The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) is an annual nation-wide survey conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) in Austin, Texas to explore institutional practices and new students’ experiences during their first weeks of college. The data collected help colleges better understand students’ early college experiences, assist in identifying early obstacles to student progress, and improve college practices in ways that can increase student success in the first year of college.

The survey is comprised of six Benchmarks of Effective Practice with Entering Students. These benchmarks are sets of conceptually related survey items grouped together to serve as yardsticks to measure performance on various domains of early student engagement. The six benchmarks are:

1. Early Connections
2. High Expectations and Aspirations
3. Clear Academic Plan and Pathway
4. Effective Track to College Readiness
5. Engaged Learning
6. Academic and Social Support Network

This Research Brief presents a comparison of NOVA’s results on the SENSE 2012, which was administered in the Fall 2012 semester, with other institutional groups from across the nation. These peer institution groups include equivalent public colleges, extra-large colleges (15,000 or more students), colleges in suburban settings, SACS region institutions, as well those from the Achieving the Dream (ATD) Consortium. All benchmark scores are on a standardized scale where the average of the 2012 cohort of participating colleges (referred to as the National Average) is set equal to 50.

Table 1 (next page) displays the six benchmarks scores for NOVA and the peer institution groups. Results show that NOVA students responded more positively to items related to Engaged Learning (52) in comparison to the other groups. However, this benchmark proved to be the exception - NOVA’s scores on all other benchmarks were lower than those of the comparison group institutions. Among the peer groups, institutions within the SACS Region
received the highest scores on High Expectations and Aspirations (52), and Clear Academic Plan and Pathway (51). ATD Consortium colleges scored highest on Effective Track to College Readiness (51). Public Colleges, followed closely by ATD Consortium colleges, scored highest on Academic and Social Support Network (both 50).

Table 1. SENSE Benchmark Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Fall 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>NOVA</th>
<th>Public Colleges</th>
<th>Extra-Large Colleges</th>
<th>Suburban Colleges</th>
<th>SACS Region Colleges</th>
<th>ATD</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Connections</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Expectations and Aspirations</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Academic Plan and Pathway</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Track to College Readiness</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Learning</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Social Support Network</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 1 through 6 present scores for NOVA and the peer institution groups on each of the six SENSE 2012 benchmarks. As can be seen in Figure 1, NOVA had the lowest score on the Early Connections benchmark (42) in comparison to the peer institution groups.

Figure 1. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Early Connections Benchmark
Figure 2 presents scores on the High Expectations and Aspirations benchmark. SACS Region Colleges had the highest score (52), followed by Public Colleges (50). NOVA had a score of 40 on this benchmark.

Figure 2. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: High Expectations and Aspirations

![Bar chart showing scores for various institutions.](image)

Figure 3 presents the Clear Academic Plan and Pathway benchmark scores. SACS Region Colleges and Public Colleges were again scored highest, both at 51. NOVA had a score of 44 on this benchmark.

Figure 3. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Clear Academic Plan and Pathway

![Bar chart showing scores for various institutions.](image)
As can be seen in Figure 4, ATD Consortium colleges scored highest on the Effective Track to College Readiness benchmark (51), followed next by SACS Region Colleges (51). NOVA had the lowest score on this benchmark (49), but was not far behind the peer institution groups.

Figure 4. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Effective Track to College Readiness

Figure 5 presents scores for the Engaged Learning Benchmark, on which NOVA scored the highest among the peer institution groups and was followed closely by ATD Consortium colleges (52).

Figure 5. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Engaged Learning
Finally, Figure 6 presents benchmark scores for Social Support Network. The highest score among NOVA and the peer institution groups was for Public Colleges and ATD Consortium colleges (50). NOVA was not far behind the peer institution groups, with a score of 47.

Figure 6. SENSE 2012 Scores at NOVA and Peer Institution Groups: Social Support Network

Summary of Results

- In 2012, NOVA’s scores on five of the six SENSE benchmarks were below those of the peer institution groups. Engaged Learning is the only benchmark for which NOVA’s score was above those of the peer institution groups.

- Public Colleges had scores among the top three on all six SENSE benchmarks in comparison to the peer institution groups.

- SACS Region Colleges and ATD Consortium colleges had scores among the top four on the six benchmarks in comparison to the peer institution groups.

- Extra-Large Colleges and Suburban Colleges had scores among the bottom three on the six benchmarks in comparison to the peer institution groups.