

Research in BRIEF

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2003 – 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Executive Summary

(Administered in the Spring)

Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, which manages the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), created five benchmarks to measure various aspects of educational practices deemed as empirically beneficial to learning and personal development: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Supportive Campus Environment and Enriching Educational Experiences. These benchmarks are derived from 42 questions on the NSSE, each of which aim to measure a vital aspect of student and institutional behavior. An in-depth description of each benchmark is provided in each section below. This Research in BRIEF focuses on these benchmarks and highlights findings from the 2003, 2005, and 2009 NSSE surveys.ⁱ All Chapman freshmen and seniors were invited to take the NSSE.ⁱⁱ

Response Rate and Survey Sample

The response rates for the NSSE in 2003, 2005, and 2009 were 57%, 40%, and 41% respectively. The racial/ethnic categories between the population and survey samples are slightly different, but close enough to obtain a snapshot of the sample's representativeness.

Race/Ethnicity

	2003		2005		2009		
	FR	SR	FR	SR	FR	SR	
NSSE	Am. Indian/Nat. Am.	1%	4%	0%	1%	1%	
	Asian/Pacific Is.	13%	11%	9%	8%	12%	6%
	African Am.	0%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
	White	78%	72%	60%	55%	62%	67%
	Hispanic/Latino	9%	17%	10%	13%	9%	10%
	Multiracial	7%	7%	7%	6%	5%	6%
	Other	3%	1%	6%	4%	2%	2%
	No response	N/A	N/A	7%	9%	7%	7%
Population	Am. Indian/Nat. Am.	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
	Asian/Pacific Is.	7%	7%	9%	9%	11%	8%
	African Am.	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%
	Hispanic/Latino	9%	10%	10%	13%	10%	11%
	International	6%	4%	3%	2%	3%	2%
	Unknown	7%	9%	11%	13%	9%	7%
White	66%	66%	63%	60%	64%	70%	

In 2003, Asian/Pacific Is. and White respondents were overrepresented in the sample. The percentage of White respondents dropped sharply after 2003 due to changes in the data collection procedures.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2005 and 2009, the sample closely matches the population for White respondents.

Gender

		2003		2005		2009	
		FR	SR	FR	SR	FR	SR
NSSE	F	71%	63%	68%	67%	65%	62%
	M	29%	38%	32%	33%	35%	38%
Population	F	50%	55%	61%	55%	60%	56%
	M	50%	45%	39%	45%	40%	44%

The findings show that the survey sample is skewed toward females. Overall, the survey samples are reasonably similar to the Chapman population, except for 2003. In that year, females are overrepresented, particularly among freshmen, and White and Asian/Pacific Is. students are also overrepresented among freshmen and seniors.

Throughout this report, Chapman University NSSE benchmark results are compared to a sample of students attending similar types of institutions – i.e., Master's colleges and universities (larger programs) as classified by the Carnegie Foundation.

FINDINGS

Level of Academic Challenge

The Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) benchmark consists of eleven items measuring student workload and perceptions about the skill sets emphasized in coursework. According to NSSE, colleges and universities that score high on this benchmark “promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.” Between 2003 and 2009, the LAC benchmark score decreased slightly for Chapman freshmen and seniors. In comparison, the benchmark score remained relatively stable for freshmen and seniors in the peer group.

Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) Items

		2003	2005	2009
Chapman LAC Benchmark	FY	55.9	55.5	54.4
	SR	61.3	57.2	58.2
Peer LAC Benchmark	FY	52.7	51.6	53.1
	SR	56.4	56.0	56.9
Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, etc. related to academic program) ^a	FY	4.16	3.93	4.04
	SR	4.05	3.83	4.19
Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings ^b	FY	3.62	3.51	3.40
	SR	3.41	3.17	3.44
Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more ^b	FY	1.40	1.22	1.20
	SR	1.90	1.71	1.70
Number of written papers or reports of between 5 and 19 pages ^b	FY	2.83	2.74	2.48
	SR	3.04	2.73	2.77
Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages ^b	FY	3.46	3.20	3.17
	SR	3.52	2.94	3.02
Coursework emphasizes: Analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory ^c	FY	3.23	3.28	3.27
	SR	3.39	3.37	3.39
Coursework emphasizes: Synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships ^c	FY	2.90	3.01	2.98
	SR	3.21	3.21	3.15
Coursework emphasizes: Making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods ^c	FY	2.80	2.95	2.99
	SR	3.00	3.06	3.06
Coursework emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations ^c	FY	2.98	3.07	3.17
	SR	3.26	3.27	3.26
Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations ^d	FY	2.67	2.68	2.60
	SR	2.83	2.77	2.68
Campus environment emphasizes: Spending significant amount of time studying and on academic work ^c	FY	2.99	3.02	2.96
	SR	3.19	2.96	3.07

^a About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing: 1) 0, 2) 1-5, 3) 6-10, 4) 11-15, 5) 16-20, 6) 21-25, 7) 26-30, 8) More than 30.

^b During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done? 1) None, 2) 1-4, 3) 5-10, 4) 11-20, 5) More than 20.

^c During the current school year, how much as your coursework emphasized the following? 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

^d During the current school year, how often have you done each of the following? 1) Very often, 2) Often, 3) Sometimes, 4) Never.

^e 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

A review of the individual questions reveals that the items focused on reading and writing are partially responsible for the decline in the LAC benchmark scores among CU students. The reading and writing items incrementally decreased each year among freshmen. The mean score for several reading and writing items decreased among seniors between 2003 and 2009, but the decrease was not incremental. In contrast, a couple of items increased slowly between 2003 and 2009 among freshmen. The “making of judgments” and “applying theories or concepts” items showed small but steady annual increases.

Enriching Educational Experiences

The Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE) benchmark consists of twelve items measuring learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom that augment students' academic program. According to NSSE, “Complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs. Diversity experiences teach students valuable things about themselves

and others. Technology facilitates collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge.” The coding for some questions that comprise the EEE benchmark changed between 2003 and 2005. As a result, these items and the EEE benchmark scores are not comparable across all years. However, between 2005 and 2009, the EEE benchmark for Chapman freshmen remained stable, while the senior benchmark score rose a few points. The EEE benchmark score for freshmen peer group also remained stable, but it declined among seniors.

Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE) Items

		2003	2005	2009
Chapman EEE Benchmark	FY	N/A*	29.9	30.4
	SR	N/A*	47.0	50.3
Peer EEE Benchmark	FY	N/A*	26.7	27.0
	SR	N/A*	40.3	38.4
Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, etc.) ^a	FY	2.71	2.27	2.64
	SR	2.47	2.28	2.75
Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment ^b	FY	N/A*	0.09	0.07
	SR	N/A*	0.54	0.55
Community service or volunteer work ^b	FY	N/A*	0.33	0.33
	SR	N/A*	0.61	0.58
Foreign language coursework ^b	FY	N/A*	0.43	0.49
	SR	N/A*	0.75	0.73
Study abroad ^b	FY	N/A*	0.02	0.01
	SR	N/A*	0.26	0.34
Independent study or self-designed major ^b	FY	N/A*	0.02	0.01
	SR	N/A*	0.28	0.24
Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.) ^b	FY	N/A*	0.01	0.01
	SR	N/A*	0.40	0.64
Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values ^c	FY	3.08	3.11	2.94
	SR	2.89	3.00	3.00
Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own ^c	FY	2.95	2.97	2.88
	SR	2.89	2.98	2.91
Using electronic medium (e.g., listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment ^c	FY	2.68	2.72	2.76
	SR	2.96	2.78	3.02
Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds ^d	FY	2.59	2.51	2.66
	SR	2.61	2.35	2.47
Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together ^b	FY	0.32	0.08	0.08
	SR	0.29	0.25	0.25

* The 2003 EEE score is not comparable to subsequent years because the calculation formula changed in comparison to later years.

^a About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing: 1) 0, 2) 1-5, 3) 6-10, 4) 11-15, 5) 16-20, 6) 21-25, 7) 26-30, 8) More than 30.

^b Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution? 0) Plan to do, Do not plan to, Have not decided 1) Done.

^c During the current school year, how often have you done each of the following? 1) Very often, 2) Often, 3) Sometimes, 4) Never.

^d To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following? 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

The series of items asking about participation in a learning activity remained stable between the two time points for both freshmen and seniors except for the senior capstone measure

among seniors. The mean score for the senior capstone course item rose from .40 to .64 between 2005 and 2009. The only other item to change more than .20 among seniors was the participation in co-curricular activities item. Among freshmen, the “participate in a learning community” item decreased .24. The mean score for many of the items (e.g., studying abroad and senior capstone course) is extremely low among freshmen because these students typically have not had an opportunity to participate in these activities.

Active and Collaborative Learning

The Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) benchmark consists of seven items measuring student reported participation in learning activities requiring collaboration. According to the NSSE, “Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.” The ACL benchmark scores remain mostly steady between 2003 and 2009 for both Chapman freshmen and seniors. The ACL benchmark scores also remained steady among freshmen in the peer group, but it moved slightly up and down among seniors.

Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) Items

		2003	2005	2009
Chapman ACL Benchmark	FY	43.2	45.8	45.2
	SR	53.1	54.4	53.8
Peer ACL Benchmark	FY	41.1	42.5	43.3
	SR	50.2	52.2	51.5
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions ^a	FY	3.06	3.02	2.94
	SR	3.19	3.29	3.24
Made a class presentation ^a	FY	2.34	2.40	2.41
	SR	2.94	3.01	3.02
Worked with other students on projects during class ^a	FY	2.23	2.46	2.28
	SR	2.58	2.60	2.49
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments ^a	FY	2.46	2.57	2.67
	SR	2.76	2.89	2.93
Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary) ^a	FY	1.77	1.75	1.73
	SR	2.01	1.95	1.92
Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course ^a	FY	1.36	1.38	1.42
	SR	1.68	1.61	1.62
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.) ^a	FY	2.87	2.91	2.94
	SR	2.98	3.03	3.03

^a During the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

Among Chapman freshmen and seniors, the survey items “made a class presentation,” “worked with classmates outside of class,” and “discussed ideas from your readings or classes with other outside of class” showed small, but consistent, increases between 2003 and 2009.

Student-Faculty Interaction

The Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI) benchmark consists of six items measuring the quality of interaction between faculty and students. According to NSSE, “Students learn firsthand

how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.” The benchmark score among Chapman freshmen steadily increased between 2003 and 2009. Among seniors, the benchmark score initially rose before falling in 2009. In the peer group, the benchmark score did not change much among freshmen but moved slightly up and down among seniors.

Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI) Items

		2003	2005	2009
Chapman SFI Benchmark	FY	39.9	42.6	43.2
	SR	51.6	53.8	50.9
Peer SFI Benchmark	FY	35.7	33.9	35.2
	SR	42.4	43.6	41.7
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor ^a	FY	2.65	2.72	2.64
	SR	3.04	2.99	2.96
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor ^a	FY	2.11	2.27	2.38
	SR	2.56	2.68	2.56
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class ^a	FY	1.92	1.98	1.95
	SR	2.27	2.37	2.26
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.) ^a	FY	1.56	1.55	1.64
	SR	1.83	2.05	1.94
Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance ^a	FY	2.74	2.86	2.86
	SR	3.04	2.98	2.89
Worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements ^b	FY	N/A*	0.04	0.02
	SR	N/A*	0.18	0.24

^a During the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

^b Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution? 0) Plan to do, Do not plan to, Have not decided 1) Done.

Seniors reported small but consistent annual declines in the “discussed grades or assignments with an instructor” and “received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty” items between 2003 and 2009 among seniors. The declines in these survey items partially explain the decrease in the SFI benchmark between 2003 and 2009.

Supportive Campus Environment

The Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) benchmark consists of six items measuring student emotional support from faculty and staff. According to NSSE, “Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.” The freshman SCE benchmark score was stable between 2003 and 2005 before increasing a few points in 2009. The senior SCE benchmark score declined 3.9 points between 2003 and 2009. The benchmark scores for the peer group remained steady among freshmen and seniors from 2003 to 2009.

The decline in the benchmark score among Chapman seniors corresponds with the decline in the “quality of relationship with faculty, staff, and other students” items. The declines for these three items ranged from .35 and .55 between 2003 and 2009.

Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) Items

		2003	2005	2009
Chapman SCE Benchmark	FY	60.2	60.8	64.0
	SR	63.5	57.4	59.6
Peer SCE Benchmark	FY	61.1	60.1	61.8
	SR	58.6	58.0	58.8
Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically ^a	FY	3.16	3.16	3.22
	SR	3.12	2.97	3.10
Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) ^a	FY	1.91	2.08	2.35
	SR	2.08	1.88	1.95
Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially ^a	FY	2.30	2.42	2.58
	SR	2.27	2.23	2.37
Quality of relationships with other students ^b	FY	5.48	5.47	5.47
	SR	5.84	5.47	5.38
Quality of relationships with faculty members ^b	FY	5.53	5.53	5.58
	SR	6.07	5.71	5.72
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices ^b	FY	4.88	4.53	4.71
	SR	5.02	4.27	4.47

^a To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following? 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very little.

^b Mark the box that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at your institution. 1) Unfriendly, Unsupportive, Sense of Alienation to 7) Friendly, Supportive, Sense of belonging.

Among freshmen, the “Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially” and “Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities” items showed consistent gains during 2003 and 2009.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, NSSE has provided Chapman University with the opportunity to document good practices and identify areas of improvement. The results from the NSSE show that Chapman University outperforms peer institutions in many of the surveyed items and constructed benchmarks. The results also point to areas of improvement. Chapman students are writing less today compared to 2003. According to student reports, freshmen and seniors wrote less short (4 pages or less), mid-length (between 5 and 19 pages), and long papers (20 pages or longer) between 2003 and 2009. And freshmen reported that their course work emphasized less synthetic, evaluative, application skills over time. It is possible that this decline, though, is not due to any changes in the content of courses over time, but rather to the increasing caliber of freshmen between 2003 and 2009. As better prepared students have enrolled at Chapman over time, these students may have viewed course content as less challenging because they are better prepared to handle difficult course material.

In contrast, the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark among seniors and the Supportive Campus Environment and Student-Faculty Interaction benchmarks among freshmen increase over time. In examining the individual items in the EEE benchmark, the findings show an increase in co-curricular activities and study abroad participation across two data points. The increase in study abroad participation is corroborated by findings from the College Senior Survey which also show rising participation between 2003 and 2007.^{iv} The individual items in

the SCE and SFI benchmarks show strong gains among freshmen in several items such as “campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities,” “campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially” and “talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.”

According to a 2009 article in *Peer Review* titled, “Global Learning: What is it? Who is Responsible for it?” 72% of business leaders thought colleges underemphasized “global issues.”^v As Chapman prepares students to become “global citizens,” as described in the University’s mission, measures such as participation in study abroad programs and foreign language classes will be important benchmarks to track institutional progress in this area.

The findings are encouraging in this regard. Participation in study abroad programs increased between 2005 and 2009 among seniors. And participation in foreign language courses remained high in 2005 and 2009 among (about .74 on a 0-1 scale). As expected, freshmen participation in foreign language courses was lower in comparison to seniors, but their participation increased between 2005 and 2009.

Personalized education is another hallmark of a student’s education at Chapman University. As noted above, the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark score has increased between 2003 and 2009 for freshmen. And certain individual items show promising trends. The “worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework” item also showed an increase for both freshmen and seniors, and the “talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor” item showed a small increase among freshmen.

Faculty-student research is an important strategic initiative. Data is unavailable in 2003 for the “worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements” item, but the mean score increased slightly between 2005 and 2009 from .18 to .24 among seniors. This item warrants closer monitoring in the future.

Assessment is said to work best when it is ongoing, not episodic. The NSSE is scheduled to be administered next Spring 2011. Given the importance of active engagement to student development, Chapman is committed to monitoring our progress in this area.

ⁱ In order to produce comparable statistics across years, weighting procedures were applied to all three data sets as recommended by the Center for Postsecondary Research. The weights compensate for non-response bias among other issues.

ⁱⁱ Email invitations were sent to freshmen and seniors during the Spring semester except in 2003. In 2003, surveys were collected through a mixture of paper and Internet methods during the spring semester.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2003, respondents could choose multiple racial categories. After 2003, respondents were forced to choose one category. Also, “I prefer not to respond” and “multi-racial” options were added and Hispanic respondents were given more ethnic choices (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican) in 2005 and 2009.

^{iv} CIRO Research in Brief, Vol. 5, Number 12.

^v Hovland, Kevin. 2009. “Global Learning: What Is It? Who Is Responsible for It?” *Peer Review*, 11(4):4-7.