

Title: Using Focus Groups to Improve Instruction

Author: Karen D. Merz, Ph.D., Educational Resources and Development

Affiliation: Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences

Address: 1111 W. 17th Street
Tulsa, OK 74107

E-mail: merzk@osu-com.okstate.edu

Abstract:

As Educators we face increasing pressure to ensure the relevance of educational activities to the learning needs of our students. A Focus Group provides an excellent forum for obtaining feedback from students about their needs, preferences, and hidden attitudes. At the same time it sends a powerful message to students about our commitment to excellence and helping them learn.

At our college, we use standard assessment approaches as well as actively involving students in the feedback process through Focus Groups, spaced appropriately throughout courses. Focus Groups, with their brainstorming dynamics, provide us with a wider range of student responses, and allow students to be part of the creative process in answering the question, "How can this course be improved?"

This presentation will review the process we use and will discuss the benefits of implementing focus groups for involving students in the course improvement process; factors to consider in creating and using focus groups; and processes for interpreting data and implementing course, or program, changes.