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# Introduction

## NSSE Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is run annually and collects information about the experiences of freshmen and senior undergraduate students at hundreds of universities and four-year colleges. The survey items are designed to provide insights about what undergraduates gain from their college experiences and how they spend their time. The Center for Postsecondary Research, at the Indiana University School of Education, administers the NSSE.

The NSSE staff provide participating institutions with a set of reports that compare the responses of their students with the responses of students at sets of comparison institutions. Institutions also receive certain data sets that they can use to compare responses of students within their institutions.

## Administration at Towson University

Towson University's practice has been to administer the NSSE every three years, with the most recent administration occurring in spring of 2020 and prior administrations recorded in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, and 2017. TU's spring 2020 NSSE administration ran between February 10, 2020 and May 22, 2020. Despite the global pandemic, TU's administration was largely unaffected by the university's switch to remote learning, as more than 99% of responses were received prior to March 13<sup>th</sup>, the date which marked TU's spring 2020 modality transition.

Institutions who participate in the NSSE can also elect to participate in one or two topical modules, short sets of questions about designated topics. TU elected to participate in the First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions topical module during the 2020 NSSE administration.

TU's NSSE results are posted to the institution's NSSE webpage. Faculty and staff can request access to the NSSE-produced reports. Certain high-level reports and interactive data tools are publicly available on that website. <https://www.towson.edu/ir/NSSE.html>

# Methodology

## Instruments

TU chose two instruments for the 2020 NSSE administration (1) the main NSSE survey and (2) the First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions topical module.

The main NSSE survey is comprised of 40 items, including 39 multiple-choice items and one open-response question. The multiple-choice items ask students about how they spend their time, what they have gained from attending college, their college experiences, and their biographical and demographic background. Institutions can select one of four open-response questions, and TU chose to ask students, "What one change would most improve the educational experience at this institution, and what one thing should not be changed?" The NSSE instrument is available for review at <https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/working-with-nsse-data/data-codebooks/data-codebooks-word/nsse-2020-codebook-core-us.docx>

The First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions topical module asks different sets of questions to freshmen and seniors. Freshmen are presented with four multiple-choice items pertaining to the difficulty of accessing and using resources, how often they have sought help, and how often they have participated in or experienced certain situations. Seniors are presented with 7 multiple-choice items that ask about their immediate and longer-term plans, in addition to how prepared they are in certain skill sets. Additionally, seniors are prompted with an open-response items that asks, “Is there anything your institution could have done better to prepare you for your career or further education? Please describe.” This instrument is available for review at <https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/survey-instruments/topical-modules/fy-experiences-sr-transitions.html>.

## Sampling

TU elected to participate in the NSSE as a census survey, inviting all senior and freshmen undergraduate students to participate. TU’s Office of Institutional Research selected initial populations of 3,878 freshmen and 5,810 seniors, based upon the fall 2019 enrollment census. The populations were updated in spring 2020, and students from the fall 2019 populations were excluded if they had graduated, were no longer enrolled, or had a change in class-level standing. The corresponding final populations included 3,612 freshmen and 4,017 seniors. Of the freshmen, 2,633 were first-time / first-year students, meaning that they had no postsecondary education experience prior to enrolling at TU and were subsequently counted as “first-year” in the NSSE-produced reports.

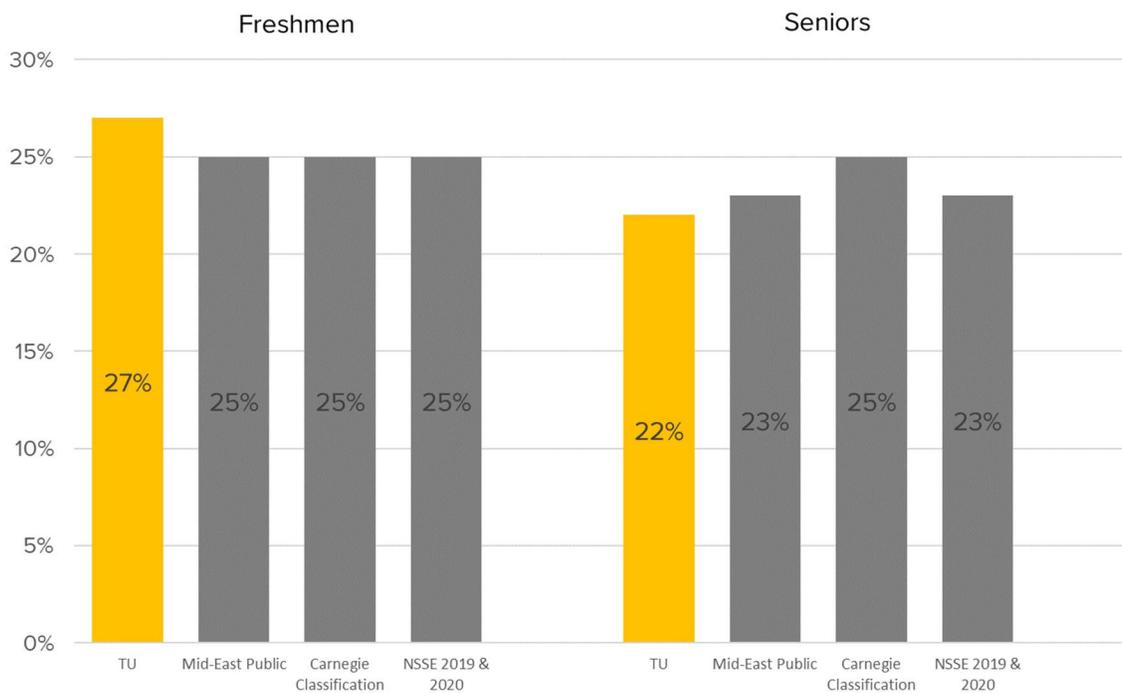
## Recruitment

TU’s NSSE response rates had been declining in recent years, to as low as 12%, as NSSE transitioned from paper to online administrations. In response, TU’s Office of Institutional Research worked with the NSSE staff and certain TU departments to develop and implement a communications strategy with the goal of increasing response rates.

TU students received the five standard emails that NSSE staff send to all selected students. TU’s emails were all sent between February 10, 2020 and March 9, 2020, on dates that provided minimal interruption to the academic calendar. TU’s enhanced outreach efforts included digital signage around campus, updates in the daily news and announcement bulletin (TU Today), LMS integration, and a participation incentive (a randomized drawing for 20, \$50 gift cards to the university store). NSSE reported that TU was one of only 30 institutions to integrate NSSE into the Blackboard LMS and that 16% of TU’s respondents accessed NSSE via Blackboard.

The recruitment investments paid off, as TU’s 2020 overall response rate was 24%, with a 27% response rate for freshmen and a 22% rate for seniors. These rates stack up well against TU’s comparison groups, as demonstrated in the following graphic.

**Graphic: NSSE Response Rates by Class Standing and Comparison Group**



## Comparison Groups

Each NSSE institution is permitted to select up to three comparison groups, comprised of other participating institutions, which are used in the benchmarking reports that the NSSE staff produce. TU chose groups that allowed for comparisons based on geographical location and control, basic Carnegie classification, and national trends. To meet these criteria, TU’s selected comparison groups included Mid-East public institutions (N=59), Carnegie Doctoral / Professional universities (N = 88), and all 2019 and 2020 NSSE institutions (N=881).

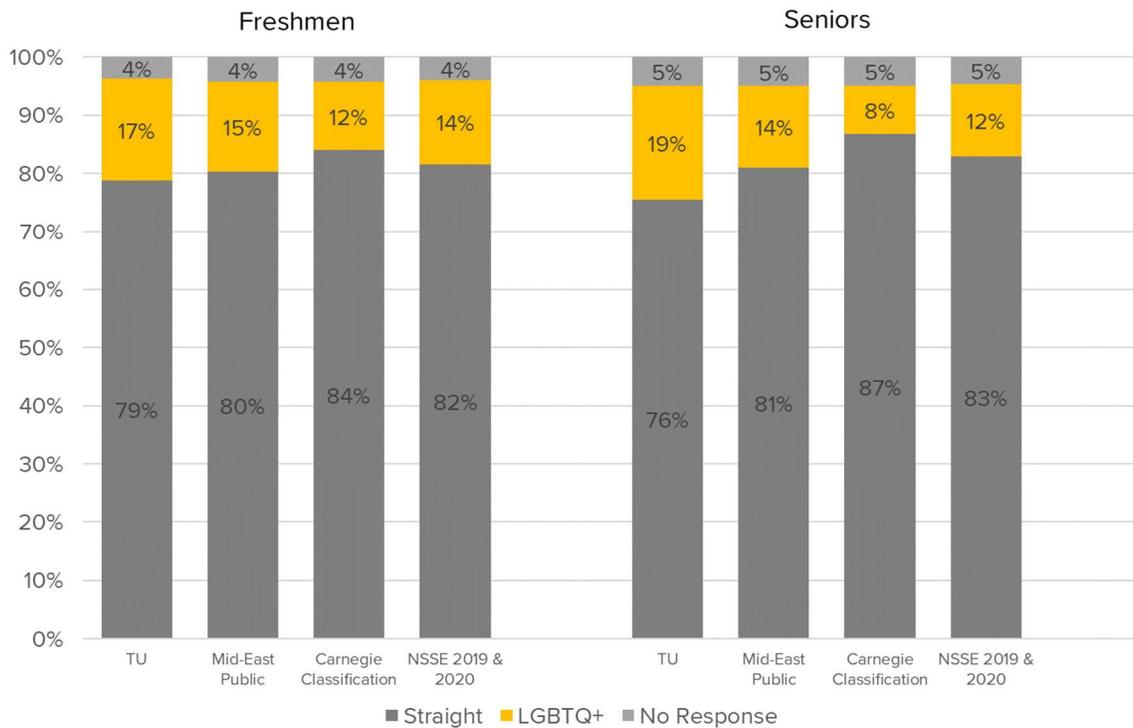
## Respondent Profile

A total of 1,861 TU students responded, including 969 freshmen and 892 seniors. Of the 916 freshmen, 817 of them were first-year / first-time students. The other freshmen included transfers and second-year / first-time students. More than half (52%) of respondents completed the survey from a mobile device, such as a tablet or phone, and 16% of respondents accessed the survey directly from TU’s learning management system, Blackboard.

The biographical / demographic profile of TU’s NSSE respondents generally approximated the profile of TU’s freshmen and seniors, with a few exceptions. Female students accounted for 77% and 71% of the respective freshmen and senior respondents; however, they account for 60% and 61% of TU’s respective freshmen and senior populations. Also, white students were over-represented by approximately 4% to 5% among NSSE respondents, and black / African-American students were underrepresented by corresponding amounts.

In addition to benchmarking university data, NSSE responses offer insight into other biographical and demographic data that are not routinely collected by the institution. For example, the NSSE asks students to describe their sexual orientation. The following table shows how TU's responses compared with those of students at comparison institutions. As shown, TU freshmen and senior respondents are more likely to identify with a LGBTQ+ orientation than are respondents at institutions in the comparison groups.

**Graphic: Reported Sexual Orientation of NSSE Respondents**



# Results

## Synopsis

The NSSE staff provide participating institutions with a standard set of reports that summarize institutional results, compare the institution with its comparison groups, and show time-series analyses of items. Members of the campus community can access these reports by visiting <https://www.towson.edu/ir/NSSE.html> and following the “NSSE 2020 Reports” link.

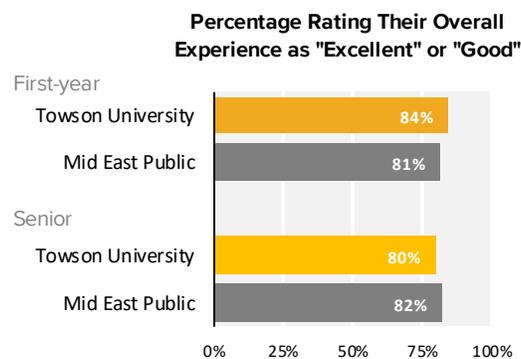
The NSSE staff also supply certain respondent-level data, which TU’s Office of Institutional Research uses to produce interactive data visualizations. These visualizations allow users to interact with TU’s NSSE results, using easy-to-understand graphics, while cutting the data by student characteristics and organizing results according to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) standards.

## Overall Assessment of Student Experience

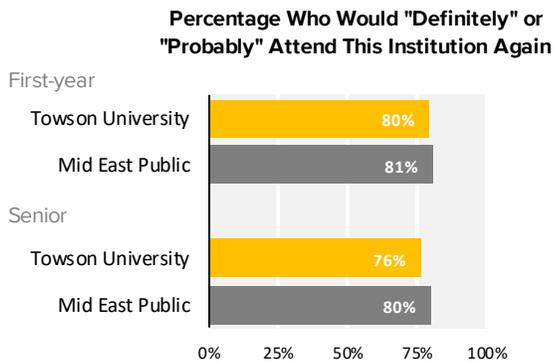
NSSE items provide insights into students’ satisfaction with the institution and their perceptions of their cognitive and affective development.

TU’s freshmen rate their overall experience similarly to their peers at Mid-East Public institutions, with 84% of TU students providing a rating of excellent or good, compared with 81% for all Mid-East Public students. At senior year, 80% of TU students responded with an excellent or good rating, which is two percentage points below their Mid-East Public peers. Similar trends appear when students were asked if they would definitely or probably choose TU again. TU seniors responded four percentage points below TU freshmen and were below the average of Mid-East Public institutions.

### Graphic: Positive Ratings of Overall Experience



## Graphic: Likelihood of Choosing to Attend Institution Again



Seniors were asked about how much their time at TU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in ten areas. They responded most positively to thinking critically and analytically, working effectively with others, and writing clearly and effectively. The least favorable ratings included being an active and informed citizen, analyzing numerical and statistical information, and developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics.

## Graphic: Perceived Gains of TU Seniors

Perceived Gains (Sorted highest to lowest)	Percentage of Seniors Responding "Very much" or "Quite a bit"
Thinking critically and analytically	84%
Working effectively with others	75%
Writing clearly and effectively	75%
Understanding people of other backgrounds (econ., racial/ethnic, polit., relig., nation., etc.)	70%
Speaking clearly and effectively	68%
Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills	67%
Solving complex real-world problems	62%
Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics	62%
Analyzing numerical and statistical information	61%
Being an informed and active citizen	54%

## High Impact Practices

Certain undergraduate activities correlate positively with student retention and learning and are consequently deemed to be “high impact practices.” These activities are characterized by meaningful interactions, high levels of collaboration with diverse audience, considerable time and effort outside of the classroom, and frequent and practical feedback.

The NSSE asks students about their participation or plans to participate in six, specific high impact practices, outlined in the following table.

**Table: NSSE High Impact Practices**

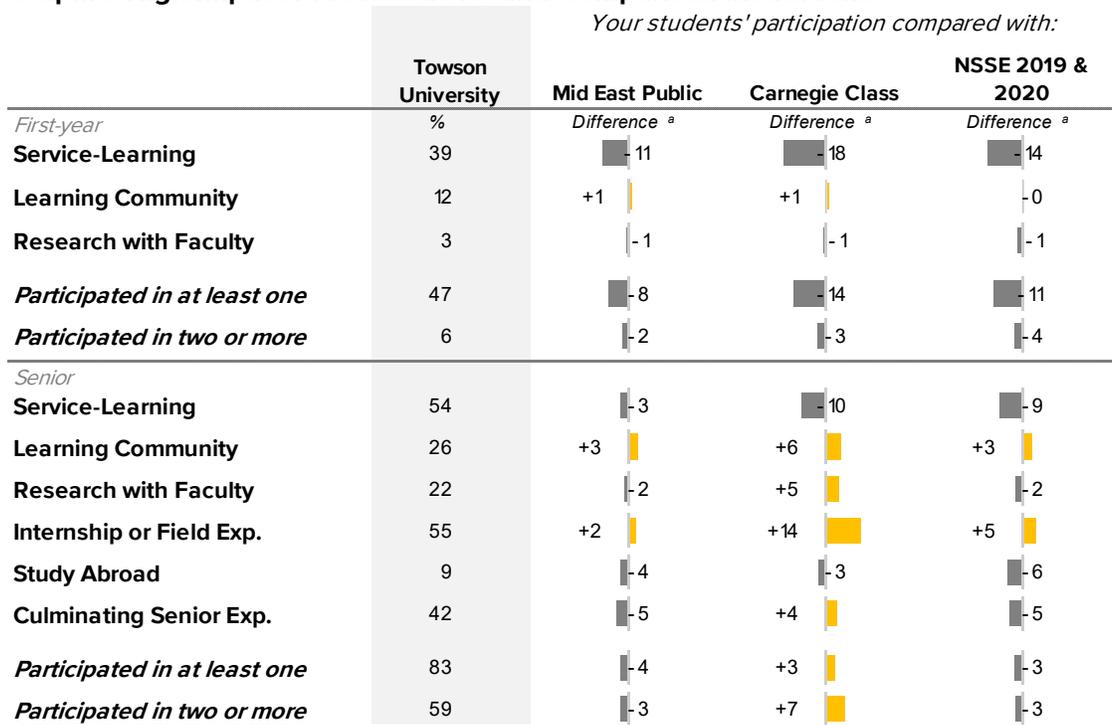
High Impact Practice	First-year	Senior
Service-learning	Participated	Participated
Learning Community	Participated	Participated
Research with faculty	Participated	Participated
Internship or field experience	Plans to participate	Participated
Study abroad	Plans to participate	Participated
Culminating senior experience	Plans to participate	Participated

TU student responses are compared with TU’s comparison groups in the following table. Dark gray bars indicate that TU’s percentage is lower than that of the comparison groups, and gold bars indicate that TU’s percentage is higher than that of the comparison groups.

TU freshmen are less likely than their peers to participate in high-impact practices, a difference which is almost entirely attributable to a difference in service-learning opportunities during freshmen year. TU freshmen’s participation in service-learning lags their peers by 11 to 18 percentage points.

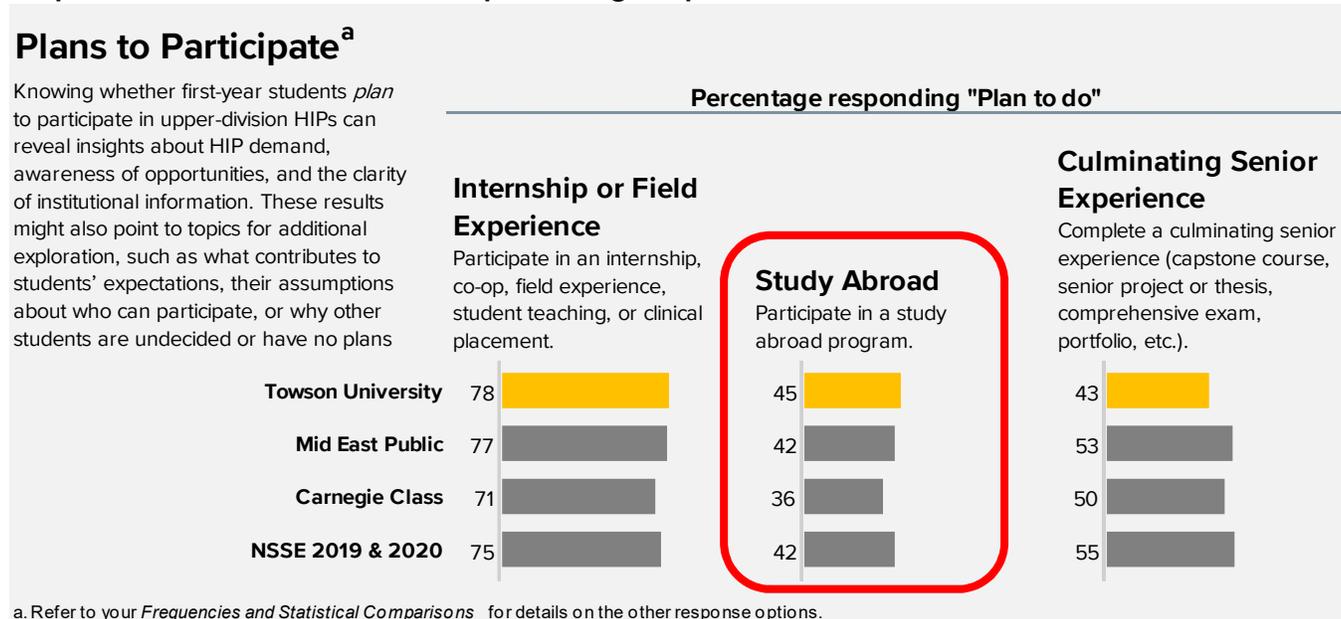
TU seniors participate in high-impact practices at rates that are close to their peer groups. One notable high point is internship and field experiences. TU seniors participate at a rate that exceeds TU’s comparison groups by 2 to 14 percentage points. Like TU freshmen, TU seniors lag their peers in service-learning by 3 to 10 percentage points.

## Graphic: High Impact Practices at TU and Comparison Institutions



Comparing the plans of TU freshmen with the reported activities of TU seniors provides evidence of opportunities for outreach and growth. For example, while 45% of TU freshmen plan to participate in study abroad, only 9% of seniors reported participating in study abroad. While this discrepancy is not entirely unique to TU, it shows that there are opportunities to engage students who desire to participate in study abroad. Freshmen and senior study abroad responses are indicated with red borders in the following graphics.

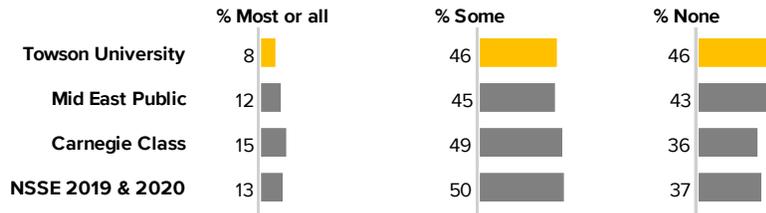
## Graphic: Freshmen's Plans to Participate in High Impact Practices



## Graphic: Senior Participation in High Impact Practices

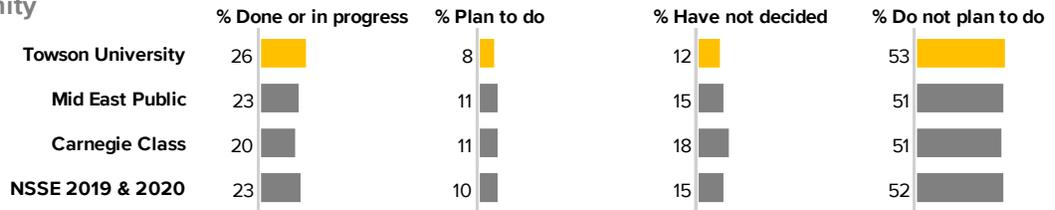
### Service-Learning

About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service-learning)?



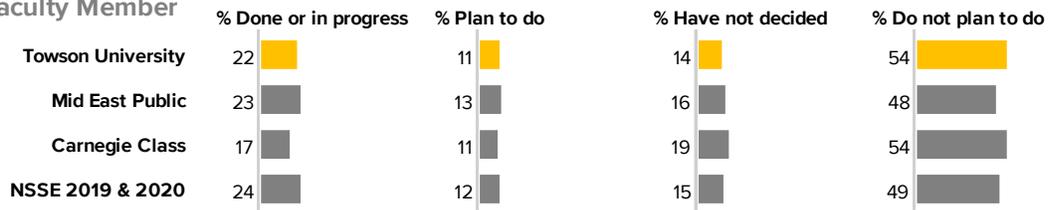
### Learning Community

Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together.



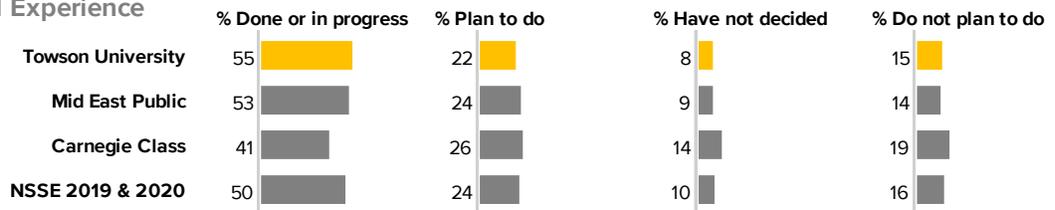
### Research with a Faculty Member

Work with a faculty member on a research project.



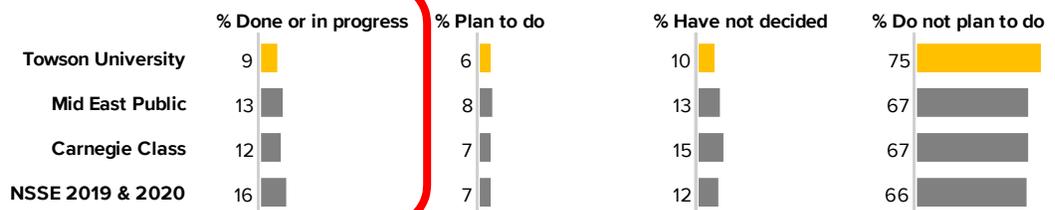
### Internship or Field Experience

Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement.



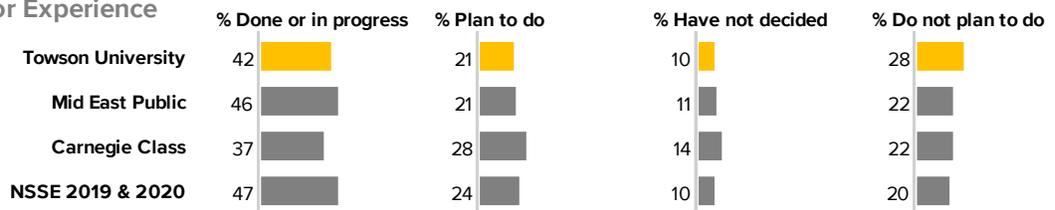
### Study Abroad

Participate in a study abroad program.



### Culminating Senior Experience

Complete a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.).



Note: Results reflect Report Sample exclusions and are unweighted. Refer to your *Administration Summary* report for more details.

While it is useful to compare high-impact practice participation rates to comparison groups, it is also important to compare participation rates within an institution. As shown in the following table, some areas of concern exist. In particular, Black or African-American seniors participate in internship/field experiences and culminating senior experiences at 10 percentage points below the overall rate for TU seniors. Additionally, part-time students are less likely than full time students to participate in any high-impact practice.

**Graphic: High Impact Practice Participation, by Student Characteristics**

	First-year			Senior					
	Service-Learning	Learning Community	Research with Faculty	Service-Learning	Learning Community	Research with Faculty	Internship or Field Experience	Study Abroad	Culminating Senior Experience
<b>Sex</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Female	38	13	2	56	28	23	60	12	42
Male	44	11	7	48	23	19	42	4	41
<b>Race/ethnicity or international</b>									
American Indian or Alaska Native	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Asian	33	11	0	73	22	24	51	15	35
Black or African American	35	10	4	47	23	13	45	6	32
Hispanic or Latino	44	13	0	59	22	19	59	11	46
Native Hawaiian/Other Pac. Islander	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
White	40	13	4	53	27	23	57	9	43
Other	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Foreign or nonresident	—	—	—	75	42	25	55	8	50
Two or more races/ethnicities	43	19	3	49	32	26	56	13	49
<b>Age</b>									
Traditional (FY < 21, Seniors < 25)	39	12	3	55	30	23	60	11	45
Nontraditional (FY 21+, Seniors 25+)	—	—	—	48	13	16	36	2	29
<b>First-generation</b>									
Not first-generation	38	14	2	54	27	23	55	11	43
First-generation	41	9	3	54	26	19	55	7	40
<b>Enrollment status</b>									
Not full-time	—	—	—	47	6	9	32	3	29
Full-time	39	12	3	55	29	23	58	10	43
<b>Residence</b>									
Not on campus	35	3	2	54	25	20	55	9	41
On campus	40	14	3	51	40	35	56	16	46
<b>Major category</b>									
Arts & humanities	38	13	5	40	14	17	23	6	58
Biological sciences, agriculture, natural res.	35	29	5	45	17	39	45	12	16
Physical sciences, math, computer science	44	14	2	19	19	26	33	0	26
Social sciences	33	13	0	45	19	30	47	8	23
Business	44	6	2	51	26	11	73	12	49
Communications, media, public relations	28	6	0	44	12	16	60	8	68
Education	51	15	2	83	63	20	87	10	64
Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Health professions	34	8	3	70	28	20	67	10	42
Social service professions	37	9	0	56	22	19	56	7	33
Undecided/undeclared	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Overall</b>	39	12	3	54	26	22	55	9	42

## Engagement Indicators

NSSE organizes survey questions about student engagement into 10 “engagement indicators” that roll up to four themes. The engagement indicators are scored on a 60-point scale (e.g., Never = 0; Sometimes = 20; Often = 40; Very Often = 60). When comparing institutional results with comparison groups, NSSE’s guidance indicates that an effect size of 0.1 in magnitude can be considered small, 0.3 medium, and 0.5 large.

**Table: NSSE Engagement Indicators and Themes**

Theme	Engagement Indicator
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning
	Reflective & Integrative Learning
	Learning Strategies
	Quantitative Reasoning
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning
	Discussions with Diverse Others
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction
	Effective Teaching Practices
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions
	Supportive Environment

TU’s freshmen reported outcomes that were significantly higher for the discussions with diverse others engagement indicator, as compared with all three comparison groups. They reported significantly lower results for the following indicators, when benchmarked against at least one of the comparison groups. All of the effect sizes were small.

- Higher Order Learning (Carnegie Class)
- Learning Strategies (Carnegie Class)
- Collaborative Learning (Mid-East Public and NSSE 2019 & 2020)
- Student-Faculty Interaction (All Three Comparison Groups)
- Effective Teaching Practices (All Three Comparison Groups)
- Quality of Interactions (Carnegie Class and NSSE 2019 & 2020)

TU’s seniors reported engagement indicator responses that were significantly higher than at least one comparison group for collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, and student-faculty interaction. The effect size of collaborative learning, when compared with other institutions within TU’s Carnegie Classification, was moderate, and the other effect sizes were small.

TU's seniors reported engagement indicator responses that were significantly lower than at least one comparison group for higher-order learning, learning strategies, quantitative reasoning, student-faculty interactions, effective teaching practices, and quality of interactions. The effect size of quality of interactions, when compared with other institutions within TU's Carnegie Classification, was moderate, and the other effect sizes were small.

### Graphic: Engagement Indicators at TU and Comparison Institutions

First-Year Students		Your first-year students compared with Mid East Public	Your first-year students compared with Carnegie Class	Your first-year students compared with NSSE 2019 & 2020
Theme	Engagement Indicator			
<i>Academic Challenge</i>	Higher-Order Learning	--	▽	--
	Reflective & Integrative Learning	--	--	--
	Learning Strategies	--	▽	--
	Quantitative Reasoning	--	--	--
<i>Learning with Peers</i>	Collaborative Learning	▽	--	▽
	Discussions with Diverse Others	△	△	△
<i>Experiences with Faculty</i>	Student-Faculty Interaction	▽	▽	▽
	Effective Teaching Practices	▽	▽	▽
<i>Campus Environment</i>	Quality of Interactions	--	▽	▽
	Supportive Environment	--	--	--

Seniors		Your seniors compared with Mid East Public	Your seniors compared with Carnegie Class	Your seniors compared with NSSE 2019 & 2020
Theme	Engagement Indicator			
<i>Academic Challenge</i>	Higher-Order Learning	--	▽	--
	Reflective & Integrative Learning	--	--	--
	Learning Strategies	--	▽	--
	Quantitative Reasoning	--	--	▽
<i>Learning with Peers</i>	Collaborative Learning	--	▲	△
	Discussions with Diverse Others	--	△	--
<i>Experiences with Faculty</i>	Student-Faculty Interaction	▽	△	--
	Effective Teaching Practices	--	▽	--
<i>Campus Environment</i>	Quality of Interactions	--	▼	▽
	Supportive Environment	--	--	--

Key:

- ▲ Your students' average was significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.
- △ Your students' average was significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.
- No significant difference.
- ▽ Your students' average was significantly lower ( $p < .05$ ) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.
- ▼ Your students' average was significantly lower ( $p < .05$ ) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.

## Item Comparisons

The following graphics show the five questions on which TU students scored the highest and lowest, relative to the Mid East Public comparison group.

Both freshmen and seniors noted higher levels of assigned writing, diverse perspectives, and an emphasis on using learning support services. Freshmen also reported higher levels of quality interactions with instructors.

Freshmen’s lowest relative responses included service learning and issues related to preparing for exams and discussing academics with other students and faculty. For seniors, the lowest relative scores were found on items related to time spent preparing for class and reading, working with faculty on non-coursework items, a culminating senior experience and reaching conclusions by analyzing data.

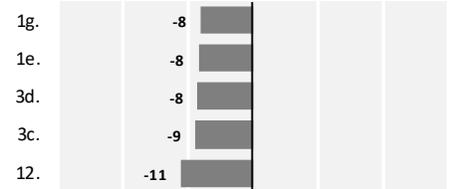
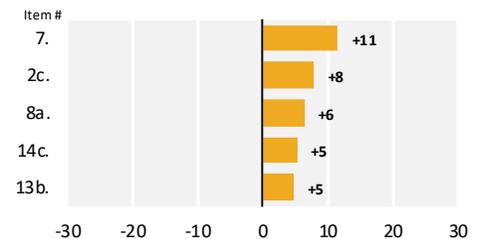
### First-year

#### Highest Performing Relative to Mid East Public

- Assigned more than 50 pages of writing
- Included diverse perspectives (...) in course discussions or assignments
- Discussions with... People of a race or ethnicity other than your own
- Institution emphasis on using learning support services (...)
- Quality of interactions with academic advisors

#### Lowest Performing Relative to Mid East Public

- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material w/other students
- Asked another student to help you understand course material
- Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member
- Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class
- About how many courses have included a community-based project (service-learning)?



Percentage Point Difference with Mid East Public

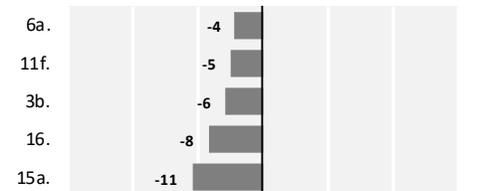
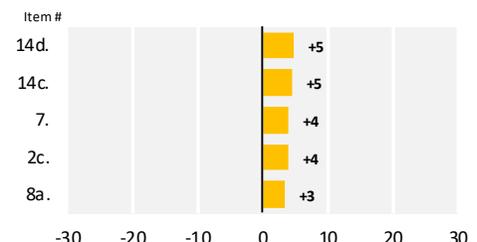
### Senior

#### Highest Performing Relative to Mid East Public

- Institution emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds...
- Institution emphasis on using learning support services (...)
- Assigned more than 50 pages of writing
- Included diverse perspectives (...) in course discussions or assignments
- Discussions with... People of a race or ethnicity other than your own

#### Lowest Performing Relative to Mid East Public

- Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (...)
- Completed a culminating senior experience (...)
- Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (...)
- Spent more than 10 hours per week on assigned reading
- Spent more than 15 hours per week preparing for class



Percentage Point Difference with Mid East Public

## First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions

The First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions topical module report compares the responses of TU students with students at the 303 other institutions that administered this module. Overall, TU students' response patterns closely resembled those of students at other institutions, with all significant differences have small effect sizes. Responses are summarized below.

TU freshmen responded more positively than their peers when asked about:

- Participated in course discussions, even when you didn't feel like it
- Sought help from family members or friends

TU freshmen responded more negatively than their peers when asked about:

- Studied when there were other interesting things to do
- Stayed positive, even when you did poorly on a test or assignment

TU seniors responded more positively than their peers when asked about:

- The extent which their coursework focused on inventing new methods to arrive at unconventional solutions

TU seniors responded more negatively than their peers when asked about:

- Confidence in their entrepreneurial skills
- Confidence in their financial and business management skills
- Having secured a job, if plans are to work after graduation