

Valencia College

College Decision Making Student Facilitated Conversations

****Note:** This guide is only for facilitators and recorders (not for participants)

A print version of this document will be provided at the facilitator training and it contains:

1. This overview
2. The Discussion Guide
3. The Participant Details Handout to be handed out at the end (copies will be provided)
4. A Notes template for the write up of the report and for note-taking

Facilitator – Primary Role: Introduce the purpose (i.e. program improvement – document aspects of the student experience), set the ground rules (i.e. comments will not be linked to student names), guide the conversation to cover the topic areas – delve deeper as appropriate (using questions like: “Tell me more about” “What might be an example of that...” “If another student were to ask you about x, what would you tell them...?”) Take notes as possible, but maintain eye contact as clearly as possible. See related notes and reminders later in The Discussion Guide.

Recorder – Primary Role: Listen. Take notes to include non-verbals and changes in tone – like sarcasm or humor – facilitators may not be able to capture that level of detail. At the very end ask any unanswered questions or questions regarding unexplored ideas at the invitation of the facilitator (we will not have time to break, confer, and reconvene the students.) If the activity results in a product (like a map or writing on the board) take a cell phone photo.

Afterwards: If time permits discuss / debrief after the session. Capture any additional notes from the session and send all notes to the Assistant Director, Learning Assessment by email.

Background of Participants and Purpose of the Student Conversations: The participants are students currently in their first year at Valencia College AND/OR students currently enrolled in local high schools who may be considering enrolling in Valencia College. Students are selected from survey responses and other contact with Valencia through transition services. College Transitions and Marketing and Strategic Communications are conducting research to learn how and when a student decides on coming to Valencia. The purpose of these conversations is to get a better understanding of: 1) when a student decides to go to college, 2) how they decide upon which college to attend, 3) how Valencia is factored into the decision, 4) how they decide to come to Valencia over other colleges, and 5) why they choose Valencia.

Research Questions:

- 1) When does a student decide on coming to Valencia?
- 2) What factors into their decision?
- 3) When are the decision-making “gates”?
- 4) How are students influenced to make a decision?

Discussion Guide

Introduction:

- We're here to find out about your experience deciding to come to Valencia College.
 - Begin on time and thank participants in advance for their time.
 - Introduce yourself, your role as a student, and how long you have been a Valencia student.
 - Discuss your role as the facilitator explaining the need for frank and honest feedback and that the information is confidential.
 - Explain aspects of the process telling why are we leading these conversations and what will happen with the information.
 - Stress that this is not an evaluation of faculty or advisors.
 - Remind those who have not signed in to sign in.

Establishing Context:

- **Their Story**
Respondent Introduction (first name)
 1. What opportunities do you believe college offers?
 2. How much do you think high school prepared you for college?

Objectives:

- **Document how students decide to go to college (see the notes for probes)**
 3. When did you first decide to go to college?
 4. How did you decide which colleges to consider?
 5. What steps did you take to apply for college and financial aid?

Objectives:

- **Reflect on factors that influence college choice (see the notes template for probes)**
 6. What was most important to you when choosing between colleges?
 7. What role, if any, did family and/or friends play into your decision to go to college?
 8. How did currently working affect the decision to go to college?
 9. When thinking about other students at Valencia, how do you think they ended up choosing Valencia?
 10. What was your opinion about Valencia prior to coming? What is it now after having attended?

Any follow-up questions raised by notetakers...

Wrap Up

- Ask if there is anything else they would like to add?
- Give them "Participant Details Handout" (with pens).
- Let them know they can leave after completing it and thank them for their time.

Participant Details Handout

College Decision Making Student Facilitated Conversations

Please take a few minutes to share additional information about yourself that will be helpful in understanding the types of students impacted by the services at Valencia.

- What is your first name?

- What was or will be your first semester at Valencia?

- What is your program of study and desired major?

- What are your career/academic goals?

- Please check here if you are willing to have us contact you in the future: _____

- If so, please include the best e-mail account to reach you.

Please include any other comments that you wish to share, here...

Thank you for your time today.

Notes Template (in Word)

Document Their Responses

1. What opportunities do you believe college offers?
2. How much do you think high school prepared you for college?
 - Did they believe in their own ability to learn?
3. When did you first decide to go to college?
 - Do they refer to life events/experiences?
4. How did you decide which colleges to consider?
 - What terms do they use?
 - Do they refer to college fairs, websites, etc...?
5. What steps did you take to apply for college and financial aid?
 - Any concrete? (Get the FAFSA application...)
 - Did you talk to someone at Valencia BEFORE submitting the application? If so, who or what department?
 - Did they need help filling out the application?
 - How did they prioritize what to do next?
6. What was most important to you when choosing between colleges?
 - Was cost a factor? Was location a factor?
 - Did they choose Valencia based on the program they wanted to study?
 - Do they report changing over time?
 - What kind of expectations did they have? (I wanted to...)
7. What role, if any, did family and/or friends play into your decision to go to college?
 - What impact do they report that this had?
8. How did currently working affect the decision to go to college?
 - What impact do they report that this had?
9. When thinking about other students at Valencia, how do you think they ended up choosing Valencia?
 - Any differences reported?
10. What was your opinion about Valencia prior to coming? What is it now after having attended?
 - Do they talk about how it does or does not fit their idea of college?
 - Do they name specifics that would be useful? Anything not useful?

Any overall themes and conclusions? Suggestions if we use these questions again?

Research questions to keep in mind:

1. *When does a student decide on coming to Valencia?*
2. *What factors into their decision?*
3. *When are the decision-making "gates"?*
4. *How are students influenced to make a decision?*