Focus Groups

The Basics
Assessment

1. Recognize some standard elements and benefits of conducting focus groups

2. Compare and contrast the use of focus groups and other data collection methods

3. Analyze results of focus group data
A Focus Group is...

A special type of group in terms of

- **Purpose**: to understand how people think or feel about an issue, product, service or idea
- **Size/Composition**: 6-8 people that have something in common
- **Procedures**: skilled moderator, comfortable environment, relaxed conversation where group members influence each other by responding to each other

“The intent of a focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants. We want to know what people really think and feel.” (Krueger & Casey, 2000)
Focus groups are different

Surveys = designer leads

Open-ended survey questions = designer leads

Interviews = questioner leads

Focus groups = respondents lead in “nondirective interviewing” with others like them
Why focus groups?

- Build (on) other data
- Interaction = the unexpected
- Non-verbals = more data
- Quick and easy and cheap
- “Face validity” = shared terms
- When you want:
  - A range of ideas or feelings
  - To understand perspectives
  - Ideas to emerge from a group
  - To test ideas
Do NOT use focus groups if...

- You want people to come to consensus
- You want to educate people
- You don’t intend to use the results
- You are asking sensitive information people don't want to share in a group
- You need statistics or projections
- The environment is emotionally charged
- The researcher has lost control of participant selection, question development, analysis
- Other methods produce higher quality info
- You can’t ensure confidentiality
Tips from the field

Less than ten

Prepare questions and bias check

Participants are designers, not subjects of the study

Good questions are simple, short, open-ended (simple questions do not yield simple answers) and avoid “why”

Start low-risk and build ...then reflective

Avoid examples if you can

Someone else runs it

Neutral space

Call it a small group discussion

At least 3 groups

Avoid power imbalances
Setting up

Clear goals / use of responses

Clear record taking methods

Clear anonymity and security measures
During

Active Listening

Less is more

Let them build off one another

Summative QUESTIONS

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<th>Focus Group Question</th>
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Wrapping up

What didn’t we ask?

Clear next steps

Repeat anonymity and security measures
Analysis

Dependent to goal

Trends (obvious agreement)

Gems (summative comments)

Coding / making distinctions

Conversation analysis = higher inference
Limitations

Small sample
Distractions
Peer pressure
Moderator training
Environment
Logistics
Example: setup

Questions for Senior Focus Groups 2-6-19

Setup: goal is to learn from you and improve the experience. Qualitative data collected today will be coded for strategy recommendations. No names or identifiers will be used. There are no right or wrongs or things you are supposed to say - the point of today is honesty for the benefit of future students in this program.

Introductions: Name and a lesson learned from college.

Discussion - start with pair-share, move to group

1. How define college success? What measures matter to you now that you look back?
2. Wish you knew?
3. What do you need now?
4. Previous groups expressed an interest in giving back to the PS program in some way. How would you like to give back?
5. A year from now, what do you think you will say you wanted or needed in your senior year?
6. If you were the chancellor, what would you do to improve this program?
7. How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

Active Listening and themes to summarize and thank them
Example - trends

Lessons learned from college?

● Time management very helpful
● Try things out (doesn't hurt to try/ask)
● “Mentors are huge--mentor others too”
● “Be independent, go after it”
● Dealing with stress; how to not let stress take over
Example - trends

What do you wish you knew sooner?

- Talking to professors (networking/mentoring)
- Biased information the more classes you take, getting into upper divs (“I've learned to ask 'what's your source?'”)
- Asking for help
- Being open instead of closed
  - “To put myself out there...great to have a group of people that share your values...you gotta apply, show up, meet people...everyone is a connection”

What do you need now?

- Information on how to graduate
- Professional networking/making connections
- Advice and informational review of recent grads (taxes, networking, living on own, etc)
- Mindfulness/life balancing skills
How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

- They are more supportive...but they still don't get it; hard to relate to family
- I'm surprisingly independent
- I’m the oldest of 4 with 3 young brothers...they are constantly asking me about FAFSA and applications now...I’m on them about being lazy and not giving up
- This has been a huge stress reliever for my family, they don’t worry about me
  - Not having to ask for $, not being an expense on them is a huge relief
  - “This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can’t take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too”
- I help them, give them $  
- I would have gone to CC or state school if it wasn’t for this scholarship
  - I would not be here without the scholarship
- This scholarship changed my family dynamics and role
  - I was able to be educated
    - Taking finances off the table means they can’t hold things over me anymore and I can share my thoughts openly
Example - gems

How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

"I'm the oldest of 4 with 3 young brothers...they are constantly asking me about FAFSA and applications now...I'm on them about being lazy and not giving up"

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF 2019

Q: What do you wish you knew sooner?

A: “To put myself out there...great to have a group of people that share your values...you gotta apply, show up, meet people...everyone is a connection”

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF 2019

“This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can’t take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too”

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF 2019
Example - gems

"How do you define college success?"

"Not being afraid to fail, knowing I’ll be okay."

Promise Scholar Class of 2019

"This has been a huge stress reliever for my family, they don’t worry about me."

“This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can’t take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too.”
Focus groups rarely lead to a strong sense of closure or answer, they generally lead to more questions.
Goals

1. Recognize some standard elements and benefits of conducting focus groups

2. Compare and contrast the use of focus groups and other data collection methods

3. Analyze results of focus group data
Resources