Qualitative Approaches to Evidence-Based Evaluation in the Self-Study Process

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Quantitative vs. Qualitative Data

- Quantitative Data:
  - Necessary for context, but:

    - How do community leaders view your commitment to engagement?
    - How do students perceive efforts to measure and improve student learning?
    - How are planning and budgeting efforts coordinated at different levels in the institution?

- *Please introduce yourself to 2 people next to you, and identify at least one area where quantitative data may not exist or be hard to get at your institution.*

So, why not just Survey Everyone???

- Problem
  - A university community (faculty, staff, and students) over-surveyed and 40,000 strong
  - A metropolitan area of 1 million people

- Need
  - Collect systemic <u>evaluative</u> information

- Solution: Qualitative Data!
  - A purposive case study survey
  - Focus groups
  - Semi-structured interviews

A Purposive Case Study Survey

- Goals (focused on Criterion 3):
  - learn how students (undergraduate and graduate) and faculty perceive how learning assessment occurs in the unit
  - learn how these constituencies use and evaluate learning and teaching infrastructure

- Selection of 11 departments/units
  - Purposive: select units to get a range in
    - Numbers of majors (undergraduate, graduate)
    - Professional accreditation
    - On/Off campus
    - Many/few transfer students
    - Range of Colleges (arts & sciences, health sciences, etc.)

Case Study Survey: Sample Topics

- **Triangulated approach**

– **Feedback**

  - How does each faculty member report assessment results to department and students?

  - How do students themselves indicate they receive assessment results?

– **Instructional Support**

  - Do faculty members use any of the instructional support services available on campus?

  - How useful do faculty and students feel they have been?

Survey Findings
Assessment of Student Learning

- **Departments**

  - Program level: exit surveys, comprehensive exams & capstone projects (graduates); exit surveys & meetings with advisors (undergraduate)

  - Course level: embedded questions & pre-test/post-test (graduates & undergraduates)

  - Some departments identify and keep track of performance in key course sequences

- **Students**

  - Except for embedded questions and online assignments, over 2/3 of all students report a wide variety of assessment tools including exams (89%), graded projects or presentations (74%), in-class assignments or discussions (67%)

  - Critical skills promoted & assessed primarily through team work, presentations & essays.

Survey Findings
Learning Infrastructure

- **Departments report:**
  - laboratory equipment and rooms: sufficient, but below standards
  - library resources and support: 'sufficient' and 'up to standards'
  - positive impact on students referred to most support services
  - recommend most teaching support services, but use is low

- **Faculty report:**
  - need to equip classrooms with technology
  - positive impact on students referred to most support services
  - low use, and questioned usefulness, of teaching support services

- **Students report:**
  - major departments genuinely interested in their learning & advancement.
  - most students do not use or use only occasionally most student support services

Activity

- *Please talk with 2-3 people near you (mix up from last time, if possible)*

  – If you were to use a **Case Study** at your institution, what would you use it for?

  – What might be some of the challenges to using a **Case Study** at your institution?

Student Focus Groups on Experience

- Concern for over-surveying & need for in-depth <u>evaluative</u> information for all criterions
  - 9 Focus groups, each with facilitator and note taker
  - 3 Groups each for lower division, upper division, and graduate students
  - Recruited through student organizations

- Each Focus group focused on one of following:
  - Institutional Issues
  - Making Connections
  - Academic Experience

Take Home from Student Focus Groups

- Lower Division Undergraduates
  - **Institutional Issues – research university matters**
    - Came for the opportunity to participate in research
    - The campus community is like a family
    - Concern that transformation (and budget woes) may cut things that drew students to the university
    - Confused about the UA as a land-grant university
  - **Connections – engagement matters**
    - Extreme satisfaction with clubs and residence life
    - UA experiment with 1100 student classes greatly disliked: rampant cheating; disruptive loud classmates
  - **Academic Experience – generally good**
    - Most accurate academic information from: advisors; "rate my professor" sites; older students; professor
    - In general faculty and staff are committed to helping; mixed feelings about TAs

Take Home from Student Focus Groups

- ## Upper Division Undergraduates
  - **Institutional Issues – research university matters**
    - World-class instructors and opportunities for first-hand research
  - **Connecting – less successful than lower-division**
    - The university could do a better job of promoting opportunities
  - **Academic Experience – generally good**
    - Preserve UA reputation, but do not want tuition raised

- ## Graduate Students
  - **Institutional Issues – generally satisfactory**
    - Value working with and being mentored by leaders in their field
  - **Connecting - successful**
    - Many opportunities, but some lack family friendliness
  - **Academic Experience - mixed**
    - Uncertainty about professional development (RA or TA work?; faculty only care about tenure; loosely structured programs)

Activity

- *Please talk with 2-3 people near you (mix up from last time, if possible)*

  – If you were to use **Focus Groups** at your institution, what would you use them for?

  – What might be some of the challenges to using **Focus Groups** at your institution?

Semi-structured Interviews: Criterion 2

- Planning and Budgeting
  - A need for better alignment and inclusion at and across all levels

- Academic Program Reviews (7 year UA cycle)
  - Tremendous effort with few benefits perceived; need to streamline procedures and focus on current key issues

- Personnel Reviews
  - Reviews not serving purpose of enhancing performance; need to rethink criteria and aims

Semi-structured Interviews: Criterion 5

- Need evaluative information for engagement
- Desire to include new voices
- Challenge – team had not used methodology
  - Collaboratively developed questions and analytical techniques
- Questions:
  - "Identify three examples of activities, projects and/or programs that demonstrate 'best practices' of community engagement and the factors that are key to the success of these endeavors."
  - Also asked about failures and recommendations

Key Findings from Engagement Interviews

- Successful Projects
  - Most come <u>to</u> the UA <u>from</u> the community
  - Follow from consultation among the partners
  - Depend on mutual respect, collaboration and common goals
  - Depend on expertise and commitment of UA students and faculty
- UA partners should remain cognizant of its primary role as an academic institution and not act as a competitor to private enterprises

Activity

- *Please talk with 2-3 people near you (mix up from last time, if possible)*

  - If you were to use **Semi-structured Interviews** at your institution, what would you use them for?

  - What might be some of the challenges to using **Semi-structured Interviews** at your institution?

University of Arizona Lessons Learned

- Qualitative methods result in new information
- Start early (it takes time to put together and analyze qualitative data)
- Be prepared for use of methods & analysis
  - Software; staffing; expertise; time; money
- Plan on how you will share results with those who have participated
- Engage team members (you can't do it all yourself!)

Questions & Answers

- The one-page handout contains links to this presentation as well as to a document with more details about the results of our use of qualitative approaches as part of our self study.

- Please visit the University of Arizona NCA 2010 Accreditation web site: http://nca2010.arizona.edu/