

MENTAL ACTIVITIES

Background

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (pronounced “sessie”) was distributed in 93 colleges across the United States in spring 2003. Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) was one of the participating colleges. Some 1,103 Mt. SAC students’ surveys were returned.

CCSSE is a survey that examines different aspects of students’ educational activities (e.g., ask questions in class). These educational activities have been shown to be related to student success. The survey was developed based on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at Indiana University. The project is supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Lumina Foundation for Education.

The following excerpt from the main report will outline one of many aspects of the survey useful for accreditation and planning purposes. The main report can be found at <http://research.mtsac.edu/factbook.html> under Student Engagement Survey.

Critical Assessment

As a College, Mt. SAC needs to decide two factors with all results/items in this report:

1. Which of the items are relevant to Mt. SAC and its students?
2. Of those items that are relevant, what are the percentage benchmarks for deciding if the results are acceptable or not. For example, if 60% or more of the students are satisfied with their learning experiences, does that mean that Mt. SAC should be proud of that outcome or should interventions be suggested?

Mental Activities

When Mt. SAC students were asked to chose to what extent their course work emphasized mental activities (i.e., challenging the students), at least 60% of the students felt that they had been challenged by the course work on one or more of the items in Table 1. The highest ranked mental activity done very often or quite a bit was “analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory” (68%). “Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods” was rated the lowest frequency of mental activity done in their courses that year (51%).

Survey Question	Table 1. Mental Activities	Very much (%)	Quite a bit (%)	Some (%)	Very little (%)	Very Much & Quite a bit (%)
#2	During the current school year, to what extent has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?					
b.	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	21	46	28	4	68
c.	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways	19	43	33	5	62
a.	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	23	39	32	6	62
f.	Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill	23	37	34	6	60
e.	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	18	37	35	11	55
d.	Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	16	35	37	12	51
	Group Average					60%

The most salient findings to each department of the College should be celebrated if it is a success and addressed with an intervention process if it is a barrier to success for students. Formative evaluation should be done throughout the next year to determine if the intervention is successful.

