Overview: Needs Assessment

These tools were created by the Student Success Centre at The University of Western Ontario for a needs assessment. The purpose of conducting the evaluation was to elicit information from students that would help us understand what supports our students feel would be valuable to them in planning and implementing their career goals. Basically, we were looking for what types of career services they wanted and how they preferred to have the services delivered. As the evaluation tool was being created we decided to also ask questions about services they have heard about and used as well as how they found out about our services. This information would/will help us plan for new, improved or continued services in the future. Additionally, we were able to learn about the resources and marketing materials and strategies that were effective to students.

An online survey was created by Sarah Dawson and Dr. Ken Meadows. Dr. Marie Hammond, of Tennessee State University was kind enough to send us the questions she used in her 2001 survey written about in the Journal of Career Development. (Career Centers and Needs Assessments: Getting the Information You Need to Increase Your Success. Marie S. Hammond. Journal of Career Developments 2001; 27; 187). The survey was used in April 2010, and was open for two weeks with a reminder sent a little more than half way through.

The survey invitation was e-mailed to all undergraduate students in one faculty (Social Science) which included a link for students to complete the survey and we received a 10.48% response rate.

The survey results have allowed us to make changes in our programming to reflect student perceived needs and also secure funding to support programs and resources students have indicated are important to them. We learned that it is easier to get funding when you have proof that students want something. I also learned to look at the survey results and the offering of services we have and objectively assess if current programming was meeting student needs. We were able to ask important questions about why we offer the services we do (because we always have vs. because there is a need).

The strengths to the online survey approach were that the tool was easily accessible to students and maintained in a way which was easy to access results. The weaknesses were that students are simply over surveyed as well and inundated with e-mails so I believe we likely missed some students due to that fact.

In the future, we would likely use a similar online tool, however we would choose to add a few more questions to expand on the information we would receive. In addition, we would choose to administer the survey slightly earlier in the year. We were a few weeks behind and got to students as they were approaching exams rather than in March. Finally, while we had had several students test the tool and found it was easily understood, once given to a larger number of students, we found question #6 confused students with its ranking structure. Next time we would not have a response be rank ordered in nature.

These tools and their overview were submitted by the Student Success Centre, The University of Western Ontario.