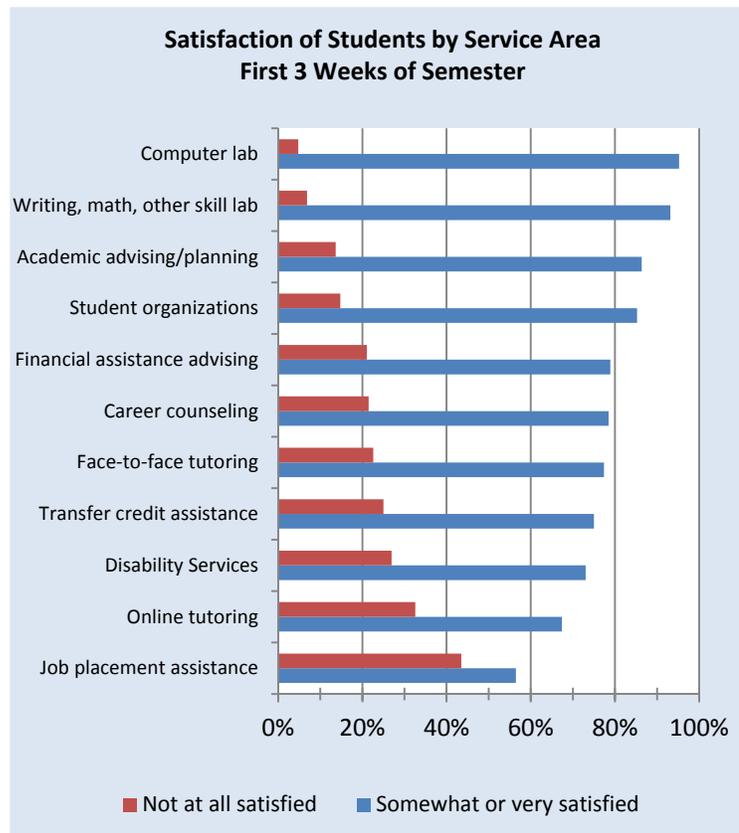## *Executive Summary*

Introduction

Mesa Community College (MCC) participated in the *SENSE* for the first time in fall 2011. *SENSE* joins the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement* (*CCSSE*) and the *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory* (*SSI*) as the three national student surveys administered by all Maricopa colleges every three years. Unlike *CCSSE* and *SSI*, which randomly sample from the entire college population, the SENSE samples only courses likely to contain large numbers of entering students.[1] According to the survey creators, SENSE was "developed by national experts in the field of community and technical college research and practice" and "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."[2] Over 1,600 MCC students in 91 sections completed the *SENSE*.

Both *CCSSE* and *SENSE* survey instruments are products of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE), which operates out of the University of Texas at Austin. *SENSE* consists of 101 items "that elicit information from students about their first impressions of the college; intake processes such as admissions, registration, assessment, placement, orientation, and financial aid; how they spend their time as they begin college; how they assess their earliest relationships and interactions with instructors, advisors, and other students; what kinds of work they are challenged to do; how the college supports their learning in the first few weeks; and so on."[2] In addition, CCCSE groups 36 items into six "Benchmarks of Effective Practice with Entering Students":

- Early Connections
- High Expectations and Aspirations
- Clear Academic Plan and Pathway
- Effective Track to College Readiness
- Engaged Learning
- Academic and Social Support Network

Finally, on top of the standard survey items, a 12-question special-focus module on promising practices for community college student success questioned students about registration, advisement, orientation, and developmental education.

Satisfaction of Students by Service Area
First 3 Weeks of Semester

(Horizontal bar chart showing percentages of "Not at all satisfied" and "Somewhat or very satisfied" for each service area: Computer lab; Writing, math, other skill lab; Academic advising/planning; Student organizations; Financial assistance advising; Career counseling; Face-to-face tutoring; Transfer credit assistance; Disability Services; Online tutoring; Job placement assistance. X-axis from 0% to 100%.)

Legend: ■ Not at all satisfied ■ Somewhat or very satisfied

---

[1] All developmental courses (excluding ESL), ENG101, and potential first-year math courses (MAT 120/121/122/140/142/150/150/152)
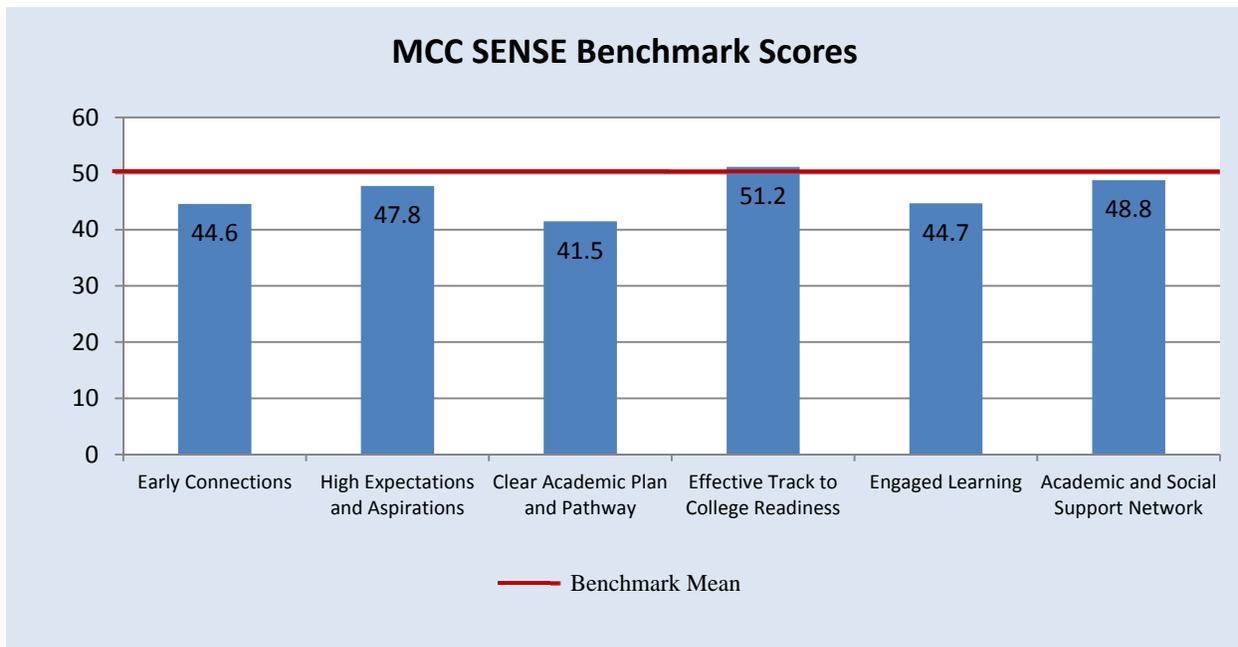[2] "About the Survey." http://www.ccsse.org/sense/aboutsurvey/index.cfm

The 2011 *SENSE* Cohort participants include 217 institutions from 39 states, the District of Columbia, and the Northern Marianas. Eighty-three colleges are classified as small (<4,500), 67 as medium (4,500-7,999), 41 as large (8,000-14,999), and 26 as extra-large institutions (15,000 + credit students). Fifty-four of the colleges are classified as urban-serving, 47 as suburban-serving, and 116 as rural-serving.[3]

> **72%** of entering MCC students said they felt welcome the very first time they visited the campus; **24%** of students expressed a neutral opinion about their first visit.

MCC falls into the extra-large college cohort (XLCC). The average IPEDS fall 2010 enrollment of the 26 XLCC colleges is 28,860 with a low of 13,411 and a high of 61,674. MCC's fall 2010 enrollment of 26,408 falls remarkably close to both the mean and median enrollments of the cohort. This report will not discuss comparisons between MCC and the overall *SENSE* Cohort or other MCCCD colleges, as these comparison groups include colleges much smaller than MCC. Instead, comparisons will be made between MCC and the XLCC. Finally, some of this report employs descriptions, commentary, and formatting provided by CCCSE; these instances are referenced using footnotes when applicable.

This report includes several analyses and comparisons:
- MCC results by *SENSE* Benchmark
- Overall student responses at MCC for part-time, full-time and all students
- MCC compared to other extra-large community colleges by *SENSE* Benchmarks
- MCC student responses to the *SENSE* special focus questions
- Comparisons of MCC student subgroups (e.g. age, gender, academic load, and so on…)
- Graphs of MCC results for each item for all students and by academic load.

MCC SENSE Benchmark Scores

Benchmark	Score
Early Connections	44.6
High Expectations and Aspirations	47.8
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	41.5
Effective Track to College Readiness	51.2
Engaged Learning	44.7
Academic and Social Support Network	48.8

— Benchmark Mean

---

[3] "Survey Results Overview." http://www.ccsse.org/sense/survey/overview.cfm

Method

The Office of Research and Planning (ORP) followed CCCSE guidelines to submit a Course Schedule File that contained three types of courses: all developmental courses (excluding ESL), the first college-level English course, and first college-level math courses. CCCSE selected a random sample of courses from this file for administration. To facilitate a smooth administration, the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the ORP sent faculty members several notifications of their selection prior to administration of the survey. Survey materials were distributed the week prior to administration, and faculty were asked to administer the survey during the fourth or fifth week of the fall semester. Department chairs also promoted faculty participation and helped to disseminate survey notices, letters, and materials. Faculty participants returned completed surveys to ORP; surveys were prepared for scanning and shipped to CCCSE for processing, analysis, and reporting.

Of the over 1,600 submitted surveys, 858 were included in MCC's *SENSE* sample; some reasons for exclusion are unanswered key survey questions, indicating an age under 18, or responding in a clearly invalid manner (i.e. indicating the same answer for all questions). The overall student response rate was 59%, and the overall class participation rate was 79%.

> **38%** of entering MCC students reported they had NOT met with an academic adviser at MCC to set academic goals and create a plan to achieve them within their first three weeks at the college.

Highlighted Results

Part I: Respondent Profile

The entering student population at MCC is inherently different from the overall student population, so it would be logical that a sample of only entering students would display different demographic characteristics; however, the characteristics of the *SENSE* sample were skewed to more traditional entering college students who are 18-19 years old and attend full-time. This is likely a result of the sampling technique and the in-class administration process; full-time students attend class in more sections and are more likely to be included in the random selection. In fact, both the *SENSE* and *CCSSE* administration produces a sample with an inverse proportion of full-time and part-time students than actually attend MCC. The sample contains 67% full-time students while the actual full-time student enrollment at MCC is 34%. For this reason, most survey results are either weighted or disaggregated on the full-time/part-time variable so that reports will more accurately reflect the overall entering student population.

Part II: Overall MCC Results by Benchmark

SENSE Benchmark scores are standardized so that the weighted mean for each score is 50. The table on page two lists MCC's benchmark scores; Effective Track to College Readiness is highest and falls just above the mean. All other benchmarks fall below the mean, with Clear Academic Plan and Pathway ranking lowest. Below are brief impressions of each benchmark.
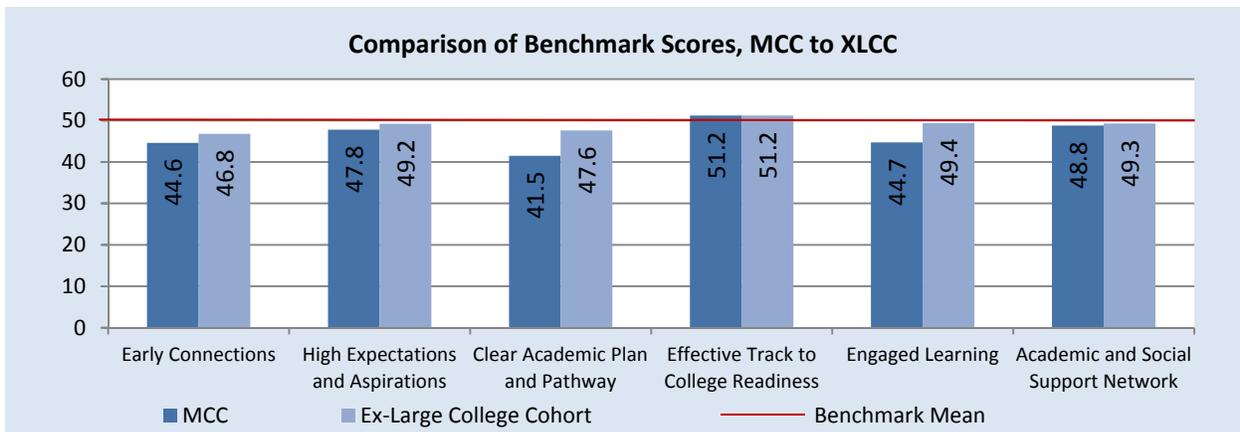
- **Early Connections:** At MCC, a majority of entering students said they felt welcome at college on their first visit (72%), but smaller percentages of students report that they received financial aid information or personalized attention from staff.
- **High Expectations and Aspirations:** Entering MCC students say they have high motivation and strong preparation: 90% agree that they have the motivation to succeed in college. However, students' reports of their first three weeks of college indicate that many are adopting academic

behaviors that do not lead to success. Within the first three weeks, many students reported skipping class at least once (28%), turning in an assignment late at least once (32%), and failing to turn in an assignment (31%).

- **Clear Academic Plan and Pathway**: About half of entering MCC students report that they had contact with an advisor, but a smaller percentage say they had help setting academic goals and developing plans. Just under half (46%) of entering student respondents agree or strongly agree that they were able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for them.
- **Effective Track to College Readiness**: While nearly all entering MCC students report that they were required to take a placement test (92%), a lower percentage report that they were required to enroll in classes indicated by their placement tests (77%).
- **Engaged Learning**: Overall, many entering MCC students keep their learning activities confined to the classroom. For example, only 32% of entering students reported working with classmates outside of class time at least once, only 12% reported attending a student-led study group outside of class time, and just over half of respondents (54%) have electronically communicated (email, text, Facebook, etc.) with other students about coursework.
- **Academic and Social Support**: The majority of students respond positively to survey items in this benchmark that measure interaction and support between students, their peers, and instructors. Large percentages of entering students reported receiving clear explanations from instructors about course policies and syllabi, as well as having communicating on a first-name basis with instructors and peers.

Part III: MCC Results Compared to National Extra-large College Cohort (XLCC)[4]

MCC compares favorably to the extra-large college cohort (XLCC) in the areas of Effective Track to College Readiness and Academic and Social Support Network. At face value, MCC performs noticeably below the XLCC in the benchmarks of Clear Academic Plan/Pathway and Engaged Learning. While the overall benchmark scores paint a picture of how MCC compares to the cohort as a whole, decile rankings help show where MCC scores are situated within the range of scores for all XLCC colleges. MCC scored higher than 50% of other XLCC colleges in two benchmarks: Effective Track to College Readiness and High Expectations and Aspirations. However, MCC scored in the lower 40% of XLCC colleges in the Early Connections and Academic/Social Support Network benchmarks; in the bottom 20% in the Clear Academic Plan/Pathway benchmark; and in the bottom 10% in the Engaged Learning benchmark.
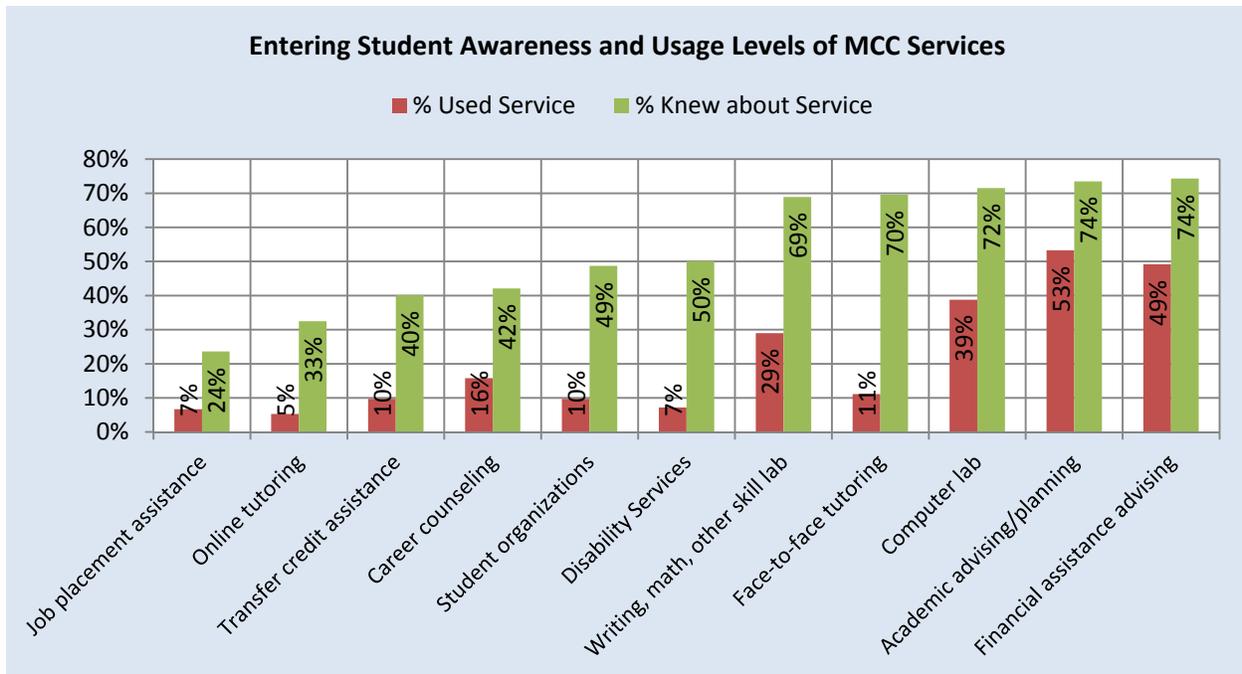

Comparison of Benchmark Scores, MCC to XLCC

Benchmark	MCC	Ex-Large College Cohort
Early Connections	44.6	46.8
High Expectations and Aspirations	47.8	49.2
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	41.5	47.6
Effective Track to College Readiness	51.2	51.2
Engaged Learning	44.7	49.4
Academic and Social Support Network	48.8	49.3

Legend: ■ MCC   ■ Ex-Large College Cohort   — Benchmark Mean

[4] The XLCC contains data from 26 community colleges participating in the last three years of *SENSE* administration.

Part IV: Overall Results by Item

This section of the full report contains bar graphs of each SENSE item broken down by enrollment status; these can be used to facilitate further investigation into survey results that may not fall within a benchmark. This summary discusses notable items that are not included in any benchmark.

Awareness and Usage of MCC Services

One such area not discussed at length, but likely useful to college service departments, are items dealing with student satisfaction, frequency of use, and knowledge about campus services. For each service, the chart below lists whether students knew about and/or used the service within their first three weeks at MCC (satisfaction levels are provided in an earlier chart on page 1 of this summary). For example, 70% of entering students knew that MCC offered face-to-face tutoring, but only 11% reported using the service. Overall, the largest shares of entering students were aware of common front door services like advising and financial aid, as well as tutoring services and computer labs. A smaller number of entering students were aware of job placement assistance, online tutoring, and transfer credit assistance.

Entering Student Awareness and Usage Levels of MCC Services

■ % Used Service   ■ % Knew about Service

Service	% Used Service	% Knew about Service
Job placement assistance	7%	24%
Online tutoring	5%	33%
Transfer credit assistance	10%	40%
Career counseling	16%	42%
Student organizations	10%	49%
Disability Services	7%	50%
Writing, math, other skill lab	29%	69%
Face-to-face tutoring	11%	70%
Computer lab	39%	72%
Academic advising/planning	53%	74%
Financial assistance advising	49%	74%

Promising Practices Special Focus Module

Another question set not included in any benchmark is the Promising Practices Special Focus Module, which contains 12 questions related to registration, advisement, orientation, and developmental education. Some responses to these questions are interesting:

- 9% of entering students reported registering for at least some of their classes AFTER the first class session was held; 3% registered for ALL their classes after classes had already started.
- 38% of students reported they had NOT met with an academic adviser at MCC to set academic goals and create a plan to achieve them within their first three weeks.
- A minority of students reported using self-study materials, workshops, or classes to prepare for placement testing: 38% of students used self-study materials to prepare for testing, 19%

reported taking a short workshop (<8 hours) to prepare, and 15% said they took a multi-day program to prepare.

- Entering student responses indicate confusion about MCC's policies related to placement testing and subsequent developmental course enrollment:
  - 25% of respondents said they were told that the college required them to take MORE THAN ONE developmental course in their first semester.
  - 23% reported they were told that the college required them to take ONE developmental course in their first semester.
  - 19% said they were told that they SHOULD take developmental courses but were not required to do so in their first semester.
- Of the entering students who reported that they were told that they were required to take a developmental course in their first semester, 33% took more than one developmental course, 51% took one developmental course, and 16% took no developmental courses.

Comparisons of MCC Student Subgroups

MCC Student Subgroups

CCCSE provides many different ways to compare SENSE data at the college level by comparing many different population subgroups. Five main subgroups are available for MCC, and key statistically significant differences between these groups are noted here[5]; means and frequency reports for all items will be made available on request from ORP.

Traditional age (18-24) compared to nontraditional age (25+)
- Traditional age entering students are more likely to enroll in more courses, come to class without completing assignments, and use electronic forms of communication to discuss coursework with students.
- Nontraditional age entering students are more likely to use face-to-face tutoring and financial assistance advising.

Female compared to male
- Male and female entering students scored similarly on most items with two exceptions: Males are more likely to not turn in an assignment or come to class without completing readings/assignments than female students.

First-generation compared to not first-generation
- First-generation students responded comparably to non first-generation students on most items with two exceptions: first-generation students take fewer classes and are more likely to agree that MCC courses or experiences helped to improve their study skills.

Part-time compared to full-time
- Part-time entering students report working more hours than full-time students.
- Full-time entering students are more likely to use academic advising, agree that it is available at convenient times, and agree that an adviser helped them to select courses and/or programs.

---

[5] Statistical significance is only available for survey items with mean scores.

- Full-time respondents communicate electronically with other students and instructors, work with peers outside of class, and discuss class content outside of class more often than part-time students.

Developmental compared to non-developmental
- Developmental entering students use skill labs, financial aid advising, computer labs, and disability resources more often than non-developmental students.
  - Developmental students are more likely to agree that MCC provided adequate information about financial aid, instructors used ice breaker activities, non-instructional staff learned their name, and their study skills improved at MCC.