

Oakton’s Perceptions of Its Office of Institutional Research

This fall, the Office of Research asked faculty, staff, and administrators to complete an online survey as part of our office’s self-assessment for program review. This *In the Abstract* describes some of what we learned from this survey. The survey asked respondents to rate various qualities about the Office of Research staff, the quality and usefulness of work produced, and the contribution that the office makes to Oakton. Additional questions asked respondents to identify strengths, weaknesses, and provide suggestions for improvement. There were 146 total respondents to the survey, representing a good mix of individuals from all areas of the college: 29% full-time faculty, 17% part-time faculty, 44% staff, and 10% administration. The majority of respondents (79%) have been at Oakton for 5 years or more. About half (49%) had worked directly with a member of the Office of Research.

How is the Office Perceived?

To get a sense of how well we were doing our job, we asked respondents to rate their level of agreement to a number of statements describing office of research staff and the work that we produce. Table 1 presents the summary of these responses from individuals who said that they had worked with our office at least once before.

Table 1 – Level of Agreement with Statements about OIR Staff and Work

	% who said that they “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” *
OIRCP staff members.....	
are courteous	90%
are approachable	79%
demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior	88%
demonstrate creativity	75%
exercise initiative	76%
have the appropriate knowledge and skills to meet my needs	87%
listen and make an effort to understand my needs	81%
show interest in receiving feedback and improving performance	67%
Data and information from the OIRCP.....	
meet my needs	72%
are reliable	89%
are provided in a timely manner	89%
are presented in a useful format	83%
are understandable	86%
The OICRP makes a positive contribution to Oakton.....	84%

(* Of those who reported working with the OIRCP on a project, n = 71)

We are pleased with the results. It appears that those who have worked with our office have favorable impressions of both the staff and the quality of work that is produced. Yet clearly there are still areas of improvement. The lone rating below 70% was that which asked if staff members “showed interest in receiving feedback and improving performance”, suggesting the perception of a resistance to input from others within the College.

The ratings in Table 1 are reinforced by the responses to open-ended questions asking what the Office of Research’s strengths and weaknesses are. The most common response reported by respondents when asked about the strengths of the office was a positive quality associated with staff members (e.g., helpfulness, professionalism, etc.), reported by 39% of those who responded to this question. This was followed closely by responses indicating that the knowledge/expertise of staff (36%) and quality of work (15%) were strengths. The most common area of improvement reported by respondents (31%) was the need for some type of outreach to make others at the office more familiar with the work provided by and resources available to our office. This was followed closely by responses indicating the need to explore other areas of research or data usage (23%), poor approachability (17%), and the need for more rigorous methods of measurement (17%).

So what do the results tell us? Overall, we are pleased with the positive ratings and comments reported by others within the Oakton community. However, there is a perception by some that those within our office are not approachable and/or reluctant to accept input or suggestions for research ideas from others within the college. This may stem from a general lack of familiarity with our office and the work produced, as evidenced by the stated need for more communication/outreach from our office with other areas of the college. Clearly there is a need for our office to do a better job of “getting the word out” about the work that we provide and the resources that we have available for others within the college. To that end, we have already taken some steps to improve our profile at the college by: developing a standard set of enrollment charts for each academic program involved in program review that was distributed for the first time this past fall, developing and administering recent online surveys that have provided usage and satisfaction data for non-academic programs within the college (Office of College Advancement, the Bookstore, the cafeteria, etc.) that we have not worked with much in the past, and refining a recently-developed unit-cost summary spreadsheet that will be used by academic programs in their program review reports.