

## Attachment 1: Discussion Guide for Qualitative Research on GSE Module

Discussion Guide for Qualitative Research on GSE Module
<p><b>Introduction.</b> Hello everyone, thank you for being here. I am [name], a [position] at NORC and this is [name], who is [position] at NORC. We'll be guiding this focus group today.</p> <p>As you probably already know, we are conducting this focus group today to discuss the possibility of adding a section on graduate school experiences to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED). The SED is the nation's primary source of information on the educational history, demographic characteristics, and postgraduation plans of doctorate recipients. It is funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and other federal agencies. NORC is conducting several focus groups on the NSF's behalf to gather information about what stakeholders would or would not find useful to have in a new section on graduate student experiences. The goal for this session is to get people talking with each other and generating ideas.</p>
<p><b>Ground Rules.</b> I'd just like to go over some ground rules for the discussion. We'd like this to be a free-flowing environment for the exchange of ideas. We want to encourage discussion between the members of the group here today, and not so much between the group members and the moderator. So as much as possible, the moderator will just be guiding the discussion. Also, we'd like the session to remain as interruption-free as possible, so if you would please silence your cell phones now if you haven't already.</p>
<p><b>Informed Consent.</b> Before starting, I would like to verify that everyone participating has read the consent form. As stated in the form, your participation in the group is voluntary and your confidentiality will be protected. This means that researchers will not identify you by name in any reports or presentations. It also means that you agree not to disclose any information from this focus group to people who are not participating in it today. If you agree to participate, please indicate that by saying, "I agree."</p>
Part 1: Introductions
<p><i>Before we begin, let's introduce ourselves. Please tell us:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your name</li> <li>2. A little about yourself (affiliation and position)</li> <li>3. How much experience you have with the SED?</li> <li>4. How much experience you have had with Graduate Student Experience (GSE) surveys?</li> </ol>
Part 2: The GSE module
<p><i>Background information on the GSE module...</i></p>
<p>5. [FOR DEANS AND DEPARTMENT HEADS] Does your institution field a survey of all current graduate students? An exit survey of graduating doctoral students that collects information on GSE?</p>
<p>6. [FOR DEANS AND DEPARTMENT HEADS] If your institution fields a GSE survey, how are the data used to inform decisions? How are the GSE data different from other data sources that are available?</p>
<p><i>Review of potential GSE topics...</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. If a module with GSE items were added to the SED, what would be useful to include?</li> <li>8. What about TOPIC (SEE LIST BELOW)? Should the GSE module cover that?</li> <li>9. What topics would not be useful to include?</li> <li>10. What level of detail would you want?</li> <li>11. What topics would be of greatest interest to you? Of least interest? Why?</li> <li>12. What kinds of experiences should be covered in the survey because they are vital to student success?</li> </ol>

13. Of the topics/items the group generally agrees should be included, which are the most important?
14. If it were not possible to include all these topics/items, which are the lowest priority to include?
15. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] What comparison data would be of interest to you in interpreting GSE findings? For example, would it be useful to have data from other institutions? What institutions (or types of institutions)?

### **Part 3: Issues of confidentiality**

*Individual students at an institution are identifiable in the SED dataset. GSE questions that could be asked about a student's program or advisor could be very sensitive if the student reports unfavorable experiences.*

16. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] What overall issues do you see with GSE module data being identifiable?
17. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] If data on advisors were presented in aggregate form, what issues do you see with the identifiability of the students and the advisors?
18. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] How might student and advisor identity be protected?
19. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] If sensitive data were to be aggregated for the institution or across institutions, what impact would that have on its utility for your institution?
20. It is possible to protect student identity by suppressing or aggregating data. For example, data could be combined across departments or across years to make it difficult to identify a particular student. Further, some information, such as exact age, gender, or time to degree could be collapsed into categories. If we used these types of techniques to protect student identity, how would it affect the utility of the data?
21. Would aggregated data be useful to you?
22. What suggestions do you have for collapsing or aggregating the data to best preserve the utility of the data for you or your institution?
23. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] Are there benefits to your institution of being able to compare your data to the aggregated data from peer institutions?
24. [FOR DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] If your institution currently fields its own exit survey, would there be benefits to having NSF collect and process the data for you instead?
25. To maintain respondent confidentiality, some of the data will need to be presented in aggregate form. How would that affect the value of the SED GSE data? Would the aggregated data still have utility?

### **Part 4: Interest in and value of a GSE module**

*Now I would like to discuss how interested you would be in a GSE module and how valuable the data would be to your institution/organization.*

26. What would you use the data for? Can you give examples of how the data would be used?
27. Is the kind of information in a GSE module available to you from other sources? What other sources?
28. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of including a GSE module in the SED?
29. [SEE EXAMPLE CHARTS in Attachment 8] Would summary data as presented in these example charts be useful to your institution? What kind of summary report would be of greatest value?
30. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] If your institution already has a GSE survey, what issues would arise if a GSE module were added to SED? How do you currently use your institution's GSE data?
31. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] Would a GSE module have potential overlap with data you already collect?

32. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] What would be advantages or disadvantages of relying on the SED GSE module instead of fielding an institution-specific survey?
33. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] SED would field the survey and process the survey data if a GSE module were added. Would shifting the labor to the SED make it worthwhile to your institution?
34. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] Standardizing administration of the survey would mean that your institution would not be able to add customized content to the SED GSE module. How would this affect your institution's use of the data? What positive or negative impacts would this have?
35. [DEANS, DEPARTMENT HEADS] If your institution is not currently participating in SED (or completion of the SED is a low priority over institutional survey): Would adding a GSE module increase your institution's interest in SED? Would having common data across institutions be interesting and valuable?

**Participant Debrief and Conclusion.** *The moderators thank the discussants for their participation.*

#### **Potential GSE Topics**

- Communication of Important Information
- Program/Campus Climate
- Professional Development Experiences
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Skill Development
- Faculty and Staff
- Scholarly Products and Presentations
- Financial Support/Aid
- Student Support Services
- Factors Hindering or Facilitating Academic Progress
- Campus Life and Activities
- Program and University Facilities
- Overall Satisfaction