

## INVOLVING STUDENTS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS AS A TOOL FOR TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP

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This special session examines the teaching of qualitative research methods that go beyond the focus group. The presentations address what students can expect to gain through employing the qualitative techniques they are learning and how involving students in qualitative research projects can further the scholarly pursuits of the professor. This last point is particularly important for the busy professor who has a significant teaching load but must also do research. While the debate still rages as to whether research activities enhance or detract from quality teaching (see, e.g., Udell, Parker, Pettijohn 1995), clearly, faculty research that actually involves students should be beneficial to the students (see Andre and Frost 1997).

Deborah Cours opens up this special session with a discussion of how she employs qualitative research as a part of her marketing principles course. Cours requires her principles students to work in small groups in developing marketing plans as a term project. In the situation analysis phase of these projects, Cours assigns the members of each team to do consumer research using different research methods. Each member of a team must, however, use a different research technique: either literature review, survey, interview, observation, or web-site review. The use of the various research methods facilitates group and class discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the various modes of research. Cours reports that students are often surprised to find that their qualitative interview data are more insightful and useful than their survey data.

Brian Jorgensen next presents his use of depth interviewing for class projects in sales and marketing research classes. In the sales class, students interview practicing salespeople. This is an important project for at least three reasons. First, it allows students to rub shoulders with sales practitioners. Second, meeting with a successful salesperson can build the student's enthusiasm for eventually taking a job in sales himself or herself. Third, having students conduct interviews, which they tape and transcribe, provides a constantly-growing source of quotes and stories that can be used for class illustration, both in the semester the data are gathered and in subsequent semesters.

For his marketing research class, Jorgensen has designed a depth interview assignment that affords students the opportunity of hands-on experience with an important qualitative research tool in addition to the traditional survey project. As compared to a focus group assignment, a depth interviewing assignment can be done without the student having to coordinate a group of researchers and respondents. However, perhaps the most compelling reason for employing an interviewing assignment is that by choosing a research topic that is of interest to the professor, he or she can provide the students with an important experience while also allowing them to take part in the actual research process.

Deborah Heisley next presents her experiences using depth interviewing projects in an MBA consumer behavior course. In this course, Heisley has her students work in groups, with each group addressing a consumer behavior issue of its own choosing. For these projects each student performs multiple interviews. Students also code and analyze the transcribed interviews. They then write up their reports and present them to the rest of the class. Heisley addresses how she trains students for effective interviewing and analysis. Heisley also discusses how students from her consumer behavior class are prepared to subsequently step into the role of research or teaching assistant.

Richard Celsi introduces and wraps up the session, commenting on the other presentations and suggesting new ideas, directions, challenges, and opportunities with regard to employing qualitative methods in teaching and research.

### REFERENCES

- Andre, Rae, and Peter Frost, eds. 1997. *Researchers Hooked on Teaching: Noted Scholars Discuss the Synergies of Teaching and Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Udell, Gerald G., Steve Parker, and Charles Pettijohn. 1995. An examination of the research productivity of marketing faculty at newly minted AACSB schools. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 3 (2): 106.