

1-2011

# Focus Group Initiative: Increase Student Participation in Program Planning and Evaluation

Sarah B. Beman  
*St. Catherine University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://sophia.stkate.edu/ma\\_nursing](http://sophia.stkate.edu/ma_nursing)

---

## Recommended Citation

Beman, Sarah B., "Focus Group Initiative: Increase Student Participation in Program Planning and Evaluation" (2011). *Master of Arts in Nursing Theses*. Paper 28.

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Nursing at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in Nursing Theses by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact [ejasch@stkate.edu](mailto:ejasch@stkate.edu).

Focus Group Initiative: Increase Student Participation in  
Program Planning and Evaluation

Sarah B Beman

St. Catherine University

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to gain a better insight into nursing student participation in governance activities of St. Catherine University Associate Degree Nursing Program. The Associate Degree Nursing Program (ADNP) has lacked student input into governance activities, and is missing a process to engage student input. Qualitative research was conducted to ascertain ways to improve student participation in program governance activities. The author completed two pilot focus groups with one cohort of ADNP students to test the process and determine feasibility throughout the program during fall term of 2010. The author took the results from that process to improve the method of data collection. Three focus groups were completed during fall term of 2010 and five during winter term 2011. There was at least one focus group for each cohort of students in the ADNP. Focus groups allowed the researcher to gain rich data about student perceptions of the course of study, providing a venue for participation in program planning and evaluation. The process also afforded the opportunity to ask students if they would participate in governance activities and if there were barriers to involvement that faculty might address. When evaluating the focus group data, the author analyzed both themes and outlier comments. The analysis mainly considered the student group comments as a whole, but occasionally data demanded immediate action for individual student needs.

In the fall term of 2010, at St. Catherine University (SCU) the associate degree nursing students were not participating in program governance activities for the Associate Degree Nursing Program (ADNP). Student involvement is critical to full and complete program evaluation. Bourke and Ihrke (2009) stated that nursing programs must complete program evaluation and that all involved parties must be included in that process. According to the National League of Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) (2008, p. 1), “The governing organization and nursing education unit ensure representation of students, faculty, and administrators in ongoing governance activities.” The university has a goal that all students will participate in leadership and collaboration (St. Catherine University, 2009). Participation in governance would be an excellent opportunity for students to connect with faculty outside of class and participate in collaboration and leadership for the program. St. Catherine University Department of Nursing (SCUDoN)(2010) includes in its governance and committee responsibilities that:

Student representatives, including 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, serve as members on their program committee in all nursing programs. In the ADP [Associate Degree Program] and BDP [Baccalaureate Degree Program] students are also invited to serve on the Committee on Curriculum and Committee on Students (p. 2).

While it is very clear that student participation in governance activities is expected of nursing programs there is a dearth of information on the subject. A literature search did not unearth any supporting articles related to student participation in governance with nursing students, associate degree students, or community colleges. Most of the articles in the literature search dealt with foreign universities and the students involved were either baccalaureate or

graduate level. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) researched students' attitudes regarding participation in governance and suggested ways to help make those experiences more beneficial for students. The students in this study were at an undergraduate or graduate level and all had been participants in student governance at a departmental or school level committee. The students in the ADNPs have not been participating in governance activities, so the Lizzio and Wilson (2009) work can inform improvements to the student experience in governance, but does not help define the best way to increase student involvement at the university. Menon (2003 & 2005) discussed student views on participation in governance and why student involvement is important. She also discussed ways to engage university students in governance activities. Love & Miller (2003) explored student's feelings regarding different strategies for increasing their involvement in governance. These students were either baccalaureate or graduate students enrolled in an education program at a large university. The students in the study were also identified as commuter students which is similar to the students in the ADNPs.

The student body in this qualitative study differs from the previously mentioned work. This study's focus groups consisted of associate degree students at a smaller urban university in a nursing program. The goal of the study was to find new ways to engage students in governance participation. This study assumes that student participation in focus groups addressing program evaluation questions will constitute student participation in program planning and evaluation and provide an opportunity for enhancement of the process. The study also assumes that students want to participate in governance activities to improve their program, but lack access in the current structure. Fowler (2008) states that through the use of mentoring, modeling and role-modeling, caring nurses help patients have a voice in their plan of care. Similarly nurse educators need to involve their students in the educational plan to improve the

quality of the educational plan. The ADNPs use Erikson, Tomlin and Swain's (1983) theory *Modeling and Role-modeling* to prepare the associate degree students to become nurses. Just as this theory asks nurses to promote patient control, the faculty should promote student control of their learning. The supporting theory of empowerment provides a backdrop for this research. Empowerment is defined as "the interpersonal process of providing the proper tools, resources and environment to build, develop and increase the ability and effectiveness of others to set and reach goals for individual and social ends (Hawks, 1992, p. 609)."

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants in the focus groups consisted of students from the ADNPs. Each Semester a new group of students starts the nursing program together and continues together until graduation. This group of students is known as a cohort. The students in these cohorts were enrolled during the 2010-2011 academic school year. The program includes a traditional day cohort, an evening/weekend cohort and a LPN to RN cohort. Each student group was offered the opportunity to participate in a focus group. All of the students in the study were volunteers. There were 6 different cohorts of students. The focus group facilitators noted some demographic data but did not verify their determinations with the students. The first group was a pilot project and consisted of 22 volunteers from our evening/weekend second level cohort. This group consisted of one Caucasian man, one African American woman, one Asian woman, four African immigrant women and 16 Caucasian women. The specific age ranges were not gathered, but appeared to be from their 20's to 50's. The second cohort was the fourth level evening/weekend students. This was the smallest focus group, with only two volunteers. They were two Caucasian women and appeared to be in their 20's to 30's. The third cohort consisted

of first level evening/weekend students including one Native American woman, one African woman, one African American woman, and six Caucasian women ranging in age from their 20’s to 40’s. The fourth cohort consisted of one African woman and five Caucasian women ranging in age from their 20’s to 40’s as well. The fifth cohort consisted of one Asian man, one African woman and two Caucasian women who ranged in age from 20’s to 30’s. The sixth cohort was the LPN to RN evening/weekend students, a group of four Caucasian women between their 30’s and 40’s. The focus groups were representative of every cohort level within the ADN and represented a good cross section of the student body regarding age, race, ethnicity and gender.

Table 1

Cohort of focus group	Total	M	F	Age	African American	Asian American	Native American	African Immigrant	Caucasian
1. pilot, E/W, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	22	1	21	20’s-50’s	1	1	N/A	4	16
2. E/W, 4 <sup>th</sup> Level	2		2	20’s-30’s	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
3. E/W, 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	9		9	20’s-40’s	1	N/A	1	1	6
4. Day, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	6		6	20’s-40’s	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	5
5. Day, 4 <sup>th</sup> Level	4	1	3	20’s-30’s	N/A	1	N/A	1	2
6. LPN to RN – Totals	4		4	30’s-40’s	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4
7. Grand Totals	47	2	5	20’s-50’s	2	2	1	6	35
8. E/W Totals	33	1	32	20’s-50’s	2	1	1	5	24
9. Day Totals	10	1	9	20’s-40’s	1	1	N/A	1	7

**Sampling Procedure**

There are many different means to determine participants in a focus group. A random sample of students from each cohort would have allowed the author to gain the most unbiased

feedback. When the author began working with the faculty to gain access to each cohort, the faculty expressed concern about requiring students to participate. Since they objected to engaging students in any process outside of asking for volunteers, all groups consisted fully of volunteer participation. The author met with faculty from each course to determine a good time when students might have free time in their schedule to participate in a focus group. In order to recruit participants the author posted an announcement on each cohorts' on-line course management system (Blackboard) one to two weeks prior to the scheduled focus group. The author also posted an invitation letter on Blackboard, which the students could download and review prior to the focus group time. Members of the department visited each class and announced the focus group date and time, referring students to the additional information on the Blackboard site. For the pilot group the author provided a random drawing of a \$10.00 giftcard as an incentive to participate. The focus group was held during the lunch hour on an 8 hour class day and the author provided lunch as an incentive to participate. For the subsequent focus groups the author provided snacks but did not offer gift cards as an incentive to participate.

### **Sample size, power and precision**

The initial goal was to get two groups of 8 participants each from each cohort providing feedback from 16 students per cohort. The literature recommends that focus groups contain somewhere between 5 and 12 individuals (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1998; McLafferty, 2004; Wyatt, Krauskopf, & Davidson, 2008). The first two pilot focus groups included 11 individuals each. It was determined that this number was too many for our moderators because the groups had inadequate time to complete all the questions. After the initial focus groups, the amount of incentive to participate was reduced. This resulted in a reduced number of participants. As stated earlier there was a focus group for each cohort of students ranging in size from two to nine

students. The total sample size was 47 students which breaks down into; 33 evening/weekend students, 10 day students, and 4 LPN to RN students. This sample size was large enough to allow analysis of themes in student feedback.

### **Measures**

The review of the literature on focus groups revealed that focus groups can be done using themes or defined questions (Krueger, 1998). None of the facilitators who agreed to moderate the focus groups were trained focus group moderators and since the data gathered from each focus group needed to be replicated it was decided to use specific questions for the focus groups. Krueger (1998) also recommends that the focus group questions be reviewed by interested parties. The first set of questions came from a set used in the SCU Masters Degree Nursing Program and were refined by the author into a list of six questions. Those questions were sent to the program director and the focus group facilitators for review. The feedback resulted in the addition of two more questions regarding student use of support services. Krueger (1998) states that there should be an opening question, an intro question, a transition question, some key questions, and an ending question. It is critical for the facilitator to have a general idea of how long they should spend gathering data on each question, so the time frame for each question was provided on the facilitator form. (See Appendix A)

In the literature there are many different options for recording focus group data. The collection can be as simple as one moderator using pen and paper to write down respondent's feedback or as involved as videotaping the focus group and having researchers sit behind mirrored glass while taking notes. The pilot group data collection process was to have one facilitator asking questions and taking notes in addition to making an audio recording of the event. Videos record the participants' body language and can provide more insight into feelings.

Audio recordings provided student anonymity while allowing the moderator to focus on group management instead of note taking. The audio recording devices used during the pilot sessions were tape recorders. The facilitators and the author checked to ensure the recorders worked, but did not note the length of recording time per side of the tape. The focus groups were one hour in length and the audio tapes were 15 minutes per side. This meant between one third to two thirds of the pilot focus groups were not audio-taped. That problem was corrected for all focus groups following the pilots by using digital recorders. Transcription of focus group interviews was complicated by background noise. The background noise impaired complete transcription of the full discussion. The author decided that the assistant moderator should use a digital audio recorder to provide a clear digital recording that could be played on the computer while transcription occurred. The pilot focus groups had one moderator. Facilitation of group process improved with the addition of an assistant moderator. The assistant's job was to handle equipment and ensure complete notes. This method was used for the rest of the focus groups. To be as inclusive as possible, all students were encouraged to write responses to the questions posted on the Blackboard site if they wanted their feedback to be included. (See Appendix B) Six students did provide written feedback for the questions.

One question from the pilots was duplicative and was removed from the list. This allowed the facilitators to spend more time on the remaining questions. (See Appendix C & D)

### **Research Design**

When conducting focus groups with participants who are part of the organization it is vital that those participants feel comfortable speaking candidly without fear of reprisal. "The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010b, p. 1)." There is a history within

the SCUDoN of using circle groups as a way of sharing information and allowing voices to be heard (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010a). Using circle groups provides a safe space where students can share their thoughts and ideas. This idea blended nicely with the pilot focus group and was continued for the subsequent groups.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis**

Focus group analysis requires that distinctions be made between themes and outlier comments (Polit & Beck, 2008; McLafferty, 2004; Krueger, 1994). As this research related directly to program evaluation and was provided by students actively participating in the program, the author looked for themes and outliers that seemed distinctive and enlightening. When reviewing the transcription data for themes the student responses were analyzed as a group. The author did address two individual student issues because the concerns were related to security on campus. The author felt that student safety warranted immediate action.

The first question asked why the participants chose St. Kates for their nursing education. The answers to the question elicited the following themes:

- the program allowed admissions with a lower GPA requirement; there was no wait list to enter the nursing program; recommendations received from a co-worker or other nurse working in the field;
- the evening/weekend students liked the evening/weekend schedule; ease of transferring credits into the institution; the mission, vision and philosophy of both the university and the nursing department;

- diversity of the student body; the smaller student to teacher ratio (they didn't want to be a number at a big university); the support services that were advertised to support adult learners.

One outlier stated her mother and sister had both attended St. Kates and that was part of why she was attending the program.

The second question asked students what they liked best about the program. Their answers mirrored the reasons students choose the program in the first place, including student to teacher ratio, the diverse student body and the support services offered. Other themes included:

- instructor approachability and the supportive atmosphere the faculty provide; the Kaplan on-line testing program; the Lewis text book;
- hands on and clinical experiences; support of the lab staff; promotion of a team atmosphere where students didn't feel in competition with one another; a less competitive atmosphere differed from their previous experience.

One outlier liked the calendar and quarter structure. Semesters are divided into 7 week quarters, which allowed this student to focus on smaller chunks of material at a time. Another outlier liked that the program was taught by seasoned professionals. The LPN to RN students were the only group to express their appreciation of the pre-requisite courses.

The third question asked the students if they were in charge, what kind of changes they would make. This question garnered many comments. One theme focused on organization and preparation of the course including:

- to have a coordinating calendar and supporting course material provided at the beginning of the course or earlier; consistency between faculty regarding skills presentation and grading;

- fewer books and a decrease in the repetition of content across books; specifically the medical-surgical nursing textbook provides the same material as the nutrition textbook; improved audio/visual support materials;
- more lab and clinical time; lab supplies available in the book store allowing each student their own intact lab supplies kit; part-time faculty who treat their students as a full-time obligation;
- an increased printing budget; PowerPoints should function as an outline for the presentation; questions answered in class without judgmental comments;
- more rigorous screening for admission, ensuring student completion of all pre-requisites prior to starting program (pre-requisite course work is instrumental to success and it is a disservice to the students who aren't as prepared); class times arranged so first and third level lab hours do not overlap.

There were some outlier comments that could be important, but need follow-up investigation to determine importance. These comments included:

- moving content from NURS 1200 to NURS 1000 would be a better distribution of work; inequity of lab facilities and a better fundamentals textbook utilized on the St. Paul campus for the BDP; respectful treatment by advisors eliminating personal attacks;
- lectures provided by no more than 3 lecturers during a seven week course; provision of a financial aid counselor with increased orientation information on costs and time commitment nursing school requires; a positive comment related to the provision of the most commonly used medications on a given hospital floor for clinical work;
- offer of a preceptorship opportunity; preference for assignments to one health care system for their entire clinical experience so orientation to informatics and other system

wide policies occurs once; orientation should include a required 'how to take nursing multiple-choice-exams' course;

- addition of more guest lecturers from the field would enhance student learning; active and involved advising offering help to struggling students.

The next question asked the students what kind of support services would facilitate their learning. The list included advising, the Access and Success (providing support to student parents), peers, the library, study sessions with the academic coach, open lab time, disability services, co-workers, learning center, and career counseling. The outlier was the LPN to RN student group. This group reported a lack of knowledge about support services and a lack of access to them. A follow-up question asked what support services were missing that would enhance their ability to learn. This question did not garner much feedback and was likely unnecessary.

The last key question explained the committee governance structure to the students and asked the students for opinions on possible participation and activities to enhance their involvement. Many students said attending a committee would need to be worthwhile and productive. Some students recommended providing food at the meetings. Suggestions ranged from utilizing the focus group format for needed improvement and then reporting changes instituted to complete a positive feedback loop. Some students suggested a student advisory committee that could take place once or twice a semester and would allow students and faculty to dialogue outside of the classroom, and would require less student time.

The closing question asked anything other comments. For one student the ADN was not her first choice. Because she already has a baccalaureate degree she wanted the post-baccalaureate program to increase in number of students accepted. Another student expressed

frustration and concern that no faculty fully explained the seminal theory modeling and role-modeling. A request was made for information on internships. Finally a student recommended interviews of past graduates on program strengths and weaknesses.

## **Discussion**

### **Limitations**

A weakness of the focus group implementation was the limited number of participants. Two focus groups of eight students per cohort, for a total of 10 groups, could have yielded even richer data with more clearly defined themes and perhaps fewer outliers. Another weakness was the use of audio recordings. Video-taping students to get facial expressions and body language would have given the data an even richer context. The drawback to video-taping is two-fold. Students might feel less sure of their anonymity and video cameras may cause people to withhold information because of their discomfort being videotaped. The total sample of students was representative of the actual student body in the program. A weakness in the student sample was the disproportionate number of evening/weekend students to day students related to the large pilot group.

### **Recommendations**

The key problem for this study was to better understand and improve student engagement in program governance activities. Student thoughts and concerns were gathered and analyzed. This author will work with the faculty, program director and the students to create two student committees. One committee will be held when day students are available and the other will be held at a time when evening/weekend students can attend. The focus of these committees is to provide students and faculty a chance to interact outside of the classroom setting in a mutual goal of program improvement.

It will be paramount importance to determine the best possible process for creating and maintaining the student program committees which can effectively engage both students and faculty in dialogue that leads to a stronger more successful program. The groups will continue to be structured using circle group process, which creates an open environment where individuals can share ideas.

The focus group process provided the ADNPs with qualitative data and possible areas for change in the program. This work was presented to the faculty at a workshop and thoughts regarding possible changes were raised. This author will work with the faculty, program director and students to continue to use the information for quality improvement, and to support a strong and solid nursing education program.

## References

- Baldwin, C. & Linnea, A. (2010a) *Basic guidelines for calling a circle*. [Brochure] Retrieved from <http://www.peerspirit.com/gifts/PeerSpirit-Circle-Guidelines2010.pdf>
- Baldwin, C. & Linnea, A. (2010b) *The circle way: A leader in every chair*. CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Bourke, M.P. & Ihrke, B.A., (2009). The evaluation process an overview. In Billings & Halstead (Eds.), *Teaching in nursing* (391-408). St. Louis: Saunders Elsevier.
- Erickson, H.C., Tomlin, E.M., & Swain, M.A., (1983) *Modeling and role-modeling: A theory and paradigm for nursing*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Fowler, M.D.M. (Ed.). (2008). *Guide to the code of ethics for nurses: Interpretation and Application*. Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association.
- Hawks, J. (1992). Empowerment in nursing education: Concept analysis and application to philosophy, learning and instruction. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 17(5), 609-618. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Krueger, R.A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Krueger, R.A. (1998). *Developing questions for focus groups: focus group kit 3*. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lizzio, A. & Wilson, K. (2009). Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in higher education*, 34(1), 69-84. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

- Love, R. & Miller, M. (2003). Increasing student participation in self governance: A comparison of graduate and undergraduate student perceptions. *College student journal*, 37(4), 532-544. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- McLafferty, I. (2004). Focus group interviews as a data collecting strategy. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(2), 187-194. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Menon, M. (2003). Student participation in university governance: A need for negotiated educational aims?. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9(3), 233-246. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Morgan, D.L. (1998). *Planning Focus Groups: focus group kit 2*. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Menon, M. E. (2005). Students' Views regarding Their Participation in University Governance: Implications for Distributed Leadership in Higher Education. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11(2), 167-182. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (2008). *Standards and criteria: Associate degree programs in nursing*. Retrieved from [http://www.nlnac.com/manuals/SC2008\\_ASSOCIATE.htm](http://www.nlnac.com/manuals/SC2008_ASSOCIATE.htm)
- Polit, D.F. & Beck, C.T., (2008) *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice*. PA; Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- St. Catherine University (2009). *Goals for liberal arts core requirements*. Retrieved from [http://minerva.stkate.edu/academiccatalog.nsf/web\\_retrieve/CBB3AA5C4499389B8625760000427305](http://minerva.stkate.edu/academiccatalog.nsf/web_retrieve/CBB3AA5C4499389B8625760000427305)

Wyatt, T., Krauskopf, P., & Davidson, R. (2008). Using focus groups for program planning and evaluation. *Journal of school nursing, 24*(2), 71-77. Retrieved from CINAHL Plus with Full Text database.

## Appendix A

- ✦ Test your tape recorder
- ✦ Let the students know the pizza and soda will be ready for them at 11:55 and they can take the food to their next activity
- ✦ Let them know the winners of the gift cards and that the gift cards will be distributed next week.

Begin focus group with a short introduction -- possible points to include:

- ✦ Information gleaned from written and transcribed responses will be analyzed and summarized by the faculty involved. This summary will be used for program evaluation and improvement. A summary will be shared with students via their Blackboard program site.
  - ✦ Responses are anonymous. Only the administrative assistant will have access to the audiotapes and she will destroy them immediately after they have been transcribed and the file is backed up.
  - ✦ Responses to questions may address specific courses, however, faculty are also eager to use student responses and recommendations to develop a plan for overall program improvement
  - ✦ Remind the students that this focus group is for overall program evaluation and improvement—it does not take the place of online course evaluations, which are extremely valuable for specific course improvement
  - ✦ After the focus group, please thank the students for their valuable feedback and take a few moments to write down the themes you heard during the discussion for each question. Please secure the audio tape, students' written responses, and your identified themes in the inner office envelope and give the envelope to Sarah Beman, who will deliver the packets to Julieann for transcription.
  - ✦ Wing it, see what they talk about, you can selectively eliminate a question if you feel the students have already covered it in another. Or we can leave the services question out and think about adding it in for the larger program wide focus groups.
1. Why did you choose St. Kate's for your nursing education? – Opening, 10 minutes
  2. Please describe your overall experience with this program. – Intro, 10 minutes
  3. What do you like best about the program? – Transition, 5 minutes
  4. If you were in charge, what kind of changes would you make? – Key, 10 minutes
  5. What kind of support services do you use to facilitate your learning? – Key, 5 minutes
  6. What support services do you feel are lacking and would enhance your ability to learn? – Key, 5 minutes
  7. The nursing department has two committees that students have the opportunity to participate in. These committees make decisions about the program and work to improve it. The Committee on

Students maintains student policies and helps facilitate pinning. The Committee on Curriculum plans all aspects of the curriculum and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum.

- a. What would it take to get you to participate in one of those committees? – Key, 5 minutes
8. Is there anything else you would like to add? – Ending, 5 minutes

## Appendix B

Dear associate degree students:

You were given the opportunity to participate in these first focus groups to help us improve our program and learn more about your experiences. You have volunteered to participate. The focus group will be held Saturday Nov 6<sup>th</sup> 2010 from 11:00-12:00 over the lunch hour. Pizza and drinks will be provided. We will also be raffling off two \$10.00 target gift cards for each focus group.

The faculty, program director and dean of nursing are eager to hear your recommendations and feedback to improve our programs. Prior to the focus group on Saturday we request that you respond to the following five questions in the attached document. This will ensure your specific feedback is included in detail.

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes and will be facilitated and tape recorded by a either Kim Jenson or Cherste Eidman. Many of you know Kim, she is our student tutor. Cherste is in the Masters in Nurse Education concentration on the St. Paul campus. To assure anonymity of your comments, course faculty will not be present during the focus group. Only the assistant administrator in the nursing office will hear the tape as she transcribes them. Once transcribed, the tape will be destroyed. This will ensure that all responses are anonymous.

Your written and transcribed responses will be reviewed and analyzed by faculty. Findings will be used for curriculum and program improvement. A summary of the findings and plan for improvement will be shared with all students. We sincerely appreciate your conscientious participation in this process.

1. Why did you choose St. Kate's for your nursing education?
2. Please describe your overall experience with this program.
3. What do you like best about the program?
4. If you were in charge, what kind of changes would you make?
5. What kind of support services do you use to facilitate your learning?
6. What support services do you feel are lacking and would enhance your ability to learn?
7. The nursing department has two committees that students have the opportunity to participate in. These committees make decisions about the program and work to improve it. The Committee on Students maintains student policies and helps facilitate pinning. The Committee on Curriculum plans all aspects of the curriculum and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum.
  - a. What would it take to get you to participate in one of those committees?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Sincerely,

Sarah Beman RN, BSN

## Appendix C

- ✦ Test your audio recorder
- ✦ Let the students know there are snacks and they are welcome to have them.
- ✦ **Please remember to record each question as a separate audio file.**

Begin focus group with a short introduction -- possible points to include:

- ✦ Information gleaned from written and transcribed responses will be analyzed and summarized by the faculty involved. This summary will be used for program evaluation and improvement. A summary will be shared with students via their Blackboard program site.
- ✦ Responses are anonymous. Only the administrative assistant will have access to the recordings and she will destroy them immediately after they have been transcribed and the file is backed up.
- ✦ Responses to questions may address specific courses, however, faculty are also eager to use student responses and recommendations to develop a plan for overall program improvement
- ✦ Remind the students that this focus group is for overall program evaluation and improvement—it does not take the place of course evaluations, which are extremely valuable for specific course improvement
- ✦ After the focus group, please thank the students for their valuable feedback and take a few moments to write down the themes you heard during the discussion for each question. Please e-mail the audio files to Sarah Beman [sbbeman@stkate.edu](mailto:sbbeman@stkate.edu) . Also secure students' written responses, and your identified themes and deliver them to Sarah Beman.
- ✦ Wing it, see what they talk about, you can selectively eliminate a question if you feel the students have already covered it in another. Or we can leave the services question out and think about adding it in for the larger program wide focus groups.
  1. Why did you choose St. Kate's for your nursing education? Opening/Intro, 10 Minutes
  2. What do you like best about the program? Transition, 10 Minutes
  3. If you were in charge, what kind of changes would you make? Key, 10 Minutes
  4. What kind of support services do you use to facilitate your learning? Key, 10 Minutes
  5. What support services do you feel are lacking and would enhance your ability to learn? Key, 10 minutes.
  6. The nursing department has three committees that students have the opportunity to participate in. These committees make decisions about the program and work to improve it. The first Committee is the Associate Degree Program Committee that deals with all program issues. Committee on Students maintains student policies and helps facilitate pinning. The Committee on Curriculum plans all aspects of the curriculum and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum.
    - a. Can you think of a way students would be able to participate in those committees or participate in the work those committees do? Key, 10 Minutes
  7. Is there anything else you would like to add? Ending, 5 minutes

## Appendix D

Dear associate degree students:

You have been given the opportunity to participate in a focus group to help us improve our program and learn more about your experiences. The focus groups will be held (DATE and TIME). Soda and snacks will be provided.

The faculty, program director and dean of nursing are eager to hear your recommendations and feedback to improve our programs. Prior to the focus group on Thursday we request that you respond to the following five questions below. This will ensure your specific feedback is included in detail.

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes and will be facilitated and audio recorded by Kim Jenson, Rachelle Hanson or Michael Gibba. Many of you know Kim, she is our student tutor. Rachelle and Michael both work in the lab. To assure anonymity of your comments, course faculty will not be present during the focus group. Only the transcriptionist in the nursing office will hear the recordings as she transcribes them. Once transcribed, the recording will be destroyed. This will ensure that all responses are anonymous.

Your written and transcribed responses will be reviewed and analyzed by faculty. Findings will be used for curriculum and program improvement. A summary of the findings and plan for improvement will be shared with all students. We sincerely appreciate your conscientious participation in this process.

1. Why did you choose St. Kate's for your nursing education?
2. What do you like best about the program?
3. If you were in charge, what kind of changes would you make?
4. What kind of support services do you use to facilitate your learning?
5. What support services do you feel are lacking and would enhance your ability to learn?
6. The nursing department has three committees that students have the opportunity to participate in. These committees make decisions about the program and work to improve it. The first Committee is the Associate Degree Program Committee that deals with all program issues. Committee on Students maintains student policies and helps facilitate pinning. The Committee on Curriculum plans all aspects of the curriculum and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum.
  - a. Can you think of a way students would be able to participate in those committees or participate in the work those committees do?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Sincerely,

Sarah Beman RN, BSN