

Summary of the 2001 National Survey of Student Engagement for UW-La Crosse

The National Survey of Student Engagement ([NSSE](#)) assesses college students' involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities that are associated with academic achievement. The NSSE is based on extensive research that shows that "the time and energy college students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development."¹ The survey questionnaire, the [College Student Report](#), includes items "that are known to be related to important college outcomes" and encompasses a broad range of activities from such things as the number of papers students write and participation in class discussions to their involvement in experiential learning and extracurricular activities.

Why did UW-La Crosse participate in the NSSE? Participation in the NSSE is part of ongoing institutional assessment of student learning and development at UW-L. The survey provides important information about student experiences and how the institution uses its resources to support academic and personal development. Because it is a national survey, UW-L can also compare its performance to that of similar institutions. The NSSE results should be useful throughout the university to improve instruction, curricula and services. In addition, all UW System institutions participated in the 2001 NSSE to gather information for the annual system-wide accountability report, "Achieving Excellence," and the UW comprehensive campuses, participating as a consortium, were able to add 20 items to the questionnaire about student development and student perceptions of services and campus climate.

How Did UW-La Crosse Do on the NSSE? The NSSE survey items are clustered into five benchmarks of effective educational practice. Each benchmark is based on a group of survey questions and represents an important aspect of collegiate educational experience. The benchmarks are:²

- **Level of Academic Challenge**—time spent preparing for class; amount of reading and writing; institutional expectations for academic performance.
- **Active and Collaborative Learning**—participating in class; working collaboratively with other students inside and outside of class; tutoring and so forth.
- **Student Interactions with Faculty Members**—talking with faculty members and advisors; discussing ideas from classes with faculty members outside of class; receiving prompt feedback on academic performance; working with a faculty member on a research project.
- **Enriching Educational Experiences**—talking with students with different racial or ethnic backgrounds or with different political opinions or values; using electronic technology; participating in such activities as internships, community service, study abroad, co-curricular activities, or a culminating senior experience.
- **Supportive Campus Environment**—the extent to which students perceive the campus as helping them succeed academically and socially; assists them in coping with non-academic responsibilities; promotes supportive relations between students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative personnel and offices.

Table 1 indicates the benchmark scores for UW-L³, UW System comprehensive institutions, Master's Institutions (N=193) and the National sample (N=467 institutions). Each benchmark is a mean score based on a cluster of items, and standardized on a 100-point scale. The differences between benchmark scores for UW-L and comparison groups appear small, but a difference of only one (1) point in the score can be a difference of 10 percentile points. Table 2 contains the percentile ranges for the UW-La Crosse Benchmark scores compared to Master's institutions and to all the institutions in the survey. As indicated, UW-L First-Year students were below the 50th percentile for all five benchmarks. Seniors were above the 50th percentile in Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, and Enriching Educational Activities. Table 3 reports on eight of the 41 individual items, four in which UW-L students were above the national average and four in which UW-L students were below the national average.

¹ [The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties](#).

² For information about the nature and development of the benchmark categories see [2001 NSSE: Viewpoint Improving the College Experience: Using Effective Educational Practices](#), and [Construction of the 2000-2001: NSSE Benchmarks](#).

³ Results are based on the responses of 1259 UW-L students who completed the survey (702 freshmen and 557 seniors).

Table 1: Benchmark Scores

Benchmark Category	First Year				Senior			
	UW-L	UW System	Master's	National	UW-L	UW System	Master's	National
Level of Academic Challenge	50.8	48.9	51.6	52.9	56.9	54.5	55.8	56.6
Active & Collaborative Learning	38.4	35.7	40.5	40.9	52.0	49.5	50.2	49.7
Student Interactions with Faculty	28.6	29.6	34.2	35.1	41.1	38.8	41.7	42.9
Enriching Educational Activities	52.0	49.3	52.9	55.4	47.2	43.7	45.5	47.6
Supportive Campus Environment	56.0	57.5	59.8	60.2	54.3	55.0	56.8	56.8

Table 2: Percentile Ranges of UW-L Benchmark Scores

Benchmark Category	Percentile Range for UW-L First-Year Students		Percentile Range for UW-L Seniors	
	Master's	National	Master's	National
Level of Academic Challenge	40 th -50 th	30 th -40 th	60 th -70 th	60 th -70 th
Active & Collaborative Learning	30 th -40 th	30 th -40 th	70 th -80 th	70 th -80 th
Student Interactions with Faculty	10 th -20 th	10 th -20 th	40 th -50 th	40 th -50 th
Enriching Educational Activities	40 th -50 th	30 th -40 th	60 th -70 th	50 th -60 th
Supportive Campus Environment	20 th -30 th	20 th -30 th	30 th -40 th	30 th -40 th

Table 3: UW-L Student Performance on Select NSSE Items

NSSE Item ⁴	UW-L Students
	ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE
Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	First-Year students and Seniors
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	Seniors
Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	Seniors
Amount of time preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program)	Seniors nationally and First-Year for master's institutions
	BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	First-Year students
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	First-Year students and Seniors
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	First-Year students
Evaluated the quality of academic advising received at the institution	First-Year students and Seniors

Use of the NSSE Results. The NSSE assesses educational quality in terms of how students engage in educationally purposeful activities and how the university allocates its resources, organizes curricula and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in educationally meaningful activities. Thus, it complements other measures of educational quality such as students' satisfaction, quality of students, quality of faculty, etc.

The NSSE will be used by UW System to demonstrate how campuses are meeting system-wide goals for educational quality. At UW-La Crosse, the NSSE can serve as an important source of information about students' involvement and experiences, and can help

- identify areas of educational strength and weakness at UW-L.
- assess student growth and development from the first year to the senior year.
- monitor campus progress over time.
- faculty, staff, administrators and students better understand and improve the quality of education—curriculum, instruction, student services.

Interested readers can examine the survey results in more detail in the report, [NSSE 2001 Report for UW-La Crosse](http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/assessment/A_NSSE.htm) (http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/assessment/A_NSSE.htm)

⁴ These 8 items were selected because they reflect differences between UW-L and the national norms. See the full report for all the survey items.