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The Engagement of the Online Community College Student

AUSTIN, TX –

A new report released by CCCSE, *The Online Student: Impact of Course Modality on Engagement*, highlights the differences in engagement between students who take all their classes online and those who take classes in person.

The most divergent areas of student engagement for the two groups are academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction.

- Online-only students are more likely to feel they are challenged by their coursework than their peers who take in-person classes. Half reported that their examinations were *somewhat* or *extremely challenging*, while 38 percent of not online-only students reported this.

- Students who take only online courses are much less likely to experience collaboration with their peers. For instance, 50 percent of online-only students reported *never* working with other students on projects during class, compared with 17 percent of not online-only students.
- Online-only students are also less likely to interact with their instructors: 58 percent said they *never* discussed their classes with their instructors outside of class, while 43 percent of students taking in-person classes reported this.

One area in which online-only students and not online-only students express similar behaviors is in their interactions with academic advisors. Eighty-two percent of online-only students reported meeting with an advisor at least once in the current academic year, and 84 percent of students taking face-to-face classes conveyed the same.

Setting aside differences in engagement between online-only and not online-only students, higher levels of engagement are associated with higher outcomes for both groups, as measured by self-reported GPA.

“These findings show us that engagement clearly matters for online-only students,” said Linda García, CCCSE executive director. “This begs the question,” continued García, “If engagement opportunities were equal across virtual and in-person experiences, would more students who take all of their classes online have better chances of succeeding?”

The data in the report are based on a survey administered in spring 2022 to 82,824 students from 181 colleges across 41 states. One in five of the survey respondents reported taking all their classes online.

CCCSE is a service and research initiative in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.