



# HIGHLIGHTS

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

## CCSSE LAUNCHES WEB SITE WITH MAJOR NEW FEATURES

CCSSE has launched its new Web site, aimed at promoting public understanding of the work of community colleges, supporting institutional improvement, and advancing public discussion about new ways of defining and examining quality in higher education.

The Web site, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org), is a primary vehicle for reporting survey results and putting them in context. The site provides in-depth information about student engagement and invites visitors to view survey results according to criteria they select. For example, the user can generate a report showing CCSSE results for all large, urban colleges, for all small, rural colleges, or for the participating colleges in a particular state or accrediting region. Results are presented in drill-down charts that display information in easy-to-manage steps.

Users first see a graph that shows general results; then, they can click on various parts of the graph to get the details behind the numbers.

Special features for CCSSE member colleges include tools to help colleges understand their survey results, communicate them to various audiences, and use them to target institutional improvement initiatives. Still under construction is a more sophisticated data search capability for members only.

The site also provides information about CCSSE, the survey instrument, sampling and administration procedures, membership benefits and pricing.

Look also for news on upcoming CCSSE events, as well as key references and links to information resources on student learning and retention.

## ENGAGING COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A FIRST LOOK

By Kay McClenney

### “Going to College” Redefined by Community College Students

Results from the 2002 CCSSE survey confirm a changing profile for the American college student and draw a picture of “going to college” that departs significantly from traditional expectations.

Key elements of that picture are highlighted in the first annual report of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Entitled *Engaging Community Colleges: A First Look*, the report is based on responses elicited from 33,500 students enrolled in 48 community and technical colleges in 22 states. The report provides a first-ever look at educational quality in

the open-access, community-based institutions often dubbed “the people’s colleges.”

Almost half of the undergraduate students in U.S. public colleges and universities are now enrolled in community colleges. Typically older than the traditional 18 to 22-year-old college student, most community college students are juggling their college studies with other responsibilities to jobs and families. Over 20% of the students surveyed have children living at home; and even among students taking a full load of classes, 45% work more than 20 hours a week. Most are financially independent of their parents, and 40% of surveyed students report that paying for college is a significant issue for them.

Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, with the subject matter — the more likely they are to learn and to achieve their academic goals.

The *CCSSE* survey, based on that research and administered directly to community college students, assesses the degree of student engagement through questions about how students spend their time, the ways they interact with faculty and other students, the degree of academic challenge they experience, and the kinds of support they receive from their college.

It is a tool created to help participating institutions assess quality in community college education, identify good educational practice, and target areas in which they can improve their programs and services for students. The survey also provides data that help colleges respond to rising expectations for public accountability.

A key challenge noted in the report is that “capture time” – the time community colleges actually have to engage students – is limited, so what colleges do to make the most of that time is critical. Students have more demands on their time and spend less time on campus. Survey results indicate that most student-faculty interaction takes place in class; students report limited out-of-classroom interaction; and more than 80% of students do not participate in college-sponsored extracurricular activities. Therefore, **the most powerful engagement strategies likely will center on the classroom and class work.**

### Highlights of 2002 Survey Results

Other findings include the following:

- Students have varied and multiple educational goals – 58% plan to transfer to a four-year college or university; but nearly as many (54%) say their primary goal is obtaining job-related skills. Eleven percent take classes at more than one institution simultaneously, and 20% have already earned some kind of postsecondary credential – a certificate or associate, bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree. Most attend college part-time.
- Despite the challenges they face, community college students express a high degree of satisfaction with their educational experience. Ninety-four percent would recommend their college to a friend or family member, and 86% rate their overall educational experience at the college as good or excellent. Over 70% indicate that their college provides the support they need to succeed at the college either “quite a

bit” or “very much.” By contrast, though, only 45% feel that they are able to get the financial support they need to afford their education.

- 73% of students surveyed indicate that their college encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying, either “quite a bit” or “very much.”
- Nearly half (49%) of respondents indicate that they have often or very often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations.
- 60% report that they have asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions either often or very often.
- 35% of full-time students report that they have written five or fewer papers or reports of any length during the current school year.
- Half of students (50%) have very often or often worked with other students on projects during class. But less than a quarter (24%) have worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- Only 17% of students report having often or very often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class, and 43% have never engaged with faculty in that way.

These findings highlight the challenges of providing a high-quality education for a diverse student population with varying academic goals, competing priorities, and a generous dose of academic, financial and personal challenges that they and their colleges must address together. The challenges are real. By participating in this survey, though, the *CCSSE* colleges are leading the way with an effort to examine their educational practice and take action to improve it where needed.

*To obtain a copy of “Engaging Community Colleges,” go to [www.ccsse.org/publications/report.pdf](http://www.ccsse.org/publications/report.pdf) or send email to [info@ccsse.org](mailto:info@ccsse.org).*

*Kay McClenney is Director of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Email: [kmcclenney@ccsse.org](mailto:kmcclenney@ccsse.org).*