Here are a few highlights from the February 21, 2013 Faculty Focus Group run by Blake Haggerty and Rich Sweeney:

1. There was concern expressed that students were crowded into too little space for faculty to easily move around the classrooms and this was an acute concern during exams with potential cheating. In addition, classrooms with too many desks aren’t easily suited for rearrangement. Faculty want more square feet per student. Note: students in an earlier focus group complained about student desks with insufficient surface area for their equipment and materials. This will be an even bigger issue as more students are required to bring laptops and/or portable devices.

2. There were complaints about the large lecture halls. There were reports of chairs that squeaked for the entire class (making it difficult for students to hear), numerous broken chairs and rows that made it difficult for faculty to help students sitting in the middle.

3. Most faculty generally preferred teaching stools with lecterns and/or counter high desks with an adequate footprint for all their equipment and belongings. This is especially important for those that are teaching 3 hour courses because the raised stools allow faculty to sit and still be able to make eye contact with the entire class.

4. Faculty wanted quad power outlets and internet connections ON their desk/teaching podiom so they don’t have to worry about extension cords and tripping over the cables. Currently the faculty sometimes need to bring their own extension cords to class.

5. Tripping was a concern for 11 of the faculty. Students and faculty have a lot of devices that need to be charged and some classrooms don’t have a lot of outlets - the outlets that are present are in inconvenient locations.

6. They wanted more white boards so that if they are used as screens for projecting, they could simultaneously use them for writing. They want to not have the projection block the use of a whiteboard; they want more whiteboard surfaces. Ideally they want at least two whiteboard screens for separate projections even in studios.

7. Everyone except one faculty member preferred whiteboards over blackboards. One problem with the whiteboards is that markers are not left in the classrooms. If a faculty member forgets a marker or the marker runs out of ink they can’t use the board. They reported that chalk tends to be left in classes with traditional chalk boards but not markers.

8. There were concern mentioned about classroom HVAC, lighting. Lighting was either too dark for students to take notes or too bright to see the projector. Light switches were often on/off but did not allow dimming or some transitional level for presentations while note taking and seeing students faces. There was a request to place a set of switches for dimming or controlling class lights from the teacher’s podium as well as near the entrance.

9. 7 of the faculty still had problems with slow internet. The complaints came from instructors teaching in Cullimore and the Central King Building – most came from instructors trying to access the internet wirelessly.

10. If the student furniture was more light and mobile, i.e. flexible, many faculty might use other teaching styles than lecturing.
11. While there was some discussion of classroom technologies by some (e.g. HDMI connections), there was more concern about the classrooms themselves.
12. Many of the faculty had reservations about students using laptops in the classroom (non-class usage) — few had a policy that prohibited the use of laptops. Many asked for the ability to turn wireless access on/off for the class.
13. UCID allocation and general support for Rutgers students is an issue. Rutgers students are pre-allocated a UCID but are not told so — they also are not told how to activate that account so it can be difficult getting them access to NJIT services.
14. Many faculty requested that we merge the pictures from the student ids with the class roster to help faculty learn the student names quicker. A number of the faculty stated that this was the only school that they have taught at that doesn’t do this.
15. There was a request for additional support for Google applications — particularly best practices and effective use of Google Applications.
16. Nine of the faculty own laptops; 8 used them in their classroom this Spring.
17. Inadequate bandwidth at peak times is still mentioned as an issue in many buildings such as Cullimore and Weston lecture hall.
18. There were concerns expressed about insufficient volume for listening to recordings in CKB.
19. E-textbooks are a problem in open book exams.
20. Adequate power is a big problem for students using their own devices in the classroom.
21. The acoustics in many of the classrooms are inadequate.