

NSSE 2014: Executive Summary

In the spring of 2014, 915 first-year students (26 percent) and 1,584 seniors (30 percent) participated in the National Survey of Student Engagements (NSSE)¹. This survey asks students to reflect on the time they devote to various learning activities and the degree to which their institution emphasizes and encourages students to participate in activities considered important to their success (Table 1).

TABLE 1: KEY ASPECTS OF NSSE

ASPECT	DESCRIPTION
MEASURES	Items and Engagement Indicators (summary measures for groups of related items) assess extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with learning and development
TOPICS	Degree of academic challenge and collaborative learning, interactions with faculty, effective teaching practices, campus environment, the amount of reading & writing students do, and participation in co-curricular activities and high impact practices
POPULATION(S)	First-year students ¹ and seniors
USES	Planning and setting priorities; Demonstrating Effectiveness; Recruiting/marketing
TYPES OF ANALYSES	Comparisons across institutions; Comparisons across sub-groups; Changes over time (<i>Note: Survey was modified substantially in 2013 limiting longitudinal comparisons before that time</i>)
OCCURRENCE	Every three years since Spring 2011 (annually before that)
CUSTOMIZATION	Institutions can add up to two topical modules and can select up to three customized comparison groups

¹ New students and continuing and transfer students with first year standing.

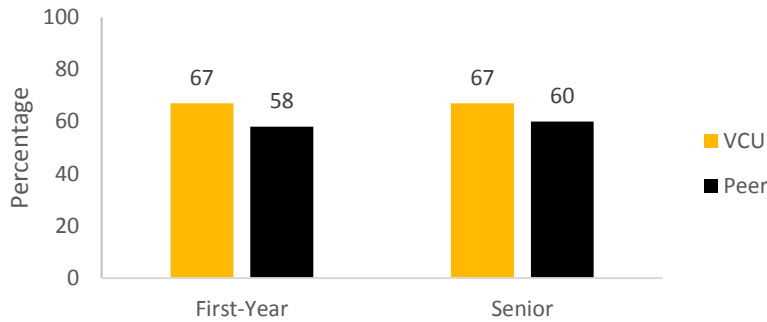
What did we learn from NSSE 2014?

In the spring of 2014, VCU students reported gaining a greater understanding of people from different backgrounds (Figure 1) and having more discussions with diverse people than students at peer institutions.² VCU first-year students also reported making more class presentations and working with other students on course projects or assignments more frequently than students at peer institutions. All of these were also areas of distinction in 2011.

¹ Assuming a random sample, the estimated global margins of error were +/-2.8% and +/-2.1% for first-year students and seniors, respectively.

² Florida State U.; North Carolina State U.; Ohio State U.; U. of Tennessee, Knoxville; U. of Alabama Birmingham; U. of Cincinnati; U. of Georgia; U. of South Carolina, Columbia; U. of South Florida; U. of Utah, U. of Washington-Seattle, U. of Wisconsin-Madison

FIGURE 1: VCU STUDENTS WERE MORE LIKELY THAN PEERS TO FEEL INSTITUTION CONTRIBUTED SUBSTANTIALLY TO THEIR UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE OF OTHER BACKGROUNDS



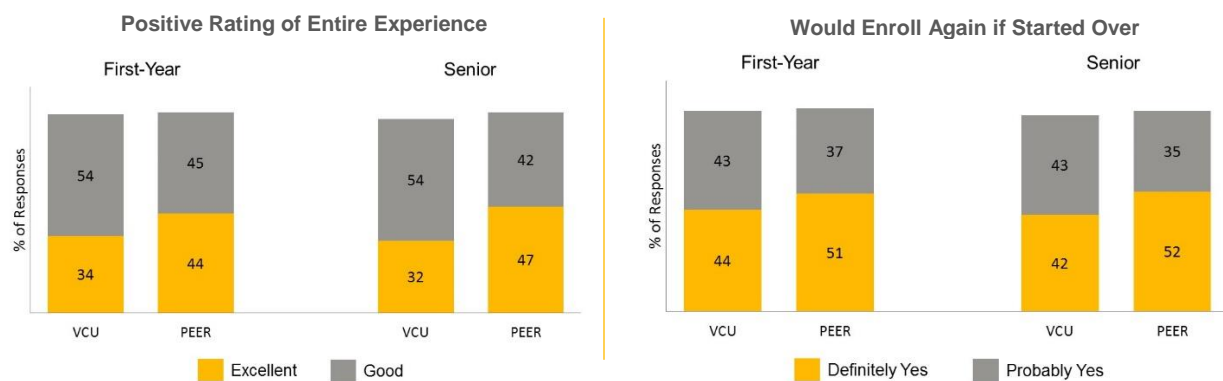
Note: Percentage of students who felt institution contributed “quite a bit” or “very much.”

By contrast, there were several areas in which VCU students reported less positive perceptions than peers in both 2011 and 2014:

- First-year and senior students reported less positive interactions with administrative staff and offices.
- First-year students reported less participation in co-curricular activities, less challenging courses and less institutional emphasis on studying and attending campus events.
- Seniors spent fewer hours per week preparing for class and reported a less positive overall evaluation of their experience.

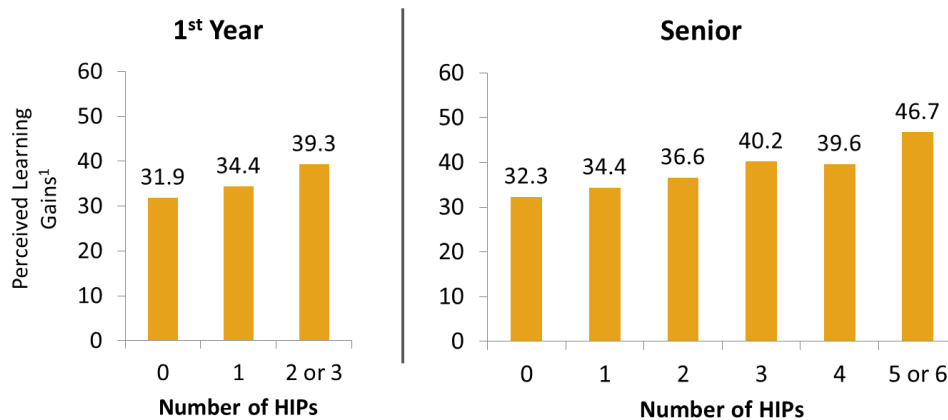
While most VCU students reported having a positive overall experience at VCU and indicated they would probably enroll at VCU again if they started over, fewer rated their experience as “excellent” and fewer said they would “definitely” enroll again compared to students at peer institutions (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: MOST VCU STUDENTS REPORTED POSITIVE EXPERIENCE AND WOULD ENROLL AGAIN IF STARTED OVER



Half of first-year students and 88 percent of seniors reported participating in at least one high impact practice³ in 2014, and VCU seniors were more likely to report having a culminating senior experience (capstone) than peers. Students who participated in high impact practices reported higher perceived learning gains (Figure 2).

FIGURE 3: STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN MORE HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES REPORTED HIGHER PERCEIVED LEARNING GAINS



¹ Composite score based on students' self-reported gains in knowledge, skills, or personal development in 10 areas.
Note: Statistically significant differences in scores.

In 2014, VCU included two topical modules:

- **Academic Advising:** First-year students reported a higher number and more helpful interactions with their advisors than peers.⁴ They were also more likely than peers to look to their advisors as a primary source of advice about their academic plans (Figure 4). Seniors, on the other hand, reported less positive and less helpful interactions with their advisors and were less likely than peers to view their advisors as their primary source of advice about their academic plans.
- **Experiences with Diverse Perspectives:** VCU students were more likely than students at other large institutions to feel events were offered that emphasized societal differences. They attended events encouraging them to examine their understanding of societal differences and inequalities as often as peers, and had discussions about these issues as often (first-year) or more often (senior) than peers.

³ Learning community, service learning or research with faculty for first-year students, plus internship, study abroad, or capstone for seniors.

⁴ Peer institutions for the modules differed from the core survey based on the subset of institutions that selected a given module. Lists of peer institutions available upon request.

FIGURE 4: VCU FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS MORE LIKELY THAN PEERS TO MEET WITH ADVISOR AND VIEW ADVISOR AS PRIMARY SOURCE OF ADVICE ABOUT ACADEMIC PLANS

