

California State University, Stanislaus
2003 Undergraduate National Survey of Student Engagement
General Education information excerpted from the Executive Summary

Survey Purpose

The California State University (CSU) System participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The survey obtained data about student learning and educational participation across a wide-range of university programs and activities. Administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, the NSSE provides information that may be used in describing and understanding student learning outcomes, the undergraduate experience, and institutional effectiveness.

Survey Methodology

The survey was administered by NSSE to all first-year and senior students. First-year students were defined as undergraduates enrolled in fall 2002 with a freshmen status (i.e. fewer than 30 units) and who returned in spring 2003 as freshmen. Seniors were defined as undergraduates enrolled in fall 2002 with a senior status (i.e. 90 or more units) and were expected to graduate in spring or summer 2003. Students were randomly selected and mailed a survey form with an option to complete the survey via the web. A postcard reminder was subsequently mailed approximately 10 days later. Non-respondents were contacted a third time approximately two weeks after the postcard mailing.

Surveys were sent to 347 first-year students and 349 seniors in the spring 2003. The response rate for both groups was approximately 35 percent that resulted in a student sample size of 121 first-year student and 127 seniors. The sampling error margin was 8.0 percent for first-year students and 8.4 percent for seniors.

NSSE calculated mean scores on the items. These results are displayed for CSU Stanislaus first-year students and seniors, and are compared to the Carnegie Selected Peer institutions. CSU Stanislaus and its Carnegie Selected Peers are classified as Master's Colleges and Universities I. These institutions typically offer a wide variety of baccalaureate degrees and award forty or more master's degrees per year across three or more academic disciplines.

Respondent Characteristics

Ninety-seven percent of first-years students are full-time students, compared to 72 percent of senior students and 28 percent are part-time students. A larger proportion of first-year students live on-campus, whereas 98 percent of seniors live off-campus. Seven of ten first-year students are 19 years of age or younger and 28 percent of ages 20-23 years. Twenty-six percent of seniors are 20-23 years of age; 33 percent are ages 24-29, 21 percent are ages 30-39, and 20 percent are 40 years of age or older. The overwhelming majority of first-year respondents and seniors are female, at 79 percent and 70 percent, respectively.

Summary of Results

The summary focuses on five clusters of survey items identified by NSSE administrators as benchmarks of effective educational practice. The five NSSE Benchmarks are:

- I. Active and Collaborative Learning
- II. Student-Faculty Interactions
- III. Supportive Campus Environment
- IV. Enriching Educational Experience
- V. Level of Academic Challenge

The following is a summarization of results by cluster area for first-year students and seniors.

I. Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL).

The lowest mean score is for item k, “participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course.”

Exhibit 1. Active and Collaborative Learning

Item	Description	First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
1k	Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	1.43	1.47	1.64	1.64

Mean score based on scale:1-never, 2-sometimes, 3-often, 4-very often

IV. Enriching Educational Experience (EEE).

Exhibit 5. Time spent on Enriching Educational Experience

Item	Description	First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
7c	Participating in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of student take two or more classes together	0.36	0.35	0.21	0.27

Mean score based on recoded items as follows: 0=have not decided, do not plan to do, plan to do; 1=done. Thus, the mean is interpreted as the proportion responding "done" among all respondents.

V. Level of Academic Challenge (LAC).

Exhibit 7 reveals mean scores that show the tendency for “quite a bit” of student engagement in the mental activities of analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments, and applying theory in their coursework emphasis. The highest means scores (based on a 4-point scale) for first-year students are for coursework emphasizing analytical thinking (mean=2.97, item 2b), coursework emphasizing making judgments about information or methods (mean=2.78, item 2c), and about applying theories or concepts (mean=2.82, item 2e).

Seniors reveal slightly higher scores for item2b (mean=3.23), item 2e (mean=2.95), and item 2c (mean=2.91). Overall, the first-year student scores and senior scores compare well with selected peers.

In Exhibit 8, the number of reading materials and writing projects are summarized based on a 5-point scale of none (1) to more than 20 (5). The tendency is for first-year students to have been assigned

between 5-10 textbooks in their courses. There is a greater activity in writing course papers of fewer than 5 pages. There is less experience in writing papers of between 5-19 pages. And fewer first-year students yet that experienced writing papers of 20 pages or more. The scores of first-year students is slightly less than that of selected peers.

Stanislaus seniors reveal slightly more activity in writing papers of 20 pages or more than first-year students, and including more experience with coursework papers of 5-19 pages. However, most senior students, as did first-year students, experienced more coursework papers of fewer than 5 pages. In all, Stanislaus seniors' scores track closely to those reported for the selected peers institutions.

Exhibit 7. Coursework Emphasis

Item	Description	First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
2b	Coursework emphasizing analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory	2.97	3.09	3.23	3.25
2c	Coursework emphasizing synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	2.78	2.82	2.91	3.04
2d	Coursework emphasizing making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods	2.83	2.80	2.76	2.95
2e	Coursework emphasizing applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	2.82	2.96	2.95	3.19

Mean score based on scale: 1 -very little, 2 - some, 3 -quite a bit, 4 -very much

Exhibit 8. Number of Textbooks and Papers Assigned

Item	Description	First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
4c	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	1.24	1.26	1.65	1.65
4d	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	2.32	2.41	2.61	2.63
4e	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	3.07	3.31	2.97	3.09

Mean score based on scale:1= none, 2 = between 1 and 4, 3 = between 5 and 10, 4 = between 11 and 20, 5 = more than 2

Overall Student Perceptions of Educational Experiences

Exhibit 10 summarizes the results. Utilizing a 4-point rating scale, students were asked, "To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?" Following the main question was a battery of 15 items with a response set of "very little," "some," "quite a bit," and "very much." The exhibit displays the results of first-year students and seniors that responded "quite a bit" or "very much."

Several items are rated highly by first-year students. In order of importance, 81 percent stated the university has contributed to their development in "thinking critically and analytically" (item 11e), 79 percent say the university contributed to "acquiring a broad general education" (item 11a), and 72 percent affirmed that CSU Stanislaus has contributed to their development in "writing clearly and effectively" (item 11c).

In addition, several more items achieved ratings of 60 percent or more: 67 percent of first-year students acknowledged the contribution to his or her development in “using computers and information technology” (item 11g), and in “analyzing quantitative problems” (item 11f, 63%).

The lowest response was for, “contributing to the welfare of his or her community” (item 11o, 25%).

CSU Stanislaus seniors gave higher ratings than did first-year students. In order of importance to seniors, 87 percent said, “thinking critically and analytically” (item 11e), 82 percent said “acquiring a broad general education” (item 11a), and 80 percent gave the university high marks for its contribution to students’ development in “writing clearly and effectively” (item 11c).

Other items receiving more than 70 percent ratings were for: “using computing and information technology” at 74 percent (item 11g), and 75 percent feel the university contributed to their development in “speaking clearly and effectively” (item 11d).

The lowest and therefore least significant ratings given by seniors were for item 11o: only 31 percent indicated “quite a bit” or “very much” on “contributing to the welfare of his or her community.”

On the whole, the ratings of Stanislaus first-year students and seniors compares fairly well with the ratings and patterns of ratings of the selected peer institutions.

Exhibit 10. Student Ratings of General Learning and Experiences

To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?		First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
Item	Description	<i>Quite a bit, Very much</i>	<i>Quite a bit, Very much</i>	<i>Quite a bit, Very much</i>	<i>Quite a bit, Very much</i>
11a	Acquiring a broad general education	79%	81%	82%	85%
11c	Writing clearly and effectively	72%	74%	80%	77%
11d	Speaking clearly and effectively	56%	63%	75%	72%
11e	Thinking critically and analytically	81%	80%	87%	85%
11f	Analyzing quantitative problems	63%	57%	69%	67%
11g	Using computing and information technology	67%	68%	76%	77%
11k	Understanding himself or herself	56%	59%	54%	62%
11l	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	52%	51%	55%	51%
11m	Solving complex real-world problems	46%	48%	48%	56%
11n	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	37%	54%	40%	57%
11o	Contributing to the welfare of his or her community	25%	40%	31%	43%

Items are based on a 4-point scale: 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much

Other GE Related Questions

Item	Description	First-Year Students		Seniors	
		Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
1d	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	2.93	3.05	3.34	3.34
1e	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	2.68	2.71	2.81	2.76
Mean score based on scale: 1 = none, 2 = between 1 and 4, 3 = between 5 and 10, 4 = between 11 and 20, 5 = more than 2					
2a	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	3.19	2.97	2.98	2.77
Mean score based on scale: 1 -very little, 2 - some, 3 -quite a bit, 4 -very much					