College Success Factors Index
Spring 2011

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The College Success Factors Index (CSFI) measures the extent to which an individual has acquired and routinely demonstrates key skills associated with academic success in a college environment\(^1\). For each student, an overall CSFI score is calculated, as well as eight subscales. These subscales are intended to measure student characteristics that are related to specific factors associated with success in college (e.g., a sense of personal responsibility for learning, or effective time management skills). Unlike previous versions of the index, a lower score on the CSFI now indicates negative performance (e.g., higher risk, lower preparedness, lower aptitude). The subscales comprising the CSFI are:

- **Responsibility & Control** - lower scores describe understanding and meeting responsibility, and an internal locus of control
- **Competition** - lower scores indicate assertiveness in competition, including competing with one’s own prior success and own expectations
- **Task Precision** - lower scores relate to persistence in tasks (follow-through on goals) and being detail-oriented
- **Expectations** - lower scores are indicative of having goals (in assignments, course, knowledge-development, and career)
- **Wellness** - higher scores are related to more depression, anxiety, and stress
- **Time Management** - lower scores indicate efficient use of time, planning ahead, and meeting deadlines
- **College Involvement** - lower scores relate to participating in extracurricular activities, and having friendships with students and interactions with faculty.
- **Family Involvement** - lower scores indicate parental expectations of success, parents’ value of education, parental interest and praise, as well as parental education level

A student and his or her counselor can then work on ways to more broadly apply the student’s strengths and to find ways to work on the areas that the student finds most difficult. Additionally, this information may be used as part of an early alert system or an aid in counseling and tutoring sessions, among other uses. Information aggregated across students can help faculty and institutions pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of their students.

**CSFI Scores**

The author of the CSFI has stated that a “watchline” can be established as one standard deviation below the scale mean. These watchlines therefore differ for each subscale and the overall score, and for each different cohort. Scores below the watchline can be used to target interventions for individual students, as well as used by the institution to determine the risk areas for the majority of our students.

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\(^1\) Information about the CSFI is from Hallberg, E. C. (2001). *College success factors index: Student success and “early alert” report: A large Midwestern research university (Student development courses): Fall 2000.*
Are Cypress College students more or less at risk than the national sample?
Average scores of students in our sample generally scored within two points of the CSFI national sample’s average scores on all subscales, as shown in the table below; our students are neither more or less at risk than are students nationally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>National Means</th>
<th>Cypress Means</th>
<th>Watchline</th>
<th>% of Cypress Sample Scoring At/Below Watchline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility &amp; Control</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Precision</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Involvement</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do Cypress College students score above the “watchline?”
Using the standard deviation of our sample's average to determine the watchline means that 16% of the sample should score above the watchline (assuming that the CSFI scores of our students are normally distributed). More than the expected 16% of the sample scored above the watchline on almost every subscale (see table or chart). For Cypress College students, physical health and family involvement do not seem to be a problem. However, time management and being competitive in school seems to be particularly troubling. A large proportion of our students also have trouble being thorough and precise, as well as being involved on campus.
Is the CSFI related to student success?

For most scales, CSFI scores were not related to student success in their courses. However, high scores were related to high rates of success for the Task Precision subscale, the Time Management subscale, and the Family Involvement subscale. These differences can be seen by larger differences in the chart below between the success rates of students who scored above and below the watchline. This means that students who are more detail-oriented, manage their time well, or have supportive families are more likely to be success at Cypress College.

Is the CSFI related to student persistence?

For most scales, CSFI scores were not related to students continuing at Cypress College in the following fall term. However, students who scored above the watchline on the total scale had higher persistence rates than students who scored below the watchline.
Students who scored above the watchline on the Expectations and Family Involvement subscales also had higher persistence rates than those who scored below the watchline on those subscales. The persistence rates are shown in the chart below.

**Conclusion**

The current sample of students who took the CSFI\(^2\) scored similarly to national samples, yet there were several subscales that had large proportions of students scoring below the risk watchline. This is particularly troubling for subscales that are statistically related to student success (Task Precision and Time Management). We recommend interventions (and follow-up evaluations) are implemented to target students’ task precision and time management in hopes of improving students’ success, as well student expectations of educational and career achievement and/or improving family support for students’ educational aspirations in order to improve persistence rates.

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\(^2\) Data provided to Institutional Research and Planning in this cohort included only students who had also attended a CSFI counseling session.