

# Preserving Culture and Planning for the Future

An Exploration of Student Experiences at Tribal Colleges



# INTRODUCTION

What follows is a discussion guide that can be used to facilitate conversations with tribal college faculty and staff about their interactions with students.

To access the full CCCSE Focus Group Toolkit, visit <https://cccse.org/resources/focus-groups>. Featured on this page is the Focus Group Manual, which provides comprehensive guidance around planning and conducting focus groups with students, faculty, and staff. This manual contains several appendix resources, such as templates for invitation emails and consent forms as well as sample intake survey questions and basic focus group opening questions. In addition, the Toolkit includes a variety of discussion guides (including this one) devoted to a diverse array of topics important to community college student engagement and success.

## FACULTY & STAFF DISCUSSION GUIDE

### OUTCOME #1

*To learn about staff and faculty perceptions of tribal college student needs and expectations.*

1. From your perspective, describe the initial experience for students, including the admissions and registration process, assessment, academic and financial aid advising, etc.
  - a. What are the strengths of those processes? How do you know?
  - b. What are the areas in need of improvement? How do you know?
  - c. Are students asked about their tribal affiliation?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being easiest and 5 being most difficult, how do you think students would rate their earliest experiences at your college with admissions and registration, assessment, advising and planning, and financial aid assistance? Do they feel a sense of belonging? Do they feel motivated to succeed at this college? Explain your answer.
3. How would you describe the students at this college? Their academic goals? Their challenges?
  - a. What helps or hinders their success at the college (such as jobs, family responsibilities, financial situation, lack of preparedness, other?)
4. What is the greatest challenge you face in meeting your students' varying needs and expectations?
5. What do you believe is the single most important factor that helps students remain in school and achieve their educational goals?

- a. If they weren't to remain in school, what would cause them to leave? Distance between the college and their home? Reliable transportation? Limited access to a computer? Limited access to the internet? Finances? Something else?

## OUTCOME #2

*To understand how staff and faculty see their role in helping tribal college students succeed.*

6. Thinking about your own role, what would you say are the most important things you can do to help students succeed? When you respond please begin by saying your role, such as "I am an advisor" or "I am an instructor," etc.
7. How do you make Native American students feel welcome at the college?
8. What would you say is (are) the most important thing(s) students can do to promote their own success? Inside the classroom? Outside the classroom?
9. Do you have any kind of an "early alert" referral system in place 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?
  - a. 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?
10. **For Staff Only:** Do you require anything of students who choose to drop a class? Instructor signature? Meeting with advisor? Anything else?
  - a. If not, have you ever considered that? What, if anything, would get in the way of making that happen?
11. **For Faculty Only:** Do you see evidence of particular challenges with students turning in assignments late? Or not submitting assignments at all? Coming to class without completing readings? Skipping class?
  - a. Any other challenges? If so, how do you address this with the student? Do you reach out to the student? Do you do this in the first three weeks?
12. At this college, what role do faculty play in advising students? How much of your time would you say you spend advising students?
  - a. Do you believe you should be spending more or less time advising students? Explain your answer.
13. 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?

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

## OUTCOME #3

*To understand the institutional strategies, policies, practices, and resources that impact the experiences of tribal college students.*

15. What is the college doing to improve student retention and completion? Please elaborate.
16. If there is something the college is not doing that you believe could increase retention and completion, what would it be?
  - a. What, if anything (in your view), gets in the way of implementing the type of opportunities you are talking about?
  - b. What would make it possible for the kinds of opportunities you are talking about to occur?
17. In general, do administrators, faculty, and staff at the college currently look at/discuss data depicting the academic progress students are making?
  - a. If so, what information/data do you look at? Students' rates of course completion, persistence from term to term, graduation and/or transfer, etc.?
  - b. What do the data tell you?
  - c. How and in what settings do those conversations take place?
  - d. Who is included in those discussions?
  - e. What has been the outcome of those discussions?
18. From your perspective, how effective are the college's current efforts in supporting the success of its students?
  - a. Has the college community discussed changes the institution might need to make in order to serve students more effectively?
  - b. What steps, if any, does your institution take to assist in removing barriers to success?
19. What types of resources does the college have in place to help students who do not have money to buy food or who have other financial challenges?
  - a. If there are college resources available, how is this communicated to students?
  - b. Do students approach you about what resources might be available or for help accessing resources?

## OUTCOME #4

*To understand what kinds of preparation and support staff and faculty receive and would like to receive to help them promote and support student success.*

20. What, if any, training/learning opportunities does the college offer to help you increase your knowledge and skills so you can work more effectively to promote and support students?
21. Is there any specific type of training/learning opportunity you would like the college to offer?

## OUTCOME #5

*To understand staff and faculty perceptions of the impact of Native American culture in the student experience.*

22. From your perspective, what Native American cultural experiences does the college offer to students?
  - a. Is there a focus on learning/speaking a Native American language?
  - b. How does the college help students develop Native American identity and values?
23. From your perspective, how has the college impacted how students understand, interact, and communicate with their tribal community?
  - a. What about how they communicate with people from other cultures?
24. If you could suggest what you believe are the one or two most important things the college could do to improve the experience for Native American students regarding connecting to the Native American culture, what would you recommend?
25. From your perspective, how does the college, if at all, provide a holistic approach to student development (mind, body, and spirit)?

## SUMMARY AND CLOSE

26. Overall, what do you believe is the most important thing the college can do to help its students succeed?