

Assessment Reflection #1

Reading reactions: For the most part I find the book quite hard to follow. The font is small and I often find myself reading something and then thinking, "what did I just read?" and having to go back for a second or third time. I wish that there were more examples of good and bad questions in the book, because I tend to learn best from examples. I thought that of all the chapters we have read thus far that Chapter 3 was the clearest, most well organized and provided the most useful information.

Class reactions: So far I am enjoying the class. The Power Points have included a lot of good information to consider when creating surveys and having print outs of the notes is always helpful. It has also been nice to get out of the classroom and go observe the different coffee shops around campus. I am looking forward to developing surveys with other members of the class and enjoy that all of the projects are creative and involve subjects that get us thinking about things other than student affairs.

Application of information presented: I wish I had started to read the book and attend the class before I had to create my office's first survey. The funny thing is that our office is using the Student Voice program to create surveys this year and I assumed that they would be well aware of all the finer points regarding surveys. I have already read several things that make me question whether or not the Student Voice staff members actually read over and critique the surveys that are sent to them. I am particularly concerned that the ordering of our questions is not that great and I will definitely be changing them around for our spring term assessment. The one thing that I hadn't thought about and that hasn't been addressed yet is when to send email surveys out. Our office sent a survey out last Thursday and at the beginning of the week we had only had two responses. We believe this is due to the fact that students don't want to take care of any unnecessary university business at the end of the week or on the weekend and then they've forgotten about it by Monday. I'm going to try and re-send the survey on Monday and see what happens. It's amazing to me how many things (wording, interviewer training, cultural sensitivity, timing, etc.) need to be thought about when assessing programs.

Assessment Reflection #2

Readings: I am still having some trouble really getting into the book, but I think it will come in handy in the future. The one thing I wish it would do is stick with the same example or analogy throughout a chapter. It would be much easier for me to follow if this were the case. Instead, every example relates to a different survey. I understand that some surveys might not allow for a lot of flexibility and therefore can't be used to cover the wide canvas of probability, non-probability, random, not random, stratified, stratified random, random cluster, etc. sampling, but it would be nice if the same example was used as much as possible. I have enjoyed the sampling and survey design segments as I think they provide a level of survey lingo to use and learn for the future.

In the classroom: I really enjoyed the mock focus group that we took part in a few weeks back. I thought it was an excellent way to make sense of the experiences we all had observing the three coffee shops. The assessment of the three cable news stations was a bit harder for me to get into. I think this was because I didn't feel like we had a very cohesive plan for how to collect and then analyze data. Of course, my feelings are partially due to my perception, which is slowly changing the longer I stay in the

social sciences, that data means numbers and figures. In fact the only thing that really stood out to me during our entire conversation was when Patrick reported that Fox News had said they provide “Fair and balanced news” over 60 times during the hour that he watched. Having analyzed the online version of MSNBC’s news I had a harder time finding any quantitative evidence to support that it was a more middle of the road station. With regards to my evolving view of research, I think that I am beginning to see people’s opinions, thoughts and beliefs as legitimate sources of data, but I still find myself wanting empirical evidence to go along with these less quantifiable elements. My hard science background has had a more profound impact on my life than I care to admit at times. I will agree with you that our group got a bit stressed during the planning stage for the news assessment and our dialogue with one another became a bit short. However, I think that the scenario that we were in is not one that is truly realistic. If a group of student affairs professionals is called upon to create an assessment they usually have more than a few minutes to look over the goals of the assessment, in fact they have usually created the goals themselves. Plus there is usually a longer, running dialogue about how to do the assessment. Which brings me to my big “ah ha” with regards to assessment over the course of the past week... my offices assessment review.

On Friday, April 25th our office had three members of the assessment committee come to our office to review and critique our recent assessment efforts. I mentioned how our online survey was not getting a good response in my last reflection and things haven’t changed that much since then. We got a few more entries after sending the email invite out on a Tuesday, instead of a Thursday, but we still don’t have enough responses to do much with the data. Well, when we met with the committee on Friday, they told us that surveying students might not be the best way for us to show that we are meeting the goals and mission set out by our office. In fact, it was suggested that we throw the survey out and try to focus on creating a checklist that every conduct officer, both in our office and through the residence halls, will fill out directly after meeting with a student. The checklist will include procedures that we try and use during every hearing to ensure that conduct officers learn more about the student’s lives outside of the potential violation, that students are given the chance to explain their side of the story, and that they are involved in the sanctioning process. Not only will using this checklist help us keep better track of whether our offices is meeting its goals, it will also ensure that the conduct process is more consistent among departments and officers. I think that up until this meeting I had a very narrow view of assessment and while I still have plenty more to learn, I have had my eyes opened to the fact that there are more than two ways to skin a cat in the world of assessment.

Assessment Reflection #3

Readings: Basically I have come to see the book as an excellent resource to refer back to when need be. I don’t plan on reading entire chapters or expecting it to be the end-all book when it comes to assessment. With that viewpoint it becomes a much better product.

In the classroom: It has been nice to mix up class time over the past few weeks with guest speakers, group activities and lecture. I think the thing I am most thankful for in this class is that you were able to take us out of the student affairs mindset from time to time. It is nice to spend a bit of time analyzing, or at least thinking about things (politics, the Iraq war/rebuilding effort, baseball) besides graduate school

on occasion. I think that it particularly true at this time of the year. I can only speak for myself, but I've realized that my general knowledge about the world around me has decreased this year as I've become so engrossed in my studies. I can't say that I would have done things differently, because I'm not sure that I could have, but having a class that made it possible for me to think "outside the box" for a little while was very enjoyable and probably contributed to me having a bit more sanity this term, so thank you for that.

As for the class as a whole... well here are a few suggestions. I really liked when Kate did her presentation on the survey she is going to do for Greek Life and think that a similar assignment could be worked into the class. I understand that critiquing an actual survey from a department could be hard, but students could work in groups to create and then present a mock assessment. It wouldn't have to be about student affairs necessarily, but it would allow people to get more experience using the terminology and presenting on assessment. Plus it would give the audience a chance to critique methods and ask questions, which I think would add to the learning process. I would also have liked to see more chances to look at data sets, like the one that was provided last week (students, income, pizza, beer) but with more information and then pull out specific pieces of knowledge from them. I think that many of us will be asked to do this in the future and it would be a helpful skill to have. Those are the only two suggestions I have more future classes. I want to thank you for sharing some of your ups and downs with us this term. I can only imagine that between worrying about whose hands your passport is in and where each one of you kids has to be after class it has been rather hard to stay focused on assessment. You did a good job and I only hope that your travel pains go away soon.