



Texas Pathways Institute #5: Keeping Students on Their Pathway **Student Focus Group Discussion Guide**

Objectives for the Keeping Students on Their Pathway Focus Group Discussion:

1. To understand what motivates students to persist higher education
2. To understand how students perceive the college's effectiveness in meeting their needs
3. To understand what the college needs to improve to help students succeed

Choose 2 additional objectives from the list below to include:

4. To understand the importance financial services in helping students meet their goals
5. To understand the importance of advising services in helping students meet their goals
6. To understand the importance of basic needs support services in helping students meet their goals
7. To understand the importance of mental health services in helping students meet their goals
8. To understand the significance of relationships in student persistence and success

Selecting Objectives for the Focus Group

Each college is asked to include the focus questions relating to **Educational Goals, General Support Services**, and **Completion & Retention** located in introductory and closing sections of the Focus Group Question Bank (highlighted in blue). Members of the leadership team attending the Texas Pathways Institute in April 2022 should also identify **two additional topics** tailored to the priorities of the college. Consider selecting topics related to your institution's Commitment to Action plan and those which will provide student voice for emerging re-design work (highlighted in green).

Selecting Students for the Focus Group

Cadre 1+ and Cadre 1 Colleges

- Each college should recruit two unique populations: 1) academic and 2) continuing education (may include AEL as appropriate).
- Include a diverse group of students in each focus group (race, age, gender, etc.)
- Conduct two focus groups (7-12 students), one for each group of students.
- Synthesize what you heard from these students on the Focus Group Report.

Cadre 2 and Cadre 3 Colleges

- Each college should recruit a diverse group of students (race, age, gender, academic, continuing education, AEL, dual credit, etc.).
- Conduct at least one focus group (7-12 students).
- Synthesize what you heard from these students on the Focus Group Report.

Timeline for Advance Work

February 4: Pathways Leads Orientation Webinar

February 7: Pathways Leads receive advance work package, including: (a) Focus Group Guide, (b) Focus Group Question Bank, (c) Consent Form for Students, (d) Profile Sheet for Students, and (e) Focus Group Report Template.

February 7 - March 25: Recruit students, conduct focus groups, and synthesize what you learned from the students in the focus groups on the Focus Group report Template.

March 30: LAST DAY TO SUBMIT FOCUS GROUP REPORT. Upload Focus Group Report Template to the Document Center on the Texas Pathways Institute #5 event page

Determine project management timeline with input from the Pathways Leadership Team (see table below.)

	2/4	2/7-2/11	2/15-2/18	2/21-2/25	2/28-3/4	3/7-3/11	3/14-3/18	3/21-3/25	3/28-3/30
Orientation Webinar									
Receive Advance Packet & Select Topics and Logistical Planning									
Recruit Students									
Conduct Focus Groups									
Synthesis Student Responses									
Upload Focus Group Report to Document Center									

Conducting The Focus Group Session(s)

A. Preparation

As participants enter, the coordinator should:

1. Ask participants to sign in
2. Ask participants to sign Consent Form For Students
3. Ask participants to fill out the Profile Sheet For Students

B. Overview of Focus Group Discussion

As focus discussion begins, the facilitator should:

1. Introduce him/herself
2. Explain the purpose of the focus group
3. Confirm that participants have signed the consent forms and reiterate that participants may stop participating at any point. Be sure to provide each student participant with a copy of the consent form and you keep the signed form.
4. Describe his/her role:
 - To ask questions and keep the group on track and on topic
 - Keep the discussion moving so that all topics are explored
 - Allow everyone to participate even though some people might have more to say about a particular topic; all voices matter
5. 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 equally participate in the discussion, however students are not required to answer every question
- Explain logistics of discussion:
 - 90 minutes maximum
 - Arrangements for refreshments
 - Cell phones turned off
- 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
- Introduce notetaker and if applicable, audio/video operators. Explain purpose of recording/notetaking:
 - For the purposes of highlighting "student voices" at the college
 - Explain that no names will be used in reporting
 - As the college representative, show appreciation for time, honesty, and authentic conversation
 - Invite questions from participants

C. Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator Tips:

The goal of these conversations is to hear from as many different students as possible to obtain a rich description of how students experience student support services at your institution.

Remind participants of the value of differing points of view:

- Does anyone see it differently?
- Are there any other points of view?

Probes (questions to elicit more detailed responses):

- Would you please 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?

[Starting on the next page is a bank of objectives and questions which can be used to form your discussion guide.]

Focus Group Question Bank

Each college is asked to include the questions included in the introductory and closing sections (highlighted in blue). Leadership teams should meet to identify two additional topics in which the student voice will be critical for informing decisions relating to the priorities of the institution.

Required Topics	Objective	Questions
Educational Goals	To understand what motivates students to persist in higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your educational goal? (e.g., Upgrade skills for a promotion? Learn new skills to prepare for career change? Certification? Degree? Transfer?)
General Support Services	To understand how students perceive the college's effectiveness in meeting their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In your opinion, what does the college do well? ▪ What aspects of college cause you the most worry or stress?
Select 2 Optional Topics	Objective	Questions
Financial Support	To understand the importance of financial services in helping students meet their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe how the cost of college influences or affects your decision to stay in college. ▪ Which financial support services offered by the college do you use? (e.g., emergency aid as well as Pell and scholarships) ▪ What additional financial support services would you like the college to provide?
Advising Support	To understand the importance of advising services in helping students meet their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was the nature of your conversation with the first advisor you met with? (e.g., Academic and career planning? Goal-setting? Discussion of your academic strengths and challenges? Choosing a program or major? Course selection? Other?) ▪ Have you laid out a plan for your time at school? ▪ Do you have a plan for earning your degree or certificate or to transfer? ▪ How would you describe advising at this college? What goes well, and what are areas for improvement?
Basic Needs Support	To understand the importance of basic needs support services in helping students meet their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What transportation do you rely on to come to school? Is the transportation you are using convenient, reliable, and available when you need it? ▪ Do any of you rely on childcare services either at the college or elsewhere to attend classes? Can you share any issues surrounding childcare (cost, location, hours, other) that have made it difficult or impossible to attend classes at this college? ▪ Does the college provide or coordinate services to students who need food or housing? How do you know about the availability of these services? ▪ Do you have reliable computer/internet access? Does the college provide computers or hot spots to students?
Mental Health Services	To understand the importance of mental health services in helping students meet their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ COVID-19 has helped many people realize that mental health and wellness are critically important. Are you aware of any mental health services or resources that your college makes available to help students? Do you know how to find and access these services if you wanted to?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In your opinion, does student mental health and wellness seem to matter to your teachers, advisors, and college leadership? How do you know? ▪ Based on what you've seen and heard, does your college seem to be adequately finding and providing the right resources to help address the mental and emotional health needs of your campus? What, if anything, sticks out as going really well? ▪ Do you have any ideas of mental health and wellness supports or services that you wish were offered, but to your knowledge, are not currently available at your school?
Students' Relationships	To understand the significance of relationships in student persistence and success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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? ▪ Who are these relationships with? (e.g., Other students? Instructors? Counselors? Academic advisors? Other staff members? Others?) ▪ 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).
Required Topic	Objective	Questions
Completion & Retention	To understand what the college needs to improve to help students succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In your opinion, what is one thing you would improve at the college to help students succeed? ▪ What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to this college? ▪ What advice would you give to a friend or sibling planning to attend this College on how to be successful at this college?