

# Lab 4: Mixed Methods

## Assignment Summary

Our survey results give us some insights into the experiences, needs, and perspectives of stakeholders, but it cannot tell us the whole story. Each research method comes with strengths and limitations, so social science researchers often employ *mixed methods*, using multiple approaches to achieve a more complete and nuanced understanding of a complex issue. In this lab, you'll choose a facet of your survey data to explore more deeply using a qualitative method: interviews, focus groups, or ethnography. The choice of method is up to your group and should relate to your research question.

## Submission Information

### Protocol

Submit to Teams at the end of class, submitted as group, due on xx

### Research Notes and Data

Submit to Teams after completion of research visit on xx

### Final Analysis

300-500 words, each student submits to ePortfolio, due on xx

## Part 1: Protocol

In your groups, return to previous research results. Take note of areas where you'd like to know more. Maybe there's a question that prompted surprising answers, or a pattern that emerged. Maybe the answers weren't as detailed as you hoped, or you realize you left out a question that would have provided more context. Review your original research plan and refine a research question. Choose the method (interviews, focus groups, or ethnography) that best complements your research question and plan how you will conduct your research during your partner visit.

### Interviews

An interview is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the participant. It's a good way to gather personal experiences and feelings about your topic, to add clarity and depth to your other research, and to gather specific examples of patterns. Interviews are also the best

choice if you expect participants to share private information, which they might refuse to do in a group setting. Some of the downsides to interviews include the limited reliability of self-reporting (responses can be inaccurate or misleading, either intentionally or inadvertently) and the time-consuming process of conducting, transcribing, and coding individual interviews.

## Focus Groups

A focus group is a conversation among a group of people who share a specific trait, moderated by a facilitator. Focus groups can help you understand how a particular trait or identity shapes responses to your research question, see how ideas and opinions are formed and shaped through conversation, and allow participants to collaboratively work through a problem. Focus groups are somewhat less time-consuming than interviews, but they share the issue of self-reporting, and moderating a focus group requires some specific speaking/facilitation skills.

If you choose an interview or a focus group, your research plan should include:

- **Research Question:** This is the big umbrella question you want your study to answer. Explain briefly how it connects to your previous research.
- **Population:** Describe who your population is and why you've selected them. Make note of special considerations you should be conscious of as you write and conduct your interview/group. For instance, with our IRB protocol we must avoid sensitive topics that address mental health, sexual preferences, use of alcohol or drugs, illegal behavior, etc. How can you frame your questions to avoid issues like these that might be upsetting to or compromise the well-being of participants?
- **Key Topics:** Think through your research question. What are the different kinds of knowledge you might need to answer it? What kinds of experiences, beliefs, feelings, and opinions might shape your participant's response to your research question?
- **Questions:** Using your topics as a guide, write 10 questions that you'll ask participants. They should be open-ended questions that produce narrative responses rather than one-word answers. Avoid leading language or baked-in opinions or judgments.
- **Probes:** A probe is a follow-up question that clarifies or expands on a response. Sometimes you'll have to come up with these on the spot, but it can be helpful to think through probes that may come up. For example, if you're asking about a prior experience, a follow-up might be "What impact has that had on you?" Or "How did that make you feel?" Probes help steer the conversation to make sure you're getting the right kinds of answers and that you're getting comparable data across your interviews/groups.
- **Introduction to Interview for Participants:** Your introduction will explain to subjects what your research is for, how their data will be collected, used, and stored, and an overview of the process. The introduction is an opportunity to build rapport, which is important for your participants' comfort and for your results. Make sure you ask for their consent to proceed!

## Ethnographic Observation

Ethnography involves observation. Ethnography allows you to see how people behave, rather than how they report behaving. This helps to lessen some of the methodological challenges of interviews and focus groups, like participants giving answers they think you want to hear or leading questions. It allows you to capture information a participant might not think is significant. However, an ethnographic approach limits insights you gain from people narrating their experiences. It can produce “observer bias,” where people act differently because they know they’re being watched. With an ethnographic approach, your protocol will include:

- **Your Research Question:** This is the big umbrella question you want your study answer. Explain briefly how it connects to your previous research.
- **Your Population:** Describe who your subjects are and why you’ve selected them. Make note of considerations you should be conscious of as you carry out your ethnography. For instance, will you need to visit at specific times or access particular spaces?
- **Key Topics:** What are the different kinds of knowledge you need to answer your research question? What kinds of behaviors and interactions might shed light on it?
- **Time and Place for Observation:** Based on your research question, your subjects, and your topics, where and when will you carry out your ethnographic observation? Why?
- **Template for Notes:** Plan on describing what you see as thoroughly as possible and realize you might see things you didn’t account for. A template for notetaking can help make your process more efficient. Based on key topics, what are some of the behaviors you’re especially interested in? For instance, if you’re observing people at a particular exhibit, you might be interested in how they interact with the signage.
- **Data Protocols:** Describe how you’ll collect, use, and store data. Draft a consent form, if necessary.

**Get revisions to plan, questions, and consent form approved prior to visit!**

## Part 2: Conduct Research

You’ll visit your chosen site to carry out your research. Remember to consider your own positionality. What are you conveying to your subjects about your professionalism, your attitude, and your openness to their perspectives? Pay special attention to your body language.

### Submit Transcription and Interview Notes (Due on xx)

Work with your group to code your data. Highlight and annotate your interviews or notes to identify themes and patterns. Identify themes you want to look for from the outset; but be open to themes that emerge. As you code, talk with each other about what you’re seeing. As with your survey data, the interviews and notes themselves aren’t the end of the story. You’ll need to analyze and interpret them. Be sure to end your discussion with plans for who needs to complete what work when to make sure the project is done by its due date.

## Part 3: Final Analysis

Discuss what you observed, why it's significant, how it relates to the partner's current initiatives, and what next steps it might indicate. Include the following:

- Contextualize and interpret themes and patterns. Why are they surprising or significant? How do they support or challenge your prior knowledge?
- Mixed methods research allows us to approach a question from multiple angles to gain breadth and depth of understanding. How do your results relate to your survey? Did the qualitative study fill in the gaps you hoped it would? Did the results support your initial conclusions? Did they reveal complexity or tensions? Did they challenge them entirely?
- In addition to exploring the data, reflect on your research design. Did you learn everything you need to know? How might you design the study differently next time to encourage more detailed or accurate information?
- While mixed methods research gives us a more holistic perspective on our topic than a single method, this doesn't mean there's nothing left to learn or that you've answered every question completely! Research is iterative – that means that we keep coming back to our topic in different ways to build up layers of knowledge and understanding. So, reflecting on what you've done so far, what else do you want to know?

## Protocol Grading Rubric

Criteria	A Proficient Protocol will...	A Developing Protocol Will...	A Protocol Still in Need of Work Will...
<b>Revised Research Question and Key Topics</b>	Include a research question and key topics that build on previous research and fills knowledge gaps	Include a research question and key topics that begin to build on past research	Does not include a research question or key topics or they do not align with previous research
<b>Population</b>	Give a thorough description of target population, why they were chosen, how to reach them, and ethical considerations	Describe target population but could say more about why they've been chosen, how to reach them, or ethical considerations	Only minimally elaborates on target population, their fit for the research, how to reach them, or ethical considerations
<b>Questions, Probes, Observation Plans, etc.</b>	Includes questions or plans that are thorough, respectful of subjects, and designed to answer to research question	Includes questions or plans that would benefit from, more ethical consideration, or correlation with research question	Include only limited examples of questions, probes, or observation plans.

# Analysis Rubric

Criteria	A Proficient Lab will...	A Developing Lab Will...	A Lab Still in Need of Work Will...
<b>Length/ Formatting of Analysis</b>	Be 300-500 words in length	Be 300-500 words in length	Be less than 300-500 words in length
<b>Organization of Analysis</b>	Use paragraphs and structure ideas within them for impact	Use paragraphs but structure, transitions, or ordering need work	Not have paragraphs
<b>Grammar/ Style</b>	Be relatively free of grammatical errors; experiment with style	Have several grammatical errors, or basic style issues	Have significant grammatical errors and stylistic issues
<b>Depth of Analysis</b>	Provides a detailed, critical analysis about what research reveals in coordination with other data	Begins to analyze what research reveals in coordination with other data	Does not analyze what survey reveals or does not consider in coordination with other data
<b>Reflection</b>	Reflect on the process, possible gaps in the data, and what you might do differently	Begin to reflect on the process, gaps in data, and what you might do differently	Does not reflect on the process, gaps in data, and what you might do differently