Conducting Research in Student Affairs: A College Counseling Center Example

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What is Research?

**Research**

- Systematic inquiry into a subject in order to find new knowledge
- Tests a hypothesis, compares groups, identifies relationships among variables
- Neutral
- Results generalize to other campuses and times
- Findings disseminated

**Assessment**

- Activities to measure effectiveness of a given program, process, service, etc.
- Observational; may identify naturally-occurring differences
- Occurs in a political context
- Results are site-specific, current
- Findings remain internal

McGillin (2003); Upcraft & Shuh (2002); Zehner (2011)
Why Do Research?

• Increase knowledge and understanding
  – Students
  – Services, programs, and interventions
• Does your program/intervention work?
  – How well?
  – For whom?
  – Under what circumstances?
  – Why?
Research in Student Affairs

Some of the challenges in the Student Affairs context

- Academic schedule
- Busy students
- Survey fatigue
- Busy professionals
- Contrast between research procedures and typical services
- Broader contextual factors
## Efficacy vs. Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficacy Research</th>
<th>Effectiveness Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Capacity for beneficial effects under ideal circumstances</td>
<td>• Degree of beneficial effect in “real world” settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explanatory studies</td>
<td>• Pragmatic studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Academia</td>
<td>• Student Affairs</td>
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The Process

1. Identify research question
2. Design study
3. Conduct research
4. Analyze results
5. Interpret results
6. Apply/share findings
What should you research?

• Be smart!
  – Research questions you would be asking anyway
• Review the literature
• Set a specific research question or hypothesis
• Keep it focused

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• STEPS Program research
Research Design

- Select a design that will address your question
  - Correlational
  - Experimental
  - Repeated measures
  - Randomized controlled trial
- Random assignment
- Measurement
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Funding
- IRB approval
Conducting Research

- Enlist help
- Time it right
- Prioritize services to students
Analyze Your Data

- Statistical analyses
  - Relationships among variables
    - Correlations or regressions
  - Comparing groups
    - t-tests, ANOVAs
  - Looking at change
    - Repeated measures ANOVA, mixed model design
- It’s ok to ask for help!
Interpreting and Using Results

• Your hypothesis is not proven, but supported
• Findings might
  – Suggest that your program is working well
  – Inform program design or adjustments
  – Lead to more research questions
• One study does not make an evidence-based intervention
• Share your findings
So how about you?

- What research questions do you have?
- What are the challenges in your specific setting?
- How can you overcome the challenges?