



The Bridge Project

SAMPLE

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Facilitator: As we discussed when you filled out the survey, I am here to learn more about your views on preparing for, and attending, college. Everything that you have to say here is confidential. I am taping this discussion so that I don't have to take notes now and can give you my full attention. I will use the tape to transcribe this discussion, and, the tape will be destroyed. No one else will have access to the tape.

It is very important that everyone feel comfortable to state their views, without being afraid that they will be judged. Let's please respect everyone's comments. At the end of this discussion, there will be a few minutes to answer questions; I will not provide answers for the questions that I ask you until then, because I don't want to influence your answers. Also, many of the questions that I am asking you have no right answers – I want to learn from you. This is your time to help researchers and educators understand how you feel about transitioning from high school to college. Finally, you do not need to respond to any of the questions if you do not want to, but I am very interested in what everyone has to say. Does anyone have any questions about the study or the surveys that you filled out?

Ice Breaker: Do students at _____ school talk with each other about college? What do people say? What about [public postsecondary institutions in your state]?

Do you talk about college issues in your classes?

- If so, which classes (all classes)?
- Are these discussions helpful?
- Why or why not?
- [If they are not talking about college in their classes, are classes on campus in which students are exposed to college-related issues?]

At what point (e.g., which grade -- 8, 9, 10, 11, 12?) do your counselors begin meeting with students to talk about college?

- Can you tell me about them? [Probe: How do they start – who initiates them? What happens in these meetings?
- What materials did you receive?
- Are these meetings frequent enough?
- Did they start early enough gradewise?
- Is there information that you wish these meetings had provided you?
- Did these meetings result in any surprises about college requirements, etc.?
- What part of the meeting(s) helped you the most?
- Did counselors suggest any particular schools that you should look into applying to and attending? If so, is that where the students want to go?]

Do public universities in your state have college nights at your campus?

- If so, which ones come here?

- How many of you went?
- What did you learn?
- What happens at the sessions? [probe: Were they helpful?
- Did the meeting(s) cause you to make changes (e.g., take different courses, enroll in a SAT prep course).
- Specify the types of changes.
- Anything you would like to change about the meetings?]

Have any of you been to a college campus?

- Which ones?
- What were your impressions of the campus(es)?
- What types of things did you do there?
- Did you learn things on your visit that are helpful for you in terms of understanding what colleges expect you to know when you go there?

Do you think it would be difficult to gain admission to [public university in your state]?

- Why -- what do you think are the requirements to get into [the public university]? [Probe: How did you learn about the requirements? What matters more in terms of being able to get into the two universities grades, SAT, etc.? Are there ways of "getting around" any of these requirements? Which ones? How? (be as specific as possible)]

Are there differences in requirements between [public universities in your state]?

What kind of classes should you be taking to prepare for college?

What graduation plan is best to follow if you want to go to [public universities in your state]?

How do you think students are placed into, for example, math classes at [a public university in your state]?

- What is the process? [prompt: Do you think students have to take a test? If so: When do they take it? What is on the math test? Have you heard of the ____ test?]

In your high school, which curriculum track offers the best preparation for going on to [a public university in your state] [If they pick a certain track, have them explain why they chose that one.]

What do you think are the main differences between [public universities in your state]? [prompt: different requirements, different majors]

What are some new things happening at your school (trying to get at recent state reforms, but let them say what's most important to them)? [State-specific questions about current reforms.]

When do you think is a good time (grade level) to start preparing for college academically?

Who do you think decides where you go to college? [prompt: you? Your parent(s)? Your counselor? Teacher? Someone else?]

Do you feel like you understand what will be expected of you in college, academically, and how you should prepare for it?

Do you have any suggestions about ways to improve the information you receive about the college admissions process – either how you receive the information, or the content of the information that you receive?

How do you think students at another school in your district (name rival school) would describe your school?

- How would you describe your rival school in comparison to your school?