

2005 National Survey of Student Engagement:

Freshman and Senior Students at

St. Cloud State University

Preliminary Report

(December, 2005)

Institutional Studies and Planning

**National Survey of Student Engagement
St. Cloud State University
Fall 2005**

In Spring 2005, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was sent to a random sample of 862 students, including 424 freshmen and 438 seniors enrolled at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) during the spring 2005 semester. After several reminders and follow-up mailings, the overall survey response rate was 42%, 11% higher than the response rate at selected peer institutions (competitive, public master's institutions with enrollments of 10,001-20,000 students), 7% higher than the response rate for national master's institutions, and 5% higher than overall response rate of all institutions participating in the NSSE survey.

Of all SCSU respondents (N=360), 45% (n=161) were freshmen and 55% (n=199) were senior students. Overall, female students (64%) were more likely to complete the survey than male students (35%).¹ About 86% of respondents were Caucasian/White students and the rest were minority or international students. More than 90% of the respondents were enrolled as full-time students.

Comparison of the 2003 and 2005 NSSE Results

Mean comparisons were conducted on the 2003 and 2005 NSSE data to determine if there were any statistically significant changes in student responses over the past two years. Only items appearing on the 2003 NSSE survey and the 2005 NSSE survey having identical survey response options were included in the analysis. The responses of 2003 first-year students were compared to the responses of 2005 first-year students and the responses of 2003 seniors were compared to the responses of 2005 seniors. In this section, survey items that showed statistically significant changes in mean responses from 2003 to 2005 are reported.

2003 vs. 2005 NSSE Data: First-Year Students

The results of the mean comparisons revealed that first year students completing the NSSE in 2005 were more likely than first year students completing the NSSE in 2003 to indicate that they did the following often or very often during the current school year (i.e., 2004-05 for the 2005 survey and 2002-03 for the 2003 survey):

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions: 51% in 2005 vs. 36% in 2003.
- Made a class presentation: 37% in 2005 vs. 27% in 2003.
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments: 45% in 2005 vs. 36% in 2003.
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary): 12% in 2005 vs. 6% in 2003.
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course: 10% in 2005 vs. 5% in 2003.
- Used email to communicate with an instructor: 70% in 2005 vs. 62% in 2003.
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor: 44% in 2005 vs. 33% in 2003.

¹ 1% of students did not report their gender.

- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class: 14% in 2005 vs. 9% in 2003.
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral): 52% in 2005 vs. 38% in 2003.
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc): 10% in 2005 vs. 7% in 2003.

Other statistically significant differences between the 2003 and 2005 first-year cohorts:

- First-year students in 2005 reported reading fewer assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs during the current school year, on average, than first-year students in 2003. Forty-two percent (42%) of first-year students in 2005 indicated reading 11 or more assigned textbooks or books compared to 52% of first-year students in 2003.
- First-year students in 2005 were more likely to be working for pay off campus than first-year students in 2003. In 2003, 41% of first-year students were working at least 1-5 hours per week off campus compared to 53% of first-year students in 2005.
- First-year students in 2005 provided lower ratings than 2003 first-year students, on average, to describe their relationships with administrative and personnel offices. In 2005, 52% rated their relationships with administrative and personnel offices in the 5-7 range on a 7-point scale (1=unhelpful, inconsiderate, rigid and 7=helpful, considerate, flexible). In 2003, 64% of first-year students rated these relationships on the higher end of the scale.
- First-year students in 2005 were more likely than 2003 first-year students to indicate that their experience at SCSU contributed to their voting in local, state, or national elections. Forty-one percent (41%) of first-year students in 2005 compared to 28% in 2003 indicated that their experience at SCSU contributed to their “knowledge, skills, or personal development” in this area.
- First-year students in 2005 were more likely than 2003 first-year students to report that they had worked with faculty on activities other than coursework. One-third (34%) of 2005 first-students indicated that they had worked with faculty members on activities such as committees, orientation, and student life activities compared to 21% of first-year students in 2003.

2003 vs. 2005 NSSE Data: Seniors

The results of the mean comparisons revealed that senior students completing the NSSE in 2005 were more likely than senior students completing the NSSE in 2003 to indicate that they did the following “often” or “very often” during the current school year (i.e., 2004-05 for the 2005 survey and 2002-03 for the 2003 survey):

- Worked with other students on projects during class: 61% in 2005 vs. 48% in 2003.
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments: 76% in 2005 vs. 65% in 2003.
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course: 20% in 2005 vs. 9% in 2003.
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral): 61% in 2005 vs. 51% in 2003.

Other statistically significant differences between the 2003 and 2005 senior cohorts:

- Seniors in 2005 reported reading fewer assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs during the current school year, on average, than seniors in 2003. Thirty-six percent (36%) of seniors in 2005 indicated reading 11 or more assigned textbooks or books compared to 46% of seniors in 2003.
- Seniors in 2005 were more likely than seniors in 2003 to indicate that their experience at SCSU contributed to their voting in local, state, or national elections. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of seniors in 2005 compared to 24% in 2003 indicated that their experience at SCSU contributed to their “knowledge, skills, or personal development” in this area.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of seniors in 2005 compared to 29% of seniors in 2003 indicated that their experiences at SCSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in the area of “contributing to the welfare of your community.”

St. Cloud State University NSSE 2005 Results vs. Master’s Institutions National Results

The 2005 NSSE results show that 80% of SCSU students described their experiences at SCSU as good or excellent and 62% described the academic advising they have received as good or excellent. When asked “if you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending,” 77% of the respondents answered “yes” or “probably yes.” However, SCSU students rated most survey items lower when compared to the national norm for master’s universities. Many of the differences were statistically significant, although the effect sizes were small in most cases (See Appendix A: Mean Comparison Report). For instance, compared to students completing the NSSE at other master’s institutions, SCSU students were less likely to feel that they were receiving the support they need to succeed academically or that the institution placed emphasis on helping them cope with their non-academic responsibilities (e.g., work, family, etc.). SCSU also rated the quality of their relationships with faculty lower than students attending master’s universities nationwide.²

There were several survey areas where SCSU students provided higher ratings, on average, than the national norm for master’s universities. For example, SCSU students were more likely to feel that their experiences at SCSU helped them to understand people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds and more likely to have worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments than students from other master’s universities. SCSU students also were more likely to be working off campus and tended to spend more time relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, exercising, etc.) than students from other master’s universities.

St. Cloud State University NSSE 2005 Results vs. Selected Peers Results

When compared to similar universities (i.e., competitive, public, master’s institutions with enrollment of 10,001 to 20,000), SCSU students’ ratings were similar to students’ ratings at comparable institutions on many of the items on the survey (see Appendix A: Mean Comparison

² For each survey item mean, please refer to Appendix A: Mean Comparison Report. When there is a statistically significant difference between SCSU mean rating and the norm, effect size is reported to indicate the size of the difference. **An effect size of 0.2 is small; 0.5 is moderate; and 0.8 is large.** The frequency distribution for each survey item is available upon request.

Report). However, there were some notable differences between SCSU students and students at selected peer universities:

- SCSU students were more likely to have worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments than students at selected peer institutions.
- SCSU students were more likely than students at peer institutions to have participated in a community-based learning project as part of a regular course.
- SCSU students were less likely to have had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own compared to students at peer institutions, but more likely to feel that their experiences at SCSU had helped them to understand people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- SCSU were more likely to have participated in physical fitness activities and less likely to have participated in activities to enhance their spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.) during the school year than students at peer institutions.
- SCSU students were more likely than students at peer institutions to be providing care for dependents (parents, children, spouse, etc.).
- SCSU students, on average, rated their overall educational experience lower than students at peer institutions.

Benchmark Score Comparisons

NSSE created five benchmarks of effective educational practice. The benchmarks are made up of groups of questions on the survey and are expressed in 100-point scales. This year's analysis is based on approximately 237,000 randomly selected students at 528 four-year colleges and universities. The students represent a broad cross-section of first-year and senior students from every region of the country. The five benchmarks are:

1. Level of academic challenge
2. Active and collaborative learning
3. Student-faculty interactions
4. Enriching educational experiences
5. Supportive campus environment

SCSU's benchmark scores in the five areas assessed by the NSSE were similar to the benchmark scores from the selected peer institutions with two exceptions:

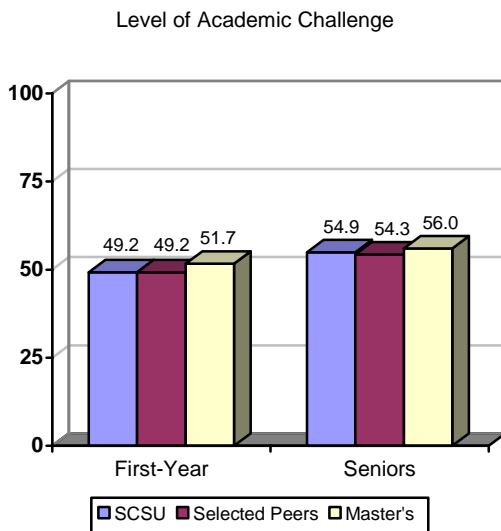
- SCSU first-year students' benchmark score in the area of *Supportive Campus Environment* was statistically significantly lower than first-year students at selected peer institutions
- SCSU seniors' benchmark score in the area of Student-Faculty Interaction was statistically significantly lower than seniors at selected peer institutions.

While these differences are statistically significant, the effect size of the mean differences was small (.2 or lower).

When compared to the national norm of Master's institutions, SCSU respondents' ratings were lower in four of the five areas: *Level of Academic Challenge*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, *Enriching Educational Experiences*, and *Supportive Campus Environment*. In the area of *Active and Collaborative Learning*, SCSU's benchmark scores for first-year students and seniors were similar to the national norm for master's institutions.

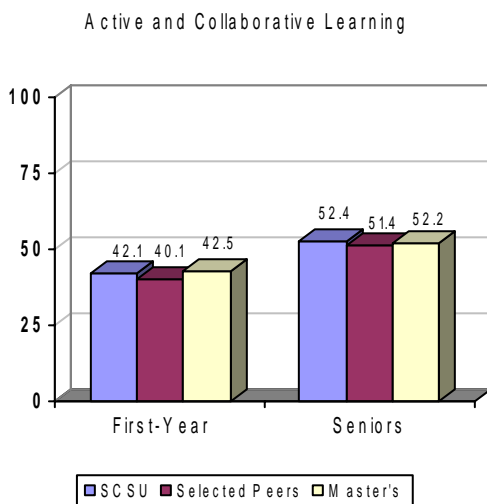
Comparable to peer institutions and the national norm for master's institutions, SCSU seniors rated *Level of Academic Challenge*, *Active and Collaborative Learning*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, and *Enriching Educational Experiences* higher than first-year students. However, SCSU first-year students and seniors had identical benchmark scores in the area of *Supportive Campus Environment*. Figures 1-5 show the differences between SCSU students, students at selected peer institutions, and students attending master's universities with respect to the benchmark scores in the five areas assessed by the NSSE. The boxed information next to the figures lists the survey items included in each benchmark.

Figure 1.



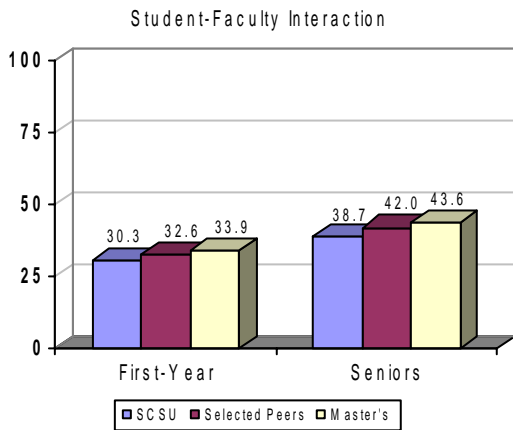
- Preparing for class
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs or course reading
- Number of written paper or reports of 20 pages or more; 5-19 pages; fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships.
- Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work.

Figure 2.



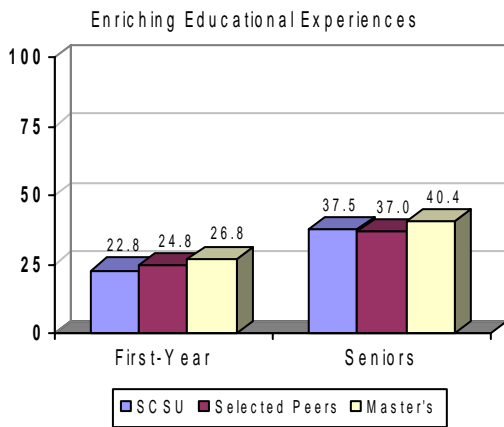
- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class

Figure 3.



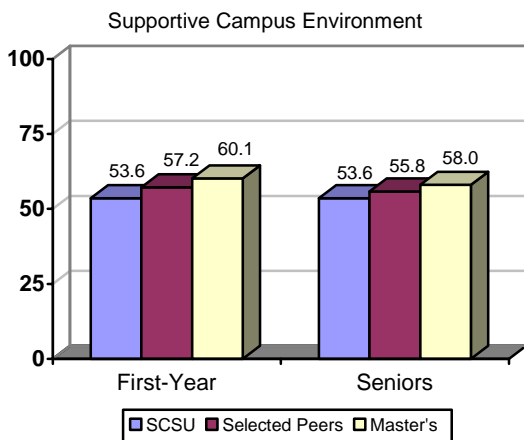
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework
- Received prompt feedback from faculty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

Figure 4.



- Participating in co-curricular activities
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework and study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience (comp. exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Figure 5.



- 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.

St. Cloud State University NSSE Benchmark Score Trends 2001-2005

An examination of SCSU's benchmark scores over time reveals some positive trends. Table 1 presents the 2001, 2003, and 2005 NSSE benchmark scores for SCSU in four of the five areas assessed by the survey. Benchmark scores for *Enriching Educational Experiences* are not included in Table 1 due to changes in the survey items included in this benchmark that do not allow comparisons from year to year.

Table 1 shows that SCSU benchmark scores in the areas of *Active and Collaborative Learning*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, and *Supportive Campus Environment* have improved since the university began participating in the NSSE in 2001. This is encouraging information and indicates that the university has been making efforts to improve the quality of student experiences in these areas. However, in the area of *Academic Challenge* the benchmark score has decreased slightly over time and, especially among first-year students, remains lower than the national norm for master's institutions.

*Table 1. Benchmarks for All Years of NSSE Participation**

Benchmark	Class	2001	2003	2005
Level of Academic Challenge	First Year	50	49	49
	Senior	56	55	55
Active and Collaborative Learning	First Year	38	35	42
	Senior	49	47	52
Student-Faculty Interaction	First Year	28	29	36
	Senior	39	39	44
Supportive Campus Environment	First Year	53	55	54
	Senior	47	52	54

* Due to changes in the response set for survey items that comprise the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark, it is not possible to compare 2005 results to earlier years, hence its omission from the table.

Although students are generally positive about their experiences at SCSU and they reported learning gains in specific areas compared to the cohort surveyed in 2003, the NSSE study results show that SCSU lags behind in many areas when compared to national survey results. The results suggest that some SCSU student behaviors or institutional practices represented by the benchmarks may warrant attention. **It is important that SCSU look at the survey results from a positive perspective. These survey results present us an opportunity to examine ourselves and improve our services.**