

Key Aspects of Informed Consent & Communication Documents

Depending upon the specific design of your assessment informed consent elements may appear in preliminary email communications/recruitment for the assessment, 2) assessment information sheets/websites, or 3) information delivered orally at the time of data collection.

Keys to Success:

- Use Informed Consent documents to help communicate the way you will use participant data.
- Include Informed Consent language on surveys or as a link on a web survey
- Provide Informed Consent documents to participants of interviews, or communicate the information below to those participating in focus groups.
- Have paper copies ready in case participants would like to read the information.

1. Purpose.

Define the purpose of your assessment. Why are you doing this study?

Example Language: UCLA Student Affairs is interested in learning more about the transition experiences of incoming transfer students who live on campus. This information will help inform future programming and services for transfer students.

2. Expectations/Process.

Give an overview of what you expect of participants if they participate, including duration of participation, procedures of the study, types of questions you will be asking, etc. What can people expect? What are they being asked to do?

Survey

- How long to complete?
- Can they return to the survey or must it be completed in one sitting?
- Will the survey time out after a period of inactivity?
- Can they skip questions/are they mandatory?

Example Language—Survey:

The link below will connect you to the online survey. The survey includes questions about your experiences at UCLA in the areas of classroom experiences, satisfaction with your major, involvement in campus activities, and interactions with other students. It should only take about 20 minutes of your time to complete this survey. While we hope that you complete the survey in one visit, if you do not complete all of the questions you can return to the survey using the link provided to you in this email.

Interview/Focus Group

- How many participants?
- Timeframe
- Will it be recorded?
- Who will be conducting the interview?

Example Language—Focus Group: If selected, you can expect to participate in a small group dialogue with 8-10 other UCLA transfer students and guided by two facilitators. The session will last 90 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

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3. Risks.

Notify participants of any risks they may experience (e.g. uncomfortable feelings in talking about potentially negative experiences).

Example Language: There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. However, as you talk about your experiences you may experience discomfort from talking about negative, painful, or difficult experiences. If you become too uncomfortable, you can stop talking or leave the focus group at any time. If you feel like you need to talk to a professional, you can visit or call the UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services Center (CAPS). They are located at John Wooden Center West 221 Westwood Plaza Box 951556 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1556. Phone: (310) 825-0768. Counseling is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by phone.

4. Benefits.

Describe the benefits of participating including direct benefits (e.g. incentives like Bruin Card credit or chance to win an iPad) and indirect (e.g. your experiences will be used to improve programming for transfer students). Will results be made available to participants? If so, indicate how they can access this information.

Example Language—Incentives: Food will be provided at the discussion. In addition, as a token of our appreciation, discussion participants will receive a \$20 BruinCard credit.

Example Language—General Benefit: Your responses to campus surveys are a valuable resource for us in our decisions about student programs and campus policies. We encourage you to use these surveys as a way to get your voice heard and to help us improve the undergraduate experiences for your class and for future cohorts of UCLA students.

5. Privacy During Data Collection.

Describe any measures you will take to protect the privacy of participants during data collection. Does the location of data collection help to ensure privacy? (e.g. for an online survey they can choose when to take it—thus ensuring their own level of privacy). In focus groups, complete privacy cannot be ensured because of multiple participants; however, you can request that participants respect one another's privacy.

Example Language: There is some risk associated with being a part of a study that recruits members of the LGBTQ population. We will protect your privacy and never disclose any identifying information. Any names or identifying information will be removed from transcripts and data records to protect your privacy.

6. Recording.

Ask permission to record the session (e.g. interview, focus group), if applicable. In a focus group, the easiest way to confirm that there is agreement is to ask if anyone does *not* agree to be recorded, rather than try to verify that each participant has, in fact, indicated agreement.

7. Data Confidentiality.

Inform participants about how data will be stored, who will have access to the data once it has been collected, and how it will be reported. Will data be saved or destroyed after the study? Who has access to electronic files? If there are paper files, how will they be stored? How will data be reported in ways that protect participants' confidentiality (e.g. reporting results only in aggregate; ensuring that interview findings/quotes are reported in ways that do not include enough information to make someone identifiable)? SAIRO enforces a threshold of a minimum of 10 cases in a cell for reporting on quantitative data.

Example Language: Your identifying information and responses will be used for assessment purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be reported in the aggregate to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

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8. **Obligation/Voluntary Participation.**

All studies need to include a statement that participation is voluntary.

Let your participants know that they are not obligated to participate in the study and they can stop at any time (e.g. stop an interview or leave a focus group if they begin to feel uncomfortable). Ensure that any incentives you offer do not create a sense of obligation or coercion (e.g. tying participation to grades). Ensure that your relationship to participants does not create a sense of obligation to participate (e.g. requiring direct reports to participate)

Example Language: While we encourage your involvement, this survey is completely voluntary and your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your standing or status at UCLA in any way. There could be survey items that you are uncomfortable answering or to which you would simply prefer not to respond. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you will be under no obligation whatsoever to answer any questions that you are not inclined to answer. You may choose not to answer any specific questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

A note on incentives: Incentives should be thought of as a “thank you” for the time spent participating, and hopefully do encourage greater participation. Think carefully about the balance between encouraging participation and incentives that might have an effect on data quality (e.g. those that could be coercive or are so high value that they might encourage inaccurate responses just to get entered in a drawing). UCLA has specific guidance on the amount of awards allowed, particularly for staff. Please see the links below for information.

- Policy on Employee Gifts (G-41): <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/3420353/BFB-G-41>
- Policy on Non-Employee Gifts (G-42): <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/3420354/BFB-G-42>

9. **Resources.**

Refer participants to available resources (e.g. CAPS), if applicable.

Example Language: See #3 above.

10. **Contact Information.**

Provide your contact information. Invite participants to follow-up with you if they have further questions, want to share additional information/experiences they forgot to mention or felt uncomfortable mentioning, or have concerns about the study/assessment, etc.

Example Language: If you have any questions or comments about the survey, please feel free to contact the Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) at sairo3@saonet.ucla.edu or 310-206-8470.

SAIRO also recommends that individuals new to assessment and research complete the Cooperative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course on human subjects protection for Social and Behavioral Research available at <http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Pages/CITITraining.aspx> for additional background.

If you have additional questions about communication with potential participants, or the specifics of informed consent, please contact SAIRO for consultation.