

Community College Survey of Student Engagement FAQs

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General Questions

1. What happens after my college registers for CCSSE?

Each college's designated Campus Coordinator will receive an email from their CCSSE Liaison in early November. This message signals the beginning of the CCSSE administration process, includes hyperlinks to survey administration materials, and details next steps in the administration process.

2. Who designates the Campus Coordinator?

Campus Coordinators can be designated by the college president, the current Campus Coordinator, or the person who registers the college for survey participation.

3. If we have multiple campuses, should we have multiple Campus Coordinators?

No. Colleges can designate only one Campus Coordinator as their primary point of contact with us. However, Campus Coordinators may select Survey Administrators to facilitate survey administration at the campus level when multiple campuses will be surveyed.

4. Who should administer the survey?

We recommend designating Survey Administrators to carry out the in-class administration process. More details on selecting administrators can be found in the [Survey Administrator Staffing Tips](#) document. Information on Survey Administrator duties can be found in the [Survey Administrator Guide](#).

5. When is the survey administered?

The survey is administered during the spring academic term for semester colleges. Quarter system colleges can administer during either the [winter](#) or [spring](#) quarter. We recommend that quarter colleges administer in the winter, as those administering the survey in the spring quarter may not be able to administer and return/complete surveys before the deadline.

6. How is the survey administered?

CCSSE is administered either as a pencil-and-paper survey or electronically on a student's



personal device in a random sample of courses selected from a course file, or list of survey-eligible courses.

7. Is it possible to administer CCSSE fully online?

Yes. While a classroom administration remains the best option for most colleges for obtaining acceptable response rates and robust data from the community college student population, colleges can opt to administer the survey fully online. Please email or call your liaison to determine the best administration modality for your college.

Note that colleges can administer the in-class survey using electronic devices rather than paper instruments.

In-Class Administration Course File

8. What is the course file?

The course file is an Excel or .csv file containing a row of data for each survey-eligible course offered by the institution during the term of CCSSE administration. Details on the contents and formatting of the file can be found in the [Course File Guidelines](#), [Course File Checklist](#), and [Procedure Guide](#), all of which are available on the [Survey Administration](#) page of the CCSSE website.

9. How and when should the course file be submitted?

The Campus Coordinator should email the course file to the CCSSE Liaison as an Excel or .csv attachment two weeks after the start of the term. The sooner after the two-week mark the college submits a sample-ready course file, the sooner the sample can be finalized, allowing more time for survey administration.

10. What should I do if our course scheduling system does not have all the required course file variables?

As the course file is submitted after the start of the academic term, all [required variables](#) should be available for the college's survey-eligible courses. Courses without a set meeting time, place, and location (i.e. online courses or self-paced courses) are not eligible for sampling, and therefore would not be included in the course file.

11. How should the required course file variables be listed in the file?

The [Example Course File](#) and [Procedure Guide](#) show appropriate ways to list all of the required variables. Details such as whether meeting days are listed as single letters or two-letter codes, or whether start and end times are represented by a 12- or 24-hour clock are not important, as long as labels are consistent throughout the file.

12. Our system separates courses into separate rows of data for each meeting day/time combination. Is it ok to submit a course file with data for a single course listed on multiple rows?

No. Only one row of data per course should be included in the course file. Please collapse all information for a single course into one row of data.

13. Some of our courses meet at different times on different days. How should we list these in the course file?



List each course as a single row of data by choosing one start time, one end time, and one meet day to list.

14. If we do not have an instructor of record listed for every course, can we still submit the course file?

Yes. It is okay to leave the field blank or indicate “Staff” in the instructor name columns. However, the instructor name field is used in conjunction with other fields to assess whether courses are appropriately cross-listed. The name field is also helpful for colleges when scheduling in-class survey administration. However, once sampling has taken place, we are unable to fill in instructor names and email addresses for any missing faculty name or email addresses. Instructor name and email address are required variables for CCFSSSE participant colleges.

15. Should we include off-campus courses in the course file?

Courses held at off-site locations that meet the [guidelines for course file inclusion](#) should be listed in the file as long as it is feasible for survey administration to take place during one of their regular class meetings.

16. Should we include ITV courses in the course file?

If Survey Administrators can be at each course location at the same time and date, ITV courses should be included in the course file. When listing ITV courses in the file, collapse all sections of each course into one listing per course and sum the total student enrollment. If an ITV course is sampled, all its surveys and administration materials will be included in ONE course packet. The Campus Coordinator is responsible for separating ITV course survey materials by location prior to survey administration and for distributing those materials to all sections of the ITV course.

17. Should we include Physical Education courses in the course file?

Include those Physical Education courses in which it is feasible to administer the survey. Courses that meet outdoors, at a swimming pool, etc. may be excluded at the Campus Coordinator’s discretion.

18. Should hybrid or blended courses be included in the course file?

Hybrid or blended courses should be included in the course file if they have a regular meeting time and location in which the survey can be administered during the survey administration timeframe.

19. How should courses with lecture and lab components be listed in the course file?

If a single roster of students attends the same lecture and lab, the course file should list only one of these two sections (usually the lecture section) to avoid having the same group of students sampled twice.

20. How should paired, linked, or cohort courses be listed in the course file?

If a single cohort of students attends two paired, linked, or cohort courses, the course file should list only one of the two sections to avoid having the same group of students sampled twice.

21. Should concurrent or dual enrollment/credit high school classes be included in the course file?



No. Courses enrolling only high school students should not be included in the course file.

22. Should classes taught to incarcerated populations be included in the course file? No. Classes taught to currently incarcerated students should not be included in the course file, as such students are not exposed to the full breadth of the college experience.

23. How do we include cross-listed or team-taught courses in the course file? Campus Coordinators should combine cross-listed and team-taught courses into a single row of data per meeting day/time/location combination. Please be sure to include the total enrollment for the courses as this is the only way to ensure that course packets include sufficient surveys for administration. *CCFSSE* participant colleges with team-taught courses in their course file should consult with their *CCSSE* Liaison for this step.

24. Should we include self-paced courses in which the instructor mainly serves as a tutor? Self-paced courses that have at least three students and a regularly scheduled meeting time and location should be included.

25. Should we include courses with low enrollments in the course file? Courses with at least three students should be included.

26. Should courses that run less than the entire academic term be included in the course file? Include all courses that run for at least four weeks and will be in session during your anticipated survey administration period. If you have modular courses that span a portion of your anticipated administration period or are shorter than 4 weeks, please contact your *CCSSE* Liaison.

27. Should non-credit developmental courses be included in the course file? Developmental education courses that carry institutional credit, are prerequisites for credit courses, and/or are eligible for financial aid should be included.

28. Can we send updates to the course file after it has been submitted? We generally cannot accept updated or additional information once the course file has been submitted. In the event that a substantial amount of vital information (i.e., start date and time, end date and time, course name, and actual enrollment) needs to be updated, contact your *CCSSE* Liaison immediately.

29. I should have included/excluded several courses the college's course file. What should I do? Contact your *CCSSE* Liaison as soon as possible, providing information about the courses to be included/excluded.

In-Class Administration Sampling Procedures

30. Can I select specific courses for my college's *CCSSE* sample? No. Since *CCSSE* is a national survey, its sampling methodology must be consistent across all participating colleges. Colleges wishing to survey specific courses may want to consider



an [oversample](#) as part of their CCSSE administration.

31. How are CCSSE samples selected?

To reach student respondents, CCSSE samples at the classroom level. CCCSE pulls a random sample of classes, stratified by class meeting time, from the course file, which lists all survey-eligible courses offered by the college during the term in which the survey is administered. Stratifying institutions' random samples by class start time increases the representation of part-time students, who tend to be under-represented in random samples.

32. How was my college's target sample size determined?

CCCSE calculates target sample sizes by college enrollment category; samples are intended to be representative at the college (rather than department/major level). Each college's sample includes approximately 160% of the students in its target sample size to make up for student- and instructor-level non-participation, duplicate students in the sample, and other unforeseen circumstances.

33. Approximately how many classes will be sampled at my college?

The table below provides the average number of classes sampled based on institution size:

Enrollment category	Target sample size	Approximately 160% of target	Approx. # of classes sampled
Less than 1,500	600*	960*	54-58
1,500–4,499	600	960	56-60
4,500–7,999	800	1,280	66-70
8,000–14,999	1,000	1,600	73-77
15,000–21,999	1,200	1,920	83-87
22,000 or more	1,500	2,400	100-104

*Targets in this category will be as close as possible to these numbers based on the number of students in the course file

34. Will my sample include at least some courses from each department at the college? Not necessarily. Samples are random and intended to be representative at the institutional level. There is no guarantee that a particular number of courses will be selected in any specific department or program area.

35. If there is a problem with the sample you send us, will you pull a new one?

We will only re-pull the sample if a substantial number of survey-eligible courses should have been included in or excluded from the course file. Contact your CCSSE Liaison if you believe this is the case.

36. An instructor has refused to let their class participate in the survey. What should we do?

CCCSE has accounted for some student- and instructor-level non-participation in its sampling strategy. Each college is provided with approximately 160% of the target sample size to account for such situations. Non-participating classes will remain on the college's sample list; simply make note of those that will not participate. When the college's survey materials arrive, this class's course packet and its contents can be recycled or discarded.

37. If instructors have multiple classes chosen, can we omit one of their classes from the sample?

Some amount of course-level non-participation in the survey is accounted for in the college's 160%-of-target sample size. However, to gather a robust data set for the college, it is best to

administer to as many of the college's sampled courses as possible. When encouraging instructors to allow their classes to participate in *CCSSE*, remind them of the college's commitment to gathering student engagement data, and of the random nature of the sampling process. Finally, it may help to share a copy of the [survey instrument](#) with instructors and to remind them that the survey asks students to reflect on their college experience as a whole, rather on their experiences in a given course.

38. Can the instructor of a sampled class administer the survey to a different class they teach?

No. Classes are sampled randomly across the national cohort; to maintain the integrity of samples and cohort-level data, no substitutions are allowed.

39. A class that was chosen for the sample has stopped meeting. What should we do?

Since each college is provided with approximately 160% of its target sample size, not surveying this class should not negatively impact the college's data.

40. Our sample file includes some courses that fall outside the sampling frame. What should we do?

Omitting a few sampled courses from the college's administration because they fall outside of the sampling frame should not have a negative impact on the college's survey data. Survey packets will be shipped for all classes in the sample; simply recycle those for classes in which the survey was not administered. However, if you discover that a substantial number of non- survey-eligible courses were selected in the random sample, contact your *CCSSE* Liaison as soon as possible.

41. What if our sample does not include specific courses we want to survey?

Since *CCSSE* is a national survey, its random sampling methodology applies to all participating colleges. Colleges wishing to survey specific courses may want to consider an [oversample](#) as part of their *CCSSE* administration.

42. Are there any differences in the sampling process for colleges that are administering the survey using electronic devices rather than paper surveys?

No. The sampling procedures will be the same. The course file should follow the same guidelines.

Survey Administration

43. How long does the survey take to complete?

The [paper](#) survey takes students an average of 45 minutes to complete. The [online](#) survey takes students an average of 20 minutes to complete. Students in developmental courses or those with lower reading comprehension levels may require additional time to complete the survey, which is written at an eighth grade reading level. Including the time it takes to distribute survey materials, read the survey administration script, and collect materials after administration, the paper survey administration is designed to be completed in one 50-minute class period. The device-based survey administration may take as few as 25 minutes.

44. What are *CCSSE* special-focus items?



The special-focus items are a set of five items that CCSSE adds to the survey with each administration. Students taking the survey on paper record their responses to these items in the Additional Items section on the final page of the survey instrument. Students taking the survey online record their responses on the online survey. The results of these items are included in participant colleges' institutional reports.

45. Do we have to administer the CCSSE special-focus items?

We suggest that colleges administer the special-focus items, as they are relevant to the community college field and will add further information to the college's institutional results. However, colleges are not required to administer these items.

46. How long will the survey take with additional or custom survey items?

We estimate a maximum of one extra minute per additional item asked.

47. Can our college use its own educational programs?

Yes. Colleges are encouraged to use their own custom programs if desired. Note that for colleges administering on paper, we do not print custom program sheets for colleges wishing to use their own. For colleges administering online, please email your liaison your custom programs in spreadsheet format prior to the end of the calendar year. It is the Campus Coordinator's responsibility to inform their CCSSE Liaison that the college will use its own programs. For college's administering on paper, we will omit program sheets from the college's survey shipment, and it will be the Campus Coordinator's responsibility to place their own sheets in course packet envelopes prior to survey administration.

48. [For colleges administering on paper] What are the additional paper surveys for?

Additional surveys can be used to supplement course packets needing more survey instruments due to enrollment discrepancies. They should not be used to survey courses not selected as part of the sample.

49. Do I have to let faculty choose the date of the in-class administration?

No. The [Scheduling Letter](#), available on the [Survey Administration](#) page of the CCSSE website, may be altered to provide faculty with pre-determined dates for survey administration.

50. Can faculty administer the surveys to their own classes?

We strongly recommend the use of Survey Administrators to streamline and standardize the administration process. However, if a faculty member must administer the survey to his or her own class, it is imperative that the faculty member read the Survey Administration Script to the class, stressing that the survey is about the entire college experience, and not about that particular class.

51. Should students under the age of 18 be surveyed?

No, although it is not a problem if a student under the age of 18 completes the survey. If a student is taking the online survey, they will be exited from the survey after they confirm they are under 18yo. Data from any student who indicates on item 38 of the paper survey that he or she is under 18 years of age is excluded from the college's raw data file as well as from CCSSE reports. Students under 18 who opt not to complete the survey should remain in the classroom during survey administration.

52. Do students have to complete the survey more than once?

No, although it is not a problem if a student completes the survey more than once during the administration. Data from any student who indicates that he or she has already taken the survey this academic term are excluded from analysis and reporting. Students who elect not to take the survey a second time should remain in the classroom during survey administration.

53. How can we accommodate students with special needs?

Accommodations should be made for students with special-needs at the college level and should be consistent with those made for students on similar multiple-choice tests and forms. If administering on paper, if a student responds to the survey verbally or on an enlarged version of the survey instrument, an administrator must mark their responses on an actual paper survey instrument, which should then be returned in the packet for the course in which the student was sampled. Please contact your CCSSE Liaison if a student requires an accessible version of the survey that is compatible with screen readers. The online survey used for the device-based administration is compatible with screen readers.

54. [For colleges administering on paper] Are students required to complete the student ID section on page 8?

No. Collection of student identifiers is optional, although colleges may want to collect this information to link CCSSE data to other institutional data and initiatives.

55. [For colleges administering on paper] How should students enter their student IDs on the survey?

Students should enter the identifier information from left to right with no spaces, dashes, or other extraneous marks.

56. What if a sampled class meets with another class that wasn't selected for survey administration?

[For colleges administering on paper] Use supplemental surveys and/or those left over from other classes so that all students in the classroom can be surveyed. All surveys completed by students in the classroom during a single administration period should be returned to the same course packet. [For colleges administering device-based] Survey all students in the classroom. Colleges submit access codes for all students, so students in the other class should also be able to access the survey.

57. Can we stop administering the survey once we reach our target sample size?

It is best for colleges to continue the administration process even after reaching their target sample size. Some of the data collected may be invalid due to duplicate survey respondents, respondents under the age of 18, improperly filled out surveys, etc. CCSSE fees cover administration to the entire 160%-of-target sample, and the more data collected, the more robust the college's student subgroup data will be.

58. What should I do with unused course packets?

All unused course packets and survey materials can be recycled. [For colleges administering on paper] Please return only completed surveys, along with their corresponding Class Information Sheets and course envelopes.

59. How are survey results presented to our college?

Institutional reports will be provided electronically via the [CCSSE online reporting system](#).

Paper Administration - Completed Survey Returns

60. We have misplaced a Class Information Sheet. What should we do?

A PDF version of the [Class Information Sheet](#) is available on the [Survey Administration](#) page of the CCSSE website. Please print, sign, and return replacement Class Information Sheets to their corresponding course packet envelopes.

61. What if a Survey Administrator did not sign the Class Information Sheet?

Please make every effort to have the sheet signed by the Survey Administrator before it is returned.

62. How do we return completed surveys to CCCSE?

Return only completed surveys and signed Class Information Sheets in their original course packet envelopes. All other survey materials can be recycled—or in the case of pencils, re-used. Course packets should be packed carefully in the return boxes included in the college's original survey shipment and should be labeled with the neon return address labels and UPS pre-paid shipping labels. Campus Coordinators should work with their college's shipping and receiving department to arrange a UPS pick-up.

63. UPS does not conduct pick-ups at my college. What do I do?

Contact your CCSSE Liaison, and they will schedule a pick-up at the college.

64. What should we do if we run out of UPS return labels?

Contact your CCSSE Liaison, and he or she will email additional return labels.

65. Can course packet envelopes be left unsealed during shipment?

Yes.

66. What is the deadline for returning completed surveys to CCCSE?

Surveys must arrive at CCCSE by the close of business on the deadline listed in the [CCSSE Administration Timeline](#). Shipments post-marked on this date will not be accepted.

Device-Based Administration - Survey Completion

67. What materials can we expect with a device-based administration?

The college receives a survey packet for each course chosen in the sample. Survey packets contain administration instructions, an administration script, and QR code cards with the survey link for each student in the class.

68. How do students complete the survey?

Students complete the survey using their own personal computer, smartphone, or tablet (or one provided by the college). Student responses are automatically saved. Although the college will not need to ship anything back to CCCSE, all surveys must be completed by the May survey deadline.

69. What can survey administrators expect with the device-based in-class administration?



Survey data is automatically stored, so colleges do not have to collect completed surveys and return them to CCCSE. Also, while we will ship out survey packets with QR code cards to facilitate data collection, these are not necessary. The Campus Coordinator can email the survey administration script and instructions and QR code/survey link to campus administrators.

70. What can students expect with the device-based in-class administration?

Completing the online survey takes less time than completing the paper survey. The online survey instrument employs skip patterns where appropriate.

71. Since the survey is online, can we survey our online-only students also?

Because the online survey instrument is already set up, colleges can share the survey link with students that do not take any in-person courses. If the college plans to survey its online-only students, please be sure to email your liaison the access codes for those students.

72. Can we administer an oversample?

Yes. Please review the information on [oversampling](#) and then contact your liaison.

73. What if a student is having trouble with their survey?

Please see the Troubleshooting section at the end of these FAQs or reference the [In-Class Administration Instructions](#).

Device-Based Administration - Surveying Online-Only Students

Colleges administering the in-class device-based version of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in randomly selected classrooms can concurrently administer CCSSE online to their online-only students. Data from the online and paper administrations are combined for analysis and reporting.

74. When is the survey administered?

The survey can be administered at any time after the survey link has been received and reviewed by the college and before the May survey administration deadline. While it is possible to promote survey participation throughout most of the academic term, it is recommended that colleges focus their efforts on a three- or four-week administration window. To determine the optimal administration window, colleges should consider the timing of their in-class administration, other online surveys the college is administering, as well as the college's academic calendar as students may be less likely to respond during extended breaks or periods devoted to exams.

75. Can we send the link to the online survey to any of our survey-eligible students?

No, the online administration is intended for students that are taking exclusively online courses.

76. How does CCCSE define "online-only" students?

Online-only students are those who are enrolled only in online courses at the college during the spring academic term. Note that the survey should not be shared with currently incarcerated students as they may not be exposed to the full breadth of the student experience.

77. Can someone other than our CCSSE Campus Coordinator oversee surveying online-only students?

CCCSE policy is that institutions maintain one point of contact for CCSSE and CCFSSSE.

While the Campus Coordinator may work closely with another staff member (i.e. someone from the institution's IT or online education departments) to plan and facilitate their CCSSE online administration, CCSSE Liaisons will direct all CCSSE online-only students-related communications to the CCSSE Campus Coordinator.

78. How should we distribute the survey link to our students?

Colleges can share the survey link using email, LMS, text, or any mechanism through which the survey link can be shared with all survey-eligible students. It is important to note that CCCSE will neither assign nor have any information regarding which access codes match individual students so colleges should track this information.

79. Can CCCSE distribute the survey invitations to our students?

Your college is responsible for distributing the survey link and individual access codes to your students. Past CCCSE experience, as well as published research, suggests that sending an email from an address recognized by the recipient results in higher responses. Please contact your liaison if you have questions related to this.

80. What happens if we accidentally provide the CCSSE online online-only students link to some students who are also enrolled in on-campus courses?

This is fine. CCSSE includes an item that asks students if they have already taken the survey and an item that asks students if they are enrolled in all online classes.

81. How will we know whether students complete the survey?

When Campus Coordinators receive their CCSSE online link, they also receive access to a Responder Tool that can be used to monitor student survey access and completion. Campus Coordinators can use the Responder Tool downloadable spreadsheet to identify which access codes have not yet reached the final page of the survey and to send targeted participation reminders. Note that CCCSE does not have any information matching individual students to a specific access code so colleges are responsible for maintaining access code records.

82. How long does the survey take to complete?

Data from online administrations of CCSSE indicate that the survey takes 15-20 minutes to complete.

ONLINE SURVEY ADMINISTRATION - TROUBLESHOOTING

83. Is the online survey accessible? What do we do if a student has special needs?

Accommodations should be made for students with special needs at the college level and should be consistent with those made for students on similar multiple-choice tests and forms. The online version of CCSSE should be compatible with screen reading software. Please contact your liaison if you have any questions.

84. Can students start the online survey and finish it later?

Yes. When students re-enter their access codes, they will be automatically returned to the place in

the survey where they left off regardless of device used.

85. What if a student doesn't finish the survey?

Their partial record is saved.

86. What if a student accidentally marks that they have already completed the survey?

The survey includes a validation question that allows students to correct the error and continue completing the survey. If you have any questions, please contact your liaison.

87. What if a student can't access the survey?

- Error message: "Unable to log into survey"
Solution – access code may have been entered incorrectly during first attempt. Make sure to refresh the page before trying again. If the problem persists, ask the student to use a different web browser.
- Error message: "Access code not found"
Solution – determine if student is survey-eligible. If they are, double check they are entering the correct access code.
 - The most common reason a student is ineligible is being under 18yo
- Error message: "This access code has already been used"
No solution – the student has already completed the survey