

About the Decision Support Center **CSUF Faculty Development Center**

What is the Decision Support Center?

Funded by the Chancellors Office, the Decision Support Center is a facility operated and managed by CSUF's Faculty Development Center (<http://fdc.fullerton.edu>). CSUF's DSC is one of only two such facilities in the CSU system. The DSC was established as a resource for the CSUF community to assist with group decision making processes: brainstorming, "blue sky/what if" thinking, problem identification, and consensus building through polling and voting on proposed ideas. What sets the Decision Support Center apart is its use of software to facilitate the group discussion process. Each computer in the DSC is linked to the network and equipped with a software package called [GroupSystems](#), specially developed for group discussion and decision processes.

What is GroupSystems?

Developed in the late 1980s from research and testing at the University of Arizona, GroupSystems is now used extensively in industry and academia to reach group based understanding and consensus. The most important feature of GroupSystems collaborative tools is **anonymity**. Users who are logged in to the GroupSystems meeting space can add their ideas, comments, and observations to the group discussion anonymously, via their computer keyboards. Anonymous input sidesteps some of the traditional problems of group discussion and consensus building. Often, some group members are less forthcoming with their ideas, although they might be good ones. Frequently in meetings a few dominant personalities will steer the discussion, leaving others to listen. And sometimes, subordinates may feel shy about speaking frankly in front of their superiors. GroupSystems can alleviate these obstacles of personality clash and participant reticence. Because all input is anonymous, proposals are left to stand, fall, or be amended based upon the merit of the ideas they contain, rather than who said them. When used in higher education settings like San Francisco State's [Center for the Enhancement of Teaching](#), research data show that the use of GroupSystems in collaborative decisions reduces by half the normally expected time needed for idea generation and proposal discussion.

GroupSystems has more to offer than anonymous input and idea generation. The collection of collaborative tools at the facilitator's disposal allows for on-demand, spontaneous opinion collection, ranking and voting on ideas, and decision-tree analysis. When you reserve the DSC for your meeting, the DSC coordinator will meet with you in advance to discuss your meeting objectives, and will help you decide which GroupSystems features will be right for your task. Those wishing to facilitate meetings at the DSC must go through this mandatory Pre-Agenda meeting and discussion process (see below).

Who can use it?

The Decision Support Center is open to all faculty, staff and administrators on the CSUF campus. The DSC's facilities can be used for various types of administrative tasks and meetings. While GroupSystems can be very effective teaching tool, the DSC was

designed primarily to support administrative processes and decision-making efforts. The DSC is not open to non-CSUF individuals or groups.

What are some typical uses of the DSC?

The DSC is new to CSUF; finding its strengths and best practices will be a process of discovery for the FDC and the rest of the Cal State Fullerton community. We imagine, and know from research on other Decision Support Centers, that group decision-making software can enhance the efficiency of:

- Hiring and retention processes
- Curriculum (re)design
- Departmental meetings that discuss or identify problems and their solutions
- Collaborative writing projects (such as grant proposals)
- Brainstorming and idea generation for new policies
- Focus groups

These are but a few examples. The FDC solicits your ideas and experiments for the DSC as well.

How can I reserve the Decision Support Center for my meeting?

The reservation process has several steps, all of which must be followed for use of the DSC. You must reserve the DSC at least one full week (7 days) in advance of the date of your meeting.

- 1) Contact the DSC Coordinator via email (spollack@fullerton.edu) or phone (x4719). Or visit the DSC homepage at <http://fdc.fullerton.edu/dsc/> to download the information form required to see if your meeting is a good fit for the DSC. Return to the form to PLS 44G, or fax it to **714-278-5805**.
- 2) The DSC coordinator will contact you for a Pre-Agenda meeting. The Pre-Agenda meeting consists of a detailed discussion of the plans for the meeting, its objectives, personnel, and deliverables. Substantive planning and discussion is required to make optimal use of the DSC facilities and to ensure your meeting's success.

How complicated is it? Is it worth the extra effort?

Most meetings proceed with the facilitator leading the discussion, and the DSC coordinator operating the software. The facilitator (the person who calls and leads the meeting) is always in charge; the software operator is just there to operate GroupSystems, and assist with process (not content) as needed. Most participants can learn to use the software as the meeting progresses. The only way to find out if it's right for your meeting is to meet with the DSC coordinator, and to try it out. But GroupSystems has a very successful track record when it comes expediting meetings and discussions.

Questions?

Contact Sean Pollack at spollack@fullerton.edu, or Sorel Reisman at sreisman@fullerton.edu

