

Research & Analysis

*A service of the offices of Strategic Planning, Institutional Research, Management Information Systems
Hillsborough Community College, February 2006 -2*

FORMER STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS: GOALS, PLANS and REASONS FOR LEAVING

INTRODUCTION. As open access institutions, community colleges accommodate a variety of students, many of whom face economic, social and academic challenges that may thwart retention (Bailey, Jenkins & Leinbach, 2005). From the students' vantage point, competing priorities and significant demands impact both time and resources (McClenney, 2005). According to results for the 2004 CCSSE results, lack of finances and full-time employment were two main reasons HCC students would withdraw from class or from the College.

PURPOSE. The Former Student Survey is part of the ongoing College assessment plan. One portion of the Former Student Survey addressed student goals, plans, and their reasons for leaving. This brief focuses on those topics.

METHODOLOGY. The 1,190 students surveyed were a 33 percent sample of the 3,572 enrolled in a program of study in Fall 2004 that were not reenrolled in either Spring 2005 or Fall 2005. Survey administration was managed through a three-step process: (1) mailed survey with an incentive for completion, (2) postcard reminder with telephone and web-access to the survey, and (3) a second mailed survey. Beginning

December 5th, 2005, each step was conducted with a two week interval. The return rate was four percent, with completed surveys received from 53 students. The demographics of respondents are appended.

The three part survey addressed (1) learning, (2) service satisfaction and (3) student goals and plans. This brief focuses on student goals and plans. The survey content was reviewed and approved by members of the College Student Success and Retention Committee.

Limitation. The high rate of non-response (75 percent) evidenced the need to revise the data gathering approach for future administrations. Additionally, the 16 percent non-deliverable rate reinforced the mobility rate among former students. Future administrations of the survey will be conducted in collaboration with student services so information may be gathered at the point of withdrawal.

RESULTS. The results are organized by four questions.

1. Did students accomplish their goals at HCC?

Consistent with national and state survey findings, the majority of students surveyed entered HCC seeking a two-year degree (79 percent). The acquisition and updating of employment skills was reported for 10 percent. When asked if their goal was achieved, 25 percent responded in the affirmative, while 67 percent reported that their educational or career goal was not achieved.

2. Did students plan to continue their education in the future?

Fifty-four percent of the students reported plans to continue at HCC, and 33 percent noted their intent to continue at another college or university. The remaining 13 percent indicated uncertainty with regard to future plans.

3. What were their reasons for non-attending?

When asked to indicate their primary reason for not continuing, personal life change (40 percent) and other reasons (38 percent) were most frequently cited. Further analysis of the other reasons revealed that financial difficulties, moving out of the area, illness, military service, and non-admission to the College program of choice were among the most frequently reported. To assess the factors impacting attendance, students were offered eleven choices to report their reasons for not attending HCC for a year. Students reported all that applied. The three most frequent reasons identified by students were:

- Family or personal problems (20 percent);
- Financial difficulties (16 percent); and
- Work schedule conflict (16 percent).

4. How may these findings be applied to service improvement?

The limited number of survey respondents requires results to be applied cautiously. However, the findings are supported by national research and recent CCSSE results for the College.

The results have implications for support for learners. There is research to suggest institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. "Engagement" is defined by the Community College for Student Engagement by five key areas: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and learner support (McClenney, 2005). The five areas are evidence based practices which promote student goal attainment, and learning at higher levels.

At HCC, student engagement is a shared responsibility among staff and faculty. It may be observed in classrooms and on campuses as a way of work which is student-centered. Faculty and staff take an active interest in student progress, and navigate students to College services to assist them with academic challenges, and non-academic responsibilities.

The Education and Student Development Division at HCC joins community colleges throughout the nation which have established intentional engagement strategies including learning communities, service learning, in-class collaborative learning projects, first year experience, student organizations, individual learning plans, success coaches, and integration of technology. These initiatives will be assessed for their impact on student progress and retention.

Finally, distance and hybrid courses offer one opportunity to deliver instruction convenient to work schedules. A review of the current balance of day, night and weekend courses may be beneficial to maximize access to classroom based instructional delivery. Integrated efforts to deliver instruction at convenient time may relax time constraints due to the demands of student employment.

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February 2006

References

Bailey, T., Jenkins, D., & Leinbach, T. (2005). Graduation rates, student goals, and measuring community college effectiveness. Community College Research Center, CCRC Brief, (28), New York, N.Y.

McClenney, K. (2005). Engaging students, Challenging the odds. Community College for Student Engagement 2005 Findings. Austin, TX.

**FORMER STUDENTS SUVEY RESULTS
RESPONDENTS**

Student Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	18	34
Female	35	66
Ethnic Group		
Asian	4	7
African-American	11	21
Hispanic	8	15
White	30	57
Award Type		
Associate in Arts	39	74
Associate in Science	12	23
Vocational	2	4

QUESTION DETAIL FOR PART THREE

Q31. What was your primary goal when you attended HCC?

Goals	Respondents (N=53)	
	N	%
Two-year Degree	42	79
Employment Skills	3	6
Update Skills	2	4
Other	6	11

Q32. Did you achieve your educational or career goal at HCC?

Goal Achievement	Respondents (N=51)	
	N	%
Yes	13	25
No	34	67
Uncertain	4	8

Q33. Do you plan to continue your college education?

Continue Education	Respondents (N=52)	
	N	%
Yes, at HCC	28	54
Yes, other college/university	17	33
No	0	0
Uncertain	7	13

Q34. What was the major reason you stopped attending HCC before graduation?

Major Reason for Discontinuing	Respondents (N=53)	
	N	%
Completed the courses I needed	4	8
Transfer to a four-year university	4	8
Could not meet my goal at HCC	4	8
Personal life changed	21	40
Other	20	38

Q35. Tell us more about the reasons you stopped attending. Check all that apply, or explain in your words.

Reason for Discontinuing	Respondents	
	N	%
Classes not at convenient times	6	8%
Do not feel comfortable at HCC	2	3%
Family or personal problems	16	20%
Financial difficulties	13	16%
Illness/health problems	3	4%
Missed too many classes	1	1%
Moved out of the area	6	8%
Not enough time to study	7	9%
Not making good grades	2	3%
Work schedule conflict	13	16%
Other	11	14%