

# Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable  
Integrated  
Cost Effective

## College Survey Summary:

Fresno City College  
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### Project Director:

Dr. Darla M. Cooper

Director, Research & Evaluation

[dcooper@rpgroup.org](mailto:dcooper@rpgroup.org)

## Introduction

As a partner in the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges' (RP Group) Student Support (Re)defined study, Fresno City College (FCC) participated in a student survey in spring 2012. Conducted at 12 community colleges across California, the survey aimed to increase our understanding of what students find particularly supportive of their success. This survey is one component in a multi-year study the RP Group is conducting with funding from The Kresge Foundation to understand how, in an environment of extreme scarcity, community colleges can deliver support both inside and outside the classroom to improve success for *all* students.

## Reader's Guide

This report briefly summarizes the findings from FCC survey participants. This document works as a companion piece to the data tables, presenting survey results from your college alongside those from the entire survey sample. Like the data tables, the report includes survey findings from the entire sample, providing you the opportunity to compare your student voices to those heard from the other colleges in the study. This report starts with key highlights for FCC survey participants. Following, we describe survey participants and share information on their academic performance and use of student services. We then offer a range of FCC student perspectives on what supports their success as compared to all survey participants.

We recommend that student support stakeholders such as faculty, counselors, student services professionals, administrators, staff and student leaders can all benefit from a review of this report. The document concludes with a series of discussion questions you might use on your campus to launch conversations about the survey findings. Additionally, we suggest reviewing (1) the full report of the study's findings from this student perspectives research and (2) the research brief that focuses on the key themes derived from these results. These documents can be found at: <http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support>.

Finally, in spring 2013, the RP Group will offer regional convenings for colleges that participated in the student perspectives survey. During these day-long sessions, we will (1) offer facilitated time to discuss your institution's results and (2) explore ways to use these findings to advance student support initiatives on your campus. We will ask that colleges send teams of key faculty, counselors and other student services professionals, administrative and staff leaders to the meeting in your region.

## Research Framework and Methodology

### Research Framework

As you review the findings, please note that the survey asked students to consider six factors that the RP Group's research found to be important for student success. The six factors are listed below in the order of importance according to students participating in our study:

**Directed:** students have a goal and know how to achieve it

**Focused:** students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize

**Nurtured:** students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

**Engaged:** students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

**Connected:** students feel like they are part of the college community

**Valued:** students' skills, talents, abilities and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated

A full definition of these factors can be found in the study's literature review brief at <http://www.rpgroup.org/content/research-framework>.

### Research Methodology

The RP Group employed two primary qualitative methods that resulted in feedback from nearly 900 students, including phone surveys with 785 students (current students, leavers and completers) and focus groups with 102 participants (current students only) from four colleges. Potential survey participants were identified using files received from FCC and the other college partners. To ensure adequate representation of African-American and Latino students in the

survey sample, we created a stratified random sample that oversampled these two groups. After the survey was conducted, the research team linked quantitative data from the CCC Chancellor's Office on students' demographics and academic history to their survey responses in order to examine the results of different groups. More detailed information about the study's methodology can also be found at <http://www.rpgroup.org/content/research-framework>.

## Key Highlights for Fresno City College Survey Participants

- Fresno City College survey participants identified being focused as the most important factor contributing to their success as a student. This response was consistent with the response from the entire survey sample.
- FCC survey participants were more likely than students in the overall sample to have used key student services, including counseling and assessment testing.
- In identifying factors that made them feel like they were learning, FCC students highlighted the importance of instructors caring about students and showing interest in what students think. It was also very important to them that their courses have real-world, practical applications.
- FCC participants were more likely than students in the overall sample to identify their family as the primary source of the nurturing they have received.
- FCC participants were more likely to identify financial constraints and obstacles as factors impacting their educational progress than students in the entire sample.
- FCC participants were more likely than students in the overall sample to identify the ability to register for needed classes and the availability of transportation as factors influencing their decision to return each semester.
- FCC participants were more likely than the overall survey sample to value opportunities to give back to the larger community and to support and mentor fellow students.

## Survey Participants

A total of 55 Fresno City College students completed the phone survey, representing 7% of the total survey sample. Table 1 below depicts the ethnic and gender distribution of FCC survey participants, all Fresno City College students enrolled in fall 2011 and the entire sample of survey participants from all 12 colleges involved.

Table 1: Comparison Demographics: Fresno City College Survey Sample, Fresno City College Fall 2011 Enrollment and Entire Survey Sample

Demographics	Fresno City College Survey Sample		Fresno City College Fall 2011 Enrollment		Entire Survey Sample	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
<b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>						
African American	12	22%	1,487	7%	198	25%
Latino	21	38%	9,181	46%	245	31%
White	17	31%	4,771	24%	251	32%
Other	5	9%	4,733	23%	91	12%
Total	55	100%	20,172	100%	785	100%
<b><i>Gender</i></b>						
Female	31	56%	10,596	52%	445	57%
Male	24	44%	9,377	47%	328	42%
Unknown	0	0%	199	1%	12	2%
Total	55	100%	20,172	100%	785	100%

***Comparison between college survey sample and college enrollment:***

- African-American and white students were overrepresented among FCC survey participants when compared to their representation in the college population; whereas Latino students were underrepresented.
- Female students were overrepresented and male students were underrepresented among FCC survey participants when compared to their representation in the college population.

***Comparison between college survey sample and entire survey sample:***

- Latino students were overrepresented in the FCC survey sample compared to their representation in the entire survey sample (38% FCC vs. 31% overall). African Americans students were slightly underrepresented in the FCC survey sample compared to their representation in the entire survey sample (22% FCC vs. 25% overall). The proportion of white students was almost the same in the FCC survey sample as it was in the entire survey population (31% vs. 32%).

- The gender representation in the FCC survey sample and in the entire survey sample was similar. The college survey sample was 56% female and 44% male; the entire survey sample was 57% female and 42% male.
- Fresno City College survey participants were younger than the entire survey population. Overall, 67% of FCC participants reported being 25 years of age or younger compared to 57% in the entire sample. Consequently, FCC survey respondents had a lower representation of students in the 32-43 age group than the entire survey sample (9% FCC vs. 15% overall).
- FCC survey participants had almost the identical proportion of students reporting they were first-generation college goers as the entire sample (31% FCC vs. 30% overall).
- FCC participants were slightly less likely to be working than students in the entire sample (64% FCC survey participants vs. 67% overall). The average number of hours Fresno City College students reported working was almost exactly the same as the average across the sample (28.5 hours vs. 28.7 hours).

**Comparison of enrollment status for college survey sample and entire survey sample:**

- As Table 2 illustrates, FCC participants included a higher representation of completers (36% FCC vs. 32% overall) and a lower representation of current students (31% vs. 36%) than the entire survey sample. Leavers were represented in almost the same proportions at FCC as in the entire sample (33% vs. 32%).

Table 2: Distribution of Students by Enrollment Status, Fresno City College vs. Entire Sample

	Fresno City College Survey Sample		Entire Survey Sample	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Completers	20	36%	251	32%
Current students	17	31%	283	36%
Leavers	18	33%	251	32%
Total	55	100%	785	100%

## Academic Performance

- 47% of FCC survey participants compared to 48% of the entire sample had entered a field of study. Entering a field of study is defined as a student having completed a minimum of nine units in a six-digit TOP code area. The average number of units earned in the field of study was higher for FCC students than for all survey participants (24 units FCC vs. 20 units overall).

- FCC survey respondents were less likely than students in the overall sample to have completed at least one basic skills course (25% FCC vs. 32% overall). The average units completed in basic skills was 7.9 at FCC compared to 7.2 for the entire sample.
- The average unit load per semester enrolled was higher among FCC students (9.6 units) than for the entire sample (8.7 units).
- The average GPA was slightly lower for FCC survey participants than for all survey respondents (2.88 FCC vs. 3.07 overall).

## Use of Student Services

- When comparing FCC survey participants to students in the entire sample, FCC students were more likely to have :
  - Received counseling (62% FCC vs. 40% overall)
  - Taken an assessment test (93% vs. 71%)
- FCC participants were less likely than students in the overall survey sample to have completed an education plan (31% FCC vs. 36% overall).
- The representation of EOPS participants among FCC respondents and the entire sample was almost the same (13% vs. 14%).
- Compared to the overall survey sample, a higher percentage of FCC participants had received need-based financial aid (65% FCC vs. 61% overall).

It should be noted that these figures were obtained via the Chancellor's Office MIS and therefore reflect the data reported by the college to the Chancellor's Office.

## Student Perspectives on What Makes Them Successful

In response to the question about what makes them a successful student, FCC survey participants' responses were similar to the entire sample in terms of the ranking of the importance of each success factor.

- 36% of FCC participants compared to 40% of the entire sample identified **being focused** as the factor they felt contributed most to their success. The second highest rated success factor, **nurtured**, was selected by 25% of FCC participants versus 22% of the entire sample.
- In identifying what it was about **being focused** that contributed to their success, more than half (58%) of FCC students who identified this factor as the top contributor to their success described it as **being motivated and dedicated to completing their goal**.
- In identifying what it was about **being nurtured** that made a difference, FCC respondents were more likely than students in the overall survey sample to point to the role of the **family** (69% FCC vs. 51% overall). Slightly less than one third of both Fresno and all respondents pointed to **teachers** as a source of nurturing (31% FCC vs. 32% overall).

- FCC participants were more likely than survey respondents overall to indicate that **being directed** was important to their achievement as a student (19% FCC vs. 11% overall).

## Exploration of the Individual Success Factors

Next, survey participants were asked questions related to each individual success factor.

### Connected

- FCC students were more likely than students in the overall sample to indicate that they **spent less than 5 hours per week on campus outside of class** (53% FCC vs. 41% overall).
- When asked what they did on campus outside of class time, FCC participants were slightly more likely than all survey respondents to report they **studied alone** (85% FCC vs. 81% overall) or **hung out alone** (60% vs. 53%).
- In response to a question about **who or what made them feel connected**, the largest group of students at FCC and in the sample overall pointed to **teachers** (both 26%). A particular class came in second (16% FCC vs. 13% overall).

### Directed

- Just over half of FCC participants (51%) identified their **primary educational goal as transfer**—slightly higher than the entire sample (46%). Proportionally, FCC had slightly more students planning to **earn an associate’s degree** than the entire sample (33% FCC vs. 30% overall).
- FCC students were slightly more likely to report that they had **decided on their educational goal before becoming a community college student** (62% FCC vs. 58% overall).
- FCC participants knew which **courses they needed to take** (85% FCC vs. 86% overall) and **what GPA they needed** (89% FCC vs. 82% overall) to achieve their educational goal. FCC Students were somewhat less informed than students in the overall sample about the **tests required** (73% FCC vs. 78% overall) to complete their goal.

### Engaged

- When asked what made them feel engaged, FCC survey participants were more likely than students in the entire sample to indicate it was very important that **their courses had real world, practical applications** (76% FCC vs. 69% overall).
- FCC participants also indicated they felt they were learning when **instructors really cared about students** and **challenged students to do their best** (75% FCC vs. 79% overall).
- FCC participants were less likely than survey respondents overall to indicate that it was very important for **classes not to be all lecture** (55% FCC vs. 69% overall), **instructors to be really interested in what students thought** (71% FCC vs. 78% overall), and **they could relate to what they were studying** (71% FCC vs. 77% overall).

## Focused

- Almost all students participating in the survey agreed that their desires to **pass the class** (95% FCC vs. 94% overall) and **get a good grade** (95% FCC vs. 96% overall) were **very important motivators for going to class**.
- FCC participants were more likely than students in the entire sample to identify **learning a lot** as a very important motivator for going to class (85% FCC vs. 79% overall).
- FCC participants were less likely than the entire sample to say that they were motivated to attend class because they **did not want to disappoint others** (44% FCC vs. 55% overall).
- Participants from FCC and in the entire sample identified the same critical reason for skipping a class: the need to **take care of somebody in their family** (both 51%). Slightly fewer students at FCC than the entire sample indicated that **having to work** was a reason they might miss a class (27% FCC vs. 30% overall).

## Nurtured

- Survey results indicate that instructors have significant role in making students feel nurtured. Over half of FCC participants and the entire sample believed it was **very important that course instructors cared about them** (51% FCC vs. 55% overall). Another 40% of FCC and 39% of respondents overall believed it was somewhat important that instructors cared about them.
- In a follow-up question about what instructors can do to make student feel they care, FCC participants were more likely than the entire sample to feel it was **very important that instructors take an interest in students and their lives** (57% FCC vs. 50% overall), and **make students feel they shared something in common** (50% FCC vs. 45% overall).
- Additionally, almost all FCC participants believed it was **very important that the instructor made sure they understand the course material** (93% FCC vs. 90% overall). Students also indicated that instructors showed they cared by **directing students to other resources that might help them perform better in class** (79% FCC vs. 80% overall) and **making students feel that it is important to him/her that they did well** (79% FCC vs. 82% overall).
- When responding to a question about whether they could recall a **time when somebody at the college showed that they cared for them**, FCC participants were more likely to respond in the affirmative when compared to students the entire sample (87% FCC vs. 77% overall).
- In a follow-up question about **who showed they cared**, respondents from both FCC and the entire sample were much more likely to point to **teachers** than to any other possible source of nurturing (both 69%). Counselors were the second most likely response for both FCC and all students surveyed (both 12%).
- The most common way those who cared about the students showed that they cared was to **genuinely care about the student as a whole person**. A higher proportion of FCC survey respondents than the overall sample pointed to this way of demonstrating nurturing (45% FCC vs. 38% overall).

## Valued

- 67% of FCC respondents indicated they **felt they added value to the college campus** compared to 68% of the entire sample.
- Similar proportions of FCC respondents and students in the overall sample indicated it was **very important to them to feel they added value to the college** (35% FCC vs. 31% overall). The same was true for the proportion of students that indicated it was somewhat important to add value (40% vs. 42%).
- Students who indicated they felt they added value to their campus were then asked about the availability of a specific list of opportunities at FCC to make such a contribution. The largest percentage of FCC participants said there were opportunities to **provide feedback and make suggestions to instructors** about what to cover and do in class (82% FCC vs. 84% overall). FCC respondents also indicated there were opportunities to give **feedback on what is happening at the college** ((78% FCC vs. 81% overall) and **perform community service** (78% FCC vs. 74% overall).
- A follow-up question asked these same students—those who felt they added value to the campus—if they had actually engaged in any of the opportunities on the same list. The largest percentage (87% FCC vs. 84% overall) indicated they had provided **feedback or suggestions to instructors** on what to cover and do in class. This response was followed by 80% of FCC respondents who reported they had **shared their family history and talked about their culture and traditions** in a way that made them feel proud (vs. 73% overall), and 74% who had **supported and mentored their fellow students** (vs. 64% overall).
- In an additional follow-up question, students were asked to indicate how important it was to them that the college offered a menu of different opportunities to add value. At FCC, students indicated that it was very important to them that they have opportunities to **support and mentor fellow students** (71%), **share their family history and talk about their culture and traditions** in ways that make them feel proud (69%) and **provide feedback or suggestions to instructors** on what to cover and do in class (66%).

## Decision to Return

- FCC students were more likely to identify the following reasons as very important in shaping their decision to return to college each semester:
  - **Being able to register for needed classes** (97% FCC vs. 88% overall)
  - **Having the money needed to pay for college** (86% FCC vs. 77% overall)
  - **Having reliable and/or affordable transportation** (84% FCC vs. 70% overall)
  - **Having financial aid** (70% FCC vs. 63% overall)
- The three reasons most leavers from FCC identified as shaping their decision to not attend school in fall 2011 were that they **got a job** (39% FCC vs. 30% overall), **transferred to**

**four-year institutions** (33% FCC vs. 29% overall) or **lacked financial aid** (33% FCC vs. 20% overall).

## Students' Advice to Other Students

- Students were asked what advice they would give to their peers currently attending a community college and **being focused** was the one piece of advice that most students at both FCC and in the entire sample offered (65% FCC vs. 59% overall).
- In explaining how to be focused, most FCC students defined it as **being motivated and dedicated to completing your goal** (61% FCC vs. 52% overall).

## Students' Final Words

After responding to the specific questions on each of the success factors, students were asked to indicate how important each factor had been in their own success. The interviewer asked this question by using statements designed to capture the essence of each factor.

In response, most FCC participants (78%) and respondents overall (79%) identified **seeing a connection between their success in college and their life goals as very important to their success**—the statement used in the survey to describe focused. This response was followed by having access to college programs and services that could help students successfully navigate their way through the college—the statement used to describe directed (55% FCC vs. 58% overall).

## Discussion Questions

The RP Group invites Fresno City College to use this report and its companion pieces to engage student support stakeholders such as faculty, counselors, student services professionals, administrators, staff and students in conversations about these findings. Several natural venues exist on campuses to hold these conversations including the president's cabinet; student success, basic skills and/or accreditation committees; the academic senate; joint meetings of instructional and student services deans and directors; and department and division meetings. Here are a few ideas for questions that could launch such conversations:

- What surprised you about the findings? What stood out to you comparing the responses from FCC students to those from the overall survey sample?
- Who are the stakeholders and providers of student support on your campus?
- How are these stakeholders communicating and collaborating at this time? Are there ways that the communication and collaboration might be strengthened?
- Students at FCC and the other colleges in the study identified being or becoming focused as the most important factor contributing to their success as students. What is the most important thing you do in your daily work at the college to help students become or stay

focused? Can you think of an example of something you did recently or could do to help students become or stay focused? [You can also ask similar questions about any of the other success factors.]

- Students at FCC and other community colleges around the state also highlighted how important it is for them to see a connection between their success in college and their life goals. Can you think of an example of something you did recently or could do to help students see this connection?
- We all know that faculty, staff and administrators are stretched thin these days. Yet, survey findings from both FCC and across the other participating colleges indicate that *everyone* at an institution plays a role in helping students succeed. How might you expand or deepen a current practice to help more students achieve? What new action might you take given students' survey responses about what colleges can do to make them successful? How might faculty, staff and administrators work together to ensure more students reach their goals?

# Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) strengthens the ability of California community colleges to undertake high quality research, planning and assessments that improve evidence-based decision making, institutional effectiveness and success for all students.

## Student Support (Re)defined Project Team

Darla Cooper  
Michelle Barton  
Kathy Booth  
Priyadarshini Chaplot  
Rob Johnstone  
Kelley Karandjeff  
Michael Large  
Nathan Pellegrin  
Rogéair Purnell  
Diane Rodriguez-Kiino  
Eva Schiorring  
Vinod Verma  
Terrence Willett  
Adore Davidson  
Loann Solem

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