 25 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for local questions. Section VI accommodates additional
questions to address specific issues of interest to the campus. Campuses may only modify questions in Section VI of the survey.

**The proposed survey for the 2015 administration of the SOS is found at the following URL:**

[https://co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1NzL1nLSkUL7BB3&Preview=Survey&BrandID=act](https://co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1NzL1nLSkUL7BB3&Preview=Survey&BrandID=act)

**STUDY POPULATION**

The SOS study population are undergraduate students 18 years of age and older who are enrolled in at least one class on campus during spring semester 2015. Please note that High School students and minors are to be excluded from the study population.

A random sample of students meeting these qualifications are invited to respond to the SOS and asked to disclose their local ID. The local ID is requested so that responses to survey questions may be better understood by linking to other information maintained by the campus, such as the student’s enrollment history. Individual responses are used for analytical purposes and not shared with instructors or other officials involved the student’s academic program. The SOS requires students to give permission to use the local ID for this purpose. If a student does not grant permission, they may complete the SOS anonymously.

This information is disclosed in directions to the SOS and in the informed consent section that accompanies the survey instrument. Also, the directions ask students under 18 years of age – who inadvertently receive an invitation - not to respond to the survey. If such a student responds to the SOS the survey response is destroyed.
SAMPLE CONSTRUCTION

The goal of sampling is to construct a sample that yields valid estimates of the study population within a +/- 4% interval at the 95% level of confidence.

Representativeness in the sample is achieved in two ways: first, randomly selecting students so that characteristics, such as academic ability, full and part-time status, day and evening students, and student demographics are reflective of the overall study population; second, obtaining a sufficient number of survey responses so experimental error (i.e., statistical uncertainty) falls within the desired level of statistical precision and confidence.

Attachment #1 identifies the minimum number of survey responses needed to achieve the level of precision desired in the project, and the number of surveys that must be administered to students assuming differing rates of return. When planning to administer the SOS, SUNY and ACT recommend that campuses adopt a lower-than-expected return rate. Campuses may choose to oversample the study population. SUNY adjusts for oversampling when summarizing the SOS findings system-wide, but such strategies allow the SOS to be used for multiple purposes on campus.

INSTITUTION REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

The SOS project should be approved by each campus’ institutional review board (IRB); or if a campus does not have an IRB, an appropriate official, such as the provost/academic vice president, vice president for student affairs, or other senior assessment official. Approval is important so campus and System officials have the flexibility to use the survey findings broadly, as described above. However, IRB approval is not necessary for the SOS to be administered to students, because the purpose of the project is primarily administrative in nature and is not used for assessing specific academic programs, services, or facilities. If IRB or equivalent approval is not obtained,
a campus may continue with the SOS, but the use of the information is limited to the administrative functions internal to the institution.

Campuses need to provide a copy of the IRB approval or letter from the local (campus) official approving the project to SUNY’s Office of Institutional Research and Data Analytics no later than March 31, 2015.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The 2015 SOS will be administered on-line. Campuses have latitude in determining when to administer the SOS during the semester; although the project should be completed no later than four weeks before the end of the semester. This will ensure that ACT can process the survey data and provide each campus with the appropriate reports and products in a timely fashion. Administration of the survey will proceed as follows:

- Campuses will construct the sample starting with the population of undergraduate students 18-years of age or older taking at least one class at the institution during the spring term. Campuses then draw students into the sample randomly. Campuses should verify that students in the sample are reflective of the study population before sending the sample to ACT.

- Campuses should send a pre-message to the students sampled alerting them that an email from ACT is coming.

- Campuses will provide ACT the names, email addresses, and local IDs of students in the sample. Campuses may also choose to provide ACT additional student characteristics to enhance the usefulness of the survey (e.g., student major).
• Campuses will provide ACT with an email message from a campus leader that encourages student participation and includes the campus logo, colors, and other relevant information as determined by the campus.

• ACT sends a personalized email message to the students with a link to the survey.

• ACT’s on-line features allow students to complete part of the survey, save their responses and return to complete the rest of the survey later. Also, ACT tracks respondents and sends up to three reminder messages to non-respondents.

INFORMED CONSENT

Participation in the SOS is voluntary. Students are asked to provide their local ID so their responses may be linked to other information maintained by the campus (e.g., a student’s enrollment history) but they may complete the survey without providing an ID. Students who do provide their ID greatly enhance the usefulness of the SOS to their campus.

The first screen student’s encounter explains the uses of the SOS, and asks for permission to use the local ID to link the responses to other data maintained by the campus. If a student fails to grant permission to be identified in the survey, ACT removes the email address and other identifying information from the data file returned to the campus.

REPORTS AND RAW DATA

ACT will process the completed surveys for scoring and analysis. ACT provides System Administration and campuses a basic report summarizing the responses to each question along with anonymous comparisons to other SUNY colleges and universities in
total and by sector. All of the ACT reports are based on aggregations of data and external institutional identifiers are removed. Campuses may also order special reports from ACT for an additional fee, as determined by ACT.

ACT also provides System Administration and campuses with an electronic data file of survey responses. This file contains the local ID of students giving permission to use the ID.

SUNY prepares various reports from the electronic files for internal use and in the Power of SUNY Report Card. The internal reports may highlight differences between campuses and sectors, as well as other relevant factors, such as institutional size, location, mission, and student selectivity. Any external disclosures by SUNY will always be in aggregate and include appropriate protections to ensure both respondent and institutional anonymity. SUNY’s policy is to direct external requests for information about the SOS to individual campuses.

ACT is not authorized to release any SOS data to a third party without SUNY and campus approval.

RISK/BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

The SOS project as proposed here achieves the goals of the study while resulting in negligible risk to students and campuses. In fact, SUNY anticipates that students will welcome the opportunity to make their views known given the positive uses of the SOS and many will disclose their ID.

In addition to aggregate reports, ACT will return electronic files containing individual student responses to the SOS to each campus. All electronic files must be maintained in a secure, password protected medium.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The SOS survey project is under the direction of the State University of New York’s Office of Institutional Research and Data Analytics. The campus contacts for this project utilize surveys as one of the primary tools for collecting information to support System and campus planning efforts. For additional information, please contact the campus contacts listed on the front page of the project document.