

First Impressions: Student Perspectives on the Conduct of Start-of-Term Classes, Sy 2023-2024

Sheryl Ann S. Coderias¹, Vinus C. Daniel², Irish T. Daus³,
Mary Grace A. Bulahao⁴, Debora B. Sampaga⁵
<http://orcid.org/0009-0009-0304-3392>⁵
Aldersgate College Inc
deb_sampaga@aldersgate-college.com⁵

ABSTRACT

The first four weeks of classes serve as a critical foundation for student integration, directly influencing retention and long-term academic completion. This study evaluated student satisfaction and qualitative feedback on the first week of classes at Aldersgate College Inc. for the First Semester of Academic Year 2023–2024. The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design and collected data from 524 collegiate students (40.59% response rate) through an online survey, analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed high satisfaction with the discussion of the institution's vision and mission ($\text{mean} = 3.29$) and course syllabus distribution ($\text{mean} = 3.13$). Overall, first-week satisfaction remained positive ($\text{mean} = 2.94$, "Satisfied"). Highlighted highlights included peer socialization, approachable faculty, and engaging icebreakers. However, the main operational friction points centered on classroom thermal discomfort, unstable class timetables, communication delays about instructor attendance, hallway noise, and overcrowded merged classes. Recommended institutional actions include upgrading classroom ventilation, finalizing class schedules in advance, streamlining official communication channels, and restricting construction or noise pollution during lecture hours. Early academic and social integration effectively builds institutional commitment, though addressing environmental and logistical bottlenecks remains essential to optimizing student retention and community belongingness.

Keywords: Student satisfaction, first-week experience, student retention, institutional orientation, academic integration

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Learning and Teaching (tilt.colostate.edu, 2023) at Colorado State University considers the first four weeks of classes a crucial phase in the teaching-learning process, as it directly correlates with learners' retention and eventual graduation. In line with this, the Office of Curriculum & Instruction gathered student feedback through an online survey on the conduct of the first week of classes at Aldersgate College Inc. This initiative aims to identify areas for improvement, evaluate institutional policies and programs, and improve communication and trust so students feel a sense of belonging within the ACI community.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine student satisfaction and feedback regarding the conduct of the first week of classes at Aldersgate College Inc. for the First Semester of Academic Year 2023–2024. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic distribution of respondents in terms of course and year level?
2. What is the respondents' level of satisfaction regarding:

3. What classroom activities did students enjoy the most?
4. What challenges were encountered by students during the start of the term?
5. What suggestions can students provide to enhance their learning experience?

Scope and Delimitations

The study evaluated student satisfaction with pre-identified start-of-term classroom activities and gathered qualitative feedback via three open-ended questions concerning highlights, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Data collection was conducted online from August 22, 2023, to August 30, 2023. The survey targeted the collegiate population of Aldersgate College Inc. and captured a total of 524 respondents.

Review of Related Literature

Early classroom dynamics play a vital role in establishing academic expectations and fostering student commitment. Hermann et al. (2010) examined whether the first week of class matters and found that initial activities significantly affect overall student satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, literature from the Institute for Learning and Teaching at Colorado State University emphasizes that early student experiences serve as a foundation for long-term retention and completion rates.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on student retention models and satisfaction theories, which posit that early social and academic integration directly affects student engagement, institutional commitment, and retention. Fostering open communication and establishing clarity during initial interactions (such as syllabus orientation and mission/vision familiarization) reduces uncertainty and builds a sense of belongingness within the academic community.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model follows an Input-Process-Output (IPO) system:

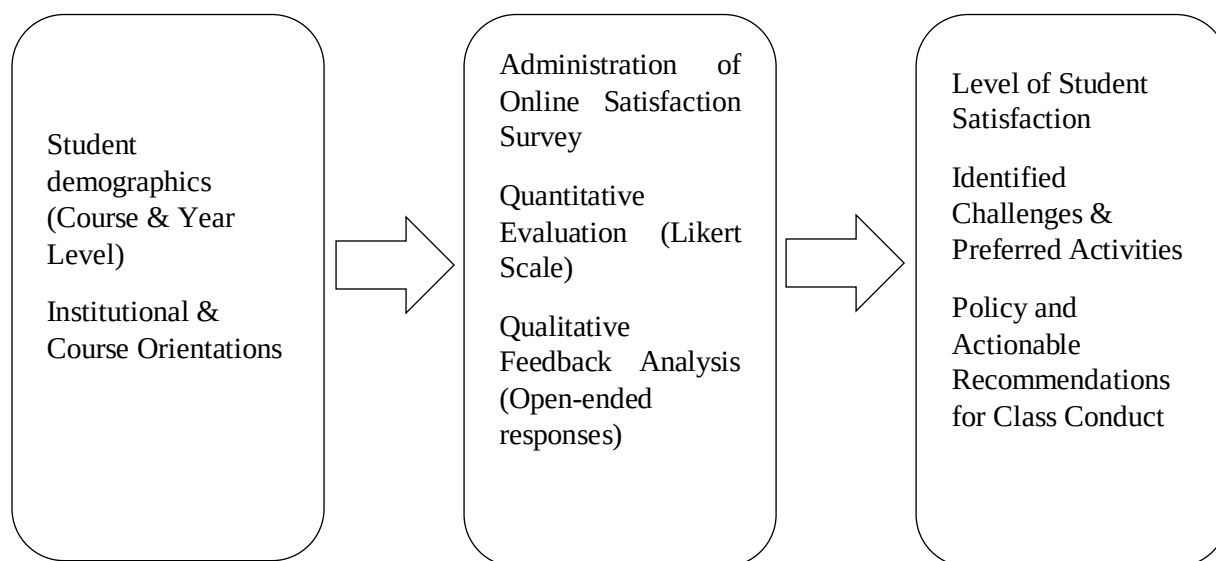


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive satisfaction survey design was utilized to gather quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback regarding start-of-term activities.

Research Design

A mixed-methods satisfaction survey design was implemented. Quantitative ratings were gathered on a 4-point Likert scale

1	Not Satisfied
2	Somewhat Satisfied
3	Satisfied
4	Very Satisfied

Qualitative perspectives were gathered using three open-ended questions:

1. What did you enjoy most during the first week of classes?
2. What challenges did you encounter during the first week of classes?
3. What suggestions can you give to make your learning experience better in the coming weeks?

Research Steps

The research process began with developing and digitizing the questionnaire using an online platform. The survey was deployed on August 22, 2023, and remained open for responses until data collection officially closed on August 30, 2023. Following the collection period, the demographic and satisfaction data were aggregated and statistically tabulated, while the qualitative feedback underwent thematic synthesis to identify key patterns and insights.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Convenience sampling via an open online survey was deployed across the collegiate body. We collected 524 responses from a population of 1,291 students, representing a 40.59% response rate. This exceeds the minimum sample size for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, which typically requires approximately 305 respondents. The sample size also ensures data saturation for qualitative data.

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean ratings. Concurrently, qualitative feedback gathered from the open-ended survey responses was subjected to thematic analysis and synthesized to capture key perspectives and insights.

Research Hypothesis and Validation

Formal statistical hypotheses were not formulated or tested, as the study was a descriptive satisfaction survey designed to measure students' perspectives and satisfaction levels.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study had certain limitations, as participation was voluntary and the survey was deployed online, resulting in a non-probabilistic sample with lower representation rates for certain academic programs.

In terms of ethical considerations, student participation remained strictly anonymous and all collected data were analyzed exclusively for institutional development, policy evaluation, and the enhancement of instructional quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP 1. What is the demographic distribution of respondents in terms of course and year level?

Respondents represented a diverse cross-section of academic programs offered across the institution. The highest concentration of respondents came from the Bachelor of Science in Criminology ($f = 91$, 17.37%), Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management ($f = 75$, 14.31%), Bachelor of Science in Accountancy ($f = 63$, 12.02%), Bachelor of Secondary Education ($f = 59$, 11.26%), and Bachelor of Science in Nursing ($f = 56$, 10.69%). Conversely, smaller academic cohorts, such as Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering ($f = 9$, 1.72%) and Bachelor of Arts in Church Management ($f = 1$, 0.19%), accounted for minor portions of the sample. Overall, the participation across 13 distinct academic programs ensures that the survey insights reflect perspectives from varied institutional units.

Survey respondents represented all academic year levels, with the highest participation coming from underclassmen. First-year ($f = 148$, 28.24%) and second-year students ($f = 148$, 28.24%) together made up more than half of respondents (56.48%). Third-year ($f = 91$, 17.37%) and fourth-year students ($f = 73$, 13.93%) accounted for nearly a third of the overall sample (31.30%), while a minor portion ($f = 64$, 12.21%) did not specify their year level. The strong representation across both early-stage and advanced cohorts ensures that the feedback reflects a well-rounded balance between new learners adjusting to institutional policies and continuing students evaluating year-over-year operational consistency.

SOP 2. What is the respondents' level of satisfaction regarding:

SOP 2.1 Discussion of Vision and Mission?

The statement evaluating the discussion of the Aldersgate College vision, mission, core values, institutional goals, program vision/mission, educational objectives, and program outcomes yielded a mean rating of 3.29, corresponding to a qualitative description of "Satisfied". This strong mean score indicates that instructors effectively prioritized introducing students to the institutional identity and academic expectations at the start of the term. Such orientation activities provide a crucial foundation for student integration, helping learners align their personal academic goals with the college's overarching mission and values.

SOP 2.2 Discussion of Syllabus and Distribution of Course Outline?

The evaluation of whether the course syllabus was discussed and the course outline distributed yielded a mean score of 3.13, corresponding to a qualitative rating of "Satisfied". This result highlights that faculty members effectively communicated course expectations, learning outcomes, and grading schemes during initial class meetings. Early dissemination of course outlines play an essential role in reducing academic anxiety and providing students with clear roadmaps for their academic responsibilities throughout the semester.

SOP 2.3 Overall Satisfaction with the First Week of Classes?

The overall experience received a mean score of 2.94, corresponding to a qualitative description of "Satisfied". Although this indicates a favorable impression and positive adaptation to the start of the academic year, the mean score is slightly lower than those obtained for institutional orientation (3.29) and syllabus distribution (3.13). This variation suggests that while academic and institutional presentations were well-received, operational and environmental factors, such as schedule adjustments, classroom temperature, and logistical challenges, impacted the overall holistic experience of the students during their initial week on campus.

SOP 3. What classroom activities did students enjoy the most?

Respondents highlighted several positive aspects that enriched their overall start-of-term experience. Social connections were a primary highlight, as students appreciated opportunities to meet new friends, reconnect with existing peers, and build lasting relationships. Classroom engagement also stood out, with students enjoying face-to-face discussions, recitations, self-introductions, and interactions with approachable faculty members. Additionally, students valued institutional activities, particularly orientation sessions covering the college's vision, mission, and core values, as well as participation in extracurricular events. Finally, academic readiness contributed to their positive impression, marked by the excitement of exploring new subjects, receiving clear course expectations, and gaining early instructional clarity.

SOP 4. What challenges were encountered by students during the start of term?

The survey findings revealed several key challenges respondents encountered during the start-of-term week. Regarding scheduling and environmental conditions, students experienced difficulties with unstable class schedules, late-night classes, room overcrowding, and uncomfortable classroom environments caused by excessive heat. In terms of adaptation and communication, respondents struggled to navigate an unfamiliar campus layout, felt anxious during classroom self-introductions, and dealt with homesickness. These adjustment issues were further compounded by communication gaps, particularly regarding unannounced schedule changes and delayed updates on instructor attendance. Finally, logistical and comfort concerns significantly impacted the students' daily routines. Learners reported feeling distracted by ongoing campus construction noise, uncomfortable wearing formal uniforms in hot weather, burdened by financial constraints, and stressed by long or difficult daily commutes.

SOP 5. What suggestions can students provide to enhance their learning experience?

Respondents provided actionable suggestions across several key operational and pedagogical areas to enhance their learning experience.

Regarding room temperature and seating, students emphasized the need for better classroom comfort, specifically recommending additional electric fans or air conditioning units and ensuring adequate seating capacity for all enrolled learners.

On scheduling and communication, students urged administrators to finalize class timetables before the term begins, reduce excessively long vacant periods, and adjust early 7:00 a.m. or late-evening classes where feasible. They also highlighted the importance of receiving prompt notifications regarding instructor absences or schedule changes.

For teaching methods and technology integration, respondents recommended using varied audio-visual tools, incorporating interactive group activities, uploading learning materials in advance, and consistently using Google Classroom.

To improve the broader learning environment, students advised implementing stricter noise control measures in campus hallways, particularly near the elementary and CSS areas, and avoiding disruptive construction work during lecture hours.

Finally, concerning blended and merged learning dynamics, respondents suggested offering flexible options such as online Saturday sessions while strongly advising against merging distinct course sections into single, overcrowded classrooms.

SUMMARY

The first week of classes at Aldersgate College brought a mix of experiences for students. Many expressed excitement at meeting new friends, reconnecting with peers, and interacting with approachable instructors. Orientation sessions received positive feedback for clearly outlining the institution's mission, vision, and core values.

However, students noted operational challenges such as schedule revisions, classroom temperature, room allocations, and campus navigation. Overall sentiment remained overwhelmingly positive, with students demonstrating adaptability and eagerness for the academic year ahead.

CONCLUSIONS

The start-of-term activities for First Semester AY 2023–2024 were successfully executed, achieving high student satisfaction ratings across orientation discussions and course syllabus distributions. While student overall satisfaction remains firmly within the "Satisfied" range, addressing logistical bottlenecks—specifically classroom comfort, schedule stability, and communication—will significantly strengthen the learning environment and foster a deeper sense of community belonging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey findings, several actionable recommendations are proposed to enhance student satisfaction and instructional efficiency:

First, facility upgrades are needed to improve classroom ventilation and expand seating capacity, particularly in high-density learning areas, to ensure a comfortable physical environment.

Second, schedule stabilization is essential; class timetables and room assignments must be finalized before classes begin to eliminate scheduling conflicts, reduce excessive vacant periods, and minimize late-night classes.

Third, the university can establish enhanced communication protocols by standardizing platforms such as Google Classroom to provide timely updates on instructor availability, schedule adjustments, and course announcements.

Fourth, instructional support can be strengthened by encouraging faculty to adopt interactive, technology-enabled teaching strategies while avoiding merging unrelated class sections into overcrowded spaces.

Finally, campus environment management needs to strictly regulate hallway noise levels, particularly near elementary and specialized academic units, and restrict disruptive campus construction activities during regular lecture hours to maintain a conducive learning atmosphere.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers thank the collegiate student body of Aldersgate College Inc. for their active participation in the survey, as well as the faculty and administration for their continued commitment to instructional excellence.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

This document was structured and formatted with the assistance of an AI language model to align raw institutional reporting data into standard academic research paper sections. All substantive findings,

data, and analytical conclusions remain representative of the original data collected by Aldersgate College Inc.

REFERENCES

- Hermann, A. D., et al. (2010). Does the first week of class matter? A quasi-experimental investigation of student satisfaction. *Teaching of Psychology*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233347824_Does_the_First_Week_of_Class_Matter_A_Quasi-Experimental_Investigation_of_Student_Satisfaction
- Institute for Learning and Teaching. (2023). Teaching and Learning Resources. Colorado State University. <https://tilt.colostate.edu>