



SUPPORTING Minds, SUPPORTING Learners

Addressing Student Mental Health
to Advance Academic Success

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a discussion guide that can be used to facilitate conversations with students about their experiences with their mental health and well-being.

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.

STUDENT DISCUSSION GUIDE

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. Let's talk about why you decided to attend this college.
 - a. Did anyone urge you to go to college? Parents? Friends? High school teachers or counselors?
 - b. Thinking about your future, what are your personal and professional goals?
 - c. Since you first started taking classes at this college, how many terms have you been enrolled?
 - d. Have you been going to college continuously since you started or have you stopped out at times? If you've stopped out, why? What brought you back to college?

THE IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON ACADEMICS

2. At this time, what causes you the most worry or stress about college? How do you relieve this stress?
3. Let's talk about your current mental health and emotional well-being. How are you feeling? What concerns do you have about your mental health and well-being impacting your ability to achieve your academic goals? What strategies have you used in the past or are you currently using to help with your mental health needs related to achieving your academic goals?
4. Let's talk about the last 2 weeks:
 - a. How have you been feeling?
 - i. What words would you use to describe how you have been feeling?
 - ii. Any idea on why you have been feeling this way?
 - iii. How would you describe your interest in doing things in general, and also in your courses?

5. In the past four weeks, have you had any days in which you felt that emotional or mental difficulties have hurt your academic performance? If so, how many days? Describe how you think your emotional or mental difficulties hurt your academic performance.
6. How likely is it that issues with mental health or emotional well-being would cause you to withdraw from classes or from this college? Please explain.

AWARENESS OF COLLEGE SERVICES

7. Do you feel like this college makes students' mental health and well-being a priority? Why or why not?
8. What services are you aware of that the college offers to help support students' mental health and well-being? If you wanted to seek help with your mental health and well-being, would you know where to go?

BARRIERS TO SEEKING HELP

9. If you needed help with your mental health and emotional well-being, what would be the greatest barriers that would keep you from seeking that help?
 - a. Have you experienced any barriers at this college from getting you the help that you need?
10. Do you worry what others may think of you if they knew you needed help with your mental health and well-being?

HOW STUDENTS WANT TO RECEIVE HELP

11. If you were experiencing emotional or mental health challenges such as feeling sad, blue, anxious, or nervous, whom would you most prefer to talk to about this? Please explain why.
 - a. Trained mental health provider (e.g., psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor, or social worker, etc.)
 - b. Someone who works at this college who is not a trained mental health provider
 - c. Friend, partner, or family member
 - d. Someone from your cultural community (identity-based, faith-based, etc.)
 - e. Other
12. Does it matter to you whether your mental health provider understands your cultural community (racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, religious identity, LGBTQIA+ identity, etc.). Why or why not?
13. During the past few years, have you ever used any of the following supports?
 - a. In-person, individual counseling or therapy
 - b. In-person, group therapy or support group

- c. Teletherapy (counseling or therapy via the phone, video, text, messaging)
 - d. Peer counseling from a trained peer
 - e. Crisis hotline (number to call or text during a mental health crisis to reach a trained responder)
14. If you have used any of the supports we just talked about, why did you choose the option you did? How effective was the support you received? If you haven't used any of the supports we talked about, why not? What might encourage you to use them?

COLLEGE ADVICE

15. What advice would you give this college about what they could do to help students with emotional health or well-being concerns?
16. What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to this college?
17. How confident are you that you will stay at this college and complete your academic goals? 1 being not very confident, 5 being extremely confident. Explain your answer.