


# 2018 Strengthening Student Success Conference Evaluation Executive Summary

From Wednesday October 3rd to Friday October 5th, 2018 the Strengthening Student Success (SSS) conference was held at the Hyatt Regency Orange County in southern California. Based on an online evaluation sent out on the last day, the conference was a significant success with a record-breaking registration count of 957. Overall, attendees gave high marks regarding conference operations, program, and accomodations.

**Attendees and Survey Response Rate**

Showing a large increase from the year prior, the 2018 SSSC hosted 928 participants. With 184 survey responses, the survey rate was a little less than 20%. Last year's response rate to this evaluation was also 20% and the year before was 22%.

**Learning Outcomes**

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they achieved the conference's multiple learning outcomes. More than 90% of respondents (the same percentage as last year's response in this area) agreed or strongly agreed that the conference:

- Strengthened their understanding of critical issues that shape student success
- Helped them gain practical examples of how colleges are helping improve student success and close equity gaps
- Increased their ability to be a leader at their institute
- Increased their ability to participate in collaborative leadership
- Helped them learn directly applicable information for their work
- Helped them feel part of a collegial team, broader community or network of educators

**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 and Guided Pathways
- The keynote speakers
- Student voices, especially if they were in the room
- Speakers who spoke to attendees' hearts
- The conference theme (Making our Colleges Student-Ready)
- Practical examples

**Least Impactful**

Conference attendees found the following to be least impactful to their experiences:

- Presenters could not be heard (e.g., during lunch, in crowded sessions with presenters conducting four breakout sessions within the room).
- Presenters had minimal to no data to support the impact of the work being presented.
- Presentation slides could not be seen.

**Improvements for Next Year's Conference**

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

- Repeat some sessions to minimize impact of full sessions
- Host and invite more students
- Ensure presenters have additional examples and data to support promising practices
- Provide increased variety of lunch selections
- Ensure there is more faculty focus on teaching and learning
- Allow team time and space
- Reserve more hotel rooms at the conference venue/hotel
- Hold registration spaces for all colleges until a certain date
- Create less vague conference titles and descriptions

**Additional Topics**

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

- Practical examples for teaching and learning
- Legislative requirements for major initiatives, including integrated topics and links, and implementation implications
- Equity as it relates to disproportionate impact and the necessary conversations needed around this topic
- Integrated planning, including guidance around related partnerships, breaking down silos, and cultural/organizational change

**College Teams in Attendance: What Were They Hoping to Take Away?**

Some 56% of respondents to this question indicated that their colleges sent teams to the conference with a specific purpose in mind. They wanted to improve their team and build more community. Some came specifically to improve their knowledge of, and ability to implement, AB 705 and Guided Pathways (two major Hot Topics). Others wanted to dive deeper into integrated planning and equity matters, and to increase the team's awareness of student success strategies used by other colleges.

**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.

*"My light bulb moment was in the session 'Foundations for Success' when the presenter showed the economic benefit of developing affective skills in the students."*

*"I loved how many presenters brought the idea of equity and social justice to student success. Very heartening."*

*"I heard so much about micro-aggressions. Yesterday I listened to Dr. Rios talking about being emotionally supportive of students and he used the term 'micro-affirmations'. Love it!"*

*"During the session on contract grading, one presenter discussed how the writing assessment we currently utilize is grounded in invisible norm of whiteness. This concept she explained is grounded in the Alfie Kohn idea that grading is contrary to learning. My light bulb moment was embracing the idea that maybe grading is not that important – maybe I could use my time better."*

*"In one of the sessions I attended, the speaker said 'the way we perceive students is the way we're going to treat students.' While I've known this, the light bulb came on because I connected a way to talk about PD to faculty that I think will help them understand why engaging equity issues like unconscious bias is SO important."*

*"Micro-interactions are a key. Every employee at a college contributes to student success. Regardless of individual roles, every interaction with a student is an opportunity to be a resource, provide emotional support, and connect students with the college. Every student engagement makes a difference."*

*"Ah-ha – we need to turn the same lenses, re emotional supports, that we're developing for our students, onto our faculty and staff, our institutional cultures. If we expect our staff to provide consistent emotional support to students, we need to provide consistent emotional support and positive work environments throughout our institutions."*