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Engagement Insights Digest

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME, AND QUALITY BEATS QUANTITY IN ACADEMIC ADVISING, NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS

Efforts to improve the quality of higher education between 2004 and 2019 have reaped gains in first-year student interactions with faculty, time spent on academic preparation, and perceptions of the campus environment, according to new survey results released by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), based at the Indiana University Bloomington School of Education. These positive longitudinal trends—particularly in time spent preparing—are encouraging because previous NSSE analyses found that the average amount of time first-year students devote to academic preparation correlates strongly with institutional retention and graduation rates.

Academic advising is vital for student success. Although interactions with advisors are important, NSSE results show that their *quality* is more important than their frequency to first-year students' perception of support for academic success, use of learning support services, and interaction with faculty. Even more, first-year students who experienced high-quality advising—characterized by advisors being available when needed, providing prompt and accurate information, and listening actively to student concerns—had twice as much interaction with faculty and were much more likely to express an intention to return the following year compared to students who experienced low-quality advising (94% vs. 77%).

Along with the release of *Annual Results 2019*, NSSE is celebrating the start of its third decade. "What began as a bold experiment is now part of the higher education landscape and is marked by ongoing innovation," says NSSE Director Alexander C. McCormick. "The embrace of student engagement as a window on the quality of undergraduate education and evidence that institutions use this information to guide improvement are vital to assuring student learning and success."

This latest volume in NSSE's *Annual Results* series, [*Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education*](#), presents key findings from the 2019 administration of NSSE and its companion survey, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). NSSE surveyed first-year and senior students attending 531 bachelor's degree-granting institutions across the United States in spring 2019, while FSSE results came from 120 institutions, almost all of which administered NSSE as well. [*Annual Results 2019*](#) also provides findings from a subset of NSSE respondents who answered additional questions about academic advising and from a study of the persistence of first-year students. Noteworthy findings include:

- The percentage of first-year students who spent more than 15 hours per week preparing for class increased from 34% in 2004 to as high as 45% in 2017.
- The proportion of first-year students who interacted frequently with faculty about career plans, on course topics outside of class, and in activities other than coursework increased by more than 10 percentage points from 2004 to 2019. Notably, FSSE 2019 results show that faculty

and student views about interaction reasonably align; 68% of faculty frequently talked with undergraduates about their career plans, and 59% discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts outside of class.

- From 2004 to 2019, the share of students reporting a substantial institutional emphasis on diverse interactions rose more than 10 points for first-year students and seniors.
- More than half of both first-year students and seniors had five or more meetings with an advisor, faculty member, or success coach to discuss their academic interests, course selections, or academic performance; only a trivial proportion (3% first-years and 6% seniors) *never* had such meetings in the current school year.
- Regardless of the frequency of their interactions with advisors, seniors who experienced high-quality advising, compared to those who experienced low-quality advising, indicated that their college experience contributed much more to their job- or work-related knowledge and skills.
- While just 66% of responding faculty received adequate training for advising, 93% felt comfortable in their role as advisor, and 70% would feel comfortable training or mentoring others in advising.
- Students' responses on Quality of Interactions and Supportive Environment, two of NSSE's 10 [Engagement Indicators](#), had the strongest positive correlations with persistence; students who persisted also spent more time preparing for class and were more likely to believe their institution emphasizes spending significant amounts of time on academic work.
- Students who returned to the institution exhibited higher levels of financial well-being, belongingness, and safety than their peers who did not persist; this suggests the importance of monitoring and enhancing these dimensions of the student experience.

Annual Results 2019 also summarizes students' participation in High-Impact Practices (HIPs). Service-learning had the highest participation rate, with about half of first-year students and three fifths of seniors participating. About half of seniors had an internship or other field experience, and half had a culminating experience. HIP participation did vary somewhat by race/ethnicity, with some students of color less likely to have done research with faculty, study abroad, or an internship or field experience.

According to Carol Geary Schneider, President Emerita, Association of American Colleges and Universities, "NSSE results help campuses explore the connections between their expectations for student achievement and what students actually experience." Demonstrating this idea in action, the report describes the use of NSSE results to inform improvement efforts at Nevada State College, Eastern Connecticut State University, The University of Tampa, and Marian University.

Summary results for all survey questions, Engagement Indicators, and High-Impact Practices by sex, major field, and institution type [are available on the NSSE website](#). The site also includes an interactive data tool.

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Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education—Annual Results 2019 can be downloaded from the NSSE website for free or ordered for \$20.

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