

**Ferris State University**  
**National Survey of Student Engagement**  
**Institutional Executive Summary**  
**Spring 2009**

**Introduction & Method**

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a tool designed to assess and illustrate the characteristics of college and university students' engagement with their institutions.

Ferris State University participates in the national administration of the NSSE once every two years and most recently during academic year 2008-2009.

Our random sample was comprised of freshmen and senior students enrolled on all campus locations. The final sample included 26% of first-year students (N = 636) and 27% of seniors (N = 682); the final sample size then was 1,318<sup>1</sup>.

The survey was administered during spring semester, 2009. Students were sent an invitation email, one follow-up and three reminders for a total of five communications.

The NSSE indicators of effective educational practice include: 1) Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)<sup>2</sup>; 2) Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE)<sup>3</sup>; 3) Level of Academic Challenge (LAC)<sup>4</sup>; 4) Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI)<sup>5</sup>; and 5) Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)<sup>6</sup>.

Primary data are considered those that demonstrated *practical* significance. Practical significance is defined as having effect size equal to or greater than  $\pm.33$ <sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that significance can document benefits (denoted by a +) or deficits (denoted by a -). The indicators of educational practice discussed in the following section reference primary data.

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<sup>1</sup> In order for the sample to be within a 95% confidence level, the survey would have had to be completed by 384 students. The sample size, 1,318 among just freshmen and seniors then is robust.

<sup>2</sup> Initiated or participated in class discussions; presented in class; worked with peers during or outside of class; provided peer support; engaged in service learning as a part of regular class assignments; shared ideas learned in class with friends or family not enrolled in the class.

<sup>3</sup> Participated in co-curricular, practicum, internship, or other practical learning experience; enrolled in foreign language or study away program; self-designed a learning experience; engaged in discussions with students who represent a range of cultural diversity; used technology to complete an assignment; participated in a learning community.

<sup>4</sup> Preparation for class; characteristics of assignments; coursework emphases; academic stamina.

<sup>5</sup> Degree of mentoring and connectivity between students and faculty during and outside of class.

<sup>6</sup> Students' perceptions of academic and social systems of support; interpersonal relationships with faculty, peers, staff, and administrators.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac, S. & Michael, W. B. (1995). *Handbook in research and evaluation* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.

Results include comparative data collected by the Center for Postsecondary Research, data drawn from institutions that share our Masters M Carnegie Classification<sup>8</sup>, and six peer institutions<sup>9</sup> selected by Ferris State University.

## Results

### Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)

First year students experienced *positive* engagement with the University when they were assigned class presentations. Among seniors, it is possible that group activity is promoted through their completion of capstone projects. Analysis of qualitative data reinforced this finding.

### Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE)

This particular benchmark area had *negative* practical significance (-.63) among first year students when contrasted to institutions that are considered “highly engaging.” Seniors at Ferris State University were less engaged than their Carnegie class peers (-.32), national peers (-.36), and highly engaging institutions (-1.18). Specific items that indicated negative practical significance included seniors who reported having serious conversations with students of different races or ethnicities than their own (-.33) and engaging in foreign language coursework (-.33 among Carnegie class peers and -.41 among national institutional peers). First year students were also less likely to participate in activities to enhance spirituality than their Carnegie class institutional peers (-.37).

### Level of Academic Challenge (LAC)

First year students, when compared to peer institutions and national peers reported *fewer* assigned textbooks or book-length packs of course readings (peer institutions [-.33] and national data -.35) and being assigned fewer written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages in length (peer institutions [-.37]).

### Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI)

None of the items captured by this particular benchmark area had practical significance. Basic descriptive statistics indicated that when compared to other institutions, students at Ferris have *comparable* interactions with faculty. First year students seem to have *slightly more* engagement with faculty than do students at selected peer institutions. Among all comparison institutions, seniors at Ferris are *more likely* to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor and first year students are *more likely* to have discussed career plans with faculty members or advisors.

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed list of Comparison Group 2 Institutions, please refer to the full report: NSSE 2008 Selected Comparison Groups, Ferris State University.

<sup>9</sup> Peer comparison group institutions included: Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, University of Michigan-Flint, University of Toledo, Western Michigan University, and Wright State University.

## **Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)**

Survey data did not indicate any item from this particular benchmark having practical significance. However, qualitative data revealed the opportunity for Ferris to be more adherent to its desire to be “big enough to offer the amenities of a large university, but small enough to treat you like family.” Additionally, while not practically significant, it is remarkable that the overall impression among more than 70% of first year students and 75% of seniors is that the University could provide more support for academic success. Thematic analysis of open-field comments indicates that students desire more continuity of support among administrators, faculty, and staff. Of particular concern are administrative processes (financial aid, communication, enforcement of housing policies), academic advising, and curriculum planning.

### **Considerations**

1. Students may benefit from faculty, administrators and staff being more explicit about intended learning outcomes and opportunities for out-of-classroom learning experiences.
2. There exists ample opportunity for faculty to collaborate in the development of learning strategies that integrate technical skills with various modes of expressing learning (i.e., completing a lab experiment, then communicating the findings in ways that laypersons can understand).
3. The University should consider how to more explicitly link mission to practice in terms of student engagement. Specifically, while the mission is anchored in the pursuit of career success, students indicated low participation in community service, volunteer work, practicum, internships, field experiences, and clinical assignments.
4. Faculty should consider assigning more complex and lengthier reading and writing assignments. Students should be encouraged to embrace longer writing assignments as strategies for developing complex ideas—not merely fulfilling a “numbers of pages” exercise.
5. Faculty who teach in technical skills disciplines may benefit from professional development in assigning and grading complex reading and writing assignments. Because faculty do not enjoy the benefit of teaching assistants, consideration should be given to team-teaching or co-teaching opportunities with expectations and compensation being commensurate with the increased workload.

6. Students will benefit from increased learning opportunities that promote knowledge and appreciation of cultures<sup>10</sup> different than theirs.
7. Future administrations of the NSSE should consider site-specific samples. The integration of all campus location populations in the 2008 survey data reveals the need to better understand the unique needs and concerns of students enrolled in Kendall College of Arts & Design and other non-Big Rapids locations.
8. Comparison to self-selected peer institutions could be enhanced by choosing institutions that are more similar to Ferris in terms of degrees offered, mission, and organizational structure.
9. Academic planning and student-facing administrative processes should be reviewed for comparability to national standards. Departmental self-studies facilitated by the appropriate leadership could be completed using the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education or other professional guidelines.

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<sup>10</sup> In this context, “culture” refers to religious, spiritual, political views; gender; race; identity; and ethnic characteristics.