



## Selected results from the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – Case Western Reserve University

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced “nessie”) was developed to assess the quality of undergraduate learning by asking students to report on their engagement in classroom learning, in campus activities, and in the community. In the spring of 2009, all first-year students and seniors were invited to complete the survey. This report serves as a summary of the 2009 results. Future reports will examine more specific aspects of the Case undergraduate experience.

### Overall Experience

- The majority of students are satisfied with their experience at Case. Specifically, 88% of first-years and 84% of seniors rated their entire educational experience here as “good” or “excellent.” Similarly, the majority said that they would probably or definitely still choose to attend Case if they could start over (82% of first-years, 71% of seniors).
- Students are engaged in their classes and in the community. Most ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions often or very often (61% of first-years, 63% of seniors) and nearly all at least occasionally make class presentations (93% of first years, 97% of seniors).
- As first-years, 76% of students say they plan to participate in a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment. Among seniors, 66% say they have already participated. Similarly, 75% of seniors participated in community service or volunteer work.
- Students are engaged with faculty. Nearly 93% of first-year students have discussed grades or assignments with an instructor, and more than half have discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class. Nearly half of seniors (46%) said they had worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements, and 86% of seniors had at least occasionally talked about their career plans with a faculty member or advisor.
- Case’s curriculum provides students with important skills. The majority of students felt that Case contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to their ability to write clearly and effectively (60% of first-years, 65% of seniors), speak clearly and effectively (50% of first-years, 60% of seniors), and think critically and analytically (79% of first-years, 87% of seniors). Similarly, 72% of first-years and 72% of seniors felt that Case contributed quite a bit or very much to their acquisition of a broad general education.

### Case Western Reserve Compared to AAU Peers - Benchmark Items

Case’s NSSE results were compared with those of other members of the Association of American Universities (AAU) who also administered the survey in 2009<sup>1</sup>. Though many of the individual NSSE survey questions

<sup>1</sup> AAU universities included in the comparison group: Indiana University, Iowa State, Syracuse, Texas A&M University, University of Arizona, University of Texas at Austin, Tulane University, University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Maryland-College Park, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Oregon, University of Washington-Seattle.

are of interest in their own right, we have chosen to focus this section of our report on the five NSSE benchmark scales. The researchers at NSSE developed these five scales in order to consolidate the 80-plus individual items into five easily interpretable, psychometrically sound scales.

- First-year students at Case significantly outperformed their AAU peers on NSSE's benchmark scale for *Academic Challenge*, which includes measures such as time spent preparing for class, the number of papers written, and the extent to which coursework emphasizes analysis of ideas and not just memorization of facts. The average score on this benchmark for seniors was higher than the average AAU score but the difference was not significant.
- The *Active and Collaborative Learning* benchmark measures extent to which students engage in classroom activities and collaborate with others to solve problems. Neither first-year nor senior students differed significantly from their AAU peers on this benchmark.
- Both seniors and first-year students reported significantly higher levels of *Student-Faculty Interaction* than did their AAU peers. The Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark scale includes the extent to which students discussed grades with an instructor, worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework, received prompt feedback on their performance, and similar measures.
- The fourth benchmark, *Enriching Educational Experiences*, measures the extent to which students engage in complementary learning opportunities such as community service or volunteer work. Seniors, but not first-years, reported higher levels of this benchmark than did their AAU peers.
- Seniors (but not first-years) scored significantly lower than their AAU peers on NSSE's measure of *Supportive Campus Environment*, a scale that includes students' ratings of relationship satisfaction (with students, faculty, administration) and the extent to which students perceive that the campus provides the support needed to thrive as a student both academically and socially.

Though it is a concern that seniors at Case score significantly lower on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark than do students at other AAU institutions, it is important to note that 2009 is the first year since NSSE started providing benchmark scores that Case first-years have not scored significantly lower than their peers on this benchmark.

### **Benchmark Scales and Satisfaction**

Next, we examine the relationship between NSSE benchmark items and students' overall satisfaction with their experiences at Case Western Reserve University. Because students are asked to complete the NSSE survey in both their first and senior years, a subset of students take the survey twice. Specifically, since 2001, a total of 642 students have taken the survey in both their first and senior years.

By studying this subset of students, we can see whether first-year responses on the NSSE benchmark items are related to students' ratings of satisfaction in their senior year. Specifically, we conducted two linear regression analyses where the four<sup>2</sup> NSSE benchmarks were entered as independent, predictor variables. As dependent variables we entered students' satisfaction with their entire educational experience and students' responses on the question asking whether they would still choose to attend Case if they could start over again.

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<sup>2</sup> The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark was calculated on a different scale prior to the 2004 NSSE administration and, as such, is not considered in this analysis.

Results of the first analysis revealed that first-year responses on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark were related to senior year satisfaction with the entire educational experience. Specifically, students who felt the environment was more supportive as first-years were significantly more satisfied as seniors. None of the other benchmarks were related to satisfaction.

A similar result was found with our second measure of satisfaction. Specifically, first-year responses on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark were related to whether, as seniors, they would still choose to attend Case if they could start over again. Additionally, responses on the Active and Collaborative Learning measure were related to this measure. In other words, students who felt the environment was more supportive and felt the learning environment was more active and collaborative as first-years were significantly more likely as seniors to say that they would still choose to attend Case if they could start over again.

### **Benchmark Scales Over Time**

Just as it is important to compare our results to those from other institutions, it is important to track how students' attitudes at Case have changed over time. The NSSE was last given to students in the Spring of 2007. This section examines how student responses on the five benchmark scales have changed since the last administration of the survey.

Among first-year students, there was a significant increase on benchmark scales measuring:

- Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Supportive Campus Environment

And no change on benchmark scales measuring:

- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences

These results are encouraging, especially when taken together with the results of our regression analyses. Specifically, scores on the two benchmark items related to senior year satisfaction - Active and Collaborative Learning and Supportive Campus Environment - significantly increased among first year students between 2007 and 2009.

There were no differences between 2007 and 2009 on any of the benchmark items among seniors.

### **Academic Advising**

The majority of first-year students (67%) and seniors (58%) were satisfied with the quality of academic advising<sup>3</sup>. That said, a larger percentage of students at our AAU peer institutions were satisfied with advising (78% of first-year students and 68% of seniors) than were students at Case.

In order to examine the importance of academic advising, relative to relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, and other students, we conducted a regression equation similar to the one

<sup>3</sup> Students who rated advising as "good" or "excellent."

above. Specifically, we entered students' first-year ratings of relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, peers, and their satisfaction with advising as predictors of senior year satisfaction with their entire educational experience and students' responses on the question asking whether they would still choose to attend Case if they could start over again.

Results showed that satisfaction with advising was unrelated to whether students would choose to attend Case if they could start over again. That said, satisfaction with advising and the quality of relationships with other students were related to students' evaluations of their entire educational experience. Specifically, 51% of students who rated their advising as "excellent" as first-years rated their entire educational experience as "excellent" as seniors. By comparison, only 16% of those who, as first-years, rated their advising as "poor" subsequently rated their entire educational experience as "excellent" as seniors.

### **Gains From First Year to Senior Year**

A number of students (236) completed the NSSE in both their first year and their senior year. By comparing scores from these two administrations of the survey, it is possible to measure changes in students' engagement over their undergraduate career. Results indicated that:

- Students are significantly more likely as seniors than as first-years to ask questions in class, give class presentations, and believe that Case has contributed to their ability to speak and write clearly and effectively.
- As seniors, students were significantly more likely to discuss career plans with faculty and to have worked closely with faculty members on activities other than coursework (i.e., committees, orientation, student life activities, etc).
- In past years, students' relationships with faculty members, administrative personnel, and their fellow students were significantly lower as seniors than as first-years. Importantly, in 2009, no such difference existed.
- Similarly, there was no significant difference between students' first year and senior year ratings of the entire educational experience at Case.

### **Conclusions**

#### Concerns

- Case seniors score significantly lower than their AAU peers on NSSE's measure of supportive campus environment. It should be noted that first-year scores on this measure are highly predictive of overall satisfaction with Case during the senior year.
- Both first-years and seniors scored significantly lower than AAU peers on NSSE's measure of satisfaction with advising. As with supportive campus environment, ratings of satisfaction with advising by first-year students were strongly related to students' evaluations of their entire educational experience.

#### Findings of encouragement

- Case students are generally satisfied and are highly engaged in their classes, in the community, and with faculty.
- Both first-years and seniors believe that their Case experience contributes to a wide variety of

abilities and types of knowledge (i.e., the ability to write and think clearly and effectively, the acquisition of a broad general education).

- For the first time since NSSE began calculating benchmark scales, first-year students were no different from their AAU peers on the supportive campus environment measure.
- Both first-years and seniors were more likely to interact with faculty than were their AAU peers, and seniors reported engaging in enriching educational experiences with more frequency than did their AAU peers.
- From first year to senior year, there was no significant change in students' ratings of the quality of their relationships with faculty, students, or administrative staff.
- From first year to senior year, students report significant positive change in their in-class engagement, their speaking ability, their writing ability, and in their interactions with faculty members.