



**BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH**

## **Policy for Handling Survey Comments**

**Context:** Institutional Research conducts and receives the results of numerous surveys, many of which include open-ended questions that invite comments. Two examples are the NSSE and the Graduating Student Survey. Students will sometimes include names of specific individuals in their responses, sometimes mentioned in a positive fashion and sometimes negatively.

**Purpose:** The document provides guidance for the distribution of comments from surveys, including whether names must be removed before distribution and how analytical files containing comments are managed.

### **Guidelines:**

1. To facilitate the management of comments, all IR-sponsored surveys will include language similar to the following: “Your responses to this survey are confidential, and only summaries of your responses will be reported. Your verbatim comments may also be sent to your department chair, your dean, and the provost for review.”
2. If the individual receiving the comments has a direct evaluative link to individuals or units mentioned in the comments, the comments will be delivered verbatim. Examples of individuals with a direct evaluative link include department chairs, deans, and provost.
3. Examples of individuals without a direct evaluative link would include the President, other VPs, and individual faculty members. They would receive a version of comments with names redacted.
4. If the comments need to have names redacted, the following procedure will be used:
  - a. Read each comment for names.
  - b. If a name is found, evaluate if the comment is positive or negative.
  - c. If the comment is positive, keep the name. If the comment is negative, remove the name and replace with \_\_\_\_ to indicate that something has been removed.
  - d. If a title is used instead of a name (e.g., chair of Criminal Justice), the title will typically be left.
5. Raw comments will typically be distributed as pdf files unless there is a specific need for the user to manipulate the data. A banner or other heading will be placed across the document indicating that the document is confidential and should not be distributed.
6. Files that are used for qualitative analysis (i.e., those containing coded open-ended comments) will not be distributed. Rather, summaries of findings will be shared.
7. If a Boise State faculty member or graduate student wishes to conduct a qualitative study using the comments, they must first obtain approval from the IRB before they receive the “redacted” version of the comments.
8. Comments will not be shared with anyone who is NOT employed at Boise State University.