

## Faculty Senate IT Committee: Script for Running Focus Groups

Nigel Ward, January 13, 2009 (with help from Lisa Weber and David Novick)

1. Welcome, thank you for coming. This session will last an hour or so, but no more than 90 minutes.
2. The goal of this focus group is to identify the most important things we can do to improve Information Technology at UTEP. We'll call it "IT".

*[Hand out agenda, including the questions]*

By information technology we mean things like the hardware (the computers, the projectors in the classrooms, the telephones), the network (internet access, wireless network ...), various software (email, Goldmine, etc.), and related services (the websites, the Helpdesk ...).

At UTEP IT is a big operation, with dozens of people, all trying to do the right thing. But we're not sure that they are always working on what's *most important* to students (faculty, staff).

So we're doing this to find out. We were asked by a faculty committee to work on this. I don't work for IT, so if you say complain a lot it won't hurt anyone's feelings. In addition to 2 focus groups, we're also doing a survey and mining Helpdesk calls, to find out what's good and what's bad.

In the end we'll write a report and send it to the higher-ups, who control the budget and set the priorities, and then in a few months, or a few years, all the problems will be solved, or at least some of them.

3. So, this is a focus group, which is basically a way to interview many people at once. It's more efficient than one-on-one interviews, and it lets us dig deeper, since you'll be able to comment on each other's thoughts. It's also more fun.

We'll be recording the whole thing so that we can go over it later, in case the note-taker wasn't sure about something. I hope that's okay with everyone?

The ground rules for a focus group are:

- keep focused (we don't want to go off topic),
- maintain momentum (we don't want to go around in circles),
- focus on the big issues (things that affect your ability to do your job),
- get closure (so that we have something definite to put in the report).

We have 5 questions we'd like to discuss, and in the end we'll ask you to prioritize the issues that come up. Most of the time we'll go around the table, so everyone gets a chance to participate. After we're done with each question the note-taker will summarize the key points, to make sure we got them down right.

4. First, let's have everyone introduce themselves. We won't associate your name with any comments you make; it will all be reported as "someone said".

*[record first name, college/major, and # of years at UTEP; make little name-tents to put on the table]*

5. The questions. *[give these out in written form, to think as they write the answers, to make the discussion reflective rather than off-the-cuff]*

*[for each question, go around the table 2 times; each person mentions an issue and/or comments on other's issues]*

(will uncover dissatisfactions about the services, about missing services, about customer service, etc. also will discover problems with students knowing what's available, or how to use it, or how to get help when things are confusing or broken. Discussion may also turn to problems that are IT-related but relate to other functions, e.g. parking. Also note these down.)

A. Let's think about things again, specifically, thinking about how IT ...

(students) supports (or fails to support) your studies/ your learning experiences? Not just directly (distance learning software) but also things like email for communicating with fellow students ...)

(faculty) ... supports student learning. ... supports your research and scholarly/creative activities

(staff) ... makes it easy or hard for you to develop and provide good services for students.

(will obtain clarification on some issues; also identify some new problems)

D. (students only). How much has your UTEP experience enhanced your knowledge and skills in working with computers and other information technology? (Good and bad; and what needs to be done, if anything.)

Other Topics (allow them to let off steam)

6. Priority-setting. Top 3-5, in the fix-now category. Use 3x5 post-its.
7. Thanks. Please write down your email if you'd like to get a copy of the report. one-on-one address any mysteries about UTEP IT that they want answers to.

### *Aims*

- Identify unmet needs
- Explore likes and dislikes regarding the current offerings
- Explore perceptions of the intangibles (delivery and support)
- Clarify the role of information technology in UTEP's critical activities

*Bring:* 3x5 stickies, blank paper, marker-pen, audio recorder & microphone, lunches

*After each focus group:* debrief the listeners and moderator; sort the comments into issues; grab verbatim quotes to illustrate the issues; write the report

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### *Resource Issues:*

- Compensation: Sodexo coupons? Extra credit in class? money to pay for the lunches;
- money to pay for transcription (if needed);
- room location/reservations;
- moderators (who, training/rehearsal) ... People needed: a recruiter, 2 note-takers (one who also operates the recorder) and 1 moderator (maybe pretend it's a team-building exercise, and use ISG people and/or Martha ...; or do it as part of the research involvement aspect of CS 1401)

*Recruiting subjects:* NB 8 is probably a good size for the groups

- students: who? how?
- faculty-staff: who? how?
- power users/developers: who? how (just send email invites)

Don't worry about getting representative demographics, except w.r.t college and age/experience/years-at-UTEP.

Only run one focus group for each population (developers / power users, faculty/staff, students)

Options: recruit from classes? Ask David Batten to advertise on the website? Take those who volunteer for follow-on from the survey?

*Notes:* the questions will need tuning based on the survey results. Also they will need to be pre-tested.