

Qualitative Assessment in Student Affairs

Assessment Workshop
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After this session, PWiBAT:

- ID at least 2 assessment opportunities in your area that are suitable for qualitative inquiry
- Articulate at least 2 strengths and weaknesses of using interviews in assessment
- Analyze qualitative data in order to draw conclusions
- Articulate at least two perspectives related

- Define **qualitative assessment** and **qualitative data**
 - Discuss the use of qualitative methods in **Student Affairs assessment**
 - Take an in-depth look at conducting **interview studies**
 - **Analyze data** and draw conclusions
 - Discuss **reporting** and **generalization**

Qualitative Assessment

- Specific rather than exploratory questions
- Informs programming decisions
- Avoid the ends of the "sampling spectrum"
- Inductive analysis
- Flexible

Qualitative Data

- In the participants own words
- Context-bound
- Rich with information
- Systematically collected

Anecdote

Chance information

Q.A. in Student Affairs

Descriptive Studies:

Describe students, their experience, the way they engage with or negotiate their environment, etc.

Phenomenological Studies:

How do students respond to, think about, or perceive a particular experience or state of being.

Yes:

How do freshman students make decisions about getting involved on campus?

How do students negotiate ethical challenges?

How do student leaders define leadership?

Not so much:

Qual studies describe rather than measure; emphasize context rather than causation

How effective w

Could populate most options on a survey; seeks broad rather than "deep" data.

Variables easy to measure; definitive answer; stats more compelling

Your turn!

✓ The project question/topic

Identify participants

- NOT protected populations
- Able to communicate ideas honestly and objectively
- Accessible

Interview Studies

SWEET!

- Provide rich data
- Allow us to study past or private experiences
- Flexible
- Unanticipated data may emerge

Interview Studies

Less sweet...

- Time-intensive
- "Touchy-feely" stigma
- Concerns about generalization
- Interviewees may not be honest, complete, or correct
- Relies on the investigator as the instrument

Before the interview...

- ◀ Do your homework!
- ◀ Prepare the instructions/informed consent documents (Examples on SA and IRB websites)
- ◀ Develop the interview protocol

Interview Questions

- ◀ Hypothetical questions
- ◀ Ideal position questions
- ◀ Interpretive question
- ◀ Mind the context!

(Bad) Interview Questions

- ◀ Multiple questions
- ◀ Leading questions
- ◀ Binary questions

The interview...

- ◀ Setting
- ◀ Non-verbals
- ◀ Recording
- ◀ Interview notes

Analysis

- Manage the data
- Read for understanding
- Coding and themes

Analysis

- Within-case analysis
- Across-case analysis
- Constant comparative analysis
- Mind the context!

Analysis

Let's do it!

- Read for understanding
- Devise codes
- Are you comparing constantly?
- Themes - within the case
- Themes - between cases

Focus Groups

Useful when:

- Interaction will yield the best information
- Interviewees are similar and cooperative
- Time is short
- Participants will feel more comfortable with a group

Focus Groups

- Notes are critical
- Interviewer/Moderator - don't let any one participant become dominant
- Encourage conversation
- Probe participants to interpret and respond to what is being said

Observation

- Triangulating (confirming) data from other sources
- Assessing behaviors rather than attitudes/opinions/knowledge

Qualitative data in survey projects

Codes and themes as with interview and observation data.

Record and report frequencies.

Great for needs-assessments and identifying future assessment projects.

- Triangulation - use other data sources to support the conclusions (i.e. - observation, focus group, survey)
- Peer review - ask a colleague to look at the raw data and provide feedback regarding themes, OR, walk colleague through the analysis (audit trail) to check logic and provide feedback
- Member checks - ask participants to provide feedback regarding themes

Drawing conclusions...

- Organize themes to relate to the initial question
- Use a logic model:
 - Start specific and then get more abstract
- Qualify, qualify, qualify...
 - "The participants in this assessment..."

Drawing conclusions...

Can you generalize from qualitative data?

- (A) No
- (B) Sure
- (C) Naturalistic generalization
- (D) Reader/user generalizability

Get to the point...then back it up with data.

Quantify when possible.

Present themes, conclusions, participant info in charts or other visuals.

Questions?

(who's willing to bet we're out of time?)
