

Beginning College Student Satisfaction Survey (BCSSE)

Full Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH OFFICE

In the fall of 2009, 239 freshmen completed the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), a response rate of 23%. The majority of students (n= 221) completed the survey after attending orientation at the University. The BCSSE measures entering college students' high school academic and extracurricular experiences, as well as their expectations for their first year of college. This survey allows the University's Institutional Research Office to analyze desirable student learning outcomes. It can aid in the design of pre-orientation programs, student services, and other efforts aimed at helping students transition through their first year of college. The questions were classified into six main categories: High School Academic Engagement (HSE), Expected Academic Engagement (EAE), Expected Academic Perseverance (EAP), Expected Academic Difficulty (EAD), Perceived Academic Preparation (PAP), and Importance of Campus Environment (ICE). Within each category, information regarding levels of academic engagement with faculty and students, time and effort students are willing to invest in their education, abilities students possess to perform academically, and commitment to academic excellence is available. (A full list of questions contained in the survey is provided immediately following the survey summary.)

High School Academic Engagement

The High School Academic Engagement (HSE) scale evaluated the levels of engagement in educationally relevant behaviors during the last year of high school. Incoming freshman class high school grades were reported: 37% received a B or B+, 31% received an A-, and 28% received an A. The students who participated in this survey report having many academic experiences. The majority of the students (58%) have completed three or more honors courses and 40% of these students actually completed five or more honors courses. Sixty-three percent of the participants were enrolled in one or more Advanced Placement (AP) course. Thirty three have completed one or more classes for college credit during their last year of high school. During the last year of high school, 62% of students have completed "quite a bit" of assigned reading, 71% of students wrote many short papers (five pages or less), and 48% wrote a fair amount of long papers or reports (five pages or more). When examining this information it becomes apparent that these students are academically advanced and experienced. These scores and percentages represent their ability to perform well in college.

Students were also asked to report how much time they spent preparing for class throughout their last year of high school. Sixty four percent of students report spending between one and 15 per week. In addition to preparing for class, participants in this survey also reported the time spent on activities outside of school. Approximately 62% of students worked twenty hours or less within a week, and 53% participated in up to twenty hours of extracurricular activities. The majority of students who participated in the survey were involved in athletics (40%), performing/ visual arts (26%), community service (49%), and academic honor societies (30%). There were also activities that were of little importance to students. These were the extracurricular programs that students were not involved in: student government (69%), academic clubs (55%), student newspaper and yearbook (66%), vocational clubs (74%),and religious youth groups (57%).

To further understand students' engagement in high school students were asked to describe their levels of participation within the classroom. These questions help determine the amount students engaged with faculty and other students. In the last year of high school, 80% of students asked questions and contributed to class discussions often/very often, 41% discussed grades or assignments with their

professors often/very often, and 45% claim to have sometimes discussed ideas from readings or classes with their teachers outside of class. Questions concerning the level of engagement with other students revealed that: 65% worked with other students on projects during class often/very often, 53% reported sometimes working with students outside of class on projects, 36% of students have sometimes had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity, and 35% have had conversations with students who have different political, religious, or personal beliefs on occasion.

Expected Academic Engagement

Students participating in the BCSSE were asked to answer questions pertaining to the expected amount of academic engagement during their upcoming year of college. These questions were identical to the questions asked in the High School Engagement category. Students were asked to report what they expected their college grades to be: 56% of students hoped to receive a B/B+, 27% hope to receive an A-, and 12% hope to achieve an A. The percentages of students who expect to achieve an A or A- in college decreased in comparison to the students who actually did achieve an A or A- in high school. Instead the percentage of students hoping to receive a B or B+ increased. After conducting a Crosstab analysis it became evident that students who got A's in high school are aiming for at least an A- in college and students who got an A- in high school are aiming for a B+ in college. On the other hand, students with grades of a B+ or lower are aiming for higher grades in college. Those students who have come to the University from a moderate to extremely challenging high school make up the majority of the students who are aiming for a B+ or better in college. The comparison between actual grades achieved in high school and expected grades in college can be seen in Table 1. The impact an academically challenging high school had on the expected college grades of students is displayed in Table 2.

Table 1
Comparison between High School Grades and Expected College Grades

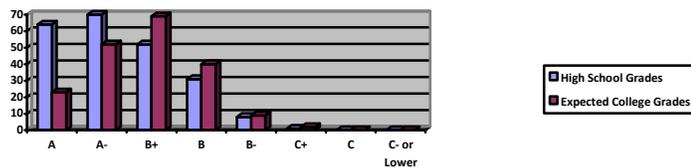
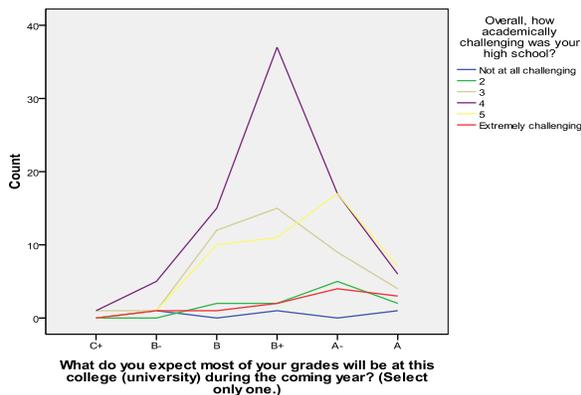
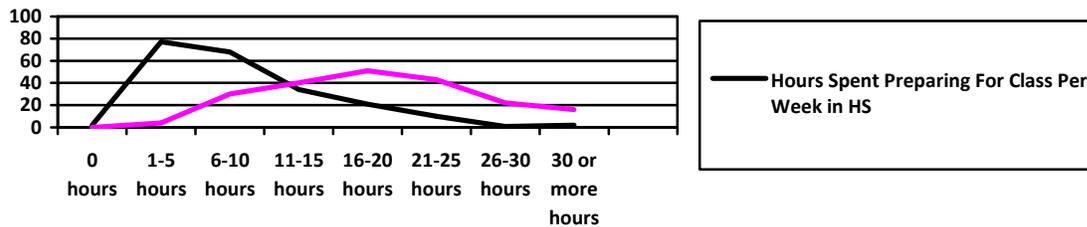


Table 2
Impact of Challenging High School on Expected College Grades



Questions on the survey also evaluated student commitment to education and investment of time and effort. At least 65% of students expect to spend anywhere from 16 to more than 30 hours per week preparing for class. The comparison between the amount of time students plan to spend preparing for class in college and time spent in high school is available in Table 3. Eighty-one percent of students plan to work ten hours or less per week (38% of which do not plan to work). Sixty-one percent of students also expect to spend up to ten hours participating in extracurricular activities. Upon entering college students are able to recognize that their workloads will increase from the last year of high school.

Table 3
Time Spent Preparing for Class



The amount of “work for pay” and extracurricular activities prevalent in high school students has decreased in participation hours for college students. The amount of students who did not work increased from 30% in the last year of high school to 38% in college. Also, 29% of students dedicated 11-15 hours to clubs or activities in high school. Only 21% of incoming college students plan to keep this same commitment level. Students are still extremely interested in participating in clubs and activities, but are unsure about how to manage their time appropriately. Within the survey itself, 73% of students believe that managing their time will prove to be very difficult in the upcoming year.

The Expected Academic Engagement scale also evaluates the levels of engagement with faculty and other students. These questions are identical to the HSE scale. Within the classroom environment, 72% of students expect to ask questions and contribute to class discussions often/very often, 57% of students plan to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor often/very often, and 45% of students claim to have expectations of discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty. There is a strong correlation between engagements with faculty in high school and engagement with faculty in college. These correlations can be seen in Tables 4, 5, and 6. The percentages are very similar to the engagement students had with their faculty during their last year of high school and expectations for their first year of college. The vast majority of students (69%) do not believe there will be any difficulty interacting with faculty. This certainty comes from the strong interactions students were participating in during the high school education and the academically challenging environments the students come from. Seventy-two percent of students come from a high school that was moderately to very challenging in academic nature; therefore, they feel more prepared to do the work required of them. Crosstab Analysis revealed that students expect to participate at or above their levels of participation while in high school during college.

Table 4
Discussing Grades in HS vs. College

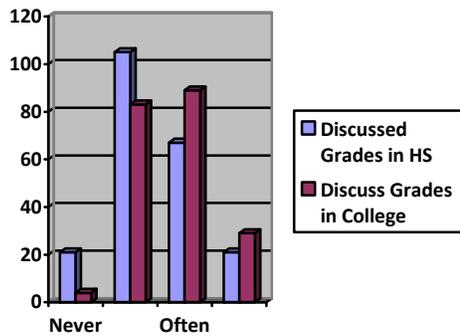


Table 5
Discussing Reading in HS vs. College

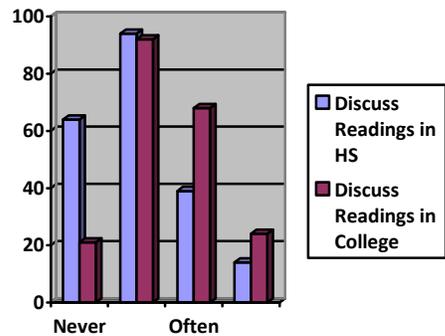
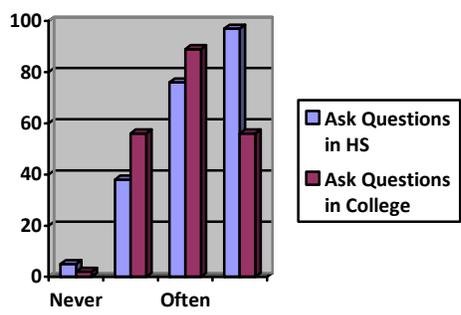


Table 6
Asking Questions in Hs vs. College

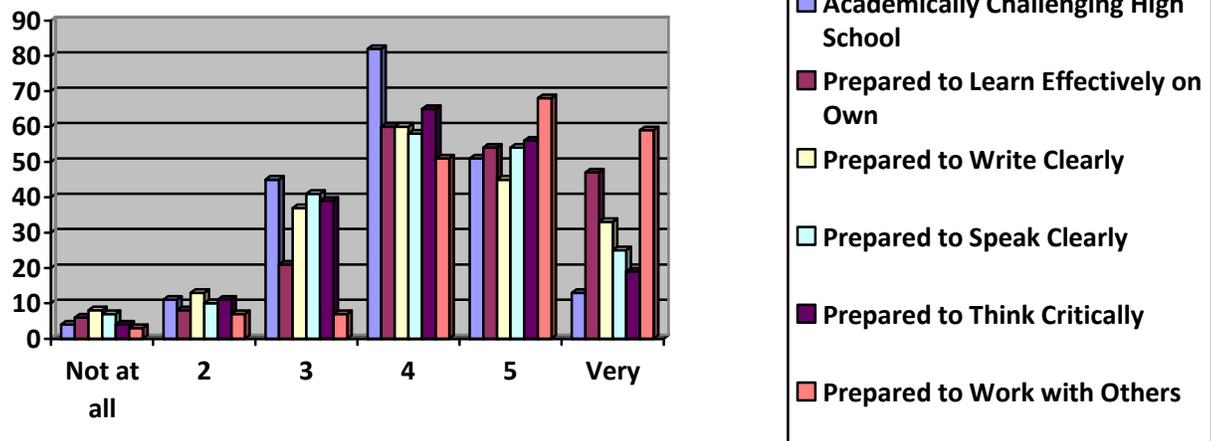


Students were also asked to report their expected levels of engagement with other students. 50% of students expect to work with others in class on projects often/very often, 66% imagine they will work with classmates outside of class to prepare projects, 43% expect to sometimes have serious conversations with students of different races or ethnicities, and 37% of students will have conversations with students who have different beliefs than they do quite often. Students are reporting higher frequencies of engagement with other students in their upcoming year of college. (A university is typically more diverse of a population than a high school and offers experiences to students that were previously unavailable. These students claim that they feel very prepared to work with others (84%), and value opportunities to interact with students from different economical, social, and racial/ethnic backgrounds (75%).)

Perceived Academic Preparedness

The Perceived Academic Preparedness (PAP) scale evaluates a student's overall ability, understanding, and preparedness upon entering their first year in college. Students who came from a moderately to very challenging high school reported feeling the most prepared to tackle these topics while in college. When analyzing the specific components, 71% feel prepared to write clearly and effectively, 71% are prepared to speak clearly and effectively, 73% consider themselves able to think critically and analytically, and 54% are certain in their abilities to analyze math and quantitative problems. Overall, students feel academically prepared on all markers. A clearer picture of this preparedness can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7
Level of preparedness in various subjects compared to the academically challenging nature of High School



These components represent students' confidence in their abilities to improve their knowledge and understanding of material, along with commitment to their education based on the challenging nature of their high school. Seventy three percent of participants report that they feel moderately to very prepared in their abilities to learn independently. This is strengthened in students who came from a challenging high school. Within the category of students who reported that they came from an extremely challenging high school, 64% reported feeling very prepared in their ability to learn effectively on their own. Twenty five percent of the students who came from schools that were not challenging report feeling "not at all prepared" for college. In fact the percentage of students from non-academically challenging high schools makes up 17% of the total students who feel unprepared for college. The grades received by each student while enrolled in high school appear to have an impact on their level of preparedness for college. 64% of students who feel very prepared to write clearly and effectively had grades of A or A-. This also applies to a student's ability to speak clearly and effectively, think critically and analytically, work effectively with others, and learn effectively on their own. However, regardless of the challenging nature of one's high school and their high school grades, students' have an overall sense of feeling moderately prepared to do any of the above mentioned tasks.

Expected Academic Difficulty

Some of the information provided in this scale has been used throughout the summary in order to further describe the students, such as, levels of difficulty in interacting with faculty and time management. In addition to these topics, this scale addresses the level of difficulty students believe they will have in learning course material. An approximate 64% of students imagine it will be moderately difficult to learn the material taught in college (Table 8). At the same time, 64% of students imagine they will have no difficulty in getting help with their school work, which is displayed in Table 9.

Table 8

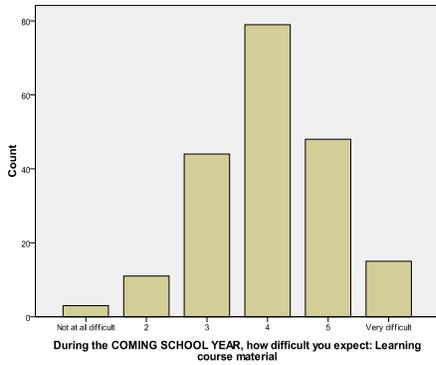
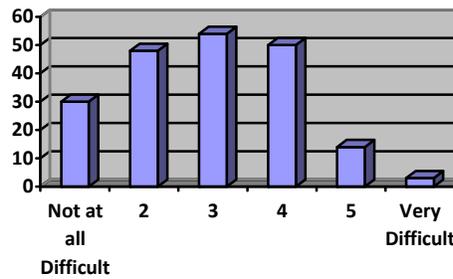


Table 9

During the coming year, how difficult do you expect it to be to get help with school work?

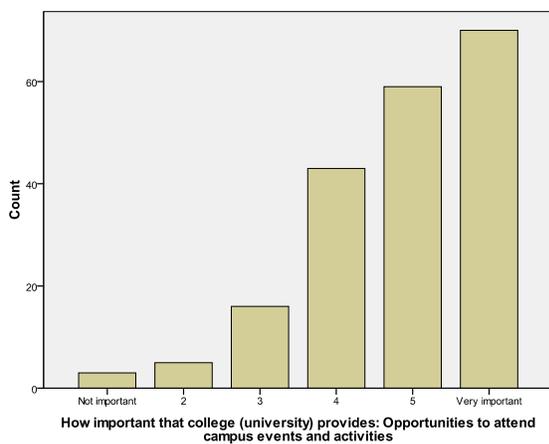


Importance of College Environment

The Importance of College Environment (ICE) scale asks students what matters to them and what they want the University to provide. To learn about students' interests and aspirations the survey asked students to rank several topics based on whether they were very important or not important to them. Students answered as follows: 85% of students find that a challenging academic experience holds moderate to extreme importance, 79% of participants are moderately to very interested in locating support to help them succeed academically, and 75% are interested in having opportunities to interact with students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. To further describe the importance of a challenging academic environment a crosstab analysis was run. (This showed that even though there was a strong desire for an academic experience across the board, students who received A's in high school revealed the highest percentages in the very important category (43%).)

Having support available to students in order to thrive socially was also viewed as an important aspect to a college environment (80%). Lastly, 88% of students believe that it is important for a university to have opportunities available to students to attend campus events and activities. Students who considered the availability of campus activities to be important were not only the students who heavily participated in extracurricular during high school, campus activities and events are overall a very important component to the college experience for all students (Table 10).

Table 10



The final piece of information that was offered from this survey is the future plans of the students. Seventeen percent report that the highest academic degree they intend to obtain is a bachelor's degree, 40% wish to obtain a master's degree, and 30% aim for a doctoral degree. This information can be seen in Table 11. Further analysis revealed that students who came from academically challenging high schools and received high grades in high school, expect high grades in college. The correlation between these two variables is visible in Table 12. Those were also heavily involved in extracurricular activities have the highest desire to continue their education beyond a Bachelor's. Students who were less involved and had average grades in high school lack a desire to pursue a degree beyond a bachelor's.

Table 11
Highest degree students wish to obtain

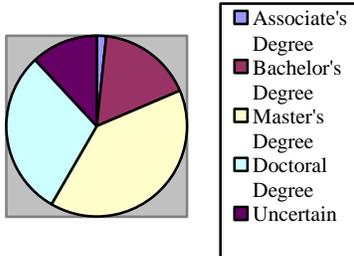
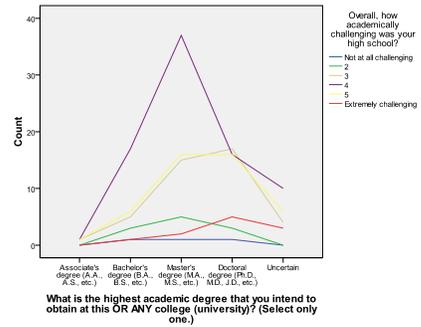


Table 12



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