SUMMARY REPORT

SPRING 2001 ADMINISTRATION OF
NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

BACKGROUND ABOUT THE SURVEY

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is described in Improving the College Experience: National Benchmarks of Effective Education Practice, the N 2001 report, as an instrument that annually assesses the extent to which students at four-year colleges and universities take part in educational practices that many research studies show are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development. Level of academic challenge, time on task, and participation in other educationally purposeful activities directly influence the quality of students' learning and their overall educational experience. The NSSE survey was designed to assess these and related activities. Although NSSE doesn't assess student learning directly, the results from the survey point to areas where colleges are performing well and aspects of the undergraduate experience that could be improved.

The national database includes 155,000 first-year and senior students at 470 different four-year colleges and universities. Results from the NSSE fall into five key activities that research studies show are linked to desired outcomes in college:

§ Level of Academic Challenge
§ Student Interaction with Faculty Members
§ Active and Collaborative Learning
§ Enriching Educational Experiences
§ Supportive Campus Environment

The combination of the above elements is termed student engagement.

EXAMINING THE DATA

Examining the Eastern Kentucky University experience in comparison with other Kentucky public universities tells the story of a campus experience that, for seniors, above average in all five benchmark areas related to learning and personal development. Our freshmen, on the other hand, report above average levels of engagement in only one of those benchmark areas.

Comparisons with master's-level institutions nationwide show similar patterns for seniors and a somewhat less encouraging picture for our freshmen. Taking a deep look at the specific questions that comprise each benchmark area provides rich and powerful detail that may be useful in guiding our improvement efforts. Retaining freshmen is of primary importance, and NSSE offers information that can be used to enrich the freshmen experience here at EKU with the expectation of increased...
retention. This document delves more deeply into the data in order to glean specific information about our students' experiences.

COMPARISONS WITH NSSE MASTER'S LEVEL UNIVERSITIES

The Good News
Before beginning the exploration of specifics it is important to note the following:

An overwhelming majority of our students, both seniors and freshmen, say they would attend EKU if they could start over again (84% of freshmen and 89% of seniors). In fact, more of our seniors state they would attend EKU again than do seniors at other master's level universities. Our students also say they had a good or excellent educational experience (84% of freshmen and 86% of seniors) which is comparable to students at other universities.

NSSE data confirms that Eastern Kentucky University offers its seniors a rich, rewarding and engaging experience. Our seniors are very actively engaged with EKU faculty, are challenged and engaged in an enriching educational experience, consistent with the campus to be supportive of their needs and are working collaboratively on academic assignments. In four of the five benchmark areas:

- Student Interactions with Faculty
- Level of Academic Challenge
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

measured by the NSSE, Eastern Kentucky University seniors report above-average levels of engagement as compared to other master's level universities. On that benchmark area, Active and Collaborative Learning, EKU seniors report engagement slightly below the average.

A closer examination of the specific questions that were used as markers for each benchmark area indicates the ways in which Eastern is providing a meaningful experience for our upper level students. At the same time, while we are slightly above average on four benchmarks, there is significant room for improvement in one area.

As would be expected, EKU seniors are consistently more engaged than are our freshmen. In fact, the differences between the experiences of our seniors and our freshmen are greater than that for students at other universities, evidencing the added value of the upper level years at EKU.

Areas in Need of Improvement
Our freshmen experiences compare less favorably with those of freshmen at other master's level universities. Our freshmen report below average levels of engagement in all five benchmark areas when compared to other freshmen. EKU freshmen report engagement only slightly below average in the benchmark area of Student Involvement with Faculty. These data show that faculty behavior can strongly influence levels of involvement, and suggest that faculty need to be made more aware of how important their interactions with students can be so they can use them more consistently. This may be an area where the Teaching and Learning Center could conduct some workshops.
Comparisons on the four other benchmark areas are sufficiently below average as warrant close examination in order to develop appropriate remedial action plans. NSSE results indicate that we should examine ways to more effectively challenge freshmen with enriching educational experiences. Eastern's greatest challenge was to meet the needs of our unique group of freshmen with increased support in non-academic areas while providing more active and collaborative learning experiences.

The chart below depicts the benchmark scores of both seniors and freshmen as percentile comparisons to other master's degree-granting institutions nationwide.

![Percentile Comparisons Between EKU and other Master's Level Universities](chart.png)

In order to attempt to account for differences in benchmark scores between EKU and other master's level universities, individual questions within each benchmark on differences in student responses were greatest were examined. Percentage differences in many instances were not great, but collectively contributed to relatively large benchmark score differences; therefore, attention is drawn to specific items where EKU student responses differ from other universities by at least 4 percent points. Recommendations for enhancing the freshmen experience at EKU are based upon areas in which a greater percentage of EKU seniors than other seniors respond positively and areas in which EKU freshmen compare less favorably with other freshmen.

Benchmark Areas

1. Student Interactions with Faculty

Eastern's greatest strengths are demonstrated in the area of student interaction
faculty. When examining responses in this area and comparing with other universities, we see that our seniors interact with faculty more than seniors at other universities and our freshman interact with faculty more than freshmen at than 40% of other universities. The NSSE data reflect the EKU tradition of faculty taking a strong interest in students and working closely with them. This is especially apparent for EKU seniors. Our seniors are engaged in meaningful dialogue with faculty and work closely with them on research, projects, committees and co-curricular activities.

Our freshmen do talk with faculty about their grades or assignments. But freshmen are not having meaningful dialogue with faculty outside of their courses. Encouraging faculty to talk about coursework with first year students outside of the classroom involving freshmen with faculty in research projects and on committees, and encouraging faculty to work with students on student life activities are possible of increasing engagement.

**Positives**

More of our seniors:
- Talk more frequently with faculty about grades or assignments. (EKU-69% vs Master s-59%)
- Talk with faculty about career plans. (EKU-48% vs. Master s-43%)
- Talk with faculty about readings outside of class. (EKU-79% vs. Master s-74%)
- Receive prompt feedback from faculty. (EKU-73% vs. Master s-64%)
- Work with faculty on activities other than coursework. (EKU-29% vs. Master 21%)
- Work on a research project with faculty. (EKU-24% vs. Master s-20%)

More of our freshmen:
- Talk with faculty about grades or assignments. (EKU-51% vs. Master s-47%)

**Improvement areas**

Fewer of our freshmen:
- Talk to faculty about readings outside of class. (EKU-44% vs. Master s-53%)
- Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework. (EKU-4% vs. Master: 12%)

2. Level of Academic Challenge

NSSE makes predictions of student engagement for each college and university based upon the characteristics of the school’s entering student body. Given the characteristics of our entering student body, EKU students found the University more academically challenging than predicted. EKU seniors reported a higher than predicted level of academic challenge than did 82% of other NSSE institutions and EKU freshmen reported a higher than predicted level of academic challenge than did 73% of other NSSE institutions.
Actual responses in this area (rather than predictions for our students), indicate our seniors are more academically challenged than seniors at 60% of other universities but our freshman are less academically challenged than freshmen at other universities. This is interesting in light of the fact that more than quarters of our students (79% of 1-year and 76% of seniors) say EKU places a strong emphasis on spending significant amounts of time on studying and academic work. This compares favorably with other NSSE Master’s level institutions where of all students say their institution shares a similar emphasis.
Comparisons show that our greatest strengths in this area arise in 1) the emphasis on upper division courses on applying theories to practical problems, and the number of reading assignments and 2) the emphasis in beginning courses on revising papers/assignments and in making judgements about the value of information. Areas in greatest need of attention include an increased emphasis on critical thinking course readings and time spent studying in the first year of University work.

**Positives**
More of our seniors:
- Report a strong coursework emphasis on applying theories to practical problems. (EKU-85% vs. Master s-78%)
- Report reading more than five assigned textbooks, books, or book-length course packets. (EKU-75% vs. Master s-71%)

More of our freshmen:
- Prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment. (EKU-76% vs. Master s-61%)
- Report a strong emphasis in making judgements about the value of information. (EKU-72% vs. Master s-61%)

**Improvement Areas**
Fewer of our seniors:
- Report preparing a written paper or report over 20 pages. (EKU-46% vs. Master s-50%)

Fewer of our freshmen:
- Report a strong coursework emphasis on analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory. (EKU-71% vs. Master s-76%)
- Report a strong coursework emphasis on synthesizing and organizing ideas, information or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships. (EKU-57% vs. Master s-61%)
- Report a strong coursework emphasis on applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations. (EKU-59% vs. Master s-68%)
- Report reading more than five assigned textbooks, books, or book-length course packets. (EKU-71% vs. Master s-78%)
- Spend more than 10 hours per week preparing for class. (EKU-42% vs. Master s-49%)

3. **Enriching Educational Experiences**

When examining responses in this area and comparing with other universities, we find that our seniors report more enriching educational experiences than seniors at 6 other universities but our freshmen report fewer enriching educational experiences than freshmen at 70% of other universities.

Our greatest strengths in this area lie in providing practical, hands-on learning experiences, some type of culminating senior experience, involving upperclassmen co-curricular activities, using electronic media in our coursework and ensuring meaningful interactions between diverse student populations. This benchmark tel
that our freshmen would benefit from becoming more actively involved in campus organizations and activities, from taking foreign language courses and from a more explicit valuing of multi-cultural dialogue and experiences.

The lower rate of freshmen involvement in activities and organizations is understandable given that:

- a. EKU has a higher percentage (63% vs. 45%) of first-generation college students than most colleges. This may indicate that they arrive with a more accurate idea of the benefits of participating in college life than some of their peers.
- b. EKU freshmen spend a higher than average amount of time taking care of dependents (child, spouse, parent). Students who have family responsibilities are likely to have less time for campus involvement in anything they perceive as extra.

EKU is currently addressing areas identified by this benchmark in several ways. Recently initiated first weekends, new speaker series, New Student Days, and additional programming for the freshman year. Opportunities for co-ops, internships, and international studies are expanding, as well.

**Positives**

More of our seniors:
- Have participated in a practicum, internship, field placement, co-op experience, or clinical assignment. (EKU-80% vs. Master s-72%)
- Have had or plan to have a culminating senior experience. (EKU-61% vs. Master s-53%)
- Participate in co-curricular activities at least one hour per week. (EKU-63% vs. Master s-55%)
- Have had serious conversations with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. (EKU-92% vs. Master s-86%)
- Have had serious conversations with students who differ from them in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions or personal values. (EKU-96% vs. Master s-92%)
- Use electronic media to complete assignments. (EKU-91% vs. Master s-85%)

More of our freshmen:
- Had serious conversations with students who differ from them in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values. (EKU-95% vs. Master s-90%)
- Use electronic media to complete assignments. (EKU-85% vs. Master s-78%)

**Improvement Areas**

Fewer of our seniors:
- Report taking a foreign language course. (EKU-24% vs. Master s-34%)
- Report plans to or experiences with studying abroad. (EKU-7% vs. Master s-13%)

Fewer of our freshmen:
- Participate in co-curricular activities at least one hour per week. (EKU-41% vs. Master s-60%)
• Say EKU encourages contact between students from different economic, social and racial or ethnic backgrounds. (EKU-76% vs. Masters-82%)
• Report plans to take foreign language coursework. (EKU-17% vs. Masters-40%)
• Report plans to study abroad. (EKU-17% vs. Masters-28%)

4. Supportive Campus Environment

Comparisons with other universities about the supportiveness of the campus environment show that our seniors report experiencing a more supportive campus environment than seniors at more than 50% of other universities but our freshmen report experiencing a less supportive environment than freshmen at 80% of other universities.

Our greatest strengths arise in the social arena for upperclassmen who feel supported socially by Eastern and have positive regard for their fellow students. Areas for improvement include student experiences with administrative staff, social support for first-year students, special assistance for our freshmen in handling their non-academic responsibilities and enhanced development of collegial relations between first-year students.

Indications of freshmen expecting more assistance in non-academic and social areas are especially pertinent given the higher percentage of EKU freshmen (40% vs. 28%) spending at least 1 hour per week caring for dependents.

Positives
More of our seniors:
• View EKU as supportive in social areas. (EKU-74% vs. Masters-70%)
• View fellow students as friendly, supportive and with a sense of belonging (EKU-92% vs. Masters-85%)

Improvement Areas
Fewer of our seniors:
• View administrative staff as helpful, considerate, and flexible. (EKU-50% vs. Masters-58%)

Fewer of our freshmen:
• Report institutional emphasis on providing support needed to thrive socially. (EKU-71% vs. Masters-79%)
• Report institutional help with coping with non-academic responsibilities. (EKU-64% vs. Masters-69%)
• View fellow students as friendly, supportive and with a sense of belonging (EKU-77% vs. Masters-83%)

5. Active and Collaborative Learning

When examining responses in this area and comparing with other universities, we find that our seniors experience more active and collaborative learning than seniors
almost 50% of other universities but our freshman experience less active and collaborative learning than freshmen at 90% of other universities.

Our greatest strengths arise in the areas of upper level students discussing rea with others outside of class and freshmen working with other students on project during class. The questions specific to this benchmark indicate the following m for increasing the active and collaborative learning experiences of our students encourage freshmen to continue to work with fellow students outside of the class both by discussing their course readings and requiring collaborative work outsid class, 2) develop community-based projects as a regular part of course design, include class presentations as part of freshmen coursework, and 4) encourage freshmen to tutor or teach their fellow students.

Although comparisons with other master s level universities suggest increasing opportunities for outside the classroom learning and leadership activities, the circumstances of our freshmen should be taken into account. Because of the highe percentage of students reporting external responsibilities (such as family, heal work), collaborative learning and leadership activities might best be infused in classroom.

Positives
More of our seniors:
• Discuss ideas from readings with others outside of class. (EKU-74% vs. Master s-64%)

More of our freshmen:
• Work with other students on projects during class. (EKU-50% vs. Master s 42%)

Improvement Areas
Fewer of our freshmen:
• Work with classmates outside of class. (EKU-65% vs. Master s-84%)
• Made a class presentation. (EKU-75% vs. Master s-84%)
• Report doing a community-based project as part of a regular course. (EKU-1: vs. Master s-28%)
• Tutor or teach other students (voluntary or paid). (EKU-33% vs. Master s-4:

Kentucky Consortium Specific Questions

In Kentucky a consortium of eight public universities designed and used question specific to Kentucky. Comparisons of student responses to these Kentucky specific questions provide rich and useful information. The questions have been divided the areas of Academic Advising and Supportive Services, Progress Towards Degree, Campus Life and Background.

Comparisons with other KY universities indicate our strengths to include advisin the upper division levels, academic computing, and use of library and physical recreational facilities. Areas in need of improvement include academic advising freshmen level and supportive services for our freshmen.
Academic Advising and Supportive Services

- EKU first year students evaluated the quality of academic advising significantly lower than the average for a consortium of eight Kentucky universities. Fifty-seven percent of EKU freshmen rated the academic advising as good or excellent and 70% of freshmen at other KY universities gave a good or excellent rating. Northern Kentucky University received highest rating by its first year students.

- EKU seniors evaluated the quality of academic advising significantly higher than the average for a consortium of eight Kentucky universities. Sixty percent of EKU seniors rated the academic advising as good or excellent. 57% of seniors at other KY universities gave a good or excellent rating. Only Kentucky State University received a higher rating by its seniors.

- EKU first year students (43.3%) turn to friends or family for academic advising at a much higher rate than do EKU seniors (12.6%) and than do first year students (29.7%) and seniors (11.2%) at other Kentucky Universities. EKU first year students (28.9%) rely on their officially university advisor for advising at a much lower rate than do EKU seniors (47.1%) and than do first year students (41.1%) and seniors (43.1%) at other Kentucky Universities.

- EKU seniors (25%) reported taking advantage of instructional support services at a significantly higher rate than do seniors (12%) at other Kentucky Universities. The reporting of using instructional support services remained constant from first year to senior at EKU whereas seniors at other Kentucky Universities reported a lower rate of use than did their corresponding first year students.

- EKU freshmen (78%) use the computer laboratories at a higher rate than do freshmen (63%) at other KY universities.

- More EKU seniors (87%) report using library facilities than do seniors (84%) at other KY universities.

- Both EKU freshmen (90%) and seniors (91%) score the availability of university computers as good or excellent at a higher rate than do freshmen (86%) and seniors (79%) at other KY universities.

- Fewer EKU seniors (76%) report owning a computer than do seniors (84%) at other KY universities.

Progress Towards Degree

- When asked to choose the one item that was most helpful in progress towards a degree, more EKU freshmen chose financial aid (32% vs. 27%) and fewer EKU freshmen chose involvement in on-campus activities and activities (7% vs. 11%) than did freshmen at other KY universities.
• Students having difficulty in working on their college degree were asked to choose the one item most responsible for slowing their progress.
• Fewer EKU freshmen chose poor academic preparations for college (5% vs. 12%) or involvement in social activities (2% vs. 7%) than freshmen at other KY universities.
• More EKU freshmen (41%) chose external pressures (family, health or work) than freshmen (28%) at other KY universities.

• EKU students chose recommendations for helping more students graduate in the following manner:
  • Offer more regular courses at nontraditional times (seniors-23.9%; first year-16.3%)
  • Offer more financial aid (seniors-22.0%; first year-36.0%)
  • Offer more student services at nontraditional times (seniors-18.3%; first year-18.6%)
  • Offer more school and work partnerships with local employers (seniors-18.3%; first year-16.3%)
  • Offer more distance education courses and degree programs (seniors 17.4%; first year-12.8%)

Campus Life
• More EKU seniors living on campus (72%) spend at least one weekend per month on campus than do seniors living on campus (64%) at other KY universities.
• Fewer EKU freshmen who do not live on campus (69%) spend at least one hour per week on campus outside of class time than freshmen who do not live on campus (80%) at other KY universities.
• More EKU seniors (49%) use physical facilities such gymnasium, weight room, swimming pool than do seniors (41%) at other KY universities.
• Fewer EKU freshmen (27%) participate in social activities (Greek organizations, clubs, intramural sports, etc.) than freshmen (39%) at other KY universities.

Background
• Fewer EKU freshmen (47%) report their father having obtained at least some post-secondary education than do freshmen (63%) at other KY universities.
• Fewer EKU freshmen (53%) report their mother having obtained at least some post-secondary education than do freshmen (63%) at other KY universities.
• More EKU seniors (66%) report their mother having obtained at least some post-secondary education than do seniors (59%) at other KY universities.
• More EKU freshmen (61% vs. 57%) vote and fewer EKU seniors (72% vs. 76%) vote than students at other KY universities.

CONCLUSIONS

Eastern Kentucky University provides an enriching and engaging academic experience for a unique group of students. Our mission of caring for students while maintaining high standards of excellence in teaching and learning is evidenced by the experience of EKU's seniors. While our freshmen are engaged at higher levels than would be predicted using demographics and institution specific characteristics, greater attention should be paid to the first-year of study at Eastern Kentucky University.