FOCUS GROUP Meetings

- **WHEN?** We will conduct focus group meetings in the first part of November – preferably the FIRST WEEK of November if possible.

- **WHO?** We will have at least one (more if able) focus group meeting for each audience:
  - Freshman students
  - Sophomore students
  - Staff
  - Community

- **WHERE?** The meetings will be conducted at college campuses (excluding Montgomery, which is engaged contractually with conducting its FoE surveys).

- **HELP!!!** A Sub-Committee will help arrange and conduct the meetings. The sub-committee consists of the following individuals:
  - Victoria Waters (Tomball) – lead
  - Ted Lewis (CyFair)
  - Rebecca Riley (Kingwood)
  - ??? ??? ?? (need a NHC rep)
  - Karen Miner (Sys Off)
  - Peggy Osbourn (CyFair)
  - Jadi Johnson (Community)
  - Mike McFarland (North Harris) – honorary temporary sub-committee member who will help to determine room options at the campus and share that info with the sub-committee

- **NORTH HARRIS** – We need someone from North Harris to step up as a member of the sub-committee to help with the logistics and planning for that location.

- **All QEP development committee members**: please contact one of the persons listed above to assist with planning the logistics for your campus location. They can use your help in handling the following logistics:

- **LOGISTICS** – these likely need to be resolved before October 29:
  - Schedule use of digital audio recorders for each meeting.
  - IRB (is this needed since anonymity is preserved)?
  - Use a release form for students. Ryan is trying to determine if the office of legal counsel should approve the form he created from the CCSSE form, or if we already have an LSCS form on file. (attached to email - FYI only)
  - Identify someone to take good written notes of the comments
  - Identify facilitator
  - Schedule room and date
  - Identify and confirm attendees for the discussion meetings
  - Order food (Contact Ryan for the budget info for the food expenses)
• QUESTIONS: Students – we will use the following questions for students (from the CCSSE document):

  o If you could design the entire entering student experience in the way that you believe would best meet your needs, what would it look like? What would be the key components? Include what you would see when you first arrived, whom you would meet with and what you’d talk about, what steps you’d go through to get everything in place and register for classes. Of the things you’re talking about, what do you believe should be required for new students? Once you are in your classes, what steps would you ideally go through to re-register for the next semester?

  o Of the things we’ve talked about, if you could suggest what you believe are the one or two most important things the college could do to improve the experience for a new student here, what would you recommend?

  o What aspects of “college” cause you the most worry or stress? What do you think this college could do to help alleviate your worry or stress about those issues?

  o Right now, are you considering not continuing here? If you are, what is the reason? What would cause you to leave? If you are considering leaving, what would help you stay and continue your studies?

• QUESTIONS: Staff – we will use the following questions for staff:

  o If you could design the entire entering student experience in the way that you believe would best meet student needs, what would it look like? What would be the key components? Include what the student would see when s/he first arrived, whom s/he would meet with and what s/he’d talk about, what steps s/he’d go through to get everything in place and register for classes. Of the things you’re talking about, what do you believe should be required for new students? Once they are in their classes, what steps would students ideally go through to re-register for the next semester?

  o Of the things we’ve talked about, if you could suggest what you believe are the one or two most important things the college could do to improve the experience for a new student here, what would you recommend?

  o What aspects of “college” cause students the most worry or stress? What do you think this college could do to help alleviate students’ worry or stress about those issues?

  o Right now, are you aware of students considering not continuing here? If you are, do you know what is the reason? What would cause students to leave? If a student were considering leaving, what would help him or her to stay and continue their studies?
• QUESTIONS: Community – we will use the following questions for community:

  o If you could design the entire entering student experience in the way that you believe would best meet student needs, what would it look like? What would be the key components? Include what the student would see when s/he first arrived at the college, whom s/he would meet with and what s/he’d talk about, what steps s/he’d go through to get everything in place and register for classes. Of the things you’re talking about, what do you believe should be required for new students? Once they are in their classes, what steps would students ideally go through to re-register for the next semester?

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• Other information about how to conduct focus group sessions is at the CCSSE web site: http://www.ccsse.org/sense/resources/focusgroups.cfm

• DURING THE FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

  o We need to focus on the following four learning outcomes. Listen for references to these within the responses from attendees and follow-up to pursue more insights on how we might affect change in these four types of learning:

    - Knowledge
    - Skills
    - Behaviors
    - Values

  o See the SACS Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation: “Within the context of the QEP as a requirement for reaffirmation, the Commission on Colleges broadly defines student learning as changes in (1) knowledge, (2) skills, (3) behaviors, or (4) values” (Commission on Colleges, 2010, p. 39).

  o The SACS Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation also advises the following questions to ask ourselves as we consider what we are trying to accomplish with the QEP: “What should students know post-implementation of the QEP that
they don’t know now? What should students be able to do then that they can’t do now? How should their behavior change? What changes in values are anticipated?”
(Commission on Colleges, 2010, p. 40)

• AFTER THE MEETINGS

  o Forward the recorded audio files to Ryan Carstens
  o Forward the written notes to Victoria Waters
  o If possible, the sub-committee should meet and explore trends among the responses.

• NOVEMBER 16

  o If the focus group meetings can be conducted the first week of November we will do our best to compile results and share insights at the November 16 meeting. Please work hard to schedule your campus meetings as close to November 1 as possible.

Notes from October 19th:

1. Examined questions for student and staff focus groups. Group identified questions 17, 19, 13, 20 as important/desirable. Claire suggested that we could use information from student groups to inform conversations with staff. This is a good qualitative research method.
2. CCSSE and SENSE data – we could perhaps filter by number of college hours so that we could triangulate data from these surveys with focus group data.
3. Five people working on focus groups – Victoria, Ted, Rebecca, Karen, Peggy. Now need to move forward with timeline and actual focus groups. What can QEP members do right now to help? Help with logistics for these groups. Dr. Goodall authorized pizza money. Ryan has an account code and a project code; he will work with the 5 cmte members. Montgomery will be working with Dr. Gardner as part of the Foundations of Excellence project. They will be doing that process instead, and don’t want to get these student focus groups confused with the FOE process. We will be able to include the FOE efforts in our narrative that shows how the FOE relates to QEP, helps “connect the dots” between the two efforts. (Will help establish our reasoning, and will differentiate the efforts.)
4. Themes that came up over and over again from comment part of surveys done as part of initial exploration for QEP in Fall 2009. Some point toward FYE and are shared in Ryan’s email.
   a. Another common theme – communication with students – better use of social media, etc.
5. Completion by design grant (Gates Foundation). There is data about students that emphasizes problems of working to earn sufficient income while attending school. Suggest that committee members look at link for the grant to explore the data about students.
6. Nov. 16 meeting, Nov. 2 meeting:
   a. Nov. 2 is a scheduled meeting. If we could possibly schedule focus group meetings the first week of Nov., it would be great to have information to inform the combined QEP and AtD Nov. 16th meeting. If we get the forums scheduled, we could skip the Nov. 2 meeting.
b. Nov. 16 – QEP and AtD Core meeting together. AtD efforts will be summarized. Will look at how we can take that information and plan for future work. Student success in a broad sense, next steps in student success, QEP nested within that information. Our data from AtD and other past initiatives should help point to the focus we should take with the QEP. Meeting requests will go out from Dr. Goodall very shortly. May have 70 people participating? We will also strive to show SACS that the QEP is part of our broader strategic plan for student success.

c. Question: how will student focus group data fit into Nov. 16 meeting? Answer: Hoping we will be able to compile insights and present them. It could help inform the focusing effort.

d. After Thanksgiving, we can look at what all of this has given us and start working up a topic proposal.

7. Michael McFarland – is on student success committee for both NH and system-wide. Chancellor does not want to restrict definition of student success to A, B, C – it’s also about transfer rates, completion, etc. John Burghduff is chairing. It is a faculty senate committee. NH – president wants a report by end of semester – plan of action.

8. Wendell Williams’ advice – the QEP from the peer evaluator’s perspective will ask: “Has the institution provided a comprehensive and a clear analysis of the crucial importance of the Plan [the QEP] for improving the learning environment” (Commission on Colleges, 2005, p. 35)? QEP is designed for improving the learning environment as defined by knowledge, skills, behaviors, values – FOCUS GROUP listeners need to hone in on these items.

9. Differences between learning outcomes and outputs – can’t just measure grades, transfer rates, etc. They will be looking for changes in learning outcomes.

10. QEP can’t be focused on retention – must be focused on changing learning environment and/or learning outcomes. What knowledge, skills, behaviors, values will be improved by the QEP. Where is your deficit in knowledge in the FYE? Behaviors? Values? That’s what we need to pull from students so that we can design a narrowly focused program to improve these learning outcomes. Broad-based participation, but narrow focus.

Note what SACS will be looking for in the 5th year report. Direct impact on learning outcomes. See item 4 at the top of the page of this document (Commission on Colleges, 2009): http://www.sacscoc.org/fifth%20year/Process%20review%20of%20QEP%20Impact%20Rpt.doc.pdf

**** Focus group facilitators will need to be focused on these four things – in follow-up questions, in guiding the discussions. Note takers need to be listening for these things as well.****

References


Members and Attendance (* - via phone):

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