



HIGHLIGHTS

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

CCSSE Recognizes 2006 High Performers

This special edition of CCSSE Highlights features 2006 CCSSE member colleges that have demonstrated outstanding performance on one or more of the five CCSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice. CCSSE benchmarks focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement and that are associated with student learning and persistence. We are pleased to highlight selected educational practices these colleges employ.

The CCSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

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, and they provide useful ways to look at each college's performance as well as to compare faculty and student views.

Community colleges use the benchmarks to compare their performance to that of similar institutions and to the full CCSSE population of community colleges; compare their own performance across benchmarks and across time; and identify areas in need of improvement. Because the results are public, benchmarks also can stimulate conversation — within colleges and among policymakers — about effective educational practice.

The CCSSE benchmarks are: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. To see descriptions of the benchmarks or the specific survey

items associated with each benchmark, visit www.ccsse.org.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Survey items associated with this benchmark assess whether students are actively involved in their education, have opportunities to think about and apply what they learn in different settings, and collaborate with others to solve problems or master challenging content. The following colleges were among the top performers within their size category on the Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark. This list is presented in alphabetical order without regard to size.

- Cascadia Community College (WA)
- Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ)
- Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FL)
- Malcolm X College (IL)
- Mira Costa College (CA)
- New Mexico Military Institute (NM)
- Northwest Vista College (TX)
- South Texas College (TX)

Intentional Engagement Strategies

Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ), a Hispanic-Serving Institution in the Maricopa County Community College District, has implemented multiple strategies to encourage Active and Collaborative Learning. These strategies include developing new learning communities, conducting part-time and full-time faculty institutes that include collaborative learning strategies, and creating physical space intentionally designed to facilitate student engagement. In spring 2006, the college opened 22 new learning studios that promote "radical flexibility." Radical flexibility frees faculty and students, so they have the ability on demand to customize their learning environment. This concept was accomplished via the use of mobile chairs and desk, rolling whiteboards, walltalkers® with computer

projection and annotation capability, and increased access to technology through the use of wireless laptop computers.

The Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning at **Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FL)** offers workshops and mini-grants for the development of learning communities, service learning, and other active learning strategies. Furthermore, faculty continually investigate the effectiveness of these approaches in their annual Learning Outcomes Enhancement Plans, a classroom research project required of all full-time faculty. These research projects provide the entire college with a growing knowledge base about what works to improve student engagement.

Two faculty members at **Cascadia Community College (WA)**, Brian Bansenauer and David Whittaker, asked students to “make their learning visible” when they developed a first-quarter differential calculus class as a lab-based, hands-on course. The course asks students to explore concepts numerically, graphically, and analytically using Maple software within a computer lab, and then to present their findings to the class for discussion. Students spend half of their class time in a computer lab and the other half in a lecture room. Pre-lab assignments are due the day of the lab; pairs work together in the computer lab; and pairs work together to present findings by creating posters, presenting their work orally, and using Maple software to demonstrate concepts. Students receive many benefits from the course being structured this way: they gain confidence as they question and interpret their learning with peers; their mathematical reasoning skills deepen through representation; they practice using mathematical language in dialogue with their peers; and there is a sense of student empowerment as the class creates a pool of shared knowledge and a deeper understanding of the connections among concepts.

In social science classes at **Malcolm X College (IL)**, students must complete a group research paper and class presentation on a topic that relates to their communities. The assignment is structured to help students make the connection between theories learned in class and the real world. Because the students are collaborating, they are discussing their ideas regularly with one another and learning more than if they worked independently.

Academic Challenge

Survey items included in this benchmark address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students,

and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. The following colleges were among the top performers within their size category on the Academic Challenge benchmark. This list is presented in alphabetical order without regard to size.

- **Essex County College (NJ)**
- **Houston Community College System (TX)**
- **Malcolm X College (IL)**
- **Mercy College of Health Sciences (IA)**
- **New Mexico Military Institute (NM)**
- **Prince George’s Community College (MD)**
- **South Suburban College (IL)**
- **South Texas College (TX)**

Intentional Engagement Strategies

Prince George’s Community College (MD) academically challenges its students in many ways. For instance, in order to ensure that developmental students are ready for higher-level coursework, they must earn a grade of “B” in order to advance to the next course. Faculty also work to include critical thinking in all of their courses. And to maintain consistency in course content, faculty must agree on basic course outcomes, which must be measurable. Furthermore, departments use external advisory committees to review courses for currency and content.

In biology classes at **Malcolm X College (IL)**, students are taught to challenge and critically analyze historical as well as contemporary theories. As a result, the students create an integrated viewpoint that broadens their thinking. Armed with the skill of managing different perspectives, they begin to engage in problem solving about the etiology of imbalances of human physiology.

Mercy College of Health Sciences’ (IA) professor Jeannine Matz received top recognition at the college for a tool she created to improve students’ critical thinking. Three times during the semester, groups of two to three students were given a short clinical scenario in their physiology course. The students had two weeks to research, prepare, and organize their presentations for the rest of the physiology course. The presentations allowed them to explain their diagnoses and their scientific understanding of mechanisms concerning the etiology, symptoms, and treatment of pathophysiological conditions. Since the presentations required a computer-generated presentation, at least a five-minute speech, and critical thinking, the

presentation also facilitated three of the six Liberal Arts and Sciences department objectives (use of technology, effective speaking, and critical thinking). Peers and faculty were able to ask questions and challenge student thought processes. Classmates were required to take notes and learn from the presentation through a 10-point assessment that occurred in a subsequent class session.

Student Effort

These survey items indicate to what extent students are applying themselves in the learning process and engaging in activities important to their learning and success. The following colleges were among the top performers within their size category on the Student Effort benchmark. This list is presented in alphabetical order without regard to size.

- El Paso Community College (TX)
- Essex County College (NJ)
- Malcolm X College (IL)
- Prince George's Community College (MD)
- San Juan College (NM)
- South Texas College (TX)
- Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (NM)
- University of New Mexico - Valencia Campus (NM)

Intentional Engagement Strategies

An educational practice that contributes significantly to student effort at the **University of New Mexico-Valencia Campus (NM)** is the use of revision as an expected part of the writing program. Portfolios required at every level of writing instruction from developmental through sophomore writing classes reflect progressive increases in students' proficiency in writing. Additionally, specially designed "integrated" classrooms allow developmental students to write and revise using computers in the lab area of the classroom and then to move to a separate area of tables

for group work such as peer editing. A one-hour skills lab is required for all developmental courses. And web pages providing assignments and supplemental course information make course work accessible to students from home as well as on campus. With a ratio of one computer per three headcount students, every student has the opportunity to research and write papers that require the integration of ideas from various sources.

Essex County College (NJ) traces its success on the Student Effort benchmark to both faculty referrals and the advertisement of its Learning Center. At the Learning Center, which is staffed with faculty and center associates, students have access to academic tutoring, peer support, and technology resources.

Through the Service Learning Program at **Prince George's Community College (MD)**, students integrate community service with course work. Student effort is also promoted through a requirement that students enrolled in developmental courses must complete 25 hours in the learning lab to reinforce class work; and students enrolled in gateway English courses are required to write, submit, and revise papers multiple times before turning in a final product.

At **San Juan College (NM)**, the Student Success Center offers peer tutoring, professional tutoring, adult basic education, learning skills courses, and a learning skills computer lab. These services have seen an increase in student participation over the past five years due to faculty investment in the Center. Based on the assumption that students relate to an institution first through their instructors, professional staff in the Center systematically invite instructors to utilize its services for individual students as well as entire classes. As a result, faculty members are regularly involved in the following Center activities: bringing classes to the learning skills lab for tours and an introduction to PLATO software; tutoring students; referring potential tutors for hire; serving on advisory committees; designing and writing online tutorials; promoting Center services in classrooms; guest lecturing in learning skills courses; providing content training for tutors; and building

Mark your calendars for the 2007 CCSSE Workshop, to be held in conjunction with the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence (May 20-23, 2007) in Austin, TX.

The CCSSE Workshop will be held on **Tuesday, May 22, 2007**.

For more information about the NISOD International Conference, visit www.nisod.org.



Center participation into course requirements.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps them focus on their academic progress. The items used in this benchmark assess the extent of these interactions, both in and out of the classroom. The following colleges were among the top performers within their size category on the **Student-Faculty Interaction** benchmark. This list is presented in alphabetical order without regard to size.

- Bluegrass Community and Technical College (KY)
- Louisburg College (NC)
- Malcolm X College (IL)
- Montgomery College (MD)
- New Mexico Military Institute (NM)
- Northwest Vista College (TX)
- South Texas College (TX)
- Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

Intentional Engagement Strategies

Located in the state's most isolated region, **Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)** serves a three-county service area that borders Tennessee and Virginia. It was largely because the region has such a poor system of highways that SKCTC has grown from one campus to five. While not a typical development pattern, the way in which the college has evolved has had an unintended benefit. Not only has it helped to ensure better access, but it also has helped to foster student-faculty interaction. Now its 4,700 students are not congregated on one large campus but are spread among five locations, each of which has its own special focus and is able to guarantee, with a student-teacher ratio of 19:1, "individualized" attention for each student. Faculty members are not just actively involved with students inside the classroom, however. Southeast teachers work with students in a variety of service learning programs, serve as advisors to more than 40 clubs and organizations, and promote student activism through joint college-community projects. An example is "Higher Ground," a community play that tackles the problem of drug abuse in eastern Kentucky

and involves a cast of 80, ranging in age from 2 to 80. SKCTC likes to brag that it's not just student-centered but community-centered as well.

Student-faculty interaction is notably high at **Bluegrass Community and Technical College (KY)**, in part because it is a point of emphasis within the faculty promotion and tenure process. In addition to providing high-quality classroom instruction, faculty are expected to devote at least 17% of their load to student advising. The quality of this advising is measured annually through an advisee survey. Faculty are expected also to show documented commitment in the areas of internal service, external service, professional development, and leadership. In many cases, faculty choose projects within these areas that enhance student-faculty interaction. Thus, a culture exists that not only values quality instruction, but also values excellent student-faculty interaction as an integral aspect of that teaching quality.

The Montgomery Scholars Program at **Montgomery College (MD)** is a learning community model that provides an exemplary first- and second-year undergraduate experience. Students are immersed in an interdisciplinary approach to post-secondary education, participating in a freshman core that blends several academic disciplines. The program is characterized by rigorous academic experiences and intense ongoing interactions among faculty and students both inside and outside the classroom. In the second year of the program, students take interdisciplinary courses that are team-taught by faculty; and the program culminates with the honors Capstone Seminar in which students, with the guidance of a faculty advisor, complete and present a research project. Travel and co-curricular activities including museum and art gallery visits, as well as service learning activities, encourage critical, independent, and global thinking. The college aims to help students in the program to graduate in two years and to pursue their major at a four-year school; to that end, the college provides personal counseling to enable students to pursue and fulfill their goals.

Founded in 1787, **Louisburg College (NC)** is the nation's oldest two-year college. Graduates laud faculty advising, instruction, and faculty availability in class and out. Each entering student at the college is enrolled in a mandatory two-semester freshman seminar that encourages a sense of belonging, development of study skills, and interactive learning through the use of campus portals. Common readings also are designed to encourage the humanitarian goals of pluralism and diversity. During the second semester, students and instructors work collaboratively on

a service-learning project selected by the class.

Support for Learners

Items associated with this benchmark indicate to what extent students are using key academic and student support services, and how much importance they ascribe to services such as advising, academic and career planning, academic skill development, financial aid, and others that may affect learning and retention. The following colleges were among the top performers within their size category on the **Support for Learners** benchmark. This list is presented in alphabetical order without regard to size.

- Atlanta Technical College (GA)
- East Georgia College (GA)
- El Paso Community College (TX)
- Essex County College (NJ)
- Housatonic Community College (CT)
- Richland College (TX)
- South Texas College (TX)
- Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

Intentional Engagement Strategies

South Texas College (TX) has high expectations of the students who choose to attend the institution. The college firmly believes that no one rises to low expectations, and with that in mind the college strategically focuses on success while maintaining access. This has been accomplished via myriad strategies led by the Division of Student Services & Development. The strategies include eliminating late registration beginning with the Fall 2005 term, implementing mandatory orientation via a combination of in-person and online orientation options, providing additional leadership and development opportunities for students on campus via student clubs and organizations, providing state-of-the-art tutoring centers, and launching the Beacon Advisement Program, a case-management approach to advisement for first-time-in-college students, which is being expanded to serve all students.

From one of the nation's longest-running Upward Bound Programs, which began at **Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)** in 1966, to its most recent support services initiative, Ready-To-Work (RTW),

the college has a well-earned reputation for caring about students and working tenaciously to help them succeed academically. Last year, although many of the college's students do not score well on the ACT and other standardized entrance tests, some 94 percent of its graduates who took licensure examinations were successful, while many others went on to do well after transferring to senior colleges and universities. Enrolling welfare recipients, the majority of whom are mothers, the program not only works closely with each of its students, but also with faculty and staff who serve them. Counselors follow the progress of students, contact them when they are absent from class to determine if a problem exists, and, if a problem is discovered, go to work to solve it. With funds from the state, SKCTC is able to provide a wide range of support services, including child care, a transportation allowance, and—when needed—funds for emergencies. The result: RTW students have a grade point average of 2.92 and a retention rate of 88 percent. Since the program began in 2001, 135 students have graduated with associate degrees, with more than twice that number receiving certificates.

Student support at **Atlanta Technical College (GA)** is realized through structured activities guided by the Academic and Learning Support Services Division. Students receive academic support through face-to-face and electronic tutorials; learning support counselors provide guidance to address academic and social barriers to educational success; and study skills, time management, and organizational skills are addressed through quarterly academic workshops. Students in need of a more comprehensive approach are registered for a ten-week student success seminar, which includes instruction in college support networks and study skills, as well as in writing and reading comprehension.

Richland College's (TX) multi-faceted approach to support student learning includes broad-based and specialized tutoring services, professional development support for faculty and staff, and a college culture that celebrates diversity and seeks to create responsible global citizens. In addition to the college's Center for Teaching and Learning, which supports general education students, Richland College offers the Science Corner to support students in the hard sciences, the Heart Program, which specializes in economics and accounting, and the Emeritus Conversation Partners, which provides tutoring in spoken English for ESOL students. Professional development support includes opportunities for all faculty and staff, as well as independent training for new full-time faculty. Richland College strives to celebrate diversity and create responsible students by

offering community volunteer opportunities through its Service Learning Program, by celebrating the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of all members of the college community at its International Festivals, and by emphasizing world peace and honoring Richland College students' international communities through its Peace Pole Trail program.

Hazard Community and Technical College (KY) High performer Across all Benchmarks

To promote active learning and academic challenge, **Hazard Community and Technical College** offers learning communities that link classes and are taught by collaborating faculty. For instance, faculty members Amy Wernette and Jenny Williams taught a learning community of students enrolled in paired sections of Writing I and Introduction to Biology. The challenge for students comes through connecting material from different disciplines. "Making connections between different disciplines is challenging for students. They have to work harder to see relationships," notes Wernette. Students benefit from learning communities because the linked courses complement and reinforce one another, challenge the students, and promote interaction with both faculty and peers. When Amy and Jenny taught their learning community, Jenny used materials from the biology textbook to teach writing skills. So instead of summarizing a random essay, students summarized a section of the biology textbook, which helped them to practice an important writing skill as well as learn the content.

Students have the benefit of working with faculty outside of the classroom at **Hazard Community and Technical College** through several campus organizations. For instance, at the small Knott County Branch of HCTC, two student organizations—the Humans Helping Humans Club (H-3) and the Student Government Association (SGA)—worked on fund-raising for the hurricane victims in New Orleans, special holiday celebrations for the children of college students, and fund-raising for the college Emergency Fund, which makes short-term loans to students who have minor emergencies. Everyone who works together comes away richer from the experience. Faculty member Lisa Maggard notes, "The community-building that occurs through these joint projects makes the Hazard Community and Technical College Knott County Branch a rich and vital place to learn."

Houston Community College System (TX) uses CCSSE results to Support Achieving the Dream

Houston Community College System includes six area colleges, each of which has used its CCSSE results to inform its *Achieving the Dream* strategies. *Achieving the Dream* is a multi-year national initiative focused on improving outcomes for community college students, particularly students of color and low-income students. Houston's system-wide effort is proving successful for its students.

Southeast College is strengthening Support for Learners specifically by focusing on financial aid. The college has implemented an aggressive strategy that reaches out to the largely-Hispanic community – including many who are not informed about financial aid. The college hired community ambassadors who reach out to students to bring them onto the campus. There also are community centers to give students more information about applying for financial aid. These financial aid strategies show promising results, including increased enrollments at this campus.

Northeast College is increasing interaction between students and their peers and between students and faculty with the implementation of new learning communities. These courses have produced promising results in terms of student retention.

Southwest College's First-Year Experience is a college-level course that includes career exploration, academic advising, study skills, and time management – all the core skills needed for success in college. Because of its promising practices and results, this course will be expanded to all the colleges.

Coleman College, which serves as the Health Science college, provides a Health Professions course that brings students to campus early for special orientation sessions.

Central College is launching a new approach to teaching developmental reading for students with learning disabilities. To facilitate student success, faculty are creating a teaching circle to foster professional development. Additionally, Northwest College provides a four-week course to help students make progress through developmental math; this course has been successful with a small number of students, and there are plans to expand the program to ascertain whether it will be successful with larger numbers of students.