# Summary of *Indirect* Assessment Techniques

| | INDIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES<br>(Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004) | |
|---|---|---|
| **Technique** | **Potential Strength** | **Potential Limitations** |
| Surveys | • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues<br>• Can be administered to large groups of respondents<br>• Can easily assess the views of various stakeholders<br>• Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed<br>• Tend to be inexpensive to administer<br>• Can be conducted relatively quickly<br>• Responses to closed-ended questions are easy to tabulate and to report in tables or graphs<br>• Open-ended questions allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results<br>• Can be used to track opinions across time to explore trends<br>• Are amenable to different formats, such as paper-and-pencil or online formats<br>• Can be used to collect opinions from respondents at distant sites | • Provide indirect evidence about student learning<br>• Their validity depends on the quality of the questions and response options<br>• Conclusions can be inaccurate if biased samples are obtained<br>• Results might not include the full array of opinions if the sample is small<br>• What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know<br>• Open-ended responses can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze |
| Interviews | • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues<br>• Can assess the views of various stakeholders<br>• Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed<br>• Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences<br>• Interviewers can prompt respondents to provide more detailed responses<br>• Interviewers can respond to questions and clarify misunderstandings<br>• Telephone interviews can be used to reach distant respondents<br>• Can provide a sense of immediacy and personal attention for respondents<br>• Open-ended questions allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results | • Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning<br>• Their validity depends on the quality of the questions<br>• Poor interviewer skills can generate limited or useless information<br>• Can be difficult to obtain a representative sample of respondents<br>• What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know<br>• 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<br>• The process can intimidate some respondents, especially if asked about sensitive information and their identity is known to the interviewer<br>• Results can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze<br>• Transcriptions of interviews can be time-consuming and costly |
| Focus groups | • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues<br>• Can provide in-depth exploration of issues<br>• Usually have face validity – the questions generally have a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed<br>• Can be combined with other techniques, such as surveys<br>• The process allows faculty to uncover unanticipated results<br>• Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences<br>• Can be conducted within courses<br>• 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 | • Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning<br>• Require a skilled, unbiased facilitator<br>• Their validity depends on the quality of the questions<br>• Results might not include the full array of opinions if only one focus group is conducted<br>• What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know<br>• Recruiting and scheduling the groups can be difficult<br>• Time-consuming to collect and analyze data |

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<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**INDIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES**<br>(<u>Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education</u> by Allen 2004)</td></tr>
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| Technique | Potential Strength | Potential Limitations |
|---|---|---|
| Reflective essays | • Are flexible in format and can include questions about many issues<br>• Can be administered to large groups of respondents<br>• Usually have face validity – the writing assignment generally has a clear relationship to the objectives being assessed<br>• Can be conducted relatively quickly<br>• Allow faculty to uncover unanticipated results<br>• Can provide insights into the reasons for the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences<br>• Can provide direct assessment of some learning objectives | • Generally provide indirect evidence about student learning<br>• Their validity depends on the quality of the questions<br>• Conclusions can be inaccurate if biased samples are obtained<br>• Results might not include the full array of opinions if the sample is small<br>• What people say they do or know may be inconsistent with what they actually do or know<br>• Responses can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze |