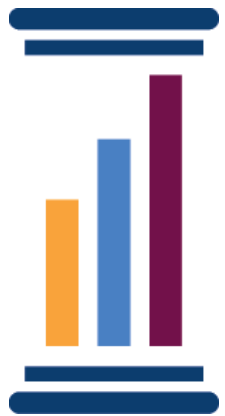


Are Our Writing Assignments Effective?



Cynthia A. Cogswell **Elijah C. Howe**
Robert M. Gonyea

Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research

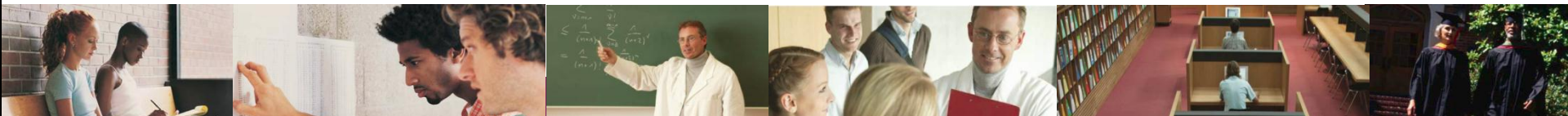


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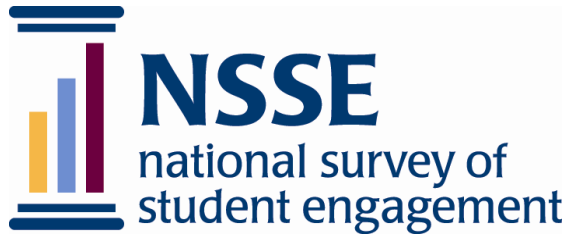
Presentation at the 2014 POD Conference
Dallas, Texas

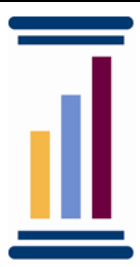
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Past Research
- Our Study
 - Instruments
 - Findings
 - Reflections
- Discussion



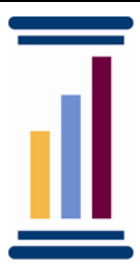
PREVIOUS RESEARCH





Deep Learning

- ▶ Students participating in high-impact practices also evidence higher scores on deep approaches to learning, even with statistical controls for a range of student and institutional differences (NSSE, 2012).
- ▶ Deep approaches to learning use strategies such as reading widely, combining a variety of resources, discussion of ideas with others, reflecting on how individual pieces of information relate to larger constructs or patterns, and applying knowledge in real world situation (Nelson Laird, et al. 2008).



Literature on Writing

- ▶ 3 ways writing currently manifests as institutional initiatives to improve learning:
 1. Writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC)
 2. Writing-intensive-courses (WIC)
 3. Writing-in-the-disciplines (WID)

- ▶ It has long been endorsed that student writing positively impacts student learning and development
 - Theoretical claims
 - Short term studies of student gains



**WHAT HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES
BEEN WITH EFFECTIVE
(AND PERHAPS NOT-SO-EFFECTIVE)
WRITING PRACTICES?**

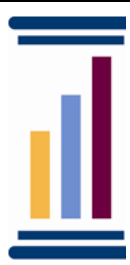
CURRENT STUDY



What is NSSE?

- ▶ National Survey of Student Engagement
 - Annual spring survey to first-year students and seniors at baccalaureate-granting institutions
 - About 650 institutions participate annually
 - Mostly U.S. and Canadian institutions
 - Assesses exposure to and participation in effective educational practices

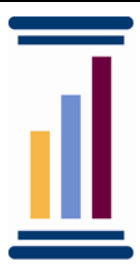
Goal: To query undergraduates directly about their educational experiences



What is FSSE?

- ▶ Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
 - Annual spring survey of faculty members
 - ~150 institutions participate each year
 - Assesses faculty perceptions and encouragement of student engagement


Goal: To provide additional information for the improvement of undergraduate education



Experiences with Writing Module

Module items grouped into three scales

- ▶ Interactive Writing Activities
- ▶ Meaning-Making Writing Tasks
- ▶ Clear Writing Expectations

 **NSSE**
national survey of
student engagement

Topical Module: Experiences with Writing

This module is the result of an ongoing collaboration between NSSE and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The questions touch on three aspects of good writing assignments—interactivity, meaning-making, and clarity. To complement questions on the core survey about how much writing students do, the nature of their course assignments, and perceived gains in written expression. (Complementary RISE set available.)

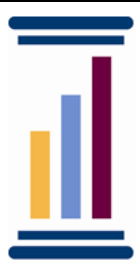
1. During the current school year, for how many **writing assignments** have you done the following?

	All writing assignments	Most writing assignments	Some writing assignments	Few writing assignments	No writing assignments
a. Talked with a classmate, friend, or family member to develop your idea before starting your assignment	0	0	0	0	0
b. Received feedback from a classmate, friend, or family member about a draft before turning in your final assignment	0	0	0	0	0
c. Gave feedback to a classmate about a draft or outline he or she had written	0	0	0	0	0
d. Summarized material you read, such as articles, books, or online publications	0	0	0	0	0
e. Analyzed or evaluated something you read, researched, or observed	0	0	0	0	0
f. Described your methods or findings related to data you collected in lab or field work, a survey project, etc.	0	0	0	0	0
g. Argued a position using evidence and reasoning	0	0	0	0	0
h. Explained in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data	0	0	0	0	0
i. Wrote in the style and format of a specific field (engineering, history, psychology, etc.)	0	0	0	0	0
j. Addressed in real or imagined audience such as your classmates, a politician, non-experts, etc.	0	0	0	0	0

2. During the current school year, for how many of your **writing assignments** has your instructor done the following?

	All writing assignments	Most writing assignments	Some writing assignments	Few writing assignments	No writing assignments
a. Provided clear instructions describing what he or she wanted you to do	0	0	0	0	0
b. Explained in advance what he or she wanted you to learn	0	0	0	0	0
c. Explained in advance the criteria he or she would use to grade your assignment	0	0	0	0	0

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Research Questions

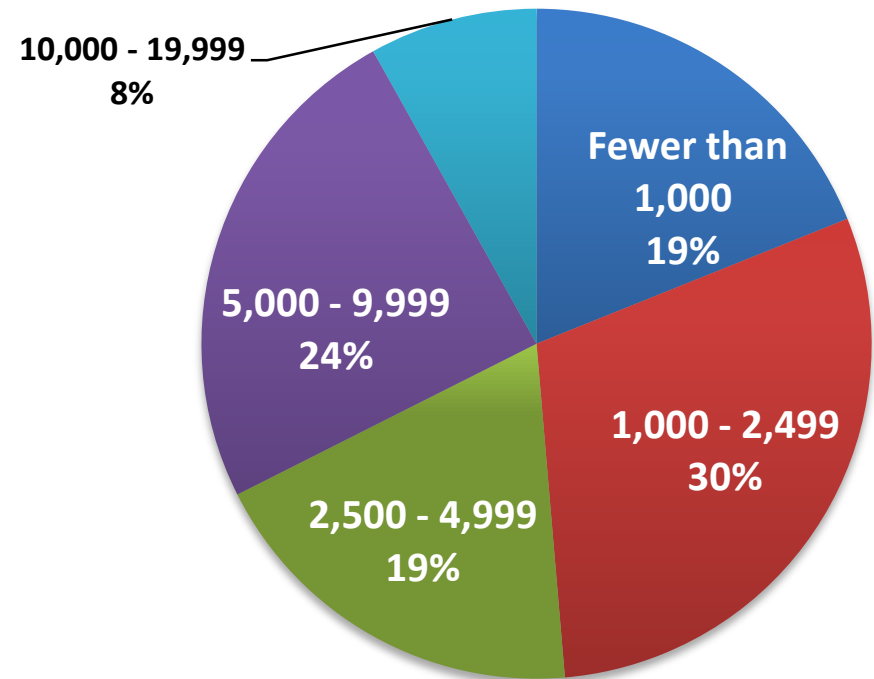
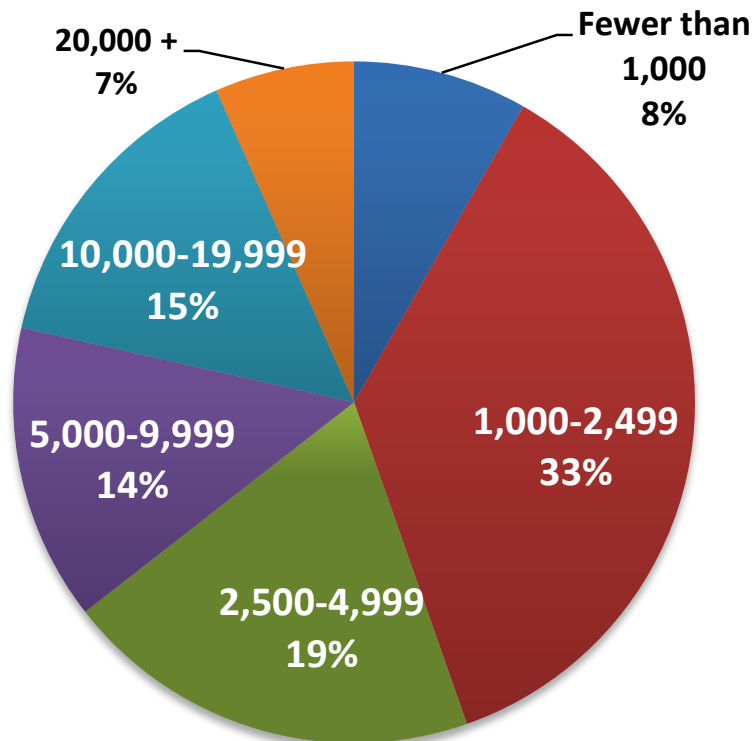
Purpose: To examine faculty perceptions of writing practices and their relationship to select Engagement Indicators.

- ▶ What are faculty perceptions and expectations of undergraduate student engagement?
- ▶ To what extent do faculty promote student learning through writing?
- ▶ What is the relationship between faculty use of writing and student engagement?

Sample Characteristics

2013-2014 Writing Module Participants
121 Institutions, n= 75,986 students

2013-2014 Writing Module Participants
36 Institutions, n= 5,076 faculty members

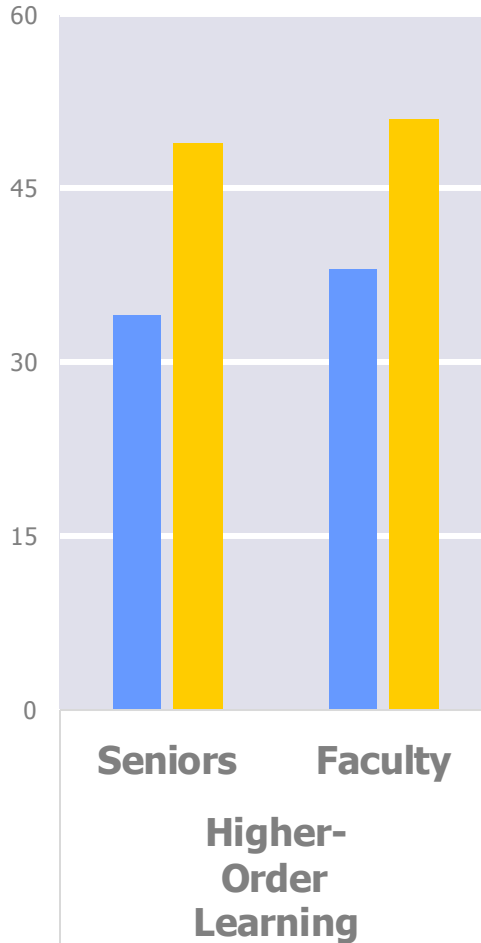




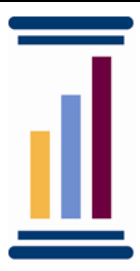
Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

■ Lowest Quartile

■ Highest Quartile



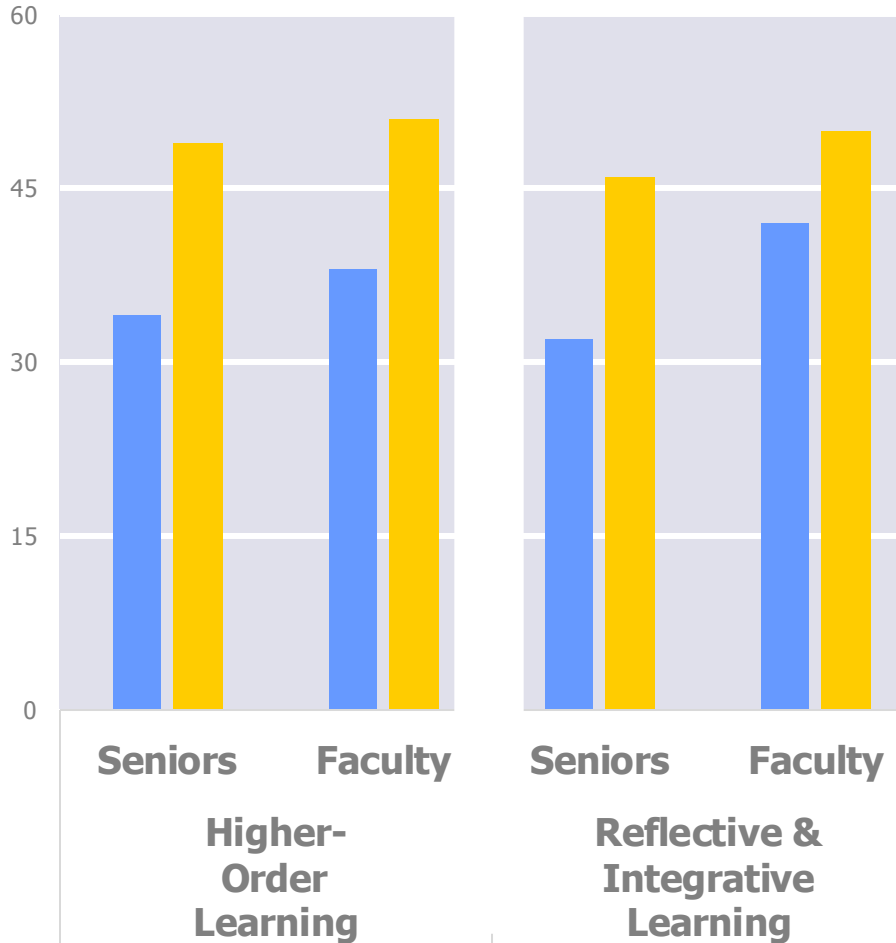
Meaning-Making Writing Tasks



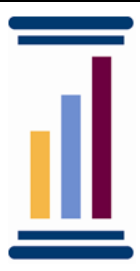
Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

■ Lowest Quartile

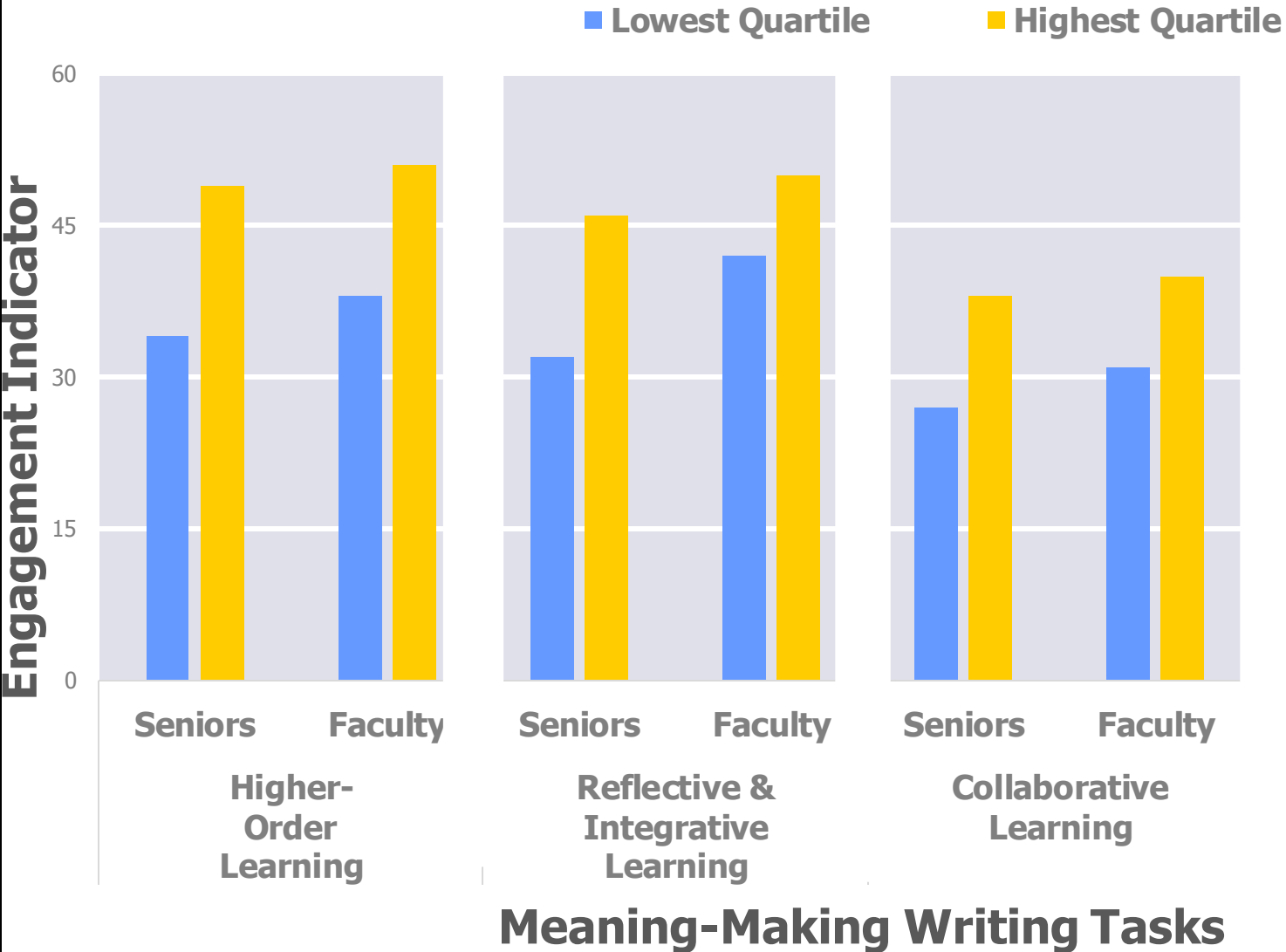
■ Highest Quartile

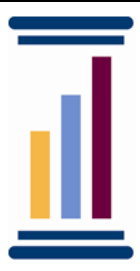


Meaning-Making Writing Tasks



Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

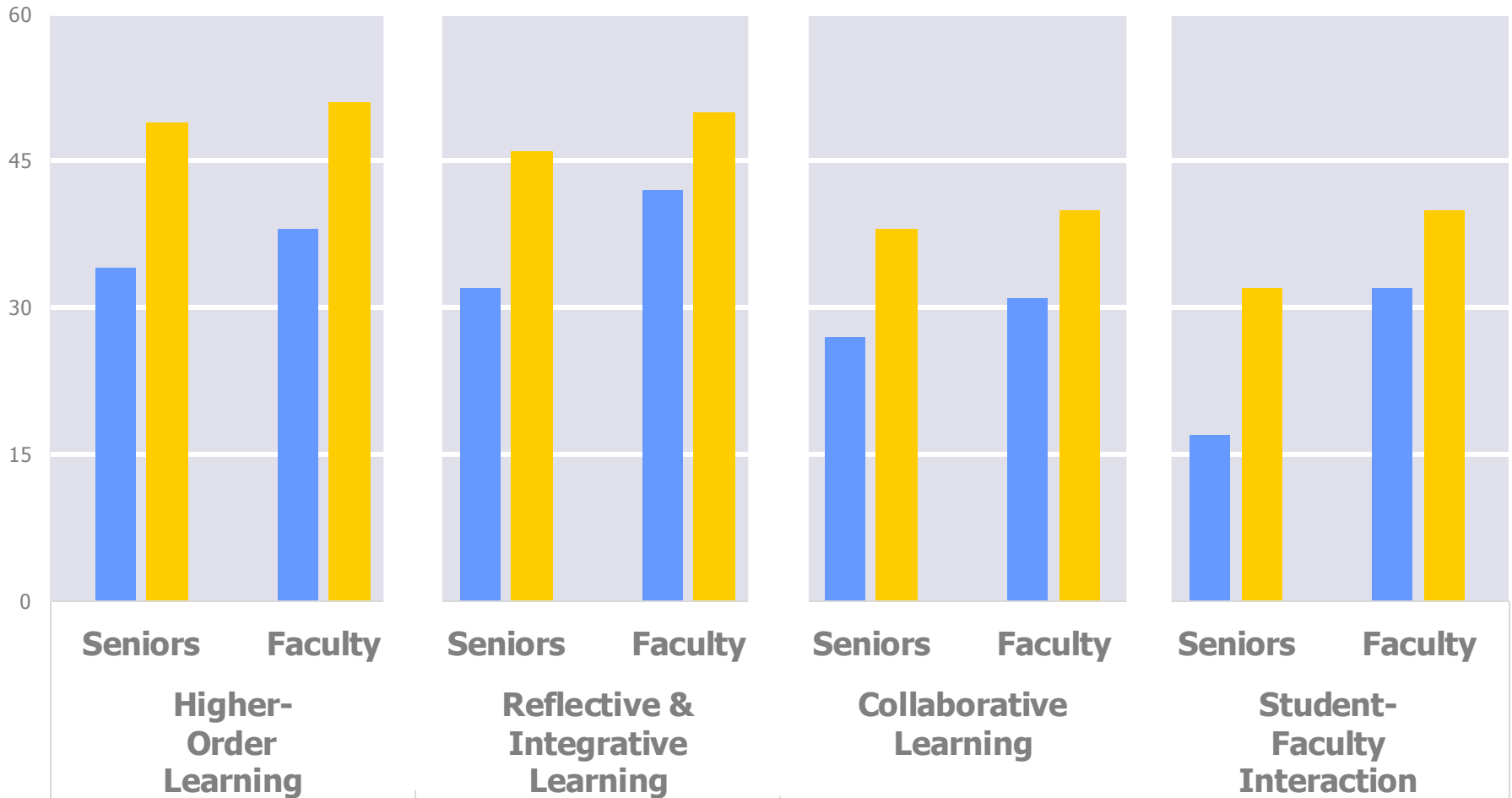




Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

■ Lowest Quartile

■ Highest Quartile

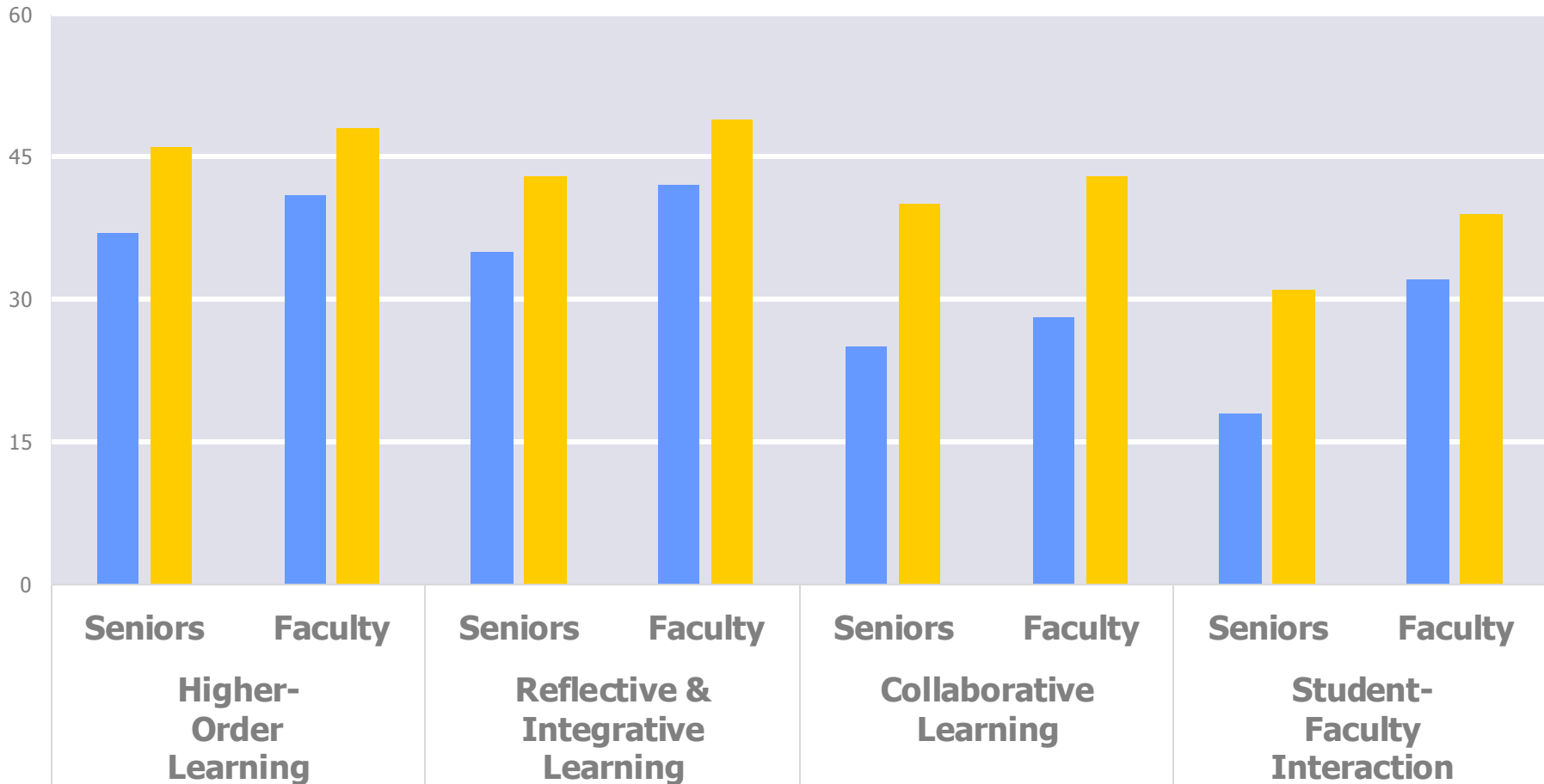


Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

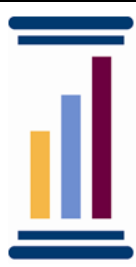


Interactive Writing Processes

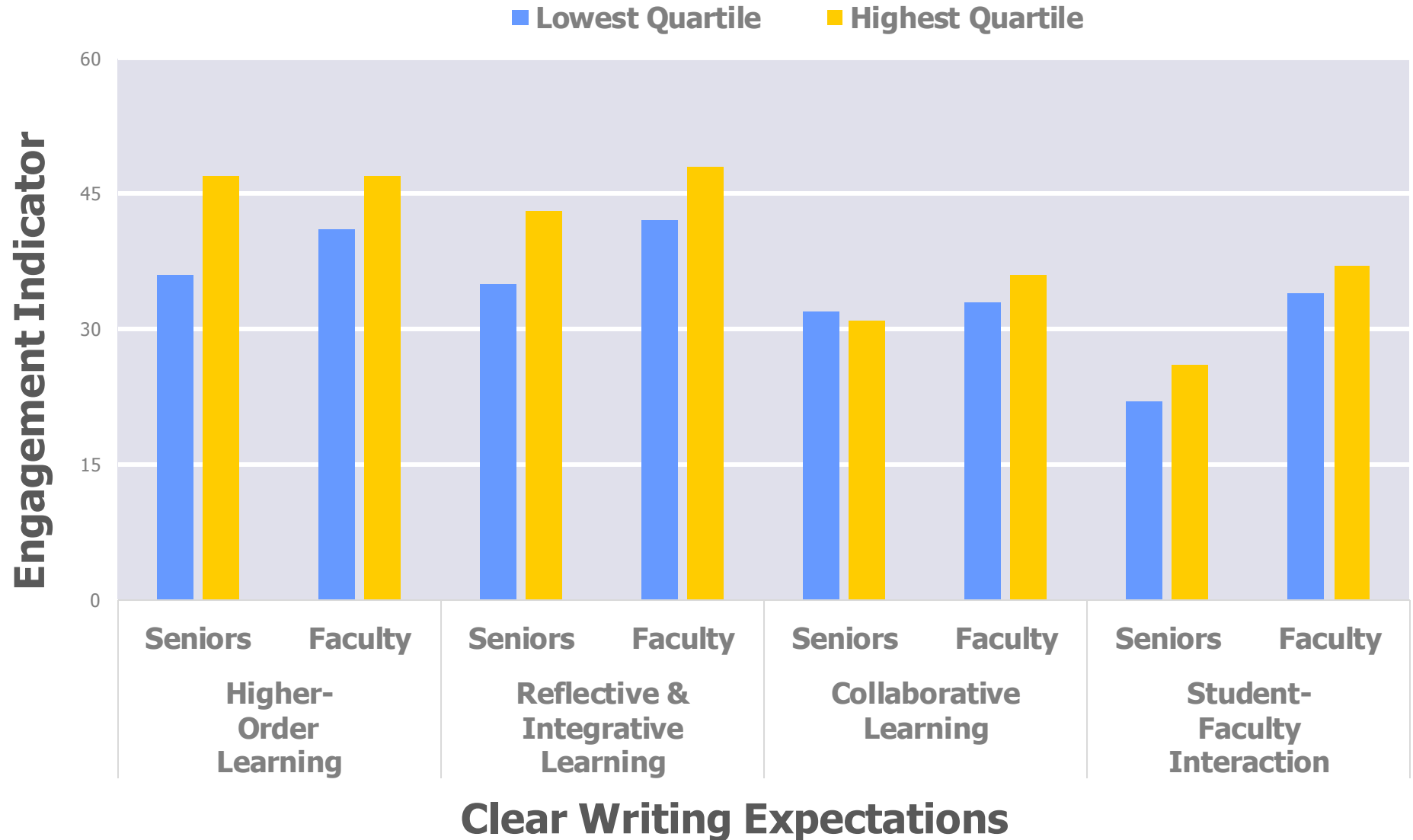
■ Lowest Quartile ■ Highest Quartile



Interactive Writing Processes



Clear Writing Expectations

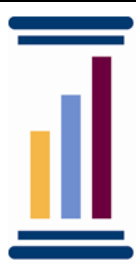




Regression Results

		Engagement Indicators			
		Higher-Order Learning	Reflective & Integrative Learning	Collaborative Learning	Student-Faculty Interaction
Effective Writing Practices	Interactive Writing Activities	+	+	++	++
	Meaning-Making Writing Tasks	+++	+++	++	++
	Clear Writing Expectations	++	+	+	+

key: + p<.05, ++ p<.05 & Unst. B >.1, +++ p<.05 & Unst. B >.3



Observations

- ▶ For both seniors and faculty, those who utilized effective writing activities the most scored substantially higher on the Engagement Indicators than those who utilized them the least

For faculty:

- ▶ Faculty use of effective writing practices are positively related to their emphases on deep learning activities, collaborative learning, and interactions with students
- ▶ Interactive writing activities are more positively associated with collaborative learning (as expected) and also with student-faculty interactions
- ▶ Meaning-making tasks are positively associated with all the engagement scales, but most strongly with deep approaches to learning (higher-order learning and reflective & integrative learning)
- ▶ Clear writing expectations had the weakest associations with the engagement indicators, perhaps because there was less variance among faculty (most faculty believed they were very clear on all or most of their assignments)

DISCUSSION

- ▶ How would you use these results to help faculty improve writing activities?
- ▶ Examples of ways faculty promote writing activities and tasks?
- ▶ Other reflections?

Thank You for Joining Our Session!

For more, contact us by:

- Email: nsse@indiana.edu
- Web site: nsse.iub.edu
- Telephone: (812) 856-5824
- Visit us at the POD
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For a copy of the slides...

- Email Cindy Cogswell at
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