

Key Benchmarks -- LANE Community College

Overview of Entering Student Engagement Benchmarks (February 2011)

Student Retention, Success, and the *SENSE*:

Today's community and technical colleges are facing unprecedented challenges as they deal with decreasing financial support while trying to serve more students who are arriving underprepared for college work.

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*), an initiative of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (a research and service initiative of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin), helps community and technical colleges focus on the "front door" of the college experience. Grounded in research about what works in retaining and supporting entering students, *SENSE* collects and analyzes data about institutional practices and student behaviors in the earliest weeks of college. These data can help colleges understand students' critical early experiences and improve institutional practices that affect student success in the first college year. The *SENSE* is administered during the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall academic term to students in courses randomly selected from those most likely to enroll entering students.

During fall term 2009, Lane joined the 16 other Oregon community colleges in administering the *SENSE*. That "consortium" project was funded through ODCCWD. Nearly 600 Lane students completed the survey.

***SENSE* Benchmarks:**

The six *SENSE* benchmarks included in this report combine conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement, learning, and persistence. These benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important in quality educational practice. The six *SENSE* benchmarks of effective educational practice in community colleges are:

- Early Connections
- High Expectations and Aspirations
- Clear Academic Plan and Pathway
- Effective Track to College Readiness
- Engaged Learning
- Academic and Social Support Network.

***SENSE* Highlights:**

In Oregon Community Colleges:

1. **Relationships matter.** Entering students' first impressions of their colleges – 71% of entering students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with "The very first time I came to this college, I felt welcome."

2. There is a disconnect between students' aspirations and actions.

- 90% of entering students “strongly agreed” “or “agreed” that they have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college.
- 84% of entering students “strongly agreed” “or “agreed” that they are academically prepared to succeed in college.

3. Following is a summary of the percentage of students who, at least once during their first three weeks of college:

- Turned in an assignment late – 38%
- Did not turn in one or more assignments – 26%
- Came to class unprepared – 50%
- Skipped class – 28%.

4. Students don't know what they don't know.

Following is a summary of the percentage of entering students who are unaware of particular support services during their first three weeks of college:

- Academic advising/planning services – 20%
- Face-to-face tutoring – 23%
- Skill labs – 32%
- Financial aid advising – 28%
- Computer labs – 19%
- College orientation – 16%.

Analysis and Action:

These Benchmarks and their scores are intended to help us understand experiences of new students at Lane and other Oregon community colleges. Lane's SAGA Committee has worked with these data to better understand Lane students' experiences and perceptions and to link knowledge gained from these data to initiatives designed to improve student learning and goal achievement. The Student Success Oversight Committee also is working with the findings from *SENSE*. The Oregon Community College Student Success Plan, *Measure What You Treasure*, adopted in 2008, guides the intentional efforts of the colleges to improve and enhance academic experiences and success rates of Oregon's community college students. Each year the work plan is updated to articulate the specific activities scheduled for each phase of the plan (<http://www.odccwd.state.or.us/StudentSuccess/edocs/policy/StudentSuccessReport-StrategicAgenda2010.pdf>).

*** Notes about Benchmark Scores:**

Each benchmark score was computed by staff from *SENSE* by averaging the scores on survey items that comprise that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the weighted mean across all students is 50 and the standard deviation across all participating students is 25.

This standardizing of the scores enables more meaningful comparisons across benchmarks and across colleges. Knowing that all benchmarks are on the same scale makes it immediately obvious that a college's scores are either above or below those for other participating colleges. Knowing that the mean is at 50 across all students in the sample enhances the score's usefulness for benchmarking, as the score contains information about whether an institution's performance is better or worse than average – and how much better or worse. For example, a benchmark

score of 55 on Early Connections and 42 on Clear Academic Plan and Pathway would indicate to a college that the institution is performing relatively better in regard to Early Connections than in regard to Clear Academic Plan and Pathway. Further, the benchmark scores allow the college to understand that the results are above the average for participating colleges on one benchmark and below average on the other. Thus, the data may be used to identify relative strengths as well as areas the college may need to improve.