Case Studies

The purpose of case studies in an Advising Program evaluation is to gain insight into the relationship between developmental factors and their context through the study of a focal subject using multiple methods. Types of "focal subjects" include students, advisors, staff, heterogeneous or homogenous groups, and advising sessions or events. Case studies allow a focus on specific experiences of student advising through holistic, individual experiences and help to understand individuals' needs and expectations. Case studies can provide a powerful means to portray the program to outsiders.

Case studies are employed when:
- the program wants to collect a rich description of a focal subject
- the program wishes to explore an unusual or particularly interesting aspect of the program
- the program is seeking a research strategy with easily controllable data collection
Establishing and Conducting Case Studies

• Clarification of case study purpose
  o Evaluative (looking closely at a past or present area of interest)
  o Exploratory (looking closely at areas of newness or possibility)

• Selection of approaches
  o Is the program testing already held beliefs or theories?
  o Is the program seeking new beliefs/practices or theories?
  o Is the program looking for stories/experiences that illustrate specific aspects of advising?

• Selection of framework of case study
  o Is the case study retrospective? a snapshot of a specific moment on the program’s timeline (synchronous)? a longitudinal examination (diachronic)?

Data Analysis
Most unique about case studies is the resulting narrative that emerges from the holistic examination of the focal subject. The components of a case study report include:
  1. An Introduction (the study’s context and purpose)
  2. List of key research questions
  3. Description of methods used to solicit data for the research questions
  4. In-depth description of interactions with focal subject(s).
  5. Findings from the methods used
  6. Possible impact on the program
  7. Suggestions for further research (optional)

Depending of the methods used as part of a case study, different analytical tools may be used. See related pages for fuller descriptions and suggestions of data analysis:
  • Interviews
  • Surveys
  • Observations

Caveats
• Plan for the time-consuming process of collecting, organizing, describing, and analyzing data.
• Account for the depth, rather than the depth, of information that results from case studies.
• Be aware of the difficulty in summarizing subject’s experiences and in creating the contextual narrative.
• Account for potential researcher-observer bias in reporting the case study.

Resources and Examples
• UC Irvine Transfer Student Success Study (multiple methods case study): http://www.assessment.uci.edu/reports/documents/Student_Success_Essay_Final_11-01-10.pdf
• Kansas State Academic Advising Case Studies: http://academicadvising.wordpress.com/final-project/academic-advising-case-studies/