

Summary Report

“Applied mixed methods in oral health research” Summer Institute

Summary of institute outcomes

Drs. Belinda Nicolau, Alissa Levine, Geneviève Castonguay and Pierre Pluye organized and taught the “Applied mixed methods in oral health research” Summer Institute. This intensive one-week course, held in August 2015 at the McGill University Faculty of Dentistry, aimed to develop the practical skills needed to understand, design and carry out mixed methods studies, which combine qualitative and quantitative approaches.

In the last decade, there has been a steady increase in the use of mixed methods in health research, including dentistry. This growth in popularity can be seen as a response to the increasing complexity of research problems relating to human health and wellbeing. However, the plurality of mixed methods designs is often difficult to cope with for novice researchers.

The Summer Institute aimed to advance the understanding of mixed methods as a research methodology for oral health researchers by enabling participants to develop research problems that could be tackled using mixed methods, and guiding them in discovering and applying the most appropriate designs and procedures.

The event brought together professors and students from seven Canadian dental schools (UBC, Dalhousie, U Toronto, U Laval, U Montreal, U McGill, U Alberta), as well as from Brazilian and Mexican universities. Participants were introduced to a research problem that could be tackled using a mixed methods study. This example served as the basis for the discussion of all components of research, including general concerns and questions sparked by the specific task at hand, such as appropriate research techniques.

During each of the 10 half-day work sessions, participants were first provided with an overview of the topic addressed, including: the defining characteristics of mixed methods; the development of a research problem, aims and questions; types of mixed methods designs; the development of research instruments; comparative methods and computer assisted mixed methods data analysis; dealing with divergence in the data; and critical appraisal of mixed methods projects. Following presentations on these topics, participants worked in smaller groups on the different stages of a research project (e.g., description and justification of the research problem, objectives, methodology including choice of research design and instrument(s)). Participants also received a mixed methods handbook prior to the course to prepare for the Summer Institute and maximize its benefits.

The evaluations from the 22 participants were very enthusiastic about the Summer Institute, both in terms of the experience and the advantages of this research approach.

Future plans

The group of instructors and participants is now preparing a manuscript about their experience and the projects generated during the Summer Institute. Building on the success of this inaugural course, Dr. Nicolau and colleagues are now planning to hold this course every summer. The next Summer Institute will be held July 25-29, 2016 at the McGill University Faculty of Dentistry. More information is available at: <https://www.mcgill.ca/dentistry/summer-institute-applied-mixed-methods-oral-health-research>.