

# Data Narrative Exercise



## Data Narrative Approach to Sharing Data

Sharing data in a meaningful way—a way that promotes positive change—can be a challenge, especially when the dataset is large and the audience diverse. A data narrative approach encourages deeper, more meaningful data-driven conversations. This approach uses data to tell a story—a story that develops and takes shape as data are shared and discussed.

The data narrative exercise is designed to be conducted in small groups, followed by a facilitated discussion with the larger group. During each session, groups are presented with a series of simply stated, related data points, with each data point being shared one at a time. After each data point is revealed, groups spend time discussing what the data point means to them in terms of their own work at the college. As group members talk about the meaning behind the data, a storyline develops, making the data more relevant and more relatable. Each data point is meant to build on the other, at times challenging members to take an honest look at their own roles in the student experience at the college.

Instructions for conducting a data narrative exercise are outlined below and are followed by example data point sets.

## Defining the Focus

An in-depth review of your results is an essential step in preparing a data narrative exercise. Determining areas in which your college is meeting goals and areas in which improvements are necessary will help frame the discussion. Next, it is important to consider your audience—who will be attending the session, which areas of campus will be represented, and in what areas these individuals can potentially have the most positive impact. A thorough review of your results and consideration of your audience will help define the focus of the session.

## Selecting Key Data Points

The objective in selecting key data points to share is to keep the dataset focused. Select two or three data points that speak directly to the focus of the session. Each data point should build on the previous one, enabling the group to develop a clearer understanding of the issue and to formulate meaning around the issue, making the discussion more salient and tangible.

If, for example, a strategic goal of the college is to move toward mandatory advising for all students, and the data show that less than half of your students use advising services, select data points that highlight advising specifically (e.g., items 13a1, 13a2, and 13a3 on the *CCSSE* instrument and/or items 20a, 20b, and 20c on the *SENSE* instrument). If the session's focus is term-to-term persistence, and the data reveal that over half of your students indicate that caring for dependents is a likely reason they would choose to withdraw from college, look at related items such as importance, frequency of use, and satisfaction with child care services on campus (items 13f1-3 on the *CCSSE* instrument). Considered individually, data points should be meaningful, but should be even more compelling when considered in conjunction with other relevant data.

Alternatively, instead of examining related data points focused only on overall student findings, you might move from an all-student view of the data to a snapshot of it broken out by full- and less than full-time students or other breakout variables. This type of review will allow the group to examine an area of interest to the college and its implications for diverse student groups.

## Presenting the Data

The data narrative exercise is conducted first in small groups. After the audience has been split into small groups, present the data. You can share data via PowerPoint, on paper, or in whatever way works best for your college. The objective is to share each data point one at a time and allow discussion after each data point is revealed.

An example dataset is presented below. Data presented are hypothetical; use college-specific and/or CCSSE/SENSE Cohort data when conducting the data narrative exercise.

**1<sup>st</sup> Data Point:** *“Sixty-eight percent of our students indicate that obtaining an associate degree is a primary goal for attending the college.”*

Groups should discuss the implications of this data point. What does it mean? What questions does it raise?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Data Point:** *“Seventy-four percent of our students consider Academic Advising/Planning to be ‘Very’ important.”*

Groups should discuss how this data point informs the first one. What additional questions does this data point raise?

**3<sup>rd</sup> Data Point:** *“Forty-three percent of our students report ‘Never’ using Academic Advising/ Planning services.”*

Groups should discuss how this data point informs the first two. Does this data point change your perspective on the issue? What are the implications now?

## Large Group Discussion

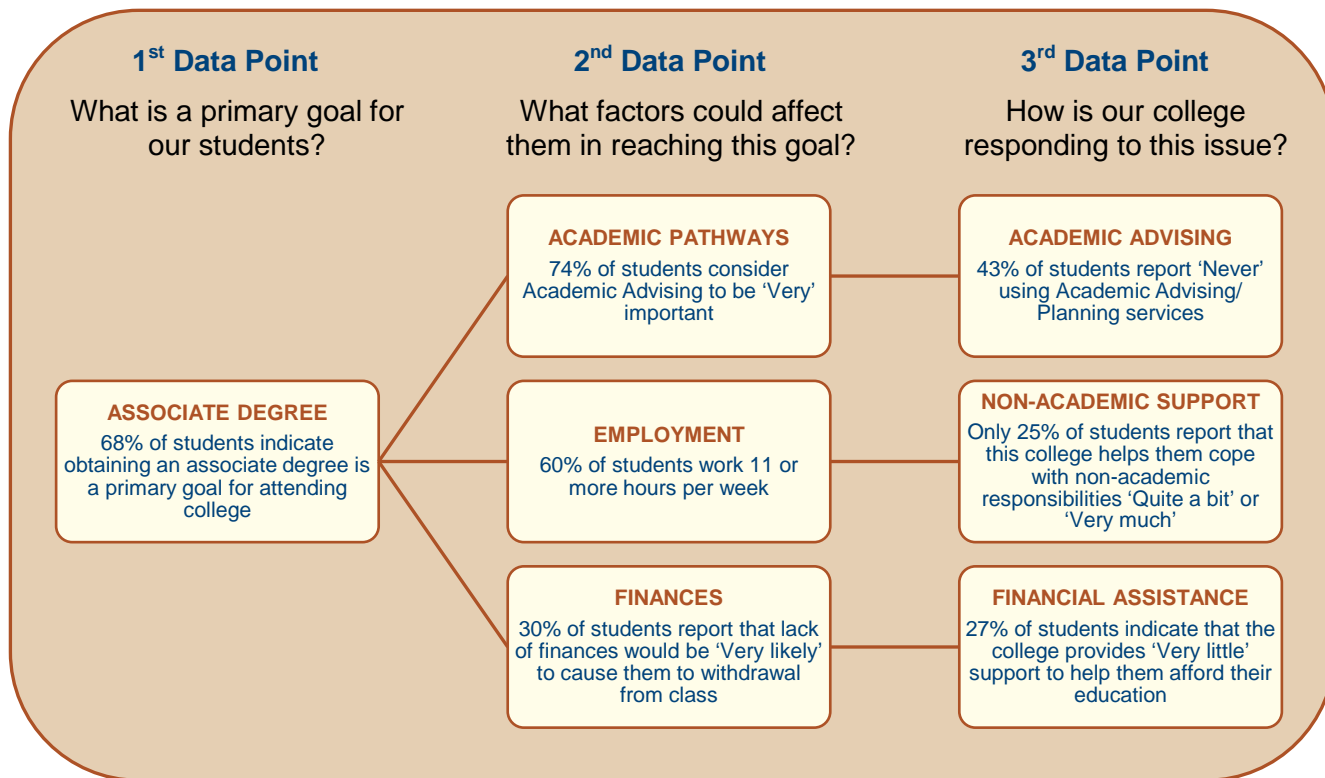
After small groups have had time to discuss the data and formulate a clearer understanding of the issues, each group should share their thoughts—their version of the “story.” The objective is to meld each group’s story into a larger discussion on the topic. Some stories may align, while others may challenge the group to take an even closer look at the issue.

The data narrative exercise is designed to encourage discussion among diverse audiences about specific issues of focus for the college. This tool, while designed for sharing results with a larger group, can be adapted for data sharing among specific areas of campus—within academic departments, student services units, student groups, etc. Selecting key data points will take time; however, if done purposefully, the data narrative exercise can yield powerful discussions that can lead to the development of actionable improvement strategies.

## Example Data Point Sets

The chart that follows outlines the process your college might employ to select a data point set for your data narrative exercise. Start with a key concept that can be informed by other relevant findings at the college. Examine related areas and their implications for student engagement. Data presented

are hypothetical; use college-specific and/or CCSSE/SENSE Cohort data when conducting the data narrative exercise.



Additional areas that may be of interest to your institution are shown below.

**Academic Advising/Planning**

CCSSE: 4m, 13a  
SENSE: 18d-g, 20a, 23

**Barriers to Persistence**

CCSSE: 10b, 10d, 10e, 13f, 14a-d  
SENSE: 18h, 24b, 32

**Career Counseling**

CCSSE: 12n, 12o, 13b  
SENSE: 20b

**Critical Thinking**

CCSSE: 4d, 5a-f, 12e  
SENSE: NA

**Educational Goals**

CCSSE: 17a-f  
SENSE: 37a-c

**Financial Assistance**

CCSSE: 13g, 14d, 18a-f  
SENSE: 15a-c, 16, 18i-j, 20g

**Job Skills/Job Placement**

CCSSE: 4m, 12b, 12n, 12o, 13b, 13c, 17d  
SENSE: 20b-c

**Orientation and Registration**

CCSSE: 8h  
SENSE: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

**Peer-to-peer interaction in class**

CCSSE: 4a, 4b, 4f, 4s, 4t, 4u, 11a  
SENSE: 18k, 18q, 18s, 19a, 19g, 19s

**Peer-to-peer interaction out of class**

CCSSE: 4g, 4h, 4r, 11a  
SENSE: 19h, 19i, 19j, 19k, 19r

**Placement (Developmental, ESL)**

CCSSE: 8b-e  
SENSE: 12a-c, 13, 14, 17a-d

**Reasons for Attending College**

CCSSE: 17a-f  
SENSE: 37a-c

**Relationships**

CCSSE: 4s, 4t, 9c, 9e  
SENSE: 18a, 18p, 18r

**Student-Faculty Interaction**

CCSSE: 4l, 4m, 4n, 4q, 11b  
SENSE: 18b, 18r, 19l, 19m, 19n, 19q

**Student Satisfaction**

CCSSE: 20, 26, 27  
SENSE: 25, 27

**Support Services**

CCSSE: 9b, 9d, 9e, 9f, 13a-k  
SENSE: 20a-k

**Technology**

CCSSE: 4j, 4k, 9g, 12g, 13h  
SENSE: 19k, 19l, 20h

**Withdrawing**

CCSSE: 14a-e, 15, 16, 20  
SENSE: 25

**Workforce Issues**

CCSSE: 8a, 12b, 12n, 12o  
SENSE: NA

**Working for Pay and Course Load**

CCSSE: 10b, 14a  
SENSE: 24b

**Writing**

CCSSE: 4c, 4d, 6c, 12c  
SENSE: 19b