Survey of Entering Student Engagement

Snow College

2011 Key Findings

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Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice with Entering Students

SENSE Benchmarks

★ **Early Connections.** When students describe their early college experiences, they typically reflect on occasions when they felt discouraged or thought about dropping out. Their reasons for persisting almost always include one common element: a strong, early connection to someone at the college.

★ **High Expectations and Aspirations.** Nearly all students arrive at their community colleges intending to succeed and believing that they have the motivation to do so. When entering students perceive clear, high expectations from college staff and faculty, they are more likely to understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement. Students then often rise to meet expectations, making it more likely that they will attain their goals. Often, students' aspirations also climb, and they seek more advanced credentials than they originally envisioned.

★ **Clear Academic Plan and Pathway.** When a student, with knowledgeable assistance, creates a road map—one that shows where he or she is headed, what academic path to follow, and how long it will take to reach the end goal—that student has a critical tool for staying on track. Students are more likely to persist if they not only are advised about what courses to take, but also are helped to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement *(SENSE)* benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of entering student engagement. The six benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experiences and educational outcomes; thus, they provide colleges with a useful starting point for looking at institutional results.

Ideally, colleges engage entering students in all six benchmark areas, beginning with a student's first contact with the institution and continuing through completion of the first three weeks of the initial academic term. This time is decisive because current research indicates that helping students succeed through the first academic term can dramatically improve subsequent success, including completing courses and earning certificates and degrees.

While many student behaviors and institutional practices measured by the benchmarks can and should continue throughout students' college careers, the *SENSE* items and the resulting data focus on this critical entering student timeframe.

SENSE benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing the benchmarks. Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 25 across all respondents.

Figure 1a
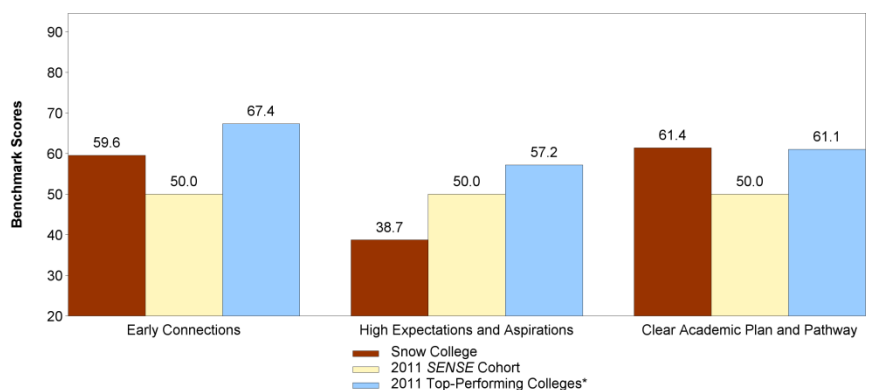
*Top-performing colleges are those that scored in the top ten percent of the cohort by benchmark.

# Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice with Entering Students

The standardized benchmark scores allow colleges to gauge and monitor their performance in areas of entering student engagement. In addition, participating colleges have the opportunity to make appropriate and useful comparisons between their performance and that of groups of other colleges.

Performing as well as the national average or a peer-group average may be a reasonable initial aspiration, but it is important to recognize that these averages are sometimes unacceptably low. Aspiring to match and then exceed high-performance targets is the stronger strategy.

Community colleges can differ dramatically on such factors as size, location, resources, enrollment patterns, and student characteristics. It is important to take these differences into account when interpreting benchmark scores—especially when making institutional comparisons. Furthermore, the Center for Community College Student Engagement has adopted a policy, "Responsible Uses of *CCSSE* and *SENSE* Data," available at www.cccse.org.

SENSE uses a three-year cohort of participating colleges in all core survey analyses. The current cohort is referred to as the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort (2009-2011) throughout all reports.
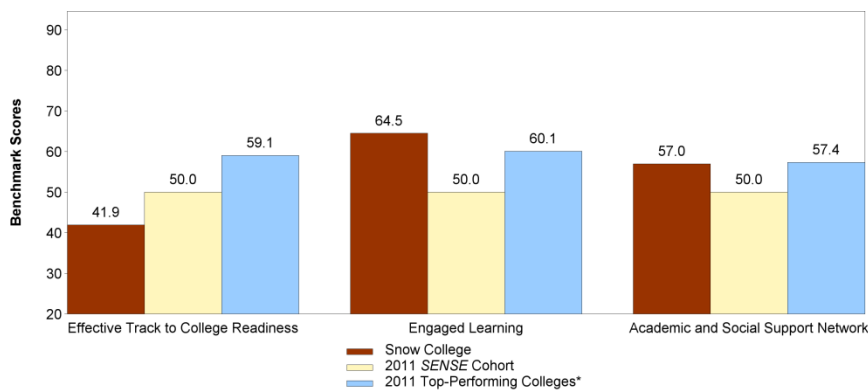
SENSE Benchmarks

Continued from Page 2

★ **Effective Track to College Readiness.** Nationally, more than six in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. Thus, significant improvements in student success will hinge upon effective assessment, placement of students into appropriate courses, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.

★ **Engaged Learning.** Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Because most community college students attend college part-time, and most also must find ways to balance their studies with work and family responsibilities, the most effective learning experiences will be those the college intentionally designs.

★ **Academic and Social Support Network.** Students benefit from having a personal network that enables them to obtain information about college services, along with the academic and social support critical to student success. Because entering students often don't know what they don't know, colleges must purposefully create those networks.

For further information about *SENSE* benchmarks, please visit www.cccse.org.

Figure 1b

*Top-performing colleges are those that scored in the top ten percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Legend:
- Snow College
- 2011 *SENSE* Cohort
- 2011 Top-Performing Colleges*

Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding *SENSE* data. One way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features the five items across all benchmarks (excluding those for which means are not calculated) on which the college scored highest and the five items on which the college scored lowest in comparison to the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort.

The items highlighted on pages 4 and 5 reflect the largest differences in mean scores between the institution and the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. While examining these data, keep in mind that the selected items may not be those that are most closely aligned with the college's goals; thus, it is important to review all Institutional Reports on the *SENSE* online reporting system at www.cccse.org.

Figure 2 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed most favorably compared with the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 66.5% of your students, compared with 44.4% of other students in the cohort, responded ' Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' on item 18p.
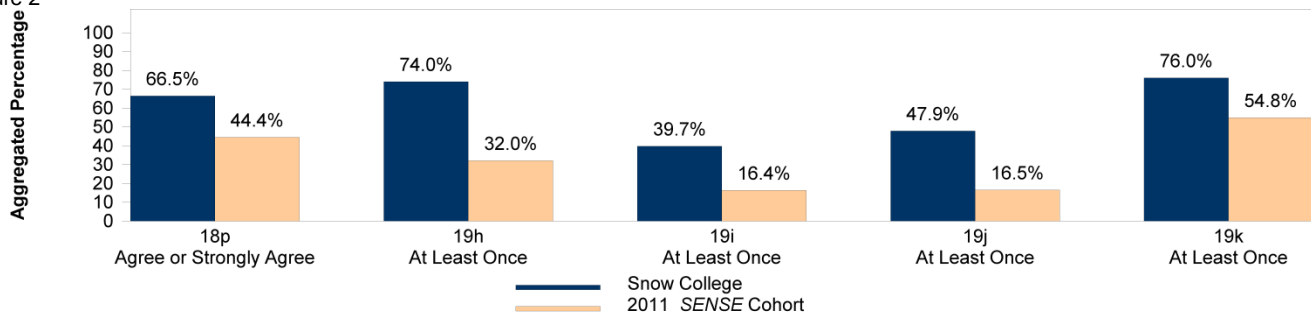
Figure 2

Table 1

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Early Connections	18p	At least one college staff member (other than an instructor) learned my name
Engaged Learning	19h	Frequency: Worked with classmates outside of class on class projects or assignments during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19i	Frequency: Participated in a required study group outside of class during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19j	Frequency: Participated in a student-initiated (not required) study group outside of class during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19k	Frequency: Used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER

Notes

For items 18, 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses are combined.

For items 19 (except 19c, 19d, 19f, 19s), 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Figure 3 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed least favorably compared with the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 52.0% of your students, compared with 68.4% of other students in the cohort, responded 'Never' on item 19c.
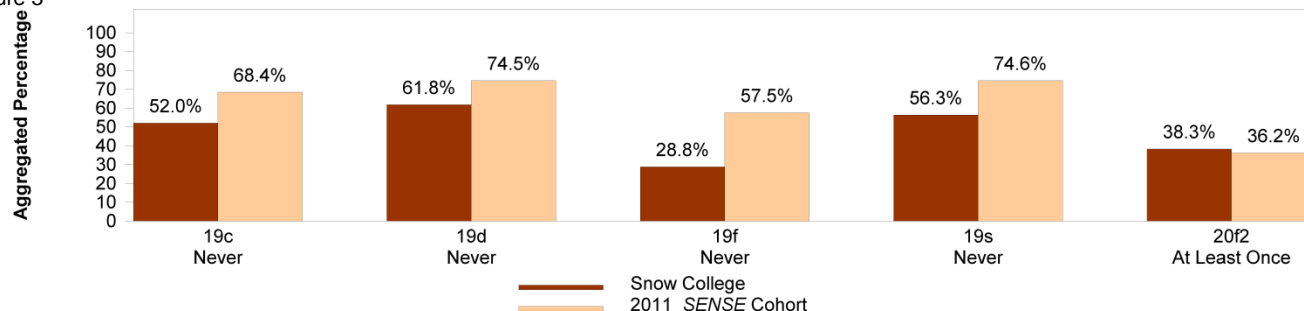
Figure 3

Table 2

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
High Expectations and Aspirations	19c	Frequency: Turned in an assignment late during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
High Expectations and Aspirations	19d	Frequency: Not turn in an assignment during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
High Expectations and Aspirations	19f	Frequency: Came to class without completing readings or assignments during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
High Expectations and Aspirations	19s	Frequency: Skipped class during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	20f2	Frequency: Used Writing, math, or other skill lab

Notes

For items 19c, 19d, 19f, 19s, 'Never' responses are displayed.

For items 20, 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

2011 *SENSE* Special-Focus Module Items

SENSE special-focus modules allow participating colleges and researchers to delve more deeply into areas of student experience and institutional performance that are related to student success. As part of an ongoing national initiative, the Center added a special-focus module focused on community college students' participation in a defined collection of "promising practices" to the 2011 *SENSE* administration. This special-focus module elicited new information about entering students' experiences associated with promising educational practices such as early registration, freshman seminars, and early alert systems. Frequency results for five selected "promising practices" items are displayed below. For colleges that did not administer the promising practices special-focus module, cohort data are provided.

To access complete special-focus module frequency reports, please visit the *SENSE* online reporting system at www.cccse.org.

Figure 4: At this college, I completed registration before the first class session(s).
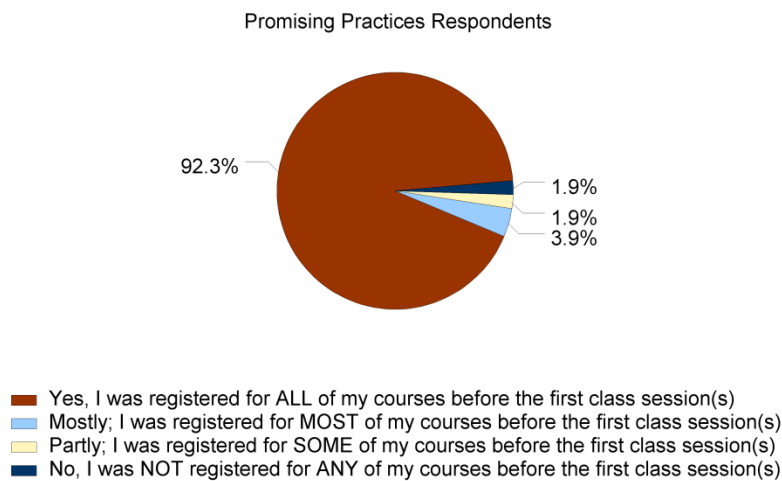
Promising Practices Respondents

92.3%
1.9%
1.9%
3.9%

■ Yes, I was registered for ALL of my courses before the first class session(s)
■ Mostly; I was registered for MOST of my courses before the first class session(s)
■ Partly; I was registered for SOME of my courses before the first class session(s)
■ No, I was NOT registered for ANY of my courses before the first class session(s)

Figure 5: At this college, the first time I met with an advisor to help me set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them was...

Promising Practices Respondents

60.4%
10.6%
29.0%

■ PRIOR to registering for classes for my first semester/quarter
■ AFTER registering for classes for my first semester/quarter
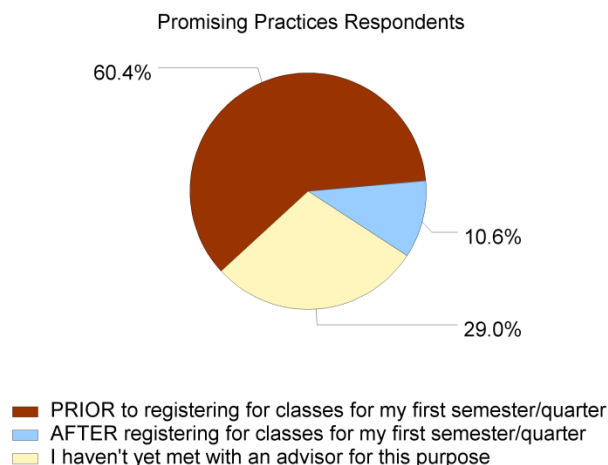■ I haven't yet met with an advisor for this purpose

Figure 6: At this college, I am participating in a structured experience for new students (sometimes called a freshman seminar or first year experience).
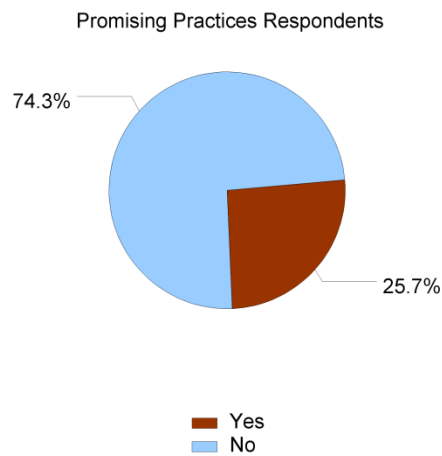
Promising Practices Respondents

74.3%

25.7%

■ Yes
■ No

Figure 7: At this college, my instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that specified how many classes I could miss without penalty.
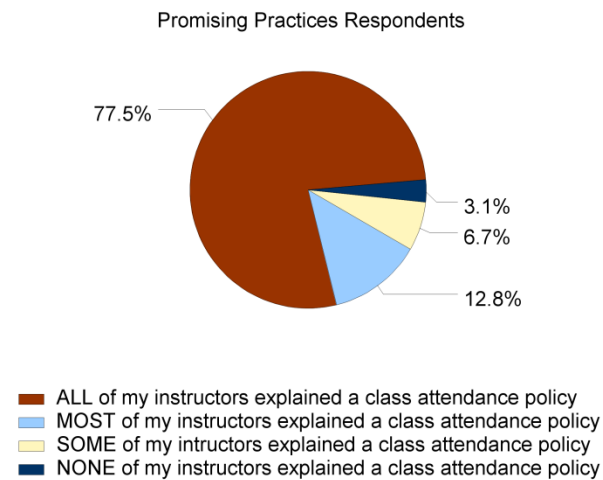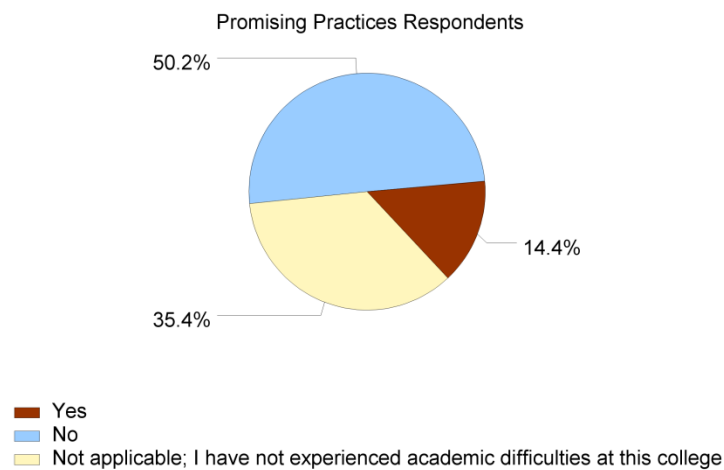
Promising Practices Respondents

77.5%

3.1%
6.7%

12.8%

■ ALL of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
■ MOST of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
■ SOME of my intructors explained a class attendance policy
■ NONE of my instructors explained a class attendance policy

Figure 8: Someone at this college contacts me if I am struggling with my studies to help me get the assistance I need.

Promising Practices Respondents

50.2%

14.4%

35.4%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Not applicable; I have not experienced academic difficulties at this college

Assessment and Placement: Are There Gaps?

Most community colleges have assessment and placement polices that are intended to help all students "start right." Yet, often these policies, even when they are ostensibly mandatory, might not be implemented in ways that ensure success for all students. The disaggregated data below illustrate the student experience with assessment and placement at your college. Nationally, more than 60% of community college students are enrolled less than full-time. Thus, while looking at these data, it is important to consider the institution's enrollment patterns. Are your entering students starting right?

Figure 9

Table 3
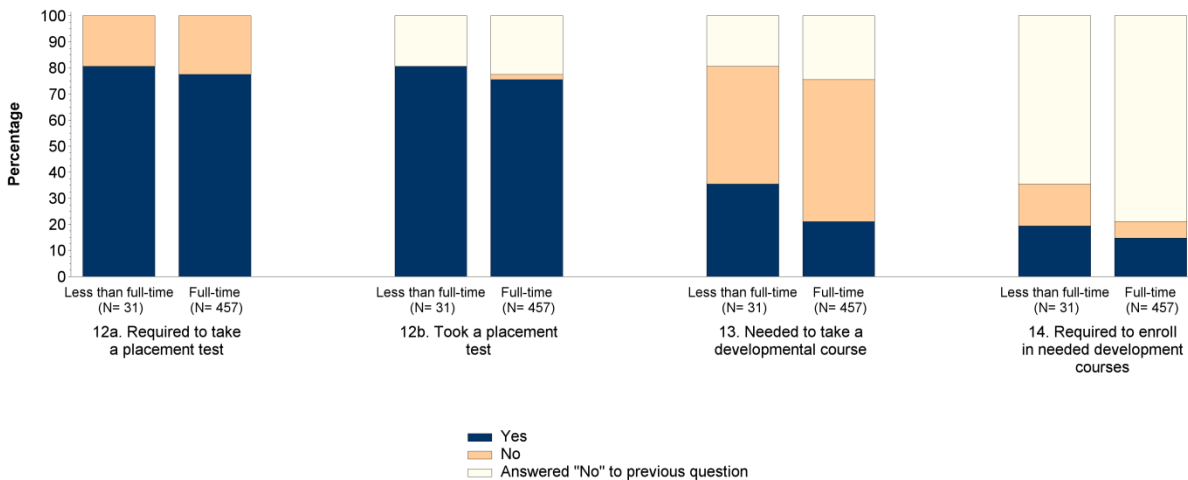
Response	12a. Required to take a placement test		12b. Took a placement test		13. Needed to take a developmental course		14. Required to enroll in needed development courses	
	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time
Yes	80.6%	77.5%	80.6%	75.5%	35.5%	21.0%	19.4%	14.7%
No	19.4%	22.5%	0	2.0%	45.2%	54.5%	16.1%	6.3%
Answered "No" to previous question	N/A	N/A	19.4%	22.5%	19.4%	24.5%	64.5%	79.0%