QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

JAMES SASS, RIO HONDO COLLEGE
DULCEMONICA DELGADILLO, NORTH ORANGE CONTINUING EDUCATION
IRPE SUMMER INSTITUTE
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QUALITATIVE METHODS

- Data in the form of words, images, and/or sounds.
- Types of understanding: describe and explain.
- Key concerns: fidelity and responsiveness.
MEET THE PRESENTERS

JIM SASS
• Rio Hondo College
• Started in qualitative interviewing as undergraduate
• Qualitative coursework and dissertation
• Hundreds of hours observing and interviewing in K-8 schools

DULCE DELGADILLO
• North Orange Continuing Education
• Started in qualitative focus groups and interviews as a research assistant
• Conducted focus groups with diverse populations and in multiple languages
• Student Equity focus groups
QUALITATIVE METHODS

- Data in the form of words, images, and/or sounds.
- Types of understanding: describe and explain.
- Key concerns: fidelity and responsiveness.
- Term you won’t hear: Control
RESEARCHER ROLES & IMAGES

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

QUALITATIVE METHODS
USES IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

• Inquiry about experiences and perceptions.
• When we don’t know much about a topic.
• Need stories/profiles to make numbers come to life.
USES IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

- Why do our students . . .
  - Not persist for a second or third semester?
  - Not utilize a particular student service?
  - Transfer without an associate’s degree?
  - Not get involved with campus activities?
  - Not visit faculty during offices hours?
  - Leave after 30 units?
  - Drop high-demand courses?
SESSION LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this session, participants will . . .

• Understand the value of qualitative methods for institutional research.
• Be aware of some common methods for qualitative research.
• Have foundational knowledge for conducting focus groups and analyzing qualitative data.

• Note: This session is only a brief introduction to qualitative methods as they apply to institutional research in the CCC system.
QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

- Document Review
- Focus Groups
- Individual Interviews
- Observation
- Photo Voice

Plus many other options not addressed this morning.
QUALITATIVE METHODS

Most Applicable to Institutional Research in the CCC System
DOCUMENT REVIEW

• Analysis of information contained in documents of the college.
• Sources: Board minutes, committee minutes, syllabi, flyers, marketing/promotional materials.
DOCUMENT REVIEW QUESTIONS

• Did the Presidential search process follow the college's procedures and timelines?
• To what extent do syllabi reflect equity practices from a professional development workshop?
• Which majors are promoted in the college's public communications?
• How well did the Board fulfill its goals and objectives for the past year?
DOCUMENT REVIEW CODING PROCEDURES

• Identify themes in the data.
• Categorize in terms of pre-defined characteristics.
• Compare to criteria on scale and assign points.
• Find evidence for the completion of an objective.

• More information later under “Analysis.”
FOCUS GROUPS

• Small group of people participating in a guided discussion.

• Purpose: Learn more about their perspectives, experiences, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about programs, initiatives, services, or events.

• Gives individuals the opportunity to tell their story in their own words.
WHEN SHOULD YOU USE FOCUS GROUPS?

• When you are considering the introduction of a new program or service.
• When you want to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered on a written survey.
• When you want to supplement the knowledge you can gain from written surveys.
• When you have the time, knowledge, and resources to recruit.
• When interaction among participants will increase your understanding or the quality of information.
## FOCUS GROUPS: PROS & CONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capture information that is not likely to come from a personal interview or a survey.</td>
<td>1. Confidentiality of sensitive information cannot be insured.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Focus Group vs Individual Interviews.</td>
<td>2. Difficult to generalize findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Non-verbal responses can be recorded and interpreted.</td>
<td>3. Recruiting may be difficult.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Group members can react to and build upon each other’s responses</td>
<td>4. Open-ended responses may be difficult to group into categories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Focus groups can be a natural forum for new ideas.</td>
<td>5. Opinions presented by assertive focus group members may overwhelm ideas held by the rest of the group.</td>
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FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- Goal and purpose of focus groups
- Start broadly, then zero in on topic of interest and end broadly again
  - Ideally 10-13 questions
  - Group questions by themes
- Ask about things participants know about
- Avoid yes/no constructs or “leading” questions
- Ask questions that can be answered in a group setting
PROTOCOL STRUCTURE

- Welcome/Introduction
- Consent
  - Confidentiality vs. anonymity
  - Voluntary participation
  - Risks, benefits and alternatives
- Guidelines
- Warm-up questions
- In-depth questions—bulk of discussion lies here
  - Use probes
- Wrap up/Thank you/ Next steps
WHAT DO FOCUS GROUPS ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?
FACILITATOR: DO'S & DON'TS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do's</th>
<th>Don'ts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep discussion on track</td>
<td>Express your views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage open conversation and participation</td>
<td>Agree or disagree with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish rapport</td>
<td>Influence conversation through comments such as: &quot;right&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions and probes</td>
<td>or &quot;excellent&quot; or by nodding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

• Purpose: Gain insight into other persons’ opinions, perspectives, and experiences.

• Description: Conversation with a purpose.

• Design: Purposeful series of open-ended questions (with follow-up questions and prompts).
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: WHEN TO USE

- Seeking in-depth information
- Experiences are too complex for categories/choices.
- Exploring sensitive issues.
- Needing individual perspectives and experiences.
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: KEY SKILLS

- Listening: Let the respondent do the talking.
- Probing: Ask for additional information on the same topic.
- Clarifying: Ask questions to reduce ambiguity in responses.
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW TOPIC EXAMPLES

• Experience of being a new student at the college.
• College experience of a specific demographic group.
• Reasons that students drop classes or drop out of the college.
• Changing role of CTE faculty in the Guided Pathways era.
• Ways that classified staff would like to grow or improve in their jobs.
OBSERVATIONS

• Purpose: Capturing behavior and interaction in context.

• Examples:
  • Student use of spaces on campus.
  • Interaction in tutoring centers.
  • Decision making in committee meetings.
  • Classroom implementation of new curriculum.

• Instrument/techniques
  • Form: Checklist with room for taking notes.
  • No Form: Extensive description and verbatim notes.
PHOTOVOICE

• Participatory action research approach where participants represent their point of view through pictures.

• Purpose:
  • Foster and nurture critical consciousness among participants.
  • Make space for participants to document various aspects of their lives on their own terms.
  • Reach policy makers with the project's findings to enact change.
PHOTOVOICE: WHEN TO USE

- What are the strengths or assets of your community college?
- What are some barriers you experience as a student?
- What would you like to change about your campus?
Figure 3. A photograph of a bicycle parked outside of a building.

One participant photographed a random bicycle. The interviewee observed the following about those lacking basic resources: “they don’t have vehicles, you know, you have people walking. You have people, you know, not having the means to purchase them [sic] a car so they have to do it [travel in another way]”

This needs to be fixed because during the school year if someone wanted to ride their scooter or skateboard to school, they’d fall. They have to stop and pick it up and walk.
QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

• Immerse yourself in the data set; understand it on its own terms before trying to create or impose codes.

• Reduce the data into manageable segments. Then, into themes and patterns.

• Define categories and codes while analyzing the data.
QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

• Inductive:
  • Immerse oneself in the data.
  • Identify themes (recurring words, situations topics).
  • Define themes and test definitions against the data.

• Deductive:
  • Start with categories from an external source (e.g., previous research, policy).
  • Code and count examples of categories.
  • Consider sequences of categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Atlas.ti</th>
<th>Dedoose</th>
<th>MAXQDA</th>
<th>NVivo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working in Teams</strong></td>
<td>Share data files. Merge tools.</td>
<td>Simultaneous access.</td>
<td>Merge tools</td>
<td>Merge projects and simultaneous use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web/Cloud-based</strong></td>
<td>Data stored locally or on network.</td>
<td>Web-based</td>
<td>Cloud-based</td>
<td>Web-based for NVivo Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
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- Atlas.ti: $670/ $2,500 (5 users) or lease options
- Dedoose: $14.95 per month with some discount for multiple users
- MAXQDA: $495/ $1,980 or subscription options
- NVivo: $700 with some discount for multiple users
REPORTING

- Themes
  - Descriptive themes
  - Analytical themes
- Notable Quotes
  - Use them with a purpose
- Word Clouds
- Telling the story
  - How should this be written up?
  - Think about your audience
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

• Data in the form of words, images, and/or sounds.
• Designed to provide deeper understanding of persons, experiences, interactions, and spaces.
• Power to make campus populations and situations come alive for students, campus staff, board members, and the public.
ADVICE FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS

• Use qualitative research in conjunction with quantitative research (mixed methods).
• Consider the necessary resources: Time and materials for training, data collection, analysis, and reporting.
• Respect the training and experience needed to be effective in qualitative research.
RESOURCES

• A Qualitative Toolkit for Institutional Research: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cfssr_publishedwork/16/

• Community Tool Box from U of Kansas: https://ctb.ku.edu/en

• Professional Learning Network: https://prolearningnetwork.cccco.edu

• Qualitative Evaluation Checklist: