Sample Population and Size

What is the population?
The population is the entire group of individuals that information is wanted about.

What is the sample?
The sample is the part of the population that information is collected from and that statistically represents the larger population.

What is the sample size?
The sample size is the number of individuals in the population from which information is collected.

What is sampling?
Sampling is a way to obtain information about a large population by examining a smaller, randomly selected sample.

What is a random sample?
A random sample is a type of sample that is selected in a way that gives each individual of the population an equal chance of being included in the sample.

What size sample is needed for assessment?
The answer to this question is influenced by several factors including, the purpose of the assessment, the size of the population, the risk of selecting a “bad” sample, and the sampling error allowed. Generally, the larger the sample the more the data collected reflects the population. The smaller the sample, the greater the chance of selecting students who do not adequately reflect the total population resulting in what is known as a sampling error. A “rule” to follow is if the population is less than 30, all should be included in the assessment.

Do ALL students have to be assessed?
No. For small programs, it may be feasible or even necessary to assess every student in the program. It may not, however, be feasible for larger programs to assess all students. Large programs may use a random sample of the total students in the program.

What does SUNY recommend as a desired percent to select when assessing a random sample of students?
SUNY and other experts recommend that “twenty percent (20%) of students enrolled in a particular learning experience” is a sufficient sample size. SUNY also recommends no having less than 30 students participate in an assessment.

SUNY GEAR homepage found at http://cortland.edu/gear/FAQs.html
Are there other guidelines for sampling?

- All students should be assessed when possible to provide the most reliable information.
- A sample of the population is an acceptable alternative when the total population can not be included in the assessment.
- A sample size should be as large as possible, but minimally, at least 30 students should be included in the sample. These 30 students should be representative of the population.
- Sampling techniques for student learning assessment may differ from other purposes of collecting information from students.

The above guidelines have been adapted from Delaware Tech [www.dtcc.edu/effectiveness/pages/sampling.html](http://www.dtcc.edu/effectiveness/pages/sampling.html) “General Guidance on Sampling in Outcomes Assessment.”