



COSUMNES RIVER COLLEGE

OFFICE OF RESEARCH & EQUITY

Online Learning Focus Groups

Office of Equity, Institutional Effectiveness, and Innovation

Spring 2021

Authors:

Brandon Muranaka, Faculty Researcher

Katy Wilson, Faculty Researcher



Executive Summary

Background

In Spring 2021, as a follow-up to findings from the [Fall 2020 Online Learning Survey](#), the Research Office engaged CRC students in a series of focus groups to learn more about their experiences with distance education. The focus groups set out to answer four primary research questions:

1. What are students' expectations for the organization of online learning at CRC?
2. What is the ideal method of communication for students (if any)?
3. What basic needs and/or academic support do students need?
4. What has worked well for students when learning online?

CRC students were invited to participate in the focus groups via a Google Form, which was advertised in a global announcement on Canvas and shared by email by Student Services leaders. After the initial round of focus groups in early March, an additional round was opened for early April and advertised in the same way. In total, nine students participated in five focus groups.

Summary of Findings

Instruction

What worked well in the online environment

- Some students say that recorded video sessions are an improvement to lectures because students can repeat the material without needing to ask the instructor to do so.
- Several students point out that they think the response rate to emails has improved during remote operations compared to on-ground operations.
- Students recommend continuing some elements of online learning post-pandemic.
 - One student says they have enjoyed taking introductory courses online.
 - Another student says that they were only able to recently enroll as a student at CRC thanks to the move to remote operations.

What could be improved in the online environment

- Focus group participants say they experience different levels of interaction and accountability in the online learning environment as compared to face-to-face.
 - They report difficulties with scheduling their own time asynchronously and feeling that they need to work more independently in their online courses.
- Some students report feeling a lack of support when completing coursework online.
 - Students recommend including study materials and additional practice resources directly in Canvas.
- Some students say that online courses lack opportunities for connection with other students.
- Students recommend CRC take full advantage of technology in the online environment, including linking to resources directly within Canvas and leveraging the Canvas homepage for announcements.



Communication preferences

- Students prefer email communications, particularly emails that are concise, clear, and bulleted with action items that they need to complete.
 - One student prefers emails that come directly from Canvas, as it signals the need to act on something course-related and is less easily lost.
- Students recommend linking or embedding academic support resources and practice materials in Canvas.
- While email was the preferred method of communication for most focus group participants, students in one focus group pointed out missed opportunities to use technology on Canvas, the college website, social media, and to leverage artificial intelligence for communications.

Dropping courses

- Students who dropped courses say they lacked resources to help them in that decision, with friends and family being more easily accessible than counselors. No students mention having spoken with their instructor prior to dropping.
- Students cite their current grade in the course, the workload required of the course, and their obligations outside of school as reasons they have dropped courses.
- Some students say they considered dropping a course at some point in their studies, but ultimately did not do so because they didn't want to repeat the course or delay their graduation.
 - Students' expectations about whether or not they can successfully complete a course may not always be accurate.
 - One student says that they considered dropping a course, but missed the drop deadline. In the end, their instructor was able to accommodate makeup work that allowed them to successfully complete the course.

Student Services

Communication preferences

- Similar to instruction, students prefer email communications, particularly emails that are concise, clear, and bulleted with action items that they need to complete.
- One student says that campus orientation is a good resource for information-sharing.
- One student suggests a more immediate correspondence, such as artificial intelligence tools.

Tutoring and academic support

- Participants recommend making student services more readily available in the online environment, whether because they were not aware of how to access services, or because the remote environment exacerbated an existing impact of these services.
 - Students recommend providing clear links and information to course-specific tutoring directly within Canvas course shells.
 - Some students say it's difficult to know when tutors are available.
- Some students also mention not immediately connecting with services they needed, such as DSPS, or say they would benefit from connection, but have yet to do so.
- Participants recommend maintaining online and phone appointments for student services when the college returns to on-ground operations.



Library & Technology Services

- Students recommend CRC take full advantage of technology to deliver education online,
 - Several students recommend providing learning resources directly in Canvas modules, utilizing Canvas for campus-wide announcements, and linking directly to academic support resources specific to their course.
 - While most focus group participants prefer email as a communication method, students in one focus group point out missed opportunities to use technology on Canvas, the college website, and social media.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, students seem to indicate having received a varying degree of support from the college when making decisions and looking for help. However, when students did find help from the college, whether from faculty or from student services, they report that it made a difference to their success at CRC. This might point to a need for increased awareness of students' situations and the assumption that students have unvoiced questions or a tendency to try to 'figure things out for themselves', which corresponds with findings from the [Fall 2020 Online Learning Survey](#).

The students who participated in the focus groups seem to indicate that there is not a one-size fits all model for online education, or education more broadly. Online learning and student services worked better than the in-person versions for some students, indicating that CRC should continue offering some version of online services and courses. However, other students point to feeling less supported and more isolated in the online environment. Thus, CRC should keep in mind the importance of proactively supporting students and not assuming that students will reach out for help when they need it. When asked to cite an example of such support, one student describes an experience working on an assignment with their instructor:

"I had to have three [citations], [my instructor] actually went through and gave me two. He helped me with my paper, where to find information. I still had to write it up in an essay form and do all the work, but he gave me a spot to go and get the information from, and I was just like oh, wow, okay. Those two helping hands there, let me know that they want me to learn, they want me to be successful. And it isn't so much about how you do it, it's just about how it feels most comfortable for you, and you do learn."



Background and Methodology

Method

In Spring 2021, as a follow-up to findings from the [Fall 2020 Online Learning Survey](#), the Research & Equity Office engaged CRC students in a series of focus groups to learn more about their experiences with distance education. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather detailed information about emergent themes from the online learning survey. Therefore, the focus groups set out to answer four primary research questions:

5. What are students' expectations for the organization of online learning at CRC?
6. What is the ideal method of communication for students (if any)?
7. What basic needs and/or academic support do students need?
8. What has worked well for students when learning online?

The Research & Equity Office invited input on the focus group development from several areas: Student Success & Equity, Student Services, Counseling, DEIT, and instructional faculty members. After several iterations, a final script was finalized by the office (see Appendix).

All CRC students were invited to participate via a Google Form, which was shared by email by Student Services and also advertised in a global announcement on Canvas. After the initial round of focus groups in early March, an additional round was opened for early April and advertised in the same way. In total, nine students participated in five focus groups.

The focus groups were conducted by two moderators from the Research & Equity Office, Brandon Muranaka and Katy Wilson. Tyler Rollins, former ARC Research Analyst and current Director of Academic and Student Support Projects, also helped with the first focus group due to scheduling conflicts in the Research & Equity Office. The moderators alternated between asking questions and notetaking at each focus group. Focus groups were also recorded and transcribed through Zoom for ease of analysis.

Following the conclusion of all focus groups, members of the Research & Equity Office verified Zoom transcripts and utilized hierarchical inductive coding to identify common themes and their relationships to each other and different areas on campus. Under inductive coding, researchers analyzed the data following the conclusion of all focus groups, searching for common themes; no prefigured codes were applied to the data. Because students' comments held implications for various areas on campus, a hierarchical coding theme emerged wherein themes were connected across campus service areas (Instruction, Student Services, and Library & Technology) as well as across broader categories, such as "communication". Ultimately, findings from the focus groups were grouped into three areas based on their implications for college planning: Instruction, Student Services, and Library & Technology Services.

Student Demographics

The nine students who participated in the focus groups were representative of the CRC student population, though younger students were underrepresented (four students under 25 and five students aged 15 and over participated). The students represented majors in Business and Computer Science; English and Language Studies; Health and Human Services; Science, Math, and Engineering; and Arts, Media, and Entertainment, with one Undeclared major. Other demographics are listed below in Tables 1-4.



Table 1: Participant Gender

Gender	
Female	5
Male	3
Unknown	1
Total	9

Table 2: Participant Race

Race	
African American	1
Asian	2
Hispanic/Latino	2
Multi-Race	1
Unknown	2
White	1
Total	9

Table 3 Participant Age

Age	
< 25	4
25 and older	5
Total	9

Table 4: Participant Education Goal

Education Goal	
Earn a Certificate	1
Earn AA/AS Degree- no Transfer	1
Maintain Certificate/License	1
Transfer to 4-Year after AA/AS	5
Transfer to 4-Year- no AA/AS	1
Total	9



Findings and Analysis

Instruction

What has worked well online

When asked what has worked well for them in online classes, students cite courses that included materials and additional practice resources embedded in Canvas. Several students also note that recorded video sessions are helpful because they can repeat the material without needing to ask the instructor to do so.

“What I have found useful with all the online stuff is when teachers post their PowerPoints and, basically, all the worksheets and stuff they would use in class. When they post them and then they will also post like their recorded zooms so you can re-watch them and go back and understand material that you didn't originally understand. And I also like that most of the teachers have been very good at responding to emails because I found that when we had in-class lectures that most teachers didn't respond to their emails, but now that we're fully online, they have been more reasonable with answering the emails at a good time.”

“I think it's [online courses] just as effective as in person now because professors have done a good job preparing the recorded lecture, and we don't have the option to play back previously in person, we always have to ask professors to repeat themselves. I think it's right now having that available; it's very useful for us to be more successful.”

Some students point to how online learning has expanded curricular options, with one student saying they have enjoyed taking introductory courses online, and another that they were only able to recently enroll as a student at CRC thanks to the move to remote operations.

“And I would love any introductory courses that can be offered online. That would be such a great option to continue the virtual sessions, instead of mandating all classes in person, because I think it's just as effective as in person now.”

“And that's also one thing to mention is that the option to enroll in Los Rios was never possible until now that classes are being offered virtually. Because previously, I would not even consider attending community college outside of East Bay now that I think that Los Rios do offer a lot of great certificate programs and associate degree programs that even working professionals can look into and enroll in, so I see the great benefit of offering classes online and definitely it could generate more revenues for the school and also give students more options.”

What could be improved online

Conversely, some students report feeling a lack of support when completing coursework online, difficulties scheduling their time asynchronously, and lack of time in which to complete their work. Students, particularly those who entered college looking for social connections, also say that online coursework lacks opportunities for connection with other students.



"It's basically just like independent study, where I have to look at the lectures myself and ...it's more of doing it yourself. I do have one class, but this one is at ARC, it's my acting class, so that when I do have to go like twice a week with students involved in it, but it's like, you know, the scree'ns off, and the only time we really engage with each other is if we're doing partner work...but it's I personally think it's better that way, and I think that was my downfall for doing classes that don't have a scheduled time. I have ADHD and...work and...mental health things and it really wasn't a great idea for me to do that."

"you have to like block out a time out of your day so it's I think that's difficult for me, because you know I have work like five times a week. And then...help out with like family so it's kind of like okay I gotta block out this time."

"When we take a test, even if it's just a practice test. There's no way to break down, when we get something wrong, there's no way to break down, you know, where we are, you know, where we're failing. And so, if I'm doing math and I'm getting the answer consistently wrong, there's no way to know which part I'm actually making a mistake on so that I can, you know, either have the system, or myself, I can say, "okay, I need to go and practice, you know, something easy like multiplying fractions", or something like that. And then you know would be nice to have a homework system for classes like that that lets us practice in an electronic environment, and it would harvest the data from our mistakes, so the teachers could see, and we can see it too, this is where this student is failing, this is where you know, the majority of students are making mistakes."

"I missed that whole, that whole interaction of you know people like I love to hear people's point of view, only you know, only to say I disagree with you, but I hear what you're saying right, but I'm happy to hear what you have to say."

Communication Preferences

Students generally express a preference for email communications, particularly emails that are concise, clear, and bulleted with action items that they need to complete:

"I like getting emails that have like bullet points of like specific, like dates and information that is straightforward, you don't have to read into like the extras of it, and everything it's just there for you to know."

Several students point out that they think email communications have improved during remote operations, noting an increase in responses from faculty than they were used to receiving in the past:

"And I also like that most of the teachers have been very good at responding to emails because I found that when we had in class lectures that most teachers didn't respond to their emails, but now that we're fully online, they have been more reasonable with answering the emails at a good time."

One student also expressed a preference for emails that come directly from Canvas, as it signals the need to act on something course-related. Additionally, students recommend using Canvas to connect students with academic support resources and practice materials for their courses.



"I think, with emails is good, I, I think that getting emails from Canvas works a lot better for me personally instead of getting them into my school Gmail because I get so many..."

"I think also the canvas site is underused, there's so much of like the homepage that's not used and the course pages, I think most classes only use the left half of the page. But then, you know, there could be pop-ups or updates that appear on the right-hand side when you first log into canvas site, it's you know hey look...You could turn on financial aid announcements, or you know event announcements all kinds of stuff so when you when you log in there's like this little calendar that's relevant to you. A bit like how...when you go into your course there's a large list of things to do on the side, you can have that for the college, for financial aid, for signing up for classes."

Another student agrees that email is the primary method of communication, but that they would also appreciate a more immediate back-and-forth interaction,

"I like emails that are sent out regularly, but if I had to choose, I would choose something that kind of facilitates more open communication, so if there were something like Twitter...I know that social media is not a good example, but that kind of style where you know we could directly communicate with financial aid and those guys and, and we'd obviously have to have student ID to do it."

Dropping courses

The stories students shared seem to indicate that those who dropped courses often lacked resources to help them in that decision. No students mentioned speaking with their instructor prior to making the decision to drop. One student said they spoke with friends about the decision in light of some challenges making an appointment to see a counselor,

"I made the decision on my own and with my friends, because it was pretty hard getting appointments with counselors, at least at CRC, so it was really hard to get communication with them, so I was never able to really talk to them, unless I scheduled an appointment and then it would be like three weeks later. I feel like their availability isn't that open or they're always just packed so I feel like they need to have more appointments or something."

Some of the reasons students cite that contributed to their decision to drop courses were their current grade in the course, the workload required of the course, and their obligations outside of school.

"I usually drop the class if I'm not doing well at that point, but if I'm doing well in a class and I'm thinking about dropping it I'll just push through it."

"I gauge on if I'm going to drop it or not, as if I feel like I will pass it or not. I look ahead at like what topics are going to be discussed and what kind of tests and assignments there are, and if I'm going to be able to keep up with all of it and understand the topics. And that's how I gauge on if I'm going to drop it or not."

"I actually almost dropped my humanities class this semester just due to I work 40 hours a week and then taking I think 14 or 13 units this semester, so I just have like a lot of homework and then I have work every Monday through Friday and it was just a lot, but I decided not to drop it because I, I just want to transfer sooner. And so it would be nice if I just follow through, got my



grade, so I could just hurry up and go to Sac State or wherever. So that was just a motivator to not drop.”

When asked if they had ever considered dropping a course but didn't, several students pointed to weighing the pros and cons of dropping and deciding that they didn't want to repeat the course or delay their graduation. One student said that they considered dropping a course, but that they missed the drop deadline. In the end, their instructor was able to accommodate makeup work that allowed them to successfully complete the course.

“Um so I did miss the deadline, I think, by a day or two, and it was just like okay, so that happened, and now you have to actually grind out and try to figure it out. And, usually professors are very nice... I think there's two ways it goes: sometimes professors leave assignments open for like a very long amount of time like almost like to a month or they don't have like a locked time where you can just turn it in. And that's great because...sometimes I'm missing assignments and so, if I email and reach out that I'm able to turn them in or they're very strict on that. So then, in that case, like if I'm on the lookout for that kind of class... (Break in conversation, student had a phone call.) ... What I was saying, so the class that I was failing, I was able to turn in everything, not everything, but enough things to turn in in order to pass a C and I think that's like...great professors, just like being really helpful, which is wonderful.”

Student Services

Participants offered Student Services-related suggestions of how CRC might help balance the feelings of isolation they feel in the online environment, with one student suggesting online study groups or “student lounges” that mimic the natural meeting spaces for students on campus.

Participants also pointed out issues that are not unique to the online learning environment, such as a need for resources for new college students, and in the case of students enrolling from high school, resources for their parents. One participant said,

“It can be very overwhelming coming straight from high school where everything is pretty much catered for you to go into an environment where you pretty much have to survive on your own, in a sense, to like maybe having like a boot camp for straight out of high school students.”

Communication Preferences

Students' communication preferences are the same for instruction and Student Services. Students generally express a preference for email communications, particularly emails that are concise, clear, and bulleted with action items that they need to complete. One student referred to campus orientation as a good resources to share information,

“In a perfect world, the best way to get those informations will probably be at orientation, but since we're in the middle of a pandemic, not a lot of orientations are going on on campus, so maybe like an interactive like Zoom orientation where like not all the faculty



members, but some faculty members from each department at CRC could like come and like tell us what their program does and how we could like get involved."

Another student agrees that email is the best method of communication, but that they would also appreciate a more immediate back-and-forth interaction,

"I like emails that are sent out regularly, but if I had to choose, I would choose something that kind of facilitates more open communication, so if there were something like Twitter...I know that social media is not a good example, but that kind of style where you know we could directly communicate with financial aid and those guys and, and we'd obviously have to have student ID to do it."

Students recommend maintaining online and phone appointments for student services when the college returns to on-ground operations. One student said, "in terms of advising or counseling, I believe virtual sessions would be just as effective as in person".

Tutoring and Academic Support Services

Many participants stated that they were aware of the tutoring and support services available to them at the college and online, but not using them. One student mentioned that their embedded tutor (e.g., SI/SA) was helpful in Zoom breakout rooms. However, students state that it's difficult to know when tutors are available, with one student trying and failing to access a course-specific tutor late at night. Students recommend providing clear links and information to course-specific tutoring directly within Canvas course shells.

"Because last semester and this I'm trying to get help for, especially the database classes, I don't find any tutor on the database, they have to mostly Tutoring in like C++, C program and Java, but then I don't find any tutor in the database like SQL. I need some help so. I don't find any tutor."

"For my classes, there is a link embedded on Canvas that we can click to access tutoring services or computer lab assistants. There's also instructional aid available specifically for that class, so I believe that, that's up for most online classes, that would be great so students have a clear office hour to know that, that's the time they can reach out to your professor or instructional aid. Yeah, pretty much the same way as I was in undergrad except it's all work virtual now."

"...finding help and with the tutoring like messaging the tutors maybe I didn't do that right, and I did it too late and still looking for like help that way"

Some students also mention not immediately connecting with services they needed, such as DSPS. One first-year student has not yet connected with DSPS, but thinks they may need to do so,

"For because I have ADHD ADHD knows like more formally diagnosed out of high school and I know it would take a lot in order to get like help with that because you'd need like a I forgot what it's called like in high school, you have like a letter and then it can translate into college, but I had one and I terminated it, but it that was bad on my part which so now it's more like I guess more support groups I'm not really sure. On that sense it's a big question mark right now."



Another student nearing the end of their studies did eventually connect with DSPS, and now refers other students,

“When I applied for college, my counselor at the time told me to go check in DSPS to see if there was something for them to do an assessment to see whether I would need special needs and I blew it off and literally went there sat down, they told me all the stuff I had to do and I said to heck with it and blew it off...once I found out that there were so many resources at the College I kind of did my own in depth research on all of them to find out just what I could use them for, how they could be a tool in my tool kit, and knowing and get myself literate with it, so that if ever something came across during my years at school I’d know where to go to get help and then I’ve referred a lot of people who in class or at the College when they’re having problems I kind of direct them to it, because I know hey this is where you go to get help on that.”

This same student mentions courses in which students are required to learn about campus resources as part of an assignment and share their findings with their classmates. They say this is a good exercise to promote awareness of resources on campus.

Library & Technology Services

Many of the recommendations pertaining to Library & Technology Services overlap with instructional areas. In the remote environment, students recommend CRC take full advantage of technology to deliver education online. For example, several students recommend providing learning resources directly in Canvas modules, utilizing Canvas for campus-wide announcements, and linking directly to academic support resources specific to their course. In addition to the integration of technology into courses, artificial intelligence tools were mentioned as part of a question about communication. While email was the preferred method of communication for most focus group participants, students in one focus group pointed out missed opportunities to use technology on Canvas, the college website, and social media.

“I think also the canvas site is underused, there’s so much of like the homepage that’s not used and the course pages, I think most classes only use the left half of the page. But then, you know, there could be pop-ups or updates that appear on the right-hand side when you first log into canvas site, it’s you know hey look...You could turn on financial aid announcements, or you know event announcements all kinds of stuff so when you when you log in there’s like this little calendar that’s relevant to you. A bit like how...when you go into your course there’s a large list of things to do on the side, you can have that for the college, for financial aid, for signing up for classes. Including things which I don’t believe are done until the classes start...they could notify you if you try to sign up for [courses] you can’t sign up for. You know before the deadline comes up so you can sign up for different class.”

“I was talking about the how much space is unused on canvas and so, if I go into modules and I click on some module there’ll be a little bit of information on screen and then a large portion of the side is unused and that could easily be used up by a service like Quizlet or something like that that would allow you to create flashcards in in canvas. And, and you could just create them alongside the material that you’re trying to learn.”



“When we take a test, even if it's just a practice test. There's no way to break down, when we get something wrong, there's no way to break down, you know, where we are, you know, where we're failing. And so, if I'm doing math and I'm getting the answer consistently wrong, there's no way to know which part I'm actually making a mistake on so that I can, you know, either have the system, or myself, I can say, “okay, I need to go and practice, you know, something easy like multiplying fractions”, or something like that. And then you know would be nice to have a homework system for classes like that that lets us practice in an electronic environment, and it would harvest the data from our mistakes, so the teachers could see, and we can see it too, this is where this student is failing, this is where you know, the majority of students are making mistakes.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, students' seem to indicate having received a varying degree of support from the college when making decisions and looking for help related to their studies. Focus group participants even seemed to internalize responsibility for decisions that did not serve them, such as not utilizing DSPS resources earlier or signing up for asynchronous courses that did not match their learning preferences. When deciding whether or not to drop a course, many of our participants said they relied on family and peers to help them make that decision.

In both the online and in-person environments, many students were aware of tutoring services but some were confused about how to access them or were not using them for various reasons. In addition, several students indicated that technology could be more effectively leveraged remotely, such as improvements to Canvas usage, email communication, and social media usage.

When students did find help from the college, whether from faculty or from student services, they reported that it made a difference to their success at CRC. This might point to a need for increased awareness of students' situations and the assumption that students have unvoiced questions or a tendency to try to 'figure things out for themselves', which corresponds to findings from the [Fall 2020 Online Learning Survey](#).

The students who participated in the focus groups seem to indicate that there is not a one-size fits all model for online education or education more broadly. Online learning worked well for some of the students we spoke to, and could be improved for others. One student said, “I would definitely drop if that class is only available in person, then I will have to drop it because I just will not be able to commute to Sacramento or Elk Grove.” For those students who struggled with online learning, CRC should keep in mind the importance of supporting and assisting students in their courses and the decisions they make along the way.

Towards the end of the focus group sessions, students were asked if they could recall a positive example from their learning experiences, whether online or in person. One student told a story about a course that required a research project with citations, though the student wasn't familiar with that process:

“And [the instructor] actually went through and gave, I had to have three cites (sic), he actually went through and gave me two. He helped me with my paper, where to find information. I still



had to write it up in an essay form and do all the work, but he gave me a spot to go and get the information from, and I was just like oh, wow, okay. Those two helping hands there, let me know that they want me to learn, they want me to be successful. And it isn't so much about how you do it, it's just about how it feels most comfortable for you, and you do learn."

This story exemplifies how CRC students have a wide range of academic experiences and difficulties, and that getting to know and providing support to address students' barriers to learning can make a difference both in their ability to succeed in their coursework, and to retain the knowledge gained along the way.

Caveats and Limitations

Several caveats and limitations should be kept in mind when contextualizing the focus group findings. Due to logistical timing and questions surrounding policy and funding, no participant incentive was advertised along with the call for participation; however, participants did receive a small gift card for coffee. Now that those logistical challenges have been worked out, future focus groups that do not offer an in-person meal during the session may be able to offer food/beverage gift cards as an incentive, provided that funding is available.

Additionally, while nine students participated over the span of six focus groups, approximately twenty students registered for a specific focus group but did not attend. This is an indication that students are busy during the semester balancing work and academic obligations. The establishment of incentives is a first step towards increasing student participation in the future, along with earlier implementation and advertising to provide ample time for more students to participate.

Because the focus groups were advertised globally to all students registered for courses in Spring 2021, they ran the risk of not fully representing the student body in terms of demographics, college experience, major of study, and educational goals. Ultimately, younger students were underrepresented in the focus groups (approximately 44% of participants compared to 65% of Spring 2021 students). It is additionally difficult to determine representation with such a small number of participants. While the sample size for these focus groups was only nine students, findings echo those of the [Fall 2020 Online Learning Survey](#), which garnered over 1,000 responses from students. It would be worthwhile to consider implementing focus groups for various affinity groups and programs on campus in order to determine any differences in experience across these groups.



Appendix

Focus Group Instrument

Moderator Introduction and Purpose of Meeting (3 minutes)

Hello everyone,

My name is **[name]**. I am **[description of role]** at Cosumnes River College. I'd like to start by thanking you for joining us today and giving us the gift of your time and experiences. We're here to learn more about your experiences at CRC and with education more broadly in order to help improve online learning at CRC. We'll be here for about an hour.

I will be leading the discussion today by asking you questions and encouraging and moderating discussion. **[name]** is here with me as a notetaker so that we can properly remember and represent your feedback. This conversation is informal. Feel free to ask each other questions or respond to something someone else is saying.

As a reminder, our conversation is being recorded on Zoom so that we may accurately refer back to our conversation and aggregate findings across all the conversations. You are not required to have your video turned on for this conversation. The recording will be stored securely and not shared in any way. It will be deleted after we have summarized all focus groups.

I want to assure you that your responses today remain entirely confidential and will not be shared with your name. The people on this Zoom meeting are the only ones who will know you provided feedback today, and **[name]** and I will summarize your feedback and report it anonymously. I do need to say as an educator in California that we are mandated to report any known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. This focus group is one of **9 total** that are happening this semester.

Ground Rules (2 minutes)

To allow our conversation to flow more freely, I'd like to go over some ground rules of this focus group:

1. We agree to respect the experiences of our peers by allowing each person to finish what they are saying before we speak up.
2. Everyone doesn't have to answer every single question, but we'd like to hear from each of you today as the discussion progresses.
3. This is a confidential discussion and **[name]** and I will not report your names or who said what to the college. We all agree to respect the confidentiality of the other members of this conversation by not repeating what other members have said outside of this conversation.
4. There are no "wrong answers". Say what is true for you.
5. You do not need to tell us if you need to take a break, and you may choose to have your video on or off.



6. Are there any questions before we begin?

Participant Introductions (10 minutes)

Before we start, I'd like for us to get to know each other a bit more. Please tell me your name and for how long you have been a student at CRC.

Questions (45 minutes)

1. Take a moment to reflect upon the courses you've taken, at CRC or at another institution. What course or courses stand out as positive experiences, and why?
 - a. Could you give more details about...Could you tell me more about what you mean by X...
X...
2. In a perfect world, what would be the best way for you to get information about your courses, services like tutoring, counseling, financial aid, events, etc.? *(may need to prompt)*
3. Have you used any tutoring services or other support services from the college this semester or last semester?
 - a. If you did, how did you learn about the services you used?
 - b. What worked well with that service? What was challenging?
 - c. If you didn't, why not? Are there any other services that you would like to see online?
4. Have you dropped a course at CRC, either this semester or in the past? *(skip this if over 30 minutes of time has passed)*

The situation might merit any of the following follow-up, but not them all...

 - a. How did you come to the decision to drop the course?
 - b. What steps did you take before dropping the course?
 - c. Have you ever *not* dropped a course at CRC after considering dropping? What made you decide *not* to drop?
5. In conclusion, are there any other significant experiences about your online education at CRC that you'd like to share?

For example....

 - a. Is there anything that has worked really well or helped you succeed, or anything that has not worked for you?

Closing (2 minutes)

Thank you for joining us today and sharing your honest experiences with learning at CRC. Your comments have given us lots of ways to envision online learning at CRC. If you have any questions about this research, please reach out to us at wilsonk@crc.losrios.edu or muranab@crc.losrios.edu. We are going to stick around for ten minutes in case you have questions, but otherwise feel free to exit the meeting.