

Survey of Entering Student Engagement

Southwest Texas Junior
College

2011 Key Findings



About *SENSE*

Developed by national experts in the field of community and technical college research and practice, the **Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*)** is designed to provide a clear picture of both student behaviors in the earliest weeks of college and the institutional practices that affect students during this critical time. *SENSE* is a research-based tool with multiple uses:

- ★ **Analyzing** — Through the *SENSE* online reporting system, member colleges have the capability of generating frequency and means reports using either weighted or unweighted data.
- ★ **Benchmarking** — The *SENSE* Benchmarks of Effective Practice with Entering Students denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experience and educational outcomes. Every *SENSE* member college receives a standardized score for each benchmark. 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 own performance across benchmarks and to compare their own performance with groups of similar colleges.
- ★ **Diagnosing** — The *SENSE* online reporting system makes it very easy for colleges to target improvement efforts by disaggregating results to explore differences among student groups (e.g., male vs. female, developmental vs. non-developmental, full-time vs. part-time, etc.).

- ★ **Monitoring** — With multiple administrations of *SENSE*, colleges can document and measure institutional effectiveness over time to examine the impact of interventions aimed at improving students' earliest collegiate experiences.

- ★ **Responding** — Institutions may choose to use *SENSE* data to demonstrate accountability to the college community, as well as to accrediting agencies' calls for institutional self-study and quality improvement strategies.

SENSE was piloted in 2007 by the **Center for Community College Student Engagement** and since has been administered annually. The Center was established in 2008 as an umbrella organization for quantitative and qualitative research, as well as service to community colleges across the United States, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Bermuda, the Northern Marianas, and the Marshall Islands. The Center is an initiative of the Community College Leadership Program in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. Major grants from Lumina Foundation for Education, Houston Endowment Inc., MetLife Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts have supported the work.

For more information about *SENSE* or the Center, please visit www.cccse.org or contact us at info@cccse.org or 512-471-6807.

Survey of Entering Student Engagement

Southwest Texas Junior
College

2011 Key Findings

Table of Contents

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice with Entering Students	2
Aspects of Highest Student Engagement	4
Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement	5
<i>SENSE</i> Special-Focus Module Items	6
Assessment and Placement: Are There Gaps?	8

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice with Entering Students

SENSE Benchmarks

- ★ **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.
- ★ **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.
- ★ **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.

Continued on Page 3

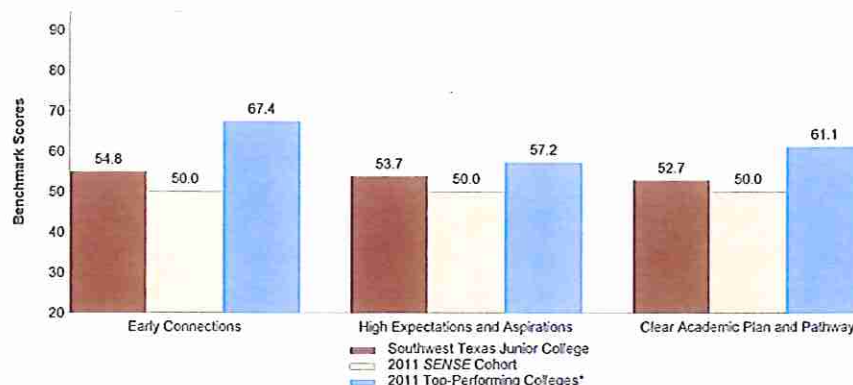
The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of entering student engagement. The six benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experiences and educational outcomes; thus, they provide colleges with a useful starting point for looking at institutional results.

Ideally, colleges engage entering students in all six benchmark areas, beginning with a student's first contact with the institution and continuing through completion of the first three weeks of the initial academic term. This time is decisive because current research indicates that helping students succeed through the first academic term can dramatically improve subsequent success, including completing courses and earning certificates and degrees.

While many student behaviors and institutional practices measured by the benchmarks can and should continue throughout students' college careers, the *SENSE* items and the resulting data focus on this critical entering student timeframe.

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 and standard deviation of 25 across all respondents.

Figure 1a



*Top-performing colleges are those that scored in the top ten percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice with Entering Students

The standardized benchmark scores allow colleges to gauge and monitor their performance in areas of entering student engagement. In addition, participating colleges have the opportunity to make appropriate and useful comparisons between their performance and that of groups of other colleges.

Performing as well as the national average or a peer-group average may be a reasonable initial aspiration, but it is important to recognize that these averages are sometimes unacceptably low. Aspiring to match and then exceed high-performance targets is the stronger strategy.

Community colleges can differ dramatically on such factors as size, location, resources, enrollment patterns, and student characteristics. It is important to take these differences into account when interpreting benchmark scores—especially when making institutional comparisons. Furthermore, the Center for Community College Student Engagement has adopted a policy, “Responsible Uses of CCSSE and SENSE Data,” available at www.ccse.org.

SENSE uses a three-year cohort of participating colleges in all core survey analyses. The current cohort is referred to as the 2011 SENSE Cohort (2009-2011) throughout all reports.

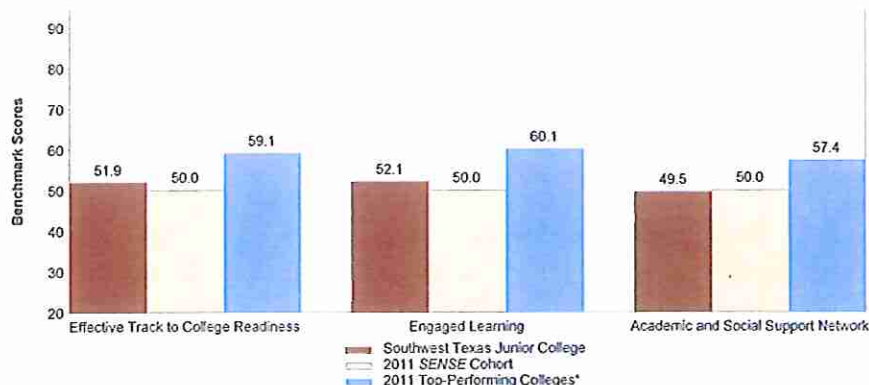
SENSE Benchmarks

Continued from Page 2

- ★ **Effective Track to College Readiness.** Nationally, more than six 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 courses, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.
- ★ **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.
- ★ **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.

For further information about SENSE benchmarks, please visit www.ccse.org.

Figure 1b



*Top-performing colleges are those that scored in the top ten percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding *SENSE* data. One way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features the five items across all benchmarks (excluding those for which means are not calculated) on which the college scored highest and the five items on which the college scored lowest in comparison to the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort.

The items highlighted on pages 4 and 5 reflect the largest differences in mean scores between the institution and the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. While examining these data, keep in mind that the selected items may not be those that are most closely aligned with the college's goals; thus, it is important to review all Institutional Reports on the *SENSE* online reporting system at www.cccse.org.

Figure 2 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed most favorably compared with the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 48.4% of your students, compared with 34.1% of other students in the cohort, responded 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' on item 18j.

Figure 2

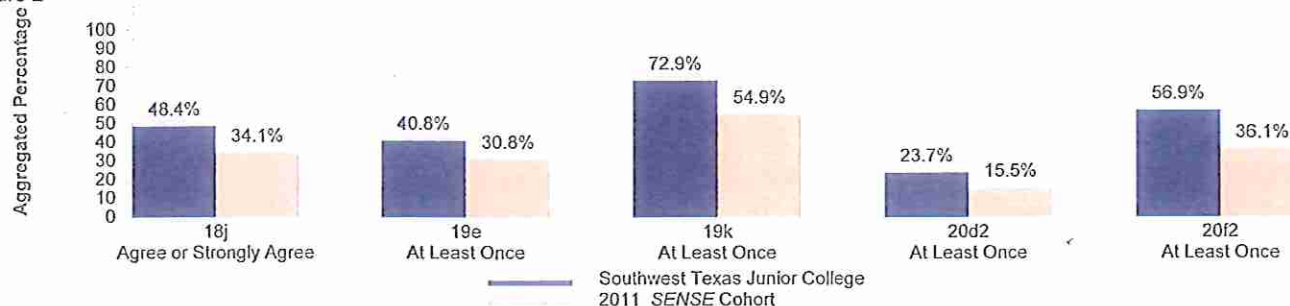


Table 1

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Early Connections	18j	A college staff member helped me determine whether I qualified for financial assistance
Engaged Learning	19e	Frequency: Participated in supplemental instruction during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19k	Frequency: Used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	20d2	Frequency: Used Face-to-face tutoring
Engaged Learning	20f2	Frequency: Used Writing, math, or other skill lab

Notes

For items 18, 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses are combined.

For items 19 (except 19c, 19d, 19f, 19s), 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

For items 20, 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Figure 3 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed least favorably compared with the 2011 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 91.1% of your students, compared with 92.2% of other students in the cohort, responded 'Once', 'Two or three times', or 'Four or more times' on item 19a.

Figure 3

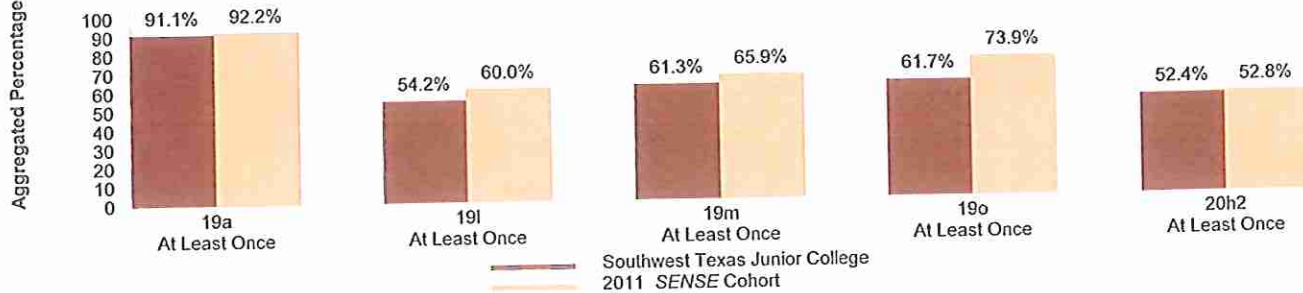


Table 2

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Engaged Learning	19a	Frequency: Asked questions in class or contribute to class discussions during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19l	Frequency: Used an electronic tool to communicate with an instructor about coursework during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19m	Frequency: Discussed an assignment or grade with an instructor during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	19o	Frequency: Received prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance during the first three weeks of your first SEMESTER/QUARTER
Engaged Learning	20h2	Frequency: Used computer lab

Notes

For items 19 (except 19c, 19d, 19f, 19s), 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

For items 20, 'Once', 'Two or three times', and 'Four or more times' responses are combined.

2011 SENSE Special-Focus Module Items

SENSE special-focus modules allow participating colleges and researchers to delve more deeply into areas of student experience and institutional performance that are related to student success. As part of an ongoing national initiative, the Center added a special-focus module focused on community college students' participation in a defined collection of "promising practices" to the 2011 SENSE administration. This special-focus module elicited new information about entering students' experiences associated with promising educational practices such as early registration, freshman seminars, and early alert systems. Frequency results for five selected "promising practices" items are displayed across pages 6 and 7.

To access complete special-focus module frequency reports, please visit the SENSE online reporting system at www.cccse.org.

Figure 4: At this college, I completed registration before the first class session(s).

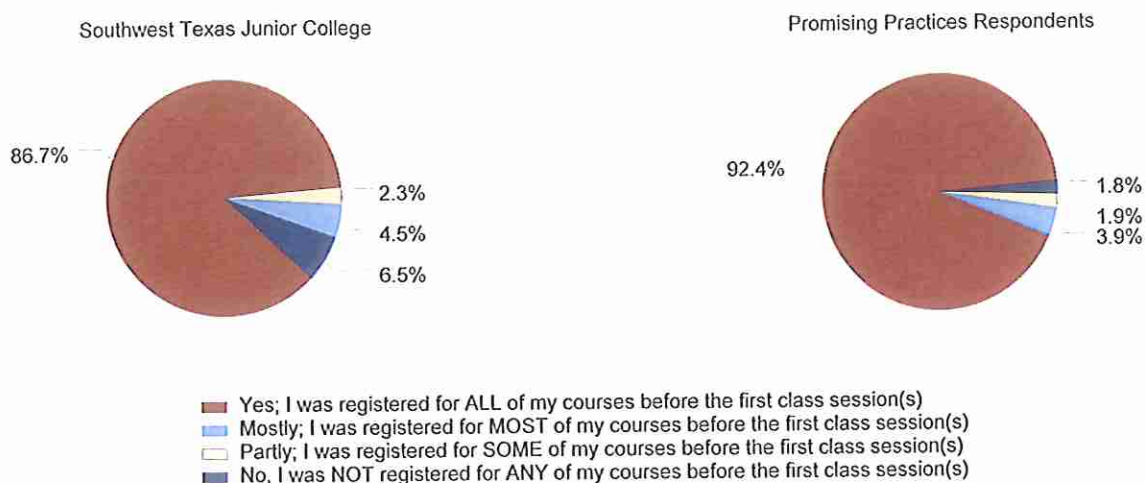


Figure 5: At this college, the first time I met with an advisor to help me set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them was...

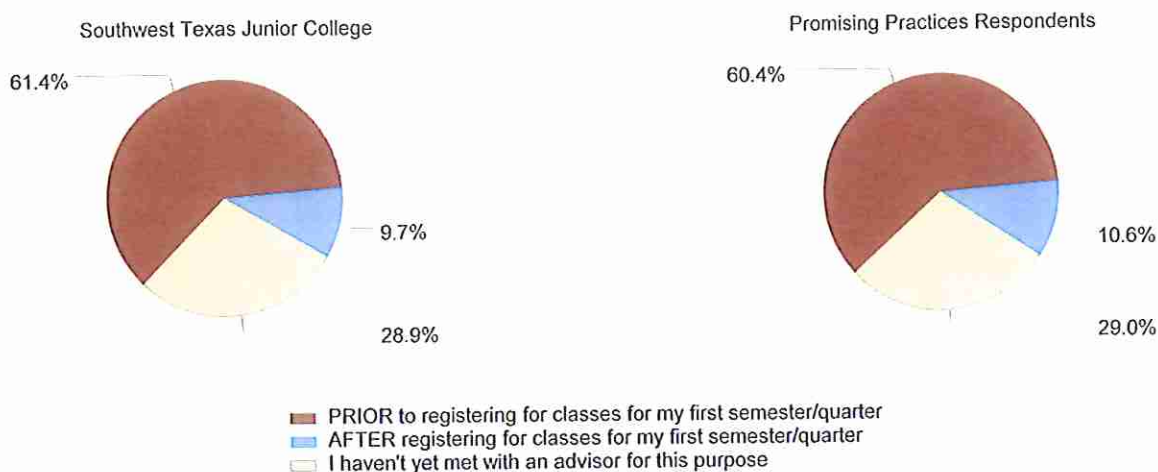


Figure 6: At this college, I am participating in a structured experience for new students (sometimes called a freshman seminar or first year experience).

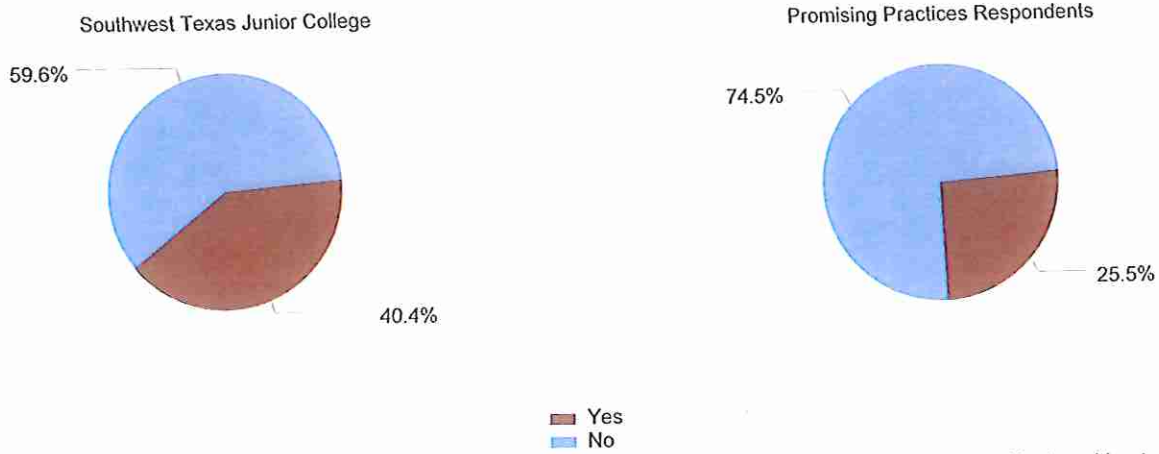


Figure 7: At this college, my instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that specified how many classes I could miss without penalty.

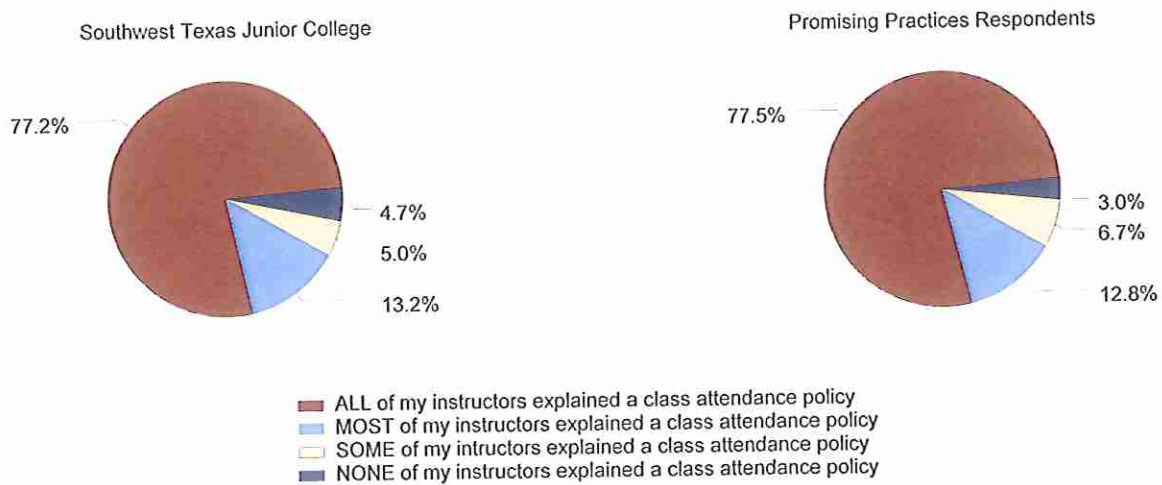
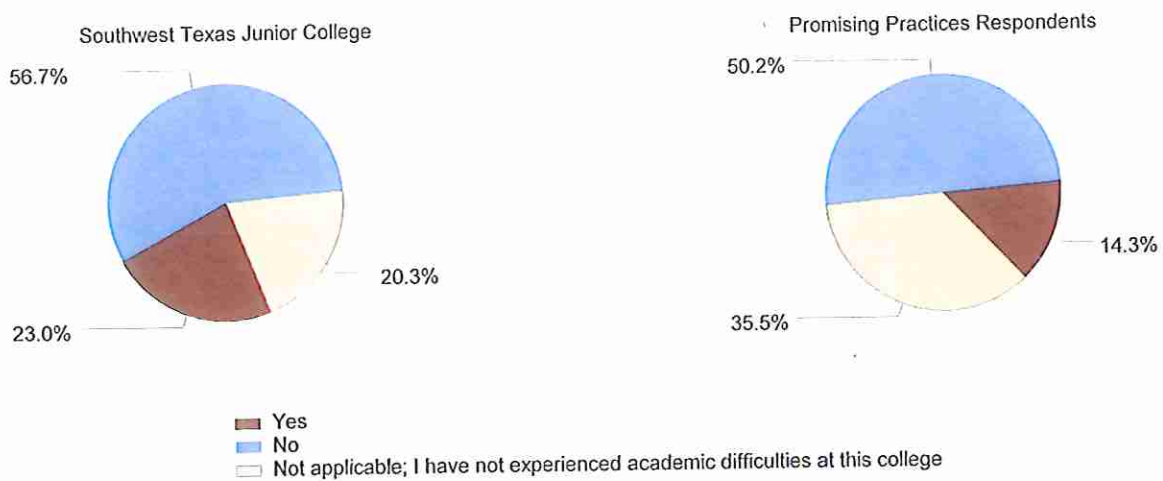


Figure 8: Someone at this college contacts me if I am struggling with my studies to help me get the assistance I need.



Assessment and Placement: Are There Gaps?

Most community colleges have assessment and placement policies that are intended to help all students “start right.” Yet, often these policies, even when they are ostensibly mandatory, might not be implemented in ways that ensure success for all students. The disaggregated data below illustrate the student experience with assessment and placement at your college. Nationally, more than 60% of community college students are enrolled less than full-time. Thus, while looking at these data, it is important to consider the institution’s enrollment patterns. Are your entering students starting right?

Figure 9

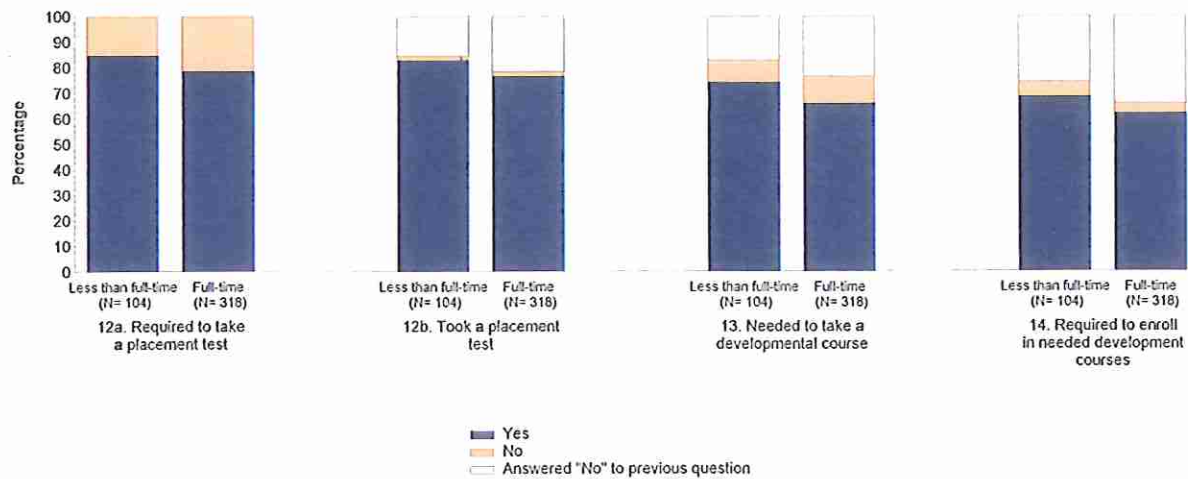


Table 3

Response	12a. Required to take a placement test		12b. Took a placement test		13. Needed to take a developmental course		14. Required to enroll in needed development courses	
	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time	Less than full-time	Full-time
Yes	84.6%	78.3%	82.7%	76.4%	74.0%	65.7%	68.3%	61.6%
No	15.4%	21.7%	1.9%	1.9%	8.7%	10.7%	5.8%	4.1%
Answered "No" to previous question	N/A	N/A	15.4%	21.7%	17.3%	23.6%	26.0%	34.3%



Center for Community College Student Engagement

Community College Leadership Program
College of Education
The University of Texas at Austin

3316 Grandview Street
Austin, TX 78705

T: 512.471.6807 | F: 512.471.4209
info@cccse.org | www.cccse.org