

# ORAP Research Bulletin

Office of Research, Assessment & Planning  
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## Selected Findings from the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Since 2000, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has collected data from freshmen and seniors at four-year colleges and universities across the United States. In its focus on activities empirically linked to learning – the amount of time students spend preparing for class, the amount of writing they do, their interaction with faculty, and so forth – NSSE has garnered attention as an alternative way to measure the quality of undergraduate education.<sup>1</sup>

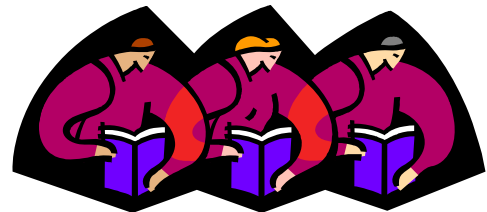
Seeing NSSE as a catalyst for institutional improvement, Adelphi University has participated in the survey every year since its inception in 2000. Selected findings from the 2005 survey administration are presented below, along with trend data and national comparisons.<sup>2</sup>

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In spring 2005, 341 randomly selected Adelphi students – 195 first-year freshmen and 146 seniors – completed NSSE questionnaires. Selected findings are presented below.

### **Students' Characteristics:**

The NSSE survey highlighted a number of areas in which Adelphi freshman and senior respondents were distinct from their peers across the nation:



- Adelphi respondents (both freshmen and seniors) were more likely to be minorities.
- Adelphi respondents (both freshmen and seniors) were a great deal less likely to live on-campus.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic quality rankings in U.S. News & World Report's annual *America's Best Colleges*, for example, are based on such institutional characteristics as institutional reputation, faculty resources, alumni giving, and acceptance rates.

<sup>2</sup> NSSE 2005 questionnaires were completed by 341 Adelphi students and about 237,000 students at 528 four-year colleges and universities nationwide.

- Adelphi senior respondents were much more likely to be transfer students.
- Adelphi senior respondents were also much more likely to be age 24 or older.

In addition,

- Adelphi respondents (both freshmen and seniors) were notably more likely than their national peers to
  - work for pay off-campus,
  - have lengthy commutes to class,
  - and for seniors, spend more time caring for dependents and less time relaxing and socializing.

### ***Level of Academic Challenge:***

A number of items included in the NSSE questionnaire focused on students' self-reported level of academic effort and their descriptions of course activities and assignments. Adelphi freshman responses to most of these items, including reports of



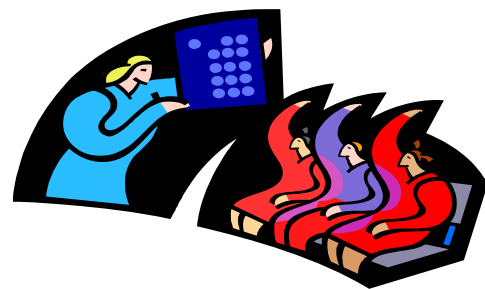
institutional emphasis on higher-order thinking skills and the general education learning goals of writing, speaking, and critical thinking, were very similar to their peers across the nation. There were a few notable exceptions, however. Adelphi freshmen recounted considerably fewer hours spent preparing for class, wrote fewer drafts of papers before turning them in, and were less apt to report that their exams

had challenged them to do their best work. Excluding their more positive perception of institutional emphasis on quantitative analysis, Adelphi freshman 2005 scores on items reflecting academic challenge were lower than in previous administrations of the NSSE survey.

Adelphi seniors, like freshmen, responded in much the same way as their peers nationally. In contrast to Adelphi freshmen, however, senior scores improved overall as compared to prior survey administrations. And compared to their peers, Adelphi seniors were significantly more likely to report an emphasis in their coursework on synthesizing and organizing ideas and on the evaluation of information, arguments, or methods.

### ***Active and Collaborative Learning:***

A second group of items in the 2005 NSSE survey focused on active involvement in the learning process and collaboration with other students in both in-class and outside-of-class settings. Seniors at Adelphi were much more likely to report these experiences, including class participation, class presentations, and working with other students on class projects, than were freshmen. Freshman scores in 2005 were relatively unchanged from prior years, while seniors' responses indicated more active



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learning than in prior administrations of the NSSE survey. Moreover, although Adelphi seniors responded similarly to their national peers, Adelphi freshmen reported much less active or collaborative involvement in the learning process as compared to other freshmen.

### ***Student-Faculty Interaction:***

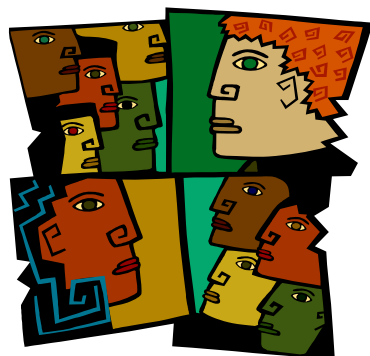
Another group of questionnaire items in the NSSE survey concentrated on student reports of their interactions with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. These items ranged from talking with faculty about grades, possible careers, and ideas from readings or classes, to working with faculty members on research projects or other non-course-related activities, such as serving on university committees or planning student events. In their responses to the 2005 survey, Adelphi seniors were much more likely to report these interactions than were freshmen. Seniors' reports of interaction with faculty also improved in each year of the NSSE survey administration, while the freshman score fell in comparison to prior years. Adelphi students' reports were indistinguishable from their nationwide peers, with two exceptions for freshmen: Adelphi freshmen reported fewer conversations with their instructors regarding grades or course assignments than freshmen enrolled in other institutions; freshmen also claimed that they had received less prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance as compared to their peers.



### ***Enriching Educational Experiences:***

A set of experiences that NSSE terms “complementary learning opportunities” are included in the survey. These activities range from participation in co-curricular activities and study abroad to diversity experiences and the use of technology to facilitate collaboration. Compared to their peers nationally, Adelphi freshmen and seniors scored higher on diversity items (such as “How often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?”), but reported less involvement in many of the experiences occurring off-campus (such as community service) and on-campus but out of the classroom (such as co-curricular activities). Adelphi seniors did, however, report more involvement in community service or volunteer work in 2005 than in prior survey administrations.

The nature of Adelphi’s student body is likely related to these outcomes; the sizeable non-traditional population is less apt to participate in these experiences than are more traditional students who are just out of high school, live on-campus, and do not work full-time or have family responsibilities.



**Supportive Campus Environment:**

The NSSE questionnaire included a group of items gauging students' perception of the university's commitment to their success and of the quality of students' relationships with different constituencies on campus (other students, faculty members, and administrative personnel). After increases in prior years, both Adelphi freshman and senior scores on most of these items dropped slightly in 2005. While freshman and senior overall responses were comparable to those of their nationwide peers, Adelphi students were more likely to report that their institution "provided the support you need to help you succeed academically." Adelphi students also perceived more positive relationships with faculty members than was true at doctoral peer institutions.



**Overall Evaluation of Collegiate Experience:**

The freshman evaluation of their overall experience at Adelphi declined in 2005 as compared to 2004, although it remained higher than in previous survey administrations. Despite their general improvement on most questionnaire items, seniors' evaluation also fell slightly, marking the second year of that downward trend and bringing seniors' rating to a level below that of all national NSSE respondents. In reply to a separate item asking whether students would choose Adelphi "if [they] could start over again," freshmen responded more negatively than in the prior year, while seniors were more positive. (A seeming disconnect with seniors' overall evaluation is puzzling.) Freshmen and seniors nationwide, as compared to Adelphi respondents, were somewhat more likely to indicate that they would choose their current institution again.

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NSSE 2005 results highlight a number of positive developments at Adelphi University, including seniors' improved responses to many academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction items. The results also point out, however, areas of concern. Perhaps most significant of these was the general tendency for 2005 freshman scores to decline in comparison to past survey administrations. Given Adelphi's commitment to providing the best possible education for all its students, the finding that freshman scores have fallen warrants the attention of the campus community.

*The full NSSE 2005 report, including results for all survey items, is available at the ORAP Web site.*

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