Valencia College
REACH Student Focus Groups – Summer 2012

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

This guide 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 the report afterwards 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.

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 and Purpose of the Focus Groups: A cohort-based learning community, REACH, was implemented on the Osceola Campus in Fall 2011 after Valencia faculty and staff attended the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities in June of 2010. REACH is a cohort based learning community with 45 students originally enrolled. The idea behind REACH was to develop a learning community for both students and faculty. The goal is for students to get 21 college level credit hours and complete their developmental education courses in one year. These two focus groups are being held in order to: 1) document student perceptions of the program; 2) inform the planning process for the next cohort; and 3) contribute to a larger conversation regarding students' experiences in cohort programs and the role that this experience plays in their development of success skills.

Research Questions:

1) What do the students report that they learned from being in the program?

2) How did their relationships with other students, faculty, and student services change, if at all?

3) Is there certain information, resources, strategies needed to succeed? Which were learned in REACH?

4) What might they do differently over the next year as a result of this experience?

Discussion Guide

Introduction:

- o Provide your name and thank them in advance for their time
- o Role as interviewer – need for frank and honest feedback, information confidential, etc.
- o Aspects of the process i.e. why are we interviewing, what will happen with the information
- o Stress that this is not an evaluation of the staff members

- We're here to find out about your experiences in THE REACH PROGRAM.

Establishing Context:

- **Their Story**

    - o Respondent Introduction (name)
        1. How did you learn about REACH?
        2. Why did you participate?

Objectives:

Document what students learned

3. What do the students report that they learned from being in the program?

> *How would you describe it to a new student?*
> *What is the purpose of this program?*
> *How would the program change if you were directing it?*
> *What aspects would you add or change?*

Reflect on the impact

4. How did their relationships with other students, faculty, and student services change, if at all?

> *Where did you go when you had questions about your courses when you began?*
> *Did this change after you became part of REACH? If so how, if not – why?*
> *Do you spend time with students you met through the REACH program?*
> *Do you talk with the professors you have had in the program?*

Find out what was learned

5. Information, resources, strategies needed to succeed? Which were learned in REACH?

    If we were writing a book for new students….

    What should every student <u>know</u> in order to succeed?
    What should every student <u>need to have</u> in order to succeed?
    What should every student <u>do</u> in order to succeed?

    [Probe: Which of these learned in REACH? How?]

6. What might they do differently over the next year as a result of this experience?

    Looking back, how have your college plans changed as a result of REACH?
    How have your goals changed since you began studying at Valencia [did you begin with goals]?
    [You mentioned you learned / experienced xxxx in REACH] … how will this impact your plan for next year?

Find out if there are any questions raised by the recorder…

You can say: "I want to invite my colleague _____ to ask any additional questions…."

- **Wrap Up**

    o Ask if there is anything else they would like to add?
    o Thank them for their time.
    o Hand out the "Participant Details Handout" (will be provided with pencils)
    o Ask them to leave it on the table and before you leave them alone with this
    o Let them know they can go home afterwards

Participant Details Handout

(Handout to be completed by participants at the end of the session –if they would like to)

- o What is your first name?

- o How long have you been a student at Valencia?

- o What is your major?

- o What are your career/academic goals?

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

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

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

Thank You for Your Time Today

Report Template (in Word)

Document Their Responses

- o 1. How did they learn about REACH?
- o 2. Why did they participate?
    - Did they arrive with goals or a plan?

3. What do the students report that they learned from being in the program?

- What terms do they use?
- Do they refer to specific activities or people?

4. How did their relationships with other students, faculty, and student services change, if at all?

- How do they describe their relationships?
- What helped or hindered them?

5. Information, resources, strategies needed to succeed? Which were learned in REACH?

- What information is important for student success from their perspectives?
- What do they know about the resources available?
- What kind of strategies do they report?
- What helped or hindered them?

6. What might they do differently over the next year as a result of this experience?

- Do they report changes?
- What kind of changes?
- Do they indicate they now have goals or plans?
- What impact do they report that this had?
- Any problems surface or changes needed?

Any overall themes and conclusions?

Suggestions if we have additional focus groups or use these questions next year?

Focus Group Interview 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 as the lead interviewer and also the recorder. 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.]

Use the shape below (or use a way that works best for you) to note who is at your table (using numbers for example can help when writing.)

ASK QUESTIONS	Take Notes	PROBE FOR MORE INFORMATION
		[*Probe: "Why did you participate?"* *"How would you describe it to a new student?"* *"Tell me more about that…"*]

Finish with a thank you—

Provide "Details Handout" and pencils and explain that it is optional and will be collected from the table and that they may leave.