

California State University, Stanislaus
2006 Undergraduate National Survey of Student Engagement
General Education information excerpted from the Executive Summary

Survey Purpose

The California State University, Stanislaus participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. The NSSE annually obtains information from random samples of first-year and senior students about the nature of their undergraduate experience (NSSE 2006 Overview 2006:1).

The NSSE was administered in Spring 2006 at CSU Stanislaus to first-year and senior students. The survey obtained data about student participation across a wide-range of university programs and activities. The NSSE provides information that may be used in describing and understanding student learning outcomes, the undergraduate experience, and institutional effectiveness. Moreover, the results show how undergraduate students spend their time in learning and personal development activities. These data focus attention on how well or not students achieve the desired outcomes of an undergraduate program experience. In addition, these data provide indicators as to how well or not the university engages in “good practices” supporting the student learning experience.

The CSU Stanislaus community shares the core belief that higher learning and the “university experience” happens best when learning occurs within the university as well as outside. Thus, the goal of CSU Stanislaus has been to ensure the institution is effective in adding value to the student undergraduate experience. The NSSE provides such data to help profile the student learning experience. These data also inform the policy and decision-making process to help improve programs, as necessary, in ways that optimize the undergraduate education experience at CSU Stanislaus.

Survey Methodology

A random sample of 260 first-year students and 274 seniors were selected for survey in spring 2006. A survey questionnaire was mailed to the student sample with the option to complete the survey via a web-based form. Only, and approximately, 20 percent of those responding completed the survey form via the online web form.

A total of 60 CSU Stanislaus first-year students responded to the survey, as did 101 Stanislaus seniors for a combined response rate of 30 percent. However, the response rate is separately 23 percent for first-year students and 37 percent for seniors. This means due to the small number of respondents to the survey, the sampling error is rather larger: 12.2 percent for first-year students and 9.2 percent for seniors, respectively.

NSSE calculated mean scores on the items. These results are displayed for CSU Stanislaus first-year students and seniors, and are compared to the Selected Peer institutions. CSU Stanislaus chose the Selected Peer institutions from a list of NSSE 2006 participants.

Respondent Characteristics

Ninety-three percent of first-year students are enrolled full-time, compared to 73 percent of seniors. Overwhelmingly more women are enrolled than men: 82 percent of first-year students are female and 63 percent of seniors are female.

In terms of race and ethnicity, the two largest groups are White non-Hispanic and Mexican American students. Among first-year students, 37 percent are White non-Hispanic and 36 percent are Mexican American. In addition, another 4 percent are Puerto Rican or Other Hispanic/Latino, followed next by Asian/Pacific Islanders at 8 percent.

Among seniors, 42 percent are White non-Hispanic and 19 percent are Mexican American, with 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 6 percent African American. Four percent of first-year students are international students, as are 7 percent of seniors.

Most first-year students live off-campus (63%), thus only 37 percent live on-campus. Among seniors all indicated they live off-campus (100%).

Three-quarters (76%) of seniors are transfer students, and 64 percent are older non-traditional students (24 years of age or older). First-year students were all less than 24 years of age.

Summary of Results

The NSSE benchmarks of educational practice are organized into five cluster areas.

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

Each cluster area is comprised of a range of survey items identified by NSSE. The following is thus a summarization of results by cluster area for first-year students and seniors.

I. Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL).

<i>Exhibit 1. Active and Collaborative Learning</i>		First-Year Students		Seniors	
Item	Description	Stanislaus	Selected Peers	Stanislaus	Selected Peers
1k	Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	1.42	1.59	1.84	1.73

Mean score based on the following scale:1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often

IV. Enriching Educational Experience (EEE).

Stanislaus first-year students show very little or no involvement in participation in learning communities (item 7c) compared to the Selected Peer institutions.

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	0.04	0.16	0.21	0.02

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).

Do CSU Stanislaus students feel they are challenged intellectually and academically? Comparing Stanislaus students to Selected Peers (Exhibits 6 and 7), the answer is a qualified yes. However, as the items in Exhibit 7 display, Stanislaus seniors engage more rigorously in academic activity and work than do first-year students. This of course is the desired pattern. As university students mature in academic experience, the intensification of engagement should predict the reporting of greater academic challenges at the senior end of the academic program than at the start.

As expressed by NSSE, the institution and academic environment should set high expectations for student performance. The survey data, as reported here, affirms this to be so at CSU Stanislaus.

The LAC cluster area includes a complex array of items that together measure the level of academic challenge to students. For sake of brevity, we summarize the results displayed in Exhibits 6-9 into the following main points.

First, both Stanislaus first-year students and seniors show remarkable engagement in their learning and academic pursuits, as intended by the stated mission and philosophy of the institution.

Second, the mean scores for Stanislaus first-year students are higher compared to the Selected Peer institutions as shown in items 2c and 3e.

Third, Stanislaus first-year students indicate they are engaged in coursework that emphasizes critical, analytical thinking (item 2c), and that during the school year they write between 5-10 papers or reports of 5 pages or less (item 3e) (although better than a quarter of students indicate writing papers between 5-19 pages, see item 3d).

Among CSU Stanislaus seniors, the results are summarized as follows:

First, the mean scores for Stanislaus seniors are higher than for Selected Peers in all but 1 instance. Second, Stanislaus seniors indicate engagement in coursework that emphasizes theory, critical thinking, and the evaluation of ideas, information, or arguments (item 2b, 2d, 2e; see also 2c). The mean scores are higher compared to Selected Peers.

Third, Stanislaus seniors are engaged in reading materials and in writing papers of various lengths (item 3c, 3d, 3e) more so than first-year students and at scores higher than for Selected Peers.

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	3.03	3.07	3.27	3.21
2c	Coursework emphasizing synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	2.92	2.86	2.98	3.02
2d	Coursework emphasizing making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods	2.75	2.84	3.02	2.93
2e	Coursework emphasizing applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	2.75	2.96	3.22	3.16

Mean score based on the following 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
3c	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	1.32	1.39	1.70	1.63
3d	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	2.24	2.28	2.67	2.58
3e	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	3.10	3.06	3.04	2.97

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

Overall Student Perceptions of Educational Experiences

Exhibit 10 summarizes the results. On 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 16 items with a response set of “very little,” “some,” “quite a bit,” and “very much.” The exhibit represents 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, 84 percent say CSU Stanislaus has contributed to their development in “writing clearly and effectively” (item 11c), 82 percent indicate the university has contributed to their development in “thinking critically and analytically” (item 11e), and 81 percent say the university contributed to “acquiring a broad general education” (item 11a). These items are all rated above 80 percent.

One of the lowest percentage of responses of “quite a bit” or “very much” were for, “contributing to the welfare of his or her community” (18%, item 11o).

CSU Stanislaus seniors match or exceed many of the same items rated highly by first-year students. In order of importance to seniors, 86 percent give the university high marks for its contribution to students’ development in “thinking critically and analytically” (item 11e), 85 percent say “quite a bit” or “very much” that the university contributed to “acquiring a broad general education” (item 11a), and 81 percent think highly of the university’s contribution to knowledge and development in “using computing and information technology” (item 11g).

Other items receiving more than 70 percent ratings were for, writing clearly and effectively(item 11c) with 79 percent, analyzing quantitative problems at 78 percent (item 11f), and, speaking clearly and effectively at 75 percent (item 11d).

On the whole, Stanislaus first-year students compare well with the selected peer institutions. However, the ratings of Stanislaus seniors are consistently higher across the battery of items compared to selected peer institutions.

Exhibit 10. Student Ratings of General Education 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	81%	82%	85%	83%
11c	Writing clearly and effectively	84%	71%	79%	77%
11d	Speaking clearly and effectively	70%	64%	75%	73%
11e	Thinking critically and analytically	82%	80%	86%	86%
11f	Analyzing quantitative problems	67%	66%	78%	71%
11g	Using computing and information technology	58%	73%	81%	80%
11k	Understanding himself or herself	50%	62%	62%	61%
11l	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	50%	57%	62%	54%
11m	Solving complex real-world problems	40%	55%	62%	57%
11n	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	45%	54%	58%	54%
11o	Contributing to the welfare of his or her community	18%	41%	41%	45%

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

Other GE Related Questions

		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	3.10	3.04	3.42	3.33
1e	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	2.88	2.77	2.93	2.83
6a	Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance	1.86	2.08	1.69	1.94
6d	Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together	2.37	2.53	2.56	2.62
Mean score based on the following scale:1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often					
2a	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	2.89	2.91	2.93	2.73
Mean score based on the following scale: 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much					