

Listen Up

An update of the *Initiative on Student Success*



Published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement

INAUGURAL ISSUE

Welcome to Listen Up

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Listen Up*, a publication of the *Initiative on Student Success* at the Center for Community College Student Engagement. We invite you to listen as we highlight key components of community college student engagement through students' voices.

The *Initiative on Student Success*, the qualitative arm of the Center, brings to life the community college experience by conducting focus groups and interviews with community college students, faculty, staff, and presidents. The *Initiative* began conducting focus groups in 2001 in conjunction with the administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). The Center first analyzes survey data, and then, through the *Initiative on Student Success*, asks participants to describe more fully the experiences behind what they're telling us in their survey responses.

Now, with funding from the MetLife Foundation and the Houston Endowment Inc., the *Initiative* is partnering with the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) through the *Starting Right* project. This project focuses on the challenges facing entering community college students and the steps colleges can take to increase the potential for more students to succeed. Gathering focus group data helps to dig beneath the survey numbers to better understand and learn from students' community college experiences—their expectations when they start college, their perceptions about what college will be like, their experiences in trying to understand and navigate the college systems, and their level of engagement inside and outside of the classroom.

In this issue of *Listen Up*, we begin at the heart of the educational enterprise—teaching and learning. Whether coming directly from high school or returning to college later in life, students are consistent in their descriptions about what helps them learn. Let's listen...

Arleen Arnsperger
Project Manager, *Initiative on Student Success*

Students Share Their Insights about What Helps Them Learn

Expect a Lot from Me, I'm in College

Entering students tell us that they're excited to be in college, but they're also scared. They worry that they're not prepared academically or that they don't really know how to study, and students with jobs and families worry about how they'll manage their time. Even so, new students are clear about what we need to expect from them.

"One of my teachers says, 'I expect college-level writing from you because you are in college,' and that makes me want to write like that. If I didn't have that expectation, I would probably do whatever and not do my best."

– Female student

"If you feel encouraged by your teacher, you'll want to go back and finish."

– Male student

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Students Offer Some Advice to New Students

Don't wait until the last minute

"With financial aid, the earlier you start, the earlier you get it." – Female Student

"Register during early registration or you might not get the classes you want or need." – Female Student

Go to class and do your work

"You can't learn if you don't want to." – Male Student

"Be serious about school." – Female Student

Don't be afraid to ask for help

"It's a learning experience, so you have to learn from your mistakes." – Male Student

"You're thinking, 'Okay, everybody gets it but me.' That's not true. Nobody gets it, trust me."
– Female Student

Help Me Make Connections

Some new students say they believe they have to take the initiative to connect with others. But many more wait for their instructors to foster connections for them.

"I don't even know my teachers' names, to tell you the truth. I honestly don't know my teachers' names. Teachers that know my name? I doubt it." – Male student

But when the instructor takes the first step, students say it makes a big difference:

"I feel it's important the professor knows your name. It makes a statement." – Female student

"He put us in groups. Group discussion brings us a little bit closer together as a class. People aren't afraid to open up, and that's great." – Male student

Engage Me in Learning

Entering students quickly distinguish between classes that excite them about learning and those that don't. Even in the same college, students often report big differences in what they describe as the quality of instruction.

"I swear, I don't know how she does it. I don't know how you can sit there and talk for an hour and 15 minutes. She just talks the entire time we're in class. The entire time." – Male student

"He lectures to the point where you know what he's talking about, you know what's going on. Then he might give us a fun work sheet or he'll give us fun things to do in groups. It's never just doing the same thing over and over." – Female student

I Know I Need Help, But...

Even when they know they need help with their classes, students say they sometimes don't see a way to get it. And, sometimes they simply won't ask for it.

I'm afraid to ask...

"She asks after every question if you understand, but nobody else says anything. I see a bunch of confused looks on everybody else's faces. I look around and nobody says they have a problem 'cause they're kind of afraid to ask." – Male student

I'm asking for help, but...

"My classes are horrible. I've talked to all my teachers and they've all said, 'You've been out of school so long! Get some tutoring.' They told me to get a little help but I haven't 'cause I don't have time to get a tutor." – Female student

"My instructor said, 'I'm not going to be able to help you. I can't individually 'cause I'm so busy.' I'm kind of like, 'Okay, I guess I'll just look at it until I understand what's going on here.'" – Male student

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**Exciting changes are in the air!
Find out more at: www.cccse.org**

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Annual CCCSE Workshop

June 1, 2010 • Austin, Texas

FREE for Member Colleges

As part of an ongoing collaboration with the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) at The University of Texas at Austin, the Center for Community College Student Engagement will host the **2010 CCCSE Workshop** at the Four Seasons Hotel from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 1, 2010.

This year's workshop will feature special guest speaker **Dr. Elizabeth F. Barkley**, community college faculty member and author of *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*.

The Center is committed to helping colleges use data to inform decisions, improve programs, and embrace practices that promote student engagement, learning, and retention. This annual workshop is offered FREE as a special service for member colleges. Other registrants of the NISOD International Conference are welcome to attend for a nominal fee.

Register today at www.cccse.org!

Pre-registration required for lunch and refreshments.

Walk-in registration may be available, but seating is limited.

Center staff members also will present sessions throughout the NISOD conference. The NISOD conference will be held May 30 - June 2, 2010 in Austin, Texas. Learn more at: www.nisod.org

I Know Good Instructors When I See Them

Students report that good teachers don't just teach the materials, good teachers "teach you."

They listen to us and encourage discussion.

"The process of interacting with the teacher—it's not about someone just coming and trying to teach you everything. You know something, the teacher also knows something, so you exchange. That process makes you get involved. It makes you feel better because you tell yourself, 'Wow, I know something.'" — Male student

They make it comfortable to ask for help.

"I like my professor. She goes step-by-step-by-step. She breaks it down and then she e-mails you, 'Did you understand everything okay? I see you were kind of hesitating. Do you have any questions?' They care. She cares. You can tell." — Female student

They're approachable and caring.

"She's an English teacher here and she's awesome. She's really soft-spoken, she's funny. I'm not related to her and I call her 'Tia' (aunt) sometimes. She really helps me to feel welcome here. She gives me advice on courses I should take and just advice in general." — Male student

They make learning active and fun.

"I like it when we can interact and be shown things. It's interacting with everybody in the class that makes it really nice and a good experience." — Female student

"I love speech class. The teacher might have you do an assignment on your own, present it to the class, and the class might give you feedback on your presentation. The interaction is so important to me when it comes to learning." — Male student

COMING SOON: A Look at the High School to College Transition

The *Initiative on Student Success* is conducting focus groups with high school seniors to learn about their preparation for life after high school. We are also following recent high school graduates through their first full year of college. Watch for future issues of *Listen Up* for more on this critical student transition.

To Learn More:

For more information about the *Initiative on Student Success*, and the *Starting Right* project, contact Arleen Arnsparger, Project Manager, at arnsparger@cccse.org.

**Your entering students are trying
to tell you something important.**

Are you listening?



SENSE helps colleges understand students' experiences in the first critical weeks of college.

We ask; they respond. You hear from your students what they need.

**The SENSE 2010
Registration
Deadline is
April 3, 2010**

www.enteringstudent.org

Join us at these upcoming events...

League Innovations Conference

Baltimore, MD • March 28 - March 31, 2010

NISOD Webinar Series:

**They Can't Succeed if They Don't Come Back:
Design Principles for Entering Student Success**
www.nisod.org/webinars

March 31, 2010 • 1 p.m. Central Time

NCA HLC Annual Meeting

Chicago, IL • April 11, 2010

AACC Annual Convention

Seattle, WA • April 17, 2010 - April 20, 2010

AIR Annual Forum

Chicago, IL • May 29 - June 2, 2010

NISOD 32nd Annual Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence

Austin, Texas • May 30, 2010 - June 2, 2010

League Learning College Summit

Phoenix, AZ • June 6, 2010 - June 9, 2010

See more upcoming events online at:
www.ccsse.org/news/calendar