USD Guidelines for Collecting Demographic Information on Surveys

At times it may be necessary to collect demographic information on a survey administered to USD community members to achieve research purposes. These guidelines outline when it is appropriate and necessary to collect demographic information and describe recommended methods for collecting and using the information.

The guidelines are organized into the following four sections which summarize when and how to collect demographic information on a survey:

A. ASK ONLY WHAT IS RELEVANT

Identify what information you actually need and only ask for information within the relevant identity category(s). Demographic information including gender, race/ethnicity, age, marital status, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation is sensitive and should be collected on applications, surveys, and forms only if necessary.

It is important to note that the collection and use of personally identifiable information in educational records (including demographic information) must follow the guidelines of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Demographic information can only be obtained if there is an educational need to know, a legitimate educational interest, or for evaluation purposes.[1]

General reasons for collecting demographic information include:

- To assess representation in a survey population
- To track data along identity categories (e.g., track experiences of different racial groups)
- To test certain hypotheses the researcher has related to differences that may exist between groups (e.g., expected gender differences)
- When legal data is required for reporting purposes (e.g., a grant or federal program)
- When there is a need to gain perspectives from underrepresented groups through qualitative data

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[1] For more information: https://epic.org/family-educational-rights-and-privacy-act-ferpa/

See the table below for more detailed information about when to collect each category of demographic information.

Identity Category	When to use it	Frequency question should appear
Pronouns[2]	We encourage you to always use this as an optional field on applications/forms so you know how best to refer to your students. When you haven't asked, work on using a student's name until you know what pronouns they use. As you adopt this practice, remember to lead by sharing your own pronouns.	All the time
Gender identity[2]	If you want to ensure representation, track data along identity categories such as gender, or if there is a gendered aspect of the experience*, then this question might be appropriate. Many systems of reporting on campus rely on the binary; including this question will ensure more accurate reporting than existing systems/data. Note that our recommended field options do not solicit trans status; you will only know how the student identifies, not if they are trans. *If there are gendered aspects of an experience, it is important that you are transparent and clear about what this looks like (e.g., describing the housing arrangements) so that students can make informed decisions about what feels good for them.	On occasion
Gender marker[2]	This refers to the sex/gender indicated on legal documentation. You only need this when legal data is required for reporting purposes (such as a grant or federal program) or you're referencing information on a student's legal ID (e.g., passport data for visa application forms). Note that if it is a federal form/reporting requirement, only binary gender markers are recognized, while in the state of California, a nonbinary option, X, is mandated.	Rarely

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[2] See "Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Design" for more information about this identity category.

Identity Category	When to use it	Frequency question should appear
Trans status[2]	Do not solicit this information. As a protected identity, all programs and services must be extended to transgender and gender nonconforming students as they would any other student.	Should not appear without explicit approval from IRP
Sex assignment[2]	Do not solicit this information. Outside of specific medical contexts, you don't need to know someone's sex assignment.	Should not appear
Age	Age is a particularly sensitive category for many respondents and soliciting this information can be viewed as an invasion of privacy. Should only appear to test hypotheses about expected differences that may exist.	Rarely
Race/Ethnicity	If you want to ensure representation, track data along identity categories, or test hypotheses about expected differences that may exist, then this question might be appropriate.	On occasion
First-generation status	If you want to ensure representation, track data along identity categories, or test hypotheses about expected differences that may exist, then this question might be appropriate.	Rarely
Pell grant recipient	Do not solicit this information. Can be obtained from IRP to track data along identity categories or test hypotheses about expected differences	Should not appear

B. METHODS FOR COLLECTING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

There are two ways to collect demographic information on surveys administered to USD community members: **1)** Request existing demographic information for the respondents from Institutional Research and Planning (preferred method) or **2)** Ask the questions on the survey.

If the survey will be anonymous, the demographic information will need to be collected by asking the questions on the survey. If the survey will be confidential, demographic

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information obtained from institutional records can be matched to survey respondent data using student Banner IDs or USD employee IDs. Using existing demographic data can be useful in reducing the number of items on a survey in order to keep respondents engaged. However, embedded demographic information is tied to individual responses so respondents can be identified. For more information about the difference between anonymous and confidential surveys, click here.

Method 1 (preferred method): Request existing demographic information from Institutional Research and Planning to append to a dataset of survey respondents:

- If you're sending a confidential survey and using a unique link to administer your survey, add student Banner ID or USD employee ID to your survey contact list in Qualtrics. This will associate ID numbers with survey responses.

- Once survey data is collected, request demographic information for respondents from Institutional Research and Planning using this Data Request Form.

The following demographic information is generally available from Institutional Research and Planning. If you don't see what you're looking for, please contact IRP@sandiego.edu to consult.

Demographic Information Available for USD Students and Employees:

Gender

Students are currently identified as either: Female, Male, or Neither. This characteristic will be changing to be more inclusive over the next year or so.

Employees are currently identified as either: Female, Male, Nonbinary, or Neither.

Race/Ethnicity

There are two primary ways that USD identifies community members by race/ethnicity. The first is by using IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) categories as defined by the federal government for compliance reporting.

IPEDS records only one race/ethnicity category. However, Institutional Research and Planning collects all of the race/ethnicity categories a community member selects by using "flags", the second way to analyze race/ethnicity. Using "flags" allows community members to be counted in more than one category. The second method can be useful when trying to understand or represent smaller groups of community members .

Examples:
Student A identifies as Hispanic or Latina/o/x and Black or African American. Using IPEDS, this student would be counted only in the Hispanic or Latina/o/x category.

Using the race/ethnicity flags, this student would be counted in both the Hispanic and Latina/o/x and Black or African American categories.

Student B identifies as Asian and White. Using IPEDS, this student would be counted only in the Two or more races category. Using the race/ethnicity flags, this student would be counted in both the Asian and White categories.

Demographic Information Available for USD Students only:

First-Generation Student Status

First-generation students are defined as those whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma or less.

Pell Grant Recipient

The Pell Grant program acts as a proxy for socioeconomic status and is one way to identify low-income students. The Pell Grant variable identifies whether a student received a Pell Grant.

Method 2: Asking demographic questions on a survey:

The section below outlines the recommended question types and field options for common demographic questions.

Gender

The following outlines question types and field options for gender inclusive design. For more detailed information, see this document "[Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Design](#)." For any surveys in Qualtrics, email Tim Novara to receive a pre-populated library of these questions.

a) Gender identity

When you want to track data along gender identity or if there is a gendered aspect of the experience, this question applies. It is helpful to provide options (i.e. a multi-select list) to keep your data consistent. Prefer not to disclose should always be available.

Which term(s) best describe your gender?

| woman |

| man |

| nonbinary |

| gender nonconforming |

| Custom |

Field Type: Multi-select list

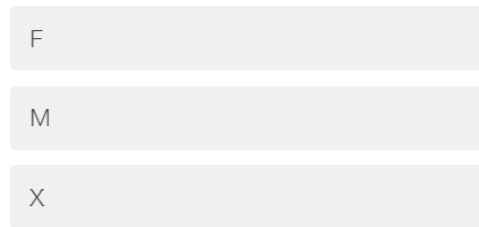**Question:** Which term(s) best describe your gender? Select all that apply.

Responses: woman; man;

nonbinary; gender nonconforming; custom (fillable option); prefer not to disclose

b) Gender marker

This question should only appear when the information is required per outside guidelines. If possible, add the option 'prefer not to disclose.'

What gender marker is on your [insert legal document]?

F

M

X

Field Type: Multi-select list

Question: What gender marker is on [insert legal document]?

Responses: F; M; X*

*Certain reporting requirements will necessitate you remove the nonbinary gender marker option.

Race/Ethnicity

The recommended question format for race/ethnicity uses [IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System)](#) categories as defined by the federal government for compliance reporting. This format is preferred because it matches the format of USD's institutional data and can be used to assess whether a survey population is representative of the population at USD.

Field Type: Multi-select list

Question: Two-part question. 1) Are you Hispanic or Latino? 2) Please select one or more of the following races:

Responses: American Indian/Alaska Native (including all original people of the Americas), Asian, Black or African American (including Africa and Caribbean), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (original peoples), White

Sample Question using the IPEDS categories for Race/Ethnicity

We are utilizing the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) categories for gathering race and ethnicity information. While this format may not allow respondents to fully describe their race or ethnicity, it allows us to understand whether or not the responses we receive are representative of the population at USD.

Are you Hispanic or Latino?

o Yes

○ No

Please select one or more of the following races:

▫ American Indian/Alaska Native (including all original people of the Americas)

▫ Asian

▫ Black or African American (including Africa and Caribbean)

▫ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (original peoples)

▫ White

First Generation Student Status

It is recommended that first generation student status be obtained as a data field from Institutional Research and Planning. If the survey will be anonymous and first generation status is determined to be necessary to track data along identity categories, or test hypotheses about expected differences that may exist, see the sample question below that is used on the FAFSA to determine first generation student status.

What's the highest level of school completed by Parent/Guardian 1?

☐ Middle school/Jr. High
☐ High school
☐ College or beyond
☐ Other/unknown

What's the highest level of school completed by Parent/Guardian 2?

☐ Middle school/Jr. High
☐ High school
☐ College or beyond
☐ Other/unknown

C. TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO PROTECT SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PRIVACY

Because demographic information is sensitive, it is imperative that you take precaution with how data is shared and stored.

Collection & Storage: Data collection and storage devices should be password protected with a strong password and access should only be given to staff members that have been designated as "need to know" as per FERPA guidelines. It is recommended to use a separate codebook file if personally identifying information is to be kept, which

separates data responses from student ID numbers, email addresses, or other identifying information. Any printed copies should be shredded after use.

Dissemination: Think critically about who has access to student information and take reasonable measures to minimize how many people have access to data files. When sharing qualitative assessment data, mine the responses for any identifying information. Keep in mind that some gender diverse students who are on campus have not shared that information. Disaggregated quantitative or qualitative data could be linked to a specific person.

D. EXPLAIN WHY YOU'RE ASKING

When asking for demographic information, be clear about how the information will be used. Students want to know why the information is being collected and how their privacy will be protected. It is useful to include a statement of affirmation alongside this explanation.

> e.g., We ask this question to assess our program outcomes across demographic lines including gender. We honor our trans participants and want to evaluate the experience for specific underrepresented communities. This information will only be shared with limited staff and is stored on a password protected server.

In the event you have to use a question that is rooted in the gender binary (e.g. federal system requirements), name this requirement and acknowledge the exclusivity of the form field.

> e.g.. This field meets our federal reporting requirements and, per the guidelines of the federal government, only has options rooted in the gender binary. Please indicate the answer that aligns with your official federal records. We recognize the limitations of these fields and will not use them within our program beyond the required report. [Program/department name] affirms the presence and participation of our trans and nonbinary students.