

Summary of *Indirect* Assessment Techniques

INDIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES (<u>Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education</u> by Allen 2004)		
Technique	Potential Strength	Potential Limitations
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues • Can be administered to large groups of respondents • Can easily assess the views of various stakeholders • Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed • Tend to be inexpensive to administer • Can be conducted relatively quickly • Responses to closed-ended questions are easy to tabulate and to report in tables or graphs • Open-ended questions allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results • Can be used to track opinions across time to explore trends • Are amenable to different formats, such as paper-and-pencil or online formats • Can be used to collect opinions from respondents at distant sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide indirect evidence about student learning • Their validity depends on the quality of the questions and response options • Conclusions can be inaccurate if biased samples are obtained • Results might not include the full array of opinions if the sample is small • What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know • Open-ended responses can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues • Can assess the views of various stakeholders • Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed • Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences • Interviewers can prompt respondents to provide more detailed responses • Interviewers can respond to questions and clarify misunderstandings • Telephone interviews can be used to reach distant respondents • Can provide a sense of immediacy and personal attention for respondents • Open-ended questions allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning • Their validity depends on the quality of the questions • Poor interviewer skills can generate limited or useless information • Can be difficult to obtain a representative sample of respondents • What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know • Can be relatively time-consuming and expensive to conduct, especially if interviewers and interviewees are paid or if the no-show rate for scheduled interviews is high • The process can intimidate some respondents, especially if asked about sensitive information and their identity is known to the interviewer • Results can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze • Transcriptions of interviews can be time-consuming and costly
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues • Can provide in-depth exploration of issues • Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed • Can be combined with other techniques, such as surveys • The process allows faculty to uncover unanticipated results • Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences • Can be conducted within courses • Participants have the opportunity to react to each other's ideas, providing an opportunity to uncover the degree of consensus on ideas that emerge during the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning • Require a skilled, unbiased facilitator • Their validity depends on the quality of the questions • Results might not include the full array of opinions if only one focus group is conducted • What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know • Recruiting and scheduling the groups can be difficult • Time-consuming to collect and analyze data

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Technique	Potential Strength	Potential Limitations
Reflective essays	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues• Can be administered to large groups of respondents• Usually have face validity – the writing assignment generally has a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed• Can be conducted relatively quickly• Allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results• Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences• Can provide direct assessment of some learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning• Their validity depends on the quality of the questions• Conclusions can be inaccurate if biased samples are obtained• Results might not include the full array of opinions if the sample is small• What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know• Responses can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze