

[Name of Four-Year Institution] Student Focus Group Protocol Latina/o Student Transfer

Possible Target Population/Groups

Latina/o students who intend to transfer

Focus Group Purpose

[Name of Institution] is conducting a series of focus groups with students and employees on our campus(es). Our objective is to build understanding of the kinds of experiences that [Latinas/os] who intend to transfer perceive are critical in the community college as well as the kinds of challenges they face. What we learn can be very helpful as [Name of Institution] works to serve its students more effectively.

Focus Group Outcomes

Outcome 1: Understand the factors that influence Latina/o students' decisions about pursuing a college education and their expectations for their college experience.

Outcome 2: Understand students' awareness and use of policies, programs and initiatives at two- and four-year institutions related to student transfer.

Outcome 3: Understand what works or what doesn't at two- and four-year institutions to support student transfer.

Focus Group Outline

Each focus group will comprise the following activities:

- Meeting overview
- Consent forms
- Participant introductions
- Questionnaires (e.g., demographics forms, survey items, etc.)
- Discussion
- Summary
- Thanks (and stipends, if used as incentives)

Approximate Total Time 75-90 minutes

Focus Group Prompts (Pre-Discussion)

1. **Introduce facilitator:** Hello, my name is [Name of Facilitator]. I work for [Name of Institution].
2. **Explain purpose of focus group:** "[Name of Institution] is interested in learning more about your reasons for pursuing a college education, your academic goals, and your perceptions about experiences that help you to achieve your community college goals."

3. **Explain desired outcomes and how information gathered will be used.** [Name of Institution] will prepare a report that captures your voices and major themes of this conversation. [List any additional ways the information will be used or disseminated]. However, you will not be identified by name.

NOTE: *At this time, the facilitator can read aloud the outcomes provided in this protocol.*

4. **Explain consent forms and request signatures:** Because we will be recording (and videotaping, if applicable) the focus group conversation, we are required to ask that you sign a form that stipulates your consent. Participation is absolutely voluntary.
5. **Describe facilitator role:** My role as facilitator is to:
 - ask questions and keep the group on track, and
 - explain that we'll be moving through the material fairly quickly, even though people might have more to say about a topic.
6. **Describe participants' role:** Each participant is expected to do the following:
 - share experiences and opinions, both positive and negative;
 - participate in discussion and fill out response forms as requested; and
 - offer advice to college leaders about steps they can take to promote Latina/o student engagement and transfer.
7. **Audio taping/videotaping/note-taking:**
 - Video and audio recording are for the purposes of gathering information to help [Name of Institution] make improvements in its processes for students; writing a report to the college; using video clips in presentations and workshops; and, if applicable, for college leaders to share with faculty and staff to help identify improvement strategies.
 - No names will be used in the report. If you are wearing a name tag or, or any other identifiers, please remove them.
8. **Logistics:**
 - 90 minutes maximum
 - Arrangements for water and restroom break
 - Other?
9. **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 your experiences at this college; what we learn will help not only this college but others as well to improve their work with students.
10. **Questions:** Now, are there any questions before we get started?
11. **Verify that all students fit the criteria established for the group:** Before we begin, I would like to verify that each participant meets the established criteria for this focus group. [All students must be over the age of 18. You may add additional criteria below as necessary.]
 - Is there anyone who is under the age of 18?

- [Do you identify as Latina or Latino?]
- [Do you intend to transfer?]

NOTE: *If someone does not fully meet the criteria or does not fit the target group for participation in the focus group, the facilitator should explain why s/he cannot participate, thank the student for his/her time and give the individual a gift card in appreciation, and courteously escort him/her from the room.*

- 12. Ensure that questionnaires and consent forms have been signed and submitted:**
Was there anyone who did not receive, complete, or submit a consent form or questionnaire? [Ensure that all have been submitted before continuing.]
- 13. Introduction of participants:** As we go around the room, I want each participant to state their name, number of credit hours earned, course of study, if determined, primary academic goal; and organizational affiliations, if any.

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Outcome 1: Understand the factors that influence Latina/o students' decisions about pursuing a college education and their expectations for their college experience.

- Q1: Why did you decide to start college at a community college? Location? Cost? A particular program? Other?** Did anyone urge you to start at a community college? If so, who? High school teachers or counselors? Family members? Friends? Other?
- Q2: When did you decide that you wanted to transfer? Before you started at the community college? While you attended the community college? What made you decide that you wanted to transfer to a four-year school?** Did any particular individuals influence your thinking about whether to transfer? Someone at the college? Friends? Family members? High school teachers or counselors? Others? What specifically did these individuals say or do that led to your decision to transfer?
- Q3: Think back to your experience at the community college before you transferred to this college/university. While at the community college, did anyone at the college help you put together a plan for the courses you needed to take at the community college before transferring?**

If yes, who helped you? Someone at the community college? Someone at this college/university? If someone at the college/university, how did you know with whom to meet at the college/university?

(If they answer No, then asked them who helped them. Family members? Community members? Friends? Other? Yourself? (If they put together the plan themselves, ask them how did they get the information to help you put together the plan?)

[NOTE: *We're hearing more often that students who have someone in their family who attended college are making use of online tools and information to put together their plans—poring through online catalogues, finding recommended course sequences, etc. It's worth asking about this.]*

- Q4:** Did you earn a degree or certificate at the community college before you transferred? If so, what degree or certificate did you earn? If not, how many credit hours did you complete at the community college before you transferred? If you did not earn a degree or certificate before you transferred, what led to your decision to transfer before earning the degree or certificate?
- Q5:** Why did you choose this college/university? Location? Cost? Academic reputation? A particular program? A family member or friend went to this college/university? Other?
- Q6:** Have you changed your major or your academic goals since you came to this college/university? If so, what (or who) caused you to change your mind? How long do you plan/expect to be here to reach your goals?
- Q7:** Once you transferred to this college/university, were there any surprises about the courses you needed for transfer? Did you receive credit at this college/university for everything that you expected to receive credit for? Did you find that the information you received about transfer at the community college was accurate? If not, what did you learn that was different from what you expected before you started classes at this college/university?
- Q8:** Think back to your time at the community college. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your satisfaction with the quality of the help you've received from your community college to help you prepare to transfer to a four-year college or university? (5 being extremely satisfied, and 1 being extremely unsatisfied) Explain your answer.
- Q9:** Now think about your experience at this college/university when you first transferred from the community college. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your satisfaction with the quality of the help you received at this college/university to help you successfully transfer to this institution. On a scale of 1–5, (5 being extremely satisfied, and 1 being extremely unsatisfied). Explain your answer.

Outcome 2: Understand students' awareness and use of policies, programs and initiatives at two- and four-year institutions related to student transfer.

- Q1:** While at the community college, was there a particular office or individual that you met with periodically about issues related to transferring? If so, who or which office? To your knowledge, did the college have a specific office or advisor who worked with students who wanted to transfer to a four-year college or university?
- Q2:** While at the community college, did you meet with anyone at your current college/university who helped you create a plan to transfer? If so, who was it? What was the person's role at the college/university?
- a. If yes, do you know whether your contact at the university talked with the individual who was advising you about transfer at the community college?
- Q3:** Since you transferred to this college/university, is there a particular office or individual you work with who advises you on issues related to your transfer? If so,

what office/individual do you work with? [**NOTE:** Answer might be the person's assigned advisor rather than someone whose specific role is to help transfer students. Listen for both. If the answer is that the student worked with a specific "transfer advisor or specialist," then ask the following:] Do you continue to work with this office or individual who advised you on transfer issues? [**NOTE:** You might want to know if the student is transitioned from a transfer specialist to a general advisor.]

- Q4:** While at the community college, were there particular programs, activities, or groups that you participated in that were specifically designed to help students transfer? Are there any that you've been told are specifically for those *Latina/o* students who plan to transfer?
- Q5:** When you first transferred to this college/university, were you encouraged to participate in any programs, activities, or groups that you were told were specifically for transfer students?
- Q6:** Now that you've been here awhile, are you currently participating in any transfer-related programs, activities, or groups at this college/university?

Outcome 3: Understand what works or what doesn't at two- and four-year institutions to support student transfer.

- Q1:** Now think about your experience at this college/university when you entered as a transfer student. How satisfied are you with your entering experience as a transfer student? On a scale of 1–5, (5 being extremely satisfied, and 1 being extremely unsatisfied). What worked for you in that process? What didn't work for you? What would have made it better?
- Q2:** Would you agree or disagree with the following statement: ("yes" or "no")
- "The community college I attended routinely created opportunities for transfer students to voice opinions about the transfer process and describe their own experiences."
 - "The college/university I attend routinely creates opportunities for transfer students to voice opinions about the transfer process and describe their own experiences."
- Q3:** **Advice to the community college:** When you think about your experiences at this community college as you've prepared to transfer to a four-year college/university, what experiences were most helpful to you as a *Latina/o* transfer student? Is there any additional help or support you wish the community college had offered you to help you prepare to transfer?
- Q4:** **Advice to the university:** When you think about your experiences when you first entered this college/university as a transfer student, what experiences were most helpful to you? Is there any additional help or support you wish this college/university had offered you to improve or streamline the transfer process?
- Q5:** **Advice to the student:** If you were giving advice to a friend who was planning to attend this college about what the student could do to be successful here, what advice would you give?

Summary & Close

- Q1:** At this point in your time in college, what aspects of college cause you the most worry or stress? What do you think the college/university could do to help alleviate your worry or stress about those issues?
- Q2:** Right now, what's the single most important factor that is keeping you moving toward success at this college?
- Q3:** On a scale of 1–5, (5 being extremely confident, and 1 being extremely unsure) how confident are you that you can stay and complete your academic goals? Explain your answer.
- Q4:** Thank you.
- Q5:** Ensure that consent forms have been collected (and hand out stipends, if used).