

Focus Group Research

As a means to further understand individuals' thinking about Catholic Social Teaching, we propose the use of focus groups in various contexts. We will use the qualitative data gained from such groups to form further research questions, build survey instruments, and inform practice.

Purpose: To elicit information from college students about their knowledge of, familiarity with, and commitment to:

- 1) **general ideas** and elements of CST (e.g., care for the poor, care for the earth, etc.)
- 2) **specific principles** and/or key concepts of the CST (e.g., common good, subsidiarity, preferential option for the poor)
- 3) the Catholic elements, or the "C" of CST: do students know how the ideas, principles, and concepts flow from, and are promoted by, the Catholic Church's social tradition?

Size of groups: 8-10 (flexible according to contexts, but not smaller than 6 or larger than 12)

Membership of groups: Groups may represent a general population of students, or one that is more experienced and likely to have encountered CST. Groups may be constituted as follows:

- 1) drawn representatively or randomly from the overall undergraduate population
- 2) students who are active in religious activities **and** community service, community based learning and social action initiatives
- 3) high CST representation (perhaps using nominations for such a group)

Invitation: Can be done via email, regular mail or by phone; may vary by type of engagement and group focus.

The text/context given can be general: "We are interested in learning about colleges students' views of the role of faith in service and social action", or the like. "You have been nominated (selected) to ..."

Incentives: May be helpful, but add complexities. We are checking on the legal/tax implications. In most cases, a direct personal invitation (vs. broadcast email) will work well.

Institution Review Board: Most likely approval will be needed at most institutions, though focus groups of this nature should not likely engender complex scrutiny.

Length of time for focus group: 1½ hours (probably better to ask for 1½ or 2 hours, then shorten if not needed)

Facilitators: One educator/researcher will facilitate the conversation; a second will take notes, etc.

Tape the session: If we choose to audiotape the session, we must get participants' permission. We can find funds to cover some of the taping, transcribing expenses.

Possible series of questions (to be further developed)

- Please describe the kinds of service and social action work you are involved with?
- Would you describe what motivates you to do such work?
- How would you describe the relationship between those activities and your faith/spiritual life?
- Are you familiar with Catholic social teaching? In what ways? Can you name any CST principles?
- Are there certain principles of CST that are salient for you? Why?
- How would you describe your efforts to apply such principles? What challenges/supports do you encounter?

Campus Timeline

Two (or more) months before focus group:

- Identify questions and process
- Apply for IRB approval

One month before focus group:

- Invite participants, confirm participation
- Plan location, pragmatics

One week before focus group:

- Remind participants
- Refine questions
- Order food/refreshments?

After focus group:

- Summarize notes and themes (across facilitators)
- Develop report

Project Timeline

Let's attempt to have 6 focus groups (across 3 campuses) completed by February 28, 2013

More information: <http://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/focus-groups.htm>
<http://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/focus-groups.htm>