University of Wyoming 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement Results

November 2009

The **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** was initiated at Indiana University nearly a decade ago. Its primary purpose is to examine the nature and quality of the undergraduate student experience. Only first-year students and seniors are asked to complete the annual NSSE survey, which includes about 100 items.

At the University of Wyoming, the spring 2009 NSSE was administered as a Web survey. UW respondents included about 550 first-year students (39% of those who were invited to participate) and more than 1,000 seniors (a 49% response in this group). In the results below, when we refer to a significant difference the term refers to differences large enough to reach statistical significance, with 95% confidence, in random samples of the same size. A more extended description of NSSE and previous results can be found at: [www.uwyo.edu/assessment/NSSE](http://www.uwyo.edu/assessment/NSSE) .

How can UW students be compared to those at other universities? **Two comparison groups are included in the NSSE report: a peer group chosen by UW of the institutions administering the NSSE in 2009 and the total of all schools that took part in the 2009 survey.** The peer group includes Colorado State, Indiana University/Purdue Indianapolis, Iowa State, North Carolina State, North Dakota State, and the universities of Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon and Washington. The second group is comprised of all 616 participating colleges and universities.

NSSE has identified five dimensions which it considers to be effective educational practice. **UW students score significantly higher than one or both of the comparison groups on two of the five NSSE dimensions (faculty-student interaction and a supportive campus environment); they score about the same as both groups on level of academic challenge; and UW students score lower than one or both of the comparison groups on active collaborative learning and enriching educational experiences.**

First, consider the dimension of student-faculty interaction. NSSE contends that “students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom.” Included here are questions about frequency of faculty interaction in a variety of areas, from discussing grades and assignments to work with faculty on research projects. **The UW averages for both first-year students and seniors are significantly higher on student-faculty interaction than the corresponding means of our selected comparators, although they are no different from the entire NSSE sample.**

Second, on the benefits of a supportive campus environment, NSSE says that “students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.” Here NSSE includes questions pertaining to the student’s relationship with other students, faculty and administrators as well as the perception of support given by the university on both academic and non-academic issues. **UW seniors are significantly higher than seniors at our selected peer universities in perceiving a supportive campus environment. There are no other significant differences on this dimension.**

On level of academic challenge, NSSE states that challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Included are questions about time spent on class preparation, number and types of assignments and the emphasis of course work—whether it includes analysis and synthesis, for example. **On level of academic challenge, UW’s first-year students and seniors score on a par with our selected peer group and with NSSE schools as a whole**.

The fourth dimension is active and collaborative learning. NSSE asserts that “students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.” This dimension includes such items as whether the student asks questions in class, works with others in and out of class and discusses course materials with others outside the classroom. **For first-year students the UW average for active and collaborative learning is significantly below that of our selected peer group, but it is not significantly different from the total NSSE group. Seniors, on the other hand, are no different from the selected peer group, but their mean falls significantly below the overall NSSE mean.**

Finally, on enriching educational experiences NSSE believes that “complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs.” Included in this dimension are questions such as whether the student has had conversations with those of a different race or different political or religious views, or has participated in community service, study abroad, independent study and co-curricular activities**. On the dimension of enriching educational experiences, both UW’s first-year students and seniors lag behind our selected peers and the entire sample of NSSE participating schools.**

**A second method** of comparison is to focus on those items for which UW students are most unlike students at other universities—either positively or negatively.

Among the positive differences, several features stand out:

* **Both UW’s first-year students and seniors indicate they spend more time preparing for class than students at all NSSE institutions.**
* **UW seniors perceive they have better relations with administrative personnel than seniors in either group.**
* **UW first-year students are more likely to attend various campus events than are first-year students in either comparison group.**
* **Both first-year students and seniors at UW are also more likely to participate in physical fitness activities than the NSSE sample as a whole.**

Of the negative differences (differences below those of the two comparison groups):

* **Both first-year students and seniors at UW report fewer serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and a lower perception of whether the university has contributed to personal development in this area.**
* **Both UW’s first-year students and seniors report spending less time relaxing and socializing than the students at peer universities.**

**A final approach** to the results of the NSSE survey is to examine what factors appear to relate to the five NSSE dimensions: academic challenge, active/collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, enriching educational experience and supportive campus environment. Two factors stand out as being the most consistently related to these dimensions: student grades and whether a student started his/her college education at UW or transferred from another institution.

* **For both first-year students and seniors, a student’s grades relate quite strongly to scores on each of the dimensions. The creators of NSSE argue that all five dimensions are related to quality of education. If so, then the higher a student’s grades, the higher the quality of education—although of course, it is impossible to say which might be the cause and which the effect.**
* **On four of the dimensions (active/collaborative learning, student/faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment), those students who began their university education at UW score significantly higher than transfer students. This is an important finding because if the quality of education is related to scores on the various dimensions, non-transfer students appear to have an edge over their transfer counterparts.**

The Data sub-committee of the University’s Enrollment Management Council compiled this report. Members include: Oliver Walter, Chair, Andrew Garner, Eileen Gilchrist, Burke Grandjean, Audrey Kleinsasser, Suzann Koller, Richard Miller, John Nutter, Erika Prager, Ilona Reif, Michelle Schutt.