



Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) 2005 Institutional Report: Using CCSSE Results

Five Ways to Look at Your CCSSE Results

Introduction

Each member college's results should be considered in terms of its own mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics. However, *CCSSE* has developed a set of recommendations regarding the analysis and interpretation of your results based on feedback from member institutions, conference and workshop presentations, and experts in the field.

Option #1:

Compare your college to the national average

Look at your benchmark reports and scores, comparing your college's results to the national average benchmark score (50), attending to internal variations on each of the five benchmarks. Then, compare your college's performance to that of other colleges that are similar in terms of size, location (urban, suburban, rural), or other variables that are meaningful to you. Through this process, begin evaluating the areas in which you are most different from the full *CCSSE* population and the relevant peer college group(s). Then, identify strengths and areas for improvement; when doing so, make sure to look at results of individual survey items that comprise the benchmarks. With the individual items, as with the benchmark scores, look

for results that distinguish your college (numbers with a relatively large positive or negative effect size) so that you can see how your institution differs from the full *CCSSE* population. By November 2005, the *CCSSE* Web site's "Search the Results" section will include 2005 survey data for these and other comparisons.

Option #2:

Compare your college to high-performing colleges

CCSSE provides a Benchmark Deciles Report for each institution, which provides an indication of your college's performance relative to the highest-performing colleges. Your college may aspire, for example, to attain performance on one or more benchmarks that is equivalent to the performance of the top ten percent of community colleges nationally. The decile report lets you know where you stand in relation to that aspiration. Deciles are percentiles that divide the frequency of benchmark scores into 10 equal groups.

Deciles are listed for the entire 2005 participating group of colleges and for each appropriate breakdown according to size and urbanicity. To help gauge a college's performance relative to the comparison groups, the shaded areas on the tables indicate the deciles that are less than or equal to your benchmark scores.

The definition of "high-performing" certainly may vary, but *CCSSE* typically classifies high performers as those institutions scoring at or above the 80th percentile on at least three benchmarks.

In addition, CCSSE encourages colleges to review the work of MetLife Foundation Best-Practice Colleges. Selection of these award-winning colleges is based on their performance on a retention index reflecting results on three CCSSE benchmarks that are related to student retention. Brief descriptions of the award winners are located on CCSSE's web site <http://www.ccsse.org/retention/bestpractices.cfm>.

Option #3:

Measure your college's performance in terms of your least-engaged student group

In certain cases colleges may know which group on campus is least engaged; in others, further analysis of the data helps yield that information. In each scenario, filtering and calculations using your raw data file will be necessary.

CCSSE has developed classifications for the following groups of students who are typically of interest in community college efforts to improve student outcomes:

- 1) **First generation students:** those who are the first in their immediate families to attend college
- 2) **Developmental students:** those who have taken or plan to take developmental courses while attending college
- 3) **High-risk students:** those with multiple risk factors such as being single parents, having to care for dependents, attending college part-time, etc.

You may also wish to explore levels of engagement of minority student groups, returning female students, or other groups.

Please contact CCSSE for information regarding the survey items used in creating these groups.

Once you have identified your least-engaged group, CCSSE recommends running comparisons between this group and the remainder of your college population, as well as comparing the results for the least-engaged group and the CCSSE 2005 national population.

Option #4:

Gauge work in areas most strongly valued

CCSSE always recommends examining your results in light of your institution's vision, mission, and/or strategic objectives. Before reviewing your data, you may want to identify key issues by answering questions like these:

- What are the high-priority objectives in your college's strategic plan?
- What benchmarks, trends, or services are most important to your college?
Examples might include particular benchmarks (academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, etc.); critical issues, such as retention; and services, such as career planning or academic advising.
- What educational practices most concern your college?
- How do your mission and specific programs at your college relate to the CCSSE benchmarks and survey items?
- What new programs are being developed at your college?

For example, if your college scored low on *student-faculty interaction*, a high priority on your campus, then ascertain the specific survey items of that benchmark that require attention; or, if your college scored high on all benchmarks, focus on ways to continue strengthening these areas.

Option #5:

Compare where you are now with where you want to be

Another useful way to examine your institution's results is to perform a gap analysis looking at where you are now versus where you want to be. Questions to consider include the following:

- What issues have been identified for your college through self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation — or recommendations from the visiting team?

- What strengths or opportunities for improvement in your college have been identified through other data-gathering or institutional research efforts?
- Are there emerging trends that fit with your college's strengths?
- Are there emerging trends that amplify areas where your college needs improvement?

Once questions such as these have been addressed, utilizing your *CCSSE* results in conjunction with other institutionally-relevant data, a set of strategic goals can be established and then pursued at your college.

CCSSE in Action: Communicating Survey Results

After you examine your data in any or all of the ways outlined above, the 7-step plan below can be tailored and implemented to help you share your college's results — and launch a dialogue with key internal and external constituencies. *CCSSE*'s Web site (www.ccsse.org) also offers various resources, including an online search engine, references, and other tools, to help you communicate about your results.

Step 1:

Identify your internal and external audiences. Internal constituencies may include governing board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. External audiences might include the media, policymakers, business leaders, K-12 educators, and community-based organizations. What do you want them to know about the survey and your results? What questions will they have? What do you want them to do with the information?

Step 2:

Set parameters — for yourself and your various audiences — that establish what data will and won't be used for. For example, you may choose to use results to design faculty development opportunities, noting that they are inappropriate for use in evaluation of individual faculty members. You may want to use data immediately with external audiences, or you may choose to focus internally at first and then, at a later date, demonstrate data-driven changes to external audiences.

Step 3:

Develop storylines that relate to issues relevant to your college and geographic area. Ask yourself, "What are the stories our students are telling us through this survey? What do these stories say about the educational experience we are providing?" Examples of potential storylines are included in the "Communications Tools." <http://www.ccsse.org/members/communications.cfm>

Step 4:

Engage your audiences, particularly your internal audiences, in ways that encourage them to move forward. Create forums that help people understand what the data mean so they can use the information to develop improvement strategies.

Step 5:

Work within your college's culture. For example, some colleges may want to organize conversations by department; others will benefit more from interdisciplinary and cross-functional discussions. Some will find it natural to incorporate improvement initiatives into their annual planning process, and some will want to convene an annual convocation or launch a special initiative on student engagement.

Step 6:

Listen to your various audiences. The best ideas often come from unexpected places. By all means, report back to the college community on actions taken in response to survey results — and the ideas generated in discussions about the survey. And don't forget students. The survey emphasizes that they have a role to play in their own learning, and these are their observations on their educational experiences. Meet with student government and encourage student-faculty discussions. Consider using selected *CCSSE* items in new venues, such as incorporating them into students' evaluations of courses and faculty.

Step 7:

Don't shy away from the data. Information, whether positive or negative, can help improve educational practice and performance. Use it to dispel myths, showcase your college's best practices, and set the bar higher for the future.

CCSSE in Action: www.ccsse.org

CCSSE's Web site, www.ccsse.org, is aimed at promoting public understanding of the work of community colleges, supporting institutional improvement, and advancing public discussion about new ways of defining and examining quality in higher education.

The Web site is a primary vehicle for reporting survey results and putting them in context. Special features for CCSSE member colleges include a Toolkit (<http://www.ccsse.org/members/communications.cfm>) that contains resources to help colleges understand their survey results, communicate them to various audiences, and use them to target institutional improvement initiatives. The Toolkit contains the following documents:

[A 7-Step Plan for Interpreting and Working with Your Survey Results](#)

CCSSE gives its members a lot of information. The 7-Step Plan offers suggestions for sorting through it — and making the best use of it.

[Developing Storylines To Communicate Results](#)

The sample storylines use hypothetical situations with hypothetical data to provide ideas for stories that can be told using CCSSE results. This isn't about spin. CCSSE's purpose is to be straightforward about data, both when the results make us shine and when they cause us to question — and improve — our current practices. The storylines are intended to inform, engage, and highlight important issues. Similar stories, geared to your college, your community, and your survey results, might be used with internal college groups, governing board members, community groups, and other audiences.

[PowerPoint Presentation Template](#)

The PowerPoint template (and the related talking points) can be used as a starting point for custom presentations to both internal and external audiences. The template will be updated for 2005 by September.

[PowerPoint Presentation Talking Points](#)

The talking points, organized by slide, are the companion for the PowerPoint template. They provide background information and additional facts that will help you elaborate on the information included in the slides. More details about using the template and talking points are provided at the beginning of the document.

[Sample News Release](#)

The sample news release is a starting point for writing a news release about your college. There are blanks in the text because the release is about your college, its survey results, and how you plan to use them.

[Sample Fact Sheet](#)

The sample fact sheet provides information about CCSSE's survey instrument, *The Community College Student Report*. You can use it as is or customize it by adding details about your college, its survey results, and how you plan to use them.

[Sample Letters to the Editor](#)

These sample letters to the editor provide background on key educational issues. Customize them with your specific CCSSE results and tie them to events in your area.

[Tips for Working with the Media](#)

You can use these tips to be better prepared in talking with the media about your CCSSE results and other aspects of college quality and performance.

The Web site also features a comprehensive search-the-data section—for example, the user can generate a report showing CCSSE results for all large, urban colleges, for all small, rural colleges, or for the participating colleges in a particular state or accrediting region. Results are presented in drill-down charts that display information in easy-to-manage steps. Users first see a graph that shows general results; then, they can click on various parts of the graph to get the details behind the numbers at <http://www.ccsse.org/members/search/>

PLEASE NOTE: CCSSE 2005 data will be posted on the Web site in November 2005.

We intend to regularly update the *CCSSE* Web site with other examples about how community colleges are using their *CCSSE* data as we learn about them. In that regard, please keep us informed about how you are using, or plan to use, your *CCSSE* results by submitting your stories to *CCSSE* Highlights at <http://www.ccsse.org/publications/pubsignup/highlightsignup.cfm> and/or *CCSSE* Vignettes at <http://www.ccsse.org/publications/pubsignup/vigsignup.cfm>.

CCSSE in Action: Using Data to Drive Decisions

To anchor discussion about the quality of undergraduate education in empirical evidence, *CCSSE* suggests that you complete the “drop-in” Overview template that was provided on your institutional CD and then circulate a copy of it and other selected sections to groups such as

- Governing board members;
- President and president’s cabinet;
- Senior administrators, deans, and department/division chairs;
- Faculty committees, faculty development

workshops and retreats, and various academic councils; and

- Students (via discussion with student leaders and articles in student newspapers, etc.).

Once these materials are circulated, we encourage colleges to conduct guided conversations or focus groups with these key constituencies to promote understanding of the findings and their potential implications for improvement initiatives. For instance, student focus groups could be organized to hear direct student voices about their college experiences and to ask students what the college could do to improve in deficient but identified areas. Discussions about faculty perceptions of students’ responses could set the foundation for faculty to assess ways to collaborate to enhance student engagement in the classroom.

Planning, Accountability, and Institutional Research

Because all regional accreditation associations require evidence of student learning and of efforts to improve student outcomes, *CCSSE* results could be appropriately used in institutional self-studies. This information is particularly powerful if *CCSSE* results are corroborated by other institutional data such as the results from other national or local surveys, review of institutional records, or student focus groups.