CCCSE
INSIGHTS THAT MATTER

FOCUS GROUP
MANUAL

Introduction

Data collected from CCCSE surveys provide colleges with a great deal of information. However, to learn more beyond the experiences and behaviors that are reported in survey responses, CCCSE encourages colleges to hold focus groups with students, as well as with their faculty and staff. There is power in sharing video clips of real students and employees voicing their hopes, struggles, and advice side-by-side with actionable data points.

This manual and its appendix pieces, along with a growing collection of Discussion Guides, combine to form CCCSE's **Focus Group Toolkit**. These resources contain foundational information and sample materials to help colleges in the logistical planning and facilitation of focus group sessions.

CONTENTS

Planning Focus Groups

Successful focus groups require thoughtful planning. This section will cover the various preparatory tasks that should be performed and suggestions for how to divide them among a team.

STAFFING THE PROJECT

CCCSE has observed that the ideal execution of a focus group involves two key sets of responsibilities—those of the Focus Group Coordinator and the Focus Group Facilitator. In many cases, the roles can be truncated or blended, but CCCSE has found that projects run most smoothly when the tasks are divided among these two individuals.

» The **Focus Group Coordinator** oversees the logistics and timeline of the project. This can include establishing a budget; recruiting participants; communicating with participants and other constituents; securing space, equipment, and other resources; making arrangements for refreshments as well as stipends, if allowable; and onboarding participants onsite by collecting any necessary paperwork. This person should be highly organized and detail-oriented with excellent project management skills.

» The **Focus Group Facilitator** is responsible for guiding discussions around specific, pre-determined subjects in an effective, respectful manner. This person should have the ability to draw substantive information from participants and keep the conversation moving forward with enthusiasm and interest. The Facilitator should not be a top administrator or someone who is viewed by students or staff as being in a position of power in the organization. If possible, the 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.

While the bulk of advance planning falls to the Coordinator, the Facilitator should review and rehearse the protocol that will be used to ensure discussions flow smoothly.

CCCSE does not recommend that the Coordinator also assume the role of the Facilitator if there is not at least one other person involved in the project and able to assist during the focus group sessions.

REVIEWING THE PROTOCOL

The college will need to identify objectives for the focus group project—what does the college wish to learn or uncover through conversations with its students, faculty, and/or staff? With those goals in mind, the Facilitator will want to be involved in the selection of a focus group protocol. The protocol is a bank of questions, prompts, and key talking points organized by topic and desired outcomes. *See Appendix F for sample introductory prompts and general focus group questions for students, faculty, and staff.* As a part of the comprehensive Focus Group Toolkit, CCCSE also offers several Discussion Guides on various topics at **https://cccse.org/resources/focus-groups** that can assist the college in further crafting their protocols.

The protocol essentially serves as a script for the Facilitator, with both verbal and nonverbal cues. It should dictate what the Facilitator will say and ask out loud, as well as include internal notes to help redirect conversations, glean additional details from participants, follow up on incomplete responses, "read the room," and so on.

ARRANGING LOGISTICS

As previously mentioned, the Coordinator is responsible for all logistical arrangements. Below are the major elements of planning to keep in mind.
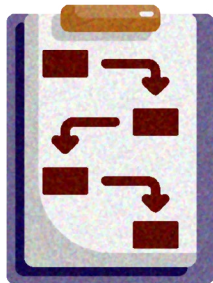
» **Institutional Approval**
As a first step, the Coordinator should determine if the college has an IRB process that needs to be followed—and if so, take the necessary steps to complete the application and necessary documentation.

» **Physical Space**
For each focus group, the Coordinator should look for a space that is about the size of a standard classroom. *See Appendix A for an example of how to set up the room.* Additional space just outside the room may be necessary to place food and beverage if it is being offered to participants. In this case, it is suggested that a staff member remain near the catering display to ensure it is reserved for the participants.

» **Audio/Visual Equipment/Technical Support**
If video recording, the Coordinator may need to work with the A/V department to arrange for a system with a boom microphone or several table microphones and to reserve technical support from someone familiar in operating this equipment. *See Appendix B for recording guidelines.* For audio only, the Coordinator can place a recorder in the middle of the table to capture the conversation (it is important to have additional batteries available for the audio recorder, if needed).

» **Refreshments**
As a small token of appreciation, CCCSE has found that boxed or "grab-and-go" style meals (sandwiches and/or salads with sides) as well as a beverage station appeal to both students and faculty/staff. Pizza is also suitable for student groups.

> **TIPS FOR GOING VIRTUAL**
> **Control for Setting**
>
> While there are limitless options for space when conducting virtual focus groups, CCCSE recommends reserving slots in a computer lab for access to equipment and technology and to achieve a cohesive look and sound. Also, the Coordinator should consider doing a test run with the IT department to ensure adequate technology and connectivity.

» **Stipends/Incentives**
These generally apply only to student participants. Rules vary significantly across institutions and governing entities, so the Coordinator should identify the proper steps to take in securing stipends (e.g., any required forms) and should determine the allowable stipend format and amount. Checks are likely the most difficult to prepare. CCCSE recommends cash, voucher, or a gift card toward a local or national bookseller, grocer, gas station, or restaurant.

» **Supplies/Materials**
The Coordinator will want to prepare a variety of paperwork needed onsite, including sign-in sheets, stipend/gift signature forms, consent forms (*see Appendix C*), and/or brief forms to collect demographic information (*see Appendix D*). The Coordinator should also ensure that they, along with the Facilitator, have an up-to-date version of the session overview, announcements, and most importantly the discussion protocol. Table tents and markers can also be used to write participant names. In edited video clips, these name plates should not be visible. This can be achieved more easily if the name plates are placed in front of each participant at floor level so the facilitator, videographer, and boom operator can still see them.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Now that the college has assembled a team to run the focus groups and those team members have made all necessary preparations, it is time to recruit participants. Regardless of the college's target population, hearing from a broad cross-section of participants is essential. The participants should be composed of those who have had positive experiences and those who have had negative experiences at the college. Most will have had both. The following tips provide a framework for capturing this balance.

» **Aim for six to nine participants.**
This ideal size ensures a number sufficient for a good discussion, but not so many that it is difficult for the Facilitator to involve everyone. All participants should be 18 years of age or older as working with minors may not be allowed at your institution or may require parental consent.

» **Avoid recruiting participants from a single class or program.**
Including too many participants from one area of the college, particularly a highly specialized one (such as nursing students), will limit the discussion and skew the results of your groups.

» **Offer times stratified throughout the day.**
Because the experiences of students and faculty who attend or teach mostly evening classes may differ from those who attend or teach classes during the day, it is important to schedule a variety of timeslots to capture voices from as many students, faculty, and staff as possible.

» **Participants should reflect the college demographics.**
To learn whether experiences at the college differ depending on race/ethnicity, age, gender, first generation status, and so on, the Coordinator will want to intentionally include participants who have varied experiences within the same focus group. If during the focus group session concerns are expressed about perceived discrimination or privilege based on these factors, the college may consider following up with separate focus groups zeroing in on these populations. Often participants, particularly students, will be more forthcoming about these kinds of issues when they are in a group of their peers.

» **Look beyond the cream of the crop.**
When it comes to students, the Coordinator should ensure they are not limiting the focus group invitations to the students who are most likely to eagerly volunteer their time. Student leaders, student employees, and those highly involved in student organizations are among the easiest to recruit, so it may take a little more effort to reach the students who reflect the typical community college student—those who attend part-time and spend minimal time on campus or logged in outside of class—but it will be worth it to obtain those perspectives.

Similarly, for faculty, the Coordinator should attempt to include a mix of full-time instructors and adjunct faculty across disciplines.

» **Include students who need various support services.**
The college will benefit from hearing from students who need support services, such as financial aid, tutoring, academic advising, childcare, counseling, or other available services (or those being considered as offerings). These sessions should include students who have used some of those services and those who haven't so that the college can learn about the experiences of those who use particular services, as well as the reasons why others don't use available services.

» **Plan separate focus groups to obtain more in-depth information about a particular program or service.**
For example, if the college is concerned about the success rate of students in developmental classes, separate focus groups can be held for students who are currently enrolled in or have completed those classes and for faculty who teach those courses.

» **Time your invitations and reminders strategically.**
CCCSE recommends that prospective focus group participants are invited approximately 2–3 weeks in advance of each scheduled focus group session. The Coordinator should also send out reminder e-mails, phone calls, or texts at least one week prior to each focus group. It is recommended to reach out by phone the day before and the morning of with reminders and location directions. *See **Appendix E** for invitation templates.* As a courtesy, the Coordinator should disclose to participants ahead of time the type of recording format that will be used (video vs. audio only) and provide additional guidelines.

Conducting Focus Groups

Most focus group projects will require holding more than one discussion in order to capture as many voices as possible. Therefore, it is crucial to apply consistency across all sessions. The following provides a framework of how the event should flow.

PERFORMING THE INTAKE PROCESS

The Coordinator should be present at least 15 minutes or so before the focus group session to help the Facilitator greet participants and orient them through necessary housekeeping items that must take place prior to the recorded discussion. Below are some of the preparatory steps to cover.

» **Sign-in Sheet**
The first action taken by each participant should be to sign in, providing their name and contact information.

» **Consent Form(s)**
Depending on the college's research protocols and applicable privacy policies, participants will need to provide written consent for their participation to be recorded and shared (*see Appendix C*). This would also be a time for the Coordinator and/or Facilitator to double-check that all participants are 18 years of age or older. The consent form templates provided in the appendix may need to be modified significantly if the college decides to conduct one-on-one interviews, which are better suited to topics that are of a sensitive nature.

» **Stipend Paperwork**
Depending on the college's research protocols and applicable financial policies, participants will need to provide written acknowledgement that they received the advertised compensation. In some cases, tax documents may be required.

» **Data Collection**
To complement the qualitative findings that will come from the discussion, the college will want to collect basic demographic information at minimum. *Appendix D provides a bank of questions from which to choose or augment based on the college's particular features and/or the topic(s) upon which the conversation will be centered.*

TIPS FOR GOING VIRTUAL
Intake

Forms can be collected electronically (via DocuSign, for example) in advance of the focus group session, not necessarily at the time of participation. Alternatively, the host can record the participant providing verbal consent after reading the consent form in its entirety. Virtual stipends, such as digital gift cards, can be sent after the meeting has concluded. Participants should be informed to check their email account to ensure they received it.

PROVIDING A SESSION OVERVIEW

The college should adapt the session overview below to align with its specific mission and objectives. It is recommended that the Facilitator create a full overview script to maintain consistency across all focus group sessions, which would be appended just before the actual protocol.

The Facilitator should

» Introduce the team helping with the focus group

» Explain the purpose of the project

» Confirm that participants have signed the necessary forms

» Reiterate that participants can stop participating at any point

» Describe the role of the Facilitator:
- ask questions and keep the group on track
- ensure that discussion moves fairly quickly, even though people might have more to say about a particular topic

» Encourage participants to share experiences and opinions, both positive and negative

» Explain logistics of the discussion:
- how much time has been allotted
- arrangements for water and restroom breaks
- cell phones turned off

» Provide 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
- avoid speaking in incomplete sentences and avoid referencing something previously said
- if you are called upon to respond to a question and do not have anything to add, please say "pass"
- if we miss the first part of your comment, we may ask you to start again
- if someone accidentally interrupts you, we may ask for you to repeat your comment

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TIPS FOR GOING VIRTUAL
Managing Multiple Speakers

Conducting one-on-one interviews in a virtual setting is much simpler than interviewing groups. Should the college choose to group participants at the same time, there will be additional housekeeping items to cover to ensure smoothness in the recorded video/audio clips. The team will want to devise a system for capturing each participant speaking without audible and/or visual interruption. CCCSE's system involves a videographer managing pinned videos and the Facilitator maintaining a gallery view to monitor all participants simultaneously. Participants should receive the following types of instructions:

⋯➔ remain muted until it is your turn to speak

⋯➔ refrain from using the chat feature or other notification while someone else is speaking as it can disrupt the recording process; instead physically raise your hand to alert the Facilitator that you have a comment to add

⋯➔ pause before responding to a question or providing comments to allow the Facilitator sufficient time to pin your video

» Talk about the recording process:

- articulate that the purpose of audio and/or video recording is to highlight student/faculty/staff voices at the college

- explain that there will likely be silent pauses in place of audible listening cues, so there is no need to await those signals to continue speaking

- assure participants that no names will be used in reporting

- ask for desired pseudonyms, if needed

» Take questions from participants

» Express thanks on behalf of the college

FACILITATING THE DISCUSSION

As covered earlier, the Facilitator should be intimately aware—if not the creator—of the protocol that will be used to steer the discussion. Having this familiarity will better prepare the Facilitator to ensure that the learning objectives of the project are met and to improvise when the conversation veers off into tangents.

The main priorities of the Facilitator during the discussion will be to maintain objectivity, keep the conversation going, ensure everyone's voices are heard, and stay consistent across groups.

In addition, though the discussion should be recorded for accurate reporting, the Coordinator can take notes of conversation highlights and informal polls during the discussion.

It is important that the Facilitator remains steadfastly impartial and silent when participants are speaking, regardless of any inaccuracies they may be sharing or any criticisms they may have about the college. Accurate information can be volunteered after the conversation ends if the Facilitator feels it is in the best interest of the participants—not the college—to do so. To help ensure impartiality, the ideal Facilitator would not be well-versed about the discussion topic.

✔

→ Follow the discussion outline and activities 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—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.

✖

→ Try to guide the participants to their own conclusions.

→ Share personal opinions 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 they mean.)

→ Interpret participants' comments for the group.

→ Give answers to participants' questions.

Acting on Focus Groups

The first step in reviewing the focus group findings is compiling the demographic data that participants provided during the intake process. These data can be included in a summary report to illustrate the diversity of participants.

Mining the focus group footage, recordings, and/or transcripts for participant comments that speak directly to the topic being explored is also an essential step in the process. It is important to highlight voices from different populations and with varying opinions in the summary report to present a complete picture of perceptions around the topic. *See **Appendix G** for an example report.*

The entire focus group process—planning, conducting, and responding—is part of a larger cycle of data collection, assessment, and institutional improvement. It is one that goes hand-in-hand with gathering insights from CCCSE surveys that countless community colleges have utilized.

Plan Data Collection

Registration/Preparation for CCCSE surveys typically begins about six months before the survey administration.

Administer Surveys

⇢ *CCSSE* & *DESSE*: spring term

⇢ *SENSE*: fall term

⇢ Race/Ethnicity: add-on to any survey; administration window is flexible.

Learn more about the surveys.

Receive Data

Results are released 3–5 months after the administration is complete.

Identify Areas for Further Exploration

Review survey data related to institutional goals and initiatives around student success. Focus on areas in which data point to a need for further exploration.

Conduct Focus Groups

Using this manual as a guide, conduct focus groups to provide context to the data findings.

Implement Improvement Efforts

Use CCCSE survey data, other institutional data, and focus group findings to guide policy, practice, and program changes.

Repeat the Cycle

Participate in CCCSE surveys every two to three years and conduct focus groups to measure the effectiveness of the improvement efforts.

Since 2001, CCCSE has become one of the leading amplifiers of community college student voices. The focus group work that has always been conducted alongside the survey research provides a deeper glimpse into the experiences of this significant but often overlooked population in higher education. Community colleges serve students who are diverse in every way, and many bring significant challenges with them to college. However, they tend to come to college with high aspirations and hopes of finishing what they start. Whether they are attending college to better their own lives, to better their children's or parents' lives, or to better their communities—it is the charge of everyone involved in these institutions and in the field to help them be successful.

CCCSE created—and has vastly expanded upon—this manual and its accompanying resources with that mission in mind. This **Focus Group Toolkit** is the result of over two decades of CCCSE research and countless hours of intently listening to students, faculty, and staff at colleges across the country.

Focus groups are a tool that can help us see beneath the data and learn firsthand how students are experiencing college. Once we fully understand the student experience that is driving the survey results, we can focus improvement efforts strategically and with the student voice at the forefront.

Contact **info@cccse.org** with questions.

Appendix

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

These templates should be modified to best meet the needs of the institution.

A.   Room Set-Up

B.   Recording Guidelines

C.   Consent Form Templates
- Students
- Faculty
- Student Services Staff

D.   Sample Intake Survey Items
- Students
- Faculty
- Student Services Staff

E.   Invitation E-mail Templates
- Students
- Faculty
- Student Services Staff

F.   Sample Discussion Guide Questions
- Students
- Faculty
- Student Services Staff

G.   Sample Focus Group Report

APPENDIX A

ROOM SETUP

The focus group room should be located in a quiet, private place, such as a minimally decorated classroom or photography studio. It should be large enough to accommodate six to nine participants, as well as the Focus Group Facilitator, Focus Group Coordinator, video and/or sound operators, materials, and possibly refreshments (those could be placed in a separate area). Regardless of the recording option chosen, the seating arrangement in the room should mimic a crescent shape so that the Facilitator can see/hear all participants and participants can see/hear each other during the discussion.

*For more descriptive guidelines on how to prepare for the focus group or to setup the physical space, see **Appendix B**.*
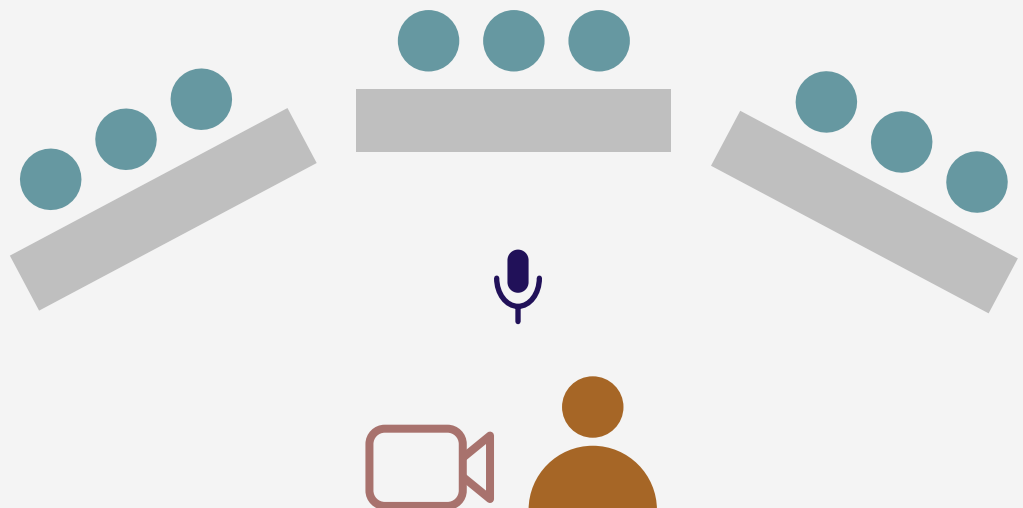
Option 1

Multiple microphones used in front of participants.
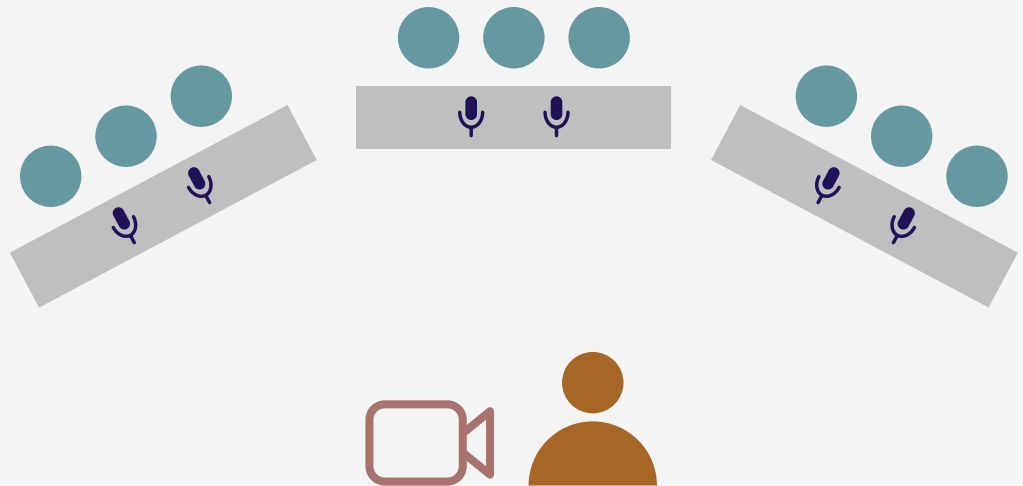
Option 2

One omni-directional microphone in the center of the room.

Note: A sound operator with a boom mic can be used instead.

RECORDING GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are intended to assist colleges in achieving consistent, high-quality quotes and/or video clips from focus group sessions through audio and/or video recording.

General

» It is helpful to use table tents or name cards (first name only) to identify participants for the Facilitator. If recording video, place them at floor level in front of participants' feet.

» All equipment should be tested in advance to ensure high-quality recordings.

Audio

» The room should be as quiet as possible. Sensitive microphones will pick up any background noise and make it difficult to achieve the desired quality.
   ○ Avoid loud air conditioning systems and nearby distracting noises.
   ○ All chairs should be stationary to minimize noise and movement.
   ○ Ask participants to silence their mobile devices and not place them on the tables.
   ○ Ask participants to place water bottles on the floor.

» The Facilitator should instruct participants to avoid interrupting one another so that that microphones and/or the camera operator can clearly capture complete statements.

» Choose and position microphones accordingly (*see **Appendix A** for a visual of the options*).
   ○ Option 1, place table microphones as close as possible to the people talking—one microphone placed equidistant between each individual should work well—so that the sound levels are as equal as possible for each participant. Warn participants to not touch or move microphones during the discussion.
   ○ Option 2, place an omnidirectional microphone in the center of the room. This option will not produce as close a "presence" as microphones placed closer to the participants, but the sound will be adequate. If possible, using a boom mic operator will provide the most ideal audio for video clips.

Video

» The room should be nondescript. Remove any distracting elements or décor.

» If using a photography studio, avoid using a black curtain/backdrop—lighter colors are better.

» When possible, do not solely rely on the room's overhead lighting. Utilize supplemental light sources and photography equipment if available.

» The camera should be positioned next to the Facilitator (*as shown in **Appendix A***) so that all individuals around the table can be seen in multiple ways—through full-face shots as participants look at the camera, profile shots as they look toward each other, and wide shots or group shots that are helpful to establish the scene.

» 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.

» When opportunities arise, the camera operator can record reaction shots of each participant to provide adequate footage for the editing process.

» The camera operator should attempt to record complete statements. The Facilitator can help by soliciting complete statements. (Generally, Facilitator questions should not be heard on the edited video segments.)

» The Facilitator should, when possible, solicit responses systematically around the table (e.g., left to right) 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.

CONSENT FORM TEMPLATES

Appendix C.1 **Students**	Appendix C.2 **Faculty**	Appendix C.3 **Staff**

Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not participate or to withdraw 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 anything possible to help students be successful. The purpose of conducting student focus groups is to learn about your experiences at [Name of College] and to hear your thoughts about what the college is doing well and what needs improvement to help you and other students be successful and achieve your goals. [INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]

The focus group discussion will be audio recorded [and captured on video]. Excerpts from the focus group may be used in presentations and publications to further the educational goals of [Name of College]. 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. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants.

Students who participate will be asked to complete an intake survey before the discussion begins. The entire focus group session will last approximately [measure of time].

[IF APPLICABLE] **Each student will receive [stipend amount] for their participation in the focus group.**

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

[INSERT any additional information as required by college's IRB process]

If you have any questions about this project, please contact [INSERT Focus Group Coordinator name and contact info].

[IF APPLICABLE] You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

I, _____, a student at _____, am 18 years of age or
    Your Name (please print)   *Your Institution's Name*

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

_____

Participant's Signature   *Date*

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM TEMPLATES

| Appendix C.1 **Students** | Appendix C.2 **Faculty** | Appendix C.3 **Staff** |

Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not participate or to withdraw at any time, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with **[Name of College]**.

[Name of College] is committed to doing anything possible 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 is being done well and what needs to be done to improve student success. **[INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]**

The focus group discussion will be audio recorded **[and captured on video]**. Excerpts from the focus group may be used in presentations and publications to further the educational goals of **[Name of College]**. 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. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants.

Faculty members who participate will be asked to complete an intake survey before the discussion begins. The entire focus group session will last approximately [measure of time]**.**

[Name of College] is required to obtain a signed consent form from every faculty member participating in this focus group project. **By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the project.**

[INSERT any additional information as required by college's IRB process, if applicable]

If you have any questions about this project, please contact **[INSERT Focus Group Coordinator name and contact info]**.

[IF APPLICABLE] You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

I, _____, a faculty member at _____, have read and
Your Name (please print)   *Your Institution's Name*

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

_____
Participant's Signature   *Date*

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM TEMPLATES

Appendix C.1	Appendix C.2	Appendix C.3
Students	**Faculty**	**Staff**

Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not participate or to withdraw at any time, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with [Name of College].

[Name of College] is committed to doing anything possible 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 is being done well and what needs to be done to improve student success. [INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]

The focus group discussion will be audio recorded [and captured on video]. Excerpts from the focus group may be used in presentations and publications to further the educational goals of [Name of College]. 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. All written publications and reports will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify individual participants.

Employees who participate will be asked to complete an intake survey before the discussion begins. The entire focus group session will last approximately [measure of time]**.**

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

[INSERT any additional information as required by college's IRB process, if applicable]

If you have any questions about this project, please contact [INSERT Focus Group Coordinator name and contact info].

[IF APPLICABLE] You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

I, _____, an employee at _____, have read and
      Your Name (please print)   *Your Institution's Name*

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

_____

Participant's Signature   *Date*

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE INTAKE SURVEY ITEMS

The following is a selection of questions colleges may wish to ask of their student focus group participants. Please note that the college may wish to adjust these items as appropriate.

Appendix D.1 **Students**	Appendix D.2 **Faculty**	Appendix D.3 **Staff**

ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

The information shared on this form will be used in coding focus group responses.

» Mark your age group.
  ○ Under 18
  ○ 18–19
  ○ 20–21
  ○ 22–24
  ○ 25–29
  ○ 30–39
  ○ 40–49
  ○ 50–64
  ○ 65+

» What is your racial or ethnic identification? *(Mark all that apply)*
  ○ American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, or Alaska Native
  ○ Asian
  ○ Black or African American
  ○ Hispanic or Latino
  ○ Native Hawaiian
  ○ Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian)
  ○ White
  ○ Another racial or ethnic identification: _____
  ○ I prefer not to respond

» Are you an international student?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

» Mark your gender identity.
  ○ Man
  ○ Woman
  ○ Transgender man/trans man/female-to-male (FTM)
  ○ Transgender woman/trans woman/male-to-female (MTF)
  ○ Genderqueer/gender nonconforming neither exclusively male nor female
  ○ I prefer to self-identify: _____
  ○ I prefer not to respond

» What is the highest academic credential you have earned?
  ○ None
  ○ High School Diploma
  ○ GED
  ○ Vocational/Technical Certificate
  ○ Associate Degree
  ○ Bachelor's Degree
  ○ Master's/Doctoral/Professional Degree

» Who in your family has attended at least some college? *(Mark all that apply)*
  ○ Mother
  ○ Father
  ○ Brother/Sister
  ○ Spouse/Partner
  ○ Child
  ○ Legal Guardian
  ○ None of the Above

» Did you enroll in college immediately after high school?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

» Is this the first college you have attended or did you begin college elsewhere?
  ○ Started here
  ○ Started elsewhere

» Is this your first academic term at this college?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No
     » If not, how many academic terms have you been enrolled (including this one)?
     _____

» Are you currently enrolled full time or part time at this college?
  ○ Full time
  ○ Part time

» How many TOTAL credit hours are you enrolled in this term?
  ○ 3 or fewer
  ○ 4–6
  ○ 7–14
  ○ 15 or more

» While in high school, which of the following courses did you take? *(Mark 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

» While in high school, which of the following tests did you take? *(Mark all that apply)*
- PSAT
- SAT
- ACT
- College placement test
- Other (please specify) _____
- I did not take any of the tests listed above

» Are you eligible for financial assistance (loans, grants, scholarships)?
- Yes
- No
- Don't know

    » 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

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

        _____
        _____
        _____

» Are you married?
- Yes
- No

» Are you employed?
- Yes
- No

    » If yes, how many hours do you work each week?
    - 1–5 hours
    - 6–10 hours
    - 11–20 hours
    - 21–30 hours
    - More than 30 hours

» Do you have children or other dependents living at home with you?
- Yes
- No

    » 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.
    - I do not currently have child care, but I need it.
    - My children do not require child care.

» Are you a current or former member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

» Is English your native (first) language?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

» Do you plan to enroll in classes at this college next term?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No
  ○ I do not know

» Do you plan to enroll in classes at another college next term?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No
  ○ I do not know

» At this college, in what range is your overall college grade point average (GPA)?
  ○ A
  ○ B
  ○ C
  ○ D or lower
  ○ I do not have a GPA at this college

SAMPLE INTAKE SURVEY ITEMS

The following is a selection of questions colleges may wish to ask of their faculty focus group participants. Please note that the college may wish to adjust these items as appropriate.

Appendix D.1 **Students**	Appendix D.2 **Faculty**	Appendix D.3 **Staff**

ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

The information shared on this form will be used in coding focus group responses.

» Mark your gender identity.
- Man
- Woman
- Transgender man/trans man/female-to-male (FTM)
- Transgender woman/trans woman/male-to-female (MTF)
- Genderqueer/gender nonconforming neither exclusively male nor female
- I prefer to self-identify: _____
- I prefer not to respond

» What is your age group?
- 24 or under
- 25 to 29
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 49
- 50 to 64
- 65 or more

» What is your racial or ethnic identification? *(Mark all that apply)*
- American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian
- Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian)
- White
- Another racial or ethnic identification: _____
- I prefer not to respond

» How many years of teaching experience do you have at any college/university, not including graduate teaching assistant positions?
  ○ I am a first-year instructor
  ○ 1 to 4 years
  ○ 5 to 9 years
  ○ 10 to 19 years
  ○ 20 to 29 years
  ○ 30 to 39 years
  ○ 40 years or more

» What is your employment status at this college?
  ○ Full-time
  ○ Part-time

  » In which department do you teach?
  _____

» During the current academic term, how many credit hours do you teach at this college (not counting overload)?
  ○ 1 to 3
  ○ 4 to 6
  ○ 7 to 9
  ○ 10 to 12
  ○ 13 to 15
  ○ 16 to 18
  ○ More than 18

» What is your current tenure status?
  ○ Tenured
  ○ On tenure track, but not tenured
  ○ Not on tenure track, although this institution has a tenure system
  ○ No tenure system at this institution

» Which of the following best describes your academic rank, title, or current position at this college?
  ○ Professor
  ○ Associate Professor
  ○ Assistant Professor
  ○ Instructor
  ○ Lecturer
  ○ Other (please specify) _____

» What is the highest academic credential you have earned?
  ○ First professional degree (e.g., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., D.V.M.)
  ○ Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)
  ○ Master's degree
  ○ Bachelor's Degree
  ○ Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX | *Focus Group Manual*

D—Sample Intake Survey Items

» Where are you employed outside of this college? *(Mark all that apply)*
- ○ Self-employed
- ○ Other college(s) in teaching position
- ○ Other college(s) in non-teaching position
- ○ Full-time non-academic position
- ○ Part-time non-academic position
- ○ Work related to my teaching field at this college
- ○ Not employed elsewhere

» What is the average number of students enrolled in your courses during the current academic term at this college?
- ○ Fewer than 10
- ○ 10 to 19
- ○ 20 to 29
- ○ 30 to 39
- ○ 40 to 69
- ○ 70 or more

» During the current academic term, how many online courses do you teach at this college?
- ○ 1 online course
- ○ 2 online courses
- ○ 3 online courses
- ○ 4 or more online courses
- ○ I do not teach any online courses

» During the current academic term, how many hybrid/blended courses do you teach at this college?
- ○ 1 hybrid/blended course
- ○ 2 hybrid/blended courses
- ○ 3 hybrid/blended courses
- ○ 4 or more hybrid/blended courses
- ○ I do not teach any hybrid/blended courses

» During the current academic term, do you teach honors courses at this college?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

» During the current academic term, do you teach developmental/remedial courses at this college?
- ○ Yes, I teach ONLY developmental courses
- ○ Yes, I teach BOTH developmental and college-level courses
- ○ No, I teach ONLY college-level courses

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE INTAKE SURVEY ITEMS

The following is a selection of questions colleges may wish to ask of their staff focus group participants. Please note that the college may wish to adjust these items as appropriate.

Appendix D.1 **Students**	Appendix D.2 **Faculty**	Appendix D.3 **Staff**

ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

The information shared on this form will be used in coding focus group responses.

» Mark your gender identity.
  ○ Man
  ○ Woman
  ○ Transgender man/trans man/female-to-male (FTM)
  ○ Transgender woman/trans woman/male-to-female (MTF)
  ○ Genderqueer/gender nonconforming neither exclusively male nor female
  ○ I prefer to self-identify: _____
  ○ I prefer not to respond

» What is your age group?
  ○ 24 or under
  ○ 25 to 29
  ○ 30 to 39
  ○ 40 to 49
  ○ 50 to 64
  ○ 65 or more

» What is your racial or ethnic identification? *(Mark all that apply)*
  ○ American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, or Alaska Native
  ○ Asian
  ○ Black or African-American
  ○ Hispanic or Latino
  ○ Native Hawaiian
  ○ Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian)
  ○ White
  ○ Another racial or ethnic identification: _____
  ○ I prefer not to respond

» How many years have you been employed at this college?
- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1 to 4 years
- ○ 5 to 9 years
- ○ 10 to 19 years
- ○ 20 to 29 years
- ○ 30 to 39 years
- ○ 40 or more years

» What is your employment status at this college?
- ○ Full-time
- ○ Part-time

» Please indicate your area of responsibility. *(Mark all that apply)*
- ○ Academic Advising and Planning
- ○ Academic Support
- ○ Admissions and/or Registration
- ○ College Orientation or Student Success Course
- ○ Counseling
- ○ Financial Aid
- ○ Institutional Research/Institutional Effectiveness
- ○ Student Activities
- ○ Other (please specify) _____

» In your role as a staff member at this college, do you interact directly with students?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

INVITATION EMAIL TEMPLATES

Appendix E.1 **Students**	Appendix E.2 **Faculty**	Appendix E.3 **Staff**

Ideal Timing: Approximately 2–3 weeks in advance of the focus group

---

New Message

To: [student email address]

Cc: [if applicable]

Subject: Invitation: Student Focus Group at [Name of College]

Dear [Name]:

Your success as a student at [Name of College] is very important to us. As such, 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. [INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]

To learn about your experiences at [Name of College] and hear your opinions, **we invite you to participate in a [measure of time] group discussion** with six to nine [or alternative number] other students. As a token of our appreciation for your participation, **you will receive [stipend amount]**.

Details on the group discussion are as follows:

DATE: [insert info]

TIME: [insert info]

PLACE: [insert info]

Refreshments will be provided.

The success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of those who attend. To confirm your attendance, **please respond to this email by [date that is approximately seven days in advance of the focus group].**

Sincerely,

[Focus Group Coordinator signature]

Send

INVITATION EMAIL TEMPLATES

Appendix E.1 **Students**	Appendix E.2 **Faculty**	Appendix E.3 **Staff**

Ideal Timing: Approximately 2–3 weeks in advance of the focus group

---

New Message   — ⌞⌝ ✕

To: [faculty email address]

Cc: [if applicable]

Subject: Invitation: Faculty Focus Group at [Name of College]

Dear [Name]:

Student success at [Name of College] is very important to us. As such, 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. [INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]

To learn about your experiences at [Name of College] and hear your opinions, **we invite you to participate in a [measure of time] group discussion** with six to nine [or alternative number] other faculty members.

Details on the group discussion are as follows:

    DATE: [insert info]

    TIME: [insert info]

    PLACE: [insert info]

    Refreshments will be provided.

The success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of those who attend. To confirm your attendance, **please respond to this email by [date that is approximately seven days in advance of the focus group].**

Sincerely,

[Focus Group Coordinator signature]

Send

INVITATION EMAIL TEMPLATES

Appendix E.1	Appendix E.2	Appendix E.3
Students	**Faculty**	**Staff**

Ideal Timing: Approximately 2–3 weeks in advance of the focus group

---

New Message — ⌐ ✕

To: [employee email address]

Cc: [if applicable]

Subject: Invitation: Staff Focus Group at [Name of College]

Dear [Name]:

Student success at [Name of College] is very important to us. As such, the college is interested in hearing perspectives from student services staff regarding college policies and practices that influence persistence and help students achieve their academic goals. [INSERT more details about the college's project/focus area if desired]

To learn about your experiences at [Name of College] and hear your opinions, **we invite you to participate in a [measure of time] group discussion** with six to nine [or alternative number] other staff members.

Details on the group discussion are as follows:

DATE: [insert info]

TIME: [insert info]

PLACE: [insert info]

Refreshments will be provided.

The success and quality of our discussion will depend on the full participation of those who attend. To confirm your attendance, **please respond to this email by [date that is approximately seven days in advance of the focus group].**

Sincerely,

[Focus Group Coordinator signature]

Send

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

What follows are sample focus group discussion questions that can be used to collect information from students about their experiences at college.

You will first want to ask some introductory questions such as 1) their major or pathway of study, 2) how many credit hours they have accrued, 3) their enrollment status, 4) their educational goals (e.g., degree, certificate, transfer, job skills, etc.), and 5) other basic information pertaining to the topic being explored.

Appendix F.1 **Students**	Appendix F.2 **Faculty**	Appendix F.3 **Staff**

1. Tell us how you would complete this sentence: "The very first time I came to this college, I felt _____."

2. Without naming names, are there particular individuals you remember meeting when you first arrived? Students? Faculty? Other college staff? How did you meet them? What were your impressions of the people you met?

3. Of the individuals you met with, were there representatives of particular offices who did a particularly good job of providing the information you needed? Advisor? Financial aid staff member? Faculty? Other students? Other? What made your contact with them helpful?

4. Were there representatives of particular offices who were not effective in providing you with the information you needed? Advisor? Financial aid staff member? Faculty? Other students? Other? What about your contact with them was not helpful?

5. Did you participate in any type of session or class designed to help you get started at the college? (Orientation)? Face-to-face? Online? If so, was it required or optional? How long was it (hours/days/academic term)? Did you find it helpful? What did you learn? If it was helpful, in what ways? If not, why not? If you did not participate in any type of orientation session, do you believe that would have been of value to you? What would you have wanted from that session?

6. Did you enroll in any other specific classes or programs that you were told would be particularly helpful for new students?

7. On a scale of one to five, with one being the easiest and five being the most difficult, how would you rate the ease or difficulty of registering for classes? Explain your answer.

8. During the process of registering for classes, did you ever consider walking out the door and not attending this college? If so, why? What made you stay?

9. As you think back to your early experiences at this college, is there anything you wish you had known before you came to campus to enroll and register?

10. Think back to your first week here and the people you met in class and outside of class. Who in the college knew your name at the end of the first week?

Appendix F.1
Students

Appendix F.2
Faculty

Appendix F.3
Staff

11. Before you registered for your first classes, did you meet with an advisor? If so, was it required or optional? Did you meet with an advisor face-to-face? Online? If online, did you have any personal contact as well? Required?

12. What was the nature of your conversation with the first advisor you met with? Academic and career planning? Goal setting? Discussion of your academic strengths and challenges? Choosing a program or major? Course selection? Other?

13. Did anyone work with you to set goals? Have you laid out a plan for your time at school? Have you declared a major? Do you have a plan for earning your degree or certificate or for taking the classes that you need to transfer?

14. Since you first came to this college, have you been assigned to a particular advisor? Is this the same person you met the first time? If you've declared a major, do you have an advisor in your program? Have you been to see an advisor – either in your program or a general advisor – since your initial advising session when you first arrived? Why or why not?

15. How would you rate the quality and usefulness of the advising you've received? Excellent? Good? Fair? Poor? Explain your response.

16. When did you decide to go to college? While in high school? After high school? Did you work for a while before deciding to return to school?

17. Before you came to this college for the first time, did you know that you might be able to receive financial help to go to college? If so, when and how did you learn about it?

18. Did you meet with a financial advisor when you first arrived on campus to start the college entry process? Why or why not? Were you required to do so?

19. Are you eligible for financial assistance? How do you know? Did you fill out any forms to determine whether you're eligible? If you don't know whether you're eligible, why haven't you investigated it?

20. Did you apply for financial assistance? If not, why not? If you think you might be eligible, why haven't you applied?

21. Have you received your financial assistance? If so, how long did it take from the time you began the process to the time you received the aid?

22. On a scale of one to five with one being the easiest and five being the most difficult, how would you rate the ease or difficulty of going through the financial aid process?

23. How would you rate the quality and usefulness of the financial aid advising you received? Excellent? Good? Fair? Poor? Explain your response.

24. Is there anything you wish you had known about getting financial assistance before you arrived on campus for the first time?

25. Why did you decide to go to college?

26. Did anyone urge you to go to college? Parents? Friends? High school teachers or counselors?

27. Why did you select a community college?

28. What were your goals when you started college? What did you hope to gain because of your college experience?

29. Have your goals changed since you've been in college? What are they now? What caused your goals to change?

30. Tell us how you would complete this sentence: "This college is like a _____." Tell us more about your response.

31. In your opinion, what are the college's strengths?

32. In your opinion, what are the college's weaknesses?

33. How good a job do you think the college is doing in helping you achieve your educational goals?

34. What responsibilities or activities do you have outside of school? (job, family, other)

35. How do these responsibilities/activities affect your ability to stay in school? Attend class? Keep up with your assignments? Study outside of class? Fulfill any other school responsibilities?

36. Does the college offer any support services to help you with your nonacademic responsibilities? If so, what are they?

37. If so, have you used any of those services? What, if anything, was helpful to you? Describe your experience using those services.

38. If the college does not offer any such support services, what type of services would you like to see?

39. What type of programs, offices, or services does the college offer to help you reach your academic goals? (Academic advisors, peer mentors, tutors, skill labs, etc.)
    ○ How many have used each of the services you have listed?
    ○ Of the services you have used, describe your experience (helpful, not helpful)

40. Are there additional programs or services that you would like to see the college offer that you believe would help you academically?

41. How are you paying for your education?

42. What type of financial aid are you receiving? Is it adequate?

43. What type of financial support services does the college provide?

44. Have you used the services? If so, describe how the experience went. If not, why not?

45. Describe how the cost of college influences or affects your decision to attend.

46. What additional financial support services would you like the college to provide?

47. We'd like to hear about the types of classroom experiences you are having, what experiences you get the most out of and what types of experiences aren't as helpful to you.

   ○ How often do you ask questions in class or contribute to class discussion? Every class? Sometimes? Never?

   ○ How often are you expected to make a class presentation during a typical academic term? More than four times per academic term? Between one and four? Never?

   ○ How many of you work on class projects with other students during class? Frequently? Sometimes? Never?

   ○ Do you work with other students on class projects outside of class? More than four times per academic term? Between one and four times per academic term? Never?

   ○ Think about a class you struggled with. How would you describe it? What made it tough for you? Did you talk with your instructor about the difficulty you were having? What was their response?

   ○ Think about a class where you really did well. How would you describe it? What made it work for you?

   ○ In general, are most of your classes like the first one you described – the one you struggled with – or like the second class you described – the one in which you did well?

48. Think about an instructor who you would say is one of the best you have had. What are the qualities or characteristics that individual has that help you learn? Style of teaching? Level of interaction with students? Availability to students outside of class? High expectations? Other?

49. In general, do you have contact with your instructors outside of class? When you contact an instructor, what kind of an issue are you usually contacting them about?

50. Online classes – For those who have taken online classes, describe your experience in accessing information presented in those classes and learning the content. What are the qualities or characteristics of the best online instructors you have had?

51. Have you missed any classes this academic term? If so, why? How many? If so, did you hear from your instructor or anyone else about those missed classes? Describe the conversation you had with that individual.

52. So far, for each of your classes, how much time per week are you spending studying (reading, completing assignments, practicing, reviewing notes, etc.) outside of class? Is it enough to help you complete your work and feel prepared? Do you feel you need help prioritizing and balancing schoolwork with other commitments you have? Have you had any experiences at the college that help you develop time management skills?

53. Do you know how well you're doing in your classes? If so, how do you know? Did your instructor give you that information or did you go to your instructor to find out? If you don't know how well you are doing, are you concerned about it? Do you plan to talk to your instructor?

54. When you think about your experience at this college outside of the time you spend in class, are there particular relationships you have developed here that come to mind?

55. Who are these relationships with? Other students? Instructors? Counselors? Academic advisors? Other staff members? Others?

56. How important would you say these relationships are to your success here? Which ones in particular? How are they important to you? Describe what impact they have on your success here (positive and negative).

57. If there are times when you have considered whether to continue attending this college, have any of those relationships have any impact on your decision? In what way(s)?

58. Describe a time or an experience you have had at the college that has not been favorable. In your opinion, how could the college have made this experience more positive?

59. What aspects of college cause you the most worry or stress?

60. What advice would you give the college about one or two things the college could do to help students succeed?

61. In your opinion, what does the college do well that helps you stay in school?

62. What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to this college?

SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

What follows are sample focus group discussion questions that can be used to collect information from faculty about their interactions with students.

You will first want to ask some introductory questions such as 1) how long they've taught (at this college and elsewhere), 2) their teaching discipline, 3) whether they teach full time or part time, and 4) other basic information pertaining to the topic being explored.

Appendix F.1 **Students**	Appendix F.2 **Faculty**	Appendix F.3 **Staff**

1. Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective student coming on to the college campus for the first time. Through the eyes of that student, complete the sentence, "This college is like a..." Please explain your response.

2. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge your students face in achieving their academic goals?

3. In your opinion, what is the greatest strength your students bring with them to college? 8.

4. Do you see differences in needs and expectations of students based on age, gender, socioeconomic factors, college readiness, learning styles, etc.? Please describe.

5. What is the greatest challenge you face in meeting your students' varying needs and expectations?

6. What do you believe is the single most important factor that helps students remain in school and achieve their educational goals?

7. At this college, what role do faculty play in advising students? How much of your time would you say you spend advising students? Do you believe you should be spending more or less time advising students? Explain your answer.

8. 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?

9. What are your expectations for your students' performance? In what ways do you communicate those expectations?

10. Does this college have any kind of an "early alert" referral system in place between faculty and student services so that contact is made with students who miss class during the first three weeks (more or less)– either by faculty or by advisors? If so, describe. In that system, what's working well and what isn't having the desired outcome? If you do not have an early alert system, what, if anything, would get in the way of putting a system like that in place?

11. Think back to the beginning of this academic term and the first couple of times your classes met. How did you get started with students at the beginning of the academic term? What information did you give them? What, if any, activities did you engage them in?

12. 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?

13. Describe one of your typical classes. 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?

14. To what extent do you build additional academic support into your curriculum – supplemental instruction, tutoring (face-to-face or online), skill labs, etc.

15. In general, to what degree do you maintain contact with students outside of class? In what ways? Text? E-mail? Through course management software (Blackboard, etc.)? Informally on campus? Other? How often? For what purposes? How responsive are students to contact you initiate? What percentage of your students would you say initiate contact with you?

16. In what ways do you make efforts to make connections for students outside of class? With other students? With college programs and activities? With support services? Other?

17. When is the first time within the academic term that you give students feedback on their performance? In what ways do you provide that feedback?

18. As you consider the diverse needs and experiences of your students, how prepared do you feel to teach to their various learning styles and proficiency levels? Please explain your answer.

19. What, if any, faculty learning opportunities does the college offer to help you increase your knowledge and skills so you can more effectively address your students' diverse needs and experiences? Is there any specific type of learning opportunity you would like the college to offer faculty?

20. From your perspective, what key initiatives are having the greatest impact on student persistence, learning and ultimate success? How do you know? Why do you think the initiatives you listed are successful? Does your college regularly use data to assess the progress and effectiveness of these initiatives?

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

What follows are sample focus group discussion questions that can be used to collect information from student services staff about their interactions with students.

You will first want to ask some introductory questions such as 1) how long worked at the college 2) their area of responsibility, and 3) other basic information pertaining to the topic being explored.

| Appendix F.1 **Students**	Appendix F.2 **Faculty**	Appendix F.3 **Staff**

1. Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective student coming on to the college campus for the first time. Through the eyes of that student, complete the sentence, "This college is like a..." Please explain your response.

2. From your perspective, describe the experience for entering students, including admissions and registration process, assessment, academic and financial aid advising, etc. What are the strengths of that process? How do you know? What are the areas in need of improvement? How do you know?

3. What components of the entering student process are required? Which ones are optional?

4. On a scale of one to five, with one being easiest and five being difficult, how do you think your new students would rate their experience with your college's front-door processes? Explain your answer.

5. How would you describe the students at this college? Their academic goals? Their challenges? What helps or hinders their success at the college (such as job, family responsibilities, financial situation, lack of preparedness, other?)

6. How would you describe your students' expectations when they first enter the college?

7. Do you see differences in needs and expectations of students based on age, gender, socioeconomic factors, college readiness, learning styles, etc.? Please describe.

8. What is the greatest challenge you face in meeting your students' varying needs and expectations?

9. What do you believe is the single most important factor that helps students remain in college and achieve their educational goals?

10. In what ways do you address the challenge of providing consistent, accurate, current information to students as they go through the testing, advising, planning, financial aid, and registration processes?

11. From your perspective, what key initiatives are having the greatest impact on student persistence, learning, and ultimate success? How do you know? Why do you think the initiatives you listed are successful? Does your college regularly use data to assess the progress and effectiveness of these initiatives?

12. Within community colleges, we lose the greatest percentage of our students during the first academic term of college and between the first and second academic terms. What do you know about the numbers of students who registered for classes and who are still there on the census date? Does your college track that information? What do you know about the numbers of students who register, but never show up for class?

13. Do you have any kind of an "early alert" referral system in place with faculty so that contact is made with students who miss class during the first three weeks (more or less) – either by faculty or by advisors? If so, describe. In that system, what's working well and what isn't having the desired outcome? If you do not have an early alert system what, if anything, would get in the way of putting a system like that in place?

14. Do you conduct exit interviews with students who decide to drop out of college?

15. When we ask students in interviews and focus groups about factors that help them stay on track to achieve their academic goals, they inevitably talk about the individuals they have met and the relationships they have formed at the college. When you consider the initiatives you have already talked about that are designed to improve the student experience and/or increase student retention, learning, and attainment, do you see relationship-building opportunities incorporated into those? If so, in what ways? Are there other intentional actions the college is taking to build and support relationships among students, between students and faculty, between students and staff? If so, please describe them.

16. Considering the multiple time commitments of many community college students, in what ways can student services realistically create opportunities for students to develop relationships with other students and with student services staff?

17. Do you require anything of students who choose to drop a class? Instructor signature? Meeting with advisor? Anything else? If not, have you ever considered that? What, if anything, would get in the way of making that happen?

18. What, if any, training opportunities does the college offer to help you increase your knowledge and skills so you can work more effectively to strengthen student engagement?

19. Is there any specific type of professional development opportunity you would like the college to offer student services staff?

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP REPORT
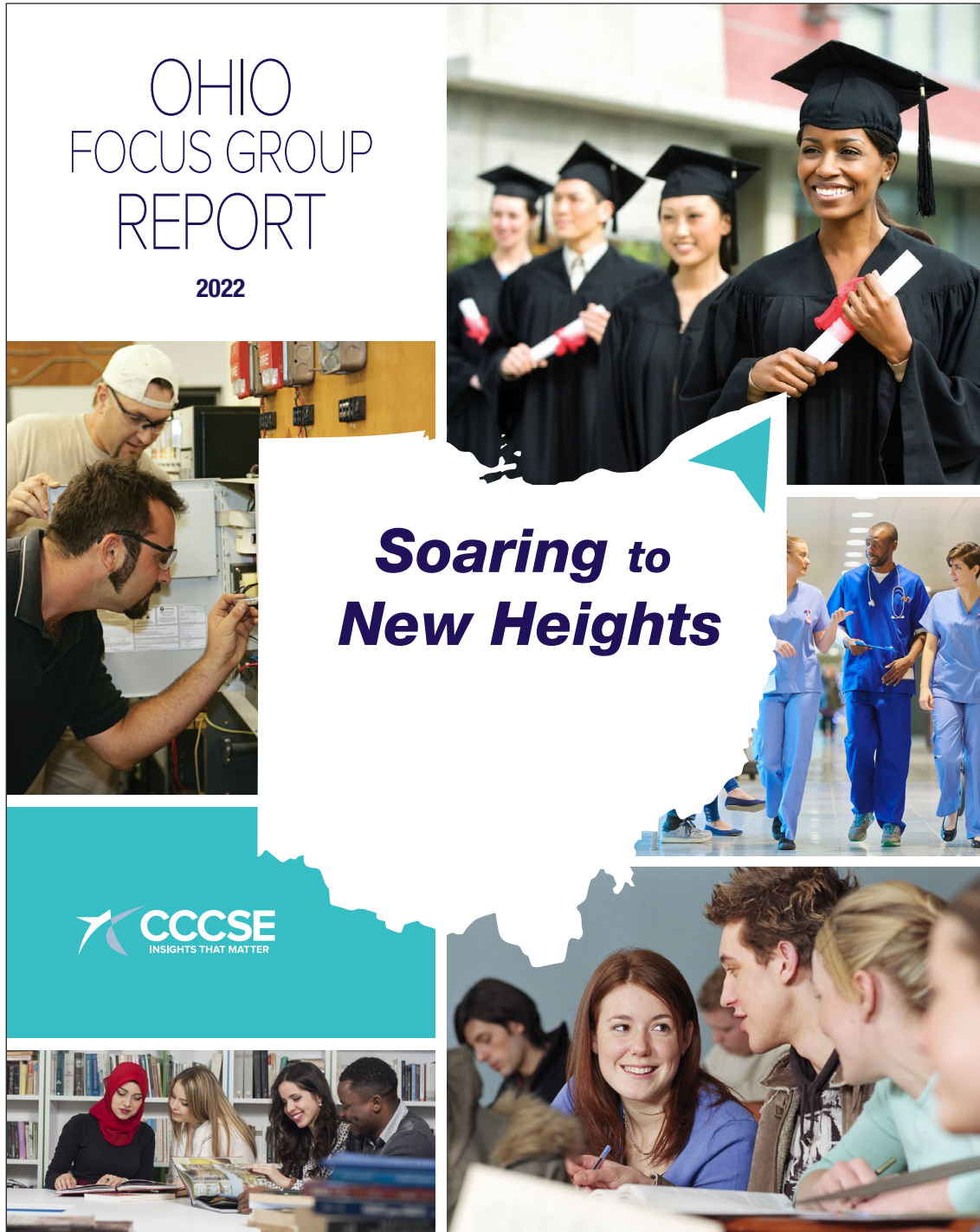
See sample: *Ohio Focus Group Report: Soaring to New Heights*