The purpose of interviews (of students/mixed stakeholders) in an Advising Program evaluation is to develop a deep understanding of student experience of the program through directed conversation with individuals.

**What are students' overall experiences in the program? (academic experiences/student services)**

**What have student experiences with the Advising Program been?**

**What do you want to learn from using interviews?**

**In what ways has the Advising Program met the needs of specific student populations?**

**How can the Advising Program encourage student retention in the program?**

Interviews are employed when:

- the program wants to explore specific topics of interest through conversation among diverse constituents
- the program is seeking extended responses to critical questions.

**Establishing and Conducting Interviews**

- Selection of interviewees from target population, based on program users
  - Interviewees can be identified through other evaluation methods, such as survey respondents or those observed during advising meetings.
- Establishment of ample time, convenient for both interviewer and interviewee
- Planning for recording of and notetaking during interview
  - A notetaker besides the interviewer is recommended.
- Preparation of critical questions based around central areas of interest (See below)
During the interview, discussion of the interview’s purpose (i.e. evaluating the advising program) and of any terms of confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees

Besides attending to interviewee’s verbal responses, attention to non-verbal cues (e.g., gesture, use of space, intonation, hesitation) in order to gauge interviewee’s comfort and interest levels

At the interview’s conclusion, presentation of summary of key ideas brought up by interviewee, seeking agreement, correction, or expansion

Immediately after focus group, the interviewer and notetaker meet to compare their reflections and observations.

Immediately after interview, (written) recording of interviewer’s and notetaker’s reactions to and feelings about the interview (first impressions).

**Question Types**

Questions can be of mixed types (e.g., structured, unstructured, semi-structured).

**Structured (limited, pre-set list of questions)**

- Tell me about the best advising experience that you have had. Why was it good? (Experience + Opinion)
- Tell me about the last time that you solved a problem using a skill learned from advising. What difficulties did you encounter, and how did you overcome them? (Experience + Behavior)

**Unstructured (expandable list of questions, adaptable to unique characteristics of interviewee)**

- For you, what are some the pros and cons of using advising services? (Opinion)
- As a senior in the College of Engineering, how do you organize your time around schoolwork/outside jobs/extracurricular activities/personal life? (Behavior)

**Semi-structured**

- What do you think makes a successful advising session? (Opinion)
- What kinds of conflicts, if any, have you encountered in your experiences with the Advising Program? (Experience)

**Use of Questions**

- All questions should be bracketed by a welcoming tone and with the reminder that the moderator(s) is not evaluating interviewee’s responses but providing relevant questions and follow up.
- The script of questions should be prepared ahead of time, and the interviewer should be aware if s/he is allowed to adapt questions or deviate from the script.
- Follow-up and interpretative questions allow for deeper understanding of the interviewee’s ideas.
  - Interpretative questions reword potentially unclear comments by the interviewee, asking her/him if the interviewer’s interpretation is correct.
- Questions should emerge from the student learning objectives of the advising program and how interviewee’s experiences reflect (or not) the objectives.
- Questions should be based on behaviors as well as opinions.
- Questions should invite interviewee to reflect on the advising process as well as her/his own experiences.
Data Analysis

- If you choose to do a rigorous analysis, transcription can be used
  - The research team creates a transcript of the interview.
  - By coding the **qualitative data** (i.e. the participants’ responses), the data can then be used for **quantitative purposes** (e.g., response frequencies; response type classified by student demographics) and/or **qualitative purposes** (ex., simple summary of focus group discussion).
  - Three possible ways to use collected data
    - (simplest) Post-interview notes by interviewer
    - (moderately complex) Cleaned up copy of notes compiled
    - (most complex) Transcription of interview and tagging and coding of data

- (If conducting only one interview) Examining the themes that emerge from the data, especially those that respond to the interview constructs provides a **thematic analysis**.

- (If conducting more than one interview on related key constructs) Multiple codings of the data and then comparisons by different researchers reveal the **convergence** of shared analysis and the **divergence** of possibly unrelated trends or lack of agreement between different interviewees (cross-interview).

Caveats

- Selecting interviews over focus groups allows for depth of responses, a more intimate environment, more possibility for confidentiality, and possibly less, more localized information to code.
- Plan accordingly for potential scheduling difficulties.
- Plan accordingly for difficulty in recruiting interviewees (draft a list with a variety of potential candidates).
- Be aware of potentially missing information based on questions and scheduling constraints.
- Minimize any undue influence by the careful selection of a particular interviewer and notetaker.
- Allow enough time and possible training for the complex process of coding data.
- Select a physical setting for the interview that reduces any negative effect on the candor/depth of responses.

Resources and Examples

