

ACT ON FACT

Using Data To Improve Student Success

2006 Findings Executive Summary



Each year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*) presents the results of its annual survey — and helps colleges use that information to improve student learning and persistence. *CCSSE* results give community colleges objective and relevant data about students' experiences at their colleges so they can better understand how effectively they are engaging their students — and identify areas for improvement.

This work is essential. Community colleges often serve students who have the fewest options and the greatest challenges. If they do not succeed at their community colleges, these students likely will not have access to further education, productive jobs, or any of the benefits these opportunities bring. When this happens, it isn't just the students who lose. Our neighborhoods and our nation need these students to succeed. More and more, we rely on every individual to participate productively in our economy, our democracy, and the worldwide community.

Why Student Engagement? Why CCSSE?

Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study — the more likely they are to learn, to stick with their studies, and to attain their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is a valuable yardstick for assessing the quality of colleges' educational practices and identifying ways they can produce more successful results — more students across all subgroups learning at higher levels and attaining their academic goals.

CCSSE's survey, *The Community College Student Report*, focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors

that promote student engagement. Beginning this year, all *CCSSE* data analyses include a three-year cohort of participating colleges. Using a three-year cohort increases the number of institutions and students in the national dataset, optimizes representation of institutions by size and location, and therefore, increases the reliability of the overall results.

This year's three-year cohort — called the 2006 *CCSSE* Cohort — includes all colleges that participated in *CCSSE* from 2004 through 2006. If a college participated more than one time in the three-year period, the cohort includes data only from its most recent year of participation. The 2006 *CCSSE* Cohort includes 249,548 students from 447 institutions in 46 states.

CCSSE Is a Starting Point: How Colleges Use Data

For colleges, participating in CCSSE and getting the results are not ends unto themselves. In fact, they are just the beginning of understanding — and acting on — student results. Colleges that use data wisely are in a never-ending cycle of gathering, analyzing, and most important, *using* data. Their work looks like this:

The inarguable fundamentals

1. The center of community college work is student learning, persistence, and success.
2. Every program, every service, every academic policy is perfectly designed to achieve the exact outcome it currently produces. If a program isn't producing the desired outcome, the only rational action is to modify or discontinue it.

The cycle of using CCSSE data to assess, inform, and act

1. **Identify the areas that are most important to your college.** What priorities are identified in your strategic plan? What issues does your college most value? What are the needs of your students? These answers may be defined broadly (e.g., we place a high value on student-faculty interaction) or narrowly (e.g., how can we strengthen the emphasis on writing across our college curriculum?).
2. **Identify the survey items that address the identified priorities and the student groups in need.** For example, colleges concerned about strengthening students' writing skills might carefully examine writing expectations across the curriculum, devise appropriate assessments of writing, and agree on rubrics to maximize consistency in feedback for students.
3. **Review and analyze the data — part 1: Start with the benchmarks.** Benchmark scores highlight a handful of key areas of the student experience. They don't tell the whole story, but they paint broad outlines — and give clues about where colleges should look more closely.
4. **Review and analyze the data — part 2: Look at individual survey items associated with each benchmark.** For each item, ask whether the college's performance is what users expect and what they desire.

Focus attention on educational practices, programs, and policies that may be in need of improvement and those worthy of celebration.

5. **Review and analyze the data — part 3: Disaggregate the data** to gauge engagement and outcomes among various student groups. The goal is to look at the data and see which students are being well served and which may need more intervention. All colleges should disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, income, and enrollment status (full-time versus part-time) to identify their more- and less-engaged student groups.
6. **Get members of year college community involved and encourage them to ask questions.** Involve faculty members and others and see what questions they raise about the data — and do so early in the process. Efforts to initiate change typically are more effective when key groups identify areas of interest or concern themselves.
7. **Design strategies that address concerns and set targets for progress.** For example, colleges concerned about retention might build career advising into coursework, require a visit with an academic advisor in the first week of classes, or have a visible presence of staff and faculty helping students navigate around campus in the first weeks of classes.
8. **Share the data and plans to address them with a broad range of stakeholders,** including faculty, staff, students, families of students, community members, business leaders, and policymakers. Involve these people in improvement efforts.
9. **Track progress by measuring outcomes.** Use CCSSE (comparing the same survey items after each administration of the survey), student cohort tracking, program/service evaluations, student focus groups, student learning assessments, and other means to collect data. Continue to disaggregate data and look at outcomes for the same groups of students.
10. **Scale up efforts that are working; modify or discontinue those that are not.** Channel resources where they will best serve students and lead to better student outcomes.
11. **Repeat.**

2006 CCSSE Cohort Results: Looking Behind the Numbers

As colleges review their CCSSE results — looking at individual survey items and disaggregating findings to see how various student groups are faring — they work to get at the student experiences behind the numbers. They ask questions, such as:

- Which students are having a more productive college experience? For whom is our current practice working? Who, if anyone, might be left behind?
- What are the differences in various students' experiences? Are certain practices mandatory for some students but not for others? Should they be required for all students?
- What practices are built into the classroom experience now? Should we incorporate more expectations, activities, or services into coursework?

Below we provide results for the 2006 CCSSE Cohort along with a discussion of how colleges might analyze the data. The results are organized by benchmark, but they focus on the specific survey items associated with each benchmark. For detailed results for every survey item associated with each benchmark, visit www.ccsse.org.

Active and Collaborative Learning

When reviewing the survey items associated with active and collaborative learning, it often is useful to compare activities that happen in the classroom with those that happen outside the classroom. Given the competing demands for students' time (working, caring for dependents, commuting) and the fact that most students attend college part-time, colleges have limited time to engage their students. The more colleges understand current patterns of student engagement, the better they can design programs to expand active and collaborative learning.

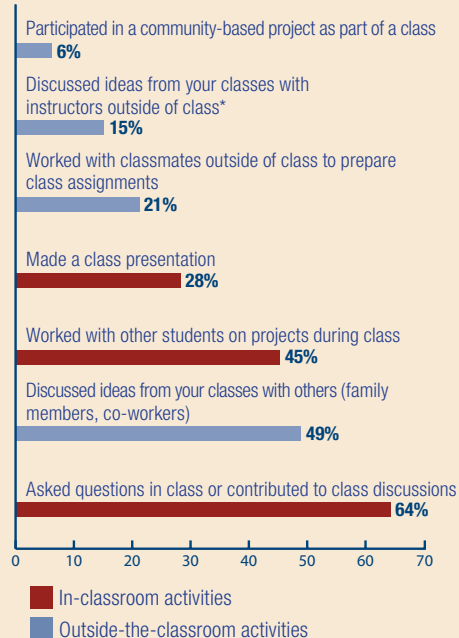
Key findings. More students are engaged in active and collaborative learning inside the classroom than outside. For example, whereas 21% of students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, more than double that number, 45%, work with other students on projects during class.

Next steps. To strengthen active and collaborative learning, faculty members may build more collaborative projects into their classroom activities. Colleges also may mandate the inclusion of community-based projects in

certain classes or introduce more learning communities or study groups. Finally, colleges may consider professional development that helps faculty members become more comfortable with interactive teaching.

ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: IN THE CLASSROOM COMPARED WITH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Percentage of students responding *often* or *very often*



*This survey item is not part of the active and collaborative learning benchmark but is included here to help illustrate the differences in student experiences inside and outside the classroom.

Source: 2006 CCSSE Cohort data.

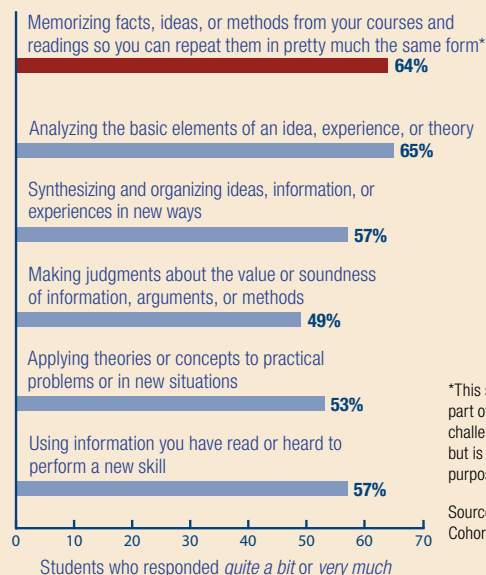
Student Effort

When reviewing survey items associated with student effort, colleges may compare performance of different student groups. They also should ask questions about how much students *should be* studying, reading, and writing.

Key findings. More than a third of full-time students (38%) spend five hours per week or less preparing for class. Full-time women put forward more effort by this measure than full-time men: 33% of women, versus 46% of men, spend between zero and five hours preparing for class; and 52% of women, versus 46% of men, spend between six and 20 hours preparing for class.

KEY FINDINGS FOR ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?



*This survey item is not part of the academic challenge benchmark but is included here for purposes of comparison.

Source: 2006 CCSSE Cohort data.

Next steps. Colleges that are focused on encouraging greater student effort may consider mandating a first-year student success course that addresses learning strategies and expectations. They also may find ways to connect all students with college services — writing and math centers, peer tutoring, and other resources that promote student success — in the first weeks of their academic experience.

To further engage men in particular, colleges might review other survey items to see where men are engaged and then create programs that build study skills and academic engagement into those areas of the student experience.

Academic Challenge

When analyzing data for survey items associated with academic challenge, colleges might compare students' responses on survey items that correspond with higher-level cognition with their responses about memorizing facts and ideas.

Key findings. The 2006 CCSSE Cohort responses indicate that students' coursework emphasizes rote memorization as much as, or more than, higher-level cognition. Almost two-thirds (64%) of students report that their coursework emphasizes work associated with memorizing facts *quite a bit or very much*. A similar percentage of respondents say their coursework emphasizes analyzing ideas, and fewer respondents report that their coursework emphasizes synthesizing ideas or information, making judgments about the value and soundness of information, and applying concepts to practical problems or in new situations.

Next steps. Colleges with similar results may focus on learning outcomes or core competencies that all students are expected to meet to graduate and identify how each course contributes to these outcomes. Some colleges implement writing requirements in most courses. Others create interdisciplinary faculty teams that develop strategies, such as oral presentations in math classes, that bring core skills to all types of classes. Colleges also may consider faculty development that focuses on bringing higher-level thinking into coursework.

Student-Faculty Interaction

In the past, CCSSE data for this benchmark have revealed intriguing engagement differences for black men, whose connections to the college tend to emphasize out-of-class and social activities. Black men, for example, are more likely than other groups to work with instructors on activities other than coursework. Colleges whose data reflect these types of differences may better serve black male students if they

find ways to build on out-of-class interests to strengthen students' academic engagement.

Key findings. It is useful to compare part-time and full-time students' responses to survey items associated with student-faculty interaction. In the 2006 CCSSE Cohort, responses to all but one survey item associated with student-faculty interaction show significant differences between part-time and full-time students. Part-time students are less likely than full-time students to use e-mail to communicate with an instructor (34% of part-time students, versus 47% of full-time students, say they *often* or *very often* do so), talk about career plans with an instructor or advisor (19% of part-time students versus 30% of full-time students), and discuss grades or assignments with an instructor (40% of part-time students versus 51% of full-time students).

Next steps. Given the dramatic differences in the experience of part-time and full-time students, colleges might explore ways to maximize such interactions for students who spend limited time on campus. They might, for example, revisit advising roles for both full-time and part-time faculty, bearing in mind that part-time faculty typically teach at least half of all sections taught at community colleges — and are more likely to teach in the evenings, when part-time students are more likely to attend classes.

Support for Learners

Once again, the story behind the numbers emerges through disaggregating the data. Each year, CCSSE data show significant differences in engagement between

academically underprepared students and their more prepared peers across all benchmarks. Academically underprepared students, in general, exert more effort, experience greater support from their colleges, and use academic services more extensively than their adequately prepared peers. They also experience greater academic challenges and, as high-risk students, are more likely to discontinue their studies.

Research shows that early success and, therefore, early intervention are critical for retaining these students — and that these efforts yield high dividends.

Key findings. Academically underprepared students use services more than their adequately prepared peers, but far fewer than half of academically underprepared stu-

dents report using these services often. Among all students, the gap between perceived importance and use of these services also indicates that more students value these services than use them.

Next steps. Colleges that want more students to take advantage of services must make services inescapable by integrating them into students' educational experiences and providing them at times and in places that accommodate students' schedules. Colleges might, for example, make the use of certain services mandatory or build them into coursework, or they might offer services in the evenings and on weekends, when students — and in particular, high-risk students — can more easily take advantage of them.

CCFSSE: Go to the Head of the Class

The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE), which is aligned with CCSSE, elicits information from faculty about their teaching practices, the ways they spend time both in and out of class, and their perceptions regarding students' educational experiences. CCFSSE now is in its second year, and this year, all CCFSSE analyses use a two-year cohort of participating colleges. This year's cohort — called the 2006 CCFSSE Cohort — includes all colleges that participated in CCFSSE in 2005 and 2006 (each college's most recent year of participation).

How Faculty Members Spend Their Time

This year's CCSSE special focus survey items target academic planning and advising because of their demonstrated value in helping students succeed. Students, moreover, identify faculty members as their best source of academic guidance. Given that finding, it is disheartening to note that 22% of faculty members do not spend any time in a typical week advising students.

A review of how faculty members spend their class time also yields noteworthy results. Almost a third of faculty respondents report that they spend more than half of their class time lecturing. On the other end of the spectrum, more than half (51%) of respondents say they spend less than 20% of their class time on teacher-led discussion, and 91% of faculty respondents say that they spend less than 20% of their class time on in-class writing. Half of faculty respondents say they spend none of their class time on in-class writing.

As with CCSSE results, colleges should analyze their CCFSSE results in terms of their institutional priorities. These findings

suggest that to boost student engagement colleges might encourage more faculty members to use more engaging instructional strategies, integrate courses through learning communities, support each other with team teaching, and build service learning and other experiential learning opportunities into their coursework. CCFSSE results also can help colleges identify areas of focus for professional development.

CCFSSE: HOW FACULTY MEMBERS USE CLASS TIME

In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time is spent on each of these activities?

	0%	1–19%	20–49%	50–74%	75–100%
Lecture	2%	27%	40%	22%	9%
Teacher-led discussion	4%	47%	38%	8%	3%
Teacher-student shared responsibility	24%	45%	25%	5%	2%
Small-group activities	22%	53%	20%	4%	1%
Student presentations	39%	50%	10%	1%	1%
In-class writing	50%	41%	7%	1%	<1%
Experiential	64%	17%	12%	4%	2%
Hands-on practice	27%	34%	22%	9%	7%

Source: 2006 CCFSSE Cohort data.

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Special Focus: Academic Advising and Planning

Roadmaps for Success

This year, CCSSE introduced a new feature for its survey: five *special focus* survey items that examine an area of student experience and institutional performance that is critical for student success. Each year, the special focus items will concentrate on a different topic. With this structure, CCSSE can present fresh ideas and address current interests — and keep the core survey stable so colleges can make comparisons across survey years.

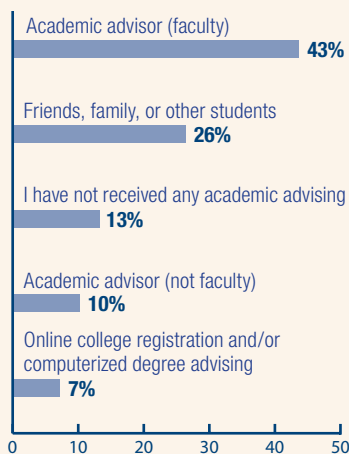
The 2006 special focus items help colleges take a closer look at academic advising and planning. Every year, CCSSE respondents place more value on academic advising than

on any other student service, and consistently, there is a gap between the number of students who value advising and those who use it. In the 2006 CCSSE Cohort, 89% of respondents say that academic advising is *somewhat* or *very important*; 55% report using that service *sometimes* or *often*.

The importance of academic advising and planning is well documented. Having a plan — a clear goal and a roadmap for reaching it — plays a critical role in students' choosing to return to school the next day, next month, and next year. Anyone interested in reaching a goal is well served by having clear milestones for progress. In focus groups, community college students report a particularly strong need for these milestones because their educational goals compete with work, caring for dependents, and other responsibilities.

KEY FINDINGS: ACADEMIC ADVISING AND PLANNING

While attending this college, what has been your best source of academic advising?



Source: CCSSE 2006 data.

Faculty Members' Roles in Advising

The special focus questions show that students value advising from faculty members more than from any other source. When asked about their best source of advising, 43% of respondents choose faculty members. More than one-quarter of students (26%) name friends, family, or other students as their best source of advice, indicating that these sources are serving students better than services provided by their colleges. Only 7% of students say that online services are their best source of advising, suggesting that students value the personal interaction that is part of an advising relationship.

Asked to rate the strength of their relationships with their advisors, 23% of all students say they do not use advising services. For part-time students, the percentage is 29%, a concern when nearly two-thirds of community college students attend part-time.



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