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Student Connection survey: Baseline report



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Introduction

Many studies have found a strong relationship between *student connection* or *engagement* and successful student program completion. In the recently funded Title V grant, one of the primary goals is to increase student engagement with the college, thus encouraging student completion. The current study establishes a baseline for student connection at Gavilan College and also measures additional factors associated with greater student success. As the college implements interventions funded by the Title V initiative, the results from this study can serve as a student-reported baseline for future comparisons.

Methods

An original draft of the current survey instrument was drafted by the Office of Institutional research. A school connection scale, developed for a secondary setting, was revised for use with community college. Additional items were added based on other Title V grant objectives, such as new student matriculation, and active, technology-enhanced, and project-based learning (See actual survey Appendix A). The survey also included background variables, such as *units completed*, *basic skills status*, and *ethnicity*, for group comparisons. The draft survey was reviewed and revised by members of the Title V advisory committee.

The survey was administered to a stratified sample of students. Twelve percent of all distance education and Hollister, Morgan Hill, and Gilroy site courses were sampled. Survey administration packets were sent to instructors of randomly selected courses sampling each of these location categories. Distance education participation requests were sent via email. A total of 584 students completed and returned a survey, which represented 9.95% of the total first census headcount.

Fifty-four percent of the sample reported having taken a basic skills course of some kind. Thirty-seven percent of the sample was composed of students who reported having completed over 30 units. Table I lists the self-reported the ethnic distribution of the sample. The background variable composition did not vary significantly from the overall student population.

Table 1:

Ethnicity	
	Percent
No response	4.8
African-American	2.6
Asian Pacific Islander	15.9
Hispanic Latino	39.0
Mixed Other	9.1
Native-American	.2
White Caucasian	28.4

A

Findings

The first set of items asked students to agree/disagree with statements about matriculation (See Appendix B: Survey Results). Nearly all survey respondents (91.8%) either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *The registration and application process was easy*, while 86.9% either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *The assessment/placement testing process was easy*.

Another set of items asked to students about their experience with alternative approaches to instruction. Most students (84.1%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes*, while 83.4% either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn*. In contrast, only 44.2% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement, *In most of my classes, instructors only present information and students listen*.

The final portion of the survey was devoted to a students' connection to the school. Some researchers have suggested that an individual's sense of connection is based on multiple factors: one's perception of the *Power* to influence or impact the institution; the *Belief* that the institution is a valid one, a student's sense that they *Belong* with others at the school, and students' *Commitment* that they can reach their goals through the school. Reliability analyses found good cohesion for the overall school connection scale ($\alpha=.821$) and the *power* ($\alpha=.821$), the *belief* ($\alpha=.738$), and the *belonging* ($\alpha=.803$) subscales. One item in the *commitment* subscale (*The things I learn in school help me outside of class*) did not seem to have a similar pattern to the other items and contributed to low reliability ($\alpha=-.1731$).

In general, students had very positive responses to most of the items on the school connection scale (See Appendix B for results). For example, 96.7% of respondents either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *Students of all ethnic groups are respected* or 96.5% of respondents either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *I can be a success at this*

college. See table below for a mean comparison. As mentioned above one item had a different pattern, only 64.1% of respondents either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes*. Moreover, this item had a high standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.415$), with most respondents either strongly agreeing or disagreeing.

Summary

Prior to any summary of the results, the limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation was the inherent challenges associated with using self-report items to assess latent variables. Said another way it is difficult to use survey items to assess abstract constructs for example school connection. One way to moderate this limitation is to select, which was done in this case, instruments that have reliability and validity strength.

Another weakness was the sample size. While a 9.9% sample is considerable, it may not accurately represent the overall student population's experiences. The smaller the sample the more likely respondents from a particular class may affect the results. For example, maybe those students who had instructors who were more organized might have been more likely to respond. Consequently, the results from the survey may have been positively skewed. Irrespective of these potential weaknesses, these data can be a starting point for future comparisons.

While as the results are very positive and suggest that students are connected to the college, this high level may present a problem as a point of comparison for future administrations of the survey. Following campus-wide Title V-funded interventions, current results will be compared against future results. The hypothesis that will be tested is that there will be increases in respondents' ratings of their experiences at the college. Fortunately, while the ratings are generally positive, most are not strongly positive, thus providing opportunities for future growth. The current study is a solid foundation for future evaluation studies, which will explore student progress towards success.

Appendix A: Survey

Student Survey

In order to help us improve Gavilan College, we would like to learn more about your experience at our college. Participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your status as a student or as a participant in any program. It is anonymous so please do not put your name on the survey.

1). How many units have you completed at Gavilan College?

0 1-15 16-30 Over 30

2). Are you enrolled in or have you taken a basic skills class (ESL, ENGL/MATH 200s or 400s)?

Yes No

3). Which ethnic group best describes you?

African-American Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino White/Caucasian Native-American Mixed/Other

4). How much do you agree with the following statements about your experiences here at Gavilan College:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A*
<i>The registration and application process was easy.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The assessment/placement testing process was easy.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>In most of my classes, instructors <u>only</u> present information and student listen.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have easy access to the internet to do my schoolwork.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Instructors and administrators at this college listen to students' concerns.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Instructors and administrators at this college act on students' concerns.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have opportunities to make decisions at the college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The college asks students about their ideas.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>When there is an emergency, there is someone here to help.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>We do not waste time in my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Students of all ethnic groups are respected.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The rules at my college are fair.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am comfortable talking with instructors/staff at this college about my problems.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I feel like I belong at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have friends at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I can be myself at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I can be a success at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>This college can help me reach my goals.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>It is good for me to do what I am supposed to in my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* N/A means **Not Applicable** or that this question does not fit me.

Appendix B: Survey Results

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
The assessment/placement testing process was easy.	120	23.4%	326	63.5%	56	10.9%	11	2.1%	1.93
In most of my classes, instructors only present information and student listen.	66	12.0%	242	43.8%	207	37.5%	37	6.7%	2.04
Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes.	130	23.6%	333	60.5%	75	13.6%	12	2.2%	1.90
I have easy access to the internet to do my schoolwork.	255	46.4%	248	45.2%	33	6.0%	13	2.4%	2.21
We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn.	146	27.3%	302	56.6%	73	13.7%	13	2.4%	1.95
Instructors and administrators at this college listen to students' concerns.	129	24.4%	322	61.0%	62	11.7%	15	2.8%	1.97
Instructors and administrators at this college act on students' concerns.	100	20.2%	287	58.0%	94	19.0%	14	2.8%	1.64
I have opportunities to make decisions at the college.	152	29.0%	293	55.8%	63	12.0%	17	3.2%	1.76
The college asks students about their ideas.	87	16.9%	262	50.9%	136	26.4%	30	5.8%	1.92
When there is an emergency, there is someone here to help.	90	20.5%	289	65.7%	56	12.7%	5	1.1%	1.90
We do not waste time in my classes.	126	22.9%	326	59.2%	86	15.6%	13	2.4%	1.69
Students of all ethnic groups are respected.	226	40.9%	308	55.8%	11	2.0%	7	1.3%	1.70
The rules at my college are fair.	163	29.9%	351	64.3%	30	5.5%	2	.4%	1.66
I am comfortable talking with instructors/staff at this college about my problems.	154	28.7%	286	53.4%	79	14.7%	17	3.2%	1.69
I feel like I belong at this college.	146	27.3%	313	58.6%	60	11.2%	15	2.8%	2.14
I have friends at this college.	202	37.0%	310	56.8%	33	6.0%	1	.2%	1.56
I can be myself at this college.	194	35.1%	336	60.9%	17	3.1%	5	.9%	
I can be a success at this college.	210	38.5%	316	58.0%	12	2.2%	7	1.3%	1.93
This college can help me reach my goals.	203	37.2%	317	58.2%	17	3.1%	8	1.5%	2.04
The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes.	323	58.5%	26	4.7%	7	1.3%	196	35.5%	1.90
It is good for me to do what I am supposed to in my classes.	242	45.3%	285	53.4%	6	1.1%	1	.2%	2.21