Development of a Qualitative Research Team: Expanding the IR Function Through the Inclusion of Library Professionals

TAIR 2014 Conference
Session F, Thursday, Feb. 20, 2014
1:00-1:45 p.m.
Elm Room, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Addison, Texas

“Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.”
Albert Szent-Gyorgy (1893-1986)
Session Purpose

Share results from the development of a Qualitative Research Team (QRT) designed to support administrative decision making.
Executive Team Concern: Drop in Enrollment

Proposed Causes

Registration Process

Scheduling Process

External Factor

The IR Function Serves as the Idea Filter Through the Use of Data

Data-Driven Decision

Role of Institutional Research on the Executive Team
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<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<td>Current practices in academic advising</td>
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<td>Satisfaction Survey Results</td>
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<td>Predictors of Student Performance</td>
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<td>Student Engagement Results</td>
<td>Review of faculty salary schedules</td>
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<td>Standardized Assessment Data (CAAP)</td>
<td>Review of reasons community colleges change their names</td>
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Responsible Division: Institutional Research
Who Should Handle Non-Quantitative Data Requests

- Administrative Staff of executive team member making the data request
- IR Department
- Qualitative Research Team Consisting of Library Science Professionals
Advantages of Using Library Science Professionals

- Formally trained in the following:
  - Locating information
  - Evaluating the credibility of information
  - Objectivity
  - Interviewing
  - Interpreting and operationalizing information requests
  - Report writing
  - Extensive knowledge of available information resources
  - Conducting effective literature reviews
Impact of QRT on Executive Team Decision Making

- Timely Access to Objective Information
- Expanded IR team/capability
- Reduction in number of decisions made on limited data
- Increase in number of non quantitative data requests
- Increase in the number of challenges to initial assertions
Meeting Qualitative Information Needs with a Team Approach

The Need

- IR offices respond to requests for internal and external quantitative data, but administrators also seek qualitative data.

The Team

- Library and Information Specialists
- QRT Coordinator
QRT Team

Sharon Kenan, Librarian/Professor—Library Services & English

Tom Proctor, QRT Coordinator (Receives, Evaluates, and Assigns Research Requests)

Felipe McQuatters, Library Reference & Technology Specialist—Library Services

Gail Woodward, Librarian/Associate Professor—Library Services

David Irvin, Senior Reference & Technical Specialist—Library Services
Emphasis in Qualitative Research

- **Objectives**
  - explores, discovers, and constructs

- **Research**
  - understands and interprets social interactions
  - is subjective
  - studies the whole, not individual variables

- **Methodology**
  - selects smaller, non-random groups
  - consists of open-ended questions in interviews and focus groups; participant observations; field notes; document identification and analysis; and reflections.
  - identifies patterns, features, and themes

- **Final Report**
  - focuses on particular findings that are not generalizable
  - includes a narrative with contextual description and direct quotations from research participants
Research Approach

- Framing submitted research questions—using the reference interview (getting to the question behind the question)

- Non-biased information searching—gathering information in a neutral manner

- Evaluating sources—checking the credibility of source materials
Quantitative Review of QRT Work

QRT Reports, 2012-13

- 24 reports
- 4 researchers
- Average time to complete each research report, 3 weeks
- Average report length, 10 pages
- Requests come from: President, Vice Presidents, and Deans

QRT Reports, 2013-14

- 6 reports (to date)
- 5 researchers
- Average time to complete research report, 3 weeks
- Average report length, 9 pages
- Requests come from: President, Vice Presidents, and Deans
Incoming Research Requests

• Incoming QRT research requests are submitted to QRT Coordinator via email, phone, in person

• Requests are evaluated
  ◦ Clarify question—close any loose ends
  ◦ Is this a qualitative research question?

Assignment of Research Requests

• Given expertise and availability of team members—assign question to team member with a specific deadline and research expectations

• Final research product is delivered to requestor with a copy to team coordinator for QRT files
Examples of QRT Research # 1 (Tom)

Current practices at Texas community colleges for switchboards/call centers? (7 page report)

- **Research**—78 Texas community colleges reviewed
- **Findings**—97% have switchboards and 17% have call centers
- **Outcome**—report used in administrative decision process on best approach in handling incoming phone calls on campus

Why do community colleges change their name? (5 page report)

- **Research**—40 community colleges reviewed
- **Findings**—
  Three reasons:
  1. Offering 4-year degrees (60%)
  2. To reflect expanded mission (28%)
  3. To remove negative impression of name suggesting a lesser status (12%)
- **Outcome**—report used in administrative decision making process on rebranding college name
Examples of QRT Research # 2 (David)

Drop/withdrawal policies at Texas Community Colleges (28 page report).

- **Research**—Researchers reviewed policies at 53 Texas community colleges

- **Findings**—64% of colleges grade withdrawals with the W code exclusively; 32% use the W code and other codes; 4% grade withdrawals exclusively with other codes. More findings -- 91% provide an “in person” option for initiating a student withdrawal; 36% provide an “in writing” option for initiating a student withdrawal; 2% provide a “telephone” option for initiating a student withdrawal; 19% provide a “fax” option for initiating a student withdrawal; 25% provide an “online portal” option for initiating a student withdrawal

- **Outcome**—Report was passed to administrative committee for further review.

Academic goals and perceptions of MCC’s University Center, among graduating high-school seniors and first-year community college students.

- **Research**—Researchers held three focus groups in the spring and summer 2013. We spoke with 7 high school students and 6 MCC students.

- **Findings**—Students indicated that certain features of a university experience would compel them to stay at MCC for 4 years; that different class schedules were needed; that certain amenities were necessary for creating a livable campus, and more.

- **Outcome**—Reports from the student focus groups were compiled into a master Emerging Markets document presented to the college board.
Examples of QRT Research # 3 (Gail)

Information on one out-of-state college: demographics, nearby colleges, degrees, and articulation agreements (9 page report)

- **Research**—case study of one college

- **Findings**—
  - FTE 30,000-32,000
  - Average student age of 24 years
  - 22 colleges within a 25 mile radius
  - The college recently changed from a community college to a four-year college
  - 2 Bachelor’s degrees offered
  - Many articulation agreements in place

- **Outcome**—report used in administrative decision making process about degrees offered and articulation agreements

Sample of Texas colleges identified as using a particular software to conduct student evaluations of faculty (6 page report)

- **Research**—12 colleges interviewed

- **Findings**—
  - Only one college used the software for student evaluations.
  - Five colleges used it for other purposes such as surveys
  - Most responses were very positive about the software’s features, usability, and customer service, with one or two specific exceptions.

- **Outcome**—report used in administrative decision making process about using this software for student evaluations of faculty
Examples of QRT Research # 4
(Sharon)

Intellectual property (IP) policies (103 page report)

- **Research**—The researcher analyzed IP policies at 8 U.S. institutions using American Association of University Professors (AAUP) “suggested components” and 6 Texas institutions using Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) “suggested components” to determine how institutions are currently addressing IP on their campuses and what an “ideal” IP policy might include.

- **Findings**—
  - AAUP suggests including 5 key components in IP policies
    5 of the 8 U.S. institutions (63%) included all of AAUP’s suggested components
  - THECB suggests including 6 key components in IP policies
    4 of the 6 Texas institutions (67%) included all of THECB’s suggested components
  - Components that **overlap**: AAUP and THECB—ownership (who owns) and fund distribution/royalty participation
  - Components that are **unique**:
    AAUP—IP defined, who may use IP, and issue/dispute resolution
    THECB—disclosure, licensing guidelines, ownership/licensing responsibilities, and equity/management participation

- **Outcome**—report used in administrative decision making process regarding the college’s intellectual property policy
QRT Lessons Learned & Improvements Made

Lessons learned:

- Importance of **defining question and expectations** of the requestor at the outset
- Importance of **setting realistic timeframes** for conducting research and completing final report
- Importance of making sure **all questions are initiated and tracked by QRT coordinator**
- Importance of **giving all team members the option to refuse an assignment when workload is heavy**

Improvements made:

- **Better communication** among QRT via email, phone, and in person
- **Willingness to turn down research requests** that are duplicative of work already done or cannot be accomplished with current staffing
- **Setting more realistic completion dates** for research and compilation of final reports
A Qualitative Research Team may be just what your college/university needs!

- Answer those nagging qualitative research questions from your executive leadership team
- Guide key decisions on campus to ensure best practices and success
- Capitalize on the research knowledge and expertise of your librarians