

**Northland Pioneer College**  
**COLLEGE PLANNING COMMITTEE ACTIVITY FOR CONVOCATION**  
August 2006

At its final meeting last spring, the College Planning Committee (CPC) decided to solicit “buy-in” from the entire college staff by having them participate in a creative brainstorming session at the initial All-College Convocation.

Here is an outline of the activity planned for Friday, August 27 convocation:

- There will be 8 focus groups devoted to brainstorming ideas on topics, determined last year by survey, to be of highest importance to faculty and staff.
- Two CPC members (named in parentheses below) have been named to each group to act as facilitators. Dr. Swarthout based the assignments on removing folks from their usual “comfort zones” into areas where they might be a little less expert. This was done in hopes of not biasing the committee by a member’s “expertise” or position.
- Here are the 8 focus groups and their facilitators
  - Employee Orientation and Training (Fairman/Swarthout)
  - Internet courses, online degrees, online programs (Belknap/French)
  - Workforce survey and development planning (Mack/Henderson)
  - Technology, technology planning (including ITV/audio systems) Manthei/Parnell
  - Associate Faculty concerns (McLane/Vest)
  - Internal college communications (Hatch/Winder)
  - District-wide instructional standards (Robinson/Kermes)
  - College management processes & team building (Balsley/Fleming)

Rather than list these general themes and hope to have meaningful discussion based on such broad concepts, a single, topic-specific question should be posed to each group. Working with your co-facilitator, develop one single question or statement that will be the thrust of your group discussions. Sample questions have been attached to this e-memo. You may use the sample question and/or any variation on it you deem useful. Or, you may develop an entirely new statement/question as a point of discussion to capture your group’s attention and excite their synapses.

Terri Tubbs indicates there will be 190 people in attendance at this convocation. The logistics of allowing 190 people to choose a group that appeals to them from among the eight topics would take up more time that is allotted for the entire activity. Ergo, free choice has flown out the window. A number from 1-8 will be written on each of the name tags Terri has printed for the convocation. Following the speaker portions of the convocation, Dr. Swarthout will direct audience members to assigned areas by the numbers on their tags. (Susan Olsen is setting up room assignments with 24 chairs arranged in circles for the discussion activity.)

Each group circle will have an easel and flip chart, magic markers, scratch pads, munchies and sticky dots (for voting). (Catch Rose if anything is missing.)

Facilitators should write the group number and the question or statement on the top sheet of the chart so that participants may see it as they enter.

Here is the process from that point on:

1. Before discussion begins, the facilitators will have their group designate a time-keeper (must have a watch with a second hand) and a recorder (someone who understands quickly and writes even faster!)
2. Each group will be provided with a large, soft, ball. The facilitator explains that he/she will toss out the first ball to someone in the group. That person then must come up with an answer to the question or response to the statement within 30 seconds.
3. After his/her reply, the respondent then tosses the ball to another person in the group. That person has 30 seconds to respond, etc., *ad infinitum*.
4. Whoever has the ball is the speaker and may not be interrupted while holding the ball.
5. If you've already had the ball and catch it again, you must hand it off immediately. Once all group members have responded, and if there's time, additional responses may be solicited.
6. This may prove unlikely as only 30 minutes will be allowed for gathering the suggestions
7. The facilitators then will review the answers and clarify any that may be obscure or unintelligible.
8. Participants then will use the itty bitty dots they have been provided to vote for the 5 responses they feel are the best of those offered. (They vote by sticking a dot on the chart next to the preferred statements. Facilitators then tally the dots, and the results will be announced.
9. Then everyone adjourns for lunch and brilliant conversations will ensue where all and sundry compare notes and ideas with one another.