



RESEARCH NOTES

Office of Institutional Research

Volume 19, Number 6

January 2006

Highlights: The National Survey of Student Engagement

In 2004 and 2005 James Madison University participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). “NSSE assesses the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived effective educational practices and what they gain from their college experience. The NSSE survey reports student behaviors that are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college education (NSSE manual, 2005).” JMU chose to participate in the NSSE to establish comparative benchmarks for student engagement in educationally purposeful activities, and to determine how the engagement of JMU students compared with their national peers.

The purpose of this Research Note is to summarize how JMU’s first-year and senior-year students responded to the 2005 survey, how they compare with national responses, and how JMU’s responses changed between 2004 and 2005. This Research Note is a summary of a larger technical report that can be accessed on OIR’s Web site at: <http://www.jmu.edu/institresrch/StudiesNotesNews.shtml>.

Sampling and Response Rate

JMU’s overall response rate for the 2005 NSSE was 1,309 (49%) with a sampling error of 2.4%. Participants included 642 first year and 667 senior students. Of the 1,309 respondents, 71% were female, 82% were white, non-Hispanic, 2.5% were international students, over 90% were full-time students, most first-year students live on campus, most seniors live off campus, and 15% of seniors and 3% of first-years were transfer students.

The JMU sample differs from the NSSE sample in several ways:

- All JMU participants responded via the web.
- JMU has slightly higher percentage of females.
- JMU has more whites, non-Hispanic, and fewer minorities.
- JMU has fewer part-time students.
- JMU has more first-year students living on-campus and more seniors living off-campus.
- JMU has fewer transfer students, especially seniors.
- JMU has fewer non-traditional students, especially seniors.

Means, Statistical Significance and Effect Sizes

The technical report contains information about each question, its statistical significance and effect size. Effect size indicates the “practical significance” of the mean difference. Whenever you have a large sample, the odds of finding statistical significance are greatly increased, just by virtue of the sample size. Practical significance, on the other hand, tells us the meaningfulness of statistical significance, regardless of sample size. The effect size can be negative or positive. A negative effect size indicates that JMU is below the NSSE 2005 national sample, while a positive effect size indicates that JMU is above the NSSE 2005 national sample. The discussion section summarizes the items on which JMU’s first-year and senior-year students differed from national data and where the effect sizes have “practical significance”.

Discussion of Findings

Seniors rank higher than NSSE norms on many more items than first-year students. There are 19 questions for which seniors rank higher than the national norm and 5 for which they rank lower. First-year students, in comparison, rank higher than the national norm on 10 questions and lower on 7 questions.

Both first- year and senior students measured higher than NSSE national norms on these items.

- Exercising or participating in physical fitness activities
- Relating to other students
- Using an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment
- Speaking clearly and effectively
- Working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Working effectively with others
- Satisfaction with the support they receive from JMU to thrive socially
- Satisfaction with their entire educational experience at JMU
- Students report that if they could start over, they would choose JMU again.

First-year students measured higher than NSSE national norms on this item.

- Acquiring a broad general education

Seniors measured higher than NSSE national norms these items.

- Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)
- Participating in community service or volunteer work and community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course
- Having a culminating senior experience (capstone course, thesis, project, comprehensive exam, etc.)
- Having serious conversations with students who are very different from them in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Participating in practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)
- Understanding themselves
- Using e-mail to communicate with an instructor and using computing and information technology, in general
- Voting in local, state, or national elections

Comparisons were made between NSSE and JMU data for both 2004 and 2005 (Positive effect size differences of at least .10 are discussed)

Within **Academic and Intellectual Experiences** first-year students improved, from 2004 to 2005, in terms of

- Working with other students on projects during class.
- Participating in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course.
- Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, students-life activities, etc.).

Within **Enriching Educational Experiences** both first-year and senior students improved, from 2004 to 2005, in terms of

- Satisfaction with JMU for providing the support they need to thrive socially.

Within **Educational and Personal Growth** seniors improved, from 2004 to 2005, in terms of

- Voting in local, state, or national elections.

Results

Results from NSSE will be used in several ways at JMU.

- Information generated by first-year students will be reviewed to identify and address specific student needs in first-year orientation and first-year advising, and to inform General Education Cluster One instructors about first-year student perceptions and expectations.
- Information generated by senior-year students will be utilized to determine strengths and weaknesses of JMU programs and services as revealed by differences in first-year and senior-year scores.
- Where applicable, information will be used to identify and narrow gaps between institutional and student expectations for learning and behavior.
- Information will also be disseminated in workshops and presentations designed to educate JMU faculty and staff about student engagement.
- Finally, NSSE data can be used for accreditation purposes; specific NSSE items can be mapped to SACS criteria.

The university plans to participate in NSSE every two or three years to monitor how the responses change to each question and how responses compare with other institutions. Questions about the implications for JMU from this study should be directed to the Associate Vice President for Student Success.