Using Focus Groups for Student Evaluation of Teaching

Eric M. Fife, Ph.D.
School of Communication Studies
James Madison University

Abstract
Traditional means of evaluating instruction, though reliable, are limited in scope. In this paper, I provide an argument and a template for the use of focus groups as a supplemental tool for gathering student feedback. I begin with a brief discussion of focus groups and an examination of the traditional student evaluation process. Next, I discuss the advantages of using focus group research to supplement that process. After considering some of the shortcomings of focus group research, I provide specific suggestions for using this means of collecting data. I conclude with a case study example of the preliminary results of my own focus group inquiry.