



NEWS RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH IDENTIFIES HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

AUSTIN, TX—Community colleges across the country are experiencing great change. Amidst escalating demands for accountability, increasing student diversity, volatile enrollment, and continuing financial constraint, these institutions are working to improve student retention and graduation rates. A new report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) points the way for college leaders seeking deeper understanding of what works in promoting student success. That understanding can help target limited resources to educational approaches likely to produce improved outcomes for large numbers of students.

Among the key findings are these: A dozen key educational policies and practices are identified as having high impact on student engagement in community colleges. Students' participation in multiple structured high-impact experiences leads to increasingly higher levels of engagement. And while increasing numbers of institutions are offering such experiences, only small numbers of colleges require them, and far too few students are participating in them.

Focusing on selected educational practices for which there is emerging evidence of effectiveness, the report, *A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students*, describes the relationships between students' participation in particular practices and their levels of engagement in college. The Center's research confirms that student participation in any of 12 such practices is consistently associated with higher benchmark scores on the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*). The report also provides participation data on each practice from the perspectives of students, faculty, and institutions.

According to Center Director Kay McClenney, the results should prompt substantial campus discussions about redesigning student experiences. The caveat, she says, is that "improved student success and college completion isn't about having a checklist, or one of everything—a collection of boutique programs. Quality of design and implementation is critically important. Integrating discrete practices into coherent pathways is essential. And community colleges will achieve the improved results they seek only when they commit to high-quality implementation at significantly higher scale."

The report provides colleges with a framework for examining their own practices, and particularly for discerning gaps between what students need and what colleges provide—and

the additional gaps between what colleges provide and what students actually experience.

“With that perspective in mind,” McClenney asserts, “and with sharpened focus on evidence-based design of students’ educational experiences, colleges can make better decisions about which practices to discontinue, redesign, or bring to scale.”

Additional report key findings:

- Eighty-four percent of colleges report offering student success courses. Yet, just 20% of *CCSSE* student respondents and 29% of *SENSE* respondents (entering students) took a student success course during their first term.
- Student respondents who indicate an advisor helped them develop an academic plan have higher adjusted benchmark scores for two *CCSSE* benchmarks (*academic challenge* and *student-faculty interaction*) and four *SENSE* benchmarks (*early connections*, *effective track to college readiness*, *engaged learning*, and *academic and social support*). However, just 66% of colleges report having a systematic process whereby entering students set academic goals by the end of their first term.
- A clearly explained class attendance policy has a notably positive relationship with three *CCSSE* benchmarks (*student effort*, *academic challenge*, and *support for learners*) and four *SENSE* benchmarks (*early connections*, *high expectations and aspirations*, *effective track to college readiness*, and *academic and social support*).

“The field has known for more than a decade the importance of student engagement. Simply stated, engagement matters—and more engagement matters more,” says McClenney. “These results underscore the importance of community college efforts to make student engagement inescapable. Requiring students to take part in activities likely to enhance their success is a step community colleges can readily take. They just need to decide to do it.”

A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students is available online:
http://www.ccsse.org/docs/Matter_of_Degrees_2.pdf

Additional Information

A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students brings together survey responses from entering students, experienced students, faculty, and institutions. Data sources include the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*), the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (*CCFSSE*), and the Community College Institutional Survey (*CCIS*).

The report is based on responses to the core student surveys from approximately 99,500 entering students (*SENSE*) and more than 458,000 experienced students (*CCSSE*) in multi-year cohorts. Special promising practices items, administered in 2012, produced responses from about 48,000 entering students and 95,000 or more experienced students. Approximately 36,000 respondents are included in faculty survey results. Reported findings from the Institutional survey are based on responses from up to 441 colleges.

This report is the second in a series of three and is part of a multi-year Center initiative—identifying and Promoting High-Impact Educational Practices in Community Colleges—funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation.

The report may be downloaded free of charge at www.cccse.org. The Center is a research and service initiative of the Community College Leadership Program in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.