2019 Strengthening Student Success Conference Evaluation
Executive Summary

From Wednesday October 9 to Friday October 11, 2019 the Strengthening Student Success Conference (SSSC) was held at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport in northern California. Based on an online evaluation sent out after the conference, the event was a success with 726 registered attendees. Overall, attendees gave high marks regarding conference operations, program, and accommodations.

Attendees and Survey Response Rate

At the close of the event, the conference planning team sent an email to all attendees with a link to an online survey and an invitation to provide feedback on the conference. With 143 responses, the survey rate was slightly less than 20%, approximately the same as previous years.

Conference Goals

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they achieved the conference’s multiple goals. Approximately 90% of respondents (the same percentage as last year’s response in this area) agreed or strongly agreed that the conference:

- Deepened their understanding of critical issues that shape student success in California Community Colleges
- Helped them gain practical, evidence-based examples of how colleges foster student success
- Increased their ability to apply concepts highlighted at the conference to our own work to create student-ready colleges
- Increased their ability to more deeply engage students in the work of our colleges to reimagine the student experience
- Helped them develop and strengthen networks with colleagues and other stakeholders
- Increased their collective capacity to lead change at our colleges

Takeaways: Impactful and Least Impactful

Impactful
Attendees were asked what impacted them the most. Respondents noted they felt most impacted by:

- Hot topics (i.e., topics of pivotal importance to the field) such as AB 705, Guided Pathways and equity
- The keynote and plenary speakers
- Student voices, especially if they were in the room
- Practical examples
- Sense of community

Least Impactful

Conference attendees found the following to be least impactful to their experience at the conference:

- Presenters without innovative ideas, practical examples, or next steps
- The length of the program
- Being turned away at full sessions
- Food and beverage choices and access

Improvements for Next Year’s Conference

The following improvements for next year’s conference were suggested:

- Reduce the cost of attending the conference
- Provide clarity about proposal selection
- Improve program session titles and descriptions
- Offer more food selections
- Create a niche for a unique Strengthening Student Success Conference
- Use equipment and Sign Language interpreters
- Increase faculty representation
- Increase capacity for breakout sessions
- Ensure presenters have additional examples and data to support promising practices
- Host and invite more students

Additional Topics

When asked what additional topics they would like to see in next year’s conference, they noted the following:

- Follow-up to colleges’ work on AB 705
- Follow-up to early implementers of Guided Pathways
- Special populations (e.g., incarcerated population, LGBTQ, Foster Youth, and equity groups)
- Consideration should be given to presentations about embedded tutoring
College Teams in Attendance: What Were They Hoping to Take Away?

Some 41% of respondents to this question indicated that their colleges sent teams to the conference with a specific purpose in mind. The noted strategic purposes of sending a team varied from presenting to gaining best practices, networking, and bonding as a team. Several teams noted that they came specifically to improve their knowledge of, and ability to implement AB 705 and Guided Pathways. Others wanted to dive deeper into integrated planning and equity matters.

Light Bulb Moments

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

“My light bulb moment was about AB 705 (math). It’s not a one size fits all approach. I was worried about this semester and how prepared our students would be. I am realizing it’s okay to be flexible and that lessons need to be tailored to my class to meet their needs.”

“It was helpful to hear from another adult school - community college consortium about their challenges (data, personnel) and successes in increasing the number of students who transition from adult schools to CCC.”

“During a session about the Umoja community, a student noted the importance of this community and the ethic of love. She said the following quote, which inspires me to continue to stress the importance of community-building in our classrooms and service areas throughout our institutions: ‘You don’t get tired of feeling at home’.”

“Equity is the underlying core to student success. How can we address the equity gap without a college-wide understanding/definition of what equity is? Personally, professionally, structurally.”

“Successful guided pathways implementation relies not on outcomes as a driver, but instead relies on creating processes that are flexible and honored by stakeholders.”

“I can do all the things I learned at the sessions I attended at my home college to move our needle of student success! I’m feeling empowered to create, inform, and inspire! *Side note- amazing conference! First conference attendee and I loved it!! Can’t wait to come back!!”

“My biggest “light bulb” moment so far has been the importance of creating avenues for collaboration across the community college for all campus initiatives and processes, especially for strategic planning and enrollment management and services/programs for our students. We need to collaborate across all groups on campus and keep the students’ needs and success as the driver for all important decision
making on our campuses. The efforts that we make to get the campus together and on the same page will help guide the changes that we make for our students.”