



OAKLAND  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE®

# **Do You Hear What I Hear?**

## ***Use of Focus Groups to Capture Student Opinions***

**Presenters:**  
**Oakland Community College**  
**Nancy Showers**  
**Stephanie Wren**

# Oakland Community College

- **Multi-campus community college (5 campuses across Oakland County).**
- **Enrollment Fall 2005: 24,287 headcount (unduplicated) with 200,503 credit hours.**
- **Full-service Institutional Research department providing a variety of research studies throughout the College.**



# To focus group or not - that is the question

- **When it's appropriate ...**
  - Exploratory, pre-survey or post-survey, initial test ideas, in-depth understanding
  - To generate hypotheses
- **When it's not ...**
  - Generate numbers
  - Very sensitive topics



# OCC Student Surveys

Student Services  
Opinion Survey

Graduate Follow-  
Up Survey

**FOCUS GROUPS =  
QUALITATIVE  
STUDENT FEEDBACK**

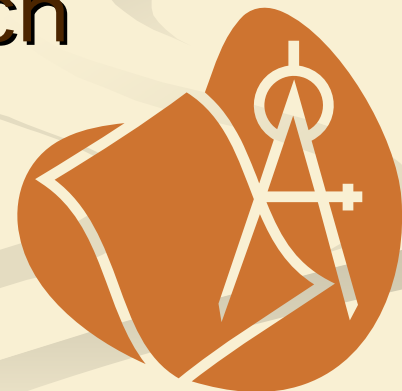
IT Internet  
Access Survey

Non-Returning  
Student Survey

Non-Matriculant  
Study

# FOCUS GROUP DESIGN

**“What are the benefits and features of this research methodology?”**



# Benefits

*A focus group provides an exploratory data collection environment.*

**This methodology provides a basis for understanding:**

- Perceptions
- Feelings
- Attitudes
- Motivations
- Honest Opinions
- Brainstorms



# Focus Group “Data” or Results

- Non-quantitative
- No percentages
- No tables
- No counts
- No statistical analyses



# Features of Focus Groups

## Length of time of discussion:

- 20 minute interview
- 120 minute discussion

## Focus group size:

- 8 to 10 participants
- 5 to 6 participants
- 2 or 3 participants

# “Why Should Someone Participate?”

Focus group participants are offered a cooperation fee or an incentive for their participation in the discussion.

***NOTE: This is a crucial component in the project's design. Offering the right incentive is imperative in securing participation!***



# Incentives Come in Many Forms:



- Novelty items
- Gift certificates
- Compensation fees
- **CASH**



**\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$**

- Generally range from **\$35** to **\$200** .
- From discussions with experts in the field, it was ascertained that the industry rate is **at least \$75** .
- The **incentive** also has an **impact** on the **show-rate** of the participants.

# Incentive Impact: Why Students Did Not Show

- Had to work or were called in to work.
- Schoolwork-related.
- Other reasons (e.g. didn't have a car, court date, sick, overslept).
- General scheduling conflicts (e.g. child care issues).

***Students didn't mention the incentive as a reason specifically, but it is considered to have played a role in securing the number of participants.***

# Use of Focus Group Findings

The findings from focus groups are used differently in the decision-making process.

Focus groups are only

**"thermometers"**

that allow you to take the

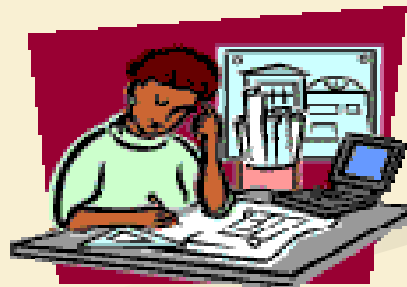
**"temperature"**

of your audience's reaction to the  
subject matter.



# FOCUS GROUP PARTICULARS

It's all in the details...



# Group Selection

Depends on the research goals of your study,  
for example:

- **Technology Focus Groups (FTIACs, On-line, Seasoned, Transfer)**
- **Vibrant Community Focus Groups (Current Students & Graduates)**

# Site Selection

**Neutrality**

**Comfort  
Level**

**Centralized  
Location**



**Accessibility  
of Sessions  
to Client**

**Availability of  
Recording  
Technology**

# Recruitment

- **Developing the screener**
  - CATI system
  - Articulation question
- **Interviewer training**
- **Tracking progress**
- **Confirmation calls and letters**



# Recruitment Grid

	FTIAC	ON-LINE	TRANSFER	SEASONED
Just to confirm, are you a student at OCC?	Y	Y	Y	Y
When did you first enroll at OCC?	Fall 2004 or Winter 2005			
Have you attended any other college?	N			
How many credits did you transfer?	0		> 8	< 8
Have you ever taken an on-line course at OCC?	0	> 0		
Approximately how many credits have you completed at OCC?	< 24			> 23

# Client Involvement

- Need buy-in and involvement from your client throughout the process.
- Be certain client understands what qualitative entails.
- Client is the expert in their area of interest; IR are the experts in research methods.

*Must juxtapose the two*

# Logistics

- Refreshments
- Video/audio taping
- Transcriptions
- Hosts/Greeters if on-site
- Incentives
- Consent form



# MODERATING

*It's All About Style!*

Or

**Finding Your Comfort Zone!**

# Developing the Moderator's Guide

- Introduction, ground rules, housekeeping
- Break the ice –something interesting they can share (e.g., major or hobby)
- Start with broad topics (e.g. top of mind responses), then go to specifics
- Use props/handouts to make interactive
- Non-leading questions
- Client involvement in development is important

# Moderating Focus Groups

- Rapport building with participants
- Respond to subtle cues
- Probing statements (e.g., “Tell me more”, “Can you elaborate on that point?”)
- Keep the flow – add times to each section

# Moderating Focus Groups

- **Be aware of who's talking and who's not**
  - **How not to let 1 or 2 dominate**
  - **How not to let others “get lost” in the crowd**
- **Boarding**
- **Moderating style** - Be comfortable with yours.

**BE FLEXIBLE!  
REMEMBER IT'S A “GUIDE” FOR DISCUSSION**

# **FOCUS GROUP CASE STUDIES**

## **Technology and Vibrant Community**

# Student Technology Usage Study

- **Research Goal:** Understand student perceptions of technology available at OCC, as well as their future technology needs.
- **Client:** Technology Master Plan Task Force.
- **Lessons Learned:**
  - Location should be carefully considered
  - Incentive offered is critical
  - Explored reasons for non-attendance

# Student Technology Usage Study

- **Major themes:**
  - Students want technology that works and instructors/staff who know how to use it!
  - In the end, technology is an enhancement – it is the quality of instruction which is key.

# Classroom Technology

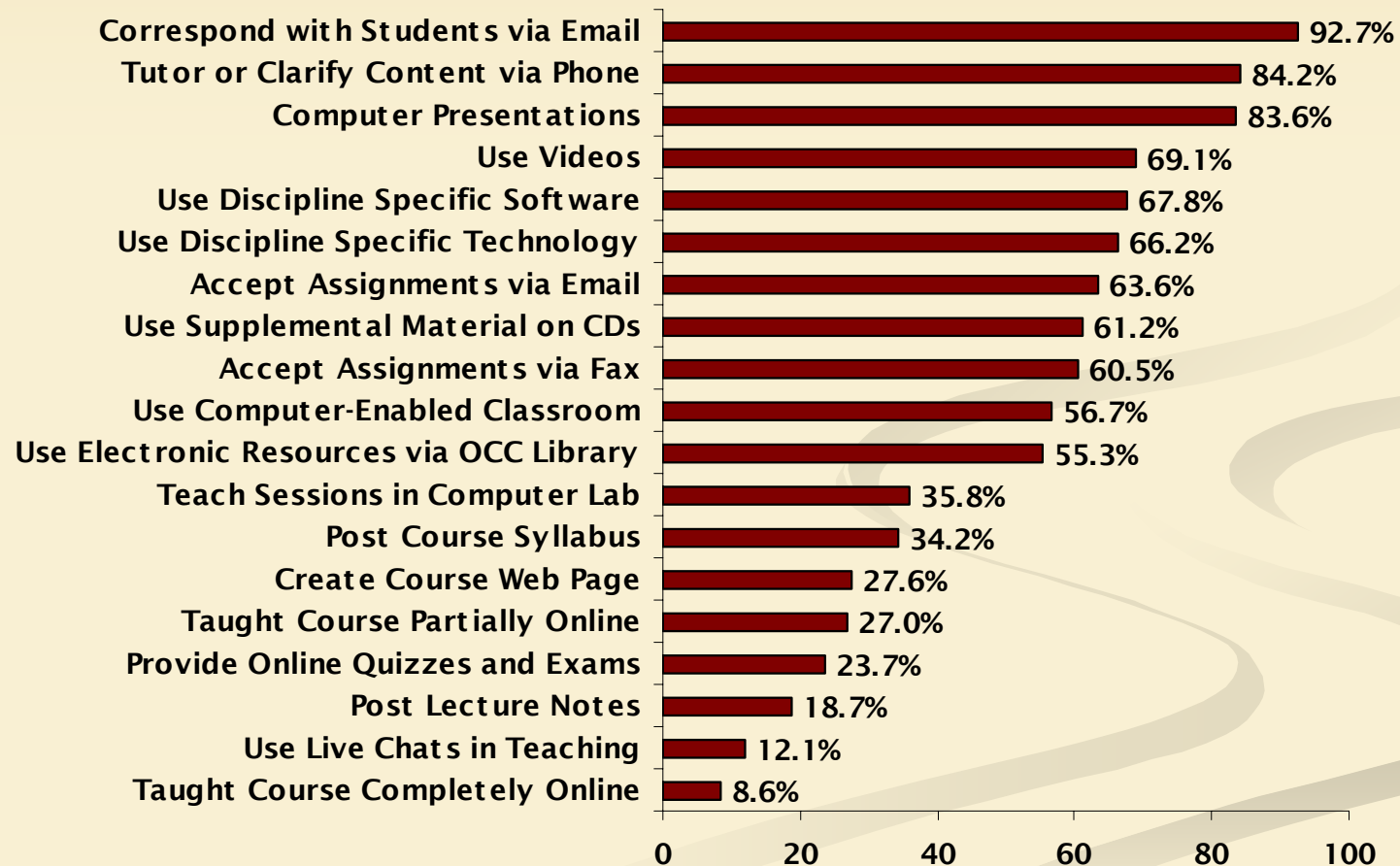
## Needs improvement:

- Instructors not always knowledgeable about how to use classroom technology.
- Classrooms aren't always set up well for technology (“seemed like an afterthought”).
- Would like instructors to use PowerPoint instead of trying to read their writing.
- Did not expect more than PowerPoint presentations.
- Inconsistent technology set-up from classroom to classroom.



# Qualitative vs. Quantitative

## Faculty Technology Use in Teaching



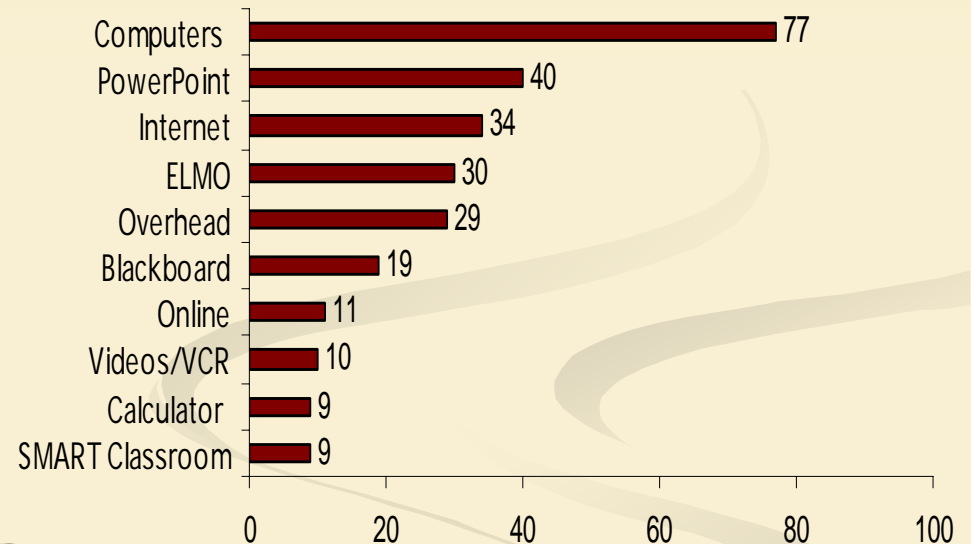
# Qualitative vs. Quantitative

## Qualitative: Students

- What did OCC students have to “say” about technology?
- When asked to respond with one word about what technology meant to them, the predominant response was computers.
- **Technology = Computers**

## Quantitative: Faculty

### Technology, Teaching, and Learning



# Vibrant Community Focus Groups

- **Research Goal:** Gather student perceptions of one of the OCC campuses, as well as their opinions about a “Vibrant Community College.”
- **Client:** Campus Facilities Management Task Force.
- **Lessons Learned:**
  - Time of day important.
  - Cash is better.
  - On-site location is more work.

# Vibrant Community Focus Groups

- **Major themes:**
  - Students unaware of extracurricular activities at OCC.
  - Students felt there is a lack of student experience enhancements.
  - Participants were open and receptive to changes that would make their OCC experience “vibrant”.
- **Unanticipated theme: Parking is a large concern.**

# VIBRANT COLLEGE

- Busy
- Caring, interesting instructors
- Diverse student population
- Extra curricular activities
- Newer buildings
- Lots of social events and activities
- Lots of students
- Positive atmosphere
- Modern buildings
- School spirit
- Upbeat
- Up-to-date technology



# Analysis, Report and Presentation



- Remember it's qualitative
- Tapes and transcripts are invaluable
- Video and audio presentations are very powerful
- Start with an outline
  - Organize notes by topic – think about “what are the headlines?”
  - Organize topics by sense of priority and what you have to say about them



# Questions?

**Thank you for your time.**

**Nancy Showers**  
**[ncshower@oaklandcc.edu](mailto:ncshower@oaklandcc.edu)**

**Stephanie Wren**  
**[sdwren@oaklandcc.edu](mailto:sdwren@oaklandcc.edu)**