

San Diego Mesa College Research Committee
RESEARCH BRIEF #1: The Five Benchmarks
The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) Series
April/May 2008

“Whether they reveal surprises or confirm expectations, data are tools to help colleges chart a course to excellence” --CCSSE

INTRODUCTION

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provides a much-needed tool for assessing the quality in community college education. CCSSE results help colleges focus on good educational practice — defined as practice that promotes high levels of student learning and retention — and identify areas in which community colleges can improve their programs and services for students. CCSSE is grounded in research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. For more information, please visit www.ccsse.org.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE): *a voluntary, nation-wide survey which provides information on student engagement, a key indicator of learning:* CCSSE, which was administered in Spring 2007 to randomly selected Mesa students, asks questions that assess institutional practices and student behaviors that are correlated highly with student learning and student retention. Students are asked to respond to questions based on their entire year’s experience at the college so that their responses are reflective of their overall college experience rather than any specific course. For more information, visit www.ccsse.org.

Cohort: *a group of individuals who share common characteristics or a common experience during a given time span:* 2007 Extra-Large Colleges Cohort: CCSSE institutions are classified according to size and location served. Mesa College is in the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort, which includes 46 institutions, due to its large enrollment. CCSSE 2007 Cohort: CCSSE utilizes a 3-year cohort of participating colleges (2005-2007) in order to increase the number of institutions and students contributing to the national dataset, thereby increasing the reliability of the overall results and minimizing the impact of statewide consortia participation. The 2007 CCSSE Cohort comprises 310,013 students from 525 institutions in 48 states, British Columbia, and the Marshall Islands.

Benchmark: *an objective measurement for baselining (setting the initial values), goal-setting and improvement tracking, which can lead to dramatic innovations (Shafer & Coate, 1992):* CCSSE addresses five benchmarks of student engagement (listed below). Each benchmark comprises survey items which pertain to the represented construct of student engagement. The survey items are standardized because the item scales within each benchmark differ (see attached survey). The benchmarks are computed such that the mean, or average, for the CCSSE national cohort is always 50 and the standard deviation, or spread about the mean, is 25. The benchmarks provide an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the national mean (50) in each of the five areas of student engagement. They also make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges.

Sample: *the selected part of a population:* The target sample comprises 1,200 students, among which 1,007 students responded to the 2007 Mesa administration of CCSSE. The response rate is 83.9%.

THE FIVE BENCHMARKS

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.

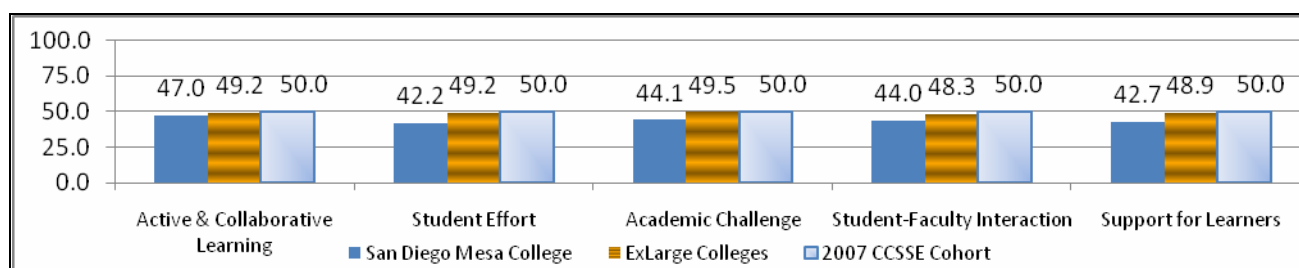
Student Effort: Students' behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals.

Academic Challenge: Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality.

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.

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.

San Diego Mesa College
Figure 1. 2007 CCSSE Benchmark Results



FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

San Diego Mesa College scored below the 2007 CCSSE Cohort national average of 50 in all benchmark areas (see Figure 1). At the December 2007 meeting, the Mesa College Research Committee examined the 2007 CCSSE benchmarks and discussed the data and their implications. As a result of the discussion, the Research Committee decided to focus on two benchmarks, Student Effort (42.2) and Support for Learners (42.7). The decision to focus in first on two benchmarks was driven by logistical concerns, mainly, the sheer volume of CCSSE data that need to be examined and analyzed. This does not preclude the examination and analysis of the remaining three benchmarks, all of which will be addressed in the near future as well. The Committee's rationale stated that Support for Learners is clearly defined, areas in need of improvement can be readily identified, and it is an integral part of the Basic Skills Initiative. Student Effort was also selected because students need to put forth the effort and assume responsibility for their learning if any gains are to be made in student engagement across the campus. These two benchmarks are intricately tied as Support for Learners may encourage and sustain greater Student Effort.

NEXT STEPS

The next step is to conduct an in-depth examination of the data related to each individual benchmark. The findings from the data will inform the recommendation of strategies for improving student engagement. San Diego Mesa College plans to administer the CCSSE again in Spring 2010, three years after our first 2007 administration, to see whether we have made gains in measures of student engagement. The next Research Committee meeting, as well as the next Research Brief publication, is scheduled to take a closer look at the benchmark of Support for Learners.

Research Briefs are a monthly publication of the San Diego Mesa College Research Committee. Its intended readership comprises the entire campus community, and its intended purpose is to facilitate greater campus consideration, discussion, and application of all-things-data.

San Diego Mesa College Research Committee

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