



Center for  
Community College  
Student Engagement

# Focus Group Guide



Available online with additional supporting materials: <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>

# Contents

1	<b>Introduction</b>	4	<b>Selecting Focus Group Participants</b>
1	<b>Key Roles</b>	6	<b>Facilitator DOs and DON'Ts</b>
	a. Focus Group Coordinator	7	<b>Outline of Focus Group Session</b>
	b. Focus Group Facilitator	9	<b>Appendix</b>
	c. Notetaker		

## Introduction

In your continuing efforts to increase student success at your college, Center survey data provide a great deal of information to help you identify strengths and areas in need of improvement. In general, the data will point you to specific areas to focus your attention.

However, before you begin to consider improvement strategies, it will be important to learn more about what students are reporting in their survey responses. The Center encourages colleges to hold focus groups to gather this qualitative information. The survey responses tell you the "what" about your students' experiences; in focus groups you will learn the "why." In addition to gathering specific details about the experiences students are having, these structured discussions will also help you uncover possible strategies to consider for improvement.

This guide contains **sample** materials to help colleges organize and conduct focus groups. Various focus group discussion guides for students, faculty, and support services staff are available at <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>.

In addition, sample quantitative profile and response sheets are provided to gather basic demographic information as well as information to complement the findings from the discussion.

## Key Roles

Three key individuals are needed to conduct focus groups: a focus group coordinator, a facilitator, and a notetaker.

### Focus Group Coordinator

Each college should assign a coordinator to oversee the focus group project and work with the facilitator.

*See Appendix A-Coordinator Checklist*

The coordinator oversees the following tasks:

- Identifying a facilitator. If possible, it is preferable to use the same facilitator for all groups on your campus. In some cases, the coordinator may also serve as the facilitator.
- Identifying an individual to serve as notetaker for each focus group who will also write a draft report, summarizing the discussion. The facilitator might also have someone to suggest as a notetaker. The facilitator and notetaker should work together to ensure that the notetaker has an electronic template of the discussion guide to facilitate note-taking. The coordinator should also plan to provide a laptop computer for the notetaker if the notetaker will not be providing his/her own laptop. If possible, it is preferable to use the same individual for all

groups on your campus to ensure consistency in reporting.

- Handling of all student recruitment and logistics for the focus groups. If an insufficient number of invited students show up for the focus group, the coordinator should be prepared to “snag” students in the hall and invite them on the spot to participate.
- Inviting potential participants by phone or e-mail ten to fourteen days before the focus group. The coordinator should send out recruitment reminder e-mails or make phone calls at least one week prior to the focus groups. See *Appendix D-Invitation E-mails*

If the focus group will be video-recorded, the coordinator should let participants know ahead of time. See *Appendix C-Video Recording Guidelines*

- Calling each student who agreed to participate the day before the focus group, reminding her/him of the session, providing directions to the location, and confirming attendance.
- Providing stipends or tokens of appreciation for student participants (as allowed per college rules). The recommended stipend is \$25-\$30 per student. It is best to provide stipends in cash in individual envelopes given to the participants. The coordinator should know what steps to take to make sure students can be paid. For example, if the college will be issuing checks to students, each student might have to fill out a W-9 form for the college. If providing a cash stipend is a problem, the coordinator might also consider a gift card for the campus bookstore or to a local coffee or sandwich shop.
- Providing necessary forms for student participation (including consent forms, profile sheets, etc.)
- Arranging for and setting up the meeting room. See *Appendix B-Room Set-up*

- Arranging for and/or setting up all audio/video equipment – an audio recorder placed in the middle of the table to capture the conversation (remember to have additional batteries available for the audio recorder, if needed) or, if video recording, working with the A/V department to arrange for a system with a boom microphone or several table microphones. See *Appendix C-Video Recording Guidelines*

The notetaker and facilitator will use the recording to ensure accuracy in the focus group report. Focus group staff might find a digital recorder to be most convenient. Audio files can be uploaded directly to the notetaker and facilitator laptops or copied onto a flash drive for each individual.

- Providing table tents and markers for students to write their names.
- Providing refreshments/snacks that will be attractive to students and reflect genuine hospitality and appreciation (e.g., pizza and soft drinks or brownies and coffee/soft drinks, etc.).
- Attending the first 15 minutes to sign students in, have them sign consent forms, have them complete profile sheets, provide them with stipends, and to recruit last minute participants if the desired number do not show up. The coordinator does not need to stay for the whole focus group.

## Focus Group Facilitator

The focus group facilitator’s role is to guide a discussion around specific, pre-determined subjects, in an objective, respectful manner. The facilitator’s greatest challenge is to be seen by participants as an objective and effective conversation leader.

Though the focus group discussion should be recorded to ensure an accurate record of the conversation, and the facilitator will be



accompanied by a notetaker, the facilitator will also be taking notes during the discussion, noting participants' comments and keeping track of the results of "show of hands" votes taken on specific questions.

### The facilitator should be

- A skilled, objective listener.
- Someone who is comfortable and familiar with the group process.
- Someone who is able to create and maintain the group's enthusiasm and interest.
- Someone who is informed about the background and expectation of the college.
- Someone who is familiar with how to draw information from people to meet focus group objectives and expected outcomes.
- Someone who is able to listen without showing reaction to statements made by participants.

**Ideally, a facilitator should be an objective person from outside the college or, at the very least, someone who is not known to the participants.** If two colleges are reasonably close together, it is sometimes helpful to trade facilitators, so each facilitator is not working with students or staff members from his/her own college.

Even if the facilitator is familiar with information at the college or recognizes that focus group participants are making inaccurate statements about the college, the facilitator cannot react to those inaccuracies during the focus group, nor respond to the inaccuracies. Accurate information can be volunteered by the facilitator after the conversation ends if the facilitator feels it is in the best interest of the participants—not the college—to do so. The facilitator should be able to avoid becoming defensive if a participant criticizes the college or individuals who work there. It is preferable that the facilitator not be overly knowledgeable about the issues being discussed. Then the facilitator can truthfully tell participants

that he or she doesn't know the answer to an issue they are discussing.

The facilitator should **never** be someone who is a top administrator or someone who is viewed by students or staff as being in a position of power in the organization.

Regardless of the prior experience of the facilitator, the individual should receive training in how to be a good focus group facilitator. Facilitating focus groups requires a different approach than simply guiding conversations.

## Notetaker

### The notetaker should be

- A skilled, objective listener.
- Someone who can write or type quickly. Notetakers will either type notes on their laptops or write notes by hand, whichever they prefer; and the notes need to be as close to verbatim as possible.
- Someone who can pull main points from what they hear—they are not writing a transcript or interpreting participants' statements, but they must be accurate.
- Someone who can identify good quotes and write them down quickly.

The notetaker compiles all the data from the profile sheets for the final report.

The notetaker will write a draft report based on a summary of the focus group findings. *See Appendix H-Sample Focus Group Report*

# Selecting Focus Group Participants

**Goal: To gain as accurate a picture as possible of student experiences at the college.**

Through the focus group discussions, you will discover information that will help you identify steps you can take to improve college practices that affect student success. You will also uncover information that will merit further investigation. If your focus is on entering student experiences, you will learn the most if you conduct your focus groups early in the first term. You will want to hear from a broad cross-section of students, some of whom have had positive experiences and some of whom have had negative experiences at the college. Most students will have had both. **You want the good, the bad, and the ugly!**

**Avoid recruiting participants from one or two classes or programs.**

Do not ask just one or two instructors or programs, such as the nursing program, to supply names of students. Including too many students from one area of the college will limit the discussion and skew the results of your groups.

**Identify a mix of students who will reflect the college demographics.**

To learn whether student experiences at the college differ, depending on students' age or ethnicity, time and format of classes taken (e.g. day vs. evening vs. online), etc., it is best to hold a separate focus group for each major category you want to learn about or to include students who have varied experiences in the same focus group. *(Sometimes you will hear concerns expressed about perceived discrimination based on age or ethnicity. If you hear this, you should consider following up with a couple of focus groups that include students of a particular age group or ethnic group. Often students will be more forthcoming on*

*these kinds of issues when they are in a group of "like" students.)*

**Look for students with varying levels of involvement with the college.**

You are not looking for students who will all be enthusiastic about the college or who are all identified as potential student leaders. You are looking for a representative group. Generally, most community college students are coming to the college just to attend classes and use whatever services they need. While you might include a student leader or two, you want to hear from those whose connection to the college best reflects the bulk of the student population. If most of your students attend part-time and only come to campus to attend class, this type of student should make up the majority of the focus group.

**Include students who need various support services, whether or not they are using the services.**

You want to hear from those who need support services, such as financial aid, tutoring, academic advising, childcare, counseling, other services you offer (or are willing to consider offering). This should include those who have used some of those services and those who haven't. You want to learn about the experiences of those who use the services you offer, as well as the reasons why others don't use available services.

**If there is a particular program or service you want more in-depth information about, hold a separate focus group for those involved in that program.**

For example, if you are concerned about the success rate of students in developmental classes, hold a separate focus group for students who are currently enrolled in or have completed those classes.

## **The ideal size for each focus group is from 6 to 9 students.**

This size ensures a sufficient number for a good discussion, but not so many that it is difficult for the facilitator to involve everyone.

## **Provide a stipend for participants, if allowed.**

Determine the amount based on what you think will be a sufficient incentive for your students. In many places, \$25 to \$30 is adequate. You might also consider a gift card for the campus bookstore or to a local coffee or sandwich shop.

## **Be flexible in determining focus group locations.**

If you hold classes at various locations, hold focus groups in places that will be as convenient as possible for attendees. Colleges with several campuses will benefit from holding focus groups on each of those campuses. You might find that the experiences differ for students depending upon the campus where they attend classes.

## **Provide childcare if needed.**

If you are hoping to hear about the needs and experiences of parents with young children who attend classes at your college, offer childcare and invite participants to bring their children with them if necessary.

## **Tips for Encouraging People to Attend Focus Groups**

- Establish meeting times for the focus groups that don't conflict with existing community or college events or activities.
- Invite potential participants via phone or e-mail approximately 10 –14 days before the meeting.
- Send a personalized invitation – e-mail or text message – one week before the session.
- Phone each person the day before the focus group, reminding her/him of the session, providing directions to the location, and confirming attendance. *Always be prepared to corral students in the halls at the last minute if some participants don't show up!*

# Facilitator DOs and DON'Ts

## DO

- Follow the discussion outline and activities, as designed, in a consistent manner from group to group; use the same key questions in each session.
- Use a neutral, yet comfortable and inviting tone of voice and facial expressions.
- Ask questions to clarify participants' points and increase understanding of each point made by participants.
- Ensure that each participant contributes throughout the conversation.
- Be respectful of all points of view and instruct those in the group to do the same. *Reminder: this is neither a debate nor an attempt to reach consensus on any issue.*
- Keep the discussion moving to stay within the specified time frame.

## DON'T

- Try to guide the participants to your own conclusions.
- Share your own opinion or experiences.
- Dominate the conversation.
- Criticize or ridicule anyone's comments or allow anyone in the group to do so.
- Challenge the accuracy of participants' knowledge or views.
- Translate jargon or slang terms. (If someone asks what a term means, ask the individual using the term to explain what he or she means.)
- Interpret participants' comments for the group.
- Give answers to participants' questions.

*For sample focus group discussion guides, visit <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>*

# Outline of Focus Group Session

Each Focus Group Session should follow the outline below:

## 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 group discussion begins, the facilitator should

- a. Introduce him/herself
- 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 his/her role:
  - To ask questions and keep the group on track
  - Explains 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
  - Explains that there are no right or wrong answers
  - Explains 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 audio taping/video recording/note taking:
- For the purposes of highlighting “student/faculty/staff voices” at the college
  - Explains that no names will be used in reporting
  - Gives thanks from the college
- i. Take questions from participants

### **C. Focus Group Discussion**

For sample focus group discussion guides, visit <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>

# Appendix

The appendix pieces that follow contain materials to assist the Focus Group Coordinator and Facilitator in planning and conducting focus groups and reporting focus group findings.

Word versions of Appendices D-H can be found at <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>. These templates should be modified to best meet the needs of the institution.

- A. Coordinator & Facilitator Checklist
- B. Room Set-Up
- C. Video Recording Guidelines
- D. Invitation E-mails
  - Students
  - Part-time Faculty
  - Full-time Faculty
  - Student Services Staff
- E. Consent Forms
  - Students
  - Faculty
  - Student Services Staff
- F. Profile Sheets
  - Students
  - Faculty
  - Student Services Staff
- G. Response Sheets
  - Entering Students
  - Returning Students
- H. Sample Focus Group Report

# A. Coordinator & Facilitator Checklist

Activity	Coordinator	Facilitator
Arrange times for focus groups	X	
Arrange for meeting room ( <i>see Appendix B</i> )	X	
Identify notetaker for focus groups and video/audio operators, if applicable	X	
Identify participants for focus groups	X	
Contact participants ( <i>e-mail or telephone</i> )	X	
Provide refreshments	X	
Arrange for audio/visual equipment	X	
Make reminder phone call to participants	X	
Provide incentives for participation ( <i>stipend, gift card, etc.</i> )	X	
Provide laptop for notetaker	X	
Provide name tents for participants ( <i>with several markers</i> )	X	
Provide pens for participants	X	
Provide note pads for students	X	
Provide consent forms to participants.	X	
Prepare and Disseminate Profile Sheet and Response Sheets	X	
Prepare Facilitator's Discussion Guide		X
Prepare Notetaker's Template		X
Provide flash drive with audio files of focus group discussions for facilitator and notetaker use	X	

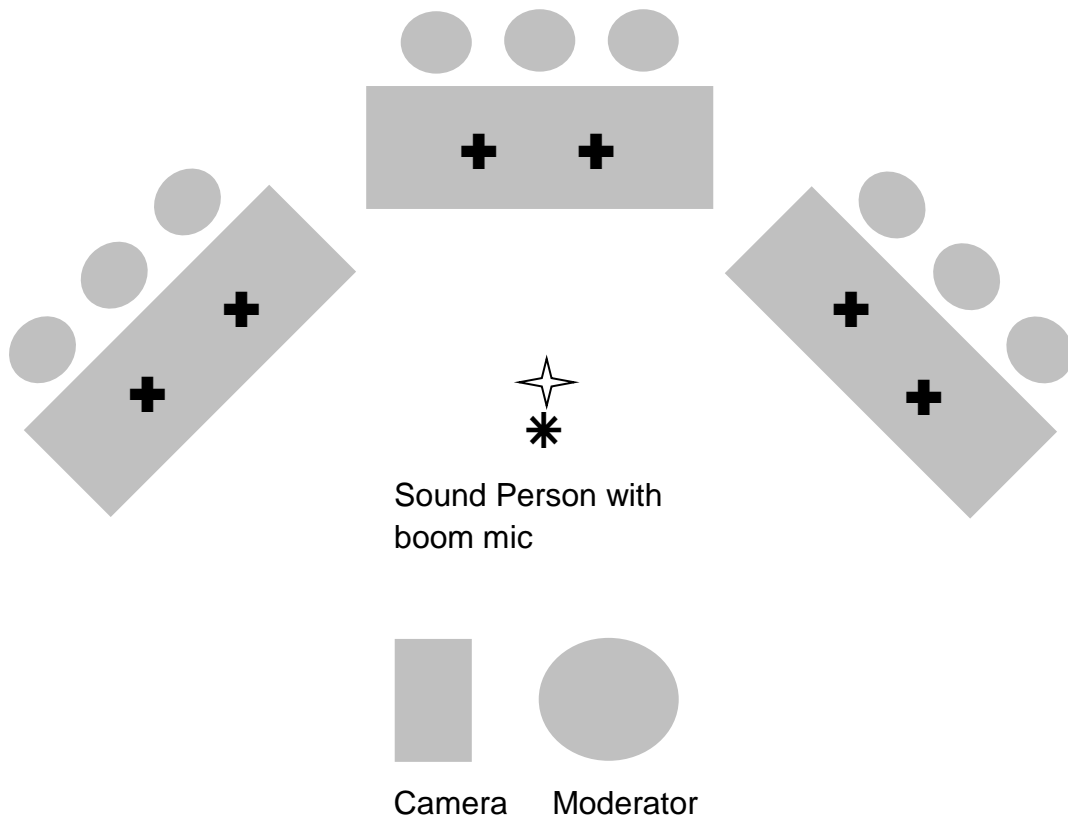
# B. Room Set-Up

The focus group room should be located in a quiet, private place. It should be large enough to accommodate the focus group facilitator, notetaker, video and sound operators if applicable, and the refreshments. Suggested audio set up options include the following:

Audio Option 1: Boom microphone (\*)

Audio Option 2: Table microphones (+)

Audio Option 3: Audio recorder with omni-directional microphone ( ) ✨





# C. Video Recording Guidelines

## Goal

- To capture complete and usable video sound bites from 90-minute focus groups and to ensure reasonable consistency in style and quality across multiple focus groups and/or colleges.

## Possible Products

- Video clips for college website(s)
- Short, edited videos to be shown at conferences, presentations, and meetings

## Physical Set-Up

- Preferred: 6-9 people seated around approximately three classroom-style tables arranged in a U or V shape. Focus group participants face the Facilitator and the camera and also see each other. The long rectangular classroom tables, end to end, but somewhat wrapped into a semi-circle, make it easiest for the participants to be reached with a boom microphone from the front. A second audio option is to provide table microphones positioned along the table so all participants can be heard equally. A third option is to place an audio recorder with an omni-directional microphone in the middle of the room or table. *See Room Set-Up Diagram – Appendix B.*
- Room may be classroom, TV studio, or any large room that will accommodate the diagrammed setup.
- Room should be nondescript. Remove any distracting elements such as pictures, statues, etc. If more than one college will be part of the videotape, remove college identifiers, such as logos or seals. If using a TV studio, avoid using a black curtain. Lighter colors are better.
- Room should be as quiet as possible. Avoid loud air conditioning systems and nearby distracting noises. Sensitive microphones will pick up the noise and make it difficult to achieve the desired quality in edited tapes.
- Position camera next to the Facilitator so that all individuals around the table can be seen. The camera will pick up full-face shots as participants look toward the Facilitator and profile shots as they look toward each other. The camera should also be able to capture a complete wide shot that includes all the participants.
- Use table tents or name cards (first name only) to identify participants for the Facilitator.
- Make sure chairs don't spin or rock—all chairs should be stationary.
- Ensure video equipment produces high quality recordings

## Audio

- Option 1 (preferred): Boom microphone with a boom operator controlling its location depending on who is speaking. Only one is needed per focus group
- Option 2: Table microphones, positioned so that the sound levels are as equal as possible for each participant. Microphones should be placed as close as possible to the people talking – one microphone placed equidistant between each two individuals should work well.
- Option 3: Audio recorder with omni-directional microphones – in the center of the room table; this will not produce as close a “presence” as microphones placed closer to the participants, but the sound will be adequate.
- Participants should not move the microphones during the taped discussion. The equipment should be as transparent to the participants as possible.

## Lighting

- Use of reflected light (umbrellas) or soft lights will ensure uniform, flat lighting for each site.
- TV lighting is preferred over natural light for a uniform look.
- Do not shoot with only available light. The resulting footage will be shadowy and faces will be harder to see. If the college does not have lighting equipment, this can be rented for minimal cost.

## Camera Framing

- The camera should frame primarily close-ups (head and shoulder shots). Close-ups are desirable, even if an individual’s face can only be captured in profile.
- Occasional wide shots or group shots are helpful to establish the scene. When opportunities arise, get reaction shots of each participant to provide adequate footage for the editing process.
- The camera operator should attempt to tape complete statements, avoiding a sense of always playing catch up once a comment has begun. The Facilitator can help by soliciting complete statements. (Generally, Facilitator questions should not be heard on the edited video segments.) In addition, the Facilitator should, when possible, solicit responses systematically around the table, left to right, right to left, etc., in order to facilitate quick easy pans and resets for the camera operator. This makes it possible for the camera operator to know who is speaking next and makes it easier to position the camera for the next comment quickly. The facilitator should also instruct participants to avoid interrupting one another so that that camera operator can capture complete sound bites.
- The camera operation should not interfere with the focus group discussion. However, stopping for a tape change is okay.
- Either before or after the focus group discussion taping, get several shots of the Facilitator asking specific questions, as well as several reaction shots from the Facilitator. Though it is intended that the Facilitator and her/his questions remain off-camera, having a few shots of the Facilitator will allow for more flexibility in editing the video.

## Instructions for Participants

- Request that focus group participants dress in camera-friendly clothing. Specifically, they should avoid strong patterns (such as stripes or checks that tend to move on camera), high contrast color combinations and chunky and/or shiny jewelry. They should avoid dark colors, specifically navy blue or black. Medium tone solid colors look best.
- Ask participants to write with pens, not pencils (including the Facilitator). A pencil makes a scribbling noise that is picked up by the microphone.

# D. Invitation E-mails

## D.1 Invitation E-mail for Students

*[Tailor your e-mail to meet your college's needs and your president's communication style.]*

To: [student e-mail address]  
Cc: *[if applicable]*  
Subject: Student Focus Group Discussion at [Name of College]

Dear [Name]:

Your success as a student at [Name of College] is very important to us. We know that many of our students face significant challenges in their efforts to achieve their educational goals. Therefore, the faculty and staff are very interested in learning what we can do to help students stay enrolled in college and have a successful and satisfying experience.

To help us determine what programs and services the college already has in place that are particularly helpful to you, and also to help us identify ways to improve programs and services, we need to hear from you. To learn about your experiences at [Name of College] and hear your opinions, we invite you to participate in a 90-minute group discussion with six to nine other students. As a token of our appreciation for your participation, you will receive *[insert amount or type of stipend]*.

Details on the group discussion are as follows:

Date:  
Time:  
Place:  
Directions:

Refreshments *[and day care, if applicable]* will be provided!

Since we are talking with a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of the people who attend. Please contact <name> at <phone number> or <e-mail address> to confirm your attendance.

*[You may want to include a sentence explaining that this focus group is tied to your college's participation in Center surveys. You may also want to direct students to the Center's website ([www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org)) or your college's website for more information.]*

We look forward to seeing you on [Date].

Sincerely,

[President's Name]



## D.2 Invitation E-mail for Part-Time Faculty

*[Tailor your e-mail to meet your college's needs and your president's communication style.]*

To: [Part-time faculty e-mail address]  
Cc: [If applicable]  
Subject: Part-Time Faculty Focus Group Discussion at [Name of college]

Dear [Name]:

Student success at [Name of college] is very important to all of us. The college is interested in hearing the faculty perspective regarding instructional approaches and college policies and practices that influence persistence and help students achieve their academic goals. To learn about your experiences at [Name of college] and hear your opinions, we invite you to participate in a 90-minute group discussion with six to nine other part-time faculty.

Details regarding the group discussion are as follows:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Directions: \_\_\_\_\_

Refreshments will be provided.

Since we are talking with a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of the people who attend. Please contact [Name] at [phone number] or [e-mail address] to confirm your attendance.

*[You may want to include a sentence explaining that this focus group is tied to your college's participation in Center surveys. You may also want to direct students to the Center's website ([www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org)) or your college's website for more information.]*

We look forward to seeing you on [date].

Sincerely,

[President's Name]

## D.3 Invitation E-mail for Full-time Faculty

*[Tailor your e-mail to meet your college's needs and your president's communication style.]*

To: [Full-time faculty e-mail address]  
Cc: [If applicable]  
Subject: Full-time Faculty Focus Group Discussion at [Name of college]

Dear [Name]:

Student success at [Name of college] is very important to all of us. The college is interested in hearing the faculty perspective regarding instructional approaches and college policies and practices that influence persistence and help students achieve their academic goals. To learn about your experiences at [Name of college] and hear your opinions, we invite you to participate in a 90-minute group discussion with six to nine other full-time faculty.

Details regarding the group discussion are as follows:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Directions: \_\_\_\_\_

Refreshments will be provided.

Since we are talking with a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of the people who attend. Please contact [Name] at [phone number] or [e-mail address] to confirm your attendance.

*[You may want to include a sentence explaining that this focus group is tied to your college's participation in Center surveys. You may also want to direct students to the Center's website ([www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org)) or your college's website for more information.]*

We look forward to seeing you on [date].

Sincerely,

[President's Name]

## D.4 Invitation E-mail for Student Services Staff

*[Tailor your e-mail to meet your college's needs and your president's communication style.]*

To: [Employee e-mail address]  
Cc: [If applicable]  
Subject: Student Services Staff Focus Group Discussion at [Name of college]

Dear [Name]:

Student success at [Name of college] is very important to all of us. The college is interested in hearing the student services staff perspective regarding college policies and practices that influence persistence and help students achieve their academic goals. To learn about your experiences at [Name of college] and hear your opinions, we invite you to participate in a 90-minute group discussion with six to nine other staff members.

Details regarding the group discussion are as follows:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Directions: \_\_\_\_\_

Refreshments will be provided.

Since we are talking with a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of the people who attend. Please contact [Name] at [phone number] or [e-mail address] to confirm your attendance.

*[You may want to include a sentence explaining that this focus group is tied to your college's participation in Center surveys. You may also want to direct students to the Center's website ([www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org)) or your college's website for more information.]*

We look forward to seeing you on [date].

Sincerely,

[President's Name]

# E. Consent Forms

## E.1 Consent Form for Students

**Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary.** You are free to refuse to be in the project at any time, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with [Name of College].

The faculty and staff of [Name of College] are committed to doing all we can to help students be successful. The purpose of conducting student focus groups is to learn about your experiences at this college and to hear your thoughts about what we are doing well and what we need to improve to help you and other students be successful and achieve your goals.

The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion. Participant comments may be recorded and/or video-recorded for the sole purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion. Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants as project participants.

**Students who participate in the project will be interviewed in a 90-minute focus group and will be asked to complete [one/two] short student response sheets.**

**Participants will receive [stipend amount] for their participation in the focus group.**

[Name of College] needs a signed consent form for every student participating in this focus group project. **By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the project.**

The records from this project will be stored securely and kept confidential. Individual participant responses will be kept confidential; however, in the event that a participant indicates a clear, serious, and direct harm to self or others, confidentiality will be broken and necessary information will be reported to a college counselor. Authorized persons from the college have the right to review focus group records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us [Focus Group Coordinator] at [phone] or [e-mail].

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

<p><b>Consent</b></p> <p>I, _____, a student at _____, understand that:</p> <p>Name (please print) Institution name</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a. This interview/focus group may be audio recorded and/or video-recorded for the purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion;</b></li><li><b>b. The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion; and</b></li><li><b>c. Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college.</b></li></ul> <p>I have read and understand this consent form and agree to voluntarily participate in this project.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Participant's Signature Date</p>
---



## E.2 Consent Form for Faculty

**Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary.** You are free to refuse to be in the project at any time, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with [Name of College].

[Name of College] is committed to doing all we can to help students be successful. The purpose of conducting focus groups with faculty is to learn about your perspective on college policies and practices that influence student success, your experiences at this college, and your thoughts about what we are doing well and what we need to do to improve student success.

The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion. Participant comments may be recorded and/or video-recorded for the sole purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion. Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants as project participants.

**Faculty members who participate in the project will be interviewed in a 90-minute focus group and will be asked to complete a short response sheet.**

[Name of College] needs a signed consent form for every student participating in this focus group project. **By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the project.**

The records from this project will be stored securely and kept confidential. Individual participant responses will be kept confidential; however, in the event that a participant indicates a clear, serious, and direct harm to self or others, confidentiality will be broken and necessary information will be reported to a college counselor. Authorized persons from the college have the right to review focus group records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us [Focus Group Coordinator] at [phone] or [e-mail].

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

### Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, a faculty member at \_\_\_\_\_, understand that:  
Name (please print) Institution name

- a. **This interview/focus group may be audio recorded and/or video-recorded for the purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion;**
- b. **The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion; and**
- c. **Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college.**

I have read and understand this consent form and agree to voluntarily participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## E.3 Consent Form for Student Services Staff

**Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary.** You are free to refuse to be in the project at any time, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with [Name of College].

[Name of College] is committed to doing all we can to help students be successful. The purpose of conducting focus groups with student services staff is to learn about your perspective on college policies and practices that influence student success, your experiences at this college, and your thoughts about what we are doing well and what we need to do to improve student success.

The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion. Participant comments may be recorded and/or video-recorded for the sole purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion. Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants as project participants.

**Employees who participate in the project will be interviewed in a 90-minute focus group and will be asked to complete a short response sheet.**

[Name of College] needs a signed consent form for every employee participating in this focus group project. **By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the project.**

The records from this project will be stored securely and kept confidential. Individual participant responses will be kept confidential; however, in the event that a participant indicates a clear, serious, and direct harm to self or others, confidentiality will be broken and necessary information will be reported to a college counselor. Authorized persons from the college have the right to review focus group records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us [Project Coordinator] at [phone] or [e-mail].

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

### Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, an employee at \_\_\_\_\_, understand that:  
Name (please print) Institution name

- a. This interview/focus group may be audio recorded and/or video-recorded for the purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion that will be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion;**
- b. The information gathered in this focus group will be summarized by the focus group staff, and the college administration will receive a summary of the discussion; and**
- c. Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of this community college.**

I have read and understand this consent form and agree to voluntarily participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# F. Profile Sheets

## F.1 Profile Sheet for Students

1. What is your gender identity?

- Man       Woman       Other       I prefer not to respond

2. How old are you?

- |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 30 to 39 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 to 49 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 22 to 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65+      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 to 29 |                                   |

3. What is your racial ethnic identification? (Mark all that apply.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian                            | <input type="checkbox"/> White                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) _____           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino               | <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer not to respond                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian                  |   |

4. Did you enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school?

- Yes       No

5. Is this the first college you have attended or did you begin college elsewhere?

- Started here       Started elsewhere

6. Is this your first academic term at this college?

- Yes       No

7. How many TOTAL credit hours are you enrolled in this term?

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 or fewer | <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7-14       | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 or more |

8. What is your enrollment status?

- Full-time       Part-time

9. What is the highest academic credential you have earned?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational/Technical                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School Diploma or GED | <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree           | <input type="checkbox"/> Master's/Doctoral/Professional Degree |

10. Have you served in the military?

- Yes       No

11. Who in your family has attended at least some college? (Check all that apply.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mother         | <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse/Partner    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father         | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Guardian    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brother/Sister | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the Above |

12. While in high school, which of the following courses did you take? (Check all that apply.)

- College classes (dual credit)                       Advanced Placement (AP) classes  
 College Prep classes                                       Honors classes  
 I did not take any of the courses listed above.

13. While in high school, which of the following tests did you take?

- PSAT                                       College placement test  
 SAT                                         Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 ACT

14. Are you an international student or foreign national?

- Yes                       No

15. Are you eligible for financial assistance (loans, grants, scholarships)?

- Yes                       No                       Don't know

15a. If you are eligible for financial assistance, please indicate which of the following describes your current situation?

- I have received financial assistance  
 I applied, but have not yet received financial assistance  
 I have not applied for financial assistance

15b. If you have not applied for financial assistance at this college, please briefly explain why you did not apply.

\_\_\_\_\_

16. During this term, my college expenses (tuition, fees, books, etc.) are being paid by: **(Check all that apply)**

My own income or savings

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Income/savings from family

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Employer contributions (i.e. your employer is paying your college expenses)

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Active military or veteran benefits

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Grants

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Scholarships

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Student loans (bank, etc)

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

Public assistance

- Major source                       Minor source                       Not a source

17. Do you have children or other dependents living at home with you?

- Yes                       No

17a. If you have children living with you, which of the following best describes your child care situation?

- My children are enrolled in a child care center at this college.  
 I currently have child care arrangements for my children outside of this college.  
 Finding child care is a major issue for me.  
 My children do not require child care.

18. In a typical 7-day week, about how many hours do you spend doing each of the following:

Working on campus?

None     1-10 hours     11-20 hours     21-30 hours     More than 30 hours

Working off campus?

None     1-10 hours     11-20 hours     21-30 hours     More than 30 hours

Providing care for dependents (parents, children, spouse, etc.)?

None     1-10 hours     11-20 hours     21-30 hours     More than 30 hours

Commuting to and from class?

None     1-10 hours     11-20 hours     21-30 hours     More than 30 hours

Participating in community organizations, religious groups, politics, etc.?

None     1-10 hours     11-20 hours     21-30 hours     More than 30 hours

## F.2 Profile Sheet for Faculty

1. What is your gender identity?

- Man       Woman       Other       I prefer not to respond

2. For how many years have you taught at the college level (full- or part-time, any college)?

- Less than 1 year       10-19 years  
 1-4 years       20 or more years  
 5-9 years

3. Please indicate your teaching field: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your employment status at this college?

- Full-time faculty  
 Part-time faculty

5. At this college, what is your teaching load this term (not counting overload)?

- 1-3 credits       13-15 credits  
 4-6 credits       16+ credits  
 7-9 credits

6. At this college, what classes are you currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

## F.3 Profile Sheet for Student Services Staff

1. What is your gender identity?  
 Man       Woman       Other       I prefer not to respond
  
2. For how many years have you worked in college student services (any college)?  
 Less than 1 year       10-19 years  
 1-4 years       20 or more years  
 5-9 years
  
3. Please indicate your area of responsibility (mark all that apply):  
 Academic Advising and Planning       Admissions and/or Registration  
 Financial Aid       Counseling  
 Student Activities       Academic Support  
 College Orientation or Student Success Course  
 Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your employment status at this college?  
 Full-time       Part-time
  
5. What technologies is the college currently using to communicate with and disseminate information to your students (mark all that apply)?  
 College website       Text message  
 YouTube       Instant messaging  
 Facebook or other social network       Podcast  
 Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_



# G. Response Sheets

## G.1 Response Sheet for Entering Students

- When did you register for classes?
  - More than one week before classes began
  - During the week before classes began
  - During the first week of classes
  - After the first week of classes
- My placement test scores indicated that I needed the following courses: (Check all that apply.)
  - Developmental/remedial reading course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial writing course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial math course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - My placement test scores did not indicate that I needed to enroll in any of the above courses.
  - I did not take placement tests
- I enrolled in the following course(s) during my first academic term at this college: (Check all that apply.)
  - Developmental/remedial reading course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial writing course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial math course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - I did not enroll in any of the above courses during my first academic term.
- I participated in the following orientation: (Check all that apply.)
  - Online orientation prior to the beginning of classes
  - On-campus orientation prior to the beginning of classes
  - I enrolled in an orientation program or course as part of my course schedule.
  - I am not aware of a college orientation program or course.
  - I was unable to participate in orientation due to scheduling conflicts or other issues.
  - I was told that I am not required to participate in orientation.
- Of the courses you enrolled in during your first term at this college, how many have you dropped since the first day of class?
  - None     One                       Two or more
- How many courses have you added since the beginning of this term?
  - None     One                       Two or more

7. I have experienced the following since enrolling in the college: (Check all that apply.)

- An academic advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.
- An academic advisor helped me select a course of study/program or major.
- An academic advisor helped me choose my classes.
- A financial aid staff member helped me analyze my financial aid needs related to college attendance.
- I am participating in a First Year Experience (FYE) program.
- I am enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course.
- I am enrolled in a class to help me learn study skills, note-taking, time management, and other skills that will help me succeed in college.
- I am participating in a First-Generation Student Program.
- I am participating in a First Time in College Student Program.
- I am enrolled in an organized learning community (linked courses for a group of students).
- I have received information about academic resources and services available to me at this college.
- I have received information about college clubs and other activities.

8. I have used the following services since enrolling in the college: (Check all that apply.)

- Tutoring – online
- Tutoring – in person
- Writing lab
- Math lab
- Computer lab
- Other (please list which other services) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

9. Do you know your current grade in all of your classes this term?

- Yes                       No

11. When did you obtain all the books you need for your classes this term?

- Before classes started
- Within the first two weeks of class
- After the first two weeks of class
- I still do not have all the books I need for my classes.

12. Since enrolling at this college, I have participated in the following college activities: (Check all that apply.)

- On-campus event (social, cultural, performance, etc.)
- Community service activity sponsored by the college
- I have joined a club or other college-sponsored activity.
- I have spent time in the student center or other student activities area.
- Other (please list other activities) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

13. What technologies are your instructors using in your coursework? (Check all that apply.)

- E-mail
- Instant Messaging (IM)
- Blog
- Course Management System
- Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_
- Texting
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networking site
- YouTube
- None of the above

14. What technologies are your instructors using to stay in contact (communicate) with you? (Check all that apply.)

- E-mail
- Instant Messaging (IM)
- Blog
- Course Management System
- Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_
- Texting
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networking site
- YouTube
- None of the above

15. I plan to enroll in classes at this college next term:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

16. I plan to enroll in classes at another college next term:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

## G.2 Response Sheet for Returning Students

1. When did you register for classes for the **current** academic term at this college?
  - More than one week before classes began
  - During the week before classes began
  - During the first week of classes
  - After the first week of classes
2. How many TOTAL credit hours have you earned at this and any other college?
  - 15 or fewer
  - 15 to 30
  - 30 to 45
  - 45 to 60
  - 60 or more
3. At this college, in what range is your overall grade average?
  - A
  - B
  - C
  - D
  - F
4. Do you know your current grade in all of your classes **this term**?
  - Yes     No
5. My placement test scores indicated that I needed the following courses: (Check all that apply.)
  - Developmental/remedial reading course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial writing course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial math course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - My placement test scores did not indicate that I needed to enroll in any of the above courses.
  - I did not take placement tests
6. I am enrolled in the following course(s) during the **current** academic term at this college: (Check all that apply.)
  - Developmental/remedial reading course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial writing course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - Developmental/remedial math course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)
  - I did not enroll in any of the above courses during my first academic term.
7. Of the courses you enrolled in during the **current** academic term at this college, how many have you dropped since the first day of class?
  - None     One         Two or more
8. How many courses have you added since the beginning of **this term**?
  - None     One         Two or more

9. So far, during the **current** academic term, how difficult is the following?  
**(1=Not at all difficult, 5=Very difficult)**

Learning course materials:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

Managing your time:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

Paying college expenses:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

Getting help with school work:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

Making new friends:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

Interacting with instructors:

1                       2                       3                       4                       5

10. During **this term** at this college, I have used the following college services: (Check all that apply.)

- Tutoring – online
- Tutoring – in person
- Writing lab
- Math lab
- Computer lab
- I have met with an academic advisor.
- I have met with a financial aid advisor.
- Other (please list which other services) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

11. During **this term** at this college, I have participated in the following college activities: (Check all that apply.)

- On-campus event (social, cultural, performance, etc.)
- Community service activity sponsored by the college
- I have joined a club or other college-sponsored activity.
- I have spent time in the student center or other student activities area.
- Other (please list other activities) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

12. When did you obtain all the books you need for your classes **this term**?

- Before classes started
- Within the first two weeks of class
- After the first two weeks of class
- I still do not have all the books I need for my classes.

13. What technologies are your current instructors using in your coursework? (Check all that apply.)

- E-mail
- Instant Messaging (IM)
- Blog
- Course Management System
- Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above
- Texting
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networking site
- YouTube

14. What technologies are your current instructors using to stay in contact (communicate) with you? (Check all that apply.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Texting   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instant Messaging (IM)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networking site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog                      | <input type="checkbox"/> YouTube   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Course Management System  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list) _____ |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above         |  |

15. I plan to enroll in classes at this college **next term**:

- Yes             No             Don't know

16. I plan to enroll in classes at another college **next term**:

- Yes             No             Don't know

17. If you plan to enroll in one or more classes **next term** at this college or another college, do you know how you will pay for your college expenses (tuition, fees, books, etc.)?

- Yes             No

17b. If you know how you plan to pay for your college expenses **next term** (tuition, fees, books, etc.), please indicate how you will be paying:

My own income or savings

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Income/savings from family

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Employer contributions (i.e. your employer is paying your college expenses)

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Active military or veteran benefits

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Grants

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Scholarships

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Student loans (bank, etc)

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

Public assistance

- Major source             Minor source             Not a source

# H. Sample Focus Group Report

## Focus Group Report Format:

1. Summary of project
2. Introduction with list of outcomes
3. Participant demographics
4. Summary of findings within each outcome, including representative quotes, results of yes or no questions, and quantitative data
5. Recommendations

## Summary of Project:

[Name of College] held a series of focus groups in [months and year] involving various student populations represented at the college, including day students, evening students, Russian students, previously enrolled students, and students from Johnson High School (a feeder school to the college). Through the focus groups, the college gathered information to help administrators, faculty, and staff. [List outcomes from discussion guide]

## Introduction

[Name of College] held a focus group discussion with [number of students] students on [date]. The focus group was conducted as part of the College's involvement in [name of initiative, if applicable]. Participants provided information in two ways: written responses and group discussion.

The discussion was designed to gather information from the students regarding to the following outcomes:

1. To understand what motivates students to pursue higher education
2. To understand how students perceive the college's effectiveness in meeting their needs
3. To understand what impact responsibilities outside of school have on a student's potential for academic success
4. To understand the importance of various college services in helping students reach their academic goals
5. To understand students' academic experience at the college and what helps or hinders their success
6. To understand the role of relationships in student persistence and success
7. To understand what the college does well to help students succeed and what the college needs to improve to help students succeed

## Participant Demographics

[Summarize data from response/profile sheets in this section.]

Ten participants took part in the focus group:

- Five women and five men
- Four students were 18-21 years old; three were 22-24 years old; three were 25-44 years old



- Two students identified themselves as Black or African American, three as White; four as Hispanic or Latino; one student did not respond
- Seven of the 10 students are employed while attending the college
- Three of the 10 students have children or other dependents living with them
- Four of the 10 students have completed 1-14 credit hours; two have completed 15-29 credit hours; two have completed 30-44 credit hours; two have completed 45-60 credit hours
- Six of the 10 students had started college immediately after high school
- Four students have taken a developmental reading course; four have taken a developmental math course; three have taken a developmental writing course; three are in the honors program; three have taken a study skills course; five have participated in academic advising/planning
- Five students are liberal arts majors; three students are nursing majors, two students are majoring in computer science
- Nine of the 10 students indicated that they plan to pursue a bachelor's degree; one student had received a Bachelor's degree; three students indicated plans to pursue a master's or professional degree
- Six students were enrolled full-time; four students indicated part-time enrollment
- All 10 students are using some type of financial aid.

## Student Perspectives

*[Organize by outcome, identify any key themes under each outcome then summarize the discussion under each outcome. Use student quotes to enhance the narrative.]*

**Outcome 1:** To understand what motivates students to pursue higher education

### Why are the students in college?

Four of the 10 participants decided to go on to college while in high school and began college the term after graduating from high school. The remaining six students worked after finishing high school and later made the decision to continue their education. The students offered a number of reasons for their decision to go to college:

- To transfer to a four-year college or university
- To focus on academics
- To pursue a specific career
- To learn new job-related skills for promotion
- To broaden their social circle and gain opportunities for networking
- They were encouraged by parents or friends
- They were encouraged by high school teachers or counselors

The students had specific reasons for choosing a community college:

- Cost
- Location close to home
- Family responsibilities

- Need to attend part-time while working
- Availability of specific program

Eight out of 10 of those participating indicated that their goals have changed since coming to the college because of courses they have taken at the college. One participant stated, “I didn’t know how interesting psychology could be! Now I want to go on to get my bachelor’s degree in psych.”

**Outcome 2:** To understand how students perceive the college’s effectiveness in meeting their needs

### What are students’ perceptions of the college?

In general, students were extremely positive when talking about the college. They used various words to describe their experience at the college, “[include quotes from students].” They cited a number of the college’s strengths, including (list them). All the students agreed that the college has two significant weaknesses, including [list them]. Other weaknesses cited by individual students include: [list them]

### Positive Features of the College

The one overwhelmingly positive attribute mentioned by participants is the beautiful campus.

“The campus is so beautiful that it makes you want to hang out here after class or between classes and do your work or visit with classmates. I like when everybody is outside on a sunny day on the lawn by the pond, hanging out or reading. It makes me want to be out there too.”

“I like all the study areas they’ve provided for us. There are louder places where you can work with people and then quieter places to study by yourself. It’s all really well designed. I feel comfortable here.”

Other positives include:

- low tuition – “It’s the only way I’d be able to go to college.”
- strong academics - “I feel encouraged to do my best.”
- good professors – “My teachers are very knowledgeable and they really make you interested in what they’re talking about because they know so much,” and “You can tell they want you to succeed.”
- accommodating and caring counselors – “My counselor even knows me by name.”
- availability of activities

### Negative Features of the College

The one resounding complaint across all groups of students is registration. They strongly object to the inconvenience, long lines, confusion, and red tape. Comments included: “Registration is a waste of time. People working registration can’t find the information...and the computer goes down all the time.” “Registration is extremely frustrating. There is too much red tape and going from room to room unnecessarily.”

Several participants commented that there is not enough useful information about college available: they did not get as much information about college as they would have liked in high school; orientation was focused on a tour and not what the college has to offer; students have to ask questions rather than be told information.

“At some high schools they have community college counselors available for students but that wasn’t available at my school. I would have liked that. I think it would have helped my transition to college; it would have been smoother and I wouldn’t have been as nervous.”

“Nobody ever told me anything about financial aid. I was just told to go to the cashier’s office to pay. That’s it.”

- Evening students believe class offerings on evenings and weekends are too limited; they also express frustration with the lack of services (counseling) and facilities (gym, food service) in the evening, “I work all day; I simply cannot be here during the day but I need services too.”
- Other negative factors: not challenging classes, classes are mostly lecture, and kids “hanging out” in halls and using bad language.

“I’m so bored in my developmental math class. I wish there was some way for me to start with the stuff that I don’t know. I already know everything that we’ve covered so far and we’re halfway through the term.”

*[Go on to discuss students’ academic experiences, experiences with specific services, etc. by putting forward the key idea that emerged from the discussion in each area, then giving specific examples and representative quotes. Give numbers of students responding to a particular question when you have that information.]*

## **Recommended Changes**

It is clear from the responses and discussions that students and potential students are committed to getting an education. They want a more customer-friendly, service-oriented environment; they want to get rid of the obstacles and have their needs met. Participants point to other colleges that do a better job in this area. They offer several ideas about changes that they believe would make it easier for them to learn about the college and make it more manageable and pleasant to attend the college. Recommended changes fall into three major categories: customer service, communications, and class offerings.

### **Customer Service:**

- Improve and streamline registration process. Offer online and telephone registration. Offer credit card payment of tuition.

- Upgrade customer service in general: Provide knowledgeable, pleasant staff who can make decisions.

#### Communications:

- Make more information on programs and services available to students, potential students, and high school counselors, in a format (and in languages) they can understand.
- Provide more outreach and detailed information about programs to high school counselors.
- Have college counselors at each of the area high schools.
- Advertise more.
- Make information more readily available online.

#### Class Offerings:

- Offer broader selection of classes and more full-time professors to evening and weekend students.