

Los Rios Community College District
Office of Institutional Research

EXCLUSIVELY ONLINE STUDENTS

November 2009

In the spring of 2009, the LRCCD Office of Institutional Research (IR) began its study of students who were enrolled in exclusively online courses at the four Los Rios colleges. These are students who enrolled in online courses only and did not take any traditional face-to-face courses at the same time. Students who are enrolled exclusively online have not been studied before and since their contacts with college employees may be minimal, it would be important to learn about their demographic background, how well they are doing in their online classes, and how satisfied they are with their online experiences. The findings from this study will help the colleges in further development of their online programs and in identifying any improvements needed in the curriculum as well as in student services for all online students.

This report consists of two sections. The first section provides a look at enrollment growth and demographic information of exclusively online students enrolled from Fall 2004 to Fall 2008 at each of the colleges and district-wide (unduplicated counts). This information is followed by a comparison of the course success rates of exclusively online students with all students enrolled in the district during the same time period to see whether any differences exist. The second section of the report summarizes the findings from a survey conducted during the summer of 2009 of exclusively online students who were enrolled during Fall 2008. The results will provide valuable information on how satisfied these online students are with their online experiences and to learn whether there are components of the online programs which could be improved to help future online students succeed.

Part A: Enrollment Growth and Demographic Information of Exclusively Online Students

Table 1 below summarizes the growth of students who were enrolled exclusively in online classes during the past five fall semesters at each college and district-wide (unduplicated counts).

Table 1: Number of Exclusively Online Students: Fall 2004 to Fall 2008

| | ARC | CRC | FLC | SCC | LRCCD |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Fall 2004 | 669 | 243 | 207 | 194 | 1,249 |
| Fall 2005 | 814 | 534 | 338 | 340 | 1,915 |
| Fall 2006 | 977 | 716 | 347 | 494 | 2,396 |
| Fall 2007 | 1,296 | 921 | 459 | 742 | 3,150 |
| Fall 2008 | 1,590 | 1,000 | 555 | 755 | 3,605 |
| % Change 2004 to 2008 | 137.7% | 311.5% | 168.1% | 289.2% | 188.6% |

The number of exclusively online students has more than doubled at all colleges over this time period, with the largest increases at CRC and SCC.

Table 2 below provides demographic information on exclusively online students who were enrolled during Fall 2008. Female students represented two-thirds of the students who were enrolled exclusively online during Fall 2008, at a higher rate than in the general student population (68.5% females among exclusively online students vs. 57.6% females among the general student population).

With respect to ethnicity, the profile somewhat resembles that of the general student population with the exception of a smaller representation of Latino students in the exclusively online group. The greatest difference however is in the age distribution. More than half of the students who were enrolled exclusively online were ages 30 or over while in the general student population such students represented only thirty-two percent.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Exclusively Online Students (in %): Fall 2008

| | ARC N=1,590 | CRC N=1,000 | FLC N=555 | SCC N=755 | LRCCD N=3,605 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 71.6 | 65.6 | 67.2 | 66.6 | 68.5 |
| Male | 27.6 | 33.3 | 30.6 | 32.3 | 30.5 |
| Unknown | 0.8 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| African American | 9.5 | 12.2 | 4.1 | 11.7 | 10.0 |
| Asian | 9.2 | 15.7 | 7.9 | 15.5 | 11.9 |
| Filipino | 3.5 | 6.2 | 2.0 | 4.2 | 4.0 |
| Latino | 9.2 | 9.1 | 7.0 | 15.9 | 10.3 |
| Native American | 1.4 | 1.0 | 2.7 | 0.8 | 1.3 |
| Pacific Islander | 1.5 | 2.1 | 1.6 | 1.1 | 1.6 |
| White | 55.9 | 43.9 | 66.1 | 40.7 | 51.1 |
| Other | 9.7 | 9.8 | 8.5 | 10.2 | 9.8 |
| Age Group | | | | | |
| Under 18 | 1.9 | 1.3 | 1.8 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| 18 - 20 | 7.0 | 6.8 | 11.2 | 7.4 | 7.4 |
| 21 - 24 | 20.3 | 17.8 | 15.9 | 22.0 | 18.8 |
| 25 - 29 | 19.0 | 16.7 | 11.9 | 22.5 | 17.9 |
| 30 - 39 | 25.5 | 26.9 | 25.6 | 25.0 | 25.9 |
| 40 and Over | 26.3 | 30.5 | 33.7 | 20.0 | 28.0 |
| First Generation | 39.3 | 37.9 | 40.5 | 37.1 | 39.1 |

As can be seen above, differences exist across the four colleges, with ARC having proportionally more female students enrolled than the other colleges, CRC and SCC having proportionally more Asians than the other colleges, and SCC showing proportionally more Latino students than the others. In terms of age groups enrolled at the colleges, FLC had a larger proportion of students who were ages 18 to 20 and those who were ages 40 and over but a smaller percentage of students between the ages of 25 through 29. More than one-third of the exclusively online students were the first generation in their families to attend college.

Below in Table 3 is information on income level and employment status of the Fall 2008 exclusively online students. Close to half of the students in this group district-wide were middle income or above and more than forty-seven percent were employed full time. About one-fourth of the students worked half time or more and nine percent said they were unemployed. In terms of income level, a higher percentage of the exclusively online students at SCC seemed to be below poverty compared with their peers at the other colleges. In addition, higher proportions of exclusively online students at FLC and SCC were unemployed.

Table 3: Income Level and Employment Status of Exclusively Online Students (in %): Fall 2008

| | ARC N=1,590 | CRC N=1,000 | FLC N=555 | SCC N=755 | LRCCD N=3,605 |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Income | | | | | |
| Below Poverty | 16.2 | 16.0 | 15.9 | 20.8 | 16.8 |
| Low Income | 18.9 | 17.9 | 15.0 | 17.1 | 17.9 |
| Middle and Above | 50.6 | 48.9 | 50.3 | 46.8 | 49.5 |
| Unknown | 14.3 | 17.2 | 18.9 | 15.4 | 15.7 |
| Employment | | | | | |
| Less than Halftime | 7.8 | 7.1 | 7.6 | 8.6 | 7.5 |
| Half Time or More | 26.7 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.8 | 25.7 |
| Full Time | 48.2 | 49.1 | 43.4 | 43.7 | 47.4 |
| Unemployed | 8.1 | 8.9 | 11.7 | 10.1 | 9.1 |
| Not Seeking | 9.2 | 9.9 | 12.1 | 11.8 | 10.3 |
| Unknown | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

Matriculation goals of exclusively online students are presented in Table 4 below. Over one-third of the students district-wide reported transfer to a four-year institution as their educational goal while close to one-fourth said they were seeking an Associate Degree (without transfer) or a vocational certificate. Almost fourteen percent were interested in acquiring or upgrading their job skills. Additionally, twelve percent had a variety of goals including exploring career interests, maintaining certificates or licenses, educational development, and improving basic skills. A further twelve percent of the students were undecided on their goal or did not indicate a goal. About four percent of students were enrolled specifically to meet requirements of their four-year institutions.

Table 4: Matriculation Goals of Exclusively Online Students (in %): Fall 2008

| | ARC N=1,590 | CRC N=1,000 | FLC N=555 | SCC N=755 | LRCCD N=3,605 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Matriculation Goal | | | | | |
| Transfer to 4-Year Institutions | 36.4 | 33.3 | 36.9 | 38.0 | 35.2 |
| AA/AS Degree/Certificate | 22.5 | 25.8 | 20.4 | 20.1 | 22.7 |
| Acquire/Upgrade Job Skills | 12.8 | 15.5 | 14.6 | 10.6 | 13.8 |
| 4-Yr Student Meet Requirement | 4.2 | 3.2 | 2.5 | 7.4 | 4.4 |
| Other Goals | 11.3 | 11.7 | 11.0 | 13.0 | 11.7 |
| Undecided/Unknown | 13.0 | 10.5 | 14.6 | 10.9 | 12.2 |

Across the four colleges, there were differences in matriculation goals being reported. SCC had higher proportions of exclusively online students who were interested in transfer and who were enrolled to meet four-year requirements but a smaller proportion interested in acquiring or upgrading their job skills. On the other hand, CRC had a slightly smaller proportion of students interested in transferring and a somewhat higher proportion interested in acquiring or upgrading their job skills. These variations in educational goals may however be a result of differences in the online course offering at the Los Rios colleges which in turn attract students with particular goals in their studies.

To find out how well these exclusively online students are doing in their online courses, information is provided below comparing course outcomes of exclusively online students with those of all students by college and district-wide. Table 5 shows the average units attempted and completed by the exclusively online students and by all students. The results indicate that the average units attempted and completed district-wide by the exclusively online students are about half of those of all students. At CRC, the average units attempted and completed among the exclusively online students are higher than those of enrollees at the other colleges, a pattern which corresponds with other district reports

showing that generally all CRC students tend to take higher unit loads than students at the other Los Rios colleges.

Table 5: Comparison of Average Units Attempted and Completed: Fall 2008

| | ARC | CRC | FLC | SCC | LRCCD |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Exclusively Online Students | | | | | |
| Average Units Attempted | 4.35 | 4.90 | 4.19 | 4.33 | 4.14 |
| Average Units Completed | 2.80 | 3.09 | 2.53 | 2.72 | 2.63 |
| All Students | | | | | |
| Average Units Attempted | 7.41 | 8.63 | 7.92 | 7.83 | 7.63 |
| Average Units Completed | 5.46 | 6.02 | 6.02 | 5.52 | 5.51 |

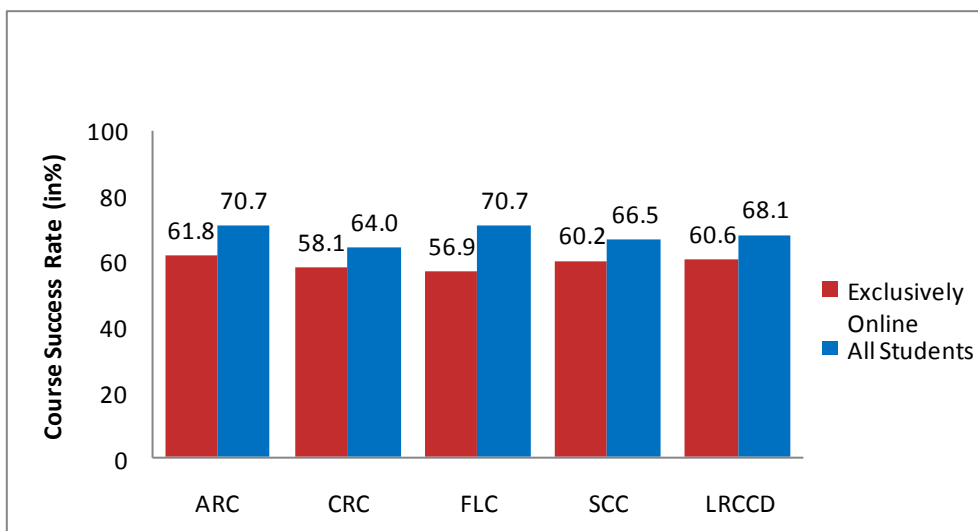
Turning to a comparison of course success rates, Table 6 below shows the proportion of student enrollments which earned a grade of “A,” “B,” “C,” or Credit for the exclusively online enrolled students and for all students. The results seem to indicate that students who were enrolled exclusively online during Fall 2008 had somewhat lower course success rates than the general student population. However, one must take into account, based on Table 5 above, that the exclusively online students had on the average attempted and completed fewer units than those of all students. Consequently, their course success rates would depend primarily on a fewer number of courses and a smaller range of course content than would be true of all students.

Table 6: Comparison of Course Success Rates (in %): Fall 2008

| | ARC | CRC | FLC | SCC | LRCCD |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Exclusively Online Students | 61.8 | 58.1 | 56.9 | 60.2 | 60.6 |
| All Students | 70.7 | 64.0 | 70.7 | 66.5 | 68.1 |

Chart 1 below provides a visual comparison between the two sets of course success rates displayed in Table 6. The largest difference in course success rates between exclusively online students and all students seems to be among students enrolled at FLC (a difference of 13.8 percent) while the smallest difference is at CRC (a difference of 5.9%).

Chart 1: Course Success of Exclusively Online Students and All Students: Fall 2008



Part B: Survey of Exclusively Online Students

In June 2009, students who were enrolled exclusively in online classes during Fall 2008 were invited to participate in a follow-up survey via electronic mail. The same questionnaire was used for students who had completed at least one of their online courses as well as students who had dropped all their online courses before the drop deadline or who withdrew. It was felt that including both groups of students will bring in a wider range of opinions and perceptions about the online courses as well as provide feedback as to why students drop or withdraw from online courses. Such information would be helpful in the planning of future online courses and services to better address the needs of students who are enrolled exclusively in online courses and who may have very little face-to-face contact with either faculty members, student services staff, or other students.

After adjusting for incorrect addresses, students who have moved without leaving new addresses, and those who did not wish to be contacted, below are the response rates for each group of students:

Table 7: Survey Response Rates of Course Completers and Those Who Dropped/Withdrew

| | # of Surveys Sent | # of Returns | Response Rate |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Completers | 2,859 | 602 | 21.1% |
| Dropped/Withdrew | 1,753 | 187 | 10.7% |

As can be expected, the response rate is lower for those students who dropped or withdrew from their online courses than of those who completed at least one of their online courses. The rest of this report will look at the demographic profile and survey results separately for each of these two groups of students.

Demographic Profile of Exclusively Online Course Completers

Table 8 below provides a demographic profile of the respondents who completed at least one of their online courses at a Los Rios college and a summary for the district.

Table 8: Demographic Profile of Online Course Completers (in %)

| | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 73.3 | 71.4 | 74.6 | 70.3 | 71.9 |
| Male | 25.8 | 27.6 | 24.6 | 28.7 | 27.2 |
| Unknown | 0.8 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 0.8 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| African American | 8.1 | 7.6 | 3.4 | 8.9 | 7.3 |
| Asian | 6.4 | 16.2 | 8.5 | 15.8 | 10.8 |
| Filipino | 3.0 | 5.9 | 3.4 | 6.9 | 4.3 |
| Latino | 6.4 | 5.4 | 4.2 | 9.9 | 6.6 |
| Native American | 2.1 | 0.0 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 1.0 |
| Pacific Islander | 0.4 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 3.0 | 1.3 |
| White | 65.7 | 51.4 | 71.2 | 45.5 | 59.8 |
| Other | 8.1 | 11.9 | 5.9 | 9.9 | 8.8 |
| Age Group | | | | | |
| Under 18 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 5.0 | 1.8 |
| 18 - 20 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 5.9 | 4.0 | 3.0 |
| 21 - 24 | 7.2 | 5.4 | 7.6 | 6.9 | 6.6 |
| 25 - 29 | 13.6 | 13.0 | 6.8 | 12.9 | 11.5 |
| 30 - 39 | 28.0 | 25.4 | 24.6 | 29.7 | 26.9 |
| 40 and Over | 46.6 | 51.9 | 53.4 | 41.6 | 50.2 |
| First Generation | 36.0 | 39.5 | 48.3 | 38.6 | 40.0 |

The profile shows that the respondents district-wide are predominantly female, close to 60 percent are white, and more than half are ages 40 and above. Moreover, forty percent of the respondents represent the first generation in their families to attend college. In comparison with the earlier demographic information of exclusively online students for Fall 2008, the survey respondents district-wide appear to reflect a slightly higher proportion of females, a higher proportion of white students, and a substantially larger representation of those who are ages 40 and over. This profile of the survey respondents is not unusual and is typical of survey respondents in general among the population at large. Furthermore, of the students participating in this survey, a higher proportion of first generation students responded at FLC than can be expected from the demographic profile of exclusively online students at FLC (48.3% among survey respondents versus 40.5% among the exclusively online students).

Turning to income level and employment status, Table 9 below shows that compared with the demographic profile of exclusively online students presented earlier, survey respondents district-wide are far more likely to be of middle income and above (59.6% among survey respondents versus 49.5% among exclusively online students) and employed full time (55.6% among survey respondents versus 47.4% among exclusively online students). Those who are below poverty are not as well represented among the survey respondents (at 10.0%) while they are much higher among the exclusively online student population at the Los Rios colleges (at 16.8%).

Table 9: Income Level and Employment Status of Online Course Completers (in %)

| | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Income Level | | | | | |
| Below Poverty | 11.0 | 7.6 | 11.0 | 10.9 | 10.0 |
| Low Income | 11.0 | 14.6 | 8.5 | 13.9 | 12.3 |
| Middle and Above | 62.3 | 56.2 | 60.2 | 58.4 | 59.6 |
| Unable to Determine | 15.7 | 21.6 | 20.3 | 16.8 | 18.1 |
| Employment Status | | | | | |
| Less than Half Time | 8.9 | 6.5 | 4.2 | 4.0 | 6.6 |
| Half Time or More | 17.8 | 20.5 | 18.6 | 24.8 | 19.1 |
| Full Time | 55.9 | 55.7 | 47.5 | 57.4 | 55.6 |
| Unemployed | 5.9 | 8.1 | 14.4 | 5.0 | 7.6 |
| Not Seeking | 11.4 | 9.2 | 15.3 | 8.9 | 11.0 |

At the college level, somewhat higher proportions of survey respondents at CRC and SCC were low income in contrast with ARC and FLC where higher proportions were of middle income and above. With respect to employment status, a higher percentage of survey respondents at FLC reported being unemployed and a lower percentage reported being employed full time compared with respondents at the other colleges.

In contrasting matriculation goals of survey respondents against the larger group of exclusively online students in the district, the survey respondents district-wide included a higher proportion seeking an Associate degree or certificate as well as of those interested in acquiring and upgrading their job skills. Across the four Los Rios colleges, there appears to be a higher proportion of survey respondents who wish to transfer to four year institutions at SCC and ARC and a higher proportion seeking degrees or certificates and job skills at CRC (see Table 10).

Table 10: Matriculation Goals of Online Course Completers (in %)

| | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Matriculation Goal | | | | | |
| Transfer to 4-Year Institutions | 32.2 | 21.1 | 29.6 | 39.6 | 29.4 |
| AA/AS Degree/Certificate | 28.3 | 32.9 | 21.1 | 20.9 | 26.9 |
| Acquire/Upgrade Job Skills | 13.6 | 20.6 | 17.8 | 11.8 | 16.6 |
| 4-Yr Student Meet Requirement | 1.7 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 1.0 | 2.2 |
| Other Goals | 12.3 | 13.0 | 12.6 | 15.9 | 13.0 |
| Undecided/Unknown | 11.9 | 9.7 | 16.1 | 10.9 | 12.0 |

Survey Findings from the Exclusively Online Course Completers

Turning to the survey findings, the first question asked of respondents is their primary reason for taking online courses at a Los Rios college. The question allows the respondents to mark more than one choice but the top three primary reasons selected district-wide are the following:

- Flexibility of online classes (75.2%)
- Time conflicts due to employment (54.0%)
- Time constraints due to family or home responsibilities (50.3%)

In addition, another twenty-one percent reported that they prefer learning on their own and a similar proportion mentioned that they live or work too far from campus. Sixteen percent indicated that they needed to meet course load and almost eleven percent selected transportation issues as the primary reason for enrolling in online courses. Across the four colleges, there were some differences in the primary reasons selected after the top three, however, at SCC close to one-fourth of the survey respondents indicated that the primary reason for online enrollment was to meet course load. Please see Table 11 below.

Table 11: Primary Reason of Online Course Completers for Taking Online Courses (in %)

| | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Flexibility of online classes | 78.8 | 76.8 | 73.7 | 72.3 | 75.2 |
| Time conflicts due to employment | 55.1 | 51.4 | 50.0 | 61.4 | 54.0 |
| Time constraints due to family or home responsibilities | 48.7 | 48.1 | 55.1 | 49.5 | 50.3 |
| I prefer learning on my own | 21.6 | 18.9 | 17.8 | 26.7 | 21.1 |
| I live/work too far from campus | 21.6 | 21.1 | 18.6 | 25.7 | 21.1 |
| To meet course load | 14.8 | 17.8 | 16.1 | 23.8 | 16.3 |
| Transportation issues | 11.9 | 9.2 | 7.6 | 12.9 | 10.6 |
| On campus course sections were all full | 4.2 | 4.3 | 5.1 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| Thought online course(s) would be easier | 1.7 | 5.4 | 3.4 | 4.0 | 3.5 |
| I have a disability, difficult to attend a class on campus | 1.7 | 1.6 | 4.2 | 2.0 | 2.2 |
| Other | 9.3 | 9.7 | 3.4 | 6.9 | 8.3 |

Under the “Other” responses, at least twenty-five students mentioned that they took an online course because it was only offered online during that semester while some indicated that the course was a work requirement. A handful explained that the online format allowed them to take the course while traveling between their work site and home.

Satisfaction with Online Course Experiences

More than half of the respondents (58.9%) reported themselves as being “very satisfied” with their online course experiences at a Los Rios college (see Table 12). Another thirty percent indicated that they were “satisfied” while two percent were “dissatisfied.” Those who were “very dissatisfied” represented less than one percent of the respondents.

Table 12: Overall Satisfaction of Online Course Completers with Online Experiences (in %)

| | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Satisfied | 60.9 | 55.4 | 61.0 | 57.0 | 58.9 |
| Satisfied | 28.9 | 32.6 | 27.1 | 31.0 | 29.5 |
| Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied | 3.0 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 6.0 | 4.0 |
| Dissatisfied | 2.1 | 2.2 | 1.7 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Very Dissatisfied | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 0.5 |
| Other | 4.7 | 5.4 | 5.1 | 4.0 | 5.0 |

In looking at individual colleges, about eighty-eight percent of the respondents reported themselves as being either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their online experiences. Except for respondents at FLC, about two percent at the other colleges said they were “dissatisfied” and less than one percent were “very dissatisfied.” No one at SCC reported being “very dissatisfied.” Comments reported under “Other” referred to the variability in the quality of online courses offered; some classes were excellent but a few were not. Generally though, students would like to see more online courses offered.

Experiences with Online Course Design Elements

Table 13 summarizes the percentage of respondents who “strongly agree” or “agree” with each of the statements about various aspects of online course design. As can be seen, the overwhelming majority district-wide strongly agreed or agreed that the course requirements were clearly stated, information about course assignments was given in a timely manner, and the reading materials helped them to learn the course content.

Table 13: % of Online Course Completers Who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Each Statement

| Course Design Elements | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Course requirements were clearly stated | 94.4 | 93.9 | 92.3 | 94.9 | 94.0 |
| Information about course assignments was given in a timely manner | 92.7 | 93.9 | 89.8 | 92.9 | 92.7 |
| Reading materials helped me to learn course content | 92.3 | 91.0 | 89.7 | 82.8 | 90.3 |
| The online class I took helped me to meet my educational goal | 89.2 | 88.8 | 86.4 | 90.9 | 88.9 |
| Course assignments were easy to understand | 88.0 | 85.5 | 88.0 | 89.9 | 88.2 |
| The online courses were well organized | 87.6 | 90.5 | 89.8 | 84.7 | 88.1 |
| Instructor was responsive to my questions | 85.8 | 90.1 | 86.3 | 86.9 | 87.9 |
| Learning activities contributed to my learning | 88.7 | 85.1 | 83.1 | 87.9 | 87.1 |
| Orientation for online classes was satisfactory | 88.8 | 82.3 | 83.1 | 90.9 | 86.0 |
| I learned about as much in my online classes as in similar face-to-face classes | 79.4 | 68.2 | 67.5 | 76.8 | 73.4 |
| Interacting with other online students was fairly easy | 79.0 | 62.2 | 52.1 | 71.7 | 67.5 |

In addition, close to eighty-nine percent district-wide said that the online classes helped them to meet their educational goal and more than eighty-five percent reported being satisfied with the clarity of course assignments, organization of the online courses, responsiveness of the instructor, learning activities which contributed to their learning, and with the orientation to online courses.

The last two statements, however, drew a wider range of responses, with over seventy percent agreeing that they learned about as much in their online classes as they did in similar face-to-face classes and close to sixty-eight percent agreeing that online interaction with other students was easy. College differences can be seen for these two statements as well, with higher proportions of survey respondents at ARC and SCC in agreement than survey respondents enrolled at CRC and FLC.

Other college differences included a higher proportion at CRC who indicated that the online courses were well organized and instructors were responsive. On the other hand, fewer survey respondents at CRC and FLC agreed that orientation was satisfactory and at FLC that the learning activities contributed to their learning. In addition, fewer survey respondents enrolled at SCC agreed that the reading materials helped them to learn the course content and that the online courses were well organized.

Satisfaction with Technology and Access

Since online courses rely on technology to deliver the content to the students, the survey questionnaire asks students how satisfied they are with the online learning systems (Blackboard or D2L) used at the Los Rios colleges, their features and functionality, and with Help Desk. Below in Table 14 is a summary of the responses from students who indicated they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with each of the features.

Table 14: % of Online Course Completers Who Are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”

| Technology and Access | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Blackboard/D2L: Overall ease of use | 89.5 | 87.7 | 85.5 | 84.8 | 87.3 |
| Blackboard/D2L: Available when I need it | 88.2 | 83.7 | 80.2 | 87.8 | 85.6 |
| Help Desk | 40.1 | 33.1 | 43.2 | 33.7 | 37.4 |
| Ease of taking quizzes and exams | 90.8 | 88.3 | 91.4 | 90.8 | 90.5 |
| Discussion Boards | 81.2 | 76.0 | 62.7 | 74.7 | 75.5 |
| Email Tools | 78.8 | 75.0 | 70.9 | 75.8 | 75.5 |

The majority of survey respondents district-wide appear to be satisfied with the ease of taking quizzes and exams and with the ease and availability of using Blackboard/D2L. In contrast, the discussion boards and email tools drew a wider range of responses, with proportionally fewer students at FLC who were satisfied than their peers at the other Los Rios colleges. The reason for the Help Desk receiving lower levels of satisfaction is that many of the survey respondents do not appear to have used the service. District-wide, close to forty-one percent of the survey respondents replied “Don’t Know/Not Applicable” to the question on Help Desk.

Comments made addressed the pros and cons of Blackboard and of D2L. Some students commented too on Moodle, which was used by some faculty members. There were also pleas to increase the access hours for Blackboard or D2L as some students could not get to their online courses until the early morning hours after finishing their work and family chores. In addition, some students found themselves locked out of the system in the middle of taking tests which caused considerable stress.

Feedback on Student Services

Since students enrolled exclusively online are learning in a virtual environment with little need to be on campus and most likely utilizing student services online, if at all, their feedback would be helpful in online program planning. Thus, the survey questionnaire also asks students to rate the importance of various student services and their level of satisfaction with such services. Table 15 below summarizes the proportion of survey respondents who rated each of the student services as either “Very important,” “Important,” or “Moderately important.”

Table 15: % of Online Course Completers Rating Student Services as “Very Important” to “Moderately Important”

| Student Services | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Registration Process | 94.1 | 89.8 | 94.1 | 88.8 | 92.6 |
| Admissions Process | 87.5 | 87.9 | 91.5 | 74.7 | 88.7 |
| Assessment Services | 65.0 | 60.3 | 58.4 | 57.9 | 61.0 |
| Counseling/Academic Advising | 60.1 | 55.3 | 62.6 | 53.2 | 57.6 |
| Library Services | 56.4 | 43.4 | 55.3 | 58.9 | 52.2 |
| Tutoring Support | 39.0 | 38.2 | 41.6 | 33.7 | 38.0 |
| Financial Aid | 40.9 | 36.5 | 31.6 | 37.5 | 36.9 |
| Transfer Services | 37.1 | 37.3 | 36.0 | 33.7 | 36.4 |

A large majority of the survey respondents in the district indicated that the registration and admissions services were important while more than half reported that assessment, counseling/academic advising, and library services were important. In addition, over a third considered tutoring support, financial aid, and transfer services as being important. More than eighty percent of the respondents district-wide however rated as “Not Applicable” services provided by programs such as CalWORKS, Disabled Student Program & Services (DSPS), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Extended Opportunity Program & Services (EOPS) so such results are not presented in this report.

College differences that can be pointed out are as follows: a higher proportion of survey respondents at ARC, compared with responses from the other colleges, rated Assessment Services as being important while a higher proportion of survey respondents at SCC rated Library Services as important. In addition, a higher percentage of respondents at FLC rated Counseling/Academic Advising as important but a lower percentage of respondents there rated Financial Aid as important. Lastly, survey respondents at SCC gave lower ratings of importance for most of the services listed with the exception of Library Services and Financial Aid Services.

The survey questionnaire further asks respondents to indicate how satisfied they are with the various services they may have used. Table 16 below summarizes these satisfaction ratings.

Table 16: % of Online Course Completers “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”

| Student Services | ARC N=236 | CRC N=185 | FLC N=118 | SCC N=101 | LRCCD N=602 |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Registration Process | 78.8 | 73.0 | 75.9 | 73.7 | 76.1 |
| Admissions Process | 73.1 | 70.4 | 72.2 | 71.3 | 72.0 |
| Assessment Services | 45.4 | 40.1 | 36.8 | 40.7 | 41.1 |
| Counseling/Academic Advising | 36.4 | 31.5 | 36.9 | 29.8 | 34.2 |
| Library Services | 39.7 | 29.5 | 39.6 | 43.8 | 36.4 |
| Tutoring Support | 19.3 | 15.8 | 19.1 | 12.8 | 16.5 |
| Financial Aid | 24.7 | 18.2 | 17.3 | 16.1 | 19.8 |
| Transfer Services | 13.1 | 15.7 | 19.3 | 15.1 | 14.9 |

More than seventy percent of the survey respondents were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the registration and admissions process. However, more than one-third to over two-thirds of the respondents district-wide responded “Not Applicable” to the other services listed suggesting that the services were not used even though they may be deemed important.

The table below presents the proportions district-wide who indicated being either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with a particular service area.

Table 17: % of LRCCD Online Course Completers “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”

| Student Services | LRCCD N=602 |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Counseling/Academic Advising | 9.2 |
| Registration Process | 8.6 |
| Financial Aid | 8.3 |
| Admissions Process | 7.3 |
| Assessment Services | 5.2 |
| Library Services | 4.4 |
| Tutoring Support | 3.8 |
| Transfer Services | 3.8 |

The comments received indicated difficulty with getting transcripts or the lack of tutors for their online course or of computer assistance when needed.

Demographic Profile of Students Who Withdrew From Their Online Courses

Table 18 shows the demographic profile of the exclusively online students who dropped or withdrew from all of their online courses during Fall 2008.

Table 18: Demographic Profile of Online Students Who Withdrew

| | ARC N=78 | CRC N=59 | FLC N=28 | SCC N=41 | LRCCD N=187 |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 76.9 | 69.5 | 57.1 | 73.2 | 70.6 |
| Male | 23.1 | 28.8 | 39.3 | 26.8 | 28.3 |
| Unknown | 0.0 | 1.7 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 1.1 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| African American | 10.3 | 6.8 | 3.6 | 19.5 | 9.6 |
| Asian | 10.3 | 18.6 | 14.3 | 24.4 | 15.0 |
| Filipino | 1.3 | 3.4 | 0.0 | 7.3 | 2.7 |
| Latino | 6.4 | 5.1 | 3.6 | 4.9 | 5.9 |
| Native American | 0.0 | 3.4 | 7.1 | 2.4 | 2.1 |
| Pacific Islander | 2.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.1 |
| White | 62.8 | 44.1 | 50.0 | 36.6 | 51.3 |
| Other | 6.4 | 18.6 | 21.4 | 4.9 | 12.3 |
| Age Group | | | | | |
| Under 18 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 18 - 20 | 5.1 | 1.7 | 7.1 | 2.4 | 3.2 |
| 21 - 24 | 12.8 | 11.9 | 10.7 | 19.5 | 12.8 |
| 25 - 29 | 15.4 | 18.6 | 10.7 | 17.1 | 16.0 |
| 30 - 39 | 24.4 | 20.3 | 14.3 | 31.7 | 24.1 |
| 40 and Over | 42.3 | 47.5 | 57.1 | 29.3 | 43.9 |
| First Generation | 35.9 | 39.0 | 35.7 | 39.0 | 39.0 |

In comparing this demographic profile with the one previously presented on students who had completed at least one of their online courses, two differences stand out. One difference is that proportionally more African American and Asian students withdrew and the second difference is that proportionally more students in the age groups of 21 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years withdrew compared with the data for the students who completed their online courses.

Income Level and Employment Status

Table 19 shows the income level and employment status of the online students who withdrew. This group of students district-wide is somewhat similar in income levels with the earlier group of course completers but they include a higher percentage of students who are employed full time.

Table 19: Income Level and Employment Status of Online Students Who Withdrew

| | ARC N=78 | CRC N=59 | FLC N=28 | SCC N=41 | LRCCD N=187 |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Income Level | | | | | |
| Below Poverty | 7.7 | 6.8 | 10.7 | 14.6 | 9.6 |
| Low Income | 17.9 | 11.9 | 10.7 | 14.6 | 13.9 |
| Middle and Above | 53.8 | 59.3 | 46.4 | 61.0 | 56.7 |
| Unable to Determine | 20.5 | 22.0 | 32.1 | 9.8 | 19.8 |
| Employment Status | | | | | |
| Less than Half Time | 3.8 | 3.4 | 0.0 | 4.9 | 3.2 |
| Half Time or More | 19.2 | 18.6 | 14.3 | 14.6 | 17.1 |
| Full Time | 64.1 | 62.7 | 53.6 | 68.3 | 64.2 |
| Unemployed | 6.4 | 6.8 | 10.7 | 4.9 | 9.1 |
| Not Seeking | 6.4 | 8.5 | 21.4 | 7.3 | 6.4 |

Matriculation Goals

In looking at the matriculation goals of the respondents in the district who withdrew, a higher proportion of these students than the course completers have goals to transfer to four-year institutions or to acquire/upgrade their job skills.

Table 20: Matriculation Goals of Online Students Who Withdrew

| | ARC N=78 | CRC N=59 | FLC N=28 | SCC N=41 | LRCCD N=187 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Matriculation Goal | | | | | |
| Transfer to 4-Year Institutions | 42.3 | 35.6 | 25.0 | 41.4 | 36.9 |
| AA Degree/Certificate | 20.5 | 18.7 | 25.0 | 14.6 | 19.8 |
| Acquire/Upgrade Job Skills | 18.0 | 23.7 | 17.9 | 22.0 | 20.3 |
| 4-Yr Student Meet Requirement | 1.3 | 1.7 | 3.6 | 4.9 | 2.7 |
| Other Goals | 9.0 | 11.9 | 21.4 | 12.2 | 12.3 |
| Undecided/Unknown | 9.0 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 4.9 | 8.0 |

Survey Findings from the Exclusively Online Students Who Withdrew

The survey findings from the exclusively online students who either dropped all their online courses before Census or withdrew during the semester will focus only on district-wide results as the low return rate by the students invited to participate in the survey and the small number of returned surveys for each college make it difficult to generalize at the college level. Furthermore, the primary reasons for gathering information from these students are to find out their reasons for dropping or withdrawing from their online courses and to obtain suggestions on what the colleges could have done to help them complete their online courses.

The primary reasons for taking online courses cited by the students who withdrew are the flexibility of online classes, time conflicts due to employment, and time constraints due to family or home responsibilities (see Table 21 below). These are the top three reasons mentioned by the students who completed their online courses also.

Table 21: Primary Reason of “Withdrew” Students for Taking Online Courses (in %)

| | LRCCD N=187 |
|--|----------------|
| Flexibility of online classes | 71.7 |
| Time conflicts due to employment | 58.3 |
| Time constraints due to family or home responsibilities | 46.0 |
| I prefer learning on my own | 20.3 |
| I live/work too far from campus | 18.7 |
| To meet course load | 17.1 |
| Transportation issues | 8.6 |
| On campus course sections were all full | 4.8 |
| Thought online course(s) would be easier | 4.8 |
| I have a disability, difficult to attend a class on campus | 1.6 |
| Other | 7.0 |

Satisfaction with Online Course Experiences

Since one would more likely expect students who withdrew from their classes to be dissatisfied with their course experiences, this appears to be true as Table 22 shows that close to nine percent of the “withdrew” students said they were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied,” compared with 2.5% of the group who had completed at least one online course. Unexpected, however, is that the majority (79.3%) of the students who withdrew reported that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their online course experiences. Even though the proportion is not as high as that of the students who had completed at least one of their online courses (i.e., 88.4% in Table 12), such a high level of satisfaction among the “withdrew” students is still remarkable.

Table 22: Overall Satisfaction of “Withdrew” Students with Online Experiences (in %)

| | LRCCD N=187 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Very Satisfied | 50.0 |
| Satisfied | 29.3 |
| Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied | 5.4 |
| Dissatisfied | 4.3 |
| Very Dissatisfied | 4.3 |
| Other | 6.5 |

Experiences with Online Course Design Elements

In looking at student responses to the various design elements of online courses, one is struck again by the generally positive feedback given by students who withdrew from their online courses (see Table 23). More than seventy-five percent strongly agreed or agreed with statements describing the clarity of course requirements, timeliness of information given about course assignments, helpfulness of the reading materials and learning activities, responsiveness of the instructor, and even that the course helped the students to meet their educational goals. Although the level of endorsements of these course design features is not as high as those from the students who had completed at least one of their online courses (i.e., more than 85% who strongly agreed or agreed with the same statements), the level is still considerably higher than what one would expect from students who withdrew from their online courses.

Table 23: % of “Withdraw” Students Who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree”

| Course Design Elements | LRCCD N=187 |
|---|------------------------|
| Course requirements were clearly stated | 84.9 |
| Information about course assignments was given in a timely manner | 84.5 |
| Reading materials helped me to learn course content | 78.8 |
| The online class I took helped me to meet my educational goal | 76.4 |
| Course assignments were easy to understand | 76.4 |
| The online courses were well organized | 78.9 |
| Instructor was responsive to my questions | 77.1 |
| Learning activities contributed to my learning | 77.2 |
| Orientation for online classes was satisfactory | 75.2 |
| I learned about as much in my online classes as in similar face-to-face classes | 62.5 |
| Interacting with other online students was fairly easy | 64.4 |

Turning to the proportion of students who indicated disagreement with the above statements, Table 24 provides a comparison of the proportion of students from the two groups of students (those who withdrew and those who completed their courses) who indicated that they either “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with each of the statements.

Table 24: % of Respondents Who “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” With Each Statement

| Course Design Elements | LRCCD "Withdraw" N=187 | LRCCD "Completers" N=602 |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Course requirements were clearly stated | 7.9 | 1.5 |
| Information about course assignments was given in a timely manner | 5.0 | 1.8 |
| Reading materials helped me to learn course content | 6.1 | 1.8 |
| The online class I took helped me to meet my educational goal | 7.3 | 2.0 |
| Course assignments were easy to understand | 7.8 | 3.5 |
| The online courses were well organized | 7.2 | 3.9 |
| Instructor was responsive to my questions | 6.7 | 3.4 |
| Learning activities contributed to my learning | 6.1 | 2.4 |
| Orientation for online classes was satisfactory | 6.6 | 3.2 |
| I learned about as much in my online classes as in similar face-to-face classes | 13.9 | 8.7 |
| Interacting with other online students was fairly easy | 7.2 | 6.4 |

Not surprisingly, the percentages of students who disagreed with each of the statements were higher for the students who withdrew than of those who had completed their online courses. For both groups, however, there were almost fourteen percent of the “withdrew” group and close to nine percent of the “completers” who did not feel that they learned as much from their online classes when compared with similar face-to-face classes and about six to seven percent disagreeing that interacting with other online students was easy.

Satisfaction with Technology and Access

Table 25 presents the proportion of students in the “withdrew” group who indicated that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the technology used in the online courses and with access to the technology. Again, the majority of the students appeared to be satisfied although not at the elevated level of the other group of students who had completed their online courses. The exception is for the Help Desk, but again more than forty percent of the students in this group (like the group of students who had completed their online courses) did not seem to have opinions about the Help Desk or marked this item as “Not Applicable.”

Table 25: % of “Withdrew” Students Who Are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”

| Technology and Access | LRCCD N=187 |
|--|------------------------|
| Blackboard/D2L: Overall ease of use | 80.3 |
| Blackboard/D2L: Available when I need it | 77.9 |
| Help Desk | 33.7 |
| Ease of taking quizzes and exams | 83.6 |
| Discussion Boards | 70.9 |
| Email Tools | 74.4 |

A review of the responses showed that less than five percent (from either group of students) indicated their dissatisfaction with the email tools and with access hours for Blackboard/D2L.

Feedback on Student Services

Table 26 summarizes the ratings of the “withdrew” students on the importance of various student services and their level of satisfaction with such services. The importance scale combined the percentages of those students who rated the service as “very important,” “important,” and “moderately important” while the satisfaction scale combined the percentages of those students who rated the service as “very satisfied” and “satisfied.”

More than ninety percent of the students in the “withdrew” group rated the registration and admissions process as important while more than three-fourth of these students indicated their satisfaction with these two services. Like the online course completers reported earlier, more than one-third of the students in the “withdrew” group felt that services in assessment, counseling, library, and financial aid were not applicable to them and more than half marked tutoring and transfer services as not applicable. Such a large proportion of “not applicable” responses helps to explain why the satisfaction ratings for these services are much lower as the responses only reflected a small number of students who actually used such services.

Table 26: % of “Withdrew” Students Rating Student Services

| Student Services | LRCCD (N=187) | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | % Rated Important | % Rated Satisfied |
| Registration Process | 93.4 | 84.6 |
| Admissions Process | 90.5 | 78.3 |
| Assessment Services | 60.1 | 43.2 |
| Counseling/Academic Advising | 60.2 | 31.2 |
| Library Services | 59.5 | 37.6 |
| Tutoring Support | 42.0 | 19.6 |
| Financial Aid | 39.5 | 20.2 |
| Transfer Services | 41.6 | 18.3 |

In examining the proportion of students who expressed dissatisfaction with student services, Table 27 below shows that 13.5% of the students who withdrew were dissatisfied with counseling/academic advising while 6.6% were dissatisfied with financial aid. Close to six percent of the students were dissatisfied with library services and another four to five percent were dissatisfied with the registration process and the admissions process.

Table 27: % of “Withdrew” Students “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”

| Student Services | LRCCD N=187 |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Counseling/Academic Advising | 13.5 |
| Registration Process | 5.1 |
| Financial Aid | 6.6 |
| Admissions Process | 4.0 |
| Assessment Services | 2.4 |
| Library Services | 5.9 |
| Tutoring Services | 2.4 |
| Transfer Services | 3.0 |

Reasons for Withdrawing from Online Classes

The most frequent reasons given for withdrawing from the online courses were:

- Time conflicts and constraints (employment-related scheduling conflicts, family responsibilities)
- Health condition or illness of the student or of a family member
- Difficulty learning in an online environment and in using the technology

Other reasons mentioned were not knowing in advance that exams were required to be taken on campus during students’ working hours, the cost and availability of textbooks, falling behind in the online class, dissatisfaction with the instructor or with how the course is organized, and having problems with home computers.

Educational Level

In reviewing the comments on student’s goals, it became apparent that some of the survey respondents had already received bachelor’s degrees or higher. Indeed, Table 28 shows that over one-fourth of the survey respondents had already received a bachelor’s degree or higher with another seven percent of the “withdrew” group and eleven percent of the “completers” holding associate degrees. The largest number of students in both group however only attained a high school diploma or the equivalent.

Table 28: Educational Level of LRCCD Survey Respondents

| | LRCCD "Withdrew" N=187 | LRCCD "Completers" N=602 |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| High School Diploma | 55.6 | 44.9 |
| Bachelor's Degree or higher | 26.2 | 27.9 |
| Associate Degree | 7.0 | 11.1 |
| GED/Certificate of Equiv. | 5.3 | 7.5 |
| Foreign Secondary School Diploma | 2.7 | 5.6 |
| Other (special admit, CA high school proficiency, not received high school diploma) | 3.2 | 3.0 |

Certainly, one would expect that students who already have bachelor’s degrees or higher would not be interested in many of the student services offered at the Los Rios colleges, especially transfer services

to four-year institutions and possibly counseling/academic advising or financial aid. Yet, it is still puzzling that so many survey respondents marked as “Not Applicable” many of the student services that could be helpful to them.

Suggestions for Program Improvement

The last open-ended question in the survey asks the students for comments that would help the Los Rios colleges improve their Distance Education programs. Below is a list of the most frequent suggestions offered by the survey respondents:

- Provide earlier and more frequent feedback throughout the duration of the online course so that students know how well they are doing in the class and can apply more effort or ask instructors for assistance sooner;
- Provide quality control of online courses to ensure that the instructors are familiar with the tools and features of the technology and that they follow standard format in posting materials and limiting file sizes so that students who have dial-up service can download the files;
- Provide a complete list of assignments and due dates and purchase requirements for class materials early in the semester so that busy students can better plan their schedules;
- Make sure not to overload the course with assignments that are “busy” work and regurgitation of information but instead provide more questions and commentary from instructors on what is important to know;
- Use a wide range of modalities such as videos, PowerPoint slides, taped lectures, and guided discussions by instructor;
- Make the online course totally online and not require students to come to campus for exams or for orientations;
- Clearly indicate the requirement of taking an orientation and exams on campus in the course description during registration so that students who cannot come to campus due to their work schedule or home responsibility will not sign up for the online course by mistake;
- Extend the availability of Blackboard/D2L until 2 AM in the morning during weekdays and all day/evenings during weekends as these are the best times for busy students who have work and family responsibilities to access the online courses;
- Provide more standardization of online support tools and platform district-wide so that students do not have to learn a different set of tools each time they take a new online course at a Los Rios college;
- Fix the testing feature of Blackboard/D2L so that students will not be inadvertently locked out during the middle of an exam and also allow students to go back and review their answers before submitting their work;
- Improve the selection of textbooks used to reflect current information and correct answers to online quizzes, as well as give students a wider range of options in purchasing textbooks;
- Allow students to receive/send communications via personal email accounts and reduce the frequency of password changes;
- Improve online registration so that students can choose to “undo” or go back to a previous screen if they change their mind and also streamline the online course dropping process;
- Increase assistance to new online students who may not be familiar with online technology;

In general though, survey respondents offered very positive comments about the online courses they took at the Los Rios colleges and remarked on how important the courses were for them. Below are some of the frequent comments made:

- Awesome instructors, very dedicated, and so responsive to students’ questions;
- Enjoyable online course experiences, everything went smoothly;
- Great learning experiences, learned so much;
- Add more online class sections as the online classes fill up very quickly;
- Offer a wider range of online classes from various disciplines, including general education courses, degree-oriented courses, courses to meet transfer requirements, and courses in fields

such as paralegal, computer information science, real estate, early childhood education, and accounting;

- Online courses are invaluable to busy workers and single parents with young children who need flexibility in course schedules and for those who live far away from college campuses;
- Without online courses, some students would not be able to continue their education or get a degree;
- Students have enthusiastically recommended Los Rios online classes to relatives and friends;
- Online classes are seen as offering good value at reasonable costs;
- Students are grateful and appreciative of the availability of online courses at the Los Rios colleges and the opportunity to provide feedback through the survey questionnaire;
- Students request that the Los Rios colleges continue to improve their online course offerings and to keep up the good work;

Summary

Students who enroll exclusively in online courses at the Los Rios colleges have increased during the past five years and will most likely continue to grow as more adults find online courses at community colleges to be affordable, flexible, and convenient. These students however represent a distinct subgroup among students enrolled at the Los Rios colleges. They tend to be older (age 30 years or above), are often employed either full time or half time, and maintain a busy life juggling work and family responsibilities. What they share in common though is a strong desire to continue their education and make progress toward their academic and occupational goals despite the heavy demands of work and family.

On the whole, the exclusively online students who responded to the survey have been very positive. Even the majority of students who had to drop or withdraw from their online courses report they are satisfied. The students who had to drop or withdraw do so primarily because of personal illness or illness of a family member. Many also found that despite the flexibility of online courses, they still could not resolve conflicts with work or home responsibilities. Only a minority of students who dropped or withdrew expressed dissatisfaction with their online experiences. The suggestions offered by the students involve fine-tuning of the online programs at the Los Rios colleges, such as increasing the frequency of feedback on student's performance, ensuring that instructors are trained in use of online technology, and standardizing online support tools across the district.

For this group of adult learners, the online courses offered by the Los Rios colleges have become vital to them in their academic pursuit. Not only are online courses their best option to continue with their education but in many cases, their *only* option. There were numerous comments expressing appreciation to the district for the availability of online courses and acknowledgment of how much they have learned from the many dedicated online instructors who have taught them. Without a doubt, a strong theme underlying the student responses is a plea for more online courses to be offered each semester and for a wider range of online courses to be made available at the Los Rios colleges.

This report was written by Flora Yen, Director, LRCCD Office of Institutional Research (IR) and is based on data gathered by the survey team of Betty Glycer-Culver, Research Analyst, and Minh La, IT Analyst for Institutional Research. The author gratefully acknowledges feedback and suggestions on the report from Betty Glycer-Culver and Susie Williams, Associate Vice Chancellor, Communications & Research.

Additional copies of this report, as well as the more comprehensive frequency distribution reports by district and by college, are available on the IR Web Site at: <http://irweb.losrios.edu>.

DE Survey09_Rpt_Exclusively_Online_Students

November 2009