

National Survey of Student Engagement 2005 Summary Report

Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a national survey instrument designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in good educational practices and to look at what students gain from their educational experiences. In completing this survey, students are asked to reflect on what they are putting into and getting out of their college experience. Survey items address student behaviors that are highly correlated in higher education research with many desirable outcomes of college. Towson University has participated in NSSE since 2001.

The NSSE instrument looks at overall student satisfaction and student evaluation of academic and co-curricular components of their education. Data are broken down by first-year and senior students, by native and transfer students, by Middle States standards, and by student engagement benchmark clusters. NSSE data also allow comparisons to peer campuses, Masters institutions, and all NSSE 2005 responding schools. The peer comparison group consists 120 Towson-identified peer institutions. The NSSE comparison group is made up of the 518 schools participating in the 2005 survey. The following sections discuss overall and individual item NSSE results.

Detailed NSSE results and analyses are available on the Towson University Assessment Office website at <http://pages.towson.edu/assessment>.

Overall Ratings

Three essential questions are asked of students completing the NSSE survey:

1. How would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at this institution?
2. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
3. If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

Results for Towson student response to these questions, while encouraging, left some opportunity for improvement. Specifically:

1. While 61% of Towson respondents rated the quality of academic advising as “good” or “excellent,” this was 10 percentage points less than peer institutions and 13 percentage points less than all NSSE 2005 schools. This result also suggests that 39% of Towson respondents rated the quality of academic advising as only “fair” or “poor.”
2. Although 84% of Towson respondents rated their overall educational experience at Towson as “good” or “excellent,” this was still somewhat lower than peers at 86% and NSSE at 88%. While this result is generally positive, Towson must consider the 16% who responded less favorably.
3. Finally, about three-quarters of Towson respondents indicate they would come to Towson again if given the opportunity. This is an encouraging number but it is again

lower than both peers (at 82%) and all NSSE schools (at 83%). Of concern are the 22% of students who would not come to Towson again.

Results by First-Year and Senior Students

Comparison of first-year response and senior response shows that first-year students are happier with academic advising, more satisfied with their overall educational experience, and more likely to return to Towson if given the opportunity. These results are comparable with peer and NSSE overall results.

Senior students, on the other hand, are much less satisfied with academic advising, much less satisfied with their overall academic experience, and much less likely to return to Towson if given the opportunity. These results are lower than peer and NSSE overall ratings.

Specifically, while 74% of first-year students rate academic advising as “good” or “excellent,” only 54% of seniors rate academic advising as “good” or “excellent.” Eighty-seven percent of first-year students evaluate their entire educational experience as “good” or “excellent” but only 81% of seniors do. Eighty-three percent of first-year students would return to Towson if given the opportunity while only 72% of seniors would return.

Results by Native and Transfer Students

Supplementing the difference between first-year and senior response is the difference between students who started at Towson and students who transferred here. Overall, native students are more satisfied with their Towson experience than transfer students on both summary and individual items. Native student results are comparable with peer and NSSE overall results but transfer students are less satisfied than peer transfers or NSSE transfers overall.

Looking at student satisfaction with academic advising, 66% of native students evaluate academic advising as “good” or “excellent” while only 55% of transfer students give the same rating. Eighty-seven percent of native students rate their entire educational experience at Towson as “good” or “excellent” while only 77% of transfer students do. When asked if they would return to Towson again if given the chance to start over, 80% of native students “probably” or “definitely” would return while only 70% of transfer students would come again.

For individual items, transfer student results demonstrate that these students spend more time working for pay off campus, commuting and caring for dependents; have more difficulty paying for college and making new friends; and were less likely to say that Towson provided the academic or social support they needed for success. On the other hand, native students spent more time relaxing and socializing, and more time participating in co-curricular activities. They were likely to “do” or “plan to do” an internship, field experience or co-op and more likely to study abroad. Native students also found it more difficult to manage their time and keep up with school work, and more often reported (2 to 1) that Towson emphasized helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities like work, family, etc. Transfer students were more likely to use financial aid planning but less likely to use career advising.

Results by Middle States Standards

Items on the NSSE survey are linked to a number of Middle State Standards for accreditation. These standards include Standard 12, General Education; Standard 13, Related Educational Activities; and Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning. Summary NSSE results for each of these standards are discussed below.

Standard 12: General Education

Standard 12 looks at whether an institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills. These skills include oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. TU students were less likely than selected peers or NSSE schools to say that their experience at TU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following general education areas:

- Acquiring a broad general education
- Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills
- Writing clearly and effectively
- Speaking clearly and effectively
- Thinking critically and analytically
- Analyzing quantitative problems
- Solving complex real world problems

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

Standard 13 addresses the extent to which institutional programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards. In these results, TU students were more likely to participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together. TU students were also less likely to or plan to:

- Do community service or volunteer work
- Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course requirements
- Study abroad
- Do independent study or a self-designed major
- Complete a senior capstone experience

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Standard 14 covers assessment of student learning and whether assessment at the institution demonstrates that students have the knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals. Towson's results on NSSE items related to Standard 14 show that, when compared to peer institutions and overall NSSE schools:

- TU seniors were more likely than selected peers or NSSE overall schools to make a class presentation, use an electronic medium and email an instructor.
- TU first year students were more likely to use an electronic medium, email an instructor and talk about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.
- TU seniors were more likely to have serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own.
- TU students were less likely to ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions, work with other students on projects in or outside of class, or participate in community-based projects as part of a course.
- TU seniors were more likely to complete a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment but less likely to tutor or teach other students.
- TU first year students were more likely to use computing and information technology but less likely to include diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments.
- TU seniors were more likely to come to class without completing readings or assignments.
- TU students were more likely to memorize facts in class but less likely to make judgments about the value of information or to apply theories or concepts to practical problems.
- TU students had more assigned readings per course and more problem sets that took less than an hour to complete.
- TU students were less likely to say they were challenged by their examinations during the current school year.

Results by NSSE Benchmarks

To focus discussions about the importance of student engagement and guide institutional improvement efforts, NSSE items are clustered into five groups as benchmarks of effective educational practice: (1) Level of academic challenge, (2) Active and collaborative learning, (3) Student-faculty interaction, (4) Enriching educational experiences, and (5) Supportive campus environment. Towson results on each of these benchmark categories are summarized below. These benchmarks can help Towson look at the NSSE results in terms of general categories rather than individual item, facilitating a broader application of the results. Findings include:

- Overall Level of Academic Challenge benchmark score for Towson first-year students (50.9) was slightly higher than peer institutions (49.8) but lower than NSSE schools overall (52.6).
- Overall Level of Academic Challenge benchmark scores for Towson seniors (53.2) were lower than peer institutions (55) and NSSE schools overall (56.5).

- Overall Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark score for Towson first-year student response (37.8) was lower than peer institutions (40.7) and NSSE schools overall (42.4).
- Overall Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark score for Towson senior students (48.8) was lower than peer institutions (52.2) and NSSE schools (51.5).
- Overall Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark score for first-year student response (30.4) was lower than peer institutions (32.4) and NSSE schools overall (34.0).
- Overall Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark score for Towson seniors (38.8) was lower than peers (42.1) and NSSE schools (44.1).
- Overall Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark score for Towson first-year students (25.2) was comparable to peer institutions (25.2) but lower than NSSE schools overall (27.8).
- Overall Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark school for seniors (35.8) was lower than peer institutions (37.7) and NSSE overall (42.2).
- Overall Supportive Campus Environment benchmark score (56.4) was lower than peer institutions (57.8) and NSSE overall (60.1).
- Overall Supportive Campus Environment benchmark score (50.7) was lower than peer institutions (56.4) and NSSE schools (57.5).

Each benchmark is described in more detail in the next sections of this report.

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. This benchmark category was developed from the results of 11 NSSE survey items:

- Preparing for class
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more, number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages, and number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationship
- Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods
- Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

- Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work

For first-year students, the mean on these benchmark items was higher than both peer and NSSE institutions on 2 out of 11 items, including “number of assigned textbooks” and “applying theories or concepts to practical problems.” The mean was also higher than peer institutions on 5 out of 11 items, including “number of written papers between 5 and 19 pages,” “analyzing the basic elements of an idea,” and “synthesizing and organizing ideas.” Overall benchmark score for Towson first-year students (50.9) was slightly higher than peer institutions (49.8) but lower than NSSE schools overall (52.6).

For senior students, the Towson mean was lower than NSSE schools on all items. The mean was higher than peer institutions on 2 out of 11 items, including “number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages,” and “number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages. Overall benchmark scores for Towson seniors (53.2) were lower than peer institutions (55) and NSSE schools overall (56.5).

There was a mean drop between first year and senior year on items addressing critical thinking. Senior mean on critical thinking items was below both peer institutions and NSSE overall.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different setting. This benchmark category is a compilation of the following NSSE survey items:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class.

For first year students, the mean on these items was lower than peer institutions and NSSE institutions overall on all items. Overall benchmark score for Towson first-year student response (37.8) was lower than peer institutions (40.7) and NSSE schools overall (42.4).

For senior students, the mean was lower than peer institutions and NSSE on all items except “made a classroom presentation.” Overall benchmark score for Towson senior students (48.8) was lower than peer institutions (52.2) and NSSE schools (51.5).

Student-Faculty Interaction

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. NSSE items for this category include:

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance

- Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course and program requirements

Mean response for first-year students was lower than peer institutions and NSSE schools overall except “talked about career plans with faculty member or advisor.” Mean response for seniors was lower than peer institutions and NSSE schools overall on all items in this category. Total benchmark score for first-year student response (30.4) was lower than peer institutions (32.4) and NSSE schools overall (34.0).

The mean for the item “talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor” increased from 2.19 (first-year student response) to 2.36 (senior student response) but is still below peer institutions and NSSE overall mean. Overall benchmark score for Towson seniors (38.8) was lower than peers (42.1) and NSSE schools (44.1).

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities in and out of class augment academic programs. NSSE items in this category include:

- Participating in co-curricular activities
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework and study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

Mean response for Towson first year students was lower than NSSE overall results on all items except “used electronic medium to complete assignment.” Mean response was higher than peer institutions on 4 out the ten items in this category. These items included “had serious conversations with students of different race or ethnicity,” “participated in co-curricular activities,” and “foreign language coursework.” Overall benchmark score for Towson first-year students (25.2) was comparable to peer institutions (25.2) but lower than NSSE schools overall (27.8).

Mean response for Towson seniors was lower than NSSE overall on all items. Mean response was higher than peer institutions on 2 out of 10 items (“used an electronic medium to complete assignment” and “had serious conversations with students of different race or ethnicity.”) Overall benchmark score for seniors (35.8) was lower than peer institutions (37.7) and NSSE overall (42.2).

Co-curricular participation mean dropped from 2.07 in first-year students to 1.74 in seniors.

Supportive Campus Environment

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. NSSE items in this benchmark category include:

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

Mean response for first year students was lower than peer institutions and NSSE schools overall on all supportive campus environment items. Overall benchmark score (56.4) was lower than peer institutions (57.8) and NSSE overall (60.1).

Mean response for senior students was lower than peer institutions and NSSE schools overall on all items. Overall benchmark score (50.7) was lower than peer institutions (56.4) and NSSE schools (57.5).

NSSE results offer information about student perceptions of their experiences at Towson University. These results were used as a platform for the January 2005 conference on Academic Excellence and Enrollment Group.

Summary

NSSE results provide Towson with data related to student perceptions of their college experience. These data offer valuable insight into what students think about Towson University and why. Results show that students are generally satisfied with their TU experience but that some groups are more satisfied than others. The results also suggest that advising is an area of particular concern and that transfer students and seniors are much less satisfied overall. Benchmark scores allow TU to identify areas of strength and weakness across these benchmarks, by group, and in comparison with other colleges and universities. Middle States standards comparisons allow us to highlight areas of excellence and to focus on those areas that are not as strong. NSSE results can serve as one stepping stone to more effective educational practice at Towson. These results, however, are only part of the information about the student experience and must be considered both in the context of what we already know about our students and what other sources of data and research will tell us. For this reason, it is important to couple NSSE findings with multiple measures of student satisfaction and multiple sources of data to build a complete picture of the student experience at Towson. This will help us understand and improve the student experience and highlight the ways in which we can tell and sell the story.