

University of Victoria 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement

University of Victoria – Institutional Planning and Analysis
February, 2007

2006 National Survey of Student Engagement Report

Institutional Planning and Analysis – University of Victoria

Executive summary

Student engagement is a key predictor of student learning and success, and can be used as an overall measure of educational quality. Specific strategies to increase students' engagement in their studies can be identified by examining results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Five benchmarks were created by NSSE to facilitate the evaluation of student engagement at post-secondary institutions. Universities use benchmarks to compare themselves with system averages and to evaluate institutional changes over time. The benchmarks are comprised of individual questions that are combined to create indices. They encompass constructs of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriched educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment.

First-year students (both at UVic and at most universities across Canada) have lower engagement scores than fourth-year students on most of NSSE's benchmarks: the Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Enriching Educational Experiences. First-year students did, however, report more positive experiences on the benchmark called Supportive Campus Environment, both at UVic and overall.

The results showed that, overall, students at the University of Victoria were engaged in their education and gave positive responses to benchmark questions. In particular, students at UVic gave the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark a high score compared with other Canadian universities in the peer group and first-year UVic students felt especially supported in this area.

In order to discover specific ways to improve student engagement at UVic, individual questions that make up the benchmarks were analysed. For example, one of the questions from the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark asked: "To what extent did your coursework emphasize

synthesizing ideas into more complex relationships?” Students in fourth-year rated this item positively, but those from first-year were significantly less positive. On the other hand, students from both groups said they spent significant time studying.

The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark combined questions such as: asking questions in class, working with classmates on projects, and participating in community-based projects. Differences between first-year and fourth-year results are significant, with fourth-year students demonstrating much higher levels of engagement in collaborative learning, both at UVic and other institutions across North America.

Questions relating to the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark also show significant differences between first- and fourth-year experiences. Fourth-year students are more likely to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor, talk about career plans with faculty or an advisor, and receive prompt written or oral feedback on academic performance.

Complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs—the benchmark called Enrich-0.0tructor,

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Background	3
Methodology	6
Results	7
Level of Academic Challenge.....	8
Active and Collaborative Learning.....	11
Student-Faculty Interaction.....	14
Enriching Educational Experiences.....	17
Supportive Campus Environment.....	20
Overall Quality of Education.....	23
Conclusions	24
Recommendations and Best Practices.....	26
Appendices	28
Appendix 1 (Selected peers)	
Appendix 2 (Respondent characteristics)	
Appendix 3 (Detailed tabular results)	
Appendix 4 (NSSE survey instrument)	

Background

Student engagement, a proxy for overall educational quality, is emerging as an area of interest for both educators and administrators as a means to attract and retain students who aspire to receive an excellent education. The level of student engagement at an institution is determined by the time and energy spent on educationally focused activities. For example, reading, writing, meeting with faculty and peers, participating in discussions inside and outside the classroom, and joining in co-curricular activities reflect students being engaged in their education. George Kuh, Chancellor's Professor at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, is the founder of the National Survey of Student Engagement and his conceptual framework has summarized student engagement research.¹

The extent to which students are engaged in their education impacts their learning and personal development as well as their level of satisfaction and achievement. As such, student engagement can be utilized as a proxy for overall quality of education. Institutional practices that facilitate high levels of student engagement include student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active and collaborative learning, prompt feedback, time spent on task, high expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey was developed to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are related to academic learning, personal development, student satisfaction, retention and completion. The University of Victoria participated in the NSSE survey for the first time in 2006, and the results are integrated into UVic's overall quality assurance procedures and academic program review. By highlighting specific educational practices that are present or absent at the university, improvements in educational quality can be facilitated.

In addition to NSSE, there are a number of other recurring surveys and focus groups at the University of Victoria, each with a specific purpose, population and time-frame. The annual Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC) survey has a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year—all current undergraduates, first-year undergraduates or all graduating students (last administered in 2006). Respondents are asked to evaluate facilities and services, to assess instruction, and to rate their overall educational experiences.

The BC Baccalaureate Graduate Survey is conducted annually to assess student outcomes after they have graduated from university. The survey has been designed to gather information on baccalaureate graduates' level of satisfaction with their education, financing and student debt as

¹ Kuh, George D., The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning
http://nsse.iub.edu/2004_annual_report/pdf/2004_Conceptual_Framework.pdf

well as further education and employment outcomes. The project has adopted a model of interviewing graduates two and five years after graduation, in alternate years. The universities, together with The University Presidents' Council of BC and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, collaborate on the project.

The National Survey of Student Engagement, in existence since 2000, surveyed about 60,000 students at 31 Canadian universities and about 270,000 students at 526 American institutions in 2006. Results from UVic are compared to aggregated results from a select group of Canadian universities. Before the survey was administered UVic was asked to choose institutions that were comparable to it—very small or affiliated colleges were not included in this group. This comparative group of 18 Canadian universities is called “Selected Peers” and the institutions included in the group are listed in Appendix 1.

The results from the University of Victoria are also compared with NSSE results from all institutions. The overall NSSE results reflect mostly American colleges and universities, which comprise 94 percent of institutions who participated in the 2006 survey. It is worth noting that many of the participating American post-secondary institutions were smaller than their Canadian counterparts, therefore their engagement scores could be higher in situations where smaller class sizes affect students' level of engagement. However, the intent of this paper is not to explore the reasons behind Canadian and American differences but to offer a broader context with which to gauge student engagement at UVic.

Student engagement is an integral part of UVic's mission and latest strategic plan, *A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*. Some of the themes in the plan that are integral to student engagement

general education and satisfaction. These factors correlated with NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practices as outlined in the following table. All correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level. It is worth noting that student satisfaction correlates the highest with the benchmark Supportive Campus Environment, and therefore initiatives to support students academically and non-academically would increase the level of student satisfaction with their studies.

NSSE Benchmarks	Practical Competence		General Education		Personal / Social		Grades		Satisfaction	
	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year
Level of Academic Challenge	.42	.37	.49	.47	.43	.41	.16	.13	.28	.27
Active & Collaborative Learning	.34	.34	.35	.34	.39	.38	.15	.15	.24	.23
Student Faculty Interaction	.35	.31	.36	.35	.42	.40	.08	.16	.24	.28
Enriching Educational Experiences	.27	.21	.28	.30	.36	.36	.10	.14	.21	.22
Supportive Campus Environment	.47	.46	.51	.51	.58	.59	.10	.13	.55	.58

Further information about the survey and sampling methodology used by NSSE can be viewed at their website: www.nsse.iub.edu/html/NSSE_Psychometric_Portfolio.cfm. NSSE addresses topics such as response bias, validity and reliability, and concerns about self-reported data.

Results

NSSE created five benchmarks or indices that institutions can use to compare themselves to system averages or to evaluate institutional changes over time. Benchmarks combine a number of questions from the NSSE survey that are similar enough to be able to create indices that reflect various aspects of student engagement.

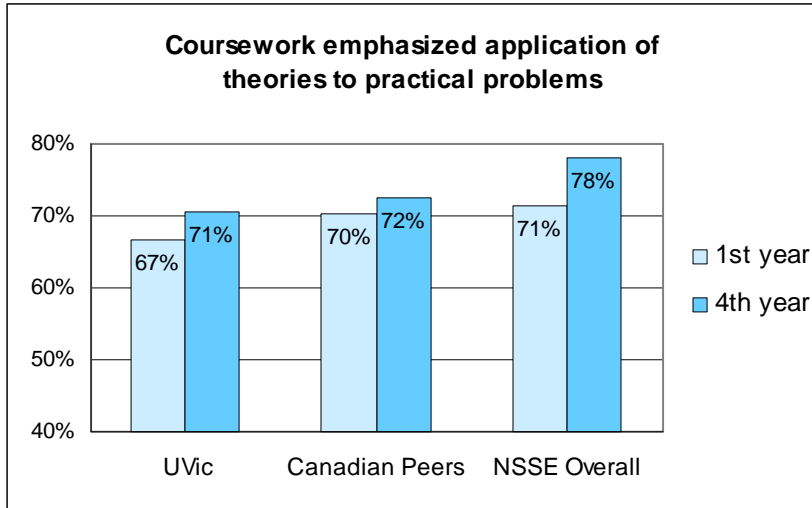
To help evaluate the level of student engagement at the University of Victoria, a number of comparison groups are used to report results. Prior to the administration of the survey, institutions were asked to choose a group of institutions with which they wished to be compared. UVic chose to be compared to a group of 18 Canadian universities, called “selected peers” in this report. Smaller universities and affiliated colleges were excluded from this group.

Another key comparison in this report is between first- and fourth-year students, as results typically differ between these two groups, both at UVic and nationally.

The results from the University of Victoria are also compared with the overall NSSE results for 557 institutions that participated in the 2006 survey. However, the overwhelming majority of participating institutions were American—526 compared to 31 Canadian institutions. Therefore, the overall results reflect mostly the conditions in the United States, not Canada. There are clearly inherent differences in the educational systems between the two countries, but this paper will not be exploring further the reasons behind these differences.

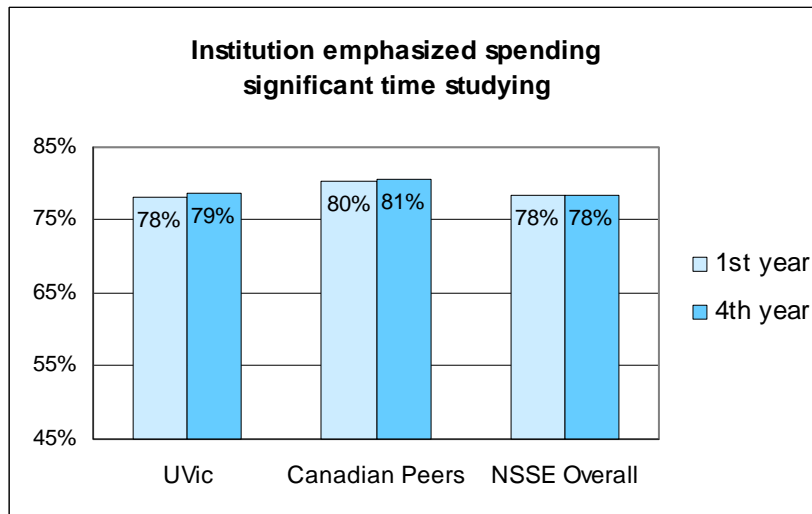
Level of Academic Challenge

In order to further explore the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark, results from a selection



Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

The extent to which institutions encourage students to put effort into their studies is an important gauge of student engagement and satisfaction. At the University of Victoria, approximately 78 percent of all respondents said the institution emphasized spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work. Results were similar across first- and fourth-year levels of study and across institutions in North America.

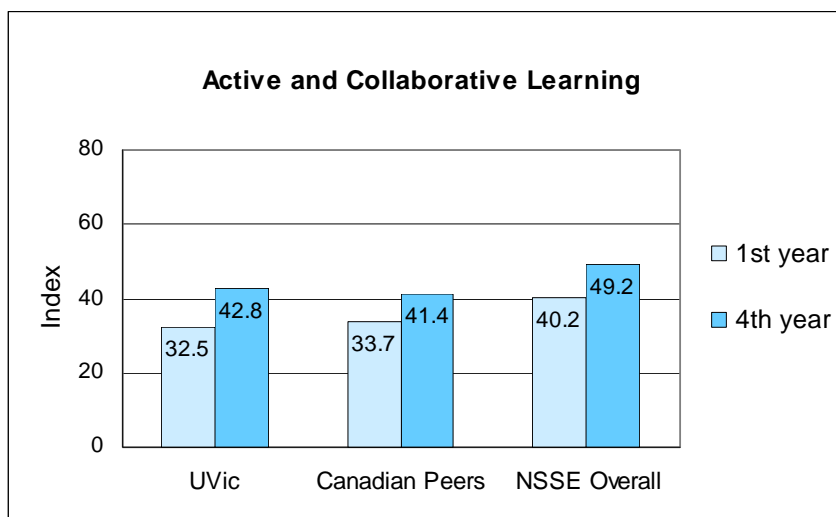


Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

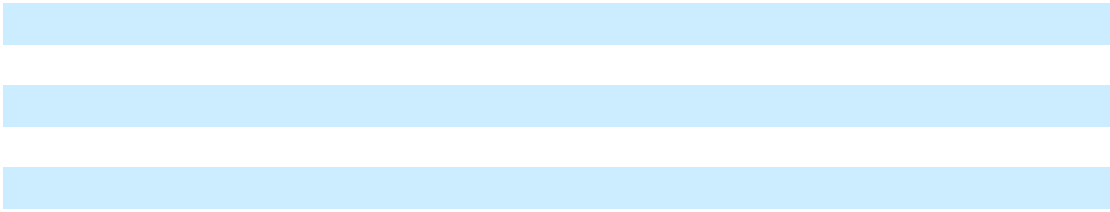
Active and Collaborative Learning

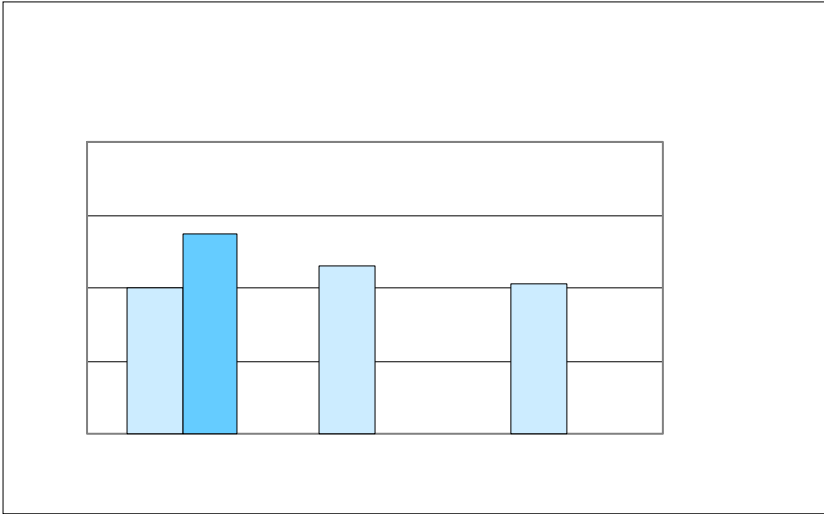
Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for problems they will encounter during and after university.

Respondents from the University of Victoria are relatively engaged in active and collaborative learning at their institution. First-year students at UVic were slightly less engaged than those from other Canadian peer institutions, while fourth-year UVic students were somewhat more engaged than students from the Canadian peer group. In general, fourth-year students score significantly higher than first-year students on this benchmark, both at UVic and at other post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States.



The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark includes individual questions that are listed in the table below. Students were asked to describe how often they did a number of in-class or out-of-class activities—student engagement increases with active participation in these activities. Universities that are committed to increasing student engagement can focus on fostering and promoting these effective institutional practices.

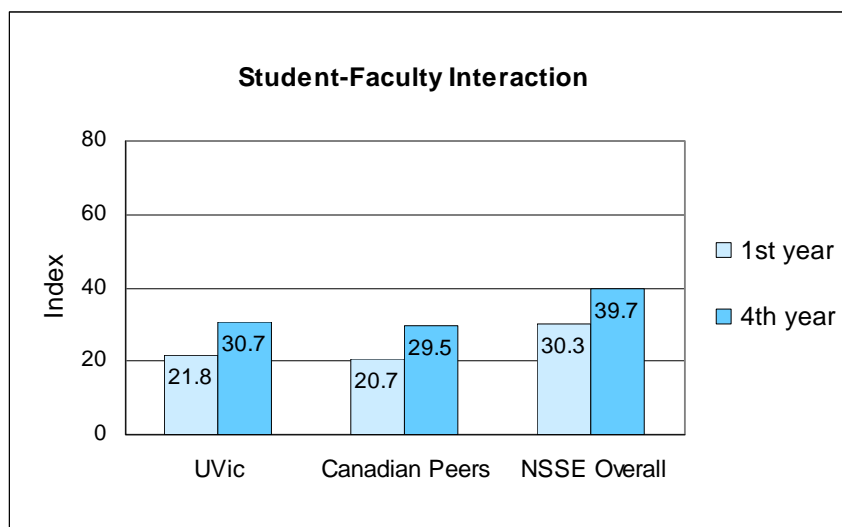




Student-Faculty Interaction

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. Teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.

As with benchmarks previously discussed, there are significant differences between first- and fourth-year results. Fourth-year students score much higher on the Student-Faculty Interaction index than do first-year students.



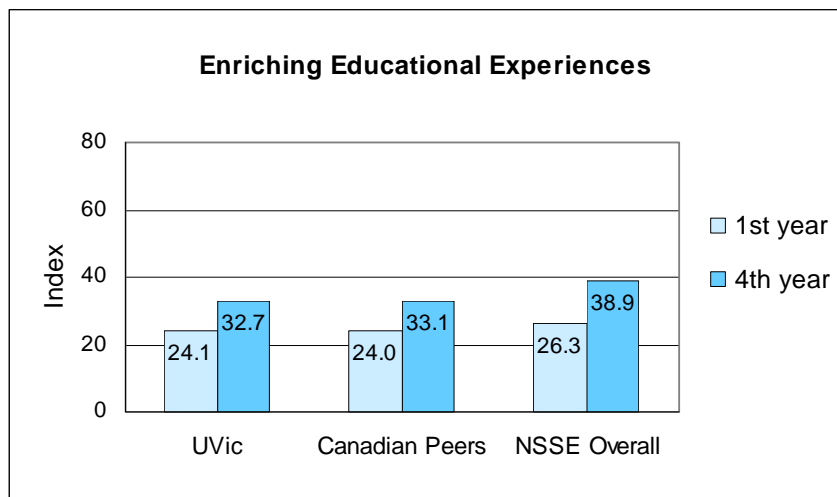
The questions that were combined to create this benchmark focussed on the frequency with which students discussed grades, assignments, ideas, or career plans with their instructors. They were also asked if they worked with faculty on research projects or other activities outside of course or program requirements.

Student-Faculty Interaction	
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework	
Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	
Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements	

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs, and diversity experiences teach students valuable ideas about themselves and others. Technology facilitates collaboration between peers and instructors while internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge learned throughout the educational experience.

Overall, scores for UVic students on the benchmark Enriching Educational Experiences are on par with Canadian peers, both for first- and fourth-year respondents.

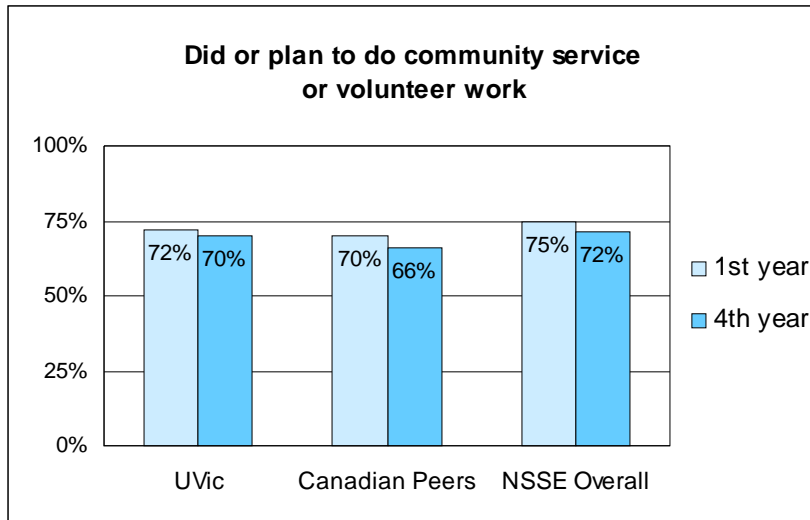


Students were asked whether they had participated in a variety of co-curricular and civic activities, or conversed with other students from diverse backgrounds. These questions relating to Enriching Educational Experiences are listed in the following table.

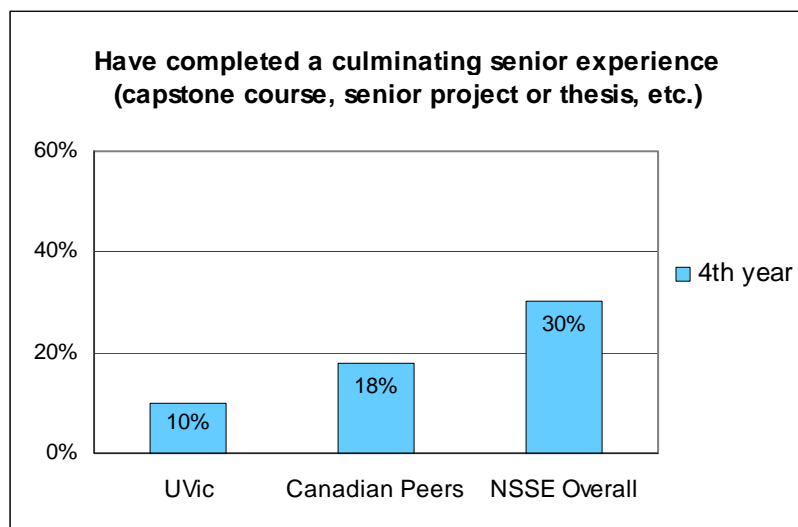
Enriching Educational Experiences

Participating in co-curricular activities (pusating in co-h0.92c-f46 om diver2c009 eiin liste4 385f4820ovTfrnm4 3,85f482-1.rtn le

For seven of the questions in this benchmark, respondents were asked if they had participated in certain activities or *planned* to participate. If neither response was appropriate, they could indicate “do not plan to do,” or “undecided.” The benchmark score was calculated using only the



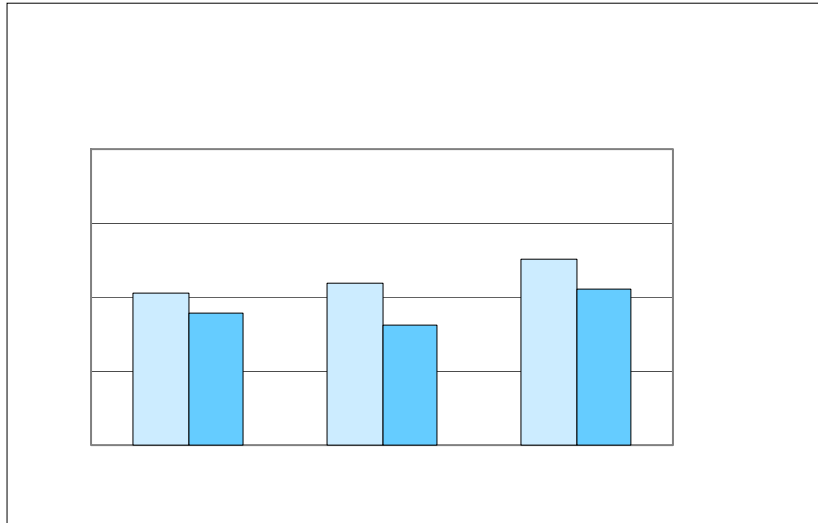
Students' engagement in their education is enhanced by integrating what is learned throughout their undergraduate experience at university, through the completion of a culminating senior experience such as a capstone course, a comprehensive exam or a senior project or thesis. Most UVic fourth-year students reported that they had not completed such an experience. The findings show a substantial gap between UVic and selected peer Canadian universities, and an even larger difference between Canadian and (mostly) American institutions.



Key to enriching students' educational experience is increasing their knowledge of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. In order to enhance a sense of campus community, universities can encourage contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Students were asked if their institution emphasized communication and contact among students of diverse backgrounds "very much," "quite a bit," "some," or "very little." Students from UVic

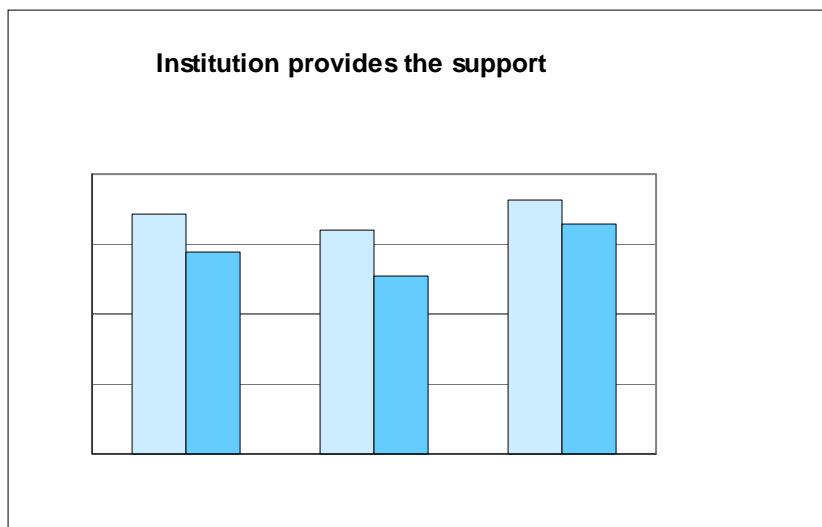
were quite positive in their response, but there is evidence that diverse contact could be improved for both first- and fourth-year students. A total of 41 percent of first-year students felt that diversity was encouraged “very much” or “quite a bit,” while fourth-year students were slightly more critical—26 percent said multicultural contact was encouraged “*very little*” compared to 21 percent of first-year respondents.



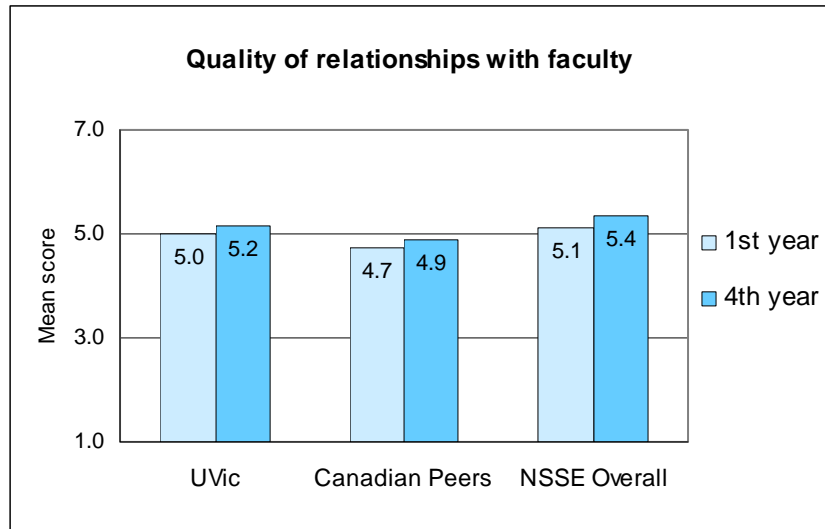
A supportive campus environment involves providing academic and social support in a friendly, supportive and helpful manner. The six questions used to create the benchmark are listed in the following table.

Supportive Campus Environment
Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
Quality of relationships with other students
Quality of relationships with faculty members
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

One of the questions included in this benchmark asked students to rate the extent to which their institution emphasized providing the support they needed to succeed academically. Students were given the following response options: “very much,” “quite a bit,” “some,” or “very little.” UVic respondents were very positive about the academic support they received and first-year students felt particularly supported.



Another question included in the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark asked students to describe the quality of their relationships with faculty members on a seven-point scale from 7 (“available,” “helpful” or “sympathetic”) to 1 (“unavailable,” “unhelpful” or “unsympathetic.”) University of Victoria respondents were positive in their assessment of faculty; evaluations were even higher if they were in fourth-year. Average scores are shown in the chart below—the maximum score was seven and the minimum was one.



Conclusions

Student engagement is a key predictor of student learning and success, and is a proxy for overall educational quality. Specific strategies to increase student engagement can be identified by examining the NSSE survey results.

First-year students generally have lower engagement scores than fourth-year students on most of NSSE's benchmarks. First-year students did, however, report more positive experiences on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark, both at the University of Victoria and other post-secondary institutions.

Engagement results for UVic students were favourable compared to the national average and benchmarks as well as individual questions were analyzed. The Level of Academic Challenge benchmark, for example, included questions about the amount of time spent preparing for class, the amount of reading and writing that students did, and the use of higher order thinking skills. Results are comparable between UVic students and the peer group for this benchmark, but the results for specific questions show substantial differences, depending on the comparison group.

The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark included questions such as asking questions in class, working with classmates on projects, and participating in community-based projects. Fourth-year students demonstrated much higher levels of engagement in collaborative learning, both at UVic and other institutions across North America, compared with first-year students.

Questions relating to the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark also show significant differences between first- and fourth-year experiences. Fourth-year students are more likely to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor, talk about career plans with faculty or an advisor, and receive prompt written or oral feedback on academic performance.

The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark includes questions about the completion of practicum and co-op experiences, community service, and experiences with students from different backgrounds. Except for the completion of a culminating senior experience, University of Victoria students are on par with or exceed national peer student engagement results.

The Supportive Campus Environment benchmark combined questions relating to academic support, the quality of relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, and other students. UVic students gave positive responses to all of these questions.

In addition to questions used to create student engagement benchmarks, the NSSE survey asked students to evaluate their overall educational experience at UVic and whether they would choose

to go to UVic again if they started over. Both questions received very positive responses from first- and fourth-year students.

Integrating the National Survey of Student Engagement into UVic's overall quality assurance procedures and academic review process is consistent with the university's strategic plan—*A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*.

Recommendations and Best Practices

As evidenced in this paper, students at the University of Victoria are engaged in their education to the same extent or more than selected Canadian peers. Students gave high evaluations to their entire educational experience at UVic and were more likely to say they would go to the same institution if starting over again. There were certain areas where UVic students gave particularly high ratings, compared to the overall NSSE results.⁶ Some of these highly rated items were:

- Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others (students, family members, co-workers) outside of class
- Number of books read on your own for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment
- Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities
- Number of hours spent preparing for class (studying, writing, doing homework, etc)
- Voting in local, state, or national elections

Comparing the results from UVic students with the overall North American NSSE results provides an opportunity to target areas where improvements could be made, in order to further increase student engagement.⁷ A number of individual questions that were used in the creation of NSSE benchmarks show specific areas where adjustments in educational practices could enhance student engagement.

- Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions
- Make a class presentation
- Work with other students on projects *during class*
- Participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discuss grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talk about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Receive prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on academic performance
- Work with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc)
- Foreign language coursework
- Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc)

⁶ Differences are statistically significant ($p < .001$) and the effect sizes are between .2 and .4

⁷ Differences are statistically significant ($p < .001$) and the effect sizes are between .3 and .7

A number of initiatives to address student engagement are already in process at the University of Victoria through the Learning and Teaching Centre.⁸ The well-known Course Redesign Workshop is an intensive week long opportunity for faculty to re-design a course from start to finish. It focuses on the student experience by helping colleagues to line up learning outcomes, teaching methods and effective assessment in their course curriculum design.⁹

Other practical recommendations and “best practices” to increase student engagement will continue to be addressed as the University of Victoria continues to focus on delivering quality education.

⁸ The Learning and Teaching Centre’s website is: <http://web.uvic.ca/terc/index/index.htm>. The latest issue of their newsletter is dedicated to the subject of student engagement:

http://web.uvic.ca/terc/newletter/documents/VoIIINo3Aug2006FINAL_000.pdf

⁹ For this event at the Learning and Teaching Centre see their calendar: <http://web.uvic.ca/terc/events/2007/April.htm#CRW>

Appendix 1

Selected peers

Before the survey was administered by NSSE, the University of Victoria was asked to select a group of institutions called “selected peers.” NSSE produced results for this group so that UVic results could be compared against a system average.

This is the list of institutions in the University of Victoria’s “selected peers” comparator group. There are 18 Canadian universities in this group—smaller universities and affiliated colleges were excluded from the selection.

Institution Name	Location
Carleton University	Ottawa, Ontario
Concordia University	Montreal, Quebec
Simon Fraser University	Burnaby, British Columbia
University of Alberta	Edmonton, Alberta
University of British Columbia	Vancouver, British Columbia
University of Guelph	Guelph, Ontario
University of Manitoba	Winnipeg, Manitoba
University of New Brunswick	Fredericton, New Brunswick
University of New Brunswick	Saint John's, New Brunswick
University of Regina	Regina, Saskatchewan
University of Saskatchewan	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
University of Toronto	Toronto, Ontario
University of Waterloo	Waterloo, Ontario
University of Western Ontario	London, Ontario
York University	Toronto, Ontario

Appendix 2

