

USING PHOTO-BASED ETHNOGRAPHY FOR EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMS, SERVICES, OR OFFERINGS

Engaging students or users to share photos with your department can be a helpful way to assess a condition, problem, culture, need, reaction, or issue. Because of the proliferation of digital smart phones with built in cameras and the crowd sourcing data movement the time is ripe for a new way to approach this assessment technique. Assessment professionals are spending less time worrying about the cameras and focusing more time on the processes, strategies and storage solutions to secure photos submitted.

Considerations on the Topic You Choose to Study

- Is your question/call to action defined narrowly defined enough to get you what you need?
- Is your topic actually able to be documented via photo-based ethnography?
- Have you thought through how respondents will submit photos back to you (see next section below)?
- Can the topic you consider actually be impacted by themes you discover in the photos?
- Have you done a literature review or practitioner-based publication review on this topic? Would this approach contribute to your understanding?
- Could the topic be misconstrued as lewd, inappropriate, or problematic from a community standpoint? If a concern is present, who do you need to discuss this project with prior to beginning? If so – consider NOT using a public collection tool but rather a private office email or SMS.
- Can you structure the topic in such a way that you can derive multiple perspectives (the topic is not a simply yes/no item)?

Approaches to Photo Collection and Storage

- How long will you leave the collection period open?
- Do you need to develop a photo release form for your department?
- Do you intend to present these findings beyond campus (IRB)?
- Consider developing an easy to capture photo hashtag for your project and advertise that
- What technology platform will you use for submission (Facebook Group Page, Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, Capsule - <http://trycapsule.com>, Email, SMS texting)
- How will you store all the digital photos? How long will you keep them?
- How will you determine if a photo should be considered for the study?
- How will you deal with a situation should a photo reveal an illegal or campus policy violation?

- How do you best market the request? Be sure to indicate purpose, call to action, length of time, and an implicit photo release statement, etc. on your marketing.
- Do you need to maintain the anonymity of the submitter? How?

Suggestions on How to Best Analyze and Report Findings

- Consider each photo as an unique data element
- Consider working with a small team of staff (an odd number is always preferred)
- Review each and every photo and consider giving it a code number – either print out each photo or use word to overlay this code on the photo
- Create an excel spreadsheet that you can use to categorize your findings (see below)
- Depending on your photo collection/storage decisions be sure to assign gender or ethnicity or other characteristics to each photo
- Utilize qualitative research theme analysis techniques to evaluate all the photos and develop an initial list of themes
- Consider using a PowerPoint to categorize photos by theme to share with campus leadership/decision makers
- Ensure you create an executive summary that highlights the themes. In this be sure to document your assessment process, how many photos were submitted, your decision making regarding themes and photos that were excluded
- Be sure to share your findings back with the community you assessed with a thank you note or announcement
- Make decisions and enhancements to your program, event, or service based on what you learn and document this accordingly.

SAMPLE PHOTO THEME CODING SHEET

PHOTO CODE	Brief Description of Photo	Contributor Supplied Text	Contributor Characteristic (you put in)	Contributor Characteristic (you put in)	THEME 1: Obstruction	THEME 2: No Spaces	THEME 3: Illegal Activity	THEME 4: Economic Impact
A001	Photo of Street Closure Sign	It is So Hard to Get Around UNT	Resident	Male	1			
A002	Photo of Line of Cars No Spaces	See - Impossible	Commuter	Male		1		
A003	Photo of Nails in Parking Spot	This almost cost me a tire!	Resident	Female	1			
A004	Photo of Double Parking on Ave C	What are these people thinking?	Resident	Female		1	1	
A005	Photo of traffic fine/boot on car	Ugh! I didn't see that coming.	Commuter	Female			1	1
TOTAL					2	2	2	1

Questions on this assessment method? Contact the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at the University of North Texas at 940.565.2085 or email Dr. Russell Ruffu (Russell.Ruffu@unt.edu) or Dr. Jason Simon (Jason.simon@unt.edu).