

Academic Mindset

Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide



Academic Mindset: SAMPLE Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide

What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from faculty regarding their experience and perceptions around academic mindset.

For supporting focus group materials such as recruitment tips, invitation e-mail templates, consent forms, profile sheets, and a comprehensive planning guide that outlines focus group staff roles and order of operations, visit <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>.

Outcomes for the Faculty Focus Group Discussion:

1. *To understand faculty perceptions about students' intelligence and their own learning.*
2. *To understand the professional development opportunities that faculty receive or would like to receive regarding academic mindset.*
3. *To understand how faculty are incorporating academic mindset into their courses.*

The Focus Group Session

A. Preparation

As participants enter, the coordinator should

- a. Ask participants to sign in
- b. Ask participants to sign consent form (if applicable)
- c. Ask participants to fill out profile sheet/response sheet
- d. Provide stipends (if applicable)

B. Overview of Focus Group Discussion

As focus discussion begins, the facilitator should

- a. Introduce focus group staff
- b. Explain purpose of focus group
- c. Confirm that participants have signed the consent forms (if applicable) and reiterate that participants can stop participating at any point
- d. Describe facilitator's role:
 - To ask questions and keep the group on track
 - Explain that discussion will move fairly quickly, even though people might have more to say about a particular topic

- e. Describe participants' role:
 - To share experiences and opinions, both positive and negative
 - Explain that there are no right or wrong answers
 - Explain that everyone should participate in discussion

- f. Explain logistics of discussion:
 - 90 minutes maximum
 - Arrangements for water and restroom break
 - Cell phones turned off

- g. Explain ground rules:
 - One person speaks at a time; no side conversations
 - No one person dominates; everyone will have a chance to be heard
 - There are no right or wrong answers; the discussion is about participants' experiences.

- h. Introduce notetaker and if applicable, audio/video operators. Explain purpose of audiotaping/video recording/notetaking:
 - For the purposes of highlighting the faculty voice about academic mindset at this college
 - Explain that no names will be used in reporting
 - Give thanks from the college

- i. Take questions from participants

C. Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator Tips:

- a. Remind participants of the value of differing points of view:
 - Does anyone see it differently?
 - Are there any other points of view?

- b. Probes (questions to elicit more detailed responses):
 - Would you explain further? Tell me more about that.
 - Can you give me an example of what you mean?
 - Would you say more?
 - Is there anything else?
 - Please describe what you mean.
 - Does someone have a similar/different experience?

[Provided below is a bank of example outcomes and questions which can be used to form your discussion guide.]

Background of, and general information about, participants

1. Participant introductions, including: a) name, b) how long you've worked at the college, c) area of responsibility.

Outcome 1: To understand faculty perceptions about students' intelligence and their own learning.

1. Why did you decide to become a faculty member? Why at a community college? Why this community college?
2. Let's talk about your perceptions around intelligence.
 - Do you believe that there is anything that students can do to change their intelligence?
 - If not, why not? What has led you to this conclusion?
 - If so, how can students change their intelligence? How much of someone's intelligence can be changed?
3. Which of these statements most accurately expresses your views about math and intelligence? a) Students can learn new things in math, but they cannot really change their basic intelligence in math; b) Students can change their intelligence in math a lot.
 - (For both responses) Why do you feel this way?
4. Which of these statements most accurately expresses your views about English and intelligence? a) Students can learn new things in English, but they cannot really change their basic intelligence in English; b) Students can change their intelligence in English a lot.
 - (For both responses) Why do you feel this way?
5. Let's talk more specifically about the students at this community college.
 - How do you think students at this college would complete this sentence: "When I first started here, I felt _____" and describe why they would feel that way.
 - How does the college create a welcoming and respectful environment? How could the college improve in fostering a welcoming and respectful environment for students?
6. How does the college prepare students for what they plan to do in life? How could the college improve in how they prepare students for what they want to do in life?

Let's talk about the courses you teach and the students in those courses.

7. Please describe your students.
 - In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge your students face in achieving their academic goals?
 - In your opinion, what is the greatest strength your students bring to the learning enterprise?

8. Do you see differences in needs and expectations of your students based on age, gender, socioeconomic factors, college readiness, learning styles, etc.? Please describe.
9. What is the greatest challenge you face in meeting your students' varying needs and expectations?
10. What do you believe is the single most important factor that helps students remain in school and achieve their educational goals?
11. Thinking about your own classes, what would you say are the most important things you can do to help your students succeed? Inside the classroom? Outside the classroom?
12. What are your expectations for your students' performance? In what ways do you communicate those expectations?
13. What would you say is (are) the most important thing(s) students can do to promote their own success? Inside the classroom? Outside the classroom?
14. In general, do you believe students are doing all they can to promote their own success? Explain your answer. If no, what, if anything, do you believe faculty can do to motivate students to take more responsibility for promoting their own success?
15. In your courses, what percentage of your students do you feel can learn all of the materials being presented? Why do you feel that way?
16. What percentage of your students do you feel can change their basic intelligence? Why?
17. What percentage of your students believe that they can change their basic intelligence?
 - Explain how you came to that percentage.
18. Think about a class in which everything is clicking just right. You feel like students are learning, everyone is getting what they need from the class. Describe that class.
 - What's going on? What are you doing? What are students doing?
 - How are people working and learning in that class?
 - What percentage of the time would you say your class measures up to that ideal?
 - When your class isn't operating at your ideal level, what's getting in the way? What are the most important things you can do to reach that ideal?
 - What are the most important things students can do to reach that ideal?

Outcome 2: To understand the professional development opportunities that faculty receive or would like to receive regarding academic mindset.

1. When did you first become aware of the concept "academic mindset?" Where were you? How was the topic brought up?
2. How would you define academic mindset?

3. What kind of training or professional development, if any, have you received in academic mindset?
 - What this self-initiated? Required by the college? Provided by the college but not required?
 - Describe the training. (How long was the training? Who attended? What activities were provided? Were any readings provided? If so, which ones?)
4. What kind of professional development would you like to receive in academic mindset (if any)?

Outcome 3: To understand how faculty are incorporating academic mindset into their courses.

For faculty who have incorporated academic mindset into their classes...

1. Why did you initially begin to incorporate academic mindset into your courses?
2. How do you incorporate academic mindset into your courses?
 - Paint a picture of what academic mindset looks like in your courses.
3. Has academic mindset had any impact on the way you assess learning in your courses?
4. Do you have any data or success stories that support the use of academic mindset in your courses?
5. What do you think the future looks like regarding continuing to incorporate academic mindset into your courses? Other faculty incorporating academic mindset?

Summary and Close:

1. What are the most compelling elements in making the case for academic mindset to other faculty?
2. What advice would you give the college about one or two things the college could do to help faculty incorporate academic mindset into their courses?

Facilitator asks participants if they have any final questions or comments. Facilitator thanks them for their participation once more.