



# HIGHLIGHTS

*Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement*

## A NEW ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR NEW TIMES

Welcome! This is the inaugural issue of *CCSSE Highlights*, a periodic publication from the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)*. *CCSSE* (pronounced "cessie") is a project that was launched in 2001 by the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin.

In this issue, you will find introductory information about *CCSSE*, a new assessment tool for community and technical colleges that are focused on improving student retention and student learning.

In future issues, you can expect to see ...

- summary and highlights from the survey data
- information about national benchmarks that community and technical colleges can use to gauge their performance
- descriptions of college programs and practices that enhance student engagement and student retention
- details about upcoming *CCSSE* sponsored events, including workshops and conference sessions

## The Accountability Challenge

Community and technical colleges have long distinguished themselves through their efforts to put students first and their emphasis on teaching and learning. Innovations in curriculum, teaching strategies, and support services for students have been hallmarks of these institutions.

Recently, though, colleges have been called to respond to new challenges. The key words? **Quality. Performance. Accountability.** The central concern? **Student learning.**

Nationwide, community and technical colleges must respond to the rising expectations of state and federal governments, governing boards, accrediting organizations and the public. Key among those expectations is that colleges should define, assess and publicly report on institutional performance, particularly as it pertains to learning outcomes, retention, and student success. Often, though, community and technical colleges have been handicapped in that effort by the lack of assessment tools appropriate to the colleges' unique mission and the characteristics of their very diverse student populations.

In addition to the pressures of external expectations, increasing numbers of community and technical colleges are undertaking internal initiatives to focus institutional processes and resources more effectively on student learning. These efforts call for more regular and rigorous institutional self-assessments and more targeted strategies for improvement. Here, too, the colleges contend with a lack of appropriate tools and also with the absence of benchmarks against which they can gauge their performance and progress.

## An Answer to the Appropriate Assessment Dilemma

Community and technical colleges with an interest in quality assessment and accountability for student learning now have a new assessment tool available to them through *The Community College Survey of Student Engagement*. *CCSSE* is supported by a \$1.5 million grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and a \$1.47 million grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education. Through the generous funding of Pew and Lumina, *CCSSE* was able to create *The Community*

*College Student Report*, which builds upon the work of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), developed for 4-year colleges and universities and headquartered at Indiana University. *The Report* is a versatile, research-based tool, designed to focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that are positively related to student learning and retention. *The Report* serves as a:

- **Benchmarking instrument** - establishing national norms on educational practice and performance by community and technical colleges
- **Diagnostic tool** - identifying areas in which a college can enhance students' educational experiences
- **Monitoring device** - documenting and improving institutional effectiveness over time

Designed by national experts, the survey asks students about their college experiences – how they spend their time, what they feel they have gained from their classes, how they assess the quality of their interactions with faculty, counselors and peers, what kinds of work they are challenged to do, how the college supports their learning, and other engagement indicators.

### CCSSE Membership

Participation in CCSSE provides colleges with data about their performance, allows colleges to compare their performance against the national benchmark data and provides data that are appropriate for use in institutional improvement as well as in accreditation self-studies and state performance and accountability reports. In addition, CCSSE members receive the following:

- Sample selection, survey materials, and procedure guides
- Online and telephone assistance with survey administration and follow-up for campus contacts and survey coordinators
- Scoring, data file, data analysis, and a standard report on results for each college and consortium

- The annual **CCSSE National Report**, defining national benchmarks and focusing on trends and issues for community and technical colleges
- Free copies of **CCSSE Highlights** - a regular newsletter featuring research findings, CCSSE services, and best practices from participating colleges
- Workshops to help college administrators understand their **CCSSE** data and use it to improve student learning and retention

### How to Join

Membership in CCSSE 2003 is available to all accredited associate degree-granting institutions. Membership fees are based on institutional size (determined by fall IPEDS enrollment data), as follows:

| Enrollment      | Annual Fee | Number of Respondents |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Less than 1,500 | \$2,500    | Call for more info.   |
| 1,500 - 4,499   | \$4,500    | ~600                  |
| 4,500 - 7,999   | \$6,000    | ~800                  |
| 8,000 - 14,999  | \$7,500    | ~1000                 |
| 15,000 or more  | \$9,000    | ~1200                 |

### Additional Information

For additional information about CCSSE or *The Community College Student Report*, please contact us or visit our web site at [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org) for an overview of the project; recent news; the survey instrument; lists of participating colleges; and links to sponsors, supporters, and partner organizations.

#### Look for CCSSE at:

**AACC Convention**  
April 20-23, 2002  
Seattle, WA

**The RP Group**  
May 1-3, 2002  
Pacific Grove, CA

**Insights Into Learning**  
May 23-24, 2002  
Toronto, Ontario

**NISOD Conference**  
May 26-29, 2002  
Austin, TX