

What's Happening with **ASSESSMENT** at Hope College

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HOPE STUDENTS TAKE THE NSSE

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During the Spring semester 2003, two groups of randomly selected Hope students took the National Survey of Student Engagement, a newer national instrument designed to measure students' perceptions of their educational experience. Developed by researchers at Indiana University, the NSSE (nicknamed "Nessie") surveys students during their first year and fourth year of college. Although quickly gaining notoriety, the NSSE is probably not as well known to most faculty as the CIRP. Whereas the CIRP questionnaire measures a variety of attitudes and behaviors related to school learning, career interest, life values, and social issues, the Assessment Committee chose to try the NSSE because we felt it focused more on student academic behaviors, something that was more in line with our committee's focus. Students were contacted several times by surface mail and email leading up to the delivery of the survey via email in March 2003. Students completed the survey on-line. Our sample consisted of 291 first-year students and 216 fourth-year students.

The Comparison Group

Hope was classified using the Carnegie classification "Baccalaureate Liberal Arts". Eighty-one schools in this classification administered the NSSE in 2003. Table 1 shows a sample of schools in our comparison group.

Demographics

A greater number of females than males completed the survey for both classes. The difference in the sample is even greater than exists in the population. This was particularly true for first-year students. Table 2 shows Hope's demographic profile.

Learning Behaviors

Students were asked to indicate how often they engaged in certain kinds of classroom and other learning behaviors. The response alternatives were: never, sometimes, often, and very often (Table 3). Fourth-year students more than first-year students reported more frequently engaging in: asking questions in class, making a class presentation, doing a project that integrated ideas from various sources, working outside of class with other students, and putting ideas from different courses together for assignments. Unfortunately, a greater number of fourth-year students reported coming to class without preparing/doing the reading. Fewer fourth-year students reported prepar-

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TABLE 1
Sample of institutions in the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Comparison Group

Allgeheny (PA)	Hanover (IN)
Antioch (OH)	Kalamazoo (MI)
Augustana (IL)	Knox (IL)
Blackburn (IL)	Monmouth (IL)
Centre (KY)	Presbyterian (SC)
Holy Cross (MA)	Skidmore (NY)
Wooster (OH)	St. Olaf (MN)
Cornell College (IA)	University of the
Dennison (OH)	South (TN)
DePauw (IN)	Vassar (NY)
Eckerd (FL)	Wabash (IN)
Furman (SC)	Westminster (MO)
Gordon (MA)	Wheaton (IL)
	Wheaton (MA)

ing multiple drafts of papers, probably reflecting the emphasis on multiple drafts in English 113.

Hope students' responses were roughly equivalent to those of the comparison group for both first- and fourth- year students, showing equal percentages on many of the nine items. If there is trend, it is in the direction of Hope students reporting that they engaged in the positive behaviors slightly less frequently than the comparison students.

Interactions with Faculty and Students

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they had various interactions with faculty and other students. The response alternatives were: very often, often, sometimes, and never (Table 4). The results showed slight to moderate increases for Hope students from first year to fourth year, with the largest increase occurring for discussing

TABLE 2
Demographic Profile of NSSE Sample

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Male	27%	34%	35%	34%
Female	73	66	65	66
White/Caucasian	92	92	84	85
African American	1	0	6	5
Hispanic	0	0	1	1
Multi-Racial	3	3	6	6
International	4	2	5	5
On-Campus	96	29	91	53
Fraternity/Sorority	9	18	16	21
Father 4-Year College Graduate or Higher	69	65	62	60
Mother 4-Year College Graduate or Higher	53	54	57	53

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TABLE 3
Learning Behaviors
(Percentage of students indicating "often" or "very often")

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	66%	78%	72%	79%
Made a class presentation	27	61	29	63
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper assignment before turning it in	46	28	54	43
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	72	91	79	91
Included diverse perspectives (race, religion, gender, political) in class discussions or assignments	64	65	65	66
Came to class without completing readings or assignments	19	29	16	19
Worked with other students on class projects	32	35	32	34
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare materials	54	70	50	56
Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments	46	67	51	69

career plans with faculty. For both first-year and fourth-year students, Hope students reported slightly to moderately less frequent engagement in these behaviors than the comparison group. Hope lagged behind the comparison group most notably in conversing with students of a different race/ethnicity, speaking with faculty outside of class, and prompt feedback from faculty.

Coursework Emphases

Students were asked to identify different types of activities in which they engaged. The response alternatives were: very much, quite a bit, some, and very little (Table 5). First-year Hope students scored slightly lower than the comparison group on several items, with the biggest differences on items addressing higher level cognitive processes such as analysis and synthesis/organization. By the fourth year, these

differences had diminished, with the biggest difference between fourth-year Hope students and comparison fourth-year students appearing for "worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's expectation." Overall, the difference between Hope first-year and fourth-year students showed positive changes, with increases in higher-level comprehension and making judgments and a decreased focus on memorization.

Reading and Writing

Students were asked several specific questions about their reading and writing in coursework. Students responded with a frequency estimate of their reading and writing behaviors. These frequencies estimates were broken down into the following categories: none, between 1 and 4, between 5 and 10, between 11 and 20, and more

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TABLE 4
Interactions with Faculty and Students
 (Percentage of students indicating "often" or "very often")

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Used email to communicate with an instructor	86%	88%	77%	85%
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	48	62	57	67
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	32	60	34	57
Discussed class materials with faculty outside of class	17	25	23	38
Received prompt feedback from faculty on your work	60	68	66	75
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's expectations	52	48	56	59
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework	12	30	17	32
Discussed ideas from your classes with others outside of class (students, family)	63	72	68	72
Had serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	35	40	58	54

than 20 (Table 6). Three-fourths of our first-year students and 86 percent of our fourth-year students read at least one unassigned book during the year. Nearly 100 percent of students are writing papers five or fewer pages long and also 5-19 pages long. Almost none of our first-year students and half of our fourth-year students reported writing a paper 20+ pages long. The figures from Hope are very similar to those of the comparison schools, an exception being fewer Hope seniors reported writing a 20+ page paper.

Out-of-Classroom Academic Experiences

Students were asked to indicate whether they had engaged in any of seven out-of-classroom academic experiences. Table 7 shows the percentage of students who reported participating in these opportunities. A large majority of se-

niors reported participating in a field/practicum experience, community service, and senior capstone. Over one-third of seniors reported conducting research with a faculty and study abroad. These figures are similar to our comparison group.

Quality of Relationships

Students were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with other students, faculty, and staff in administrative/personnel offices. Students responded on a seven-point scale, with 7 being friendly and supportive and 1 being unfriendly and unsupportive (Table 8). First-year students reported their best relationships with other students and fourth-year students reported their best relationships with faculty, although these differences are not large. Overall, the Hope means are slightly higher than the

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TABLE 5
Coursework Emphases
(Percentage of students indicating "quite a bit" or "very much")

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Memorizing facts, ideas or methods	69%	49%	63%	51%
Analyzing the basis elements of an idea	85	87	88	89
Synthesizing and organizing ideas	65	75	76	82
Making judgements about the value of information, arguments, or methods	60	77	69	74
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or new situations	74	84	75	82

comparison group for relationships with both other students and faculty.

How Students Spend Time

Students were asked to indicate the amount of time they spent engaged in various activities. Students responded with a frequency estimate of how they spent their time outside of class. These frequency estimates were broken down into the following categories: zero hours, between 1 and 10 hours, between 11 and 20 hours, between 21 and 30 hours, more than 30 hours (Table 9). The Hope results are very similar to the data from the comparison group. In general, fourth-year students spent more time working on- and off-campus, although there was little difference between first- and fourth-year students on time spent relaxing/socializing and time spent on co-curricular activities.

Perceptions of Institutional Emphases

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which Hope emphasized each of seven institutional values. The response alternatives were: very much, quite a bit, some, and very little (Table 10). In general, fourth-year students saw Hope as less supportive than first-year students

with respect to emphasizing academic support, non-academic responsibilities, social support, campus events, and multicultural contact.

Hope's Contribution to Student Growth

Students were asked to what extent their experience at Hope contributed to development in 15 life domains. Response alternatives were: very much, quite a bit, some, and very little (Table 11). Compared to first-year students, fourth-year students reported that Hope had a moderately greater impact (defined in this analysis as greater than five percentage points) on seven of the areas. The biggest deficit seems to be on understanding people of other racial/ethnic groups, where far fewer fourth-year students than first-year students indicated that Hope made a contribution in this area. This also appears to be our biggest deficit with respect to our comparison schools; although Hope compares favorably at Year 1, we fall behind in Year 4. Our biggest strength in relation to the comparison schools seems to be developing a personal code of values and ethics. This difference exists for both first-year and fourth-year students.

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TABLE 6
Reading and Writing
 (Percentage of students indicating each response category)

	Hope First Year	Hope Senior	Comparison Group First	Comparison Group Senior
<i>Number of assigned textbooks, book-length packs of course readings</i>				
None	0	0	0	1
Between 1 and 4	7	12	8	13
Between 5 and 10	34	30	27	27
Between 11 and 20	40	36	40	32
More than 20	18	21	25	26
<i>Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment</i>				
None	26	14	22	17
Between 1 and 4	53	56	59	55
Between 5 and 10	14	21	13	18
Between 11 and 20	3	6	4	6
More than 20	3	2	2	4
<i>Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more</i>				
None	90	49	84	37
Between 1 and 4	8	45	13	55
Between 5 and 10	1	4	2	6
Between 11 and 20	1	2	1	1
More than 20	1	0	1	1
<i>Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages</i>				
None	7	3	5	4
Between 1 and 4	51	39	43	32
Between 5 and 10	27	39	35	39
Between 11 and 20	11	16	13	16
More than 20	4	3	3	6
<i>Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages</i>				
None	1	1	2	26
Between 1 and 4	6	13	18	5
Between 5 and 10	20	23	34	29
Between 11 and 20	38	28	28	23
More than 20	35	34	18	17

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TABLE 7
Out-of-Classroom Academic Experiences
 (Percent indicating they have participated or plan to participate)

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op, or clinical assignment	87%	81%	82%	74%
Community service or volunteer work	87	78	82	77
Participate in a learning community where students take two or more classes together	27	30	30	25
Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course requirements	34	37	38	39
Study abroad	56	39	56	35
Independent study or self-designed major	17	32	25	43
Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, ect.)	32	71	57	73

TABLE 8
Quality of Relationships
 Mean score on a seven point scale, with 7 = friendly, supportive, sense of belonging and 1 = unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Relationships with other students	6.16	5.83	5.85	5.83
Relationships with faculty members	5.95	6.08	5.88	6.05
Relationships with administrative, personnel offices	5.63	4.78	5.32	4.89

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TABLE 9
How Students Spend Time
(Percentage of students indicating each response category)

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
<i>Preparing for class</i>				
0 hours	0%	0%	0%	0%
1 - 10 hours	38	39	30	33
11 - 20 hours	38	42	40	37
21 - 30 hours	19	13	22	21
More than 30 hours	4	7	7	9
<i>Working for pay on campus</i>				
0 hours	64	39	63	47
1 - 10 hours	28	43	28	35
11 - 20 hours	8	15	8	15
21 - 30 hours	0	1	0	2
More than 30 hours	0	1	0	1
<i>Working for pay off campus</i>				
0 hours	79	62	83	64
1 - 10 hours	15	18	9	14
11 - 20 hours	5	14	5	11
21 - 30 hours	0	4	2	6
More than 30 hours	0	2	1	5
<i>Participating in co-curricular activities</i>				
0 hours	18	17	19	22
1 - 10 hours	58	57	55	53
11 - 20 hours	21	19	18	17
21 - 30 hours	3	5	6	6
More than 30 hours	0	2	2	2
<i>Relaxing and socializing</i>				
0 hours	0	0	1	1
1 - 10 hours	56	57	51	52
11 - 20 hours	31	30	33	33
21 - 30 hours	9	8	9	9
More than 30 hours	4	3	5	5

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Overall Evaluation

Eighty-five percent of first-year students and 86 percent of fourth-year students rated the quality of advising as either excellent or good and over 90 percent of students in both groups rated their overall educational experience as either excellent or good. Ninety percent of first-year students and 81 percent of fourth-year students reported that they would select Hope again. All of these figures were similar to our comparison group.

Conclusions

I offer the following comments based on *my* interpretation of the data. First, comparing the results of first-year to fourth-year students, on most of the dimensions in this survey there was noticeable value added. Senior students regularly reported more involvement than first-year students in meaningful academic activities, higher-level cognition, and engaging classroom behaviors.

Second, the one dimension on which Hope seems to fall short consistently on this survey is

multiculturalism. Issues of race and ethnicity were measured with several different items on the survey, and in each case Hope's results lagged behind that of the comparison group.

Third, when comparing Hope's results to those of the comparison group, a general trend emerged in the direction of Hope scoring lower (although often only slightly lower) than the comparison group. This is a broad generalization, and indeed often Hope's scores were comparable. Furthermore, at least in the case of coursework emphases (Table 5), differences that existed at Year 1 were not present in Year 4, suggesting that a Hope education is making an important contribution. Still, although the differences in most cases were not large, it is the case that Hope scores were more often below the comparison group's scores than above them. Any analysis of a comparison group runs the risk of turning assessment into an "educational Olympics." External comparisons are helpful, but I believe in general assessment should be more about internal comparisons than external. Still, such comparisons provide benchmarks for Hope as we track our progress on these learning

TABLE 10
Students Perceptions of Institutional Emphases
(Percentage of students indicating Hope emphasizes a dimension either "quite a bit" or "very much")

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	87%	86%	88%	87%
Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	91	84	87	82
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial/ethnic backgrounds	53	38	57	48
Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	39	24	35	27
Providing the support you need to thrive socially	50	43	47	35
Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, athletic events)	76	70	76	68
Using computers in academic work	86	96	86	89

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TABLE 11

Hope's Contribution to Student Growth

(Percentage of students indicating Hope contributes "quite a bit" or "very much" to student development)

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
Acquiring a broad general education	90%	92%	89%	92%
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	64	71	56	64
Writing clearly and effectively	74	75	80	85
Speaking clearly and effectively	55	67	61	77
Thinking critically and analytically	87	93	88	93
Analyzing quantitative problems	58	57	57	62
Using computing and information technology	64	77	62	71
Working effectively with others	81	83	68	78
Voting in local, state, and national elections	16	14	23	25
Learning effectively on your own	75	82	75	82
Understanding yourself	73	82	66	74
Understanding people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds	51	32	53	53
Solving complex real-world problems	50	53	51	59
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	69	74	60	64
Contributing to the welfare of your community	54	50	50	54

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dimensions. The survey itself can provide the college community with a list of learning outcomes on which we seek to improve. In the hands of college decision-makers and governing boards, NSSE data can be used as important talking points for discussions of continuous improvement and future planning.

TABLE 12
Overall Evaluation
 (Percentage of students indicating each response category)

	Hope First-Year	Hope Senior	Comparison First-Year	Comparison Senior
<i>Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?</i>				
Excellent	39%	41%	37%	42%
Good	46	45	45	40
Fair	12	9	14	13
Poor	3	5	3	4
<i>How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?</i>				
Excellent	54	50	49	52
Good	43	42	42	40
Fair	3	7	7	7
Poor	0	1	1	1
<i>If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?</i>				
Definitely yes	59	51	48	47
Probably yes	31	30	37	36
Probably no	7	15	10	12
Definitely no	2	4	4	5

New Book

Departments That Work: Building and Sustaining Cultures of Excellence in Academic Programs. Written by Jon F. Wergin (2003); **Anker Publishing Company**, Bolton, MA; 172 pages.

Here is the first paragraph of a review offered by Jean Ekrich of Colby-Sawyer College, and published at www.aahebulletin.com:

“Academic departments often struggle to make self-assessments meaningful and useful. In this book author Jon Wergin, an educational studies professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and an AAHE senior scholar who has done extensive work with academic departments, recognizes the different factors that may act as obstacles for each department and describes characteristics and qualities of departmental evaluations that are successful in moving a department forward.”

If your department is interested in obtaining a copy of this book, please contact Scott VanderStoep or Jon Huisken.