

Unit 5: Questionnaire Design

Critique of the University of Iowa Student Employee Survey

The University of Iowa Student Employee Survey is concise and easy to complete, but several design issues limit the depth and reliability of the data collected. The questionnaire contains only six questions, which reduces response burden but restricts the measurement of important aspects of student employment experiences. Clear information about confidentiality or data use is also missing, which can reduce trust and response quality (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014).

Question design issues:

Q1 (“How long have you been employed...?”) uses overlapping time categories, which may confuse respondents. More precise intervals (e.g., “0–5 months”, “6–11 months”) would improve clarity (Brace, 2018).

Q2 uses Likert scales to measure skill development, but lacks a “*Not applicable*” option for items such as conflict negotiation. Without this, students may be forced to give inaccurate answers (Fink, 2017). Some statements are also overly broad or ambiguous, such as “my supervisor helps me make connections between my work and my life as a student.”

Q3 offers only three response options (“Never”, “One conversation”, “Two or more”) which compresses potentially meaningful variation. A more granular frequency scale would capture richer data.

The open-ended questions (Q4–Q6) encourage detail but assume the experience was positive (“one specific way ... has positively influenced”). This creates positivity bias and may discourage honest reporting of negative experiences (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski, 2000).

Improvements:

- Provide clearer interval categories in Q1.
- Add “*Not applicable*” to relevant Likert items.
- Expand frequency options in Q3.
- Rephrase Q4–Q5 to allow positive, neutral, or negative experiences.
- Add a brief confidentiality statement and explanation of data use.

These changes would increase validity, reduce ambiguity, and provide a more accurate picture of student employee learning outcomes.

References

Brace, I. (2018) *Questionnaire design: How to plan, structure and write survey material for effective market research*. 4th edn. London: Kogan Page.

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- Fink, A. (2017) *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. 6th edn. London: SAGE.
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L.J. and Rasinski, K. (2000) *The psychology of survey response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- University of Iowa Division of Student Life (n.d.) *Student Employee Survey (Iowa GROW®)*. Available at: <https://studentlife.uiowa.edu/sites/studentlife.uiowa.edu/files/imports/IG-Student-Employee-Survey.pdf> (Accessed: 27 November 2025).