Students’ Perceptions of Oakton: Another Research Approach

This spring the Office of Institutional Research (OIR), in collaboration with several COL 101: College Success Seminar instructors, conducted a research project to learn more about how students perceive the College. Courses were in both Des Plaines and Skokie. Students were given disposable cameras and asked to take photographs that depicted what’s good about Oakton, what’s bad about Oakton, and what best illustrates the characteristics and nature of Oakton students and employees. A selection of photographs taken by students in each class was then shown to that class, and students were asked to discuss the photos. This form of research is an empirical approach to visual analysis, and elicits participants’ perceptions about a topic (in this case, Oakton) by having them discuss the meaning they draw from a visual stimulus. For more information on this research approach, see Collier (2001) and Creswell (2009).

In this In the Abstract we present a few representative photos and a synthesis of students’ observations about what the photos suggest about Oakton.

Students took a number of photographs of art, both outside and inside the buildings. Some students said art made the campus more pleasant and demonstrated the importance of art at Oakton.

Students decided this apparel was likely worn by an Oakton athlete. They said they were not inclined to wear Oakton apparel because ‘it is a two-year school’ and ‘anyone can get into Oakton.’

Students said this photo represented the clean, peaceful, Skokie campus. They noted individuals were studying, and that the campus provides many places to work on assignments. They also said the Skokie campus is ‘more cozy’ than the Des Plaines campus.

This photo shows that Oakton cares about the environment by asking people to recycle their trash. Students said they ‘sometimes’ pay attention to recycling.

One student remarked that her first encounter with Oakton was ‘scary’ but she was welcomed into the campus by an advisor (‘she was so nice’) and the Learning Center staff. Students noted that having student activities and vendors at the entrance to the Skokie campus make them feel welcome.

Students took few photos of people, in part because they felt uncomfortable doing so and sometimes because individuals resisted having their pictures taken. There were some photos with people, and students noted that faculty and tutors were available to help. (Note: this photo was posed with permission of individuals in it, but is similar to photos taken by students in the project.)
