

2019 Executive Summary Report

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Prepared by
Office of Academic Planning and Assessment

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In spring 2019, Sam Houston State University (SHSU) administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to a sample of First-year and Senior students. The primary motivation for administering the NSSE was for use as part of SHSU's assessment of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) six Core Learning Objectives (THECB, 2018). However, the NSSE contains rich, robust information about student learning, student engagement, and student perceptions of campus experiences that will be valuable to the various units across the University. The NSSE is administered at SHSU on a 3-year cycle. The 2019 administration was the second such administration in this cycle, and this report provides comparisons from the 2016 to 2019 administrations, when applicable and relevant. At various points this report references comparisons between SHSU students and different comparison groups. For the 2019 report, these groups were:

- **IPEDs Comparison Group** - NSSE-participating institutions that were also within SHSU's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) comparison group
- **THECB Comparison Group** - NSSE-participating institutions that were also within SHSU's THECB Comparison Group
- **Texas Comparison Group** - NSSE-participating institutions from Texas

This report provides an executive summary of select findings from the 2019 NSSE administration. Any questions regarding the findings presented within this report, or requests for additional NSSE data, can be directed to Brandi Jones, Director of Assessment (bjones@shsu.edu).

Student Perceptions of Institutional Quality

For the 2019 NSSE administration, SHSU students responded in an overwhelmingly positive way to two questions regarding students' perceptions of the general quality of the institution:

- How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
 - Approximately 90% of First-year students evaluated their "entire educational experience at this institution" as being good or excellent.
 - Approximately 89% of Senior students evaluated their "entire educational experience at this institution" as being good or excellent.
- If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending?
 - Approximately 89% of First-year students indicated if they "could start over again" they would probably or definitely "go to the same institution [they] are now attending."
 - Approximately 86% of Senior students indicated if they "could start over again" they would probably or definitely "go to the same institution [they] are now attending."

2019 NSSE administration results from both First-year and Senior SHSU students for these questions were statistically significantly higher than those from all three comparison groups.

Additionally, the 2019 results were very similar to those from 2016, indicating that student perceptions regarding the general quality of SHSU have remained consistent over time.

Student Perceptions Regarding High Impact Practices

Due to positive associations with student learning and retention, certain undergraduate opportunities are designated High-Impact Practices (HIPs) and share several traits:

- They demand considerable time and effort.
- They facilitate learning outside of the classroom.
- They require meaningful interactions with faculty and students.
- They encourage collaboration with diverse others.
- They provide frequent and substantive feedback.

Student participation in these practices can be life changing (Kuh, 2008). NSSE founding director George Kuh recommended that institutions should aspire for all students to participate in at least two HIPs over the course of their undergraduate experience—one during the first year and one in the context of their major (NSSE, 2007).

Areas of Strength

The percentages of SHSU First-year students participating in service learning, learning communities, and research with faculty members were comparable to those of both the IPEDs and Texas comparison groups. Additionally, the percentages of Senior students at SHSU participating in service learning activities were also comparable to those of the IPEDS and the Texas comparison groups. Student participation in service learning continues to be a relative strength for SHSU, with both First-year and Senior students engaging in service learning at higher rates than any other high impact practice.

Areas of Improvement

Data from both the 2016 and 2019 NSSE administrations revealed that SHSU student participation in broader HIPs remains an area of improvement. The total percentage of both First-year and Senior SHSU students participating in HIPs were lower than those of all three comparison groups.

Senior students reported HIP participation rates that were statistically significantly lower than those of all three comparison groups, with a total of 75% of Senior SHSU students participating in at least one HIP and only 43% of Senior students participating in two or more HIPs. The participation of Senior SHSU students in research with faculty members, internships and field experiences, and study abroad were statistically significantly lower than those of the IPEDS and Texas comparison groups, while Senior SHSU student participation in a culminating senior experience (e.g., capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio) was statistically significantly lower than all three comparison groups. These results were consistent with those from the 2016 NSSE administration, indicating that student participation in HIPs, particularly Senior student participation in culminating student experiences, remain areas for improvement.

Civic Engagement

As part of the 2019 NSSE administration, SHSU students again completed an additional *Civic Engagement Topical Module*. Adapted from a pilot survey developed by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, this module asked students to assess their conflict resolution skills and examine how often they engage with local, campus, and state/national/global issues. The module complemented questions on the core survey relating to service-learning, community service or volunteer work, and becoming an informed and active citizen.

Areas of Strength

First-year students reported engaging in several civic engagement-related activities at statistically significantly higher rates than students at other institutions. Specifically, they reported that the institution:

- Emphasized being an informed and active citizen
- Emphasized encouraging free speech and expression
- Encouraged important social, economic, or political issues through in-course assignments

And that students engaged in activities in which they:

- Informed themselves about campus or local issues
- Discussed campus or local issues with others

Senior students reported confidence in their ability to resolve conflicts involving bias, discrimination, and prejudice at a statistically significantly higher rate than students at other institutions.

Areas for Improvement

The perceptions of First-year students regarding their civic engagement skills were generally equal to, or slightly above, those of students at other institutions. However, the perceptions of Senior SHSU students were lower than those of the comparison groups in several areas.

Specifically, Senior SHSU students reported that the institution emphasized the following elements of civic engagement at rates that were statistically significantly lower than those reported by students at other institutions:

- Discussing important social, economic, or political issues with others
- Organizing activities focused on important social, economic, or political issues
- Voting in campus, local, state, or national elections
- Discussing campus or local issues with others

These results indicate several potentially areas of civic engagement that SHSU students could improve upon. Of note were the questions focusing on students “discussing important social, economic, or political issues with others” and “discussing campus or local issues with others.” Both questions were strengths for First-year students; however, they were areas of weakness for Senior students.

Inclusiveness and Engagement with Diversity

As part of the 2019 NSSE administration, SHSU students completed an additional *Inclusiveness and Engagement with Diversity Topical Module*. This module examined environments, processes and activities that reflected the engagement and validation of cultural diversity and promoted greater understanding of societal differences. The questions explored students' exposure to inclusive teaching practices and intercultural learning, perceptions of institutional values and commitment regarding diversity; and participation in diversity-related programming and coursework.

Areas of Strength

The perceptions of both First-year and Senior students at SHSU were statistically significantly higher than students at other institutions on a number of questions within this module, indicating that inclusiveness and engagement with diversity were strengths for both student populations.

There were several areas of strength for both First-year and Senior SHSU students.

Specific areas of strength for First-year students included completing coursework which emphasized:

- Developing the skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds
- Recognizing their own cultural norms and biases
- Sharing their own perspectives and experiences
- Learning about other cultures
- Discussing issues of equity or privilege
- Respecting the expression of diverse ideas

Additionally, First-year students noted that SHSU:

- Demonstrated a commitment to diversity
- Provided students with the resources needed to succeed in a multicultural world
- Ensured that students were not stigmatized because of their identity (racial/ethnic, gender, religious, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Took allegation of discrimination or harassment seriously
- Helped students develop the skills to confront discrimination and harassment

Finally, First-year students noted participating in the following activities at rates statistically significantly higher than students at other institutions:

- Participated in the activities of centers related to specific groups (racial-ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, LGBT, etc.)
- Participated in a diversity-related club or organization
- Participated in a demonstration for a diversity-related cause (rally, protest, etc.)
- Reflected on their cultural identity

Specific areas of strength for Senior students included completing coursework which emphasized:

- Developing the skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds
- Recognizing their own cultural norms and biases
- Sharing their own perspectives and experiences
- Exploring their own background through projects, assignments, or programs
- Learning about other cultures
- Discussing issues of equity or privilege
- Respecting the expression of diverse ideas

Additionally, Senior students noted that SHSU:

- Demonstrated a commitment to diversity
- Provided students with the resources needed for success in a multicultural world
- Created an overall sense of community among students
- Ensured that they were not stigmatized because of their identity (racial/ethnic, gender, religious, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Provided information about anti-discrimination and harassment policies
- Took allegations of discrimination or harassment seriously
- Helped students develop the skills to confront discrimination and harassment

Senior students also noted that SHSU provided a supportive environment for the following forms of diversity:

- Racial/ethnic identity
- Gender identity
- Economic background
- Political affiliation
- Religious affiliation
- Sexual orientation
- Disability status

Finally, Senior students reported feeling valued by the institution at rates that were statistically significantly higher than students at other institutions.

Areas for Improvement

Senior students noted participating in the following activities at rates that were statistically significantly lower than those of students at other institutions:

- Attending events, activities, or presentations that reflect an appreciation for diverse groups of people
- Participating in the activities of centers related to specific groups (racial-ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, LGBT, etc.)

This could potentially indicate an area of improvement for SHSU students, specifically related to Senior student engagement in different diversity-related activities.

Engagement Indicators

Engagement Indicators provide a useful summary of the detailed information contained within the responses of SHSU's students. By combining student responses to related NSSE questions, each Engagement Indicator offers valuable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement. Ten indicators, based on three to eight survey questions, are organized into four broad themes: 1) *Academic Challenge*, 2) *Learning with Peers*, 3) *Experiences with Faculty*, and 4) *Campus Environment*.

Areas of Strength

First-year students reported statistically significantly higher rates of engagement in the areas of *Learning Strategies*, *Discussions with Diverse Others*, and *Quality of Interactions*.

Within the area of *Learning Strategies*, First-year students reported:

- identifying key information from reading assignments
- reviewing notes after class, and
- summarizing what they learned in class from course materials

at rates higher than those of the IPEDS and Texas comparison groups.

Within the area of *Discussions with Diverse Others*, First-year students reported having discussions with people:

- of a race or ethnicity other than their own,
- from an economic background other than their own,
- with religious beliefs other than their own, and
- political views other than their own

at rates that were higher than the THECB comparison group.

Finally, within the area of *Quality of Interactions*, First-year students reported quality interactions with:

- academic advisors,
- faculty, and
- student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)

at rates that were higher than all three comparison groups.

Senior students reported statistically significantly higher rates of engagement in the areas of *Higher-Order Learning*, *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, *Learning Strategies*, *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussions with Diverse Others*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, *Effective Teaching Practices*, *Quality of Interactions*, and *Supportive Environment*.

Within the area of *Higher-order Learning*, Senior students reported their coursework emphasized:

- evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source, and
- forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information

at rates that were higher than the IPEDS comparison group.

Within the area of *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, Senior students reported they:

- connected their learning to societal problems or issues,
 - included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments,
 - examined the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issues,
 - tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective,
 - learned something that changed the way they understood an issue or concept, and
 - connected ideas from their courses to their prior experiences and knowledge
- at rates that were higher than all three comparison groups.

Within the area of *Learning Strategies*, Senior students reported they:

- identified key information from reading assignments,
 - reviewed their notes after class, and
 - summarized what they learned in class or from course materials
- at rates that were higher than all three comparison groups.

Within the area of *Collaborative Learning*, Senior students reported:

- asking another student to help them understand the course material,
 - explaining course material to one or more students, and
 - preparing for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students
- at rates that were higher than the Texas comparison group.

Within the area of *Discussions with Diverse Others*, Senior students reported having discussion with people:

- of a race or ethnicity other than their own,
- from an economic background other than their own, and
- with political views other than their own

at rates that were higher than all three comparison groups.

Within the area of *Student-Faculty Interaction*, Senior students reported they:

- talked about career plans with a faculty member,
- discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class, and
- discussed their academic performance with a faculty member

at rates that were higher than the Texas comparison group.

Within the area of *Effective Teaching Practices*, Senior students reported their instructors:

- clearly explained course goals and requirements,
- taught course sessions in an organized way,
- used examples of illustrations to explain difficult points,
- provided feedback on drafts of work in progress, and
- provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments

at rates that were higher than all three comparison groups.

Within the area of *Quality of Interactions*, Senior students reported quality interactions with:

- faculty,

- student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.), and
 - other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)
- at rates higher than all three comparison groups.

Within the area of *Supportive Environment*, Senior students reported that the institution emphasized:

- providing support to help students succeed academically,
 - using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.),
 - encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds,
 - providing opportunities to be involved socially, and
 - providing support for their overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)
- at rates higher than all three comparison groups.

Areas for Improvement

First-year students reported statistically significantly lower levels of engagement in the areas of *Quantitative Reasoning* and *Student-Faculty Interaction*.

Within the area of *Quantitative Reasoning*, First-year students reported they:

- used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issues (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.), and
 - evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information
- at rates lower than the IPEDS and Texas comparison groups.

Within the area of *Student-Faculty Interaction*, First-year students reported they:

- talked about career plans with a faculty member,
 - worked with faculty on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.), and
 - discussed their academic performance with a faculty member
- at rates lower than the IPEDS comparison group.

The lower levels of reported First-year student engagement in *Quantitative Reasoning* activities is of particular note, as that was also a reported area of weakness for First-year students in the 2016 NSSE administration.

Recommendations

As with the 2016 NSSE results, students responding to the 2019 NSSE overwhelmingly indicated they felt their educational experiences were good and that they would attend SHSU again if given the chance. However, an examination of the broader NSSE data do reveal opportunities for continued institutional improvement.

- Data from the 2019 NSSE administration revealed that student engagement in High Impact Practices (HIPs) remains a continued area for improvement. HIPs include First-year Seminars/Experiences, Common Intellectual Experiences, Learning Communities, Writing-intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments and Projects, Undergraduate Research, Diversity/Global Learning, Service Learning/Community-based Learning,

Internships, Capstone Courses and Projects (AAC&U, n.d.). This was an area of weakness for both First-year and Senior students in the 2016 data, and remained so within the 2019 data. Senior students reported HIP participation rates that were statistically significantly lower than those of all three comparison groups. Specifically, Seniors reported lower rates of engagement in research with faculty members, internships and field experiences, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences (e.g., capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio). SHSU should explore ways to further promote these types of activities for Senior students.

- Senior students identified engaging in civic engagement activities like discussing social, economic, and political issues with others; organizing activities focusing on important social, economic, or political issues; voting in campus, local, state, and national elections; and engaging in discussions on campus or local issues at statistically significantly lower rates than students at other institutions. SHSU should continue to investigate opportunities, both within the curriculum and within the co-curricular, for students to better engage with these types of activities.
- Opportunities also exist to further promote student engagement with inclusiveness and diversity. Senior students reported being less engaged in events, activities, and presentations that reflected an appreciation for diverse groups of people and participating in fewer activities of centers related to specific groups (racial-ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, LGBTQIA, etc.). SHSU should explore ways to better engage with students within the curriculum and the co-curricular in these types of activities and to encourage student participation.
- First-year students within the 2019 NSSE reported statistically significantly lower levels of engagement with quantitative reasoning activities, particularly using numerical information to examine real-world problems or issues and evaluating what others have concluded from numerical information. Both were also areas of weakness within the 2016 NSSE results. Additionally, First-year students in the 2019 NSSE reported lower rates of student-faculty interaction, particularly identifying activities like talking about their career plans with faculty members, working with faculty on activities other than coursework, and discussing their academic performance with faculty members, at rates lower than students from comparison institutions. SHSU should seek to identify ways to further engage First-year students in these areas, particularly regarding quantitative reasoning, which has remained a weakness over time. SHSU should examine other sources of data related to quantitative reasoning skills and consider targeted initiatives to address areas in need of improvement.

References

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