

The College Student Inventory

Form B 4-Year Scale Descriptions

The Retention Management System Plus

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The CSI Reports

The College Student Inventory (CSI) Form B is a 100-item questionnaire. Students will likely have completed the inventory before or during the first few weeks of classes, and you can readily access reports about each student. If your campus uses the online CSI, these reports are available immediately upon completion of the CSI. If your campus uses the paper version of the CSI, the answer sheets are shipped to Ruffalo Noel Levitz, scored within two to four business days of arrival to our office, and then posted to a secure online link for your access.

The Advisor/Counselor Report and the Student Report convey the student's self-reported information as concisely as possible. The Student Report includes two to three pages of narrative about the student's results which are not included in the other reports. In the narrative, your campus coordinator may have inserted a paragraph about your particular campus services under Receptivity to Support Services. If your coordinator has given you permission to access these reports electronically, please review the Report Access for Advisors.

The following discussion provides a detailed explanation of the more sensitive CSI Coordinator Report. Though the Coordinator Report is comparable to the Advisor/Counselor Report, a key feature of the Coordinator Report is not, however, included in the Advisor/Counselor Report; namely, the Summary Observations (dropout proneness, predicted academic difficulty, educational stress, and receptivity to institutional help).

Identifying Information

This section lists the student's name, educational level, gender, age, student ID, and group designation. The date that the report was initially generated from the CSI and the name of your institution are also noted.

Restricted Report

If the student has responded "no" to the last item of the CSI, then a boxed statement appears at the top of the report:

Restricted to Program Coordinator per Student's Request

If you receive or access a Restricted Report by mistake, you should return it promptly to the RMS *Plus* coordinator.

Instructions

This section contains a brief set of instructions to guide you in discussing the report with the student. Suggestions for follow-up measures and appropriate use of the report also appear. This section is printed on every report as a reminder of the basic conditions under which the information has been made available.

Summary Observations (only found on Coordinator Report)

This section presents the results from four summary scales, discussed below. All scores in this section are expressed in terms of stanines, which are normalized standard scores with a mean of 5 and a standard deviation of 1.96. The distribution of students falling into the different categories is:

Score	Distribution
9	4%
8	7%
7	12%
6	17%
5	20%
4	17%
3	12%
2	7%
1	4%

The larger the stanine is, the larger the corresponding raw score. For example, a stanine of 9 indicates that the student's raw score was in the top 4 percent of the normative sample, a stanine of 8 indicates that the student's raw score was in the next 7 percent (and the top 11 percent of the sample), and so forth.

The Dropout Proneness Scale

This scale measures the student's overall inclination to drop out of school before finishing a degree. The scale was developed empirically by comparing students who stayed in school after their first term with those who did not.

One should be careful not to attribute greater predictive power to the dropout scale than it actually possesses. Existing research suggests that many students with high scores on dropout proneness will not, in fact, drop out during their first term. While predictiveness should increase when dropout is studied over time, there are simply too many mediating factors in predicting this behavior with a high degree of accuracy. For this reason, *students with high scores on dropout proneness should be considered as having a pattern of intellectual and motivational traits that is loosely associated with dropping out, but which may or may not lead to actual dropout in any given case.*

The Predicted Academic Difficulty Scale

This scale was developed by correlating CSI questions with first-term college grade point average (GPA). It is thus designed to predict who is most likely to have low grades in college. The caution that applies to the dropout scale also applies to this scale. The scale will identify some, but not all, of the students who will encounter academic difficulty during their college careers. *Predictors of academic difficulty include such factors as study habits, verbal and writing confidence, math and science confidence, desire to finish college, interactions with previous teachers, and high school GPA.*

The Educational Stress Scale

This scale measures the student's general feelings of distress in the context of college. It was developed as a factor analysis of all of the CSI's scales, and it represents the first (largest) factor. One part of the scale focuses on emotional aspects of academic life. Thus, students scoring high on this scale tend to feel dissatisfied with teachers in general based on their earlier school experiences. They also tend to have a lower-than-average score on desire to finish college. Finally, their study habits tend to be lower than average, suggesting difficulties in focusing and self-discipline.

The educational stress scale also measures two broader aspects of distress. First, high-scorers tend to have a lower-than-average sense of family emotional support. Second, high-scorers are more interested in receiving personal counseling than most students. Based on these considerations, *this scale should be considered the CSI's primary indicator of the student's need for personal counseling*. But one should keep in mind that the CSI's main purpose is not to assess mental health. For this reason there are very important facets of mental health that this scale does not measure. Rather, it is merely one piece of information that can be used in making referrals for personal counseling.

Receptivity to Institutional Help

This scale indicates how responsive the student is likely to be to intervention. The higher the score, the more receptive the student is. This scale is based on how strongly the student expressed the desire for help in a wide variety of areas, such as career counseling, personal counseling, social engagement, academic assistance, and financial guidance.

Overall, the four Summary Observations scales have been keyed in a way that simplifies their joint interpretation. Thus, high scores on the dropout proneness, predicted academic difficulty, and educational stress scales all indicate high need. A high score on receptivity to institutional help indicates a strong desire for help. The general pattern is for high scores to imply the advisability of intervention. In addition to giving referrals to students who score high on these scales, you may want to make a special effort to befriend them so they will feel comfortable coming to you for advice at critical times during their first year in college.

The summary scales involve sensitive global information which a student may not be able to understand or accept in a constructive fashion. Thus, a student with a high score on dropout proneness might misinterpret this score to mean that they should give up because they stand little chance of succeeding at college. *In fact, the opposite conclusion might be called for: that the student **can** succeed if motivational barriers are overcome. Because of their susceptibility to misinterpretation, it is recommended that the summary scores not be discussed with students.* If a student claims the Coordinator Report, which will occur very rarely, you will want to have a special conference with that student to explain the summary scores.

Motivational Assessment

The heart of the CSI Form B consists of the 17 independent motivational scales in this section. The student's standing on each scale is indicated in two ways: as a percentile rank and as a bar graph on a visual profile.

If you are interested in the exact score, you can refer directly to the percentile rank; if you prefer a general and immediate sense of the student's motivational pattern, the visual profile will give you an overview at a glance. A percentile rank indicates the proportion of students in the normative sample who scored below that student.

These scores are organized into five sections: academic motivation, social motivation, general coping, receptivity to support services, and two supplementary scales.

Academic Motivation

Study Habits. This scale measures the student's willingness to make the sacrifices needed to achieve academic success. *It focuses on a student's effort, rather than interest in intellectual matters or the desire for a degree.* It can therefore be used to make referrals to services that assist students in developing better study habits.

A sample item is, "I study very hard for all my courses, even those I don't like."

Reading Interests. This scale measures how much the student enjoys the actual learning process, not the extent to which the student is striving to attain high grades or to complete a degree. *It measures the degree to which the student enjoys reading and discussing serious ideas.* Students with high scores are likely to enjoy classroom discussions and will feel comfortable with the high level of intellectual activity that often occurs in the college classroom. Students with low scores can be encouraged to broaden and deepen their intellectual interests.

A sample item is, "Over the years, books have broadened my horizons and stimulated my imagination."

Verbal and Writing Confidence. This scale measures the degree to which the student feels capable of doing well in courses that heavily emphasize reading, writing, and public speaking. It is not intended as a substitute for aptitude assessment, but rather as an indicator of self-esteem relative to this type of task. A comparison between the student's standing on this scale and verbal aptitude or achievement test can be very revealing. Talented students who underestimate their abilities in the verbal area need to be strongly encouraged to recognize their potential. Students with low scores can be referred to services that will help them strengthen their verbal confidence.

A sample item is, "I am capable of writing a very clear and well-organized paper."

Math and Science Confidence. This scale measures the degree to which the student feels capable of doing well in math and science courses. It is an indicator of self-esteem relative to this type of task and is not intended as a substitute for aptitude assessment. A comparison between the student's standing on this scale and a math and science aptitude or achievement test can be very revealing. Some talented students underestimate their abilities, and they need to be strongly encouraged to recognize their talents. Students with low scores can be referred to services that will help them strengthen their confidence in math and science.

A sample item is, "Math has always been a challenge for me."

Commitment to College. This scale measures the degree to which the student values a college education, the satisfactions of college life, and the long-term benefits of graduation. *It identifies students who possess a keen interest in persisting, regardless of their prior level of achievement.* With low-scoring students, an advisor can explore their beliefs and values related to college. In some cases, additional clues about scores for this scale can be informed by low scores in parental education levels, career planning scores, or academic confidence.

A sample item is, "I am very strongly dedicated to finishing college – no matter what obstacles get in my way."

Interactions with Previous Teachers. This scale measures the student's attitudes toward teachers and administrators in general, as acquired through their pre-college experiences. *Students with poor academic achievement often express a general hostility toward teachers and this attitude often interferes with their work.* A counselor may want to help a low-scoring student clarify how certain isolated incidents in school may have influenced their attitude toward all educators. Sometimes a low score reflects a degree of self-sufficiency that borders on arrogance when the student is a high-achiever. Other times a low score may indicate that the student has been treated poorly by one or more teachers as far back as elementary school; perhaps the student was subjected to ridicule or perhaps efforts were criticized or went unrecognized by a teacher.

A sample item is, "Most of my teachers have been very caring and dedicated."

General Coping

Social Engagement. *This scale measures the student's general inclination to join in social activities. The relationship between sociability and academic outcomes can be complex. High sociability, for instance, can be a positive force for a person with strong study habits, but a negative force for a person with poor study skills. An advisor may wish to explore the implications of an extreme score, either high or low, with the student.*

A sample item is, "I would like to attend an informal gathering where I can meet some new friends."

Family Support. *This scale measures the student's satisfaction with the quality of communication, understanding, and respect that they have experienced in their family. These are factors that can influence their ability to adapt to the stresses of college life. An advisor can offer encouragement and empathy to low-scoring students, or they can refer these students for personal counseling. Low family support has repeatedly emerged in the validity studies as a strong correlate of attrition, particularly in academically successful students. Many advisors focus heavily on this scale for insights into a student's difficulties.*

A sample item is, "My family and I communicated very well when I was young, and we have a good understanding of each other's point of view."

Capacity for Tolerance. *This scale measures the degree to which the student feels that he or she can accept people without regard to their political and social opinions. Most directly, it indicates whether a student will be able to tolerate the diversity of social backgrounds to which he or she is exposed at college. But the scale also provides a broader indication of the student's general socio-political flexibility as it relates to all unfamiliar and threatening philosophical perspectives, including those that arise in course content. Thus, it can identify students whose perspective may impede the learning of threatening ideas in such areas as philosophy, comparative religion, world literature, world history, and the social sciences. An advisor or counselor may wish to discuss this potential problem with the student and encourage him or her to consider new ways of thinking about the basic issues of life without immediately accepting or rejecting them.*

A sample item is, "I find it easy to be friends with people whose political ideas differ sharply from my own."

Career Plans. *This scale measures the degree to which the student has defined a career goal and developed a firm commitment to it. Because career aspirations are often the central foundation upon which academic motivation is based, students with low scores should be strongly encouraged to seek career counseling. In a more general way, the scale can be useful in assessing the student's progress in moving from the exploratory and adventurous attitudes of adolescence to the adoption of greater realism and responsibility typical of adulthood. Lack of progress on this dimension may indicate the need for personal counseling.*

A sample item is, "I have made a firm decision to enter a certain occupation and have begun planning my life around that decision."

Financial Security. *This scale measures the extent to which the student feels secure about his or her financial situation, especially as it relates to current and future college enrollment. The scale is not intended to measure the objective level of financial resources that the student has, only their feeling of being financially secure. Some students with quite modest means may feel more secure than do students with much greater means but higher expectations. With low-scoring students, an advisor can explore their financial needs and refer them to appropriate offices for assistance.*

A sample item is, "I have the financial resources that I need to finish college."

Request for Support Services

Academic Assistance. *This scale measures the student's desire to receive course-specific tutoring or individual help with study habits, reading skills, examination skills, writing skills, or mathematics skills. It can be taken into account in deciding whether to encourage the student to seek academic assistance.*

A sample item is, "I would like to receive some help in improving my study habits."

Personal Counseling. *This scale measures the student's felt need for help with personal problems. It covers attitudes toward school, instructor problems, roommate problems, family problems, general tensions, problems relating to dating and friendships, and problems in controlling an unwanted habit. The scale is a very useful aid in deciding whether to encourage the student to seek counseling for motivational problems indicated elsewhere in the CSI.*

A sample item is, "I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school."

Social Engagement. *This scale measures the student's desire to meet other students and to participate in group activities. Students with high scores can be directed toward the type of social activities they desire.*

A sample item is, "I would like to attend an informal gathering where I could meet some new friends."

Career Guidance. *This scale measures the student's desire for help in selecting a major or career. It can be used in conjunction with the career planning scale. If the student has a low score on both scales, for example, an advisor can point out that he or she seems to be avoiding the issue of career choice.*

A sample item is, "I would like some help selecting an occupation that is well suited to my interests and abilities."

Financial Guidance. *This scale measures the student's desire to discuss ways of increasing his/her financial resources for college. Even though the opportunities for scholarships are usually very limited at the point at which the student completes the inventory, loans and work-study positions may still be available. A referral to the placement office may also be very helpful. In some cases, it may be helpful for an advisor simply to empathize with the student's situation and provide encouragement regarding the prospects of working part-time while attending school. Depending on the circumstances, the advisor may wish to help the student recognize the advisability of cutting back on his or her course load when working long hours at a job.*

A sample item is, "I would like to talk with someone about getting a loan to help me through school."

Supplementary Scales

Internal Validity. *This scale measures the student's carefulness in completing the inventory. Each question asks the student to follow a simple instruction and it is scored in terms of whether or not the student followed the instruction. The scale is very useful in identifying any students who might have responded randomly in order to finish quickly. A sample item from this category is, "Enter a '2' for this question."*

Since the overwhelming majority of students (97.1 percent) make one error or less on the validity scale, the task can be considered quite easy. For this reason, students who fall into the categories labeled "questionable" (two or three errors) or "unsatisfactory" (four or more errors) are likely to be distractible, oppositional, or uncommitted to their education. Because these traits are related to dropout, a low validity score may prove to be an indicator of dropout proneness.

In some cases, a low validity score can indicate that a student has a severe language difficulty. But because the validity task is so easy, many students with serious deficits in English will not be identified through the scale. Schools enrolling large numbers of students with significant problems with English should consider using a standard reading test to screen all first-year students. If that approach is not feasible, advisors

should at least remain alert to the possibility that a foreign student may not have had an adequate understanding of the CSI to complete it properly. The indicator of native language can be useful in this regard (see below). Problems can then be handled on an individual basis.

Specific Recommendations

Selecting support services is a difficult task, especially for first-year students. Beginning students have complex needs, which they do not understand very well. In addition, they may have many motivational barriers to admitting their needs, even to themselves. The present section helps students make these decisions by presenting a set of recommendations that clarify their needs, relate their needs to specific forms of assistance, and present the issue of assistance as a set of clear alternatives that can be readily evaluated and compared.

Means of Arriving at Recommendations

To use the recommendations effectively, it is helpful to understand how they are formulated. The CSI's scoring program contains a pool of 25 potential action statements, which are listed in the following section. Each action relates to a particular form of student assistance (e.g., "Get help with reading skills"). A priority score ranging from 0.0 to 10.00 is computed for each potential action based on a comprehensive analysis of the student's needs and desires. A 10.0 indicates a very high-priority recommendation.

Needs are inferred from the student's background data (e.g., high school grades) and motivational assessment (e.g., study habits, desire to finish college). The priority score for a given action will increase in direct proportion to the measured need for that action.

These initial, need-based priority scores are then adjusted in two ways.

- The first adjustment takes into account the student's general interest in the broader category to which the action belongs. For instance, the priority scores of all potential actions related to academic support are increased if the student's general receptivity to academic support is high.
- The second adjustment takes into account the student's desire for the specific assistance in question. If a student expresses a strong desire for help with reading skills, for example, then his or her priority score for this potential action is adjusted upward.

After these computations have been made, the potential actions having the highest priority scores are printed in the form of short, direct recommendations (e.g., "Get help in selecting an academic program"). Recommendations are printed in order of priority scores, with the strongest recommendations at the top. Priority scores are noted directly after the statement of recommendation. For example, "Discuss job market for college graduates 8.0."

The CSI Coordinator Report ranks the seven strongest recommendations, while the Advisor/Counselor Report and Student Report state the 10.0 strongest recommendations in order of importance to the student.

Most priority scores that appear on reports fall in the top end of the distribution, from 6.0 to 10.0. Approximately 70 percent of priority scores are below 7.0. However, even a priority score of 5.0 is worth consideration, since it exceeds 40 percent of all the priority scores in a normal distribution.

Only rarely will an advisor see a priority score of 10.0, since a student must have both the highest possible need and the highest possible desire in order to earn a priority of 10.0.

Potential Action Statements

The following list contains the 25 potential action statements that form the pool from which recommendations are made in the CSI reports. You'll notice that they cluster thematically around academics, personal, career, financial, and social areas.

- a. Get help with exam skills.
- b. Get help with study habits.
- c. Get help with writing skills.
- d. Get help with basic math skills.
- e. Get tutoring in selected areas.
- f. Get help with reading skills.
- g. Discuss attitude toward school with counselor.
- h. Discuss any unwanted habit with counselor.
- i. Discuss personal relationships and social life with counselor.
- j. Discuss any family problems with counselor.
- k. Discuss any emotional tensions with counselor.
- l. Discuss any unhappy feelings with counselor.
- m. Discuss the qualifications for occupations.
- n. Get help in selecting an academic program.
- o. Discuss job market for college graduates.
- p. Get help in selecting an occupation.
- q. Discuss advantages/disadvantages of occupations.
- r. Get help in finding a part-time job.
- s. Get help in obtaining a loan.
- t. Get help in obtaining a scholarship.
- u. Get help in finding a summer job.
- v. Get help in meeting new friends.
- w. Get information about student activities.
- x. Get advice from an experienced student.
- y. Get information about clubs and social organizations.

Priority of Recommendations

On the CSI Reports, priority scores of greater than 8.0 are most noteworthy. If a student has multiple recommendations that exceed this level, you may need to focus the student's attention on those recommendations that you believe are the most critical. If the student is concerned about having so many priority recommendations, explain that the high scores are partly due to his/her high level of receptivity. You may also want to explain that 8.0 is a somewhat arbitrary number and that it does not represent a critical dividing point; it is merely a rough boundary line.

Special care should be taken in making final recommendations to students. The printed recommendations should only be considered preliminary, as they are generated by an analytical model that contains a definite margin of error. The model assumes that students are most likely to accept and act upon recommendations that are consistent with their existing motivational framework. Based on this premise, it gives relatively strong weight to the student's general receptivity in the area and to their expressed desire for the specific form of assistance under consideration. While the model appears sound as a general theoretical basis for formulating recommendations, *it is not intended to be definitive*. There will be individuals who do not fit the model's assumptions.

For this reason, *one should never accept recommendations uncritically*. The recommendations should be weighed in terms of all the information you have about the student, including transcripts, placement

scores, and the student's comments during your conference. After such consideration, you may well decide to place more emphasis on an intermediate recommendation (e.g., one with a priority score of 6.0) than on a strong one (e.g., one with a priority score of 9.0). Given the unique features in every individual case and the fact that printed recommendations are already a select subset from the larger pool of potential actions, such adjustments are quite appropriate.

Student Background Information

To better understand the student's present motivational pattern, it is often helpful to have an overview of his or her background. For this reason, *the report provides a summary of information about the student's high school academics, family educational background, hours the student plans to work, and other indications.*

High School Academics

This section presents information about the student's high school education.

Senior-Year Grade Point Average. The student is asked to give the average of all their grades during their senior year in high school. The response is often quite accurate and it gives a moderately good indication of the student's first-year academic performance.

Family Background

This section provides valuable information about the student's family background. Since the family often instills many key skills and attitudes, it usually has the single greatest influence on the way a student approaches college.

Racial/Ethnic Origin. This question can be a springboard for the advisor to identify broad bases of community support for all ethnic groups on campus, as well as support services for students of diversity.

Mother's/Father's/Guardian's Education. Information about the educational level of the student's parents is helpful in gaining insight into the student's socioeconomic perspective, especially his or her feelings about education. Students raised by well-educated parents often have a greater-than-average appreciation for the value of education and career success, but they may also feel burdened by pressures to meet high parental expectations. Other parents may strongly encourage achievement so that their child will have more opportunities than they did, or they may discourage academic achievement for cultural reasons. These patterns illustrate the kinds of issues that a counselor may wish to explore with a student whose other scores indicate a need for special help.

College Experience

This section gives information about the timing of the students' decision to enroll in college, the academic degree they are seeking, and the number of hours per week they plan to work at a job.

Decision to Enroll. The student is asked to indicate when he or she made the decision to enroll at this institution. Research indicates that the closer to the time of actual enrollment that a student makes the decision, the greater the propensity for dropping out.

Degree Sought. The student is asked to specify the highest degree he/she is planning to pursue. This question should not necessarily be taken at face value. Rather, it reveals something about the public stance the student has adopted regarding personal goals. A weak student who expresses an intention of getting an advanced degree may simply be trying to appease parental expectations. On the other hand, a talented student who indicates a low goal may have had their educational goals stunted. The student's answer to this question is a valuable point of departure for further discussion.

Plans to Work. The student is asked to indicate how many hours per week he or she plans to work at a job while enrolled at the college. Students who work more than 15 hours per week while enrolled as full-time students are generally at greater risk of dropping out and/or performing below their expectations.

Other Indications

This section has been designed to provide information about the student's desire to transfer, which should be handled with considerable sensitivity by the advisor. This score does not appear on the student's report.

The Notice Box

The statement in this box emphasizes the discretionary nature of the report. It is important to respect the student's right to claim the CSI Coordinator Report and CSI Advisor/Counselor Report at any time. The intent is to accommodate the student who may feel uncomfortable with his/her results and may decide that he/she does not wish to have them filed in an academic office.