

Tidewater Community College

Community College Survey of Student Engagement

2013 Results: Focus on Academic Affairs

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is a voluntary, national survey designed to provide knowledge about student behaviors that relate closely to student success and student retention. TCC participated in the 2013 survey administration of CCSSE along with 280 other colleges across the nation, including four Virginia community colleges. (see http://www.tcc.edu/welcome/collegeadmin/OIE/briefs/documents/CCSSEbrief2013_FINAL_000.pdf) For comparison purposes, CCSSE uses a three-year cohort based on data from 2011, 2012, and 2013 participating colleges. CCSSE survey items are grouped conceptually into five key areas, or benchmarks, of student engagement and success. This report focuses on four benchmarks: Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, and Student Faculty Interaction. For comparative purposes, the tables included throughout the report use the three-year cohort of extra-large colleges to ensure an appropriate comparison to TCC.

2013 Highlights: Academic Affairs

This report is divided into three parts: Part one focuses on student perceptions of faculty interaction, student effort, and academic challenge. Part two focuses on pedagogy, types of learning, and use of technology in the learning process. The last section, Part three, addresses student perceptions of their knowledge and skills regarding general education competencies.

Part 1: Student Perceptions—Faculty Interaction, Student Effort, and Academic Challenge

In general, the more interaction between students and faculty, the more likely students will persist and accomplish their educational goals. Faculty serve as mentors, role models, and guides for continuous lifelong learning. From Table 1 below, it appears that the majority of TCC students interact with faculty within the jurisdiction of the classroom, such as discussing grades, assignments, and receiving prompt feedback from instructors. However, outside of the classroom, students responded that they have very little interaction with instructors with regard to advising, discussions of readings, or activities other than coursework.

Table 1: Student Faculty Interaction (Responding Very Often/Often)

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	49.6	48.2
Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor	25.1	25.3
Discussed ideas from readings or classes w/instructors outside of class	17.6	16.8
Received prompt feedback from instructors on performance	60.1	57.4
Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	8.6	9.4

Students' behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals. Effort is a key component of the learning process, and items listed in Table 2 illustrate that the majority of students are working hard to succeed in their coursework. For example, the majority of students participate in class discussions, prepare two or more drafts before turning in assignments, and integrate information from various sources to complete an assignment. They tend to read books outside of class for enrichment, and the majority spends six or more hours per week preparing for class. However, based on the CCSSE results which focused on student services, relatively few students are proactive about utilizing services such as tutoring and specialty labs when they need supplemental help.

Table 2: Student Effort (Responding Very Often/Often)

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Asked questions in class or contributed to discussion	66.9	62.9
Made a class presentation	37.9	33.2
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	54.6	51.5
Worked on a paper or assignment that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	69.1	64.9
Came to class without completing readings or assignments	14.2	13.8
Skipped class	6.4	5.6
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	54.1	52.6
Read one or more books on your own for enjoyment or academic enrichment	72.8	72.3
Spent five hours or less per week preparing for class	40.4	41.8

Academic challenge, addressed in Table 3, relates to the nature and amount of assigned academic work and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. According to the data below, the college does a good job emphasizing the need for students to study. In addition, during the school year over half of the respondents were assigned to read five or more textbooks, manuals, and books and to write five or more papers or reports.

Table 3: Academic Challenge

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Assigned 5 or more textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings	52.8	55.6
Wrote 5 or more papers or reports of any length	60.1	60.8
On a scale of 1-7, with 7= Extremely Challenging, the extent exams have challenged you to do your best work (mean score)	4.95	4.92
The college emphasizes quite a bit or very much for students to spend significant amounts of time studying	76.2	74.0

Part 2: Student Perceptions—Pedagogy, Types of Learning, and Use of Technology

Part 2 depicts student perceptions of the complexity of cognitive tasks required in class and the types of collaborative learning that are emphasized in their coursework. Table 4 shows respondents' answers to coursework emphasis, while Table 5 provides a brief look at technology as it is used in the learning process.

Most notable is the fact that less than half of the students worked with other students in a collaborative effort on projects either during class or outside of class. Also, for both TCC and all extra-large college respondents very few classes used community-based projects as part of the regular course.

Table 4: Pedagogy/Coursework Learning Emphasis (Responding Very Often/Often or Very Much/Quite a Bit)

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Worked with other students on projects during class	43.7	48.3
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	21.9	23.4
Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class	50.2	49.5
Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	7.3	6.9
Coursework emphasized memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from courses and readings to repeat in the same form	69.3	67.1
Coursework emphasized analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	69.2	70.8
Coursework emphasized synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways	60.6	63.1
Coursework emphasized making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	52.6	55.4
Coursework emphasized applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	60.1	59.0
Coursework emphasized using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill	65.7	63.2

According to Table 5 two out of three respondents used email to communicate with their instructor, and over 70 percent used the internet or instant messaging to work on an assignment. By all measures, it appears that computer technology has been assimilated into many different facets of the learning process from communication to research.

Table 5: Use of Technology in the Learning Process (Responding Very Often/Often or Very Much/Quite a Bit)

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	66.5	61.9
Used the internet or instant messaging to work on an assignment	71.1	70.6
Used computers in academic work	82.4	78.2

Part 3: Student Perceptions—Acquisition of General Education Knowledge and Skills

TCC general education requirements address the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values expected of all TCC degree graduates. They are unbound by discipline and reflect the characteristics of educated persons. CCSSE has a number of items that provide indirect measures of general education as provided in Table 6.

Overall, 74 percent indicated that TCC contributed quite a bit or very much to the acquisition of a broad general education. The greatest percentage of students perceived they had gained in the areas of “thinking critically and analytically” and “learning effectively on your own.” The area of cultural and social understanding showed less improvement with less than half of the students indicating they had gained (quite a bit or very much) an understanding of people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds and had developed a code of personal ethics.

Table 6: How Much Has the Experience at TCC Contributed to Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development in the Following Areas (Responding Very Much/Quite a Bit)

Survey Item	% TCC	% Ex-Large Colleges
Acquiring a broad general education	73.5	73.3
Writing clearly and effectively (<i>Communication</i>)	62.5	63.3
Speaking clearly and effectively (<i>Communication</i>)	59.6	59.1
Thinking critically and analytically (<i>Critical Thinking & Scientific Reasoning</i>)	72.0	70.5
Solving numerical problems (<i>Quantitative Reasoning</i>)	56.4	57.3
Using computing and information technology (<i>Information Literacy</i>)	64.6	60.0
Gaining Information about career opportunities (<i>Information Literacy</i>)	53.6	50.2
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (<i>Cultural & Social Understanding</i>)	46.9	49.3
Developing a personal code of values and ethics (<i>Cultural & Social Understanding</i>)	48.0	47.0

Working effectively with others (<i>Cultural & Social Understanding</i>)	61.5	60.3
Understanding yourself (<i>Personal Development</i>)	58.2	56.3
Learning effectively on your own (<i>Personal Development</i>)	71.7	70.1
Contributing to the welfare of your community (<i>Personal Development</i>)	32.4	29.7
Developing clearer career goals (<i>Personal Development</i>)	59.3	57.1

Conclusions and Next Steps

The 2013 survey results show overall improvement in each of the four benchmark areas. Several observations of the data results are summarized below:

- With regard to faculty-student engagement, most interaction occurs within the confines of the classroom. Very little interaction takes place external to the classroom environment.
- With regard to student-student interaction, less than half of the students worked collaboratively with other students either in or out of the class on projects.
- Although students initiate quite a bit of effort to be successful, they are not likely to seek tutoring or specialty labs if supplemental help is needed.
- Overall, students feel challenged in the nature and amount of academic work assigned.
- The general education area of cultural and social understanding was perceived by the fewest respondents as being enhanced by their TCC experience.

The college continues to strive to improve engagement practices and adopt new ideas that show promise in the advancement of student success. There are many ways to use this data to assist the college in improving the academic experience. For example, enhancing collaborative learning and student interaction in the learning process might also improve the cultural and social understanding among students as they interact with others of a different race, ethnic group, or culture.

While the survey results describe student experiences, they do not tell us the “why” about experiences. For example, we know that students tend not to use many of the services that are available and considered by research to be key to student success, but we do not know why they are not using the services. Digging deeper into some of the results will help to examine specific details about student engagement activities. One way to do this is through focus groups that will provide structured discussion and lead the college to uncover possible strategies for improvement. The CCSSE website provides a comprehensive toolkit for planning and conducting focus groups and includes sample materials to use as a guide for organizing, conducting, and reporting findings from focus group work. The CCSSE toolkit is available at <http://www.ccsse.org/center/initiatives/iss/focusgrouptoolkit.cfm>.

Toolkit resources include:

- Planning Focus Groups
- Recruiting Focus Group Participants
- Focus Group Discussion Guidelines
- Analyzing and Reporting on the Focus Group Discussion

CCSSE results can be useful tools in determining how TCC retention and student success strategies and efforts compare to those offered by other community colleges. Indeed, by accessing the CCSSE web site (www.ccsse.org), members of the public can obtain scores from any of the participating schools, as well as group scores by various institutional characteristics. However, some caution should be exercised in examining all scores, as they are indirect (or self-reported) measures, and thus not as reliable as direct, or “hard” measures.

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