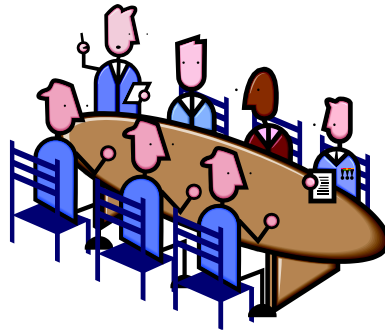


Introduction to Focus Groups



Prepared for Student Affairs

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Spring 2009

What is a focus group?

- Carefully planned discussion(s) to understand what people think about certain issue/product/service.
- Typical group consists of 6-8 people with something in common.
- Skilled neutral moderator.
- Comfortable permissive environment.

Alternatives to a focus group?

- Data from already completed surveys
- Review of existing documents
- Observation and recording of actions
- Development and administration of new survey
- Individual interviews

When is a focus group your best method?

What issues or services might Student Affairs want to learn about through focus groups?

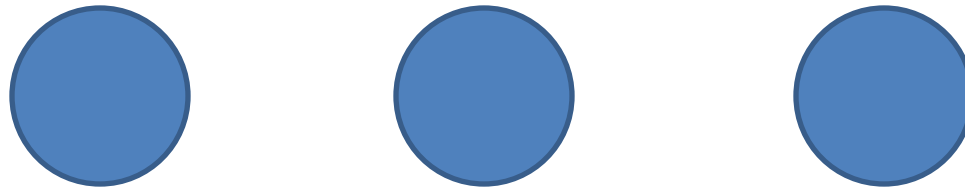
Division of Student Affairs

STUDENTS

How many groups?

- Simplest case – single category of person
Example: focus group study of “students” about residency requirement.

Conduct *at least three* focus groups.



*??? Have you reached saturation?? If not,
conduct more focus groups!*

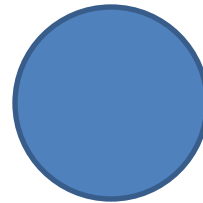
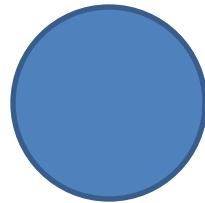
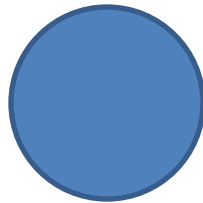
How many groups?

- Multiple categories of person.

Example: focus group study of Greeks and Independents about social climate on campus.

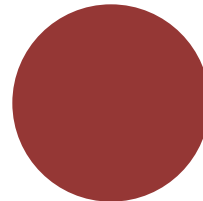
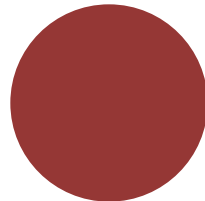
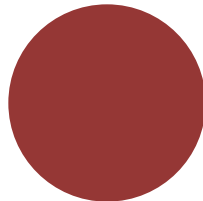
Conduct *at least six* focus groups.

Greeks



...

Independents



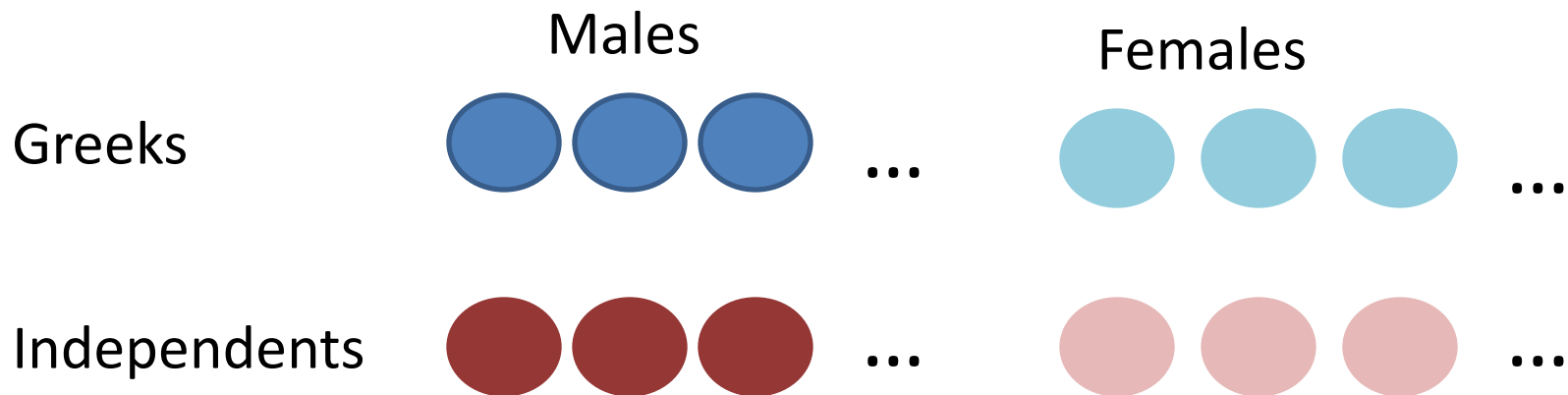
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How many groups?

- More than one factor with multiple categories.

Example: Focus groups of male and female Greeks and Independents...

Conduct at least 12 focus groups.



Who should the participants be?

- Fairly homogenous group
- About 6 to 8 people (4 to 12 at outside)
- Meet your criteria (eg, Greek male)
- Remember that you want them to feel comfortable to freely discuss the topic.

How will we locate people meeting your criteria?

- Example: Greek and Independent men and women
- Example: Muslim students
- Example: Students who use the Bell Center and students who do not use the Bell Center

Ideally, you would select participants randomly from among all who meet your criteria but...

How should we invite them?

- Personal invitation
- Set date, time, location
- Request response
- Invite more if not enough positive responses
- Reminder to those who agree to attend shortly before the session
- Incentives recommended



How will we formulate questions?

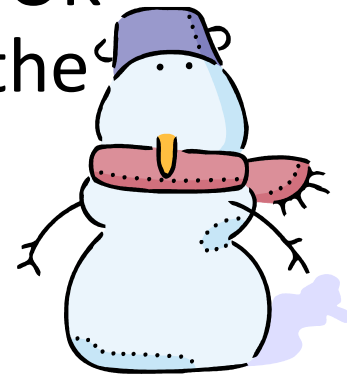
- Start with an easy question that will have short answers and get everyone talking.
- Build up to the key questions about the topic as needed.
- Key questions.
- Consider having some ending questions that help to summarize.

*Plan on 10 to 15 minutes for responses to most questions.
Total time should not exceed 90 to 120 minutes.*



Some possible variations

- List items on flip chart (eg, advantages of living on campus)
- Ask participants to rate something and then discuss the rating (eg, grade the quality of student activities with a letter grade)
- Imagination questions (eg, “Imagine that you have been cryogenically frozen and you wake up 20 years in the future. You are completely OK and you awake in an ideal world. What is the university like in this ideal world?”)

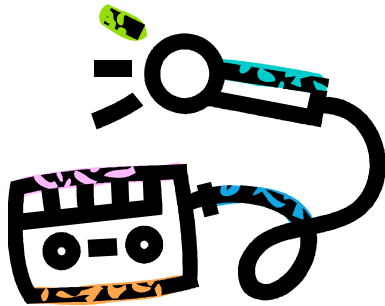


Who will moderate the sessions?

- Moderator must be neutral, non-judgmental, non-threatening.
- Moderator must convey a sincere interest in the thoughts of the participants.
- Moderator encourages discussion but is mostly a listener. May probe for details.
- Moderator persuades those who are not talking and dissuades dominators.

How will we record the discussion?

- Use a tape recorder. (Possibly two.)
- Moderator typically takes minimal notes.
- Have an assistant moderator who takes detailed notes and switches tapes.



Other considerations

- May want to have some refreshments available.
- May want to have name tags.
- Arrive early and set up.
- Bring extension cords, extra tapes, batteries, note pads and pens for moderators, laptop...



How do we analyze the results?

- Analysis should fit the purposes of the study.
 - What did you want to get out of this study?
 - Are crucial decisions going to be made with these results?
 - How clear and consistent were the responses?
 - How quickly do stake-holders need the results?

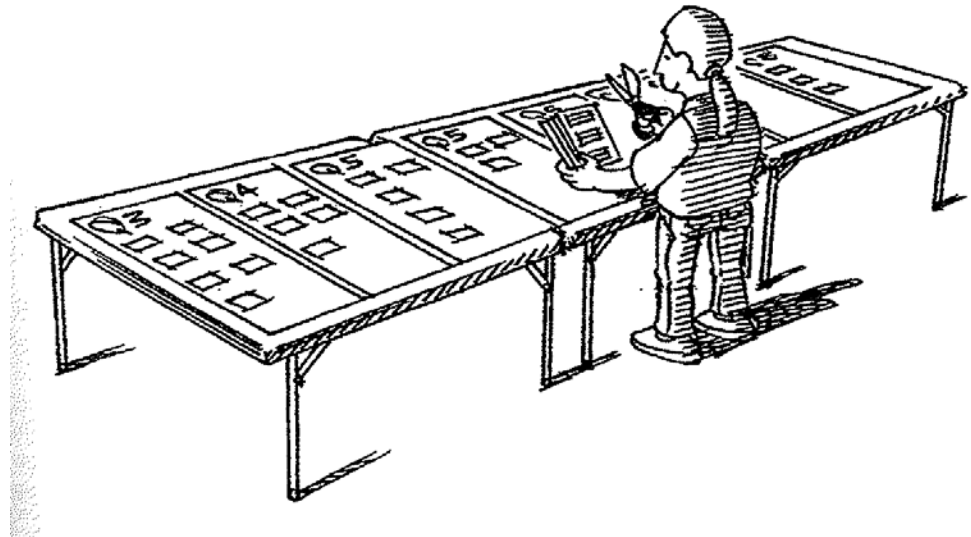


Ideas for Analysis

- **Mini analysis.** Moderator and assistant moderator discuss impressions from memory and summarize their conclusions.
- **Moderate analysis.** Use the assistant moderator's notes (perhaps in digital form). Cut and paste (literally or on the computer) to pull together themes. As needed (for clarification or quotations) refer to tapes. Write up report.

Ideas for Analysis

- **Ultimate analysis.** Have the tapes transcribed. Print transcriptions on different colored/patterned paper. Cut and paste to identify themes...

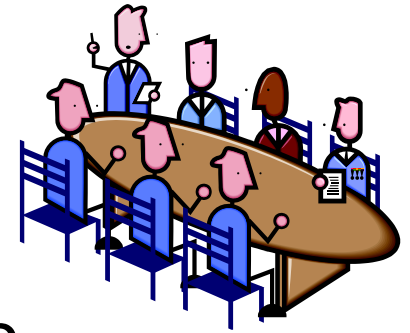


Analysis Tip

- May be able to ask an ending question that gets participants to help summarize.



Summary



- Is a focus group the best tool for the purposes?
- What types of people will you want as participants? How many groups will you need?
- Identify potential participants.
- Send invitations, receive RSVPs, make arrangements for room.

Summary (cont.)

- Work with stake holders to develop questions.
- Identify moderator and assistant moderator.
- Conduct focus group sessions.
- Perform analysis and provide results to stake holders.

