Survey Advisory Committee Meeting
September 26, 2011
8:00 – 9:30 A.M.
1911 Building rm 129
Meeting Minutes

Members present: Nancy Whelchel, Maxine Atkinson, Leslie Dare, Ken Esbenshade, Ginny Hall, Michelle Johnson, Sarah Lannom, Stan North Martin, Malina Monaco, Shevaun Neupert, John O'Daniel, Deb Paxton, Paul Umbach, Mike Williams, Carrie Zelna

Not attending: Mike Carter, Haylee McLean, Donna Petherbridge, Kevin Rice, Alan Schueler, Sheri Schwab

Others present: Karen Helm

Call to order: Nancy Whelchel called the meeting to order at 8:05.

Agenda
Welcome and Introductions: Nancy Whelchel gave a brief welcome to the group, followed by attendees introducing themselves.

Charge: Karen Helm went over the Provost's charge for the Survey Advisory Committee (SAC). She explained that the apparent growing number of surveys being conducted on campus has created a concern that response rates have been negatively impacted, thereby affecting the quality and usefulness of the data collected. She gave a brief overview of the institutional surveys that UPA routinely administers, and several examples of surveys UPA knows are being administered on campus by other NC State units or individuals. The challenge for SAC will be to recommend procedures that enable the institution, individual units, and individual researchers to collect the data they need for their program assessment and/or research needs while at the same time potentially limiting the actual number of surveys being conducted on campus. It is important for the committee to remember that the focus is not on researchers/research content per say, but rather on surveys that rely on the participation of NC State students, faculty, staff (and to some extent alumni) as respondents. Examples of possible recommendations include creating opportunities for units to collaborate on surveys, limiting non-NC State researchers' access to our students, faculty, and/or staff, and/or the use of systematically drawn survey samples. In addition to improving the utility of survey data SAC recommendations could also lead to cost-savings for the University and better quality surveys. Helm emphasized that it is up to SAC to determine whether it would be most effective to recommend that official policies be established, or whether it was more appropriate to, for example, provide something like guidelines and/or best practices for conducting survey research with members of the NC State community.

Nancy Whelchel summarized her research on efforts other institutions are making with respect to survey oversight. A quick Google search identified about 20 institutions (ranging from Research I schools to small community colleges) having some sort of survey oversight. Such efforts include official policies, standing committees that review requests for surveys on campus, calendars of survey activities, and educational outreach activities.

Whelchel also summarized efforts UPA has been taking over the past couple of years to help minimize the survey burdens on students. In particular, she has been working closely with units who are most likely to be aware of survey activities (e.g., Student Affairs, DUAP, Registration & Records, IRB) to ask that when they become aware of a large-scale survey activity involving our students, faculty and/or staff as respondents, they ask the researcher to contact her. These efforts thus far have helped somewhat in limiting the number of surveys in the field at any one time, and in keeping surveys out of the field during ClassEval. In addition, UPA has implemented procedures for systematically selecting samples for surveys so that students (faculty or staff) who have already been selected for a survey sample that

semester are not selected in the sample for another survey. SAC members expressed support for these efforts.

Discussion: **Summary of issues**
What is the current 'survey burden' on campus? While there does not appear to be any systematic evidence, there is a general belief among most SAC members that our students, and perhaps less-so faculty and staff, are being asked to participate in an ever-growing number of surveys. Various units report regularly receiving requests to send survey invitations from non-NC State researchers - - this is particularly true for minority or hard-to-reach populations, such as our GLBT or Native American students. Some expressed the concern that in simply passing along such requests to, e.g., a listserv, those receiving the email might assume that the NC State person forwarding the email has carefully vetted the survey project and/or that NC State will somehow benefit from the student's participation in the survey.

The IRB representative on SAC estimates they see up to 800 proposals each year from NC State faculty, staff and students, most of which include an online survey, often to be administered to members of our campus community. Many of these proposals are considered exempt from IRB approval because they either do not meet the federal regulations definition of 'research' and/or collect data anonymously. This also means that many survey projects never come to the attention of IRB - - the unit is collecting data for, e.g., program assessment so IRB review is not required (i.e., it is not "research"). In addition, our IRB is rarely aware of surveys being conducted of our campus community members by external researchers because such projects typically only require IRB review from the home institution of the researcher.

There was general support among SAC members to create and maintain an institutional 'survey calendar.' Such a calendar could serve not only to gather needed information on the extent of surveying on campus, but could ultimately be used to facilitate the collaboration between individually proposed survey projects, manage the timing of surveys (i.e., not have multiple surveys of the same population in the field at the same time), and inform the selection of survey samples.

How do NC State units reconcile the need to conduct assessment activities with the possibility of restrictions on surveys?
The group discussed the conflict between the need to provide data for high stakes activities (e.g., accreditation) and limiting surveys. Would it be possible and/or helpful for the University to prioritize its institutional data needs and incorporate such criteria in a review process of proposed surveys? In addition, educational efforts could help those needing to conduct assessment activities to think of non-survey alternatives for collecting needed information, using existing survey data, and/or using systematic sampling rather than doing population surveys.

Developing and promoting educational and 'best-practice' models is essential.
The group discussed their concern that along with the growing number of surveys being conducted (and in particular the ease with which they can be administered using readily available online survey tools) is the possible decline in the quality of the surveys. Not only does this result in poor quality data, badly designed surveys can possibly turn students (faculty and staff) off from participating in surveys in the future. SAC members also commented that issues of data security are another very serious concern possibly misunderstood by novice (and even experienced) survey researchers. Security breaches, e.g., the release of protected data, could place the University at risk.

There was support among the group for educational outreach efforts to be included among recommendations for survey oversight. This would include best practices for all steps in the survey research design.

Whelchel addressed the concern about data security, and in particular the possibility of personally identifying information being included on survey responses. As the NC State 'Brand Administrator' for Qualtrics (the online survey tool for which NC State [through UPA] has a university-wide license) Whelchel is responsible for setting 'permissions' for individual users. By default, permissions are set for all users to not allow personally identifying information (e.g., IP address, email address) to be included in the survey responses returned to the person administering the survey. Individual users can request that

the relevant permissions be changed to enable them to collect such information, but must provide valid reasons (and, depending on the situation, evidence of IRB approval) for needing such information in order for the request to be granted. Aside from the issue of personally identifying information, Qualtrics also has standard online data security practices in place.

Given public records laws is it in fact possible to deny requests for, e.g., email addresses for a given NC State population?
Several attendees expressed concern with legal limitations on denying requests for public information. This is something that General Counsel will need to advise on.

Do we want to recommend official policy?
There was some concern expressed during the meeting about what 'level' of guidelines we could or should recommend, e.g., policy, regulations, rules, or something less official. In addition to the issue expressed above related to public records, some expressed concern that such oversight could be seen as impinging on academic freedom. SAC members are also aware of current efforts to reduce the number of 'Policies, Regulations, and Rules' and there was some discussion about the wisdom of recommending new ones.

The SAC representative from Legal Affairs suggested that we not automatically rule out recommending policy, rules or regulations because in her experience such actions help to clarify expectations and can serve to limit liability for the University.

What can we learn from other institutions?
The group thought it would be helpful to more thoroughly explore 'survey oversight' activities at other institutions. Nancy Whelchel, Carrie Zelna, and Sarah Lannom will take on this task and report back to the committee.

Next steps
The group thought it would be reasonable to meet about once per month. Nancy will send out a Doodle Poll to schedule the next meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30