

# ACTION TEAM PROCESS GUIDE



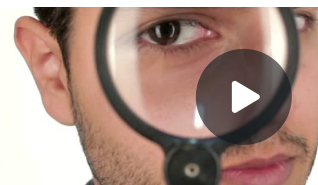
## What this guide contains

This document is intended to guide Action Teams through a process of inquiry based learning, such that conclusions may be drawn from this learning process and recommendations formed based upon the findings. This process places value in several areas:

- developing questions and exploring theories based on the experience of a cross-constituent group of professionals who work directly with students, and from students themselves
- exploring and developing clearer understandings of the data on our students' behaviors, outcomes and experiences
- testing ideas and assumptions against real data
- developing conclusions based on deeper investigation
- disseminating information and reporting the inquiry process to the greater college community, thus raising awareness and understanding of this unique way of exploring the SRJC student experience
- developing actionable recommendations intended to improve the outcomes and experience of our students

Recommendations- the ultimate outcome of this process- are submitted to the President's cabinet for consideration and further action.

## STEP 1: ORIENTATION



**Picking a topic through observation and exploration,  
and creating a problem statement**

# Overview



## Objective(s):

- Stimulating interest and curiosity in relation to the problem at hand
- To pick a topic area for your Action Team investigation

“ During this phase the learning topic is introduced by the environment or given... or defined by the learner” (p. 54)

“One has to explore or observe a phenomenon in order to get interested in it, to read some theory in order to know the scientifically oriented questions related to this particular phenomenon, and to engage him or herself with the issue through a challenging anchor point.” (p. 52)

**Outcome/Work Product:** *(See Appendix A for an example)*

### Problem Statement

Write a narrative addressing the following sections:

- Background/Introduction:** provide a brief overview of the context or situation leading to the identification of the problem/topic area.
- Impact/Why it matters:** Describe the potential consequences or impact of the problem on individuals, organizations, or the broader community.
- Aims/Objectives:** Outline the goals or desired outcomes of addressing this topic area or problem.
- Stakeholders:** Identify the key stakeholder affected by or involved in the problem.
- Summary Problem Statement:** clearly state the problem that needs to be addressed. Be specific and concise.

## Timeline:

- Prior to Session 1: Broad areas of data are presented, or
- Session 1: Bring
- Session 2:
- Session 3:

# Process



**Here are the basic steps for Orientation:**

### 1. **Identify your area of interest:**

Start by determining the broad area or topic you want to explore. This could be informed by your academic discipline, personal interests, or current issues at the college, with your students, or previous work on the committee.

#### **Questions to ask yourself and your team that can bring forth a topic for further exploration:**

- *What is a challenge you have witnessed that seems common to a particular group of students?*
- *What are challenges you have witness particular to the students in your program or area of work?*
- *What is an area where SRJC data shows a disproportionate impact?*
- *Where is equity work missing or not being addressed at SRJC?*
- *What piques your curiosity about various points in our data sets?*
- *What theories do you have about our students about which you want to investigate?*
- *What questions were left from previous Action Teams?*

### 2. **Identify gaps and problems:**

As you review your answers to the questions below, pay attention to the areas where there is disagreement, conflicting viewpoints, or insufficient research. These gaps and problems can serve as the basis for your topic area.

### 3. **Write your problem statement:**

The problem statement outline is the work product of this step.

Once your group has come to a consensus of the topic area, coming to a greater understanding of the topic is vital to creating a problem statement, which includes five sections:

#### a. **Background/Introduction**

- How do you understand the context of this challenge?
- How would you explain this area of inquiry to someone in a 30 second elevator ride? What are the most salient points?

#### b. **Impact/Why it matters:**

- How will the findings of this inquiry impact students, faculty, staff, the college or the broader community?

#### c. **Aims/Objectives:**

- What are the the goals or desired outcomes of addressing this topic area or problem?
- What do you aim to do in the course of your inquiry?

#### d. **Stakeholders:**

- What are the key groups affected by or involved in the problem?

#### e. **Summary Problem Statement:**

- What is a short, specific and succinct way of stating the problem that needs to be addressed?

*See Appendix A for an example of a Problem Statement for an Action Team project*

# STEP 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION



## Understanding the concepts in your topic area and defining research questions and/or hypotheses.

### Overview

#### Objective(s):

- Clearly define and identify the problem and what needs to be known
- Decide on either research questions or a hypothesis to test

“ Conceptualization is a process of understanding a concept or concepts belonging to the stated problem.” (p. 54)

“ ... **hypothesizing** is a formulation of a statement or a set of statements (de Jong, 2006a), while **questioning** is a formulation of investigable questions (White & Frederiksen, 1998). Thus, the outcomes of the Conceptualization phase are research questions or hypotheses to be investigated or both if first research questions are formulated and then hypotheses are generated based on these.” (p. 54)

**Outcome/Work Product:** *(see Appendix B for an example)*

- **Research Question(s) or Hypotheses.**

#### Timeline:

- Prior to Session 1:
- Session 1:
- Session 2:
- Session 3:

### Process

Moving from your problem statement to researchable questions is about narrowing, because often topic areas are quite broad. Your team will want to identify research questions or hypotheses that address your problem statement, but also get more specific into something

that is both answerable or testable within the timeframe of a semester or two, considering all the research and footwork that needs to be completed.

Here are the basic steps for Conceptualization:

1. **Conduct a literature and data review:**

Before formulating your research questions, it's essential to review existing literature or research on your problem statement. This helps you understand what has already been studied, what gaps exist in the current knowledge, and where your inquiry can make a meaningful contribution.

2. **Identify gaps and problems:**

As you review the literature and data, pay attention to areas where there is disagreement, conflicting findings, or insufficient research. These gaps and problems can serve as the basis for your research questions.

3. **Brainstorm potential questions:**

Begin brainstorming potential research questions based on the gaps and problems you identified. These questions should be specific, focused, and feasible given your resources and time constraints.

4. **Narrow down the focus:**

Refine your list of potential research questions by considering factors such as relevance, significance, feasibility, and the scope of your study. You may need to narrow down your focus to a specific aspect or population to make your research questions more manageable.

5. **Consider research objectives:**

Think about the broader objectives of your research and how your research questions align with these objectives. Your research questions should ultimately help you achieve your inquiry goals.

6. **Formulate clear and concise questions:**

Once you have narrowed down your list of potential research questions, formulate them into clear and concise statements. Each research question should be specific enough to guide your investigation but broad enough to allow for exploration and analysis. Your research question(s) and/or hypotheses are the work product of this step.

7. **Evaluate and refine:**

Review your research questions to ensure they are well-defined, feasible, and relevant to your research objectives. Seek feedback from the larger committee, IERP and the co-chairs to to refine your questions further if necessary.

8. **Finalize your research questions:**

Once you are satisfied with your research questions, finalize them. Remember that research questions can evolve throughout the research process, so remain open to adjustments based on your findings and insights gained during the inquiry.

*See Appendix B for an example of a Problem Statement for an Action Team project*

# STEP 3: INVESTIGATION



## Define a plan of inquiry and conduct exploration or experimentation, and collect and analyze data.

### Overview

#### Objective(s):

- Define a plan of inquiry
- Through the planned exploration, generate data based on your research question(s)
- Make meaning out of the data you collected in order to synthesize new knowledge

“ Investigation is the phase where curiosity is turned into action in order to respond to the stated research questions or hypotheses (Scanlon et al., 2011).” (p. 54)

“ In general, exploration is a systematic way of carrying out an investigation with the intention of finding a relation among the variables involved (Lim, 2004). In this case there is no need for stating a hypothesis, but careful planning is still needed in order to save resources (e.g., time, materials, money).” (p. 54)

“Both Exploration and Experimentation involve the design and implementation of the investigative activities, and an intermediate outcome is the design or plan of the exploration or experiment.”(p. 54)

“The final outcome of the Investigation phase is an interpretation of the data (a formulation of the relations between variables) that will permit returning to the original research question or hypothesis and drawing a conclusion regarding what was asked or hypothesized.” (p. 54)

#### Outcome/Work Product: *(see Appendix C for an example)*

##### ● An Inquiry Plan

Write an inquiry plan including the following sections:

##### a. Inquiry methods:

- Outline the approach and methodology for conducting the investigation, including
  - What data sources and collection methods will you use?
    - (interviews, document review, observation, existing data sources).

- Timeline for completing each phase of the investigation.
  - Resources required (personnel, equipment, budget, etc.).
  - Data definitions
- b. **Personnel:**
- Identify the individuals or team members responsible for conducting the investigation and their roles
- c. **Legal and Ethical Considerations:**
- Document that you have reviewed any college policy or ethical considerations with IERP relevant to the inquiry, including confidentiality, privacy, and compliance with applicable policies and practices.
- d. **Interview Plan (if used)**
- Develop a plan for conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders, including:
    - List of individuals to be interviewed.
    - Interview questions and topics.
    - Interview schedule and logistics.
    - Guidelines for conducting interviews professionally and impartially.
- e. **Focus Group Plan (if used)**
- Develop a plan for conducting focus groups with relevant stakeholders, including:
    - List of focus groups desired.
    - Focus group questions and topics.
    - Schedule and logistics.
    - Guidelines for conducting focus groups professionally and impartially.
- f. **Evidence Collection (if used):**
- Specify what existing data or evidence will be collected
    - (documents, physical evidence, electronic data, etc.).
- g. **Analysis Plan:**
- Describe how the collected evidence will be analyzed to draw conclusions and make recommendations, including:
    - Analysis techniques and tools to be used.
    - Criteria for evaluating the credibility and relevance of evidence.
    - Process for synthesizing findings and identifying patterns or trends.

### **Timeline:**

- Prior to Session 1:
- Session 1:
- Session 2:
- Session 3:

### **Process**



Here are the basic steps for inquiry:

1. **Plan the inquiry:**

Develop an inquiry plan outlining the various methods used and steps to be completed. This is a Work Product in this step. Please see above.

2. **Collect information and evidence:**

Gather relevant information and evidence through various methods such as interviews, document review, observation, surveillance, and forensic analysis. Ensure that all evidence is collected and documented properly.

3. **Interview or conduct focus groups:**

Conduct interviews and/or focus groups. Prepare questions in advance and follow established protocols to ensure thorough and unbiased questioning. Consult IERP.

4. **Analyze the evidence:**

Examine and analyze the collected evidence to identify patterns, inconsistencies, and key insights. Interpret the evidence and draw meaningful conclusions.

5. **Corroborate information:**

Verify the accuracy and reliability of the collected information and evidence through cross-referencing, fact-checking, and independent verification. Corroborating information helps ensure the credibility of your findings.

*See Appendix C for an example of an Inquiry Plan for an Action Team project*

## STEP 4: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS



**Discuss the analysis of the findings and make statements of your conclusions.**

### Overview

#### Objective(s):

- Draw conclusions from your data analysis
- Answer your research question(s) and/or hypotheses
- Document your insights



“In this phase learners address their original research questions or hypotheses and consider whether these are answered or supported by the results of the study (Scanlon et al., 2011; White, Shimoda, & Frederiksen, 1999).” (p. 55)

“It may lead to new theoretical insights.” (p. 55)

“The outcome of the Conclusion phase is a final conclusion about the findings of inquiry-based learning, responding to the research questions or hypotheses”(p. 55)

**Outcome/Work Product:** *(see Appendix D for an example)*

- **Statement of Conclusions**

Write your conclusions based on your research question(s) or hypotheses

**Timeline:**

- Prior to Session 1:
- Session 1:
- Session 2:
- Session 3:

## Process

Here are the basic steps for Drawing Conclusions

1. **Review your data analysis:**

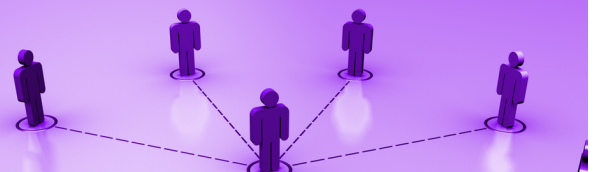
What did your data analysis reveal? How does it relate to your research questions? How can you concisely state your conclusions and answer your research questions?

2. **Write your Statement of Conclusions**

In writing your statement, it should be in direct response to the research question(s) and/or hypotheses you posed.

*See Appendix D for an example of a Statement of Conclusions*

## STEP 5: COMMUNICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



# Communicate your findings/recommendations so that action can be taken by the college from your work.

## Overview



### Objective(s):

- Draw conclusions from your data analysis
- Answer your research question(s) and/or hypotheses
- Document your insights

“Communication can be seen as an external process where learners present and communicate their findings and conclusions to others.” (p. 55)

### Outcome/Work Product: *(see Appendix E for an example)*

#### ● Recommendation Document

Write your conclusions based on your research question(s) or hypotheses

##### a. Date and Title

##### b. Submitted by

- List the name of the Team and the members

##### c. Background/Context

- Refer to your Problem Statement for this information

##### d. List of Recommendations

- Clearly state the proposed course of action or recommendation. Specify what action is being proposed, why it is necessary, and how it will address the identified problem or opportunity.

##### e. Impact/Objectives

- List the specific objectives or goals that the proposed action aims to achieve. Refer to your Aim/Objectives and Impact from your Problem Statement


##### f. Attachments

- List any additional documents, data, or supporting materials that accompany the proposal, such as research reports, financial projections, or project plans

### Timeline:

- Prior to Session 1:
- Session 1:
- Session 2:
- Session 3:

## Process



Here are the basic steps for Drawing Conclusions

1. **Develop recommendations from your conclusions:**  
What did your data analysis reveal? How does it relate to your research questions? How can you concisely state your conclusions and answer your research questions?
2. **Write a Recommendation Document**  
In writing your statement, it should be in direct response to the research question(s) and/or hypotheses you posed.
3. **Seek Feedback and Refinement**  
Have the rest of the committee review your document and provide comments and feedback
4. **Submit Recommendation Document**  
Submit your Document to the co-chairs for referral to the President's Cabinet.

*See Appendix E for an example of a Recommendation Document*

## Appendix A

### Sample Problem Statement



# PART-TIME STUDENTS

## Background

SRJC is designed for the success of full-time students, and gives the message that students should be full-time. Furthermore, students who attend the community college have varied goals, from preparation for a four-year degree and graduate work to career development, workforce preparation, career education and personal development. However part-time students comprise 75% of SRJC students, and has for decades. While full-time students do not show disproportionate impact, part-time student do. The disproportionate impact is different among groups within part-time students as well. Within the very recent past, some eligibility requirements have been changed to make more financial assistance available to part-time students.

## **Why It Matters**

Due to many reasons, including work, family obligations, learning styles and other reasons, students choose or are obliged to attend part-time. The college needs to face the reality that most students are part-time and that will not change. With some exception (DRD and EOPS), the college is not designed for the success of part-time students, from services to instruction. Without changes in practices, policies, and attitudes, part-time students will continue to achieve at lower rates than full-time students, and the college will not attract and retain as many students, thus not fulfilling the promise of social and economic mobility for which the community colleges are known.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this inquiry is to identify the college's systems, policies and culture creates obstacles and barriers to the success of part-time students. The method of exploration will include examining the DI groups within part-time students and the identification of both risk and success variables for part-time students at the college.

The ultimate aim of this research is to change the college to be inclusive as a part-time student success ready college.

- Support systems
- Changing mindset/culture/awareness
- Changing actual systems of delivery

## **Stakeholders**

This issue is of significance to most groups of the college:

- Students, particularly part-time students, who represent up to 80% of the college population
- Faculty, who teach mostly part-time students
- Staff, many of whom support part-time students
- Administrators, who have policy and operational responsibilities and authority
- The Board of Trustees, who are ultimately responsible for the success of students at the college

## **Problem Statement**

Persistence and completion rates are lower for part-time students compared to full-time students at SRJC.

## Appendix B

### Sample Research Questions or Hypotheses

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#### PART-TIME STUDENTS

##### Research Question(s)

- How does utilization of Counseling impact credit part-time students' persistence and completion compared to part-time students who do not utilize the services?
  - Does this vary among population groups?
  - Does it vary based on types of utilization?

## Appendix C

### Inquiry Plan

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## Appendix D

## Statement of Conclusions

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## Appendix E

## Recommendation Form

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## Appendix F

## Sample Timeline

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Step	Session/Time	?

# References

Phases of inquiry-based learning: Definitions and the inquiry cycle

M. Pedaste et al./Educational Research Review 14 (2015) 47–61