Surveys, Focus Groups, and Interviews: Which One is Better?
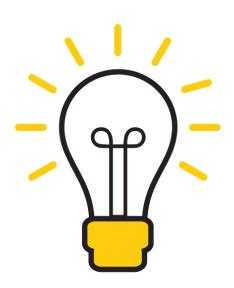
How to Select an Assessment Method

Student Life Assessment, Improvement, & Research

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Assessment, Improvement, & Research (AIR)

AIR Mission

The mission of Student Life Assessment, Improvement, & Research (AIR) is to lead outcomes-based assessment in the co-curricular setting, support evidence-based decision-making, and promote a culture focused on the continuous improvement of programs and services.

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Agenda

- Indirect versus Direct Measures

- Qualitative versus Quantitative Data

- Assessment Methods

- Tools for Assessment

- 3:2:1 Activity

- What's Next

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Learning Outcomes

As a result of this workshop participants will be able to…

- <mark>Differentiate between direct and indirect measures of learning</mark>
- Identify the pros and cons of different types of assessment methods
- Select an assessment method to utilize based on their needs

ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency

Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)

Select AER methods, methodologies, designs, and tools that fit with research and evaluation questions and with assessment and review purposes.

Facilitate appropriate data collection for system/department-wide assessment and evaluation efforts using current technology and methods.

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Assessment

"any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence that describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18)."

In practice, assessment is **making decisions** based on [systematically collected] **evidence** vs. instinct or tradition.

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Assessment Cycle

Gather Evidence

- Think about **how** you'll need to use the information

    - What types of information will be useful in helping you know what you need to change?
    - What will provide you with information to make decisions?

- Think about **who** will use the assessment information

    - What kind(s) of data do they respond to?
    - What will influence your constituents?

How will you gather evidence to know whether the program/service is effective?

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More Background?

Assessment Question – An Important Factor

- Your assessment question will guide you in selecting a method

- Your assessment question will also determine what type of data you need to collect

Data can be...

- **Qualitative** or **quantitative**
  - Qualitative data describe things in terms of categorizations or qualities (e.g., gender)
  - Quantitative data can be counted or expressed numerically (e.g., age)

- **Direct** or **indirect** measures of learning
  - Direct measures require students to display learning
  - Indirect measures ask students or others to reflect on student learning (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004)

Quantitative versus Qualitative

Quantitative Examples

- Responses to a survey that asks student to rate their level of agreement with a statement (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

- Rubrics that rate students on their ability to explain the importance of physical activity

Qualitative Examples

- Responses to a survey that asks student to define leadership in their own words

- Notes and recordings from a focus group

- Interviews with students about what they learned from an experience

Direct versus Indirect

Direct Examples:

- Collections of student work

- Pre-post tests

- Performance on a case study

Indirect Examples:

- Questions asking self-perceptions of learning

- Satisfaction surveys

- Focus group discussion regarding experience

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Considerations

- There are naturally occurring assessment methods (e.g., things that are or can be embedded within a program or experience such as reflection papers, essays, portfolios, role plays, observed behaviors, student interactions)

- There are methods designed solely as a means to evaluate

Classroom Assessment Techniques

Minute Papers

- Students are given 60 seconds to write a response to a given prompt

Muddiest Point

- Ask students to write down their points of confusion from the lecture, homework, etc.

Application Cards

- Students are asked to identify one to three applications of a given topic in their work, life, etc.

Eberly Center, Carnegie Mellon University, 2020

Existing Measures

Data that has been collected for another purpose

Strengths	Limitations
Saves time and money	Access to raw data
Not having to manage response rate	Can't manage response rate
Cuts down on survey fatigue	Trustworthiness

Examples: institutional data, reflection papers, applications or other materials, incident reports

What information already exists that could assist you in your assessment process?

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Exercise

- Write down as many assessment methods/tools you can think of...

- Of these methods...which have you personally tried?

Assessment Method versus Tool

- Assessment Method: the **process** that will be followed in order to gather qualitative or quantitative data
  - Ex. Survey, focus group, interview, etc.

- Assessment Tool: a **device** that will be incorporated as a supplemental piece of the data collection process for a particular method
  - Ex. Rubric, questionnaire, protocol, etc.

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Assessment Methods

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Observations

- Document/Content Analysis
- Reflections
- Visual Methods
- Portfolios

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Example of how each assessment method can be used will be incorporated with the method description

Surveys

Descriptive data about attitudes, behaviors, opinions, values of an individual are collected

Strengths	Limitations
Flexible (multiple formats and question formats)	Can result in a large amount of data
Ask a larger number of questions	Based on self-report data which depends on accurate and honest responses
Breadth of topics and understanding	Often gathers data on indirect forms of student learning
Ability to develop internally or use standardized surveys	
Questions can be written to get at direct measures of learning	

Surveys

- Can access a large number of potential participants

- Relatively easy to analyze, particularly if using an online survey

- Students can respond anonymously

- Students can respond when it is convenient to them, particularly if using an online survey

- National surveys allow for comparison with other institutions

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants
- Conduct a survey to assess the retention of information diseminated during a previous training

Focus Groups

An interview with a small group of people to get information on a specific topic or experience

Strengths	Limitations
Rich detail	Transcribing recorded conversation takes time and effort or if an outside company is hired to transcribe, money
Deeper levels of information	A note-taker is recommended to ensure conversation is recorded
Gather information on topics we know little about/testing ideas	Breadth of understanding
Does not require professional moderator	Difficult to select and solicit participants
Does not require special facilities	Not representative of population
Flexible	
A large amount of data in a short amount of time	

Focus Groups

- Provide rich information

- Allow for flexibility

- Can seek immediate clarification

- Give students an opportunity to discuss/reflect on learning with others, which may – in and of itself – promote learning

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants
- Facilitate a focus group to better understand the experiences resident assistants are having in their halls across campus

Myths About Focus Groups

- Low-cost and quick

- Require professional moderators

- Require special facilities

- Must consist of strangers

- Will not work for sensitive topics

Morgan (1998)

Interviews

Purposeful discussions with a single individual to get information

Strengths	Limitations
Rich detail	Transcribing recorded conversation takes time, effort and sometimes money
Deeper levels of information	Time consuming if a large sample of students is needed
Gather information on topics we know little about	Breadth of understanding
Does not require professional moderator	Difficult to select and solicit participants
Does not require special facilities	Not representative of population
Good for discussing sensitive topics	

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Conduct exit-interviews with residents to assess their learning at the culmination of the experience

Observations

Observing what is there (naturally occurring)

Strengths	Limitations
Data is usually there waiting to be collected	Have to think about what you are measuring
Can track change over time without relying on participant response	Privacy?
Natural setting can be an asset	Consistency
Qualitative or quantitative data	

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Observe RA's as they navigate a conflict between roommates to assess proper use of the process they were trained in for such instances

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Content Analysis

Uses available documents to glean meaning, perspective, or growth/change through qualitative data analysis

Strengths	Limitations
Available and accessible (already there)	Context, decoding language
Low cost	Not interactive
Can be more precise	Can't generally follow up for more information
Timeline	Not all stakeholders will respond to this data

Examples: training manuals, notes, portfolios, discussion boards, twitter, blogs, emails, papers, agendas, flyers, policies, meeting minutes, logs, etc.

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Review existing submissions of HawkTalk data from RA's to learn about the conversations occuring in the halls with residents

Reflection

Capturing reflection as assessment data (vs. an individual exercise) is a frequently missed opportunity

Strengths	Limitations
Rich detail/depth	Qualitative data analysis requires time to theme/code responses
Classroom assessment technique/embedded	

Rubrics can be used to collect aggregate information about level of reflection (depth, quality, connection)

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Provide opportunities for resident assistants to reflect on their experiences and skills gained during bi-weekly one on one conversations

Visual Methods

Captures images (pictures, videos, art work, sculptures, etc.) as main form of data

Strengths	Limitations
The old cliché - "A picture says a thousand words"	Smaller number of perspectives
Could use images for multiple uses	Timeline
Technology	Technology

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

• Review topical bulletin boards within each floor of the residence halls for themes to understand current outreach students are receiving

Portfolios

Collections of artifacts that demonstrate student learning

Strengths	Limitations
Opportunities for reflection	Labor and time intensive to compile and review
Opportunity for personal selection and self-assessment	
Look at learning outcomes over time	

Examples: writing samples, projects, journals, etc.

Assessing an Experience: Resident Assistants

- Ask RA's to create a compilation of all the programs they have facilitated for their residents and review for implementation of training techniques

Inventive Assessment Tools

Kahoot!

- Generates analytics on class learning progress for formative assessment

- Download the app or provide user with the url link to play from mobile device

Poll Everywhere

- Allows user to ask multiple choice questions, collect live responses and creates visual results

- Users text in responses to given prompts

Twitterfall.com

- Set geographic ranges for host location; track designated hashtags

- Allows user to view feed of compiled posts that is continuously updated

Assessment Tool - Rubrics

Detailed set of criteria for defining the standards for evaluation performance

Strengths	Limitations
Ability to develop a home grown rubric	Can take time to develop
Ability to use and tailor existing rubrics	Multiple raters may have to coordinate ratings for reliability
Expose to students what we want them to learn	
Reduces bias and/or subjectivity	

Assessment Tool - Rubrics

- Make the criteria explicit for staff, which can lead to greater consistency in evaluating students

- Make the criteria explicit for students, which enables them to know what we are looking for (not a bad thing)

- Can be used in self-evaluation

- Give students an opportunity to see improvement over time

But which is best...

- The BEST assessment method is the one that gives you useful and useable data.

- If you have a great survey, but no one completes it, what do you have?

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Exercise

- Thinking about an assessment question you have for your department/office...

- Select an assessment method to gather data on your question

- What steps will you need to take to implement this method/these methods?

3:2:1 Activity

Take a moment to write down:

3 Things you learned

2 Questions you have

1 Takeaway

Questions?

What's Next

Assessment Development Series Workshop #4

A Qualtrics How To: What is it and How can I use it?

As a result of this workshop participants will be able to…

- Explain the pros and cons of using Qualtrics Survey Software as an assessment tool

- Summarize the steps involved with creating a survey

- Construct a survey using Qualtrics

How can I use this tool effectively to answer my assessment question?

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Resources

Assessment, Improvement, & Research

- The University of Iowa

- 231 Iowa Memorial Union

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