



# ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the new format of *Engagement Matters*, the Center for Community College Student Engagement's official newsletter. It was designed with our mission in mind: we provide information about effective educational practice in community colleges and assist institutions and policymakers in using that information to promote improvements in student learning, persistence, and attainment.

So please take a moment to learn about our latest endeavors. In case you weren't aware, we are in the midst of a three-year project dedicated to adding profound research to the community college field on high-impact practices. We are enlisting the help of all community colleges to contribute to these unprecedented data by participating in our four national student engagement surveys. More information is presented in this newsletter and on our website, [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

As you browse the various sections within, I invite you to hear what community college students are telling us in focus groups; become more familiar with Center projects (and their nicknames); discover strategies from two member colleges for promoting student engagement; learn about our ongoing improvement efforts; find out about the upcoming 2012 CCCSE Workshop, featuring Vincent Tinto; and, finally, explore the different formats in which we report survey results to participating colleges in a regular feature devoted to topics of interest from our data and research team.

As part of our commitment to quality and service to our nation's community colleges, we look forward to keeping you informed and providing support through future issues and continued partnership.

*Kay M. McClanney*



## *The Makings of a* **Promising Future** *for* **Community Colleges**

**WITH NEW GRANTS, CENTER PROJECT WILL EXAMINE POTENTIAL HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

Community colleges across the country are rising to the challenge of improving student success and college completion. As they grapple with that challenge, they quite naturally raise questions about what exactly they should be doing. What is known about effective educational practice? What makes a practice effective? And how do we bring effective practice to scale, turning small accomplishments into widespread improvement?

To help colleges answer these questions, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, the Center is conducting a three-year project: Identifying and Promoting High-Impact Educational Practices in Community Colleges. This initiative began with the launch of the Community College Institutional Survey (CCIS) in early 2011. **Participation in CCIS 2012 will be available (at no cost) to all community colleges starting in March 2012.** The deadline to complete the survey is May 15, 2012. Please contact Project Coordinator Emmet Campos for more information about CCIS or the initiative (512-475-9201 or [campos@cccse.org](mailto:campos@cccse.org)).

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## CENTER DEFINED

The **Center for Community College Student Engagement** is a research and service initiative of the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin that provides important resources for assessing and improving educational practice in community colleges through the following projects and initiatives:

**Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)** /'sɛ'sɛ/, administered to students in the spring, includes items that assess institutional practices and student behaviors correlated with student learning and retention.

**Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE)** /'sɛ'sɛ'fesɛ/, an online companion to CCSSE, elicits information from instructors about their students' educational experiences, their teaching practices, and how they spend their professional time.

**Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE)** /sens/, administered in early fall to entering students, gathers information about their academic and non-academic experiences from the time of their decision to attend the college through the first three weeks of class.

**Community College Institutional Survey (CCIS)** collects data on high-impact educational practices in community colleges as well as new knowledge about implementation, design, and scale of these practices.

**High-Impact Practices Initiative** is a grant-funded project that combines findings from the Center's four quantitative surveys and qualitative data.

**Initiative on Student Success** conducts focus groups and interviews at select colleges, gathering student, faculty, staff, and administrators' perspectives to paint a rich picture of the student experience.

**Student Success BY THE NUMBERS (SSBTN)** is a grant-funded initiative designed to build the capacity of community and technical colleges in Texas to understand and communicate data depicting student success and institutional performance.

Learn more about these projects and initiatives at [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org)

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Data from the Center's student surveys, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), will help to define high-impact educational practices in community colleges as well as measure the extent to which those practices are part of the current student experience. Results from the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) will illuminate the current realities of teaching practice. Finally, CCIS will address questions about whether those key practices (when offered) are required or optional and what key components they include—for what target student populations and at what current scale.

Accompanying the survey work will be a series of focus groups conducted with students and with full- and part-time faculty, providing—as is the Center's custom—authentic voices and video documentation that help to enrich understanding of the quantitative data.

By incorporating additional items and item modules into the large-scale national surveys—student, faculty, and institutional—and through the focus groups, the Center will produce unprecedented data regarding student and faculty experiences in regard to a vetted set of promising educational practices. Therefore, the field will have meaningful and actionable information for use in strengthening student persistence and completion in community colleges.

## LISTEN UP

At the Center, we're always listening! Since 2001, alongside the CCSSE and SENSE national survey projects, the Center has been conducting focus groups and interviews with community college students across the country. Through the Center's Initiative on Student Success, we ask students to describe more fully the experiences behind what they're telling us in their survey responses.

Since 2007, with funding from MetLife Foundation and Houston Endowment Inc., the Initiative on Student Success has focused on entering students' earliest community college experiences through *Starting Right*. By listening to students in 124 focus groups and more than 70 individual interviews, we've learned more about students' expectations when they start college, their experiences trying to navigate college systems, their level of engagement inside and outside their classes, and what college practices help them succeed.

Students often talk about challenges they face at the “front door” of the community college:

*“They do have information available for the college, but I found that navigating their webpage is like trying to figure out a calculus problem when you have no clue what calculus is.”*

Students suggest ways community colleges can help students transition successfully into college:

*“For incoming freshman, for people that are just starting, they have a lot of confusion about what*

*resources are available and what they're supposed to do as far as starting up with the school. I think if there was more of an orientation that people had to take...”*

*“When new students first come in, I think they should have a mandatory one-on-one sit-down with a counselor to really discuss in detail their degree plan...”*

*“I think the first two weeks of class, they should have activities...that get students to interact with other students, to get to know each other.”*

Recognizing that more and more new community college students are coming directly from high school or starting college within two or three years of graduating, a primary area of focus for the Initiative has been the high school to college transition. In subsequent issues, we'll hear from students about that transition and consider steps community colleges can take to help students prepare for college.

For more information about the Initiative on Student Success, contact Project Manager Arleen Arnsparger at [arnsparger@cccse.org](mailto:arnsparger@cccse.org)

*“It's really, really like a community. The old saying is it takes a village to raise a child. Everybody in the village is helping out, from deans, president, down to career services, people in student life...they make you feel that you want to be part of this.”*

—Student



# COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

The Center is committed to continually improving its services to better meet member colleges' needs. Accordingly, following each survey administration, the Center solicits feedback on survey materials and services, and invites suggestions for improvement.

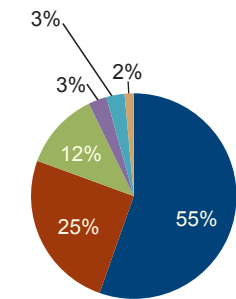
To learn more about Center improvement efforts, please review the annual "Improvement through Feedback" reports that provide responses to the most common questions and requests the Center receives from member colleges following a one-year *CCSSE-SENSE* administration cycle. They are available online at [www.ccsse.org/center/resources/publications.cfm](http://www.ccsse.org/center/resources/publications.cfm).

## IMPROVEMENT THROUGH FEEDBACK

Recent feedback has led the Center to change its survey packing policy, becoming greener while upholding its commitment to member service.

During each survey administration, the Center sends member colleges in-class survey materials for its sampled courses. Historically, the Center has also sent 100 additional surveys to account for enrollment discrepancies. In recent evaluations, member college contacts have voiced concern over the number of supplemental surveys included in Center shipments, indicating that the additional surveys cause unnecessary waste.

Supplemental Survey Use



- Fewer than 10
- 10-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- More than 50

In keeping with the Center's data-informed philosophy, Center researchers analyzed survey data from 435 *CCSSE* 2011 member colleges to examine supplemental survey use. The team was tasked with determining if the Center could decrease the number of additional surveys provided and, if so, how many surveys would sufficiently meet member colleges' needs.

Center researchers found that about one-third of member colleges made use of supplemental surveys. As shown in the "Supplemental Survey Use" chart, about three-quarters of those colleges used fewer than 20 supplemental surveys, while 2% used more than 50.

Based on these findings, the Center will reduce the number of supplemental surveys sent to member colleges to 75 for future survey administrations.

This reduction will allow the Center to decrease the number of surveys sent by about 7,000 during the 2012 administration and will still ensure that member colleges in need of supplemental surveys will have them available. Colleges with unused supplemental surveys are welcome to return them to the Center, where they will be used as sample surveys during conference presentations and workshops.

**BUTLER COMMUNITY COLLEGE** (KS) uses *CCSSE* data to respond to the Higher Learning Commission AQIP requirements that institutions (a) be able to compare the performance of their student-learning processes to the performance of other institutions, (b) have effective processes in place to build and maintain relationships with its students, and (c) have ongoing evaluation and assessment processes that provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

Those requirements are part of the AQIP Systems Portfolio, a comprehensive description and evaluation of the college's essential systems and processes. Butler submitted a portfolio in November 2008. In that report, Butler used *CCSSE* data to document the current state of student engagement. Butler also used these data to guide the development of its AQIP action project related to Learning Spaces, concluding that the survey design could be adapted to supporting the creation of effective learning environments.

Butler maintains accreditation with HLC and is one of a handful of community colleges selected to pilot the HLC Pathways process, due in large part to its effective use of data, including *CCSSE* results, in AQIP.

At **MIDDLESEX COUNTY COLLEGE** (NJ), the Council for Adjunct Faculty Development ensures an equipped collegial space for part-time instructors to meet. The council also develops orientation programs for new adjunct instructors at the start of each semester and at an annual faculty development event. At these events, adjunct faculty members are provided with general information about the campus and course management tools; have an opportunity to network with one another; and explore topics such as academic integrity, active learning techniques, and teaching a diverse student body. According to evaluations from the most recent event, 90% of participants indicated they would use the presented information and techniques in their classrooms.

Furthermore, new adjuncts are invited to participate in a peer mentoring program, through which seasoned adjuncts volunteer their time to support the new adjuncts with general campus help and to share teaching strategies. Adjuncts also are honored annually for their excellence and 10 or more years of service. Between 2000 and 2011, nearly 200 adjuncts were honored. Middlesex County College's efforts have led to long term relationships with adjunct faculty members who are extremely committed to the institution, as evidenced by high adjunct faculty retention rates (e.g., 96% for fall-to-spring 2010-2011).

### SHARE YOUR COLLEGE'S STORY

Has your college used Center data to strengthen student engagement and improve student success? Are *CCSSE*, *CCFSSE*, and/or *SENSE* results included in materials submitted to your accrediting region? If so, please visit our Engagement in Action site ([www.ccsse.org/center/resources/engagement.cfm](http://www.ccsse.org/center/resources/engagement.cfm)) to submit a vignette.

Your story may be featured in our publications, online, or as part of conference presentations.



# ON THE ROAD



Look for our sessions at the following upcoming events:

## FYE – Annual Conference

February 17-21, 2012  
San Antonio, TX  
[www.sc.edu/fye/annual](http://www.sc.edu/fye/annual)

## TAIR – Annual Conference

February 21-24, 2012  
Corpus Christi, TX  
[www.texas-air.org/conference/2012](http://www.texas-air.org/conference/2012)

## AtD – D.R.E.A.M.

February 28-March 2, 2012  
Dallas, TX  
[www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org)

## League – Innovations Conference

March 4-7, 2012  
Philadelphia, PA  
**Center Booth: 209**  
[www.league.org/i2012](http://www.league.org/i2012)

## AAC&U – Network for Academic Renewal Conference

March 22-24, 2012  
Seattle, WA  
[www.aacu.org/meetings](http://www.aacu.org/meetings)

## Board of Trustees Institute

March 29-31, 2012  
Santa Fe, NM

## CCCSE – Entering Student Success Institute

April 1-3, 2012  
Santa Fe, NM  
[www.ccsse.org/sense/essi](http://www.ccsse.org/sense/essi)  
REGISTRATION IS STILL OPEN!  
(colleges must have *SENSE* data)

## AACC – Annual Convention

April 21-24, 2012  
Orlando, FL  
**Center Booth: 315**  
[www.aacc.nche.edu/convention](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/convention)

## NISOD – Annual Conference

May 27-30, 2012  
Austin, TX  
**Center Booth: 319**  
[www.nisod.org/conference](http://www.nisod.org/conference)

## League – Learning College Summit

June 10-13, 2012  
Phoenix, AZ  
[www.league.org/lcs](http://www.league.org/lcs)

## Noel-Levitz – Annual Conference

July 24-26, 2012  
Chicago, IL  
[www.noellevitz.com/events](http://www.noellevitz.com/events)

We can also come to you:

The Center offers to colleges and college systems custom workshops for working with survey results.

Many colleges also invite Center associates to speak at faculty/staff professional development events.

*Direct inquiries to [info@ccsse.org](mailto:info@ccsse.org). Book early to ensure availability!*

## Register for the 2012 CCCSE Workshop at NISOD

Tuesday, May 29, 2012 | Austin, TX

- ★ Networking
- ★ Professional development
- ★ Strategies, tools, and resources

- ★ Plenary luncheon featuring

## Vincent Tinto

Distinguished Professor  
Syracuse University



**FREE for up to five people from a member college**

Interested in attending? Please visit [www.ccsse.org/center/workshop](http://www.ccsse.org/center/workshop)

To view all events and more details, visit [www.ccsse.org/center/calendar](http://www.ccsse.org/center/calendar)

# DELVING INTO DATA



The Center summarizes *CCSSE* and *SENSE* results for member colleges by providing three types of reports: benchmarks, means, and frequencies. Many users focus on the benchmark scores alone, but the Center strongly recommends using all three types of reports to best understand a college's data.

## BENCHMARKS

These reports begin with a table showing the scores on each benchmark (five for *CCSSE*, six for *SENSE*), followed by means and frequency tables of items in each benchmark. While the benchmark scores provide an overview of how the college is doing in particular areas, colleges must be mindful that the results from the individual survey items composing each benchmark deserve examination.

Example: On *CCSSE*, the Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark is made up of several questions within item 4. If a college's score on this benchmark is 47, then that college performed below the standardized national average of 50. But what causes that score of 47?

The means reports can help a college identify which items are driving a benchmark score, whether it is just one or even all items within that benchmark.

## MEANS

These reports present an average of all responses for survey items that have scaled response categories (e.g. strongly agree to strongly disagree). For other types of items, the mean would not be meaningful (e.g., we wouldn't say that, on average, students are between male and female). Means reports also provide an effect size, which is a visual indicator of significant differences between the college and a comparison group.

Example: In *CCSSE*'s Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark, item 4a asks, "How often have you asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions?" The response options are: Never=1, Sometimes=2, Often=3, and Very Often=4. If a college's mean is 2.5 and the rest of the Cohort has a mean of 2.9, then item 4a is contributing to the college's lower benchmark score. But what student responses lead to a mean of 2.5?

The frequency reports can help a college identify how student responses affect the mean.

## FREQUENCIES

These reports display the count and percentage of students who chose each response option for

a survey item. The Center reports frequencies for most items except demographics, which are included in the Appendix of a college's online Institutional Report.

Example: *CCSSE* item 4a gives students four response categories: Never, Sometimes, Often, or Very Often. If half of the students respond that they ask questions in class Never, with the other half of students indicating Very Often, the mean is 2.5. If, instead, students are evenly spread out over all four categories, the mean is still 2.5. The mean alone does not tell the whole story.

These two situations may have different policy implications. In order to find out which is happening, users must dig past the benchmark scores and utilize the means and frequency tables as well.

## Center for Community College Student Engagement

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