

The Anti-Racist Classroom

PRE-COURSE SURVEYS

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UNIVERSITY OF
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Why use a pre-course survey?

A pre-course survey can be very useful in several areas. It can...

- Help students prepare for challenging course material by introducing them to vocabulary and by signaling to them that your class will be targeting certain complicated issues. Nobody likes to be taken by surprise!
- Allow students to start reflecting on their own attitudes and experiences in preparation for the class. We are all more articulate and accurate if we have rehearsed our opinions before being put on the spot.
- Start the process of students reflecting on their own writing. This will be an essential part of their growth as writers and thinkers throughout the semester.
- Give an instructor an opportunity to get to know the incoming class a little bit! These surveys can help an instructor gauge the range of comfort and facility with difficult conversations AND with critical writing. An instructor can use that information to target early-semester content and conversations appropriately.

What to ask?

What do you want to know? A pre-course survey should be brief, upbeat, engaging, and it can jump-start community and curiosity.

Some general categories you may consider:

- **Demographics:** Where are your students from? How old are they? While many of our students may find questions about their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or religion a little invasive (especially since they've never met their instructor!), you can invite them to share using an open-ended question. For example: "What do you want me to know about you?"
- **Writing background:** Open-ended prompts like "Describe your writing process" or "What makes a good essay?" might encourage students to think about writing from a slightly different angle than they are accustomed to!
- **Experience with conversations around race and social justice:** An open-ended question along the lines of "What is your experience discussing race?" could work here, as could more structured question formats. You might ask students to rate their comfort level from 1-10, or to rate their (dis)agreement with certain statements, e.g. "It is important to discuss racism."

How do I design and distribute a pre-course survey?

Luckily, the University of Georgia partners with Qualtrics to offer members of the UGA community access to survey creation and distribution tools that make the survey construction process relatively user-friendly. To login or to establish an account, go to

https://eits.uga.edu/web_and_applications/qualtrics/

And then have fun with it! Best practices with surveys include keeping things short, sweet, and easy to understand. Remember: these students haven't taken your class yet, so it is unreasonable to assume any baseline knowledge about college-level writing or social justice. That comes later!

Consider when to send your surveys to your students. The most effective window is one-two weeks before the start of the class. Plan on sending the survey out multiple times: once as an initial greeting, and then again with a reminder a few days before your first class meeting. You can also leave the survey open for the first week of the course, allowing stragglers to participate. Remember to remind students in person, too!