

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Attachments I through V

NCER- NPSAS Grant Study – Connecting Students with Financial Aid (CSFA) 2017 Focus Groups

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Attachments:

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Attachment I

Recruitment Procedures

Two focus groups will be conducted with current graduate students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and potentially up to two more with undergraduate students from other postsecondary institutions in the Boston, Massachusetts area. For the two focus groups with graduate students, former students of Dr. Long's course "The Economics of Higher Education" will be recruited.

Dr. Long will announce two focus group opportunities using the email listserv of her former class, which ended in October 2016, and will select a diverse set of focus group participants from among those that sign-up using an online sign-up tool that is part of the course website. Up to seven students will be recruited for each focus group.

Attachment II Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Research: Connecting Students with Financial Aid (CSFA) 2017- Focus Group

Introduction and Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a focus group being conducted by Dr. Long for a project being sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the focus group is to bring together students to discuss the informational letters that are part of the intervention for the CSFA 2017 study. The results of the focus group discussions will be used to revise and improve the clarity of the letters to be used in the study.

Procedures

You are one of a small number of individuals who have been invited to participate in a focus group to discuss your understanding and reaction to the study's intervention letters.

The focus group will not be audio recorded, but notes will be taken to help us write a report summarizing the results of the group discussions. Your name will never be used in the report that we write. Although we will ask participants not to reveal anything about others in the group, we cannot guarantee this.

Study Duration

Your participation in the focus group will take about 60 minutes.

Possible Risks or Discomforts

We do not anticipate that any of the discussion topics will make you uncomfortable or upset. However you may refuse to answer any question or take a break at any time.

Benefits

Your Benefits Light snacks and drinks will be provided.

Benefits for Other People We hope that this focus group will help us improve students' understanding of our intervention letters.

Confidentiality

Dr. Long is conducting this focus group for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. This study is authorized by law under the Education Sciences Reform Act (20 U.S.C., § 9543). All responses that relate to or describe identifiable characteristics of individuals may be used only for research purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C., § 9573).

Future Contacts

We will not contact you in the future as part of this focus group study.

Your Rights

Your decision to take part in this research study is completely voluntary. You can refuse any part of the study and you can stop participating at any time.

Your Questions

If you have any questions about the study, you may call Dr. Long at 617-495-3401.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have received answers to your questions, and have freely decided to participate in this study. By agreeing to participate in this study, you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____ Date

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this study have been explained to the above-named individual.

_____ Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Attachment III
Focus Group Confirmation Email or Text

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group for the study, Connecting Students with Financial Aid (CSFA).

The focus group will be held on December X, 2016 in room XXX.

It will begin at XXX and will last approximately 60 minutes.

The goal of the focus group is to get your feedback on informational letters, which will be used in a study that aims to increase financial aid application completion and college persistence.

Prior to the focus group, please review the attached document, which includes several informational letters that we intend to use in the study. Please be ready to discuss them during the focus group.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Please contact me at bridget_long@gse.harvard.edu or 617-495-3401 if you have any questions.

Thank you again,

Bridget Long
Principal Investigator, CSFA Study

Attachment IV

Pre-Focus Group Review of the Informational Letters

The Connecting Students with Financial Aid (CSFA) 2017 Study

This research project proposes to implement and examine the effects of a set of interventions focused on key problems related to lack of awareness about financial aid. The goal of the project is to test whether providing clear information to college students improves the rate of submission of the financial aid form and subsequent enrollment and credit completion. The informational interventions focus on three main aspects of financial aid: (i) eligibility for aid, (ii) FAFSA application procedures, and (iii) award rules related to the number of college credits taken. Additionally, we will aim to explore whether the framing of the message (positive, negative, or neutral) influences student responses to the information.

We have included four of the intervention letters, which vary according to the message framing and whether credit information is also provided (see the table below).

<i>Focus on the Intervention</i>		<i>Communication</i>
Intervention varies message framing	<i>Neutral Framing</i>	Letter A
	<i>Positive Framing</i>	Letter B
	<i>Negative Framing</i>	Letter C
Intervention varies whether credit information is given	<i>Neutral Framing + Credit Information</i>	Letter D

For each letter, please consider the following questions:

- What is the letter trying to convey?
- Did you find any of the language confusing?
- Do you see ways to improve the clarity of the information provided?
- Two of the letters attempt to use either positive or negative framing of the information rather than neutral, straightforward language. What differences do you notice between these letters?
- How did the letters make you feel? Are there differences in how each letter made you feel?

Attachment V

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction and Welcome

Hello, my name is Bridget Long, and I will lead our discussion today. This is Lena Eisen who will be taking notes. We are developing informational letters that will provide financial aid information to college students with the goal of increasing the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the likelihood of college persistence, particularly as a full-time student.

We are conducting this focus group as a part of our overall study. It will last around 60 minutes. We are particularly interested today in learning how you comprehend these letters messages and how you suggest we might improve them.

We will be taking notes so that we can review your ideas and comments after this meeting is over. We will prepare a report that does not single out any one person but instead summarizes what we heard from the group as a whole. No names will be mentioned in the report. Before we begin, I would like to go over the format for our discussion this afternoon.

Interview Format

- _ I ask that you talk, one at a time, and in a voice at least as loud as mine.
- _ Although each person does not have to comment on every question, I would like to hear from everyone about some of the issues.
- _ In commenting, you can speak to me in response to a question or you can talk with another person in the group regarding his or her comments.
- _ There are no right or wrong answers
- _ It is very important that we talk one at a time, and that we do not have any side conversations.
- _ Because it is important that we cover all of the questions, I will act as our timekeeper. If we are spending too much time on one topic, I may ask us to move along to the next question
- _ Your experiences and opinions are important to us, and we hope that you will feel free to share them openly.
- _ I would like to remind you that our report will not identify any names of persons participating in this group discussion and your name will not be associated with what you say.
- _ We thank you for your time and insight. Your participation will help to improve the project.

We will begin by asking each of you to introduce yourself and say what you are studying. If there are no objections, we will start now.

Examples of General Probes

- What do you think the letters are trying to say?
- How would you rephrase the message in your own words?
- How easy or difficult was it to understand the message?
- Did you find any of the language confusing?
- Do you see ways to improve the clarity of the information provided?
- What differences do you notice between the letters?
- How did you feel when reading the letters?
- Are there differences in how each letter made you feel?
- How would you respond if you received one of these letters?
- What was the reason for that comment?
- Probe for examples.
- Can you tell me more about that?
- You seemed to hesitate/take a moment before giving/entering your response. Can you tell me what you were thinking about?
- What do you mean by...?
- Is there any additional information that we should have provided to help understand the message?
- Does this term/question sound ok to you, or would you prefer something different?

Closing

This concludes our discussion questions for this session. We really appreciate your involvement in this process. Your comments will be very helpful as we prepare recommendations for improving the informational letters.