

Sample Focus Group Questions

Gathering Data from Focus Groups

Facilitators

- Confidentiality will lead to more open and honest feedback from participants. Please consider how you will protect the anonymity of the participants when inviting participants and scheduling sessions.
- The facilitator should not have power over the participants (e.g., someone who assigns grades)
 - Consider inviting emeritus faculty to facilitate
- Consider asking a graduate student to take detailed notes
 - Word for word transcripts are not necessary but direct quotes can be powerful.
 - If you audio-record the session, have someone who would not be able to identify participants transcribe the conversation.

Logistics

- Consider how much time you will need.
 - We suggest about 3 hours for a small focus groups of ~5-8 people.
- Plan to ask no more than about ~5-10 questions total.
 - Consider sending questions to participants in advance in order to receive richer, more thoughtful responses.
- Consider serving refreshments (or a meal) in order to create a collegial atmosphere.

Running a Session

- Let the participants know that they do not need to self-censor themselves. This room is a safe space to provide feedback.
 - Participants are welcome to build on each other's thoughts and ideas.
- The facilitator should try to keep the conversation on track
 - Actively try to draw input from everyone
 - Call upon quieter participants to ensure that there is equal participation.
- Consider recording key points on flip chart paper to help capture discussion.
- If participants' responses are general or vague, ask follow-up probes to help draw out concrete examples or ideas. For example:
 - Tell me more about what you just said or please elaborate on that statement.
 - Can you clarify what you meant?
 - Are you willing to provide a specific example/situation/context?

Questions for Students or Alumni

General

- Describe your most significant learning experience(s) in the program.
- How did you integrate knowledge from required courses with other courses you took as part of your degree?

Program Purpose

- Why did you choose the program?
- What were you expecting of the program?
- How did you hope it would prepare you for your future?

Program Strengths

- What is one thing you like about the program?
- What is a key strength of the program?
- What current strengths should the program build upon?

Areas for Improvement

- What key improvement could be made to the program and why?
 - What would you remove from the curriculum? What would you add?
- Drawing on your background and experience, what two key changes would you suggest if you were to redesign the program?

Final Reflection

- What is the most important thing you would like to tell the curriculum committee as they work to enhance the program?

*Questions Specifically for Alumni

- What aspects of your undergraduate learning experience benefit you in your work the most?
- Describe three things that you learned in your position in the first year after graduation that you could have learned at university, but did not.

Questions for Academic Counselors or Staff

- What are the most frequent program/curriculum related questions students ask you?
- Are there program requirements that students find difficult to complete? Are there bottlenecks where they get stuck?
- What do you think is the main reason why students drop out of the program?

Questions for Graduate Teaching Assistants

- What areas of the curriculum are most challenging for first year undergraduates?
- Of the courses that you have taught, where did you see the greatest improvement in students' writing/numeracy/research skills?
- If you graduated from the undergraduate program, which learning experiences helped you prepare for graduate school?

Questions for Employers

General

- What key characteristics, knowledge or skills do you look for when hiring?
- What advice would you give to recent graduates or soon to be graduates of the program?

Program Strengths

- How does the program's structure or outcomes support your expectations of graduates (new employees)?
- Based on your experience with graduates of the [Program] employed at your organization, what are some key strengths that they possess?
- How do Western graduates add value to your organization?
- Describe how the [Program] at Western has helped your organization fulfill its mission or meet its objectives.

Areas for Improvement

- Based on your experience with Western University graduates employed in your organization, what are some key areas for improvement?
- What gaps, if any, do you see in the program's structure or outcomes?
- What two key changes would you propose if you were to improve the [Program] to better prepare Western graduates for employment in your organization.