

FGCU NSSE Report

Introduction

Extensive research on college student development shows that “what students *do* during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college (Kuh **2002**, emphasis his). Conventional wisdom had it that the resources of a college – with linkages to perceived excellence of academic staff members, physical and research facilities etc – and its student selectivity based on SAT and ACT scores and high school class rank, were key factors in the “quality” of education a student received at a college. But it became clear over time that the student was not a passive receiver of learning, rather, an active participant in and seeker after his/her own educational enrichment; and that the role of the college or university was to facilitate and encourage that quest by creating the most supportive and dynamic physical, intellectual and communal environment possible.

In such a scenario the quantum of resources of a college – physical, financial, administrative – while obviously important, becomes less significant than how they are deployed, and the benchmark of collegiate success becomes less a series of “inputs” than an assessment of the ongoing effectiveness of the interaction between college and student.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), done annually, is designed to obtain information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development: in simple terms, student engagement with their college environment. The survey is administered each spring, through a paper questionnaire or on the Web, to random samples of first year and senior students at four year colleges and universities.

The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. Survey items on the NSSE report reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college.

The NSSE is designed by a national team and administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research in cooperation with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. The survey is co-sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning, and supported by grants from the Lumina Foundation for Education and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The NSSE survey consists of 30 questions seeking information in four categories:

- Student behaviors in college
- Institutional actions and requirements

- Student reactions to college
- Student demographics (background information)

The first survey was done in spring 2000, when 276 colleges and universities participated. Students from more than 420 institutions took part in the 2003 survey; altogether, 725 different colleges and universities have participated in NSSE. In 2003, Florida Gulf Coast University participated in the NSSE for the first time.

In every area, FGCU's scores met or exceeded the mean of the colleges and universities surveyed; this was true both for national benchmarks and for peer institutions within its Carnegie classification. Particularly significant was the extent to which FGCU's scores met or exceeded mean scores of participating universities on items related to its stated student learning goals.

Results related to FGCU's student learning goals.

Matters relating to FGCU's undergraduate student learning goals were explored in parts of Question 11 of the survey, which looked at educational and personal growth through sub-items related to the main question: *To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development?* Several of the sub-items measured aspects of growth and development that coincided with FGCU's student learning goals.

Sub-items were identified that corresponded to six of FGCU's nine student learning goals. These were the goals related to development of *a culturally diverse perspective, effective communication, ethical responsibility, problem solving abilities, technological literacy, and community awareness and involvement*. For five of these the university posted scores that were average for the universities participating in the survey. For the goal on *community involvement* the FGCU scores were very significantly better. In this area, FGCU placed well above the average both for universities in its Master's classification, and nationally.

This demonstrates the continuing alignment of the university's learning goals with the national norms, and its success in creating a learning environment for students to achieve them.

The broader results.

FGCU students saw their university as making a very important contribution to their own personal and educational growth, in terms of their *academic and intellectual experiences* (Question 1). FGCU scores, for example, exceeded the NSSE mean in 14 of the 22 sub-categories of this survey question, often by significant margins. The same pattern was evident in their assessment of enriching educational experiences, their own time usage, and of the institutional environment as provided by FGCU.

In arriving at a meaningful way to organize and communicate the results, NSSE created five clusters or benchmarks of effective educational practice:

1. *Level of academic challenge* – the extent to which institutions emphasize the importance of academic effort and set high expectations for student performance;
2. *Active and collaborative learning* – the extent to which students are encouraged to collaborate with others in solving problems and mastering difficult material;
3. *Student faculty interactions* – inside and outside the classroom;
4. *Enriching educational experiences* – these include complementary learning experiences in and out of the classroom, including diversity experiences, internships, community service and senior capstone courses; and
5. *Supportive campus environment* – the extent to which institutions cultivate positive working and social relations among difference groups.

To more fully appreciate FGCU's performance, one can look at the survey results in terms of comparisons over the five NSSE clusters.

With regard to, *enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment*, FGCU's scores for seniors were superior to the scores from both the national group of students and those in the Masters categorization of the Carnegie Classification.

For *student faculty interactions*, FGCU's scores for seniors showed no significant differences when the means for FGCU were compared with those for universities within

the Master's classification, and nationally. In this category FGCU's results for first years were similar.

In terms of providing a *supportive campus environment*, FGCU scores for first year students were below average for institutions within its Carnegie type, and nationally. This was also true for the first category *level of academic challenge*. However, with respect to *enriching educational experiences*, FGCU scores for its first year students were above the average of institutions nationally, and significantly better than means within the Master's grouping.

FGCU's best performance came in relation to *active and collaborative learning*. The University's scores were better than for universities both nationally and within the Master's Classification. The difference observed was highly significant when the comparison was made, both in the case of first years and for seniors.

Adjusted Results

The above comparison is based on FGCU's benchmark scores compared to the average of all college scores within the group, Master's or nationally. A second set of comparisons can be made using the same "raw" data but taking into account certain features which differentiate colleges from each other. These include the composition, level of attainment, age and sex of their student body, and the nature of the institution itself. Weighting each of these and other factors, a "predicted benchmark score" can be arrived at for each college. The adjusted scores represent the performance of the

university in relation to its predicted score. In other words: *How well did the institution do in relation to how it was expected to do?*

In such a comparative framework, and using the same five clusters of effective educational practice, FGCU's impressive performance can be better appreciated.

In the *level of academic challenge* category, FGCU's adjusted scores for first years were better than 94 percent of universities, and for seniors were better than more than 98 percent.

For *active and collaborative learning*, FGCU's scores were in the very highest percentile, better, for first years and for seniors, than the scores of more than 99 percent of all institutions.

In terms of *student faculty interactions*, among first years FGCU performed better than 88 percent of colleges and universities, and among seniors, an even higher 94 percent.

Scores for both groups of FGCU students are very good in relation to *enriching educational experiences*: better than 95 percent of institutions for first year students and, for seniors, better than 99 percent of institutions.

FGCU's scores fall slightly in the fifth category, *supportive campus environment*, but are still extremely high: for first years they are better than 89 percent of the institutions, and for seniors they are better than 85 percent of institutions.

["These scores place FGCU in the very highest category of institutions participating in the NSSE..."]