

Response process validity is the extent to which the actions and thought processes of survey responders demonstrate that they understand the construct in the same way it is defined by the researchers. In other words, it questions whether respondents understand survey questions to mean what we intend. There is no statistical test for this type of validity, but rather it is examined through respondent observation, interviews, and feedback. This document summarizes findings from a response process validity study of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

Purpose

In an effort to determine whether faculty are understanding and answering FSSE questions as we intend, we undertook a study of write-in responses collected from instructional staff in the 2013-2016 administrations. These responses were analyzed to determine whether they could have fit into an existing response option, would require editing the question, or signal confusion among respondents. Once these distinctions were drawn, we made decisions about whether and how to change response options to more fully represent the needs of our population.

Data Description

The data for this study were drawn from write-in responses to three questions on the FSSE core survey in the 2013-2016 administrations. The three questions asked survey recipients to identify their academic rank, highest degree earned, and the division for the course they selected while responding to FSSE. Across those four years, 70,561 instructional staff from 541 institutions responded to the survey. See Table 1 for the frequency of responses for these questions.

Table 1. Frequencies for Study Measures

| Course Division | |
|---|--|
| What is the class level of most students in your selected course section? (n = 61, 493) | |
| 41.6% | Lower division (mostly first-year students or sophomores) |
| 52.6% | Upper division (mostly juniors or seniors) |
| 5.9% | Other, please describe |
| | <i>5.5% (n = 3, 563) wrote something in</i> |
| Academic Rank | |
| Which of the following best describes your academic rank, title, or current position? (n = 61,621) | |
| 23.9% | Professor |
| 22.8% | Associate Professor |
| 22.9% | Assistant Professor |
| 17.8% | Instructor |
| 7.1% | Lecturer |
| 0.7% | Graduate Teaching Assistant |
| 4.8% | Other, please specify |
| | <i>4.9% (n = 3,026) wrote something in</i> |
| Highest Degree | |
| What is the highest degree you have earned? (n = 61, 439) | |
| 63.2% | Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.) |
| 2.9% | Professional degree (J.D., M.D., D.D.S., D.V.M., etc.) |
| 30.8% | Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.F.A., M.B.A., M.S.W., etc.) |
| 2.2% | Bachelor's degree |
| 0.1% | Associate's degree |
| 0.8% | Other, please specify |
| | <i>0.9% (n = 571) wrote something in</i> |

Response Process Validity

Methods

The researchers used three different methods to analyze these write-in responses. One researcher read responses and took notes, one researcher used RapidMiner, a text mining tool, to determine which words were used more frequently, and; as combination of the first two methods; one researcher read and coded responses using NVivo qualitative software.

Results

Although three methods were used in our analyses, the researchers all came to similar conclusions about whether faculty respondents were answering these questions as we had intended. The great majority of write-in responses to the course division and academic rank questions indicated that faculty understood the question, but did not see an appropriate response option among those presented.

However, the write-in responses for the highest degree earned question indicated that respondents were not understanding the question as we intended. Specifically, “ABD” and “In progress” were two of our most frequent write-in responses, demonstrating that although we asked for information about completed degrees, respondents chose to give information about their current educational status instead. “Multiple degrees” was also a popular write-in response to this question, highlighting not a lack of understanding on the part of the respondents, but a need for an additional response option, clarification of the question, or the addition of a question.

With these results in mind, FSSE made updates to items for the 2018 administration year. Changes included adding more academic ranks for respondents to choose amongst; asking new questions about whether a respondent is in progress towards a degree, holds a terminal degree in their field, or holds an administrative position; and simplifying the highest degree earned response options for better clarity.

For more details on this study, see [here](#).