Course
Focus Group Summary Report
Date
N= 10 students

Goal: The purpose of this focus group is to identify the effectiveness of …to promote achievement of the program learning outcomes and to gather additional feedback on the program.

Part 1: Survey on Program Learning Outcome (PLO): "Solve … problems using …"

My skills to solve … using … methods have become...	Number of Students N=10
Stronger	9* or 90%
Much Stronger	1 or 10%

Why have my skills become stronger?	Number of Students N=10
Excellent instruction and application to real-world problems	3 or 30%
Review of material	3 or 30%
Challenging homework	2 or 20%
Immediate research project	1 or 10%

What projects have helped you to achieve these skills?	Number of Students N=10
Homework	5 or 50%
Courses	4 or 40%
Personal research topic	3 or 30%
Meetings with advisor	1 or 10%

Given this PLO, how useful have your assignments been toward teaching you how to communicate…?	Number of Students N=10

Illustrative Comments:
"Assignments are very helpful." (4 or 40%)
"They have been extremely useful for ... However, there is no formal teaching for communicating … to another audience."
"Very useful, in courses where assignments are collected. If our work is not collected, the assignment is not useful."
"This is some of the best … instruction I have ever received. Our assignments have been incredibly useful in getting in the … mindset."

*the numbers in parenthesis represent the total and percentage of participants agreeing with the statement.

Part 2: Elaboration

1) At what point (or which project) did you really feel as though you were fully engaged with …?

Some of the students did not feel they had the opportunity yet to get involved with … projects since they were attending their first year … (6 or 60%). Students enrolled in … because of personal fulfillment and looking ahead to future careers.

Illustrative Comments:
"Well, half of us are first years [in the graduate program] in this room."
"You can't do a lot with a ... bachelor's degree."

2) Have there been teaching practices that have been particularly effective at supporting your learning? How so?

For the most part, the graduate students felt the workload so far had been appropriate, challenging, and helpful (6 or 60%). There is also a … project that some faculty are interested in the graduate students putting together. However, the students feel they don't have the time, and that the department is small for the project to be useful. In regards to faculty, participants feel that the … are of very high quality.

Illustrative Comments:
"The first year coursework has been very appropriate for first year grad students. Here they're actually expecting us to be good …. They really give us challenging work."
"I agree the homework has been very helpful."
"It's challenging in an appropriate way"

3) Can you suggest assignments or projects that could further help students develop their ability to communicate … ideas?

A majority of the students (6/10 or 60%) voiced their desire to give presentations in front of their peers to build and practice necessary skills. One participant shared that they had a weekly event run by a student called "Sample" in which peers would present to each other. "Unfortunately, it did not last long because students stopped participating". The same student said, "there were not enough people, and everyone is too focused on their own research." When the students were asked if the faculty could be of any help in getting students to give more presentations, a majority of the graduate students (7 or 70%) said no, unless giving presentations became a requirement.

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