

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) Key Points

Introduction

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provides information about effective educational practice in community colleges and assists institutions in using that information to promote improvements in student learning and persistence. CCSSE's goal is to provide member colleges with results that can be used to inform decision making and target institutional improvements. **Student engagement**, or the amount of time and energy that students invest in meaningful educational practices, is the underlying foundation for CCSSE's work. CCSSE's survey instrument, the Community College Student Report (CCSR), is designed to capture student engagement as a measure of institutional quality.

CCSSE Member Colleges

CCSSE will again utilize a 3-year cohort of participating colleges (2006 through 2008) in all of its data analyses,¹ including the computation of benchmark scores. This cohort is referred to as the **2008 CCSSE Cohort**.

This approach, which was instituted in 2006, increases the total number of institutions and students contributing to the national dataset; this in turn increases the reliability of the overall results. In addition, the 3-year cohort approach minimizes the impact, in any given year, of statewide consortia participation.

The 2008 CCSSE Cohort is comprised of a total of 585 institutions across 48 states, plus British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and the Marshall Islands. Two hundred ninety-five of these member colleges are classified as small (< 4,500), 147 as medium (4,500-7,999), 96 as large (8,000-14,999), and 47 as extra-large institutions (15,000 + credit students).² One hundred fourteen of the Cohort member colleges are located in urban areas, 129 in suburban areas, and 342 in rural-serving areas.

Raymond Walters College falls into the small size comparison group.

CCSSE Statistical Analysis

Effect Size as a Measure of Notable Difference

Effect size is a measure of group differences. In the CCSSE results, it refers to mean differences between the institution and the group of colleges to which the institution is being

¹ For returning participants, the college's most recent year of participation is included in data analyses. For example, if a college participated in 2007 and 2008, only the 2008 data would be used in the 3-year cohort.

² These enrollment statistics are based on the most recent IPEDS data with the exception of situations in which it is necessary for colleges to self-report.

compared divided by their standard deviation. This procedure rescales all effect sizes to the same scale (differences in standard deviations) and thus allows for comparisons.

CCSSE uses both statistical significance and standardized effect sizes to identify items on which a college's performance differs from comparison groups. An asterisk or directional arrow highlights items for which students' responses differ at a statistically significant level ($p < .001$ **and** have standardized effect sizes equal to or greater than .2. Statistical significance is based on the effect size, the number of respondents, and the variability in their responses; as a single number, it also is the probability that the observed difference between outcomes would occur where there is truly no difference. While this is a useful guideline for identifying differences between groups, very small differences can be statistically significant in very large sample sizes such as the CCSSE national data set. Thus, items where notable differences occurred were identified as standardized effect sizes of .2 or greater.

Statistical Significance Meets Practical Significance

In addition to focusing on items meeting the criteria highlighted above, look for patterns in students' responses. For example:

- ✓ Are students consistently above or below the mean of the comparison group in certain areas of engagement?
- ✓ Are the differences explainable in terms of the college's mission, the nature of the undergraduate program, or certain students' characteristics?

Also, do not rely exclusively on statistical significance tests to identify areas that warrant attention. A consistent pattern of scoring above the mean, even though all the items may not reach statistical significance, may indicate the institution is doing the right things in terms of good educational practice. At the same time, some institutions have very high expectations for student engagement and may fall short of their own aspirations even though comparisons with other institutions are favorable. And in some cases, of course, it may be that the national mean is itself unacceptably low.