



VALENCIA COLLEGE

# CAPTURING STUDENT VOICES, TEACHING THEM TO LISTEN: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR CONDUCTING **FOCUS GROUPS** ON CAMPUS

APRIL SEA WEBINAR

THURSDAY, APRIL 9TH, 11:30 AM -12:30 PM ET

**Laura** Blasi, Ph.D., Director of Institutional Assessment

**Nichole** Jackson, Assistant Director for Learning Assessment

[www.valenciacollege.edu/via](http://www.valenciacollege.edu/via)

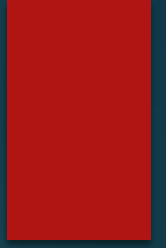
E-mail: [lblasi@valenciacollege.edu](mailto:lblasi@valenciacollege.edu)

## The Southeast Evaluation

Association (SEA) encourages the sharing, advancement, and dissemination of program evaluation knowledge and best practices across disciplines. Our members come from a variety of backgrounds: policy analysis, auditing, management, education, teaching, consulting, financial services, criminal justice, and social/community services.



# Welcome Poll of Participants

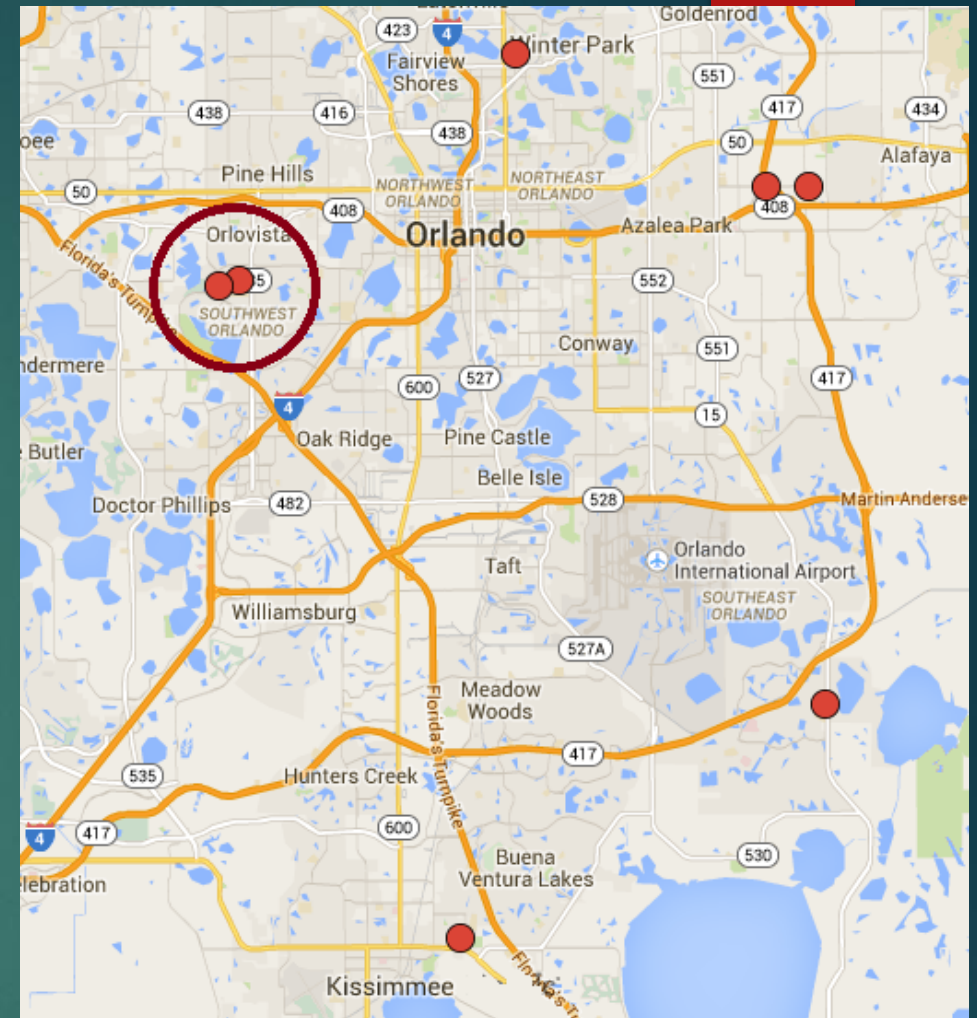


- ▶ Introduction of Valencia –  
Laura and Nichole

## STUDENTS: ENROLLMENT

### ANNUAL ENROLLMENT

Credit-Seeking Students: 59,958



## NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS

- Valencia was named the **best community college** in the nation as the inaugural winner of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.
- Valencia's economic impact on the region is more than **\$1 billion a year.**
- **One out of four** UCF graduates started at Valencia.

You should be able to....

Describe the methods  
Outline an effective strategy  
Provide examples  
Create and implement a plan  
Develop and train using a protocol

.... and point to resources  
to continue the good work!

(across communities)

What we will do

## I Introduction to Focus Groups

History and Methods

A working example:

Internships and Workforce Education

## II Methods

Question development

Facilitator preparation and training + recorders

Protocols and facilitation guide

Keeping notes - creating reports – having an impact

Limitations of focus groups

## III Student Focus Group Example - implementing these pieces

Purpose

Challenges

Methods

Results

Lessons Learned

## IV Resources & questions



# I Introduction to Focus Groups History and Methods

A working example –  
Internships and Workforce Education



- 
- ▶ The focus group concept is about 50 years old, and like many modern innovations, its roots date back to **World War II**. A group of sociologists were asked **to investigate how the military's propaganda films were being received by their audiences**. They learned that, with proper prodding, people can identify the exact reason certain scenes, lines, or phrases make them think or act in a certain way.
  - ▶ The consumer culture was next to use focus group technology, turning to academically trained market researchers **to determine everything from packaging and pricing to advertising and marketing**. Today, roughly 70% of all consumer research dollars are earmarked for qualitative research, and it is nearly impossible to find a Fortune 500 company that does not use focus groups to develop its corporate image and/or marketing strategy.
  - ▶ *Focus Group Research in American Politics* by Frank I. Luntz (1994)
  - ▶ <http://www.pollingreport.com/focus.htm>

Adapted from: Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews by Richard Krueger, University of Minnesota (2002) 18 pages [a shared resource](#)

### Participants

- ▶ 5 to 10 people per group, 6-8 preferred
- ▶ Similar types of people
- ▶ Repeated groups

### Environment

- ▶ Comfortable
- ▶ Circle seating
- ▶ Tape recorded

### Moderator

- ▶ Skillful in group discussions
- ▶ Uses pre-determined questions
- ▶ Establishes permissive environment

### Analysis and Reporting

- ▶ Systematic analysis
- ▶ Verifiable procedures
- ▶ Appropriate reporting

# II Methods

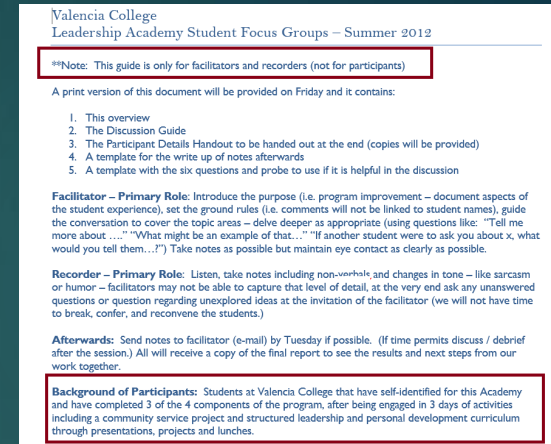
## Question development – Qualtrics example

## Facilitator preparation and training + recorders - Practice Protocols and facilitation guide – Examples

## Keeping notes - creating reports – having an impact

## Data Analysis

## Limitations of focus groups





Valencia College  
Leadership Academy Student Focus Groups – Summer 2012

---

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

A print version of this document will be provided on Friday 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 template for the write up of notes afterwards
5. A template with the six questions and probe to use if it is helpful in the discussion

**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.

**Recorder – Primary Role:** Listen, take notes including 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 question regarding unexplored ideas at the invitation of the facilitator (we will not have time to break, confer, and reconvene the students.)

**Afterwards:** Send notes to facilitator (e-mail) by Tuesday if possible. (If time permits discuss / debrief after the session.) All will receive a copy of the final report to see the results and next steps from our work together.

**Background of Participants:** Students at Valencia College that have self-identified for this Academy and have completed 3 of the 4 components of the program, after being engaged in 3 days of activities including a community service project and structured leadership and personal development curriculum through presentations, projects and lunches.



## Six Focus Group Interview Questions and Notes Template

Date  
Location  
Begin Time  
End Time  
Facilitator  
Recorder  
Number in Group  
Group Name / Topic

Any other details about the participants as the session begins?

Introduce yourself and read the introduction.

*[Note: As you take notes stick to initials and write up your notes using them.*

*Below you will find space for “notes” – these may be short phrases or questions that you want to return to as you go along.]*

### QUESTION

### Notes

### PROBE

1. How did you learn about the Academy?

*[Probe:  
“Why did you participate?”]*

# Limitations...

- ▶ ...having one or several dominant individuals within a group, permitting only one opinion to be heard;
- ▶ the likelihood of group dynamics obscuring some of the more controversial perspectives, for example the tendency for participants to reproduce normative discourses.
- ▶ These issues can be treated as problems to be overcome by better **moderator techniques**, or as limitations for the use of this methodology. I argue that the most **important issue for the researcher is how to analyse focus group data in a way which takes account of these issues**, and moreover, that the interactive features of focus groups can be viewed as interesting possibilities for this methodology, as well as limitations.

*Adapted from: Using and analysing focus groups : limitations and possibilities.* Janet Smithson (2000) **shared resource**

Blue = New staff members

CN

LA092. Please list the top three ways this institution helped you in your transition to college.

I could not figure out the system last semester. I don't know how to administer an email system, not a course system. The university is so big and I'm so new here. For such a large university, they would not have an abroad program. I came from, with a wide assortment of students.

1. Allowed access to transfer students of information : Early advising &

CO

LA093. Please list the top three ways this institution could have improved your

CP

D094. Number of semesters/quarters in which you have enrolled at this institution, including



*"I use it when my eyes are tired"*  
*"They [students] want me to look at small type on their phones that I can't see."*

*"We put tabs on it and pass it around."*  
*"I scan and send pages to students."*

*"When a student challenges the institution we all know what has been said..." There is a sense of authority when you look at the hard copy with a student."*  
*"The Web version does not seem real to them."*

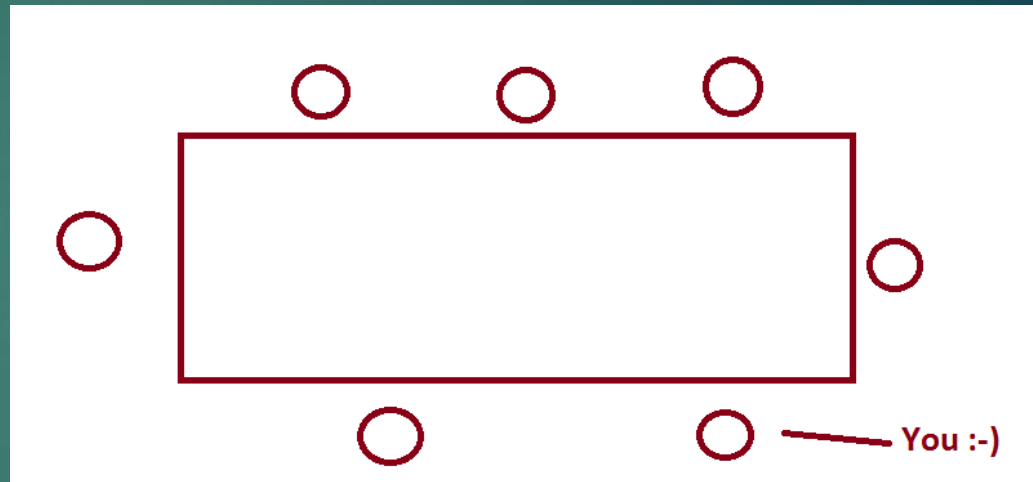
A NEW STUDENT  
Orientation planning guide

transfer of information (e.g. so students can connect at orientation)



# Capture the Moment

- ▶ Tip: Draw a map of the room to note who is sitting where



- ▶ Record it and write up with memo. Reflect on the process as well as the topic. Use a consistent format with clear title information.... (you can cite your memo, transcripts, related notes.)

# *Interviewing as Qualitative Research (Seidman, 1991)*

Ask open-ended questions

Ask them to tell you a story

Ask them to describe the process

Ask them to reconstruct, not remember

Yes: “What happened?”

No: “Do you remember what happened?”

Ask for concrete details

Keep them focused

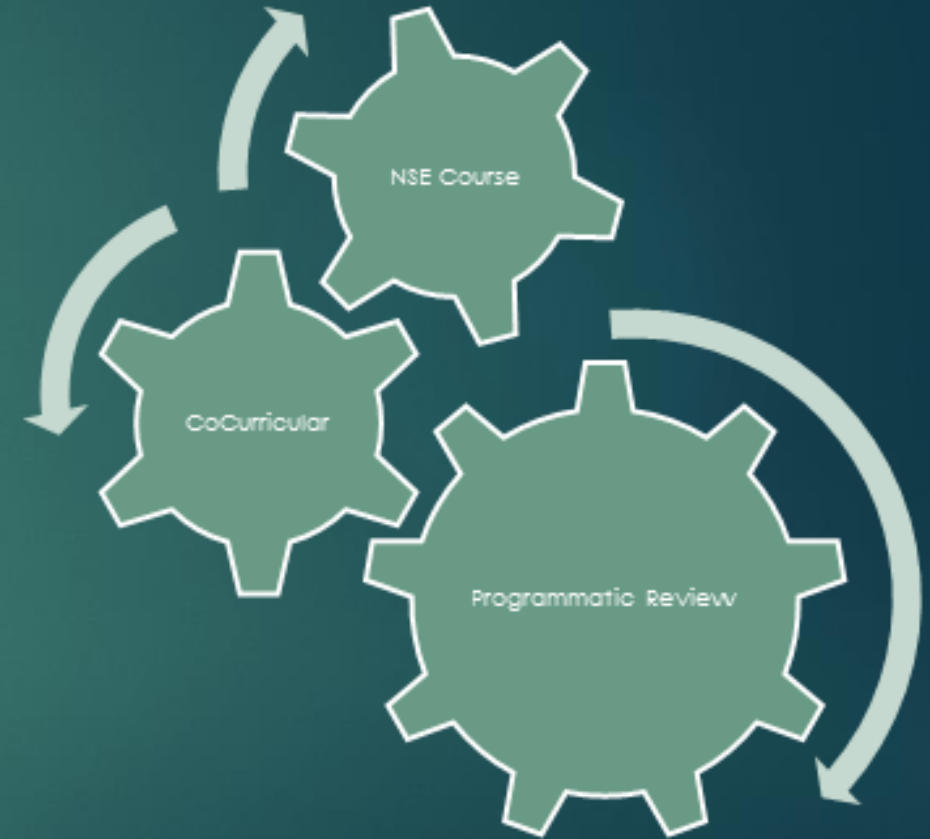
## III Student Focus Group Example

### Purpose

A case study–  
Peer facilitated focus groups

Process improvement requires

- ▶ Information
- ▶ Standard format
- ▶ Consistent guidelines

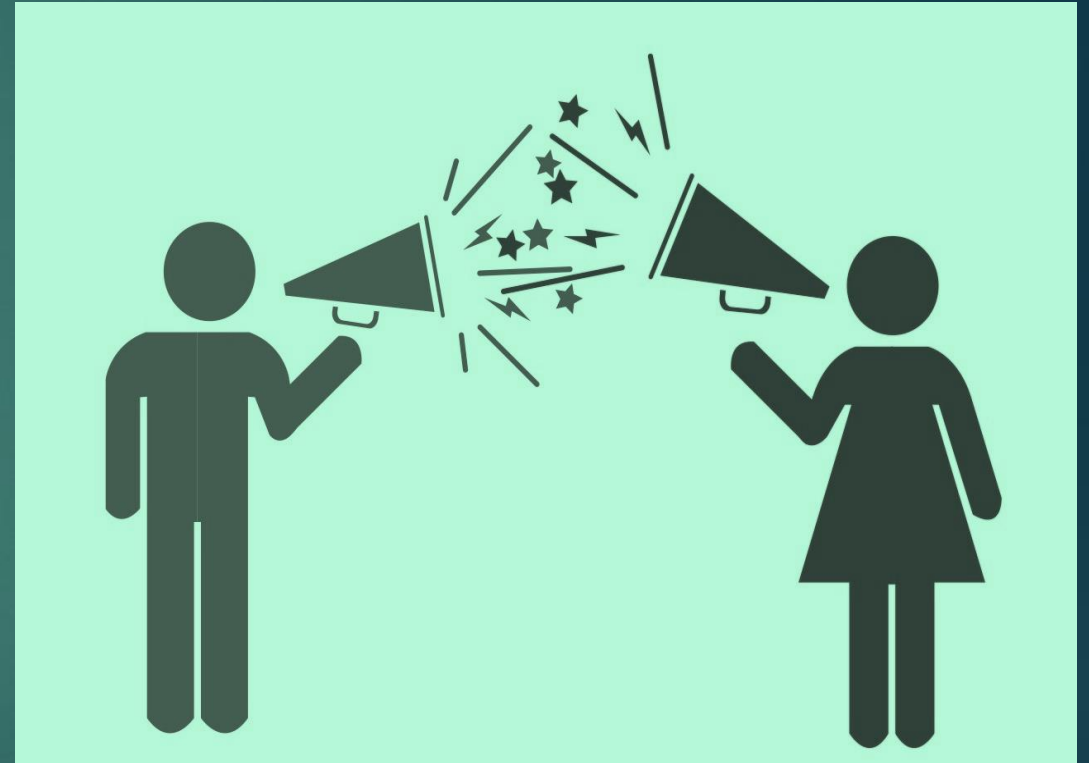


## III Student Focus Group Example Challenges

A case study–  
Peer facilitated focus groups

Listening styles affect how you

- ▶ Work as a team
- ▶ Maintain focus
- ▶ Manage time
- ▶ Avoid advising participants



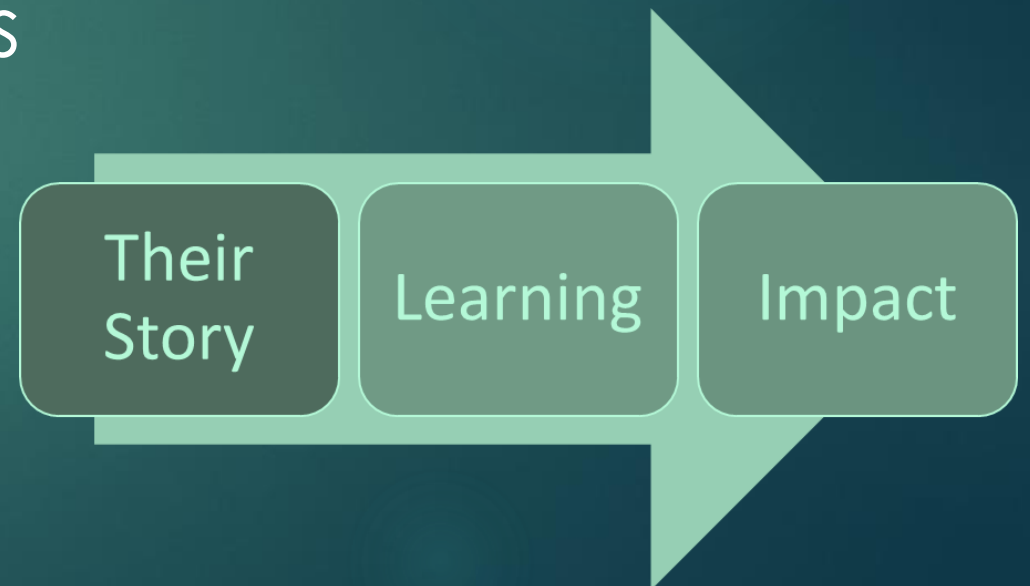


## III Student Focus Group Example Methods

A case study–  
Peer facilitated focus groups

Preplanning allows for

- ▶ Connected questions
- ▶ Strategies
- ▶ Identifiable stages of the conversation



## III Student Focus Group Example Results and Lessons Learned

A case study–  
Peer facilitated focus groups

Peer facilitation leads to

- ▶ Authenticity
- ▶ Shared strategies
- ▶ More communication and debriefing



## IV Resources & Questions (<http://www.eval.org/>)



**VALUES:** The American Evaluation Association values excellence in evaluation practice, utilization of evaluation findings, and inclusion and diversity in the evaluation community.

- i. We value high quality, ethically defensible, culturally responsive evaluation practices that lead to effective and humane organizations and ultimately to the enhancement of the public good.
- ii. We value high quality, ethically defensible, culturally responsive evaluation practices that contribute to decision-making processes, program improvement, and policy formulation.
- iii. We value a global and international evaluation community and understanding of evaluation practices.
- iv. We value the continual development of evaluation professionals and the development of evaluators from under-represented groups.



# Final Reflection - Poll of Participants



# Videos

About the history of focus groups (in marketing)

- The Engineering of Consent (part 3 of 6)\n<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WBPNLQgfGY>

Asking questions of citizens (politics)

- Happiness Machines (part 5 of 6 – see the last 5 minutes of this clip)\n<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-MksApggT0>
- ASTHO Public Health Marketing Focus Group\n[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBJUGi\\_Ohsk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBJUGi_Ohsk)
- PS The New Clean - Focus Group\n[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQjODuB\\_vXA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQjODuB_vXA&feature=related)

Only look at this if you need a laugh:

- Dodge Commercial - Focus Group\n<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcj7QT0Abk8&feature=related>

# Slides and Related Materials: [www.valenciacollege.edu/via](http://www.valenciacollege.edu/via)

**VALENCIA COLLEGE**

Future Students | Current Students | Faculty & Staff | Visitors & Friends

Home ▶ Institutional Effectiveness & Planning ▶ Institutional Assessment

**Navigate**

- Home
- Audio and Video
- Calendar
- Faculty Workshops
- Focus Groups**

## Institutional Assessment

**Welcome to Valencia's Institutional Assessment (VIA) Office:**

**Supporting Faculty and Staff Members  
Assessing What Matters Most**

*"Improvement—if it is to happen—will occur where faculty and staff have the most*

# Shared Resources

Krueger, Richard. (2002) Designing and conducting focus group interviews. St. Paul: University of Minnesota. Retrieved from <http://www.eiu.edu/~ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>

Luntz, Frank I. (1994) Focus group research in American politics. Pollingreport.com. Retrieved from <http://www.pollingreport.com/focus.htm>

Smithson, Janet. (2000) Using and analysing focus groups : limitations and possibilities. *Social research methodology*, 3 (2), 103-119. Retrieved from <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Smithson-2000-Using&AnalysingFocusGroups.pdf>