

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

KEY BENCHMARKS, ITEMS and 2008 Results

Why Focus on Student Engagement?

The research findings are unequivocal. Student learning and student retention are correlated strongly with student engagement. The more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, with the subject matter being learned — the more likely they are to persist in their college studies and to achieve at higher levels. This connection has been emphasized in a number of major studies and reports on the undergraduate experience. For example:

- *Involvement in Learning*, a 1984 report sponsored by the National Institute of Education, clearly states “two fundamental principles about the conditions of educational excellence everywhere.” Those principles are:
 1. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
 2. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement in learning (p.19).
- In “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” (1987), Chickering and Gamson provide this oft-quoted guidance:

Good practice in undergraduate education:

1. Encourages student-faculty contact.
 2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
 3. Encourages active learning.
 4. Gives prompt feedback.
 5. Emphasizes time on task.
 6. Communicates high expectations.
 7. Respects diverse talents and ways of knowing.
- In *How College Affects Students* (1991), Pascarella and Terenzini affirm from their examination of 20 years of research that “students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not so involved.”
 - In *Leaving College* (1993), Tinto summarizes recent evidence by saying:

Simply put, the same forces of contact and involvement that influence persistence also appear to shape student learning. Though the research is far from complete, it is apparent that the more students are involved in the social and intellectual life of a college, the more frequently they make contact with faculty and other students about learning issues, especially outside the class, the more students are likely to learn (p. 69).

CCSSE Five Benchmarks and 2008 Nationwide Results

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives. The following seven survey items contribute to this benchmark.

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class

- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

2008 Nationwide Results

- 64% of respondents report that they asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions either often or very often. This leaves 36% who have engaged in these activities less frequently or not at all.
- Only 28% have often or very often made a class presentation. Almost one third (31%) have never done so.
- Fewer than half (47%) often or very often worked with other students on projects during class, while 13% report never having that experience.
- Only 21% worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- A small percentage (8%) have tutored or taught other students often or very often.
- Half of respondents (50%) often or very often discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Student Effort

Students' behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals. "Time on task" is a key variable, and there are a variety of settings and means through which students may apply themselves to the learning process. Eight survey items that indicate how frequently students engage in a number of activities important to their learning and success are associated with this benchmark. They are:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- Come to class without completing readings or assignments
- Used peer or other tutoring services
- Used skill labs
- Used a computer lab

During the current school year:

- How many books did you read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment
- How many hours did you spend in a typical week preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, or other activities related to your program)

2008 Nationwide Results

- Nearly half (49%) of respondents indicate that they often or very often prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, though over a fifth (21%) report that they never did so.
- 60% of respondents report that they often or very often worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources, while 12% never did so.
- Only 13% of full-time students report spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class. Sixty-six percent of full-time students spend between one and 10 hours preparing for class. Among all students, 69% report that they come to class unprepared at least some of the time.
- Over a third (35%) of surveyed students participate sometimes or often in tutoring, while 46% do so rarely or never. Use of skill labs by 39% of students may be an encouraging result, and the use is more common among students who are academically under prepared.

Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Ten survey items 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. They are:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

How much does your coursework at this college emphasize:

- Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
- Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways
- Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods
- Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill

During the current school year:

- How many assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings did you read
- How many papers or reports of any length did you write
- To what extent have your examinations challenged you to do your best work

How much does this college emphasize:

- Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying

2008 Nationwide Results

- 49% of students indicate that they very often or often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.
- 72% of students surveyed indicate that their college encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying, either "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 25% of *full-time* students report that they have written four or fewer papers or reports of any length during the current school year.
- 68% indicate that their exams are relatively to extremely challenging, while 9% find them relatively to extremely easy.
- 66% of surveyed students report that their coursework emphasizes "very much" or "quite a bit" analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, but smaller percentages report an emphasis on using information to perform a new skill (60%) or using the mental processes of synthesis (58%), application (56%), and judgment (51%).

Student-Faculty Interaction

In general, the more interaction students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist toward achievement of their educational goals. Personal interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps them focus on their academic progress. Working with an instructor on a project or serving with faculty members on a college committee lets students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problems. Through such interactions, faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning. The six items used in this benchmark are:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class
- Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance
- Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework

2008 Nationwide Results

- 17% of students say they have never used e-mail to communicate with an instructor. 48%, however, have used e-mail for that purpose often or very often.
- 46% report that they have discussed grades or assignments with an instructor either often/ very often, leaving over half who have done so occasionally/ never.
- While 25% of students have often or very often talked with an advisor or instructor about career plans, 31% say they have never done so.
- Only 16% of students report having often or very often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class, and 47% have never engaged with faculty in that way.
- Only 8% of students say that they have often or very often worked with instructors on activities outside of class.
- 57% state that they often or very often received prompt feedback from instructors on their performance. And community college students generally give faculty members quite positive ratings regarding their availability and helpfulness

Support for Learners

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus. Community college students also benefit from services targeted to assist them with academic and career planning, academic skill development, and other areas that may affect learning and retention. The following seven survey items contribute to this benchmark:

How much does this college emphasize:

- Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college
- Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Providing the support you need to thrive socially
- Providing the financial support you need to afford your education

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Used academic advising/planning services
- Used career counseling services

2008 Nationwide Results

- While students attribute relatively high importance to academic advising and career counseling, 35% to 51% of students rarely or never use them.
- Highest levels of dissatisfaction are expressed with (1) job placement assistance*, (2) career counseling*, (3) financial aid advising* (*tied).
- While 71% of students indicate that their college provides the support they need to succeed at the college either “quite a bit” or “very much,” a smaller percentage, 45%, report that the college provides the financial support they need to afford it.
- One-quarter report that the college helps them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) either quite a bit or very much, and 41% say that “very little” help is provided on that front.
- 48% report that their college puts emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.