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# Qualitative Inquiry in a Distance-based Environment: Thoughts and Tips

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# Objectives

- Acquire a better knowledge of how technology can transform the process of the qualitative inquiry.
- Gain a better understanding of the unique aspects of an online-based qualitative study.
- Develop a better awareness of existent distance-based tools that can enhance the design and promote the completion of an online-based qualitative project.



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## Introductory Exercise

**Do you have any experience with online/distance-based education or research process?**

**YES**



Quickly re-examine the experiences that you have had so far. What stands out? What comes to mind?

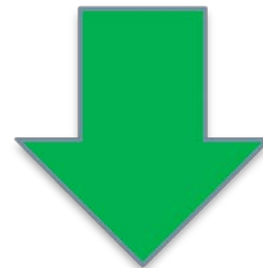


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## Introductory Exercise

**Do you have any experience with online/distance-based education or research process?**

**NO**



**Think about your assumptions about online education/research.**

- What questions would you like to ask?
- What would excite you about taking an online class or being engaged in a research project online?
- What would worry you?



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## Introductory Exercise

**Tell us the first three words that came to your mind to describe for you your thoughts about “online education/research”.**



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# Introductions

- Yulia
- Darren
- Debi



# History of Online Education

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Students Enrolled in Higher Education</b>	<b># of Online Students Enrolled in Higher Education</b>	<b>% of Online Students</b>
<b>Fall, 2007</b>	18.2 Million	3.9 Million	21.4%
<b>Fall, 2010</b>	21 Million	6.1 Million	29.0%
<b>Fall, 2012</b>	20.6 Million	6.7 Million	32.5%



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# Current Trends of Online Education

- Continuum of offerings
- Required adaptations (e.g., gainful employment)
- Expansion into graduate programs
- International expansion





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# Common Pitfalls of Online Education

- Utilization of the Medium
- Adaptation of Curriculum
- Human Resources Considerations



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## Our Study: Institutional Context

- Faculty and Administrators in a Primarily Graduate Degree Online Environment
  - What does it mean to be a researcher?
  - Student's Engagement
- Institutional Support
  - University intention to enhance research culture
  - MFS vision for a doctoral program



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## Method

- Research Design: Collective Case Study.
- Sample: 4 full time teaching faculty, 4 administrators, selected from four Schools (SOE, SOP, SOB, SMFS).
- IRB process of a distance-based University
- Data Collection: Interviews conducted through Webex.

## Collaboration Online

- Establishing engagement between co-investigators
  - Bi-Weekly meetings through Webex
  - Continuous conversation via email
  - Synchronous and Asynchronous
- Engagement Factors
  - Sustained effort
  - Three dimensionality of the online environment
  - Greater intentionality



# Engagement with Participants

- Interviewing method
- Structure of an interview conducted online
- What does it mean to be anonymous online?



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# Data Analysis

- Interviews transcribed
- 1<sup>st</sup> Stage Coding: Value and Versus Coding
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Coding: Pattern Coding

(Saldana, 2013)



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# Preliminary Findings

## Faculty

Responsibility Flexibility Optimism

**Empathic Engagement**

Pride Quality **Strategies** Self-care

Technology



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# Preliminary Findings

## Administrator

Uniqueness Focused Nature/Skilled  
**Empathic Engagement Quality**  
Qualifications Flexibility Strategy  
Consistency





## Supporting Quotes: Faculty

- “ I am here for students” (FP2)
- “I am an online convert” (FP1)
- “ This is what I tell them [my students]:  
“this is what I do, and I am here for you”.  
(FP3)
- “I like to do my work to a level when I  
feel like students are actually moving  
forward, they are gaining and they are  
acknowledging that” (FP4).



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## Supporting Quotes: Administration

- “[Feedback from faculty] came across very personalized, very specific to a student, so it’s not just a cookie cutter” (AP2)
- [Feedback from faculty] is heavily influenced by one individual student” (AP1)
- “ [Faculty] is organized, engaging to students, accessible to students” (AP4)
- “The most efficient strategies come from faculty” (AP3)



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# Online Environment Paradigm

- Perception of cyberspace as distant and cold
- Language that we use to describe online education
  - Virtual
  - Distance-based
- Less than brick and mortar



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# Online Environment Paradigm

- What are some words that we could use to describe our experience?
- How to explain online environment without comparing it to a brick a mortar environment?
- Would it be helpful to create a new language?



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# Wrap-up Exercise

Three words that describe Online research and education experience following



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