

Mt. SAC and Benchmark Comparison

2003 Survey of Student Engagement

In November 2003, results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) are to be released (www.ccsse.org). Mt. SAC is one of more than ninety community colleges participating. The focus of this article is on **benchmark**¹ comparison of the Colleges. Using benchmark comparisons allows all Colleges' data in the study to be standardized so that if Mt. SAC's benchmark score is higher than the others, it means that Mt. SAC students are better in that area than the other Colleges.

Benchmark

The benchmarks chosen comprised:

1. **Active and collaborative learning** (e.g., asking questions in class; making presentations)
2. **Student effort** (e.g., time on task such as preparing two or more drafts of a paper; using the computer lab)
3. **Academic Challenge** (e.g., worked harder than thought you could to meet an instructor's standard; applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations)
4. **Student-faculty interaction** (e.g., used email to communicate with instructor; discussed grades or assignments with an instructor)
5. **Support for learners** (e.g., Mt. SAC provides the support you need to help you succeed at this college; how often you used academic advising/planning services)

In four out of five benchmarks, Mt. SAC is higher than both the extra-large college comparison group as well as all Colleges that participated in the study (table 1). **Overall, Mt. SAC was highlighted as one of the top performers in its group for the national study.** The top area, in which Mt. SAC students are doing the best, when compared to the other groups, is when they are active and doing collaborative learning in the classroom. Mt. SAC students excel at challenging themselves academically and they also believe that Mt. SAC gives them support for learning. Mt. SAC students also spend more time on tasks such as preparing two or more drafts of a paper than other College students.

Mt. SAC's scores are lower than the group average on student-faculty interaction. When compared to the other two groups, Mt. SAC students are less likely to have contact with their faculty. Less contact could mean a deficit in allowing them to learn more effectively and perhaps allow them the direction and skills needed to achieve their educational goals.

¹ **Benchmark:** To obtain benchmark comparisons, CCSSE averages the scores on survey items that comprise a benchmark. Weights are used to compensate for large number of full-time students in the survey versus those in the College population. Benchmarks are standardized so that the weighted mean scores across all students is 50. Benchmarks allow all Colleges' data to be placed comparatively so that if Mt. SAC's data is higher than 50, it means that Mt. SAC is better than the standardized average.

Table 1. Mt. San Antonio College benchmarks versus comparison group.

Benchmark	Mt. San Antonio College	Comparison Group Statistics		
			Extra Large Colleges	All 2003 Colleges
Active and Collaborative Learning	51.7	Benchmark Score	48.9	50.0
		Score Difference ²	2.8	1.7
Student Effort	50.9	Benchmark Score	50.1	50.0
		Score Difference	0.8	0.9
Academic Challenge	52.0	Benchmark Score	50.5	50.0
		Score Difference	1.5	2.0
Student-Faculty Interaction	46.8	Benchmark Score	48.9	50.0
		Score Difference	-2.1	-3.2
Support for Learners	51.5	Benchmark Score	50.0	50.0
		Score Difference	1.5	1.5
		Number of Colleges	13	93

Conclusion

Findings from this benchmark comparison indicate that Mt. SAC and its students should celebrate. Students are obviously doing better than the study average in a number of areas. The area in which there is room for improvement, student-faculty interaction, can be addressed at the faculty level with a critical eye to study items that address this issue in particular:

- Used email to communicate with an instructor
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor
- Discussed ideas from the readings or classes with instructor outside of class
- Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructor on performance
- Worked with instructor on activities other than coursework

It is also important for faculty to generate their own listing of interactions between students and faculty that would fall under this domain. The ultimate goal is to enact interventions to improve the student-faculty interactions.

² **Score Difference:** The result of subtracting the comparison group score (same size colleges or 2003 colleges) from your college's score on each benchmark.