

Priorities Survey for Online Learners

JWU College of Online Education – April 2018

Recap of Results

JWU's College of Online Education administered the Ruffalo Noel Levitz *Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)* in April 2018, following previous administrations in April 2017 and May 2016. The PSOL provides an opportunity for an online institution to examine the priorities of its online students as a unique group. Since 2009, the PSOL has been administered by more than 300 institutions and completed by over 400,000 students. The PSOL asks students to respond to 26 statements about online learning with both a level of importance and a level of satisfaction. The data from the survey provides the basis to identify the things that matter to COE's online students and how satisfied these students are with them. With this information, COE can target the specific areas most important to its students to enhance both satisfaction and retention.

Further, by administering the survey annually, progress in increasing student satisfaction can be objectively measured and documented. While the April 2017 survey results demonstrated an increase in student satisfaction across all of the items in the survey compared to the May 2016 survey results, the April 2018 survey results compared to the April 2017 show small declines of .01 to 0.24 points on the 7-point Likert scale for 22 of 30 items, and small increases in the remaining 8 items. The majority of April 2018 survey items compared to the 2018 national comparison group showed higher scores in satisfaction for COE students.

Survey Population

The link to the PSOL instrument was sent on April 2, 2018, to all 1,295 COE online students actively registered in the Spring 2018 term. The survey closed on Sunday, April 22, 2018. A total of 327 students (27%) completed the survey, a response rate slightly above the typical range for PSOL administrations of 20% to 25%, and at 27% three percentage points higher than the 2017 response rate of 24% (222 out of 934 possible). The demographics of the 327 responding students were compared with the demographics of the 934 active students and found to align strongly, although the percentage of females responding to the survey (75.2%) is a little higher than the percentage of total enrollment that is female (65%).

Comparison Group

In addition to providing insight into the satisfaction of COE's online students, the PSOL results also compare COE results to those of a comparison group of participating institutions over the past four years. That group encompasses approximately 131,000 students from 170 U.S. institutions, including both public and private college and universities offering online education.

Scoring Scale for Items

The PSOL uses a 7-point Likert scale for the 26 importance/satisfaction items, with 1 being the lowest importance or satisfaction level and 7 being the highest importance or satisfaction level. In addition, for the 2017 and 2018 surveys COE added four campus-defined questions to the items in the survey. Three Summary Satisfaction questions also use a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest possible response and 7 being the highest.

Demographic Items

The PSOL includes 13 standard demographic items. As noted above, the demographics of the 327 respondents to the survey were compared with the demographics of the entire Spring 2018 active student body and found to be very similar with the exception that 75.2% of respondents were female while only 65% of online students are female. Females were more likely to respond to the survey than male students. This was also true for the 2017 survey where 70% of respondents were female.

Survey Results

There are 26 standard items rated for importance and satisfaction on the PSOL, as well as the four custom items added by COE for 2017. COE's scores on the 26 items are compared year to year and are also compared to those of the comparison group institutions. The items on the PSOL have been analyzed statistically and conceptually to form five comprehensive scales that are titled Institutional Perceptions, Academic Services, Instructional Services, Enrollment Services, and Student Services. Strengths and Challenges are derived from examining the gaps between the institution's importance and satisfaction scores.

Strengths

Strengths are items with high importance and high satisfaction, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the upper 25% of all satisfaction scores. COE results cite six strengths, listed in descending order of importance below.

1. Registration for online courses is convenient (Item 18).**
2. This institution responds quickly when I request information (Item 10).**
3. My program advisor is accessible by telephone and email (Item 2).**
4. Program requirements are clear and reasonable (Item 7).*
5. This institution has a good reputation (Item 1).**
6. Assessment and evaluation procedures are clear and reasonable (Item 17).*

**Items marked with an asterisk were also cited as Strengths in the 2017 survey administration.*

***Items marked with two asterisks were also cited as Strengths in both the 2016 and 2017 surveys.*

All six of the strengths cited for the 2018 administration of the survey are the same as the six strengths cited in the 2017 administration, although the ranked order changed somewhat. COE's 2018 results show higher satisfaction than the 2018 national comparison group in three of the six strengths (items 1, 3, 5).

Challenges

Challenges are items with high importance and low satisfaction or large performance gap, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the lower 25% of all satisfaction scores, or items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the top 25% of all performance gap scores. COE results cite eight challenges, listed in descending order of importance below.

1. Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus (Item 11).
2. The quality of online instruction is excellent (Item 20).
3. There are sufficient offerings within my program of study (Item 12). Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment (Item 6).
4. Instructional materials are appropriate for program content (Item 3).
5. Adequate financial aid is available (Item 9).
6. Custom Item: Faculty provide feedback I can use to improve my learning (Item 28).

7. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress (Item 4).
8. *Custom Item: Faculty make the relevance of the courses evident (Item 29). (NEW)*

Seven of the eight challenges identified were also listed as challenges in the April 2017 survey. The new challenge for 2018 is the Custom Item: Faculty make the relevance of the courses evident (Item 29).

COE staff will develop the 2018/19 PSOL Action Plan to address each of the eight Challenges identified in the survey with the goal of increasing student satisfaction in these areas. Success with these goals will be assessed through the Spring 2019 administration of the PSOL.

Satisfaction on 26 Items

Another assessment through the PSOL is the comparison of the satisfaction scores of the institution's online students on the 26 items to the satisfaction scores of the comparison group students. Overall, COE's results on the PSOL survey indicate that COE's online students perceive the online education provided by COE in ways that are very similar to the perceptions of students in the comparison group institutions. In the April 2017 survey, 15 of the 26 items (58%) had satisfaction scores that reflected no statistically significant differences from the satisfaction scores of the comparison group. The 2018 survey results reflect 18 of the 26 items (69%) had satisfaction scores that reflected no statistically significant differences from those of the comparison group.

In the 2018 survey, six (6) of the 26 items (23%) had satisfaction scores that represented statistically significant increases/differences in satisfaction scores compared to the national comparison group. In the 2017 survey there were nine (9) such items. Items with statistically significant increases against the Comparison Group in 2018, listed in descending order from highest variance with comparison group to lowest, include:

- Tutoring services are readily available for online courses (+0.40)
- My program advisor is accessible by telephone and email (+0.33)
- Channels are available for providing timely responses to student complaints (+0.25)
- This institution has a good reputation (+0.23)
- This institution responds quickly when I request information (+0.21)
- I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services (+0.21)

In April 2017, just one item had a statistically significant difference that is negative and significant at the .001 level: *Item 8 – Student-to-student collaborations are valuable to me*. In April 2018, the same item had results that is negative and significant at the .01 level rather than the 0.001 level. In addition, in the 2018 administration a second item had a statistically significant difference that is negative and significant at the .001 level: *Item 18 – Registration for online courses is convenient*.

Summary Questions on Satisfaction

There are three Summary Questions on the PSOL (not part of the 26 scale items) that indicate overall student satisfaction. While COE's satisfaction on all three of the summary questions for 2018 is higher than that of the 2018 comparison group, overall COE's scores on the three questions declined slightly compared to 2017 results.

1. So far, how has your college experience met your expectations?

	2017 COE	2017 CompGrp	2018 COE	2018 CompGrp
What I expected or better	95%	92%	93%	91%
Worse than expected	5%	8%	7%	9%
Average numeric score	5.24	5.19	5.20	5.19

2. Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far?

	COE	2017 CompGrp	2018 COE	2018 CompGrp
Somewhat satisfied or higher	92%	88%	88%	88%
Neutral or dissatisfied	8%	12%	12%	12%
Average numeric score	5.97	5.84	5.88	5.84

3. All in all, if you had to do it over again, would you enroll here again?

	COE	2017 CompGrp	2018 COE	2018 CompGrp
Maybe yes or higher	90%	85%	86%	85%
Don't know or no	10%	15%	14%	15%
Average numeric score	6.03	5.88	5.93	5.88

Five Scale Items

The five scale items defined by the PSOL are described below:

- **Institutional Perceptions:** assesses how students perceive the institution.
- **Enrollment Services:** assesses the processes and services related to enrolling students in the online program, including financial aid, registration and payment procedures.
- **Instructional Services:** measures students' academic experience, the instructional materials, the faculty/student interactions, evaluation procedures, and the quality of instruction.
- **Academic Services:** assess the services students utilize to achieve their academic goals, including advising, course offerings, technical assistance, online library resources and tutoring services.
- **Student Services:** measures the quality of student programs and services, including responses to student requests, online career services, and the bookstore.

Scale	2017 COE Satisfaction	2018 COE Satisfaction	Comparison Group	Mean Diff
Enrollment Services	6.04	6.08	6.08	0.00
Academic Services	6.16	6.08	5.97	0.11*
Student Services	6.06	6.01	5.89	0.11
Institutional Perceptions	6.04	6.00	5.93	0.07
Instructional Services	5.93	5.86	5.89	-0.03

As shown in the chart above, COE's satisfaction scores on the five scale items decreased slightly on four of the five scales for the April 2018 survey compared to the April 2017 survey results, while COE's 2018 scores for four of the five scale items are higher than those of the April 2018 comparison group, and higher with statistical significance for one of the items (Academic Services).

Qualitative Comments

In addition to the survey items, the PSOL provided space for students to provide any comments they wished to share. A total of 181 of the 327 respondents (55%) provided comments. As in previous years there were a number of positive comments about faculty being helpful and flexible in working with students, the helpfulness of online advisors and financial planners, as well as the benefits of the overall online experience. Overall, 96 of the comments were positive (56%), 56 were negative (31%), and the remainder (13%) were neutral. Other themes within the negative comments include complaints about the difficulty and workload of online education, the quality and repetitiveness of discussions, lack of engagement of faculty in courses, too little or no feedback on assignments, outdated course syllabi and materials, and the high cost of tuition and books. All of these comments will be taken into consideration in the development of the 2018/19 PSOL Action Plan as deemed relevant and appropriate.