

# Survey of Entering Student Engagement

Montgomery College

**2018 Key Findings**

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## Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice With Entering Students

### SENSE Benchmarks

#### ★ Early Connections

When students describe their early college experiences, they typically reflect on occasions when they felt discouraged or thought about dropping out. Their reasons for persisting almost always include one common element: a strong, early connection to someone at the college.

#### ★ High Expectations and Aspirations

Nearly all students arrive at their community colleges intending to succeed and believing that they have the motivation to do so. When entering students perceive clear, high expectations from college staff and faculty, they are more likely to understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement. Students then often rise to meet expectations, making it more likely that they will attain their goals. Often, students' aspirations also climb, and they seek more advanced credentials than they originally envisioned.

#### ★ Clear Academic Plan and Pathway

When a student, with knowledgeable assistance, creates a road map—one that shows where he or she is headed, what academic path to follow, and how long it will take to reach the end goal—that student has a critical tool for staying on track. Students are more likely to persist if they not only are advised about what courses to take, but also are helped to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.

*Continued on Page 3*

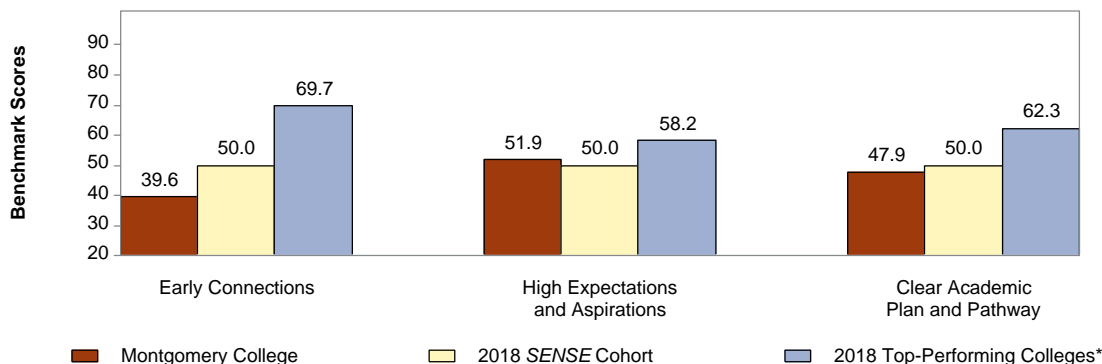
The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of entering student engagement. The six benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experiences and educational outcomes; thus, they provide colleges with a useful starting point for looking at institutional results.

Ideally, colleges engage entering students in all six benchmark areas, beginning with a student's first contact with the institution and continuing through completion of the first three weeks of the initial academic term. This time is decisive because current research indicates that helping students succeed through the first academic term can dramatically improve subsequent success, including completing courses and earning certificates and degrees.

While many student behaviors and institutional practices measured by the benchmarks can and should continue throughout students' college careers, the *SENSE* items and the resulting data focus on this critical entering student timeframe.

*SENSE* benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing the benchmarks. Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 25 across all entering student respondents.

Figure 1a



\*Top-Performing Colleges are those that scored in the top 10 percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Notes: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents. For further information about how benchmarks are computed, please visit [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

## Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice With Entering Students

The standardized benchmark scores allow colleges to gauge and monitor their performance in areas of entering student engagement. In addition, participating colleges have the opportunity to make appropriate and useful comparisons between their performance and that of groups of other colleges.

Performing as well as the national average or a peer-group average may be a reasonable initial aspiration, but it is important to recognize that these averages are sometimes unacceptably low. Aspiring to match and then exceed high-performance targets is the stronger strategy.

Community colleges can differ dramatically on such factors as size, location, resources, enrollment patterns, and student characteristics. It is important to take these differences into account when interpreting benchmark scores—especially when making institutional comparisons. The Center for Community College Student Engagement has adopted the policy “Responsible Uses of CCSSE and SENSE Data,” available at [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

SENSE uses a three-year cohort of participating colleges in all core survey analyses. The current cohort is referred to as the 2018 SENSE Cohort (2016-2018) throughout all reports.

### SENSE Benchmarks

*Continued from Page 2*

#### ★ Effective Track to College Readiness

Nationally, more than six in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. Thus, significant improvements in student success will hinge upon effective assessment, placement of students into appropriate courses, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.

#### ★ Engaged Learning

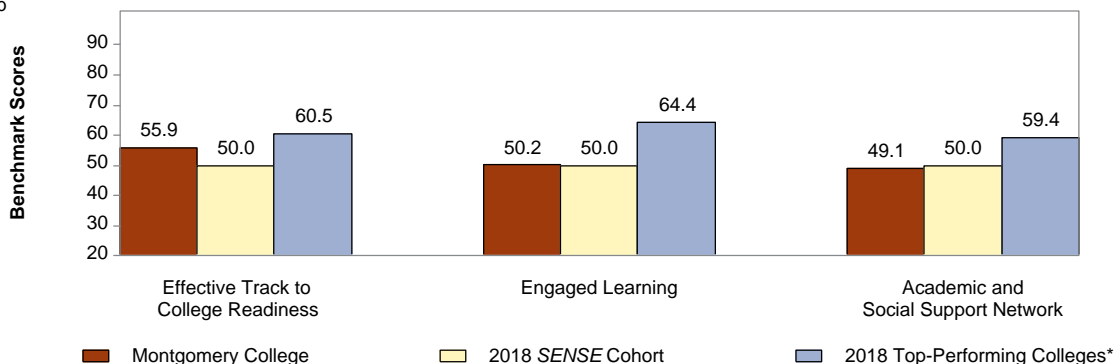
Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Because most community college students attend college part-time, and most also must find ways to balance their studies with work and family responsibilities, the most effective learning experiences will be those the college intentionally designs.

#### ★ Academic and Social Support Network

Students benefit from having a personal network that enables them to obtain information about college services, along with the academic and social support critical to student success. Because entering students often don't know what they don't know, colleges must purposefully create those networks.

For further information about SENSE benchmarks, please visit [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

Figure 1b



\*Top-Performing Colleges are those that scored in the top 10 percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Notes: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents. For further information about how benchmarks are computed, please visit [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

## Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding *SENSE* data. One way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features the five items across all benchmarks (excluding those for which means are not calculated) on which the college scored most favorably and the five items on which the college scored least favorably relative to the 2018 *SENSE* Cohort.

The items highlighted on pages 4 and 5 reflect the largest differences in mean scores between the institution and the 2018 *SENSE* Cohort. While examining these data, keep in mind that the selected items may not be those that are most closely aligned with the college's goals; thus, it is important to review all institutional reports on the *SENSE* online reporting system at [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

Figure 2 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed most favorably relative to the 2018 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 89.0% of Montgomery College students, compared with 84.3% of other students in the cohort, responded *strongly agree* or *agree* on Item 18r. It is important to note that some colleges' highest scores might be lower than the cohort mean.

Figure 2

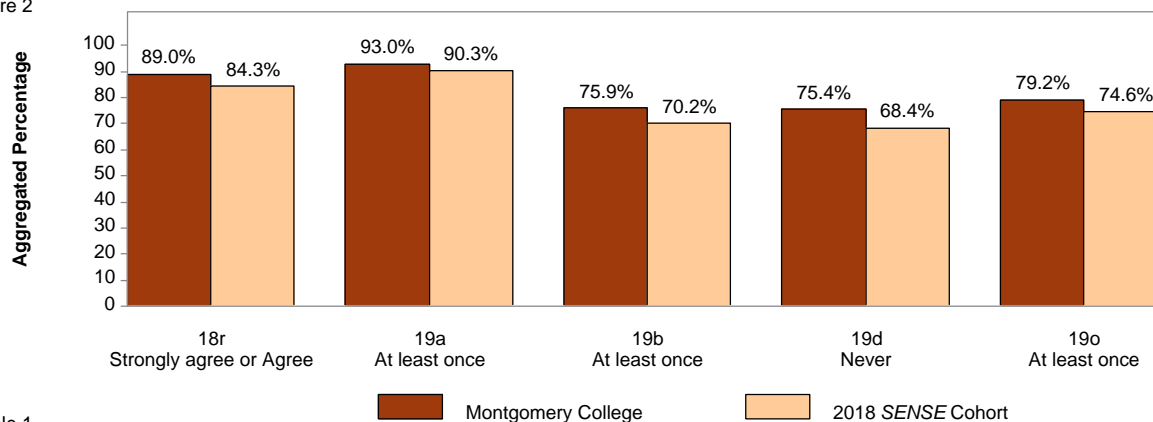


Table 1

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Academic and Social Support Network	18r	At least one instructor learned my name
Engaged Learning	19a	Frequency: Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
Engaged Learning	19b	Frequency: Prepared at least two drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
High Expectations and Aspirations	19d	Frequency: Not turn in an assignment
Engaged Learning	19o	Frequency: Received prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance

**Notes:**

For Item(s) 18, *strongly agree* and *agree* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 19, except 19c, 19d, 19f, and 19s, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 19c, d, f, and s, responses have been reversed. The frequency displayed is the percentage of students who report *never* doing the activities described in the items.

## Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Figure 3 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed least favorably relative to the 2018 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 27.3% of Montgomery College students, compared with 32.9% of other students in the cohort, responded *strongly agree* or *agree* on Item 18h. It is important to note that some colleges' lowest scores might be higher than the cohort mean.

Figure 3

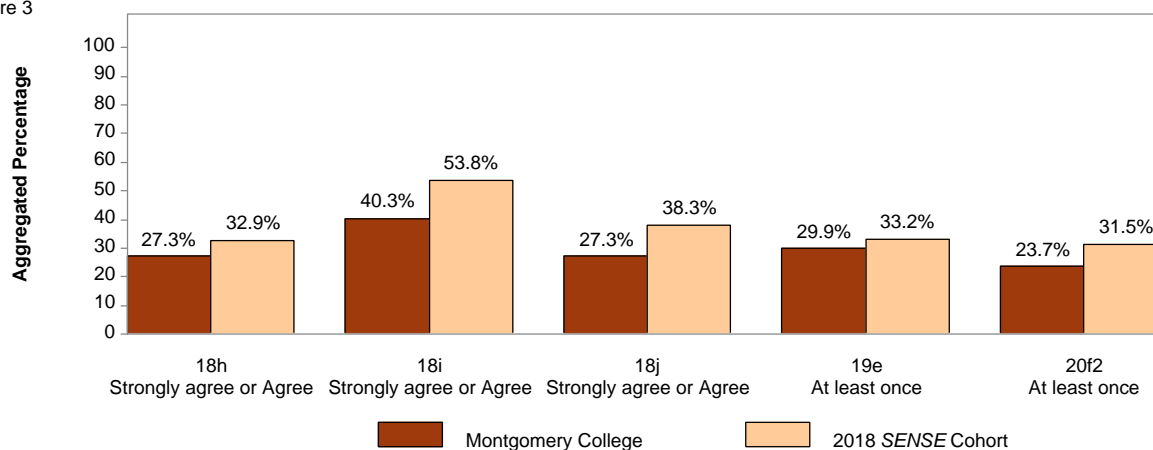


Table 2

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	18h	A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take
Early Connections	18i	The college provided me with adequate information about financial assistance
Early Connections	18j	A college staff member helped me determine whether I qualified for financial assistance
Engaged Learning	19e	Frequency: Participated in supplemental instruction
Engaged Learning	20f2	Frequency: Used writing, math, or other skill lab

Notes:

For Item(s) 18, *strongly agree* and *agree* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 19, except 19c, 19d, 19f, and 19s, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 20, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

## Guided Pathways

The Center adds special-focus items to *SENSE* each year to augment the core survey, helping participating colleges and the field at large to further explore fundamental areas of student engagement. The 2018 special-focus items elicit new information around the topic of guided pathways. Frequency results from five special-focus items for your college and the 2018 *SENSE* Guided Pathways item-set respondents are displayed across pages 6 and 7.

Figure 4: Has a staff member at this college talked with you about the types of jobs your program, major, or pathway of study might lead to?

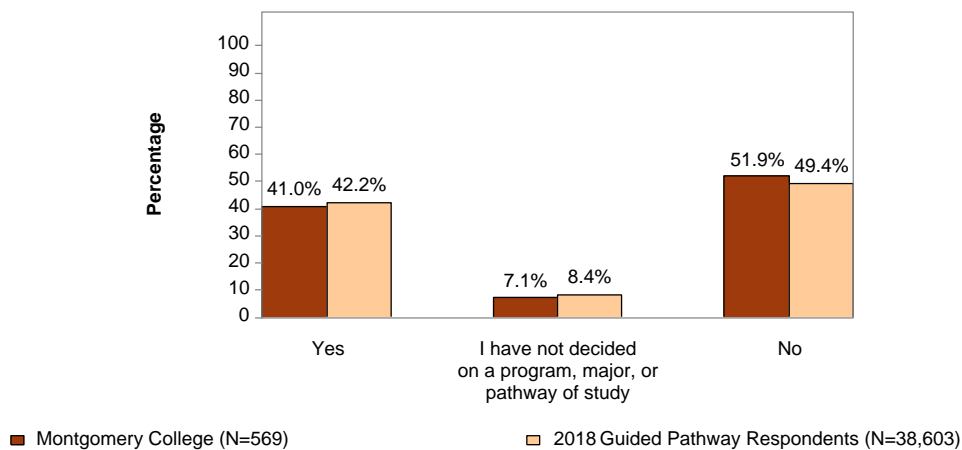


Figure 5: Has a staff member at this college talked with you about how long it will take to complete your certificate or degree?

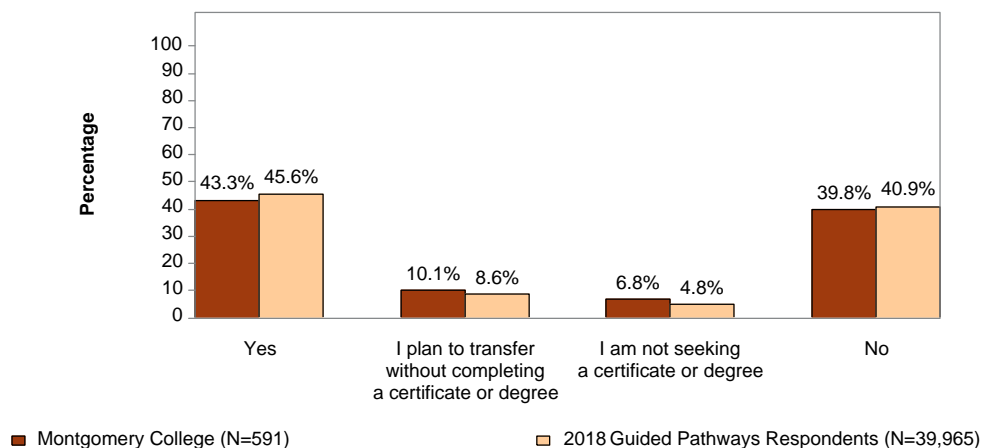


Figure 6: Has a staff member at this college talked with you about the total cost to complete your certificate or degree?

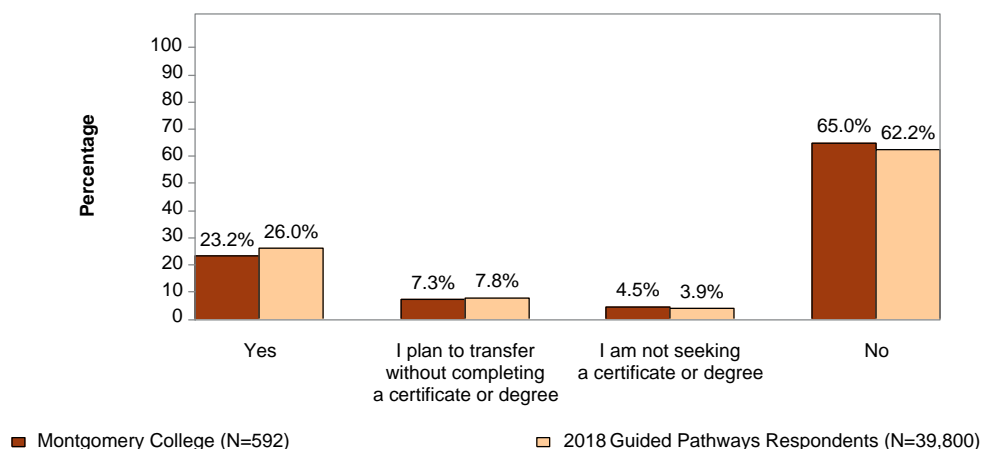


Figure 7: Has a staff member at this college talked with you about which credits will transfer toward your intended program or major at the four-year institution of your choice?

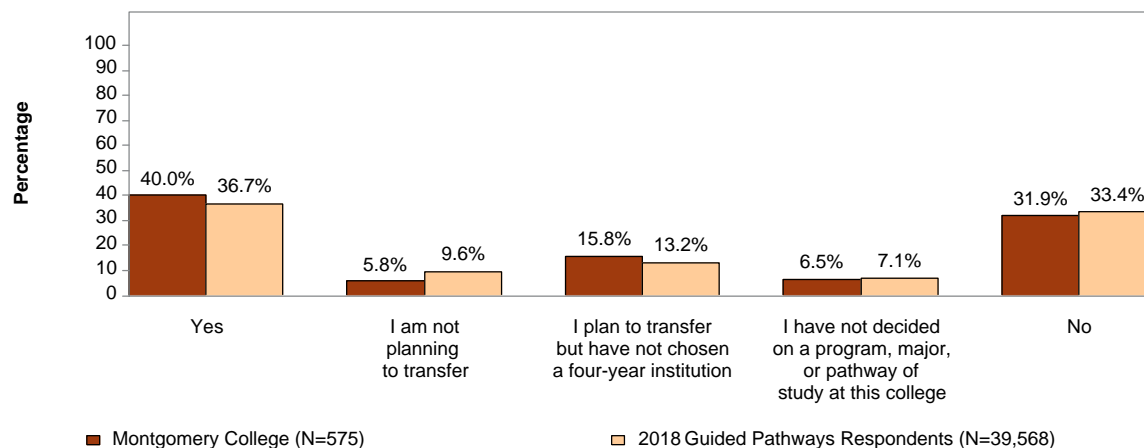
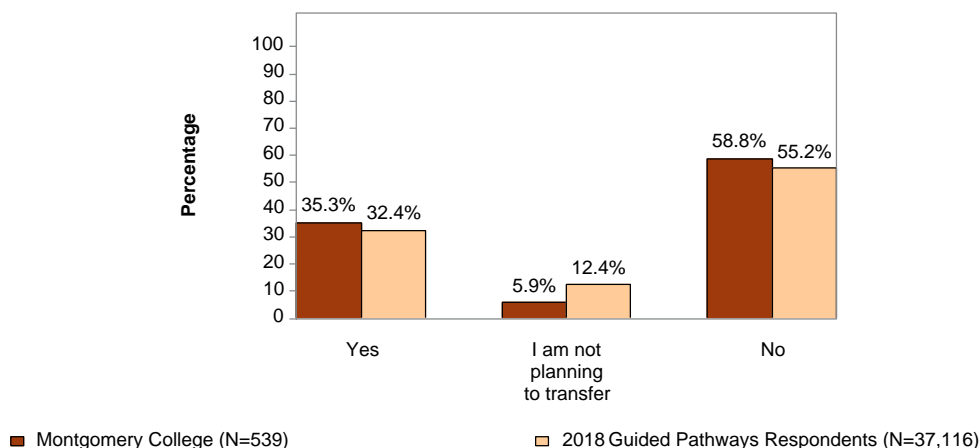


Figure 8: Has a staff member at this college talked with you about the overall process for transferring to a four-year institution (application, financial aid)?



## Academic Goal Setting and Planning

Most community colleges have academic and goal setting policies that are intended to help all students *start right*. Yet, often these policies, even when they are ostensibly mandatory, might not be implemented in ways that ensure success for all students. The disaggregated data below illustrate the student experience with academic goal setting and planning at your college. Nationally, more than 60% of community college students are enrolled less than full-time. Thus, while looking at these data, it is important to consider the institution's enrollment patterns. Are all of your entering students starting right?

Figure 9

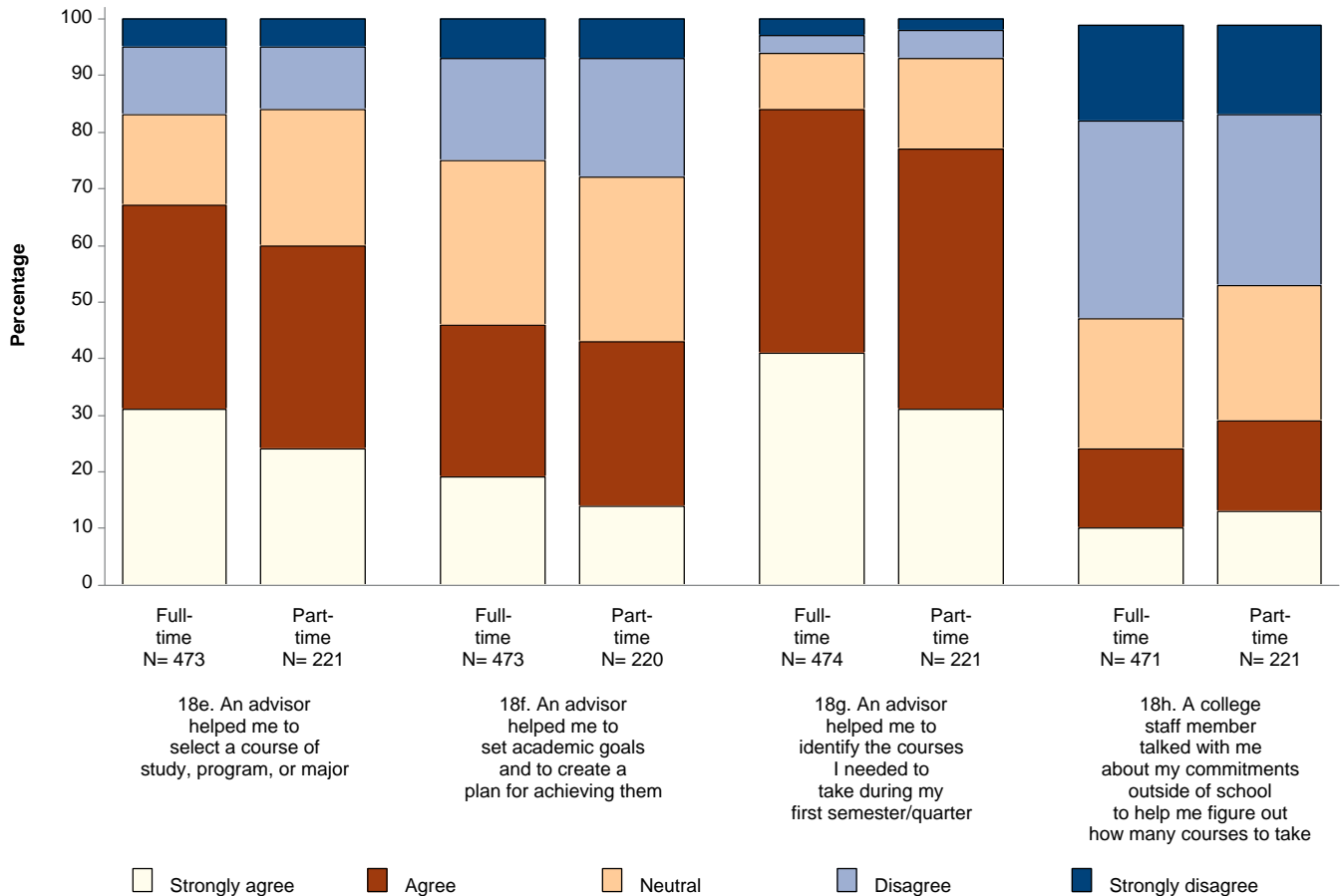


Table 3

	18e		18f		18g		18h	
Response	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Strongly agree	30.7%	23.5%	19.2%	14.1%	40.5%	30.8%	10.4%	13.1%
Agree	35.9%	36.2%	27.1%	28.6%	43.0%	46.2%	14.0%	16.3%
Neutral	16.5%	24.4%	28.5%	29.1%	9.9%	16.3%	23.4%	24.4%
Disagree	11.6%	10.9%	18.0%	21.4%	3.2%	4.5%	35.0%	29.9%
Strongly disagree	5.3%	5.0%	7.2%	6.8%	3.4%	2.3%	17.2%	16.3%