New Faculty (randomly selected and organized by the Faculty Senate)
Focus Group
At CSUS

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Before actual discussion began the moderator, Barbara O’Connor, began with a brief introduction discussing the purpose of the focus group. The moderator also went over some simple ground rules for the group.

- We will be tape-recording your comments today. This is for me to review and summarize your thoughts in a report. It would be too hard to try to talk and take notes, so I use a tape recorder.

- This focus group is confidential. Everything you say in this discussion will be kept private. No names will ever be used in my report. It is important to us that you give us your honest opinions.

- To make sure we end the group on time and cover everything we need to, I will move the discussion from topic to topic, and allow everyone an opportunity to speak. I might be asking questions of some of you who don’t seem to be getting enough of a chance to speak.

- There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions and you do not have to agree with one another. We are actually interested in hearing different opinions.

Focus groups are a marvelous research method for generating hypotheses, and the best way to see your problem through the eyes of consumers, voters, citizens, etc. Focus groups are, however, a poor way to test hypotheses. Given the small sample sizes and the heavy influence that a few members can have on a discussion, generalizations about the larger populations from which participants are drawn can be misleading. Ideally, hypotheses generated during focus groups should be subjected to further quantitative tests using experiments, surveys, test markets or conjoint analyses.

Conclusions:

1. Participants were excited about their involvement with CSUS. They represented different departments and came from different parts of the county. Two were Sacramento natives who had returned home. All participants are very satisfied with their choice to take jobs at CSUS. They loved our students and were very happy with the support staff and faculty colleagues. Most were very concerned about our ability to maintain our quality instruction, small class size, and high quality faculty going forward. They felt, cost of living, housing costs, budget cuts and University growth over the next ten years would challenge our ability to maintain what we have. Their vision of a large urban campus, fully integrated into the community and delivering a low cost, high quality education to a diverse
and talented student population was critical to our success. They also felt that applied research that was subsidized was critical to our location in the state’s capitol. They felt that every effort should be made to increase town, gown relationships and faculty should be the primary drivers of that effort.

2. These participants were uniformly positive about the leadership changes at the University. They also thought this was the perfect time to be addressing the mission and the positioning of the University. They encouraged the President to brand the University as a part of the 2010 drive. They felt that the issue of the name of the University was not as important as a clear statement about positioning the University in the Community. They cited systemic issues like Community awareness of University success stories, role of the University in Community life in the arts, public policy and planning as bigger issues than what we call the University. Most felt that everyone thought of the University as Sac State but that it was important to include University in the name for the outside the area community and their professional groups. They felt Sacramento State University might be a good solution for outside groups.

3. The group felt that we really needed to work on a campus community plan. They felt that closer subsidized housing, more dorms etc. would require more for people to do on campus. They all felt that 24 hours services, attractive entertainment options on campus and nearby and centralized transportation would be essential to our plans to be a vibrant urban university that is connected to it’s community.

4. The consensus of the group is that CSUS is a bargain price for a high quality liberal arts education. They all felt that teaching, close student contact and our diversity were our strengths and what drew them to take jobs here. They were very concerned that larger class size and more part time faculty would detract from their ability to continue to deliver our real strengths. They also felt that another strong asset of the University is its attractiveness. The group did not need to be prompted for the academic strong points of CSUS: small class sizes, access to faculty, etc.

5. The most common complaint about CSUS is the availability of parking. Most participants were speaking from their own personal experiences. They felt that the University must focus on light rail access to the new developments and better access to the main part of the campus. The also felt that faculty should not be asked to pay for parking and then not be able to park. They felt the same way about students.

6. Most of the participants believe CSUS is the main option for students desiring to, or needing to, remain close to home. Most participants view CSUS as a commuter campus. They also feel that we need to maximize our relationship to the capitol and provide applied research in keeping with our mission as a teaching institution. Many participants felt we needed to do a better job of articulating major programs with the feeder community colleges.