



Priorities Survey for Online Learners

JWU College of Professional Studies – April 2023

Recap of Results

JWU's College of Professional Studies administered the Ruffalo Noel Levitz *Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)* in April 2023, following previous administrations in April 2021, April 2018, April 2017 and May 2016. The college did not administer the survey during spring of 2019 or 2020, as the conversion to semesters and 8-week/16-week courses was taking place during that time. The PSOL provides an opportunity for an online institution to examine the priorities of its online students as a unique group. The PSOL has been administered by more than 150 institutions each year and completed by over 95,000 students in the past three years. The PSOL asks students to respond to 26 statements about online learning with both a level of importance and a level of satisfaction. In addition, CPS has defined four additional customized items for the survey, bringing the total items to 30. The data from the survey provides the basis to identify the things that matter to CPS's online students and how satisfied these students are with them. With this information, CPS can target the specific areas most important to its students to enhance both satisfaction and retention.

Further, by administering the survey repeatedly, progress in increasing student satisfaction can be objectively measured and documented. CPS has had varying results from the multiple survey administrations. Results from the April 2017 survey demonstrated an increase in student satisfaction across all of the items in the survey compared to the May 2016 survey results, while the April 2018 survey results compared to the April 2017 showed small declines for 18 of 26 items, and small increases in the remaining 8 items. For the April 2021 administration, we saw increases in the satisfaction scores across 22 of the 26 survey items, a marked improvement over 2018. Similar to the April 2018 administration, the April 2023 administration reflects small declines in 18 of 26 survey items, 9 of which are statistically significant and 9 which are not, and small increases in 8 survey items.

Survey Population

The link to the PSOL instrument was sent on March 20, 2023 to all 2,352 CPS online students actively registered in the Spring 2023 term, excluding those students who started their online program in Spring 2023 (who did not have enough experience with the online program to effectively assess many of the questions). The survey closed on Sunday, April 30, 2023. A total of 352 students (15%) completed the survey, a response rate below that of any other CPS survey administration and less than half the response rate of the 2021 survey (31%). Survey outreach communications for the 2023 survey were identical to those for the 2021 survey, making the very low response rate difficult to understand. There appears to be a difference in the students currently enrolled at CPS compared to two years ago, perhaps as a result of the isolation and insecurity during the acute Covid period. The 2023 survey also included students enrolled through the Guild partnership, some of which have seemed less prepared for college level study than our typical CPS online students. The demographics of the 352 responding students were compared with the historical demographics of CPS active students and found to align strongly.

Comparison Group

In addition to providing insight into the satisfaction of CPS's online students, the PSOL results also compare CPS results to those of a Comparison Group of participating institutions over the past four

years. That group encompasses approximately 95,000 students from 150 U.S. institutions, including both public and private college and universities offering online education.

Scoring Scale for Items

The PSOL uses a 7-point Likert scale for the 30 importance/satisfaction items, with 1 being the lowest importance or satisfaction level and 7 being the highest importance or satisfaction level. Three additional Summary Satisfaction questions also use a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest possible response and 7 being the highest.

Demographic Items

The PSOL includes 13 standard demographic items. As noted above, the demographics of the 352 respondents to the survey were compared with the historical demographics of CPS's full online population and found to be very similar. As in years past, female responders were 64.7% of overall responders, slightly less than the 71.2% female respondents in the 2021 administration of the survey. More males participated in the survey as a percentage of total respondents than any previous survey administration.

Survey Results

There are 26 standard items rated for importance and satisfaction on the PSOL. CPS's scores on the 26 items are compared year to year and are also compared to those of the Comparison Group institutions. The four custom CPS items added to the survey cannot be compared to the Comparison Group, as they are unique to CPS. The 26 standard items on the PSOL have been analyzed statistically and conceptually to form five comprehensive scales that are titled Institutional Perceptions, Academic Services, Instructional Services, Enrollment Services, and Student Services. Strengths and Challenges are derived from examining the gaps between the institution's importance and satisfaction scores.

Five Scale Items

The five scale items defined by the PSOL are described below:

- **Academic Services:** assess the services students utilize to achieve their academic goals, including advising, course offerings, technical assistance, online library resources and tutoring services.
- **Enrollment Services:** assesses the processes and services related to enrolling students in the online program, including financial aid, registration and payment procedures.
- **Institutional Perceptions:** assesses how students perceive the institution.
- **Instructional Services:** measures students' academic experience, the instructional materials, the faculty/student interactions, evaluation procedures, and the quality of instruction.
- **Student Services:** measures the quality of student programs and services, including responses to student requests, online career services, and the bookstore.

Scale	2021 CPS Satisfaction	2023 CPS Satisfaction	Comparison Group 2023	Mean Diff
Academic Services	6.17	6.01	6.04	-0.08
Enrollment Services	6.17	5.97	6.07	-0.10
Institutional Perceptions	6.06	5.90	5.99	-0.09
Instructional Services	5.95	5.77	5.94	-0.17**
Student Services	6.16	6.02	5.96	0.06

As shown in the chart above, CPS's satisfaction scores for 2023 on the five scale items decreased for four of the five scales when shown against the CPS 2021 satisfaction scores and the 2023 Comparison Group. It is important to note that the only statistically significant difference was for the Instructional Services with a -0.17 change between the 2023 result and that of the Comparison Group. The only scale upon which CPS outperformed its own 2021 results and the Comparison Group is the Student Services scale with a 0.06 positive difference, which is not a statistically significant difference.

Strengths

Strengths are items with high importance and high satisfaction, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the upper 25% of all satisfaction scores. CPS results cite five strengths, listed in descending order of importance below, three of which were also cited as Strengths in the 2021 survey.

1. My program advisor is accessible by email and telephone (Item 2 – also cited in 2021 Strengths)
2. Program requirements are clear and reasonable (Item 7 – new for 2023)
3. This institution responds quickly when I request information (Item 10 – also cited in 2021 Strengths).
4. Assessment and evaluation procedures are clear and reasonable (Item 17 – new for 2023)
5. Registration for online courses is convenient (Item 18 – also cited in 2021 Strengths).

The two Strengths identified in 2021, but not in the 2023 results are:

- Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me (Item 23).
- This institution has a good reputation (Item 1).

CPS's 2023 Strengths results show slightly higher satisfaction scores than the CPS 2021 results in four of the five strengths (1, 2, 3, and 4). The score on Item 18 regarding Registration is lower than the 2021 results (6.15 vs. 6.33). The 2023 Strengths show slightly lower satisfaction scores for all five of the items when comparing to the 2023 Comparison Group, although only one Strength had a statistically significant lower score at the .05 level of confidence (Item 2 – 6.32 vs. 6.49).

Challenges

Challenges are items with high importance and low satisfaction or a large performance gap, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the lower 25% of all satisfaction scores, or items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the top 25% of all performance gap scores. CPS results cite five challenges, listed in descending order of importance below.

1. Instructional materials are appropriate for program content (Item 3).
2. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress (Item 4).
3. The quality of online instruction is excellent (Item 20).
4. CPS Item: Faculty provide feedback I can use to improve my learning (Item 28).
5. Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment (Item 6).

Four of the five challenges identified were also listed as challenges in both the April 2021 and April 2018 surveys. These are common areas of dissatisfaction across the institutions that use the PSOL on a regular basis. CPS's 2023 scores on these four challenges were lower than both the April 2021 survey results and the Comparison Group, although none at a statistically significant level.

Satisfaction on 26 Items

Another assessment through the PSOL is the comparison of the satisfaction scores of the institution's online students on the 26 items to the satisfaction scores of the comparison group students. Overall, CPS's results on the PSOL survey indicate that CPS's online students perceive the online education provided by CPS in ways that are very similar to the perceptions of students in the Comparison Group institutions. For the Spring 2023 administration, 17 of the 26 items (65%) had satisfaction scores that reflected no statistically significant differences from satisfaction scores of the Comparison Group. Within this group, 7 items had slightly higher satisfaction scores and 10 had slightly lower scores. There were 8 items when compared to the Comparison Group that had statistically significant lower levels of satisfaction and which are listed below. The 8 items with statistically significant lower scores than the Comparison Group are:

1. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress (Item 4 – 5.78 vs. 5.95*).
2. Student to student collaborations are valuable to me (Item 8 – 4.98 vs. 5.43***).
3. There are sufficient offerings within my program of study (Item 12 – 5.82 vs. 6.01*).
4. The frequency of student and instructor interactions is adequate (Item 13 – 5.67 vs. 5.94***).
5. Registration for online courses is convenient (Item 18 – 6.15 vs. 6.33*).
6. The quality of online instruction is excellent (Item 20 – 5.62 vs. 5.86**).
7. Adequate online library materials are provided (Item 21 – 6.06 vs. 6.25**).
8. Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me (Item 23 – 6.07 vs. 6.24*).

One item (Item 26 – The bookstore provides timely service to students) had a statistically significant higher score than the Comparison Group (6.32 vs. 6.13*) in the 2023 administration. Two of the above items (2. Item 8 and 5. Item 18) were also lower than the Comparison Group in the 2021 administration of the survey.

*NOTE: * Denotes statistically significant at the 0.05 level; ** denotes statistically significant at the 0.01 level; *** denotes statistically significant at the 0.001 level.*

Summary Questions on Satisfaction

There are three Summary Questions on the PSOL (not part of the 26 scale items) that indicate overall student satisfaction. CPS saw its overall student satisfaction decline on all three measures of student satisfaction. While the Comparison Group's overall satisfaction declined on all three Summary Questions, they did not decline as much as the CPS student responses. The PSOL administration in 2021 is CPS's high water mark for overall PSOL results.

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

	2021 CPS	2021 CompGrp	2023 CPS	2023 CompGrp
What I expected or better	93%	91%	86%	87%
Worse than expected	7%	9%	14%	13%
Average numeric score	5.25	5.17	5.10	5.21

2. Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far?

	2021 CPS	2021 CompGrp	2023 CPS	2023 CompGrp
Somewhat satisfied or higher	88%	86%	77%	82%
Neutral or dissatisfied	12%	14%	23%	18%
Average numeric score	5.84	5.79	5.62	5.80

3. All in all, if you had to do it over again, would you enroll here again?

	2021 CPS	2021 CompGrp	2023 CPS	2023 CompGrp
Maybe yes or higher	86%	85%	79%	82%
Don't know or no	14%	15%	21%	18%
Average numeric score	5.92	5.86	5.70	5.92

CPS saw declines in these overall satisfaction questions in 2023 both in comparison to its 2021 results and to the Comparison Group. This is, of course, disappointing to everyone on the CPS team.

Actions to Improve Satisfaction

Steps we will take to address the overall drop in satisfaction summary items, the Challenges items and the 8 items where declines in satisfaction were statistically significant when compared with past results and the Comparison Group include:

- The CPS Leadership Team will develop a PSOL Action Plan with specific steps to address each of the five Challenges identified in the survey with the goal of increasing student satisfaction in these areas in the next survey administration in Spring 2025.
- The PSOL Action Plan will also address the 8 survey items in which the decline in satisfaction in 2023 is statistically significant. Note that two survey items (Items 4 and 20) are included in both the Challenges and in the 8 survey items with statistically significant lower scores, resulting in a total of 11 items to be addressed in the PSOL Action Plan.
- The Action Plan will be drafted by July 31, 2023, and implemented starting in the Fall 2023 semester.
- Success with improving on these 11 items will be assessed through the Spring 2025 administration of the PSOL.

Potential Contributors to Satisfaction Declines

- A perceived change in the level of engagement and commitment among the current CPS student body reflected by poor participation in the PSOL survey, higher course withdrawal and failure rates, and reduced retention rates, particularly among undergraduate students.
- A reduction in key staffing of CPS created by the transfer/promotion of CPS employees to other departments with no approval to replace the lost positions. This has left meaningful gaps in a number of areas related to student satisfaction.