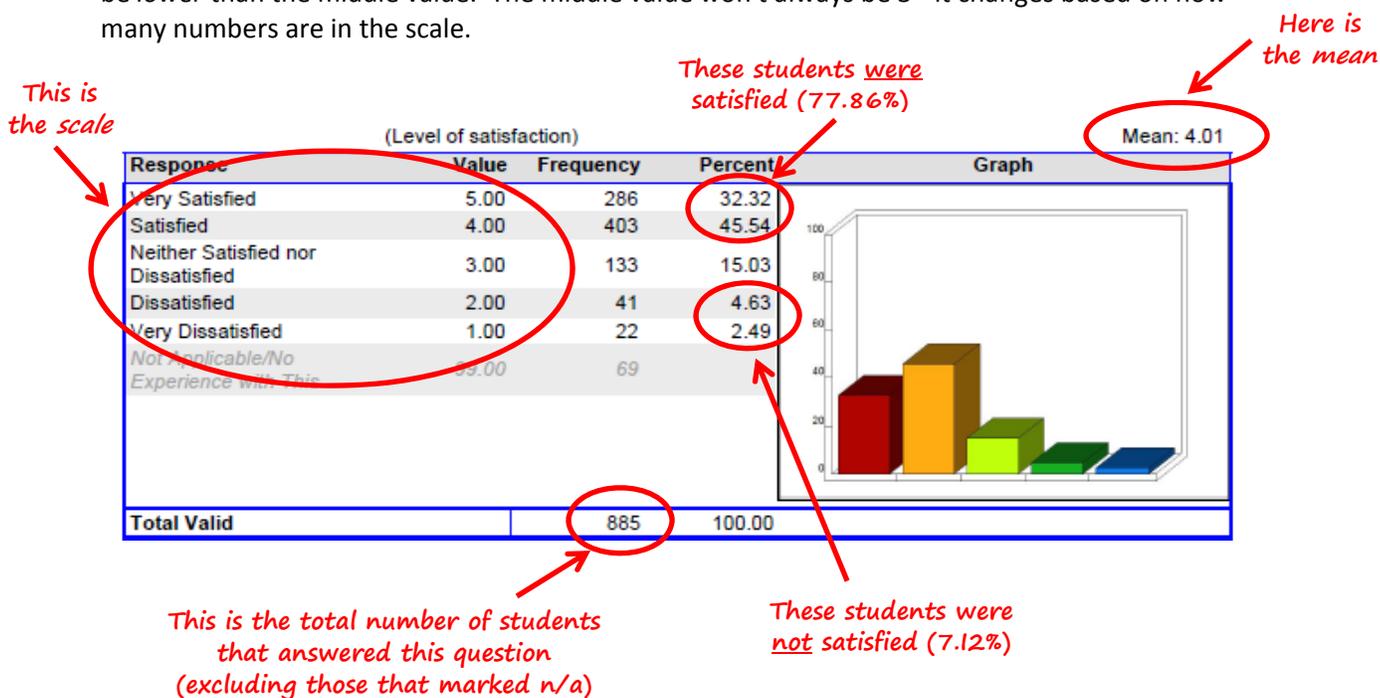# Tips for Interpreting Survey Data

Below are some things to keep in mind when looking at survey data for program review and other evaluation/planning activities. The examples refer specifically to the **Fall 2013 LAMC Student Survey (http://www.lamission.edu/irp/surveys.aspx)**, but the concepts can be applied to interpreting data from any survey.

1. Numbers don't mean anything out of context.

Before you look at your scores, look at the *scale*. For example, the scale for the **Level of satisfaction** question goes from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest ("best") score. 3 is in the middle of the scale, so if you are doing well, your *mean* (average score) will be *higher* than 3. If not, then you know you need to improve.

Some scales will be reversed, with 1 being the "best" score. In that case, you want your mean to be *lower* than the middle value. The middle value won't always be 3 - it changes based on how many numbers are in the scale.

This is the scale

These students __were__ satisfied (77.86%)

Here is the mean

(Level of satisfaction)   Mean: 4.01

Response	Value	Frequency	Percent	Graph
Very Satisfied	5.00	286	32.32	
Satisfied	4.00	403	45.54	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	3.00	133	15.03	
Dissatisfied	2.00	41	4.63	
Very Dissatisfied	1.00	22	2.49	
Not Applicable/No Experience with This	99.00	69		
Total Valid		885	100.00	

This is the total number of students that answered this question (excluding those that marked n/a)

These students were __not__ satisfied (7.12%)

2. Is this what people really think?

One way to find out is to look at how many people answered the question. This is not the same as the number of people who completed the survey (because people skip questions). The more survey respondents, the more likely the results will reflect what people really think.
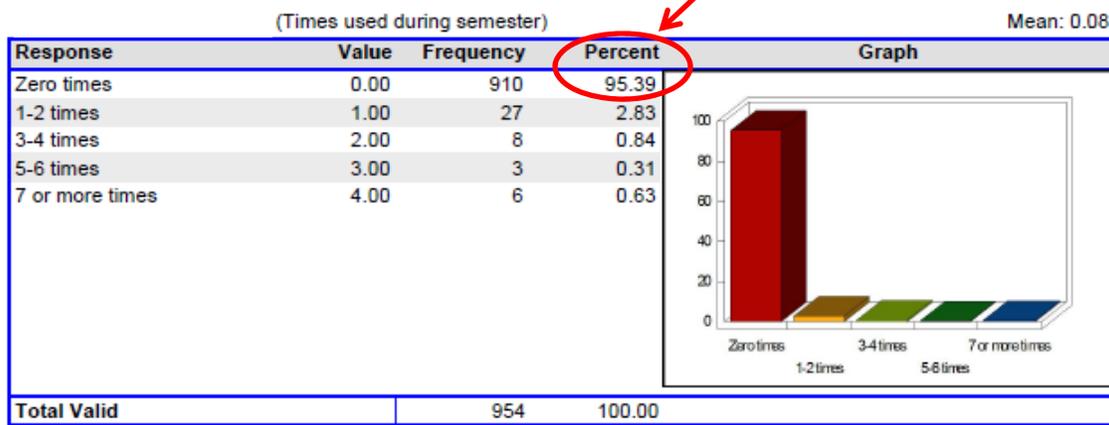
Another way to find out is to compare yourself to others. If everyone got exactly the same score, the survey respondents might not be giving true feedback. If everyone got relatively high scores, maybe all the survey respondents were just very easy-going (like having an easy professor) - in this case, focus on the low end of the spectrum to figure out what to improve.
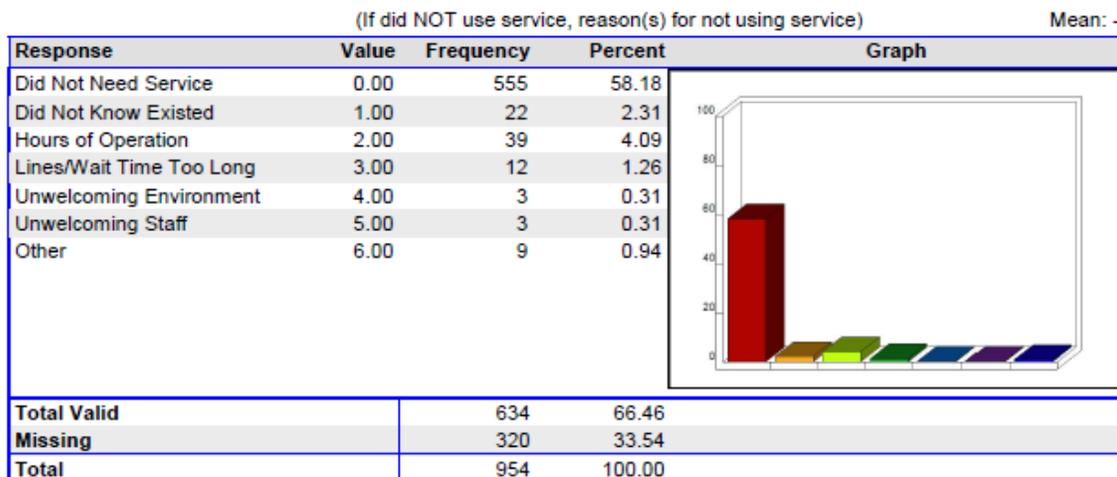
3. Look for an explanation.

If you scored well in an area, ask why - the reasons may be able to help you improve other areas. If you scored poorly in an area, also ask why - you need to know what's wrong in order to fix it. In some cases, you may find that a low score is explained completely by external circumstances and does not reflect poor performance at all.

In the **Times used during the semester** question below, 95% of survey respondents did *not* use the service in question that semester. Why didn't more students use the service? Maybe they don't know about it, maybe the lines are too long or the hours are too short, maybe the service isn't needed and can be eliminated. How do we know? As it happens, the survey has another question that asks students why they didn't use the service.

This is the % of students that selected each option. The total for this column adds up to 100%.

(Times used during semester)				Mean: 0.08
Response	**Value**	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Graph**
Zero times	0.00	910	95.39	
1-2 times	1.00	27	2.83	
3-4 times	2.00	8	0.84	
5-6 times	3.00	3	0.31	
7 or more times	4.00	6	0.63	
Total Valid		954	100.00	

The data from the question on **reason(s) for not using service** shows that 58% of students didn't need the service, which explains why those students didn't use it.

(If did NOT use service, reason(s) for not using service)				Mean: -
Response	**Value**	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Graph**
Did Not Need Service	0.00	555	58.18	
Did Not Know Existed	1.00	22	2.31	
Hours of Operation	2.00	39	4.09	
Lines/Wait Time Too Long	3.00	12	1.26	
Unwelcoming Environment	4.00	3	0.31	
Unwelcoming Staff	5.00	3	0.31	
Other	6.00	9	0.94	
Total Valid		634	66.46	
Missing		320	33.54	
Total		954	100.00	

Another survey question asks students that have used a service to indicate which aspects of the service they were **NOT satisfied** with:

(If HAVE used service, check the box if you are NOT satisfied with the following:)   Mean: -

Response	Value	Frequency	Percent	Graph
Location	1.00	19	1.99	
Hours of Operation	2.00	87	9.12	
Waiting Times	3.00	93	9.75	
Accuracy of Information Provided	4.00	41	4.30	
Amount of Information Provided	5.00	34	3.56	
Clarity of Information Provided	6.00	39	4.09	
Friendliness of Staff	7.00	45	4.72	
Total Valid		196	20.55	
Missing		758	79.45	
Total		954	100.00	

Hours of Operation and Waiting Times were the areas that had the largest number of unsatisfied students.

The same data is shown graphically in the bar chart. Unfortunately, the bars are unlabeled, but they go left-to-right starting from the top of the response list.

Data from this question can be used to determine which changes are most pressing to improve student satisfaction.