

Consultant's Manual

This manual has been divided into three sections. The first section, Overview of Student Focus Groups, will provide a rationale for the use of these groups, explain the consultant's role in conducting student focus groups and how reports for these groups shall be prepared. The second section, Overview of One-on-one Consultation, will provide a rationale for the use of consultation, explain the consultant's role in individual consultation and how reports for this process shall be prepared. The third section, Training Materials, will provide the detailed information you will need to be a consultant for either of these two programs.

There are three Appendices. Appendix A lists the references used in the compilation of this manual. Appendix B provides a sample report for Student Focus Groups and Appendix C contains a sample report form for One-on-one Consultations.



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Section One: Overview of Student Focus Groups

What are Student Focus Groups?

Student Focus Groups have been one of the methods the ILTE has adopted to provide faculty feedback about their teaching and about what students are learning. A trained consultant interviews students using pre-selected questions from the faculty member designed to assess whether the students are learning what the faculty member intends.

Faculty initiate this process with a request to the ILTE. Once such a request is made, a trained consultant will contact the faculty member and schedule an appointment with them to review the process. During this initial meeting, the entire process is explained and the faculty member supplies the consultant with the course syllabus, other appropriate course materials and explains course objectives. Together the consultant and the faculty member create a series of questions that address the concerns the faculty member has expressed. The creation of appropriate questions is one of the critical aspects of this approach. Questions should probe the breadth and depth of student understanding. A class time is scheduled when the consultant will interview the students during class time. During the interview, the faculty member will not be in the class. Following this student focus group, the consultant will meet with the faculty member to report on the results of the interviews. A final report is written by the consultant and given to the faculty member.

Why use Student Focus Groups?

Directly interviewing students provides a greater sense of what students are actually learning, what impact various pedagogical techniques might be having on the students and what kinds of connections to other course material the students were able to make.

Many professors report that the information they receive from Student Focus Groups is richer and more directly relevant to their courses than the standard student evaluation of teaching forms.

What is the consultant's role?

Consultants must:

Meet with faculty member to review course materials and to create questions for the Student Focus Group

Interview students

Meet with faculty member to report on results of Student Focus Group

Prepare and submit a summary report outlining the results of the Student Focus Group

Guidelines for consultants

It is preferred, when possible, that consultants not be linked with faculty from their own discipline.

On this campus, interviews are conducted with all students in the course.

Total time for the interview should be at least 30 minutes but no more than 45 minutes.

Consultant should take notes regarding the tenor and substance of the student-interviewer discussions.

The consultant should attempt to ensure all students are heard and all opinions are equally weighted.

It is best to conduct a Student Focus Group near the end of the semester, preferably when only three or four class sessions remain.

Section Two: Overview of One-on-one Consultation

What is one-on one consultation?

One-on-one consultation is a formative peer review of teaching process. Proper peer review of teaching is an important complement to the widespread use of standard student evaluations of teaching. If peer review of teaching becomes a part of the culture at IU Southeast, then this process can enhance the quality of learning at our university.

The peer review process adopted by the ILTE has been called one-on-one consultation. Essentially, the faculty member and the consultant work together to assess the faculty member's teaching and to assist the faculty member in efforts to strengthen teaching. The thrust of this program is developmental, not judgmental.

On the IU Southeast campus, one-on-one consultation will include the following components:

Request initiated by the faculty member

Consultant schedules an appointment to meet with the faculty member. During this meeting, the consultant will explain the steps of the program and will request the course syllabus and course materials. A date is set for the consultant to attend the faculty member's class.

Class observation. More than one observation may occur at this point depending upon the needs of the faculty member and what the consultant believes will be most valuable. During this observation, the consultant will be looking for several instructor behaviors, student behaviors, and evidence to support the instructional goals outlined by the faculty member.

Meeting with faculty member to review observations and make suggestions for improvement. Suggestions may be made about course materials or about classroom issues.

Class observation. Once again, this may be one observation or two depending upon the faculty member and consultant.

Meeting with faculty member to review observations.

Consultant prepares a report and submits it to the faculty member.

Why use one-on-one consultation?

Across the nation, academicians have assumed, usually erroneously, that summative evaluation (decision making with respect to reappointment, promotion, tenure, and compensation) may also be used to facilitate instructional improvement. A careful reading of the IU Southeast policies pertaining to compensation suggests a similar philosophy. Unfortunately, summative evaluation rarely provides sufficient information to faculty for improving teaching.

In response to criticism about summative evaluation, formative evaluation has been recommended that exists alongside, but separate from, summative evaluation.

Several studies have documented that teaching improves when faculty actively take part in programs where they work collaboratively to improve teaching. In addition, faculty morale and collegiality have also been found to improve when they are involved in peer evaluation.

What is the consultant s role?

Consultants must:

Meet with faculty member to review course materials

Observe class using standardized approach learned through training.

Meet with faculty member to report on results of observation and to recommend improvements.

Observe class using standardized approach learned through training.

Meet with faculty member to report on results of observation and to suggest future efforts faculty members could undertake to improve their teaching.

Prepare and submit a summary report outlining the results of the one-on-one consultation.

Guidelines for consultants

It is preferred, when possible, that consultants not be linked with faculty from their own discipline.

Consultants must remain nonjudgmental.

Training Materials

Confidentiality

What do you mean by confidentiality?

All activities offered through the ILTE are confidential. This means that no one outside the ILTE (and the consultant) may be given any knowledge about who is involved in ILTE activities. As a consultant, this means you may not discuss any consultations you conduct with anyone other than the Director of the ILTE. You may not tell anyone if a faculty member is or is not a part of this program. You may not reveal any positive information about faculty members you have worked with in this program for any reason, including summative evaluations for promotion or tenure. Any questions concerning confidentiality should be directed to the ILTE Director.

What if the Chancellor or the Dean asks whether a faculty member is seeking assistance?

They won't. In the time the ILTE has been operating, no administrator has asked me to violate the ILTE policy on confidentiality. If this question arises, simply tell them that confidentiality binds you and they should speak to the Director of the ILTE.

Can I write a letter of recommendation for faculty members who I have provided consultations?

Of course. The letter, however, must not contain any information acquired through the consultation process.

Doesn't this policy penalize the faculty member?

The literature is clear that formative assessment and summative assessment need to be complementary but separate. This is in the best interest of the faculty. There is nothing to prevent the faculty member from utilizing the information from the consultant's report to supplement their dossier. It is recommended that the faculty member summarize the report and reflect on how this report led to their continued efforts at improving their teaching. Simply attaching the report is typically not seen as sufficient.

Student Focus Groups

Reviewing course materials: What should I look for?

By looking through the sections under One-on-one Consultation covering good teaching and areas to cover, you should develop a sense of what topics you would like to consider when reviewing course materials. Each course will differ and the goals each faculty member will have will differ. In spite of this, a few general questions should always be addressed:

Goals/objectives:

Has the professor clearly outlined his/her goals and objectives for the course? Would a student know?

Are lectures and assignments geared toward achieving the goals and objectives the faculty member has outlined?

Assignments/lectures:

Are materials designed to challenge and stimulate students who quickly master basic goals and objectives?

Are materials designed in a clear, logical, and appropriately structured format?

Is material previously learned incorporated into subsequent course materials?

Is there evidence of short and long term planning?

Evaluation of Students:

Are the evaluation techniques appropriate to curricular goals and objectives?

Are a variety of evaluation techniques being used?

Are assignments and exams directly related to curricular goals and objectives?

Is evaluative feedback provided promptly?

What type of questions should the students be asked?

Asking good questions is critically important. Some experts have stated that failure to ask appropriate questions is the most common reason for failure of these types of focus groups. Developing questions for the Student Focus Groups must be taken in two stages.

Stage One:

During your meeting with the faculty member, ask them what questions they would like you to ask the students. What concerns does the faculty member have about the course? What aspects of the course does the faculty member believe are going well? What aspects do they believe are problematic?

Record all of these questions. Be sure that the faculty member has given you at least four to five questions that he or she would like answered.

Stage Two:

Prior to meeting with the students, take the questions the faculty member has provided, possible questions that have occurred to you and the following list of questions:

What do you like most about this course?

What do you like least about this course?

What does the professor do that helps you the most in learning the material?

Is there anything the professor does that makes it hard for you to understand the material?

What would you like to see the professor do differently?

Is there anything that other professors have done that helped you to learn?

Rewrite all questions in an open-ended form. There might be one question that cannot be re-structured in an open-ended form. If this question is critical, keep it. If it isn't critical, omit it. Organize the questions so that you begin and end the Student Focus Group on a

positive note.

It is recommended that you write the questions out on a sheet that you can take with you to the Student Focus Group. You may only have time for about five to six questions, so choose carefully. Prepare a few extra questions in case the class moves quickly.

What is the best way to conduct the Student Focus Group?

Each campus I have seen that utilizes procedures such as the Student Focus Group conducts the interviews in a slightly different manner. The manner I am proposing has been in effect on the IU Southeast campus for the past eighteen months and has been highly effective. To date, no problems have arisen with the approach. As we conduct more Student Focus Groups, we may discover variations that would increase our effectiveness.

Prior to attending the class where you are to conduct the Student Focus Group, the faculty member should be asked to explain that a consultant from the ILTE would be coming to the next class. Explain that the consultant is coming to discover how the class is going and what can be done to improve the class for future students. Request that the faculty member explain that the consultant will interview the students as a group while the professor will be out of the room. Also ask the faculty member to explain to the students that their comments will be confidential.

On the day of the Student Focus Group, place the students into a circle around you. If the desks do not move, see if you can move the students into another classroom or go outside, weather permitting. If the class is over 40 students, see the procedures for large classes below.

Begin the session by introducing yourself and asking them if they know why you are there. If they cannot answer, give them the same information you had requested the faculty member to provide and emphasize the confidential nature of the proceeding (Do not assume the faculty member did not provide the information. Some classes won't respond to you at first and you will need to warm them up.). Specifically state that you will be taking notes but that you will not be giving the professor any detail about which student said what (if you don't know the students, use that as further evidence that you couldn't possibly reveal who said what).

Start the actual interview with an easy, positive question. The nature of the question will vary depending upon the class. Gauge which students are responding. You will want to give all students a chance to respond so specifically ask students to respond when they do not spontaneously respond. Even when most of the class seems to agree on a point, be sure to ask if there is anyone who does not agree.

Frequently, after you ask one or two questions, the class will begin to volunteer information that answers questions that you have yet to ask. Don't stifle them. Provide responses that keep the

conversation going as long as you are getting useful information. Don't worry if the students take the conversation into areas you didn't expect.

When time is running out, be sure that students who have not participated have a chance to add any additional information. It is okay to turn to a student who has not responded and say, I've noticed you haven't said very much. What is your reaction to how this course is going

Finally, end the conversation on a positive note. I typically end with the question, What do you like best about this class?

What about large classes?

For classes with 35 or more students, a different approach is recommended. First, prepare your questions in a written format with sufficient space between the questions for short answers to be written. Make enough copies for groups of five students plus a copy for yourself. On the day of the Student Focus Group, provide general information as a large group. Then split the class into groups of five students. Ask each group to select a spokesperson. Allow the groups about 15 minutes to talk about the questions you have provided. While the groups talk, walk among them asking them to explain more about a particular comment or to share an example of something they are discussing.

At the end of the group time (you may shorten the time if they are all done early), have the class reform into a whole. Try to put them in a layered semi-circle around you if at all possible. Ask the group spokespeople to share their answers. Have each spokesperson deliver one response then move to the next spokesperson until all responses are given. Encourage anyone who wants to add to the comments to do so.

One-on-one Consultation

What is good teaching?

Good teaching may take many forms. One of the basic characteristics of good teaching is that students are learning. This learning, according to experts, should occur in a positive, supportive environment rather than a negative, aversive environment. In essence, you catch more bees with honey.

However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the contribution of any one faculty member in relation to what a student has learned. Students enter the classroom with differing abilities, motivations, backgrounds and level of knowledge. End of course testing cannot tease out what an individual faculty member has contributed to a student's overall knowledge level. Assessing these types of outcomes is best done on a program level.

So, how can we assess good teaching at the individual faculty member level? Based on a perusal of the guidelines adopted at IU Southeast for purposes of summative evaluation and the literature concerning this topic, the ILTE's one-on-one consultation program has adopted the following principles and practices related to effective teaching.

The Effective teacher:

Principle 1: Sets clear goals and intellectual challenges for student learning.

Principle 2: Employs appropriate teaching methods and strategies that actively involve learners.

Principle 3: Communicates and interacts effectively with students.

Principle 4: Attends to the intellectual growth of students.

Principle 5: Respects diverse talents and learning styles of students.

Principle 6: Incorporates learning beyond the classroom.

Principle 7: Reflects on, monitors and improves teaching practices.

These principles have guided the development of the one-on-one consultation process in the ILTE. It is important that consultants be familiar with these principles and share these principles with faculty members wishing to avail themselves of this process. Obviously, not all of these principles will be apparent in every one-on-one consultation. It is hoped that through the consultation process, faculty members will become more familiar with these principles and begin thinking about them as they design their courses.

What areas will the one-on-one consultation cover?

This question is being answered in many different ways across the country. Some schools are covering six separate areas, some cover four areas, and some treat the peer review process as a research endeavor. At IU Southeast, the one-on-one consultation process will utilize an approach advocated by Arreola (1999).

Arreola advocates that faculty, as part of a campus effort, delineate the components of the teaching role. Based on campus conversations at IU Southeast and the adopted guidelines on summative evaluations, the following four components were developed for one-on-one consultation.

Subject matter or Content expertise: knowledge, skills, and abilities a faculty member possesses in a chosen field.

Is the depth and breadth of the material appropriate for the level of the course and the students?

Does the faculty member emphasize a conceptual grasp of the material?

Are the faculty member's goals appropriate for the level of the course and the students?

Is higher-order learning or critical thinking a part of the curriculum?

How well does the material relate to other courses in the department?

Does the faculty member help students learn to apply what they are learning?

Is lack of knowledge of the subject matter evident?

Is the material selected by the faculty member appropriate for the specified goals and objectives?

Instructional delivery skills or interpersonal skills: interactive skills that promote or facilitate learning including the ability to motivate students, generate enthusiasm and communicate effectively

Does the faculty member appear to be enthusiastic about teaching?

Does the faculty member appear to be enthusiastic about the subject matter?

Are the faculty member's interactions with students conducive to learning?

Does the faculty member show interest in students and their learning?

How are the students reacting to the lesson?

What are the implications of the observed student behaviors for the faculty member's approach to teaching?

Does the faculty member recognize when students do not understand? How is this handled?

How does the faculty member deal with students of diverse backgrounds?

What accommodations are made for students with varied learning styles?

Does the faculty member communicate effectively (oral and written)?

Is the faculty member's use of humor appropriate?

Does the faculty member use effective active listening skills?

Does the faculty member model respect for other faculty and students?

Instructional design skills: technical skills in designing, sequencing, and presenting experiences that induce learning and assessing student learning

Are course materials logically organized?

Is there sufficient time between assignments?

Are the faculty member's course objectives reflected in course assignments and grading?

Do daily course lessons and assignments aid the student in achieving final course outcomes? Is this built sequentially?

Please see additional questions relating to this topic under the Student Focus Group section on [Reviewing Course Materials](#).

Course management skills: organizational and bureaucratic tasks involved in maintaining and operating a course such as keeping grade records, on time processing of forms, arranging for supplementary resources, or scheduling guest lecturers

Are course assignments returned promptly?

Are supplemental materials available when the students need them?

Does the course syllabus reflect course policies?

Does the course syllabus provide information for students who may be having difficulty in the course?

Is confidential information handled ethically and with discretion?

Does the faculty member keep personal problems outside of the classroom?

Does the faculty member recognize and deal effectively with crisis issues in students (e.g., substance abuse, suicidal behavior, and mood changes)?

These categories and questions are meant to be used as an organizational framework and not a checklist. Modifications will be required to reflect individual differences among faculty and among courses.

What makes a good consultant?

First, and foremost, the literature suggests that faculty respect consultants who have been recognized as outstanding teachers and who have been through a training process. Second, consultants for this program will be required to engage in peer observations. The literature suggests that the primary characteristics of effective peer observers are closely related to characteristics of good teachers. An effective observer must:

Be sensitive must be able to empathize with the person being observed.

View **teaching improvement** as an important objective of the observation process.

Be reflective about his/her own teaching.

Be a **good listener**.

Have the ability to give advice **constructive feedback**.

Take the observation **process seriously** carefully prepare for the observation.

Accept the **validity of differing teaching methods and styles**, even when they differ from his or her own.

What should I do in my first meeting with the faculty member?

During your first meeting, you will want to explain the process, allow the faculty member to ask whatever questions he or she may have, gather course materials, and prepare for the first observation.

The following questions might be used to help prepare for the observation:

What are the goals for the class I will attend?

What are your plans for achieving these goals?

What teaching/learning activities will be taking place?

Will this class be typical of your teaching style? If not, why?

What would you like me to focus on during this observation?

Be sure to schedule not only the date of the observation but also the date you and the faculty member will meet for feedback. This date should not be longer than two weeks from the date of the observation.

What should I not do?

There are many things to avoid. Most are self-evident, once you are aware of them. However, most of us will catch ourselves engaged in these errors.

The Halo Effect

Allowing one positive factor, or prior positive feelings, to outweigh all other aspects of the assessment.

The Reverse Halo Effect

Opposite of the halo effect. Allowing one negative factor, or prior negative feelings, to outweigh all other aspects of the assessment.

Leniency

Being uncritical in order to avoid controversy or because you dislike conflict.

Central Tendency

Evaluating everyone as average because it is less trouble.

Tunnel Vision

Focusing on only one part of the performance rather than the whole performance.

Going through the motions

Not taking the evaluation seriously, making up your mind in advance, or boredom.

The Expert

Using your own teaching performance as criteria for judgment rather than agreed-upon evaluation standards. This is one of the most common problems when just beginning as a consultant. Be very cautious about absolute statements such as you should never use overhead transparencies that way .

Gotcha

Using the evaluation for political purposes or personal revenge.

How do I give constructive criticism?

Essential Elements of Constructive Criticism

Positive phrasing

Concreteness comments should be grounded in specific, observable behavior

Action-orientation provide the faculty member with a specific plan of action to follow

Focus provide feedback on behavior the faculty member can change

Affirmation acknowledge achievements and efforts toward change

Confirm the message check that what you are saying is what the faculty member is hearing

Examples:

Your opening points of the lecture were very interesting and I could see how they were related to the day's topic, but during the lecture the students seemed a bit confused about the connections. Perhaps you could write these points on the board or prepare them ahead of time on an overhead transparency so you could refer to them again during the remainder of the lecture.

The case study discussion seemed to be very productive and most of the students participated with meaningful comments and good answers to your questions. Unfortunately there didn't seem to be enough time for closure, and I sensed that the students needed to have some resolution of at least the major issues in the case, especially since their mid-term is coming up soon. Since you are trying to keep to your schedule, it is probably impractical to resume the discussion in the next class, but one solution might be to prepare a handout to tie up some of the loose ends that you can give to the students next time.

The time and energy you devoted to the preparation of the class discussion questions is clearly well received by the students; they do the work and are clearly interested in the subject. This is a definite plus. However, you might find that many of the detailed, fact-based questions that you asked in class might be given to the students ahead of time to self-test their comprehension, and emphasize higher-order, integrating questions in class discussion. This tactic would allow you to delve more deeply into the issues with the students.

How should I begin discussion of the observational data?

The following questions are examples of the kind of reflective questions that are often used. There are many other possibilities.

Did the lesson proceed in the way you had planned it? Why?

Did the students react to the lesson in the way that you thought they would?

What specific things did you do to help the students understand difficult parts of the lesson?

Did you do anything that confused the students or made it difficult for them to understand the lesson?

What did you do in the lesson to allow for individual difference in students' learning styles or abilities?

Do you think your students learned all that you wanted them to learn in this lesson? What brings you to this conclusion?

What did you do to encourage the students to participate actively in the lessons?

What did you learn about teaching from this class?

If you were to teach this lesson again tomorrow, what would you do differently? Why?

Appendices

Appendix A

References

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Appendix B

Sample Form

This report is only to be given to the faculty member.

Student Focus Group
Summary Report

Date of Student Focus Group:

Narrative:

Review of course goals and objectives as outlined by faculty member.

Review of course materials provided to consultant by faculty member.

Listing of the questions asked of the students.

Description of the interview process and the student reactions to the interview process.

Summary of student comments. No interpretation of student comments should occur in this section.

Summary:

In this section, the consultant should pull together the student comments with their own impressions of the course materials. Interpretation is okay here but should be used sparingly.

Recommendations:

Based upon student comments and the consultant's review of course materials, what possible changes could the faculty member make?

Appendix C

Sample Form

This report is only to be given to the faculty member.

One-on-one Consultation
Summary Report

Dates of Classroom Observations:

Narrative:

Review of course goals and objectives as outlined by faculty member.

Review of course materials provided to consultant by faculty member.

Description of the first observation conducted by the consultant.

Summary of feedback session to faculty member and what steps the faculty member planned on the basis of this feedback.

Description of the second observation conducted by the consultant.

Summary of feedback session to faculty member and what steps the faculty member planned on the basis of this feedback.

Summary:

In this section, the consultant should pull together the entire process. Interpretation is okay here but should be used sparingly.

Recommendations:

Based upon the entire process, what additional changes could the faculty member make?