



Executive Summary

*Priorities Survey for
Online Learners (PSOL)*

November 2020

Rowan College at Burlington County
2020 Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)
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Rowan College at Burlington County (RCBC) administered the Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL) in Spring 2020. The survey is designed to assess the priorities and satisfaction of students who enrolled in online courses. Only those students who purposefully registered for online courses **prior to Covid-19** were invited to participate in the survey. Invitations were sent to 4,042 students, and 852 students completed all or part of the survey for a response rate of 21.2%.

Table 1: Key Aspects of the PSOL

Aspect	Description
Measures	Importance and satisfaction ratings; performance gaps; strengths and challenges; composite scores for groups of related surveys
Topics	Enrollment services; institutional perceptions; academic services; student services; instructional services
Uses	Planning and setting priorities; demonstrating effectiveness
Analysis	Comparisons across institutions; changes over time
Customization	RCBC inserted nine customized “Campus Items”

Areas of Importance

The PSOL asks students to indicate both the level of importance they place on an item, as well as their level of satisfaction that the institution is meeting this expectation. Students responded to each item on a 1 to 7 Lickert scale, with 7 being high.

Table 2: Top Items in Order of Importance

Item	Score
18. Registration for online courses is convenient	6.74
27. Campus Item: The institution’s online courses are well organized and easy to navigate	6.69
31. Campus Item: Important class information was available at the beginning of the semester	6.66
32. Campus Item: Information in my courses is clearly presented using multiple means	6.65
20. The quality of online instruction is excellent	6.64
7. Program requirements are clear and reasonable	6.63
11. Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus	6.63
25. Faculty are responsive to student needs	6.63
23. Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me	6.62
28. Campus Item: College services are linked and easily accessible via Blackboard	6.62

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Executive Summary

Strengths and Challenges

Institutional strengths and challenges are calculated by subtracting the satisfaction score from the importance score, thus creating a performance gap. The larger the performance gap, the greater the discrepancy between what students want and their satisfaction with the current situation. The strengths and challenges listed below represent the areas of highest importance to students (see Table 2) and their satisfaction with those areas.

Table 3: Strengths and Challenges

Strengths			
Item	Importance	Satisfaction	Performance Gap
18. Registration for online courses is convenient	6.74	6.33	0.41
31. Campus Item: Important class information was available at the beginning of the semester	6.66	6.32	0.34
11. Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus	6.63	6.11	0.52
23. Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me	6.62	6.29	0.33
28. Campus Item: College services are linked and easily accessible via Blackboard	6.62	6.20	0.42
Challenges			
Item	Importance	Satisfaction	Performance Gap
27. Campus Item: The institution's online courses are well organized and easy to navigate	6.69	5.99	0.70
20. The quality of online instruction is excellent	6.64	5.69	0.95
25. Faculty are responsive to student needs	6.63	5.85	0.78

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Executive Summary

National Comparison

The PSOL also compares RCBC’s survey results with an appropriate national comparison group. The national comparison group includes three academic years of data for students who completed the same survey version and/or are at the same type of institution.

The difference between RCBC’s satisfaction score and the satisfaction score of the comparison group creates a mean score. If the mean difference is a **POSITIVE** number, then RCBC students are **MORE** satisfied than the students in the comparison group. If the mean difference is a **NEGATIVE** number, RCBC students are **LESS** satisfied than the students in the comparison group. A mean difference of at least **0.05 (-0.05)** indicates a statistically significant score.

Table 4: Lower Satisfaction vs. National Online Learners

Item	RCBC	National	Mean
20. The quality of online instruction is excellent	5.69	5.86	-0.17
25. Faculty are responsive to student needs	5.85	5.99	-0.14

Summary of Conclusions

This was the first survey administered exclusively to students enrolled in online courses. The data provided offers the college insights into what online students find most critical in their academic journey. Students indicated a very high level of satisfaction in important areas of Enrollment Services, including registration (Question #18) and billing (Question #23). In addition, students are very satisfied in important areas of Instructional Services, including a clear syllabus (Question #11). However, the lower satisfaction scores in other important areas of Instructional Services, including the quality of online courses (Question #20) and faculty responsiveness (Question #25) offer an opportunity for the college to address these areas of student concern.

The Distance Education Department was very deliberate in designing the nine customized “campus item” questions. The department has been working diligently over the past few years to ensure that both course information (Question #31) and college services (Question #28) are clear and easily accessible to online students. The department was pleased to see that these important items received such high student satisfaction scores. However, the department will continue to concentrate on the important item of online course organization and navigation (Question #27). While students indicated a high satisfaction rate (86%), this score is still lower compared to other areas of student satisfaction.

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Executive Summary

Use of Results and Continuous Improvement Efforts

The Distance Education Department received the results of the PSOL in Summer 2020 and immediately began working on the challenges indicated in the survey. Faculty have expressed a desire for additional training, and the department can now focus that training on specific areas of quality and responsiveness. The department has designed a professional development opportunity for faculty, which allows them to work within their own Blackboard courses to create an “instructor presence,” increase the ease of navigation for students, and better utilize the communication tools provided. These sessions will take place throughout the months of November and December 2020. In addition, the department has developed a post-course survey to assess achievement of course learning goals. Feedback will be used to improve future iterations of the course.

The Distance Education Department completed an Operational Unit Review in 2018. One of the goals of this review was to determine operational needs and procedures compared to available personnel. The gap revealed a need to create a position for an Instructional Designer. In addition the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) visiting team also made the same observation and explicitly cited the need for such a position in their report. The position was posted in August 2019, but before the position could be filled, the college temporarily put a hold on all new positions due to campus closing during Covid-19. However, once that hold has been lifted, the department plans to continue the search process. The instructional designer will be able to assist faculty in improving the quality of their online courses.

Lastly, RCBC subscribes to the Quality Matters™ (QM) program, a powerful tool and process for evaluating and improving the quality of online course design. In the past the Distance Education Department was budgeted for training and stipends for formal course reviews using QM, however these funds have not been part of the budget in recent years. Given that the quality of online courses (Question #20) was one of the lower scoring items, the department would like to reinvigorate the use of QM, assuming funds can be allocated for that purpose in the future.