ECAR Study of Community College Students and Information Technology, 2019

MANAGERS' SUMMARY

MAY 2019

Key Findings

- **Community college students are juggling more responsibilities than their four-year peers.** They are older, more often employed, and twice as likely to be married or in a domestic partnership. The majority of community college students are financially independent, and they are more likely to have dependents of their own. More women than men at community colleges reported living on their own and having dependents.
- **Nearly all community college students own smartphones and laptop computers, and more own desktop computers than students at other institutions.** A very small percentage of community college students have access to AR/VR headsets and 3D printers; of those who do have access, more own them versus depending on their campus to provide them. Despite this limited access, more community college students than four-year students rated AR/VR headsets and 3D printers as very or extremely important to their academic success. The majority of these students were health science majors.
- **Although community college students find online student success tools useful, fewer are aware of degree planning and mapping tools than four-year (non–community college) students.** More than a third reported they either don't have access to or aren't aware of the tools. Significantly more minority than white students at community colleges rated early-alert systems and tools that suggest how to improve course performance as very/extremely useful.
- **Community college students who are women, those who work, students who are married or in a domestic partnership, and those with dependents are all more likely to prefer learning environments that are mostly or completely online.** This preference is likely due to the demands of balancing work schedules, family responsibilities, and academics. Around half of community college students prefer blended learning environments, but they are also twice as likely as four-year students to prefer courses that are completely online.

- **Two-year and AA colleges are doing a significantly better job than other institutions of meeting the needs of students with disabilities who require technology for their academics.** More than half of community college students with disabilities who need accessible or adaptive technology reported their college's awareness and support of their needs as good or excellent.

Recommendations

- **Deploy the ECAR student surveys on more community college campuses.** Several US regions were underrepresented; the New England and Rocky Mountain states, as well as the outlying areas/US territories, were not represented at all in the 2018 survey results. Given the large number of students—many from underrepresented populations—who attend two-year and AA institutions, the role these institutions play is vital in providing access to an affordable education. Broader participation in ECAR surveys would allow for greater understanding of these students' technology experiences and enable EDUCAUSE to better serve the unique needs of these two-year and AA institutions, and their students.
- **Increase investment in and access to newer technologies such as AR/VR headsets and 3D printers.** Compared with their four-year peers, fewer community college students have access to these technologies on their campuses, and increasing access can help avoid the creation of a new digital divide. Due to the large number of women and minority students they serve, community colleges can position themselves as leaders in access to and implementation of next-gen technologies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Allocate a budget to these devices and offer faculty support in their implementation. Locate 3D technologies in common spaces on campus (e.g., libraries, makerspaces, media studios) to increase access and encourage student engagement.
- **Increase the awareness and use of student success tools when available, especially those related to degree planning and mapping.** Online success tools can contribute to a student's academic performance, and these are especially valued by minority students who have access to them. Train students, faculty, and advisors to effectively use these tools, and increase their visibility through online campus marketing, student orientations, and advisement sessions.
- **Couple more opportunities to take blended and online courses with student support initiatives.** IT can partner with other campus units to educate students about the demands and possibilities of online environments so that they can make informed decisions about the learning environments that work best for them. Train faculty who teach blended and online courses to effectively use early-alert and other online student success tools and encourage their use.
- **Partner across campus units to continue increasing awareness to meet the needs of students with disabilities who require assistive/adaptive technologies.** Foster an inclusive mind-set and use language that communicates accessibility in student resources to maintain an open and productive dialogue with students so that they are comfortable disclosing their needs. Work proactively with disability services and support the adoption of universal design for learning principles for tech across campus.