



CCSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

CCSSE Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. The five benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to students' college experiences and educational outcomes. Therefore, they provide colleges with a useful starting point for looking at institutional results and allow colleges to gauge and monitor their performance in areas that are central to their work. These benchmarks are:

1. Active and Collaborative Learning:

Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives. The following seven survey items contribute to this benchmark.

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions (4a)
- Made a class presentation (4b)
- Worked with other students on projects during class (4f)
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments (4g)
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary) (4h)
- Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course (4i)
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.) (4r)

2. Student Effort:

Students' behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals. "Time on task" is a key variable, and there are a variety of settings and means through which students may apply themselves to the learning process. Eight survey items that indicate how frequently students engage in a number of activities important to their

learning and success are associated with this benchmark. They are:
During the current school year, how often have you:

- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in (4c)
- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources (4d)
- Come to class without completing readings or assignments (4e)
- Used peer or other tutoring services (13d1)
- Used skill labs (13e1)
- Used a computer lab (13h1)

During the current school year:

- How many books did you read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment (6b)
- How many hours did you spend in a typical week preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, or other activities related to your program) (10a)

3. Academic Challenge:

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Ten survey items address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. They are:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations (4p)

How much does your coursework at this college emphasize:

- Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory (5b)
- Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways (5c)
- Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods (5d)
- Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations (5e)
- Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill (5f)

During the current school year:

- How many assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings did you read (6a)
- How many papers or reports of any length did you write (6c)
- To what extent have your examinations challenged you to do your best work (7)

How much does this college emphasize:

- Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying (9a)

4. Student-Faculty Interaction:

In general, the more interaction students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist toward achievement of their educational goals. Personal interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps them focus on their academic progress. Working with an instructor on a project or serving with faculty members on a college committee lets students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problems. Through such interactions, faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning. The six items used in this benchmark are:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor (4k)
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor (4l)
- Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor (4m)
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class (4n)
- Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance (4o)
- Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework (4q)

5. Support for Learners:

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus. Community college students also benefit from services targeted to assist them with academic and career planning, academic skill development, and other areas that may affect learning and retention. The following seven survey items contribute to this benchmark:

How much does this college emphasize:

- Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college (9b)
- Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (9c)
- Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (9d)
- Providing the support you need to thrive socially (9e)
- Providing the financial support you need to afford your education (9f)

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Used academic advising/planning services (13a1)
- Used career counseling services (13b1)

Using the Benchmarks: Every college has a score for each benchmark, computed by averaging the scores on survey items that comprise that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the mean — the average of all participating students — always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25. The most valuable use of benchmarks is to see an individual college's deviation from the mean, and the standardized score provides an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark.