

## **Background on NSSE**

UW-La Crosse participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) every 3 years. The purpose of the NSSE is to “gain knowledge about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that [UWL provides] for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.”

UWL first-year and senior students completed the survey in February and March 2020; most responses were entered before the closing of campus due to the COVID pandemic. UWL's NSSE results are compared to results from three other groups of institutions to identify possible strengths or areas for improvement. These groups are:

- all UW Comprehensive Campuses,
- [our self-identified IPEDS Peers](#) (institutions with similar size, type, and program array), and
- the overall NSSE national sample from all schools who administered the survey in 2019/2020.

## **Interest in the First Year Experience**

UWL has taken multiple steps to better understand and improve the experience of students in their first year, including participating in the AACSB Re-Imagining the First Year (RFY) initiative, implementing a required First Year Seminar (FYS), and making changes to first year academic advising. This will explore items that provide more information about what students are saying about that first year through their responses to the NSSE.

## **A Challenging and Beneficial Academic Experience**

### *Quantitative Reasoning*

***UWL first-year students report higher levels of engagement than UW System, IPEDS, and National peers with tasks that require quantitative reasoning;*** as in, applying numerical information to understand or analyze a problem.<sup>1</sup>

- **54%** reported reaching conclusions based on analysis of numerical information
- **45%** reported using numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue
- **43%** reported evaluating what others have concluded from numerical information

### *Collaborative Learning*

***UWL first-year students report that they collaborate with other students to learn course materials at higher levels than UW System peers.***

- **58%** asked another student to help them understand course material
- **59%** explained course material to one or more students
- **52%** prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students
- **57%** worked with others on course projects or assignments

### *Higher-Order Learning, Reflective Learning, and Course Challenge*

***UWL first-year students indicated their courses were academically challenging, with activities that involved higher-order and reflective learning***<sup>2</sup>.

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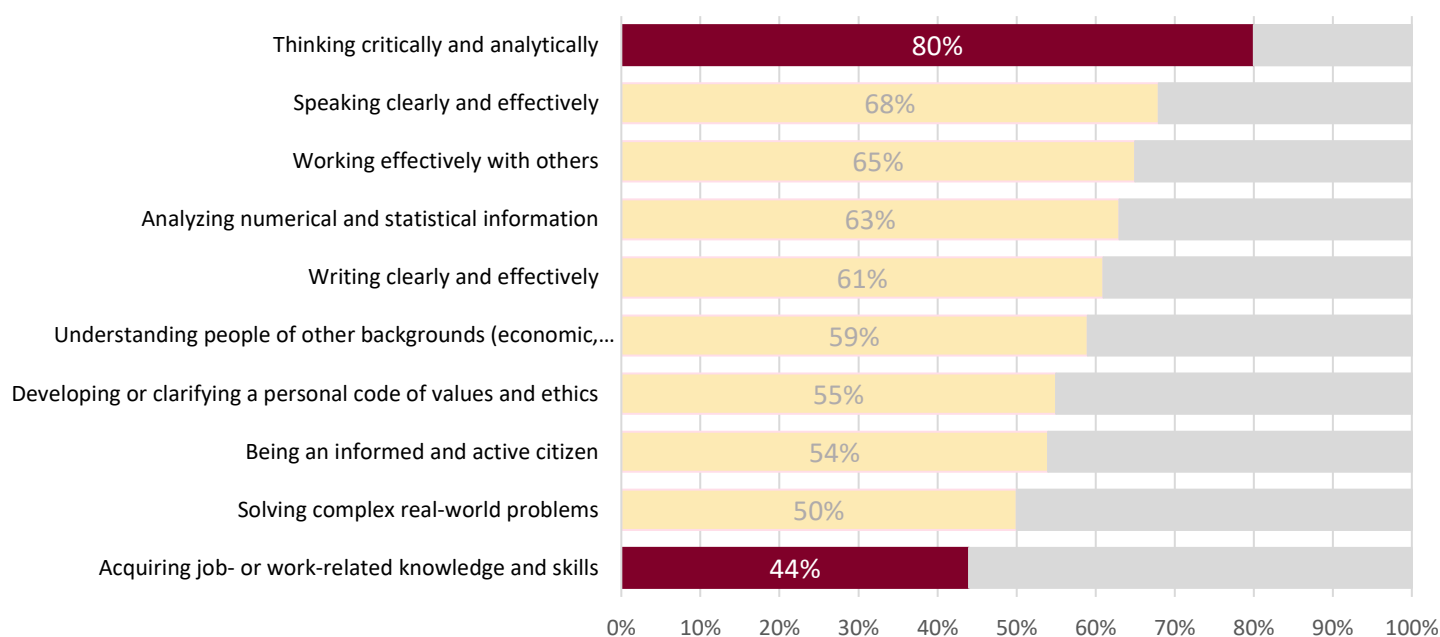
<sup>1</sup> Mean scores on all three of the indicators are above the three comparison groups. Percentages are based on those reporting “often” or “very often”.

<sup>2</sup> Mean score on higher-order learning above all three comparison groups, reflective learning and course challenge item means above two comparison groups. Percentages of higher-order and reflective learning items based on scores of “often/very often”.

- **77%** reported being asked to apply facts, theories, or methods to practical problems, indicative of higher-order learning (i.e. above pure memorization).
- **57%** reported being asked to connect their learning to societal problems or issues, indicative of reflective learning.
- **85%** indicated their courses challenged them to do their best work.<sup>3</sup>

### *Development of Critical Skills*

**8 in 10 first-year students report that their experience at UWL has contributed to their knowledge, skills, and abilities to think critically and analytically. 4 in 10 report that their experience has contributed to them acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills.** An area for growth, then, could be in helping students make the connections between their new skills and how those skills will translate in a future career and workplace.



### **UWL Providing Support of Well-being and Sense of Belonging**

**Over 8 in 10 first-year students indicated UWL provided support for their well-being.**

- **89%** indicated that UWL provided support for their overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.) at levels above all three comparison groups.

**And over 8 in 10 reported high levels of belongingness on a three-item scale<sup>4</sup>.**

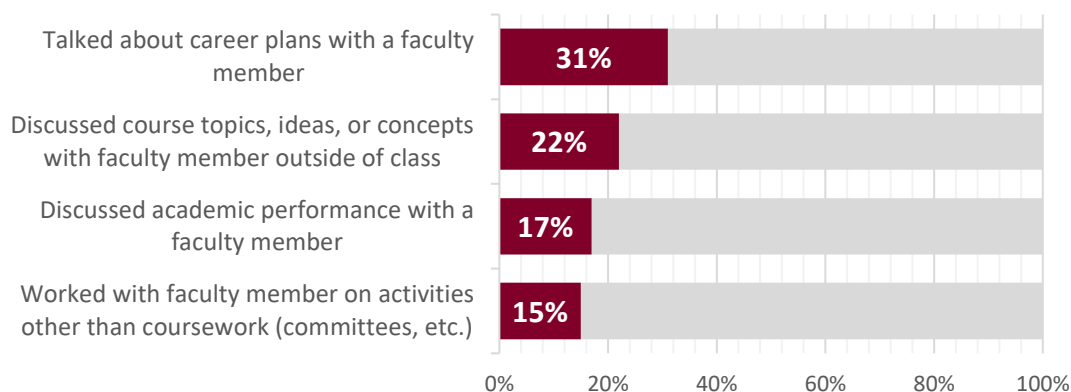
- **93%** agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves.
- **84%** agreed they felt valued by the institution.
- **85%** agreed they felt like part of the community.

<sup>3</sup> Ratings at 5 or above on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Mean surpassed UW System and IPEDS Peers.

<sup>4</sup> UWL mean scores on all three items of the belongingness scale were above our UW System peers.

### **Faculty Interaction: An Area for Improvement**

*Items related to levels of faculty interaction with first-year students highlighted a need for improvement.* UWL first-year students indicated lower levels of contact with faculty than our comparison groups on three items.



- **84%** of UWL first-year students did indicate positive relationships with faculty.<sup>5</sup>

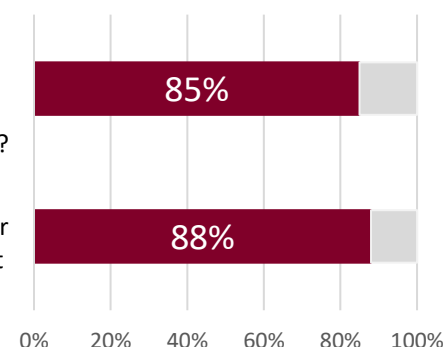
### **Overall Evaluation and Intent to Return**

First year students indicated high positive evaluation of their experiences and desire to return at levels above our UW System peers.

**89%** of UWL first-year students intend to return for a second year

FY: If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

FY: How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?



### **How did First Year Seminar participation affect student responses?**

The Fall term of 2019 marked the start of UWL's new First Year Seminar course. A statistical comparison was completed of first-year students responses who had taken this course (n= 181) versus those who had not (n=503) on each of the items in this brief. No significant findings were identified in any of the comparisons.

### **For Additional Information**

For more information on the NSSE and its use by higher education institutions, please go to:

<https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/index.html> If you have questions specific to this brief or results at UW-La Crosse, please contact Patrick Barlow ([pbarlow@uwlax.edu](mailto:pbarlow@uwlax.edu)), Institutional Research, Assessment, & Planning.

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of ratings at 5 or above on 7 point scale from 1 (poor) to 7 (excellent).