Introduction

As a partner in the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges’ (RP Group) Student Support (Re)defined study, Porterville College 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 Porterville Community College 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 Porterville 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 Porterville 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 Porterville 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 Porterville Survey Participants

- Porterville 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 sample population.

- Porterville participants were more likely than students in the overall sample to have received counseling, have an education plan and use financial aid and EOPS.

- Porterville participants were less likely to have transfer as a goal than students in the overall sample.

- When identifying factors that contributed to their learning, Porterville participants highlighted the importance of instructors being interested in what students thought, really caring about students and challenging learners to do the best they could. It was also very important to Porterville respondents that they could relate to what they were studying.

- Porterville participants were more likely than survey participants overall to indicate that it was very important that course instructors cared about them.

- When asked about a time someone at the college had cared about them, Porterville students were much more likely than students in the overall sample to indicate that it was a staff person at the college.

- In identifying factors that were important to their success at the college, Porterville participants were more likely than students in the entire survey sample to think it was very important that they saw a connection between their success in college and their life goals.

Survey Participants

A total of 67 Porterville students completed the phone survey, representing 9% of the total survey sample. Table 1 below depicts the ethnic and gender distribution of Porterville survey participants, all Porterville students enrolled in fall 2011 and the entire sample of survey participants from all 12 colleges involved.
Table 1: Comparison Demographics: Porterville Community College Survey Sample, Porterville Community College Fall 2011 Enrollment and Entire Survey Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Porterville Survey Sample</th>
<th>Porterville Fall 2011 Enrollment</th>
<th>Entire Survey Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3,974</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3,974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison between college survey sample and college enrollment:

- When compared to the college's overall student body in fall 2011, Porterville survey respondents were more likely to be female and African-American and slightly less likely to be white; with nearly equal percentages of Latino students.

Comparison between college survey sample and the entire survey sample:

- Latino students were significantly overrepresented in the Porterville survey compared to their representation in the overall survey sample (66% Porterville vs. 31% overall). White and African-American students were underrepresented in the Porterville survey compared to their representation in the entire survey sample (21% Porterville vs. 32% overall for white students; 10% Porterville vs. 25% overall for African-American students).
- Female students were overrepresented (70% Porterville vs. 57% overall) and male students underrepresented (30% Porterville vs. 42% overall) among Porterville survey respondents compared to their representation in the overall survey sample.
- The Porterville survey sample had more students in the 26-31 years of age group than seen in the entire sample (25% Porterville vs. 18% overall) and slightly fewer students in the 21 years or younger age groups than the overall sample (29% Porterville vs. 34% overall).
- Porterville had a higher proportion of participants reporting they were first-generation college students than the entire sample (36% Porterville vs. 30% overall).
- Porterville respondents were more likely to be working than students in the entire sample (70% Porterville vs. 67% overall). The average number of hours Porterville students reported working was slightly lower than the average across the sample (27.9 hours Porterville vs. 28.7 hours overall).

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

- As Table 2 illustrates, Porterville participants included a higher representation of completers (37% Porterville vs. 32% overall) and a lower representation of current students and leavers than the entire survey sample (33% Porterville vs. 36% overall for current students; 30% Porterville vs. 32% overall for leavers).

**Table 2: Distribution of Students by Enrollment Status, Porterville vs. Entire Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Porterville Survey Sample</th>
<th>Entire Survey Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current students</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Performance**

- Porterville participants were much more likely to have entered a field of study than students in the entire survey sample (60% Porterville vs. 48% overall). 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 at Porterville in comparison to the overall sample (22.7 Porterville vs. 20 units overall).
- Porterville respondents were almost twice as likely to have completed at least one basic skills course as the entire survey sample (63% Porterville vs. 32% overall). The average units completed in basic skills was 9.8 for Porterville and 7.2 for all students in the sample.
• The average unit load per semester enrolled was lower among Porterville students (7.8 units) than for the entire sample (8.7 units).

• The average GPA was 3.06 for Porterville survey participants and 3.07 for all respondents.

Use of Student Services

• When comparing Porterville participants to students in the entire sample, Porterville respondents were more likely to have received student services in several cases:
  o 30% of Porterville respondents participated in EOPS vs. 14% overall
  o 48% of Porterville participants had developed an education plan vs. 36% overall
  o 51% of Porterville participants received counseling vs. 40% overall
  o 69% of Porterville students received need-based financial aid 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, Porterville survey participants’ responses were similar to the entire sample in terms of the ranking of the importance of each success factor.

• 38% of Porterville respondents (vs. 40% overall) identified being focused as the factor they felt contributed most to their success. The second highest rated success factor, nurtured, was selected by 32% of Porterville participants compared to 22% of the entire sample.

• In identifying what it was about being focused that promoted their achievement, 68% of the Porterville students who identified this factor as the top contributor to their success described it as being motivated and dedicated to completing their goal (vs. 60% overall).

• For those students who indicated that being nurtured was important to their success, Porterville students were more likely to mention family as a source of this nurturing (57% Porterville vs. 51% overall) followed by teachers (33% Porterville vs. 32% overall).
Exploration of the Individual Success Factors

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

Connected

- Porterville students were less likely than all survey respondents to **spend fewer than 5 hours per week on campus outside of class** (33% Porterville vs. 41% overall) and more likely to **spend 5-10 hours per week** (40% Porterville vs. 36% overall).

- In response to questions about what they do on campus outside of class, Porterville students were equally as likely as students in the overall sample to report **studying alone** (82% Porterville vs. 81% overall), however, Porterville students were more likely to indicate that they spent time **studying with friends** (64% Porterville vs. 57% overall).

- Porterville differs in two areas from the overall survey sample in that Porterville students were more likely to indicate they spent time outside of class participating in **clubs** (22% Porterville vs. 14% overall) or working in a **campus job** (16% Porterville vs. 9% overall).

- Three fourths of Porterville respondents (75% Porterville vs. 77% overall) were able to tell the interviewer about a **time when they felt connected to the college**. Less than one fifth of respondents could not recall such a time (18% Porterville vs. 19% overall).

- In response to a question about who or what made them feel connected, the largest group of students at Porterville and in the sample overall pointed to **teachers** (28% Porterville vs. 26% overall).

Directed

- The largest group of Porterville participants identified their primary educational goal as **earning an associate degree** (43%)—higher than that of the entire sample population (30%). Proportionally, Porterville had fewer students identifying **transfer** as their primary education goal (30% Porterville vs. 46% overall) and more intending to earn a **certificate** than in the entire sample (15% Porterville vs. 6% overall).

- 51% of Porterville participants (vs. 58% overall) indicated they decided on an educational goal **before becoming a community college student**.

- Porterville survey participants were more likely than students in the entire sample to know what **transfer requirements** they needed to complete (96% Porterville vs. 88% overall) and what **tests they needed to take** (81% Porterville vs. 78% overall) to complete their goal. However, they were slightly less informed about what **courses were required** (81% Porterville vs. 86% overall) or **what GPA they needed** (75% Porterville vs. 82% overall) to achieve their goal.
Engaged

- Porterville participants were **more** likely to identify several factors as **very important to their learning** when compared survey respondents overall:
  - The instructor is interested in what students think (88% Porterville vs. 78% overall)
  - They can relate to what they are studying (87% Porterville vs. 77% overall)
  - The instructor really cares about students (85% Porterville vs. 79% overall)
  - The instructor challenges them to do their best (84% Porterville vs. 79% overall)
  - The instructor provides regular feedback about students’ performance in class (75% Porterville vs. 66% overall)
  - They have opportunities to work with different kinds of students (63% Porterville vs. 57% overall)

Focused

- Porterville participants, like nearly all students responding to the survey, agreed that their desires to **pass the class** and to **get a good grade** (97% each) were very important motivators for going to class.

- At the same time, Porterville participants were **more** likely than students in the entire survey sample to rate several conditions as **very important to maintaining focus**, including:
  - Learning a lot (87% Porterville vs. 79% overall)
  - Wanting to show family they can succeed in college (85% Porterville vs. 75% overall)
  - The instructor expects them to attend (76% Porterville vs. 61% overall)

- When asked about **reasons they might skip class**, Porterville students’ top two responses mirrored those of the overall survey sample: needing to **take care of family** (55% Porterville vs. 51% overall) and having to work (33% Porterville vs. 30% overall). However, Porterville respondents were **more** likely than the entire survey sample to point to two additional factors as reasons for skipping class: **not being able to find childcare** (30% of Porterville vs. 20% overall) and **lack of transportation** (24% Porterville vs. 15% overall).
Nurtured

- Porterville participants were more likely than survey participants overall to indicate that it was very important that course instructors cared about them (67% Porterville vs. 55% overall). Another 25% of Porterville students and 39% of students in the entire sample believed it was somewhat important that instructors cared about them.

- In a follow-up question about what instructors can do to make students feel they care, Porterville participants were more likely than the entire sample to feel it was very important that instructors:
  - Make sure students understand the material (93% Porterville vs. 90% overall)
  - Direct students to other resources that might help them perform better in class (89% Porterville vs. 80% overall)
  - Provide students with opportunities to participate in class discussions (87% Porterville vs. 81% overall)

- Responding to a question about who at the college cared about them, respondents from both Porterville and the entire sample primarily pointed to teachers (70% Porterville vs. 69% overall). In a finding different than that seen among overall survey respondents, Porterville students were much more likely to indicate that it was a staff person who had shown caring toward the student (16% Porterville vs. 5% overall).

- Porterville students were more likely than students in the overall sample to report that the most common way people displayed their nurturing was to genuinely care about student as a whole person (50% Porterville vs. 38% overall).

- When asked if they could tell about a time when they felt that somebody at the college cared about them or helped in a way that made a difference, 73% of Porterville participants responded in the affirmative (vs. 77% overall). A total of 19% of survey respondents at Porterville could not recall such a time (vs. 18% overall).

Valued

- 69% of Porterville respondents indicated they felt they added value to their campus (vs. 68% overall).

- Porterville respondents were more likely to indicate that it was very important for them to feel they added value to their college compared to respondents in the entire sample (45% Porterville vs. 31% overall).

- Students who felt they had added value to their campus were then asked about the availability of a specific list of opportunities at Porterville to make such a contribution. The largest percentage of these Porterville students (87%) said there were opportunities to provide feedback and make suggestions to instructors about what to cover and do in class.
(vs. 84% overall). Large percentages of Porterville students also indicated there were opportunities to give feedback on what was happening at the college (85% Porterville vs. 81% overall), support and mentor fellow students (84% Porterville vs. 81% overall) and give back to the larger community through community service (81% Porterville vs. 74% overall).

- A follow-up question asked the same students—those who felt they had added value at Porterville—if they had actually engaged in any of the opportunities on the same list. The largest percentage (90% Porterville vs. 84% overall) indicated they had opportunities to provide feedback or suggestions to instructors on what to cover and do in class. This response was followed by 88% of Porterville students who said they had opportunities to share their family history and talk about their culture and traditions in ways that make them proud (vs. 73% 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 Porterville, students indicated that it was very important to them that they have opportunities to share their family history and talk about their culture and traditions in ways that make them proud (78%), support and mentor fellow students (75%) and provide feedback or suggestions to instructors on what to cover and do in class (73%).

**Decision to Return**

- Receiving good grades was identified by most Porterville participants as very important in shaping their decision to return to college each semester (94% Porterville vs. 86% overall). Porterville respondents also rated being able to register for the classes they need (91% Porterville vs. 88% overall) and having the money needed to pay for college (81% Porterville vs. 77% overall) as critical factors.

- The two reasons most Porterville students identified as shaping their decision to not attend school each semester related to finances were not having the money needed to pay for college (50% Porterville vs. 31% overall) and lack of financial aid (44% Porterville vs. 26% overall).

**Students’ Advice to Other Students**

- Students were asked what advice they would give their peers currently attending a community college and being focused was the one piece of advice that most students at Porterville and in the entire sample offered (57% Porterville vs. 59% overall).

- In explaining how to be focused, Porterville students were more likely to define it as being motivated and dedicated to completing your goal (61% Porterville vs. 52% overall). This response was followed by 35% of Porterville students recommending to their peers that they do the work required (vs. 40% 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 to their own success. The interviewer asked this question by using statements designed to capture the essence of each factor.

In response, Porterville students were more likely than survey respondents overall identified seeing a connection between their success in college and their life goals—the statement used to describe being focused—as very important to their success (90% Porterville vs. 79% overall). This response was followed by having access to college programs and services that can help students successfully navigate college—the statement used to describe directed (67% Porterville vs. 58% overall) and having the sense that fellow students, instructors and staff want them to succeed—the statement used to describe nurtured (64% Porterville vs. 56% overall).

Discussion Questions

The RP Group invites Porterville 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 Porterville 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 Porterville and in other community colleges around the state 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 Porterville and the other colleges in the survey 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 Porterville 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

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