



ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

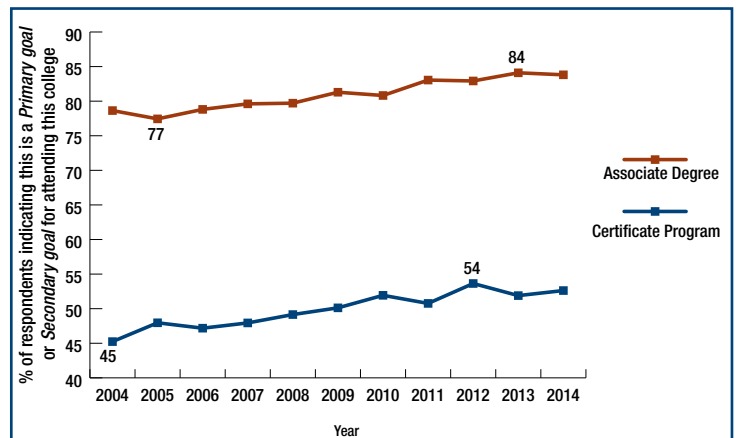
Student Aspirations for Credentials on the Rise

Community colleges across the country are responding to a mounting chorus for dramatic improvements in student success and college completion. Set forth by the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges in support of President Obama's completion agenda, the challenge to increase rates for attainment of community college credentials (certificates and associate degrees) by 50% by 2020—while preserving access, enhancing quality, and eradicating attainment gaps across groups of students—has heightened the sector's commitment to student success.

Engagement Rising: A Decade of CCSSE Data Shows Improvements Across the Board, the Center's report that was released in March of this year, features some promising findings. From 2004 to 2014 there was an unmistakable trend in Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data at the national level: consistent, continuous improvement in engagement. Since student engagement is a proxy for student success, this shift leads us to reason that more students will be more successful in the coming years. But one thing we didn't highlight in the report were the changes over the decade in student aspirations for attending college and how these changes can be a significant contributor to the completion agenda.

The accompanying chart features CCSSE Item 17: *Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college*. Students

can mark *Primary goal*, *Secondary goal*, or *Not a goal* on six aspiration items. For purposes of the completion conversation, the chart focuses on all affirmative responses to *certificate program* and *associate degree*. When we look at these data over time, we see that a greater proportion of students are coming to college to obtain a certificate or associate degree than they did a decade ago. This is **encouraging news!** The next step is to ensure that the students who enter our doors with these aspirations have a college experience that is engaging and allows them to be successful and meet their goals.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As the new academic year begins, the quieter days of summer are gone and voices of students are energizing campuses across the country. And for many of us, I suspect most, this is why we do what we do—the students. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) capture students' opinions on engagement

through data—these tools tell us the *what*. But it's with focus groups that we are able to capture the *why* behind the data.

In gearing up for the fall term, I encourage you to peruse the Center's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/ccsevideo), as it highlights the student voice on numerous topics such as transfer, financial vulnerability, race/ethnicity, developmental education, orientation programs, and many other

issues of interest. How would your students respond to the questions that were posed to the students in the focus group video clips? I also encourage you to consider conducting your own focus groups. The Center provides resources for you to do this. For more information, see "Listen Up" on page 2 of this newsletter. Most of all, let's make this year a time when we really LISTEN TO STUDENTS.

E. Howie

CENTER DEFINED

The Center for Community College Student Engagement is a research and service initiative of the Program in Higher Education Leadership at The University of Texas at Austin that provides important resources for assessing and improving educational practice in community colleges through the following projects and initiatives:

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) /ˈseːsɛ/, administered to students in the spring, includes items that assess institutional practices and student behaviors correlated with student learning and retention.

Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) /ˈsɛːsɛˈfesɛ/, an online companion to CCSSE, elicits information from instructors about their students' educational experiences, their teaching practices, and how they spend their professional time.

Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) /sens/, administered in early fall to entering students, gathers information about their academic and non-academic experiences from the time of their decision to attend the college through the first three weeks of class.

Community College Institutional Survey (CCIS), developed as part of the High-Impact Practices Initiative, is a free tool that helps community colleges collect data about the implementation, design, and scale of high-impact educational practices on their campuses.

Latino Student Engagement and Transfer is a grant-funded initiative that brings together community colleges and baccalaureate institutions to strengthen Latino student engagement, transfer, and college completion. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and *Excelencia* in Education are partners in this work.

Initiative on Student Success conducts focus groups and interviews at select colleges, gathering student, faculty, staff, and administrators' perspectives to paint a rich picture of the student experience.

Learn more about these projects and initiatives at www.ccsse.org

LISTEN UP

At the Center, we're always listening! Since 2001, the Center has been uplifting the student voice through surveys and focus groups, helping community college practitioners better understand their students' experiences.

Grants Enable Center to Hear From Latina/o Students About College Transfer Experiences

With extended funding from Greater Texas Foundation and The Kresge Foundation, the Center was able to conduct focus groups at 10 community colleges and universities in spring 2015 to deepen the understanding of the transfer experience for Latina/o students.

The project team conducted four focus groups (three with students and one with faculty and staff) at each of the following partner institutions in California, Florida, and Texas:

- Oxnard College/California State University Channel Islands
- Valencia College/University of Central Florida
- Alamo Colleges/The University of Texas at San Antonio
- El Paso Community College/The University of Texas at El Paso
- Houston Community College/University of Houston

“Being in a campus that is predominantly Latinos, it's good to get insight from a Latino that has been through the same experiences that we've been through, that knows their way around, that can guide you.”

—Student

Based on the focus group findings, the Center prepared custom reports that were submitted to each of the 10 institutions. Paired institutions also received one-page summaries that captured common themes across the two partner campuses. A report capturing recurring themes across all 10 campuses is in progress now and will be disseminated to the community college field soon.

“[My student success course and teacher] really motivated us and always told us if you want to do something, go for it, but don't just stay here . . . That kind of drives us to actually move forward and transfer.”

—Student

In addition, video clips from the focus group sessions are posted on the Center website and on the Center's YouTube channel. Center leaders will also highlight these student voices in workshop and conference presentations, as well as at *Excelencia* in Education's fall 2015 national events.

For more information about the Engaging Latino Students for Transfer and College Completion initiative and the focus group project, please visit www.ccsse.org/center/initiatives/els. Along with video clips, the website also offers resources and tools for community college and university leaders to use as they work to strengthen Latina/o student engagement, transfer, and college completion on their campuses.

To conduct your own focus groups . . .

If you are interested in conducting focus groups at your college to support Latina/o student success, please visit www.ccsse.org/center/initiatives/els/tools.

For more information about conducting different types of focus groups, contact info@cccse.org.

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

San Jacinto College Uses CCSSE Data as an Important Measure of Critical Thinking and Communication Skills

In 2011, **SAN JACINTO COLLEGE (TX)** began an assessment of its performance around six state-mandated general education core objectives, focusing first on the Critical Thinking Skills objective. Direct measures included the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric, a widely used assessment tool, which was applied to a government course at the college. The findings resulted in the decision to develop common assignments among core curriculum courses and also to identify a source of indirect measures of critical thinking.

During the 2012–2013 academic year, San Jacinto College examined 2013 results from 10 items on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) as indirect measures of students' attainment of critical thinking skills. The 10 identified survey items for the college's 2012–2013 Assessment Report were 4a, 4n, 4r, 5b, 5c, 5d, 5e, 12a, 12e, and 12i. The college also compared its 2013 CCSSE results to the cohort of participating colleges. During 2013–2014, the college expanded the core objectives being assessed to include Teamwork and Empirical & Quantitative Skills.

During 2014–2015, the common assignments that came out of the Critical Thinking Skills assessment were in turn assessed using the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric for the Communication Skills, Social Responsibility, and Personal Responsibility core objectives. The 2014–2015 Assessment Report will draw upon a separate set

of CCSSE and potential CCFSSSE survey items as indirect measures of students' attainment of communication skills, the college's next assessment area of focus.

San Jacinto College will continue its assessment of Critical Thinking Skills by reviewing its 2015 data from the 10 CCSSE items related to critical thinking; these results will be compared to the 2013 CCSSE results, both internally as well as to the national cohort. The findings will be distributed to the Institutional Effectiveness Council and Assessment Committee and will be included in the 2015–2016 Assessment Report.

The annual Assessment Reports are distributed among the faculty within disciplines that offer core curriculum courses, and discussions continue at deeper levels within these groups. Throughout the overall assessment process, San Jacinto College has observed more engagement among faculty.

The assessment of common assignments as direct measures of student attainment of critical thinking and communication skills—in conjunction with the indirect measures provided through CCSSE results—will provide San Jacinto College a clearer picture of how to support and improve student learning.

SHARE YOUR COLLEGE'S STORY

Has your college used Center data to strengthen student engagement and improve student success? Are CCSSE, CCFSSSE, and/or SENSE results included in materials submitted to your accrediting region? If so, please visit our Engagement in Action page to learn about sharing your college's story: www.ccsse.org/center/resources/engagement.

Your story may be featured in our publications, online, or as part of conference presentations.

High-Impact Practices Institute: Creating Plans for Student Success

Earlier this year, 18 college teams convened in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to delve into survey data, examine college initiatives, and explore high-impact practices in support of student success.

The High-Impact Practices Institute, an intensive hands-on learning event, was held March 29–31. The overarching purpose of the Institute was to engage college teams in an in-depth review of student cohort and Center survey data that facilitated a discussion about institutional policies and practices aimed at substantially improving student success.

Two of the participating presidents had the following to say about their Institute experience:

The insights we gained from the staff, resident faculty, and participants helped us to hone in on what really made a difference for Aims Community College as we grapple with the national issue of student success and completion.

- Marilynn Liddell, President
Aims Community College (CO)

As president of a thriving community college, taking two and a half days of uninterrupted time and spending it with my key leaders reviewing, discussing, and planning our college's next steps in ensuring the success of its students is the most productive use of time I have had. The High-Impact Practices Institute is the foundation upon which the college has built its student success initiatives. The Institute's expert faculty provided crucial insights and assistance resulting in the highest caliber service and education being provided to our college's students.

- H. Jeffrey Rafn, President
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (WI)



Join Center Staff in Celebrating
the Return of the Entering
Student Success Institute (ESSI)

November 2016
San Antonio, Texas

Stay tuned for more information!

For questions, please contact Misha Turner
at turner@cccse.org or 512-232-8428.



CCSSE Refresh is Coming in 2017

To ensure that we continue to support colleges in their work, the Center is refreshing the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) so it is better aligned with colleges' current needs. Implementation of the enhanced, but still familiar, CCSSE will begin with the spring 2017 survey administration.



Updates include the following:

- Items about high-impact practices will be part of the main survey instead of a special-focus item set. With this change, colleges will be able to better evaluate their use of these important practices and measure their impact over time.
- Items that are no longer providing relevant data (e.g., items about outdated technology) will be eliminated.
- Language will be fine-tuned to make student response options more precise.
- The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) will be updated in a manner consistent with the changes to CCSSE.

To learn more, visit www.ccsse.org/refresh.



Update on the Survey of Online Student Engagement (SOSE)

Due to numerous requests from college representatives, the Center is continuing attempts to collect data from community college students taking online courses. During the spring 2015 academic term, the Center administered a modified version of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the SOSE, to students enrolled exclusively in online courses at 14 participating colleges.

Center staff analyzed the collected data and held a debriefing session with participating colleges. The session provided valuable feedback regarding the online administration, in addition to providing information about the online student population not currently surveyed during normal CCSSE administrations. The Center remains committed to serving this population and plans to pilot a revised version of SOSE during an upcoming CCSSE administration.

DELVING INTO DATA

Last in Four-Part Series Concludes *What's in a Name?*

The Community College Institutional Survey (CCIS) was developed to complement the Center's national work on identifying and promoting high-impact educational practices in community colleges. Information collected from CCIS, a tool that allows colleges to systematically gather data about key promising practices, led Center researchers to understand that practices and programs with the same names can be implemented differently across colleges while programs with differing names can be implemented similarly. The first two installments of "What's in a Name?" featured in *Engagement Matters 10(2)* and *11(1)* discussed the extensive overlap of elements among the programs and practices featured in the CCIS, and further, the importance of understanding the features that compose programs before comparing them.

The third "What's in a Name" column in *Engagement Matters 11(2)* discussed process evaluation and implementation monitoring, which are critical to being able to associate programs with outcomes—and ultimately assess success. This final installment presents an overview of the types of analyses Center researchers have used to study relationships between participation in high-impact practices and various student outcomes.

For the Center's second report in a series of three reports focused on high-impact practices, *A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students*, Center researchers used data from the 2012 CCSSE

and SENSE administrations to demonstrate that there are statistically and practically significant differences between benchmark scores for students who participated in one of the high-impact practices and those who did not, with the former having higher benchmark scores than the latter. In the final report of the high-impact practices series, *A Matter of Degrees: Practices to Pathways*, Center research staff analyzed CCSSE and SENSE survey data matched with student transcript data from 12 colleges and found that students who participated in high-impact practices were more likely to be successful with regard to persistence, completion of developmental education courses, and completion of gatekeeper math and English courses.

It may seem that the progression of "What's in a Name?" has strayed from the original title. To bring this series back to where we started, it is important to keep in mind that the results presented in the *A Matter of Degrees* reports are based on national level data and, as such, the participation data reported by students is based on a mix of similar and not-so-similar programs. The analysis discussed in the first installment illustrated that, for example, not all student success courses are the same. As a result, the relationships presented in the two aforementioned national reports may have been diminished because of the inconsistent content of the named programs; had the named programs been clearly defined and consistent across the participating colleges,

these results may have been even stronger. The reports and the supplemental materials provide guidelines on how to replicate the work Center researchers conducted. To the extent that the content of these practices at individual institutions is known to the local researchers, replication of these studies with local data may produce cleaner and more informative results.

Notes:

Previous issues of *Engagement Matters* can be found at www.ccsse.org/center/publications/#engagement

A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students can be found at www.ccsse.org/center/publications/#nationalreports

A Matter of Degrees: Practices to Pathways can be found at www.ccsse.org/center/publications/#nationalreports

Supplemental materials can be found at www.ccsse.org/hip2 and www.ccsse.org/hip3

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