



Strengthening Student Success Conference 2025

Evaluation Executive Summary

Strengthening Student Success Conference 2025 (SSSC25) was held at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport in Burlingame, California, from Wednesday, October 8, to Friday, October 10, 2025. This year marked the 20th anniversary of SSSC and provided a meaningful opportunity to reflect on two decades of progress in advancing student success. Based on an online survey sent out after the conference, the event was a success, with a total of 328 registered attendees for the main conference and post-conference workshops. This number is lower than the attendance numbers from the last two years of the conference. It was noted that another California community college equity-focused conference was held on the same dates as SSSC this year, which was in direct competition with our conference. Although attendance declined, respondents reported their appreciation for the conference and indicated that most of the conference was a very positive experience. Overall, attendees were excited about participating in the conference and enjoyed the programming.

Attendees and Survey Response Rate

At the close of the event, the conference planning team sent an email to all attendees with a link to an online survey and an invitation to provide feedback on the conference. With 50 total responses, the response rate was 14%, which is higher than the rate of 10–11% over the last few years, but still lower than the return rate of conference evaluations prior to the pandemic (20–21%).

Conference Goals

The goals of the SSSC25 conference were for participants to:

- Learn ways to navigate changing landscapes, funding, and other challenges in order to create caring institutions for faculty, staff, and students;
- Understand how colleges are scaling practical, equitable, race-conscious, and evidence-based practices to advance student success;
- Learn and commit to strategies that engage students as partners in designing race-conscious and equitable student experiences; and
- Exchange ideas with colleagues and other stakeholders and feel empowered to lead change.

The attendees who returned an evaluation survey indicated that overall, they enjoyed the conference. The first question asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree) with the effectiveness of each of the conference goals (listed above). Almost 100% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with having met each of the conference goals.

Takeaways: Most and Least Impactful

Most Impactful

Attendees were asked to identify which element of the conference impacted them the most. Respondents noted they felt most impacted by:

- The student panel
- Rafael Agustín's keynote address
- Dr. Cynthia Olivo's keynote address
- The sense of community
- Engaging in conversations with people from diverse roles and institutions
- The variety and caliber of conference sessions
- The opportunity to network, meet new colleagues, and reconnect with old friends

Least Impactful

Conference attendees who responded to the survey found the following to be least impactful to their experience at the conference:

- Sessions about equity and inclusion that were framed in ways that limited dialogue rather than expanding it.

- The reduced number of sessions and not enough sessions geared toward student services.
- The disconnect between CCCCO executives and faculty.

Improvements for Next Year's Conference

Survey respondents suggested the following improvements for next year's conference:

- Avoid having plenary or keynote speakers towards the end of the conference
- Start the conference on a Thursday
- Allow more time for post-session collaboration, discussion, and networking
- Provide facilitated time for people in similar roles to connect across the colleges

Light Bulb Moments

Beyond the evaluation survey, attendees were asked to submit comments about what resonated with them (their “light bulb moments”). The following are a select few responses that add substance to this evaluation:

“Fear and trauma can be shown as apathy and laziness.”

“The lightbulb that shines the brightest for me is simply how powerful we are in higher education. We have the power to impact lives, and we have a responsibility to those students and to be powerful FOR THEM. Use my life experiences, my privilege as an administrator, to stand up and advocate for our students, to step outside of my office to be a voice for our students.”

“This morning, Rafael Agustín said not to build borders in our classrooms and colleges. As a teacher and department chair, I will carry this back to my college. No borders!”

“A recurring theme from the student panel is that we (educators) must resist and not be complicit. Our keynoter, Rafael, also brought this up when he said we must fight back!”

“A little kindness and consideration for our students goes a long way to giving them a sense of belonging and being able to reach their college goals.”

“Rafael Agustín: ‘Education provides air to democracy.’ Students: ‘Education is a form of self-care.’”