El Camino College
The Survey of Entering Student Engagement
Overview of 2014 Survey Results

Introduction

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE)*, a survey from the Center for Community College Student Engagement, helps community colleges discover why some entering students persist and succeed and others do not.

Administered during the 4th and 5th weeks of the Fall 2014 academic term, *SENSE* asked students to reflect on their earliest experiences (academic and services-related) with El Camino College (ECC). *SENSE* serves as a complementary piece to the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*)](), with a more narrowed focus on early student experiences.

SENSE Member Colleges

SENSE data analyses are based on a three-year cohort of entering student data from participating colleges. This approach increases the total number of institutions and students contributing to the national data set, which in turn increases the reliability of the overall results. In addition, the three-year cohort approach minimizes the impact, in any given year, of statewide consortium participation. If a college participated more than one time in the three-year period, the cohort includes data only from that college's most recent year of participation.

The *SENSE* 2014 (2012-2014) cohort includes 267 institutions in 39 states, the District of Columbia, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia. One-hundred and two 2014 cohort colleges are classified as small (<4,500), 65 as medium (4,500-7,999), 66 as large (8,000-14,999), and 34 as extra-large institutions (15,000 + credit students). Sixty-eight of the colleges are classified as urban-serving, 57 as suburban-serving, and 142 as rural-serving.

SENSE Sampling

In *SENSE* sampling procedures, students are sampled at the classroom level. The survey was administered in classes randomly selected from those courses most likely to enroll entering students, with a random sample pulled from all first college-level English and math courses and all developmental reading, writing, and math courses, excluding ESL courses.

Of those entering students sampled at ECC, 645 respondents submitted usable surveys. The number of completed surveys produced an overall "percent of target" rate of 43%. The percent of target rate is the ratio of the adjusted number of completed surveys (surveys that were filled out properly and did not fall into any of the exclusionary categories) to the target sample size. The margin of error is ±3.7%.

Excluded Respondents

Exclusions serve the purpose of ensuring that all institutional reports are based on the same sampling methods and that results are therefore comparable across institutions. Respondents are excluded from institutional reports for the following reasons:

- ✖ The respondent did not indicate whether he or she was enrolled full-time or less than full-time at ECC.
- ✖ The respondent did not indicate whether he or she was an entering or returning student.
- ✖ The survey is invalid. A survey is invalid if a student answered all sub-items of Item 19 as either *never* or *four or more times*.
- ✖ The student reported his or her age as under 18.
- ✖ The student indicated that he or she had taken the survey in a previous class or did not respond to item 1.
- ✖ Oversample respondents are not included because they are selected outside of *SENSE*'s primary sampling procedures.

2014 Student Respondent Profile

Enrollment Status

Twenty-six percent of ECC entering student respondents report being less than full-time college students, compared to 27% of the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort colleges' entering student respondents. Seventy-four percent of the entering student respondents at ECC report attending college full-time, while 73% of the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort colleges' entering student respondents attended full-time. Population data[1] for all students at ECC are 70% less than full-time and 30% full-time. This inverse representation is a result of the sampling technique and the in-class administration process. For this reason, survey results are either weighted or disaggregated on the full-time/less than full-time variable so that reports will accurately reflect the underlying student population.

Age

Entering student respondents at ECC range in age from 18 to 65+ years old. Ninety-six percent are between 18 and 24 years old. Students at ECC are younger than the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort respondents, of which 82% of students are between 18 and 24.

Gender

Forty-three percent of ECC entering student respondents are male and 53% are female, which is comparable to the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort, which is 43% male and 54% female.

Racial/Ethnic Identification

Twelve percent of ECC entering student respondents identified themselves as White, Non-Hispanic; 53% as Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; 11% as Black or African American; and 11% as Asian, Asian America, or Pacific Islander. Less than 1% of the student respondents are American Indian or Native American. Three percent marked *other* when responding to the question, "What is your racial/ethnic identification?" ECC's student sample is more diverse than the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort, which is comprised of 49% White/Non-Hispanic; 19% Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; 15% Black or African American; 3% Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; and 2% American Indian or Native American respondents.

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[1] Population data are those reported for the most recent IPEDS enrollment report.

International Students

Seven percent of ECC entering students responded *yes* to the question, "Are you an international student or nonresident alien?" ECC has more international students than in the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort, of which 5% are international.

First-Generation Status

Fifty-five percent of entering student respondents indicated that neither parent has college experience.

The results for the following student respondent categories are weighted according to the most recent IPEDS population data.

Language Background

At ECC, 35.2% of *SENSE* respondents indicated that English was not their first language.

Orientation

Forty percent of entering student respondents report attending an on-campus orientation prior to the beginning of classes, while 25% report attending an online orientation. Five percent of entering student respondents report enrolling in an orientation course during their first semester at ECC.

Courses Dropped

Seventeen percent of entering student respondents report dropping at least one course after the first day of class.

External Commitments

Seven percent of entering student respondents work 21 or more hours per week.
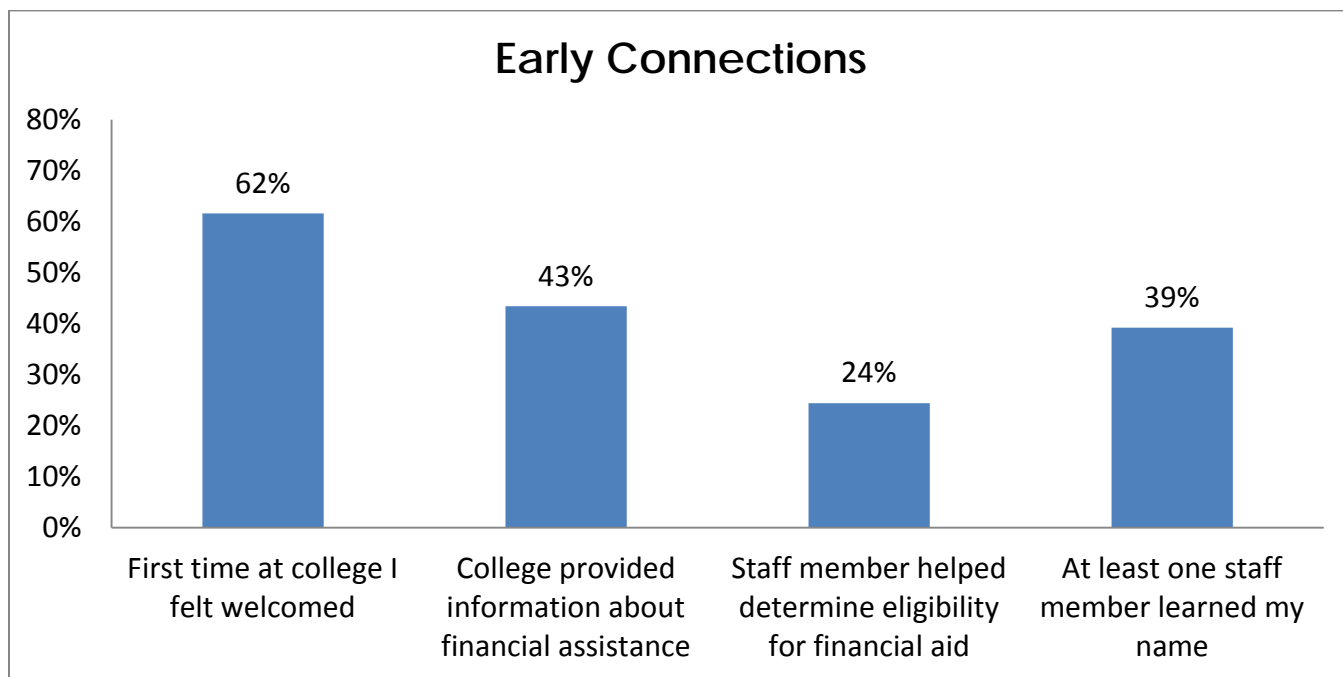
Goals

Entering student respondents were asked to indicate their reasons or goals for attending this college; students could choose more than one goal. Sixty-seven percent indicated that completing a certificate is a goal, 76% indicated that obtaining an Associate degree is a goal, and 91% indicated that transfer to a 4-year college is a goal.

SENSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

To assist colleges in their efforts to reach for excellence, the Center for Community College Student Engagement reports national benchmarks of effective practice with entering students in community colleges. Research shows that the more actively engaged students are—with faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter—the more likely they are to learn and to achieve their academic goals. *SENSE* benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement early in the college experience—and that are positively related to student learning and persistence. The six benchmarks of effective educational practice with entering students in community colleges 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.

Early Connections

When students describe their early college experiences, they typically reflect on occasions when they felt discouraged or thought about dropping out. Their reasons for persisting almost always include one common element: a strong, early connection to someone at the college. 62% of respondents indicated that they felt welcomed the first time they came to ECC. In terms of financial aid assistance, 43% of respondents indicated that they were provided them with information about financial assistance, while 24% indicated a staff member helped them determine their financial aid eligibility. Additionally, respondents were asked *"was a specific person assigned to you so you could see him/her each time you needed information or assistance*?" and a low percentage, 22%, reported yes. Overall, ECC students reported lower levels of agreement than the national cohort sample.
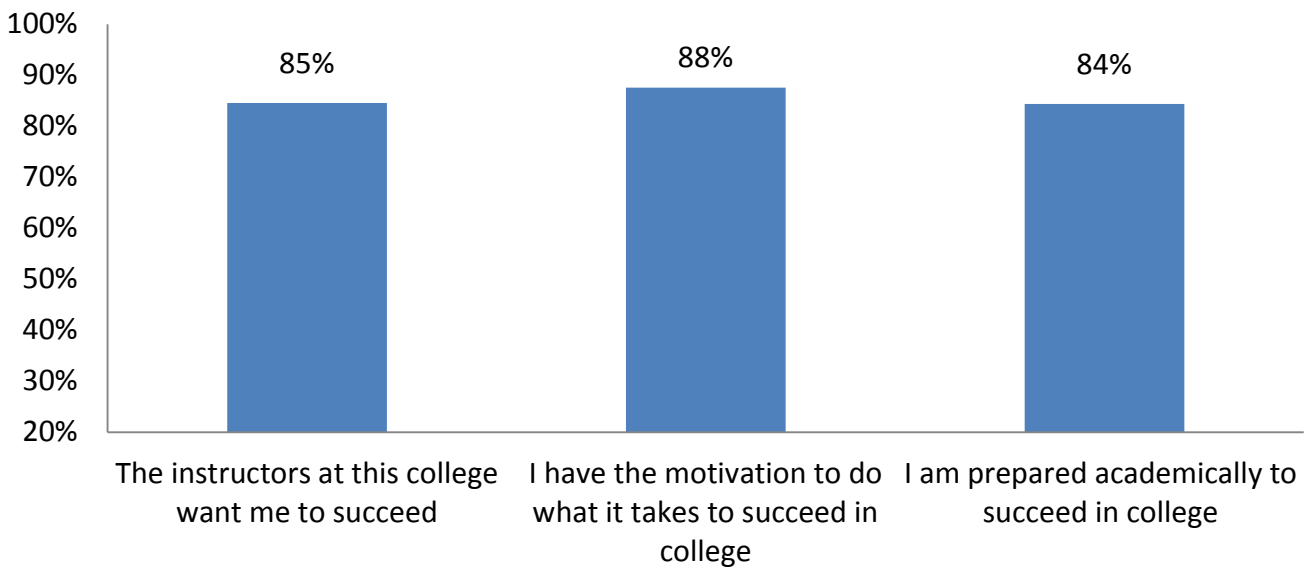
Early Connections

Category	Percentage
First time at college I felt welcomed	62%
College provided information about financial assistance	43%
Staff member helped determine eligibility for financial aid	24%
At least one staff member learned my name	39%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

High Expectations and Aspirations

Nearly all students arrive at their community colleges intending to succeed and believing that they have the motivation to do so. When entering students perceive clear, high expectations from college staff and faculty, they are more likely to understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement. Students then often rise to meet expectations, making it more likely that they will attain their goals. Often, students' aspirations also climb, and they seek more advanced credentials than they originally envisioned.

Eighty-five percent of students were in agreement that their instructors wanted them to succeed. When students were asked "I have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college," 88% of respondents were in agreement. Moreover, 84% of students were in agreement that they are academically prepared to succeed in college. Overall, El Camino College responses were comparable to the national cohort responses.
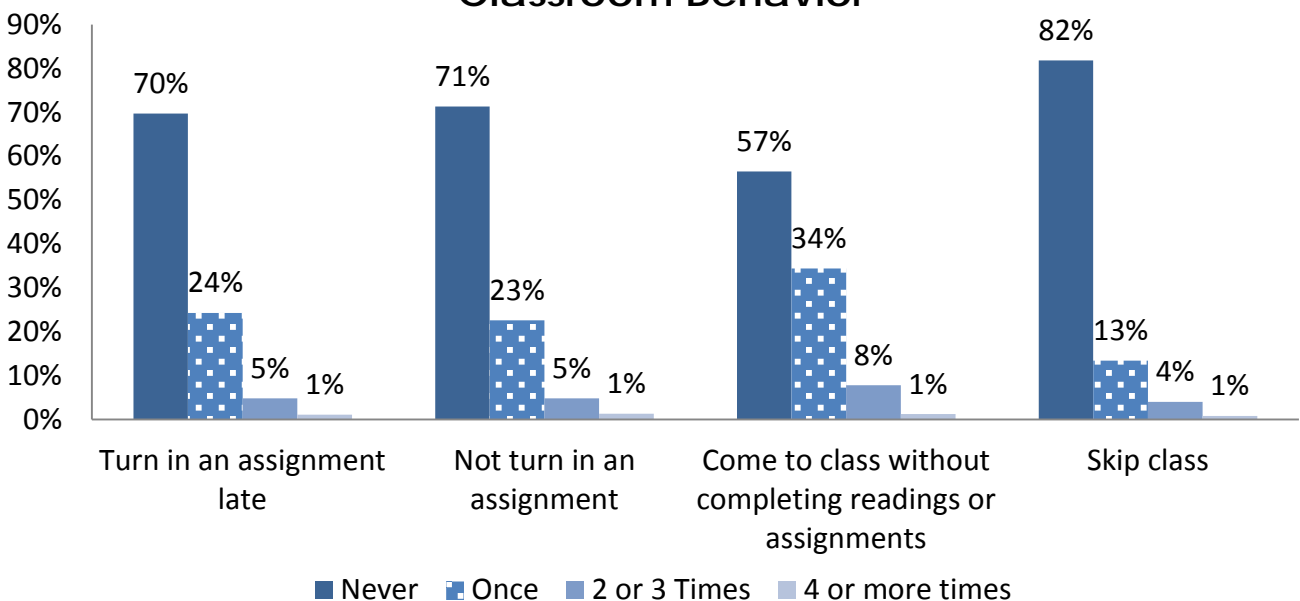
High Expectations and Aspiration

Bar chart showing:
- The instructors at this college want me to succeed: 85%
- I have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college: 88%
- I am prepared academically to succeed in college: 84%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

Students were also asked about their classroom behaviors. When asked how often students "turned in an assignment late," 70% of respondents answered never, slightly higher than the national cohort sample (67%). When asked how often they did not turn in an assignment, 71% answered never while 23% said once. ECC respondents answering once were slightly higher than the national cohort sample (19%). In addition, students were asked how often they attended class having not completed their assignments or readings. A majority of ECC respondents indicated never (57%) and once (34%). Compared to the national cohort sample, ECC students responded higher amongst those answering once. Lastly, students were asked how often they skipped school. A majority of respondents, 82%, answered never, which was seven percentage points higher than the national cohort sample.

Classroom Behavior

Bar chart with legend: Never, Once, 2 or 3 Times, 4 or more times

- Turn in an assignment late: Never 70%, Once 24%, 2 or 3 Times 5%, 4 or more times 1%
- Not turn in an assignment: Never 71%, Once 23%, 2 or 3 Times 5%, 4 or more times 1%
- Come to class without completing readings or assignments: Never 57%, Once 34%, 2 or 3 Times 8%, 4 or more times 1%
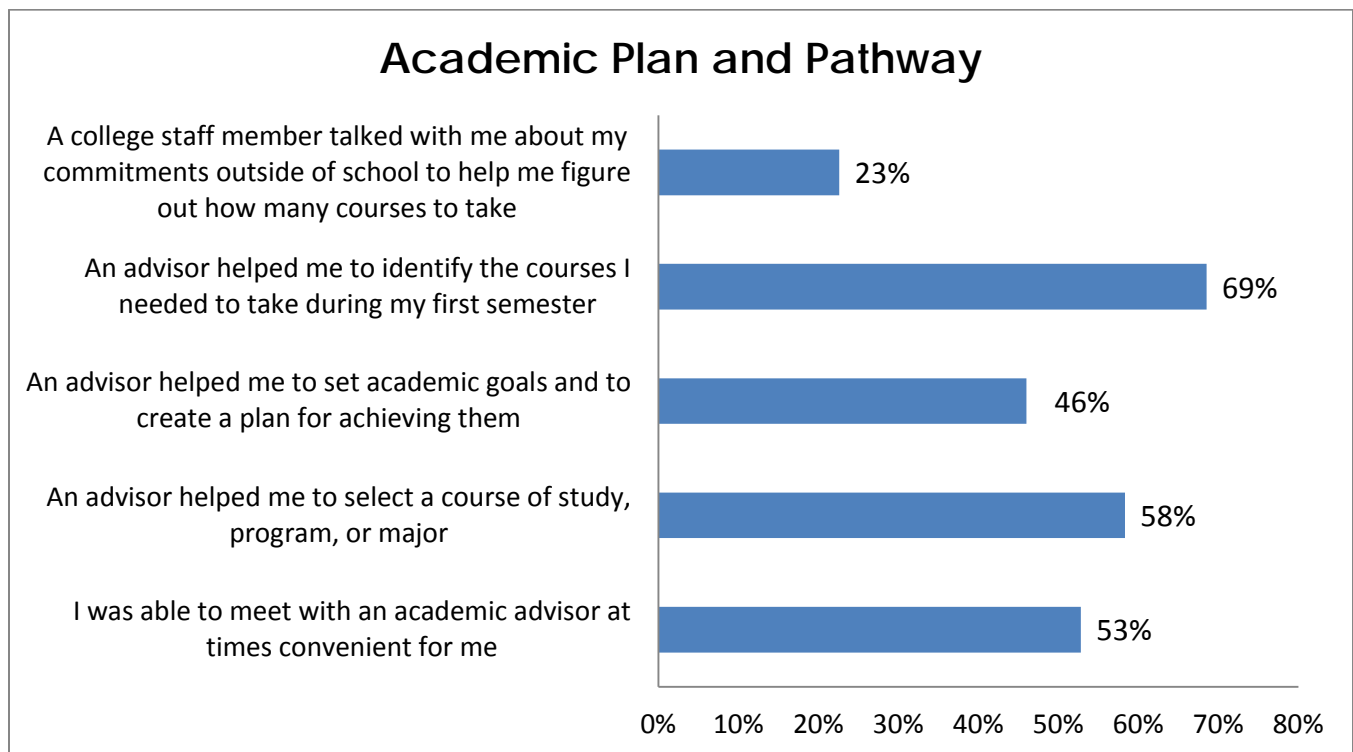- Skip class: Never 82%, Once 13%, 2 or 3 Times 4%, 4 or more times 1%

Clear Academic Plan and Pathway

When a student, with knowledgeable assistance, creates a road map — one that shows where he or she is headed, what academic path to follow, and how long it will take to reach the end goal— that student has a critical tool for staying on track. Students are more likely to persist if they not only are advised about what courses to take, but also are helped to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.

Students were asked various questions regarding their interaction with academic advisors. When asked about their ability to meet with academic advisors during times convenient to them, a little more than half of respondents (53%) answered agree or strongly agree. Sixty-nine percent of respondents acknowledged that advisors assisted them with identifying the courses needed for their first semester, while 58% reported having an advisor help them select a course of study, program or major. Additionally, 46% of students reported that an advisor helped them set academic goals and create a plan for achieving them. When students were asked about the type of advice obtained from ECC staff members in general, about a fourth of respondents (23%) agreed that a staff member had talked to them about outside commitments when determining how many courses to take.

Academic Plan and Pathway

A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take	23%
An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester	69%
An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them	46%
An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major	58%
I was able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me	53%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

Effective Track to College Readiness

Nationally, more than 6 in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. Thus, significant improvements in student success will hinge upon effective assessment, placement of students into appropriate course, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.

ECC students were asked about their experience with placement testing. Ninety-three of respondents reported they were required to take a placement test prior to registering for classes and 92% stated having taken a placement test. Furthermore, 87% of students indicated the "college required me to enroll in classes indicated by my placement test scores during my first semester."

Placement Testing

93%	92%	87%
Before I could register for classes, I was required to take a placement test to assess my skills in reading, writing, and/or math	I took a placement test	This college required me to enroll in classes indicated by my placement test scores during my first semester
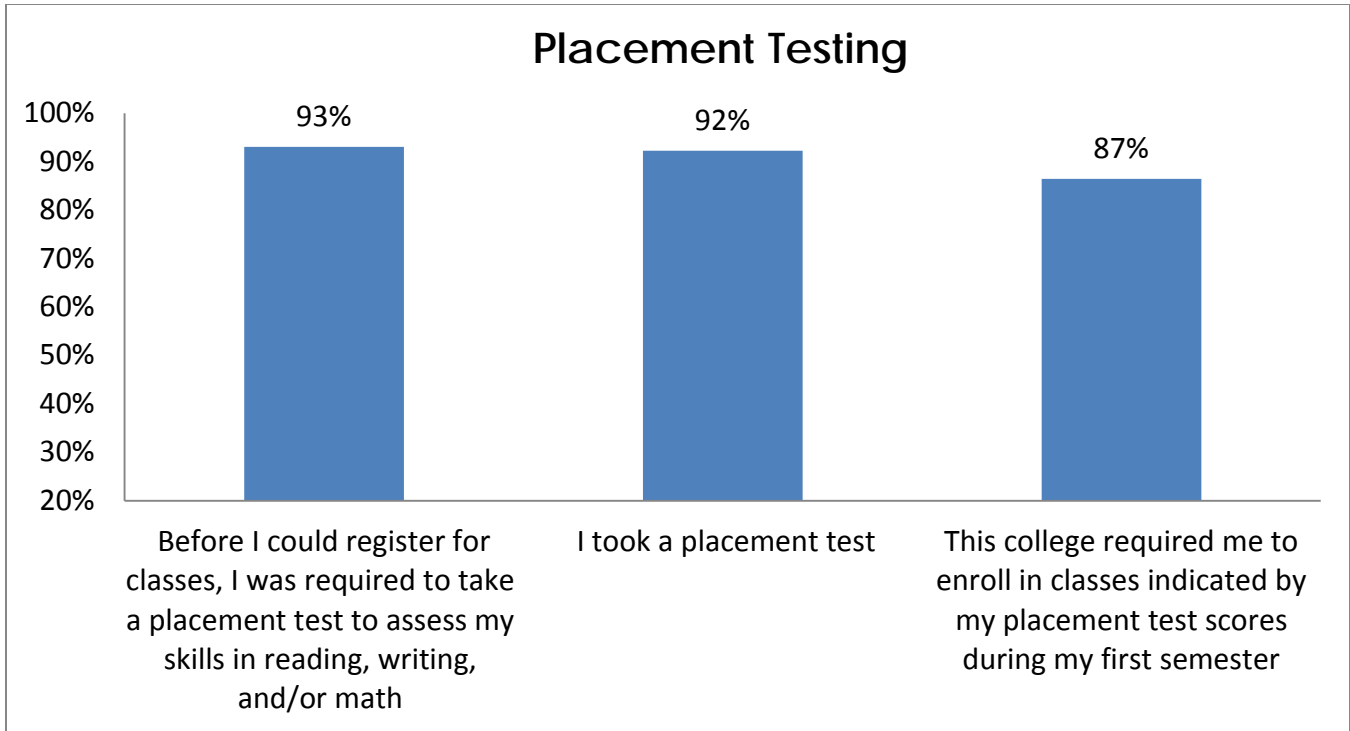
Note: Reporting percentage of those who responded Yes

The survey also asked questions regarding academic skill building. Students were asked if experiences at ECC helped to improve their study skills and 72% of respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed. Additionally, 68% of respondents indicated they learned to "understand their academic strengths and weaknesses" and half of all respondents specified learning skills and strategies to improve test-taking ability.

Academic Skill Building

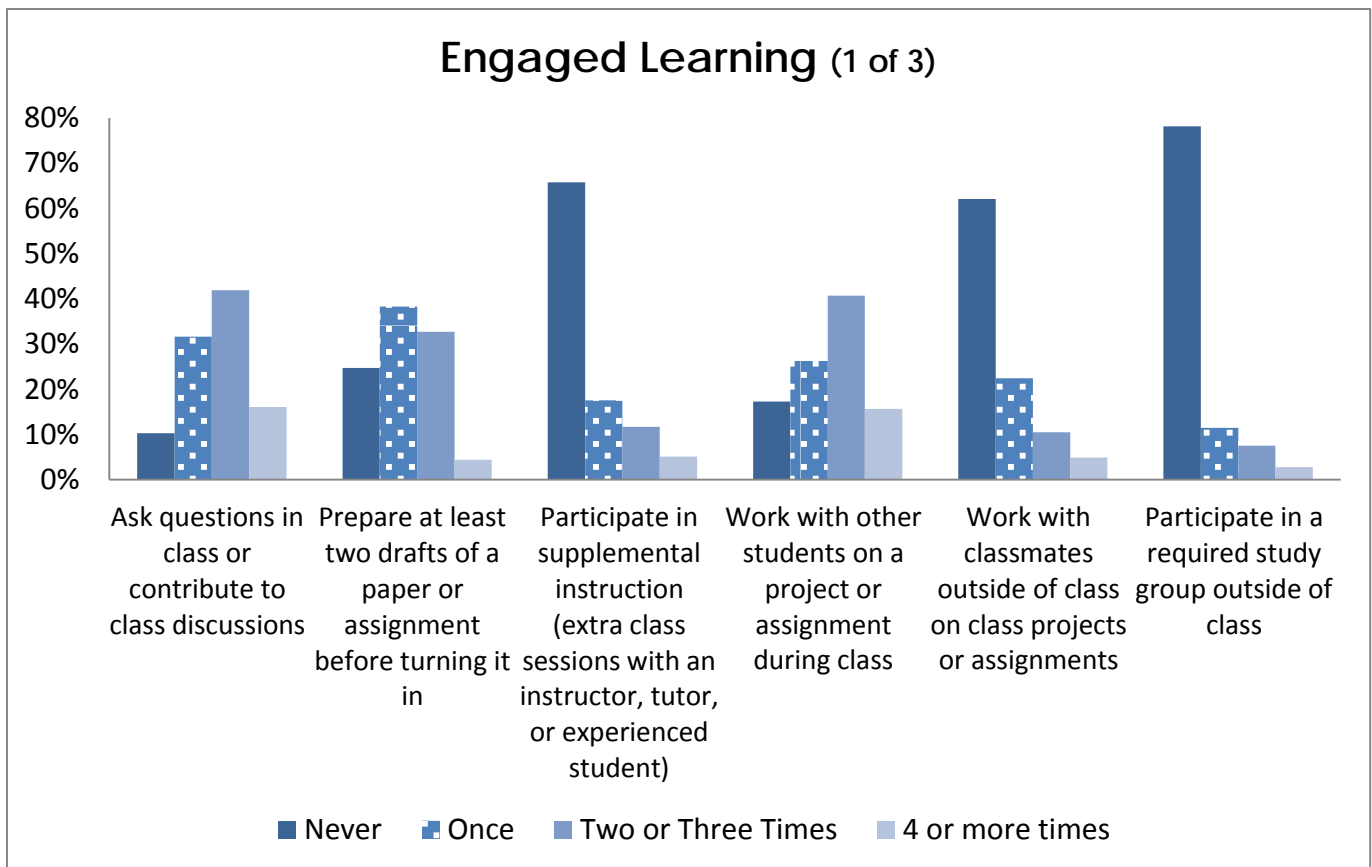|		
72%	68%	50%
I learned to improve my study skills (listening, note taking, highlighting readings, working with others, etc.)	I learned to understand my academic strengths and weaknesses	I learned skills and strategies to improve my test-taking ability
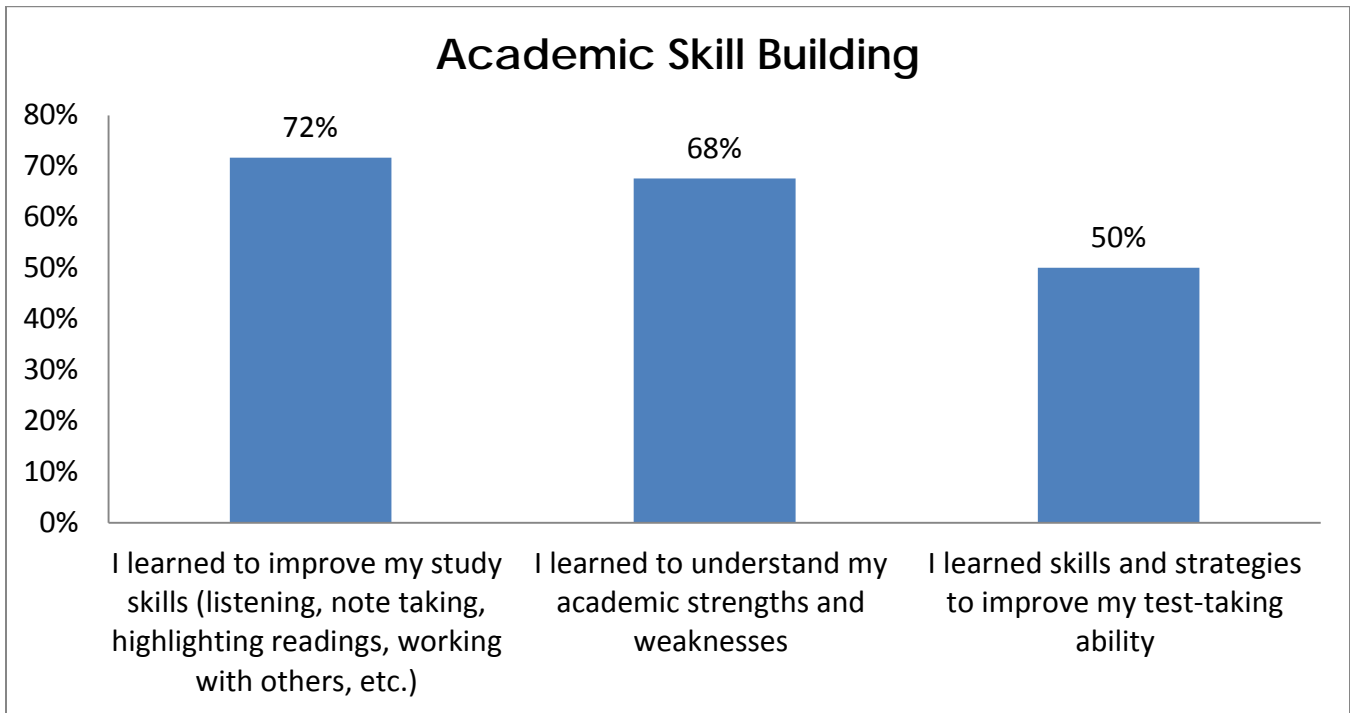
Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed
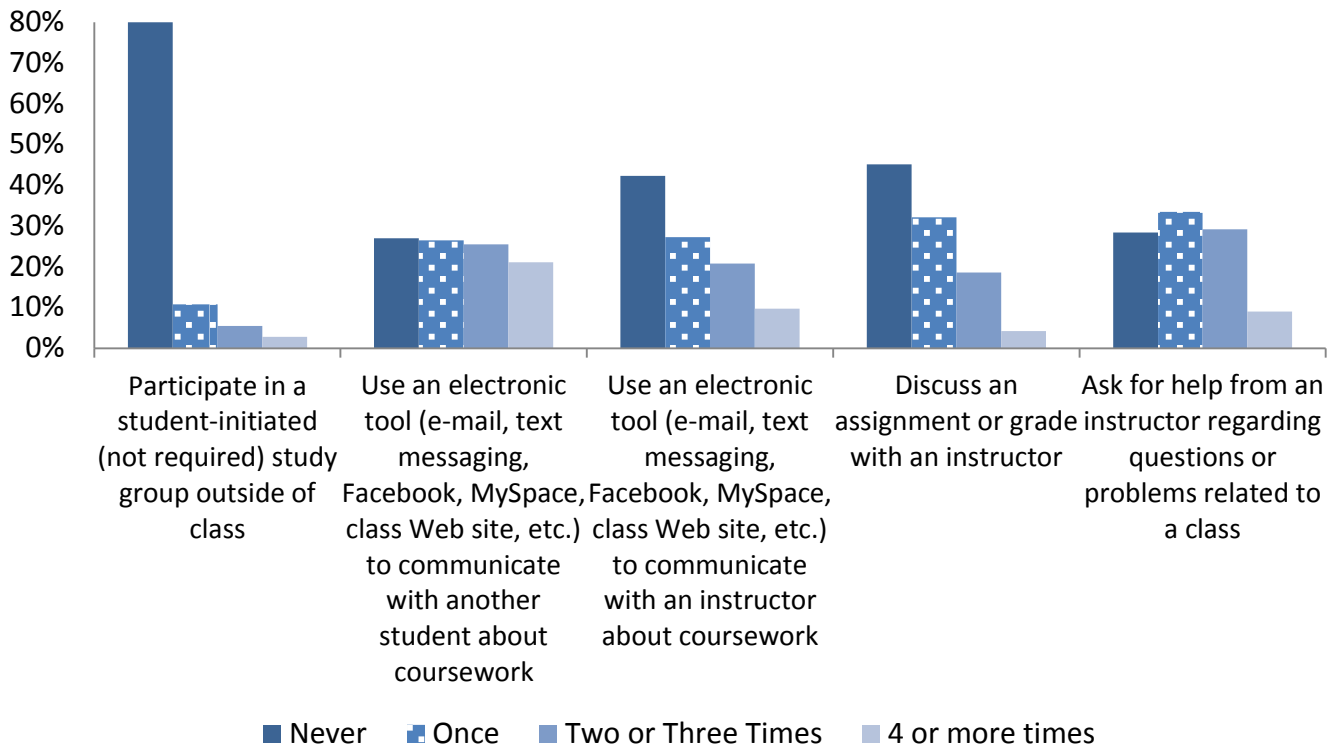
Engaged Learning

Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Because most community college students attend college part-time, and most also must find ways to balance their studies with work and family responsibilities, the most effective learning experiences will be those the college intentionally designs.

Respondents were asked various questions about their involvement in institutionalized engaged learning activities. For activities in which students engaged two or more times, only two had half or more respondents acknowledge involvement. The majority of respondents, 58%, indicated they engaged in asking questions or contributing to class discussions while 56% reported working with other students on a project or assignment during class. Additionally, 42% indicated receiving written or oral feedback from instructors.

For activities in which students engaged only one time, the highest activities indicated were preparing at least two drafts of a paper, asking help from instructors, and receiving written or oral feedback. Approximately, one-third of all surveyed students indicated participating in the above engaged learning activities. The learning activities with the highest reported responses of no engagement included face-to-face tutoring (84%), required study group outside of class (78%), and writing, math, or other skill lab attendance (71%).

Engaged Learning (1 of 3)

Engaged Learning (2 of 3)

Categories (left to right):
- Participate in a student-initiated (not required) study group outside of class
- Use an electronic tool (e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, MySpace, class Web site, etc.) to communicate with another student about coursework
- Use an electronic tool (e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, MySpace, class Web site, etc.) to communicate with an instructor about coursework
- Discuss an assignment or grade with an instructor
- Ask for help from an instructor regarding questions or problems related to a class

Legend: ■ Never ■ Once ■ Two or Three Times ■ 4 or more times

Engaged Learning (3 of 3)

Categories (left to right):
- Receive prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance
- Discuss ideas from readings or classes with instructors outside of class
- Face-to-face tutoring
- Writing, math, or other skill lab
- Computer lab

Legend: ■ Never ■ Once ■ Two or Three Times ■ 4 or more times
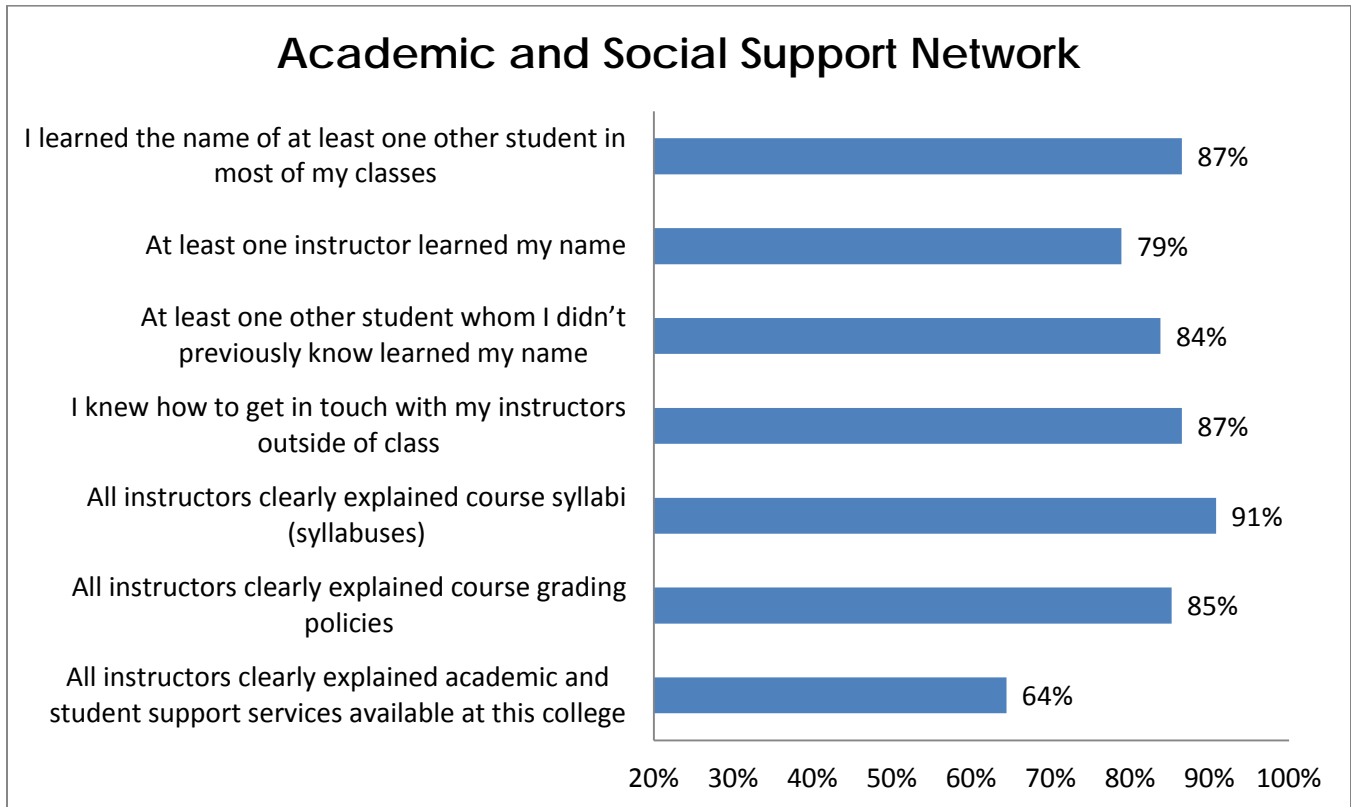
Academic and Social Support Network

Students benefit from having a personal network that enables them to obtain information about college services, along with the academic and social support critical to student success. Because entering students often don't know what they don't know, colleges must purposefully create those networks.

ECC students were asked questions regarding the type of support they received from faculty and fellow peers. Ninety-one percent of students surveyed agreed that their instructors communicated the expectations and requirements of their course clearly. Over three-fourths of students (87%) indicated they knew how to get in touch with an instructor outside of class and the same percentage of students acknowledged learning the name of at least one other student.
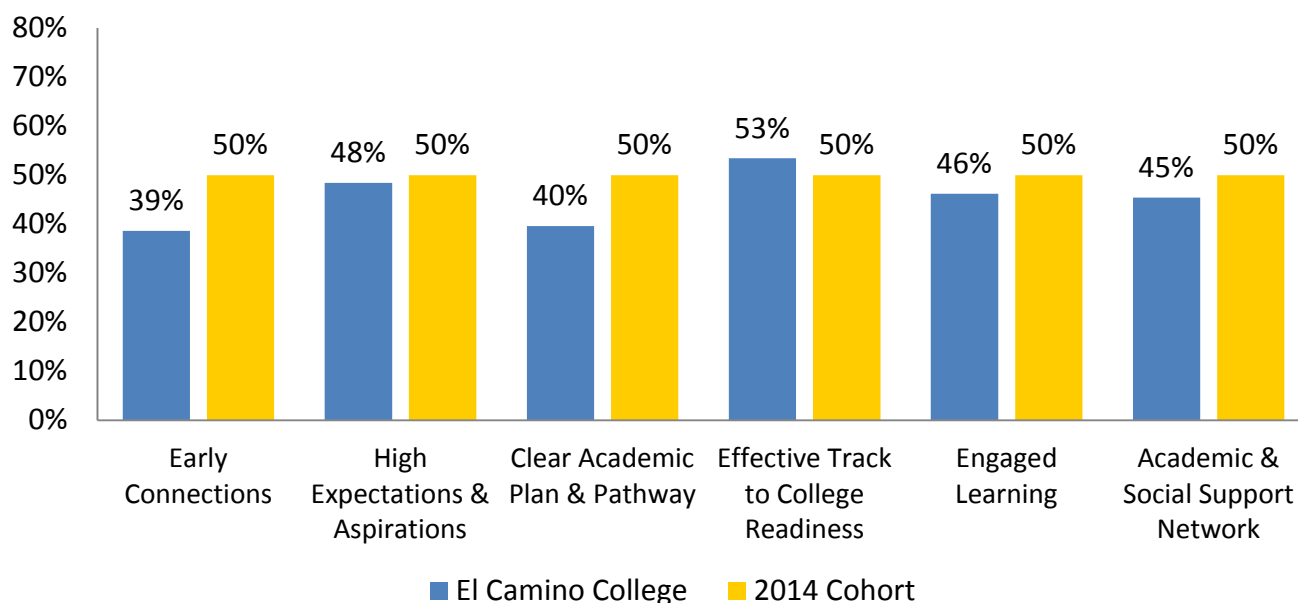
Academic and Social Support Network

Category	Percentage
I learned the name of at least one other student in most of my classes	87%
At least one instructor learned my name	79%
At least one other student whom I didn't previously know learned my name	84%
I knew how to get in touch with my instructors outside of class	87%
All instructors clearly explained course syllabi (syllabuses)	91%
All instructors clearly explained course grading policies	85%
All instructors clearly explained academic and student support services available at this college	64%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

SENSE Benchmark Comparisons

Benchmarks are used to compare each institution's performance to that of similar institutions and with the *SENSE* Cohort. Each individual benchmark score is computed by averaging the scores on survey items that make up that benchmark. Benchmark scores are then standardized so that the mean (the average of all participating students) always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25.

SENSE Benchmark Scores for El Camino College Compared to 2014 Cohort

Benchmark	El Camino College	2014 Cohort
Early Connections	39%	50%
High Expectations & Aspirations	48%	50%
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	40%	50%
Effective Track to College Readiness	53%	50%
Engaged Learning	46%	50%
Academic & Social Support Network	45%	50%

Among the six *SENSE* benchmarks, El Camino College highest benchmark score was that of effective track to college readiness followed by high expectations & aspirations. The lowest benchmark scores were clear academic plan & pathway and early connections. Additionally, in comparison to the 2014 Cohort scores, El Camino College benchmark scores were lower with the exception of effective track to college readiness.
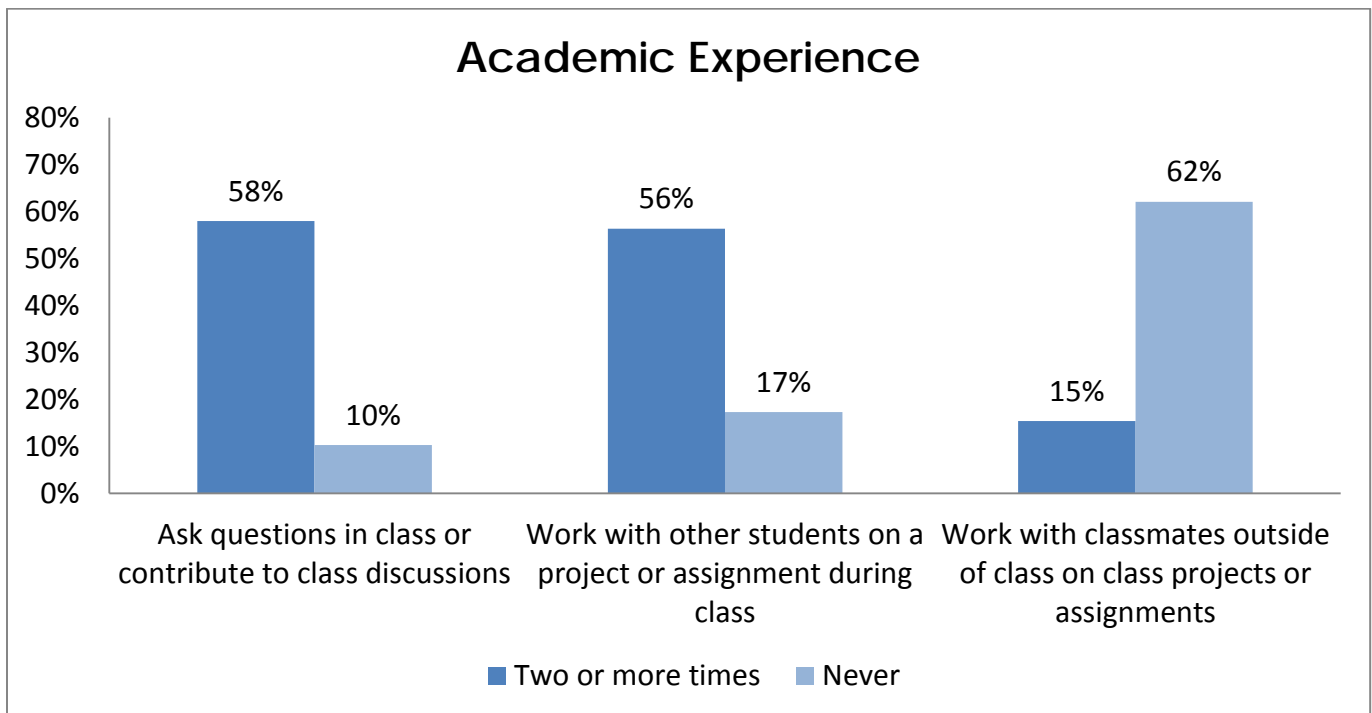
Selected Findings

Academic Experience

A positive academic experience is a product of many ingredients, one of which is the amount of time and energy students invest in their academic work and spend collaborating with others. SENSE asks students to respond to several survey items in order to gauge how actively they are involved in their education. Students are given the opportunity to mark never, once, two or three times, or four or more times in response to items such as the following:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments
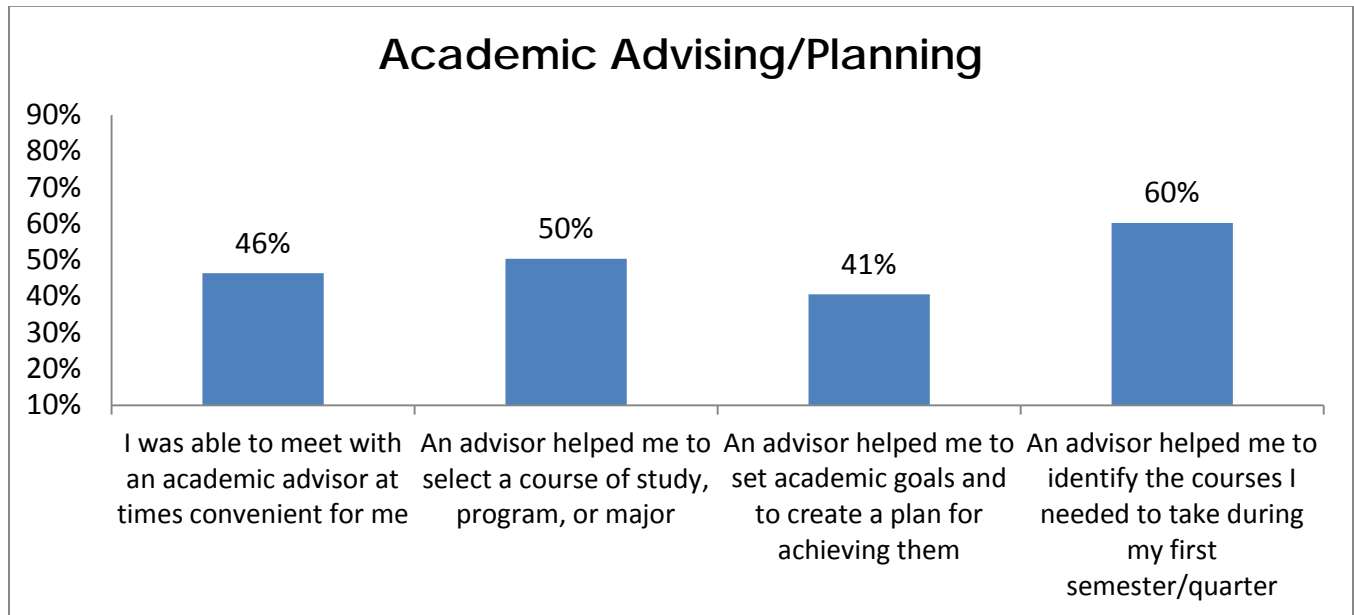
While some students are highly involved in their academic experience (those who marked two or more times), others are less engaged, as illustrated by their responses of never, as displayed in the following graph.

Academic Experience

	Two or more times	Never
Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions	58%	10%
Work with other students on a project or assignment during class	56%	17%
Work with classmates outside of class on class projects or assignments	15%	62%

Academic Advising/Planning

Most community colleges have academic and goal setting policies to help students start right. Students were asked about their experiences with academic advising and planning. Seventy-two percent of respondents reported knowing about academic advising/planning. Fifty percent of students reported using academic advising/planning at least once. Of those students, only a fifth of the students (20%) reported being very satisfied with the service. The low satisfaction rate could be due to students not being able to meet with an academic advisor at a convenient time. Only 46% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to meet with an advisor at a time convenient for them. Also, 82% of students reported not being assigned to a specific person to see each time they needed assistance.

It is also important to ensure students are being helped appropriately when meeting with an academic advisor. The majority of students reported an advisor helped them to identify necessary course to enroll in during their first semester (60%). Half of the respondents reported their advisor helping them with selecting a course of study, program, or major (50%), while less than half indicated an advisor helped them set academic goals and creating a plan to achieve them (41%).

Academic Advising/Planning

Statement	Percentage
I was able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me	46%
An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major	50%
An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them	41%
An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester/quarter	60%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

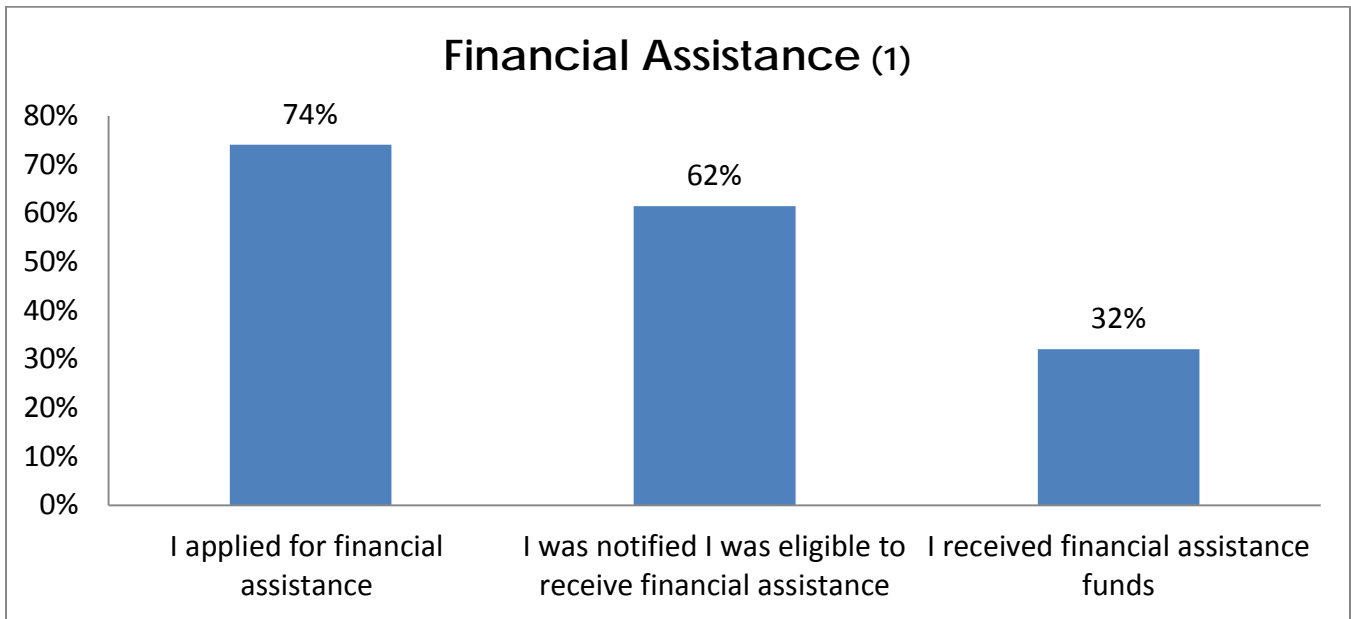## Educational Goals/Reasons for Attending College

Community colleges have multiple missions and goals, as do their students. Students responding to the survey were given the opportunity to report their educational goals. They had the opportunity to indicate whether or not completing a certificate, obtaining an Associate degree, or transferring to a 4-year college or university was an educational goal. Students were allowed to indicate more than one goal. The majority of El Camino College students indicated that transferring to a 4-year college or university (91%) or obtaining an Associate degree (76%) as their educational goal.

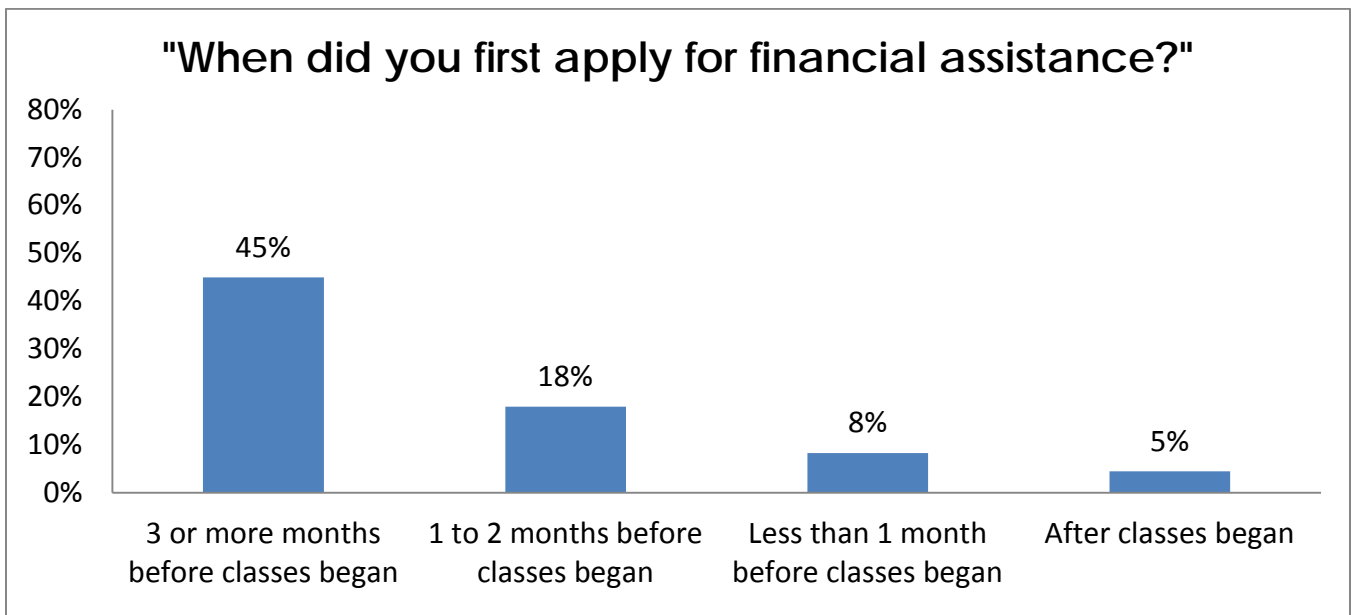## Educational Goals

Goal	Percentage
To complete a certificate	67%
To obtain an Associate degree	76%
To transfer to a 4-year college or university	91%
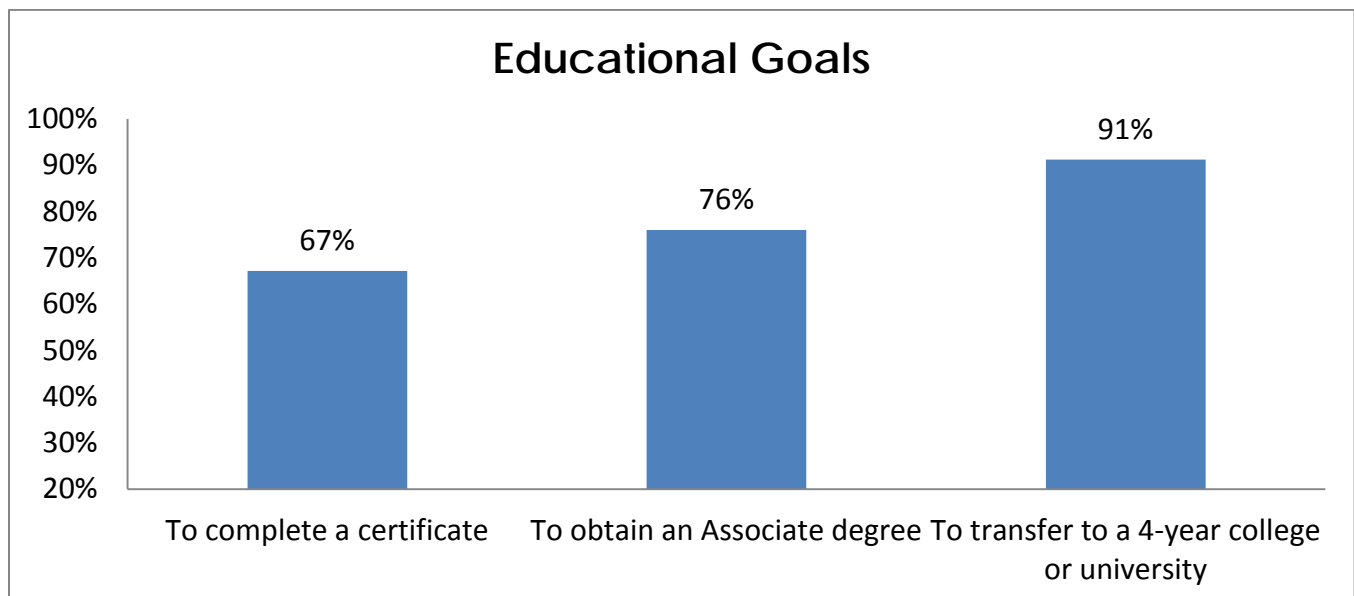
Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed
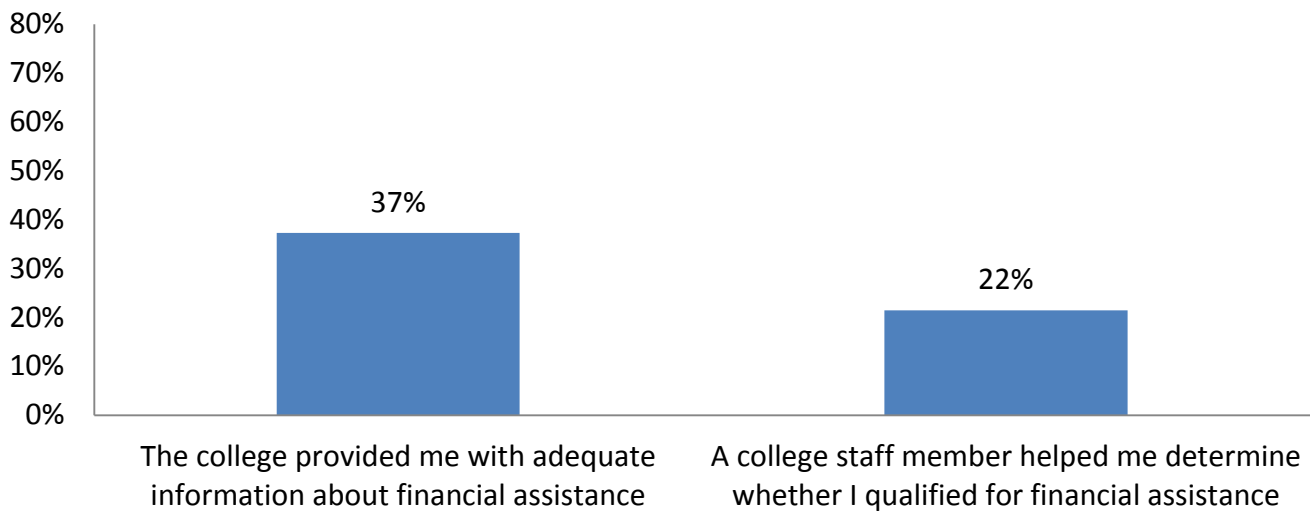
Financial Assistance

Paying for college can be a large obstacle for some students, and not receiving financial assistance could determine whether or not a student enrolls. It is important for these students to be aware of the financial assistance that is available to them. A large percentage of respondents applied for financial assistance (74%). However, only 64% of students reported knowing about financial assistance advising and 32% reported using financial assistance one or more times. Of those who reported using financial aid assistance, only 34% reported being very satisfied with the service. Thirty-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the college provided adequate information about financial assistance, and only 22% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a college staff member helped them determine their qualifications. The majority of students applied for financial assistance at least one month before classes began (63%). After applying for financial assistance, 62% of respondents were notified of being eligible to receive financial assistance. However, only 32% reported receiving financial assistance funds.

Financial Assistance (1)

	I applied for financial assistance	I was notified I was eligible to receive financial assistance	I received financial assistance funds
	74%	62%	32%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who responded *Yes*

"When did you first apply for financial assistance?"

	3 or more months before classes began	1 to 2 months before classes began	Less than 1 month before classes began	After classes began
	45%	18%	8%	5%

Financial Assistance (2)

A bar chart titled "Financial Assistance (2)" with a y-axis ranging from 0% to 80% in 10% increments.

- The college provided me with adequate information about financial assistance: 37%
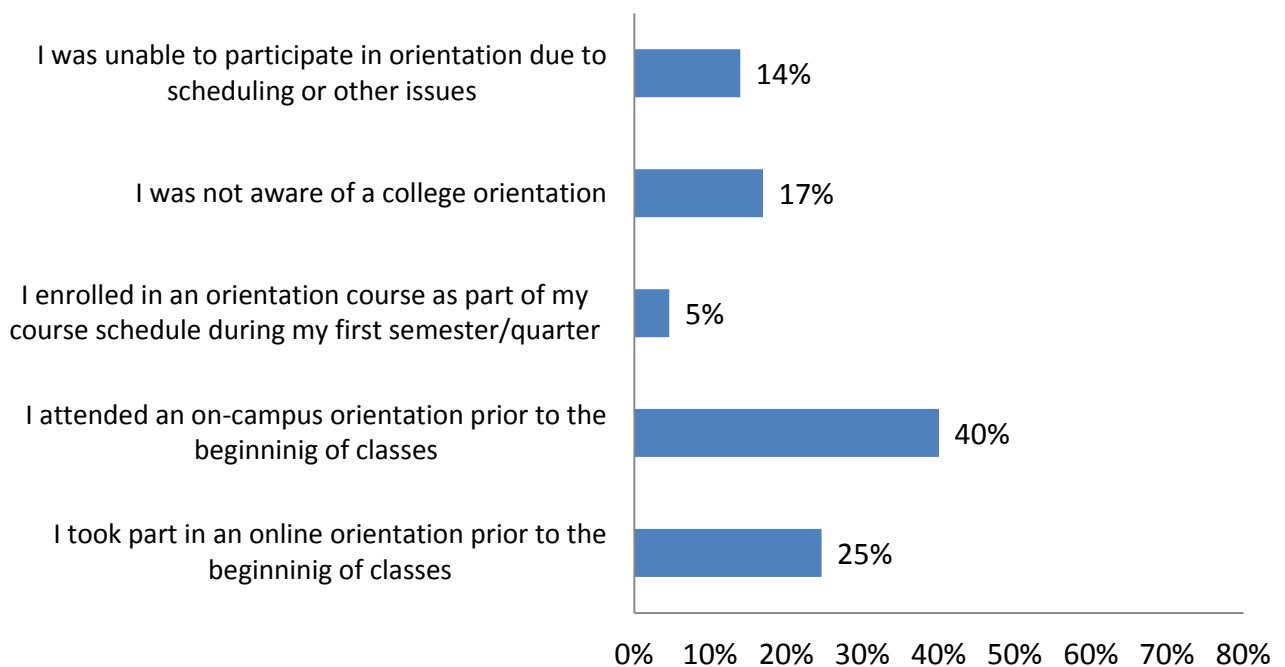- A college staff member helped me determine whether I qualified for financial assistance: 22%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed

Orientation and Registration

It is important to examine whether students are enrolling at the college with knowledge about the campus and the process of obtaining an education. They can obtain this knowledge through orientation. The majority of students participated in orientation either online (25%) or on-campus (40%) prior to the beginning of classes. Also important to notice is that 17% of the students were not aware of orientation, which can be a reason for some students not completing the requirements for obtaining a degree or certificate.

Orientation

A horizontal bar chart titled "Orientation" with an x-axis ranging from 0% to 80% in 10% increments.

- I was unable to participate in orientation due to scheduling or other issues: 14%
- I was not aware of a college orientation: 17%
- I enrolled in an orientation course as part of my course schedule during my first semester/quarter: 5%
- I attended an on-campus orientation prior to the beginninig of classes: 40%
- I took part in an online orientation prior to the beginninig of classes: 25%

Equally important is to examine students' enrollment in classes. The graph below shows when students enrolled in their classes. The majority of students enrolled in classes before classes began (89%).
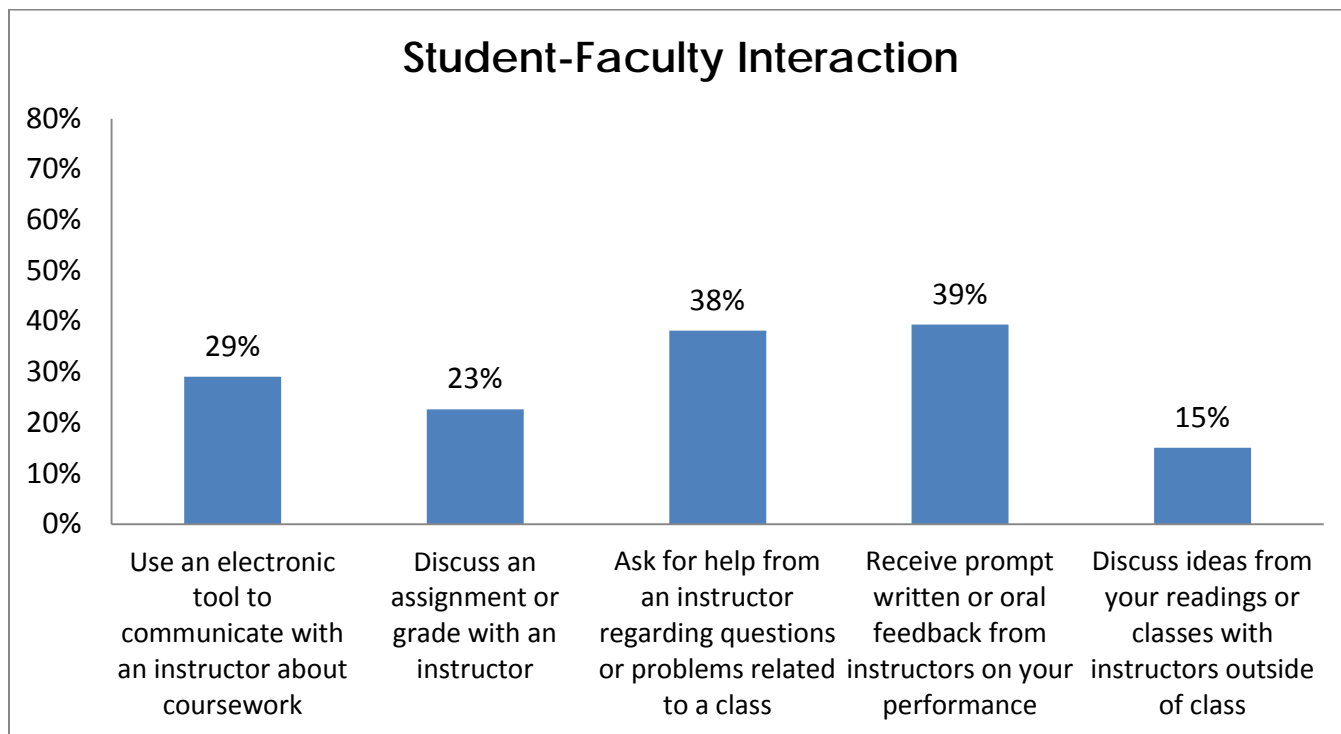
Registration for Classes
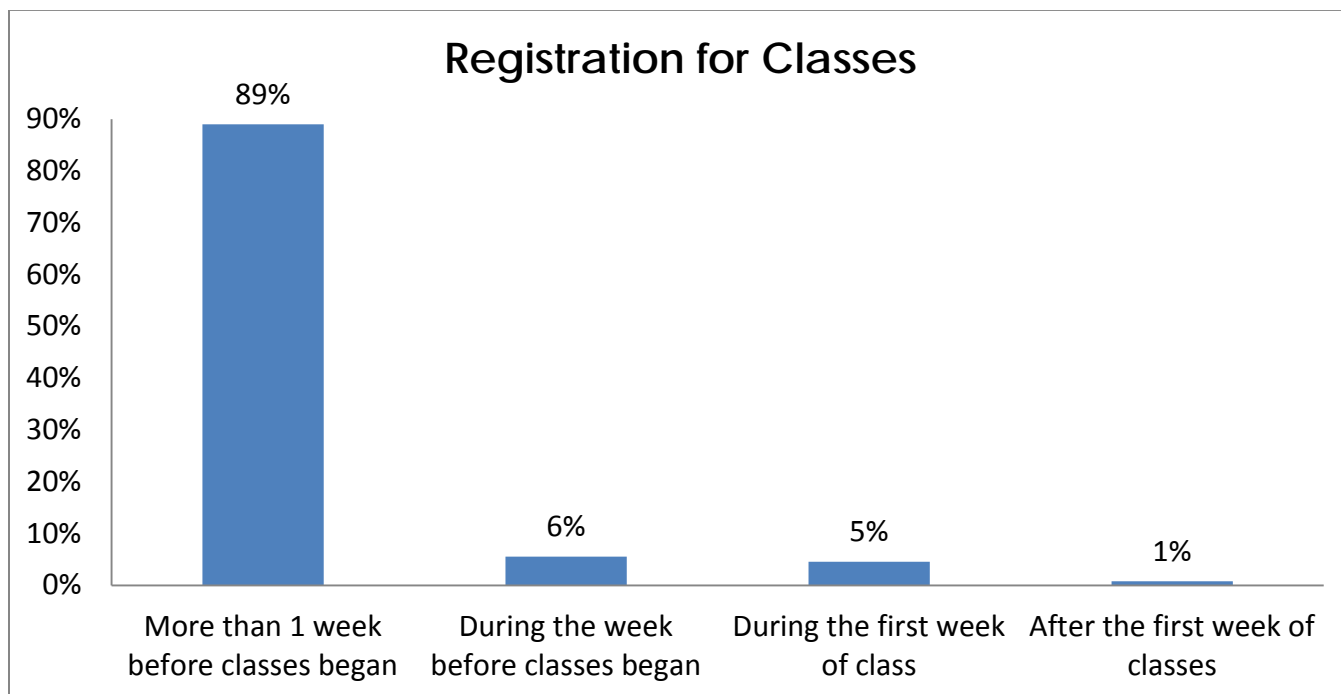
The majority of students reported enrolling in four or more course (40%), with 38% enrolling into three courses, 16% in two, and 6% in one course. After enrollment, the majority of students did not drop a course within the first three weeks of the semester (67%). Of those who did drop a course within the first three weeks, a third discussed their decision with a college staff or instructor. Of those who dropped course, the majority dropped only one course.

"Did you add or drop any classes within the first three weeks of your first semester at this college?"
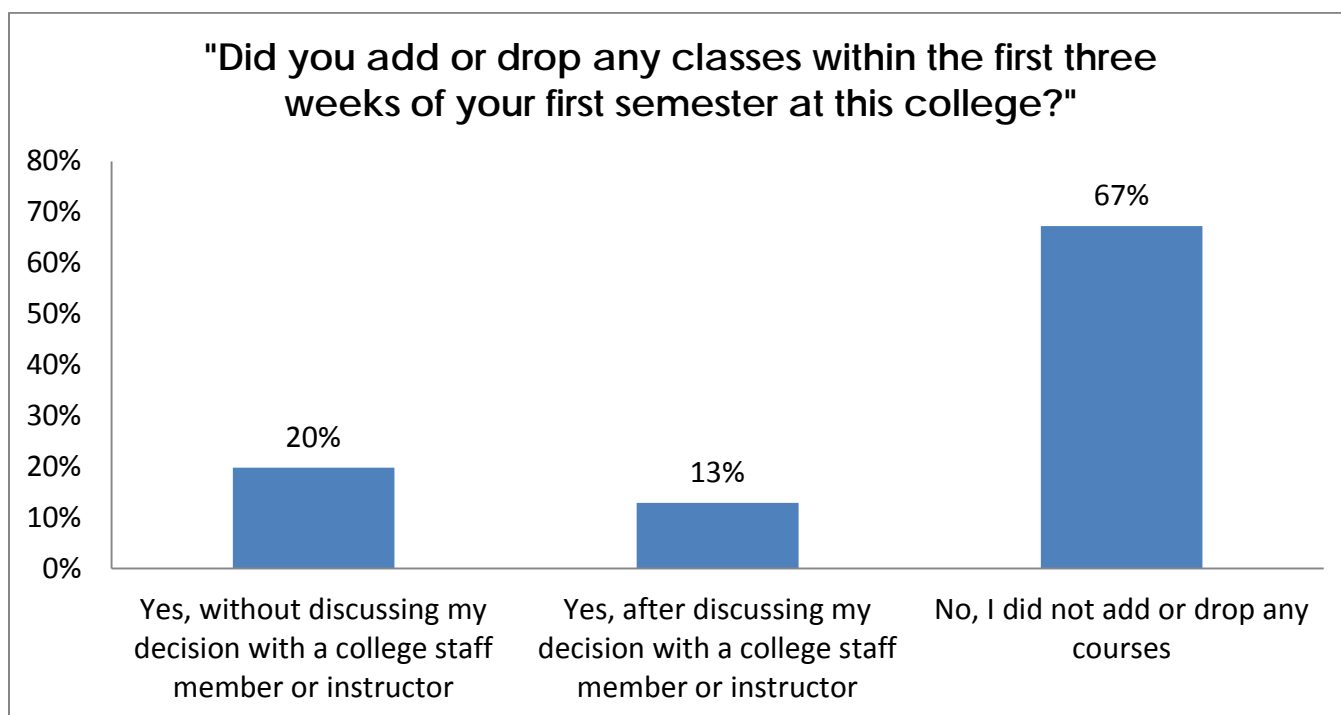
Student-Faculty Interaction

A large factor in a student's academic experience is their engagement and interaction with their professors. Various items on the survey addressed the extent of interaction between student and faculty. Overall, less than half of the respondents engaged with their instructors two or more times in various situations. The graph below shows data for students who reported engaging in specific student-faculty interactions at least twice. Students were more likely to receive prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on their performance and least likely to discuss ideas from readings or classes with the instructor outside of the class. Also, 78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that at least one instructor learned their names.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Activity	Percentage
Use an electronic tool to communicate with an instructor about coursework	29%
Discuss an assignment or grade with an instructor	23%
Ask for help from an instructor regarding questions or problems related to a class	38%
Receive prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance	39%
Discuss ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class	15%

Note: Reporting percentage of those who reported engagement of these activities at least twice

Student Satisfaction

A useful measure of satisfaction is whether a student recommends a service or institution to others. Students were asked if they would recommend El Camino College to a friend or family member. Ninety-two percent report they would make such a recommendation, slightly lower than the national SENSE cohort (94%).

Support Services

Often surveys ask a combination of questions relating to satisfaction, use, or importance levels of services, but rarely are surveys designed in a way that asks students to link all three, as does the *SENSE*. The table below displays awareness of service, use, and satisfaction of a number of key academic and student support services. The first column reports the percentage of students who say that they are aware of the service; the second column shows the percentage of students who reported having used the service 2 or more times; the third column shows the percentage of students (who used the service) who report they are Very Satisfied with the service.

Over half of the El Camino College respondents reported being aware of eight of the eleven services. Many El Camino College students do not use the variety of student services available to them. Eighty-three percent of students indicated that they use computer labs 2 or more times. No other services were used by more than three-fourths of the El Camino College respondents.

Students were most satisfied with the computer labs, services to students with disabilities, and face-to-face tutoring. Students were least satisfied with job placement assistance, online tutoring, and financial assistance advising tutoring, although job placement assistance and online tutoring represent categories of low usage.

	Aware of Service (Yes)	Use (2+ times)	Satisfaction* (Very)
Academic advising/planning	72%	15%	36%
Career counseling	60%	8%	40%
Job placement assistance	30%	2%	25%
Face-to-face tutoring	67%	7%	53%
Online tutoring	31%	3%	32%
Writing, math, or other skill lab	69%	18%	44%
Financial assistance advising	64%	12%	34%
Computer lab	83%	38%	58%
Student organizations	51%	7%	37%
Transfer credit assistance	45%	3%	39%
Services to students with disabilities	57%	3%	54%

*Sample excludes those who responded N/A to level satisfaction and indicated never using service.

Conclusion

Overall, El Camino College scores fell below the 2014 *SENSE* Cohort scores in all but one of the six benchmarks. El Camino College fared better in measures of effective track to college readiness; however, ECC scored low among items measuring early clear academic plan and pathway and early connections in comparison to the national sample.