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## Qualitative Research Workshop

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SCHOOL OF INFORMATION  
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**Research Day @ LMU**

**Feb 17, 2015**

**1:30 -4:30 pm**

# **Qualitative Research Workshop**

Lili Luo

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San José State University

## Objectives

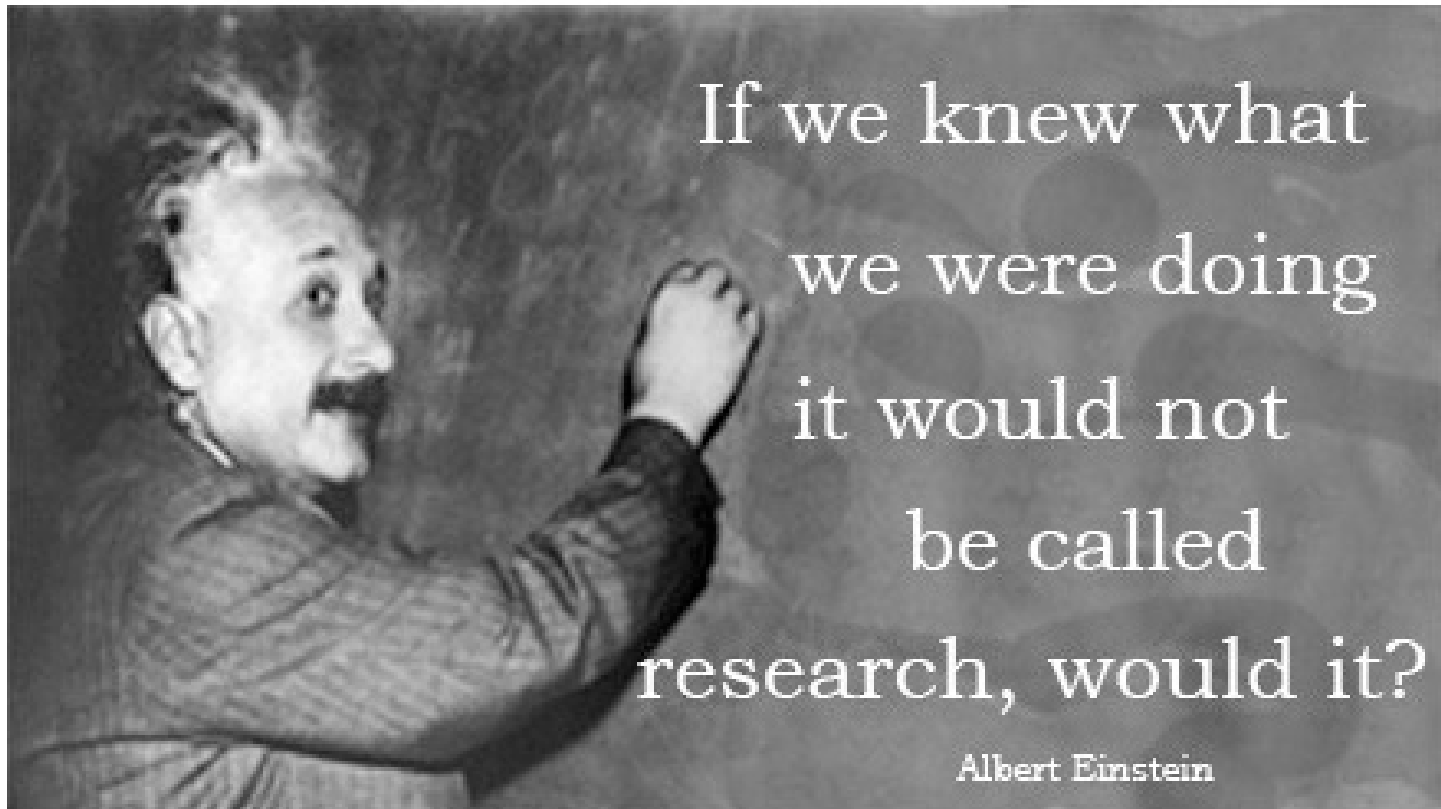
- Gain first-hand experience of developing qualitative research questions (RQs), conducting in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group interview
- Deepen understanding of qualitative research

***We won't cover*** – *research design, sampling, participant recruitment, data analysis*

## Agenda

- Review the techniques of RQ development, and conducting IDI and focus groups
- Group exercises
- Reflection







## Sources of research questions

- Personal observations/experiences
- Literature
- Real-world problem
- Programmatic need
- Theory
- Sponsor

*...they are not mutually exclusive*

Broad

Iterative process

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Consider what the study purpose is, who the audience is, what's already known, what to do with the findings



Narrow

Research Area  
(Information literacy)



Research Problem/Focus  
(faculty have inconsistent understanding of how information literacy is defined)



Research Question  
(How do faculty of different disciplines define information literacy skills?)



Hypotheses



## Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- Inductive, flexible
- Probe into responses or observations as needed
- Capture nuances
- Obtain information not anticipated by researcher
- Appropriate for topics where not much has been known
- Time consuming
- Diminished generalizability due to small and non-probabilistic samples
- Reliability challenges

*Keywords* – identify, explore, describe, explain, why, how, what

*Avoid* – measure, test, how many

## Developing a qualitative research question

Qualitative questions usually inform the direction of the study in both theoretical and methodological terms.

Good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey. Create an overarching question to guide the inquiry process, and develop sub-questions and new questions during a study.

Begin with a self-question “what do I want to know in this study”. Creating one or two broad questions can be a fertile starting point for thinking through the specifics. However, starting with questions that are too focused can lead to tunnel vision and inhibit a researcher’s understanding and analysis.

## Evaluating a qualitative research question

Can the research question hold my interest?

Can it pass the “so what” test?

Is it well grounded in current theoretical and empirical research?

Are all the terms unambiguous?

Is the question answerable, given the constraint of time, budget, expertise, manpower, and ethics?

Is it packed with multiple sub-questions?

Is there any unchecked assumption?

## **Exercise 1**

# **Developing qualitative research questions**

## Choosing the right data collection method

### In-depth interview vs. Focus group interview

Both - investigate *how* and *why* and capture the nuances of human experience/behavior/perceptions/beliefs; use open-ended questioning; use inductive probing; subject to self-report bias.



## What to consider...

### Research topic

- Is your topic about group norms and normative expectations? Is it a topic on which a variety of viewpoints is known or expected to exist? Is it about examining reactions and responses to certain stimuli? Is it about problem solving and brainstorming? Is it about group processes and group dynamics?
- Is your topic personal, sensitive or highly controversial?

*G. Guest, et al., "Collecting qualitative data", 2013*

## What else to consider...

### Time limitations

- Do you have a tight time frame for your study?

### Staff limitations

- Do you have adequate manpower for your study?

### Sponsor preferences and expectations

- Do funders/sponsors of your study want you to do IDI or focus groups?

### Safety and comfort issues

- Do your study participants feel safer and more comfortable to talk one-on-one or in a group?

G. Guest, et al., "Collecting qualitative data", 2013

## **Exercise 2**

**Determining the proper data collection method  
– IDI or focus group interview**



## Conducting IDI

- Usually 45-90 minutes long
- Plan ahead (participant recruitment, location, interview documentation protocols, interviewer training, etc.)
- The interview guide (from broad to specific)
  - Research objectives
  - Structure
  - Types of questions
  - Phrasing questions
  - Sequencing questions
  - Transitions
- Conducting the interview
  - Establishing rapport
  - Introduction/Informed consent
  - Questions and probes – listening/thinking/talking at the same time; a guided conversation; the almost invisible interviewer

*G. Guest, et al., "Collecting qualitative data", 2013*

## Conducting focus group interview

- Group ranges from 6 to 12 people; ideal group size – 8
- Plan ahead
- The interview guide
- The moderator – knows the RQ and the interview guide, quick thinking, has excellent facilitation skills, knows how to handle participants of different personality (talkative, aggressive, shy, angry, etc.), and has mental/physical energy and stamina
- Conducting the interview
  - Gauging the group
  - Introduction - setting the tone and expectations
  - Probing
  - Maximize positive group dynamic
  - Use activities/visual or audio stimuli

*G. Guest, et al., "Collecting qualitative data", 2013; Krueger & Casey, "Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research", 2014*

## **Exercise 3**

### **Practicing data collection - conducting IDI or focus group interview**

## Reflection



# Questions?



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