

Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) – Montgomery College

Executive Summary

Survey Background and Administration

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) is an initiative of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). SENSE is a national survey of institutional practices and student behaviors during the earliest weeks of college.

Montgomery College (MC) conducted the survey for the first time in fall 2018. Faculty administered the survey during the fourth and fifth class weeks of the academic term in 119 collegewide classes that were randomly selected by CCCSE. CCCSE pulled the sample from data provided by the College of classes that traditionally have a high proportion of first-year student enrollment. These include first-year English, math, developmental courses, and some student success courses.

CCCSE adds special-focus items to the SENSE each year. The 2018 special-focus module collected information on students' Guided Pathways experiences, such as selecting a program, time to program completion, program costs, and transferability of credits. This information as well as other analyses will be provided to MC's Achieving the Dream (ATD) coaches in August 2019.

The targeted number of surveys for administration was 1,500, based on the size of the College. CCCSE categorizes MC as an extra-large college. SENSE utilizes a three-year cohort (2016 through 2018) of participating colleges in all of its data analyses, including the computation of benchmark scores. This cohort is referred to as the 2018 SENSE Cohort. The 2018 SENSE Cohort participants include 269 institutions from 40 states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-nine colleges are classified as extra-large institutions.

Montgomery College submitted 1,511 valid surveys to CCCSE, which does not include surveys completed incorrectly and any students under the age of 18 who are automatically excluded. CCCSE also intentionally excludes certain surveys from the analyses based on student responses, such as those who indicate they are returning students or did not specify if they are new or returning students. Oversampled respondents are not included because they are selected outside of SENSE's primary sampling procedures.

Montgomery College's adjusted survey count for analysis was 717. A chart of the College's completion rates compared to all colleges in the cohort and to all extra-large colleges is below:

	Overall Completion Rate	Within Class Completion Rate	Percentage of Selected Classes Surveyed
Montgomery College	53%	72%	74%
All Extra-Large Colleges in Cohort	52%	69%	76%
All Colleges in 2018 SENSE Cohort	43%	51%	77%

Student Respondent Profile

	Montgomery College Respondents	Montgomery College Population (IPEDS)	Ex-Large Colleges Comparison Population	2018 Cohort Colleges Population
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Gender				
Male	44%	47%	45%	44%
Female	51%	53%	55%	56%
Race or Ethnicity				
Native American	1%	0%	0%	1%
Asian Am. or Pacific Islander	11%	11%	7%	6%
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	26%	28%	12%	13%
White, Non-Hispanic	14%	24%	34%	44%
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	30%	24%	40%	31%
Other	6%	0%	3%	4%
International Student or nonresident alien	10%	9%	3%	2%
Enrollment Status				
Part-time	32%	64%	70%	66%
Full-time	68%	36%	30%	34%

Benchmark Reports

SENSE benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and behaviors that promote engagement among entering students. Benchmarks are used to compare each institution's performance to that of similar institutions and with the SENSE Cohort. The six SENSE benchmarks are Early Connections, High Expectations and Aspirations, Clear Academic Plan and Pathway, Effective Track to College Readiness, Engaged Learning, and Academic and Social Support Network.

SENSE benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing the benchmarks. Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50, a standard deviation of 25 at the individual respondent level, and weighted by full-time and part-time enrollment status. The scores provide an overview of how the college is performing in particular areas compared to the full 2018 Cohort, to other extra-large colleges, and to top-performing colleges.

	Montgomery College	Ex-Large Colleges	2018 Cohort Colleges	Top Performing Colleges
Benchmark	Score	Score	Score	Score
Early Connections	39.6	45.7	50.0	69.7
High Expectations and Aspirations	51.9	49.5	50.0	58.2
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	47.9	46.7	50.0	62.3
Effective Track to College Readiness	55.9	49.6	50.0	60.5
Engaged Learning	50.2	47.6	50.0	64.4
Academic and Social Support Network	49.1	47.7	50.0	59.4

Some of the College’s areas of highest student engagement are in Effective Track to College Readiness, High Expectations and Aspirations, and Engaged Learning. The area of lowest student engagement is Early Connections, when students describe their early college experiences. Only 27% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that “a college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take” or “a college staff member helped me determine whether I qualified for financial assistance.” (Note that the question language refers to a staff member. At MC, faculty assist students with course selection.)

However, a comparison of first generation and non-first generation students shows that first generation students report higher engagement in Early Connections, although still lower than benchmarks at other extra-large colleges and the full 2018 cohort:

		Montgomery College	Ex-Large Colleges		2018 Cohort	
Benchmark	Breakout Group	Score	Score	Difference	Score	Difference
Early Connections	First-generation	41.0	46.9	-6.0	54.5	-13.5
	Not first-generation	38.4	44.7	-6.3	52.0	-13.6

CCCSE encourages colleges to use the benchmark comparisons as a starting point to design effective engagement opportunities for entering students. Some of the peer-group averages may be low. Matching or exceeding like-size school’s benchmarks is a reasonable initial strategy, but the goal should be to match or exceed top-performing colleges in the cohort.

Guided Pathways

Responses to the Guided Pathways module provide additional comparisons of students’ early experiences with academic plans and advising:

Question	Responses	Montgomery College	Ex-Large Colleges	2018 Cohort
		Percent	Percent	Percent
At this college, are you required to follow an academic plan that specifies which courses you are required to take?	Yes	68.2	65.5	66.8
	I do not have an academic plan	14.2	15.0	14.4
	No	17.6	19.5	18.9
Were you required to meet (in person or online) with an academic advisor before registering for classes this academic term at this college?	Yes	77.9	64.2	66.7
	No	22.1	35.8	33.3

Summary

Additional review of the raw data files may yield strategies to improve the College’s engagement with first-time students. Analyses can be run using various identifiers, depending on what questions the College chooses to explore further in determining which initiatives to supplement or program outcomes to measure. The identifiers include enrollment level (FT/PT), gender, ethnicity, developmental

education status, first generation college, work performed outside of college, native (first) language, or intended goals. The College can also compare benchmarks and responses for individual questions to those of ATD schools in the cohort. MC plans to participate in the SENSE during fall 2019 and fall 2020, which can help demonstrate if activities pursued due to 2018 responses have a positive effect.

Finally, to end on a high note, this response from the SENSE participants is a result of positive student engagement:

Question	Response	Percent
Would you recommend this college to a friend or family member?	Yes	94.4
	No	5.6