



Talking SENSE

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SENSE Teams Up!

Starting Right Initiative Adds to Understanding of Entering Students

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) was created to help community colleges focus on the “front door”—what entering students experience from the first moments of their interactions with the college—to improve student persistence and success. *SENSE* is a companion to the Community College Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*CCSSE*); both surveys capture student engagement as a measure of institutional quality and to provide specific sign-posts for colleges’ paths to improvement. While *CCSSE* provides a comprehensive look at the overall quality of all students’ educational experiences, *SENSE* offers a focused view of new students’ earliest experiences.

As part of the *SENSE* 2007 pilot administration, *SENSE* teamed with *Starting Right: The MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success*—a project that helps community colleges look beneath their *CCSSE* and *SENSE* data to deepen understanding of what can be done to increase student retention, persistence, and learning.

Along with this issue of *Talking SENSE*, we are pleased to provide *CCSSE Highlights* featuring new information on these complementary projects.

We invite you to visit www.enteringstudent.org to find profiles of *SENSE* participating colleges, research on entering students, and other tools to help your college support entering students.

Regards,

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SENSE UPDATES

Fall 2007 Pilot Administration Completed

The 2007 pilot administration of *SENSE* included 22 institutions from eight states. Administered during the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall academic term, the pilot yielded more than 13,000 usable surveys.

The core survey is composed of items focused on the entering processes—admissions, registration, orientation, financial aid—as well as early classroom experiences. *SENSE* also features special focus item modules. These modules allow colleges to delve more deeply into key areas related to student engagement. The 2007 pilot survey included modules on student goal commitment and student success courses.

CHECK IT OUT!

Emerging themes and data from the *SENSE* Pilot on page 2.

Each college received its institutional report via the *SENSE* Web site in early March. These pilot data are providing a first look into entering students’ experiences and offering important insights into areas where the colleges are doing well and where there is room for improvement. This information is unprecedented in the community college field. We commend the pilot colleges for their contribution to the development of new understanding!

2008 Field Test in Final Planning Stages

SENSE and *Starting Right* will continue working collaboratively for the upcoming 2008 field test. Ninety-four colleges from 33 states are currently registered. And the MetLife project will conduct focus groups at Durham Technical Community College (NC), Phillips Community College (AR), Santa Fe

Community College (NM) and South Texas College (TX). Data from the field test and focus groups will be used for final survey revisions for the first national administration in fall 2009.

Emerging Themes

A number of themes are emerging from the *SENSE* pilot data, helping to refine the focus on college entry processes and generating additional important questions for further investigation. Two broad themes and related data are shared below.

Entering students are highly motivated, committed to achieving their academic goals; and they sincerely believe they will achieve them.

- 93% of entering student *SENSE* participants strongly agree or somewhat agree that they have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college.
- 89% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they are academically prepared to succeed in college.
- All MetLife *Starting Right* student focus group participants indicate they were confident they will remain in college to the completion of their academic goals.

Entering students are less likely than returning students to report exhibiting the behaviors we know to be closely linked to student engagement and thereby retention. Entering students are less likely to:

- Use academic advising: 41% of entering student *SENSE* participants reported not using academic advising by the end of their first three weeks of the fall term.
- Discuss an assignment or grade with an instructor: 40% of entering students reported not discussing an assignment or grade with an instructor.
- Ask questions in class, contribute to class discussions, or work with other students on a project or assignment outside of class.

Additional pilot data will be highlighted in *SENSE Starting Right: A First Look at Engaging Entering Students* scheduled for national release later this spring.

Entering Student Success Institute (ESSI) in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Reporting survey results is only the beginning of an important process for our member institutions. Communication of results to key groups—both internally and externally is a next significant step. Using the results to improve student learning and retention is the ultimate goal.

To that end, teams from 21 pilot colleges will attend the first annual Entering Student Success Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, March 30 - April 2, 2008. During the Institute, participating college teams will:

- Work with their *SENSE* data with the assistance of a *SENSE* data facilitator,
- Learn about key strategies that can help improve the entering student experience from community college practitioners,
- Interact with other college teams committed to improving experiences and outcomes for entering students, and
- Formulate an action plan that may be integrated into each college's ongoing entering student success agenda.

The Entering Student Success Institutes will be conducted in cooperation with the Community College Leadership Program's work on Achieving the Dream.

SENSE and *Starting Right* are developing a number of tools and resources for use in the field, including highly interactive Web-based data search tools and information resources to assist participating colleges in understanding their data, benchmarking their performance, and improving their practice.

For More Information

To learn more about *SENSE* and related resources, visit www.enteringstudent.org. For more information about the Entering Student Success Institutes, contact *SENSE* Project Coordinator, Angela Oriano-Darnall at oriano-darnall@ccsse.org or (512) 475-6526.