Sample Focus Group Questions for Curriculum Review

General Guidelines

Facilitators

- Confidentiality will lead to more open and honest feedback from participants. Consider how you will protect the anonymity of the participants when inviting participants and scheduling sessions.
- The facilitator should not have power over the participants (e.g., someone who assigns grades)
- Consider involving a 'Note Taker' to take written notes during the focus group
    - Word for word transcripts are not necessary but direct quotes can be powerful.
    - If you audio-record the session, have someone who would not be able to identify participants transcribe the conversation.

Logistics

- Consider how much time you will need.
- Plan to ask no more than about ~5-10 questions total.
    - Consider sending questions to participants in advance in order to receive richer, more thoughtful responses.
- Consider serving refreshments (or a meal) in order to create a collegial atmosphere.

Running a Session

- Let the participants know that they do not need to self-censor themselves. This room is a safe space to provide feedback.
    - Participants are welcome to build on each other's thoughts and ideas.
- The facilitator should try to keep the conversation on track
    - Actively try to draw input from everyone
    - Call upon quieter participants to ensure that there is equal participation.
- Consider recording key points on flip chart paper to help capture discussion.
- If participants' responses are general or vague, ask follow-up probes to help draw out concrete examples or ideas. For example:
    - Tell me more about what you just said or please elaborate on that statement.
    - Can you clarify what you meant?
    - Are you willing to provide a specific example/situation/context?

Sample Questions for Students or Alumni

General

- Describe your most significant learning experience(s) in the program.
- How did you integrate knowledge from required courses with other courses you took as part of your degree?

Program Purpose

- Why did you choose the program?
- What were you expecting of the program?
- How did you hope it would prepare you for your future?

Program Strengths

- What is one thing you like about the program?
- What is a key strength of the program?
- What current strengths should the program build upon?

Areas for Improvement

- What key improvement could be made to the program and why?
  - What would you remove from the curriculum? What would you add?
- Drawing on your background and experience, what two key changes would you suggest if you were to redesign the program?

Final Reflection

- What is the most important thing you would like to tell the curriculum committee as they work to enhance the program?

*Questions Specifically for Alumni:

- What aspects of your undergraduate learning experience benefit you in your work the most?
- Describe three things that you learned in your position in the first year after graduation that you could have learned at university, but did not.

Sample Questions for Academic Staff

- What are the most frequent program/curriculum related questions students ask you?
- Are there program requirements that students find difficult to complete? Are there bottlenecks where they get stuck?
- What do you think is the main reason why students drop out of the program?

Questions for Graduate Teaching Assistants

- What areas of the curriculum are most challenging for first year undergraduates?
- Of the courses that you have taught, where did you see the greatest improvement in students' writing/numeracy/research skills?
- If you graduated from the undergraduate program, which learning experiences helped you prepare for graduate school?

Questions for Employers

General

- What key characteristics, knowledge or skills do you look for when hiring?
- What advice would you give to recent graduates or soon to be graduates of the program?

Program Strengths

- How does the program's structure or outcomes support your expectations of graduates (new employees)?
- Based on your experience with graduates of the [Program] employed at your organization, what are some key strengths that they possess?
- How do Queen's graduates add value to your organization?
- Describe how the [Program] at Queen's has helped your organization fulfill its mission or meet its objectives.

Areas for Improvement

- Based on your experience with Queen's University graduates employed in your organization, what are some key areas for improvement?
- What gaps, if any, do you see in the program's structure or outcomes?
- What two key changes would you propose if you were to improve the [Program] to better prepare Queen's graduates for employment in your organization.