



Student Needs' Survey Findings: Follow-up To The Equity For All Report to the President

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INTRODUCTION

Merritt College, like most urban colleges serves a diverse population of students that reflects the diversity of its community in terms of culture, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. A recent report on The Equity For All Scorecard Project submitted by Merritt College Scorecard Team stated among other things that Merritt College “can do more to support the educational success of all of our students and, in particular, of African American and Hispanic/Latino students, who are lagging behind their peers on a substantial number of indicators of academic progress.”¹ Merritt College is seeking ways to address the findings in the Equity For All Scorecard Project report and to improve its services and assistance to students. One of our major objectives is to develop comprehensive ways for assisting students in completing their educational goals. To this end, this study was undertaken to obtain essential information about the needs of the students and specific problems they face in completing their educational goals. This study sought to answer the following questions:

- Which instructional and student support services do the students find satisfactory?
- How do students feel about instructors, fellow students, and administration?
- What are the major issues affecting most students’ ability to complete their program at Merritt College?
- What, if any, differences are there in student opinion by ethnicity?
- What specific suggestions or recommendations do the students have for the president to assist them in achieving their educational goals?

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey of students’ needs was conducted in Spring 2007 to answer the questions above. The survey instrument was developed in several phases. First, studies of community colleges students’ needs were reviewed to obtain relevant information.² Based on this review, an initial draft of the questionnaire was developed. Then, the questionnaire was submitted to selected members of the ASMC for comments and suggestions on the clarity of the questions and ease of

¹ Toussant and Trotter. (2006) The Equity For All Scorecard Project Institutional Responsibility for Student Success: Final Report To The President.

² Jetson and Sngupta (2006).California Community Colleges Students. California Counts. Public Policy Institute of California. 8, 2. Winbush (2004). North Carolina State University Alumni Survey
Winbush (2004). Cedar Valley College. Climate Assessment Inclusiveness Survey
Winbush (2004). Cedar Valley College. Inclusiveness Survey.

administration. The feedback obtained from ASMC was wrapped into the survey. Lastly, a letter from the president attached to the survey explained the surveys confidential nature and purpose .

DATA COLLECTION

ASMC members were trained to administer the survey to students. Participants in the study were provided an explanation of the purpose of the survey, which included how the information would be used to improve the services to students. The participants were also encouraged to read the cover letter from the President that was attached to each survey. The respondents were asked in most cases to rate the extent to which they agree to Likert scale questionnaire items. Although classes were not selected randomly, efforts were made (through purposive sampling) to include students from a variety of backgrounds, and to reflect diversity in student characteristics. The survey was distributed to 929 students enrolled in the 50 largest classes.

RESULTS

Highlights of the findings are provided below. Details of the survey results are available in the Appendix.

Which instructional support and other services do the students find satisfactory?

The data indicate that Merritt College students are pleased with the services provided by the Registration Office, Computer lab, Counseling Services, and Learning Center. A majority of students are satisfied/very satisfied with the following services/ programs:

Instruction and Student Services Areas	Satisfied/Very Satisfied
Registration	72%
Computer Lab	58%
Counseling	56%
Learning Center	56%

On the other hand, students are ambivalent about the services provided in the Health Center, Student Government, Financial Aid Office, Math Lab, Student Programs, and Study areas. A relatively small percentage are satisfied (approximately one third). In some cases, students are more uncertain than satisfied with the service/program. The lack of satisfaction and uncertainty indicate that there are opportunities to modify and raise awareness about existing programs. In equal proportions, students were unsatisfied and uncertain with the services provided by Financial Aid.

Instruction and Student Services Areas	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	Uncertain
Health Center	26%	51%
Student Government	29%	49%
Financial Aid	34%	26%
Math Lab	37%	38%
Student Programs	40%	39%
Large Study Areas	43%	33%

How do students feel about instructors, fellow students, and administration?

Students overwhelmingly had positive feelings about instructors, their peers, and administrators. Approximately 80% of students agreed that their instructors were helpful, cared about them, and felt comfortable asking them questions. Students also had a positive experience working with other students (87%). Over half of students (62%) agreed that the Administration is committed to helping students.

What are the major issues affecting most students’ ability to complete their program at Merritt College?

Students speculate that they would leave Merritt College for reasons external to their college experience. Most students would leave due to financial considerations and family related concerns. Very few students stated that they would leave due to not fitting in or academic problems. Students would leave Merritt for the following reasons, list below respectively:

- financial problems,
- family related concerns,
- academic concerns, and
- not fitting in at Merritt College.

What, if any, differences are there in student opinion by ethnicity?

There is a gulf (of at least 10%) between African American and White student opinions about their instructors, fellow students, administration, and support services. African American student opinions are the most favorable of all ethnic group opinions and White student opinions are the least favorable.

What specific suggestions or recommendations do the students have for the president to assist students in achieving their educational goals?

Consistent with other findings in the report, students suggested improving three areas to assist them in achieving their goals. The areas recommended by students include the following: 1) Financial Aid Office, 2) Programs, and 3) Counseling Services. Specifically students made the following comments about the aforementioned areas.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Financial Aid</i> ○ Organize systems and processes in FAO ○ Improve service provided by staff ○ Offer more financial assistance ○ <i>Counseling</i> ○ Educate counselors about transfer and the nursing program ○ Improve access to the transfer counselor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide customer service training to counselors ○ <i>Programs</i> ○ Offer dental hygiene courses ○ Coordinate science classes so they are not offered at the same time ○ Offer more evening/weekend, 6-8 week, and summer school classes ○ Train nursing instructors so that they are more approachable to students |
|---|--|

The findings suggest that Merritt is doing well in some areas; however, more in-depth probing on student opinion needs to occur before any sound recommendations can be made. Focus groups will be conducted in the fall to elicit such information.

APPENDIX

Merritt College Student Needs Survey
Spring 2007

1. How satisfied are you with each of the following instructional support services?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Uncertain	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1a. Learning Center	2%	6%	22%	39%	17%
1b. Math Lab	3%	4%	34%	24%	9%
1c. Computer Lab	2%	3%	21%	35%	19%
1d. Large Study Rooms & Meeting Rooms	3%	6%	31%	28%	12%

2. How satisfied are you with each of the following services at Merritt?

2a. Counseling/Advisement	3%	11%	20%	34%	18%
2b. Financial Aid Office	13%	13%	24%	22%	10%
2c. Health Center	3%	3%	46%	16%	8%
2d. Registration	2%	7%	14%	48%	22%
2e. Student Programs	3%	6%	36%	25%	12%
2f. Student Government	3%	4%	44%	18%	8%

3. How much do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
3a. My instructors care about me as a person	2%	5%	13%	48%	31%
3b. In my classes, most instructors find ways to help students to understand the materials	2%	5%	7%	51%	36%
3c. Most of the time, I have positive experiences working with other students in the class	1%	4%	9%	55%	30%
3d. In my class, I feel free to ask for help from my instructor	2%	4%	8%	45%	40%
3e. The Administration is committed to helping students to achieve their goals	3%	6%	27%	40%	21%

4. What is your current educational goal at Merritt?

4a. Transfer to a four-year institution.....	60%
4b. Associate’s degree only.....	15%
4c. Vocational education degree or certificate.....	7%
4d. Career advancement, certificate or license maintenance.....	10%
4e. Basic skills.....	1%
4f. Complete credits for high school diploma or GED.....	.2%
4g. Undecided.....	7%

5. If I left Merritt College before completing my program, it would most likely be due to:

	Number of Responses
5a. Financial problems.....	353
5b. Academic problems.....	107
5c. Not fitting in at Merritt.....	36
5d. Family related concerns.....	207
5e. Transfer to another college.....	N/A
5f. Other (please specify)	

6. How do you describe your ethnicity?

6a. African-American.....	36%
6b. Asian.....	12%
6c. Filipino.....	4%
6d. Hispanic/Latino(a).....	13%
6e. Native American.....	1%
6f. Other Non White.....	7%
6g. Pacific Islander.....	1%
6h. Unknown.....	8%
6i. White.....	18%

7. Are you:

- 7a. Female..... 70%
- 7b. Male..... 30%

8. Which age group are you in?

- 8a. Under 16 years of age..... .3%
- 8b. Between 16 and 18 years of age..... 5%
- 8c. Between 19 and 24 years of age..... 35%
- 8d. Between 25 and 29 years of age..... 16%
- 8e. Between 30 and 34 years of age..... 11%
- 8f. Between 35 and 54 years of age..... 23%
- 8g. Between 55 and 64 years of age..... 6%
- 8i. 65 years of age or older..... .6%
- 8j. Unknown..... 2%

9. What three recommendations would you make to the President of Merritt College for ways to assist students in achieving their educational goals?

Recommendation Area	Response
1. Financial Aid	170
2. Program	90
3. Counseling Services	85

DETAILED DEPARTMENT FINDINGS

Counseling Services

1. How satisfied are you with each of the following services at Merritt?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Uncertain	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Counseling/Advisement	3%	11%	20%	34%	18%

2. What three recommendations would you make to the President of Merritt College for ways to assist students in achieving their educational goals?

Top three recommendation areas	Response
<input type="radio"/> Financial Aid	170
<input type="radio"/> Program	90
<input type="radio"/> Counseling Services	85

3. Student comments fall into the following subcategories :

- Counselors are not well informed about transfer
- Improve access to the transfer counselor
- Counselors are poorly trained
- Counselors are rude and in a rush
- More counselors should know about nursing

Financial Aid

1. How satisfied are you with each of the following services at Merritt?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Uncertain	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Financial Aid Office	13%	13%	24%	22%	10%

2. If I left Merritt College before completing my program, it would most likely be due to:

	Number of Responses
<input type="radio"/> Financial problems.....	353
<input type="radio"/> Academic problems.....	107
<input type="radio"/> Not fitting in at Merritt.....	36
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3. What three recommendations would you make to the President of Merritt College for ways to assist students in achieving their educational goals?

Top three recommendation areas	Response
<input type="radio"/> Financial Aid	170
<input type="radio"/> Program	90
<input type="radio"/> Counseling Services	85

4. Student comments fall into the following subcategories :

- Systems and processes not organized well and long wait
- Improve service provided by staff
- Need to offer more financial assistance

Programs

4. How satisfied are you with each of the following services at Merritt?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Uncertain	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Student Programs	3%	6%	36%	25%	12%

5. What three recommendations would you make to the President of Merritt College for ways to assist students in achieving their educational goals?

Top three recommendation areas	Response
<input type="radio"/> Financial Aid	170
<input type="radio"/> Program	90
<input type="radio"/> Counseling Services	85

6. Student comments fall into the following subcategories :

- Coordinate Science classes so they are not offered at the same time
- Offer more evening, 6-8 week classes, summer classes, and weekend classes
- Train Nursing program instructors to be approachable