

Kyle White

Research Method: Interviews

Kyle White describes how he used interviews as a research tool for his MPP thesis on Aboriginal economic development corporations. In this video, he talks about his experience interviewing business and political leaders from First Nations communities., outlining the importance of learning and following proper protocols when engaging Aboriginal peoples in the research process.

Researchers must respect the procedures outlined by First Nations communities, given that they are frequently studied and the research does not always benefit the communities themselves.

Kyle recommends that anyone using interviews as a research method create a solid interview guide with clear objectives and follow-up questions; the appendices of other studies and reports are a good place to find examples of these. In addition to interviewing participants, White supplemented his study with a document analysis of relevant policy papers, consultation reports, and legislation.

Resources

“Recommendations for Ethical Research with Indigenous Peoples”:

research.usask.ca/documents/ethics/Indigenous-research-guide-draft.pdf

Jen Budney

Research Method: Online Surveys

Jen Budney, a PhD candidate in Public Policy, used an online survey to supplement her research that examines how publicly funded institutions build public value. Her work involves case studies of art museums and in-depth interviews with art museum educators; her online survey provided the data she needed to back up the arguments initially shaped by her interviews. The survey helped her to capture the opinions, ideas, and attitudes of front-line workers who have insights that could benefit organizational decision makers.

Budney says her survey was successful in part because she used it to target a specific group of people. Launching a survey to the general public is a more difficult process. The biggest challenge, she says, is the time it takes to create an effective survey. She also discovered that, once the survey was created, she had to cut it in half to limit the time it would take each participant to complete. She advises researchers who want to use this method to give themselves ample time to create and test the survey, and learn about the factors that make it effective, such as the order of the questions.

Resources

For more information on Fluid Surveys and other survey software, contact the Social Sciences Research Lab (<http://ssrl.usask.ca/>) or access the following resources:

Fluid surveys: <http://fluidsurveys.com/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EuO2zLrMCQ>

Andrew Swift

Research Method: Interviews

MPP student Andrew Swift is studying First Nation financial accountability policies in Canada. His research is centred around interviews with government officials, in addition to document analysis.

Swift discusses the challenges he had securing interviews under a tight timeline, and the resulting necessity to revise his research strategy. He provides insights about how best to contact and engage with government employees, and has some advice on how to prepare for and follow up on interviews. In his experience, using this method requires the ability to adapt to unforeseen situations, both in setting up and conducting interviews with individuals.

Giovanny Bastidas

Research Method: Econometrics

Giovanny Bastidas's PhD dissertation uses econometrics to analyze the political factors that influence executive compensation in the public sector. Focusing on information gathered from hospitals, universities, and government ministries, he uses this statistical analysis of economic data to determine the relationships among his chosen variables.

The challenges of this method include determining which data sets are available and which ones will give the researcher the answers they are looking for. Bastidas recommends deciding in advance which variables are most important to the study and then looking for the data sets to complement them. When seeking out secondary data for analysis, keep in mind that each jurisdiction, organization, government, etc., will have different information available and may have different procedures for accessing it.

Bastidas used Stata software to analyze his data, commenting that a basic understanding of statistics and economics is important before undertaking this type of analysis.

Resources

For more information on Stata software, contact the Social Sciences Research Lab (<http://ssrl.usask.ca/>) or access the following resources:

Coursera course (free to audit): Econometrics: Methods and Applications — <https://www.coursera.org/learn/erasmus-econometrics>

Using Stata:

<http://data.princeton.edu/stata>

<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/sscc/pubs/stat.htm>

A Handbook of Statistical Analyses Using Stata (Third Edition) https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/docs/430-2015-06-22-rave_heschet%202004%20handbook_STATA.pdf

How to access Stata on campus through remote access lab:

<https://www.usask.ca/ict/hardware-software/statistical-software/stata.php>

Colten Goertz

Research Method: Comparative Analysis

Colten Goertz, MPP, used a type of comparative analysis to study Canada's Federal Health Transfer and contrast it with its counterpart in Australia. This method involves reducing policies to their bare-bones components in order to compare their effectiveness in different contexts; it is a useful tool for both academics and policy makers.

Goertz's method, based on a framework by Richard Rose, stresses the importance of understanding the domestic policy or program you are studying before finding a similar policy elsewhere with which to compare it. This type of analysis is useful for determining how policies could work better, but also for learning negative lessons from other contexts (i.e., what not to do). He advises researchers who use this method to keep an open mind and let the data speak for itself, rather than going in with assumptions about what they will find.

Resources

Dolowitz, David P. 2009. "Learning by Observing: Surveying the International Arena." *Policy and Politics* 37(3): 317–34.

Bennett, Colin J., and Michael Howlett. 1992. "The Lessons of Learning: Reconciling Theories of Policy Learning and Policy Change." *Policy Sciences* 25(3): 275–94.

Rose, Richard. 2005. *Learning from Comparative Public Policy: A Practical Guide*. New York: Routledge.

Kristin Bruce

Research Method: Social Network Analysis

MPP student Kristin Bruce used social network analysis as well as stakeholder interviews and document analysis to help her understand the governance model used to make decisions about water in Saskatchewan. This method allows researchers to visually map the connections among people in a given network, and helps explain how information or social goods might travel through that network. Bruce used UCINet and Netdraw software for this component of her study.

Bruce notes that social network analysis captures only a specific moment in time, and that the network can be altered at any point after data is collected. It is also important to keep ethical considerations in mind: participants may want to remain anonymous in this process and also worry about violating the privacy of those they identify as part of their network. Bruce addressed this issue by providing her participants with a detailed description of her plans for the data, and also removed identifying information from her analysis.

Resources

For more information on UCINet, Netdraw, or other software, contact the Social Sciences Research Lab's Social Network Laboratory (<http://ssrl.usask.ca/laboratories/snl.php#SNLFacilities>)

Hayley Carlson

Research Method: Document Analysis

MPP student Hayley Carlson's unique study about policy narratives concerning the Saskatchewan River Basin involved analysing stakeholder documents from the sector. Carlson compiled 134 documents from various stakeholder groups and used Nvivo coding software to determine the themes and stories present in them.

Carlson discusses the process of creating her study. She came to the MPP program from a science background, thinking she would conduct a cost-benefit analysis for her thesis. Taking the time to explore what she wanted to find out, however, led her in a very different, qualitative, direction. She talks about the process of choosing her method and how she developed her strategy for finding and coding data.

Resources

For more information on Nvivo software, contact the Social Sciences Research Lab (<http://ssrl.usask.ca/>). Nvivo is freely available to U of S students through the Campus Computer Store: <http://www.usask.ca/ict/hardware-software/qualitative-analysis-software/>