Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Guide

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS—WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Introduction: [Introduce yourself and co-facilitator] In 2006 a committee was formed by President Nietzel to better understand the experiences of faculty, staff, and administrators in regards to how they balance the demands of work and home life. The committee developed a survey that was distributed in fall 2007, in fact several of you may have completed that survey. Survey results provided a lot of valuable and important information about the work-life experiences of employees. The survey results also raised some additional questions and the committee has asked us to assist in further exploring some of these questions through focus groups. We appreciate that you have taken time out of your day to participate in this focus group. What you have to say is important and has the potential to make a difference in how the university and the administration views work-life issues as well as the types of programs and policies that may be developed. Before going further we would like you to read and sign the informed consent document that you have each received. This is a voluntary process so you should feel free to leave at any time if you are not comfortable participating and feel free to pass on any question that you would prefer not to answer. Please be assured that anything you say will be kept confidential. While we may report what is said here, no one will be able to connect what is said to you personally. With your permission we would like to tape record our conversation to make sure that we capture your words and perceptions as you share them. Does anyone have concerns with tape recording the conversation? [Explain that your co-facilitator will also be assisting in the process by both taking notes and asking questions]. Before we get started are there any questions? Could we begin with everyone introducing themselves and the unit/department in which you work.

Transition: We would like to begin asking some general questions about how you understanding and experience work-life balance.

1. When you hear the phrase work-life balance, what does that mean to you—how would you define the term/phrase?

   **Follow up:** If you were able to achieve the optimum work-life balance—what would that look like? How would you describe it?

   **Follow up:** Depending on the response of the group the facilitators may want to follow up here with an explanation of how the committee defines work-life balance so that the group moves forward with a similar understanding of the concept: **For the committee and others who have studied work-life balance they define work-life balance as a circumstance in which there is not a lot of conflict or tension between what you need to accomplish at work and what you need to do at home. Another way to think about this is a good balance between work and home life is when you do not go home worried about work and when you do not go to work worried about home.**
2. Given the above definition, if you were placing yourself on a work-life balance continuum with 10 being that your work and home life is in perfect balance (there is virtually no conflict or tension between what you need to accomplish at work and what you need to do at home) and 1 being that your work and home life are completely out of balance (there is significant tension or conflict)—where would you place yourself on that continuum?

Follow up: Give us some examples or describe your circumstance in ways that will help us understand why you placed yourself where you did on the continuum?

3. People who study work-life issues often talk about the impact of the culture or the values of an organization on work-life balance. We would like for you to take a moment and think about the culture/values of University. Describe the culture/values of the University and talk about how you believe these values influence your ability to achieve a positive work-life balance.

4. In what specific ways does your immediate work environment [unit/department] make it difficult for you to manage the conflict between work and life? In what ways does it help you in managing the balance between work and life more positively?

Follow up: Be sure to probe for specific examples not just general feelings?

Follow up: Do you think your unit is similar to or different from the university as a whole? PROBE: If they answered yes, then probe for what accounts for this difference?

Transition: We are interested in how the length of time that you have been at the university or whether you are male or female may influence work-life issues.

5. We would like you to think back to when you first came to the university. When you first came to the university how difficult was it for you to manage/achieve an acceptable balance between your work and family life?

Follow up: We would like you to fast forward to the present—is it easier or more difficult now for you to balance work and home?

Follow up: Depending on the groups’ response, probe as to what has changed at the university, in their unit/department and/or in their personal circumstances that has caused it to be more difficult/easier to achieve a work-life balance?

6. Results from the work-life survey suggested that it may be more challenging for men to maintain a positive work-life balance at the university than it is for women [Men reported slightly higher levels of work interfering with family and family interfering with work compared to levels reported by women.]
Follow up: What is your reaction to this finding? Is this consistent with your experiences/perceptions? What factors/circumstances do you think may account for this finding?

Transition: In the next few questions we are interested in your perceptions of benefits and how these figure into managing work-life balance.

7. [NOTE: Distribute list of benefits and rankings] Others have found that many people equate benefits with being able to manage work-life balance more effectively. We would like you to look at the benefits that were listed and ranked by university employees who completed the work-life survey this fall. Our first question to you is whether there is any benefit that you would add to this list? Now we would like to know from you how each of these benefits impacts your ability to manage your work-life balance in a positive way? [at this point we will go benefit by benefit]

Follow up: Benefits are not the only things that help individuals in the workplace better manage work-life balance—are there specific things that would help you better achieve a positive work-life balance that we would not typically think of as a monetary benefit?

Follow up: As the committee reviewed the list of benefits identified in the work-life survey, the committee was struck with the fact that a number of benefits listed actually exist at the university already. Why do you think that people are unaware of these benefits? Probe: Do not typically use them?

Follow up: Benefits are not the only things that help individuals in the workplace better manage work-life balance—are there specific things that would help you better achieve a positive work-life balance that we would not typically think of as a monetary benefit?

Transition: In the next few questions we are interested in your concluding thoughts about achieving work-life balance at the university.

8. What is the most important thing that could be changed in your immediate work environment that would make it easier for you to achieve a positive work-life balance?

Follow up: Be sure to get specific examples and elaboration

9. What is the most important thing that could be changed at the university level that would make it easier for you to achieve a positive work-life balance?

Follow up: Be sure to get specific examples and elaboration

10. The work-life committee was created by the administration to better understand how they could structure an environment that encouraged a positive balance between work-life and home-life. What are specific ways that you believe the Administration could structure the work environment at the university in such a way that employees could achieve a more positive balance between work and home?

Transition: Sometimes when you are talking to folks you forget or don’t know to ask a really important question—to this end:
11. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know about work-life balance that we have not asked?