



HIGHLIGHTS

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Appreciative Inquiry

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Richland College, an urban, public community college located in Dallas, Texas, serves approximately 14,000 residents from Northeast Dallas, Richardson, and Garland. The largest of seven colleges within the Dallas County Community College District, Richland welcomes students from diverse backgrounds with widely varying academic and professional needs. In an ongoing effort to enrich the college experience, Richland has become involved with in-depth research that focuses on student learning and engagement.

To support Richland's desire to serve its students by improving institutional quality and effectiveness, Richland was one of 12 colleges that chose to participate in *The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)* pilot study in 2001. *CCSSE's* survey instrument, ***The Community College Student Report***, supplemented findings from Richland's implementation of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (NLSSI). Specifically, ***The Community College Student Report*** included information on an important dimension not included in the NLSSI – the degree to which students engage in the learning experience. For example, ***The Community College Student Report*** provided information on aspects of the college experience surrounding student effort, academic challenge, and student-faculty interaction. Richland also identified potential gaps between student and faculty perceptions on student experiences by employing the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), developed jointly by Robert Smallwood at Southwest Texas State University and Judith Ouimet, project manager and associate director of *CCSSE*.

Upon completion of the research, Richland's Leadership Team reviewed data from a combination of results gathered from the NLSSI, ***The Community College Student Report***, and the Faculty Survey. As survey results can be overwhelming and confusing if data are not communicated meaningfully and concisely to faculty and staff, the Leadership Team called on Dr. Karen Jackson, a consultant

in the field. Dr. Jackson's approach was to use a process called "Appreciative Inquiry" to help share the information.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach is one way to triangulate or compare college survey results and validate findings. The technique provides an effective large group method for gaining college-wide participation and emphasizes opportunities for improvement through examination of data. Dr. Jackson, along with the Richland Leadership Team and trained faculty volunteers, helped to facilitate the April, 2002 session. Seated at round tables, participants (faculty and staff from various academic disciplines and professional departments) responded to one of three questions by providing strategies, comments, and feedback. The questions follow:

1. *What strategies should Richland College employ to positively impact student perceptions regarding prompt feedback from instructors on course performance?*

Students' responses on two implementations of the NLSSI and ***The Community College Student Report*** were below the norm on the promptness of feedback from instructors on course performance. Conversely, faculty responses on the Faculty Survey indicated a strong desire to provide prompt feedback. As a result, the challenge was to determine strategies that would help to bridge the gap between faculty and student perceptions on promptness of feedback from instructors.

2. *What strategies should Richland College employ to encourage students to work harder than they thought possible to meet an instructor's standards or expectations?*

Results from ***The Community College Student Report*** revealed a gap between the importance that faculty attach to setting high standards for students and the students' perception of how often they worked hard to meet an instructor's standards or expectations. For example, 98% of Richland faculty responded that it was "important" or "very important" to set high expectations for students while only 48% of Richland students responded that they "often" or "very often" work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.

3. *What strategies should Richland College employ to positively impact student perceptions regarding the institution's concern for the individual?*

hereafter – especially

The 2000 NLSSI results were below the national norm on items that focused on the institution's concern for the individual. However, the results from the 2002 Noel-Levitz survey showed improvement in this area – throughout all 12 survey areas – over the results from 2000. Further, Richland's 2001 results from *The Community College Student Report* indicated students' perceptions of the institution's concern for the individual scoring above the national norm, but the difference was not statistically significant.

All participant responses from the Appreciative Inquiry session were collected, summarized, and reported back to the college at the Convocation for the fall 2002 term. Based on these responses, Richland developed action plans with assigned faculty responsibilities and timelines. Action plans were applied to address various issues raised throughout the process. Richland will focus on the following:

Prompt feedback from instructors

Richland will track the percentages of student e-mail addresses recorded in Richland's Colleague database because Richland believes that increased e-mail contacts provide the college and its faculty with a valuable, cost-free avenue for communication with its students. To improve potential communication, Richland has increased the percentage of students with e-mail addresses recorded in its Colleague system from 50 percent to 65 percent.

Watch for Upcoming CCSSE Events

2003 CCSSE Workshop:

- May 18 American Association for Institutional Research (Tampa, FL)
- May 25 NISOD Conference (Austin, TX)

2003 CCSSE Exhibits and Presentations:

- Feb. 25-27 Texas Association for Institutional Research (El Paso, TX)
- Mar. 15-18 Innovations 2003! (Phoenix, AZ)
- Apr. 4-8 American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention (Dallas, TX)
- Apr. 13-16 North Central Association's 23rd Annual Meeting (Chicago, IL)
- May 17-21 American Association for Institutional Research (Tampa, FL)
- May 25-28 NISOD's Silver Anniversary (Austin, TX)

Encouraging students to work harder than they thought possible

In an attempt to encourage students, Richland's Council for Community Building has initiated the construction of a Student Wall of Honor that Richland will use to recognize the achievements of its outstanding current and former students.

Student perceptions regarding the institution's concern for the individual

Richland plans to effectuate positive change with regard to student perceptions of the institution's concern for the individual through faculty development. For instance, Richland will empower faculty and staff to develop holistic approaches to institutional assessment and improvement. Further, faculty will continue to participate in professional development opportunities such as Cooperative Learning and the Learning Exchange Networks – LENS – programs to enhance the classroom learning experience. Action plans further include Richland's implementation of follow-up administrations of the Noel-Levitz and CCSSE instruments. Richland also will conduct periodic student focus group sessions based on survey responses.

Richland's research and practical focus on student learning and engagement can be replicated at other institutions. Using surveys with different foci provides valuable crosschecks in determining gaps in student programs and services. Involving all faculty and staff in the problem-solving process and utilizing a targeted approach to identify opportunities for improvement results in actions that have broad-based support. These methods also make efficient use of college resources.

For further information about the Appreciative Inquiry process, please contact Karen Jackson at karen@kljackson.net or 828-877-3718.

To submit articles to CCSSE Highlights: Please contact Christine LeBard, CCSSE College Relations Coordinator, at lebard@ccsse.org or 512-232-6452.