



# Engagement By Design

*2004 Findings*



## Acknowledgments

CCSSE is indebted to the 152 community colleges that participated in the 2004 survey. It requires continuous acts of courage to put data and evidence in front of an institution and ask hard questions about what must be learned from them. It requires continuous acts of will to make and support decisions that put resources in the most useful rather than the most popular or familiar places. And it requires truly relentless focus to avoid all the things that can divert community colleges from the central mission of helping students learn and achieve their academic goals.

We thank our member colleges for opening themselves to scrutiny and for doing so publicly. We thank them for continuously reaching for excellence in learning, teaching, and student success. These commitments alone set them apart from other institutions and help set a new standard for American higher education.

**Kay M. McClenney**

*Director*

Community College Survey of Student Engagement

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*“The Community College Survey of Student Engagement has provided Butler Community College with the means to critically assess our collective efforts to fully engage our students in the learning process. The results have prompted conversations that matter, resulting in a heightened focus upon the success of our students, particularly those most at risk.”*

**JACKIE VIETTI**

President, Butler Community College (KS)

## Engagement By Design: A Call To Action

Each year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) presents the results of its annual survey. These survey results help community colleges assess their educational practices so they can improve student outcomes in one of the most challenging and least understood sectors of American higher education.

The challenges facing community colleges include:

- ★ providing full access to education through open admissions;
- ★ serving a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals, from earning a degree to receiving on-the-job training;
- ★ serving students who have significant time commitments — to their families, their jobs, and their communities — in addition to their studies;
- ★ serving the students who were least well served by their previous public school education and therefore are most likely to have academic challenges;
- ★ serving disproportionately high numbers of low-income and first-generation college students; and
- ★ addressing all of these challenges while dealing with severe resource constraints.

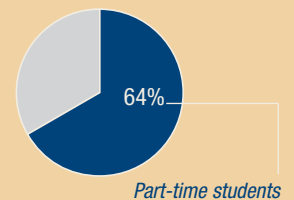
Overcoming these hurdles — providing quality education and the necessary support to help all students meet their educational goals — is the driving force of community colleges. It is their mission. It is their job. And it is achievable.

It is true that most community college students will continue to work, commute, and have other demands competing for their time. Many will continue to feel that abandoning their education is an easier path than continuing it.

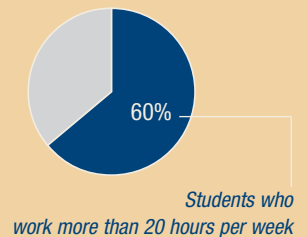
But these challenges do not make student engagement impossible. They simply indicate that student engagement is not likely to happen by accident. Engagement, therefore, must be intentional. It must happen by design.

### CCSSE Students Spend Limited Time on Campus

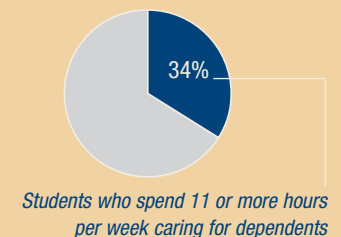
#### Two-Thirds of Students Are Enrolled Part-Time



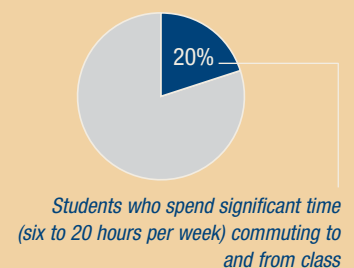
#### Most Students Work



#### Many Students Care for Dependents



#### Most Students Commute, Many Spend Significant Time Commuting



Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

## Improvement Is Essential

This year's *CCSSE* data bring good news about how community colleges are being intentional about engaging students — practicing engagement by design. But the data also reveal where individual colleges, and the field as a whole, have work to do.

And this work is essential. Community colleges tend to serve students who have the fewest options; if they do not succeed in their community college, students likely will not have access to productive jobs, further education, or any of the benefits these next steps bring. Community colleges, moreover, are not just preparing students for their own benefit. They are preparing students to contribute to their neighborhoods, the nation, and the world. Providing effective learning experiences is critical for both the students themselves and our society, which increasingly relies on every individual to participate productively in our economy, our democracy, and the global village.

For these reasons, community colleges must be focused on better understanding their current performance as a necessary first step toward building a better future.

Improving performance requires a serious, focused, and sustained effort. And it requires effective leadership across all levels of community colleges. Ultimately, *every action* a college takes — in classrooms, out of classrooms, in the ways it reaches out to and communicates with students, in the way its campus is configured and used — should be designed to improve student learning. And every project,

## Why Student Engagement?

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 and persist toward achieving their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is a valuable yardstick for assessing whether, and to what extent, an institution is employing educational practices likely to produce successful results — more students across all subgroups achieving their academic goals.

*CCSSE's* survey, *The Community College Student Report*, focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. *CCSSE* works with participating colleges to administer the survey, using research-based items to measure students' levels of engagement in a variety of areas. The colleges then receive their survey results, along with guidance and analysis they can use to improve their programs and services for students.

All *CCSSE* work is grounded in research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. *CCSSE* also makes its results public at its Web site, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

program, and practice should be evaluated on these terms as well.

Community colleges are working to help students learn and achieve their own academic goals. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*) is a tool that helps colleges be intentional about this work — intentional about assessing their educational practice and intentional about improving student outcomes by designing engagement strategies suited to their student populations. Through these efforts, community college leaders are setting goals; monitoring progress toward them; and step by step, year by year, encouraging innovation and improvement that will lead to better student outcomes.

*“One of the key reasons we chose to use CCSSE is that the authentic nature of the survey questions directly evaluates the learning environment. The questions encourage faculty and staff to focus on the most critical elements of student engagement as part of the teaching and learning process.”*

**HOMERO LOPEZ**

President, Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ)

## Looking Behind the Numbers: Practicing Engagement By Design

Community college students have strong aspirations for academic and career success. Asked to name their primary goals, more than a quarter (27%) of CCSSE 2004 respondents indicated completing a certificate program, 59% named obtaining an associate degree, and 53% said transferring to a four-year college or university. More than a third (39%) cited obtaining or updating job-related skills as a primary goal, while 29% named changing careers.

Unfortunately, available data show a significant, persistent, unacceptable gap between student aspirations and student outcomes as measured by graduation and transfer rates.

★ **More students aspire to earn degrees than actually do.** Only one-quarter of the students who entered a public two-year institution in 1995–96 with the goal of earning a degree or certificate had attained a credential at that institution by 2001, six years later.\*

★ **More students aspire to transfer than actually do.** 53% of students cite transferring to a four-year college as a primary goal (an additional 21% name it as a secondary goal), but national data indicate that only about 25% of students actually do transfer.\*\*

These facts and CCSSE data indicate that students may too often leave community colleges before they achieve their goals. Just as important, CCSSE data indicate that many students are not certain about their future educational plans. When asked about their educational plans for subsequent terms, only 11% of CCSSE respondents said they had accomplished their goals. It is encouraging that 67% planned to return to their community colleges within 12 months,

### Reflections: How Good Is Good Enough?

CCSSE and its member colleges must not shy away from the question of whether the performance reflected in survey results is *good enough*, either for individual institutions or for community colleges nationally. Our answer — and, we think, the answer likely to emerge from most discussions at most community colleges — is that no matter how good we are today, it is not as good as we need to be or as good as we are capable of becoming.

To help colleges consider this question, CCSSE presents information in two ways:

1. **Benchmarks**, described with a standardized mean of 50, provide overviews of key performance areas. They are useful for comparing performance across several areas within an institution and for comparing institutional performance to groups of similar institutions.\*\*\* Discussions of the five CCSSE benchmarks begin on page 12 of this report.
2. **Students' responses to individual survey items**, presented in absolute terms, help assess the performance of participating colleges on specific points. These responses are the place to see exactly what is happening and to ask the difficult question, *how good is good enough?*

Answering that question is a central challenge for each and every college; the answer will define, for each institution, what *quality* really means.

\*\*\* The CCSSE Web site, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org), provides benchmark data for the full CCSSE population, various subgroups within the population, and individual colleges. Users can create customized data searches, choosing to view data by variables including the type of institution (e.g., institutional size or location); student characteristic (e.g., full-time or part-time students, gender, or credential-/noncredential-seeking students); and combinations of these variables.

\*American Council on Education, "Student Success: Understanding Graduation and Persistence Rates," *ACE Issue Brief*. Washington, DC: ACE Center for Policy Analysis, 2003.

\*\*National Center for Education Statistics, *Community College Transfer Rates to 4-Year Institutions Using Alternative Definitions of Transfer*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2001.



but 17% of respondents — nearly one-fifth of the students — said their educational plans were uncertain.

### The Role of Intentional, Inescapable Engagement

These figures identify significant percentages of community college students who are primary candidates for more effective engagement strategies. Community colleges cannot expect that a student will have a chance encounter with a professor that leads to informal academic or career advising. They cannot count on students to have unplanned discussions about classwork over dinner or study sessions. Most students simply are not on campus enough for these types of engagement to occur spontaneously.

Community colleges, therefore, must find ways to promote student success by making engagement inescapable. The good news is that community colleges do not have to do this work alone. Taken as a whole, CCSSE results, other community college research, and expert judgment suggest a number of strategies that can provide important returns in terms of strengthened student engagement and improved student outcomes.

In addition, community colleges can learn from each other. This report highlights examples of student engagement, provided by colleges of all sizes, from all regions of the country. It includes examples of intentionally engaging practices, provided by benchmark (starting on page 14), as well as examples that cut across multiple benchmarks and demonstrate the engagement strategies in action (starting on the next page).

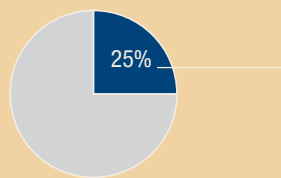
#### Students' Primary Goals

Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this community college.

	Primary goal	Secondary goal	Not a goal
Complete a certificate program	27%	19%	55%
Obtain an associate degree	59%	20%	21%
Transfer to a four-year college or university	53%	21%	26%
Obtain or update job-related skills	39%	27%	34%
Self-improvement/personal enjoyment	39%	34%	27%
Change careers	29%	16%	55%

Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

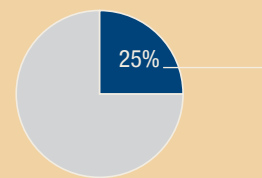
#### Students Who Earn Degrees



25% of students who entered a public two-year institution in 1995–96 with the goal of earning a degree or certificate had attained a credential at that institution by 2001, six years later.

Source: American Council on Education, "Student Success: Understanding Graduation and Persistence Rates," ACE Issue Brief. Washington, DC: ACE Center for Policy Analysis, 2003.

#### Students Who Transfer

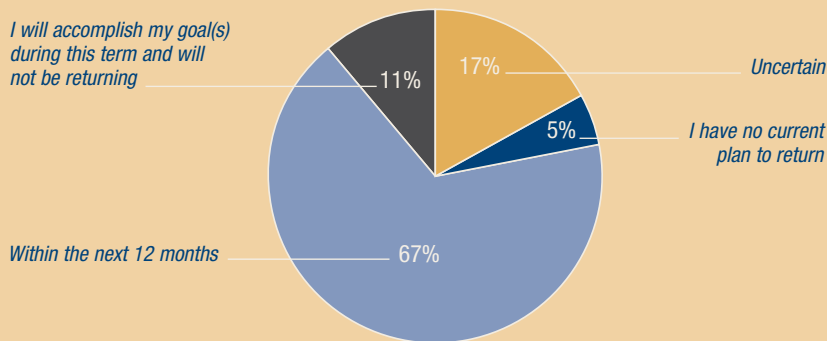


53% of students cite transferring to a four-year college as a primary goal (an additional 21% name it as a secondary goal), but only 25% of students do transfer.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Community College Transfer Rates to 4-Year Institutions Using Alternative Definitions of Transfer*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2001.

#### Students' Plans after the Current Semester

When do you plan to take classes at this college again?



Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

**STRATEGY 1**

**Engage Early, Engage Often**

Community colleges typically lose about half of their students prior to the beginning of the sophomore year, and data indicate that most students who leave college before achieving their goals do so early in their collegiate experience.

Colleges can address this precipitous loss of students by designing engagement efforts that start from the moment of students' first interactions with the college — and continue with powerful focus during their first few weeks and months as college students.

Such efforts can focus on students who likely are less familiar with negotiating a college campus, such as first-generation college students, who represent one-third (33%) of CCSSE respondents.

**Intentional Engagement Strategies**

**Sinclair Community College** (OH) increased retention rates after better marketing their learning support and financial aid services.

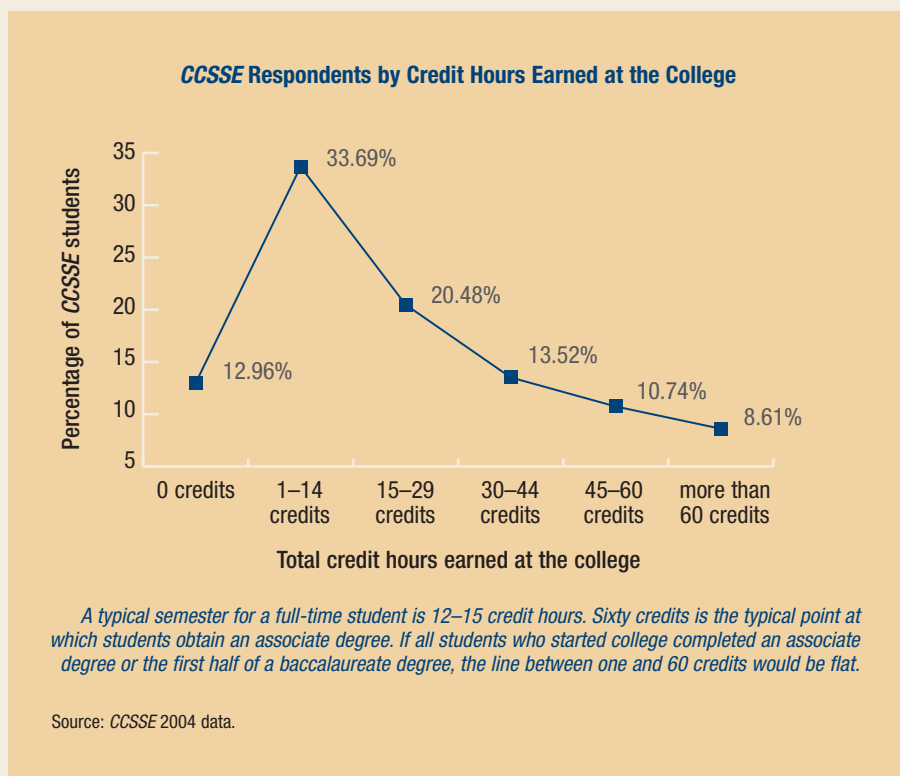
The Start Right program at **Valencia Community College** (FL) mandates developmental and prerequisite sequences, giving students a better chance at early success. In addition,

application deadlines are enforced, and students are not added to classes after the class has met just once, so real work can begin on the first day.

**Tallahassee Community College** (FL) creates a positive, helpful environment at the beginning of each term. Throughout the campus, students can stop at information tents for help finding classes or other resources. Office employees wear “Ask Me” buttons, and faculty and staff create welcome stations stocked with refreshments, maps, and other information in academic building lobbies.

*“Faculty members have used the CCSSE results to create a series of classroom and out-of-class projects that focus on critical thinking and improved course retention, student success by any definition.”*

**BILL LAW**  
President, Tallahassee Community College (FL)





## STRATEGY 2

## Stress Academic Advising

Having a plan — a clear goal and a step-by-step strategy for attaining it — plays a critical role in students' choosing to return to school the next day, next month, and next year. There are indications from college data that the simple act of declaring a major (a form of articulating a plan) can be a key factor in student persistence.

Thus, engagement efforts that encourage students to set and meet goals — such as academic and career advising — can have a significant impact on student retention and, ultimately, student success. Certainly the 17% of students who report that they are undecided about whether they will return to college after the current semester are likely candidates for such advising.

Unfortunately, more than a third (36%) of CCSSE respondents report that they rarely or never use academic advising/planning services, even though 88% cite advising as important. Nearly half of students (49%) report that they rarely or never use career counseling services.

**Intentional Engagement Strategies**

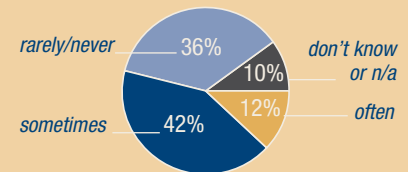
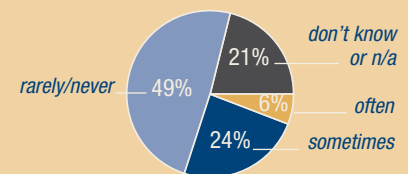
The LifeMap program at **Valencia Community College** (FL) provides developmental advising that supports student planning (for education, career, and life) and aims to strengthen students' self-confidence and decision-making skills. Developmental advising refers to the process of making students self-sufficient. Faculty and staff are students' advising partners, providing significant information and support initially. The expectation, however, is that as students gain experience they will increasingly take the lead in defining and implementing their educational and career goals until, ultimately, they are completely directing their own learning process. LifeMap includes a variety of electronic tools, including MyCareerPlanner and MyEducationPlan.

**Sinclair Community College** (OH) saw significant increases in new, at-risk student persistence and success rates as a result of its Student Success Plan system, which stresses individual learning plans and includes counseling and intervention.

*“As we work to uncover best-practice models in transitions along career pathways between high schools, community colleges, and the workplace, CCSSE helps us stay connected to the student experience. There literally is nothing like it. CCSSE spurs those important and complex conversations about the student experience in the transitions process and challenges thoughtful educators to reach for more.”*

**MARK MILLIRON**

Executive Director, Education Practice, SAS Institute, Inc.

**Students' Use of Academic Advising/Planning Services****Students' Use of Career Counseling Services**

Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

## STRATEGY 3

## Emphasize Effective Developmental Education

Almost 50% of all first-time community college students are assessed as underprepared for the academic demands of college-level courses, and the numbers are far higher in some settings.\* Colleges that design strategies to retain these students learn that effective remediation pays high dividends.

First and most important, students who benefit from effective developmental education will then have the opportunity to be successful in college-level studies. The reality is that without developmental education to level the playing field, they will not have that opportunity.

In addition, most students who successfully complete the prescribed remedial course sequence become productively employed: 16% as professionals; 54% in mid-level, white-collar, or technical positions; and 20% as high-skill, blue-collar workers. Only 9% remain in unskilled or low-skill jobs.\*\*

There is other good news: According to results on a variety of CCSSE items, developmental students appear to be more engaged in their community college experience than their academically prepared peers. For example, developmental students are significantly more likely to:

- ★ Talk about career plans with an instructor (26% vs. 19%).
- ★ Prepare multiple drafts of assignments before turning them in (56% vs. 42%).
- ★ Work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's expectations (52% vs. 43%).
- ★ Indicate higher educational outcomes in nearly all areas. For example, when asked if their college experience contributed to their ability to think critically and analytically, 70% of developmental students answer "very much" or "quite a bit" as compared with 59% of academically prepared students.

They also report, unfortunately, that they are more likely to withdraw from college because they are academically unprepared or lack finances.

### The Need for Developmental Courses Is High

Which of the following have you done, are you doing, or do you plan to do while attending this college?

Take a developmental reading course	27%
Take a developmental writing course	31%
Take a developmental math course	47%
Take developmental study skills	31%

Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

### Intentional Engagement Strategies

**Prince George's Community College** (MD) requires aspiring college students who lack sufficient reading, writing, and computational skills to complete the college's developmental program. The later academic performance of those who successfully complete the developmental program is as strong as the performance of students who never needed remediation.

**Miami-Dade College** (FL) has learning communities that combine mathematics and student life skills (SLS) courses. The math classes focus on math competencies while paying attention to study skills and habits. The SLS courses address time management, math anxiety reduction, test-taking strategies, learning styles, and self-confidence. This approach leads to math retention and pass rates that are consistently above the norm.

\*Roueche, J.E., and S.D. Roueche, *High Stakes, High Performance: Making Remedial Education Work*. Washington, DC: Community College Press, 1999; Grubb, W.N., *From Black Box to Pandora's Box: Evaluating Remedial/ Developmental Education*. CCRC Brief 11. New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2001.

\*\*McCabe, R.H., *No One to Waste: A Report to Public Decision Makers and Community College Leaders*. Washington, DC: Community College Press, 2000.

## STRATEGY 4

## Redesign Educational Experiences

Most community college students work, nearly all commute, and many spend time caring for dependents. With these competing priorities, most students spend little time on campus. In fact, *CCSSE* data indicate that overall the most successful engagement strategies currently occur in classrooms.

This data notwithstanding, however, engagement does not have to be limited to in-classroom activities. Colleges can redesign educational experiences to promote engagement both in and out of the classroom. *Every* interaction with students presents the potential to engage them. Community colleges can make engagement inescapable by promoting engagement through each syllabus — each assignment, each course requirement, and each mode of assessment. They can require students to work on projects with other students outside of class, require a service learning project, require students to see faculty members in their offices at least once before mid-semester, make the end-of-course assessment a group project, and so on.

Colleges are using these and other approaches to design intentionally engaging experiences for their students. More and more colleges, for example, are structuring coursework around learning communities — multidisciplinary, highly interactive, linked courses that usually are team-taught. Many learning communities combine classes from two or more disciplines (e.g., world history and world literature), and students earn credit for both classes. Learning com-

munities tend to emphasize collaborative work and student-directed work. Most include activities outside the classroom, as well, and they sometimes involve counselors or advisors who bring support services directly into the learning experience.

**Intentional Engagement Strategies**

**Northwest Vista College** (TX) uses learning communities to engage students in multidisciplinary environments. In the Weekend College learning community, for example, two or three disciplines are combined in a team-taught, multidisciplinary atmosphere. For their final project, the students — either as a whole class of 40–45 or in smaller groups of four to five students — develop a play that incorporates what they have learned in all of the disciplines over the entire semester. Working together, the students write the script, direct, act, make costumes and props, design lighting and sound, and create handouts.

Ideally, engagement happens both in and out of the classroom. To promote meaningful student-faculty interaction outside the classroom, faculty offices at **Santa Fe Community College** (FL) are in interdisciplinary units that combine private offices with comfortably furnished common areas that become sites for review sessions, informal advising, and intellectual discussions.

Commuter students at **Prince George's Community College** (MD) can become members of a community of scholars when they participate in one of five Collegian Centers. These discipline-based centers provide faculty mentoring and advising, offer peer support and a place to belong, and emphasize scholarly activities and opportunities.

## Engagement In and Out of Class

## Collaborative Learning among Students

Students who often or very often worked on projects with other students during class

44%

Students who often or very often worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

21%

0 10 20 30 40 50

## Interactions with Faculty Members

Students who often or very often asked questions in class or participated in class discussions

63%

Students who often or very often used e-mail to communicate with an instructor

35%

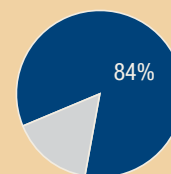
Students who often or very often discussed ideas from readings or classes with instructors outside of class

15%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

## Students Who Never Participate in College-Sponsored Activities

(organizations, campus publications, student government, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)



Source: *CCSSE* 2004 data.

## Reflections: Building a Culture of Evidence

The strategies outlined in this report are data-driven. They are predicated on the willingness of college administrators, faculty, and staff to build and work within a culture of evidence.

Better educational outcomes do not just happen. They are the result of using data wisely and of marshalling the will to be honest about current student performance in order to identify means for improving. They are the result of setting goals and implementing strategies to achieve those goals.

This means being relentless and courageous about putting data in front of faculty and staff — and using the data to focus effort and promote positive change. It is difficult work. Data can challenge assumptions and traditions. Data can disrupt informal power structures and threaten the status quo. Data also, however, help chart a course to excellence. In fact, given community colleges' limited resources, it may be impossible to create real change without basing every decision — about programs, policies, budgets, and staffing — on which action will have the best effect on student learning. In other words, building and working within a culture of evidence.

### Disaggregating the Data

Community colleges should disaggregate data. Each college should break down data by race and ethnicity, income, gender, and age to develop a genuine understanding of how different student groups are faring in their colleges.

Disaggregating data in this manner might highlight, for example, an alarming difference between both college participation and attainment levels of low-income students and students of color, as compared to their more affluent and white peers. National degree completion rates show that 38% of white students who begin at a community college earn a degree or certificate within six years. Only 26% of African American students and

29% of Hispanic students do so.\* Similar attainment gaps separate academically prepared students and those who begin their college experience in developmental courses.

Colleges and their students would be well served by becoming familiar with their own college data at this level of specificity. Then, as a standard of quality suitable to the challenge of the new century, a college's overall performance should be considered no better than the outcomes of its lowest-achieving student group.

### Intentional Engagement Strategies

Faculty members at **Lorain County Community College** (OH) review programs and plan for improvements using the Course Assessment Record Database (CARD), which focuses decisions on data. Through CARD, faculty assess course outcomes using a variety of criteria, including student learning outcomes, general educational outcomes, learning processes and activities, performance criteria, assessment techniques and analysis, and recommendations for continuous improvement. Individual faculty members' assessments of their own courses are aggregated into a program assessment. Faculty who teach the program then use that data to identify both successful strategies and specific actions that should be taken to further improve results. For example, as a result of CARD, the humanities program faculty decided to use a common essay test to establish a baseline for measuring cognitive outcomes.

**Valencia Community College** (FL) has several faculty development programs that support the college's engagement efforts and work toward building a culture of evidence. The Teaching/Learning Academy, the tenure-track community of new hires, explores the learning literature with discussion on theory and related teaching strategies. Essential Competencies of a Valencia Educator ensures that faculty are competent in the college's engagement initiatives, such as LifeMap (described on page 7). The Scenarios Online program is

\* Price, D.V., "Defining the Gaps: Access and Success at America's Community Colleges," *Keeping America's Promise*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2004.

an online forum through which faculty discuss challenges and work together to solve problems and improve their practice.

**Sinclair Community College** (OH) took a serious look at data on student retention in distance learning classes and then implemented a series of steps aimed at

strengthening student success. The college developed an interactive Web site to give students the look and feel of online learning. Sinclair also revamped college policy to reduce the sizes of distance classes, restricted distance-course access to students who demonstrated sufficient preparation, and discontinued late entry into distance courses.

## CULTURE OF EVIDENCE INDICATORS

In a culture of evidence, institutional and individual reflection and action typically are prompted and supported by data about student persistence, student learning, and institutional performance. Indicators of a culture of evidence include the following:

- ★ The institutional research and information systems provide systematic, timely, useful, and user-friendly information about student persistence, learning, and attainment.
- ★ The institutional culture promotes willingness of governing board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students to rigorously examine and openly discuss institutional performance regarding student persistence, student learning, and student attainment (certificates, degrees, transfers to four-year institutions).
- ★ The institution is committed to cohort tracking of entering students to determine rates of attainment and identify areas for improvement.
- ★ The institution regularly collects, analyzes, and reports data pertaining to successful completion of remedial/developmental courses; progress from remedial/developmental courses to college-level courses; successful completion of selected gate-keeper courses (e.g., high-enrollment/high-failure-rate courses, such as college algebra and freshman composition); rate of successful course completion (grade of C or better) for all courses; student persistence (enrollment from one term to the next); and completion of certificates and associate degrees.
- ★ The institution routinely disaggregates and reports data depicting student persistence, learning, and attainment by student characteristics, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and income level.
- ★ The institution regularly assesses its performance and progress in implementing educational practices that evidence shows will contribute to higher levels of student persistence and learning.
- ★ The results of student and institutional assessments are used routinely to inform institutional decisions regarding strategic priorities, resource allocation, faculty and staff development, and improvements in programs and services for learners.
- ★ Beliefs and assertions about “what works” in promoting student learning and attainment are evidence-based.

Source: McClenney, B., and K. McClenney, *Student Learning, Persistence and Attainment*. 2003.



## Understanding the *CCSSE* Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. *CCSSE*'s five benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important in quality educational practice, and they provide useful ways to look at each college's performance.

Community colleges use the benchmarks to compare their performance to that of similar institutions and to the full *CCSSE* population of community colleges; compare their own performance across benchmarks and across time; and identify areas in need of improvement.

Because the results are public, benchmarks also can stimulate conversation — within colleges and among policy-makers — about effective educational practice.

The *CCSSE* benchmarks are:

### **Active and Collaborative Learning.**

Survey items associated with this benchmark assess whether students are actively involved in their education, have opportunities to think about and apply what they learn in different settings, and collaborate with others to solve problems or master challenging content.

**Student Effort.** These survey items indicate to what extent students are applying themselves in the learning process and engaging in activities important to their learning and success.

**Academic Challenge.** Survey items included in this benchmark 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.

### **Student-Faculty Interaction.**

Interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps them focus on

their academic progress. The items used in this benchmark assess the extent of these interactions, both in and outside of the classroom.

**Support for Learners.** Items associated with this benchmark indicate to what extent students are using key academic and student support services and how much importance they ascribe to services such as advising, academic and career planning, academic skill development, financial aid, and others that may affect learning and retention.

To see the specific survey items associated with each benchmark, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

## What Are Benchmark Scores?

Every college has a score for each benchmark. These individual benchmark scores were computed by averaging the scores on survey items that comprise that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the mean — the average of all participating students — always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25.

A valuable use of benchmarks is to see an individual college's deviation from the mean — or better yet, its comparison to a standard higher than the mean. The standardized score provides an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark. The standardized scores make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges.

## **CCSSE Opposes Ranking**

*CCSSE* opposes using its data to rank colleges for a number of reasons.

- ★ There is no single number that can adequately — or accurately — describe a college's performance; most colleges will perform relatively well on some benchmarks and need improvement on others.
- ★ Each community college's performance should be considered in terms of its mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics. Because of differences in these areas — and variations in college resources — comparing survey results between individual institutions serves little constructive purpose and will likely be misleading.
- ★ Demographically, *CCSSE* member colleges and their students are representative of the national population of credit-enrolled community college students. However, because of the growing incidence of statewide participation in the survey, data in any given year will reflect some states more extensively than others.
- ★ More important, the 152 *CCSSE* member colleges are a self-selected group. Their choice to participate in the survey demonstrates their interest in assessing and improving their educational practices, and it distinguishes them. Ranking within this group of colleges — those willing to step up to serious self-assessment and public reporting — might discourage participation and certainly would paint an incomplete picture.
- ★ Ranking does not serve a purpose related to improving student outcomes. Improvement over time — where a particular college is now, compared with where it wants to be — likely is the best gauge of a college's efforts to enhance student learning and persistence.



## Reaching for Excellence

Affirming the spirit of benchmarking, throughout this report, *CCSSE* offers examples of promising educational practices at colleges that demonstrate outstanding performance on particular benchmarks. These are examples of both innovative thinking and intentional engagement.

Although it is useful for colleges to benchmark against the national average, this work takes us only so far. Colleges, policymakers, and other stakeholders must continually ask whether current performance is good enough; whether the national average is good enough; and what measures of success ultimately are most appropriate, relevant, and useful.

For these reasons, *CCSSE* offers five ways that colleges might reach for excellence in student engagement. Colleges can:

1. Compare themselves to the national average (the average of participating colleges, which is at the 50 mark).
2. Compare themselves to high-performing colleges. A college might, for example, aspire to be at or above the 80th percentile on some or all benchmarks.
3. Measure their overall performance against results for their least-engaged group. A college might aspire to make sure all subgroups within its population (e.g., full- and part-time students; developmental students; students across all racial, ethnic, and income groups, etc.) engage in their education at similarly high levels.
4. Gauge their work in areas their college strongly values. They might focus, for example, on survey items related to service to high-risk students or on survey items related to academic rigor (e.g., are they asking students to read enough and write enough?).
5. **Make the most important comparison: Where they are now, contrasted with where they want to be.**

### TOP PERFORMERS

The following colleges, presented in alphabetical order within their size categories, were among the top performers on three or more *CCSSE* benchmarks in 2004.

#### **Extra-Large Colleges** (15,000 or more students)

Miami-Dade College (FL)  
Montgomery College (MD)  
St. Petersburg College (FL)  
Valencia Community College (FL)

#### **Large Colleges** (8,000–14,999 students)

Daytona Beach Community College (FL)  
Manatee Community College (FL)  
Prince George's Community College (MD)  
Santa Fe Community College (FL)  
St. Philip's College (TX)  
Tallahassee Community College (FL)

#### **Medium Colleges** (4,500–7,999 students)

Central Community College (NE)  
Doña Ana Branch Community College – NMSU (NM)  
Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ)  
Housatonic Community College (CT)  
Lehigh Carbon Community College (PA)

Northwest Vista College (TX)

San Juan College (NM)

#### **Small Colleges** (4,499 or fewer students)

Cecil Community College (MD)  
Coastal Bend College (TX)  
Hawaii Community College (HI)  
Maui Community College (HI)  
Mayland Community College (NC)  
New Mexico State University – Grants (NM)  
North Florida Community College (FL)  
Texas State Technical College – Marshall (TX)  
Texas State Technical College – West Texas (TX)  
West Virginia State Community and Technical College (WV)  
Windward Community College (HI)  
Wor-Wic Community College (MD)  
Yakima Valley Community College (WA)  
Zane State College (OH)

## Looking Behind the Numbers: Key Findings by Benchmark

Benchmarks — which denote areas important in quality educational practice — are useful for gauging colleges' success at making the most of “capture time,” that limited opportunity for engaging students in meaningful ways. Here we present results of selected survey items that make up each benchmark. We also share stories from *CCSSE* member colleges — colleges that are producing results with efforts specifically designed to boost student engagement.

### Active and Collaborative Learning

Key findings for this benchmark include:

- ★ Close to two-thirds (63%) of students often or very often asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions. That leaves more than a third (37%) who engaged in these activities less frequently or not at all.
- ★ Fewer than half (44%) often or very often worked with other students on projects during class, while 14% never did.
- ★ Only 27% often or very often made a class presentation.
- ★ Less than a quarter (21%) often or very often worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- ★ Only 6% participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course.

#### Intentional Engagement Strategies

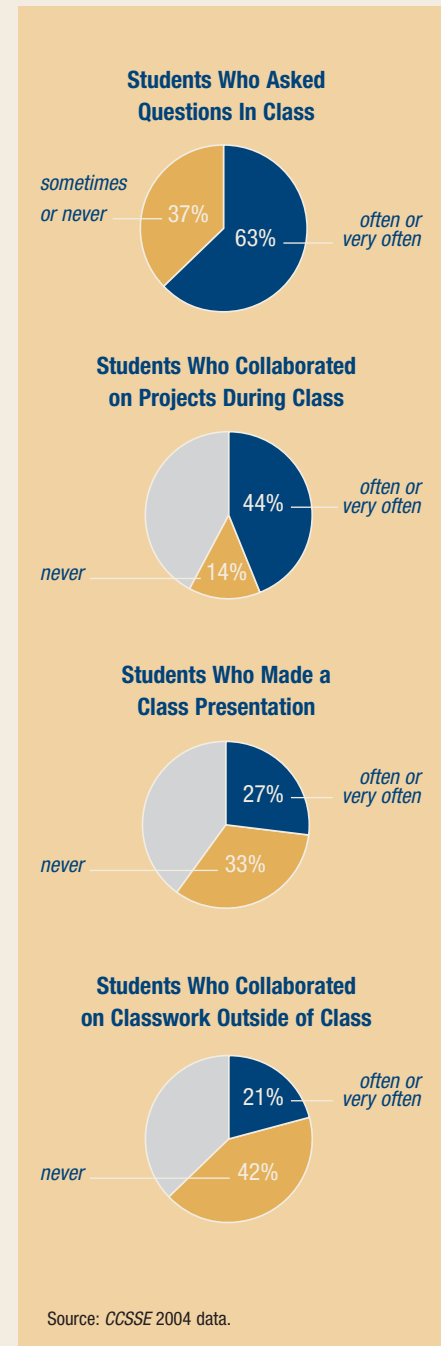
To increase success rates in selected gatekeeper courses (typically, courses that students must complete successfully to achieve their goals), **Miami-Dade College** (FL) built a learning-community-style program around its Academic Resource Center (ARC). The ARC, which includes a computer laboratory, tutoring rooms, a library, and rooms for socializing, is designed to be a “belonging” place. Outcomes for the 383 students in the targeted gatekeeper classes — two-course

sequences in biology, organic chemistry, and calculus — show dramatic increases in student success and retention. In biology, for example, 87% of students received a final grade of A, B, or C, more than double the student success rate of 38% using a traditional approach. Withdrawals from the same class declined from 44% in the traditional course to just 3% in ARC. Outcomes for the other courses showed similar success rates.

At **James A. Rhodes State College** (OH), early childhood education students select and work with local community organizations that assist families. Working in small groups, the students interview the organization's employees and undertake projects that benefit their selected organizations. This volunteer work is completed outside of regularly scheduled class time.

**Santa Fe Community College** (FL) recognizes the importance the campus environment plays in promoting collaborative learning among commuter students. The college's Tyree Library provides 10 group study rooms, a café, and a covered patio where students work together. The entire library offers wireless Internet access.

A community development class at **Hawaii Community College** (HI) spearheaded an effort to start a community center in a nearby town. They organized community meetings, met with the mayor to request space in an old school building, and solicited volunteers and donations to open the center. The center is now operating and serving as a service learning site for students.



## Student Effort

Key findings for this benchmark include:

- ★ Half of students (50%) often or very often prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, although 21% report that they never do so.
- ★ 59% often or very often worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.
- ★ Only 12% of full-time students report spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class. More than two-thirds (68%) of full-time students spend 10 or fewer hours preparing for class. Among all students, 71% report that they come to class unprepared at least some of the time, while 28% report that they never do so.
- ★ Only one-quarter (25%) of surveyed students participate sometimes or often in tutoring, while 45% do so rarely or never. Use of skill labs by 40% of students may be an encouraging result, and the use is more common among students who are academically underprepared.

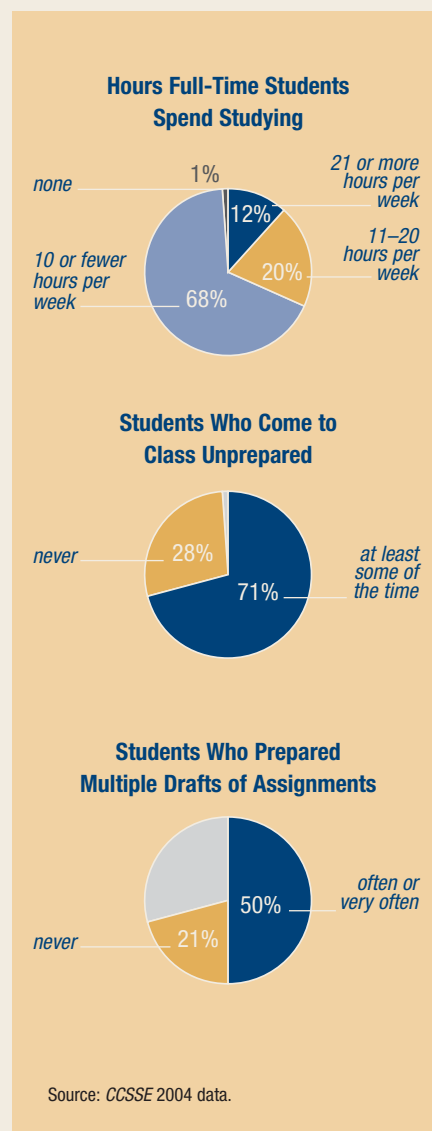
### Intentional Engagement Strategies

At **San Juan College** (NM), faculty frequently provide flexible, student-directed assignments that allow students to tailor the projects to their own interests and goals, giving students greater ownership of their work. For example, the English department emphasizes individual responses to thematic assignments. Students work on several drafts of essay assignments, working individually, in writing groups, and with the writing center. The essays are not graded until the final form is submitted.

**Texas State Technical College – Marshall** (TX) appoints students as team leaders and group facilitators of course projects. Expectations and consequences are clearly outlined at the beginning of each course, and students accept responsibility for their own learning processes. Leadership rotates during each project so every class member has the opportunity to lead.

At **James A. Rhodes College** (OH), students self-assess papers, using established criteria, before turning them in. The student's self-assessment is later compared with the instructor's or a peer's assessment based on the same standards.

**Miami-Dade College** (FL) films lab exercises in digital format and creates CD-ROMs with content that mirrors course content. The CD-ROMs use the same terms, charts, models, and dissections that are used in regular lab classes so students can use them to preview, review, and study topics from the use of the microscope to the cardiovascular system.



*“CCSSE has allowed the voices of our students to be heard. We know their perceptions about us — both inside and outside the classroom. We are integrating this information into our quality improvement initiatives throughout the institution.”*

**PAUL R. BROWN**

President, Zane State College (OH)

## Academic Challenge

Key findings for this benchmark include:

- ★ 48% of students indicate that they very often or often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations.
- ★ 69% of students surveyed indicate that their college encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying, either “quite a bit” or “very much.”
- ★ 31% of *full-time* students report that they have read four or fewer assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings during the current school year. (The survey is administered in February–April.)
- ★ 29% of *full-time* students report that they have written four or fewer papers or reports of any length during the current school year.
- ★ 67% indicate that their exams are relatively to extremely challenging, while 9% find them relatively to extremely easy.
- ★ 63% 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 of students report a similar emphasis on using information to perform a new skill (57%) or using the mental processes of synthesis (56%), application (52%), and judgment (48%).

### Intentional Engagement Strategies

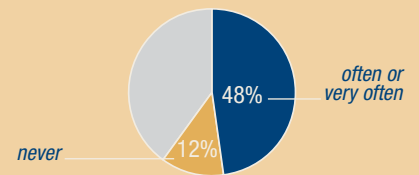
**San Juan College** (NM) has capstone courses that are considered the culmination of earlier work and often are the last required courses of a specific content area in the degree or certificate program. Capstone courses focus on projects that require students to use skills developed in earlier classes to perform higher levels of idea synthesis, analysis, writing, and presentation. For example, the small-business management course applies entrepreneurial principles to establish, organize, and manage a business. This practical and extended application of learning helps students internalize their knowledge and apply it in a new situation.

At **Wor-Wic Community College** (MD), all courses require at least one writing assignment and one electronic library assignment.

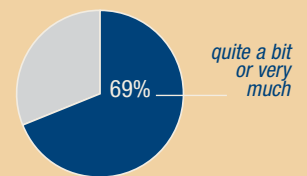
**Prince George’s Community College** (MD) has a 98% graduation and transfer rate at its Honors Academy. Academy graduates’ success rate at four-year institutions is equally high. The Honors Academy includes demanding courses, community service and leadership requirements, one-on-one mentoring, full scholarship, and seamless transfer to partnering four-year institutions where financial help also is provided.

At **Montgomery College** (MD), students in the History of Victorian Women course assume responsibility for conducting an in-character and in-costume social tea typical of the era. Students research the cultural, social, and political norms of the period; hand write invitations; develop a script; rehearse; and conduct the tea as it would have occurred in late 19th-century England.

### Students Who Worked Harder than They Thought They Could

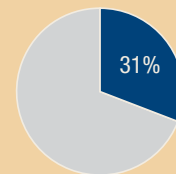


### Students Who Say Their College Encourages Them To Spend Significant Time Studying



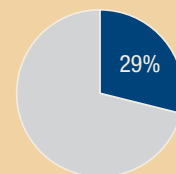
*Even as students indicate that their college encourages study time, they still struggle to find the hours in a packed schedule. Among all students, 76% report that they spend 10 or fewer hours per week preparing for class.*

### Are Students Reading Enough?



*31% of full-time students read four or fewer assigned textbooks, manuals, or books during the current school year.*

### Are Students Writing Enough?



*29% of full-time students wrote four or fewer papers or reports of any length during the current school year.*

Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

## Student-Faculty Interaction

Key findings for this benchmark include:

- ★ More than a third (35%) of students have used e-mail to communicate with an instructor either often or very often; 29% have never done so.
- ★ 43% report that they have discussed grades or assignments with an instructor either often or very often, leaving more than half who have done so occasionally or never.
- ★ While 22% of students have often or very often talked with an advisor or instructor about career plans, 34% say they have never done so.
- ★ Only 15% of students report having often or very often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class, and nearly half (49%) 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.
- ★ 56% state that they often or very often received prompt feedback from instructors on their performance, a practice known to be an important factor in student learning and retention. And community college students generally give faculty members quite positive ratings regarding their availability and helpfulness.

### Intentional Engagement Strategies

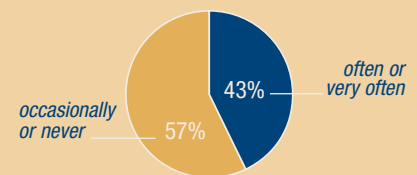
**Valencia Community College** (FL) has a creativity course in which the instructor invites inspiring leaders to talk with students about channeling creativity into educational, career, and life choices. In this course, the college president, for example, has talked with students about using his own poetry and music in his quest for balance between life and work.

**New Mexico State University – Grants** (NM) uses ethnography (the science of describing a culture or group) as a framework to teach writing. This approach results in a portfolio of work and provides substantial opportunity for shared reflection between students and faculty members.

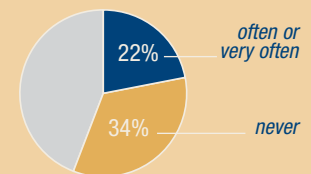
With a focus on early engagement with students, all **Tallahassee Community College** (FL) faculty receive electronic rosters that include student photos. In addition, each student receives a TCC e-mail address, and faculty are given student e-mail groups for each section they teach.

Similarly, **Santa Fe Community College** (FL) has followed its students' lead in embracing e-mail as the most efficient and often most effective means of communication. Student e-mail addresses are provided to faculty via interactive, online class rosters so faculty can easily e-mail individual students or the entire class with a single click.

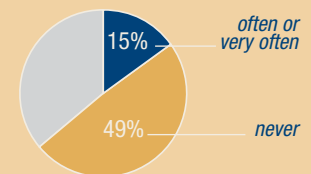
#### Students Who Discussed Grades and Assignments with Instructors



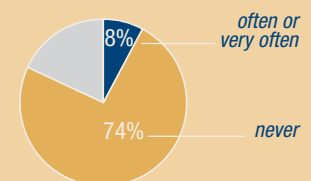
#### Students Who Talked with Advisors or Instructors about Career Plans



#### Students Who Discussed Ideas with Instructors Outside of Class



#### Students Who Worked with Instructors on Activities Other Than Coursework



Source: CCSSE 2004 data.



## Support for Learners

Key findings for this benchmark include:

- ★ While students attribute relatively high importance to academic advising and career counseling, one-third to one-half of students rarely or never take advantage of those services.
- ★ The highest levels of dissatisfaction are expressed with career counseling, job placement assistance, and financial aid advising.
- ★ While 68% 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 (42%) report that the college provides the financial support they need to afford their education.
- ★ Less than one-quarter (22%) report that the college helps them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) either “quite a bit” or “very much,” and 44% say that “very little” help is provided on that front.
- ★ 45% report that their college puts emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

### Intentional Engagement Strategies

**Sinclair Community College** (OH) serves many first-generation students who often have trouble navigating the college system. All full-time employees of the student services division attend 16 hours of customer service training per year. (Part-time staff members attend slightly less training.) Sinclair also created a communications call center, a “verbal one-stop shop,” where students can get answers to questions about admissions, financial aid, registration, and fee payment.

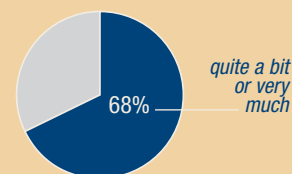
Students' Views of Academic and Support Services			
<b>Most Important</b>			
1. Academic advising/ planning	2. Financial aid advising	3. Computer lab	4. Career counseling and transfer credit assistance (tie)
<b>Most Frequently Used</b>			
1. Computer lab	2. Financial aid advising	3. Skills lab	4. Academic advising/ planning
<b>Most Satisfied With</b>			
1. Computer lab	2. Academic advising/ planning	3. Financial aid advising	4. Skills lab
<b>Least Satisfied With</b>			
1. Career counseling, Financial aid advising, Job placement assistance (tie)		2. Transfer credit assistance	
Source: CCSSE 2004 data.			

At **Housatonic Community College** (CT), academic advising is mandatory; students' advisors must approve their course selections before they can register.

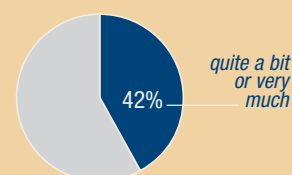
English for Academic Purposes (EAP, formerly ESL) Reading Clinics at **Miami-Dade College** (FL) emphasize critical thinking and comprehension so students can improve their College Placement Test (CPT) reading scores. Before starting the clinic, students take the PASS Test (pre-CPT). Miami-Dade hopes to see a 15% improvement in performance for at least 80% of participating students.

**Estrella Mountain Community College** (AZ) is piloting cohort-based mentoring programs. For example, in exchange for scholarships (funded through the National Science Foundation), students work with faculty mentors and attend college-sponsored events in preparation for careers in math and science. Estrella Mountain Community College also has an early alert system, through which faculty members use a secure

### Students Who Say Their College Provides the Support They Need To Succeed



### Students Who Say Their College Provides the Financial Support They Need



Source: CCSSE 2004 data.

Web form to supply feedback on students' progress early in the semester. A student success coordinator manages the process, identifying appropriate services for each student and contacting the students directly.



## Overview of 2004 Survey Respondents

The 2004 CCSSE survey was administered in spring 2004 during class sessions at CCSSE member colleges. An overview of the participating colleges and their students follows. Details about the member colleges, student respondents, and the survey sampling and administration process are available at [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

- ★ A total of 92,301 students from 152 institutions in 30 states are included in the CCSSE national sample.
- ★ The more than 92,000 respondents in 2004 comprise about 1.5% of the 6.3 million students enrolled in U.S. public community colleges. 2004 CCSSE member colleges enroll 18% of all U.S. community college credit students.
- ★ Of the 152 participating colleges, 49% are classified as small (up to 4,499 students), 23% as medium (4,500–7,999 students), 16% as large (8,000–14,999 students), and 11% as extra large (15,000 or more students). Nationally, 58% of community colleges are small, 19% are medium, 14% are large, and 8% are extra large.
- ★ Colleges reported their locations as 26% urban, 34% suburban, and 40% rural. Fall 2002 IPEDS data indicate that among all U.S. community colleges, 38% are urban, 24% are suburban, and 38% are rural.
- ★ Students who responded to the survey generally reflect the underlying student population of the participating colleges in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Part-time students, however, were underrepresented in the CCSSE sample because classes are sampled rather than individual students. (About 34% of CCSSE

respondents are enrolled part-time, and 66% are enrolled full-time. IPEDS shows that the national figures are 64% part-time and 36% full-time.) To address this discrepancy, CCSSE results are weighted by part-time and full-time status to reflect the institutions' actual proportions of part- and full-time students.

- ★ Of the survey respondents, 60% were female and 40% were male. These figures are similar to the national community college student ratio, which is 58% female and 42% male.\*
- ★ 2004 CCSSE student respondents range in age from 18 to 65+ years old.
- ★ With respect to race/ethnicity, 2004 CCSSE respondents and the national community college population may be compared as follows:

Race/ethnicity	CCSSE respondents	National percentages
White	61%	59%
Latino/Hispanic	13%	14%
Black	10%	12%
International*	7%	2%
Asian	4%	6%
Native American	2%	1%
Other	3%	6%

\*International students are not citizens or nationals of the United States and are in the country on a visa or temporary basis.

Sources: CCSSE 2004 data and IPEDS, Fall 2002 data.

## Noteworthy Facts about 2004 Participating Colleges

- ★ All or most of the public community colleges in five states — Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, and New Mexico — participated in the 2004 CCSSE survey. This statewide participation affects respondents' geographic diversity.
- ★ At least 15% of the total statewide community college population in Arizona, Ohio, and Texas participated in 2004.
- ★ The 2004 membership includes eight consortia: a consortium of small Texas colleges (23 colleges); the Hispanic-Serving Institutions/Hispanic Association of Colleges and Schools consortium (15 colleges in two states); the consortium for the College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI) of the League for Innovation in the Community College (17 colleges in 13 states); and member colleges from Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, and New Mexico.

\*AACC, *National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends and Statistics*, 3rd Edition. Washington, DC: Community College Press, 2000.

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## **CCSSE Member Colleges 2004**

For a list of CCSSE member colleges, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).



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