

Sample Sizes and Assessment

The number of elements (e.g., respondents, artifacts, or cases) utilized in analysis and reflective of a greater population is known as a study's *sample size*. The sample size needed to conduct statistical analyses depends on several factors, including the confidence interval, margin of error, and population size. With so many factors in play, sample sizes can prove difficult to calculate and complicated to apply to assessment in higher education. Therefore, Suskie (2009) argues that the answer to "How much evidence is enough?" is to use common sense:

"Collect enough evidence to feel reasonably confident that you have a representative sample of what your students have learned and can do. The sample should be large enough and representative enough that you can use the results with confidence to make decisions about a course or program. And take careful steps to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of your assessment findings." [Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. p. 47]

Recommended Assessment Sample Sizes*

Populations of 10 - 1500

Note: "N" stands for the total number of students in the degree program; "n" stands for the size of the recommended sample. The sample sizes are based on the 95% confidence level and a random sampling methodology.

N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n
10	10	110	86	300	169	950	274
15	14	120	92	320	175	1000	278
20	19	130	97	340	181	1100	285
25	24	140	103	360	186	1200	291
30	28	150	108	380	191	1300	297
35	32	160	113	400	196	1400	302
40	36	170	118	420	201	1500	306
45	40	780	123	440	205		
50	44	190	127	460	210		
55	48	200	132	480	214		
60	52	210	136	500	217		
65	56	220	140	550	226		
70	59	230	144	600	234		
75	63	240	148	650	242		
80	66	250	125	700	248		
85	70	260	155	750	254		
90	73	270	159	800	260		
95	76	280	162	850	265		
100	80	290	165	900	269		

* Johnston, B. and Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research – Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. p. 234.

Guiding statement on sampling, SACSCOC*

“An institution may provide a sampling of its programs as long as it is representative of its mission and includes a valid cross-section of programs from every school or division and at each degree level. Sampling should also include programs offered at off-campus instructional sites and course work offered through distance or correspondence education. It is the institution’s responsibility to make a compelling case as to why the sampling and assessment findings are an appropriate representation of the institution’s programs. This sampling, however, does not preclude the institution from having data/analysis available on the effectiveness of all programs in case evaluators request to review it. It is the evaluators’ prerogative to conduct a more in-depth review of an institution’s data/findings/analysis on the effectiveness of its educational programs.”

* SACSCOC (May 2012). *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges.