

Data Narrative Exercise

A Narrative Approach to Sharing Data

Sharing data in a meaningful way — a way that promotes positive change — can be a challenge, especially when the dataset is large and the audience diverse. A data narrative approach encourages deeper, more meaningful data-driven conversations. This approach uses data to tell a story — a story that develops and takes shape as data are shared and discussed.

As group members talk about the meaning behind the data, a storyline develops, making the data more relevant and more relatable.

The data narrative exercise is designed to be conducted in small groups, followed by a facilitated discussion with the larger group. During each session, groups are presented with a series of simply stated, related data points, with each data point being shared one at a time. After each data point is revealed, groups spend time discussing what the data point means to them in terms of their own work at the college. As group members talk about the meaning behind the data, a storyline develops, making the data more relevant and more relatable. Each data point is meant to build on the other, at times challenging members to take an honest look at their own roles in the college student experience.

Instructions for conducting a data narrative exercise are outlined below and followed by example data point sets.

1

Defining the Focus

An in-depth review of your results is an essential step in preparing a data narrative exercise. Determining areas in which your college is meeting goals and areas in which improvements are necessary will help frame the discussion.

Next, it is important to consider your audience — who will be attending the session, which areas of campus will be represented, and in what areas these individuals can potentially have the most positive impact. A thorough review of your results and consideration of your audience will help define the focus of the session.



2

Selecting Key Data Points

The objective in selecting key data points to share is to keep the dataset focused. Select two or three data points that speak directly to the focus of the session. Each data point should build on the previous one, enabling the group to develop a clearer understanding of the issue and to formulate meaning around the issue, making the discussion more salient and tangible.



If, for example, a strategic goal of the college is to move toward mandatory advising for all students, and your data show that less than half of your students use advising services, select data points that highlight advising specifically (e.g., *CCSSE* Items 4l, 12a, and 20 and/or *SENSE* Items 18d-h, 20a, 20b, 22, and 23).

If the session's focus is term-to-term persistence and your data show that over half of your students indicate that caring for dependents is a likely reason they would choose to withdraw from college, look at related items such as frequency, satisfaction, and use of child care services on campus (*CCSSE* Items 12f1-3).

Considered individually, data points should be meaningful, but should be even more compelling when considered in conjunction with other relevant data.

3

Presenting the Data

The data narrative exercise is conducted first in small groups. After the audience has been split into small groups, present the data. You can share data via a presentation on paper, or whatever works best for your college. The objective is to share each data point one at a time and to allow discussion after each data point is revealed.

EXAMPLE DATASET*

1st Data Point: *“Sixty-eight percent of our students indicate that obtaining an associate degree is a primary goal for attending the college.”*

- ▶ Groups should discuss the implications of this data point. What does it mean? What questions does it raise?

2nd Data Point: *“Seventy-four percent of our students consider Academic Advising/Planning to be ‘Very’ important.”*

- ▶ Groups should discuss how this data point informs the first one. What additional questions does this data point raise?

3rd Data Point: *“Forty-three percent of our students report ‘Never’ using Academic Advising/ Planning services.”*

- ▶ Groups should discuss how this data point informs the first two. Does this data point change your perspective on the issue? What are the implications now?

**Data presented are hypothetical; use college-specific and/or CCSSE/SENSE Cohort data when conducting the data narrative exercise.*

4

Large Group Discussion

After small groups have had time to discuss the data and formulate a clearer understanding of the issues, each group should share their thoughts — their version of the “story.” The objective is to meld each group’s story into a larger discussion on the topic. Some stories may align, while others may challenge the group to take an even closer look at the issue.

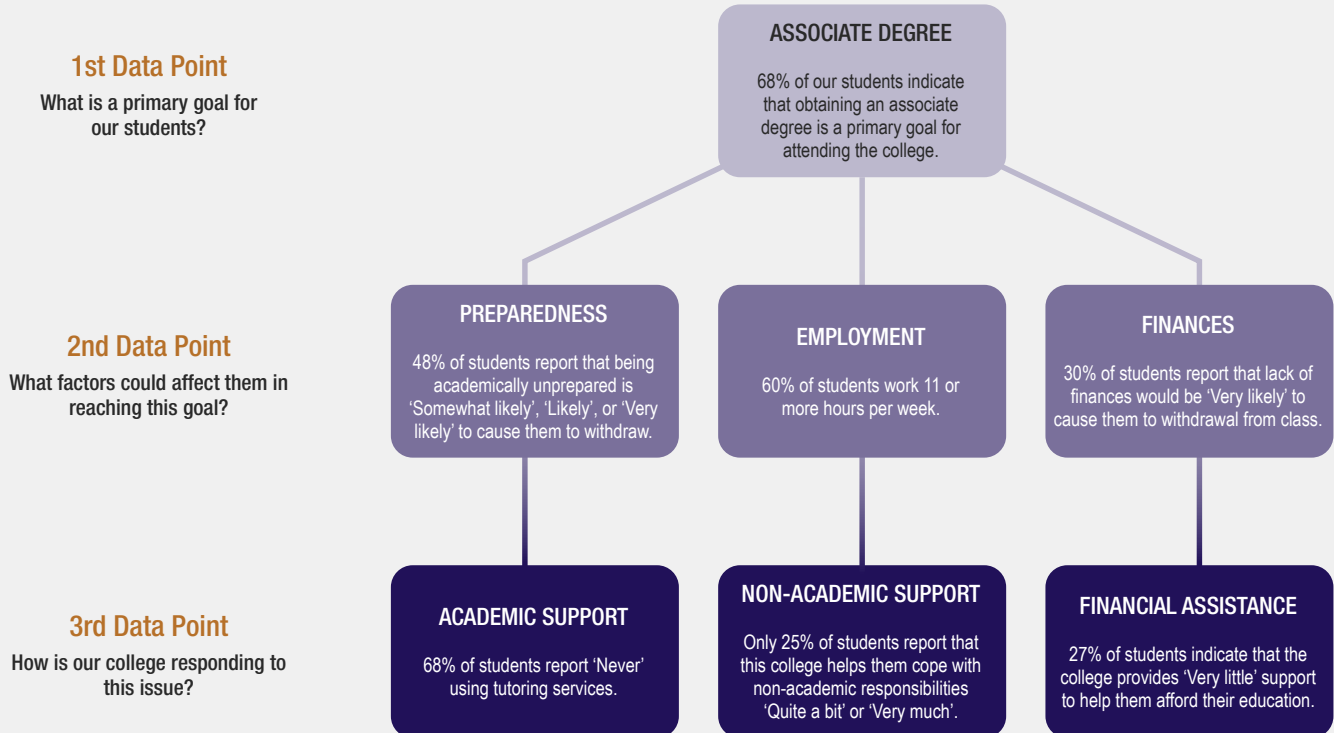
The data narrative exercise is designed to encourage discussion among diverse audiences about specific issues of focus for the college. This tool, while designed for sharing results with a larger group, can be adapted for data sharing among specific areas of campus — within academic departments, student services units, student groups, etc. Selecting key data points will take time; however, if done purposefully, the data narrative exercise can yield powerful discussions that can lead to the development of actionable improvement strategies.



Example Data Point Sets

The chart that follows outlines the process your college might employ to select a data point set for your data narrative exercise. Start with a key concept that can be informed by other relevant findings at your college. Examine related areas and their implications for student engagement. Data presented are hypothetical; use college-specific and/or CCSSE/SENSE Cohort data when conducting the data narrative exercise.

Additional areas that may be of interest to your institution are shown on the next page.



Area of Interest	CCSSE Items	SENSE Items
Academic and Curricular Experiences	4a-4s, 8a, 8f, 15-17, 22	17e-f, 19a-s
Academic Advising/Planning	4l, 12a, 20	18d-h, 20a, 22, 23
Career Development and Counseling	4l, 8a, 11a, 11h-i, 12b	20b
Challenges	10b, 10d-e, 23a-e, 24, 25	24b, 25
Critical Thinking	4d, 5b-f, 11d	21a-c
Educational Goals	26a-f	37a-c
Financial Assistance	12g, 23d, 27a-h	15a-c, 16, 18i-j, 20g
Job Skills/Job Placement	4l, 8a, 11a, 11h-i, 12b-c, 26d	20b-c
Orientation and Registration	13, 14	7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Peer-to-peer interaction in class	4a-b, 4f, 4r	19a, 19g
Peer-to-peer interaction out of class	4g-h, 4q	19h-j, 19r
Placement (Developmental, ESL)	8b-e, 18	12a-c, 13, 14, 17a-d
Relationships	4f-h, 4p, 4q, 4r, 9c, 9e, 12i	18a-b, 18p-s, 19j, 19n, 19q, 23
Student-Staff Interaction	12a-c, 12e-g, 12j-m, 20	20a-c, 20f-g, 20j-k
Student Satisfaction	12a2-12m2, 35, 36	27
Support Services	9b, 9d-f, 12a-m	20a-k
Writing	4c-d, 6c, 11b	19b