

Texas Small Colleges BULLETIN

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Building Connections, Building Success

What we know about community college students: the majority are enrolled part-time and a growing number work more than 30 hours per week, take evening classes, and take classes online. *What we also know:* It is becoming increasingly evident that the unanticipated success factors in retaining these students, and seeing them persist semester to semester, are the personal connections students make with faculty, staff, and peers on their campus. By effectively connecting with students in intentional and purposeful ways, colleges can encourage students to build relationships that are essential to success.

The CCSSE 2009 National Report, *Making Connections—Dimensions of Student Engagement*, recently released by the Center for Community College Student Engagement highlights several areas in which colleges can focus their efforts in connecting with students: in the classroom, in virtual space, on campus, and beyond campus. In an effort to encourage a closer look at campus connectedness, the Center has developed a new inventory tool designed to help colleges focus discussion around this topic.

Making Connections—Is Your College a Connected College? An Inventory to Support Campus Discussion

The new discussion inventory, accessible at www.ccsse.org/resources/communication.cfm, describes connections as a series of interactive, personal events that create a sense of presence. As such, the 18-item inventory has been designed to help focus discussion on the extent to which the college provides opportunities for such connections to take place between students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, the inventory is designed to help colleges take a closer look at the relationship-building opportunities for populations that are often the most difficult to reach: part-time and distance learning students.

The 18 items have been categorized into two general areas to help facilitate conversation:

1) Connections through face-to-face interaction:

An institution-wide commitment to promoting deeper connections with students through shared experiences, both one-on-one and in groups.

Example items:

To what extent does the college assign someone to serve as a primary contact for each new student (e.g. another student, advisor, success coach, mentor, etc.)?

To what extent does the college ensure that evening and part-time students have access to the services they need at times and in locations that fit their schedules?

To what extent does the college ensure that all full-time and part-time faculty members have adequate space to meet with students outside of class?



Your entering students are trying to tell you something important.

Are you listening?

SENSE helps colleges understand students' experiences in the first critical weeks of college.

We ask; they respond. You hear from your students what they need.

**The SENSE 2010 Registration
Deadline is
April 3, 2010**

2) Connections through technology:

An institutional commitment to providing access to and training on various technologies (social networking, course management systems, etc.) and assessing the use of these technologies.

Example items:

To what extent does the college require orientation and training for students on the use of technologies employed by the college, rather than assume that students know how to use them?

To what extent does the college ensure that the college's online courses consistently incorporate engagement strategies that promote student-student and student-faculty interaction?

Each item on the inventory points to ways colleges can strengthen students' connections to the institution—connections that are critical to student success. As stated in the *Making Connections* report, "Whatever the mechanism for reaching out to students, the work of connecting is ongoing. It requires an interaction, a feeling of personal investment, a commitment to listen and to respond" (pg. 7).

Recap: TSCC Mini-Workshop Conference Call—Strategies for Engaging Faculty in Data-Driven Discussion

THANK YOU for participating! On February 9, 2010, several Texas Small College Consortium members joined together to share strategies for engaging faculty in data-driven discussion. As part of the conference call, Barbara Walker, Director of Institutional Effectiveness at Howard College (TX) and Ricka Fine, Director of the Institutional Research Office at Harford Community College (MD) presented promising strategies implemented at their colleges. Below is a brief recap.

Howard College, Big Spring, TX

In an effort to educate faculty at Howard College about CCSSE and the college's CCSSE data, the Institutional Effectiveness Office provided training sessions for all faculty at all campus locations. The training sessions included an introduction to CCSSE, an overview of the CCSSE Benchmarks and the college's results, and an in-depth look at the CCSSE reporting website. As faculty explored the CCSSE website, they were asked to create peer groups, compare data, and to share data gathered in their data search with the group. Faculty were then asked

to identify areas where more focus was needed and to brainstorm strategies for improvement.

As a result of this training and brainstorming session, a list of "promising practices" for engaging students in the classroom was developed and shared with all district faculty. A few months after the training session, the Institutional Effectiveness office contacted participants to follow up on "promising practices" they were using in the classroom.

Harford Community College, Bel Air, MD

In a presentation to all division deans and the Faculty Advisory Council (governance body), the Institutional Research Office at Harford Community College focused on linking CCSSE benchmarks to the college's Strategic Plan themes and initiatives. This presentation spurred the deans and faculty to develop a committee to look more closely at their college's data.

After reviewing the data in more detail, the committee decided to focus their efforts on improving "Active Learning" and developed initiatives to be implemented and assessed over the next two years. In addition, a full day professional development session was dedicated to this topic. The Institutional Research Office also shared CCSSE results with the college's student services staff. Specifically, they discussed items related to the importance of, use of, and satisfaction with student services.

In working with deans, faculty, and student services staff throughout this process, Harford Community College found that involving academics and student services professionals with college data is key to moving data-driven conversations to action.

Save the Date!

2010 CCSSE Workshop

Tuesday, June 1, 2010 • 10:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

Austin, TX

FREE for Member Colleges

Join us for further discussion on **student engagement in the classroom**, the focus of this year's workshop. For more information and to register for the CCSSE Workshop, visit: www.ccsse.org.

For more information about the CCSSE Texas Small Colleges Consortium, contact April Juarez, CCSSE College Liaison, at juarez@ccsse.org or (512) 232-3744.