

**Focus Group Protocols
Biol. 1001, Fall 2006**

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1. Welcome/Introduction

You may have noticed that your Biology professors are doing a lot of *stuff* in your Biol 1001 class. There are activities of various sorts, work in groups, going up to the front of class to present stuff, quizzes, those forms that you scratch off to reveal answers (IFATs), and so forth.

The point of today's session is to hear what you think about all this – how the class is going for you, what you've liked and haven't liked, what has helped you to learn and what hasn't, etc. Your professors will use this information not only to improve Biol 1001 in the future, but also to improve *your* class.

We have some questions to guide our discussion, but you should feel free to contribute anything you think is relevant. There's no need for everyone to come to agreement; we'd like to hear all points of view, so if someone says something you don't agree with, please speak up! After all, different people will like/dislike different things, or find some approaches more effective than others.

We are going to record this session, because otherwise we won't be able to remember everything you say. You will remain anonymous, though, and your names will not be reported to anyone. All that your professors will receive from this session will be the summary that we come up with, so you should feel free to be honest.

Any questions before we begin?

2. Icebreaker:

- Is this the first big class (over 100 people) that you've taken? How have you found the experience?

3. In-class activities, including:

I understand that this is in many ways not a traditional lecture class, but that your professors are using a lot of in-class activities. And that a lot of these activities require you to work with other students in small groups.

Now, I have a list of these things, but I don't know what the heck they are. For instance, could someone tell me what "pipe cleaner biology" is? "Fatal attraction in rats"? Etc. [perhaps a way of getting them to explain what the point of the activities is]

- Fatal attraction in rats

- Tournament of kitchen utensils
- WHIPPO
- Penis size & Ratites
- Fatal FAMILIAL Insomnia: genetic locus
- DNA concept map
- Pipe cleaner biology
- “Protein Scramble” matching game
- Mutation generation/karyotype analysis
- BOB (bag of beans) & population genetics

Also **in-class strategies**, including:

- problem-based hypothesis generation and/or testing
- active student involvement (DNA concept map, pipe cleaner biology, Tournament of Kitchen Utensils)
- worksheets (WHIPPO, Mendelian inheritance problems, population genetics)
- mini lectures
- IFATs
- Question messages

General:

- what did you think of the in-class activities?
- what did you think of **working in groups**?

Specific:

- did you understand **the point** of the individual activities? What you were supposed to learn from each one?
- do you understand the **point** of doing all these activities in the first place? Why aren't they just lecturing?
- how **effective** were they? What do you get out of the activities, do you think? Do they help you to learn? Do they help you to prepare for exams?
- do you learn anything from **working in groups**? Do your group members sometimes help you to find the right answers? Do you ever learn from helping others to figure things out?
- how enjoyable were they?
- were there too many/too few?
- were some better than others? Which ones, and in what ways?
- can you think of any ways in which the activities could be improved?

3. In-class quizzes:

I understand your professors are giving you quizzes on certain days, is that right? Just brief, little things.

General:

- what did you think of the in-class quizzes?

Specific:

- what did you think the **point** of the quizzes was?
- did they encourage you to do the reading for each class?
- did they keep you from falling behind?
- did they help you to understand what's going on in class?
- were they useful preparation for exams?
- was it useful to work in groups on some quizzes?

5. Value of lectures:

If students want more lecture:

- Why? What are you not getting out of class as things stand? Do you think your exam score would have been higher? (But overall, your class did slightly better than the other section of Biol 1001.)

6. Other supporting elements of the course:

I know there is some material that you're expected to get not from lectures, but from your own reading. So there are various supplementary materials available to you, at least some in your WebCT Vista site, such as this nice lecture outline on natural selection and adaptation. It tells you exactly what you should get out of the material, includes study questions, an outline, and lots of information.

- How comfortable are you with the idea that you are expected to learn some stuff *on your own*?
- Do you use this sort of thing? Is it helpful? Do you read the book?

7. Overall:

- what is particularly good about the class? Particularly bad?
- how **motivated** are you to come to class? How motivated do you feel when you're *in* class?
- how do you like the fact that the class is **team-taught**, involving two different professors?
- what would you change about the class?
- is there anything you'd like to add? Anything we've missed?