

Institutional Research & Testing Data Flash



What is the NSSE?

The NSSE (fondly referred to as “Nessie” by researchers) is the National Survey of Student Engagement. Nessie was conceived in 1998 with support from the Pew Charitable Trust and a pilot of the program was launched in 1999 at 70 selected colleges. Since then, over 970 colleges have participated in this survey with 557 colleges participating this past Spring. The NSSE asks students to report the frequency with which they engage in certain activities that represent good educational practice. Students also report their perspectives of the college environment regarding achievement, satisfaction, and persistence. Students also evaluate their educational and personal growth since starting college. Finally, as with many surveys, students provide demographic information such as age, gender, race or ethnicity, living situation, educational status, and major field.

When comparing results, we receive information about results from Selected Peers, Carnegie Peers, and National Peers. Selected peers are selected public 4 year institutions in Michigan. We use them as a benchmark for comparison. We want to make sure that we are providing a comparable level of quality education in our state. Carnegie peers are institutions nation-wide that are in the same Carnegie classification as us. Carnegie classifications are based on the types of degrees offered. This distinction is used to be able to compare the performance of like institutions. Finally, National peers are all institutions that have participated in the NSSE.

December 16, 2006 Newsletter Focus

- **What is the NSSE**
- **Why it is used**
- **How we compare**
 - **Strengths**
 - **Challenges**

“The NSSE results show us some of the great things happening at Ferris State right now. We compare well with our Peer Institutions on many measures. I believe our students are more engaged than ever before.”

Daniel Burcham

Vice President for Student Affairs

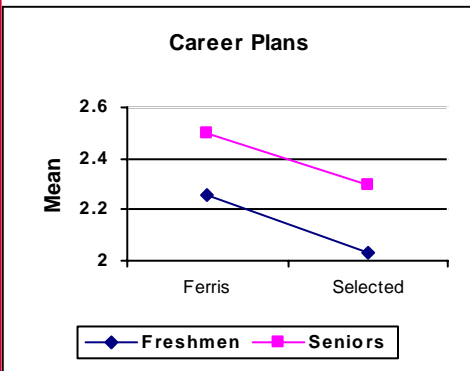
Why do we use the NSSE?

Student engagement is an important factor in the college experience because research has shown that the time and energy students devote to educational activities is the best predictor of learning and personal development. From the information gathered using this tool, we are able to assess how well the institution is doing from the students’ point of view. This information is vital to the success of the university. We want to provide a high quality educational experience and this information helps us to continuously improve. It also helps us to determine what areas we can improve upon and what we might do about it.

These results help us to develop a plan of action. If we are doing well, what is it that we have done to get these results and how are we going to continue to succeed? If there is room for improvement, what events will we plan or changes will we make? This survey provides a wealth of information, but it is only valuable if action is taken.

One final note: remember to consider the reality of humanity. No matter how hard we try to improve, how much money we invest or the number events we plan, there will always be people who are dissatisfied. This does not make our efforts for naught, it is just an important fact to realize. A goal of 100 percent satisfaction is not possible to achieve. Set realistic goals and you are much more likely to succeed. The rest is up to the students.

Student Career Planning



This question on the instrument asked respondents *In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor?* The possible responses were a four point scale from Very Often (4) to Never (1). The graph below shows that the mean for both Ferris’ freshmen and seniors was noticeably higher than our selected peers. This would indicate that students are seeking advice on this important issue and that faculty members want to help students with their goals.

Faculty/student interaction is vital to classroom success and professional development. Faculty have the experience and knowledge that can help students

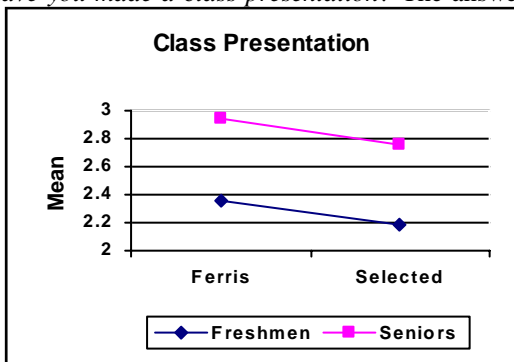
“The FSU instructors are and have always been SUPERB!”
- Ferris State Senior Respondent

achieve their goals, whether it is great successes they have had, or mistakes they have made. Caring faculty makes a big difference in students’ attitudes and experiences. They make coming to class and asking for help easier and more pleasant. Students do better in classes in which the teacher is more involved and helpful.

Involvement in the Classroom

Ferris is doing well in the avenue of classroom involvement. This area is essential to active learning and developing the skills needed to work with others.

The question regarding class presentations asked *In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you made a class presentation?* The answers

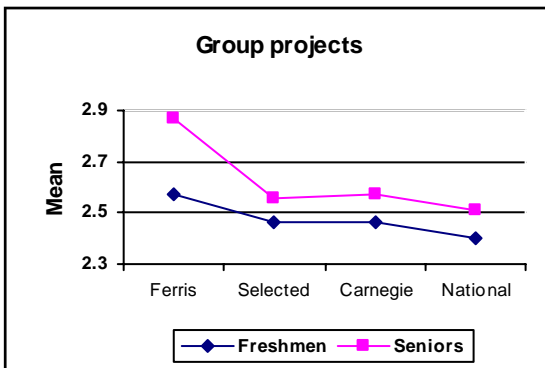


again used a four point scale of the lowest being Never (1) to the highest being Very Often (4). Ferris’ average means for both Freshmen and Seniors are noticeably higher than selected peers (see graph, above). This is good because class presentations foster communication skills, public speaking, and the ability to convey information to others.

The other piece of classroom involvement deals with the frequency of group projects. The instrument question asks *In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you worked with other students on projects during class?* The same 4 point scale was used as the Class Presentation question. As shown in the graph (below), Ferris students—particularly Seniors—have a significantly higher mean rating of this experience than their compared peers.

Group projects help students understand the effectiveness of working together. Working together can bring new ideas and perspectives. It also lightens the individual load so students are not as stressed by how much work that is ahead. They will be able to focus more on the importance of the material and not the magnitude of the work to be done.

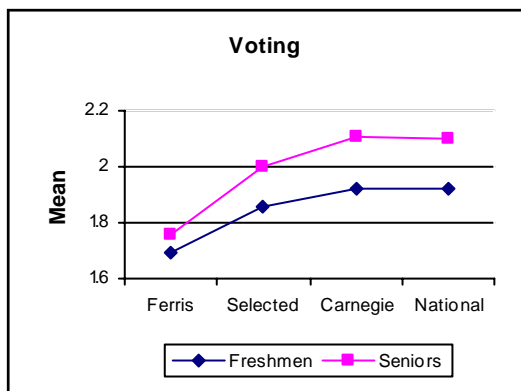
Another important lesson it teaches is the necessity of cooperation. Working with others in the “real world” is a commonplace occurrence. Getting along with others can enhance one’s ability to get ahead in their career or just be recognized as a great co-worker. Regardless of whether co-workers get along, they need to put aside their differences to work effectively and put



forth quality work. Group projects enhance students’ ability to get along with a variety of people and learn what works and doesn’t work in a group setting.

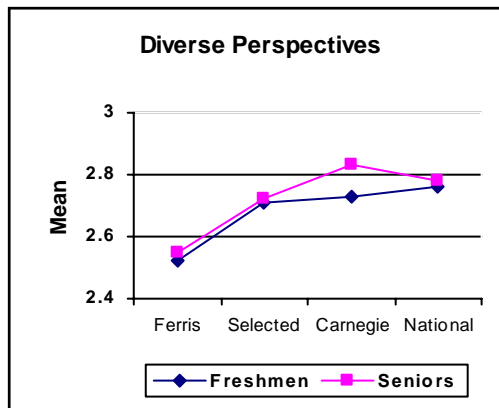
The Student Vote

The question on the NSSE asked *To what extent has your experience contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in voting in local, state, or national elections?* The 4 point scale of answers that followed ranged from Very Much (4) to Very Little (1). The mean for Ferris' freshmen was 1.69, a number much lower than the compared peers. The results were even worse for seniors, with a mean of 1.76. The mean for the entire population of NSSE respondent is 2.1 which is quite a bit higher. (See graph below).



Overall, the means are low, but especially so for Ferris students. They feel they are not receiving guidance or information regarding these elections. Perhaps the results were lower because of the timing at which the survey was conducted. It was not a presidential election year and the midterm elections were barely even "on the radar." Because of these factors, faculty and staff might not be so inclined to emphasize the importance of voting. However, it is still important to be politically aware even during lulls in election activity.

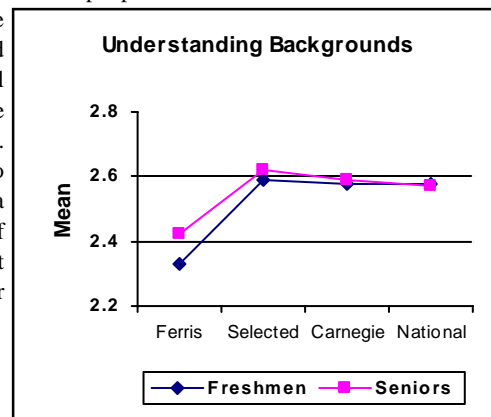
Opportunity for Improvement in Understanding Diversity



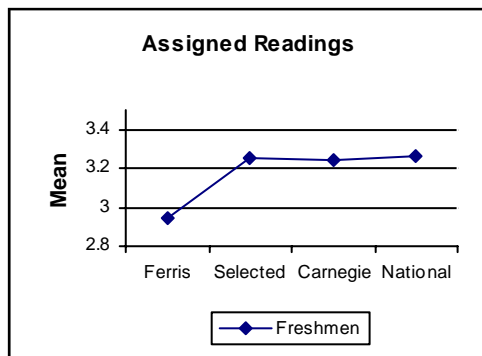
Two questions that stood out on the NSSE where Ferris can improve have to do with diversity. The first question asked: *How often have you included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments?* The respondent had an option of choosing an answer from Never (1) to Very Often (4). The graph (left) shows the mean score for respondents. As you can see, both the freshmen and seniors at Ferris rated their experiences significantly lower than their peers.

The second question asked: *To what extent has the institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds?* Again, a four point scale was used with responses ranging from Very Little (1) to Very Much (4). Unfortunately, the graph (below, right) shows that our averages again are noticeably lower than our NSSE peers.

This is a very important issue of concern, especially in today's diverse world. There are more immigrants and people with different kinds of beliefs in our country than ever before. One freshman student commented about the lack of interracial social diversity and how he/she would like to see it changed. Students need to be prepared to understand and get along with a number of different kinds of people in their lives whether it be with co-workers, clients or potential acquaintances.



Freshmen Reading Assignments...Is Less More?



Number of reading assignments students are required to complete was addressed on the NSSE. The question was stated *During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done?* One of the sub-questions to that was to indicate *Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings.* The answers ranged from 0 to More than 20 readings. The average freshman Ferris students' average is quite a bit lower than their peers.

Students probably believe this is a good thing because it reduces their academic workloads. However, compared to their peers, they are going to end up being much less well-read. This will likely hurt them in the future because they have not been exposed to as many literary experiences as the average college student.

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What does this all mean?

Although you have just read that Ferris is doing above average in some areas and below average in others, the reality is that the results are really very good. The entire NSSE is comprised of 85 opinion items and 15 demographic items. Out of the 85 questions that solicit subjective experiences, this newsletter only selects a few pieces that stand out. The truth is that Ferris is on par with our fellow NSSE respondents.

We should be proud of these results! The results tell us that while we have some areas to improve in, we are also doing great in other areas, but mostly we are right on the mark. These results are encouraging because they show that we are providing a competitive educational experience. The classes, events, faculty, staff, and extra-curricular activities are keeping our students on the level with local and national student experiences.

Please contact the Institutional Research and Testing Office for more details about the NSSE results. A full report on the data is available on our website.

