

# Qualitative Research in IR Offices

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# Objectives

- Illustrate uses of qualitative research
- Identify new approaches to qualitative research
- Evaluate the current state of qualitative research in IR offices
- Network with qualitative researchers

# Situating Qualitative Research

## EDITORS' NOTES

In 2016, the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) released its *Statement of Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research* (Swing & Ross, 2016a, 2016b). The *Statement* represents the efforts of the institution (AIR) to respond to the changing needs of postsecondary institutions. Its creation involved more than a year-long process and included an open call for ideas, crafting by six "subject matter experts" (2016b, p. 7), pilot testing at 10 institutions who vetted the statement, and feedback from more than 260 researchers (2016b). The statement release emphasized that some of its elements already exist at many institutions of higher education, but also recognized that much of what is included in the statement remains aspirational for most institutions (2016b).

The *Statement* suggests a new model of institutional research that moves it away from being the "one source of truth" (2016a, p. 2) and instead incorporates other institutional agents (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) not just as consumers or potential data sources, but also as institutional stewards and decision-makers in their own right. This is an important shift, with institutional research no longer confined to a service unit or office, but rather coaching and interacting with multiple decision makers. Importantly, the *Statement* proposes a student-focused paradigm, that is, one aimed at improving the student experience by "**intentionally** grounding institutional research initiatives and reports in a student-focused perspective" (2016b, p. 6, bold in original).

In this volume, we propose that one way to move institutional research (and researchers) toward the aspirational practices presented in the *Statement* is by more systematically incorporating qualitative research. We posit that qualitative research techniques can add depth to current institutional research practices and promote a holistic understanding of student experiences. Our work is anchored by Terenzini's (1993) definition of institutional research as a form of organizational intelligence and discussion of the various awarenesses required to cultivate organizational intelligence. Terenzini (1993) described organizational intelligence as arising from technical/analytical awareness, issues awareness, and contextual awareness. The technical/analytical domain of organizational intelligence consists of having the requisite methodological skills to construct a systematic research design and execute it with rigor and probity. Issues awareness is based on the ability of the institutional researcher to identify pressing organizational problems and to generate information that can help facilitate decision

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# Think-Pair-Share

What are some of your experiences  
with qualitative research?

# Think-Pair-Share

What has been your favorite  
qualitative research project? Why?

# Think-Pair-Share

What have been some struggles encountered when conducting qualitative research?



# Think-Pair-Share

How do you prioritize/manage  
multiple qualitative research  
projects?

# Think-Pair-Share

What software do you use for  
qualitative analysis?



# Think-Pair-Share

What are your most used methods of data collection?

# Think-Pair-Share

What are some emerging qualitative data approaches that you (or your department) would like to implement?

# Think-Pair-Share

Where do you think qualitative  
research methods fit within IR  
offices?

# Think-Pair-Share

How can researchers leverage qualitative methods in the conversation about student success?

# Think-Pair-Share

How does the work at the local level  
contribute to the national  
conversation directing IR offices and  
higher education?

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