

Contact: Jillian Kinzie
Phone: 812.856.5824
Email: nsse@indiana.edu

Financial Stress Affects Academics for College Students, Survey Finds.

Findings released today illuminate how financial challenges affect college students. A majority of students surveyed worry about paying for college, and as many as one in three frequently opt not to purchase required academic materials due to cost. Full-time students working more than 20 hours per week face the greatest financial stress: three in five said that their job interfered with their academic performance, yet just as many had considered working more hours.

The survey also shows that social media can be a mixed blessing. Nine out of ten students use social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), primarily to connect with friends and family. Many also use social media in educationally purposeful ways, such as to plan study groups or complete class assignments. Frequent interaction with peers, faculty, and campus offices by way of social media corresponded to higher engagement and satisfaction. But those who used social media during class for nonclass activities had lower grades and were less satisfied with college.

These findings, released by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), demonstrate the need for colleges and universities to monitor how emerging issues and trends facing today's college students affect their ability to thrive and succeed.

The report, ***Promoting Student Learning and Institutional Improvement: Lessons from NSSE at 13—Annual Results 2012***, details results from a 2012 survey of 285,000 first-year students and seniors attending 546 U.S. colleges and universities. NSSE's annual survey provides diagnostic, comparative information about the prevalence of effective educational practices at participating bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities.

On the eve of launching an updated survey in 2013, NSSE dedicated a part of this year's report to revisiting key findings from its first 13 years. New analyses reinforce the educational benefits of deep approaches to learning—approaches that favor higher-order thinking over rote memorization, that call on students to integrate knowledge from multiple sources, and that inspire them to rethink and revise their prior beliefs. Students participating in high-impact practices such as service-learning and culminating senior experiences (e.g., capstone courses and senior theses) showed higher levels of deep approaches to learning.

A core purpose of the NSSE project is to provide actionable information to inform the improvement of undergraduate education. An updated analysis of multi-year, institution-level results in student engagement at more than 400 colleges and universities found that more than half showed positive trends for first-year students, as did more than one-third for seniors. Only 7-8% evidenced negative trends. Positive trends were found at public as well as private, and large as well as small institutions.

– continued on back –

“These findings offer compelling evidence that positive change is not only possible, it’s happening on many campuses. Size and institutional structure are not insurmountable obstacles. Across the range of institutional types, many faculty and college leaders are taking up the challenge to improve undergraduate education,” said Alexander C. McCormick, NSSE director and associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Indiana University Bloomington.

NSSE seeks to refocus the discourse about college quality on what matters for student learning. “Along with a rich pool of evidence of effective practices, NSSE provides insightful guidelines for interpretation and productive use of the data,” according to Daniel J. Bernstein, professor of psychology and director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at The University of Kansas.

Other noteworthy findings from the 2012 survey and its companion surveys, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), include:

- First-year students spent an average of 15 hours per week preparing for class, and seniors averaged one half-hour more. Those earning grades of A or A- studied about four more hours per week than their first-year peers with grades of C+ or lower.
- In most fields, full-time seniors devoted about one to two hours less to class preparation than faculty expected. Engineering majors studied more than faculty expected. But when asked how much they believe students *actually* study, faculty estimates in all fields fell short of student accounts by five to eight hours per week.
- On average, distance education students spent about one hour more per week preparing for class than their on-campus counterparts.
- Support for learning in college was beneficial regardless of how engaged students had been in high school. Although high school engagement was related to subsequent engagement in college, on average, students who experienced a more supportive campus environment evidenced higher levels of engagement.
- Job opportunities were cited by the majority of seniors among the factors motivating their choice of major, but this varied by racial/ethnic background and field of study. Students of color were generally more concerned than Whites about their ability to find a job. Seniors majoring in science, technology, engineering, and math were more likely than others to cite job opportunities as a motivating factor.

NSSE’s *Annual Results 2012* is sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

###

Promoting Student Learning and Institutional Improvement: Lessons from NSSE at 13—Annual Results 2012 can be downloaded from the NSSE Web site (nsse.iub.edu) or ordered for \$20.