



Lake Superior College

Priorities Survey for Online Learners

Spring 2025

Introduction

The Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL) is an online survey designed and administered by Ruffalo Noel Levitz that allows institutions to identify what matters most to online learners and assess their level of satisfaction. The survey instrument measures student perceptions in five broad areas. Individual survey items are rolled up into the following *Survey Scales*:

- Academic Services
- Enrollment Services
- Institutional Perceptions
- Instructional Services
- Student Services

Results from student satisfaction surveys, such as the PSOL, may be used to guide strategic action planning, strengthen student retention initiatives, and chart progress toward campus goals.

Spring 2025 is the fifth administration of the PSOL at Lake Superior College, with the survey previously administered in 2015, 2017, 2021 and 2023.

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Methodology

The PSOL was administered to all Spring 2025 students taking one or more online courses. In total, 1771 students were invited to take the survey. Although multiple reminder emails were sent over a 6-week administration period, the response rate was only 5.87%.

In addition, comparisons with earlier administrations of the PSOL (2015, 2017, 2021) should be viewed with caution. Due to significant changes in course delivery methods resulting from the COVID19 pandemic, many Spring 2021 students were online out of necessity because a face-to-face option was not available, while other students were online by choice. Starting in Spring 2021, a campus-defined demographic item was added into the survey that allows us to compare responses from these two subpopulations.

Most of the survey items, including ten that are campus-defined, are rated by respondents for both importance and satisfaction based on the following Likert scale:

- 1 – Not Important at all / Not Satisfied at all
- 2 – Not Very Important / Not Very Satisfied
- 3 – Somewhat Unimportant / Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat Important / Somewhat Satisfied
- 6 – Important / Satisfied
- 7 – Very Important / Very Satisfied

Demographics

45% of the survey respondents reported that all their instruction is delivered online, while 55% reported that some of their instruction is delivered face-to-face.

48% indicated they are taking online courses *only* because a face-to-face option was not available to them. In contrast, approximately 52% reported that they consider themselves to be online students and prefer the online course delivery format.

Additional demographic data are summarized in Table 1, with self-reported current online enrollment (number of credits) depicted in Figure 1. Please note that this survey does not mandate answering all questions. Respondents have the option to skip any question they prefer not to answer. The number of students who responded to each demographic question is indicated by N=

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Gender N=98			Educational Goal N = 99	
Female	70%		Certificate	5%
Genderqueer	4%		Associate Degree	55%
Male	16%		Bachelor's or Master's Degree	26%
Prefer not to respond	4%		Doctoral or Professional Degree	6%
Transgender	5%		Job-related training	1%
			Other	7%
Race/Ethnicity N=98			Employment N=99	
Students of Color	21%		Full-time	25%
White	74%		Part-time	57%
Prefer not to respond	4%		Not employed	18%
Current Enrollment Status N = 99			Class Load N=101	
Primarily on-campus	48%		Part-time	47%
Primarily online	52%		Full-time	53%
Age N=98			Current Plans N=99	
Traditional (<=24)	55%		Transfer Credits	21%
Non-Traditional (>24)	45%		Complete this course	13%
			Complete online degree program	20%
			Complete degree on campus	45%

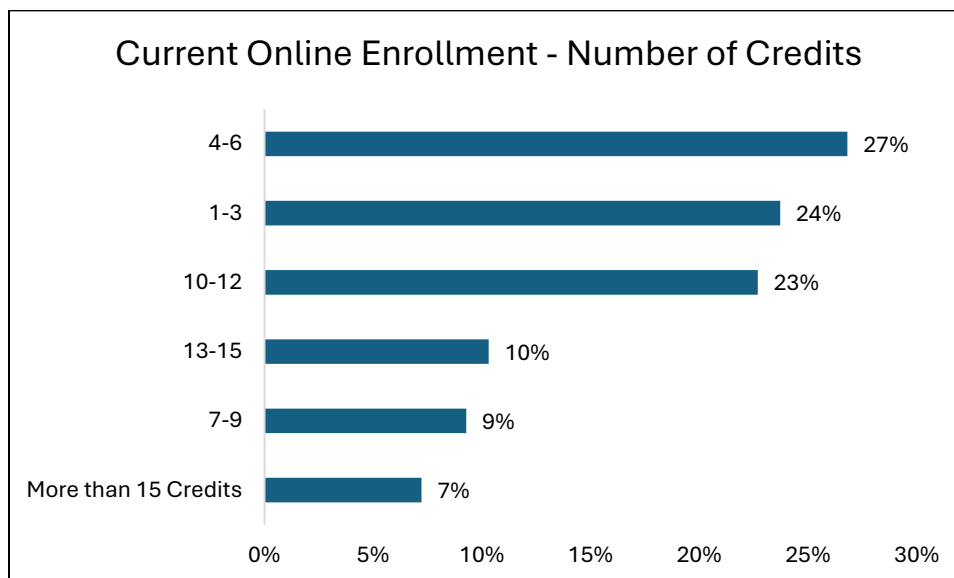


FIGURE 1. CURRENT ONLINE ENROLLMENT – NUMBER OF CREDITS

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate their Major/Program. Those most represented within the survey results include Nursing (28.7%), and Associate of Arts Degree (11.9%), followed by Associate of Arts Transfer Pathways, Associate of Science Transfer, and Radiologic Technology (all at 6.9%).

Student Perception – Survey Scales

For each of the five survey scales, Table 2 provides the importance and satisfaction scores, along with the performance gap score (the mathematical difference between the importance and satisfaction scores). The larger the performance gap, the greater the discrepancy between what the students expect and their current level of satisfaction. The smaller the gap, the better we are doing at meeting student expectations.

The highest performance gap score and the lowest satisfaction scores are associated with *Instructional Services*. Instructional services continues from the previous PSOL surveys in 2021 and 2023 to have the lowest satisfaction score and a higher gap performance, although the satisfaction score has been increasing since 2021. Previously, enrollment services exhibited both a higher performance gap and the higher rate of satisfaction, which suggested that while students are relatively more satisfied with this aspect compared to others, their satisfaction levels did not align with its importance to them. With the current administration of the survey, enrollment services had the highest satisfaction, and the gap has decreased.

TABLE 2. SURVEY SCALES – AVERAGE IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION SCORES, WITH PERFORMANCE GAP

	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap
Academic Services	6.39	6.11	0.28
Enrollment Services	6.51	6.28	0.23
Institutional Perceptions	6.27	6.10	0.17
Instructional Services	6.32	5.96	0.36
Student Services	6.29	6.11	0.18

Institutional Strengths – Survey Items

Ruffalo Noel Levitz defines *Strengths* as items rated with high importance and high satisfaction. These are specifically identified as items above the midpoint in importance (top half) and in the upper quartile (25%) of the satisfaction scores:

TABLE 3. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS WITH IMPORTANCE, SATISFACTION, AND GAP SCORES

	Imp	Satis	Gap
Campus item: My online instructors' expectations for proctored exams or other work that cannot be completed online are clearly stated.	6.67	6.34	0.33
Registration for online courses is convenient.	6.51	6.51	0.00
My program advisor is accessible by telephone and e-mail.	6.48	6.26	0.22

Institutional Challenges – Survey Items

Challenges are defined as items rated with high importance and either low satisfaction or a large performance gap. These are specifically identified as items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and **either** in the lower quartile (25%) of the satisfaction scores **or** in the upper quartile (25%) of the performance gap scores:

TABLE 4. INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES WITH IMPORTANCE, SATISFACTION, AND GAP SCORES

	Imp	Satis	Gap
Campus item: My online courses are set up to allow flexibility to complete my work.	6.71	6.05	0.66
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress.	6.65	6.00	0.65
Campus item: My online instructors are proficient in using the Learning Management System (D2L Brightspace).	6.63	5.93	0.70
Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	6.61	6.07	0.54
There are sufficient offerings within my program of study.	6.50	5.99	0.51
Campus item: My online instructors are present and engaged in my courses.	6.49	5.93	0.56

In addition to those specifically defined as *Challenges*, it's important to examine survey items rated with the lowest satisfaction scores and/or highest performance gap scores (Table 5).

TABLE 5. ADDITIONAL SURVEY ITEMS WITH LOW SATISFACTION AND/OR HIGH GAP SCORES

	Imp	Satis	Gap
Campus item: The quality of online instruction at LSC is equal to or better than LSC face-to-face classes.	6.14	5.19	0.95
The quality of online instruction is excellent.	6.41	5.55	0.86
Campus item: I was well informed about what taking classes online involved before I registered for my first online course.	6.33	5.74	0.59
My program advisor helps me work toward career goals.	6.44	5.89	0.55
Campus item: My online instructors are proficient in using the Learning Management System (D2L Brightspace).	6.63	5.93	0.70

To put these results into context, the overall 2025 LSC PSOL response ranges and mean scores (based on all survey items) for the three metrics are provided below:

Importance - Range: 4.56 to 6.71; mean = 6.21

Satisfaction - Range: 5.19 to 6.51; mean = 6.06

Gap score - Range: -0.70 to 0.95; mean = 0.32 (a negative gap score indicates we are *exceeding* student expectations)

Survey items designated as “*Campus Item*” in Tables 3, 4, and 5 are among the ten LSC custom survey items (Campus-defined), which are discussed more fully in the following section of this report.

Campus Defined Items

Table 6 contains LSC’s custom campus-defined survey items. As with previous administrations of the PSOL survey, several of the campus-defined survey items are associated with low satisfaction scores and/or high-performance gap scores, indicating we are continuing to not meet student expectations in those areas.

Most notably, as with previous PSOL results, the scores suggest that students feel that the quality of online instruction is inferior to face-to-face course delivery. There is also a lack of confidence with instructors’ proficiency in using D2L Brightspace.

Trends in performance gap scores over the 2015, 2017, 2021, 2023, and 2025 PSOL survey administrations are represented visually in Figure 2. On the positive side, since 2021, there has been a decrease in the gaps for being well informed before registering for their first online course, the quality of online instruction in comparison to face-to-face classes, and online instructors being proficient in D2L Brightspace. All campus defined survey items have seen a decreased gap between importance and satisfaction from 2023, except the tutoring online service being valuable which had a slight increase in gap size (Figure 2).

TABLE 6. LSC-DEFINED SURVEY ITEMS WITH IMPORTANCE, SATISFACTION, AND GAP SCORES

		Imp	Satis	Gap
1	I was well informed about what taking classes online involved before I registered for my first online course.	6.33	5.74	0.59
2	The quality of online instruction at LSC is equal to or better than LSC face-to-face classes.	6.14	5.19	0.95
3	My online instructors are proficient in using the Learning Management System (D2L Brightspace).	6.63	5.93	0.70
4	My online courses promote and enforce academic honesty.	6.42	6.41	0.01
5	My online instructors' expectations for proctored exams or other work that cannot be completed online are clearly stated.	6.67	6.34	0.33
6	My online courses are set up to allow flexibility to complete my work.	6.71	6.05	0.66
7	The Tutor.com online tutoring services are valuable to me.	6.13	6.03	0.10
8	My online instructors are present and engaged in my courses.	6.49	5.93	0.56
9	Online course materials are available in formats that are easy to use.	6.56	6.17	0.39
10	I am able to use my smart phone to access online course content.	6.19	6.01	0.18

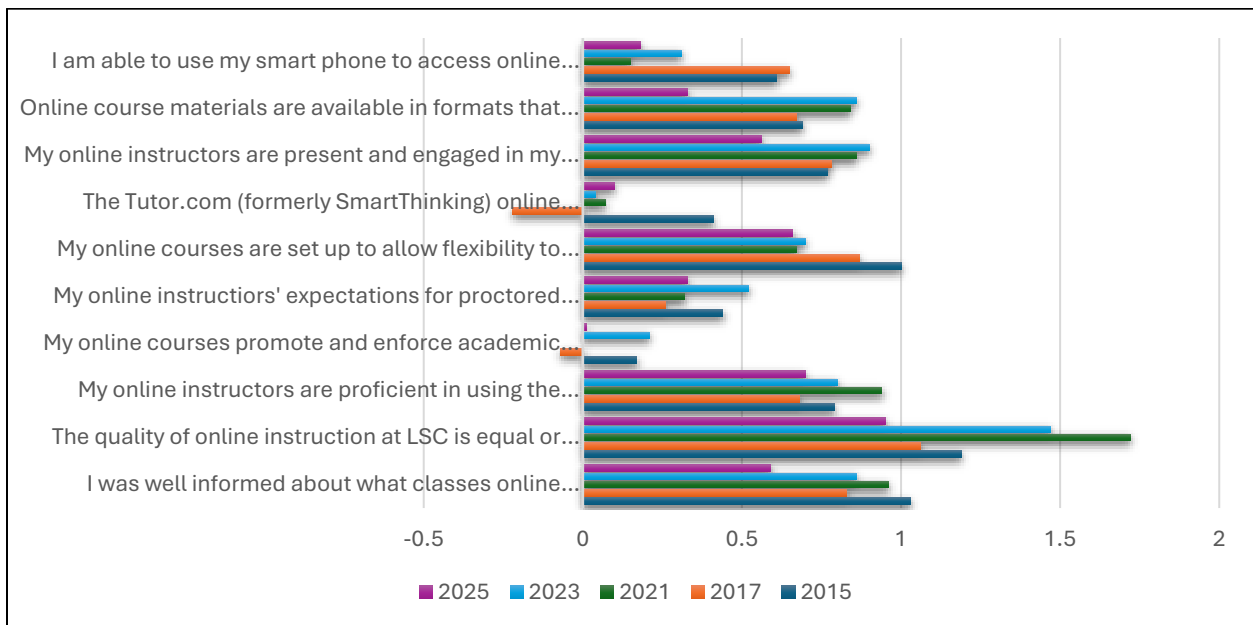
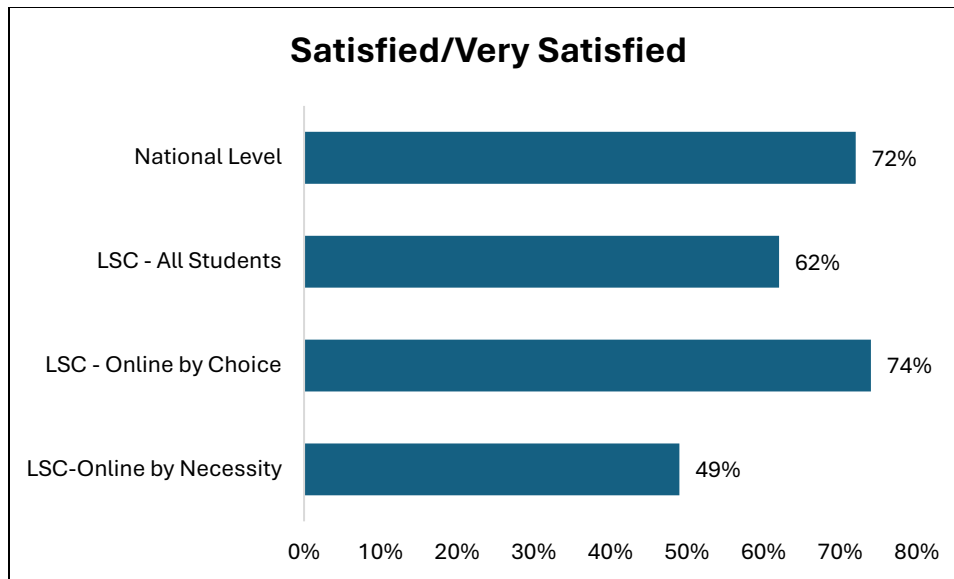


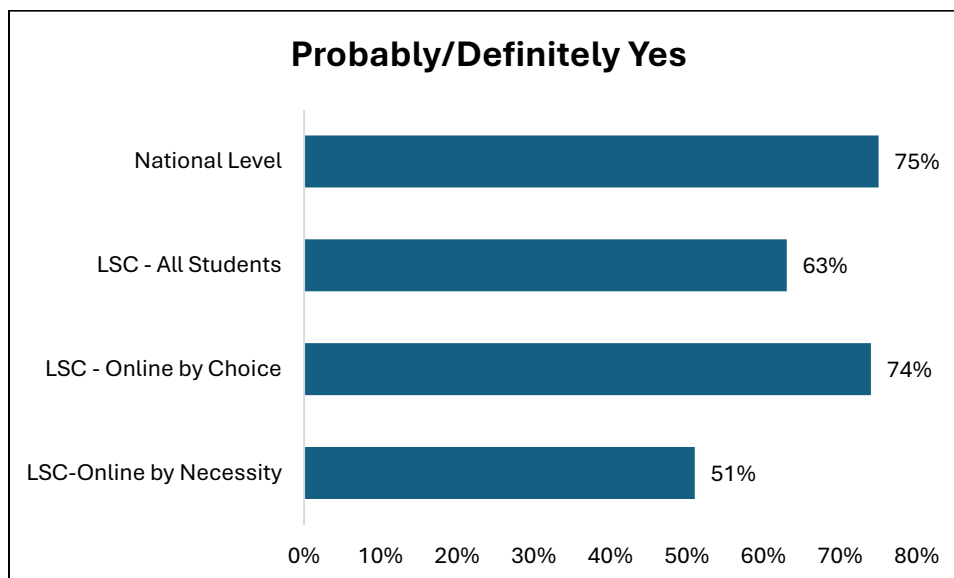
FIGURE 2. CAMPUS ITEMS - TRENDS IN PERFORMANCE GAP SCORES

Summary Items – Overall Expectations and Satisfaction

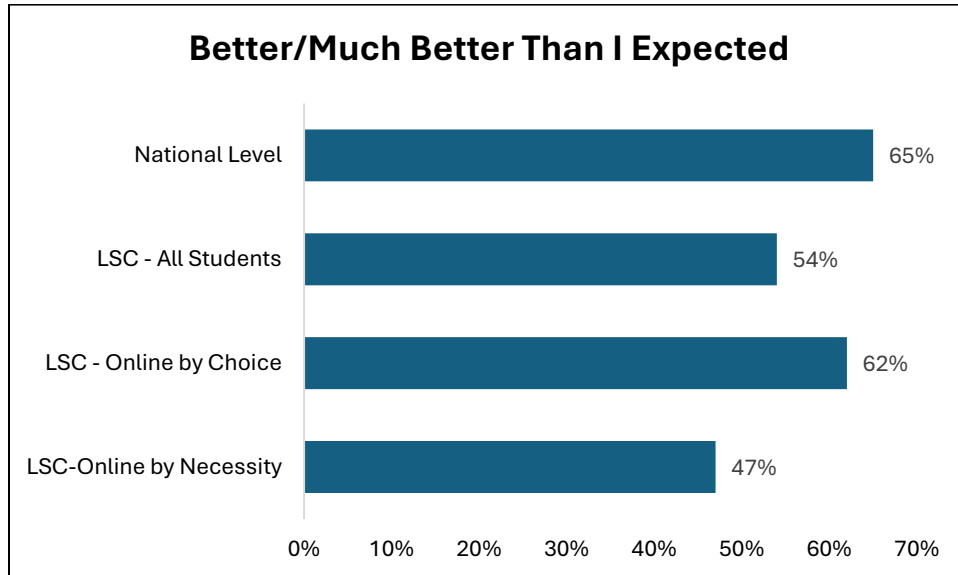
How satisfied are online students compared with online students nationally?



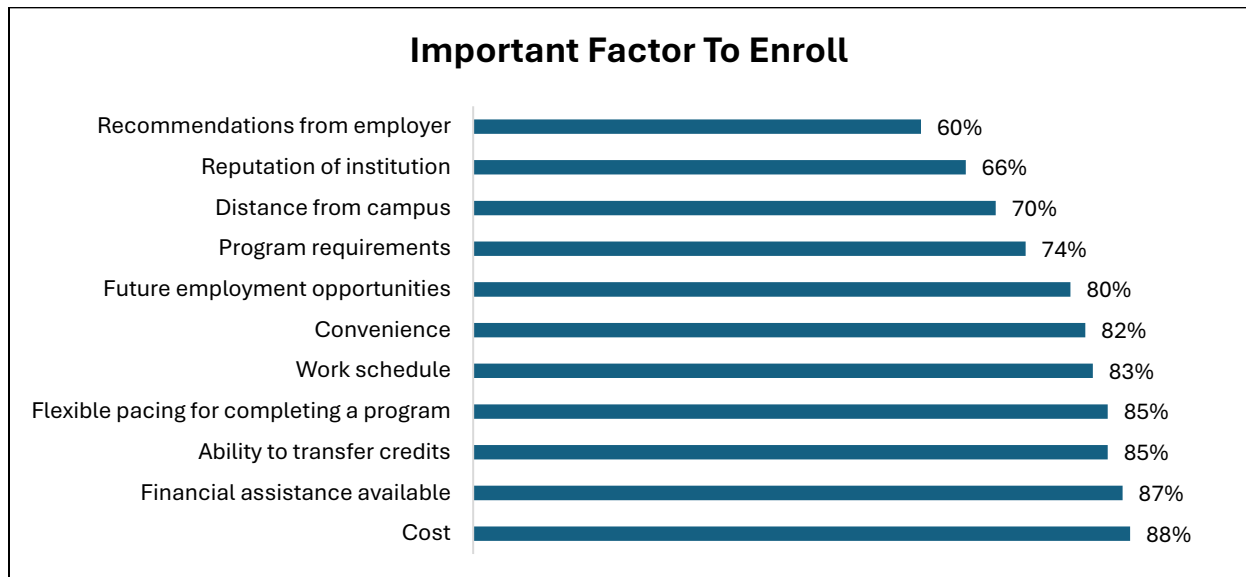
How likely are our students to enroll again if they had it to do over?

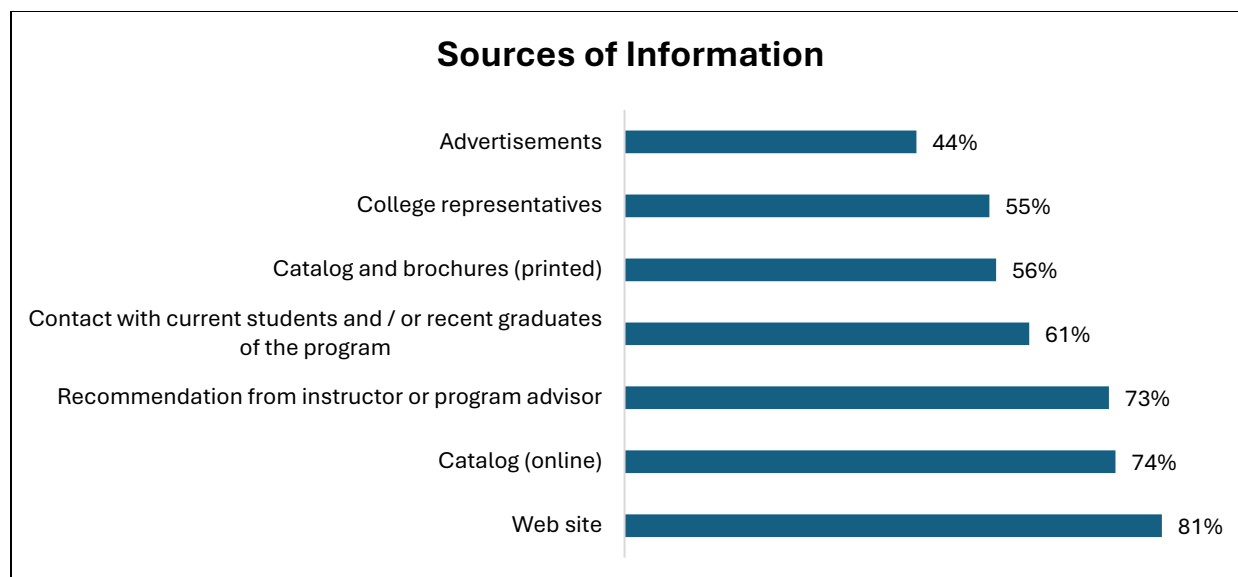


So far, how has your college experience met your expectations?



Enrollment Factors and Sources of Information





Discussion

A low response rate raises concerns about the validity of survey results in general. The response rate this year was lower than the previous years. In addition to emailing students, we also put up advertisements on the informational screens around campus, on D2L, and through the employee Newsplash and the student IceHawk Talk.

Out of all the items surveyed, only two items showed a significant difference compared to the national average. Specifically, the items "Adequate financial aid is available" and "The quality of online instruction is excellent". Adequate financial aid had a lower gap score at LSC compared to the national results, and the importance and satisfaction were also higher at LSC. The quality of instruction had a higher gap score, and the importance and satisfaction scores being lower than the national results; the satisfaction score at LSC was much lower than the national score. The remaining survey items were comparable to the national averages.

When the data is segmented to distinguish between students who self-report as online by choice and those who are online by necessity, as with previous administrations of the PSOL survey, there are notable differences in responses, with the latter group showing lower levels of satisfaction. Although, students online out of necessity have lower levels of satisfaction, there was only one survey item that had a significant difference. The gap size for students who are taking classes online out of necessity for the campus item regarding the quality of online instruction is equal to or better than LSC face-to-face classes was more than twice the size of the gap for students who were taking classes online by choice.

A complete list of the survey items can be found in the Appendix.

Appendix – PSOL Survey Items

- 1 This institution has a good reputation.
- 2 My program advisor is accessible by telephone and e-mail.
- 3 Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.
- 4 Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress.
- 5 My program advisor helps me work toward career goals.
- 6 Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.
- 7 Program requirements are clear and reasonable.
- 8 Student-to-student collaborations are valuable to me.
- 9 Adequate financial aid is available.
- 10 This institution responds quickly when I request information.
- 11 Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.
- 12 There are sufficient offerings within my program of study.
- 13 The frequency of student and instructor interactions is adequate.
- 14 I receive timely information on the availability of financial aid.
- 15 Channels are available for providing timely responses to student complaints.
- 16 Appropriate technical assistance is readily available.
- 17 Assessment and evaluation procedures are clear and reasonable.
- 18 Registration for online courses is convenient.
- 19 Online career services are available.
- 20 The quality of online instruction is excellent.
- 21 Adequate online library resources are provided.
- 22 I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services.
- 23 Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me.
- 24 Tutoring services are readily available for online courses.
- 25 Faculty are responsive to student needs.
- 26 The bookstore provides timely service to students.
- 27 Campus item: I was well informed about what taking classes online involved before I registered for my first online course.
- 28 Campus item: The quality of online instruction at LSC is equal to or better than LSC face-to-face classes.
- 29 Campus item: My online instructors are proficient in using the Learning Management System (D2L Brightspace).
- 30 Campus item: My online courses promote and enforce academic honesty.
- 31 Campus item: My online instructors' expectations for proctored exams or other work that cannot be completed online are clearly stated.
- 32 Campus item: My online courses are set up to allow flexibility to complete my work.
- 33 Campus item: The Tutor.com online tutoring services are valuable to me.
- 34 Campus item: My online instructors are present and engaged in my courses.
- 35 Campus item: Online course materials are available in formats that are easy to use.

- 36 Campus item: I am able to use my smart phone to access online course content.
- 37 Source of information: Catalog and brochures (printed)
- 38 Source of information: Catalog (online)
- 39 Source of information: College representatives
- 40 Source of information: Web site
- 41 Source of information: Advertisements
- 42 Source of information: Recommendation from instructor or program advisor
- 43 Source of information: Contact with current students and / or recent graduates of the program
- 44 Factor to enroll: Ability to transfer credits
- 45 Factor to enroll: Cost
- 46 Factor to enroll: Financial assistance available
- 47 Factor to enroll: Future employment opportunities
- 48 Factor to enroll: Reputation of institution
- 49 Factor to enroll: Work schedule
- 50 Factor to enroll: Flexible pacing for completing a program
- 51 Factor to enroll: Convenience
- 52 Factor to enroll: Distance from campus
- 53 Factor to enroll: Program requirements
- 54 Factor to enroll: Recommendations from employer