

Round Pegs for Square Holes: Assessing to Find the Right Fit for Student Affairs Programming for Retention at Community Colleges

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Session Focus

Motivation for Session

- Disconnect in meaning of retention, engagement and application of assessment between 4 year colleges and community colleges

Purpose and Intent

- Discuss terms and problematics of measuring retention and engagement efforts at the community college as well as strategies

Who Are We?

What is our interest in this session?

Differing Realities for Student Affairs at Community Colleges versus Four-Year Colleges

At Community Colleges:

- Students register often for one or series of classes rather than a program
- Students almost always commute distances
- Students tend to be older
- Students lives don't revolve around campus
- Students don't often declare program intent early
- For many students this is their second or third degree pursuit

At Four Year Colleges:

- Students focus on program progression rather than individual courses
- Students are typically somewhat residential, near campus
- Students tend to be younger
- Students seek social network of campus
- Students must declare program intent relatively early in tenure at school
- For many students this is their first career pursuit

How is the Community College Assessment Reality Different?

Different conceptions of what “retention” and “persistence” mean operationally.

- Four year: Retention is keeping students at the institution so that they can continue to persist, or move forward to graduation.
- Community College: Retention is keeping students enrolled in courses during any given term, so that they can continue to persist, or enroll in subsequent semesters.

How is the Community College Assessment Reality Different?

Different conception of how students are engaged in college and campus life.

- Four year students join organizations, clubs, inter/intramural athletics, college sports teams, live on campus, join fraternities and sororities, and maintain active social connections to campus.
- Community College students may join these organizations, often don't have a choice to belong to fraternities and sororities, do not have campus living as an option, and many times only have classes as their social connection to campus.

How are engagement and retention linked? Or, why do students fail to persist?

Challenges cited by students include: insufficient academic preparation, multiple work and family demands, financial constraints, inadequate childcare, and lack of connection to the college community.

The 2006 CCSSE at CCSN found that

- 10% of students report working 21+ hpw
- 31% report 11+ hpw of dependent care
- 24% report commuting 6+ hpw
- They perceive low levels of support from the college to help them thrive socially and to help with non-academic responsibilities

Popular Tools for CC Measurement

- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)
- Noel Levitz
- AACCC/ACT Faces of the Future
- Homegrown approaches
- Other?

What problems can arise when differences aren't acknowledged?

- For Assessment Planning and Practice?
- For Divisional and Institutional Strategic Planning
- Other?

Case in Point: Community College of Southern Nevada

Institution Profile in general, per CCSSE:

- 37% male, 63% female
- 90% are 18-39 years of age and 61% are 18-24 years of age
- 48% Caucasian, 19% Asian/Asian American, 17% Hispanic, 8% African/African American, 1% Native American, 6% other; 13% report International student status
- 64% are full time, 36% part time
- 22% are not native English speakers
- 32% are first generation, 32% report mother's highest degree is high school diploma or equivalent and 23% report the same for their father

More About CCSN: Academics

- 67% of CCSSE respondents report starting their college career at CCSN
- 74% report their highest level of educational attainment is a HS diploma or GED; 17% report either a certificate or associates degree, 5% report a bachelors degree and 1% have an advanced degree
- 61% have completed fewer than 30 college credit hours, 39% have completed fewer than 15 college credit hours
- 48% report earned grades of B+ or higher, 7% report earned grades of C- or lower

CCSN and CCSSE

Results Related to Academic Engagement

- #1: More department-based academic engagement is needed
- #2: Enhanced partnerships between Academic and Student Services are critical
- #3: Service Learning aligns Academic and Student Services under common objectives

CCSSE Results:

Increase Department Based Academic Engagement

...Such as departmental academic advising, transfer advising, department based co-curricular activities and in-house student support structures.

- Results indicate that students spend essentially no time (1-5 hpw) participating in college-sponsored activities, very little time (between 'rarely' and 'sometimes') obtaining academic advising and planning and peer or other tutoring, using skills labs, and obtaining transfer credit assistance
- Students indicate that each of these objectives are 'somewhat' important to them

Increasing Department Based Academic Engagement

- How can student affairs staff support/facilitate the enhancement of department-based academic engagement?
- What approaches to AA and SA partnerships have been effective?

CCSSE Results

Service Learning Can Complement the Community College Student's Academic Experience

- Service learning is directly tied to instructional objectives, is course-based, and differs from volunteerism in that it is course-embedded.
- Research indicates that students completing a service learning experience feel more committed and connected to campus, community, and often confirm their suspected career path. In a word, they are engaged.

CCSSE Results: Students aren't engaging through service-learning experiences

CCSSE results indicate that students rarely:

- Participated in a community based project as part of a regular course
- Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework
- Spent class time understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, developing a personal code of values and ethics, or contributing to the welfare of their community

Solution: Engage Through Service Learning

- How do you see service learning engaging and retaining students on campus?
- How would that work at a community college?
- What needs to be done to make that happen?

Your Thoughts

- What else can be useful in helping engage students to retain them at the community college? What can student affairs professionals do?

Some Resources

- NASPA Assessment & Retention Conference (each June)
- NASPA NetResults
- CCSSE
- Center for the Study of (and Journal of) College Student Retention
 - http://www.cscsr.org/alan_seidman_cv.htm

Useful Websites

- Community College Student Retention (US Dept. of Education):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/reten.html>
- National Academic Advising Association:
<https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/retain.htm>

Useful Websites

- The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (U of Oklahoma):
<http://www.ou.edu/csrde/index.html>
- The Center for Community College Policy:
http://www.communitycollegetpolicy.org/html/top.asp?page=/html/publications_main.asp