



Improvement through feedback

Published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement

The Center for Community College Student Engagement is committed to continually improving its services to better meet member colleges' needs. This document provides responses to feedback we received from member colleges after the 2009 administration of the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*). Below are the most often cited issues identified through evaluations received from college presidents and contacts, along with responses to each of those issues.

Sampling & Administration

Issue: Why does the Center only sample developmental and first college-level English and math courses for the *SENSE* survey? Couldn't we capture many of our entering students by surveying our student success courses?

Response: The Center established the *SENSE* sampling frame, which has been validated by an independent researcher, of first college-level English and math courses and all developmental courses taught in the fall semester because these are the courses *across all colleges* that are most likely to be composed of the highest percentage of entering students. While many colleges do offer student success courses to entering students, some do not, and the nature of the courses varies greatly across campuses. As *SENSE* is a national survey, the sampling methodology must be consistently implemented across all participating colleges.

If your college would like to gain information regarding the entering student experience in student success courses, the Student Success Courses Special-Focus Module can be administered for an additional fee. Colleges can also elect to create and administer a custom set of items. Information about these options is available on the *SENSE* website: (www.ccsse.org/sense/join/pricing.cfm#specialfocus).

Colleges can also use Oversample Option #1 (www.ccsse.org/sense/join/pricing.cfm#oversampling) to survey students in student success courses.

Issue: Can you include the survey administration date range on the list of randomly selected courses?

Response: Yes. Beginning in 2010, the Center will include survey administration date ranges to aid survey administrators in streamlining the administration process. This information will appear not only in the sample file of randomly selected courses to be surveyed but also on the paper printout of the sample list that is included with the shipment of course packets.

Issue: The survey administration timeframe is very short. Why do we need to survey students during the 4th and 5th weeks of the fall academic term?

Response: *SENSE* is designed to capture students' earliest experiences at the college, beginning from the time they consider enrolling at the college through the first three weeks of the semester. As such, students are asked to respond to items related to their orientation, advising, and registration experiences, as well as their classroom experiences during the first three weeks of the course, making the 4th and 5th weeks the best time to most accurately capture the experiences of students at risk of leaving. By focusing energy and resources on these "front door" college experiences, *SENSE* data will assist institutions in producing more successful outcomes for larger numbers of students.

Issue: Can we administer *SENSE* online?

Response: The Center is interested in online survey administration and has conducted two pilot tests of a web-based version of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*). While the survey technology worked very well, response rates were extremely low. Thus, the sample of students who responded to the survey was not representative of the population. At this point, the paper survey still proves to be the best method for collecting and analyzing entering student engagement data.

Issue: A number of our students take classes online. Why do we have to omit online students from the sampling frame?

Response: As *SENSE* is a paper and pencil instrument, students must meet in a classroom setting to complete the survey. Because online or distance-learning courses do not typically have a regular, on-campus meeting time during which the survey can be administered, they must be omitted from the sampling frame.

The Center is currently developing the Survey of Online Student Engagement (*SOSE*), which will be a web-based instrument that will help community and technical colleges assess the engagement of distance-learning students specifically. As we review results from item-pilot testing, we will learn more about the feasibility of providing this type of assessment option to colleges.

Issue: Fall course offerings are not finalized until just before the fall term. Why do we need to submit the list of courses eligible for random selection so early?

Response: The submission deadline is in place to ensure that the Center has enough time to complete all the necessary processes so as to have the surveys delivered on or near the first day of fall classes. In cases in which a college's fall course offerings will not be finalized until late summer or early fall, the Center recommends that the college use the previous fall's offerings as a guide for the submission of the course schedule file (CSF). The Center understands that enrollment numbers will fluctuate and that some courses will be cancelled, etc. To account for these types of situations, the Center samples at 200% of each college's sample target.

Reporting

Issue: Some of the *SENSE* reports are difficult to navigate and print.

Response: Since the release of the 2009 *SENSE* data via the online reporting system in March 2010, the Center has made all appendix pieces and reports print-friendly. Additionally, the Center has revamped the benchmark reports so that corresponding means and frequencies are included. The benchmark reports can be viewed by benchmark area or by breakout group, with both views being print-friendly. Center staff will continue to make improvements to the online reporting system that will further ease the navigation and printability of reports.

The Center also provides telephone training for the online reporting system. If an institution is interested in receiving a "walk through" of the reporting site, please contact College Liaison April Juarez at juarez@ccsse.org. Depending on the nature of the assistance needed, April will ensure that the appropriate Center staff member leads the training.

Issue: Why don't all the reports include a "Returning Student" comparison group?

Response: The purpose of *SENSE* is to capture important information about entering students' earliest experiences at college. Moreover, because the *SENSE* sampling frame is restricted, the returning students surveyed are not representative of all returning students.

Since the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*) is administered in the spring semester and asks all students taking credit-based courses questions about their experiences over an entire academic year, it would serve as a more precise assessment for institutions interested in collecting data about returning students.

Issue: Will the Center provide a "First Look" report for *SENSE* as has been provided with *CCSSE* results?

Response: With the release of the 2010 *SENSE* results, the Center will also release a *SENSE* Key Findings booklet—an eight-page executive summary individually tailored to each participating college. The Key Findings booklet will provide college-specific data in an easy-to-read and easy-to-share format and will highlight areas of highest and lowest entering student engagement, similar to the *CCSSE* First Look report.

Issue: When will we be able to compare our *SENSE* data across years using the online reporting system?

Response: While the Center understands that monitoring improvement across time is a matter of interest to a number of colleges, comparing data across years using the online reporting system is a complex issue due to the fact that each three-year cohort will be composed of a different group of colleges.

The Center does have the capacity to conduct specialized data analysis that will achieve this goal for institutions. If institutions are interested in this type of special reporting, or would simply appreciate guidance for conducting this type of analysis, please contact the Center's Senior Research Associate, Mike Bohlig, at bohlig@ccsse.org.

Additionally, data from previous years will be archived on the online reporting system so that they are readily accessible to member colleges.