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**FOCUS GROUP REPORT**

Dining & Entertainment in Roanoke College and Around Salem, Virginia

# Focus Group Discussion Report

**Introduction**

Our focus group was conducted on the third floor of Fintel Library on Thursday March 31st at seven in the evening. The total focus group time took about an hour. Mohammad was the moderator, while Indeya, Colin, Selam, and Kristina took notes on body language and answers to the questions that Mohammad asked. The participants consisted of four females and two males. Their classes and majors were as followed: two sophomore business majors, one junior science major, one junior business major, one freshman who is undecided, and one senior biology major.

**Discussion Guide Answers**

*Roanoke College Dining:*

When participants were asked whether they dine on campus at Roanoke College, they all answered “yes”. Five out of six participants responded that they often eat on campus: two meals per day on average. And one respondent said that they only eat dinner on campus. When asked about timing, participants stated that they mainly eat at Rooney's for breakfast and at Commons for dinner. One participant stated that they spend money off campus dining almost every day. The location where most participants normally eat is Commons. Satisfaction of on campus dining was not so great when they were questioned. They all mainly stated that they are not happy with on campus dining conditions because of the options available. One also stated that they were not satisfied because of the quality, especially at Freshens. The person said that they found hair in their food repeatedly.

Participants were then asked about factors that could make RC dining options more desirable. Participants responded with suggestions such as bringing back pre-covid meal options such as a waffle maker to diversify dining at brunch in Commons on the weekends. They also suggested that offering healthier food options, Friday on the quad, smoothies, and ice cream options, being able to get an entire meal including a drink and a sandwich or rice bowl for one swipe at Freshens, would increase desirability of on-campus dining. Two out of six of the participants also stated that there should be longer hours of operation for the dining options, especially at night as students spend most nights studying. Additionally, allowing mobile ordering for Cravetown closer to closing hours would be very pleasant for students. Lastly, participants were asked if they think new additional dining options are needed on campus. All participants answered in sync, “yes”. They stated that they would love to see a Chic-Fil-A, a real Starbucks store, and maybe a Pizza place on campus.

*Roanoke College Entertainment:*

Moving on to Roanoke College entertainment, participants were asked if they attend entertainment events on campus. All participants said it depends on what the event is, when it is, and whether it is during the week or on weekends. One out of the six responded by saying it depends on whether drinks are served. Five out of six most often attend BINGO and Silent Disco. One out of the six prefers to attend reading events and spoken poetry events. The participants most often attend events that are on the weekends when they are not as busy or may not have as much work compared to weekdays.

When asked about their satisfaction of on-campus entertainment, one participant responded that not everyone is allowed to participate in a lot of the events because of the limited amount of supply which in most cases is not fair. However, the rest of the participants replied that they were satisfied for the most part. All six participants agreed that the day in which the event takes place was a big factor in their participation. When asked about factors that could make RC entertainment more desirable, they all suggested that events should take place more on the weekends rather than the weekdays. As the last question for this section, participants were asked if they thought there needs to be more entertainment options on campus. All six participants stated that they would love to see bigger events like the Prez Ball taking place. They also suggested bringing in popular, well-known artists that students would want to see for the Fall concerts.

*Salem Dining:*

Shifting to dining off campus, i.e., dining around Salem, participants were asked if they dined around Salem. All six participants responded that they dine off-campus. They all had varied responses about how often they dined. Two participants said once a week, three said about three times a week, and one said that they eat in Salem about every day. Three of the six participants stated that they usually eat off campus in Salem if they miss brunch or want something different for dinner. Two participants reported that they prefer to eat at a local sub restaurant or at Frank’s Pizza in Salem, when they do eat off campus. When asked about some of their favorite places they like to dine at, they all had different responses. Two participants said that they did not have a favorite. The other participants replied that some of their favorites were Mill Mountain, All Sports Café, Mac and Bob’s, and Chip and Joe’s.

When asked about how much they are willing to spend on food around Salem, three responded that they would be willing to spend around $30. One participant responded that they would be willing to spend $60, while two others stated that they would be willing to spend about $35 per week. When asked about their satisfaction of off campus dining in Salem, three mentioned that they were very satisfied. One stated that they were somewhat satisfied, while one said that they were only satisfied with the breakfast options. They were then asked if they thought there needs to be new dining options available in Salem, no respondent gave a direct response. However, one opinion was expressed that they should have more breakfast options and that would increase their satisfaction with the options.

*Salem Entertainment:*

For the last part three questions were asked. Participants were asked if they attend entertainment events and venues around Salem, which ones they attend, and how often they attend. Two participants stated that they visit the Duck Pond and Thunder Valley most often. When asked about their satisfaction, they all responded with “not really”. Two of the participants reasoned by saying it is because of the inconvenience. They stated that they needed to travel on the other side of Salem to find good entertainment options, which is relatively far from RC. Lastly, they were asked if entertainment around Salem needs to incorporate more options. All participants agreed that new entertainment options would be nice. Some of the recommendations included clubs and golf clubs to make entertainment more desirable off-campus.

**Observations**

* In the beginning of the interview the air was heavy and gloomy but after a couple of jokes everyone was more open, relaxed, and comfortable.
* Surprisingly, all Respondents shared the same opinion but for different reasons leading to no debates happening at all throughout the interview, but a lot of add-ons on suggestions.
* Everyone was very cooperative with the mediator and answered every question
* One respondent preferred to eat outside campus as often as possible.

**Overall findings**

Conducting the focus group, some of the overall findings were genuinely surprising. When participants were asked about RC’s and Salem's food conditions, most had similar responses. What we most importantly learnt about RC’s dining is that more food options are needed. Especially for dietary requirements, more variety and options are essential. Upperclassmen in our study stated that Commons has decent food compared to the other on-campus dining options. But they also noted that, Covid-19 had made significant impact on the dining conditions at Commons. They stated some of the better conditions that were present before Covid-19. They mentioned that Common’s was self-serve, and that it had interesting dining options like the smoothie and ice cream serving options. Conversely, students now have to wait in line because self-serve is no more an option. They also noted that Commons used to have a Fro-Yo machine and a rice bar with meat and teriyaki, which no longer is available.

For entertainment and dining around Salem, the participants stated that there were a lot of options available relatively. Most respondents have favorite restaurants, while some did not. Once again, upperclassmen were the ones that said there is more to enjoy around Salem. The bar that is situated across from Freshens has a college night for RC juniors and seniors that are old enough, on Thursday nights. The participants also stated that entertainment and food in Salem are reasonable. All participants complained about the inconvenience of the entertainment options in Salem. They stated that they would have to go a long way, around downtown, if they wanted enjoyable entertainment options. The observations of this discussion gave us vital information that could potentially get in the hands of the decision makers of Roanoke College to make significant changes on campus and maybe even off-campus around Salem.

**Focus group experience**

We believe that the conducted focus group was a success as we were able to gain information we needed. We thought that all of our questions were more or less answered, and we conducted the focus group discussion appropriately. We learnt a lot of important information from a consumer perspective. We were also able to understand the mindset of the consumers (i.e., RC students). We were able to understand the reasons behind the problems we see on and off campus. Problems like the reduced consumption of certain types of foods in on-campus diners or the reduced participation in on-campus events. We gained thorough information that could help businesses recognize where they are lacking and where they could improve to make the best out of their businesses and increase their customer satisfactions.

We did not face challenges we did not expect while conducting the focus group, however, there were some we thought were challenging. We thought that getting every participant’s opinion without the influence of another participant’s opinion was a little difficult. The participants tended to agree with whatever the participant before them responded with and we though that could be as a result of group influence. We also thought that keeping the discussion interesting to the participants was challenging as responses tended to be similar among all participants. We believe that the focus group was conducted appropriately and successfully so we do not think there is much we could have done differently other than maybe making the environment more open, less formal and enjoyable to keep the participants engaged and interested in the discussion.