

Key Benchmarks -- LANE Community College

Overview of Entering Student Engagement Benchmarks (April 2013)

Student Retention, Success, and the *SENSE*:

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) is an initiative of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (a research and service initiative of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin). The survey is designed to help community and technical colleges focus on the “front door” experiences they provide for their students. The *SENSE* is grounded in research about what works in retaining and supporting entering students. It collects and analyzes data about institutional practices and student behaviors in the earliest weeks of college. These data can help colleges understand students’ critical early experiences and improve institutional practices that affect student success in the first college year.

The *SENSE* is administered in class during the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall academic term to students in courses randomly selected from those most likely to enroll entering students. During fall term 2012, Lane joined 13 other Oregon community colleges in administering the *SENSE*.¹ That “consortium” project was funded, in part, through ODCCWD. Fifty-two of Lane’s 78 course sections invited to participate did so for a 67% course participation rate. This resulted in 323 entering/new students completing the survey and 505 returning students completing the survey.

***SENSE* Benchmarks*:**

The six *SENSE* benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement—and that are positively related to student learning and persistence from the time the student has first contact with the college through the end of the third week of class. The six *SENSE* benchmarks of effective educational practice in community colleges are:

- Early Connections
- High Expectations and Aspirations
- Clear Academic Plan and Pathway
- Effective Track to College Readiness
- Engaged Learning
- Academic and Social Support Network.

Each individual benchmark score is computed by averaging the scores on survey items that compose that benchmark. The standardized scores make it possible for colleges to compare their

¹ Portland Community College, Mt. Hood Community College, Clatsop Community College, and Treasure Valley Community College did not participate in the 2012 Oregon *SENSE* Consortium.

own performance across benchmarks and to compare their own performance with groups of similar colleges.

Using *SENSE* Findings:

These Benchmarks and their scores are intended to help us understand experiences of new students at Lane and other Oregon community colleges. Lane's Success And Goal Attainment (SAGA) committee worked with the 2009 data to better understand Lane students' experiences and perceptions and to link knowledge gained from those data to initiatives designed to improve student learning and goal achievement. Study groups completing the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) self-study for first-year and/or transfer student success also worked with 2009 *SENSE* findings. The Student Success Leadership Team will work with the findings from both *SENSE* surveys.

*** Understanding Benchmark Scores:**

Each benchmark score was computed by staff from *SENSE* by averaging the scores on survey items that comprise that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the weighted mean across all students is 50 and the standard deviation across all participating students is 25.

This standardizing of the scores enables more meaningful comparisons across benchmarks and across colleges. Knowing that all benchmarks are on the same scale makes it immediately obvious that a college's scores are either above or below those for other participating colleges. Knowing that the mean is at 50 across all students in the sample enhances the score's usefulness for benchmarking, as the score contains information about whether an institution's performance is better or worse than average – and how much better or worse. For example, a benchmark score of 55 on Early Connections and 42 on Clear Academic Plan and Pathway would indicate to a college that the institution is performing relatively better in regard to Early Connections than in regard to Clear Academic Plan and Pathway. Further, the benchmark scores allow the college to understand that the results are above the average for participating colleges on one benchmark and below average on the other. Thus, the data may be used to identify relative strengths as well as areas the college may need to improve.