

Survey, Interview and Focus Group Governance Framework

Section 1 - Background

(1) Surveys, interviews and focus groups are an important tool for students to provide feedback on their studies, for conducting research and for the University to collect information to satisfy compliance and national benchmarking needs. As Australian Catholic University (ACU) has grown, and digital technology has improved, these data collection methods have become increasingly prevalent as means of gathering data from large cohorts of students. Research with students can pose several risks for the University, which include:

- a. students becoming disengaged due to survey and research fatigue;
- b. disrupting communications channels with invitations and reminders;
- c. lowered response rates which compromise data quality due to over-surveying students; and
- d. lack of institutional understanding / clarity in engaging students in a research project.

(2) This Framework aims to minimise the risks of over-researching students and to promote a clear and transparent methodology for the governance of research involving students as participants.

Section 2 - Objectives

(3) The primary objectives of this Framework are to:

- a. formalise a consistent approach to the management and process of recruiting students into research;
- b. clarify the process for approval and execution of surveys, interviews and focus groups of ACU students;
- c. minimise over-communication and research fatigue in the student body; and
- d. maintain a high level of validity and response rates of surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This Framework is applicable to any survey, interview or focus group that has currently enrolled students as participants. In general, this can be categorised as:

- a. internal quality assurance surveys (service and feedback related);
- b. institutional surveys (government endorsed surveys, national benchmarking surveys);
- c. internal research (initiated by ACU staff and students); and
- d. external research (other external surveys).

(5) Surveys conducted as part of laboratory studies, classroom activities and student assessments are exempt from the approval process but must comply with all other procedures of this Framework. Surveys, interviews or focus groups of prospective students, graduates or alumni are outside the scope of this Framework.

Section 4 - Definitions

(6) The following terms are defined:

Term	Definition
Ad-hoc Data Collection	Data collection without a clearly defined fieldwork period. For example, a survey that is administered to students after they meet with a University Counsellor.
Fieldwork Dates	The period of time that respondents have to respond to a survey or complete data collection activities.
Focus Group	A small group of carefully selected participants who contribute to open discussions for research.
Interview	Communication with a respondent face to face or on the telephone to conduct a prepared questionnaire.
Research	The investigation and study of a particular topic or subject by gathering and analysing information and data from various sources to generate new knowledge, insights, and understanding. This can include research involving and/or conducted with and upon the ACU student body.
Research Register	The formal record cataloguing approved student data collection and their metadata.
Response Rate	A response rate (also known as completion rate or return rate) is the number of people who responded to the research over the number of people who were invited to complete the research, expressed as a percentage.
Survey	A formal set of structured questions that require recorded responses from an individual.
Survey Fatigue or Research Fatigue	A feeling of exhaustion or annoyance from the experience of repeatedly completing surveys or other data collection methods.

Section 5 - Framework Principles

Block Out Periods

(7) The 'block out' periods are times during the Academic Calendar which the University has identified when students are at risk of experiencing over-communication and research fatigue. These periods include student breaks and exam times, and the fieldwork dates of institutional surveys. During block out periods no communications or promotion from non-institutional research should take place.

(8) When planning data collection, care should be taken to make sure that the fieldwork dates do not overlap with block out periods, and to minimise communications around the block out periods.

(9) The block out periods for the current Academic Calendar can be viewed on the [Research Register calendar](#).

Institutional Surveys

(10) Institutional surveys are surveys within the University which have the largest impact on students; they are surveys that require a large number of responses and are conducted to satisfy compliance and national benchmarking needs.

(11) Surveys that have been identified and approved as Institutional surveys by the Director, Centre for Education and Innovation will have a period of the academic calendar blocked off and assigned to them, and do not need to seek further approval for recurrences of the survey during that block off period. For example, Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT), Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) surveys.

(12) Institutional surveys will be reviewed every three years to ensure that they are still necessary and fit for-purpose.

Research Projects and Ethics Approval

(13) Research projects that require ACU students to participate in a survey require both the permission to survey students through the Framework and ethics approval through the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

For Internal Researchers

(14) Permission to collect data from ACU students should be sought prior to ethics approval and attached to the HREC application. This will minimise the potential that research participants might be affected by survey fatigue or over-communication during the research project, which may compromise the quality of research.

For External Researchers

(15) External researchers are required to seek ACU approval as per this Framework, however, do not require HREC approval. Evidence of external ethics approval should be attached when applying for permission to collect data from ACU students. Research must be distributed to students by an ACU Research Delegate.

Section 6 - Criteria for Survey Approval

(16) Applications for permission to collect data from students must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the commencement of the fieldwork. Applications will be processed within ten (10) working days of being received and are approved in the order they are received. They will be approved based on:

- a. the quality and completeness of the application;
- b. the potential conflicts with other research during the proposed fieldwork period; and
- c. the potential impact of proposed communications.

(17) Ad-hoc data collection methods that do not have clearly defined fieldwork dates or rely other factors to determine when they must be run, such as program-based evaluations, can apply to run the research for the duration of the academic calendar year. Approval must be sought prior to the end of year preceding to guarantee continued running of the research and must also withhold communications during block out periods.

Section 7 - Application of Framework

(18) Before applying for permission, consult the Research Register to check if similar data is already available. Please fill in the [Survey, Interview and Focus Group Governance Framework - Application Form](#) and email the completed form to CEI@acu.edu.au.

(19) The key information requirements for approval are:

- a. the purpose and objectives of the research;
- b. the fieldwork dates;
- c. the population of student respondents;
- d. the data collection method;
- e. the planned communications that will be received by students;
- f. the research contact(s) responsible for running the research and storing the data; and
- g. any other supporting material.

Section 8 - Data and Reporting

(20) All surveys must comply with the [Privacy Policy](#). Research Leads are responsible for the storage and distribution of data and reports. Storage and distribution of data must comply with the [Information Security Policy](#).

Section 9 - Roles and Responsibilities

Activity	Responsible role or body
Submitting application to collect data from ACU students	Research Lead
Submitting application for ethics approval	Research Lead
Authority for Ethics approval	Chair of the HREC
Assessing applications	Centre for Education and Innovation
Authority for approval	Director, Centre for Education and Innovation
Data entry for the Research Register	Centre for Education and Innovation
Conducting the research	Research Lead (or Delegates)
Storage and distribution of student data	Research Lead
Review of Institutional Surveys	Centre for Education and Innovation
Maintenance of the Research Register & Calendar	Centre for Education and Innovation
Maintenance of the Framework	Centre for Education and Innovation

Section 10 - Review

(21) This Framework will be reviewed and updated at least every five (5) years from the approval date, or more frequently if appropriate.

(22) Unless otherwise indicated, this Framework will still apply beyond the review date.

Section 11 - Further Assistance

(23) For any enquiry about the Framework or the approval process, please contact the Centre for Education and Innovation.

Section 12 - Associated Information

(24) For related legislation, policies, procedures and guidelines and any supporting resources, please refer to the Associated Information tab.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	9th February 2024
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Responsible Executive	Anthony Whitty Director, Centre for Education and Innovation
Responsible Manager	Anthony Whitty Director, Centre for Education and Innovation
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