

Reflecting on Methods of Inquiry

Course Learning Fall 2014

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Author Note

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When I originally signed up for this course, I wasn't sure of what I should expect. It was going to be my fifth statistics course. A small part of me was a little frustrated that I'd once again have to go through learning z-scores and t-tests, but another part of me was glad that I was going to have an opportunity to take a class with something that was at least slightly familiar to me. It shocked me, however, when I found out that the course was going to take a focus on qualitative research over quantitative research. Given that my previous background was in clinical psychology and research in clinical psychology, I had a personal bias towards quantitative research due to the power of conclusive evidence that it provides. I saw little value in qualitative work. It was through this course, however, that I learned the power that qualitative work can have, new suggestions for assessment in higher education, how research can be applied to student affairs, and how to communicate this in an academic manner (PLO 5, PLO 6, PLO 7). This was especially emphasized in the annotated bibliography assignment where I was able to analyze different form of research and see the strength and weakness of both styles.

One of the particularly challenging aspects of this original assignment was the area of focus I was particularly interested in. Ever since I first developed an interest in student affairs, assessment has been a key phrase discussed by everyone. Since then, I've come to learn the importance of assessment and the political role it plays in student affairs. Specifically, outcomes assessment is currently frequently utilized to evaluate existing programs, instead of serving the purpose of providing feedback for improvement. When I can to this realization, I discovered a whole other side of politics behind assessment implementation and the need to prove worth when conducting assessment in higher education. This assignment helped me realize that the vision of assessment as it currently serves in many offices, needs to be reconsidered as assessment should be used as a tool for improvement instead of a tool for understanding worth (PLO 7). Through

this process, I was also able to further understand the politics that could occur in an institution that relies on assessment results to evaluate programs and services, especially when resources were limited. Specifically, if resources are already limited for programs, it would make sense that there is pressure to consolidate assessment and evaluation. Through this assignment, however, it became apparent that the politics at play might negatively affect services provided and that assessment needed to be a separate process from program evaluation.

This assignment, while not necessarily considered a form of assessment in it of itself, was really helpful in understanding assessment practices and best practices for assessment and research in student affairs (PLO 9). Through a process of reading how assessment is being conducted at various institutions, it was eye opening to see the difference quantitative and qualitative research can have. Specifically, it was interesting to see that while quantitative research could demonstrate statistical significance, qualitative research had the power to include detailed information that could tell a story and complete the big picture (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). This being said, it was particularly challenging to attempt to start what would be a research project in a doctoral program on assessment. Given that there was not a lot of available information, it became important to pull other relevant research to create a fuller story. Through this process, I felt reaffirmed that research is possible, even if it seems difficult or near impossible at first.

On a personal level, I was originally really scared of starting a research on such a vast topic with little background knowledge or information in the field. This assignment helped me address my personal goal of become better at dealing with ambiguity. When I first started this project I was intimidated and concerned by not having specific details on a topic of research. Through the process of researching relevant topics and information, I was able to slowly gain a better sense of the question that I wanted ask. This process helped me understand what I was

exactly interested in learning. This inquisitive process, however, was also critical in understanding that sometimes its acceptable to not have all the details figured out.

I really appreciated having this course included in the program, especially with the focus being on education and counseling. I enjoyed relearning many statistical concepts that I was previously introduced to in previous years. I especially enjoyed having a focus on qualitative research and data analysis which provided new insight to research. By asking us to conduct a small scale research project, I was able to get hands on experience and support in conducting research, which could prove to be helpful in understanding research when presented in the future as a scholar or practitioner. Even though I originally dreaded taking “another statistical course” I’m grateful for the knowledge and new insight I’ve gained as a result of this class.

## References

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, Inc.