

# On Student Part-Timeness

## Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide



# On Student Part-Timeness: **SAMPLE** Faculty Focus Group Discussion Guide

*What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from faculty about their interaction with part-time students.*

*For supporting focus group materials such as recruitment tips, invitation e-mail templates, consent forms, profile sheets, and a comprehensive planning guide that outlines focus group staff roles and order of operations, visit <http://www.ccsse.org/focusgrouptoolkit>*

## **Outcomes for the Faculty Focus Group Discussion:**

- 1. Learn what institutional policies, practices, and processes help faculty promote student success.*
- 2. To better understand faculty perspectives about students attending community college part-time, including their perceptions on student participation patterns inside and outside of class and on factors influencing students' part-time status.*
- 3. To understand faculty perceptions of how long students think it will take to accomplish their academic goals.*
- 4. To understand how effectively faculty believe the college supports part-time students, and to identify steps the college could take to help faculty better support all students, particularly part-time students.*

## **The Focus Group Session**

### **A. Preparation**

As participants enter, the coordinator should

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

### **B. Overview of Focus Group Discussion**

As focus discussion begins, the facilitator should

- a. Introduce him/herself
- b. Explain purpose of focus group

- c. Confirm that participants have signed the consent forms (if applicable) and reiterate that participants can stop participating at any point
- d. Describe his/her role:
  - To ask questions and keep the group on track
  - Explains that discussion will move fairly quickly, even though people might have more to say about a particular topic
- e. Describe participants' role:
  - To share experiences and opinions, both positive and negative
  - Explains that there are no right or wrong answers
  - Explains that everyone should participate in discussion
- f. Explain logistics of discussion:
  - 90 minutes maximum
  - Arrangements for water and restroom break
  - Cell phones turned off
- g. Explain ground rules:
  - One person speaks at a time; no side conversations
  - No one person dominates; everyone will have a chance to be heard
  - There are no right or wrong answers; the discussion is about participants' experiences.
- h. Introduce notetaker and if applicable, audio/video operators. Explain purpose of audiotaping/video recording/notetaking:
  - For the purposes of highlighting "faculty voices about the part-time student experience" at the college
  - Explains that no names will be used in reporting
  - Gives thanks from the college
- i. Take questions from participants

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

#### **Facilitator Tips:**

- Remind participants of the value of differing points of view:
  - Does anyone see it differently?
  - Are there any other points of view?
- Probes (questions to elicit more detailed responses):
  - Would you explain further? Tell me more about that.
  - Can you give me an example of what you mean?
  - Would you say more?
  - Is there anything else?
  - Please describe what you mean.
  - Does someone have a similar/different experience?

*[Provided below is a bank of example outcomes and questions which can be used to form your discussion guide.]*

**Background of, and general information about, participants**

1. Participant introduction, including: a) name, b) title, c) full-time or part-time status, d) academic department or program, e) years employed at the college.
2. If you are a full-time faculty member, did you start as a part-time faculty member? If you are part-time, have you ever taught as a full-time faculty member?

***Outcome 1: Learn what institutional policies, practices, and processes promote effectiveness and success for faculty, specifically as it relates to student success.***

1. Think back to the beginning of your employment as a faculty member at this college. What information were you provided about the college in general, and about the students the college serves? For full-time faculty? For part-time faculty?
2. What is the main reason you teach at this college? Why did you decide to become a community college instructor? Did someone approach you about the possibility of teaching here? Did you seek it out on your own?
3. What do you feel you bring to your role as a college instructor? What makes you an effective teacher (e.g., knowledge/experience in your field, good teaching skills, ability to relate well with students, other)?
4. For part-time instructors:
  - a. If a full-time teaching position in your field opened up at this college, would you apply for it? Why or why not?
5. For the courses that you teach that require prerequisites, do you know what steps the college takes to ensure that students have completed the necessary prerequisites? If yes, what does the college do? If no, how do you handle students who have not taken the necessary prerequisites?
6. Is there a college-wide attendance policy that you have to follow in your classes? (Give an example of an attendance policy if needed.) If yes, what is it? If not, do you have an attendance policy in your classes? If so, what is your attendance policy in your classes? How do you monitor student attendance? What is the college process for a faculty member to drop a student who fails to attend according to the college policy or your policy?
7. Are you familiar with the federal and state regulations regarding Satisfactory Academic Progress measures that are tied to financial aid? (Be prepared to explain this for those who do not know.) If yes, what kind of information about students who are on Satisfactory Academic Progress is shared with faculty? If this information is shared with faculty, how do you use it? Is it helpful to you?

***Outcome 2: To better understand faculty's perspectives about students attending community college part-time, including participation patterns inside and outside of class and factors influencing their part-time status.***

1. When you were hired, how far in advance of the starting date of the term did you receive your course assignments?
2. Do you know if your students are full-time or part-time students at this college? Some of your students? All of your students?
  - a. If you know your students' enrollment status...When do you find out about their status? How do you find out about their status? If you do have this information, does it impact how you work with your students? Do you have different classroom/communication strategies for full- and part-time students?
3. To what extent do you connect students in your classes to additional academic supports, such as supplemental instruction, tutoring (face-to-face or online), skill labs, required study groups, etc.? Do you refer students to these services? Do you require participation and incorporate this into students' grades? Whether referred or required, do you find in your experience that participation in these academic supports is affected by students' enrollment status? If so, how? Do you have to work with part-time students differently to make it possible for them to benefit from these additional academic support services?
4. In general, to what degree do you maintain contact with your students outside of class? In what ways? Texting? Phone? E-mail? Through course management software (such as Blackboard)? IM? Social networking site? Informally on campus? Other? How often? For what purposes? Are there differences in how you maintain contact with part-time vs. full-time students outside of class? Explain.
5. If/when you meet face-to-face with students outside of class, where do these meetings take place? Faculty offices? Elsewhere on campus? Outside of campus? Are there differences in how you meet with part-time students vs. full-time students outside of class? Explain.
6. In what ways do you make efforts to connect students outside of class with other students? With college programs and activities? With support services? How do you learn about services available to students?
7. If a student is falling behind, coming to class unprepared, or skipping classes, what do you do? Do you contact the student? Refer the student to an advisor? Use the college's early alert system? Anything else? How does the student's enrollment status impact how you follow up with the student?
8. In general, do you learn much about your students' lives outside of school (work, children, other family responsibilities, extracurricular activities, etc.)? If yes, how do you become aware of it? If yes, does having this information about students' lives outside of school impact how you set up your class? In-class activities? Out of class activities? The amount of group work assigned outside of class?

9. In general, to what degree do you have discussions with your students about their career plans? How does that discussion take place? What's the result of these conversations? Are there differences in your discussions about career plans with part-time students vs. full-time students? Explain.
10. Are your students aware of your status as a full-time or part-time instructor? Do you think it is important for students to know whether you are full-time or part-time? Explain.
11. Think of a time when you took steps that were particularly helpful for a part-time student. Describe what happened that benefited the part-time student.
12. Think about the time your students spend outside of class preparing for class—doing assignments, reading, studying for quizzes or exams, working with other students on projects or assignments. In your experience, on average, do students spend as much time studying or preparing for each class as you would expect? In your experience, are there differences in how prepared part-time students vs. full-time students are in your class? Explain.

***Outcome 3: To understand faculty's perceptions of students' expectations of how long students think it will take to accomplish their academic goals.***

1. What do you think are the most important factors that influence students' decision to go to college full-time or part-time?
2. From what you hear expressed by your students, how long do you think part-time students expect to be attending this college in order to achieve their academic goals? What about full-time students?
3. How do you think students come to identify how long it will take them to complete college?
4. How can the college help students identify how long it will take them to complete their academic goals? Do you think there are steps the college can take to help students complete more quickly? If so, explain.

***Outcome 4: To better understand how effectively faculty believe the college supports part-time students and what steps the college could take to help faculty better support all students, particularly part-time students.***

1. From your perspective and in your role at the college, how successful would you say part-time students are at this college?
  - a. In terms of academic performance? Academic progress? Completion?
  - b. How do you know? (What leads you to and/or confirms those perceptions?)
2. Do you see differences between part-time and full-time students regarding those measures of success?

3. Is there any specific type of learning opportunity you would like the college to offer for students, particularly part-time students?
4. Do you see evidence of particular challenges encountered by part-time students at this college? If so, what are they? Do you think there are steps the college can take to help part-time students manage or overcome those challenges? If so, explain.
5. As a faculty member, are you included in college-wide and/or department discussions where data are shared about student learning and persistence?
6. As a faculty member, are you invited to become involved in any activities related to the college's student success agenda? Strategic planning? Planning, design, and implementation of specific initiatives? Course redesign?
7. Are you invited to share your own expertise in areas that support teaching and learning? If so, in what ways?
8. Do you have opportunities to connect with other faculty within your department and college-wide?
9. When you think about the experience you've had so far as an instructor at this college, on a scale of 1-5—5 being "outstanding, and 1 being "not at all what I had hoped for"—where would you rank your experience? Why?
10. In what ways, if any, does your teaching experience here not meet your expectations? In what ways, if any, does your teaching experience here exceed your expectations?

### **Summary & Close**

1. If you were giving advice to the college on how the college can better support faculty with the ultimate goal of helping more students, what advice would you give? Now answer that question regarding all students, both full-time and part-time. Is there additional advice you would give the college on how they can better support all students achieve their academic goals?

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