

Academic Mindset

Student Focus Group Discussion Guide



Academic Mindset: SAMPLE Student Focus Group Discussion Guide

What follows is a sample focus group discussion guide that can be used to collect information from students regarding their experience and perceptions around academic mindset.

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 Focus Group Discussion:

1. *To understand what motivates students to pursue higher education.*
2. *To understand students' perceptions of their intelligence and their own learning.*
3. *To understand the significance of relationships in student persistence and success.*
4. *To understand how and to what extent students experience academic mindset in their courses at the college.*

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 focus group staff
- 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 facilitator's role:
 - To ask questions and keep the group on track
 - Explain 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
 - Explain that there are no right or wrong answers
 - Explain 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 the student experience at this college
 - Explain that no names will be used in reporting
 - Give thanks from the college
- i. Take questions from participants

C. Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator Tips:

- a. Remind participants of the value of differing points of view:
 - Does anyone see it differently?
 - Are there any other points of view?
- b. 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 introductions, including: a) name, b) major, and c) other colleges you've attended.

2. What is your educational goal? Degree? Certificate? Transfer? Upgrade skills for a promotion? Learn new skills to prepare for career change? Other?
3. If earning a degree or certificate is not your goal, why not?

Outcome 1: To understand what motivates students to pursue higher education.

1. When did you decide to go to college? While in high school? After high school?
2. Let's talk about why you decided to attend this college.
 - Did anyone urge you to go to college? Parents? Friends? High school teachers or counselors?
 - Why did you select to attend this college? To earn a degree? For a job or career? Something else? (Note: Let students name these areas and use their words in subsequent questions.)
 - Have your goals changed since you've been in college? What are they now? What caused your goals to change?
 - On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not very confident and 5 being extremely confident, how confident are you that this college is preparing you for what you plan to do in life?
3. Think about how you felt when you first got started here at this college and complete this sentence: "When I first started here, I felt _____" and describe why you felt that way.

Outcome 2: To understand students' perceptions of their intelligence and their own learning

1. Let's talk about your perceptions around intelligence.
 - Do you believe that there is anything that people can do to change their intelligence?
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, how can people change their intelligence? How much of someone's intelligence can be changed?
2. Let's talk about the material in your college courses.
 - Have you ever taken a course in which you didn't think you could learn all of the material? (Which course? Why did you feel that way?)
 - On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not very confident and 5 being extremely confident, how confident are you that you will be able to keep up your courses at this college?
3. Let's talk about your own learning.
 - Pretend that you are getting ready to take a test in one of your classes. Do you believe that you can do well on tests, even when they are difficult? Why or why not?
 - Talk about your learning at the college. Do you feel that what you learn in your classes is necessary for your success in the future? Why or why not?
 - How is your academic work at the college preparing you for the career field that you are interested in?

4. Let's talk about math.

- How did you decide which math to take [multiple measures, placement test, etc.]? Did someone tell you which math to take? If so, was it required that you take a specific kind of math? Did the person explain why? If so, did you understand?
 - Which of these statements most accurately expresses your views about math and intelligence? a) I can learn new things in math, but I cannot really change my basic intelligence in math; b) I can change my intelligence in math a lot.
 - Why do you feel that way?

5. Now, let's talk about English.

- How did you decide which English to take [multiple measures, placement test, etc.]? Did someone tell you which English to take? If so, was it required that you take a specific kind of English? Did the person explain why? If so, did you understand?
 - Which of these statements most accurately expresses your views about English and intelligence? a) I can learn new things in English, but I cannot really change my basic intelligence in English; b) I can change my intelligence in English a lot.
 - Why do you feel that way?

Outcome 3: To understand the significance of relationships in student persistence and success.

1. 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?
2. Who are these relationships with? Other students? Instructors? Counselors? Academic advisors? Other staff members? Others?
3. 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).
4. If there are times when you have considered whether or not to continue attending this college, have any of those relationships had any impact on your decision? In what way(s)?

Outcome 4: To understand how and to what extent students experience academic mindset in their courses at the college.

1. Have you taken a course at this college in which the instructor discussed academic mindset?
 - If so, what was the name of the course?
 - How do you define academic mindset?
 - What did you learn about academic mindset in the course?
 - What activities were involved? (readings, taking an online assessment, an activity, a failure project, etc.)
 - Did learning about academic mindset in your course change your views on intelligence and learning? If so, how did your views change?
 - How can someone develop a growth mindset when it comes to education and failure?
 - What did you like most and least about this course?

Summary and Close:

1. 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?
2. What advice would you give the college about one or two things the college could do to help students succeed?
3. What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to this college?
4. On a personal note, who is one of your role models (can be a family member, someone at the college, a celebrity, etc.), and why do you admire that person?

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