

Introduction

Achieving the Dream (AtD) is a national initiative to help more community college students succeed. One Achieving the Dream objective is to increase the percentage of students who enroll from one semester to the next. While student persistence behavior is complex and, for most students, not predicted by a single factor, there is a large body of higher education research that validates the causal connection between student persistence and academic engagement at college. Positive experiences in the classroom lead to increased intellectual integration which positively impacts commitment to the learning process and persistence at the college. This Fact Sheet explores the relationship between short-term student persistence and student engagement at CCP.

During the Spring 2007 semester CCP participated in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) which provides student feedback related to five benchmarks of effective educational practice. These benchmarks represent several dimensions of student engagement. Descriptions of the benchmarks, which appear in Table 1, are available in IR Report #167, titled *Community College Survey of Students Engagement Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice*.

Average scores on the five benchmarks are presented separately for students who returned to their studies at CCP in the Fall 2007 term and those who did not return (Table 1). These scores were computed by averaging the scores on individual survey items that comprise each benchmark. Higher benchmark scores indicate greater levels of engagement. Mean Group Differences reflect the disparity between average group scores.

| Benchmarks | Returned Fall 2007 | Did Not Return Fall 2007 | Mean Group Difference | Statistically Significant Difference |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Active and Collaborative Learning | 50.55 | 52.86 | 2.31 | No |
| Student Effort | 57.86 | 56.54 | 1.32 | No |
| Academic Challenge | 58.93 | 53.76 | 5.17 | Yes |
| Student-Faculty Interaction | 58.42 | 54.13 | 4.29 | No |
| Support for Learners | 51.19 | 45.72 | 5.47 | Yes |

Statistically significant group differences emerged in two areas: 1) Academic Challenge and 2) Support for Learners. Students who returned in fall 2007 were significantly more academically challenged and experienced significantly greater levels of support than non-returning students. While not significant, the group difference associated with the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark was also notable.

Ten items contribute to the Academic Challenge benchmark (Table 2) and seven items contribute to the Support for Learners benchmark (Table 3). As a group, students who persisted indicated greater levels of engagement than students who did not persist across most of these survey items that comprise the benchmarks.

Academic Challenge and Support for Learners Benchmark Items

| Table 2: CCSSE Items That Comprise the Academic Challenge Benchmark | Returned Fall 2007 | Did Not Return Fall 2007 | Mean Group Difference | Statistically Significant Difference |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4p. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or experience | 2.81 | 2.51 | .30 | Yes |
| 5b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experiences in or theory | 2.96 | 2.81 | .15 | No |
| 5c. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways | 2.92 | 2.78 | .14 | No |
| 5d. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods | 2.67 | 2.59 | .08 | No |
| 5e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations | 2.64 | 2.45 | .19 | Yes |
| 5f. Using information you have read or heard to perform new skill | 2.85 | 2.65 | .20 | Yes |
| 6a. Number of assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings | 3.15 | 3.23 | .08 | No |
| 6c. Number of written papers or reports of any length | 3.29 | 3.22 | .07 | No |
| 7. Mark the box that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college | 5.11 | 5.01 | .10 | No |
| 9a. Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying | 3.10 | 3.06 | .04 | No |

| Table 3: CCSSE Items That Comprise the Support for Learners Benchmark | Returned Fall 2007 | Did Not Return Fall 2007 | Mean Group Difference | Statistically Significant Difference |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 9b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college | 2.89 | 2.73 | .16 | No |
| 9c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds | 2.44 | 2.47 | .03 | No |
| 9d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) | 1.86 | 1.72 | .14 | No |
| 9e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially | 2.07 | 2.01 | .06 | No |
| 9f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education | 2.46 | 2.12 | .34 | Yes |
| 13a1. Frequency: Academic advising/planning | 1.74 | 1.65 | .09 | No |
| 13b1. Frequency: Career counseling | 1.30 | 1.11 | .19 | Yes |

Response Scale for Survey Items

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Question 4 : | 1 = Never | 2 = Sometimes | 3 = Often | 4 = Very Often |
| Question 5 : | 1 = Never | 2 = Sometimes | 3 = Often | 4 = Very Often |
| Question 6 : | 1 = 1 to 4 | 2 = 5 to 10 | 3 = 11 to 20 | 4 = 20+ |
| Question 7 : | 1 = Extremely Easy | to | | 7 = Extremely Challenging |
| Question 9 : | 1 = Never | 2 = Sometimes | 3 = Often | 4 = Very Often |
| Question 13 : | 1 = Don't Know | 2 = Never/Rarely | 3 = Sometimes | 4 = Often |