The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement ("Bessie") measures entering students’ pre-college academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their interest in and expectations for student engagement during college. In the summer of 2008, the BCSSE survey was administered online from mid-June through early September. A total of 460 students took the BCSSE survey.

A second survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement ("Nessie") was given to all first-year students and seniors in the spring of 2009. Because BCSSE and NSSE are companion instruments, responses on the NSSE survey can be compared to those on the BCSSE. A total of 243 students took both surveys in academic year 2008-2009, allowing us to examine how students’ high school experiences and expectations for college affected first-year outcomes.

**Students’ Concerns About the Transition to College**

Incoming first-years were most concerned about their ability to manage their time and learn course material. Women were significantly more concerned about their ability to learn course material than were their male peers. Neither of these concerns was related to first semester grades, second semester grades, or the amount of time spent preparing for class in their first semester. The more difficulty students felt they would have learning course material, the less time they spent relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.) in their first semester.

Interestingly, the amount of time they spent socializing with friends was not related to students’ ratings of the satisfaction of their relationships with peers. Similarly, the amount of time students spent socializing in their first semester was not related to their overall rating of the educational experience here, or whether they would choose to attend Case if given the choice again.

The more concerned incoming students were about their ability to make new friends, the lower their first semester satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with peers. Similarly, the more concerned students were about their ability to interact with faculty, the lower their first semester satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with faculty.

When examining gender differences, an interesting distinction arises. The relationship between concern with making friends and satisfaction with the quality of relationships with peers exists only among men. Conversely, the relationship between concern with the ability to interact with faculty and satisfaction with the quality of relationships with faculty exists only among women. This result suggests that, perhaps, women are better able to overcome their concerns with making friends, whereas men may be better able to overcome their concerns with interacting with faculty members.

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1 For a more complete report of results from the 2008 BCSSE survey please visit: [http://www.cwru.edu/president/cir/BCSSE08.pdf](http://www.cwru.edu/president/cir/BCSSE08.pdf)
**Time Management**

Incoming first-years thought they would spend 26-30 hours per 7-day week preparing for class; however, after one semester at Case, students reported only spending 21-25 hours, on average, preparing for class.

Most students (59%) said they at least “sometimes” went to class unprepared in high school. During their first semester at Case, 80% of students said they at least “sometimes” went to class unprepared.

Unsurprisingly, the more certain students were that they would be able to study when there were other interesting things to do, the less likely they were to attend class unprepared. Still, the majority (66.4%) of students who said they were “very certain” they would be able stay on task “sometimes” came to class unprepared.

Interestingly, the more certain students felt they would be able to study when there were other interesting things to do, the higher their first semester GPA; however, certainty was not related to second semester GPA or with students’ cumulative GPA at the end of their first year. The figure below illustrates this result by examining fall and spring semester GPA among the most confident students (4, 5, and 6 on a six point scale, where 1 = “not at all certain” and 6 = “very certain”) with the least confident students (1, 2, and 3 on the same scale):

![GPA by semester and confidence in the ability to study when there are other interesting things to do](image)

Results of a follow-up analysis revealed that, among the students most confident in their ability to stay on task, average GPA dropped significantly. Among those least confident, GPA actually increased between fall and spring semesters; however, the increase was not statistically significant. These results suggest that students confident in their ability to stay on task hit the ground running but, possibly, find it more difficult to stay focused in their second semester.
**Importance of Social and Academic Support**

Nearly all incoming students (97.5%) thought it would be important for Case to provide support to help them succeed academically, with 66.7% saying they felt it would be “very important.” After one semester, 83.5% of students reported that Case provided “quite a bit” or “very much” of the support they needed to succeed academically. Women were significantly more likely to say that it would be important for Case to provide them help to succeed academically. Women were also more likely to say that Case had provided that support.

The majority of incoming students (70.5%) also believed that it would be important for Case to provide support to help them thrive socially. After one semester, 41.7% of students felt that Case provided “quite a bit” or “very much” of the support they needed to thrive socially. Women were significantly more likely to say that it would be important for Case to provide them help to thrive socially, but men and women were equally likely to say that Case had provided that support.

Results of a predictive analysis revealed that, even after controlling for incoming ratings of importance, the more students felt that Case provided the support to thrive socially and academically, the more satisfied they were with their entire educational experience and the more likely they would choose to attend Case if given the opportunity again. Both academic and social support were significantly, and positively, related to the measures of satisfaction; however, social support was more strongly related to both items than was satisfaction with academic support.

Among women, both social and academic support played significant roles in predicting satisfaction with the entire educational experience at Case. Among men, only social support was related.

**Importance of High School Academic Engagement**

The BCSSE results include six scales on high school academic engagement and expectations for college thought to be predictive of success. All scales are normalized to a 0-10 range and consist of as many as 12 or as few as four BCSSE items. The six scales are as follows:

- **High school academic engagement** – Measured with 12 items assessing engagement in “educationally relevant activities during the last year of high school.” For example, the scale includes the frequency with which students asked questions in class or discussed grades with faculty during their last year in high school.

- **Expected academic engagement** – Measured with eight items assessing the extent to which students expect that they will engage in “educationally relevant behaviors” during the first year of college, such as the extent to which students expect they will ask questions in class, or work with classmates outside of class to complete projects.

- **Expected academic perseverance** – Measured with six items assessing the extent to which students believe that they will able to persevere in the face of challenges. Example questions include the extent to which students feel that they will be able to study when there are other interesting things going on, and the extent to which they will be able to stay positive even when they do poorly on a test or assignment.
• Expected academic difficulty – Measured with four items assessing students’ expected difficulty during the first year of college. Items include the extent to which students feel they will have difficulty learning course material or managing their time.

• Perceived academic preparation – Measured with seven items assessing students’ perceptions of their academic preparation. Items include questions about the extent to which students feel they are prepared to write clearly and effectively and think critically and analytically.

• Importance of campus environment – Measured with six items assessing how important it is to students that the university provides a “challenging and supportive environment.” Items include the extent to which students feel it is important that the university provides support to help them thrive socially or support to help them succeed academically.

We decided to examine whether these new BCSSE scales did, in fact, predict success in the first year by comparing the BCSSE scales with NSSE’s five benchmarks of effective educational practice:

• Level of Academic Challenge – measures the extent to which students exert—and institutions demand—academic effort. Items include time spent preparing for class, number of assigned textbooks, and the extent to which the campus environment is perceived to emphasize academics.

• Active and Collaborative Learning – measures extent to which students engage in classroom activities and collaborate with others to solve problems. Items include the extent to which students asked questions in class, made class presentations, and worked with other students on projects inside and outside of class.

• Student-Faculty Interaction – measures the extent to which students learn and solve problems by interacting with faculty members. Items include the extent to which students discussed grades with faculty, frequency with which students worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework, and promptness with which students received feedback on their academic performance.

• Supportive Campus Environment – measures the extent to which students believe that the institution is committed to their success and cultivates positive relations among different groups on campus. Items include students’ quality of relationships with faculty and peers, and the extent to which the campus environment is perceived to provide support to succeed socially and academically.

• Enriching Educational Experiences – measures the extent to which students engage in complementary learning opportunities in and out of class. Items include student participation in co-curricular activities, community service or volunteer work, and using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment.

In order to determine whether the pre-college BCCSE scales were related to the NSSE benchmark scales, we conducted a series of five multiple regression analyses. For each of the five analyses we entered the six BCSSE scales as predictors of an individual NSSE benchmark. Results are as follows:

• Academic Challenge – Four of the six BCSSE scale items were related to academic challenge. High school academic engagement, expected academic perseverance, and expected academic
difficulty were all positively related to the academic challenge benchmark (i.e., higher scores on the BCSSE items were predictive of higher scores on the NSSE benchmark). Conversely, perceived academic preparation was negatively related to academic challenge. In other words, students who felt more prepared for college had an easier time transitioning to the rigors of academic life at the university.

- Active and Collaborative Learning – Two of the six BCSSE scale items were related to active and collaborative learning. Both measures, high school academic engagement and expected academic engagement, were positively related to this NSSE benchmark. In other words, the more engaged students were in high school and the more they expected to be engaged in college, the more engaged they were.

- Student-Faculty Interaction – The only BCSSE scale item related to student-faculty interaction was high school academic engagement. The more engaged students were in high school, the more likely they were to interact with faculty in their first year.

- Enriching Educational Experiences – The only BCSSE scale item related to the enriching educational experiences benchmark was high school academic engagement. Again, the more engaged a student was in high school, the more likely they were to participate in enriching educational experiences in the first year, such as having serious conversations with students different from themselves, participating in community service or volunteer work, or taking an independent study course.

- Supportive Campus Environment – None of the BCSSE scale items were related to the supportive campus environment benchmark.

The one BCSSE scale item most frequently related to NSSE benchmarks was high school academic engagement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these results suggest that the students who were most engaged in high school are the students who were most engaged during their first semester at Case.

Conclusions

Results of the above analyses suggest:

- Students most concerned about interpersonal relationships before starting at the university are those who struggle the most with interpersonal relationships once they begin.
  - This is especially true among men who are concerned about making friends with peers and among women who are concerned about their interactions with faculty.

- Students confident in their ability to work when there are other interesting things to do appear to hit the ground running, academically, and outperform their peers in their first semester. This difference, however, seems to disappear by the second semester.

- The extent to which the university provides resources to thrive socially is a greater predictor of student satisfaction than is the extent to which the university provides resources to succeed academically.

- High school academic engagement is a predictor of four out of five NSSE benchmark scales, a result that highlights the impact of the high school experience on college outcomes.