# Dean's Innovation Grants

# Final Report

Date:  9/28/20
Project Title:  UNT Libraries 30-Second Survey
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## Project Purpose

The 30-Second Survey Project is a series of short, in-person surveys carried out by the University of North Texas Libraries during the 2019-20 academic year in order to gain a better understanding of student impressions about the services offered at our facilities. The design of these surveys, with an average completion time of 30 seconds or less, anonymous responses, and an incentive for completion helps to obtain a high response rate while minimizing sampling error. The standardized structure of these surveys allows them to be deployed quickly and inexpensively to address a variety of questions, from broad usage trends to specific purchase preferences. By providing a flexible means of obtaining reliable, actionable responses from students, these surveys allow our libraries to better align our services to the needs of our users.

## Project Activities

This project involved a series of in-person student surveys conducted primarily during the fall semester, with three surveys completed before the covid-19 campus closure.  We conducted these surveys on library-owned laptops and followed a standardized format that emphasized low barriers to completion and easily comparable responses.  While members of this project ultimately designed the surveys, they were often carried out in coordination with other library departments that had questions about their users.  Once created, we then carried out these surveys either in the libraries themselves or on neutral campus territory (depending on the intended audience) and tabulated and presented the results within one week.

## Budget

While the project remained in budget in all categories, the unexpected campus closure and consequent cessation of the project left much of the funding unspent.  Of the $600 requested for equipment, $170.10 was used for adjustable-height folding tables and $332.94 went toward interchangeable sandwich-board sign holders ($503.04 total).  These items will be used for future 30-second surveys and have also been used by other departments for library events. The remainder of our expenses were spent on survey incentives (donuts and napkins).  Even

when accounting for the early curtailment of the project, we remained significantly under budget on this supplies budget, using only $933.59 of the requested $2,800.  This was largely due to our survey of all donut bakeries in Denton and our agreement with the lowest-cost provider.  By reusing materials and conducting surveys on cost-free campus spaces, we avoided any printing or space usage fees.  Ultimately, our total expenditures amounted to $1,266.53 of the $4,000 approved budget, providing exceptional return for our limited investment.

## Project Outputs/Outcomes

Though the covid-19 shutdown unfortunately forced our project to conclude five months early, it nonetheless produced a wealth of information about library user (and in some cases, non-user) perspectives on library services, spaces, and resources.  In fall 2019, we completed surveys on general library use, library facilities, and the Media Library, ECL, and Discovery Park libraries.  In the shortened spring semester, we held a follow-up general library survey, as well as surveys for the Willis Library Factory and the Factory at Discovery Park.  Each of these surveys completely "sold out" of incentives, reaching our target sample size in every occasion.  The number of respondents ranged from 227 to 809, depending on the population being measured in the survey (for example, a smaller sample is required for the population of Discovery Park Library users than for that of Willis Library).

These surveys were completed with a minimal investment of time and financial resources, but they revealed useful, actionable information about our user population.  Following each survey, we created a Power BI report detailing the results of each question.  These surveys are accessible to all library employees on powerbi.com.  The results can be used for a variety of reasons, from aligning resource usage to student needs to fixing common issues.  Within TACO, 30-second surveys have contributed to purchasing decisions at both Factory (now Spark) locations, long-term plans for technology acquisition and decommissioning, and for building maintenance issues, among other applications.  Furthermore, these reports can provide context for future surveys, allowing us to identify trends in student perceptions and preferences.

## Anecdotal Information

The UNT Libraries 30-Second Surveys are completed on laptops, but it is typical for respondents to discuss their sentiments with project members after they complete the survey.  This informal feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many respondents expressing their approval of the format of the surveys.  Some have reported surprise at the survey taking only 30 seconds as advertised, while others have shown appreciation for being properly compensated for their time.  Many students, both informally and through the open-answer question included on every survey, have expressed appreciation for having their voices heard.

In addition, multiple graduate students have reached out to the project members to discuss adapting our survey methodology to their own academic projects.  Curiously, in one instance a student identified one of the project members by name and informed him that the UNT

Libraries' survey methodology was being taught in one of their classes.  Given the strong response from respondents, we feel that our methods can be applied to a variety of academic and professional contexts.

## Best Practices

From its conception, the UNT 30-Second Survey was intended to be easily adopted by other university libraries.  The format is simple and emphasizes low resource usage and limited time spent cleaning or parsing data.  The main "commandments" of the 30-Second Survey are: 1) The survey must take an average user 30 seconds or less to complete; 2) the respondent should be well compensated for their time (this is crucial to minimize voluntary response bias); and 3) the questions should be categorical, with limited choices (with the exception of a single open-ended question at the end).  Most importantly, the survey design should focus on the needs and preferences of the users, not the creators of the survey.

To further our goal of spreading the 30-Second Survey to other academic libraries, we briefly presented on the purpose and design of the program at the Cross Timbers Library Collaborative (CTLC) in August 2020.  Once the initial project is complete (see next section), our intention is to follow up with CTLC and the Library Assessment Conference in 2021.

## Program Continuity

Like many on-campus initiatives, the 30-Second Surveys were prematurely canceled due to the covid-19 pandemic, with six of the planned surveys not being carried out.  Fortunately, this project was designed to be carried out on an ongoing basis following the conclusion of its DIG year.  TACO intends to carry out two surveys per semester as soon as on-campus health conditions allow, possibly as early as the spring 2021 semester.  Additionally, we intend to volunteer our time and equipment to any library department that wishes to fund a survey of their own.  Our hope and intent is for the library to continue to continue to use flexible, simple, reliable survey methodology to inform its decisions.