



HIGHLIGHTS

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Using CCSSE to Respond to an Accreditation Agency: The Surry Community College Engagement Story

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As one of fourteen small colleges represented in the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)* 2002 membership, Surry Community College (Surry) in northwestern North Carolina serves approximately 3,500 students in 34 degree programs. Surry faculty and staff participated in *CCSSE*'s 2002 administration for various reasons. Surry aspired to understand students' perceptions of their experiences at the college; sought to gain information about student experiences that contributed to meaningful learning; and wanted to identify areas that it could address in its response to Surry's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), one component in the accreditation visit from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In this edition of *CCSSE Highlights*, Surry has described *CCSSE*'s administration on its campus, made meaning of *CCSSE* data and reports, and showed the ways in which *CCSSE* results – specifically, information on student behaviors and perceptions of faculty and staff – contributed to Surry's QEP.

CCSSE Administration

CCSSE's survey instrument, *The Community College Student Report*, was administered at Surry to 637 students in 50 randomly selected classes during the spring 2002 term. Surry completed and returned the survey instruments to *CCSSE* staff for processing and evaluation. Simultaneously, Surry faculty became engaged in this process by reviewing the survey and indicating how they would like students to respond to each item, "...if Surry Community College were exactly as you would like it to be." Responses provided local "benchmarks" that represented faculty views. Survey review was implemented in the summer, so only about half of the faculty participated. The local benchmarks were set aside to await the report of results.

Surry received the *CCSSE* results in July 2002. Review of the data and reports required Surry to determine how to disseminate the results and how to use them in creating its QEP. First, the results and comparison data from the other 14 small colleges were posted on the college intranet web site. Graphs for each item accompanied the data. Second, an overview of the results was presented to all faculty and staff during the first fall 2002 faculty meeting.

Following this meeting, faculty workshops were held. At these workshops, faculty members were presented with selected items from the *CCSSE* student questionnaire. They were asked to choose the three items they felt were the most important in promoting meaningful student learning. These individual choices then were tallied and ranked for each workshop group. Faculty and staff participated in brainstorming activities regarding the top items on the list and discussed programs that could be adopted to promote a particular practice or behavior. These workshops were effective in introducing faculty to the survey results; they also advanced the idea that the results could and should be used for improvement. Finally, Surry distributed a report on the faculty-defined benchmarks compared to the actual values provided by the students.

Action Plans: Using Data for Effective Decision Making

Surry appointed a faculty committee to identify possible topics for the college's QEP. The following *CCSSE* information was made available to the committee:

- comparison of the faculty-defined benchmarks to actual student responses
- comparison of Surry results to the combined results of the other *CCSSE* small-sized colleges
- results of the faculty workshop groups - indicating practices faculty considered most important in leading to student learning, and
- the list of successes and challenges (for Surry) identified in the initial *CCSSE* data reports

The faculty committee used *CCSSE* findings and other information to shape its QEP proposal. *CCSSE* findings

contributed to various aspects of the QEP proposal, one of which focuses on the gap between student responses to *The Report* and faculty perceptions from the focus groups. For example, one item on the survey asked, "In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you ... worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources?" Both the faculty benchmark study and the faculty workshops revealed that this was an important issue for the faculty. However, *CCSSE* results showed that students indicated they were not as engaged as students at other small community colleges or as the faculty would have liked. The committee combined this finding with existing faculty concerns about how to assess general education and other learning outcomes. Accordingly, a major part of the QEP will focus on the use of student projects, created within regular course requirements, to assess and improve general education outcomes.

Based on an institutional portfolio model developed by Jeffrey A. Seybert (2001), Surry will use embedded student projects to assess learning outcomes. Surry expects that faculty will increase the assignment of papers and projects that require the integration of information from various sources. A cross-disciplinary faculty committee will evaluate the student projects, assessing strengths and weaknesses. Information about weaknesses will be used by faculty to improve the appropriate general education outcomes.

Implications for Future Practice: Surry's Suggestions to Other Colleges

A key assertion of the *CCSSE* initiative is that survey results should be used to stimulate improvement. Enacting that value, G. Frank Sells, President of Surry, asserts that *CCSSE*'s administration and findings coincide with the aims of the college:

When I presented to our Board of Trustees the recommendation to administer CCSSE, I emphasized that our purpose was not to receive a 'pat on the back.' Instead, the results would enable us to look at student learning and how we facilitate learning in much better ways than ever before. We are striving to become a 'learning college' and consequently, with CCSSE, we are focusing our QEP on specific student engagement practices that we think will make a significant difference in student learning.

The types of information derived from *CCSSE* are both relevant for faculty and are practically useful. Surry's experience shows that faculty can use *CCSSE* data to

identify areas for meaningful improvement. Surry recommends that other colleges also involve faculty to examine and discuss the results openly and in a setting structured to encourage faculty ideas.

Reference

Seybert, J.A. The institutional portfolio: a performance-based model for assessment of general education. Paper presented at The League for Innovation in the Community College International Conference, Boston, 2001.

CCSSE at Upcoming Fall Conferences

October 11-14, 2003

Southern Association For Institutional Research (SAIR),
San Antonio, Texas
<http://www.sair.org>

October 15-17, 2003

Rocky Mountain Association for Institutional Research,
(RMAIR), Santa Fe, New Mexico
<http://departments.weber.edu/ir/rmair/main.htm>

October 18-21, 2003

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
(HACU), Anaheim, California
<http://www.hacu.net>

October 19-21, 2003

National Council on Student Development (NCSD),
St. Louis, Missouri
<http://www.nationalcouncilstudentdevelopment.org>

October 29-31, 2003

Florida Association of Community Colleges (FACC),
Orlando, FL
http://www.facc.org/facc_2003_calendar.htm

November 6-7, 2003

Illinois Association for Institutional Research (ILAIR),
Findley, Illinois
<http://www.ir.ilstu.edu/AIR>

November 12-14, 2003

California Association for Institutional Research (CAIR),
Rohnert, California
<http://www.cair.org>

November 20-22, 2003

Community College League of California (CCLC),
Oakland, California
<http://www.ccleague.org>

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