**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.