2017 SSSC Conference Evaluation Executive Summary

Based on the evaluation, *the 2017 Strengthening Student Success Conference was a great success*! Overall, comments gave great praise to the conference operations, its program, and the hotel. From the staff, to the food, to the location, top marks were given by many of the respondents. As with all surveys, a very few, however, didn't like the food or hotel. A few also had suggestions on areas of the conference that could have worked better for them.

Attendees

There were 767 attendees at this 2017 Strengthening Student Success conference. 155 answered the survey online equating to a survey response rate of 20% or one in five attendees. Last year's response rate was 22% and the previous year was 26%. So, though, the number of attendees is increasing, the response rate is going down.

Learning Outcomes

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements, which are the conference learning outcomes. About 90% or more (nine out of ten) respondents agree or strongly agree that the conference:

- strengthened their understanding of critical issues that shape student success
- strengthened their understanding of critical issues that shape student equity
- gained practical examples of how colleges are helping improve student outcomes
- increased their ability to offer leadership at their institute
- increased their ability to support leadership skills of others at their institute
- helped them learn directly applicable information for their work
- helped them to feel part of a collegial team, broader community or network of educators.

All statements had some respondents disagree and strongly disagree, but the extent of this disagreement was for the most part small. The following statements were exceptions and had relatively higher percentages disagreeing or strongly disagreeing – still lower than 13%.

- What I learned will increase my ability to offer leadership at my institution. 10% (n=15)

- What I learned will increase my ability to support leadership skills of others at my institution. 12% (n=19)

Take Aways

Attendees who completed the conference evaluation survey indicated that they were generally pleased with the conference. They were able to learn about critical issues related to student success, student equity, and guided pathways, to mention a few. They gained practical examples to bring back to their colleges, they increased their ability to offer leadership at their institution, and they developed their network. They were able to achieve the learning outcomes for the conference. The conference provided opportunities to build a sense of community and to take some tools to their college for action. Just over 1 in 10 did not feel that their experiences at the conference will increase their ability to support leadership skills of others at their college.

Similar to last year, this year there was minimal mention of breakout sessions being full. Many responded that they liked the hotel and especially the food. Different than last year, happily, many commented that they liked the keynote speakers.

Attendees found that **strong evidence for best practices was not being discussed**. **Some sessions were not using data well, if at all. Some attendees also wanted higher-level thinking and perspectives on topics.** They were craving something more than statements about who should be at our meetings. The quality of the sound system in the poolside breakout room was a major issue.

Conference respondents noted many specific sessions that impacted them at the conference. **The most common reason for the impact was that they received practical application of the information and the engaging manner in which it was presented.** Guided pathways and equity were hot topics, especially how they could use the information when they returned to their colleges. Guided Pathways seemed to be more impactful to participants this year when compared to last year.

Respondents wanted students' voices to be more prevalent this year as well as last year. In this light, how may we build the program next year to provide more purposeful students' voices throughout? Other hot topics included placement of students into math and English using high school information and accelerated learning, to mention a few.

Over half of the survey respondents were coming as members of a team of five or more people – an increase from last year in the number of members of the group. **Forty-three percent indicated their college had sent a team with a strategic goal in mind**, down from last year at 48%.

Although the respondents highly valued the conference, when asked for recommendations for improvement, they indicated that **presenters needed more guidance on the following**:

- how to make a truly engaging presentation (not a talking head or PowerPoint heavy)

- how to allow for questions
- how to learn from all in attendance
- how to use data to show the effectiveness of their work
- how to focus on the heart and soul of their work
- ***how to get at the deeper aspects of their work (e.g., leadership issues, how to navigate difficult situations)***

In particular, ***they wanted new information and perspectives.*** Some thought that after several years of attending the conference that there was nothing new. Some thought that the same colleges were presenting the same materials.

Considerations for the Future and Possible Action

For the future, the following considerations are based on the respondents' comments as well as the report authors' years of experience as researchers, conference survey evaluators, and as part of the Strengthening Student Success Conference team.

Respondents' Considerations	Possible Actions
1. Have presenters that are more dynamic and motivational. Have sessions that provide foundational work, evaluation/research efforts, and how it can be applied at other schools. Spend minimal time on giving background information about the college.	Provide more targeted guidance and professional development for presenters.
2. Have more student voices.	Bring more students and their voices to the sessions via recordings, skype, social media, forensic presentations, etc.
3. Repeat sessions. Have conference over 3 days. Have conference over weekend.	Have sessions repeat on different days. Offer skill-building networking sessions where attendees may learn how to do a specific skill as well as network. Connect conference with current hot topic (e.g., Guided Pathways)
4. Leadership Skills	Be intentional with leadership skill-building at the conference sessions and workshops as well as how they connect to the other leadership work of the RP Group and other groups across California.

Strengthening Student Success conference organizers might also want to consider these other observations.

Considerations	Possible Actions
1. The low survey response rate.	Is it time to offer the evaluation to attendees throughout the conference such that when they are ready to take it they can do so at their own accord? Some are only in attendance for a day while some two days and some three days. While waiting in the airport, they could complete the survey on their smartphones.

2. Conference app implementation and evaluation.	Investing in a more robust app that allows attendees to evaluate the conference and/or sessions in real time. Investigating apps that allow presentations to be uploaded in real time allowing attendees to access and obtain the presentation as it happens. It is also important to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of this app.

Light Bulb Moments

Beyond this survey, attendees were asked to submit some comments about what resonated with them (their "light bulb moments"). The following are a select few that add substance to this evaluation.

"Instead of just giving students information about college, careers and majors, the information we want them to "get" should be built into activities that engage them in non-cognitive and metacognitive behaviors which will increase their success throughout their college experiences."

"Creating an intermediate algebra class that is supported to help students who should be in a lower class is an amazing idea that I hope we can implement at my college to help students reach transfer-level math courses sooner."

"Guided Pathways are geared for undecided students, default sequences, developmental education transformation, and academic & non-academic supports. This was my biggest light bulb moments."

"Be more aware and sensitive to my immigrant population in the classroom
- Don't flag the wrong student – no marginalization or stigmatize just highlight their strengths
- Give students a home by providing an academic plan & emotional support
- Students passed math when they're placed higher than remedial math courses, exact opposite of what I've experienced."

"Attended the Aspen Fellows Workshop, the "light bulb" was switched on when one presenter stated that "validation of vision inspired fearlessness with a clarity of purpose". Wow! It's hard to lead initiatives & charges, especially when addressing equity. This inspires me more to "do what is right" fearlessly to impact student success from all groups but especially for our underserved communities & disproportionally [sic] impacted students at the college, and future students to the colleges."

"1- Embedding counselors (Early Alert/Early Support), or tutors into Canvas to monitor student performance and contact students/instructor rather than waiting for instructors or students to contact counselors/advisors/tutors after they have dropped below successful grade threshold.
2- Colleges should ask themselves what are the barriers we, as an institution, place in front of our students and not just what are the barriers students are coming to college with."

"The connections we need to make with our students. We often are too involved in our day-to-day that we forget we are models for our students. As such, we need to empower them and continue the struggle with them to educate our students."

"I learned so much more about Student Equity and how it is a part of student success. I feel that if I can take one idea away from a conference, I have had a great conference. This time I have a least 4 things to take away. This means I am going back to my school with Treasures!"