

**COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO
CSM'S STUDENT CAMPUS CLIMATE & SATISFACTION SURVEY, SPRING 2011
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

OVERVIEW

In May through June 2011, CSM conducted the *CSM Student Campus Climate and Satisfaction Survey (CSM Student Survey)*. All CSM students were invited to participate and a link to the online survey was emailed to all students enrolled in Spring 2011 (10,261 email addresses). The college received 1,397 unique responses, a return of 14%.¹ This is a substantial number of respondents for a higher education setting.

This survey probed students' satisfaction with campus climate and a spectrum of the student experience and included such areas as:

- Overall impressions and attitudes about CSM;
- Campus safety and security;
- Effectiveness of channels of communication;
- Diversity awareness, overall campus climate, and CSM as a respectful place;
- Satisfaction with facilities and equipment;
- Effectiveness of student support programs and services, including the library; and
- Effectiveness of instructional programs and offerings

Survey Content: Spring 2010 vs. Spring 2011

The core of the 2011 *CSM Student Survey* was developed last year in Spring 2010 by CSM's Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness (PRIE). PRIE staff reviewed numerous models of campus climate and satisfaction surveys used at both 2-year and 4-year institutions along with several CSM surveys used in previous years for accreditation purposes.

Over 100 questions were formulated about campus climate and the overall student experience. The survey also contained several questions about campus climate that paralleled the faculty/administrators and classified staff satisfaction surveys, also conducted in Spring 2010 and again Spring 2011.

In Spring 2010, in addition to administering the *CSM Student Survey*, CSM also simultaneously conducted the standardized and nationally-recognized *Noel-Levitz* to which CSM had 1,810 student respondents. In the *Noel-Levitz*, CSM was allowed to include CSM-specific questions that probed the extent to which CSM student made gains in the various institutional-level, General Education Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's).

¹ Students were offered the opportunity of winning an iPad as an incentive to participate in the survey. The gift was made possible through donations to CSM held by the San Mateo County Community Colleges Foundation.

Since CSM did not conduct the Noel-Levitz in Spring 2011, this section addressing SLO's was included in the Spring 2011 version of the CSM Student Survey.

In addition, other question-items previously addressed by Noel-Levitz were added to the Spring 2011 CSM Student Survey. They included items concerned with academic advising, assessment and course placement, the clarity of stated program requirements, and the availability of computer and lab equipment.

A separate seven-item section on Library usage developed for the Spring 2010 CSM Student Survey was collapsed into three library-related items in the Spring 2011 version. In addition, the Spring 2011 version included a new question-item addressing campus climate for LGBT students.²

Survey Organization

The survey is organized into the following areas:

- *Personal Interactions at CSM*
- *My CSM Experience*
For reporting purposes, "My CSM Experience" responses are grouped into the following categories: Academic Advising, Academic Services, Campus Climate, Campus Support Services, Concern for the Individual, Facilities, Instructional Effectiveness, Library, Registration Effectiveness, Responsiveness to Diversity, Safety and Security, and Student Centeredness.
- *Impressions of CSM*
- *CSM as a Respectful Place*
- *CSM Overall*
- *Demographics [of Student Respondents]*

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Conducted by staff PRIE, this narrative analysis identifies highlights of strengths and challenges for CSM. It does not address all response items. Discussion is organized into themes and includes comparative analysis of the findings with the Spring 2011 CSM Student Survey and with, where pertinent, the 2010 Noel-Levitz.³

Generally, this analysis discusses data in terms of total satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels (e.g. a sum of "agree strongly" and "agree" or "disagree" and "strongly disagree"). CSM does not use "neutral" as a response option but does use "Does not Apply."

² For specific question items added to the Spring 2011 CSM Student Survey, see CSM Student Campus Climate & Satisfaction Survey: Item Questions and the report, CSM Student Campus Climate & Satisfaction Survey: Comparative Data.

³ For reasons of length, not all items covered solely by the 2010 Noel-Levitz could be included in the Spring 2011 CSM Student Survey.

Note about Comparative Analysis: With the except of a few question-items, results from this year's version of the CSM *Student Survey* were comparable to or slightly better than last year's and indicated consistently very high levels of satisfaction with CSM. Generally, variations of a few percentage points between the two years of data are not significant; minor fluctuations are customary in surveys of large populations. When this survey is conducted again next year—the third year—the college may confidently begin to identify “trends.” However, the data do clearly suggest areas of success and improvement for CSM.

At the same time, this analysis suggest changes between the Spring 2010 and Spring 2011 findings in institutional strengths and concerns.

In addition, as noted above, the majority of students report satisfaction with CSM. Given the consistently high levels of satisfaction, possible areas of concern can be identified only when question-items are ranked by levels of satisfaction. Ranking of selected items is, therefore, addressed in this narrative analysis.

STRENGTHS

Strengths: Students' Positive Overall Experience at CSM

Overall, Spring 2011 students expressed very high levels of satisfaction with CSM, generally comparable to and in several cases higher than in Spring 2010. These high levels of satisfaction are reflected in a variety of question items that probed at overall campus climate and the extent to which students feel valued, welcomed, and a sense of campus pride.

Several key questions demonstrated the overall satisfaction of CSM students:

In the 2011 CSM *Student Survey*, 93% indicated that they “were proud to be a CSM student.” When asked if they would choose to attend CSM (if starting over), 91% said yes and 97% would recommend CSM to a family member or friend. When asked to rate their overall “educational experience,” 92% had a positive response (49% rated their overall experience as “excellent”; and 44% rated it “good”).

Strengths: Students Feel Welcomed & Respected

Generally students feel “respected” at CSM—a theme that emerges in both the Spring 2010 and 2011 versions of the CSM *Student Survey*. In the 2011 CSM *Student Survey*, the Section, “CSM as a Respectful Place,” asks students to rank how CSM “respects” students according to 11 distinct delimiters (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age groups, etc.). In all categories students indicated 94% or higher levels of satisfaction—very high ratings. These responses were slightly higher, though not significantly, than those in Spring 2010.

When students were asked about their “Impressions of CSM,” this positive theme is further reflected in their ranking of adjectival descriptors. The 6th highest ranked descriptors (96% to 98%) indicate a sense of CSM as a tolerant, welcoming place. These words and phrases include in highest ranking order: “Tolerant of Diversity,” “Safe.” “Friendly,” “Improving” “Welcoming,” and “Respectful.” This ranking is comparable to the previous year's findings,

with the exception of a 3% higher rating for adjective "Improving." (See section, *Improvements: CSM as an "Improving" Institution*.) In addition, when asked explicitly whether they "like the CSM campus and feel comfortable," 96% expressed agreement vs. 93% in Spring 2010.

Students were also asked to rate the overall "friendliness" of their personal interactions with other students, campus offices and personnel, and faculty. These too were consistently positive and the same or slightly more positive than the previous Spring's (ranging from 75% to 84%).

Strengths: Responsiveness to Diversity

Consistent with the Spring 2010 student surveys, the Spring 2011 CSM *Student Survey* includes very positive responses to campus climate questions related to diversity. In the CSM *Student Survey*'s section, "Impressions of CSM," the phrase "Tolerant of Diversity" received the highest ranking (97%) as it did in Spring 2010. In the Section, "My CSM Experience," the top first and third ranked items (96-97%) explicitly address diversity. In nearly all questions concerned with diversity, including the entire Section, "CSM as a Respectful Place," the vast majority of students report pride in CSM and a sense that their unique attributes are respected.

A diversity question item new to the survey section, "CSM as a Respectful Place," concerned students who identified as LGBT; students reported 98% satisfaction in this area; a related item concerned with "sexual orientation" was rated as the highest in this section (99%).

Responsiveness to diversity also includes the issue of whether a free exchange of ideas is tolerated and encouraged on campus. In the CSM *Student Survey*, students report high levels of satisfaction with items concerned with the free exchange of ideas. Students indicate that CSM "values students' opinions" (89%) and encourages the "open discussion of controversial topics" (91%). In addition, students perceive that faculty encourage students to "examine different points of view" (88%).

Strengths: Instructional Effectiveness (Faculty & Programs)

Students generally report high levels of satisfaction with their faculty and instructional programs. In the CSM *Student Survey*, 93% indicate that they have learned a great deal from their courses and that grading practices are fair (90%). Students also report that class assignments "challenged" them to do their best work (91%).

Students see program requirements as "clear and reasonable" (92%); this response was consistent with last year's Noel-Levitz's similar question that was ranked above the national average.

When asked about their experiences with faculty, 93% indicate that most instructors are "genuinely interested in teaching and their students" and 92% report they are "comfortable" approaching an instructor to ask questions. In addition, 88% indicate that the "overall quality of teaching is excellent" while 89% also report that "most faculty carefully prepare" for classes. These findings are all consistent with those from Spring 2010.

Possible Improvement in Instructional Effectiveness: Availability of Classes

In both surveys conducted last year, some students indicate that they are not completely satisfied with the availability of classes. In last year's CSM *Student Survey*, a majority (76%) indicated they were able to get classes "most of the time," yet this item was also ranked among the bottom 10% with that section of the survey. When asked in the Noel-Levitz whether a "good variety of classes" are offered or scheduled at "convenient times," students' responses also ranked below the national average. In addition, their satisfaction levels with the availability of tutoring were below the national average.

At a time in which CSM had been compelled to trim its course offerings and did not yet offer a comprehensive, centralized learning and tutoring center, such findings were no surprise.

This year, when asked whether they felt the classes they want "most of the time," 81% showed satisfaction, a +5.5% increase in satisfaction as compared to Spring 2010. (The vast majority of students indicate satisfaction here, yet this is still one of the lowest ranked items within that section.)

When the survey is conducted an additional year in 2012—a third year—we may be able to confirm a trend: whether this is, in fact, an improvement in how students perceive the "availability" of classes or whether these responses indicate that the population who could not get classes is simply no longer with CSM and is, thus not participating in the survey.

Strengths: Campus Services

Students also see personnel in student "support services" as informed and helpful (87%), consistent with last year's findings from both the previous year's CSM *Student Survey* and the Noel-Levitz. Personnel in admissions and registration (88%) are reported as "informed and helpful."

In addition, assessment and course placement processes were also viewed as "reasonable" (91%). (Note: last year, neither the CSM *Student Survey* or the Noel-Levitz instruments addressed this area.)⁴

Strengths: Communicating Information & Processes

In a variety of ways, CSM appears to communicate effectively some types of information. In the CSM *Student Survey*, 96% felt they received useful information from the schedule and catalog, 92% found useful information on the website, and 90% found the website, "easy to

⁴ Note: Last year's Noel-Levitz contained question-items not replicated in the Spring 2011 CSM *Student Survey*. They included questions about the helpfulness and approachability of library and bookstore staff, financial aide counselors, Veteran's Services staff, recruitment counselors, student orientation, and tutoring. There were also questions related to policies or procedures in admissions and registration, making class (add/drop) changes, and paying school bills. These areas will be addressed in the Spring 2012 surveys.

navigate." All these areas showed slight increase in satisfaction as compared to last year's responses.

In the CSM *Student Survey* students are also clearly quite informed about the consequences of unethical behavior (96%); in a related question, 96% indicate that the college and faculty give clear information about what constitutes cheating consistent with last year's responses.

Strengths & Improvements: Facilities and Safety

Extremely positive perceptions about CSM's facilities continue to be an institutional strength and, in this area, CSM *Student Survey* findings showed significant improvement from last year. The question concerned with "ample places to meet and study" showed a 9.5% increase in satisfaction from 84% to 93%. In last year's CSM *Student Survey*, one of the top ranked items (92%) was concerned with classrooms as "clean, neat, and conducive to learning." This year students were even more satisfied with classroom conditions (95%). Clearly, students have positive perceptions about CSM's new campus facilities and recent renovations and previously positive responses became even more positive.

Last year several items in the *Noel-Levitz* that were explicitly concerned with facilities had ratings above the national average, including the adequacy of lab and computer equipment. In this year's CSM *Student Survey* students were asked similar questions which yielded similar positive responses: 91% indicated that lab equipment was "sufficiently up to date" and 93% indicated satisfaction with computer equipment.⁵

The perception of CSM as a "safe" campus also continues to be one of the college's strengths. Last year the issue of campus safety showed some of the highest rated satisfaction levels in both CSM *Student Survey* and the *Noel-Levitz*.⁶ In last year's CSM *Student Survey* the word "safe" was ranked fifth (96%) for words or phrases used to describe CSM—this year it was ranked second (97%).

Improvements: CSM as an "Improving" Institution

In the section in the CSM *Student Survey*, "Impressions of CSM," students rank adjectives and phrases describing CSM. Three descriptor items showed notable change in satisfaction levels: "Improving" jumped from 93% to 96%, "Up-to-Date" changed from 88% to 94%, and "Changing with the Times" jumped from 91% to 95%.

⁵ Note: Last year's *Noel-Levitz* survey addressed the availability of child care facilities and the amount of parking spaces, areas which students ranked above the national average. These topics were not included in 2011 and need to be addressed in the 2012 student survey.

⁶ Last year's *Noel-Levitz* survey also included question items concerned with the quick response of security staff in emergencies, the attitude of security officers, and the security of parking lots. These topics were not included in 2011 and need to be addressed in the 2012 student survey.

Students may associate these adjectival phrases solely with obvious enhancements to campus facilities over the past year. At the same time, these positive responses may also reflect changing views of how CSM delivers its program and services.

Strengths: General Education SLO's

The 10-item section, "Based on my experience at CSM," measures students' self-assessed gains in mastering CSM's General Education (GE) Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's). Questions covered all the GE SLO's thematic areas: Effective Communication, Quantitative Skills, Critical Thinking, Social Awareness and Diversity, and Ethical Responsibility. (For detail about SLO's, see: <http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/sloac/>.)

Students were asked to rate "agreement" with statements about the skills or knowledge they have acquired using a 6-point agreement scale (Note: the *CSM Student Survey* uses a 4-point agreement scale in most other sections.) The survey instrument did not identify this section as an SLO assessment.

Students reported very high levels of agreement, ranging from 95% to 98%.

CHALLENGES & THEMES TO INVESTIGATE

In general, as noted earlier, CSM students indicate very high levels of satisfaction with CSM in both 2010 and 2011. In fact in the *CSM Survey*, the lowest ranked item for satisfaction (60%) still indicates *that a majority were satisfied in that area*.

This section is intended to identify themes in those items ranked either among the 20 lowest rated in *CSM Student Survey*. In many cases, the "challenges" or themes suggested here are subtle issues; they are, however, the same themes that appeared in last year's *CSM Student Survey*, and in some cases, in the *Noel-Levitz*.

As also noted in last year's PRIE analysis of the student satisfaction surveys, these themes may suggest areas to be examined further explored in future surveys, in-depth focus groups, or disaggregated analyses of the data.

Possible Challenge: Aspects of Campus Climate & Diversity

While CSM students report extremely high levels of satisfaction with virtually all question probes related to diversity, small numbers of students do perceive problems with sexual harassment and a sense of racial tensions.

In the *CSM Student Survey* one question item was explicitly concerned with sexual harassment: "I think sexual harassment is a problem at CSM." While 85% did not think it a problem, 15% agreed with the statement. Despite the overall very positive response, 164 individuals indicated dissatisfaction—again suggesting an issue that might be probed further. (Last year, 144 individuals or 16% perceived sexual harassment as a problem.)

When asked whether CSM “handles complaints of sexual harassment fairly,” 91% agreed, clearly a very positive response. Yet 9% disagreed, the latter group including 84 individuals. (Last year, 12% indicated a perception of sexual harassment as a problem.)

In addition, consistent with findings from the Spring 2010’s CSM *Student Survey*, a small group of students also perceive ethnic or racial “tensions in the classroom”; 224 individuals (18%) reporting perceiving racial tensions while conversely 82% or 1,009 individuals disagreed.

Possible Challenge: “Being Welcomed” vs. “Belonging”

As noted above, students feel genuinely welcomed by the faculty and staff they encounter and by the “friendly” campus as a whole.

However, similar to findings from Spring 2010, some students don’t feel a strong sense of “belonging” to the campus or a sense that there is concern about the student as an individual. As in last year’s CSM *Student Survey*, students were asked to describe CSM through a word or phrase—the lowest ranked item was “concern about me as an individual.” In the section, “My CSM Experience,” among the 15 lowest ranked items continued to be items concerned with a student feeling “valued as an individual on campus” and that “CSM is genuinely concerned about me as an individual.” In fact, 27% (321 students) report feeling “isolated within the CSM community...because of my background.” (Conversely, 73% or 887 students did not report feeling isolated.)

Last year these themes are corroborated in the Noel-Levitz. Items ranked below the national average include the statements about whether students know “what’s happening on campus” and whether they think “most students feel a sense of belonging on campus.” In addition, the “institution’s commitment to commuters” “ranked below the national average.

A lack of a sense of “belonging” is surely connected to the fact that CSM is a commuter campus.

Possible Challenge: CSM’s Identity

It should be noted that in the Section, “Impressions of CSM,” students indicated high levels of agreement with all the phrases, from 82% to 97%. However, in a pattern similar to last year’s survey, the 5 items ranked lowest in agreement levels included phrases describing CSM as “Caring,” “Intellectually Challenging,” “Academically Rigorous,” “Cutting Edge” and “Concerned about me as an individual.” In fact, the phrase, “Cutting Edge” showed a -11% shift in satisfaction levels, from 95% last year to 84% this year. This ranking perhaps continues to suggest that some students may be concerned with CSM’s credibility as a contemporary academic institution adapting to a rapidly changing world.

In addition, as in last year’s survey, among the 15 lowest ranked items in the Section, “My CSM Experience,” were the statements “students understand how to behave in the classroom and on campus” (81%) and “there is clear sense of appropriate and inappropriate behavior on campus” (83%). Most students believe faculty effectively handle rudeness or inappropriate behavior (87%). However, for some students at CSM, there are issues about civility and what

constitutes acceptable behavior in a college environment.

Possible Challenge: Channels for Complaints and Getting Help

Consistently with last year's findings, this year some students experience difficulties as they negotiate selected college processes. Students do have positive feelings about the approachability of their instructors. They indicate they can approach their instructors when they have questions about assignments or readings (92%).

However, in the Section, "My CSM Experience," students were also asked whether they know where to get help for a class in which they are having problems or for a complaint about a faculty or staff member. These were among the 10 lowest ranking items for satisfaction, 80% and 60% respectively.⁷

One of the 5 lowest rated items also concerned "being notified early if they are doing poorly in classes" (73%).

Clearly some students face communication problems and feeling of isolation when they are having difficulties at CSM.

Possible Challenges: Campus Support Services & Advising

Like respondents in the Spring 2010 surveys, students generally have very positive responses to many student services. As noted above, personnel in student support services (87%) and admissions and records are perceived as "informed and helpful" (88%).

Last year the Noel-Levitz responses to academic advising were mixed. Questions about whether the student's academic advisor helped the student set goals or whether advisors were knowledgeable about transfer indeed ranked above the national average. An academic advisor's concern for the student's "success as an individual" was ranked comparable to the national average. Items concerned with whether the student's academic advisor is "approachable" and is "knowledgeable about program requirements" ranked below the national average.

This year, variations of the Noel-Levitz academic advising questions were included in the CSM *Student Survey*. Items added to this year's survey include whether the student's academic advisor is "approachable" (83%), "knowledgeable about program requirements" (83%), and "knowledgeable about transfer requirements" (81%). While the majority of students indicated satisfaction, these were among the lowest ranked within the section, "My CSM Experience."

However, when students are asked whether they know which courses to graduate or transfer in both Spring 2010 and 2011 surveys, students indicated more positive responses (88%).

DIFFERENTIALS: ETHNICITY AND AGE

⁷ A concern with how CSM handles complaints was also suggested last year in the Noel-Levitz: the item regarding the availability of "channels for expressing student complaints" was ranked below the national average.

Ethnicity

PRIE has disaggregated student responses according to both age and ethnicity demographics and published the data in separate reports for age and ethnicity. The CSM *Student Survey* used 9 ethnicity categories, including “multi-racial.”

PRIE cautions that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about demographic populations when there are 20 or fewer respondents to some question items; this was the case for several responses from Native Americans (9 students) and Pacific Islanders (22 students) in the CSM *Student Survey*.⁸

In general there were not significant differences in overall levels of satisfaction among ethnic groups though there are differences when one examines specific question items. As one of the large subpopulations in the survey, Hispanic/Latino students (237 students) consistently reported the highest levels of satisfaction.

Last year African American respondents indicated the most positive attitudes among the subpopulations of students on many question items, yet this year there are gaps. While African Americans (42 students) indicate that CSM is supportive of “all students regardless of ethnicity....” (92%), they also report lower levels of satisfaction than the average for student respondents on several items. For example:

- 74% vs. 83% for feeling “CSM is concerned about my welfare”
- 81% vs. 91% for feeling class assignments “challenged me to do my best work”;
- 73% vs. 86% for feeling “valued as an individual”;
- 80% vs. 90% for feeling grading practices are fair; and
- 60% vs. 73% for being notified early if doing poorly in class.

These responses suggest that some African American students feel isolated and less equipped to succeed academically—issues that may need to be probed further.

Age

The CSM *Student Survey* has 7 age categories. Historically it is in this area where one sees significant differences among specific populations. The older the students, generally, the higher the levels of satisfaction.

The youngest cohort, 24 or younger, is historically the most at risk at CSM. They have the lowest success rates and highest drop-out rates. Last year, the cohort of 19 or younger had levels of satisfaction significantly lower than the respondent population as a whole and they appeared more disaffected in both the CSM *Student Survey* and the Noel-Levitz.

This year, however, this group, 19 or younger, appeared more satisfied as a cohort. Their overall ratings of CSM were equal to or even higher than the population as a whole in several questions. They also rated higher than the population as whole such descriptive phrases for

⁸ Not all students in a given group responded to all question items.

CSM as “up-to-date,” “cutting edge” and “changing with the times.” But consistent with respondents last year, they also rated lower levels of satisfaction on questions related to feeling isolated or getting help. For example, for the item about to being notified if they were doing poorly, 60% agreed with the statement vs. 73% for the population as a whole.

CSM's Sensitivity to Working Students

Of the older students, the cohort of ages 31-39 generally had levels of satisfaction higher than the population as a whole (like other “older” students). However, on question items related to CSM's sensitivity to working students with families, they indicate some discontent and a more critical view of the institution than other cohorts. For example:

- 83% vs. 88% for “CSM's programs and services accommodate working students”;
- 82% vs. 89% for “faculty understand the needs of people raising families”; and
- 82% vs. 87% for “faculty understand the needs of people who have to work.”

PROFILE OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS

Overall, student survey respondents have similar demographic characteristics to the general CSM student population with slight differences. They are predominately female, somewhat older, and somewhat more likely to be fulltime students than the general population in Spring 2011. Their ethnicity, however, generally reflected that of the general student population.

CSM Student Survey Students

- Respondents were somewhat more likely to be full-time students (39% vs. 32%)
- Respondents were somewhat older (39% 30 years and above vs. 31%)
- Women were more likely to respond (60% vs. 49%)
- The ethnicity of respondents roughly approximated the general student population:
 - African American (3% vs. 4%)
 - Asian (21% vs. 16%)
 - Hispanic (17% vs. 19%)
 - Pacific Islander (2% vs. 2%)
 - Filipino (6% vs. 7%)
 - Multi-Racial (7% vs. 9%)
 - White (39% vs. 35%)
- The day only and mix of day + evening enrollment patterns of respondents closely mirrored the general student population:
 - Day only (50% vs. 48%)
 - Day + Evening (17% vs. 20%)
- The employment status of respondents is as follows:
 - 67% were employed
 - 38% were working half-time or more
 - 30% of were unemployed (13% of whom were looking for work)
 - 3% were retired