

Summary of responses to our query to academic departments and campus offices:

In light of the NSSE data, what can your department or office do to promote a higher level of academic engagement for more of our students?

A complete set of departmental and office responses can be found on the Share Drive, under Campus, in the AcAB-NSSE file.

In individual classrooms:

1. Be more willing to hold students to high standards—give harder work and lower grades.
2. Introduce more pop quizzes into course assignments. Give a quiz whenever a reading assignment is given.
3. But avoid just adding busy work.
4. Assign more primary research articles as reading assignments in courses for the major. These articles are cognitively complex and require extensive reading and independent work on the part of students.
5. Gradually raise standards for workload and for grades.
6. Be creative with homework assignments, to include classroom components (reports, group work, Moodle, in-class discussion) which students know they will be accountable for.
7. Recognize the reality that whatever gets graded or awarded points becomes a priority for students. “If you grade it, they will do it.
8. Require students to submit multiple drafts of any papers 5 pages or longer prior to final submission.
9. Model passionate engagement with ideas and course materials; be an inspiring teacher for whom students want to work hard.
10. To encourage students to write multiple drafts of papers, make use of the writing tutorial services of the Academic Support Center.
11. Assign more out-of-class research projects.
12. Gradually increase demands in courses where we feel demands should be higher.
13. Change expectations so that if a student does all that is asked for on certain assignments, that level of accomplishment receives a grade lower than an A. Reserve the A for students who go beyond what is asked.

In departments

1. Conduct exit interviews with graduating students and ask directly about their degree of engagement.
2. Work with first-year majors to help them acquire appropriate work habits.
3. Administer standardized disciplinary tests to graduating majors to gauge their level of accomplishment. If students do well on tests, perhaps we don't have a problem.
4. Check in with departmental colleagues at least once a semester on how courses are going with respect to student demands.
5. Review course requirements for 100-, 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses.

Colleagues should make courses appropriately demanding according to agreed departmental standards.

6. Create more out-of-class opportunities for students to be involved in the discipline.
7. Since workloads vary from instructor to instructor, seek agreements within departments about homework, assignments, exams, and grade distributions.
8. Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. Value the variety of good teachers we have, and don't force conformity.
9. Work together within departments to set common grading standards.
10. Publicize departmental events (performances, colloquia, lectures, etc) with enough lead time to allow faculty members to incorporate them as academic requirements, and course components.
11. Create summer reading lists for majors.

In the General Education program

1. Rethink the ways First-Year Seminar establishes expectations for engagement and grading standards in the college.
2. Make Gen Ed courses as demanding as courses for majors.
3. Reduce class size in Gen Ed courses to allow faculty to work more closely with students and to require more work from them.
4. Encourage cross-divisional courses that emphasize synthesis.
5. Be more intentional in the design of FYS and Senior Seminar courses—and more explicit in our communication with students—to expect and require a synthesis of ideas.

In the college as a whole

1. All departments and offices must recognize that we all play a role in creating academic engagement. We all need to publicly reinforce the academic mission of the college.
2. The effort to increase student engagement must be a campus-wide effort so individual faculty members do not bear the brunt of student irritation.
3. We must reduce class sizes, especially in General Education courses. The large class size in these courses translates directly into difficulties for faculty in assigning appropriate amounts of work. The problem is especially acute in Cultural Heritage courses, which are supposed to be writing intensive, but usually have 28-30 students per section.
4. Campus Ministries, Student Development, and others can offer programming that complements, not competes with, the academic mission of the college.
5. Emphasize academics in the student recruitment process. Don't market Hope as a place of endless social activities.
6. Make changes to the Orientation program to emphasize academic issues.
7. Emphasize academics in the public image of the college, especially in recruiting new students.
8. Speak regularly with student groups to emphasize academics.
9. Ever increasing faculty load reduces ability to ask more of students. Often, greater workload for students means greater workload for faculty.

10. Create faculty linkages to Student Development programs by involving key faculty in program areas.

11. Try to alter the common perception that we all must be busy with a dozen activities all the time. Encourage a campus climate of reflection and focus.

12. The heavy reliance on student evaluations in the faculty evaluation process (especially pre-tenure) creates an impression among many faculty members that there is a risk in being too demanding of students, that by “lightening up” on requirements, one can achieve higher student evaluation responses.

13. We need to pay attention to the ways new faculty members are taught about expectations for academic engagement. Address student engagement in the TEW.

14. Offer optional faculty development workshops that focus on course design, assignment design, and student engagement.

Larger cultural issues (we can't control these, but we recognize they are connected to the question and need to be named)

1. We have a very wide variety of levels of student preparation. Perhaps the issue is not student engagement but student competence to do the work they are assigned.

2. The entertainment culture creates passive students, expectations to be entertained.

3. Ever increasing tuition charges may result in more members of the student body who view themselves as customers entitled to a product, rather than students working to gain an education.

4. Many students work at part-time jobs for 15-20 hours a week to help pay the bills. It's hard to be fully engaged in academic work when employment takes so many hours.

5. Students become accustomed to “resume-line thinking,” filling their lives with activities intended to impress future employers.