

# Voices Amplified

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## QUALITATIVE DATA HIGHLIGHTS

# Who are we?

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The Office of Research & Planning believes student equity and success should be at the center of our work. We seek to cultivate a culture of inquiry that **keeps students' experiences and aspirations** at the forefront through disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data to inform planning and decision-making.

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# What is Qualitative Research?

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# What is qualitative research?

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Qualitative research is a scientific method that explores the meaning of people's lives and experiences, and how they think, feel, and behave.

It's often used in the humanities and social sciences to understand social phenomena in their natural setting.



# What is qualitative research?

## Focus

Qualitative research focuses on the "how" and "why" of human behavior, rather than the "what" or "how many".

## Purpose

Qualitative research can help provide in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas.

## Methods

Trained qualitative researchers follow rigorous methodology and systematic process to plan the entire inquiry, data collection and analysis to answer research goal using methods like interviews, observations, and content analysis to collect non-numerical data like text, video, or audio.

## Example Formats

- Focus group
- Listen & learn or Quasi-focus-group (Quasi-qualitative)
- Survey open-ended questions
- Interview

# Why we do qualitative research at CCSF?

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We do qualitative research because we want to answer the following questions:

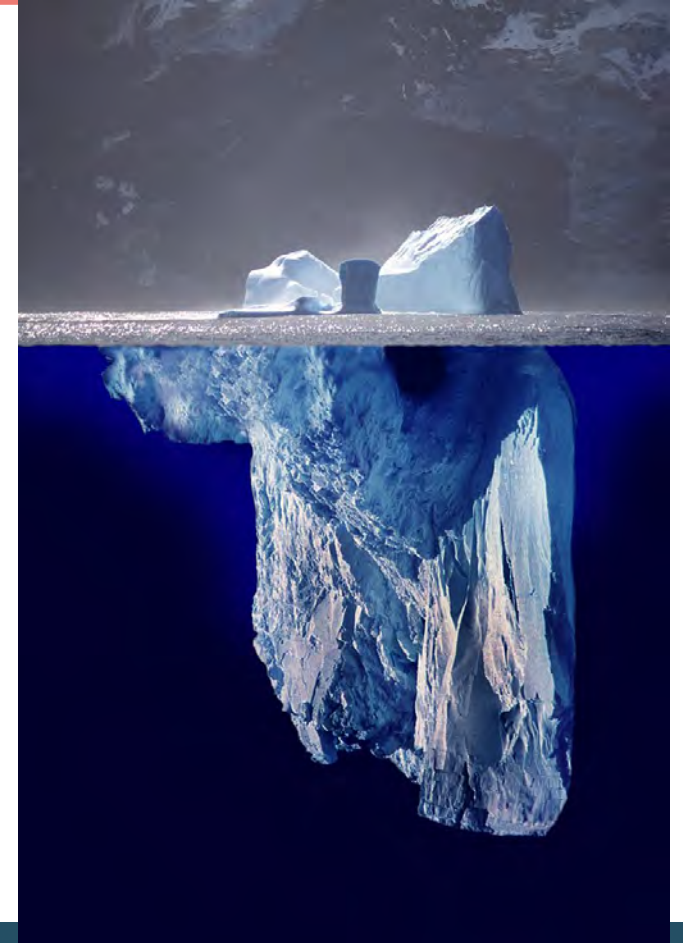
- How are the students doing (in college/programs)?
- Why do students engage with various college/programs?
- How can we support students?

# What are the benefits and limitations of doing qualitative research at CCSF?

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## Benefit 1: Reveal what quantitative data cannot show

- For example, like many other community college, CCSF's opportunity gaps have persisted for years. If we lean on quantitative data, we may not understand what's beneath the tip of the iceberg of equity issues and what we can do to move the needle to close opportunity gaps.
- Equity focus group, 2022



# What are the benefits and limitations of doing qualitative research at CCSF?

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## Benefit 2: Understanding students' needs and assessing program outcomes

- In 2020, four student retention programs (CalWORKs, EOPS, Guardian Scholars, and HARTS) collaborated with ORP to assess their shared Student Services Outcome: "Program provides students a welcoming space and community that will serve to encourage persistence."
- Career Service focus group, 2024



# What are the benefits and limitations of doing qualitative research at CCSF?

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**Benefit 3: Developing new ideas, applying new framework or informing planning**

- Re-imagining the Student Experience focus groups, 2019
- Adult Education Listen and Learn sessions, 2020
- Free City focus group, 2024 (ongoing)



# What are the benefits and limitations of doing qualitative research at CCSF?

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## Limitations:

1. Not-generalizable
2. Time-consuming
3. Expensive

# Take-aways based on the limitations of qualitative research

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1. Qualitative findings aren't generalizable but can inform future quantitative research.
2. Recurring themes from past research can be used for program improvements.
3. Connecting with the Office of Research and Planning on qualitative research ideas allows for standardization and contributes to our collective knowledge base.

# Recent CCSF qualitative research projects and corresponding venues for sharing findings

Year	Qualitative Research Project	Student group for research	Venue for sharing findings
2019	<a href="#">Re-imagining the Student Experience (RiSE) focus groups</a>	CCSF Students	RiSE teams planning efforts
2020	<a href="#">Student services and welcoming spaces Focus Group</a>	Students served by CalWORKs, EOPS, Guardian Scholars, and HARTS	Student service outcome (SSO) assessment
2021	<a href="#">Listen and Learn session for AEP students</a>	Noncredit students	SF Adult Education Consortium Three Year Plan (2022-25)
2022	<a href="#">Equity focus groups</a>	Equity student groups (i.e., African American students)	Student Equity Plan (2022–25)
2024	<a href="#">Career service focus groups</a>	CTE students	Strong Workforce Program Plan (2024-28)
2024	Free City focus groups (on going)	Credit students eligible for Free City	Free City Plan (2023-26)

# Qualitative Research Results

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# Thematic analysis

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- Themes identified across all focus groups
- Representative quotes identified for those themes

# Who are our students?

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Our student population's diversity is clearly seen in our quantitative work

And, that diversity is clearly illustrated through qualitative research



"We're caretakers, we're workers, a lot of things. I think it's important to understand that and hold that space for people." (Equity Focus Groups)

# CCSF students come from diverse backgrounds with unique lived experiences.

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- Living in San Francisco presents its own challenges



“We’re going through something right now in our city where it’s really affecting everybody. Our friends and people we grew up with are moving away. We’re getting pushed out of our neighborhoods.” (Re-imagining the Student Experience focus groups)

- Understanding student identity can demonstrate where some students might need support



“I know there is a lot of information on the website, but as an adult student without computer skills and without much time to navigate, I feel lost.” (Adult Education Listen & Learn sessions)



# CCSF students come from diverse backgrounds with unique lived experiences.

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- Students are often balancing a multitude of responsibilities



“...it’s nonstop. You wake up, you go to school, you go to work, you come home, you have your child, you have homework you still gotta get done, you got midterms to do, you got papers to turn in. You got this on Canvas, you got that, you knock out, you wake up. Back at it. Back at it. Back at it.”  
(Student services and welcoming spaces focus groups)

- So, how are our students experiencing City College?

# Main themes

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- A. Students report positive experiences with faculty and staff... for the most part.
- B. Students are seeking clarity around navigating CCSF programs and services.
- C. Students face inequitable barriers to their education.
- D. Students expressed a need for access to physical spaces.

# A. Students report positive experiences with faculty and staff...

- Students describe feeling welcomed, motivated, and inspired by faculty and staff



"[My counselor] made it clear for me ... how important it was for me to take those classes. ... I know where to focus more because of that. It gives me a sense of direction, how to plan for future, like, 'okay, I know what I'm doing.'" (Student services and welcoming spaces focus groups)



"I adore [my professor] so much. She has been incredibly present and contributed to my growth, academically, but also [to] who I am today... She acknowledges the ways that I do show potential and knowing that I can grow in that and it's come to fruition. So, faculty being able to spot our strengths and our talents and being able to build upon that has been such an incredible experience since being here. She's not the only one, but, she's one of the main ones and the list goes on. (Equity focus groups)



"...It does seem small, but I notice the staff are real welcoming. As soon as you come through the door. You know, 'how can I help you?' -- 'come back in,' they invite you into their little area.... I did notice that, that they were really welcoming and inviting." (Student services and welcoming spaces focus groups)

# A. Students report positive experiences with faculty and staff... for the most part.

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- Not all students report positive experiences



"...I have gotten a lot of inconsistent information, which has extended my length of stay at the college, unfortunately." (Equity focus groups)



"Some instructors aren't here to really help you and educate and guide you; they're more here to clock in and clock out and get their paycheck. It grinds you down and, if anything, it diminishes the whole idea of a learning institute." (Re-imagining the Student Experience focus groups)

# Actions/ planning items informed by qualitative and quantitative research

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Examples include:

SSO Workgroup improvement efforts to make their program spaces (virtual and in person) more welcoming to students:

- EOPS, CalWORKS, City DREAM, Guardian Scholars/HARTS, Veterans Resource Center, Student Life & Leadership

## B. Students are seeking clarity around navigating CCSF programs and services.

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- Students expressed difficulty with finding services



"I wish there was one person I could talk to who could tell me about all the resources that exist at CCSF. Frankly, it has been so much work trying to track down any sort of help or support I might get; a bunch of extra time that I just didn't have that I had to spend." (Equity focus groups)

- Students voiced a desire for clear pathways to employment



"Would like to get more classes which bridge career with academics (I took janitor class, found it is okay). Would like to get more help to find jobs, but I don't know any information." (translated from Chinese) (Adult Education Listen and Learn sessions)



"It takes a long time to be a firefighter. Doing [the] EMT cert concurrently is really helpful but that info isn't shared." (Career services focus groups)

# Actions/ planning items informed by qualitative and quantitative research

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Examples include:

- RiSE-supported development of Academic and Career Communities (ACCs) and Program Maps for degrees and certificates
- Strong Workforce Program Strategic Plan (2024-28)
- SF Adult Education Plan (2022-25)

# C. Students face inequitable barriers to their education.

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- Students expressed challenges around finances



“Housing, that’s the biggest issue that I’ve had here and it’s hindered me from being good or successful in my classes and being present. I’m showing up in spaces absentminded because I’m just not in a safe housing environment. On the financial front, all my money is going to housing and my bills. I have to fund my basic needs and it’s expensive to live in the city and be a student. Not being able to do certain things or eat certain foods. I have to eat very cheap food like ramen noodles, ... which is not healthy to have because you just can’t really make enough money. Hopefully, with a degree, things will change..” (Equity focus group)

- Students reported feeling they were not represented in programming & coursework



“I want [everyone] to be educated to know who we are. We [as people of color] also need to know who we are so [other] people can’t tell us who we are, but then I come to White classes, [students] will say things about people of color and they’re just wrong.” (Re-imagine)



“One of my teachers mentioned that Latinas make up a third of the school, but not of faculty. If I'm going to learn Latin history, I need to learn it from a Latin professor...someone who is from a Latin background. Or if, like, I'm going to learn Black history, I need a Black teacher to teach me that. I found that [having a teacher of that background] teach their history is very powerful.” (Re-imagine)



# C. Students face inequitable barriers to their education.

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- Which highlighted the importance representation for the purpose of access and academic success



“The DSPS tutors are better for me because they know my learning style. The regular tutors, they’re not patient and always in a hurry. They don’t understand how I learn, and they don’t comprehend what’s going on. I have a lot of trouble, and they don’t have enough time.” (Re-imagine)



“I really appreciate how City College is so diverse. I had people who have returned to school later in life, people with disabilities, elderly students, and LGBT students. I think it gives a lot of perspective that you otherwise wouldn’t get from your peers, especially if you’re a younger student and your only life experience is high school. There’s so many different life perspectives in one classroom that it can be really more of a robust learning experience for everyone. For me, going to City College, whenever I encounter a new person, whether it’s a student or instructor, it’s like reading a new book. It’s like your world just opens up.” (Equity focus group)

# Actions/ planning items informed by qualitative and quantitative research

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- Examples include:
  - EEO Advisory Committee
  - SparkPoint Basic Needs Center
  - Snack Shelves
  - Language Line

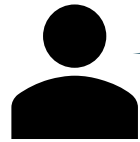
# D. Students expressed a need for access to physical spaces.

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- Students reported wanting space for work, socialization and private matters, noting that spaces often served one of those needs individually



“You have the computer lab—but this is place to relax, too. People are relaxing, talking aloud, then you can work... at the computer. I don't use the books in the library; I...want to use the lab.” (Building a welcoming community)



“We are talking about just not counseling here. We're talking about income and all these other issues, and I feel like it should be--there should be privacy.” (Building a welcoming community)

- Students expressed the impact of COVID-19 on their sense of community



“I've basically been doing CCSF for around two years online, so I can't say I feel really much of a community. It's mostly [been] just me and my laptop. I just started doing online classes. It wasn't the community I wanted [because] community college is supposed to be about community, and I wasn't even inside the community to even have that community. I just kept doing the work trying to get through. And, for the most part, the classes that I took I was enjoying. Then, it started getting a little harder and I was like, “I need the one-on-one attention of in-person. I need a connection. I need to talk to a professor and actually connect with them. I just wanna get back to in person and make that more of a community.” (Equity focus group)

# D. Students expressed a need for access to physical spaces.

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- Students highlighted the need for consistent access to resources



"You can't print stuff. If you really need to print your homework at the last minute, and the door is locked, you're like 'Oh dang'." (Building a welcoming community)



"...[A] kind of like hassle is that when [the staff] go on break, they have to leave the door where the computers are at locked and we can't enter on our own." (Building a welcoming community)

# Actions/ planning items informed by qualitative and quantitative research

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Examples include:

- New Student Services building
- Ensuring staffing availability to keep physical locations open
- Discussions at Facilities and Technology Committees of the Participatory Governance Council (PGC)

# Discussion

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1. What resonated with you? Why?
2. How does this information help you serve students?

# Office of Research & Planning

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