

STUDENT CAMPUS CLIMATE EXECUTIVE REPORT

Spring 2025

Essex County College

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Assessment

Introduction

The Essex County College (ECC) Student Campus Climate Survey is administered by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) annually each spring semester. This year's survey was opened on March 18th, 2025 and closed on May 13th, 2025. The purpose is to gauge the student's feelings of safety, acceptance and their sense of value within the ECC community. This survey is apart of the ongoing effort of improving the every day experience for students.

The survey was distributed through Qualtrics. The target population was any ECC student who was enrolled in the Spring 2025 semester. The survey was sent to 5870 students and 346 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 5.9%.

As per the *ACCESS TO SUCCESS: Strategic Plan FY2025*, Goal III has the following targets for FY2025:

- "Increase the percentage of employees reporting they "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" by 2 percent in fiscal year 2025, over the prior year for the following statements:
 - ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population (Employee and Student Campus Climate Surveys)
- Increase the Campus Climate Index Score on the Student and Employee Campus Climate Surveys by 2 percent in fiscal year 2025, over the prior year."

A full copy of the FY25 ACCESS TO SUCCESS: Strategic Plan 2024-2029 can be found on the College's website.

Over the past year ECC has been implementing new programs and resources for students in the effort to increase the agreement to that statement. The Campus Climate Index Score is calculated by taking all the scores from the first 10 questions asked in the Matrix tables and averaging them to give a score between 0 and 100, with 100 being the most positive score. The survey was made up of a few multiple-choice questions, agreement and satisfaction Likert scales, and an open-ended comment section.

Results

Demographics

The first set of multiple-choice questions aimed to understand the demographics of the respondents. About a quarter of respondents were new students and the rest were continuing. In regards to attendance status at the school, 46.8% of respondents had been attending ECC for less 1 year, 30.8% attended for 1-2 years and 22.4% have attended for 2 years or more. There was also a series of questions for students who took courses at the West Essex Campus in West Caldwell which accounted for 16.9% of respondents.

Overall Campus Climate

The first set of ten questions in the matrix tables determine the Campus Climate Index Score, and overall campus climate. See Table 1 below:

Table 1: Campus Climate Results

Statement (2024)	Agreement 2024		Agreement 2025		Percent Change
	n	%	n	%	
I feel safe at Essex County College	358	91.3%	284	87.7%	-3.7%
There are sufficient support resources available	321	81.9%	243	75.0%	-6.9%
I believe my differences are embraced and valued	323	82.4%	250	77.2%	-5.2%
Discrimination is not tolerated at ECC	335	85.5%	254	78.4%	-7.1%
Harassment is not tolerated at ECC	339	86.5%	265	81.8%	-4.7%
ECC works hard to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening	321	81.9%	245	75.6%	-6.3%
Racial and cultural differences are celebrated at ECC	351	89.5%	273	84.3%	-5.3%
I feel a sense of community and belonging at ECC	322	82.1%	244	75.3%	-6.8%
Campus police and security protect us from harm	314	80.1%	256	79.0%	-1.1%
ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population	328	83.7%	261	80.6%	-3.1%

When compared to the year prior, every statement saw a decrease in scores from the previous year. The statement with the biggest decrease in agreement was “There are sufficient support resources available” (-6.9% change). This could be caused by the fact that certain resources such as the laptop loaner program were downscaled since the regression of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the perceived change could cause students to believe there are less resources now than the year prior.

The statement that was the most agreed on was “I feel safe at Essex County College” (87.7%). The least agreed statement was “There are sufficient support resources available.” (75.0%). This suggests that ECC is able to create a consistently safe environment but students do not believe that ECC possesses the resources that they need. This could be improved by improving the access to learning materials, increasing hours and availability of student service offices, and updating technology throughout the school.

As per the *ACCESS TO SUCCESS: Strategic Plan 2024-2029*, there was the goal to increase the Campus Climate Index Score by two percentage points. This score decreased by 1.6 percentage points from 81.7 in 2024 to 80.1 in 2025. Therefore, this goal was not achieved during this year and improvements still need to be made. ECC also had a target in the strategic plan to

increase the score for the statement “ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population” by 2 percentage points. This statement saw a decrease by 3.1 percentage points in scores from the previous year, suggesting that the college should invest in alternate ways to increase this score for the upcoming year. This could be improved by adding more internship programs and tutoring resources.

Student Experience on Campus Matrix Table Analysis

Table 2: Student Experience on Campus

Statement (2024)	Agreement 2024		Agreement 2025		Percent Change
	n	%	n	%	
I feel valued by my professors	314	80.1%	244	75.3%	-4.8%
I have sufficient access to academic support services	324	82.7%	239	73.8%	-8.9%
Professors respond to emails or phone class promptly	284	72.4%	219	67.6%	-4.9%
I have at least one faculty member that I view as a role model	267	68.1%	189	58.3%	-9.8%
I feel valued by my classmates	270	68.9%	193	59.6%	-9.3%
Faculty, staff and administrators respect student's opinions and thoughts	302	77.0%	210	64.8%	-12.2%
Faculty, staff, and administrators are genuinely concerned for my well-being	281	71.7%	207	63.9%	-7.8%
I think faculty, staff and administrators treat students fairly	288	73.5%	216	66.7%	-6.8%
I believe students at this school respect each other	306	78.1%	235	72.5%	-5.5%
ECC treats all students equally	294	75.0%	231	71.3%	-3.7%
Faculty and staff work proactively to remove barriers to success for diverse student populations	302	77.0%	229	70.7%	-6.4%

The next section of the survey aimed to understand the student experience on the campus. Similar to the first section, when compared to the year prior, every statement saw a decrease in agreement with 8 out of the 11 statements having a decrease of more than 5 percentage points. The largest decline in agreement for students was the statement “Faculty, staff and administrators respect student’s opinions and thoughts” (12.2% decrease). Again, this suggests that the issue is not just with faculty but all who interact with students at the college. ECC should aim to improve these scores over the next year by improving customer service for students, increasing efforts to incorporate student feedback into decision making and enforcing timely communication with students.

The statement that students agreed with most was “I feel valued by my professors” (75.3%). The statement students agreed with the least was “Faculty, staff and administrators are

genuinely concerned for my well-being” (63.9%). This suggests that the issue is not specific to faculty or instructors. It suggests an overall distrust from students towards ECC employees to ensure their well-being. Therefore, ECC should aim to improve the experience of the student outside the classroom including advisement, access to student services, and general customer service.

It is important to note that this survey is based off student perception of the school, which can be skewed by outside circumstances. According to a 2023 study run by Gallup, American’s confidence in the institution of higher education went from 57% in 2015, to 48% in 2018, to 36% in 2023. This suggests that there is dwindling trust between the general public and higher education which will give students a more negative outlook on the college. The general American public is more likely, in recent years, to question how funds are being distributed throughout higher education and view a college degree as unworthy of the cost. There is also declining trust in the accuracy of information taught in classrooms due to perceived political bias. However, it is still the responsibility of the College to improve trust with ECC students.

Experience on the West Essex Campus

This year, the Office of IEPA has added a few questions to ask to the specific students who have taken courses on the West Essex Campus (WEC) in West Caldwell. Of the 346 respondents, 58 reported on taking courses at the WEC (16.9%). See Table 3 below:

Table 3: Experience on the West Essex Campus

Statement	Satisfied		Dissatisfied	
	n	%	n	%
The variety of programs offered at WEC	43	89.6%	5	10.4%
Timing/scheduling of the courses	42	87.5%	5	10.4%
Campus Facilities	43	89.6%	4	8.3%
Study Areas	43	89.6%	5	10.4%
One Stop Center (staff and services)	42	87.5%	5	10.4%

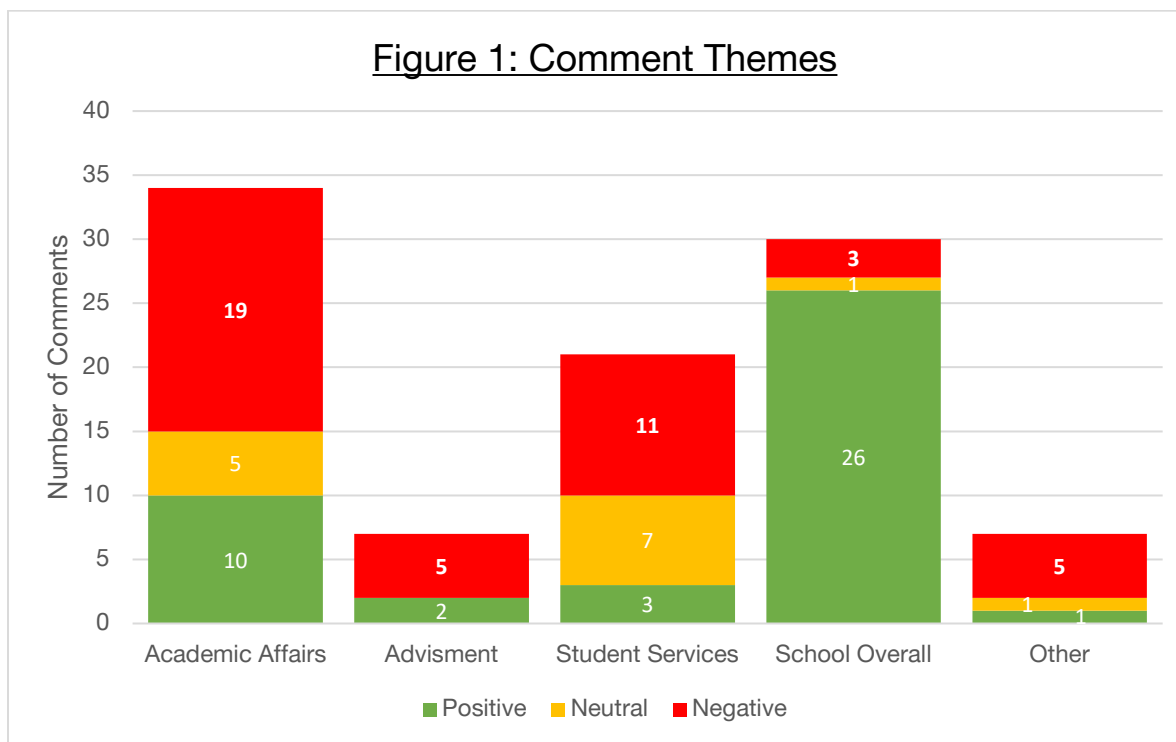
The scores from these statements were relatively similar to each other, suggesting an overall positive experience on the WEC. ECC should continue to implement more programs and courses on this campus.

Comment Analysis

Of the 346 students who took the survey, 97 respondents left a comment (28.0%). The comments were relatively equally split between positive and negative sentiments. Negative experiences were reported in 43.3% of comments, positive experiences were reported in 42.3%, and the rest was made up of neutral comments (14.4%). Themes that came up in the negative comments was issues with rudeness (16.5%), complaints about poor communication (9.3%), and experiences with general unprofessionalism (7.2%). Issues with rudeness have seemed to increase due to the fact that last year only about 5% of comments expressed issues with rudeness. The

comments addressed various areas of the college including Academic Affairs (35.1%), the college overall (30.9%), student services (21.6%), and advisement. (7.2%).

See Figure 1 below for comments broken out by area of the college:



Conclusion

The student campus climate has appeared to decline when compared to the prior year and as a result two strategic targets in ECC's strategic plan were not met. There is increasing issue of employee rudeness towards students, issues with the availability of resources and poor community building across the college. While this may be partially explained by the growing distrust between the American public and higher education nationally, it is within the college's control to improve on these issues. Students are in need of more support and a more positive learning environment and this report presents several areas of possible improvement.