

# Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable  
Integrated  
Cost Effective

## College Survey Summary:

Los Angeles Valley  
College

January 2013

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## Introduction

As a partner in the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges' (RP Group) Student Support (Re)defined study, Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC) 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 LAVC 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 LAVC 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 LAVC 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 LAVC 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 Los Angeles Valley Survey Participants

- LAVC 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.
- LAVC participants were more likely than students in the overall sample to have taken an assessment test.
- LAVC students were less likely than students in the overall sample to report knowing what courses and GPA they need to complete their goal.
- In identifying factors that made them feel like they were learning, LAVC students highlighted the importance of instructors caring about students and challenging them to do the best they can. It is also very important to them to see a connection between success in college and their life goals.
- LAVC students were less likely than students in the overall sample to identify nurturing as playing an important role in their success and to be able to identify a time when they felt that somebody at the college cared for them.
- LAVC students were more likely than students in the overall sample to point to a **particular class** they had taken as having made them feel connected to the college, whereas students in the overall sample were more likely to identify **teachers**.
- LAVC students were more likely than students in the overall survey sample to value opportunities to give back to the larger community and to share family history and talk about their culture and traditions.

## Survey Participants

A total of 62 Los Angeles Valley students completed the phone survey, representing 8% of the total survey sample. Table 1 below depicts the ethnic and gender distribution of LAVC survey participants, all LAVC students enrolled in fall 2011 and the entire sample of survey participants from all 12 colleges involved.

Table 1: Comparison Demographics: Los Angeles Valley College Survey Sample, Los Angeles Valley College Fall 2011 Enrollment and Entire Survey Sample

Demographics	LAVC Survey Sample		LAVC Fall 2011 Enrollment		Entire Survey Sample	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
<b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>						
African American	1	2%	1,066	6%	198	25%
Latino	32	52%	8,341	44%	245	31%
White	23	37%	6,041	32%	251	32%
Other	6	10%	3,627	19%	91	12%
Total	62	100%	19,075	100%	785	100%
<b><i>Gender</i></b>						
Female	29	47%	11,076	58%	445	57%
Male	33	53%	7,999	42%	328	42%
Unknown	0	0%	0	0%	12	2%
Total	62	100%	19,075	100%	785	100%

***Comparison between college survey sample and college enrollment:***

- African-American students were underrepresented in the LAVC survey compared to their representation in the college. Latino and white students were overrepresented in the college survey sample compared to their representation at the college.
- Female students were underrepresented and male students were overrepresented in the college survey sample compared to their representation in the college population.

***Comparison between college survey sample and entire survey sample:***

- Latino students, comprising 52% of LAVC participants, were significantly overrepresented compared to their representation in the entire survey sample (31%). LAVC had only one African-American survey participant (2% LAVC) while African Americans comprised 25% of the entire survey sample. The proportion of white students was higher among LAVC survey participants than among the entire survey sample (37% vs. 32%).

- The gender representation in the LAVC sample was 47% female and 53% male while the gender split among the entire survey sample was 57% female and 42% male.
- LAVC participants included more students under 20 years of age and more students 26 or older than the overall survey sample. Overall, 16% of LAVC participants were under 20 years of age (vs. 12% overall) and 52% of LAVC participants were 26 years of age or older (vs. 45% overall).
- LAVC participants were more likely to be first-generation college students than the entire sample (39% LAVC vs. 30% overall).
- LAVC respondents were more likely to be working than students in the entire sample (73% LAVC vs. 67% overall). The average number of hours LAVC students reported working was almost exactly the same as the average across the sample (28.6 hours LAVC vs. 28.7 hours overall).

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

- As Table 2 illustrates, LAVC survey participants included a smaller representation of completers (27% LAVC vs. 32% overall) and a higher representation of leavers (35% LAVC vs. 32% overall) than the entire survey sample. Current students were represented in almost the same proportion at LAVC as in the entire sample (37% LAVC vs. 36% overall).

Table 2: Distribution of Students by Enrollment Status, Los Angeles Valley College vs. Entire Sample

	LAVC Survey Sample		Entire Survey Sample	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Completers	17	27%	251	32%
Current students	23	37%	283	36%
Leavers	22	35%	251	32%
Total	62	100%	785	100%

## Academic Performance

- Like survey participants overall, 48% of LAVC respondents had entered a field of study. 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 slightly less for LAVC students than for all survey participants (19.3 units LAVC vs. 20.2 units overall).

- LAVC respondents were less likely than students in the overall sample to have completed at least one basic skills course (21% LAVC vs. 32% overall). The average units completed in basic skills was 6.5 at LAVC compared to 7.2 for all students in the sample.
- The average unit load per semester enrolled was lower among LAVC students (7.0 units) than for the entire sample (8.7 units).
- The average GPA was slightly higher for LAVC survey participants than it was for all survey respondents (3.09 LAVC vs. 3.07 overall).

## Use of Student Services

- When comparing LAVC participants to students in the entire survey sample, a higher percentage of LAVC respondents had taken an assessment test (81% vs. 71% overall).
- Compared to the overall survey sample, a higher percentage of LAVC students received need-based financial aid (63% LAVC vs. 61% overall).
- The representation of EOPS participants among LAVC respondents was smaller than in the overall sample (5% LAVC vs. 14% overall).
- When examining the data related to counseling and education plans, we found anomalies in the data. It should first be noted that the source of these data was the matriculation data that all colleges submit the Chancellor's Office MIS. Therefore, these data are only as reliable as what the college submits. For LAVC, according to the MIS data, none of the students who participated in the survey had received counseling services and only 2% had an education plan on record. We assume these data to be an inaccurate reflection of these services at the college and are a result of incomplete data submitted to the Chancellor's Office.

## Student Perspectives on What Makes Them Successful

In response to the question of what makes them a successful student, LAVC survey participants' responses were similar to the entire sample in terms of the top-ranked success factor, but there were differences related to how they perceived the role of the other factors in their success.

- 47% of LAVC respondents compared to 40% of the entire sample identified **being focused** as the factor they felt contributed most to their success as a student. More than half of LAVC students who named being focused as a top contributor to their success described it as **being motivated and dedicated to completing your goal** (54% LAVC vs. 60% overall).
- LAVC students were less likely than students in the overall sample to indicate that **being nurtured** was key to their success (10% LAVC vs. 22% overall). It should also be noted here that survey participants overall rated being nurtured as the second highest rated success factor, however among LAVC participants, nurturing was rated fourth in importance.
- LAVC students were more likely to cite being directed as important to their success

compared to all survey participants (14% LAVC vs. 11% overall).

## Exploration of the Individual Success Factors

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

### Connected

- Nearly half (47%) of LAVC respondents **spent less than 5 hours per week on campus outside of class** compared to 41% of all survey respondents.
- When asked what they do on campus outside of class, LAVC participants were less likely to indicate they spent time **studying with friends** (45% LAVC vs. 57% overall) or **hanging out with friends** (35% LAVC vs. 46% overall.)
- In response to a question about **who or what made them feel connected**, LAVC students were more likely than students in the overall sample to point to a **particular class** they had taken (23% LAVC vs. 13% overall). In contrast, survey respondents overall were more likely to identify **teachers** as what had made them feel connected to the college (14% LAVC vs. 26% overall).

### Directed

- LAVC participants were more likely to have identified their **primary educational goal as transfer** (56% LAVC vs. 46% overall). Consequently, LAVC had fewer students planning to earn an associate's degree than the entire sample (21% LAVC vs. 30% overall).
- 55% of LAVC survey participants indicated they had **decided on an education goal before becoming a community college student** compared to 58% of all survey respondents.
- LAVC survey participants were less likely than students in the overall sample to report knowing **what courses they need to take** (77% LAVC vs. 86% overall) or **what GPA they need** (71% LAVC vs. 82% overall) to complete their goal. Nearly equal percentages of LAVC respondents and those from the entire sample knew **what tests they needed to take** to complete their goal (77% LAVC vs. 78% overall).

### Engaged

- LAVC participants identified the following conditions as very important to their learning:
  - **The instructor really cared about students** (84% LAVC vs. 79% overall)
  - **The instructor challenged them to do the best they could** (82% LAVC vs. 79% overall)
  - **They could relate to what they were studying** (79% LAVC vs. 77% overall)

- **The instructor was interested in what students thought** (73% LAVC vs. 78% overall)

## Focused

- LAVC participants, like nearly all students responding to the survey, agreed that their desires to **pass the class** (95% LAVC vs. 96% overall) and to **get a good grade** (95% LAVC vs. 94% overall) **were very important motivators for going to class.**
- LAVC participants were more likely than the entire sample to identify **learning a lot** (81% LAVC vs. 79% overall) as a very important motivator for going to class.
- LAVC participants were less likely than the entire sample to say that they were motivated to go to class because they **did not want to disappoint anybody** (45% LAVC vs. 55% overall).
- When asked why they might skip a class, 47% of LAVC participants identified the need to **take care of family** (vs. 51% overall) and 27% cited **having to work** (vs. 30% overall) as the most important reasons.

## Nurtured

- Survey results indicate that instructors have significant role in making students feel nurtured. LAVC participants were less likely than those in the entire sample believed it was **very important that their instructors cared about them** (66% LAVC vs. 55% overall). Another 31% of LAVC respondents and 39% of the entire sample believed it was somewhat important.
- In a follow-up question about **what instructors can do to make students feel they care**, LAVC survey participants were less likely than students in the entire sample to feel it was very important that faculty **make sure they understand the material** (85% LAVC vs. 90% overall). Nearly equal percentages of LAVC respondents and participants overall believed teachers showed they cared when it was **important to them that students do well** (83% LAVC vs. 82% overall). Both LAVC respondents and the overall survey sample agreed that it was very important that instructors **direct students to other resources that might help them** perform better in class (both 80%).
- When asked if they could recall a time when somebody at the college showed that they cared for them, LAVC participants were less likely to have said yes (63% LAVC vs. 77% overall).
- In a follow-up question about **who showed they cared**, respondents from both LAVC and the entire sample were much more likely to point to **teachers** than to any other possible source of nurturing (77% LAVC vs. 69% overall). Counselors were the second most likely response for both LAVC and all students surveyed (11% LAVC vs. 12% overall).
- When asked how those who had cared about them had displayed this support, LAVC students were more likely to indicate that these people had provided them with academic assistance (33% LAVC vs. 22% overall). In contrast, students in the overall sample were

more likely to indicate that those who cared had done so by showing that they **genuinely cared about the student as a whole person** (23% LAVC vs. 38% overall).

## Valued

- 61% of LAVC respondents indicated they **felt they added value to their campus** (vs. 68% overall).
- 37% of LAVC respondents (vs. 31% overall) indicated it was **very important to their success that they were able to add value to the college**; 35% indicated it was somewhat important (vs. 42% overall).
- Students who felt they had added value to their campus were then asked about the availability of a specific list of opportunities at LAVC to make such a contribution. The largest percentage of LAVC students said there were opportunities to **support and mentor fellow students** (79% LAVC vs. 81% overall). LAVC students also indicated there were opportunities to give **feedback or suggestions to instructors** on what to cover and do in class (77% LAVC vs. 84% overall) and to give **feedback on what is happening at the college** (73% LAVC vs. 81% overall).
- A follow-up question asked these same students—those who felt they had added value to the LAVC campus—if they had actually engaged in any of the opportunities on the same list. The largest percentage of both LAVC respondents and survey respondents overall indicated that they had provided **feedback or suggestions to instructors** on what to cover and do in class (85% LAVC vs. 84% overall). This response was followed by 64% of LAVC students who had given **feedback on what is happening at the college** (vs. 63% overall) and 63% of LAVC students who **shared their family history and talked about their culture and traditions** in ways that made them feel 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 LAVC, students indicated that it was very important to them that they had opportunities to **share their family history and talk about their culture and traditions** in ways that make them feel proud (87%), **support and mentor fellow students** (79%) and provide **feedback or suggestions to instructors** on what to cover and do in class (69%)

## Decision to Return

- **Being able to register for needed classes** was identified by most LAVC participants as very important in shaping their decision to return to college each semester (78% LAVC vs. 88% overall). **Having the money needed to pay for college** (75% LAVC vs. 77% overall) and **receiving good grades** (75% LAVC vs. 86% overall).
- LAVC students were less likely to identify **getting the academic support they need** to do well in classes as a critical factor influencing their decision to return each semester (65%

LAVC vs. 75% overall). **Having financial aid** was another top factor impacting persistence for LAVC and all survey respondents (60% LAVC vs. 63% overall).

- The three reasons most leavers from LAVC identified as shaping their decision not to return were they: (1) **could not register for the classes that they needed** (41% LAVC vs. 21% overall), (2) **transferred to a four-year institution** (36% LAVC vs. 29% overall) and (3) **they got a job** (27% LAVC vs. 30% 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 LAVC and in the entire sample offered (66% LAVC vs. 59% overall).

- In explaining how to be focused, 61% of LAVC students described it as **being motivated and dedicated to completing your goal** (vs. 52% overall). The second most frequent piece of advice from LAVC students was to **do the work that is required** (36% LAVC 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, most LAVC participants (81%) and respondents overall (79%) identified **seeing a connection between their success in college and their life goals**—the statement used to describe focused—as **very important to their success**. This response was followed by having access to college programs and services that can help students successfully navigate their way through the college—the statement used to describe directed (52% LAVC vs. 58% overall).

## Discussion Questions

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

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## Who supports this study?

The RP Group's work on cost effective student support for underrepresented minority groups is supported by a three-year grant from The Kresge Foundation (June 2011 – June 2014)

