Because stories, experiences, and perspectives matter.
“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

-Maya Angelou
Hello!

I am Christine

I am here because I love to help student affairs practitioners use people’s stories, experiences, and perspectives to help improve practice.

"The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories."
- Mary Catherine Bateson
We are going to talk about...

- What focus groups and interviews are and when to use each
- Questions: patterns and types
- Recruiting and protecting participants
- Preparing for and conducting focus groups and interviews
A focus group is...

- A type of group interview.
- A way to get feedback and comments.
- Designed to elicit information that can lead to new ideas.
Use a focus group to...

- Gather opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about issues of interest
- Test assumptions
- Encourage discussion about a particular topic
- Provide an opportunity to learn more about a topic or issue.
- Build excitement from spontaneous combination of participants' comments
Use a focus group when...

...participants hearing each other’s ideas helps generate more ideas and conversation

...you are not worried about participants influencing each other
An interview is...

...a 1:1 meeting with a person designed to get that person’s specific comments in an honest and uninfluenced way.

Interviews get answers to questions that can lead to individual stories, experiences, and perspectives.
Use an interview when…

...you do not want folks to be influenced by each other’s opinions

...the information sought is sensitive, controversial, or highly confidential

.....the questions are specific to the identity or identities of the interviewee, but the overall participant pool is diverse

...you need a deep dive into a specific case (person)
Interview &
focus group patterns

opening the floodgates
main branches of a tree
river and channel
picking up the twigs
Types of questions

1. Main questions: to answer the assessment question
2. Follow up: to get depth, detail, richness, and nuance
3. Probes: to manage the conversation
Questions are...

- singular
- open ended
- non directional
Recruiting Participants

Who and how depends on the assessment question

- Do you need a representative sample?
- Is it a controversial topic?
- Do the students know you?

Direct email (merge)
Direct email (identifying factor)
Fronted email
Flyer, ad
Snowball
Times: offer a variety of locations: private, neutral, comfortable.

Times: match the class schedule for starting times.
Protecting participants

Explain the purpose of the assessment

Let them ask questions about the project and process before starting

Have them sign an acknowledgement

Let them know they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to

Let them know they can stop participating at any time

Use pseudonyms
Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation.”
Getting ready

Who needs to be there and what are they doing

Gather materials

Set up

Conducting

Greeting / tone setting

Explain the purpose and process

Stay on track and wonder off when appropriate

Immediately and soon after

Add and clarify own notes

Discuss; compare; clarify

Transcribe
"Stories are a communal currency of humanity."
-Tahir Shah, in *Arabian Nights*

And its time for the magic to happen!
Thank you!

Any questions?

You know where to find me!