**National Survey of Student Engagement**

**University of North Alabama Report 2008**

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 - consist of class involvement, preparation, and professor/student interaction
* Mental Activities - relates to memorizing, analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments, and applying theories/concepts
* Reading and Writing – number or readings and length of reports/papers
* Problem Sets – ask the student how long it takes them to complete a certain number of problems
* Examinations – relates to the level of challenge presented by examinations
* Additional Collegiate Experiences – concerned with physical fitness activities, religious activities, art/theatre involvement, and increased tolerance of other’s views
* Enriching Educational Experiences – Practicum/internship involvement, community service work, foreign language coursework/study abroad, and culminating senior experiences
* Quality of Relationships – relationships with other students, faculty, staff and administrators
* Time Usage – class preparation, on/off campus employment, co-curricular activities, providing for dependents and commuting
* Institutional Environment – does the institution provide support to help you succeed, encourage contact among diverse students, support for non-academic responsibilities, and promote social involvement
* Educational and Personal Growth – developing a general education, 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 asked if the same institution would be chosen if given another opportunity

The NSSE report is developed by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Education and delivered to UNA. The report is approximately 100 pages and resides in the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (OIRPA) if one feels so inclined to view the entire report.

The following report will 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 may improve.

The 2008 administration received a 23 percent response rate including 17 percent (n=213) as first-year students and 30 percent (n=302) classified as seniors. The NSSE has 10 response options in regard to race/ethnicity with the distribution outlined in Table 1:

*Table 1:*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NSSE Race/Ethnicity** | **First-Year** | **Senior** | **Combined** |
| **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 | | | |

UNA’s International response to the survey was 10 percent higher than the response of its Selected Peer institutions, and 8 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 these institutions chosen by UNA:  
Table 2.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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 |

Choosing representative peers enables the University to compare their 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 two means from two groups and compare them to one another to see if one is “statistically significant” from the other. Statistical significance is found in this case if less than 1 percent of the finding is related to chance (*p*<.01). This report will only look at questions where UNA scores were significantly different from the Selected peer institutions at the *p*<.01 or *p*<.001 levels.

UNA’s first-year and/or senior students had significant differences in 5 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 UNA’s first-year respondents were below average on 5 questions: Made a class presentation (= 2.02, effect size = -.29, *p<.*001*)*, prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in ( *=* 2.56, effect size = -.25, *p<*.001*),* worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources ( *=* 2.88, effect size = -.26, *p*<.001*),* come to class without completing readings or assignments ( = 2.17*, effect size = .23, p*<.01*),*  worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments ( *=* 2.08, effect size = -.26, *p*<.001*)*. The senior students were above average on one question and had no deficiencies related to this area: worked with other students on projects during class ( *=* 2.54*,* effect size = .16, *p*<.01*)*.

The third area, Reading and Writing, asked the respondents during the current school year how much reading and writing they had done. 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 ( *=* 2.87, effect size = -.25, *p*<.01). Also, the first-year students indicated the number of written reports or papers between 5 and 19 pages they had completed were significantly less when compared to the Selected peer group ( *=* 2.01, effect size = -.21, *p*<.01). 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 (*=*5.13, effect size = -.26, *p*<.001). 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 3 years and this is reflected in the first–year student’s responses to this question with 24 percent stating that they had participated in a learning community or similar program and this can be compared to the 15 percent of first-year students from UNA’s peer institutions. Therefore, it seems that UNA 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. The senior students seem to have a significantly higher level of understanding people of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds than their peers ( *=* 2.75, effect size = .18, *p*<.01).

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 listed above (Table 3)  
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 deficiency at the p<.05 level for first-year students at UNA when compared to its Selected peer institutions ( = 47.6, effect size = -.19, *p*<.05). Level of Academic Challenge relates to class preparation, number of readings, written papers, coursework emphasis, exceeding your own expectations, and amount of time spent studying.

UNA’s first-year students scored significantly lower than their peers in regards to Active and Collaborative Learning ( = 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.

Student-Faculty Interaction had no significant differences. However, UNA’s first-year student’s 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 ( = 25, effect size = -.21, *p*<.001). Senior student’s 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 student’s participation in cultural activities, diversity experiences, community service, technological advancement preparation, foreign language study, co-curricular activities, and practicum/internship involvement.

Supportive Campus Environment had no significant differences when compared to our peer institutions. UNA students, both first-year and seniors, scored significantly lower on all 5 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 dormant, and Student-Faculty Interaction as well as Enriching Educational Experiences saw a decline in engagement. However NSSE did not perform statistical significance analysis when comparing multiple administrations. The OIRPA will conduct such analyses in the future.

The 2008 administration showed a 7% decline in the percentage of respondents who completed the questionnaire. In future administrations UNA needs to improve upon informing students on the importance of this survey. NSSE has many suggestions for increasing the response rate, including various incentives or posting NSSE on social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. The results indicate UNA’s main insufficiency relates to senior engagement in regards to Enriching Educational Experiences. According to their responses, UNA’s senior students are extremely 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 population’s in the region implying that there should be no excuse for its students to be deficient in diversity relations. Given these results it is essential that The University take responsibility for these deficiencies in regard to student engagement and confidently make changes to improve the overall college experience for our students.