

Executive Summary of 2019 Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement

Beth Hinga, Assistant to the Senior Vice Chancellor

September 2019

1. We still excel at high-impact practices.
 - Many more of our students are participating in high-impact practices than students at our peer institutions. High-impact practices include learning communities, research with faculty members, service-learning, culminating senior experiences, and study abroad. We far surpassed our peers in all areas except study abroad.
2. Students at all levels struggle in the area of Learning Strategies.
 - It would be helpful for all who provide academic support to students to give students information about practices that enhance learning.
 - Providing support to faculty in innovative, engaging, and effective teaching practices that enhance learning would also be helpful, perhaps through a Teaching and Learning Center with a director whose expertise is in the science of learning and effective teaching pedagogy.
3. Quantitative reasoning is an area of weakness.
 - Students are either not encountering the need for quantitative analysis or they do not feel comfortable with the practice. This can be addressed not only in math and statistics classes, but also in any class or research project with faculty in which students are asked to analyze and interpret numerical data.
4. 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.
 - Students need guidance and incentive from faculty and staff to interact with students from different races and ethnicities. They are not moving outside their own cliques and silos on their own.
 - The university would also do well to redouble its efforts to recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented ethnic groups. 72% of the first year student population identifies as white, and 80% of the senior class identifies as white. From the first year to the senior year, we lost approximately 75% of our black/African-American students, 42% of our international students, and 8% of our Hispanic/Latino students. We are losing our diverse voices that enhance and enrich our campus. A recent diversity survey has a number of recommendations that would be helpful in both recruiting and retaining students, faculty, and staff from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
5. First year students struggle to find a supportive environment on campus.
 - Specifically, they do not feel the university encourages: contact among students 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 them manage non-academic responsibilities such as work and family (-5 points), and providing support for their overall wellbeing (-3 points). Senior students also struggle in most of these areas.

- Faculty and staff need to get creative about ways to engage students in discussions with students different from themselves, about their outside pressures and obligations and ways to handle those stressors, the multitude of benefits of becoming involved in organizations and attending performances and presentations outside the classroom, and ways to stay mentally and physically well.
 - Student affairs is investigating an “outside the classroom” curriculum, which could be one avenue to increase participation and incentives for students to engage more on campus.
6. First year students report that they are less happy (-5 points) with advising than students at our peer institutions.
- 44% of first year students said an advisor never reached out to them to ask about their academic progress or performance. 35% of students said “sometimes,” 15% said “often,” and 7% said “very often.”
 - There is clearly room for more work on the part advisors working with first year students to reach out and ask how they’re doing academically throughout the year. This would have the added benefit of helping students feel more supported. Toward this end, advisors could also have conversations with students about how they’re handling their obligations and activities outside the university, if they’re attending on-campus events, getting involved in organizations, and meeting new friends.
7. Seniors students are more happy (+10 points) with advising than their students at our peer institutions. This is a 15 point shift from the freshman year to the senior year.
- Seniors report more often than their peers that advisors have talked with them about career interests and post-graduation plans. However, 34% of seniors report academic advisors never reached out to them to talk about their academic progress or performance.
8. 32% of first year students and 17% of seniors report that their main source of advice regarding academic decisions is a friend or family member rather than official university resources.
9. Only 33% of first year students voted in the November 2018 elections despite the fact that only 5% of this population was too young or otherwise ineligible to do so. 50% of senior students voted in the November 2018 elections, and only 3% were not old enough or otherwise ineligible.
10. Our students work more than their peers.
- 25% of first year students work on campus and 50% work off campus. The average time spent working for pay is 10.2 hours per week.
 - 36% of seniors work on campus and 75% work off campus. The average time spent working for pay is 20 hours per week. 20% of seniors work more than 30 hours per week off campus.
 - 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 times and the offerings of online classes to help students who work and care for dependents to attend school. Cultivating relationships with local and regional employers and encouraging them to provide paid internships to our students could alleviate the need for both an internships and separate job to get through that final year of school.

Demographic information of interest

32% of seniors started college at an institution other than UNK. Transfer students are a significant component of our population.

22% of first year students and 20% of seniors were members of a Greek organization.

8% of first year students indicated they had been diagnosed with a disability or impairment.

- 48% 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)

- 34% had a disability not specified in the question.

13% of senior students indicated they had been diagnosed with a disability or impairment.

- 56% were diagnosed with a mental health disorder

- 33% had a learning disability

- 15% had a sensory impairment (hearing or vision)

- 3% had a mobility impairment

- 19% had a disability not specified in the question

12% of first year students and 9% of seniors identified as LGBTQ.

4% of first year students are older than age 23.

11% of seniors are between ages 24-29, and 11% are aged 30 years or older.

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.