

San Diego Mesa College Research Committee
RESEARCH BRIEF #2: Support for Learners
The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) Series
May 2008

“CCSSE is committed to presenting data without flinching. Accurate information, whether positive or negative, can help improve educational practice and performance.” –CCSSE

INTRODUCTION

The first issue of this publication, *Research Brief #1: The Five Benchmarks* from the series on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), provided a high-level overview of Mesa’s Spring 2007 CCSSE survey results by covering the five benchmarks of student engagement: Active & Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners. Under the direction of the Mesa Research Committee, this second issue in the CCSSE Series, *Research Brief #2: Support for Learners*, drills deeper into the individual survey items that constitute the Support for Learners benchmark, which is based on research suggesting that 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.

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.

Mean: *the arithmetic average of all responses on a particular item:* Means are provided for San Diego Mesa College and two comparison groups: the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort and the 2007 CCSSE Cohort.

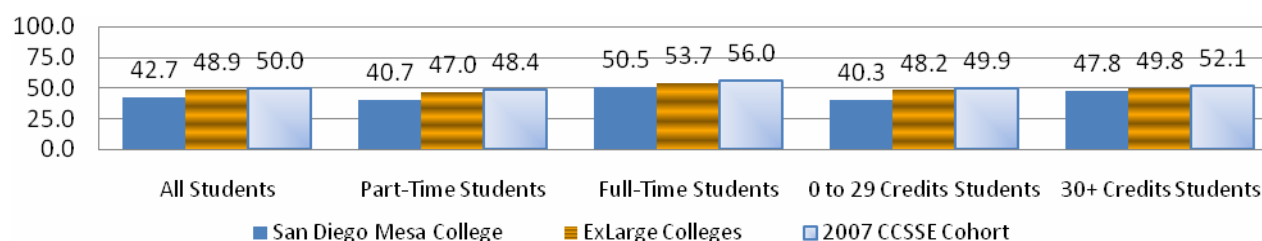
Statistical Significance: *the degree to which the difference between two means, CCSSE scores for San Diego Mesa College and its comparison cohort, would occur by chance:* A t-test, a statistical procedure used to compare two means, was conducted between San Diego Mesa College and the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort as well with the 2007 CCSSE Cohort. The mean differences that are significant at the .001 level, i.e., statistically significant differences, are indicated in Table 1 by bold print within shaded cells (see Table 1 on page 2).

Effect Size: *the magnitude of the discrepancy between CCSSE scores for San Diego Mesa College and its comparison cohorts:* The actual magnitude of some item score differences may seem trivial, even though they are highly reliable and statistically significant. For this reason, CCSSE also considers the effect size associated with those item comparisons that are statistically significant. The mean differences that have an effect size greater than or equal to .2, i.e., at least a small effect, are indicated in Table 1 by bold print within shaded cells (see Table 1 on page 2).

RESULTS

The graph in *Figure 1: CCSSE Benchmarks for Support for Learners* (page 2) shows the benchmarks for all CCSSE participants, as well as groups disaggregated by Enrollment Status (part-time v. full-time) and Credits Earned (0 – 29 units and 30+ units). The standardized benchmarks provide an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the national mean (50.0). They also make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges, which in Mesa’s case is the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort.

Table 1: Individual Survey Items for Support for Learners Benchmark (see page 2) displays Mesa’s mean scores for the survey items constituting the Support for Learners benchmark in relation to two comparison cohorts: the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort, which includes 46 institutions, and the 2007 CCSSE Cohort, which is a 3-year cohort of participating colleges (2005-2007) comprising 525 institutions. Means are shown for All Students and are also disaggregated by Enrollment Status and Credits Earned. Shaded cells with bold print indicate a statistically significant difference between the comparison cohort and San Diego Mesa College ($p < .001$ with an effect size greater than or equal to .2).

Figure 1. 2007 CCSSE Benchmark Results for Support for Learners**Table 1. Individual Survey Items for Support for Learners Benchmark**

All Students	All Students					
	Mesa College		X-Large Colleges	CCSSE Cohort		
9b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.67		2.90	2.93		
9c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.31		2.49	2.45		
9d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.71		1.88	1.91		
9e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.90		2.06	2.08		
9f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.10		2.27	2.37		
13a1. Frequency: Academic advising/planning (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.63		1.69	1.74		
13b1. Frequency: Career Counseling (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.40		1.46	1.43		
Enrollment Status	Part-Time Students			Full-Time Students		
	Mesa College	X-Large Colleges	CCSSE Cohort	Mesa College	X-Large Colleges	CCSSE Cohort
9b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.61	2.87	2.89	2.82	2.95	2.98
9c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.24	2.45	2.40	2.49	2.57	2.52
9d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.71	1.84	1.86	1.73	1.94	1.96
9e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.88	2.01	2.02	1.96	2.15	2.17
9f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.01	2.18	2.25	2.32	2.45	2.54
13a1. Frequency: Academic advising/planning (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.56	1.65	1.69	1.81	1.77	1.81
13b1. Frequency: Career Counseling (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.38	1.44	1.41	1.45	1.50	1.46
Credits Earned	0 - 29 Credits Students			30+ Credits Students		
	Mesa College	X-Large Colleges	CCSSE Cohort	Mesa College	X-Large Colleges	CCSSE Cohort
9b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.60	2.89	2.91	2.80	2.93	2.96
9c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.24	2.47	2.43	2.42	2.53	2.50
9d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.70	1.88	1.90	1.72	1.86	1.91
9e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially (Scale: 1 – 4)	1.86	2.06	2.08	1.99	2.04	2.09
9f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education (Scale: 1 – 4)	2.07	2.28	2.36	2.17	2.27	2.39
13a1. Frequency: Academic advising/planning (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.51	1.67	1.71	1.87	1.76	1.81
13b1. Frequency: Career Counseling (Scale: 1 – 3)	1.35	1.44	1.41	1.52	1.49	1.46

*Shaded cells with bold print indicate a statistically significant difference between the comparison cohort and San Diego Mesa College ($p < .001$ with an effect size greater than or equal to .2).

FINDINGS

Statistical Significance and Effect Size

- In all cases of statistically significant differences with effect sizes equal to or greater than .2, San Diego Mesa College scored below the mean in relation to the comparison cohort(s).

Cohort Comparisons

- For all students as a whole, as well as for each of the sub-samples, San Diego Mesa College scored significantly below the mean (at the .001 level with an effect size $\geq .2$) less frequently when compared with the Extra-Large Colleges Cohort and more frequently when compared with the 2007 CCSSE Cohort. This finding supports the hypothesis that a college's results will be more comparable to like-sized colleges.

Part-Time v. Full-Time Students

- Part-time students scored Mesa College significantly below the mean on three items: support needed to help students succeed, encouragement to engage with students from different backgrounds, and financial support needed to afford an education. Some of these results may be related to the fact that part-time students spend less time on campus and therefore may be less likely to have as many opportunities to benefit from college support systems. Full-time students scored San Diego Mesa College significantly below the mean on two items: helping to cope with non-academic responsibilities and providing the support needed to thrive socially.

Number of Credits Earned

- Students who earned fewer than 30 units generally perceived lower levels of Support for Learners at Mesa than did students who earned 30 or more units.

Frequency of Service Usage

- In regard to usage of Academic Advising/Planning and Career Counseling Services, students who earned fewer than 30 units indicated that they used the Academic Advising/Planning Services significantly less than did their comparison cohorts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Engage early, engage deliberately, and engage often. As a college, and as individual faculty, staff, and administrators, we need to do a better job of engaging students early in their Mesa years, as evidenced by our 2007 CCSSE results for students who have earned 0 – 29 credits. Also, we need to be deliberate about the way we engage students. Community college students often juggle other commitments and consequently do not get the benefit of impromptu study sessions or discussions. Thus, Mesa needs to deliberately design opportunities to engage students and encourage students to become more purposeful in their educational efforts. Finally, we must engage students often. We serve day and evening students, part-time and full-time students, working students, and caretakers of dependents, and we need to consider **who** we are serving when we are deciding **when** to offer support and services. The Research Committee encourages programs, departments, and schools to develop innovative ways to apply these recommendations to their policies and practices. We recommend that you explore the CCSSE web site to read about the research-based student engagement strategies that are being implemented successfully at CCSSE community colleges at <http://www.ccsse.org>.

NEXT STEPS

The next step is to continue our in-depth examination of the data related to each individual benchmark. Research Brief #3 will take a closer look at our next benchmark: Student Effort.

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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