

New Student Survey Report

Introduction

The New Student Survey is administered annually by the Essex County College (ECC) Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) each fall semester. The survey is sent those who are in their first semester as a student at ECC. The aim of the survey is to understand their transition into college life and how to better support these students. The survey was sent out to 2,854 students and 147 responses were received, yielding a 5.2% response rate. The survey was opened on November 5th, 2025 and closed on January 4th, 2026. The instrument was made up of multiple-choice questions, matrix tables and an open-ended comment section. The gender breakdown of the sample was relatively reflective of the general ECC population. Black students were slightly over represented in the sample, with the other race categories relatively reflective. The majority of these participants applied to ECC applied as a first-time college student (79%).

The amount of first-time enrolled students and student credit hours has increased for the fifth year in a row. The headcount increased from 2,194 in Fall 2024 to 2,455 in Fall 2025. The credit hours increased from 21,618 in Fall 2024 to 23,455 in Fall 2025. Transferred students also increased headcount (from 310 to 322) but decreased in student credit hours (3,448 to 3,287).

Key Findings

- Fall 2025 new students are more confident in navigating school life than the year prior.
- The new student experience with the financial aid office has improved.
- The experience for transfer students has improved.

Results

Respondents were asked if they were worried about paying for basic needs at the start of their academic career at ECC. Examples included food, housing, transportation, textbooks, family expenses, and medical bills/healthcare. Compared to the year prior, respondents reported higher concern for paying food, but less concerned for paying for textbooks and housing. The largest increase in concern was for food which had a 7.3% percentage point increase. They were also asked about their concerns with their abilities to finance their education and the scores were very similar to the year prior. The most common response was "Some concern, but I will probably have enough funds" (51.9%), then "Major concern, I am not sure that I will have enough funds to complete college" (25.0%), and then lastly "No, I am confident that I will have sufficient funds (23.1%)."

Respondents were also asked to rate how difficult they think a variety of challenges will be. See Table 1 on the next page:

Table 1: Perceived Difficulty

During your first year at ECC, how difficult do you expect the following to	2024		2025	
	Very to Somewhat difficult	Slightly to Not at All Difficult	Very to Somewhat difficult	Slightly to Not at All Difficult
Understanding the registration process/deadlines	43.6%	56.4%	41.3%	58.7%
Learning course material	41.7%	58.3%	35.0%	65.1%
Managing time	48.2%	51.8%	45.6%	54.4%
Getting help with schoolwork/tutoring	37.7%	62.3%	28.1%	71.9%
Knowing what courses to take/advisement	36.4%	63.6%	48.6%	51.5%
Making friends	42.8%	57.3%	40.8%	59.2%
Interacting with faculty	30.2%	69.8%	26.2%	73.8%
Getting help with personal issues	36.2%	63.8%	38.8%	61.2%

Respondents reported that “Knowing what courses to take/advisement” was going to be the most difficult and the least difficult would be “Interacting with faculty”. Most of the statements saw a decrease in perceived difficulty, suggesting that this class of students could be more confident in navigating school than the year before.

Those who reported using financial aid were asked about their experience. They were asked if they agreed that they were communicated with in a timely manner, that the office was helpful, that they were clearly communicated with and that they received the amount of financial aid they expected. All of these statements saw an increase in agreement from the year prior with an average increase of 4.2 percentage points.

They were then asked about the factors that influenced their decision to attend ECC, see Table 2 below:

Table 2: Factors in Decision Making

Student's base their decision to attend Essex County College on a variety of	2024				2025			
	Very important	Somewhat important	Slightly important	Not important at all	Very important	Somewh at important	Slightly important	Not important at all
Price of tuition	80.9%	12.1%	3.6%	3.6%	82.7%	11.8%	3.6%	1.8%
Campus location	82.1%	15.0%	1.4%	1.4%	78.0%	13.8%	6.4%	1.8%
Academic facilities	64.0%	26.5%	4.4%	5.2%	61.0%	25.7%	10.5%	2.9%
Racial and ethnic diversity	50.7%	22.8%	8.8%	17.7%	50.0%	18.9%	18.9%	12.3%
Academic program selection	71.4%	18.6%	5.7%	4.3%	67.6%	19.1%	8.6%	4.8%
Student support services (e.g., free childcare)	51.8%	24.1%	11.7%	12.4%	57.3%	19.4%	15.5%	7.8%

Like in 2024, price of tuition was the most important factor in their decision (82.7%) and the least import was the racial and ethnic diversity (50.0%). The only factor

that has somewhat of a change is an increase in the importance of student support services.

For those who reported that they were transfer students, they were asked specific questions about their experience transitioning to ECC. See Table 3 below:

Table 3: Transfer Student Experience

As a new transfer student, please rate your level of agreement with each of	2024			2025		
	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
ECC's website contains easily searchable information specific to transfer students	75.0%	14.3%	10.7%	79.5%	5.1%	15.4%
The social climate at ECC is welcoming to transfer students	60.7%	17.9%	21.4%	87.2%	10.3%	2.6%
There are sufficient resources available to transfer students to make the transition easy	64.3%	21.4%	14.3%	79.0%	15.8%	5.3%

Agreement for all three statements above has increased when compared to the year prior. This suggests that ECC is improving the experience of transfer students. For example, the statement “The social climate at ECC is welcoming to transfer students” saw an increase in agreement by 27.5 percentage points.

There were 22 comments left in the open comment section. The most common theme was that they needed better access or more specificity in student services (40.9%). There were some concerns with specific instructors but also comments about enjoying being a student on the campus.

Conclusion

This group of new students appear to be more confident in navigating ECC, while just as confident in being able to pay for various resources as a student than the year prior. The data suggests that the financial aid office has improved their communication and customer service. It also appears that the experience of the transfer student at ECC has also improved. ECC could improve by making it easier to find where to ask for help for first time students.