

Ensure Students Are Learning

Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide



Ensure Students Are Learning: SAMPLE Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide

What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from faculty about innovative teaching practices.

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 learn what institutional policies, practices, and processes promote effectiveness and success for faculty, specifically as they relate to student success.*
- 2. To understand the engaging practices that innovative faculty are using in their classes.*

The Focus Group Session

A. Preparation

As participants enter, the coordinator should

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

B. Overview of Focus Group Discussion

As focus discussion begins, the facilitator should

- Introduce focus group staff
- Explain purpose of focus group
- Confirm that participants have signed the consent forms and reiterate that participants can stop participating at any point
- 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
- 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

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- 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; 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 “innovative faculty voices” 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?

[Starting 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 introduction, including: a) name, b) how long you've taught c) how long you've taught at this college, d) full or part-time status, and e) teaching field

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Outcome #1: To learn what institutional policies, practices, and processes promote effectiveness and success for faculty, specifically as they relate to student success.

1. What inspired you to become a community college instructor? Did someone approach you about the possibility of teaching at a community college? Did you seek it out on your own?
2. What do you feel you bring to your role as a community college instructor? What makes you an effective teacher (e.g., knowledge/experience in your field, good teaching skills, ability to relate well with students, other)?
3. What kind of professional development opportunities does your college provide to help faculty develop more effective teaching and learning strategies?
 - How do you work with other faculty at your college to support improvement in teaching practices? What about part-time faculty?
 - Can you describe a time when you've shared teaching strategies with colleagues? Or when you have successfully implemented a strategy you learned from a colleague?
 - When you first started teaching at this college, were you assigned a faculty mentor? Have you served as a mentor?
 - What do you do on your own to stay abreast of engaging and effective teaching practices?
 - What are some of the incentives offered for faculty who engage in professional development opportunities and/or undertake this type of teaching? (Intrinsically motivated rewards?)

Outcome #2: To understand the engaging practices that innovative faculty are using in their classes.

1. Think about a specific course in which you make the most use of an engaging practice. Go through the process of designing a course. What do you think about as you are designing a course?
 - What resources have been helpful?
 - Where did you find these resources?
 - As you are designing a course, do you think about how you will know that learning is going on, what you will observe when it is happening, and how you will assess that it is happening? Describe that process.
 - How is student self-reflection part of the assessment process?
 - What tools do you use that help students document and monitor their learning (e.g. electronic portfolios)?
 - How do you incorporate course-level learning outcomes into your course design and assessment processes?
 - If program-specific learning outcomes are incorporated into your course design and assessment processes, how do you do that?

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- How are program-level outcomes tied back to institutional level outcomes or mission statements? (How is program-level work tied to the larger vision for student success at the institutional level?)
- How has your college integrated feedback from employers to improve program-level learning outcomes for graduates?

[The next questions are about how the college measures learning outcomes for students.]

- How does your college measure student achievement of learning outcomes?
 - Is this assessment at the course, program, or institutional level? (Probe about assessment at the college, program, and faculty level. For example, do faculty see grading as relevant to this discussion and to what degree do they see a connection between measuring success at the course level to measuring success at the program or institutional levels?)
 - Is the assessment disaggregated by student demographics/characteristics?
 - How are the assessment data shared? How are the data used to improve teaching and learning strategies?
2. To what extent have you integrated active and applied learning experiences (e.g., apprenticeships, field work, group projects, clinical placements, service learning, etc.) into your courses?
- Why did you decide to include these experiences in your courses?
 - How did you learn about how to incorporate them into your courses?
 - How did you identify community partners to implement these applied learning activities?
 - How did your students respond to these experiences?
 - How do you know that these experiences were effective? (Data or success stories?)
 - Did you notice a difference in student learning compared to other classes where this activity was not used?
3. Paint a picture of what collaborative learning looks like in your courses.
- How are your groups chosen? Do your groups change from one project to the next?
 - What encouraged you to incorporate collaborative learning?
 - How do your students respond to it?
 - What do you observe that indicates your students are learning the course content? If another instructor were to try this in their classroom, what should they look for?
 - Let's move from talking about collaboration at the course level to collaboration at the program level. What does collaboration look like at the program level at your college?
4. How are your activities structured so that all students are engaged? How do you monitor that all students are engaged? What strategies do you use if you notice a student is not engaged?

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- Let's continue discussing when 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? Describe one of your typical classes in which all students are engaged.
 - What does equitable participation look like in your courses? How do you assess equitable participation?
5. How do you incorporate cultural awareness and inclusivity into your classes?
 - Have you taken any kind of cultural competence training?
 - How would you distinguish equity from equality from diversity? (Are these terms fundamentally different or more or less the same to you?)
 6. What percentage of the time would you say you spend lecturing? What percentage of the time would you say you devote to students working with other students, in groups or pairs? Do you intentionally structure your class time to incorporate different types of instruction? Why or why not?
 7. What specific things have you done to really captivate your students—to pull them in and engage their interest?
 8. What would you say are the most important things you can do to help your students succeed? Inside the classroom? Outside the classroom?
 9. What is the biggest challenge to implementing engaging teaching strategies? How have you overcome this challenge?

Summary and Close:

1. Can you tell us about a favorite moment where you felt your work made a difference?
2. What advice would you give a new, just beginning community college faculty member?

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