

NSSE 2017: Summary of Findings

In the spring of 2017, 1,190 first-year students (30 percent) and 1,381 seniors (24 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
OCCURRENCE	Every three years since Spring 2011 (annually before that)
CUSTOMIZATION	Institutions can add up to two topical modules ² and select up to three customized comparison groups

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

² In 2017, VCU included modules on academic advising and inclusiveness and engagement with cultural diversity.

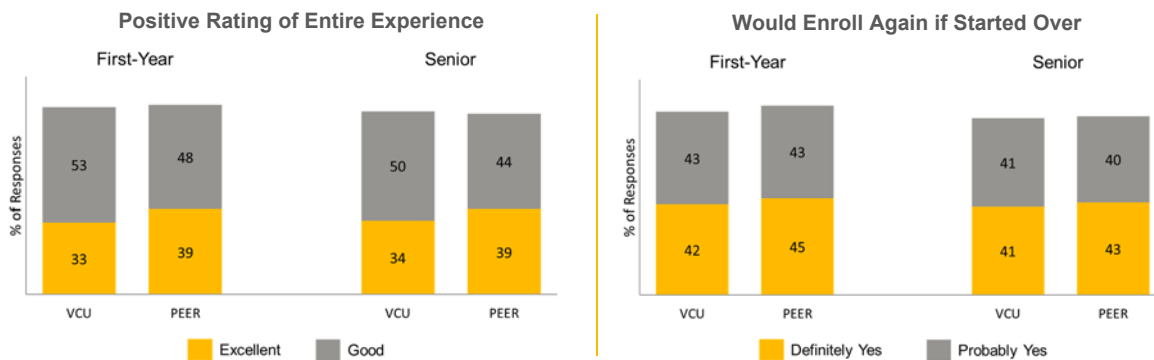
Key Findings from NSSE 2017

Most students reported having a positive overall experience and indicated they would probably enroll at VCU again if they started over (Figure 2). Results for these summary measures were similar to peer institutions and compared to 2014.²

¹ Assuming a random sample, the estimated global margins of error were +/-2.4% and +/-2.4% for first-year students and seniors, respectively.

² Peer institutions included five Quest for Distinction peer institutions: U. of Alabama Birmingham, U. of Cincinnati, U. of Illinois at Chicago, U. of South Carolina Columbia, and U. of South Florida. Percentages presented in this summary are weighted based on sex and enrollment status to produce less biased estimates of the entire institution.

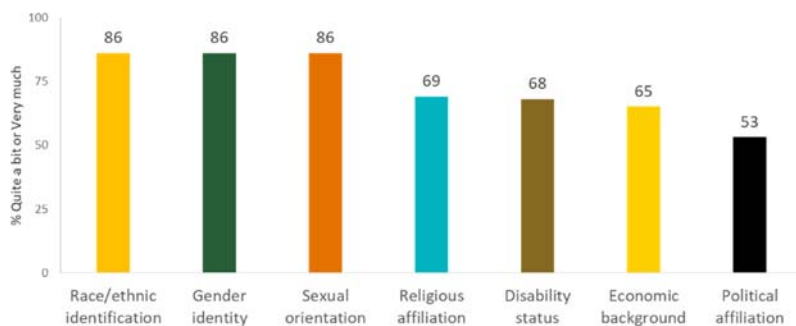
FIGURE 1: MOST VCU STUDENTS REPORTED POSITIVE EXPERIENCE AND WOULD ENROLL AGAIN IF STARTED OVER



Strengths

VCU students reported a strong institutional commitment to and support of diversity. Over 80 percent of first-year and senior respondents felt VCU emphasized demonstrating a commitment to diversity and ensuring students are not stigmatized based on their identity. Over three-quarters felt VCU emphasized creating a sense of community among students. Students also reported a supportive environment for most forms of diversity (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: STUDENTS FELT THAT VCU PROVIDES A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR MOST FORMS OF DIVERSITY

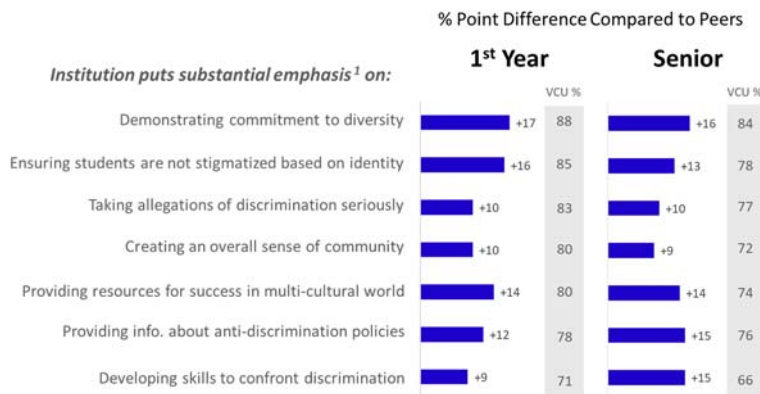


VCU's commitment to and support of diversity stood out as the greatest areas of distinction compared to other institutions, with VCU students reporting greater than a 10 percentage point difference for many items (Figures 3 and 4). VCU first-year students were also more likely than students at comparison institutions to report that their coursework emphasized diverse ideas and perspectives and respect for differences. It should be noted that VCU is considerably more diverse with respect to race/ethnicity than many of the institutions in the comparison group for this optional module, and differences in structural diversity both reflect and contribute to differences in the campus climate for inclusion.³

There were several other areas of distinction for VCU students compared to peers. VCU first-year students continue to report making class presentations and including diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments more often than peers (as was the case in 2011 and 2014 as well), and they were more likely to report often connecting their learning to societal problems or issues. VCU seniors were more likely to report having a capstone experience (which was also the case in 2011 and 2014) and perceiving a greater institutional emphasis on students' attending events that address important social, economic or political issues.

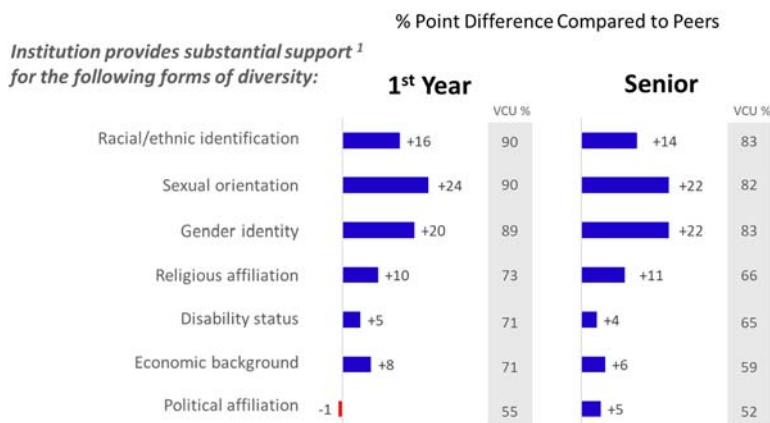
³ Participating large, public research universities in urban (any size) or large suburban locales: Auburn U., Stony Brook U., U. at Buffalo SUNY, U. of Cincinnati, U. of North Dakota, Western Michigan U., Wichita State U.

FIGURE 3: VCU STUDENTS REPORTED A GREATER INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY THAN STUDENTS AT COMPARISON INSTITUTIONS DID



¹ “Quite a bit” or “Very much”

FIGURE 4: VCU STUDENTS REPORTED GREATER SUPPORT FOR DIVERSITY THAN STUDENTS AT COMPARISON INSTITUTIONS DID



¹ “Quite a bit” or “Very much”

Opportunities

The biggest challenge for VCU students compared to peers was the quality of interactions students had with administrative staff and offices.⁴ This was also a challenge in 2014 and 2011⁵, and results from a 2015 student satisfaction survey also highlighted opportunities for improved interactions with campus staff.⁶

Results suggest there may be opportunities to support more student engagement with diverse political views. For example, just over half of students felt VCU provides a supportive environment for political differences (Figure 2 above) and students reported having less frequent discussions with students with different political views than in 2014 (down from three-quarters to less than two-thirds). Similarly, in a 2016 campus climate survey, undergraduate students reported feeling less satisfied with the atmosphere for political differences (59%) than for religious differences (67%) and differences in sexual orientation (72%).⁷ Also, fewer undergraduate students agreed that they are respected by each other regardless of their political beliefs (60

⁴ Registrar, financial aid, etc. Students were asked to evaluate their interactions with student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.) in a separate question.

⁵ Item was changed in 2013. In 2011, the item asked students to rate the quality of their relationships with administrative personnel and offices.

⁶ Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory.

⁷ HERI Diverse Learning Environments survey.

percent) than due to differences in gender (82 percent), race/ethnicity (81 percent), sexual orientation (80 percent), disability status (74 percent), socioeconomic status (73 percent), or religious/spiritual beliefs (72 percent).

Changes Since 2014

The most noteworthy changes since 2014 were in the area of first-year advising. While advising for first-year students was an area of distinction in 2014, student perceptions in 2017 were similar to peers.⁸ First-year students reported having more interactions with advisors than peers did; but fewer than in 2014 (Figure 5). Compared to 2014, first-year students perceived less support from their advisors (Figure 6). Several factors may have contributed to changes in perceived support, including: (1) an increase in the number of enrolled first-year students without a commensurate increase in advisors and (2) staff turnover – half of first-year advisors were new in Fall 2016.⁹ Senior VCU students perceived similar levels of support from their advisors compared to students at peer institutions and slightly more support compared to 2014.¹⁰

FIGURE 5: VCU FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS REPORTED HAVING MORE INTERACTIONS WITH ADVISORS THAN PEERS DID

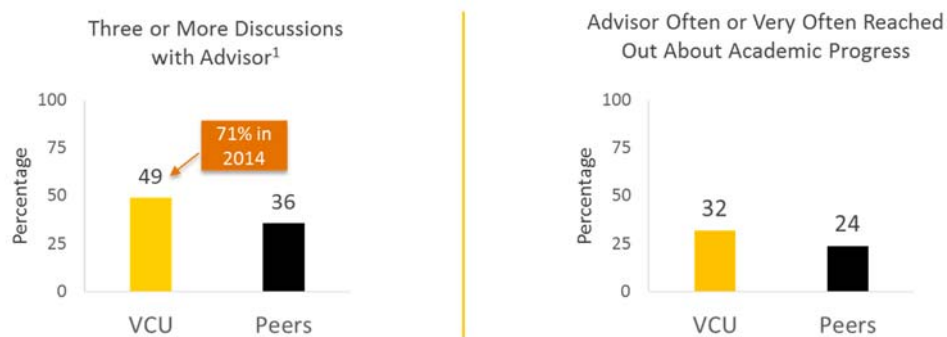
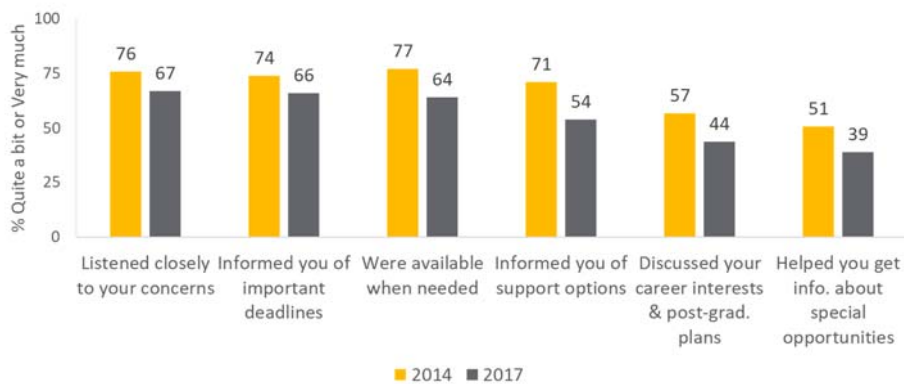


FIGURE 6: FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS PERCEIVED LESS SUPPORT FROM ADVISORS THAN IN 2014

Extent to which their advisors did the following:



⁸ Large, public, urban (any size city), very high research universities: Colorado State U., Michigan State U., Ohio State U., U. at Albany, SUNY, U. of Alabama at Birmingham, U. of Arkansas, U. of Houston, U. of Illinois at Chicago, U. of Oregon, U. of Texas at Arlington, U. of Texas at Dallas, U. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

⁹ The number of new full-time 1st year students increased by 632 between Fall 2013 and Fall 2016 without an additional advisor position. Due to high staff turnover, advisors taught fewer sections of UNIV 101 (“Introduction to the University”), and evidence suggests students who took that course perceived more support from their advisors.

¹⁰ The differences compared to 2014 were trivial (based on effect sizes), but the overall trend for seniors was positive. Between summer 2016 and spring 2017, three directors and five additional advisors were hired for upper-division students.