Conducting a Needs Assessment: A Case Study

Berkeley International Office

October 5, 2012

BIO's Guiding Principles

- **Understanding and Helping People**
- **Passion and Enthusiasm in what we do**
- **Excellence in everything we do**

Assessment in Student Affairs:
A Guide for Practitioners

By M. Lee Upcraft and John H. Schuh

Definition of Assessment:

Any effort to gather, analyze and interpret information which describes an organizations effectiveness.

Assessment vs. Research

Assessment in our case was to guide good practice and not guide any theory or conceptual foundation.

So we would clearly not refer to our work as "research."

Key Questions?

What's the Problem?

Develop a clear understanding of the problem. BIO's view of the problem:

- Rapid growth of international students
- A changing demographic

What is the purpose of the study?

- Determine student concerns

- Learn how they perceive BIO and its services

- Learn how they view services of other key units.

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Who should be studied?

Precisely define the population to draw conclusions about those who need to be studied.

BIO sought to study two distinct groups: graduate and undergraduate students

What is the best assessment method?

Should a quantitative or qualitative assessment, or both be undertaken? BIO decided upon:

- A quantitative study
- A qualitative component

Whom to study?

Can the whole population be studied or some parts of it? BIO studied the whole population.

Factors influencing BIO's decision:

- Access to their e-mail addresses

- Easier than obtaining a representative sample (age, level of study, degree status, gender, regional variation, etc)

- Small added cost

How should the data be collected?

Issues to consider when using a questionnaire:

- Properly constructed cover letter
- Confidentiality
- How much time it will take to complete the survey?
- Timing of the mailing
- Incentives for completing the survey
- Offer to share the results & how it will be used
- Communications plan

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What instrument should be used?

- Develop your own or use one that already exists?

- Can the results be statistically analyzed?

- Is it statistically valid and reliable ?

  - Does it measure what it says it measures?

  - Is it consistent internally and across groups?

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- Used an existing instrument (questionnaire) and modified it to make it relevant to our specific needs

- Pilot tested the instrument with a group of students

- Believe it to be statistically valid but not reliable

Who should collect the data?

- If you have a vested interest in the outcome the possibility of bias exists.

- Quantitative studies have less bias than qualitative studies.

BIO's Approach

- BIO conducted the study on its own.

- A team was in place to undertake the study.

How do we analyze the data?

- Are the respondents representative of the population?

- Is there interest in just the individual responses?

- Is there interest in bivariate (significant differences between two groups)or multivariate analysis (use of multiple characteristics)?

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- The study appeared to be representative of the population (22% return rate).

- Interested in level of concerns so results were reported in terms of percentages.

- We did not conduct any analysis to determine if there we significant differences across groups.

How do we report the results?

- **Is there integration between the quantitative and qualitative results?**
  - The open ended questions provided useful insights
- **Is the results written on the basis of who will read the report, why will they read it and what will they do with it?**
  - BIO staff
  - For the campus
  - For students
  - Control unit
  - Other stakeholders

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How do we use the results? -The Evaluation Process

- Is the report just a public document (or collecting dust)

- Is it being managed in an effective way?

Berkeley International Office:

- Organizational changes

- Programming initiatives

- Staff training

Questions??