



Understanding Why Students Leave— Using Thematic Analysis to Analyze Open-Ended Question Data

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Overview

1

- Introduce research question and data collection

2

- Introduce thematic analysis method

3

- Findings and use of results

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa



- Flagship Campus
- Research University of International Standing
- Offers Professional Degrees in Fields of Law, Medicine, Education, Architecture, and Nursing
- Student Population of Over 20,000
- Alumni Population of Over 130,000 Across All 50 States and in 126 Countries



MĀNOA CAMPUS TODAY

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa



Research Question

“Why students chose to leave the institution?”





Data Collection

- Leavers' Study (2012)
- Participants (N = 600):
 - Students who enrolled in academic year 2011 but did not return in fall 2012 semester
- Online and phone surveys
- Open-ended question
 - “Major reasons that you are leaving other than reasons listed above”.
- 274 valid responses



Thematic Analysis

1: Careful Reading

2: Unitization

3: Categorization

4: Coding

5: Finding patterns and trends

6: Reporting and Using



Step 1

Careful Reading



My husband got military orders to another location

I had to get a job not in Hawai'i.

Did not accept the majority of my transfer credits

Was Pregnant

Very limited classes.

Did not offer the degree I was interested in..

Step 2 Unitization: Break it Apart

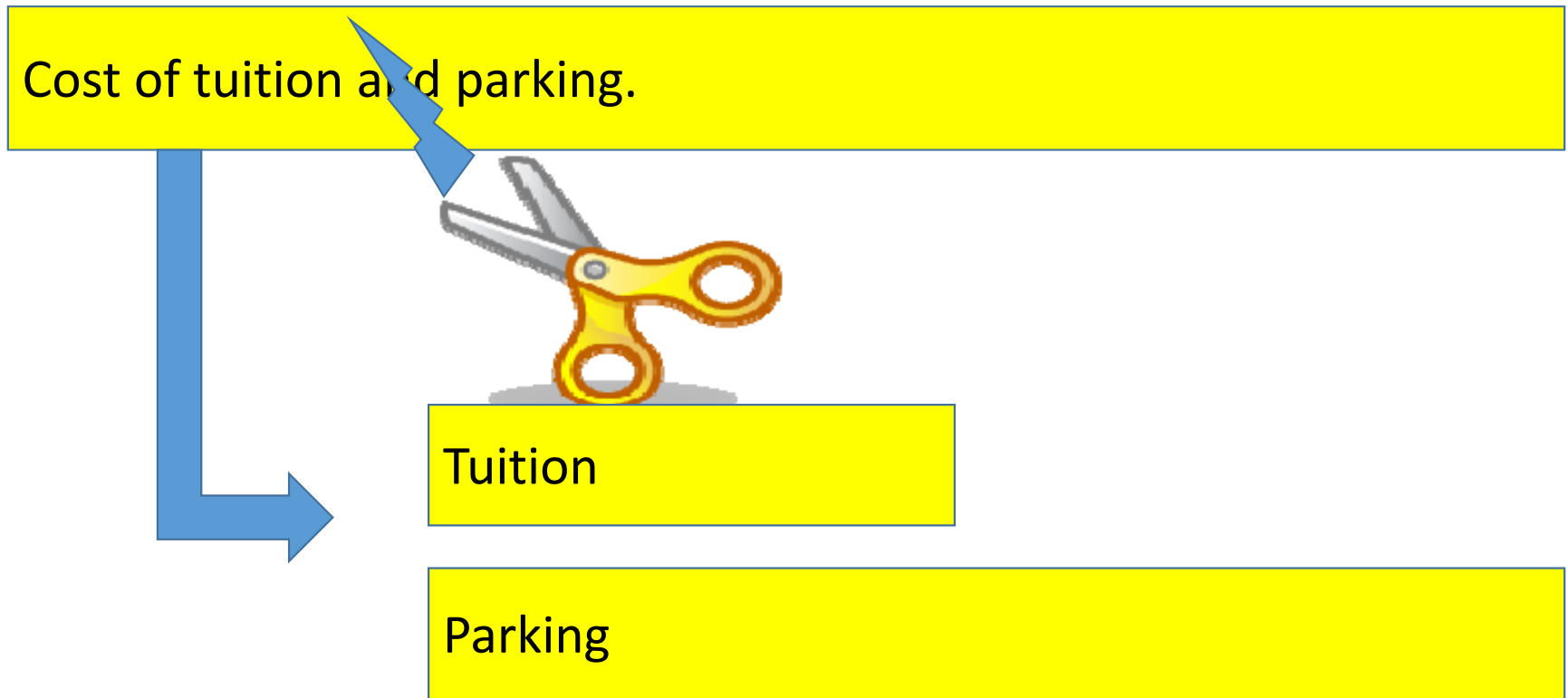


- Break responses into *thought units/units of meaning*
- Each unit communicates only one idea
- Can be several sentences, one sentence, text chunks, or one word.

How about: 😊 , “?” or “...”



Example



Step 3 Categorization



- How much material to use?
 - All if possible. If not, try a balanced random sub-sample
- How to go about it?
 - Deductive-inductive procedure
 - Skip difficult ones first
 - Select a sample (30) and check your code against your colleagues'.
- How detailed should it be?
 - Balance between verifiability and consistency
- Aggregate or break it done?

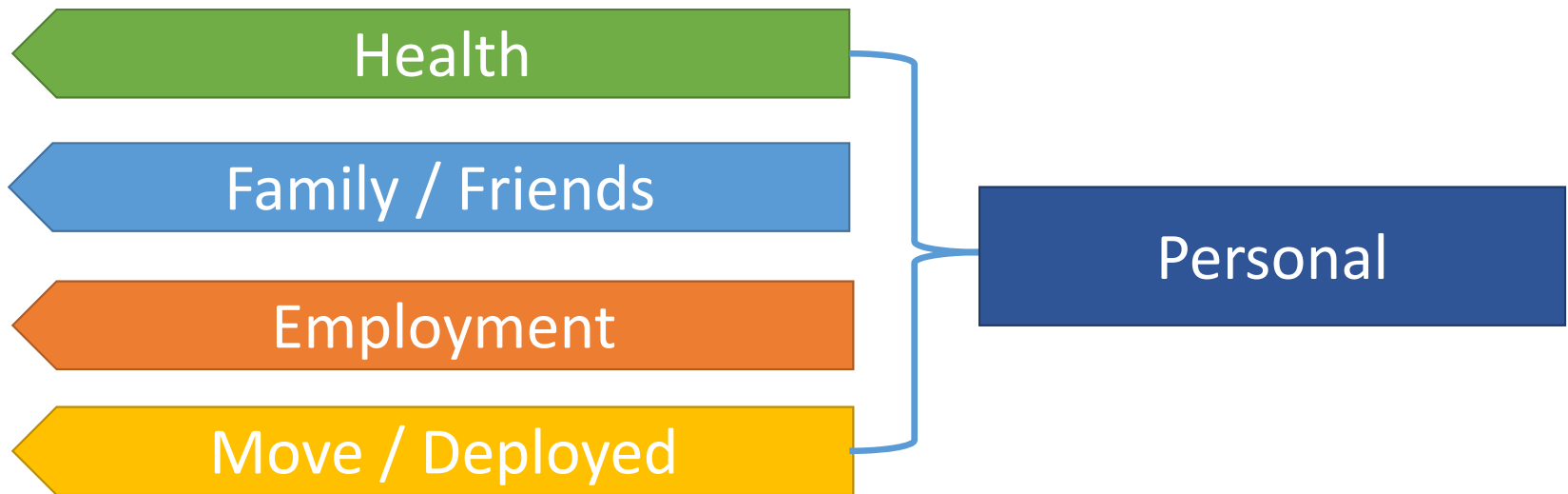


Categories for inductive approach

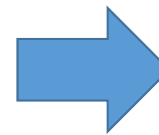
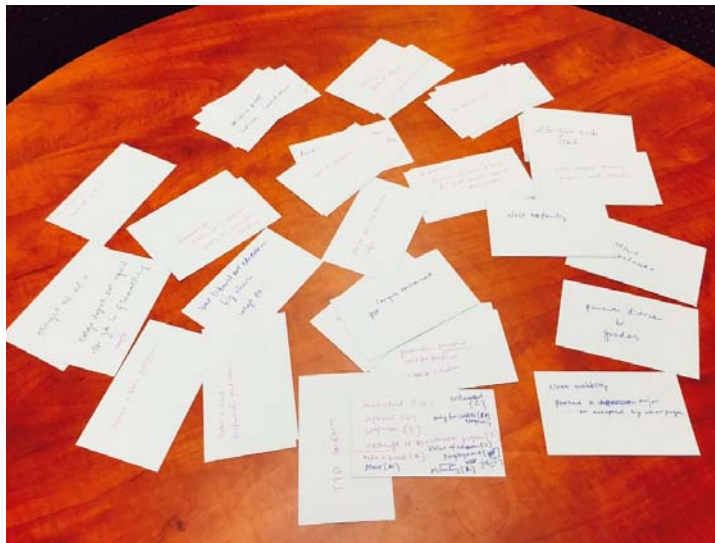
- Theory
- Previous research
- Accreditation standards



Example: Generating categories



Compare for Consistence and Difference



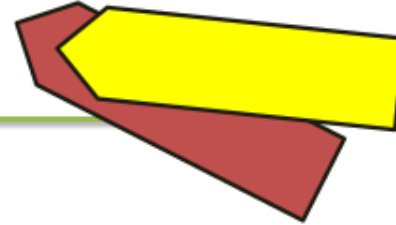


Create Code Book

1. Finance		2: Academics		3. Support Service		4. Social Integration and Interaction		5. Personal		6. Student Accountability	
10	General	20	General	30	General	40	General	50	General	60	General
11	Cost of Attendance	21	Program/ Curriculum	31	Parking/ Cummer	41	Campus Climate/Safty	51	Health	61	Decide a Major
12	Financial Aid	22	Instruction/Facul ty Support	32	Facilities/Service	42	Personal Interaction	52	Family or Friends	62	Stay on Academic Track
13	Scholarship	23	Advising	33	Procedures	43	College or Program fit	53	Value of Degree/Education	63	Follow Requirements
14	Debt or Loan	24	Class Availability/Sche	34	Staff Support			54	Move/Deployed	64	Life/School Balance
		25	Transferrable Credits					55	Employment		
		26	Desirable Program					56	Missionary or Religion		
		27	Time to Degree					57	Play sports or do art elsewhere		



Step 4 Coding



- Label or code response with the indicators
- Check your work
 - with another colleague (reproducibility)
 - against yourself at a different time (stability)
- Modify the code book if necessary



Example: Coding

Q14	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
During my freshmen year, I wasn't taking school seriou...	62	12	.	.	.
I decided to move to Hawai'i for a number of personal r...	50	11	.	.	.
My grades dropped when I got a full time job and I coul...	55	52	.	.	.
Not enough campus activities - Not enough community ...	41	32	.	.	.
2 of the classes taken were unable to be passed, even ...	62	.	.	.	.
A close friend passed away and made me reevaluate m...	52	.	.	.	.
a place to stay where i can concentrate. could find a job...	32	23	.	.	.
Academics just weren't very good. And I felt like I would...	20	53	.	.	.
Accepted a full-time job requiring my relocation for five ...	55	.	.	.	.
Accepted a well-paying full time job at Aulani, a Disney ...	55	.	.	.	.
Accepted into a nursing program elsewhere.	26	.	.	.	.



Exercise

Code ten open-ended responses using the code book

1. Apply the indicators to each response
2. One response may be coded with more than one indicator





SPSS Syntax Transformation

```
**Create FA**
```

```
IF (R1 = 10 or R1 = 11 or R1 = 12 or R1 = 13 or R1 = 14 or R2 = 10 or R2 = 11 or R2 = 12 or R2 =  
13 or R2 = 14 or R3 = 10 or R3 = 11 or R3 = 12 or R3 = 13 or R3 = 14 or R4 = 10 or R4 = 11 or R4 =  
12 or R4 = 13 or R4 = 14 or R5 = 10 or R5 = 11 or R5 = 12 or R5 = 13 or R5 = 14 ) FA=1.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
**Create AC**
```

```
IF (R1 = 20 or R1 = 21 or R1 = 22 or R1 = 23 or R1 = 24 or R1 = 25 or R1 = 26 or R1 = 27 or R2 = 20 or R2  
23 or R2 = 24 or R2 = 25 or R2 = 26 or R2 = 27 or R3 = 20 or R3 = 21 or R3 = 22 or R3 = 23 or R3 = 24 or  
or R4 = 20 or R4 = 21 or R4 = 22 or R4 = 23 or R4 = 24 or R4 = 25 or R4 = 26 or R4 = 27 or R5 = 20 or R5 =
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
**Create SP**
```

```
IF (R1 = 30 or R1 = 31 or R1 = 32 or R1 = 33 or R1 = 34 or R2 = 30 or R2 = 31 or R2 = 32 or R2 =  
33 or R2 = 34 or R3 = 30 or R3 = 31 or R3 = 32 or R3 = 33 or R3 = 34 or R4 = 30 or R4 = 31 or R4 =  
32 or R4 = 33 or R4 = 34 or R5 = 30 or R5 = 31 or R5 = 32 or R5 = 33 or R5 = 34 ) SP=1.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```



Frequency of Themes

Q14	FA	AC	SP	SI	PL	SA
During my freshmen year, I wasn't taking school seriou...	1	.	.	.	.	1
I decided to move to Hawai'i for a number of personal r...	1	.	.	.	1	.
My grades dropped when I got a full time job and I coul...	1	.
Not enough campus activities - Not enough community	1	1	.	.
2 of the classes taken were unable to be passed, even	1
A close friend passed away and made me reevaluate m...	1	.
a place to stay where i can concentrate. could find a job...	.	1	1	.	.	.
Academics just weren't very good. And I felt like I would...	.	1	.	.	1	.
Accepted a full-time job requiring my relocation for five	1	.
Accepted a well-paying full time job at Aulani, a Disney	1	.
Accepted into a nursing program elsewhere.	.	1	.	.	.	.



Step 5 Identify the Patterns & Trends

- Make the obvious obvious
 - Make the obvious dubious
 - Making the hidden obvious
- (Schlechty & Noblit, 1982)



If you must write a report...



- Use executive summary for long reports
- Focus on the patterns and trends and the unexpected
- Use quotes to bring it to life
- Use bullet points, underlines, italics to make it easy to read
- Summarize the findings in tables and charts



Step 6

Use – To Facilitate Improvement Discussions

Finding:
Students mentioned the difficulty of finding classes fit their work schedule.

Diagnose 1:
Not enough evening classes

Strategy 1:
Increase evening classes

Diagnose 2:
Classes with flexible schedule

Strategy 2:
Online classes



Step 6

Use – To Improve the Instrument

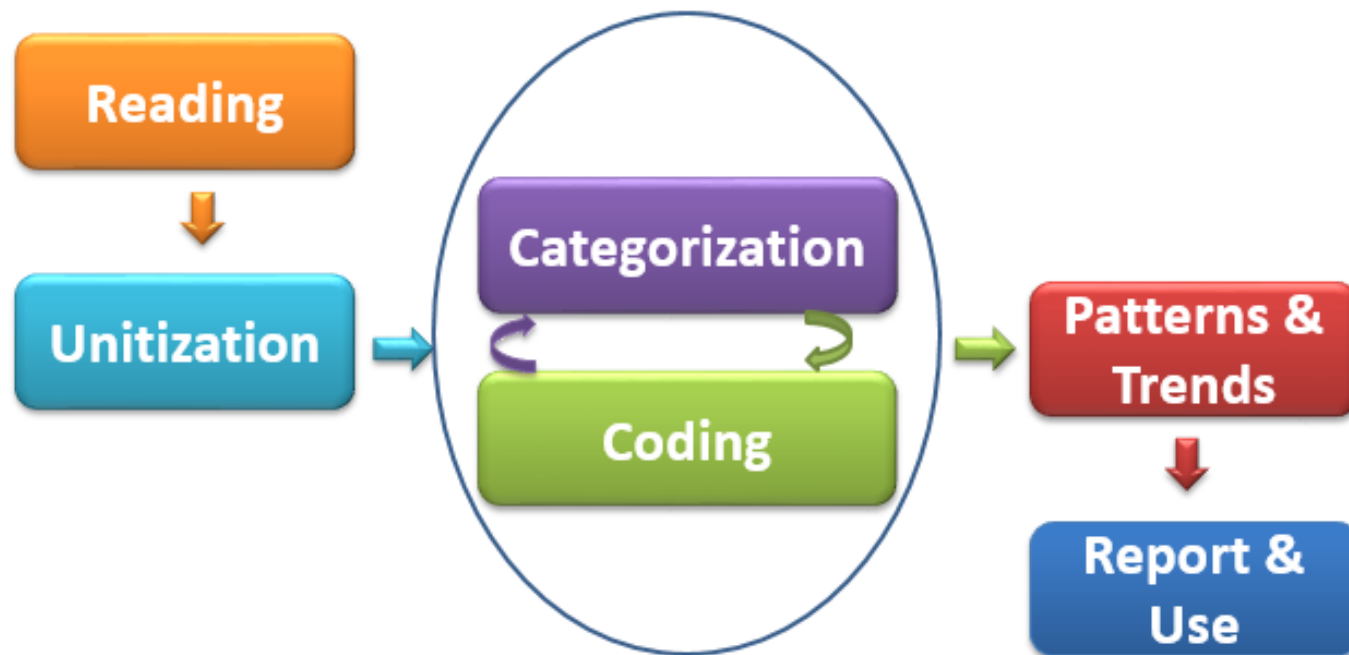
Exploratory to confirmatory

What were your main reasons to leave the university?

- Academic
- Financial
- Personal
- Student support services
- Social interactions with others
- Student support services
- ...



Summary of the steps





Questions?

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Mahalo 