

Research in BRIEF

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

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USING EVIDENCE FROM THE COLLEGE SENIOR SURVEY (CSS) TO SUPPORT CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY'S THEMES FOR REACCREDITATION

INTRODUCTION

About every 10 years, institutions accredited by the Western Association of Schools and College (WASC) are required to undergo a critical institutional self-review as part of the reaccreditation process. During this self-review process, institutions are encouraged to identify key issues and strategic themes and address the WASC core commitments and standards in the context of those issues and themes. During the 2009-10 academic year, Chapman University identified three investigative themes (Student-Faculty Research, Educational Effectiveness, and Interdisciplinarity) and three descriptive themes (Learner Engaged Community, Organizational Resources, and General Education) to investigate during the reaccreditation process.

This edition of *Research in BRIEF* examines five of the six themes using longitudinal data gathered from the *College Senior Survey (CSS)*.ⁱ Since 2003 the CSS, a national survey developed by the Higher Education Research Institute, has been administered every spring semester at Chapman University to graduating seniors. The four-page instrument contains over 50 items inquiring how undergraduates spend their time, their level of satisfaction with the college experience, student involvement, cognitive and affective development, student values, attitudes and goals, degree aspirations, and future plans. Data from the CSS will be one of many pieces of evidence the WASC committees will review to gauge our progress and success in these areas. This report will focus on notable trends among Chapman seniors between 2004 and 2010 as they relate to the descriptive and investigative WASC themes. For the purposes of this report, only CSS survey items which could be used to describe or operationalize the various themes were selected for analysis.

CSS Response Rate and Survey Sample

The table below displays the percentage of all graduating seniors who completed the CSS for each year. The sharp decline after 2005 may be partially explained by the change in data collection methods.ⁱⁱ Given the low response rates after 2005, the findings for these two years should be interpreted with caution since they represent a smaller proportion of the senior class.

CSS Response Rate

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
Response Rate	60.3	21.2	25.5	27.0

The CSS sample is skewed toward female respondents during the examined period.

Gender Population and Sample

		Survey Year			
		'04	'06	'08	'10
CSS Sample	M	35.7	33.3	28.4	26.6
	F	64.3	66.7	71.6	73.4
CU Population	M	39.7	41.6	40.0	43.8
	F	60.3	58.4	60.0	56.2

A racial/ethnic comparison was not conducted due to incompatible racial/ethnic categories employed by Chapman University and the CSS.

FINDINGS

Student-Faculty Research

The CSS asks two questions focused on student-faculty research. Seniors responded to a question which asked how often (Frequently, Occasionally or Not at All) professors provided them with "an opportunity to work on a research project" and "an opportunity to publish." Findings show that the percentage of seniors reporting frequent opportunities to work on research projects with faculty members reached a high in 2006 before falling back down to the lower twenty

percentage range. The question focused on the opportunity to publish was not asked until 2010 and findings show that about 9% of the most recent graduating class reported that they had been provided this opportunity “frequently” by a professor.

Faculty-Student Research

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Frequently”</i>				
Opportunity to work on a research project	20.6	28.7	23.0	22.3
An opportunity to publish	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.8

Educational Effectiveness

While the Educational Effectiveness theme is focused on evidence of student learning at the degree program level, the CSS provides evidence of student learning at the institutional level. The two tables below focus on self-reported perceptions of growth and ability. The percentage of seniors reporting “much stronger” ability in general knowledge increased slightly in 2006 and 2008 before falling back to 50.4% in 2010. Self-reported foreign language ability increased 6.4% between 2004 and 2008 before dropping 3% in 2010. Self-reported writing, public speaking, and mathematical ability increased about 6% to 10% between 2004 and 2010.

Educational Effectiveness

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Much Stronger” Ability</i>				
General Knowledge	50.8	55.0	54.3	50.4
Foreign Language	10.1	N/A	16.5	13.5
<i>Percent reporting “Highest 10%” and “Above Average”</i>				
Academic ability	85.2	84.9	81.6	87.9
Mathematical ability	32.9	40.4	38.1	42.3
Artistic ability	44.0	45.0	43.9	50.3
Creativity	65.6	65.0	68.3	67.2
Public Speaking ability	50.1	53.4	52.5	56.2
Writing ability	71.1	67.7	68.0	78.8

Two measures of creativity—artistic ability and creativity—show growth in the self-reported confidence in these areas, although the creativity item only increased 2% to 3% in 2008 and 2010 in comparison to earlier years. The academic ability item declined between 2004 and 2008 before increasing to 87.9% in 2010.

The “Post-Graduation: Preparedness” tables reports two measures of post-college preparation. Preparedness for employment dropped to 31.9% in 2010, but preparedness for graduate education has been steadily increasing from 33.3% in 2006 to 45.6% in 2010.

Post-Graduation: Preparedness

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Much Stronger”</i>				
Preparedness for employment	N/A	36.0	40.1	31.9
Preparedness for graduate education	N/A	33.3	36.7	45.6

General Education

The General Education section reviews measures that correspond to educational objections of the General Education program. General satisfaction with the GE program is first reviewed followed by each goal of the GE program. The findings show that GE satisfaction has dropped a few percentage points between 2006 and 2010. However, over the years the majority of graduating seniors have been consistently satisfied with the GE program.

Satisfaction with GE Program

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Very Satisfied” and “Satisfied”</i>				
GE Program	77.5	78.1	76.2	75.3

Develop the means of critical inquiry in academic and civic matters.

Self-Perception of Growth: Critical Analysis

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Much Stronger” Ability</i>				
Analytical, problem-solving skills	31.7	38.1	44.2	50.4
Ability to think critically	38.4	39.4	47.5	53.3

Both measures of critical thinking show strong, self-perceived growth among Chapman seniors. The first item, analytical, problem-solving skills, increased each year between 2004 and 2010 from 31.7% to 50.4%.

Become independent thinkers able to sustain a lifelong desire for intellectual growth.

Self-Perception of Growth: Independent Thinkers

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent reporting “Highest 10%”</i>				
Leadership abilities	27.1	25.6	34.9	48.2

Corresponding with the growth in leadership training participation, self-reported confidence in leadership abilities increased 22.6% between 2006 and 2008.

Engage in experiential learning as thoughtful, principled citizens in a local and global sense.

Self-Perception of Growth: Local and Global Awareness

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting “Much Stronger” Ability</i>				
Understanding community problems	15.6	20.0	28.8	26.3
Understanding global issues	25.7	N/A	31.3	29.2
Understanding national problems	25.2	31.9	35.6	24.5

The findings show growing self-perceived awareness in understanding community and global issues since 2004, but understanding national problems decreased 11.1% between 2008 and 2010.

Gain breadth of knowledge in the liberal arts and depth of knowledge in areas unique to Chapman.

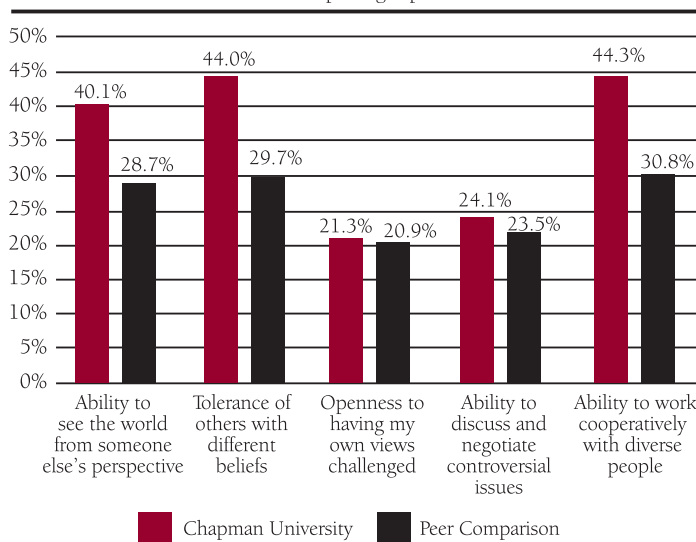
Self-Perception of Personal Growth

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent Reporting "Much Stronger" Ability</i>				
Knowledge of a single discipline	73.8	65.6	73.4	79.9

In 2010, the item, knowledge of a single discipline, increased to 79.9% after hovering around 73% in 2004 and 2008.

Cultivate ethical awareness in learning and practice.

Ethical Awareness: 2010 Self-Ratings
Percent reporting Top 10%



The CSS does not have any questions that measure ethical awareness directly. At best, the CSS asks about various character traits that were introduced in 2010. Unfortunately, there is no longitudinal data available but peer data are available from comparable institutions. The findings show that the self-ratings of Chapman seniors were around 12 percent higher than their peers on three measures: “ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective,” “tolerance of others with different beliefs,” and “ability to work cooperatively with diverse people.” About 22 percent of Chapman seniors self-rated themselves in the top 10% for the other two items, “openness to having my own views challenged,” and “ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues.” These figures are comparable to the peer group.

Learner Engaged Community

Involvement in activities outside of the classroom is an important priority for Chapman University. These learning practices create “real-life” application of classroom learning. The findings show growing participation among Chapman seniors in a variety of high impact activities. Reported participation in studied abroad programs has almost doubled between 2004 and the last two data points in 2008 and 2010. Students working on independent studies took a 20.9% increase between 2004 and 2006 before leveling off. Internship participation and applying classroom learning to “real life” situations have been slowly increasing between 2006 and 2010, while leadership training took a sharp increase in 2010.

Learner Engaged Activities

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
<i>Percent reporting "Yes"</i>				
Studied abroad	17.5	18.5	34.9	33.9
Internship	50.1	49.4	55.4	60.6
Leadership training	20.4	21.0	21.9	31.8
<i>Percent reporting "Frequently"</i>				
Had an opportunity to apply classroom learning to "real life" issues	37.0	38.1	47.5	54.7
<i>Percent reporting "Frequently" or "Occasionally"</i>				
Worked on independent study	50.6	71.5	67.3	73.3
Performed community service as part of a class	N/A	41.4	35.3	43.8

Findings also show that slightly over 40% of students have performed community service in 2006 and 2010.

Organizational Resources

One WASC standard is achieving educational objectives through core functions. Organizational resources represent a key core function since they provide support for student learning. The findings show that strong upward trends in satisfaction in library facilities and tutoring/academic assistance. In particular, satisfaction with library facilities took a sharp increase between 2004 and 2006, most likely due to the opening of the Leatherby Libraries. The increase in satisfaction with tutoring/academic assistance is modest in comparison but still represents a double digits increase.

Satisfaction with Services, Percent Reporting “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”

	Survey Year			
	'04	'06	'08	'10
Laboratory Facilities	61.0	54.2	49.8	57.9
Library Facilities	31.7	84.5	87.7	82.0
Available Internet Access	80.6	77.2	80.9	N/A
Computer Facilities and Services	75.0	87.0	87.8	N/A
Tutoring/Academic Assistance	53.9	61.0	68.7	73.4

The computing facilities question was not asked in 2010 but the item increased 12% between 2004 and 2006 before leveling off.

DISCUSSION

The findings point to several positive trends. The perceived increase in the level of intellectual stimulation and critical thinking skills may be partially due to the increase in learner-engaged activities on campus. Students are participating in the study abroad, internships, community service, and leadership training. The increasing satisfaction with facilities support also helps create an environment conducive to learning and intellectual development.

Faculty-student research stands out as the one area that is in need of close monitoring. Since 2006, the percentage of students who reported working on faculty research has dropped each year. This trend may partially be the result of the increasing female skewed sample since 2006. More faculty-student research opportunities are available in the hard sciences which tend to enroll more males. As the gender breakdown indicates, males are disproportionately declining participation in the CSS. Thus the level of faculty-student research may be underreported given the sample demographics.

As noted in the *Chancellor's Operational Response to the Academic Strategic Planning Task Force Report*, increasing support for student-faculty research is a priority. Recently, the Office of Undergraduate Research was established to help facilitate faculty-student research. Toward this goal, the Office sponsors an annual undergraduate research fair and offers student scholarly/creative grants.

Other CSS findings show however that faculty and students are interacting in other productive ways besides research. Strong upward trends in other interactions with faculty were evident. Over the years, seniors have reported faculty providing them with more intellectual challenge and stimulation. This item increased from 51.4% in 2004 to 74.8% in 2010. Help with achieving professional goals, experienced a double digit increase from 32.7% in 2004 to 47.8% in 2010. In addition, the "encouragement to pursue graduate study" and "emotional support and encouragement" items have increased about eight percent between 2004 and 2010.

CONCLUSION

WASC accreditation cycle requires universities to ask several questions. Who are you? What are you striving to do? What makes you unique? Upon asking those questions, universities are required to identify student learning outcomes for all departments and demonstrate the capacity and institutional resources to carry out this assessment. Chapman University is currently in the process of collecting evidence to evaluate our student learning outcomes. The CSS, along with other surveys, serves as one resource toward completing assessment efforts. The current WASC accreditation cycle will run through 2014. In the Spring of 2014, the WASC Steering Committee will submit the final Educational Effectiveness Review Report followed by a campus visit by a WASC evaluation team.

This Research in Brief reviews findings from the CSS in light of the assessment areas identified by the WASC Steering Committee. The results provided here show that the resources are available for rigorous assessment. The NSSE will be administered to freshmen and seniors in the Spring of 2011. CIRO expects the results from this survey will be instrumental in Chapman's continual efforts to undergo a critical institutional self review.

ⁱ Interdisciplinarity is the only theme that is not reviewed because the CSS does not contain any appropriate indicators.

ⁱⁱ As part of that change, seniors no longer received an in-person reminder to complete the CSS. Before 2006, the Academic Events Coordinator reminded seniors to fill out the CSS when turning in their Ceremony Attendance Form in person. Also, the Career Development Center (CDC) began distributing a survey to the same target population as the CSS in 2006 and 2007, thus increasing email contact with seniors.