



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA **UNK** KEARNEY

Summary of 2019 NSSE Results

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Photo from the 2019 Study Abroad trip to Australia led by Dr. Suzanne Maughan

Snapshot

The Snapshot is a short summary of the extremes in our data. A very few highlights:

- We still excel at High-Impact Practices.
 - 68% of our first year students report participating in at least one high-impact practice. 21% participated in two or more. (Peer institutions report 56% participating in one and 9% participating in two or more.)
 - 92% of our seniors participated in at least one high-impact practice, while peer institutions report 83% participation in at least one high impact practice. 72% of our seniors completed two or more high impact experiences. Peer institutions report 57% of seniors participating in two or more.
- The Snapshot lists the five items we performed highest and lowest on relative to our peer institutions.
 - First year students scored highest relative to our peers in participation in a learning community (+18%)
 - First year students scored lowest relative to our peers in “Institution emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds” (-11 points)
 - Senior students scored highest relative to our peers in completion of a culminating senior experience (+24%)
 - Senior students scored lowest relative to our peers in the question “Explained course material to one or more students” (-10 points)
- First year students struggle to find a supportive environment on campus.
- Both our first year and senior students struggle with using the learning strategies specified in the survey’s questions. This includes items:
 - Identified key information from reading assignments
 - Reviewed your notes after class
 - Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials

Engagement indicators

Engagement indicators are separated into four broad categories. These and their components are:

Academic Challenge

- Higher-order learning
- Reflective & integrative learning
- Learning strategies
- Quantitative reasoning

Learning with Peers

- Collaborative learning
- Discussions with diverse others

Experiences with faculty

- Student-faculty interaction
- Effective teaching practices

Campus environment

- Quality of interactions
- Supportive environment

ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

Our first year students scored below peer institutions in nearly every category. Reflective & integrative learning was the only area in which they scored better than their peers, and it was only by 1 point. In that category, they scored 7 points lower than their peers on the item “Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue.” Learning strategies and quantitative reasoning were the two areas of greatest weakness.

Our senior students scored nearly equal to our peer institutions in higher order learning. They struggled in all other areas. Learning strategies was the area of greatest weakness, though they also struggled slightly with quantitative reasoning. One standout under reflective & integrated learning is the item “Tried to better understand someone else’s

view by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective. They scored 4 points lower than their peers on this particular item.

Students at all levels struggled in the area of Learning Strategies. It would be helpful for faculty, Learning Commons staff, Student Success Services, Success Coaches, Advising and Career Development, and others providing academic support to give students information about practices that enhance learning. This includes reviewing and enhancing notes after class, spending time after class summarizing information learned in that session, and taking notes while reading so they can identify key information. A university “Teaching and Learning Center” would be a relatively efficient way to disseminate information to faculty about classroom strategies that can enhance learning. If created, the center should employ as its director an expert in the body of literature related to learning and pedagogy.

First year students also struggled to self-assess their own arguments and beliefs. Instructors may be able to help students with this skill through guided practice.

Quantitative reasoning is a major area of weakness. Students are either not encountering the need for quantitative analysis or they do not feel comfortable with the practice. The questions in the survey seem to indicate lack of experience rather than lack of comfort. Our students scored significantly lower than students at both our peer institutions and those within our Carnegie classification. This lack of experience and comfort with quantitative reasoning may be investigated at several points in the curriculum, including in math/statistics classes, in classes across campus where students are asked to analyze and interpret data, and in research with faculty members where they may be asked to do the same. Students may need extra instruction in data analysis and interpretation.

LEARNING WITH PEERS

Our first year students are collaborating more with their fellow students than students at our peer institutions, and much more than students within our Carnegie classification. Our seniors are collaborating much less with fellow students at our peer institutions but at a comparable level with those within our Carnegie classification.

Our students scored significantly behind their peers in questions about how often they had discussions with people of a race or ethnicity other than their own, and with people from an economic background other than their own. They scored slightly better than our peers in having discussions with people with political views other than their own.

Our peer institutions are emphasizing collaboration among students more than other institutions within our Carnegie classification.

First year students are doing a good job of asking their peers to help them understand course material. They also prepare for exams with other students.

Senior students spend less time than their peers both explaining course material to other students and asking students for help understand course material. They are also not preparing for exams with other students as often as their peers. They might do well with reminders that these can be effective strategies for success.

Regarding discussions with diverse others, roughly 72% of the first year student population identifies as white. The largest groups of other ethnicities are Hispanic or Latino (13%), foreign or nonresident (7%), and Black/African American (4%).

Students are not taking advantage of natural or happenstance opportunities to socialize and study with others of different ethnicities. Silos and cliques develop for a number of reasons, and only concerted efforts across campus can break down those boundaries. Faculty and staff may benefit from learning these results so they can come up with innovative strategies to ensure students are talking with others unlike themselves.

About 80% of the senior population identifies as white. Between the freshman year and senior year, we are losing many of our students of color. The black/African American population fell by 75% from the first year to the senior year. The foreign student population fell 43% from first year to senior year.

All of our students (but particularly our students of color and foreign students) are suffering from a lack of diversity in race and ethnicity on our campus. The university would be well served to redouble efforts to recruit faculty, staff, and students from diverse groups. It is critical to find effective strategies to retain these diverse populations. Strategies should address not only academic barriers, but social and community barriers as well.

For example, African-American students have trouble finding an experienced cosmetologist to take care of their specialized hair care needs. The closest cosmetologist who specializes in African-American hair care is in Lexington. Perhaps the university could sponsor her or another cosmetologist to join a salon in town part-time in order to serve the university's African-American student, staff, and faculty population. Or perhaps offering a scholarship at Joseph's College, the local cosmetology school, for a person to be specially trained in African-American hair care and hair styling could be arranged to create a resource in Kearney for our students, faculty, and staff, as well as for the community at large.

Many of our international students are Asian, and a large number of these students do not have cars. The nearest Asian market is in Grand Island. Perhaps the university could sponsor the cost of a van for weekly trip to the market for students who don't own cars so they can shop for supplies.

A diversity climate survey was completed in 2017, and there are many recommendations within the final report that should be investigated for implementation in an effort to help all members of our campus community to feel welcome and supported.

EXPERIENCES WITH FACULTY

Both first year and senior students report overall positive interactions with faculty. Particularly positive are items “talked about career plans with a faculty member” and “worked with faculty on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.).

Our students felt much like those at our peer institutions about faculty’s use of effective teaching practices. First year students reported that faculty provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments slightly less often than their peers. They reported slightly more often than their peers that faculty taught courses in an organized way.

Students feel by and large, and *in the specific areas mentioned*, that faculty are using effective teaching practices. However, there is always room for improvement. Faculty need to make sure they are interacting early and often with students and returning work in a timely fashion.

CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

First year students report that the quality of interactions with their fellow students, student services staff, and other administrative staff and offices is positive more often than at our peer institutions. They are less positive about interactions with faculty (-4 points) and academic advisors (-5 points) than students at our peer institutions.

Senior students feel that the quality of their interactions with other students, academic advisors, student services staff, and other administrative staff and offices is positive more often than those at our peer institutions. They are slightly less positive about interactions with faculty than those at our peer institutions. Of particular note is that interactions with academic advisors are 10 points higher than our peer institutions. **This represents a 15 point shift in perceived quality of interactions with advisors from the freshman to the senior years. There is clearly room for improvement of interactions between advisors and first year students.**

Freshmen struggle to find a supportive environment on campus. They feel that the institution does not encourage: contact among student from different backgrounds (-11 points), attending campus activities and events (-8 points), providing opportunities to be involved socially (-6 points), attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues (-6 points), helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities such as work and family (-5 points) and providing support for your overall well-being (-3 points).

Senior students also struggle with finding a supportive campus environment. Like first year students, they find lack of support for helping to manage non-academic

responsibilities (-6 points), encouraging interaction among students from different backgrounds (-4 points), attending campus activities and events (-4 points), and attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues (-4 points).

Faculty and staff may need to get creative about ways to engage students in discussions with students different from themselves, about their outside pressures and obligations, the multitude of benefits of becoming involved in organizations and attending presentations outside the classroom, and ways to stay mentally and physically well. They may wish to develop incentives to get students to attend campus events, including but not limited to sporting events, plays, musical and dance performances, lectures, poetry readings, and on-campus conferences and symposia.

Student Affairs is investigating an “outside the classroom curriculum.” This could be one avenue to increase participation and incentives for students to engage more on campus.

High-Impact Practices

By far the most positive responses we received relative to our peer institutions and Carnegie class come in the high-impact practices categories. We performed better than our peers in all areas, and much better than our peers in many categories.

- Our first year students engage in learning communities 18% more often than our peers, with 30% of students participating.
- 6% of first year students participated in research with faculty, which is 3% higher than our peers.
- 55% of first year students participated in service-learning, which is 5% higher than our peers.
- Senior students participate in culminating senior experiences 24% more often than those at peer institutions, and 19% more often than students at institutions within our Carnegie classification. 62% of students at UNK have participated in a culminating senior experience.
- 78% of senior students have had a course in which service-learning was a component. This is 15% higher than our peers.
- 23% of seniors have participated in research with faculty, which is 3% higher than those at our peer institutions and 4% higher than students at institutions within our Carnegie classification.
- 92% of seniors had participated in at least one high-impact practice, and 72% had participated in two or more. This is 15% higher than our peer institutions and 17% more than students at institutions within our Carnegie classification.
- The area in which we scored roughly the same as our peer institutions was study abroad. Only 11% of students reported studying abroad.

Should the university decide to set a goal of having every student participate in at least one high impact practice prior to graduation, it is within reach. One area of focus is “experiential learning,” which is our Higher Learning Commission-mandated Quality Initiative. The vision for this program is that every student will have a meaningful experience that develops skills valued by employers in students’ future careers. A large number of existing experiences would satisfy this requirement, including internships, research with faculty, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences.

It might be helpful to survey students to identify barriers to study abroad. Likely possibilities include cost, worry that they have to interrupt progress toward their degrees for a semester, lack of understanding of options available to them, and parent buy-in. There are a number of other possibilities, of course. Identification of our students’ barriers to studying abroad may help the university develop resources that would enhance students’ interest and participation in study abroad.

Academic Advising

220 universities, including UNK, participated in a topical module which consisted of an additional set of questions regarding student experiences with academic advising.

First year students report experiences on par with other institutions that participated in this module across most areas, with one exception. Students were asked how often academic advisors have reached out to them about their academic progress or performance. Our students reported “often or very often” less frequently than those at other institutions in the cohort. 44% of students said “never.” 35% of students said “sometimes.” 15% of students said “often” and 7% said “very often.” These results lag behind our peers.

There is clearly room for more work on the part of first year advisors to reach out to students and ask how they’re doing academically throughout the year. This would also help improve students’ perceptions of UNK creating a supportive environment, particularly if advisors encouraged students to talk about their lives in a more holistic manner, reaching beyond classroom concerns. In other words, advisors could help students feel more supported by asking about obligations and activities outside the university, if they are attending on-campus events, getting involved in organizations, meeting new friends, etc.

First year students’ answers about the primary source of advice regarding their academic plans was surprising. 44% said their primary source of advice was the academic advisor assigned to them. 4% said an academic advisor available to any student, and 7% said faculty or staff not formally assigned as an advisor. 7% said an online advising system. 4% reported that they used the website, catalog, or other published sources. 17% said friends or other students were their primary source of advice regarding their academic plans. 15%

said family members were their primary source of advice. Fully 32% of students are receiving their academic advice from someone other than a faculty member or official university sources. **This result indicates that it would be worthwhile to reach out to parents and give them advice about how to respond to their students when they ask for academic information.**

Senior students seek advice more frequently from official sources. 49% report that their primary source of advice was the academic advisor assigned to them, 1% was an academic advisor available to any student, and 16% was a faculty or staff member not formally assigned as an advisor. Only 10% reported friends or other students were their primary source of advice, and 7% cited family members as their primary source of advice.

It should also be noted that our senior students reported more positive results than other members of the cohort in the majority of questions regarding advising. Particularly positive was the question about to what extent your academic advisors have discussed your career interests and post-graduation plans.

34% of seniors report that academic advisors never reached out to them about their academic progress or performance. 35% report that advisors sometimes reached out, 22% report they do so “often,” and 9% said advisors reached out “very often.” This is slightly better than other cohort institutions. **There is still room, even at the senior level, for advisors to approach students and ask them about their academic progress, their concerns and obligations outside the classroom, and their overall wellbeing.**

Honors Consortium

UNK elected to join an Honors Consortium for purposes of the 2019 NSSE administration. All students were asked the same 12 questions, regardless of their honors affiliation at their respective institutions. Overall, our students appeared to give similar responses to others in the consortium for the majority of topics.

First year students reported that they spent less free time learning more about interesting topics discussed in classes, and that they were less interested in taking a course on a topic outside of their major area or comfort zone less often than their peers. They also discuss socio-political issues with family or friends slightly less often than others in the cohort. They are slightly less likely than others in the cohort to take a position they thought was correct or inventive event if they thought it might be challenged by a professor other person in authority. They report that their courses have delved deeply into complex issues less often than others in the cohort. First year students put less importance on earning a lot of money, and more importance on using their creativity to make artistic works or new contributions in a field than other students in the cohort. They place more importance at arriving at a personal understanding of the meaning and purpose of life than others. They get less exercise or physical activity than others in the cohort, but feel so depressed that it

was difficult to function less often than others in the cohort. A greater percentage of students at UNK reported being in an honors program than other schools in the cohort.

Like first year students, senior students report discussing socio-political issues with family or friends less often than others in their cohort. They also are less interested in taking a course on a topic outside of their major area or comfort zone than other students. They also placed less importance on making a lot of money than those at other institutions in the cohort.

They feel their experiences at the university have increased their comfort with asking difficult questions or taking unconventional positions more often than others in the cohort. They report feeling so depressed it was difficult to function less often than others in the cohort, and felt mentally or emotionally exhausted less often than their peers in the cohort.

Only 33% of first year students voted in the November 2018 elections, despite the fact that only 5% of these students were too young or otherwise ineligible to do so at that time. This is significantly less than at other institutions within the cohort.

50% of senior students voted in the November 2018 elections. 3% were not old enough or otherwise ineligible to do so. This is also significantly less than at other institutions within the cohort.

UNK students in general report less interest in socio-political issues and in attending events that highlight social or political issues than their peers. It is possible that programming in these areas by faculty and staff could develop additional interest and comfort with these areas. Incentives to participation in these events may be helpful as well. Increased efforts in on-campus voter registration and education could have a big impact on the number of our students who vote in the presidential election next year.

Work, Volunteerism, and Caring for Dependents

50% of first year students work off campus, and 25% of students work on campus. The average time first-year students spend working for pay (either on or off campus) is 10.2 hours per week. This is higher than that of our peer institutions, which is 8.2 hours per week. 3% of first year students work more than 30 hours per week.

55% of first year students perform at least one hour of community service or volunteer work weekly, with the most common response (44%) that their time commitment is 1-5 hours per week.

20% of first year students report spending some time each week providing care for dependents (children, parents, etc.). 3% of first year students spend more than 30 hours per week caring for dependents.

36% of seniors work on campus, and 75% work off campus. 20% of seniors work more than 30 hours per week off campus. (More than 30 hours was the choice with the greatest frequency for seniors.)

The average amount of time our senior students spend working is 20 hours per week, higher than that of our peer institutions, which is 17.3 hours per week.

56% of seniors report spending at least 1 hour doing community service or volunteer work weekly. Most of these seniors (43%) are spending from 1-5 hours per week volunteering.

31% of senior students report providing care for dependents at least one hour per week. 9% of seniors spend more than 30 hours per week caring for dependents.

Many of our students have significant responsibilities in their lives other than attending class and doing homework. The university may wish to consider increasing the number of classes taught at non-traditional course times (evenings and weekends) and online offerings to make it easier for working students and those caring for dependents to attend school. Additional scholarship funds and grants can reduce the financial burden on students working their way through school.

It is unclear how many of these students are involved in paid internships, but it would be helpful if the university could cultivate relationships with local and regional employers, government agencies, county offices, etc. and encourage them to provide paid internships so students get a double benefit from engaging in this high-impact practice. It might prevent some students from needing both an internship and a separate job to get through that final year of school.

Demographic Information

Among students who responded, the following apply:

- 11% of first year students and 14% of seniors plan to complete more than one major.
- 96% of first year students and 81% of seniors were full-time students in Spring 2019.
- 41% of first year students and 60% of seniors were taking at least one online class in Spring 2019. 3% of first year students and 15% of seniors were taking ALL classes online.
- 11% of first year students started college at an institution other than UNK. 1% started at a vocational or technical school, 12% started at a community or junior college, 13% started at a different 4-year college or university, and 5% reported they started at another type of institution.

- 32% of seniors started college at an institution other than UNK. 3% started at a vocational or technical school, 28% started at a community or junior college, 23% started at a different 4-year college or university, and 3% reported they started at another type of institution.
- 48% of first year students and 46% of seniors claim first-generation status. 5% of first year students and 8% of senior students have at least one parent who did not finish high school.
- 87% of first year students are 19 years of age or younger. Another 8% are aged 20-23. 4% are considered non-traditional students, who are 24 years of age or older.
- 78% of senior students are aged 20-23. The remainder are non-traditional students. 11% are aged 24-29, 7% are aged 30-39, 3% are age 40-55, and 1% are 55 or older.
- 6% of first year students identified as international students. 77% were from Asia, 9% were from Europe, 9% were from Latin America and the Caribbean, 5% were from the Middle East and North Africa.
- 3% of senior students identified as international students. 100% were from Asia.
- 22% of first year students and 20% of seniors were members of a Greek organization.
- 23% of first year students lived off campus, with 12% living farther than walking distance from campus. 84% of senior students lived off campus, with 47% living farther than walking distance from campus.
- 11% of first year students and 9% of seniors were student athletes.
- 0% of first year students and 3% of seniors were veterans of the US Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard.
- 8% of first year students indicated that they had been diagnosed with a disability or impairment. (3% preferred not to respond.) 48% of those students were diagnosed with a mental health disorder, 24% had a learning disability, 7% had a mobility impairment, 3% had a sensory impairment (vision or hearing), and 34% had a disability not specified in the question.
- 13% of senior students indicated they had been diagnosed with a disability or impairment (1% preferred not to respond.) 56% of those students had a mental health disorder, 33% had a learning disability, 15% had a sensory impairment (hearing or vision), 3% had a mobility impairment, and 19% had a disability or impairment not specified in the question.
- 12% of first year students identified as LGBTQ, with 3% preferring not to respond. 9% of seniors identified as LGBTQ, with 2% preferring not to respond.
- Our respondents were overwhelmingly female (72% first year and 70% senior). This does not accurately reflect the student body demographics. The actual population of first year students is 58% female, and of senior students is 61% female.