

## **BLINN COLLEGE GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH PROJECTS**

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Blinn College is faced with increasing demands for data and information as it responds to demands from local, state, regional, and national sources. The availability of current and relevant institutional data at so many levels enhances decision-making processes and strengthens the college's ability to fulfill its stated mission and goals, but represents a significant investment of resources. The increases in internal demands, such as program review and ongoing departmental assessment, combined with external demands from such entities as accrediting agencies, the National Center for Educational Statistics, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Legislative Budget Board, have made it necessary to implement a set of guidelines to define data gathering processes and to make more effective use of research resources.

### **Basis for Research Requests**

As a college practice, all research requests must demonstrate benefit to the college in some significant aspect. Notably, but not exclusively, these may include curriculum improvement, student development, or enhancement of student services. To assist with the development of research to achieve these enhancements, the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, with advice from the Executive Council and the Committee for Institutional Strategic Planning and Effectiveness, has developed a set of guidelines to illustrate the issues and circumstances involved in such projects. In particular, these guidelines are intended to

- ❖ ensure that research conducted by the college is of significant benefit to the college
- ❖ ascertain that the methods used in the research process will yield reliable and valid answers to the principal issues of the study
- ❖ ensure minimal disruption of the educational process
- ❖ provide an oversight function for review of research requests to ensure that research demands upon the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness do not exceed the ability of the office to provide quality and timely service to the college.

## Definition of Research

The term “research,” as used in this document, refers to the process of obtaining data that are not readily available in existing sources. In general, research activities involve a measurement process, which may take the form of written surveys, interviews or focus groups, observation of groups or individuals, or testing. The purpose of such activities is usually to translate activities, behaviors, or attitudes into quantifiable data elements, to determine general characteristics about groups, sub-groups, or individuals, or to determine cause-and-effect relationships between people and activities.

Research methodology is a term which defines the processes and underlying theory upon which a project will be based. Typically, research begins with a specific research question, or hypothesis. Then, the investigator (the person requesting the research) must determine any underlying assumptions, matters of concern, or potential areas of conflict, as well as define basic terms or concepts to be addressed in the research. Finally, the investigator must demonstrate how the results may be used to benefit the college community for whom the research was conducted.

As part of the development process, a person requesting research activities must define the specific processes and procedures which will constitute the active phase of the project, including

- ❖ a statement of the intended objectives of the research that defines the main questions or issues to be investigated and the intended use and benefits of the study
- ❖ a proposed time line, which takes into account the time needed for the different stages (design and production of survey forms, focus group or interview scripts, observation criteria, as well as distribution, collection, analysis and reporting time) of the process
- ❖ a thorough description of the intended subjects, including sampling criteria
- ❖ a sample of proposed instruments, such as survey or interview questions
- ❖ samples of any associated materials, such as instruction sheets, cover letters, or faculty information letters)
- ❖ a discussion of the impact, if any, that the research may have on the educational process, including the amount of class time used for participation in the project
- ❖ a description of how the privacy of participants will be protected

## **Specific Guidelines for Conducting Class-Based Research Projects**

Often, the information needs of a particular department require that large groups of students be surveyed to determine attitudes, behaviors, or activities. The best alternative to do this is to survey entire classes, based on specific sampling criteria. Although this has the advantage of providing consistent results, it is a disruption of the main purpose of the institution, student learning. In order to minimize this disruption, the following guidelines must be considered.

- ❖ Make the decision to conduct surveys or focus groups as far as possible in advance of actual information needs. The typical development time for a survey can be up to three months, depending on the complexity of the instrument, sample size, and competition of other projects for limited staff time.
- ❖ The optimum window to conduct survey activities is between the fourth and tenth week of the semester. However, since there may be several surveys conducted during that time frame, it is essential not to overburden faculty and students with multiple projects. By submitting requests early, it is often possible to combine several projects to obtain the maximum amount of information with the least disruption.
- ❖ No class should be subject to more than one survey of any type during a single semester, if possible. A log of surveyed classes will be maintained in the OIRE office for each term.
- ❖ No surveys can be conducted during the first three weeks of class, during mid-term week, or during the final three weeks of class.
- ❖ Faculty teaching classes affected by a classroom survey must be notified well in advance of the survey, so that modifications may be made or other issues addressed before the actual start date.
- ❖ The time it takes to complete a survey should be held to a minimum to prevent excess loss of class time.