Student Input for the Academic Program Review Process

This resource is to help you in the design and use of focus groups and surveys to collect student information for your academic program review. Keep in mind you are gathering student input about their experience in your program of study to better understand how this program helps meet their educational goals. You want to target the students who have declared your program as their major. Faculty teaching in the program will need to collectively decide the most efficient and effective approach to gathering student input during this fall semester and report your findings as part of the College Area Review process (See Academic Program Review Report_16, section one, number 6). You have flexibility in the type and number of questions asked of the students.

Potential topics to include are:
   a) any special and unique features of the program,
   b) any questions related to student expectations,
   c) extent to which the program outcomes were emphasized throughout the student's course of study, and
   d) any questions that would inform the program's impact on student success.

Method of Inquiry

There are advantages and disadvantages to using a focus group or survey. There are multiple issues to consider when determining whether to use focus groups or surveys to gauge student perceptions. Focus groups allow for additional probing and follow-up questions. On the other hand, focus groups are generally more costly than surveys to organize, staff, and analyze, and they may require access to skilled focus group moderators. Surveys allow faculty to gather information from a large number of students in a relatively short period of time, and answers can be easily aggregated. Students may also feel more comfortable completing a survey than talking in a focus group. However, surveys do not allow for additional probing questions, and response rates may be low, especially if a survey takes too long to complete. Faculty are encouraged to carefully weigh these issues in light of resource and timeline considerations, as well as local context and needs.

Tips for using Surveys

- Inform the students that their input helps to make positive improvements to the program.
- Choose only questions that are most likely to generate the information needed.
- Limit the number of questions and consider asking both qualitative and quantitative questions.
- In prioritizing questions, be sensitive to the time needed to complete the survey.
- Choose question types that best match your needs and capacity to analyze data. Open-ended questions have the benefit of enabling respondents to provide their personal feedback, but they can be time consuming to analyze when looking at hundreds of responses. Conversely, multiple-choice responses are very easy to code for data analysis but do not typically give respondents an opportunity to provide in-depth feedback.

- You may choose to administrator the survey to the whole class, reaching students who are declared majors and potential majors. You may randomly select a specific

course on each campus. You can chose another desirable method of selecting who to survey.

- Chose whatever method best fits your schedule and is doable by either paper or electronic survey.
- Offer to share results with any student who requests it.

Tips for Focus Group

Who will moderate the focus group? Time, place, and location of the focus group are factors for consideration. To allow time for each member of the focus group to participate, consider limiting the number of questions to ten or fewer. A neutral party should conduct the focus group. A dedicated note-taker and timekeeper is suggested. Also, using a program club that has representatives from all campuses where the program is taught is suggested. Use an existing meeting time to have an ad-hoc focus group meeting.

Suggested Ground Rules for conducting the Focus Group…

- The purpose of this focus group is part of an academic program review process to gather student input about the specific program of study.
- One person should speak at a time. Everyone should have a chance to speak.
- There are no "wrong" answers to any of these questions. We are interested in hearing your perspectives.
- Ensure the students that we value confidentiality. We will not associate any feedback that comes out of this focus group with a particular individual.
- Please turn off or silence your cell phones.
- Disclosure of note-taking: > A note-taker is present to make sure that we get all of your feedback. The note-taker will not associate comments with names.

Note: The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (Clary L. Brown, Research Analysts, x7-4182 provides expertise in survey and focus group design and administration, however, due to the time constraints, it is expected that you would consult with that office on a limited basis for the academic program review process.

Additional Resources:

http://www.ccsse.org/center/initiatives/iss/focusgrouptoolkit.cfm

http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/howto/assessteaching/focusGroups.html