(Dr. Genie Giaimo, Bristol Community College)--Speaker 8

Innovating While Growing a Community College Writing Center: Student-Directed Writing Center Research at Bristol Community College

About: This breakout session will discuss how to improve outreach efforts and pedagogical direction of community college writing centers using student-driven research projects.

Asking Good Questions: determine a topic and appropriate method of study.

(1) Listening to the questions of those people around you and start identifying topics:

- Is there an issue or question that students keep bringing up over and over again?
- Is there an area in your Writing Center that has been informed by "past practice" and "lore" rather than assessment?
- Do you find yourself wanting to know more about your center's reputation? It's efficacy?
- Perhaps, administrators are asking you for numbers and results in order to justify further budgetary allocations…

(2) The type of research method (qualitative or quantitative, large-scale or focused on a limited number of subjects) you want to employ, such as:

- Survey
- Interview
- Focus group
- Case study
- Ethnography
- "Artifact" collections and norming

Designing your study: Brainstorm questions and develop question structure with your students/peer tutors.

(3) Start with topical items and then phrase them as questions using one of the six different survey question types. Consider a mixture of these types of questions.

- Likert/Interval scale question
- True or False
- Free Write/Open-Ended
- Multiple choice
- Ordinal scale question
- Ratio scale question

(4) Contact your Institutional Review Board (IRB) to discuss human subjects testing and ethics.

You must meet with your IRB and submit a formal proposal for the IRB to review. This is a great opportunity to discuss ethics in human subjects testing and the importance of anonymity and "a way out" should either the respondent or the surveyor become uncomfortable. Students can review the history and the importance of treating human subjects in a respectful manner while also maintaining rigor.

Data Collection and management: How to collect and manage large data sets.

(5) Develop a script that explains the impetus for the study, who is the principal investigator and the parameters of the survey (anonymous, you can stop answering at any time, the data will be coded and secured, etc.)

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(6) Develop a randomized method of sampling to capture a wide cross-section of the student population.

- Across campuses
- Across time periods
- On different days of the week
- Use different locations
- Survey mutable disciplines
- The surveying can be staggered across different time periods
- Make sure to have students electronically enter results
  examples: Google forms, Excel, Google docs, ect.

(7) Significance: The more uniform the student population the fewer responses one needs to sample a cross-section.

Example: 150-200 responses at a 4 year school and 250-300 at a community college for a survey.

Data Analysis: modeled for students and done by students.

(8) Cleaning up data and re-coding responses:

- Review and discard any inconsistent responses or surveys.
- Code the open-ended questions using key words, thematic grouping, scoring/norming or another qualitative method.
- For Quantitative analysis: make true = 1 and false =0.

(9) Statistics: sample of simple statistics and tests determining statistical significance:

Statistics
- Mean (average)
- Standard deviation
- Confidence intervals
- Frequency tables

Tests
- T-test
- Least likelihood ratio
- Linear correlation and regression

(10) Choose the appropriate visualization to represent the data: try a few:

- Pie charts (good for proportions)
- Bar chart (Likert/Interval scale question)
- Table (Free Write/Open-Ended)

Presenting your Results: Present to administrators, WC colleagues, faculty colleagues, etc.

- Data visualization is important for quick and clear dissemination of information.
- Not all responses will yield solid or certain answers to your questions; they might be more like suggestions or they might simply confirm what you have already suspected.
- Some responses ought to be paired with each other, depending on relationships, to develop correlations. (I consider myself a good writer, strongly disagree, I do not want to learn new writing strategies, strongly agree).
- Include your students in the analysis, dissemination, and presentation of the research.

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Resources

- Canning, John. *Statistics for the Humanities,* 2014. Free book link: http://statisticsforhumanities.net/book1/index.php?title=Statistics_for_Humanities
- Haswell, Richard. H. (2005). NCTE/CCCC's recent war on scholarship. *Written Communication*, *22*(2), 198223.
- Lerner, Neal. "Counting beans and making beans count." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.1 (1997): 1-3.
- Lerner, Neal. "Writing center assessment: Searching for the 'proof'of our effectiveness." *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship* (2003): 58-73.
- Schendel, Ellen, and William J. Macauley. *Building Writing Center Assessments That Matter*. University Press of Colorado, 2012.
- Welch, Kristen, and Susan Revels-Parker. "Writing Center Assessment: An Argument for Change." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (2012).

Online Resources

- http://www.uta.edu/faculty/sawasthi/Statistics/stbasic.html
- Types of charts and their uses: "Periodic Table of Visualization Methods": http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html
- Free infographic making software: Piktochart, Easel.ly, Venngage ect.

For queries email me at Geniegiaimo@gmail.com and visit my website at http://geniegiaimophd.weebly.com/