SENSE Administration: Tips for Success

About this Guide

The tips that follow align with the SENSE Survey Administration Timeline and SENSE Procedure Guide. This guide is organized into three sections—pre-administration, administration, and post-administration—and is intended to help colleges carry out a successful SENSE administration. All documents referenced below are available on the SENSE website.

Pre-Administration

The first step in a successful administration is communicating early with all stakeholders at your institution. Key stakeholders include faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Communicating with Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Dialogue with faculty, staff, and administrators about the survey’s purpose and value to your institution helps ensure a successful survey administration. Use various forms of communication to reach the widest audience possible, including campus newsletters, campus mail, e-mail, breakout sessions at faculty workshops, and discussions at administrative meetings. Center resources to aid in your communications include:

- The President’s Memo to Faculty, Staff, and Administrators, which can be sent at the end of the spring term leading into the fall term of survey administration.
- The SENSE Talking Points, which provides details on the project’s scope, purpose, and administration procedures.
- Copies of the survey instrument to familiarize the campus community with the types of items to which students will respond.
- The SENSE Participant News Release, which can be sent as a reminder the week before survey administration begins.
- Examples of ways other colleges are using SENSE data, which can be found in the Center’s National Reports, available in the Publications section of the Center website.

Communicating with Students

Many participating colleges inform their students about participation in SENSE through an announcement in the college newspaper or via an e-mail or other online message.

The Center encourages college administrators to work with student government and other student organizations to support survey administration and use of survey results.

Selecting Survey Administrators

Each college has a designated Campus Contact who is responsible for facilitating a successful SENSE administration.

The Campus Contact serves as the single point of contact between the college and the Center, and designates Survey Administrators to carry out in-class survey administration. The number of Survey Administrators needed varies depending on college enrollment size. The Survey Administrator Staffing Tips can assist colleges in determining how many administrators to designate.

During Administration

SENSE administration takes place during the fourth and fifth class weeks of the fall academic term, and Survey Administrators are responsible for scheduling and conducting in-class survey administration. Clear, consistent communication between Survey Administrators and the instructors of sampled classes is vital for success.

Working with Survey Administrators

Survey Administrators are integral to the administration process, and the Campus Contact should work with them closely throughout the administration. The following are suggestions to help Campus Contacts prepare Survey Administrators for their role:

- Conduct an orientation to train Survey Administrators on the in-class administration process as outlined in the SENSE Procedure Guide.
- Provide Survey Administrators with copies of the Survey Administrator Guide, SENSE FAQs, SENSE Student FAQs, a list of the courses in which they are responsible for survey administration, the Scheduling Letter Template, and, later in the administration, their in-class administration materials.
- Ensure that Survey Administrators communicate with instructors to schedule days and times for survey administration in their assigned classes; the Scheduling Letter can aid in this process. Survey Administrators may use the “Notes” section their assigned course packet labels to track administration dates and times.
- Inform Survey Administrators of proper survey return procedures: completed surveys and their corresponding Class Information Sheets should be returned to the Campus Contact in their original course packet envelopes.
**Post-Administration**

SENSE results are released electronically at the beginning of March. The following tips can be useful in engaging internal and external audiences in discussions about your college’s data.

**Working with Faculty, Staff, and Administrators**

The following tools and ideas can spark meaningful conversation about the college’s SENSE results with faculty, staff, and administrators. Remember to let the college’s priorities guide your discussion of the data.

- Use the SENSE Faculty Predictions Exercise, the College Connections Inventory, and the SENSE Student Services Staff Predictions Exercise as ways to introduce the data and make it relevant to faculty and staff.
- With Data Narrative Exercise faculty, staff, and administrators identify clusters of SENSE items related to existing initiatives or identified concerns at your college. Examples include academic advising and planning, developmental education, and student intake processes.
- Sponsor a discussion series or “brown bag lunches” to review results on the SENSE benchmarks of effective educational practice.
- Plan a convocation day or professional development event focused on entering student engagement.

**Working with Students**

SENSE data provide valuable information to help you identify strengths and areas in need of improvement at your college. The Center encourages colleges to hold focus groups to learn more about what students are reporting in their survey responses. The survey responses tell you the “what” about students’ experiences; in focus groups you can learn the “why.” In addition to gathering specific details about student experiences, these structured discussions will help you uncover possible strategies for improvement. The Focus Group Toolkit provides information on planning for and conducting focus groups.

**Sharing your Story**

Your college can share success stories in a number of ways, including the following:

- Present your SENSE findings at national, statewide, and local conferences.
- Showcase findings, initiatives, and improvements on your college website.
- Use the SENSE Results News Release template inform the media of your college’s successes.

**Future Administrations**

Most SENSE member colleges participate on a two- or three-year administration cycle. Consistent participation allows colleges to engage in continuous improvement efforts and to gauge the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives.

**CCSSE**

In addition to SENSE, member colleges may participate in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) to help them understand students’ overall experiences at the college and to improve institutional practices that affect student success. Whereas SENSE is conducted during the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall academic term, CCSSE is conducted in the spring term, and provides a snapshot of overall student engagement at the college.

**CCFSSE**

As a companion to CCSSE, the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) is an online survey that provides information about how faculty members spend their time both in and out of the classroom, as well as information about faculty members’ perceptions of students’ levels of engagement. Sharing CCFSSE results can be an effective method for engaging faculty members in data-driven conversations about student engagement at the college.

**SOSE**

Another companion to CCSSE, the Survey of Online Student Engagement (SOSE) helps community and technical colleges gather engagement data from online-only students at their institutions by asking questions that focus on aspects of student engagement in the online learning environment.