



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD), COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN • WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

Implementing a Point-of-Leaving Survey

The increasing amount of research on college students in recent years is an indication of the importance many educational institutions are now placing on social research. For many administrators, student input has become an important ingredient in formulating and implementing institutional policies.

Surveys on college students are conducted for a number of reasons: to monitor student concerns, to assess and change institutional policies, to evaluate program effectiveness, to assess students' perceptions of their training, and to monitor quality assurance in academic training. Since job placement of graduates is an overriding concern of all vocational/technical programs and is one indicator often employed to evaluate program effectiveness, an annual job placement survey of former students has become a *modus operandi* for many colleges.

In recognition of the salient role of student follow-up surveys in the academic environment, any systematic effort to evaluate the quality and success of vocational/technical programs must look beyond student follow-up surveys. A point-of-leaving (POL) survey can be valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of a vocational program from the student's point of view.

Alberta Vocational College, Lac La Biche

Alberta Vocational College (AVC), Lac La Biche, is located in rural northeastern Alberta. The college is one of four provincially administered vocational colleges operating under the Alberta Department of Advanced Education. The college provides educational opportunities for adult Albertans, particularly the "disadvantaged" (i.e., the unemployed and the educationally, economically, or socially disadvantaged). The mandate of the institution includes the provision of "educational opportunities for adult learners (people who need a second chance) to improve their academic qualifications, to develop skills suitable for employment, and to enhance those skills necessary for successful living."

To fulfill this mandate, Alberta Vocational College in Lac La Biche offers a broad spectrum of academic and skill-oriented training programs which are reflected in its four divisions: Adult Basic Education/Academic

Upgrading, Human Services/Business Careers, Trades/Technical, and Community Programs and Services. AVC provides support services to its students in the form of counseling, family support and housing, financial support, and recreation/leisure programs.

Point-of-Leaving Survey

A point-of-leaving survey, as the name suggests, is an annual in-class survey of all prospective graduates of the Alberta Vocational College. The survey is administered by the office of Planning, Research & Development in the last week of class. The purpose of the survey is to gather empirically based data for administrators to use in counseling prospective graduates and in guiding potential students who are considering a program. Specifically, the survey solicits students' perceptions of their training program, employment prospects, and future educational plans.

The Instrument

The POL survey utilizes a generic questionnaire jointly developed by the four Alberta Vocational Colleges and designed to capture the following information from prospective graduates: (a) opinions regarding their experience while attending AVC; (b) employment prospects; (c) future educational plans; and (d) general comments about the college—such as, changes they would like to see at AVC or what they would tell current or future students about AVC.

The instrument contains a total of four sections: Section One provides demographic information such as age, address, gender, and number of dependents. Section Two measures respondents' perceptions of their training program using a Likert Scale (i.e., "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). There are as many as 12 statements to which students must respond about their program: (a) "I believe my program at AVC prepared me well for entry into my career," (b) "My program prepared me for other things besides a job," (c) "I believe AVC prepared me for future advancement in my career," and (d) "I would recommend AVC to a friend." Student perceptions of teacher effectiveness are included in this section, as well.



Section Three solicits information about respondents' plans after leaving college, especially whether respondents now have a job where they will continue to work, have been offered a job, or will look for a job later. Respondents are also asked if they expect to use their training on the job, the type of job they anticipate looking for, their expected starting pay, and if they plan to continue their training at any time in the future. Section Four is designed to gather general comments from students on various aspects of college life.

Significance of POL Survey

A point-of-leaving survey can be extremely valuable to educational institutions in terms of assessing the quality of a vocational program from the perspective of its graduates. As well, results of POL surveys benefit the students *before* graduation.

- A POL survey enables administrators to understand the perceptions and the problems of students before they graduate.
- Since the overwhelming majority of AVC students were unemployed at the time of admission, the results of a POL survey may serve as a basis for the development of job-hunting skills or job counseling for graduating students.
- Students in vocational programs are overwhelmingly oriented to work force entry; the survey offers timely insight into problems that prospective graduates envisage in their transition from school to work, particularly those who had been unemployed for many years. A POL survey can be used to assess the perceived information needs of job hunters.
- A POL survey can assess how well students are prepared to meet the very real challenges of the employment marketplace.
- A POL provides one of the best means of collecting reliable, representative, and cost-effective, empirically based data on students. It is a valid means of assessing opinions among a representative group of students.
- A POL survey is a means of assessing quality assurance in vocational education. It depicts the image the graduate of a vocational program takes with them to the labor market.
- A POL permits a comparative analysis of graduates' perceptions of their vocational training before and after graduation.
- Comments from graduates on various aspects of college life are useful in guiding administrators in meeting the needs of new students.
- A POL survey reveals future educational plans of graduating students, particularly those in academic

upgrading. Those who intend to further their education can be recruited into AVC career programs.

Alberta Vocational College, Lac La Biche, has found that the best approach is to conduct a triangulation of student surveys annually, including student point-of-entry, point-of-leaving, and follow-up.

Bob Adebayo, *Research Coordinator, Planning, Research & Development*

For further information, contact the author at Alberta Vocational College, Lac La Biche, P.O. Box 417, Lac La Biche, Ab. T0A 2C0, CANADA.

Susanne D. Rousseau, Editor

October 18, 1991, Vol. XIII, No. 24

©The University of Texas at Austin, 1991

Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER institutions for their own personnel.

INNOVATION ABSTRACTS is a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, EDB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, (512) 471-7545. Funding in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation. Issued weekly when classes are in session during fall and spring terms. ISSN 0199-106X.