

This is the first in a series of newsletters from the Institutional Research (IR) office of El Camino College. The intent of the newsletter is to provide administrators, faculty, staff and student leaders with more information on how IR can support the college through program review, research questions, grant applications, and general data analysis of academic and student support programs on campus. We also

hope to keep you informed of college-related news and general research. The newsletter will be produced once or twice each term.

This inaugural edition includes information on available success, retention and demographic data on our website, the upcoming student opinion survey and the first in a series on survey design.

Success and Retention Information

Success and retention rates are a valuable tool in program review and serve as general measures of how well students are faring academically in courses and programs over time. *Success* is defined as the percentage of students receiving a C or better, while *retention* refers to the percentage of students who received any grade except W or I (i.e., completed the course).

Were you aware that Institutional Research publishes success and retention rates for El Camino College each term? These rates are calculated at the division, department and program levels. Other success and retention rates can be calculated upon request.

To access available rates, visit our website at <http://www.elcamino.edu/administration/ir>. Click on the link, "Campus Profile." From there, you will see a series of links to division, department and course rates for each term.

The IR reports provide two types of success rates; the top rate in the report excludes Ws in the denominator, or lower half of the fraction, while the bottom rate includes them.



Therefore, the top rate will always be considerably higher. Either rate may be used depending on your needs but the definition for the rate you select should be noted when possible.

In addition to academic performance, a general demographic profile of students is available on the IR website. Click on the "Campus Profile" link for a profile for the fall 2004 term (fall 2005 coming soon!).

If you would like to request special success and retention rates, click on "Research Request Form." This will take you to a PDF form. Simply type your information right on the screen, print it, get appropriate signatures and mail to Institutional Research, 116 Administration.

Student Opinion Survey

In spring 2001, students were asked for their opinion on various aspects of El Camino College including academics, support services, and student life. Five years later, we would like to seek student opinions again about similar topics to gauge what improvements we have made and how things might have changed at El Camino from a student perspective.

The selected instrument is ACT's Survey of Student Opinions which will take students less than 30 minutes to complete. It will be distributed early in the spring semester to a random sampling of course sections. Faculty for selected sections will distribute the survey

to students in class, while students taking online classes will receive a copy of the survey by mail. Results will be analyzed and reported back to the campus by the end of the semester.

While assessing student opinions and campus climate is valuable for accreditation, it is also an important way to assess how well the campus is helping students learn, prepare for life, gain skills and participate in lifelong learning. Successes noted by students can be illuminated and challenges can be targeted for improvement. This self-evaluation process should benefit all members of the campus community. Institutional Research will keep the campus informed throughout the process.

Survey Design – Early Considerations

When planning an evaluation of a program or course, many consider a student satisfaction survey as the best and easiest approach. Although a great deal of information can be gathered, surveys do have limitations and may involve unnecessary time and effort.

Before planning your survey, consider first what you hope to gain from the survey, the availability of alternative options and plans for use of the results if you decide to proceed with a survey. These issues are discussed individually below.

What do I hope to gain from the survey?

Before writing your questions, have a clear idea of what information you hope to learn from the survey results. Think about your program, service or course goals. Consider

your own professional perceptions and observations of successes and challenges.

Is a survey the best way to discover what I want to know? Does similar information already exist somewhere else?

After you know what you want to find out, consider whether a survey is the most appropriate way to discover this information. You may save yourself a lot of valuable time by accessing existing information instead.

Sources of existing data include previously administered surveys upon which no action was taken, survey results from national organizations or other campuses, demographic data, success, retention and other academic performance data, and existing research studies. New research on program or course

success may be conducted with the help of IR staff as another alternative to surveying.

Eliciting opinions is important but has limitations since it measures only *perceptions*, not true performance. Data that can demonstrate effects on actual performance can enhance your program profile by providing direct evidence of quality. This direct evidence, in turn, can be applied to assessment of student learning, meeting two goals with one analysis.

How will the information gained from a survey be used?

Students occasionally express frustration regarding opinion surveys, wondering if anything will change as a result of their efforts. It is important for you to outline who will see the results of the survey and how the information will be used, particularly for program improvement, if applicable. Your

plans should be shared with the survey respondents so they understand its purpose.

Next Steps

Whether you are seeking alternatives to a satisfaction survey or are ready to move forward with your own survey, contact Institutional Research early in the process. IR can help you formalize survey questions, organize and format your questions, and suggest approaches to what you would like to learn from students. Early planning and contact with IR will help to ensure that your survey will be implemented in a timely manner (see contact information below).

Future editions of this newsletter will include tips on crafting survey questions, how sampling (instead of polling) your students can save time and money, and how to implement your survey for the most accurate results.

Meet the Staff!

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The IR staff is here to serve the research and surveying needs of El Camino College. Irene Graff works Monday through Friday. Mike Wilson is on campus on Monday and Tuesday.

All research, surveying and data requests require a completed Research Request Form. To access this form, visit our website (<http://www.elcamino.edu/administration/ir>) and click on “Research Request Form.” Some requests may need prior approval from the VP for Student and Community Advancement. You will be informed when this is necessary.

Institutional Research is a program of the Vice President for Student and Community Advancement. We are located in the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, 116 Administration.

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