University of Wyoming 2009 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement

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The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) is conducted by the organization that also conducts the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Last spring 296 UW faculty and academic professionals (a 43% response rate) completed the survey, which was administered via the Web. Although FSSE asks faculty a variety of their personal characteristics, most of these items are not provided in the data set. Therefore, the only breakdown of faculty responses presented in this report is a comparison of those teaching lower division courses to those in upper division courses. Moreover, it should be noted that NSSE and FSSE are almost exclusively concerned with undergraduate education and, thus, questions concerning graduate education were not part of the survey. A number of items in the faculty survey have similar, though not identical, questions in the student survey. Where possible, this report compares faculty and student responses.

1. The first set of questions in the survey asks faculty, “How important is it to you that undergraduates at your institution do the following?” Results for the eight different kinds of activities covered in this set of questions are summarized in Table 1.

* Ranked highest by UW faculty are a culminating senior experience and a practicum, internship or the like. More than three-fourths of the respondents rated these activities as very important or important (scored 3 or 4 on a 4-point scale). This is an interesting result because many departments do not require a senior experience, comprehensive examination or internships.
* Nearly six of ten UW faculty believe foreign language coursework and work with a faculty member on a research project are similarly important. Again, these are activities that most faculty believe are important but that are not required on a university-wide basis.
* Less than one-third say that independent study or a self-designed major is important.

**Table 1**

How important is it to you that undergraduates at your institution do the following?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Importance to Faculty** | **Percent very important or important** |
| Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.) | 78 |
| Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience or clinical assignment | 77 |
| Foreign language coursework | 59 |
| Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements | 57 |
| Study abroad | 45 |
| Community service or volunteer work | 45 |
| Participation in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together | 37 |
| Independent study or self-designed major | 28 |

1. Table 2 compares the faculty responses to those of first-year and senior students on a question about the emphasis that UW places on each of a set of items. In many respects, the faculty and student response are similar.

* There is nearly unanimous consensus among all three groups that UW emphasizes the use of computers in academic work.
* Eight of ten faculty believe UW emphasizes providing students with the support they need to succeed academically. The proportion of students who share that view is only slightly lower.
* Faculty are substantially less convinced that UW requires students to spend a significant amount of time on studying and academic work than students perceive. Still, it is notable that 8 out of 10 students believe the University requires them to concentrate on academic work.
* Fewer than four in ten faculty believe the University encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. Interestingly, half the first-year students believe UW places a heavy emphasis on this aspect but by the senior year the percentage has fallen to 36 percent. This decrease may reflect the fact that diversity classes are almost all offered at the lower division.
* Although the University does provide services to aid students in coping with non-academic problems, only about one-third of faculty and students perceive it is a University emphasis.

**Table 2**

To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following (Ranked in order of perceived emphasis as rated by faculty)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Degree of Emphasis (Percent very much or quite a bit)** | **Faculty response** | **First-year response** | **Senior response** |
| Encouraging students to use computers in their academic work | 88 | 89 | 90 |
| Providing students the support they need to help them succeed academically. | 80 | 77 | 71 |
| Requiring students to spend significant amounts of time studying and on academic work | 61 | 83 | 81 |
| Encouraging students to attend campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.) | 60 | 74 | 59 |
| Encouraging students to participate in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.) | 56 | Not included in student survey | Not included in student survey |
| Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds | 38 | 50 | 36 |
| Providing students the support they need to thrive socially | 35 | 53 | 44 |
| Helping students cope with their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) | 32 | 36 | 26 |

1. Two items ask faculty about the gap between their expectations of student preparation and the amount of time students actually spend preparing. As can be seen in Table 3, faculty perceive that gap to be considerable.

**Table 3**

Faculty expectations and perceptions of amount of student work

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Avg. Hours** |
| In a typical 7-day week how many hours do you **expect** your students to spend preparing for your class (studying, reading, writing doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing and other academic activities) | 6.1 |
| In a typical 7-day week how many hours do you think your students **actually**  spend preparing for your class (studying, reading, writing doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing and other academic activities) | 3.6 |

1. The next set of items (Table 4) asks faculty to select either a lower division or an upper division course and respond to the questions with this course as their focus. Direct comparisons of faculty and student responses are at best approximate here because of subtle but important differences in the wording of questions. For example, the faculty survey asks about a specific course, but the student survey asks about the university experience in general. With that caveat, it appears that faculty members tend to perceive **less** communication from and among their students than the students themselves report.

* Faculty are much less likely than students to believe that there is a high degree of communication from students to faculty via e-mail.
* Similarly, faculty say that students are much less likely to ask questions or contribute to class discussions than students report.
* A similar pattern exists with the item asking about frequency of discussion of grades or assignments. Students are considerably more likely to perceive that such discussion takes place than are faculty.
* Faculty and students appear to agree that less than one-third of the students engage in discussion of ideas from readings or classes with the faculty outside of the classroom, a somewhat discouraging finding.
* One would hope that, at least for seniors, there would be considerable discussion with faculty about career plans. Faculty report that less than one-third of the students in their upper division class ever have such discussions with them, whereas 41% of seniors say they often have such discussions.

**Table 4**

About what percent of students in your selected course section do the following?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Avg. Faculty Estimate, Lower Division** | **Avg. Faculty Estimate,**  **Upper Division** | **First-year, Percent often or very often** | **Senior, Percent often or very often** |
| Occasionally use e-mail to communicate with you | 41 | 49 | 80 | 92 |
| Frequently work harder than they usually do to meet your standards | 41 | 42 | 51 | 56 |
| Frequently ask questions or contribute to class discussions | 33 | 43 | 54 | 73 |
| Occasionally discuss grades or assignments with you | 34 | 37 | 55 | 65 |
| Frequently come to class without completing readings or assignments | 33 | 31 | 26 | 27 |
| At least once, talk about career plans with you | 24 | 32 | 34 | 41 |
| At least once, discuss ideas from readings or classes with you outside of class | 25 | 27 | 21 | 26 |

1. A similar set of items asks faculty and students how often they engage in the items listed in Table 5.

* Perhaps not surprisingly, faculty are more likely to say they give prompt feed back to students on their academic work than the students themselves perceive. Even so, a majority of all groups say that prompt feedback occurs often or very often.
* Just over a third of faculty, but 80% to 92% of students, say that students use electronic media often or very often to discuss or complete assignments. This difference suggests that the extensive Internet usage, e-mailing, and text messaging among students for academic purposes is largely invisible to faculty.
* Although the questions are somewhat dissimilar for students and faculty, data in Table 4 indicate that students perceive more exposure to diverse perspectives and to people from diverse backgrounds than faculty estimate.

**Table 5**

How often do students in your selected course section engage in the following?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Faculty Percent often or very often, Lower Division** | **Faculty Percent often or very often, Upper Division** | **First-year Percent often or very often** | **Senior Percent often or very often** |
| Receive prompt written or oral feedback from you on their academic performance | 79 | 92 | 54 | 67 |
| Work with other students on projects during class | 50 | 49 | 44 | 49 |
| Have class discussions or writing assignments that include diverse perspectives | 43 | 36 | 58 | 62 |
| Use an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment | 37 | 34 | 80 | 92 |
| Have serious conversations in your course with students who are very different from themselves | 29 | 28 | 58 | 59 |
| Have serious conversations in your course with students of a different race/ethnicity | 19 | 17 | 41 | 42 |
| Participate in community-based projects | 4 | 7 | 12 | 12 |

1. Table 6 presents the results from another set of items which questions faculty and students about the importance of various course objectives.

* Far and away, faculty rate learning “something that changes the way (students) understand an issue or concept” to be most important—9 out of 10 view it as important or very important. Students are notably less likely to indicate this is important to them.
* Integrating ideas or information from various sources is considered most important by students. Such integration is also important to faculty, especially for those reporting on upper division classes.

**Table 6**

In your selected course section, how important to you is it that your students do the following?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Faculty Percent important or very important, Lower Division** | **Faculty Percent important or very important, Upper Division** | **First-year Percent important or very important** | **Senior**  **Percent important or very important** |
| Learn something that changes the way they understand an issue or concept | 89 | 92 | 64 | 64 |
| Work on a paper or project that requires integrating ideas or information from various sources | 63 | 75 | 76 | 88 |
| Examine the strengths and weaknesses of their views on a topic or issue | 68 | 72 | 51 | 68 |
| Try to better understand someone else’s views by imagining how an issue looks from that person’s perspective | 64 | 67 | 58 | 64 |
| Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions | 57 | 62 | 57 | 74 |
| Work with classmates outside of the class to prepare class assignments | 58 | 47 | 49 | 59 |
| Discuss ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class | 56 | 47 | 50 | 66 |
| Prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in | 43 | 50 | 54 | 51 |
| Tutor or teach other students (paid or voluntary) | 28 | 23 | 18 | 19 |

1. Another set of questions asks faculty to estimate the percent of class time spent on a variety of teaching approaches. As shown in Table 7, faculty devote about half their time to lectures in both lower division and upper division classes.

**Table 7**

In your selected course section, on average, what percent of class time is spent on the following?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Avg. Faculty Estimate,**  **Lower Division** | **Avg. Faculty Estimate, Upper Division** |
| Lecture | 48 | 47 |
| Teacher led discussion | 23 | 25 |
| Teacher/student shared responsibility--seminar, discussion | 17 | 13 |
| Small group activities | 14 | 12 |
| Experiential labs, field work, art exhibits, etc | 14 | 9 |
| Testing and evaluation | 12 | 8 |
| Student presentations | 8 | 8 |
| Performances in applied and fine arts | 8 | 2 |
| In class writing | 7 | 5 |
| Student computer use | 6 | 6 |

1. Table 8 presents responses to a question about the extent to which a class engages students in various mental activities. Clearly there is a large discrepancy between faculty and students on the amount of time spent memorizing facts, ideas or methods. Less than one-third of faculty report emphasizing memorization, while 72% of freshman students and 59% of seniors say that memorization is emphasized. Part of the difference may be due to divergent conceptions between students and faculty regarding what constitutes memorizing, analyzing, and synthesizing information. Still, the gap between faculty and students in this area is striking.

**Table 8**

In your selected course section, how much emphasis do you place on engaging students in each of these mental activities?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Faculty Percent quite a bit or very much,**  **Lower Division** | **Faculty Percent quite a bit or very much, Upper Division** | **First-year**  **Percent quite a bit or very much** | **Senior Percent quite a bit or very much** |
| Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth, and considering its components | 91 | 92 | 81 | 86 |
| Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations | 89 | 85 | 79 | 82 |
| Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships | 88 | 88 | 70 | 76 |
| Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions | 68 | 75 | 69 | 75 |
| Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your course and readings so students can repeat them pretty much in the same form | 29 | 25 | 72 | 59 |

1. Table 9 provides results of a question pertaining to the goals of course structure. Faculty are in overwhelming agreement that thinking critically and analytically and learning effectively on “your own” are the structural goals of their classes. About 9 out of 10 faculty indicate they structure their courses around these objectives. Encouragingly, a nearly equal proportion of students say that their knowledge, skills, and abilities have developed quite a bit or very much in these same areas.

* Overall, it appears that most students feel they are learning and developing new skills in the classroom, even when these particular proficiencies are not the major focus of the intended structure of the course, at least as stated by faculty. For example:
* 81% of seniors and 77% of first-year students report learning and developing skills in using computing and information technology, while only about 30% of the faculty report priority structuring of these activities into the course.
* Similarly, students believe they have learned how to work together effectively with others, even though faculty do not report this as a course priority. Seventy-five of seniors and 69% of first-year students report learning how to work effectively with others, while less than half of faculty report classroom time actually being structured toward this objective.
* Students also report a difference in acquiring a broad general education and analyzing quantitative problems, with student giving much higher ratings in these areas than faculty report structuring into the course section.

**Table 9**

To what extent do you structure your selected course section so that students learn and develop in the following areas?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Faculty Percent quite a bit or very much,**  **Lower Division** | **Faculty Percent quite a bit or very much, Upper Division** | **First-year Percent quite a bit or very much** | **Senior Percent quite a bit or very much** |
| Learning effectively on your own | 87 | 86 | 75 | 74 |
| Thinking critically and analytically | 86 | 95 | 85 | 88 |
| Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills | 71 | 73 | 61 | 74 |
| Acquiring a broad general education | 61 | 53 | 81 | 83 |
| Writing clearly and effectively | 55 | 63 | 67 | 78 |
| Solving complex real-world problems | 54 | 73 | 57 | 60 |
| Working effectively with others | 48 | 49 | 69 | 75 |
| Analyzing quantitative problems | 45 | 43 | 75 | 76 |
| Understanding themselves | 44 | 43 | 63 | 57 |
| Speaking clearly and effectively | 39 | 42 | 62 | 71 |
| Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds | 39 | 27 | 49 | 49 |
| Developing a personal code of values and ethics | 38 | 40 | 52 | 53 |
| Using computing and information technology | 30 | 32 | 77 | 81 |
| Developing a deepened sense of spirituality | 10 | 5 | 30 | 20 |

1. Finally, a question asks faculty how much time in a 7-day week they spend on various work- related activities. In Table 10, these activities have been categorized, approximately, as involving mainly teaching, research, service, or advising. In view of the diversity of faculty categories (tenured full professors to academic professionals) and the variety of disciplines represented in the survey, the time allocations across these broad categories roughly mimic the typical job description. A slight exception is the time devoted to service activities, which appears somewhat higher than expected.

**Table 10**

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week on the following?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Avg. Hours** |
| **Teaching** |  |
| Preparing for class | 8 |
| Teaching undergraduate students in class | 7 |
| Grading papers and exams | 6 |
| Giving other forms of written and oral feedback to students | 5 |
| Reflecting on ways to improve my teaching | 4 |
| Supervising internships or other field experiences | 2 |
| **Teaching Total:** | **32 hours or 52%** |
| **Research** |  |
| Research and scholarly activities | 14 |
| Working with undergraduates on research | 3 |
| **Research Total:** | **17 hours or 28%** |
| **Service** |  |
| Conducting service activities | 4 |
| Other interactions with students outside the classroom | 3 |
| Working with students on activities other than coursework | 2 |
| **Service Total:** | **9 Hours or 15%** |
| **Advising** |  |
| Advising undergraduate students | 3 |
| **Advising Total:** | **3 hours or 5%** |