

**UWB Academic Services User Needs Committee, 2005-06 and 2006-07**  
**Recommendations for running and completing focus groups**

This report was authored by the Academic Services User Needs Committee members including Tami Garrard, Nicole Hoover, Amanda Hornby, Julie Planchon Wolf and Betsy Tippens.

*For more detailed information about specific processes, tasks, and timelines, please see the [User Needs Committee tasks, processes, timeline document](#)*

**Preface:** This report provides recommendations for running Academic Services focus groups with students or faculty. Before beginning a large-scale focus group project, we recommend also considering other methods of gathering information from users, such as quantitative surveys with some open-ended qualitative questions or holding an informal discussion session with your users.

**Stage 1: Pre-focus groups work**

**Stage 1 took the User Needs Committee 10 months**

**Planning with stakeholders**

- We recommend that the Committee, or chair(s), meet with Academic Services Director, or appropriate administrator, to clarify the Committee's charge
- Work with the Director, and other stakeholders, to create a clear vision for the focus group
  - We recommend that key stakeholders be part of the Committee
- Ensure that all stakeholders agree about what kind of information they want to gather from the focus group and determine the student/faculty populations you want to conduct the focus groups with.
- Based on the clear vision your group has for the focus group, brainstorm focus group questions. Consult with appropriate administrators, key stakeholders, and qualitative research experts as your focus group questions are being developed.
- Finalize which focus group populations you wish to question.
- Decide on focus group facilitator, and include facilitator in appropriate meetings, appropriate review of focus group questions, etc. The User Needs Committee contracted with Mary McGuire, UWB Institutional Researcher and faculty member.

**Literature Review and Research**

- We recommend that the Committee conduct a literature review and read articles and books relevant to the type of focus group(s) the Committee seeks to run. Consult with qualitative research experts/faculty for advice on running focus groups, and as your focus group questions are being developed.

**Human Subjects**

- Gather information on the UW Human Subjects review process for your focus group(s) and – where appropriate – consult Cascadia Community College and/or University of Washington Bothell Human Subjects review processes
- Complete the appropriate Human Subjects review process(es).
  - The current Human Subjects approval is good through 2011, and the User Needs Committee received a Certificate of Exemption (an expedited HS

review process). The approval number is: #06-1630-E/C 01. The approved Human Subjects application allows the Library and Media Center – with Cynthia Fugate as Primary Investigator – to conduct student and faculty focus groups with Cascadia and UWB populations (over age 18); Focus group questions on non-invasive/exploratory topics about the CLMC have been approved, as has the ability to publish official data from the focus groups and to audio record focus groups. We recommend that future User Needs Committees consult with Human Subjects for any new focus group, even if it falls under the approved HS review form.

### **Funding**

- Submit a request to Director of Academic Services (or appropriate administrator) for the Committee's funding needs
- When determining funding needs, be sure to include the following: staff time and resources, transcription and focus group moderator costs, the cost of focus group food, and premiums/gift certificates for focus group participants
- In our experience, the following UWB units (full-time staff) put in considerable time: Library Administration staff; Librarians; Media Center staff; Academic Services staff (note takers) and User Needs Committee Members; Publicity/Marketing Committee

### **Marketing**

- Create marketing flyers and letters to recruit faculty and/or students for focus groups; determine if these need to be approved as part of the UW/CCC/UWB Human Subjects review process.
  - When creating the focus group recruiting materials, be sure to advertise how participant involvement “makes a difference” and is “important and valuable” to us. This strategy is a stronger motivator than gifts or food.
  - An effective tactic to recruit students is to work with faculty to promote focus groups in class and/or give students extra credit for participation

Resources relating to Stage 1 can be found in these folders:

- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Questions>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Research>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Human Participants - CCC>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Human Subjects Dept - UWS>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Marketing and Publicity>

## **Stage 2: Pilot focus group work**

### **Stage 2 took the User Needs Committee 5 months**

#### **Pilot Focus Group Planning**

- Run a pilot focus group to ensure focus group questions are effective, to determine work flow and what tasks need to be accomplished that you may not have thought of, and to work out any kinks in focus group processes.
- Determine when you will hold the pilot focus group, and with which population you will run the pilot focus group.
  - A good strategy to determine dates of focus groups is to time focus groups either before or after specific classes
- Decide on note takers for each focus group session, two are needed per focus group

- In our experience, UWB Academic Services team are good note takers, ensure that Administration supports staff time to take notes; Consider bias and influence when determining note takers; We recommend not using student workers as note takers.

### **Pilot Focus Group Sub-Committee**

- For the pre- and post- focus group tasks, such as distributing screening forms, reserving rooms, posting flyers, etc., we recommend creating a sub-group within the Committee to project manage and accomplish these small but time-consuming tasks
- The day of the pilot focus group, we recommend that the following steps are taken (managed by the sub-group): inform all staff about the focus group; have staff stationed to help guide students/faculty to the focus group location; coordinate with appropriate administrative team to ensure food and gift premiums and signature sheets are ready; have all participants read and fill out consent form before the focus group; make photocopies of the consent forms and slide the copies under the door to be re-distributed to the participants; finally, at the end of the focus group have the facilitator pass around the signature sheet for proof that the participants received a gift premium and distribute the gift.

### **Marketing**

- Promote the focus groups to your focus group populations through flyers, letters, invitations, posters, sandwich boards, etc. In our experience, you will need permission to hang up flyers, and there is a daily need to distribute and replenish flyers; create sandwich board advertisements, hang a poster in the Library walkway, and/or determine other ways of promoting the focus groups.

### **Pilot Focus Group Participants**

- Before the pilot focus group, try and pre-screen interested participants by having them call a designated contact and fill out a participant screening form. This will help determine the number of participants, the student/faculty program area, age, etc.
  - In our experience, students often “show up” the day of focus groups, so rather than arranging for participants to call ahead, you should have participant screening forms ready to fill out over the phone and on the day of focus group

### **Planning with Stakeholders**

- Post-pilot focus group, we recommend holding a debriefing session with focus group facilitator, note-takers, and other stakeholders about the process, focus group questions and responses, etc.
- We also recommend further consultation with stakeholders after the pilot focus group to ensure that the focus group questions and responses provide the type of information desired; Confirm that this meets the goals of the “clear vision” for focus groups before running the official focus groups.

Resources relating to Stage 2 can be found in these folders:

- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Planning and Scheduling>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Marketing and Publicity>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Transcripts and Notes\Pilot 12-5-06 with students>

### **Stage 3: Conducting Focus Groups**

#### **Stage 3 took the User Needs Committee 4 months**

##### **Planning and Implementing Official Focus Groups**

- Follow the steps taken during the pilot focus group to run successful student and faculty focus groups, including planning official focus groups; and working with focus group participants, note takers, focus group facilitator, etc. To accomplish all of the small and time-consuming focus group processes and tasks, we recommend coordinating with a team of staff, and utilizing the User Needs Committee's sub-committee.
- In our experience, these tasks include, but are not limited to: determining focus group dates (often based on class schedules, availability, etc.), screening participants, reserve meeting rooms, coordinate with the Campus Media Center about recording equipment and staff needed, order and provide food and gift certificates, marketing the focus groups, and coordinating with multiple administrative teams and divisions.
- Run focus group sessions for faculty and students, ensuring that Committee members communicate session dates with Library staff, take notes on the focus group processes and be prepared to adjust or change tasks depending on changing or emerging needs.
- For recorded focus group sessions, consult with the Campus Media Center and the transcription company what type of format is required; coordinate with Library Administration or the party who is going to coordinate payment with the transcription service; coordinate with the transcription company to receive transcriptions; coordination with the two note-takers for each focus group session is also necessary.

Resources relating to Stage 3 can be found in these folders:

- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Planning and Scheduling>
- <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Transcripts and Notes\focus groups in 2007>

### **Stage 4: Post-Focus Groups Work**

#### **Stage 4 took the User Needs Committee 6 months**

##### **Debrief with Stakeholders**

- After the focus group sessions are held, hold a debriefing meeting with the User Needs Committee, administrators, and key stakeholders (in the User Needs Committee's case, this included Cynthia Fugate and Mary McGuire) about the focus groups, focus group processes, and begin to discuss how best to analyze the qualitative focus group data.

##### **Work with Qualitative Data from Focus Groups**

- With input from stakeholders and focus group literature, determine the best format for sharing focus group data; also determine the various audiences for the data by consulting stakeholders

- We recommend that the Committee hold a series of meetings to read all of the focus group transcripts and notes

#### **Summarize and Report Data from Focus Groups**

- We recommend that the Committee collaborate to creating several documents that summarize focus group results/findings for different audiences
- We recommend creating an executive summary of the focus group results
- We also recommend creating a report/recommendation that summarizes the focus group process

Resources relating to Stage 4 can be found in these folders:

<\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Reports>

### **Stage 5: Final Steps**

**Stage 5 is ongoing through 2008**

- Upon completion of all focus groups, disseminate focus group results/findings to Cascadia Community College, Campus Library, UW Libraries, and possibly publish and present results to broader audiences
- In compliance with Human Subjects, destroy focus group participant contact information and transcripts to protect data against disclosure to the public by the date required by Human Subjects review committee.

*For more detailed information about specific processes, tasks, and timelines, please see the User Needs Committee tasks document, <\\Mercury\collaboration\Academic Services\User Needs Comm\Focus Group Reports\Tasks, processes, timeline for running and completing focus groups.doc>*