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## Approaching CCSSE Results

Each college's results should be considered in terms of its own mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics. However, the Center for Community College Student Engagement has developed a set of recommendations regarding the analysis and interpretation of results based on feedback from member institutions, conference and workshop presentations, and experts in the field.

## Review of Key Findings

The Center recommends beginning your data review by examining more broad aspects of the college's Institutional Report including your respondent population and key findings.

## Respondent Population

As you work with your CCSSE data, it is important to determine whether your respondent population is representative of your entire student population. Table 1: Respondents to Underlying Populations Comparisons—available on the Standard Reports page of the CCSSE online reporting system—provides side-by-side population data for your college's respondent and student populations.

**Table 1: Respondents to Underlying Populations Comparisons**—This one-page table details respondent characteristics from your college compared to population data for 1) your college, 2) similarly-sized CCSSE Cohort colleges, and 3) the CCSSE Cohort. The specific characteristics examined include gender, race/ethnicity, age, and enrollment status.

## Key Findings Booklet

Developed in response to member college feedback, the new CCSSE Key Findings booklet—an individually-tailored executive summary—provides

college-specific data in an easy-to-read and easy-to-share format. The booklet includes benchmark comparisons between your college, colleges of similar size, and the CCSSE cohort; highlights of the areas of highest and lowest student engagement at your college; results from the five CCSSE special-focus items; and results from the faculty survey (CCFSSE). Example college results will be provided to colleges that did not administer CCFSSE.

When examining the data presented in the Key Findings booklet, the Center recommends that you consider the following:

- ▶ What data confirm facts you already know?
- ▶ What results did you not expect?
- ▶ What areas appear to be meeting your college's goals/expectations?
- ▶ What areas appear to need further investigation?

The key findings highlighted in the booklet serve as a starting point for your review; the next step is to begin a more substantial data review process.

## Digging Deeper

The Center recommends taking time to examine results in greater detail. Review of individual survey items can shed light on specific aspects of an institution's efforts that are not detailed in the Key Findings booklet mentioned above. The Standard Reports tab includes Benchmark reports, Means Summary report, and Frequency Distribution report to assist with such efforts.

**Benchmarks**—Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. CCSSE's five benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important in quality educational practice: active and collaborative learning, academic challenge, student effort,

student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. The benchmarks are used to compare each institution's performance to that of similar institutions and with the CCSSE Cohort. Reviewing survey items that make up the benchmarks can help your college to identify areas of strength or areas that need improvement.

**Means Summary**—These reports provide item-by-item means for student responses at your institution contrasted with a comparison group and the CCSSE Cohort. Other useful statistics found in these reports include 1) significance, 2) effect size, 3) standard deviation, and 4) standard error of the mean. The presentation of the effect size indicator and other statistics will aid in the interpretation of the magnitude of the differences on any given item.

**Frequency Distributions**—These reports summarize the observed frequencies of occurrence (counts and percentages) of the values for each item on the survey. Such statistics are useful for easily locating the highest and lowest scores as well as understanding how the data are distributed across response categories.

## Reaching for Excellence

Institutional reports are an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean as well as allowing for comparisons across similar colleges. While such reports are quite useful, they should only serve as a starting point. Better educational outcomes are the result of using data wisely to focus effort and promote positive change and being relentless about putting data results in front of faculty and staff. Given such requirements, the Center also provides the following tips for examining and interpreting data.

### **Tip #1: Compare the college to high-performing colleges**

The Center provides a benchmark Deciles Report for each institution, which provides an indication of a college's performance relative to the highest-performing colleges. Deciles are percentiles that divide the frequency of benchmark scores into 10 equal groups. A college may aspire, for example, to attain performance in one or more benchmark areas equivalent to the performances of the top ten percent

of community colleges nationally. The decile report lets colleges know where they stand in relation to that aspiration.

Deciles are listed for the CCSSE Cohort and for each appropriate comparison group according to size and urbanicity. To help gauge a college's performance relative to the comparison groups, the shaded area on the tables indicates the deciles that are less than or equal to that college's benchmark scores.

The definition of "high-performing college" certainly may vary, but the Center typically classifies high performers as those institutions scoring at or above the 80th percentile on at least three benchmarks.

### **Tip #2: Measure the college's performance in terms of your least-engaged student group**

Some colleges may know which group on campus is least engaged, while others may wish to run further analysis on the data to help yield that information. In either scenario, working with the raw data file will likely provide further insight into the college's results.

To help colleges identify groups on campus that may be least engaged, the Center has developed classifications for the following groups of students that are typically of interest in community college efforts to improve student outcomes (for more details regarding the survey items used in creating these groups, please contact the Center at [info@ccsse.org](mailto:info@ccsse.org)):

- 1) First-generation students:** those who are the first in their immediate families to attend college
- 2) Developmental students:** those who have taken or plan to take developmental courses while attending college
- 3) High-risk students:** those with multiple risk factors such as having to care for dependents, attending college part-time, etc.

Once a college has identified its least-engaged group, the Center recommends that the college run comparisons between this group and the remainder of the college population, as well as comparing the results for the least-engaged group and the CCSSE Cohort.

### **Tip #3: Gauge work in areas most strongly valued**

The Center always recommends examining results in light of your institution's vision, mission, and/or strategic objectives. Before reviewing data, colleges may want to identify key issues by answering questions like these:

- ▶ What are the high-priority objectives in our college's strategic plan?
- ▶ What benchmarks, trends, or services are most important to our college? Examples might include particular benchmark areas (academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, etc.); critical issues, such as retention; or services that are key to student success, such as academic advising or college orientation.
- ▶ What educational practices most concern our college?
- ▶ How do our mission and specific programs at our college relate to the CCSSE benchmarks and survey items?
- ▶ What new programs are being developed at our college?

For example, if a college scores low on the student-faculty interaction benchmark, a high priority on its campus, then the college will want to investigate the specific survey items of that benchmark that require attention; or, if a college scores high on all benchmarks, it will want to focus on ways to continue strengthening these areas.

### **Tip #4: Compare where the college is now with where it wants to be**

Another useful way to examine an institution's results is to perform a gap analysis looking at where the college is now versus where it wants to be. Questions to consider include the following:

- ▶ What issues have been identified for the college through self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation—or recommendations from the visiting team?
- ▶ What strengths or opportunities for improvement in our college have been identified through other data-gathering or institutional research efforts?

- ▶ Are there emerging trends in the data that fit with our college's strengths?
- ▶ Are there emerging trends in the data that amplify areas where our college needs improvement?

Once questions such as these have been addressed, and CCSSE results have been examined in conjunction with other institutionally-relevant data, a set of strategic goals can be established and then pursued at the college.

## **Utilizing Resources: CCSSE Tools**

CCSSE's website, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org), is the primary vehicle for putting survey results in context. The website is aimed at promoting public understanding of the work of community colleges, supporting institutional improvement, and advancing public discussion about new ways of defining and examining quality in higher education. Below are highlights of several tools available to member colleges via the CCSSE website.

The Tools section of the CCSSE website contains the following documents and resources to help your college evaluate your CCSSE results:

- ▶ **CCSSE Drop-In Overview Report Template and Presentation Template**—To assist colleges in sharing results with faculty and other constituents, the Center provides member colleges with templates in both Word and PowerPoint formats for colleges to drop-in data from their CCSSE results. These templates can be used as a starting point for custom presentations that highlight both CCSSE and CCFSSSE data (if applicable).
- ▶ **Sample Results News Release**—This sample news release can be customized to highlight the college's CCSSE results.
- ▶ **Faculty Predictions Exercise and Student Services Staff Predictions Exercise**—To support colleges in examining gaps between faculty/student services staff and student responses, the Center has developed exercises to jump-start discussions with both groups by asking them to fill in their predicted answers to the survey items listed on the exercise worksheet. The group facilitator can then have faculty and staff go through the items and discuss actual student responses from your college's Institutional

Report. This exercise is designed to help spark discussion about whether and why faculty/student services staff predictions differ from actual student responses.

▶ **CCSSE Course Evaluation Form**—The *CCSSE Course Evaluation Form*—an end-of-course evaluation instrument for course-level and program-level assessment—was developed with the assistance of an advisory panel of administrators, counselors, and faculty members from six CCSSE member colleges. The instrument is based on student engagement items from the CCSSE survey and additional course feedback items submitted and reviewed by the advisory panel members. The *CCSSE Course Evaluation Form* is intended for local administration and data analysis.

▶ **CCSSE Classroom Observation Form**—The *CCSSE Classroom Observation Form* was designed as a professional development tool to be used by deans, department heads, mentor faculty, and peer faculty. The instrument includes standard classroom review items, but keeps student engagement as its primary area of focus. The *CCSSE Classroom Observation Form* is intended for local data collection and analysis, in accord with the college's policies.

▶ **CCSSE Accreditation Tools**—A successful accreditation plan is unique for each institution. However, an important step for all institutions in developing an accreditation plan is determining what evaluation practices are currently in place and what evidence from those assessments can be linked to accreditation standards. The CCSSE Accreditation Tools are individually tailored for each of the six regional higher education accrediting bodies and are intended to be utilized as an approach to mapping CCSSE data to accreditation standards.

Two components of the Accreditation Toolkits are the Map and the Item Key. The Map lists which CCSSE items align with the regions' accreditation standards. The CCSSE Accreditation Item Key is a supplemental tool that displays the full text of the items, highlights key concepts, and shows items mapped to standards for all accrediting regions.

The survey items in the CCSSE Accreditation Item Keys are first organized by benchmarks. CCSSE items not associated with benchmarks appear at end of the item key. Some survey items in the item keys are shaded blue; this indicates that the same item appears on the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) instrument as well. Colleges using results from both surveys in the accreditation process may find this feature helpful in organizing evidence.

▶ **Focus Group Toolkit**—Your college's CCSSE data may help point the institution to specific areas on which to focus attention. As the institution begins work on improvement strategies, the college may benefit from more in-depth discussions with faculty about their experiences and their perceptions of student engagement. These structured discussions may help the college uncover possible strategies for improvement and shed light on the college's survey results. The Focus Group Toolkit provides detailed instructions for planning and conducting focus group sessions and can be tailored to fit a variety of constituent groups, including faculty.