



**SENSE**

Survey of Entering  
Student Engagement  
a CCSSE Initiative



**CCSSE**

Community College Survey  
of Student Engagement

**Phillips Community College  
of the University of Arkansas**

**Engaging Students  
June 2009**

**2008 Field Test Findings-PCCUA Data**

# SENSE & CCSSE

Volume 1, Issue 1

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas

June 2009

## SENSE

### Survey of Entering Student Engagement

PCCUA – Fall 2008 Data

#### Principle #1: Personal Connections

*Imagine a college at which every student is intentionally connected to an individual person who feels responsible for that student's success—and that these connections are made before completion of the intake process.*

#### Preliminary Findings

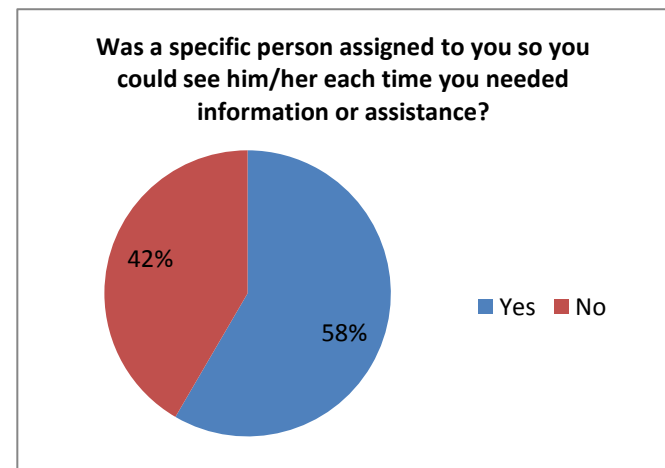
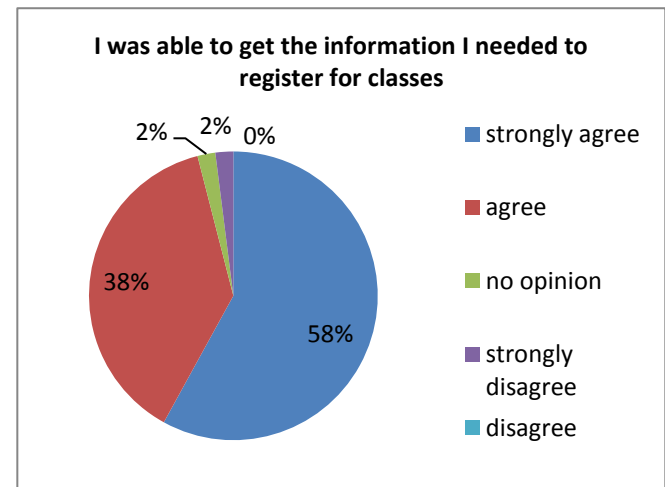
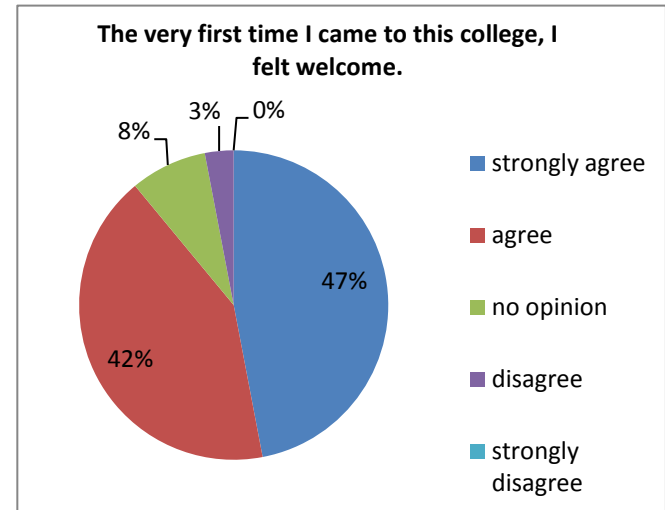
The *SENSE* survey includes several items that gauge whether students feel welcome and personally connected to instructors, staff, and other students during their first three weeks of college.

- Asked whether they agree with the statement, "The very first time I came to this college, I felt welcome," 89% of entering students agree or strongly agree, and 3% disagree or strongly disagree.
- In response to the statement, "I was able to get the information I needed to register for classes," 96% of entering student agree or strongly agree, and 2% disagree or strongly disagree.

*SENSE* respondents report the quality of their relationships at the college during the first three weeks of their first academic term using a scale of 1-7, on which 1 indicates unfriendly, unsupportive, and sense of alienation, and 7 designates friendly, supportive, and sense of belonging. Students report the quality of their relationships as follows:

- Regarding administrative personnel and office staff, 69% indicate a 6 or 7; 5% report a 1 or 2.
- Regarding other students, 58% of entering students describe their relationships as 6 or 7; 3% report a 1 or 2.
- Regarding instructors, 68% classify their relationships as 6 or 7; 2% indicate a 1 or 2.

#### Entering Students' First Impressions of PCCUA



## Principle #2: High Expectations and Aspirations

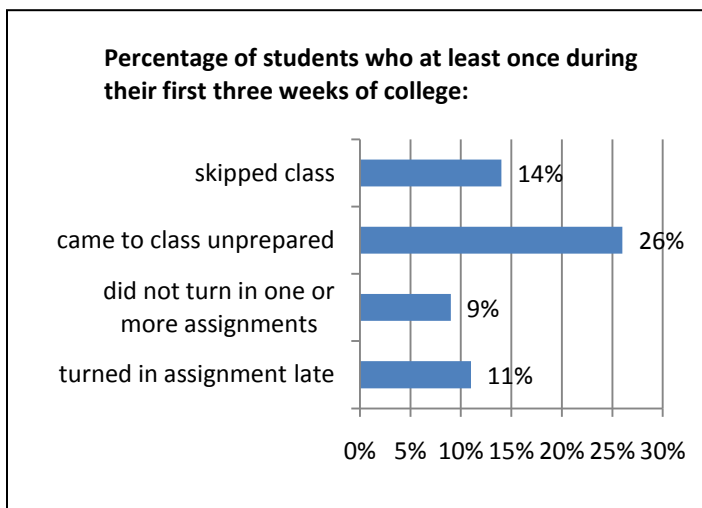
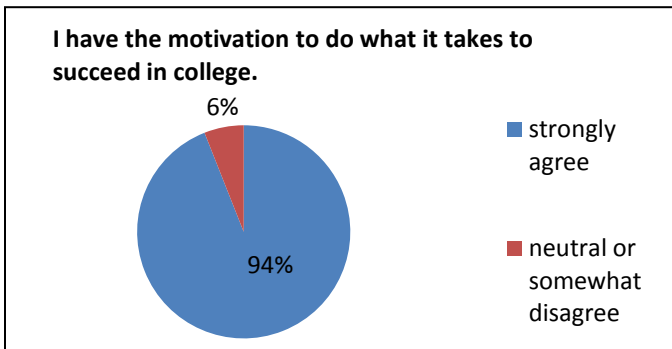
Imagine a college at which every new student is clear about the college's high expectations for performance—and every student has high aspirations for his or her own success.

### Preliminary Findings

In response to the statement, "I have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college," 94% of PCCUA entering students *strongly agree*. While this motivation is critical, it has little value—indeed it is wasted—if students do not understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement.

When colleges set clear and high expectations for all students, they often find that students' aspirations rise. Students begin to believe they can succeed—even if they did not succeed in high school. Then, students not only become more likely to attain their goals but also begin to reach for more.

### Entering Students Need Clear and High Expectations



2008 SENSE Field Test Findings

## Principle #3: A Plan and a Pathway to Success

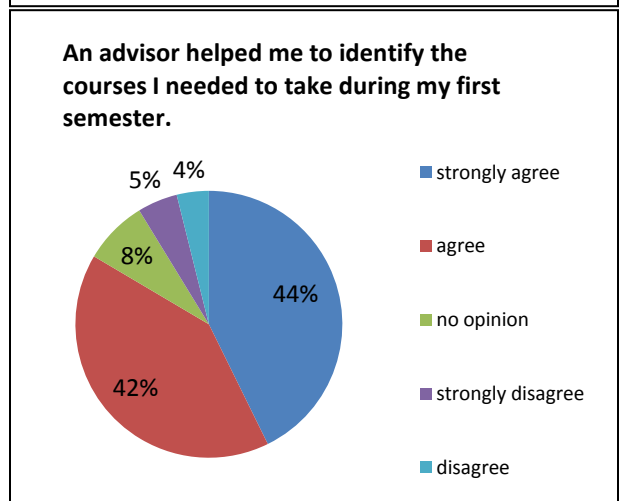
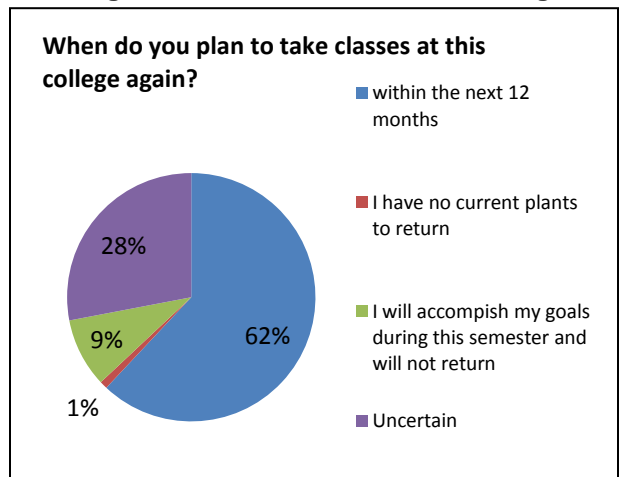
Imagine a college at which every entering student, in the first three weeks of college, defines his or her educational goals and develops a plan for attaining them. Imagine further that these plans are updated regularly, with guidance, as students progress.

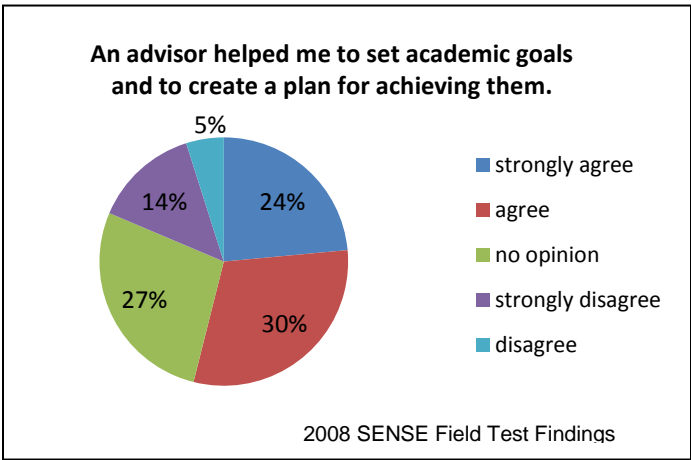
### Preliminary Findings

There is ample evidence to document the importance of academic advising and planning. Having a plan—clearly defined goals and a roadmap for reaching them—plays a critical role in student persistence. Yet, despite their high aspirations, 28% of entering students are uncertain when they plan to take classes again.

About 86% of entering students *agree or strongly agree* that an advisor helped them select their courses, but only 54% of entering students *agree or strongly agree* that an advisor helped them to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them. *SENSE* data also shows that lower percentage of part time students report working with an advisor.

### Entering Students and Academic Planning





*“Students have their dreams and goals in hand, but their action plan is blank. We, as professors, educators, and staff, should be able to help them fill in the blanks.”*  
 --Faculty Member

**Principle #4: An Effective Track to College Readiness**

*Imagine a college at which all academically under-prepared students have an effective, efficient path to completing developmental education and beginning college-level work.*

**Preliminary Findings**

In the SENSE survey, a higher percentage of PCCUA students reported taking placement tests than at other small colleges and 78% of entering students indicated that they placed into a developmental course.

- 46% of entering students enrolled in developmental reading
- 53% enrolled in developmental writing
- 59% enrolled in developmental math
- 36% enrolled in a student success course

Additionally, there is growing evidence that participating in student success courses leads to improved student outcomes, particularly for developmental students.

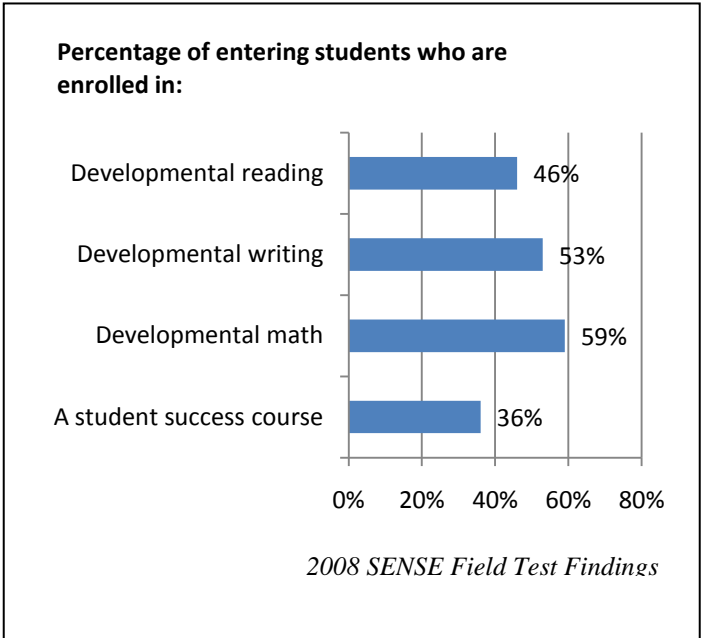
PCCUA participated in the SENSE special-focus module on student success courses and those students who responded to the survey question indicated that they agree or strongly agree that they gained key skills and knowledge.

- 79% gained skills to be a better student
- 69% report improving their time management skills
- 75% say they learned to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses
- 72% report learning about college services available to help students succeed in their studies
- 84% report learning about college policies and deadlines that affect them

More than half (66%) of the entering students responded that the student success course should be mandatory for all entering students.

According to the *Imagine Success: Engaging Entering Students 2008 Field Test Findings Report*, colleges may be better able to meet students’ needs by incorporating student support services such as academic advising and planning into student success courses.

**Entering Students and Developmental Education**



## Principle #5: Engaged Learning

*Imagine a college at which engaged learning is intentional, inescapable, and the norm for all students.*

### Preliminary Findings

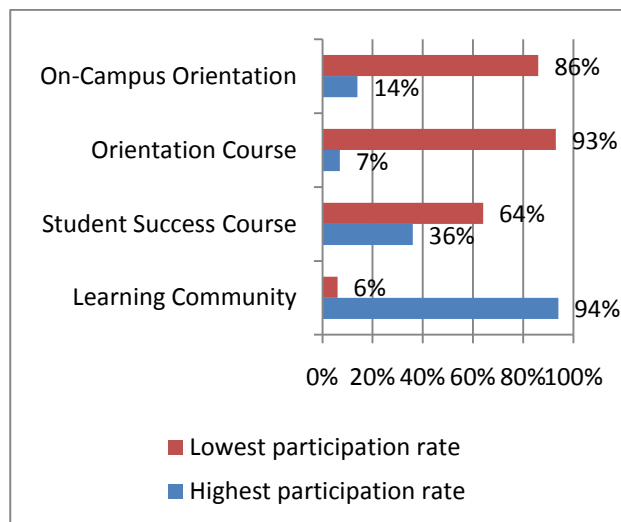
Evidence shows that engaging learning strategies are related to desired student outcomes such as persistence and academic achievement.

*SENSE* data indicate that large numbers of entering students are not experiencing these instructional approaches during their first three weeks of college.

- 64% of entering students say they are not enrolled in a student success course
- 94% say they are not enrolled in a learning community
- 78% say they **never** participate in a required study group outside of class
- Although 42% of entering students stated they had worked on a project or assignment in class, 64% of students said they **never** did so outside of class
- 32% say they **never** received prompt feedback (oral or written) about their performance from an instructor
- 24% report **never** asking for help from an instructor regarding questions or problems related to class
- 65% say they **never** discussed ideas from readings or assignments with instructor outside of class

Colleges can make the most of class time by using the instructional approaches that are most likely to engage students, help them learn, encourage them to build relationships and take advantage of campus resources—and make them want to come back for more.

## Engaging Experiences: Range of Responses by PCCUA Students



2008 *SENSE* Field Test Findings

## Principle #6: An Integrated Network of Financial, Social, and Academic Support

*Imagine a college at which every entering student is met with a personalized network of financial, academic, and social support.*

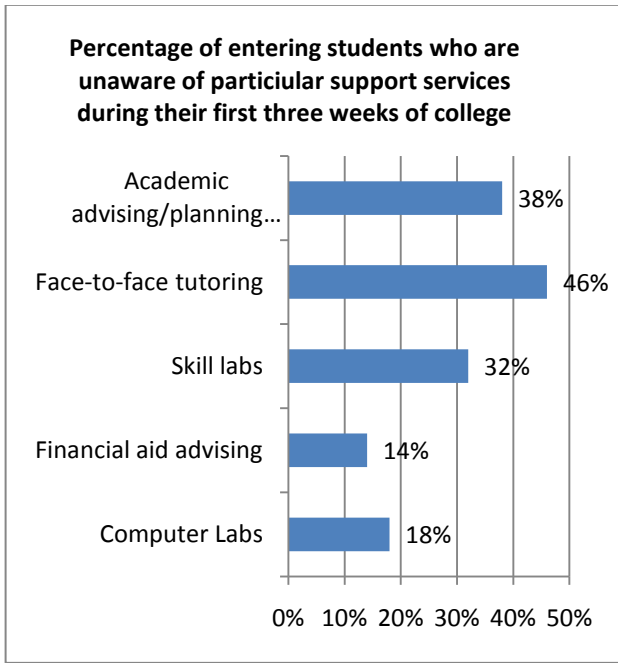
Entering students are most likely to succeed when expectations are high and they receive the support they need to achieve at high levels.

### Preliminary Findings

The ability to take advantage of student support services begins with knowing both that they exist and how to access them. Unfortunately, *SENSE* data indicate that students are not aware of student services during the first three weeks of school.

- 38% of entering students say they did not know about academic advising/planning services
- 46% report not knowing about face-to-face tutoring
- 12% say they were unaware of skill labs
- 16% say they were unaware of computer labs

Colleges can improve both awareness and use of student services by integrating them into the classroom experience. This makes services inescapable and ties them directly to the course content.



2008 SENSE Field Test Findings

## Overview of PCCUA 2008 SENSE

The 2008 SENSE field test survey was administered during the fall 2008. The survey was administered in classes randomly selected from the population of all first college-level English and math courses and all developmental education courses.

Both entering students and returning students responded to the survey but the preliminary findings in this report focus only on entering students.

## Characteristics of 2008 Field Test Respondents

Characteristics	Entering Students	Returning Students
Male	32%	23%
Female	69%	77%
Enrolled part-time	17%	27%
Enrolled full-time	83%	73%
Traditional age (18-24)	74%	48%
Non-traditional age (25-older)	28%	53%
Work more than 20 hrs per week	25%	41%
Married	14%	24%
Have children living with them	38%	56%

2008 SENSE Field Test Findings

## Race/Ethnicity of 2008 Field Test Respondents

Race/Ethnicity	Entering Students	Returning Students
Latino/Hispanic	3%	2%
White	43%	45%
African American	45%	44%

SENSE is one of three surveys administered by the Center for Community College Student Engagement. The others are the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Community College Faculty Survey of Student engagement (CCFSSE). All are tools that assess student engagement—how engaged students are with college, faculty and staff, with other students, and with their studies—and help colleges improve their educational practice so more students will succeed.

Why student engagement? Research shows that the more actively engaged students are, the more likely they are to learn, or persist with their studies, and to attain their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is a valuable yardstick for assessing the quality of colleges' educational practices and identifying ways they can help more students succeed.

- CCSSE, now in its seventh national administration, surveys more experienced students to gather information about their overall college experience.
- SENSE focuses on the first three weeks of students' college experience and assesses practices that are most likely to engage entering students and encourage them to stay in college until they attain their academic goals.
- CCFSSSE provides faculty perspectives on student experiences as well as their own work.
- Together, SENSE and CCSSE offer complementary pieces of the student success puzzle with
  - CCSSE providing a comprehensive look at the overall quality of students' education experiences and
  - SENSE offering a focused snapshot of new students and their earliest college experiences.

Source: Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2008). *Imagine Success: Engaging Entering Students (2008 SENSE Field Test Findings)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program

# CCSSE

## Community College Survey of Student Engagement-Spring 2008 Data

### 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 comprise 38 engagement items that reflect many of the most important aspects of the student experience. The benchmarks measure behaviors that educational research has shown to be powerful contributors to effective teaching, learning, and student retention.

The CCSSE benchmarks are:

- **active and collaborative learning**
- **student effort**
- **academic challenge**
- **student-faculty interaction**
- **support for learners.**

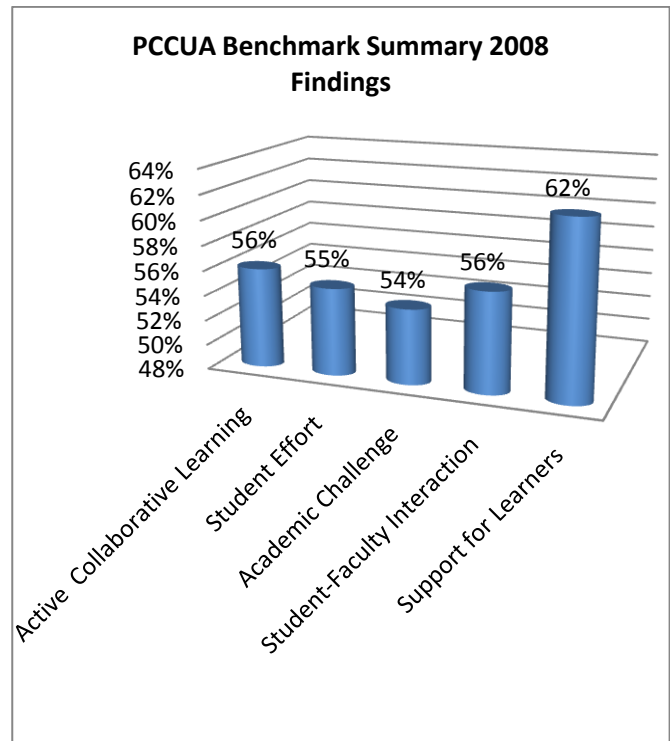
Every college has a score for each benchmark. These individual benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the mean—the average of all participating students—always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25.

The standardized scores provide an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark. They also make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges. To learn more, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

### Data Show the Way: 2008 CCSSE Benchmarks and CCFSE Results

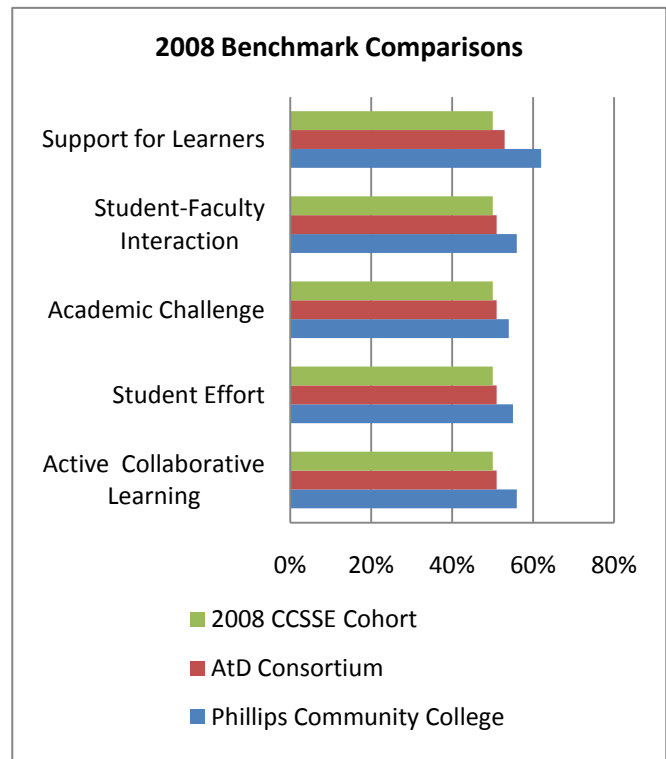
According to the *CCSSE 2008 Findings*, three of the five CCSSE benchmarks—**student effort**, **academic challenge**, and **support for learners**—can help colleges assess whether they are setting high expectations and providing high support.

PCCUA ranked above the national norm in all benchmarks areas, but there is still room for improvement with the lowest benchmarks in academic challenge (54%), student effort (55%), and the highest area in support for learners with 62%.



2008 CCSSE Cohort Data

### 2008 Benchmark Comparisons



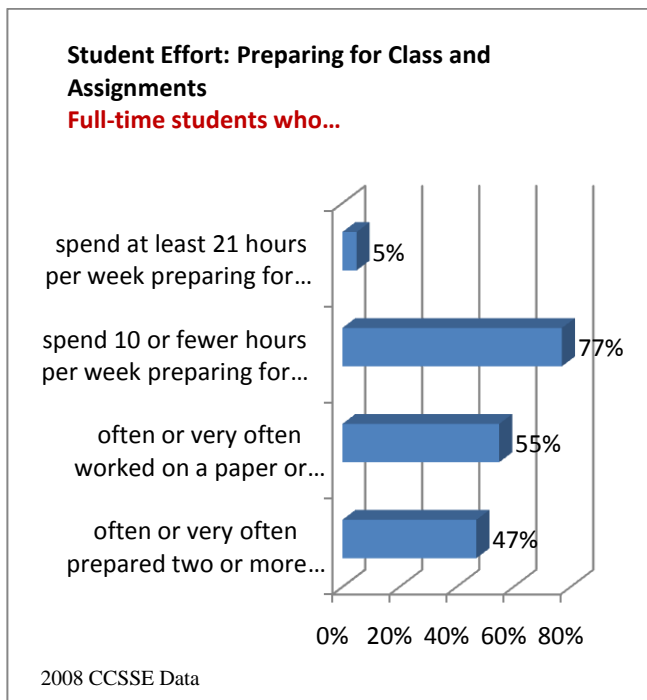
2008 CCSSE Cohort Data

## Student Effort

Survey items that are part of this benchmark indicate to what extent students are applying themselves in the learning process and engaging in activities important to their learning and success. These survey items ask about student behaviors such as preparing multiple drafts of papers, using tutoring services and skill labs, and preparing for class.

Among PCCUA full-time students:

- 47% often or very often prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.
- 55% often or very often worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.
- 77% spend 10 or fewer hours per week preparing for class.
- 5% spend at least 21 hours per week preparing for class.



*“They lecture over what they wanted you to read the night before. So reading often seems pointless. You sit there and think, “Why am I even here?”*

--Male Student

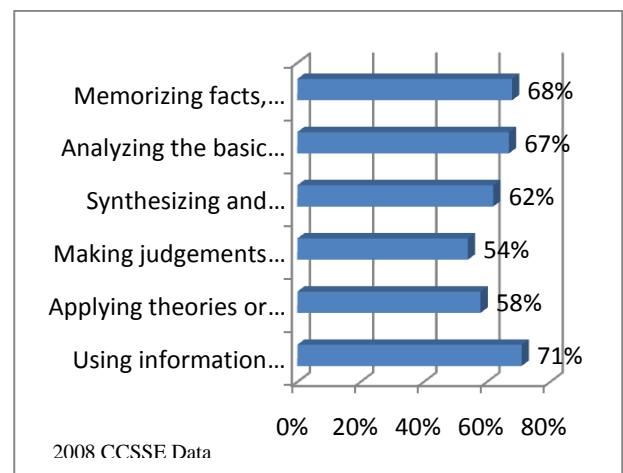
## Academic Challenge

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.

- More than half (60%) of 2008 PCCUA respondents report that they *often or very often* worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations; 11% of students say they *never* did so.
- 80% of respondents say the college *quite a bit or very much* encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying; 2% say the college does so *very little*.
- 62% of 2008 PCCUA respondents say their coursework emphasizes synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways *quite a bit or very much*.
- 58% report that the college emphasizes applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations *quite a bit or very much*. These are examples of higher-level cognition, or greater academic challenge.
- 68% of students say that their coursework emphasizes memorizing facts and ideas *quite a bit or very much* (not part of benchmark but is included for comparison.)

### Academic Challenge: Critical Thinking

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at PCCUA emphasized the following mental activities?





## Support for Learners

Survey items associated with this benchmark indicate the extent to which students use key academic and student support services as well as how important they consider these services to be. The survey items address advising, academic and career planning, academic skill development, financial aid, and other services that can affect learning and retention.

- 78% of PCCUA respondents say that the college provides the support they need to succeed in college *quite a bit or very much*. At the same time:
- 63% report that PCCUA provides the financial support they need to afford their education *quite a bit or very much*; with 17% who say the college provides this support *very little*.
- Less than half, (40%) of students say the college helps them cope with their nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) *quite a bit or very much*; 33% say the college provide this support *very little*.

Students indicate that they value services and think that they are important but do not utilize the services very often. CCSSE suggests that colleges can increase the use of these services by making them mandatory, integrating them into coursework, and providing them at times and in places that are convenient to both full-time and part-time students.

The college needs to expand efforts to build awareness of student services and encourage students to use them.

### Support for Learners: Use and Value of Student Services

#### How often do you use the following services?

	Often	Rarely/Never
<b>Academic Advising/Planning</b>	71%	20%
<b>Career Counseling</b>	42%	43%
<b>Job Placement assistance</b>	15%	49%
<b>Peer or other tutoring</b>	28%	50%
<b>Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)</b>	54%	29%
<b>Child Care</b>	12%	45%
<b>Financial Aid Advising</b>	64%	24%
<b>Computer Lab</b>	68%	22%
<b>Student Organizations</b>	26%	45%
<b>Transfer credit assistance</b>	31%	34%

## How important are the following services?

	Very	Not at all
<b>Academic Advising/Planning</b>	92%	8%
<b>Career Counseling</b>	82%	18%
<b>Job Placement assistance</b>	67%	33%
<b>Peer or other tutoring</b>	71%	29%
<b>Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)</b>	80%	20%
<b>Child Care</b>	56%	44%
<b>Financial Aid Advising</b>	86%	14%
<b>Computer Lab</b>	88%	11%
<b>Student Organizations</b>	67%	34%
<b>Transfer credit assistance</b>	73%	27%

CCSSE Institutional Report

## Intentional Engagement –Engaging Students

Colleges must make engagement strategies and support services inescapable, either by integrating them into the classroom experience, making them mandatory, or otherwise bring them to students.

Data consistently show that students are more engaged in the classroom setting than anywhere else.

- 50% of students *often or very often* work with other students on projects during class but PCCUA respondents indicated that 0% *often or very often* work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.

Given these data, colleges can ask themselves whether students who need support services should be sent across campus, to an unfamiliar building, at a time that meets the scheduling needs of an unknown staff member—or whether the services should be provided at times and places convenient to students, including those enrolled part-time.

## Engaging Faculty

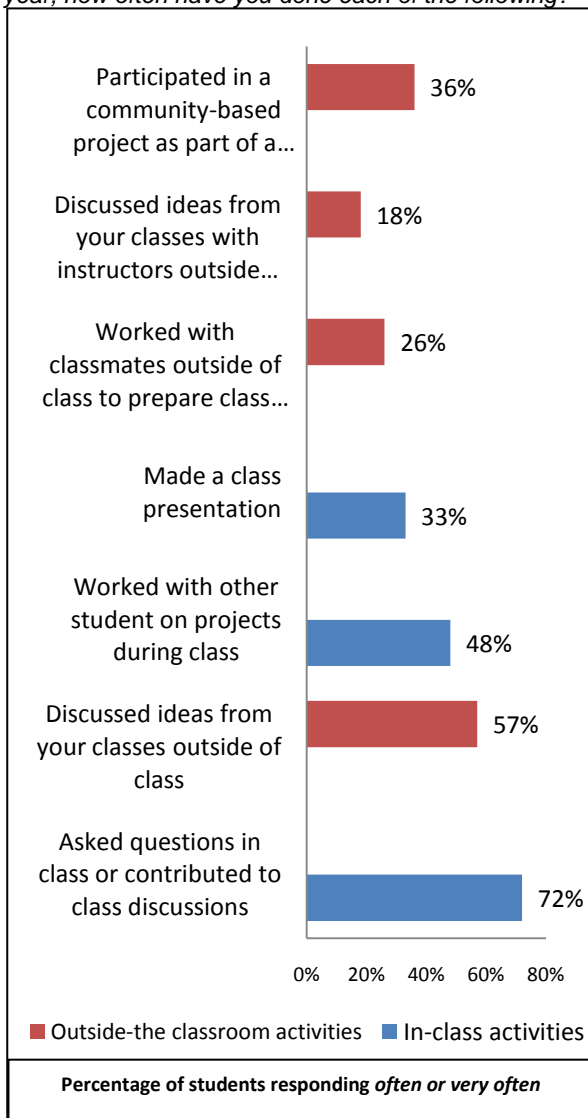
Colleges' focus on high expectations and high support should extend to faculty, including both full-time and part-time instructors. Faculty should be expected to maintain high standards for students, engage students in learning with active teaching strategies, and provide support to help students succeed.

Colleges can use their Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) results to target areas for professional development. For example, CCFSSE results indicate that there are opportunities for professional development in the area of active teaching and learning strategies.

- A fourth (25%) of the 2008 CCFSSSE respondents (faculty respondents) say that they spend 50-100% of their class time lecturing.
- 75% of faculty members allocate less than 10% of their class time to small group activities.
- 75% of faculty members report spending less than 20% of their class time on in-class writing.
- A fourth (25%) of faculty respondents spends no class time on student computer use.

### Engagement In and Out of the Classroom

*In your experience at PCCUA during the current school year, how often have you done each of the following?*

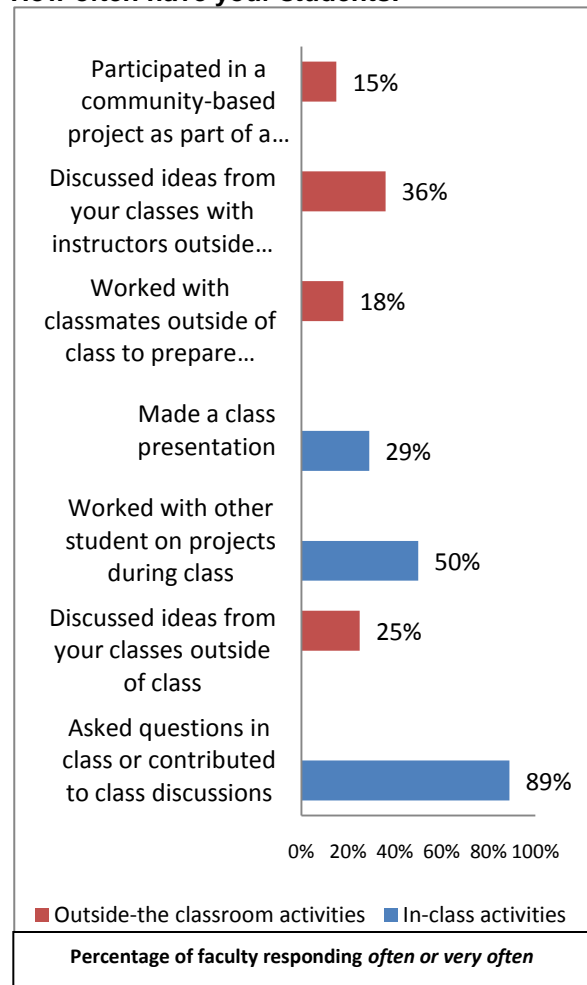


### CCFSSE: The Faculty Perspective

The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE), which is aligned with CCSSE, elicits information from faculty about their teaching practices, the ways they spend time both in and out of class, and their perceptions regarding students' educational experiences. For more information about CCFSSSE, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

CCSSE encourages comparisons of faculty perceptions with student responses and shares the data with faculty members. The comparison is not perfect because students report their experiences throughout the current academic year, but faculty members are asked to describe their practices in a specific, randomly selected course and also to indicate their perceptions of student experiences in the college more generally. The comparison can inspire powerful conversations because faculty and students typically have different perceptions of the degree of student engagement. Additional PCCUA data available at [www.pccua.edu/ccsse](http://www.pccua.edu/ccsse).

### How often have your students:



## **NOTES:**

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For more information: [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org) or [www.enteringstudent.org](http://www.enteringstudent.org)

**Sources:**

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2008). *Imagine Success: Engaging Entering Students (2008 SENSE Field Test Findings)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

*2008 SENSE Commitment and Support* Special Module

*2008 SENSE Student Success Course* Special Module

2008 Institutional Reports for Phillips College of the University of Arkansas  
*CCSSE* Institutional Report 2008  
*SENSE* Institutional Report 2008

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). (2008). *High Expectations and High Support*. Austin, Texas: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success *Starting Right*  
Focus Group Summary Report