



Synopsis of the results from the National Survey of Student Engagement - 2008

Institutional Research, Planning,
and Assessment

About the Author

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of North Alabama has participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for two iterations during the years 2006 and 2008. NSSE is used to evaluate student (first-year and senior) level of engagement in numerous areas. The survey is currently on a two-year cycle.

This report outlines the following areas of concern:

- First-Year students had below average responses in comparison to UNA's peer institutions regarding preparation for class, classmate interaction, and number of presentations presented.
- First-Year students indicated they were not challenged by exams given to them during the year.
- First-Year students reported less class/course reports written and readings completed during the current semester in comparison to peer institutions.
- Only 35 percent of UNA's senior students stated that they have participated in a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, as compared to 50 percent involvement of its peer institutions.
- UNA's seniors indicated a deficiency in relation to Enriching Educational Experiences (one of five benchmarks). The seniors reported significantly less involvement in social activities, volunteer work, and diversity interaction when compared to their peers.

INTRODUCTION

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from samples of first-year and senior students about the nature and quality of their undergraduate experience. The survey is used to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with learning, personal development, and other desired outcomes such as student satisfaction, persistence, and graduation (NSSE 2008 overview).

The NSSE was administered through the Web to the University of North Alabama first-year and senior students in the spring of 2008. This is the second administration of the NSSE to UNA students; the first administration was in spring of 2006. Currently, UNA has chosen to administer on a two-year cycle. The NSSE consists of 13 categories with varying Likert-style response options.

- **Academic and Intellectual Experiences** - consists of class involvement, preparation, and professor/student interaction
- **Mental Activities** - relates to memorizing, analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments, and applying theories/concepts
- **Reading and Writing** – evaluates number of readings and length of reports/papers
- **Problem Sets** – relates to how long it takes to complete a certain number of problems

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- **Examinations** – relates to the level of challenge presented by examinations
- **Additional Collegiate Experiences** – describes physical fitness activities, religious activities, art/theatre involvement, and increased tolerance of other's views
- **Enriching Educational Experiences** – relates to practicum/internship involvement, community service work, foreign language coursework/study abroad, and culminating senior experiences
- **Quality of Relationships** – relates to relationships with other students, faculty, staff, and administrators
- **Time Usage** – evaluates class preparation, on/off campus employment, co-curricular activities, providing for dependents, and commuting
- **Institutional Environment** – relates to the institution providing support to help students succeed, encouraging contact among diverse students, offering support for non-academic responsibilities, and promoting social involvement
- **Educational and Personal Growth** – is concerned with clear/effective writing, critical/analytical thinking, computer utilization, effective teamwork skills, values/ethics, and deepened sense of spirituality
- **Academic Advising** – evaluates the quality of advising
- **Satisfaction** – evaluates entire educational experience and asks if the same institution would be chosen if given another opportunity

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The NSSE report is developed by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Education and delivered to UNA. The official NSSE report that details the results of the survey is approximately 100 pages and resides in the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (OIRPA). NSSE also developed a pocket guide for incoming students and their parents (Appendix A).

RESULTS

The following white paper is a synopsis of the official NSSE report and contains information regarding demographic outcomes, UNA's means in comparison to its selected peer institutions, benchmark results, 2006 results compared to the current administration, and ways UNA can improve.

The 2008 administration received a 23 percent response rate from the total number of students surveyed (n=2,262). Among first-year students surveyed (n=1,244) 17 percent responded while the response rate among the seniors surveyed (n=1,018) was 30 percent. The NSSE has ten response options in regard to race/ethnicity with the distribution outlined in **Table 1**:

UNA's International response to the survey was ten percent higher than the response of its selected peer institutions, and eight percent higher than the masters/comprehensive institutions as defined by Carnegie as well as the entire NSSE 2008 population.

NSSE allows institutions to choose a comparison group which closely resembles their specific institution. **Table 2** indicates those institutions chosen by UNA.

Table 1
Race/Ethnicity of UNA Respondents

NSSE Race/Ethnicity	First-Year	Senior	Total Surveyed
American Indian/Native American	3%	2%	2.33%
Asian/Asian Am./Pacific Isl.	7%	12%	9.90%
Black/African American	10%	3%	5.83%
White (non-Hispanic)	69%	80%	75.53%
Mexican/Mexican Am.	1%	0%	0.39%
Puerto Rican	1%	0%	0.39%
Other Hispanic or Latino	1%	1%	0.97%
Multiracial	1%	0%	0.39%
Other	5%	0%	1.94%
I prefer not to respond	3%	2%	2.33%
International*	16%	11%	13.07%

* International is a separate option on the NSSE demographic section

Choosing representative peers enables the University to compare its results to other similar institutions and make adjustments for significantly deficient areas. NSSE utilized the *Studentized T-test* in analyzing significance between group means. In brief, this test allows individuals to take means from two groups (effect size) and compare them to see if one is “statistically significant” from the other.

Statistical significance is found in this case if less than one percent of the finding is related to chance ($p < .01$). This white paper will only look at questions where UNA scores were significantly different from the selected peer institutions at the $p < .01$ or $p < .001$ levels of statistical significance.

UNA’s first-year and/or senior students had significant differences in five of the 13 areas. The areas of Mental Activities, Problem Sets, Additional Collegiate Experiences, Time Usage, Institutional Environment, Educational and Personal Growth, Academic Advising, and Satisfaction did not show significant differences when compared to peer institutions.

In the area of Academic and Intellectual Experiences, the respondents were asked: “In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?” (1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often,

Table 2 UNA’s Selected Peers Comparison Group		
Institution Name	City	State
Auburn University at Montgomery	Montgomery	AL
Boise State University	Boise	ID
Georgia College & State University	Milledgeville	GA
Jacksonville State University	Jacksonville	AL
Northwestern State University of Louisiana	Natchitoches	LA
South Dakota State University	Brookings	SD
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	Pembroke	NC
University of West Georgia	Carrollton	GA
Valdosta State University	Valdosta	GA

4=Very Often). UNA's first-year respondents were below average on five of the questions from this area:

- Made a class presentation, (Mean= 2.02, effect size = -.29, $p<.001$)
- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, (Mean = 2.56, effect size = -.25, $p<.001$)
- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources, (Mean= 2.88, effect size = -.26, $p<.001$)
- Come to class without completing readings or assignments, (Mean = 2.17, effect size = .23, $p<.01$)
- Worked with classmates **outside of class** to prepare class assignments, (Mean = 2.08, effect size = -.26, $p<.001$)

The senior students were above average on one question: worked with other students on projects during class (Mean = 2.54, effect size = .16, $p<.01$), and had no deficiencies related to this area.

The third area, Reading and Writing, asked the respondents during the current school year how much reading and writing they had accomplished. The choices were as follows: 1 = None, 2 = 1-4, 3 = 5-10, 4 = 11-20, 5 = More than 20. The first-year students stated they had a significantly less number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings when compared to the selected peer group (Mean = 2.87, effect size = -.25, $p<.01$). Also, the first-year students indicated the number of written reports or

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papers between five and 19 pages they had completed were significantly less when compared to the selected peer group (Mean = 2.01, effect size = $-.21$, $p < .01$). The seniors had no significant differences in this area.

Area five asked the students to select on a seven-point Likert scale (very little to very much) the extent to which examinations during the current school year challenged the respondent to do his/her best work. UNA's first-year students indicated that they were not challenged by exams given to them during their current school year (Mean = 5.13, effect size = $-.26$, $p < .001$). The seniors had no significant differences in this area.

Area seven, Enriching Educational Experiences, indicated three significant responses within the senior students. This area asked students which of the following have they done or plan to do before graduation from the institution. Only 35 percent of UNA's senior students stated that they have participated in a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment. This is significant because 50 percent of the respondents from the selected peer group have participated in these programs at their current institution. Only 16 percent of senior students at UNA have participated in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together and the selected peer group had 28 percent involvement in these programs. However, UNA has just recently implemented learning communities within the past three years. This is reflected in the first-year students' responses to this question with 24 percent

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stating that they had participated in a learning community or similar program. This can be compared to the 15 percent of first-year students from UNA's peer institutions. Therefore, it seems that UNA's recently implemented learning community program is reaching a significantly higher number of students when compared to its peer institutions. When asked if they had participated in a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.) only 18 percent of UNA's seniors stated that they had, which is significantly lower than its selected peers of 30 percent.

Area ten, Educational and Personal Growth, had one significant difference correlated to understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Only the senior students demonstrated a significantly higher level of understanding varying racial and ethnic backgrounds than their peers (Mean = 2.75, effect size = .18, $p < .01$). The first-year students had no significant differences in this area.

NSSE created five benchmarks in relation to Effective Educational Practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. These benchmarks were created using a combination of specific questions obtained from the 13 categories, and are outlined in **Table 3.**

The five benchmarks are used to compare UNA's responses to that of its selected peer institutions and the overall NSSE population. Level of Academic Challenge showed a

Table 3
Benchmarks as Related to Categories

AREAS USED TO CREATE BENCHMARK	Five Benchmark Comparison				
Sub-Categories within NSSE	Level of Academic Challenge	Active and Collaborative Learning	Student-Faculty Interaction	Enriching Educational Experiences	Supportive Campus Environment
Academic and Intellectual Experiences	•	•	•	•	
Mental Activities	•				
Reading and Writing	•				
Problem Sets					
Examinations					
Additional Collegiate Experiences					
Enriching Educational Experiences			•	•	
Quality of Relationships					•
Time Usage	•			•	
Institutional Environment	•			•	•
Educational and Personal Growth					
Academic Advising					
Satisfaction					

deficiency at the $p < .05$ level for first-year students at UNA when compared to its selected peer institutions (Mean = 47.6, effect size = $-.19$, $p < .05$). Level of Academic Challenge relates to class preparation, number of readings, written papers, coursework emphasis, exceeding respondent's own expectations, and amount of time used for studying. The seniors had no significant differences in this area.

UNA's first-year students scored significantly lower than their peers regarding Active and Collaborative Learning (Mean = 38.6, effect size = $-.14$, $p < .05$). Active and Collaborative Learning requested information involving in-class discussion, presentations, group work in and out of the classroom, helping other students, participation in community based projects, and discussion of ideas from readings with others outside of the classroom. The seniors had no significant differences in this area.

Student-Faculty Interaction indicated no significant

differences. However, UNA's first-year students did have a higher average in this category, but not large enough to achieve significance.

Enriching Educational Experiences proved problematic for the senior students at UNA (Mean = 25, effect size = -.21, $p < .001$). Senior students at UNA state that they intend to participate in specific activities but the results indicate they are not carrying out their intentions. Enriching Educational Experiences involves students' participation in cultural activities, diversity experiences, community service, technological advancement preparation, foreign language study, co-curricular activities, and practicum/internship involvement. The first-year students had no significant differences in this area.

Supportive Campus Environment had no significant differences when compared to UNA's peer institutions. UNA students, both first-year and seniors, scored significantly lower on all five benchmarks when being compared to the top 50% and 10% of overall 2008 NSSE responses, with most being significant at the $p < .001$ level.

In comparing UNA's 2006 administration results with the current outcomes, UNA's first-year students have increased engagement on all five benchmark comparisons. However, the senior students only had increases on two of the five benchmarks, Level of Academic Challenge and Supportive Campus Environments. Active and Collaborative learning remained unchanged, while Student-Faculty Interaction and

“Senior students at UNA state that they intend to participate in specific activities but the results indicate they are not carrying out their intentions.”

Enriching Educational Experiences saw a decline in engagement. However, NSSE did not perform statistical significance analyses when comparing multiple administrations. The OIRPA will conduct such analyses in the future.

CONCLUSION

Results from the NSSE survey indicate UNA's main insufficiency relates to senior engagement in regards to Enriching Educational Experiences. According to their responses, UNA's senior students are significantly lacking in community service, diversity interaction, practicum/internships, campus activities, or university-wide organizations, when compared to its peer institutions. The outcome would suggest that UNA needs to make an effort in improving involvement within these areas.

These findings correlate with UNA's alumni survey. Alumni students indicate that they did not feel prepared to interact with individuals from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds after graduation. Enrollment figures reveal that UNA has one of the largest international populations in the region, implying that there should be ample opportunity for UNA to infuse diversity relations throughout the institution.

UNA's first-year students seem to be having difficulty related to Academic and Intellectual Experiences. The first-year students seem to be less prepared and spend less time working on projects outside of the classroom. When compared to its selected peers, UNA first-year students seem to be reading less and writing fewer papers. Also the number of assigned readings was significantly less than UNA's peers. UNA's first-year students state they do not feel they are being challenged to do their best work. The institution may want to consider increasing

the number of readings and papers assigned to students. Also, creating more group work would allow students to work on projects outside of the classroom with their peers and may assist in improving diversity interaction within senior students. In addition, first-year students stated they did not create two or more drafts of an assignment before turning it in. UNA could increase promotion of its Learning Resource Center and Writing Center for students to use in the preparation of assignments.

The 2008 administration showed a seven percent decline in the percentage of respondents who completed the questionnaire. In future iterations, UNA should work to improve its response rate. NSSE has many suggestions for increasing the response rate, including various incentives or posting NSSE on social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook.

Appendix A

Pocket Guide Report: “What Students are
Saying...?”

What Students Are Saying About Their UNA Experience

Each year the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) asks students at hundreds of colleges and universities to reflect on the time they devote to various learning activities. The topics explored are linked by previous research on student success in college.

The following responses were provided by 515 randomly selected UNA students on the 2008 NSSE survey.

Academic Challenge

To what degree is studying and spending time on academic work emphasized?

80% of FY students feel that this institution places substantial emphasis on academics.¹

Do faculty hold students to high standards?

50% of FY students frequently work harder than they thought they could to meet faculty expectations.²

How much time do students spend on homework each week?

24% of FY students spend more than 15 hours per week preparing for class. 31% spend 5 hours or less.

What types of thinking do assignments require?

First-year students report substantial emphasis on the following activities:

- Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods: 64%
- Analyzing basic elements of an idea or theory: 66%
- Synthesizing and organizing ideas: 52%
- Making judgments about value of information: 61%
- Applying theories or concepts: 65%

How much writing is expected?

3% of FY students write more than 10 papers between 5 and 19 pages and 17% have written a paper more than 20 pages in length.

How much reading is expected during the school year?

19% of FY students read more than 10 assigned books and packs of course readings. 38% read fewer than 5.

Do exams require students to do their best work?

45% of FY students report that their exams strongly challenge them to do their best work.³

Active Learning

How often are topics from class discussed outside of the classroom?

53% of FY students frequently discuss readings or ideas from coursework outside of class.²

Do students work together on projects – inside and outside of class?

35% of FY students frequently work with other students on projects in class, 28% work with peers on assignments outside of class.²

How often do students make class presentations?

23% of FY students report that they make frequent presentations in class.²

How many students participate in community-based projects in regular courses?

15% of FY students frequently participate in service-learning or community-based projects during a given year.² 60% never took part in such activities.

How many students apply their classroom learning to real life through internships or off-campus field experiences?

By their senior year, 35% of students have participated in some form of practicum, internship, field experience, co-op, or clinical assignment.

Do students have opportunities to tutor or teach other students?

23% of seniors frequently assist their fellow students by tutoring or teaching them.²

Student-Faculty Interaction

Are faculty members accessible and supportive?

40% of FY students say their faculty are available, helpful and sympathetic.

How many students work on research projects with faculty?

By their senior year, 15% of students have done research with a faculty member.

Do students receive prompt feedback on academic performance?

47% of FY students indicate that they frequently get prompt verbal or written feedback from faculty members.²

Note: FY= First-Year Student SR=Senior Student
IPEDS=101879

How often do students talk with advisors or faculty members about their career plans?

87% of seniors at least occasionally discuss career plans with faculty.⁴ 13% never talk with faculty members about career plans.

Do students and faculty members work together on committees and projects outside of course work?

51% of FY students at least occasionally spend time with faculty members on activities other than coursework.⁴



Enriching Educational Experiences

What types of honors courses, learning communities, and other distinctive programs are offered?

During their first year, 24% of students participate in a learning community. By their senior year, 17% of students have taken an independent study class.

How often do students interact with peers with different social, political, or religious views?

48% of FY students say they frequently have serious conversations with students who are different from themselves in terms of their religious, political, or personal beliefs.²

How often do students interact with peers from different racial or ethnic backgrounds?

40% of FY students frequently have serious conversations with those of a different race.²

How many students study in other countries?

By their senior year, 10% of students have studied abroad.

Do students participate in activities that enhance their spirituality?

42% of FY students frequently engage in spiritually enhancing activities such as worship, meditation, or prayer.²

What percentage of students participate in community service?

By the time they are seniors, 51% of students have participated in community service or volunteer work.

Supportive Campus Environment

How well do students get along with other students?

50% of FY students report that their peers are friendly, supportive, and help them feel as if they belong.

Are students satisfied with their overall educational experience?

82% of FY students report a favorable image of this institution; 80% of seniors would choose this school again if they could start their college career over.

How much time do students devote to co-curricular activities?

11% of FY students spend more than 15 hours a week participating in co-curricular activities. 44% spend no time participating in co-curricular activities.

How well do students get along with administrators and staff?

30% of FY students find the administrative personnel and offices helpful, considerate, and flexible.

To what extent does the school help students deal with their academic and social needs?

71% of FY students feel that this institution has a substantial commitment to their academic success.¹ 43% feel well-supported by the institution regarding their social needs.

A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College is available at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm

Notes:

1. "Substantial" emphasis is defined by combining the responses to values of "Very much" and "Quite a bit."
2. "Frequently" is defined by combining the responses to values of "Very often" and "Often."
3. "Strongly challenge" is defined by combining response values of "6" and "7" on a one-to-seven point scale where 1 is "Very little" and 7 is "Very much."
4. "Occasionally" is defined by combining the responses to values of "Very often," "Often," and "Sometimes."

Data source: National Survey of Student Engagement 2008

National Survey of Student Engagement

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