

Quickly Collect Qualitative Data With a Video Booth!

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Abstract: Cameras are everywhere in modern times, making it easy to collect data on a topic of interest, particularly on a college campus. This workshop describes the use of a “video booth” to pose a small number of questions to individuals, one at a time, in short, focused interviews. Workshop participants learned about a case in which the method, modeled on the practice of virtual reality television shows in the United States, was piloted in a project examining the role that use of the library as a place on campus has in student success. This case study illustrates the effectiveness of collecting qualitative data on a tightly-defined topic in a short period of time in an academic library setting.

Keywords: Assessment; Qualitative methods; Video recording; Innovation; College & university students; Academic libraries

1. Introduction

The new video booth method can be used to collect focused data from individuals in a relatively short span of time, providing rich qualitative data and freeing up the researcher to dedicate time to analysis of responses. During the workshop participants learned about how to implement the method in their own libraries, with illustration drawn from a case in which the method was used to collect data from college students.

2. Video Booth Basics

Essentially, the video booth method, modeled after the “confessionals” of reality television, are a recorded interview in which participants speak directly to a video camera while answering a small number of questions on a narrowly-defined topic. Materials needed are few: a room in a relatively quiet part of the building, a video camera, smart phone, or other recording device with sound and image capability; a board or sheet of paper with questions printed clearly upon it; a private space in which to conduct the recorded interviews. Additional optional materials include lighting to improve the quality of the recorded image; external microphone to improve quality of the recorded audible response; a backdrop to provide a neutral image against which the participants are recorded;

and a comfortable chair for respondents. Personnel associated with the research project recruit participants, secure necessary permissions including informed consent, and “host” each participant in the video booth recording process.

3. The Case Study

The initial implementation of the video booth method was part of a mixed-methods project exploring the impact of use of the library on students’ academic success. As part of the Association of College & Research Libraries’ Assessment in Action multi-year project, this research project examined the research question through a survey of furniture use, focus group interviews, the video booth, questions on faculty and graduating senior surveys, and institutional data on participants in the focus groups and the video booth. The focus groups provided guidance for the three questions delivered to participants (Table 1); the questions were designed to address three different aspects of use of the library.

Table 1. Questions delivered to participants in the video booth and the purpose of each for better understanding the impact of use of the library on student academic success

Question	Purpose
What motivates you to come to Michener Library rather than another spot on campus?	There are other places on campus to find solitude, computers, even study spaces. Online tools such as subscriptions to journals suggest that use of the library <u>building</u> is no longer necessary; if so, why do students choose this place over another?
What activities tend to fill your time when you’re in the library? Examples?	Students meet friends at the library, they study, read, write, and socialize. They also sleep, gather with their sorority sisters or fraternity brothers, meet up with team-mates for a team-required study hall, apply for jobs, check their grades or correspondence in the campus portal, and even plan their summer break. What are the ones that they recall most readily when asked?
How has using the Michener Library impacted your academic success? Please share a story.	Anecdotal data would be compared against the institutional data drawn on participants in the focus groups and video booth activities.

Data from the focus group interviews highlighted the importance of asking for clarification and illustration from participants, hence the follow-up asking for “examples” or “a story.” In addition, limiting the number of questions ensured that most participants would need 10 minutes or less to complete the survey.

3.1. Set up

A small room in the center of the main floor of the library was selected as the video “booth.” Window blinds were drawn to ensure privacy for participants, a camera and light were installed, a chair and neutral backdrop positioned. Outside the room a small table held the required informed consent forms and campus photo permission forms; one colleague volunteered to staff that table for the two hours of the data collection phase. Another colleague offered to serve as “host” of the booth itself, escorting participants in, ensuring their comfort and clarifying the task of addressing the three questions displayed, and finally, framing the camera on the participant’s image and starting the recording. Upon completion of all three questions, participants left the booth and received a small gift as a token of thanks. Each participant was also entered in a drawing to win a wireless speaker designed to work with MP3 players; the winning student took the speaker home that day.

3.2. Implementation

The Institutional Review Process (IRB) began months before the actual implementation, and was much the same as a focus group or other sociological method might entail, with one exception. Since the data collection would also include audiovisual recordings of participants, a photo release form was needed along with the informed consent form required for IRB compliance. Promotion of the video booth project began a week ahead of the implementation, and included postings on the library homepage, the library’s Facebook page, on the electronic sign in the entry area, and via table-tents and flyers in select locations in the building. Implemented during the university’s final exam week, the last week of the academic year before summer break, the project took advantage of a traditional pizza lunch held in the library. Students who queued up for free pizza lunch were solicited to participate, and handed a small (5.5 x 4.25 inches, or 14 x 11 cm) “invitation” outlining the details such as location. Shortly after the lunch began, members of the recruiting team walked the library, stopping to visit with students and encouraging participation in the video booth. The brief amount of time estimated to complete the questions was a significant part of the recruiting work; many students were happy to take a break from studying for final exams, as long as it didn’t take too long. Location of the video “booth” was also shared with students; the central location within the building made it easy and quick to find from all four levels of the library. Invitations visible next to empty pizza plates presented the perfect opportunity to start a conversation, particularly since most students ate lunch with a group of friends before returning to their studies.

3.3. Results

In total, 18 students participated in the two-hour video booth project, generating more than 60 minutes of video footage for analysis. Transcriptions of each participants’ words were accompanied by simple description of notable gestures and other non-verbal signs. For example, one participant, in describing a

favorite place to study during her response to Q1, looked upward and to the left, as if she could see through the concrete of the building to the third-floor room she prefers. Another participant, in answer to Q2, made motions similar to typing on a keyboard as he described his use of the computers in the library; this motion accompanied the words “I write a lot of papers here, you know, research and writing.” Q3 asks for a story to illustrate how use of the library has impacted the student’s success; one respondent’s wide grin at the end of a sentence about devoting regular study time in the library on a difficult subject had “turned out pretty well” tells us that she is more than pleased with her grade and standing at the end of the semester.

Participants of both the focus groups and the video booth signed informed consent forms, providing campus identification numbers as they did so. These numbers were used to obtain institutional data from the campus database, including major area of study, years enrolled, and grade point average (GPA).

3.4. Limitations

This unique method has limitations in recruitment and implementation. At the outset, some potential participants may be too shy to want to appear in front of the camera, and therefore are self-excluded from the study. Similarly, there may be potential participants for whom the possible invasion of privacy is unacceptable. Participants, once set up inside the booth, may experience shyness or a reticence to “confess” to certain behaviors or actions, depending on the nature of the questions posed. There can be other sorts of limitations: in the case at the heart of this workshop, noise outside the booth was both a distraction to some participants and an interference of the quality of the audio recording. The method, designed to allow focus on a select topic and generate qualitative data quickly, precludes the ability to probe when answers seem incomplete. Indeed, formulation of questions that address the topic and prompt for sufficient depth or dimension to the answer is a challenge. In this implementation, data from focus group interviews informed the question formulation stage, prompting the inclusion of a request for examples and a story. In situations where the video booth will be implemented as the sole means of data collection, careful thought and a pilot implementation are recommended.

4. Conclusions

The video booth method shows promise as a tool for collecting rich qualitative data on focused topics. Given the relative ubiquity of cameras, both installed in public spaces and privately held in patrons’ hands, recorded images and audio are increasingly common, familiar, and, in some cases, desirable. Simple to implement, the method can be more cost-effective than larger efforts such as focus groups, and faster to implement, saving time for the more complex task of analysis.

With only 25 participants total out of a student body of approximately 12,000 the sample is too small to generalize, but overall the institutional data does warrant further study. With an average cumulative GPA of 2.95, study

participants appear to be representative of the larger population, which averages 3.01 overall.

Despite the small quantitative sample size in this case study, data from the video booth method suggests that further research is warranted; at the very least anecdotal evidence can now be supported with self-reported data from library users themselves, demonstrating that use of the library does contribute to the academic success of students at the University of Northern Colorado. Data collected in the video booth can be shared with library administrators and campus leadership to encourage ongoing investment in library technology, furnishings, and services. Snippets of video recordings may be used on the Libraries website, or as part of an orientation activity for first-year students.

Pioneered in an academic library, the video booth method can be applied in a variety of other library settings as well. Public libraries might use it to gather data on family activities, suggestions for new programming, even feedback on large events. As long as sufficient protection of participant privacy, and informed consent, is assured, this fast and easy form of data collection could be quite useful in many situations. Librarians are encouraged to experiment with the method, adapting it to fit their own circumstances.