

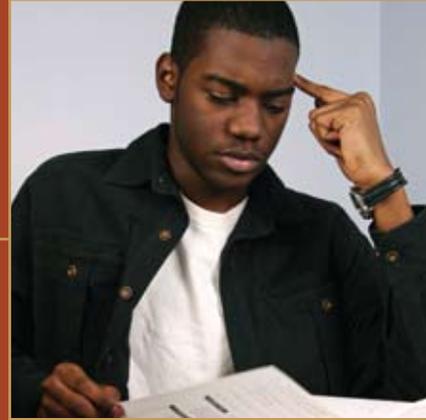


# MAKING CONNECTIONS

*Dimensions of Student Engagement*



2009 Findings



## Acknowledgments

Quite appropriately, this 2009 *CCSSE* National Report is dedicated to community college people who are *making connections*.

To the teachers who design educational experiences that intentionally connect students to faculty and to one another — and who help students consistently connect their studies to their lives.

To the advisors and counselors who connect students to resources, to services, and to their potential futures.

To the social networking innovators and early adopters, all a-Twitter with their FacebookingYouTubeLinkedIn possibilities for engaging students more effectively.

To the learning technologists, media specialists, instructional designers, webmasters, and IT staff who make the gadgets and the gizmos go, and the whatzits and whatchamacallits work, in the interest of student learning and success.

To the leaders who work to connect the college community to a shared vision of student success and a shared belief that all students, given the right conditions, can learn.

To the students who connect with one another, providing encouragement and support — and who make it so clear to us that in their often heroic efforts to achieve educational goals, *connections matter*.

**Kay McClenney, Director**

Center for Community College Student Engagement

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*“This college is like a job that you pay to go to but enjoy while you’re there. A lot of the people I’ve met here are like family. I have teachers that I no longer take classes with, but I still maintain a mentorship with them. So that’s really good.”*

— Male student

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## Forewords

*“I am a part of all that I have met.”*

— Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

*Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.*

*“Pooh!” he whispered.*

*“Yes, Piglet?”*

*“Nothing,” said Piglet, taking Pooh’s paw.*

*“I just wanted to be sure of you.”*

— A.A. Milne (1882–1956), from  
*The House at Pooh Corner*

*“The Internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow.”*

— Bill Gates

*“I have fallen in love with this [online] method of teaching. I feel more connected to my students than I ever have . . . .”*

— Gina Greco, English instructor, Hudson Valley Community College (NY) and University of Phoenix

*“Even when they’re in a physical classroom, of course, students can use technology to ignore the classroom around them. . . . Somehow professors have got to engage the students more than the technology at their fingertips.”*

— Mark Blankenship, critic and reporter

*“I trained for it, I tried it, and I’ll never do it again. While online teaching may be the wave of the future (although I desperately hope not), it is not for me. . . . ‘Virtual community’ is the ultimate oxymoron.”*

— Elayne Clift, Lecturer at various colleges and universities

*“It was impossible to get a conversation going, everybody was talking too much.”*

— Yogi Berra

*“Eventually everything connects — people, ideas, objects. The quality of the connections is the key to quality per se.”*

— Charles Eames (American designer, 1907–1978)

*“With new technologies we’ve tended to do the same things more efficiently, when what we need is to do different things more effectively.”*

— Christopher Dede, Professor, Harvard School of Education

*“These are just technologies. Using them does not make you modern, smart, moral, wise, fair, or decent. It just makes you able to communicate, compete, and collaborate farther and faster.”*

— Thomas L. Friedman, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist



## Build Connections, Build Success

*Most students arrive at college expecting to succeed and believing that they are motivated to do so. Too often, though, there is an evident difference between being motivated and being prepared to succeed. Still, community college students often come to recognize one factor that plays a pivotal role in their success: connections.*

*Entering students predict they will stay in college and achieve their academic goals because of their own resolve. They expect to succeed because of “my own determination,” or so “my children will have a better life.” But most continuing students indicate that, at some point, they considered dropping out, and their reasons for staying in school are revealing: They almost always include the name of a particular person — an instructor, a staff member, another student — who gave the encouragement, guidance, or support they needed to keep going.*

*Personal connections are the unanticipated success factor — a critical variable that improves the odds of persistence. But students’ typical patterns of college attendance, including part-time enrollment and juggling classes with work and family commitments, create challenges. Establishing personal connections may not happen easily, much less automatically. This discrepancy raises an important question for colleges and their approach to engaging students: Since strong personal connections are key to keeping more students in college, how can institutions foster stronger and more diverse connections with (and among) students?*

This year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) focuses on the importance of relationships among students, faculty, and staff, and with the institutions themselves: how these connections evolve, the value they add, and the importance of devoting greater effort to nurturing them.

In this evaluation of connections, it is important to distinguish between communicating information and connecting. Communicating information is a one-way, self-contained event. The individual for whom the information is intended may or may not receive it, understand it, care about it, or act on it. Connecting is an interactive, iterative series of events that is personal and creates a sense of presence. No one ever asks “so what?” in the wake of a genuine connection.

### *The Connected College*

*Connected colleges* effectively connect with their students and encourage them to build the relationships — with faculty, staff, other students — that are essential to student success. Connected colleges are easily identified by their campus cultures. Their language and actions communicate the belief that *all* students can succeed and demonstrate that everyone on campus is committed to facilitating that success. Moreover, a college’s commitment to building connections is:

- ★ Evident across campus groups, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

*“One of the things that was unexpected that worked for me ... everyone in my college success course really coalesced, they really networked. I still see those people. We talk and we’re all chummy. It’s like this ground floor. ... It kind of keeps you in the community.”*

— Male student

*“Students have come back to me and said, ‘This person cared.’ The sense that whoever they’re working with actually cares about their welfare has an impact on their success.”*

— Staff member



## Student Engagement and CCSSE

Community colleges use *CCSSE* to collect data about student engagement on their campuses and then use those data to improve student learning and persistence. Once colleges have data about students' experiences, they can begin making decisions based on evidence — rather than suppositions — about what works for their students.

All *CCSSE* work is grounded in a large body of research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study — the more likely they are to learn, to stick with their studies, and to attain their academic goals.

The *CCSSE* survey focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. The Center for Community College Student Engagement works with participating colleges to administer the survey, which measures students' levels of engagement in a variety of areas. The colleges then receive their survey results, along with guidance and analyses they can use to improve their programs and services for students.

Each year, *CCSSE* includes five special-focus survey items that examine an area of student experience and institutional performance. These five items address a different topic each year and are separate from the core survey, which does not change. The 2009 special-focus survey items explore the use of technology for making connections.

*CCSSE* data analyses for the core survey items include a three-year cohort of participating colleges. Using a three-year cohort increases the number of institutions and students in the national data set, optimizes representation of institutions by size and location, and therefore increases the stability of the overall results.

The 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort includes more than 400,000 students from 663 colleges that participated in *CCSSE* in 2007, 2008, and 2009. For colleges that participated more than once in this three-year period, the cohort includes data only from the most recent year of participation.

- ★ Carried through all college policies and procedures, from admission and financial aid services to class scheduling, teaching practices, student support services, and so forth.
- ★ Visible in every contact with a student or potential student, starting with outreach to local high schools and continuing through day-to-day interactions with students in classrooms, on campus, and online.
- ★ Cognizant of and relevant to student needs.
- ★ Apparent in all communications — face-to-face, print, and electronic.

Colleges that successfully engage students do not merely set up classrooms on a campus and say, “Come here.” They meet students where they are — literally, figuratively, and virtually — and help them get where they need to be.

In focus groups, students often reflect on the importance of relevant, personal connections. For example, when discussing a tutoring center with a one-size-fits-all approach, one student observes, “They probably are there to help, but I need somebody that’s going to be more interested in *my* situation.”

But faculty and staff members can demonstrate a commitment to connecting with students — to understanding and acting on *their situations* — in many ways, big and small. As one staff member in a focus group describes, “You can stop them in the hallway and ask, ‘Do you need assistance? Do you know where the bookstore is?’ If not, take them. If you show just a little bit of interest, then they’re already bonded with someone on campus, so if they have a problem, they feel comfortable coming back to you.”

Students consistently report that gestures like these make a lasting difference: “I was alone when I came here. It was the first time I’d been on my own since high school. And I didn’t really know where to go. But the lady at the front office helped me through everything even though it wasn’t her department. She walked me down to the financial aid office, walked me down to get my classes set up.”

### Colleges Making Connections

**Prince George’s Community College (MD)** created six Collegian Centers that provide an academic “place to belong” outside the classroom and give students opportunities to interact with faculty and other students with similar interests. Organized by discipline, the centers provide opportunities for mentoring and career exploration. For example, participants in a Collegian Center for students interested in criminal justice have visited the University of Maryland to see the dollhouses that are used to teach crime scene investigation, attended seminars on current legal issues, and visited a DNA exhibit at a local science museum.

**East Georgia College (GA)** unites its student engagement efforts under the theme “Education with a Personal Touch.” The college recently launched a comprehensive, student-focused customer service process, which features a new student services complex. The complex houses enrollment, business, counseling, and student life offices, providing a one-stop shop for a variety of student services and serving as a gathering place. East Georgia College has used *CCSSE* to monitor the success of these and other campus initiatives since 2005.



# Characteristics of Community College Students

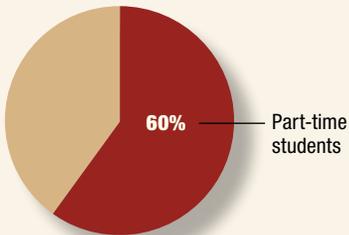
Community colleges serve a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals and levels of academic preparation. Some are returning from the workforce to learn new skills. Many are first-generation college students who have never been to a college campus. Most have significant demands on their time as they juggle personal, academic, and financial challenges.

Colleges focused on helping more students succeed acknowledge these challenges but do not use them as justification for low levels of student success. Instead, they use the data to understand students' needs, connect with students where they are in their lives, and purposefully create relationships that help students stay in college and succeed.

## Key Demographics, Enrollment, and Attendance

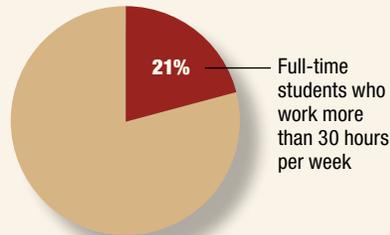
Most community college students are enrolled part-time. Many students, even full-time students, work nearly full-time. Thus, many community college students take classes at night and online.

**Most students are enrolled part-time**



Source: IPEDS, fall 2007.

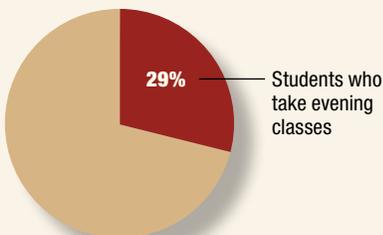
**Many full-time students work close to full-time**



More than half (54%) of community college students work 20 or more hours per week, while more than one-third (36%) work more than 30 hours per week. Additionally, more than one in five full-time students work more than 30 hours per week.

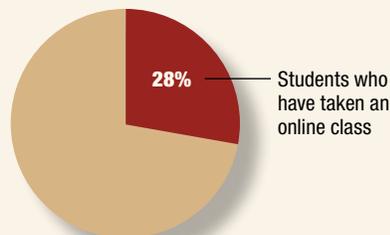
Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

**Many students take evening classes**



Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

**Many students take classes online**



Source: Data from American Association of Community Colleges and Allen, I.E. & Seaman, J. *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008*. Needham, MA: The Sloan Consortium. Analysis by CCSSE.

*"I will use tutoring as soon as I can get time to go up there. It's just a matter of getting time. I take care of not only my two-and-a-half-year-old son but my parents as well; they are both handicapped."*

— Female student

*"After the class is over, or after the work is done, just the interaction with all the different people, all the different cultures coming together in one place ... [a]fter the business is handled, then it's just fun, so I'm confident I'll finish and stay."*

— Male student



## Least Engaged Community College Students

Students who are less engaged are at the greatest risk of dropping out. Colleges should identify the least engaged students at their own institutions and direct resources to interventions that will more effectively connect these students with the college community.

For example, students who work more than 30 hours per week are less likely to be engaged, but students who work on campus have more opportunity to be highly engaged. Thus, colleges might consider staffing college programs with more student workers.

This strategy may have the added benefit of better engaging students who come into contact with the student employees. As one staff member notes in a focus group, “Students work our front counter, so a lot of times you have students [saying], ‘Hey, wait a minute, you’re in my class!’ So, we have the students-helping-students thing going on.”

### Least Engaged Students\*

- ★ Part-time students
- ★ Traditional-age students (those 24 and younger)
- ★ Students not seeking credentials
- ★ Students who have not completed 30 or more credits
- ★ Male students
- ★ Financially independent students (those using their own income or savings as the major source to pay the tuition while not using their parents’ or spouse’s money)
- ★ Students who work more than 30 hours per week
- ★ Students who have not taken developmental courses
- ★ Students who have not taken study skill courses
- ★ Students who have not participated in orientation
- ★ Students who have not participated in learning communities

\*This analysis does not include students who hold degrees.

Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

## Students’ Goals

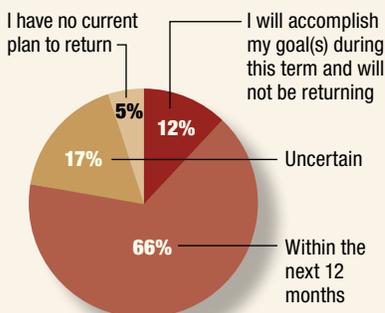
Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college.

	Primary goal	Secondary goal	Not a goal
Complete a certificate program	30%	19%	51%
Obtain an associate degree	60%	20%	20%
Transfer to a four-year college or university	51%	22%	27%
Obtain or update job-related skills	42%	27%	31%
Self-improvement/personal enjoyment	40%	34%	26%
Change careers	29%	16%	55%

Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

## Students’ Plans after the Current Semester

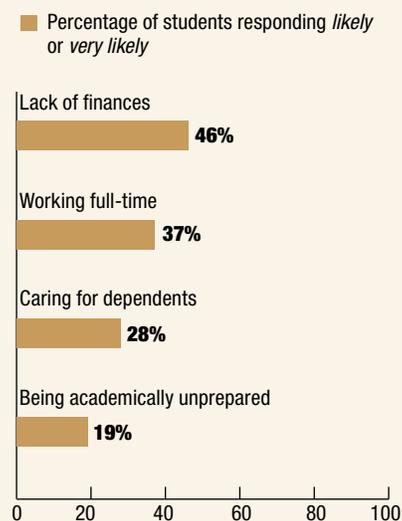
Asked when they plan to take classes at this college again, 22% had no plan to return or were uncertain about their future plans.



Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

## Barriers to Returning to College

How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?



In addition, 48% of respondents say that transfer to a four-year college or university is a likely or very likely reason they would not return to this college.

Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.



## Cultivating Connections

“The medium is the message.” Marshall McLuhan’s famous phrase reminds us that a communication medium fundamentally affects the way people receive messages and construct their perceptions of reality. The medium itself drives changes in behavior.

Community colleges can apply this concept to their efforts to connect with students. The challenge is twofold: (1) using data to understand the status quo — which students need to be better engaged; and (2) finding ways to use each interactive medium — such as individual face-to-face exchanges, classroom experiences, online services, and social media — to create meaningful, lasting connections.

Increasingly, colleges are using technology to reach out to students. Recent data show significant growth in the use of online courses and support services, including online developmental education classes, orientation, and tutoring. The effectiveness of these classes and services varies — in part because success depends on execution and in part because some programs and services, and some students, are better suited to online delivery than others.

Whatever the mechanism for reaching out to students, the work of connecting is ongoing. It requires an interaction, a feeling of personal investment, a commitment to listen and to respond.

In the following pages, *Making Connections* addresses four arenas: connections in virtual space, in the classroom, on campus, and beyond the campus. In each of these dimensions and at every point in time, colleges can strengthen students’ connections to the institution by fostering relationships between students and a variety of others, notably faculty, staff, and other students. Student voices and other qualitative data featured throughout this report were documented in focus groups *CCSSE* conducted through the MetLife Foundation-supported *Initiative on Student Success*.

### Colleges Making Connections

**Jefferson Community College (OH)** increased fall-to-fall student retention from 48% to 56% over two years by making its Orientation to College course mandatory for all first-time, full-time students.

Troubled by disproportionately high failure rates among male students of color, **Halifax Community College (NC)** recently established the male mentoring program P.R.I.D.E. (*PReparing men for Intellectual, acaDemic, and Educational success*). The program uses a variety of high-touch interventions to create an on-campus support system, builds community connections through business field trips and college visits, and offers technology support with a loaner laptop for each participant. Students are assigned a Learning Coach who is their contact for academic, personal, career, mentoring, and other needs. Coaches also help their students develop a comprehensive college success plan and monitor their progress. HCC’s fall-to-fall retention rate for full-time black

### 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, and 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 similarly sized colleges.

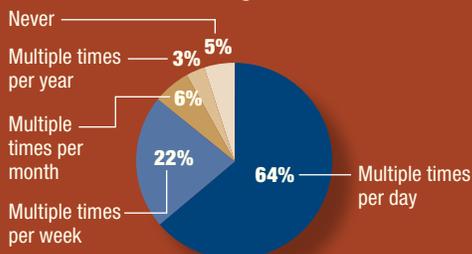
Visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org) to see descriptions of the benchmarks, specific survey items associated with each benchmark, and key findings organized by benchmark.



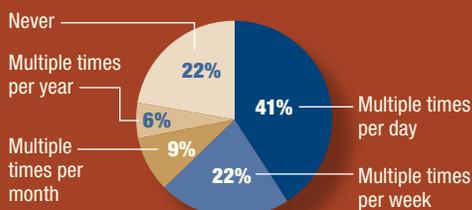
## Students' Use of Social Networking Tools for Any Purpose

How often do you use social networking tools, such as instant messaging, text messaging, MySpace and/or Facebook, Twitter, etc., for any purpose? (This does not include e-mail.)

### Traditional-age students



### Nontraditional-age students

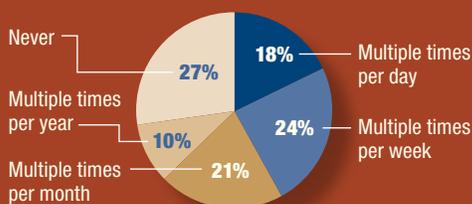


Source: 2009 CCSSE data.

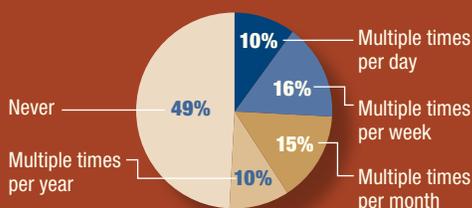
## Students' Use of Social Networking Tools To Communicate about Coursework

How often do you use social networking tools, such as instant messaging, text messaging, MySpace and/or Facebook, Twitter, etc., to communicate with other students, instructors, or college staff about coursework at this college? (This does not include e-mail.)

### Traditional-age students



### Nontraditional-age students



Source: 2009 CCSSE data.

males currently is 38%, as compared with 58% for all full-time students. The college hopes P.R.I.D.E. will provide the connections these students need to stay in college. At the end of P.R.I.D.E.'s first semester, 94% of participants say the mentoring program has been *very important* or *important* in helping them remain enrolled and successful.

## Connections in Virtual Space

Quantitative data indicate that students increasingly use social media and other virtual tools to interact. At the same time, qualitative data tell us that students value personal connections at their colleges. How should colleges reconcile these two facts? The challenge is to use online and social networking tools to cultivate relationships that help students feel connected and encourage them to persist in their studies.

Building virtual communities to help students connect is both a challenge and an opportunity — a challenge to identify the best ways to use new media effectively, and an opportunity to connect with the growing number of tech-savvy students in ways they will consider both familiar and engaging.

## Social Networking

Over the last five years, CCSSE respondents have reported steady increases in use of technology — computers, the Internet, and e-mail. More important, while technology used to be the province of only younger students, the age gap is closing. In 2004, 54% of nontraditional-age students, versus 60% of traditional-age students, used the Internet or instant messaging to work on an assignment. Today, that gap has closed to one percentage point: 65% for nontraditional-age students and 66% for traditional-age students. Similarly, the age gaps for using e-mail to communicate with an instructor and using computers in academic work have narrowed.

However, the 2009 CCSSE special-focus survey items indicate that technology-related age gaps remain for some types of technology, notably for use of newer social networking tools. Traditional-age students are more likely to use social networking tools, such as Twitter or Facebook, multiple times per day for any purpose (5% of traditional-age students versus 22% of nontraditional-age students *never* do so), and they are more likely to use social networking tools to communicate with other students, instructors, or college staff about coursework at the college (27% of traditional-age students versus 49% of nontraditional-age students *never* do so).

These usage patterns also are reflected in respondents' reports about how frequently their colleges use social networking tools to communicate about services. Forty-three percent of traditional-age students, versus 53% of nontraditional-age students, report that their colleges *never* do so. At the same time, more than one-quarter (28%) report that using social networking tools makes them feel *somewhat more* or *much more* connected to their college.



The special-focus survey items also indicate that some use of social networking tools is related to increased engagement. There is, however, a point of diminishing returns.

- ★ Using social networking tools to communicate with others (students, instructors, or college staff) *about coursework* is related to higher CCSSE benchmark scores. The more students use social networking tools for academically purposeful activities, the higher their levels of engagement.
- ★ However, higher frequency of using social networking tools *for any purpose* is related to lower scores on the student effort benchmark.

### Online Learning

Across the nation, online enrollments continue to grow at rates far faster than classroom enrollments, and the highest growth rates are in two-year associate degree institutions. In fact, community and technical colleges account for more than one-half of all U.S. online enrollments for the last five years.\*

A recent U.S. Department of Education analysis of online and face-to-face instruction showed that students learning in an online setting had better performance, on average, than those who received face-to-face instruction. Students who took courses that combined classroom and online learning, known as blended or hybrid instruction, had the best outcomes of all.\*\* Future research is needed to address the question of whether there are important differences in the experiences of community college students and those of undergraduates in four-year colleges and universities.

While online education continues to grow, the need for remedial education continues apace as well. An estimated 62% of community college students are underprepared for college-level courses, and at some colleges that number exceeds 90%.

With such a dramatic need for developmental education and national reports touting “no significant difference” in learning outcomes in online courses, it may be tempting to declare online coursework the definitive solution. However, additional research is needed to determine the efficacy of online developmental education. Also, as with all new strategies, the devil is in the details. Attention must be paid to the effective execution of online courses and programs. As with other initiatives, colleges should use data to monitor outcomes — including student engagement, persistence, and learning — and make adjustments as necessary to maximize success for all online students.

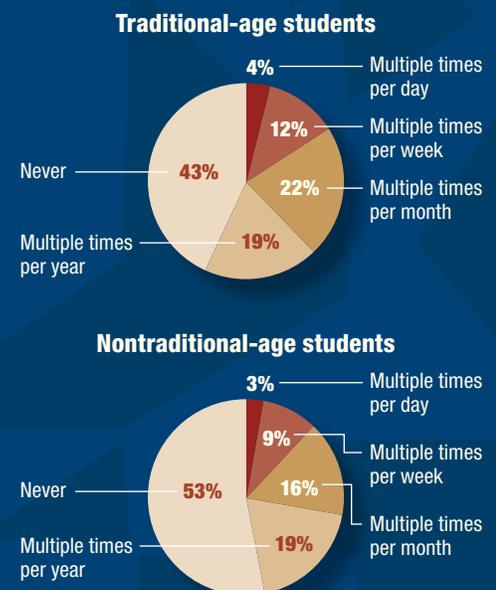
In focus groups, faculty members and students raise a related issue: Colleges should not assume that students — even those in the Net Generation — understand how to use the technology they need for an online course.

\*Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. *Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning*, 2007. Needham, MA: The Sloan Consortium.

\*\*Report available at [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepdp/ppss/reports.html#edtech](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepdp/ppss/reports.html#edtech).

## Colleges' Use of Social Networking Tools To Communicate about Services

*How often does this college communicate with you about services (financial aid, advising, etc.) using social networking tools, such as instant messaging, text messaging, MySpace and/or Facebook, Twitter, etc.? (This does not include e-mail.)*



Source: 2009 CCSSE data.

*“In my online class, the first assessment requires you to turn in a paragraph about yourself. You have to intermingle with other people. Your paragraph is posted, and everybody else reads it. It’s actually sort of neat to read everything.”*

— Male student



## 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.

All CCFSSE analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. The 2009 CCFSSE Cohort includes all colleges that participated in CCFSSE in 2007, 2008, and 2009 (each college's most recent year of participation).

All institutions that participated in the 2009 administration of the CCSSE survey were invited to participate in CCFSSE, which was administered online. At colleges that chose to participate, every faculty member teaching credit classes in the spring term was eligible to respond to the survey, and faculty respondents generally mirror the national two-year college faculty population. The notable exception is employment status: Nationally, 33% of two-year college faculty members are employed full-time, and 58% of 2009 CCFSSE Cohort respondents indicate they are employed full-time.

CCSSE encourages colleges to compare faculty perceptions with student responses and share those 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 and reflect on their perceptions of student experiences in a specific course they teach. Nonetheless, the comparison can inspire powerful conversations because faculty and students typically have different perceptions of the degree of student engagement.

For more information about CCFSSE, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

One professor developed a Blackboard training DVD to support online students. Another faculty member notes, "As you introduce this technology, you have to have support systems to go along with it. ... We created a call center to provide that extra hand holding just to use the technology."

### Making the Most of Connections in Virtual Space

Connecting in virtual space is a new challenge for many colleges. But social networking tools are just another communications channel, a new set of resources that colleges can add to their toolboxes. Colleges that successfully engage students with these tools understand that sharing information using social media is not necessarily connecting with students. The medium must be suited to the service the college is providing.

For example, in focus groups, students consistently say that colleges should eliminate online orientation, which they criticize as "impersonal," but they reliably applaud online tutoring. Why? It is difficult for a virtual orientation to create a genuine sense of connection to a college. For example, a virtual tour shows a campus in a way students taking on-campus courses will never use it: Students will never eat in a virtual cafeteria or park in a virtual parking lot.

Online tutoring, however, is simply another mechanism for delivering the same service provided by face-to-face tutoring. It involves a one-on-one connection with a real person, facilitated by technology. Students do the same work (revisions to a paper, for example) that they would do if they were meeting their tutors in person.

Despite successes with online tutoring, it is a challenge to create an online experience through which students can receive an immediate, empathetic response to a particular problem — a response from a knowledgeable and helpful human. Finding this solution is important, as students often explicitly cite the importance of an early experience interacting *in person* with faculty, staff, and other students.

Engaging students with social media requires the same intentionality and diligence as engaging them with other tools. The magic happens when colleges find the right match between students' needs and the mode of response to those needs.

### Colleges Making Connections

In the last year, **Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (AR)** has actively encouraged faculty members to use Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking tools. For example, at in-service activities, the chancellor personally encourages faculty to use Facebook. In August 2009, the college surveyed faculty members and learned that about one-third (32%) were using or planned to use Facebook with students, 19% use Facebook as a student recruitment tool, 21% use Twitter, and 71% use texting. Almost two-thirds (62%) of full-time faculty reported that they have a Facebook account. Asked how long they had been using Facebook, 74% of faculty members reported that they had been using it for one year or less, indicating that the



college's efforts during this timeframe were successful. Phillips plans to administer CCSSE again in spring 2010 to assess whether the increased use of social networking tools improves student engagement.

Virtual interest groups (VIGs) at **LaGuardia Community College (NY)** are asynchronous online advising seminars that are organized by students' majors. VIGs offer career and transfer advising in an online academic community that includes students, faculty, mentors, advisors, and professionals in the field. Each VIG presents online assignments that are fulfilled by posting responses to a discussion board. The resulting conversation is rich and diverse. The discussions also prompt action: When VIG assignments directed students to take advantage of the college's transfer services, the college saw a 140% increase in use of the Transfer Office.

**Lone Star College System (TX)** has created a learning community that links an online student success course with traditional, hybrid, and online content courses. The student success course presents topics relating to career, college, and lifelong success in an interactive online experience that incorporates journaling, quizzes, and an online student portfolio. The curriculum is personalized for each student based on personality type and learning style. Class time in the linked courses is spent on interactive activities that complement the online curriculum. All student work is posted in the student portfolio so that faculty can easily monitor student progress.

The Industrial Maintenance Technician program at **Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WI)** offers practical, hands-on experience in welding, hydraulics, electricity, and mechanical maintenance. In 2008, WITC incorporated Amatrol Virtual Integrated Technology Concepts into the program curriculum. These virtual trainers, which look and act just like real trainers in a lab, reflect the college's hands-on approach to learning. Students can hook up hoses and components as if they were working on real equipment. The virtual trainers also allow students to learn at their own speed, at times convenient to their schedules.

## Connections in the Classroom

CCSSE and other data consistently show that students are more engaged in the classroom than anywhere else. For example, 22% of students say they *often* or *very often* worked with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments, but more than twice as many (47%) *often* or *very often* worked with other students on projects during class. Almost two-thirds of students (64%) report that they asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions *often* or *very often*, but only 16% say they discussed ideas from their classes with instructors outside of class *often* or *very often*.

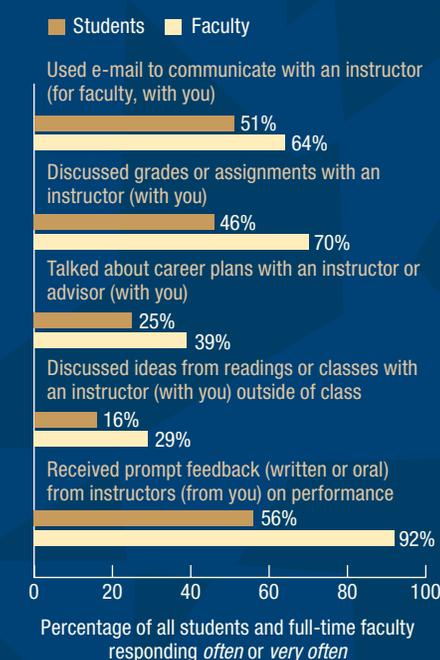
Year after year, CCSSE and CCFSSSE data show that students and faculty have different perceptions of classroom engagement. For example:

- ★ 92% of faculty report that they *often* or *very often* give their students prompt feedback (written or oral) on their performance, as compared with 56% of students who report receiving this feedback *often* or *very often*.

## Student and Faculty Perceptions of Engagement in the Classroom

*For students: In your experiences at this college during the current school year, how often have you done each of the following?*

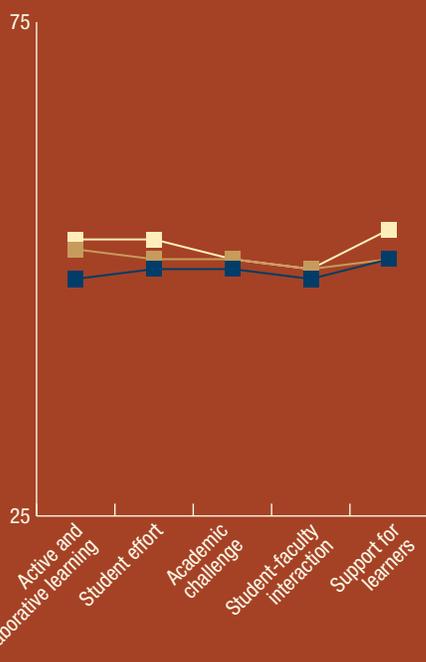
*For faculty: How often have students in your selected course section done the following?*



Source: 2009 CCSSE and CCFSSSE Cohort data.



## Connections in the Classroom: More Engaging and Less Engaging Instructional Strategies



■ **Lecture.** The 30 colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort with the highest reported percentages of class time spent lecturing. (On average, faculty at these colleges spent a greater percentage of class time lecturing than did faculty at other colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort.)

■ **Small group.** The 30 colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort with the highest reported percentages of class time spent on small group activities. (On average, faculty at these colleges spent a greater percentage of class time on small group activities than did faculty at other colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort.)

■ **In-class writing.** The 30 colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort with the highest reported percentages of in-class writing time. (On average, faculty at these colleges spent a greater percentage of class time on in-class writing than did faculty at other colleges in the 2009 *CCFSSE* Cohort.)

Source: 2009 *CCSSE* and *CCFSSE* Cohort data.

- ★ 70% of faculty indicate that students *often* or *very often* discuss grades or assignments with them, while 46% of students say they have these conversations *often* or *very often*.
- ★ 29% of faculty say students *often* or *very often* discuss ideas from readings or classes with them outside of class, as compared with 16% of students who report having these discussions *often* or *very often*.

*CCSSE* data also demonstrate that instructors' use of classroom time may have an impact on student engagement. Not surprisingly, more time spent on interactive instructional approaches appears to increase student engagement. For example, colleges in which instructors use high percentages of classroom time for lecturing have lower benchmark scores than those in which instructors spend high percentages of classroom time on in-class writing or small group activities.

Focus group data indicate that both students and faculty members know which types of classroom practices are most effective. Indeed, students and faculty members give similar answers when asked to describe a class that works well. "I really get into classes with teachers who encourage discussion," says one student. "It's how good the professor is ... and how engaging the conversation becomes. I know a lot of professors have a lot of material to discuss, but sometimes, the way they bring out the stories makes the students want to be more involved," adds another.

In focus groups, faculty members say that a class that works well is one in which students are self-directed and talking with one another. For example, one instructor observes, "I put [my students] in groups. They're all talking to each other ... They're checking with each other, they're self-sufficient, and they're able to initiate questions with me ... I'm seeing a lot of good interaction and curiosity ... they're having some fun and doing some serious work."

### Making the Most of Connections in the Classroom

Colleges can capitalize on the time students spend in class by using engaging instructional approaches that emphasize active learning and building connections. A faculty member notes, "We've moved from lecture, a teacher-centered environment, to an active student-centered environment. If you're focused on learners ... if the students do research, if they give presentations, if they are active, then [the strongest] learning occurs. We've formalized that."

Another faculty member says, "[Early in the class,] I assign a personal writing ... so students can tell people a little bit about themselves. I don't like it when it's week 15 and someone says, 'I agree with that guy there.' Do you mean Bob? So we try our best to get them to work together as a whole."

Colleges also can build additional engagement opportunities, such as academic advising and study skills training, into the classroom experience.



## Colleges Making Connections

Counseling-enhanced developmental learning communities at **Skagit Valley College (WA)** strengthen both developmental education and learning support. In the Skagit model, counseling and teaching faculty work collaboratively to incorporate college success skills into course content. Topics are tailored to meet the specific needs of the class and to support student learning and success overall. Students who participated in these learning communities in fall 2008 had a pass rate (C or better) of 74%, significantly higher than the 68% pass rate of students in stand-alone developmental courses. The learning communities also improved retention — 91% for students in the learning communities versus 85% for students in stand-alone developmental courses. Through Community Colleges Can, Skagit Valley personnel also worked with peers at **Aims Community College (CO)** and **Delta Community College (MI)** as they developed similar programs.

**Coastal Bend College (TX)** improved graduation rates by requiring supplemental instruction (SI) along with other interventions for students in Intermediate Algebra and College Algebra. Students were required to take two hours of SI. The program also included peer tutoring, time management training, study skills, and student orientation. Students who participated in the SI math classes were able to earn certificates and degrees faster, generating a 16% graduation rate after three years, compared with the average Coastal Bend graduation rate of 19% after six years.

**Iowa Valley Community College Grinnell (IA)** launched its Year of the Team initiative in fall 2008. This initiative sought to improve student engagement in the area of active and collaborative learning. Year of the Team had a straightforward goal: All students taking courses at IVCC Grinnell during the 2008–09 academic year would be involved in collaborative work in all of their classes. Thus, faculty who already incorporated group work into their classes were encouraged to expand and improve on traditional group activities. Faculty who typically lectured were encouraged to implement an aspect of team or group work in their courses. The college currently is collecting data to evaluate the program, focusing on improved retention and increased student satisfaction regarding the learning experience. Ultimately the college aims to ensure that more graduates are prepared for the world of work, where collaboration is an expectation.

## Connections on Campus

Although students are most easily engaged in the classroom, the campus community offers untapped opportunities to help students forge deeper connections through shared experiences.

For example, 41% of students report that they *never* worked with other classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. Nearly half of all students (47%) report that they *never* discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class.

*“A lot of students know or enjoy music, and I’m a musician, so we talk about music, and you can see some of them light up. You know, we’re fishermen in a way. You throw the line out. ‘Are you going to go for that? No? How about that?’ ‘Yeah!’”*

— Faculty member

*“I have two instructors [who have] such life experiences and stories. I just sit there in awe and learn ... . I go home and, “Oh my God, class was just wonderful today!”*

— Female student



*"I see signs around the school a lot. If you just see a sign ... you might not be as apt to participate."*

— Female student

*"We do a good job of broadening their horizons. Students come to us with very limited exposure to so many things, and we [bring in outside speakers]; next month, we'll have the state Supreme Court here to do an oral argument ... so in terms of providing them with opportunities to see things and explore things that they've not been able to do, we do a really good job."*

— Faculty member

Moreover, while about one-third of students (32%) say their colleges provided the support they needed to thrive socially, 75% of full-time students and 87% of part-time students report that they spent *zero* hours in a typical seven-day week participating in college-sponsored extracurricular activities.

CCSSE is administered in the spring semester, long past the point when most students should have experienced an orientation to college. However, only slightly more than one-quarter (27%) of students indicate that they attended a college orientation program. Although 13% report that they plan to attend orientation, 60% say they did not attend an orientation nor do they plan to do so.

In focus groups, many students indicate that their colleges are providing information about campus activities and events, but they are not connecting with students in meaningful ways. As one student explains, "When people come here, they need somebody to talk to ... they need somebody to reach out to them." Another concurs: "I think if they were to announce it and you hear somebody else talking about it instead of just reading a paper about it, it'll get you."

On the other end of the spectrum, some colleges expect every person on campus to actively connect with students. Jerry Sue Thornton, president of **Cuyahoga Community College (OH)** notes, "We do a lot of professional development for our maintenance staff. They often are the first line for students. Some of our friendliest, most helpful people are those who have nothing to do with classroom teaching and learning, but they want students to be successful. I think they realize that if they do something that can help students, it makes a huge difference."

### Student Services

Student services are critical resources, and students say they value many services highly — but they are not using these services often. For example, 90% of students say that academic advising/planning is *very important* or *somewhat important*, but only 56% of students use this service *sometimes* or *often*. More than one-third (35%) say they *rarely* or *never* use it.

Faculty views and actions mirror those of students. For example, 85% of faculty members say they believe academic advising and planning is *very important* to students. Yet only 29% refer students to this service *often*, and 19% incorporate the use of academic advising/planning into their selected course *often*. Similarly, 73% of faculty members report that career counseling is *very important* to students, but only 14% refer students to this service *often*, and 15% incorporate the use of career counseling into their selected course *often*.



## Making the Most of Connections on Campus

Colleges can strengthen student engagement by making outside-the-classroom engagement inescapable. Rather than minimizing expectations for out-of-class commitments from students, colleges can require students to participate in educational experiences that are important to their success. Examples might include mandatory study groups or projects with faculty or students outside of class.

In a focus group, one faculty member notes, “This semester, when midterm grades came out, each student had to go into the computer, get his or her grades, and bring them to me. Then we sat down and discussed them. The whole dynamic of my class has changed since I did that. They saw me outside the classroom. I told them I believed they could do it, encouraged them, gave them ways to succeed if they were not passing.”

To provide better support to students, colleges can close the gap between perceived importance of student services and regular use of these services. Colleges can increase the use of services by making them mandatory and/or integrating them into coursework. Students can be required, for example, to make an appointment with a career counselor and then to write a résumé as part of a class assignment.

## Colleges Making Connections

**Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College (WV)** created a rewards program to increase student participation in college-sponsored activities. Students receive an activity card that is punched or stamped when they attend designated events on campus. Students earn points, which they can exchange for T-shirts, jump drives, tote bags, and portfolios. This effort was inspired by the college’s CCSSE results, in which 82% of students report that they never participated in college activities.

SOAR (Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration) at **Guilford Technical Community College (NC)** is an intensive four-hour orientation experience provided to all new students. SOAR includes general information, academic success strategies, academic planning and advising, and registration. In summer 2008, about two-thirds of all new students enrolled in SOAR. Since the program’s inception in fall 2005, SOAR attendees have persisted at higher rates than nonattendees.

Peer tutoring is a practical strategy for encouraging and providing structure for student interaction and academic coaching. **Carolinas College of Health Sciences (NC)** recruits student tutors based on academic achievement and communication skills as assessed by instructors. At-risk students are referred to a peer tutor through the Student Success Center after academic assessment and advising. From a student population of about 500 students, at least 50 students visit the Student Success Center for academic advising each year. To date, more than 80% of academically at-risk students who received peer tutoring successfully passed the course (with a C or better) for which they were tutored. Student evaluations of peer tutoring reflect greater than 98% satisfaction with the program.

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

*How important are the following services?*

	Very	Not at all
Academic advising/planning	62%	10%
Career counseling	50%	21%
Peer or other tutoring	39%	29%
Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	44%	25%
Financial aid advising	61%	21%
Student organizations	24%	41%

*How often do you use the following services?*

	Often	Rarely/ never
Academic advising/planning	13%	35%
Career counseling	5%	51%
Peer or other tutoring	7%	46%
Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	15%	37%
Financial aid advising	17%	32%
Student organizations	5%	45%

*Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.*

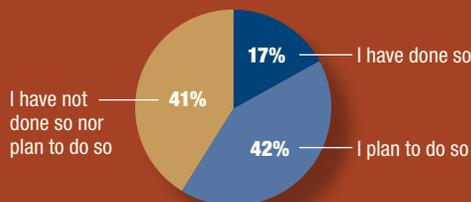


## Connections Beyond the Campus

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

	<i>Often or very often</i>	<i>Never</i>
<b>Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course</b>	7%	77%
<b>Discussed ideas from your classes outside of class (with students, family members, co-workers)</b>	50%	12%

*Will you have an internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment while attending this college?*



Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data.

## Connections Beyond the Campus

A variety of powerful engagement and connection opportunities — such as community service projects, internships, field experiences, and attendance at assigned cultural or political events — are available beyond the campus.

Many community colleges also begin engaging students when they still are in high school to encourage college enrollment and boost college readiness. By making early connections directly with students, as well as with high school teachers, administrators, and parents, colleges can help incoming students prepare for the academic, social, and financial challenges ahead.

In focus groups, staff members encourage their colleges to do more of this work. One staff member notes, “We love the idea that it would be possible to have early contact with the students before they register. We could start to build a relationship and tell them about college . . . . They would feel that they knew someone to talk to and someone to contact with their questions about going to college . . . and we wouldn’t lose them before they ever come.”

In terms of off-campus connections for current students, 50% of students report that they *often* or *very often* discussed ideas from their classes outside of class (with other students, family members, co-workers, etc.). But few students are engaged in college-related projects that take place off campus. More than three-quarters of students (77%) report that they *never* participated in a community-based project. Fewer than one in five students (17%) has participated in an internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, while 41% indicate that they have not had, nor do they plan to have, such an experience.

## Making the Most of Connections Beyond the Campus

Connections beyond the campus are most likely to happen when they are mandatory. Colleges can require service projects and other experiential learning opportunities so more students can make the compelling connections that may evolve from these experiences.

## Colleges Making Connections

**El Paso Community College (TX)** and the El Paso Area College Readiness Consortium are focused on designing strategies that will decrease the need for remediation for college-bound high school graduates. The consortium administers placement tests to students while they are still in high school so they can take necessary steps to prepare for college before they graduate. Other key strategies include a summer bridge program and sharing of student data between K–16 schools and partners. Between 2003 and 2006, EPCC saw a 5% increase in the number of college-ready students and a 26% decrease in the percentage of students placing into all three developmental education areas.



**Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (NM)** collaborated with Bernalillo High School, a nearby high school with a high concentration of Native American students, to establish a career pathway to engineering. College and high school faculty introduced dual enrollment and developed an articulated curriculum so high school students would graduate college ready. The pathway extends to the baccalaureate degree level through a statewide articulation agreement. At SIPI, college student teams work on engineering projects, such as designing and manufacturing robotic kits that high school students use in statewide robotics competitions. The SIPI students identify their projects, research solutions, and collaborate with industry and government representatives to begin implementing their ideas. Preliminary results indicate some success. Since fall 2007, when the college began admitting students to its engineering degree program, 11 students — including four Native American women — have graduated and/or transferred to four-year engineering or engineering technology programs.

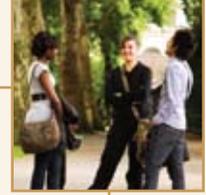
Faculty advisors at **Bridgemont Community and Technical College (WV)** help students organize community service activities related to academic fields of study. For example, dental hygiene students provide free oral health education, civil engineering technology students conduct stream monitoring for a local watershed, Cisco Academy students assist in running Internet cables for nonprofits, and building construction students participate in Habitat for Humanity projects. Throughout these programs, students are actively engaged in their learning while being mentored by their faculty advisors.

At **Olive-Harvey College (IL)**, students enrolled in chemistry courses have the opportunity to participate in an out-of-class activity with the American Chemical Society. This event provides a supportive environment in which students interact professionally and socially with professors at research institutions, undergraduate and graduate research students, and their peers from Olive-Harvey College. Students are required to attend research presentations, interact with participants, and interview a professional chemist during the outing. They then write papers that reflect on their experiences. Students say this event expands their knowledge of chemistry, reinforces their career choices, and improves their communication skills. One participant wrote, “I am sure, now more than ever, that I am choosing the right path for my education.”

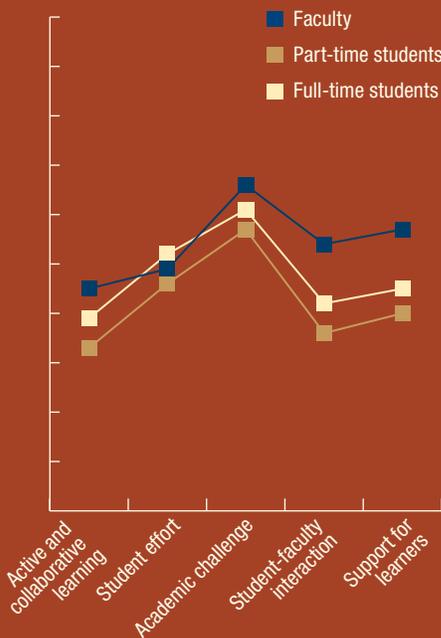
## CCSSE Opposes Ranking

*CCSSE* opposes using its data to rank colleges for a number of reasons.

- ★ There is no single number that can adequately — or accurately — describe a college’s performance; most colleges will perform relatively well on some benchmarks and need improvement on others.
- ★ Each community college’s performance should be considered in terms of its mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics.
- ★ Because of differences in these areas (and variations in college resources), comparing survey results between individual institutions serves little constructive purpose and likely will be misleading.
- ★ *CCSSE* member colleges are a self-selected group. Their choice to participate in the survey demonstrates their interest in assessing and improving their educational practices, and it distinguishes them. Ranking within this group of colleges — those willing to step up to serious self-assessment and public reporting — might discourage participation and certainly would paint an incomplete picture.
- ★ Ranking does not serve a purpose related to improving student outcomes. Improvement over time — where a particular college is now compared with where it wants to be — likely is the best gauge of a college’s efforts to enhance student learning and persistence.



## Student Engagement: Student and Faculty Views



Source: 2009 CCSSE Cohort data and 2009 CCFSSSE Cohort data.

CCFSSE data are based on results from all colleges in the 2009 CCFSSSE Cohort. When student (CCSSE) and faculty (CCFSSE) views are presented side by side in this report, the student responses include data only from colleges that participated in the faculty survey. Also, although CCSSE results are presented in terms of benchmarks, which are created through a complex statistical analysis and expert judgment, there are no benchmarks for CCFSSSE. For this report, CCFSSSE results are presented in groupings of survey items that correspond to the CCSSE benchmarks.

To create this chart of student and faculty views, responses to CCSSE and CCFSSSE items were rescaled to a range of zero to one. Don't know/not applicable responses on items measuring frequency of use were not included in the computation of these scores.

Three items were excluded. A CCSSE survey item about the number of books students read on their own cannot be asked on the faculty survey. Items about the number of books read and papers assigned for classes were omitted because students report on those activities for the full year, but faculty members report on those activities for their particular classes.

## The Connection Gap

The phenomenon of *part-timeness* stands as one of the greatest challenges community colleges face in creating strong connections with students.

Close to two-thirds of community college students attend college part-time, and about two-thirds of community college faculty members (67%) teach part-time.\* This is the reality of community colleges, and it is not likely to change.

It is well documented that part-time students are less engaged than full-time students and that they are at greater risk of leaving college without attaining their educational goals. A National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report found that after controlling for factors including gender, family income, and educational expectations, part-time undergraduate students were less likely than full-time students both to persist and to attain degrees. Only 15% of part-time students, compared with 64% of full-time students, had earned a degree or certificate six years after enrolling. While 73% of part-time students left college without earning a degree, 72% of full-time students persisted (either earned a degree or were still enrolled in college).\*\*

In addition to the different engagement levels for full-time and part-time students, faculty members consistently report higher levels of student engagement than students do. The difference in perception between faculty and students likely stems, at least in part, from the difference between personal data — what each individual personally observes about the students with whom they most often interact — and systematically collected data, which show what typically is happening to all students.

### Part-Time Isn't Just about Students

The 67% of community college faculty members who teach part-time typically teach half to two-thirds of all course sections. They play a large role in shaping students' experiences, yet in far too many colleges, they are minimally involved with students beyond the hours they are teaching.

CCSSE data consistently show that students consider academic advising more important than any other service. Moreover, data from the 2006 CCSSE special-focus items revealed that students value advising from faculty members more than advising from any other source.

Yet CCFSSSE data show that about four in ten part-time faculty members (42%) spend zero hours in a typical week advising students.

\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF: 04) Report on Faculty and Instructional Staff in Fall 2003*.

\*\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Part-Time Undergraduates in Postsecondary Education: 2003–04. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report (NCES 2007-165)*.



Even when they have the same teaching loads, part-time faculty spend less time engaging students outside the classroom. Among part-time faculty teaching between nine and twelve hours per week, 40% never spend time advising students. Among full-time faculty with the same teaching load, only 15% never spend time advising students.

This difference may be attributed, at least in part, to different expectations and support for part-time faculty. Adjuncts are less likely to have office space, and they have fewer opportunities for professional development. Further, they may not be compensated for work, such as advising, that happens outside of class hours. They also may be less likely to receive data about student engagement, learning, and success at their colleges — and less likely to be part of conversations about how to use those data to improve student performance.

Nonetheless, part-time faculty teach a sizable portion of course sections, and many students interact primarily with part-time faculty. If part-time faculty are not engaging students outside the classroom, then large numbers of students — particularly those who attend college part-time — likely have little opportunity to receive essential guidance from faculty members.

Part-time students are more likely to attend class in the evening; similarly, part-time faculty are more likely to teach evening classes. Forty-three percent of part-time students take evening classes, as compared with 12% of full-time students. As a result, these students have fewer options for certain kinds of interventions that strengthen engagement. For example, among students taking evening classes, only 6% have participated in a learning community, as compared with 10% of daytime students.

In focus groups, students raise concerns about missing opportunities due to their course schedules. One part-time student who attends evening classes says, “In my lab class, we don’t get to participate in a lot of our labs because they require us to do things out by the ponds, and it’s dark by the time we get to this class ... so those are omitted. We lose out on some things versus the daytime students.”

Another notes, “A lot of things are happening during the day for daytime students, and not much happens at night for nighttime students ... like activities and orientations. If you come to class at night, you miss out on all that.”

### *Closing the Connection Gap*

The NCES study showing that part-time students are less likely to persist included students at both two- and four-year colleges, but the overwhelming majority of part-time students attend two-year colleges. Clearly, if community colleges are to retain and effectively educate their students — the majority of whom attend part-time — attention must be focused on strategies that more effectively engage part-time students.

## Time on Task: Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty with the Same Teaching Loads

*How many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?*

*Percentage of CCFSSSE respondents who indicate zero hours.*

	<i>Part-time faculty teaching 9–12 hours/week*</i>	<i>Full-time faculty teaching 9–12 hours/week*</i>
<b>Advising students</b>	40%	15%
<b>Working with students on activities other than coursework</b>	82%	50%
<b>Involved in other interactions with students outside the classroom</b>	47%	22%
<b>Coordination and/or administrative activities</b>	71%	23%
<b>Participating on college committees or task forces</b>	78%	8%

*\*And not employed elsewhere*

*Source: 2009 CCFSSSE Cohort data.*



*“There are a lot of part-time teachers . . . that I’ve [fallen] in love with because of their teaching style. Is there a petition I can sign for you to stay here?”*

— Male student

*“As hard as it is to teach part-time at night, I still try to do what I can to help students. I think if they feel a good connection with you, they’re comfortable about their experience.”*

— Faculty member

To engage part-time students, colleges must make the most of the minimal time they are on campus. Colleges can make support services available at times convenient to part-time students or integrate services into required coursework. They can link student success courses to developmental courses so that part-time students who need remediation will be more likely to succeed. They can require orientation and advising for part-time students and make participation in study groups mandatory.

Part-time instructors need professional development to learn about their colleges and discover new and more effective teaching strategies. Not surprisingly, part-time faculty members are more likely to participate in these activities if their participation is required and if they are compensated for their time.

The extensive use of part-time faculty is unlikely to change, given the economic realities of community colleges. Moreover, there is ample evidence that part-time faculty bring real value and commitment to their work. To close the connection gap, colleges will need to grapple with ways to offer part-time faculty the same kinds of instructional support and development opportunities that are available to their full-time colleagues.

### Colleges Making Connections

**Northwest Vista College (TX)** made cooperative learning a central teaching strategy by introducing cooperative learning workshops and mentoring for full-time and part-time faculty. New tenure-track faculty are required to attend the workshop, and the training sessions are part of the college’s ongoing faculty development. The workshops are offered in evenings and on weekends to accommodate adjunct faculty schedules, and those who complete the training are given a \$100 stipend along with a certificate of completion.

Through its Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, **Parkland College (IL)** offers a yearlong orientation course to new full-time faculty to provide support and to form a cohort of colleagues who can learn from each other. Part-time faculty are invited to attend a two-hour general orientation session and given access to all workshops, seminars, and discussions offered through the center. To meet the schedules of part-time faculty, seminars are offered in the evenings and on weekends.

In calculating paid hours for part-time faculty, **Vancouver Community College (BC, Canada)** considers time spent outside the classroom on tasks such as holding office hours, grading papers, preparing course materials, supervising practicums, and tending to administrative duties. Contracts specify how much time each part-time instructor will devote to each job-related activity. The college, moreover, prorates compensation for part-time instructors so that their hourly earnings are comparable to those of full-time faculty members with similar levels of experience.



## Challenges in Making Connections

Community colleges face a number of challenges as they work to foster connections among students, faculty, and staff.

- ★ **Campus culture.** One indicator of the campus culture is the language used to describe students and their prospects for success. Is it the language of deficiency or the language of potential, the language of despair or the language of hope? Is there an obvious shared conviction that all students can learn, or is it acceptable to believe that some students just cannot learn? Is there support for courageous conversations about race, class, and institutional performance, or do fear and resistance make such conversations taboo?
- ★ **Scale.** Individual actions do not add up to large-scale change until they are intentionally coordinated, driven by a shared vision, and implemented through collaborative processes. Colleges are challenged to ensure innovative ideas are tested and successful ones reach beyond individual classrooms and become integrated throughout the college.
- ★ **Data.** Colleges are challenged with collecting and sharing data about their students and the quality of their students' educational experiences. The data should inform decisions about priorities for improving student engagement and success as well as for faculty and staff professional development.
- ★ **Technology.** It is a challenge to equip colleges and their people to use new technologies — and to keep both equipment and skills up to date. Colleges also must identify the technology tools that best meet their students' needs. How should colleges determine which technologies to use in which situations, with which students?
- ★ **The connection gap.** Colleges must continue to connect part-time faculty and part-time students to the experiences most essential to fostering professional growth and student success.
- ★ **Economic concerns.** In today's economy, virtually all community colleges face the challenge of limited resources. However, an economic downturn is no time to default on the student success agenda; students and the country are depending on successful outcomes at community colleges as the cornerstones for individual advancement and renewed economic prosperity. Community colleges are preparing a new generation of workers, retraining those already in the workforce for new careers, educating students who are attending college part-time because they cannot afford to attend full-time, and making sure all Americans can contribute productively. More than ever, students and communities deserve to receive the highest possible value for their investment.

*“Any way you can get students involved, beyond just coming here for three classes and wandering off to work and all of their other responsibilities, is going to enhance the chances that they’re going to achieve their goals here.”*

— Faculty member

*“If I were to work the Ask Me table, and someone were to ask me, ‘Where’s the science building?’ I wouldn’t have a clue. Maybe we need to have something for our new staff members to introduce them to the campus and the college culture so we can be more effective in dealing with our students.”*

— Staff member



*“We don’t view the students as on a conveyor belt. ... They’re all different people, there’s a lot of diversity here. All of us care about that and value that in each student.”*

— Faculty member

*“I’ve learned that I can’t just say, ‘It’s your credit, it’s your money.’ ... You have to get in there with these students. It’s important to me for them to succeed, not just in this class, but in life.”*

— Faculty member

## *Is Your College a Connected College?*

Colleges can use the guide below to prompt discussions about how well they are connecting with their students. To what extent is your college doing each of these things (e.g., not at all, under discussion, partial implementation, or full implementation)?

Does your college ...

- ★ Design experiences to ensure that all students make personal connections with other students, faculty, and staff during their earliest contacts with the college?
- ★ Create *required* cohort-based experiences, such as learning communities, study groups, first-year seminars, and the like, to intentionally promote interaction among students?
- ★ Assign someone to serve as a primary contact for each new student (e.g., another student, advisor, success coach, mentor, etc.)?
- ★ Systematically inquire about students’ use of various technologies, including course management systems, the Internet, and social networking tools?
- ★ Systematically inquire about faculty and staff members’ use of various technologies, including course management systems, the Internet, and social networking tools?
- ★ Provide professional development for faculty on ways to engage students for academic purposes through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or other social networking technologies? Provide this training to both full-time and part-time faculty?
- ★ Require orientation and training for students on the use of technologies employed by the college, rather than assume that they know how to use them?
- ★ Promote student connections with college services and staff by integrating services into organized courses?
- ★ Ensure that the college’s online courses consistently incorporate engagement strategies that promote student-student and student-faculty interaction?
- ★ Ensure that evening and online students have access to the services they need at times and in locations that fit their schedules?
- ★ Establish and enforce academic policies regarding acceptable/encouraged and unacceptable uses of social networking technologies and electronic devices during class time?
- ★ Ensure that students have access to computers for uses related to their studies (e.g., computer labs, loaned laptops, etc.)?
- ★ Provide free, easily accessible Internet access throughout the campus?
- ★ Provide adequate, user-friendly support for use of broadband and wireless technologies on campus and for online learning?
- ★ Provide comfortable, open spaces for students, faculty, and staff to interact?
- ★ Ensure that all full-time and part-time faculty members have adequate space to meet with students outside of class?
- ★ Build a college-wide culture of connection and caring?



# Overview of the 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort

Each year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement is administered in the spring during class sessions at *CCSSE* member colleges. All *CCSSE* data analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. The 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort includes data from all colleges that participated in *CCSSE* from 2007 through 2009.

An overview of the 2009 cohort's participating colleges and their students follows. Details are available at [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

- ★ More than 400,000 students from 663 institutions in 48 states as well as British Columbia, the Marshall Islands, Nova Scotia, and Ontario are included in the 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort.
- ★ 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort member colleges enroll a total of 4,317,841 credit students — approximately 65% of the total credit-student population in the nation's community colleges.
- ★ Of the 663 participating colleges, 331 (50%) are classified as small (up to 4,499 students), 162 (24%) as medium (4,500–7,999 students), 112 (17%) as large (8,000–14,999 students), and 58 (9%) as extra large (15,000 or more students). Nationally, 55% of community colleges are small, 21% are medium, 15% are large, and 9% are extra large.
- ★ According to the Carnegie classifications,\* the 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort includes 125 (19%) urban-serving colleges, 142 (21%) suburban-serving colleges, and 396 (60%) rural-serving colleges. Fall 2007 data indicate that among all U.S. community colleges, 17% are urban, 21% are suburban, and 62% are rural.

- ★ 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort respondents generally reflect the underlying student population of the participating colleges in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Part-time students, however, were underrepresented in the *CCSSE* sample because classes are sampled rather than individual students. (About 29% of *CCSSE* respondents are enrolled part-time, and 71% are enrolled full-time. IPEDS reports the national figures as 60% part-time and 40% full-time.) To address this discrepancy, *CCSSE* results are weighted by part-time and full-time status to reflect the institutions' actual proportions of part-time and full-time students.
- ★ 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort respondents are 59% female and 41% male. These figures mirror the full population of *CCSSE* Cohort community college students, which is 58% female and 42% male.
- ★ 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort respondents range in age from 18 to 65 and older.
- ★ With respect to race/ethnicity, 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort respondents and the national community college population may be compared as follows:

Race/ethnicity	<i>CCSSE</i> respondents	National percentages
White	65%	58%
Latino/Hispanic	12%	14%
Black	12%	13%
International**	6%	2%
Asian	5%	6%
Native American	2%	1%
Other	4%	8%

\*\*International students are not citizens or nationals of the United States and are in the country on a visa or temporary basis.

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding and inclusion of the International category.

Sources: 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort data; IPEDS, fall 2007.

## Noteworthy Facts

- ★ The 2009 *CCSSE* membership (colleges that administered the survey in 2009) includes statewide participation in Maine, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming and state-based participation in Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.
- ★ 2009 was the fifth year of participation for the Achieving the Dream Consortium, the sixth year of participation for the Hispanic Student Success Consortium (Hispanic-Serving Institutions/Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities), and the sixth year of participation for the Texas Small Colleges Consortium.

\**CCSSE* uses the Carnegie Classifications (from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) to identify colleges as urban-serving, suburban-serving, and rural-serving.



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For a list of CCSSE member colleges, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

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