

Student Engagement at ASU

Student engagement, that is, the extent to which college students spend time participating in educationally purposeful activities, is a good predictor of student satisfaction and achievement (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Kuh, 2002; Passcarella, 2001; Astin, 1991). The *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) is the assessment tool we use at ASU to measure institutional effectiveness in promoting student learning through effective educational practices such as student-faculty interaction, prompt feedback, time on task, and high expectations. NSSE was established in 2000 by the Lumina Foundation, Center for Inquiry at Wabash College, the Spencer Foundation, the Teagle Foundation, and the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. It is administered by Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research. Findings concerning the validity, reliability, and other psychometric properties of NSSE are available at http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/psychometric_framework_2002.pdf.

Empirically derived educational practices included in the NSSE cluster into five factors of desirable outcomes for college students: *Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, Active and Collaborative Learning, Supportive Campus Environment, and Level of Academic Challenge*. Since 2007, the response rate for a random sample of ASU students has been about 28% for first-year students and about 37% for seniors. Trend analyses show little variation among 2007, 2010, and 2011 responses to NSSE items. Complete findings from three years of NSSE data can be found under the surveys tab on ASU's webpage for Institutional Research. Student responses for each NSSE question can be compared to faculty responses reported via FSSE, the *Faculty Survey of Student Engagement*. Two years of FSSE results also are available from Institutional Research.



Student – Faculty Interaction

Student-faculty interaction is a high-performing benchmark for ASU relative to overall NSSE 2011 findings from 673 U.S. baccalaureate degree-granting colleges and universities (sample size = 416, 000 students). Questions in this cluster ask students about the extent to which they discuss grades, career plans, readings, and assignments with faculty outside of class. Forty-seven percent of first-year students said faculty were available, helpful, and sympathetic. Eighty-seven percent of seniors said they occasionally discussed their career plans with faculty, and 44% of seniors said they work with faculty members inside *and* outside the classroom.

Faculty may not realize just how much time they spend helping students succeed. Whereas 23% of freshmen said the faculty discussed grades or assignments with them “very often,” (NSSE), only 9% of faculty surveyed reported this frequency of discussion. By contrast, students and faculty differed as to their perceptions of prompt feedback on assignments. Whereas faculty reported a greater frequency of prompt feedback (42% said they very often provide senior level students with prompt feedback), only 25% of seniors said they receive prompt feedback from their instructors very often.



Enriching Educational Experiences

ASU 2011 freshmen and seniors reported lower participation in on-site learning such as internships, senior capstone projects, research, community service, and living learning communities than comparative schools. Of the 156 faculty responding to the FSSE question, “How important do you think it is that undergraduates at your institution work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course requirements?” 19% of faculty said it was very important. Six percent of freshmen and 13% of seniors said they had participated in such research. Nationally, 5% of freshmen at research-intensive universities and 20% of seniors engage in faculty-mentored undergraduate research outside of class projects. Although 48% of faculty surveyed believe students should take foreign language coursework, only 24% of seniors report having done so.

Active and Collaborative Learning



ASU students participate in class discussions and work with classmates on projects at levels similar to comparative Southeast Public Universities. Sixty percent of freshmen and 77% of seniors said they often ask questions and contribute to class discussions. One of ASU's general education goals is communicating effectively. To this end, 35% of freshmen and 54% of seniors said they had given an oral presentation as part of their ASU coursework.

Supportive Campus Environment



ASU students generally believe that ASU is committed to their success. Seventy percent of first-year students and 78% of seniors perceive faculty as available, helpful, and supportive. Students' relationships with administration/office personnel were ranked slightly lower, as 58% of freshmen and 56% of seniors described administrative personnel as helpful, considerate, and flexible.

Level of Academic Challenge



ASU did not score well on level of academic challenge. When asked how many 5-19 page papers or reports they had written at ASU, 28% of freshmen and 19% of seniors responded, "None," while 46% of freshmen and 49% percent of seniors responded, "1-4 papers or reports." Compared to students at Southeast Public Universities and students at other Carnegie Classified Master's Large Universities, ASU freshmen and seniors reported fewer required reading assignments, fewer reports and papers, and fewer assignments involving analysis of a theory or examination of a situation in depth than the number reported by students at similar institutions. However, ASU students were similar to students at comparison schools when reporting the extent to which they felt they had worked harder than they ever thought they could (94% of seniors said they often worked this hard) to meet an instructor's expectations.

ETS Proficiency Profile Scores 2010 - Writing

Results from the ETS Proficiency Profile Exam

Freshmen N = 234

Seniors N = 304

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification			Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient		Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient
Reading, Level 1	56%	25%	19%	Reading, Level 1	70%	18%	11%
Reading, Level 2	26%	18%	57%	Reading, Level 2	41%	20%	40%
Critical Thinking	1%	7%	92%	Critical Thinking	5%	17%	78%
Writing, Level 1	55%	32%	13%	Writing, Level 1	64%	26%	11%
Writing, Level 2	10%	36%	54%	Writing, Level 2	21%	36%	43%
Writing, Level 3	2%	21%	78%	Writing, Level 3	7%	28%	66%
Mathematics, Level 1	41%	28%	31%	Mathematics, Level 1	62%	21%	17%
Mathematics, Level 2	18%	23%	59%	Mathematics, Level 2	29%	32%	39%
Mathematics, Level 3	4%	11%	85%	Mathematics, Level 3	7%	17%	76%

Writing Level I Students who are proficient can:

- Recognize agreement among basic grammatical elements
- Recognize appropriate transition words
- Recognize incorrect word choice
- Order sentences in a paragraph
- Order elements in an outline

Writing Level II Students who are proficient can:

- Incorporate new material into a passage
- Recognize agreement among basic grammatical elements when these elements are complicated by intervening words or phrases
- Combine simple clauses into single, more complex combinations
- Recast existing sentences into new syntactic combinations

Writing Level III - Students who are proficient can

- Discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of parallelism
- Recognize redundancy
- Discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of idiomatic language
- Recognize the most effective revision of a sentence

Additional Information about Critical Thinking and Writing

(Arum and Roksa, 2011)

- I. Some factors that correlate with higher critical thinking scores
 - A. Students having taken courses that require both
 1. 40 pages of reading a week
 2. 20 pages of writing by the end of the semester
 - B. Students whose work schedules consist of
 1. No more than 10 hours of on-campus employment a week
 2. No employment off campus
 - C. Students who perceive faculty as instructors who
 1. Are approachable
 2. Have high expectations
 - D. Institutions whose general education programs are
 1. Clearly linked to campus-wide goals
 2. Prescriptive in disallowing students to avoid rigorous courses
 - E. Students who report studying alone (as opposed to studying in groups)
 - F. Students who report less involvement in fraternities and sororities, activities, and volunteer work

- II. ASU Students' Scores Compared to Students at Similar Universities

<i>Critical Thinking</i>	<u>Not Proficient</u>	<u>Marginal</u>	<u>Proficient</u>
<u>ASU Freshmen</u>	92%	7%	1%
<u>Similar Schools</u>	91%	7%	2%
<u>ASU Seniors</u>	78%	17%	5%
<u>Similar Schools</u>	73%	19%	8%

Research: The Effects of Faculty Perceptions of Freshmen on Faculty Expectations for Student Success

Welsh, J. & Birdno, J. (paper presentation by Birdno at Create @ State, ASU's annual undergraduate and graduate research conference)

Background and Method

Comparative findings from NSSE and FSSE 2011 indicate that faculty and students describe the typical freshman differently regarding how the student spends his or her time. Using results from the combined NSSE/FSSE report, we presented 68 faculty with one of two randomly assigned descriptions of a first-year student. The first scenario describes a freshman according to 2011 FSSE results, that is, the way faculty described a typical freshman. The second scenario describes a freshman according to 2011 NSSE results, that is, the way freshmen described themselves. Underlining is used here for emphasis; the font used on the actual survey was consistent throughout the document, and no underlining was used.

I am an ASU-Jonesboro Freshman attending school full time. I am a white American from Arkansas, and I am 19 years old. My experience at ASU has contributed some to my development of a personal code of values and ethics, and I believe this institution has demonstrated strong commitment to my academic success. Sometimes, I discuss ideas from my readings and classes with other students and family members outside of class. In a typical, 7-day week, I spend 5-10 hours participating in co-curricular activities, fraternities, organizations and intramural sports, and I spend 6-10 hours providing care for parents or children.

I am an ASU-Jonesboro Freshman attending school full time. I am a white American from Arkansas, and I am 19 years old. My experience at ASU has contributed quite a bit to my development of a personal code of values and ethics, and I believe this institution has demonstrated strong commitment to my academic success. Very often, I discuss ideas from my readings and classes with other students and family members outside of class. In a typical, 7-day week, I do not spend any time participating in co-curricular activities, fraternities, organizations and intramural sports, and I spend no time providing care for parents or children.

The survey then asked faculty to indicate the extent to which they would recommend the student for involvement in various enriching educational experiences and to predict how well the student described in the scenario would perform in courses that were reading and writing intensive. Responses were recorded according to a 7-point, Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

When presented with a description of a freshman student according to 2011 FSSE data, that is, according to faculty perceptions of student engagement, faculty were less likely to agree that the student would perform well in courses that required more than 20 pages of writing over the course of the semester ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.34$), than they were if they were presented with a description of a freshman student according to 2011 NSSE data, that is, according to freshmen perceptions of student engagement ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(66) = 2.63$, $p = .010$.

Discussion

Given the lower scores ASU received on comparative data for the benchmark of Academic Challenge, we may wish to explore ways to increase expectations for writing and increase the number of writing-intensive courses required. Departments may want to conduct transcript analyses in which a student's trajectory to degree completion is examined to identify detours and loopholes that allow students to avoid rigorous and writing-intensive courses. Adding course rigor to end-of-course faculty evaluations may encourage faculty to demand more writing. Finally, support for assistance and grading by individuals trained to review draft papers and proposals as well as continued use of e-raters such as *Grammarly* available at ASU through ITTC may encourage faculty to demand and expect more writing from students.

It is possible that engagement by our students is different now than it may have been when faculty were first appointed to ASU. Highlighting our students' commitment to academic success may encourage faculty to expect more from first-year students.

Response to 2011 ETS Proficiency Profile Scores - Shared Governance General Education Committee

General Education Committee Recommendation to the Provost September 9, 2011

The General Education Committee reviewed the assessment data provided by the Office of Assessment and Student Learning Outcomes on critical thinking and writing. The data were derived from the administration of the ETS Proficiency Profile Exam. The critical thinking subsection is comprised of academic content of three questions from the humanities, three questions from the social sciences, and three questions from the natural sciences. The ETS Proficiency Profile Exam was administered to 234 students from First Year Experience classes and 304 Seniors who volunteered or were recruited by faculty. For the overall Proficiency Profile Exam ASU Freshmen performed below expected and Seniors at expected levels.

The ASU shared governance General Education Committee chose to use a criterion-referenced viewpoint related to the findings from the ETS Proficiency Profile. In the area of critical thinking, the findings indicate 1% of ASU Freshmen and 5% of ASU Seniors are proficient. At similar schools, Master's (Comprehensive) Colleges and Universities I and II, 2% of Freshmen and 8% of Seniors are proficient. Conversely, according to the findings the percentage of ASU Freshmen who are not proficient is 92% and at similar schools the percentage non-proficient is 91%. The findings related to Seniors at ASU are 78% are not proficient and for similar schools 73% are not proficient.

In the area of writing, the findings indicate 2% of ASU Freshmen are proficient at Level 3 writing and 78% are not proficient. The findings related to seniors at ASU are 7% are proficient at Level 3 and 66% are not proficient. Three percent (3%) of entering Freshmen students at similar Master's (Comprehensive) Colleges and Universities I and II scored proficient at Level 3 writing and 81% not proficient. At the same Colleges and Universities, 8% of the seniors were proficient and 64% were not proficient.

When Senior students at ASU who took the ETS Proficiency Profile were asked about the helpfulness of the general education courses in meeting the general education goals their response was positive. The survey included statements related to the general education goals and a 7-point scale of helpfulness. The statements began with "I believe my general education courses" and continued with a general education goal competency. For the overall survey the modal response was 5 and the mean was between 5 and 6. For the statement "I believe my general education courses improved my skills in critical thinking" the modal response was 6 "agree" and the mean was 5.5. Finally, for the statement "I believe my general education courses improved my skills in writing" the modal response was 6 "agree" and the mean was 5.4.

The General Education Committee recommends (without assigning priority)

1. Accepting the current assessment of critical thinking and writing from a sample of Freshmen and Seniors as the best data we have now;
2. Adopting the view that, while the General Education curriculum is the foundation for critical thinking and writing skills and that General Education courses will be held to account for providing that foundation, the development of students in the areas of critical thinking and proficient writing ought to be an integral element in each degree program and, as such, each degree program is responsible for incorporating critical thinking and writing in its curriculum and assessing its students in these areas;
3. Advising students to take at least some courses that are writing and reading intensive or provide those opportunities in multiple courses in a degree curriculum;
4. Encouraging the faculty to use evidence-based best practices in teaching to foster critical thinking and effective writing such as
 - a. collaborative learning experiences,
 - b. use of technology,
 - c. prompt written and verbal feedback,
 - d. opportunities for faculty and student conversation,
 - e. guidelines for time on task,
 - f. high expectations from faculty, and
 - g. opportunities for experiential learning*;
5. Appropriately valuing assessment activities by faculty for PRT as teaching, scholarship or service;
6. Providing faculty development activities related to evidence-based best practices in teaching critical thinking and effective writing;
7. Providing additional or expanded resources for student preparation of writing assignments, such as a well-supported Writing Center, E-rater software and other software as appropriate;
8. Providing additional resources for grading written assignments in large classes, such as Teaching Assistants, Graduate Assistants or modified workloads;
9. Supporting the General Education Committee during the 2011-2012 academic year as it undertakes course-specific assessment of selected General Education courses which have the primary goal of critical thinking and writing; and
10. Delegating responsibility for reviewing the future assessment findings comparing Freshmen and Seniors University-wide to the Learning Outcomes Assessment Council.

*evidence-based best practices from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA, 2010)

Provost - Commitment to Improvement

Provost Formal Acceptance

Dear Sue,

Please accept this e-mail as my formal acceptance of the General Education Committee's recommendations contained in your e-mail of September 9, 2011. I will begin working immediately with our team in AAR to develop an action plan for accomplishing each of the recommendations. Once developed, I will share this action plan with your committee in addition to reporting progress on each recommendation periodically. I greatly appreciate the committee's efforts in reviewing the assessment data and in developing a series of recommendations that will enhance the development of our students. Again, thank all of you for a job well done.

Sincerely,

Glen

Glen Jones

Office of the Provost

Arkansas State University

