



ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

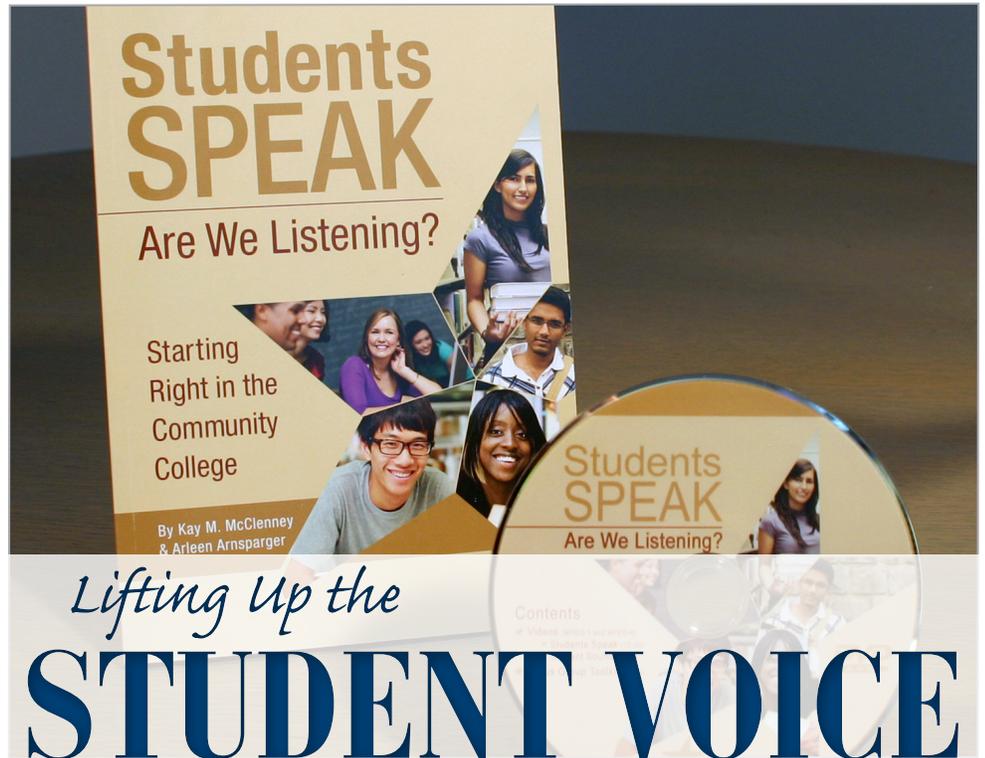
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The launch of a new academic year still brings for many of us the sense of a fresh start—another chance to learn, to get it better, to get it right—whatever the “it” might be. At the Center, our focus is on helping community colleges get it right in the ways they design and implement students’ educational experiences. As has been the case for more than a decade now, we seek to build understanding of the challenges faced by community college students and thus, by the institutions that serve them.

That commitment currently brings us to several initiatives highlighted in this issue of *Engagement Matters*. How, we ask, at a time when community colleges are experiencing more intense limelight, more intense scrutiny, and more serious financial constraints than ever before, can we help them identify and implement at scale the educational practices that are likely to have a high impact on student success? How might we systematically bring student voices forth to inform college efforts to ensure that men of color, along with their classmates, attain their educational goals? How might we continue in the second decade of the Center’s work to support community colleges in building their capacity to use data about students’ experiences as a powerful tool for institutional improvement?

In addition to describing work on these issues, we remind you in these pages of a new book and companion DVD, *Students Speak—Are We Listening?*, which captures lessons learned from students who have expressed themselves through more than 100 focus groups and nearly 2 million completed surveys. In the coming academic year, we will still be listening, and we look forward to having our community college colleagues with us along the way.

Kay M. McClenney



Who best can explain the excitement, expectations, perceptions, fears, and goals of new students? Who best can describe what it feels like to know that you’ve fallen behind in a class, yet you’re afraid to ask for help? Who best can inform our understanding of what really matters in promoting student success?

For over a decade the Center has highlighted student voices as the best source of information about their own experiences. Student voices come to life in the Center’s new book and companion DVD, *Students Speak — Are We Listening? Starting Right in the Community College*.

As they begin college, students share their goals, expectations, concerns, and sense of their own readiness for college. Through their first college year, students tell how college experiences help shape their success or their lack of success:

“When new students first come in, I think they should have a mandatory one-on-one sit-down with a counselor to really discuss in detail their degree plan.”

“I really get into classes that have teachers who encourage discussion. It doesn’t matter the class. Classes that really engage you, talking to the person next to you.”

Continued on next page

LISTEN UP

This year the Center will be abuzz with student focus group work

Page 2

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

Two SENSE colleges make good on their institute action plans

Page 3

DELVING INTO DATA

Essential information for working with survey data files and codebooks

Page 4

CENTER DEFINED

The **Center for Community College Student Engagement** is a research and service initiative of the Community College Leadership Program 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) /'se'sē/, 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) /'sē'sē'fesē/, 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) collects data on high-impact educational practices in community colleges as well as new knowledge about the implementation, design, and scale of these practices.

High-Impact Practices Initiative is a grant-funded project that combines quantitative and qualitative findings in efforts to identify proven effective educational practices.

Initiative on Men of Color is a grant-funded project that aims to assist colleges in improving educational outcomes for African American males and Latinos.

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.cccse.org.

Continued from cover

Authors Kay McClenney, the Center's Director, and Arleen Arnsperger, Project Manager of the Center's Initiative on Student Success, share with readers what *they* have learned by listening.

With students' permission, the Center captures focus groups and interviews on video. A unique feature of *Students Speak — Are We Listening?* is a companion DVD that includes a 12-minute video following students' community college journeys. The DVD also contains individual student video clips organized by topic that college leaders can use in presentations, as well as a toolkit that serves as a guide for conducting student focus groups.

Throughout the country, community colleges are seeking ways to improve by designing and implementing interventions and evaluating their effectiveness. The book highlights examples of how colleges—and in some cases, states—are taking steps to strengthen student success.

In the book's Foreword, Vincent Tinto, Distinguished Professor at Syracuse University, points out, "By listening and listening well, we can learn much from our students so that we can better understand what all of us must do to more effectively promote students' success. As McClenney and Arnsperger illustrate, we must work together to establish on our campuses a culture of connection, of high expectations, of student potential, of collaboration, and of inquiry and evidence as guides for our actions."

"Success is possible," Tinto adds. "The experiences of students tell us, if only we will listen, about *how* it is possible."

Students Speak — Are We Listening? is available for purchase through the American Association of Community Colleges.

LISTEN UP

At the Center, we're always listening! Since 2002, alongside *CCSSE* and *SENSE*, the Center has been conducting focus groups with community college students across the country. We ask students to describe more fully the experiences behind what they're telling us in their survey responses.

Still Listening: Center Schedules Next Round of Student Focus Groups

Through its commitment to providing the nation with unprecedented data on student engagement in community colleges and to partnering with those colleges to increase student success rates, the Center is enriching its ongoing contributions to the field with two new grant-funded projects. Identifying and Promoting High-Impact Educational Practices in Community Colleges, also called the High-Impact Practices Initiative, is supported by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education. Improving Outcomes for Men of Color in Community Colleges, also called the Initiative on Men of Color, is supported by The Kresge Foundation.

Project staff will facilitate more than 50 focus groups over the next 18 months to explore the two topics in more depth. Between the two initiatives, the Center will host three student success institutes, publish several reports, and disseminate information at national conferences.

The Center has historically conducted focus groups while simultaneously collecting quantitative data

in order to gain a richer, more accurate perspective on student experiences. Quantitative data from the surveys reveal *what* is happening at the college, and data from focus groups help to explain *why* it is happening. For example, when data gleaned from the quantitative surveys indicate that a large number of students are unable to participate in orientation due to scheduling issues, data from student focus groups not only can illuminate specific scenarios but also can inspire possible solutions.

For the High-Impact Practices Initiative, the Center will partner with The Community College of Baltimore County (MD), Durham Technical Community College (NC), Houston Community College (TX), Kingsborough Community College (NY), Tallahassee Community College (FL), and Zane State College (OH). The following colleges are partnering with the Center through the Initiative on Men of Color: Austin Community College (TX), Jackson Community College (MI), Lansing Community College (MI), Los Angeles Southwest College (CA), Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (CA), and Tarrant County College District (TX).

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

Center Institute Remains a Valuable Resource for Colleges in Their Strategic Planning

Prior to the 2012 Entering Students Success Institute (ESSI), **DES MOINES AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (DMACC)** (IA) had been reviewing data, researching effective educational practices, and beginning to create strategies to help more entering students persist and succeed in college.

“However, the institute helped us focus in on our data and pick out those factors most likely to benefit our students,” said attendee Joe DeHart, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness. “What a difference a few days can make!” The format of the institute allowed college leadership to map out each week of a student’s first year and integrate those experiences into weekly instruction, meetings, events, and deadlines. Thanks to the dedicated time for ESSI participants to reflect and set priorities, the DMACC team was among several that returned from the institute with a detailed action plan for improving practices with entering students.

Beginning in 2013, DMACC will require all new students—full-time and less than full-time—to take an orientation course aimed both at providing students with the practical information they need to be successful and at connecting students with services, faculty, staff, and other students. The course is designed to promote these connections throughout the students’ entire career at the college.

Another important policy change is that students are no longer allowed to register for classes that have already begun. The DMACC team greatly benefited from the opportunity to interact with other college participants, particularly in hearing support for this practice, despite the usual list of criticisms. “The work done at the ESSI reinforced our belief that late registration is harmful to students and to the institution,” said DMACC President Rob Denson.

DMACC also spent the summer after the institute realigning developmental education offerings with the credit courses required for graduation. Students can now choose from multiple accelerated developmental tracks aimed at remediating targeted skills through the Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) service.

“DMACC is closely monitoring progress and hopes current strategies will yield expected results, and is ready to do whatever it takes to improve student success and completion,” DeHart said.

SENSE key findings and the comparison of benchmarks scores with peer institutions during the 2012 Entering Student Success Institute (ESSI) helped **ST. PETERSBURG COLLEGE (SPC)** (FL) to identify new and augment existing priorities and strategies for strengthening the college’s work with entering students.

“While the college had already begun its planning for improving the entering student experience, ESSI provided our team the opportunity to discuss at length with key individuals the next steps in the college’s strategic plan,” said Tonjua Williams, SPC Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs.

After a review of effective educational practices, SPC developed several new strategic initiatives, slated for implementation in the 2012 fall academic term. These new initiatives are part of a larger, values-based student completion and success initiative, *The College Experience*, which was recently communicated through SPC President Bill Law’s 5/180 Plan. One goal of the 5/180 Plan is to ensure every staff member receives the necessary training to

best support the student success initiatives via a multi-tier program entitled the College Experience Institute.

“We were able to use the institute as retreat time for planning out—in detail—the professional development component of our plan, which we knew was essential for helping to ensure a solid execution of our various new student success initiatives,” Williams said.

That message is echoed on SPC’s website: “Just as St. Petersburg College is committed to student success, we also are committed to each employee’s success. That’s why, starting in June, we will be rolling out a series of training sessions for every employee—whether full-time or part-time, on the front line or in the back office.”

SPC’s five major success initiatives, all of which address performance goals based on institutional and SENSE data, include

- **Individualized Learning Plans** to increase student success and completion by promoting academic planning according to programs and life conditions;
- **Out of Class Support** to increase course success rates without compromising academic standards by ensuring a wide selection of robust support services to support the critical work of faculty in the classroom; and
- an **Early Alert System** to keep more students enrolled, on track with assignments, and fully engaged both inside and outside the classroom by training faculty and staff to identify students at risk early in the semester.

These strategic initiatives, along with **Career Counseling and Developmental Advising** and **Revised New Student Orientation**, are intended to improve student success rates and help students finish what they start. The college will evaluate progress by reviewing results from the SENSE 2012 administration once reports are released in spring of 2013.



SHARE YOUR COLLEGE’S STORY

Has your college used Center data to strengthen student engagement and improve student success? Are *CCSSE*, *CCFSSE*, and/or *SENSE* results included in materials submitted to your accrediting region? If so, please visit the Engagement in Action section of www.ccsse.org to submit a vignette.

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



IMPROVEMENT THROUGH FEEDBACK

Center Launches New Custom Report System

Starting with 2011 *SENSE* reporting, Center member college contacts can run custom analyses on their survey data, while continuing to receive a variety of pre-generated standard reports. The *CCSSE* and *SENSE* online reporting systems now contain a Custom Report Requests section, through which institutional results can be explored at deeper levels by selecting a combination of criteria. This feature is available for 2012 and now for 2011 *CCSSE* reporting.

Report requests focused on the main survey instrument will generate benchmark, means, frequency, and summary statistics reports. Analysis on an additional item set will generate a frequency report. In both cases, the user has the option of making comparisons within the college or of comparing college results to cohort comparison groups based on institutional characteristics such as size, location, state, and accreditation region. Users also have the option of creating a custom comparison group.

Additional customizations include viewing data grouped by a student breakout variable like

enrollment status. Then, the user has the option to drill deeper by focusing on a subgroup of that breakout and selecting a second breakout variable, such as focusing on full-time respondents with a second breakout by credit hours earned.

Before the report request is submitted, users have the opportunity to name the request and to provide an e-mail address if he or she would like to be notified when the analyses are complete. Typically, reports can be retrieved from the Completed Report Requests page within 10 minutes of request; reports will remain available for 15 days.

The Center is committed to continually improving its services to better meet member colleges' needs. Accordingly, following each survey administration, the Center solicits feedback on survey materials and services, and invites suggestions for improvement.

To learn more about Center improvement efforts, please review the annual Improvement Through Feedback reports that provide responses to the most common questions and requests the Center receives from member colleges following a one-year *CCSSE-SENSE* administration cycle. They are available online at www.cccse.org.

DELVING INTO DATA

A Tour of the College Data File

When the Center releases results for *CCSSE* and *SENSE*, one of the items available for download from the Standard Reports page is the college's data file. This file is an Excel spreadsheet containing one row for each survey respondent, excluding invalid surveys and surveys completed by students under the age of 18. The first row of the data file is reserved for variable names; student response data start in the second row. The file contains data from the main survey, additional survey items, class-level information, and created (or derived) variables.

The codebook is a valuable resource for understanding the data file and is available for download from the Standard Reports page. It matches the variable name in each column from the data file to a description of the item and to the meaning of numeric responses to that item, such as 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very often. The codebook covers main survey, class-level, and created variables. For *CCSSE*, the codebook also includes the first five special-focus items from the administration. For both *CCSSE* and *SENSE*, information about other additional survey items can be found in separate codebooks on the Standard Reports page.

The first column of the data file contains the college identification number used by the Center

(*CCSSE_ID*); the second contains the college name (*INSTITUTION*). The third column is the survey number (*SURVEYNO*), which is a unique identifier for each paper survey scanned by the Center.

The next section of columns contains variables from the main survey instrument. After that, variables for any additional survey items are included. Following the columns for survey items, there are columns for class-level variables from the course file (for example, campus location and section number) and from the information sheet completed by the survey administrator (for example, the administration date and number of students in attendance).

Following the class-level variables are the created variables—those that the Center has created based on a respondent's answers to one or more items. Created variables include breakout variables such as developmental status or age groups; an institutional weight (*IWEIGHT*), assigned based on a respondent's enrollment status; raw benchmark scores; and standardized benchmark scores.

If a college administered an oversample, additional columns will appear in the data file—these variables are defined in the codebook provided to these colleges. In a data file that includes student identifiers, which can be requested from

a Center liaison, the last column on the right will contain the identifiers.

Respondents who are included in the Center's institutional reports will have a numeric value for the weight variable, and respondents who are excluded from the reports will be missing a value for the weight. Respondents may be excluded from institutional reports for the following reasons: not indicating his or her enrollment status, indicating that he or she had already taken the survey in a previous class or not answering that item, or being surveyed within a college's oversample.

Please send questions for Center researchers to data@cccse.org.

Center for Community College Student Engagement

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