

Summer 2014

Student Connection survey: Year 4 report



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Introduction

Many studies have found a strong relationship between *student connection* or *engagement* and successful student program completion. In the recently funded Title V grant, one of the primary objectives is to increase students' connection to the college, thus encouraging student completion. The current study compares student connection data from three consecutive years and also measures additional factors associated with greater student success. As the college implements interventions funded by the Title V initiative, the results from this study can improve the understanding of the campus-wide effects of these efforts.

Methods

An original draft of the current survey instrument was drafted by the Office of Institutional research. A school connection scale, developed for a secondary education setting, was revised for use with community college. Additional items were added based on other Title V grant objectives, such as new student matriculation, and active, technology-enhanced, and project-based learning (See actual survey Appendix A). The survey also included background variables, such as *units completed*, *basic skills status*, and *ethnicity*, for group comparisons. The draft survey was reviewed and revised by members of the Title V advisory committee.

The survey was administered to a stratified sample of students. For this year, (Spring 2014), 10 percent of all distance education and Hollister, Morgan Hill, and Gilroy site courses were sampled. Survey administration packets were sent to instructors of randomly selected courses sampling each of these location categories. Distance education participation requests were sent via email and completed through an online survey. In addition to this sample, all of the courses receiving a Title V intervention and those courses that were comparably matched were also administered the survey. A total of 547 students completed and returned a survey, which represented 10% of the total college first census headcount.

Fifty-one percent of the sample reported having taken a basic skills course of some kind. Thirty-one percent of the sample was composed of students who reported having completed over 30 units. Table I lists the self-reported the ethnic distribution of the sample. The background variable composition did not vary significantly from the overall student population or the previous administration of the survey in Spring 2011, 2012, and 2013.

Table I: Ethnic distribution of sample (SPI4).

	Count	Percent
Unknown	87	15.9
African-American	7	1.3
Asian-Pacific Islander	76	13.9
Hispanic/Latino	188	34.4
Mixed/Other	53	9.7
Native-American	3	.5
White/Caucasian	133	24.3
Total	547	100.0

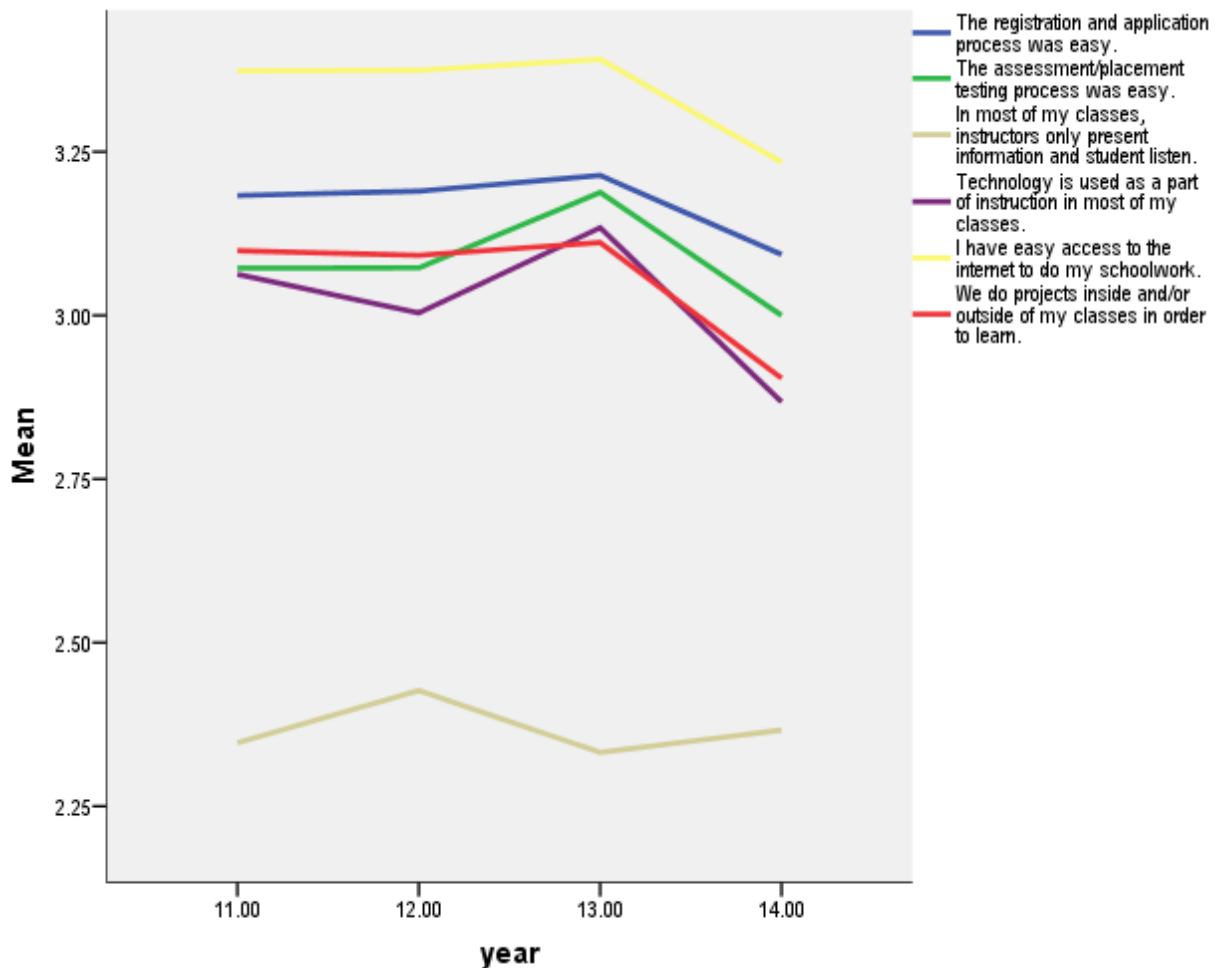
Findings

The first set of items asked students to agree/disagree with statements about matriculation (See Appendix B: Survey Results). Nearly all survey respondents (89.3%) either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *The registration and application process was easy*, while 85.5% either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *The assessment/placement testing process was easy*.

Another set of items asked students about their experience with alternative approaches to instruction. Most students (76.4%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement, *Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes*, while 83.9% either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement, *We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn*. In contrast, only 59.1% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement, *In most of my classes, instructors only present information and students listen*. Most students (91.6%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement *I have easy access to the internet to do my schoolwork*.

This year's responses (Spring 2014) were also compared to the previous spring semesters' responses. Diagram I shows the average responses from Spring 2011, 12, 13, on matriculation and instructional practice items. Most of these scores dropped from previous terms, except for the item *In most of my classes, instructors only present information and students listen*.

Diagram I: Mean comparison of matriculation and instruction practices.



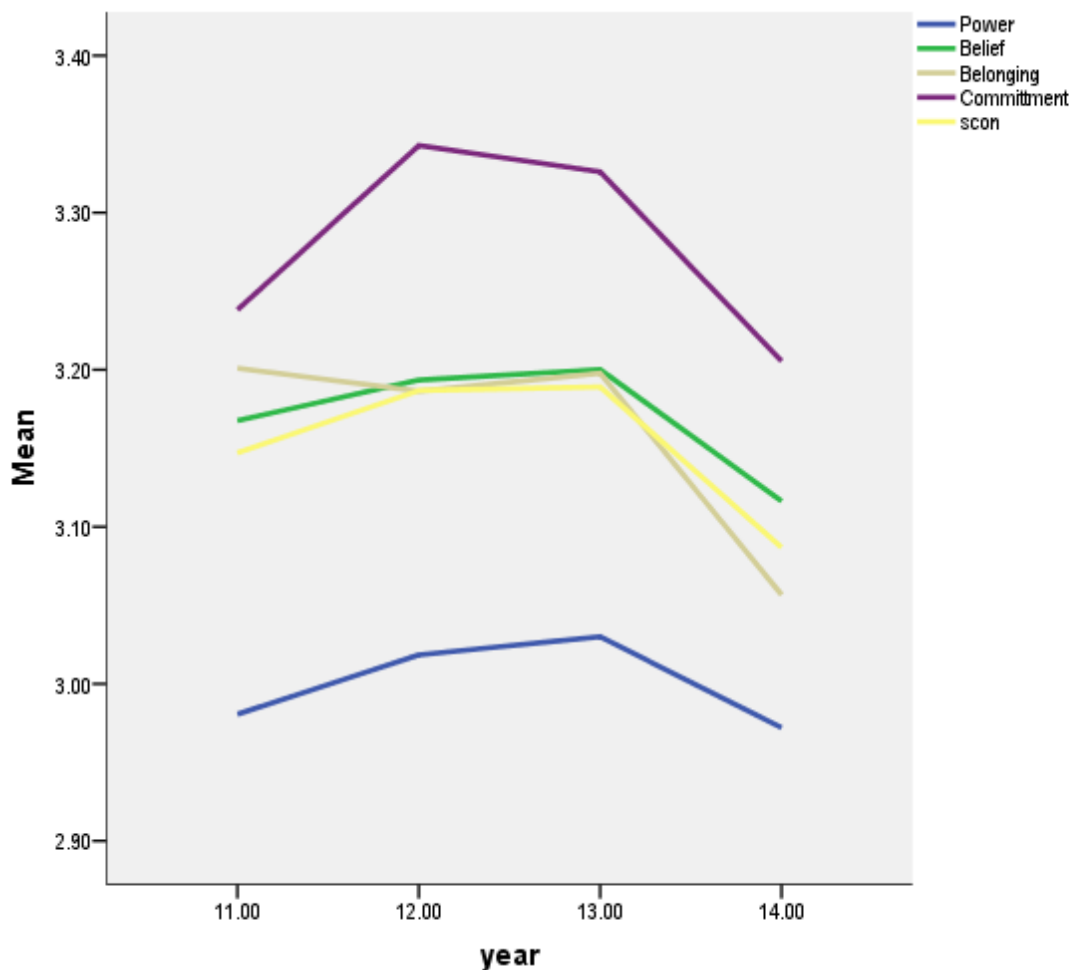
The final portion of the survey was devoted to a students' connection to the school. Some researchers have suggested that an individual's sense of connection is based on multiple factors: one's perception of the *Power* to influence or impact the institution; the *Belief* that the institution is a valid one, a student's sense that they *Belong* with others at the school, and students' *Commitment* that they can reach their goals through the school. Reliability analyses found excellent cohesion for the overall school connection scale ($\alpha=.916$) and the *power* ($\alpha=.832$), the *belief* ($\alpha=.756$), and the *belonging* ($\alpha=.814$) subscales. One item in the *commitment* subscale (*The things I learn in school help me outside of class*) did not seem to have a similar pattern to the other items and contributed to relatively low reliability ($\alpha=.700$) of the *commitment* subscale.

In general, students had very positive responses to most of the items on the school connection scale (See Appendix B for results). For example, 96.5% of respondents either

agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *I can be a success at this college* or 94.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *The rules at my school are fair*. Several items did not have high scores relative to other items. For example, only 63.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes* or 67.8% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *The college asks students about their ideas*.

When compared to the previous year's results, the overall scale scores and all of the sub-scale scores decreased (See Diagram 2 below). The scores were at the lowest level since the survey was first administered in Spring 11.

Diagram 2: Mean comparison of school connection and subscales over time.



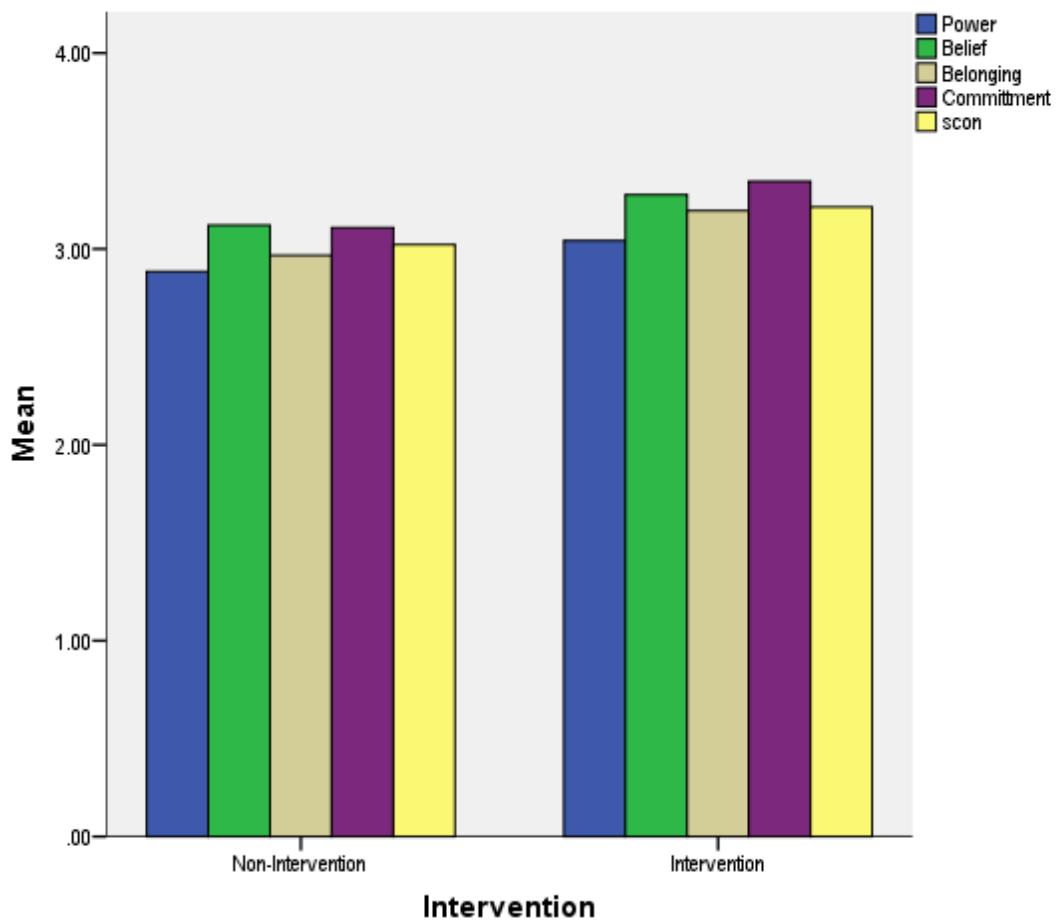
A comparison was also conducted between courses that received a Title V intervention vs. a matched sample of students who did not receive an intervention. The results found that those courses that received an intervention had slightly higher connection rates and in all the

sub-scales (See Diagram 3). None of the increases reached significant levels was tested (See Table 2).

Table 2: Mean comparison by course intervention status.

Intervention	Power	Belief	Belonging	Commitment	School Connection
Non-Intervention	2.8846	3.1131	2.9702	3.1090	3.0200
Intervention	3.0379	3.2519	3.1739	3.3373	3.1923
Total	3.0029	3.2189	3.1264	3.2833	3.1521

Diagram 3: Mean comparison of school connection and subscales between intervention and non-intervention groups.



Summary

Prior to any summary of the results, the limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation was the inherent challenges associated with using self-report items to assess latent variables. Said another way it is difficult to use survey items to assess abstract constructs, for example school connection. One way to moderate this limitation is to select, which was done in this case, instruments that have reliability and validity robustness.

Another weakness, that may affect comparisons to the previous data, was the sampling differences that occurred in Spring 14. This spring, courses that received an intervention and courses that were matched on instructor, time of day, and location, were added to the overall 10% sample. While there were not any significant differences between the samples on background items, these differences may have affected the comparisons.

These results, as were the previous year's, were very positive and suggest that students are connected to the college and have positive opinions about matriculation and instructional practices. This year, students' reported ratings of matriculation and instructional practices, however, decreased. These decreases are concerning, since the college has undergone a variety of efforts to increase the quality of instruction and student support. The college is in the midst of adjusting to statewide changes in student priority and eligibility. It may be that these changes are reducing the quality of students' experiences.

Overall, school connection scores, were high, but lower than from previous survey administrations. All scores dropped to the lowest levels since this survey was first administered in Spring 11. Again, these decreases may be due to a variety of factors and are concerning.

In the comparison between those courses that receive Title V interventions and those that did not, intervention courses had slightly higher school connection levels. The intervention group had comparatively higher levels in each of the sub-scales as well, although these differences did not reach significant levels. These comparisons, however, are fraught with difficulties in that many of these courses in the matched sample also receive interventions, which are not funded by Title V grant funds. These comparisons will be continued in future examinations.

Since it is difficult to conclude a trend from one year's worth of data, future administration of this survey will determine if these shifts will be sustained. Additionally, future research will provide more information as to the effect of the considerable intervention efforts funded by both the Title V and STEM grants.

Appendix A: Survey

Student Survey

In order to help us improve Gavilan College, we would like to learn more about your experience at our college. Participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your status as a student or as a participant in any program. It is anonymous so please do not put your name on the survey.

1). How many units have you completed at Gavilan College?

0 1-15 16-30 Over 30

2). Are you enrolled in or have you taken a basic skills class (ESL, ENGL/MATH 200s or 400s)?

Yes No

3). Which ethnic group best describes you?

African-American Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino White/Caucasian Native-American Mixed/Other

4). How much do you agree with the following statements about your experiences here at Gavilan College:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A*
<i>The registration and application process was easy.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The assessment/placement testing process was easy.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>In most of my classes, instructors <u>only</u> present information and student listen.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have easy access to the internet to do my schoolwork.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Instructors and administrators at this college listen to students' concerns.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Instructors and administrators at this college act on students' concerns.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have opportunities to make decisions at the college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The college asks students about their ideas.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>When there is an emergency, there is someone here to help.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>We do not waste time in my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Students of all ethnic groups are respected.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The rules at my college are fair.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am comfortable talking with instructors/staff at this college about my problems.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I feel like I belong at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I have friends at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I can be myself at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I can be a success at this college.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>This college can help me reach my goals.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>It is good for me to do what I am supposed to in my classes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* N/A means **Not Applicable** or that this question does not fit me.

Appendix B: Results

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total agree
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	%
	The registration and application process was easy.	19	4.1%	31	6.6%	290	61.8%	129	27.5%
The assessment/placement testing process was easy.	10	2.4%	50	12.1%	265	64.2%	88	21.3%	85.50%
In most of my classes, instructors only present information and students listen.	48	10.6%	219	48.5%	153	33.8%	32	7.1%	40.90%
Technology is used as a part of instruction in most of my classes.	23	5.0%	85	18.6%	257	56.4%	91	20.0%	76.40%
I have easy access to the internet to do my schoolwork.	13	2.4%	33	6.0%	248	45.2%	255	46.4%	91.60%
We do projects inside and/or outside of my classes in order to learn.	13	2.4%	73	13.7%	302	56.6%	146	27.3%	83.90%
Instructors and administrators at this college listen to students' concerns.	15	2.8%	62	11.7%	322	61.0%	129	24.4%	85.40%
Instructors and administrators at this college act on students' concerns.	14	2.8%	94	19.0%	287	58.0%	100	20.2%	78.20%
I have opportunities to make decisions at the college.	17	3.2%	63	12.0%	293	55.8%	152	29.0%	84.80%
The college asks students about their ideas.	30	5.8%	136	26.4%	262	50.9%	87	16.9%	67.80%
When there is an emergency, there is someone here to help.	5	1.1%	56	12.7%	289	65.7%	90	20.5%	86.20%
We do not waste time in my classes.	13	2.4%	86	15.6%	326	59.2%	126	22.9%	82.10%
Students of all ethnic groups are respected.	7	1.3%	11	2.0%	308	55.8%	226	40.9%	96.70%
The rules at my college are fair.	2	.4%	30	5.5%	351	64.3%	163	29.9%	94.20%
I am comfortable talking with instructors/staff at this college about my problems.	17	3.2%	79	14.7%	286	53.4%	154	28.7%	82.10%
I feel like I belong at this college.	15	2.8%	60	11.2%	313	58.6%	146	27.3%	85.90%
I have friends at this college.	1	.2%	33	6.0%	310	56.8%	202	37.0%	93.80%
I can be myself at this college.	5	.9%	17	3.1%	336	60.9%	194	35.1%	96.00%
I can be a success at this college.	7	1.3%	12	2.2%	316	58.0%	210	38.5%	96.50%
This college can help me reach my goals.	8	1.5%	17	3.1%	317	58.2%	203	37.2%	95.40%
The things I learn in school help me outside of my classes.	196	35.5%	7	1.3%	26	4.7%	323	58.5%	63.20%
It is good for me to do what I am supposed to in my classes.	1	.2%	6	1.1%	285	53.4%	242	45.3%	98.70%