



Assessment Report – June 30, 2008

A culture of assessment is growing at Southern. In 2007-08, assessment activities informed a number of major university initiatives, including new student orientation, the First-Year Experience program, faculty development, and strategic planning. Assessment of student learning will be an integral part of our recently approved 5-year academic program review process and our new general education program which is currently under review. At the program level, an increasing number of academic departments are actively collecting program-level data about student learning in the major and beginning to use program-level data analyses to make curricular and other departmental changes to better serve our students.

Institutional Level Assessment

National Survey of Student Engagement

SCSU has participated in the **Beginning College Student Survey of Engagement (BCSSE)** since fall 2004 and in the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** since spring 2005. The BCSSE, administered to incoming freshmen at New Student Orientation, provides us with important baseline information about the precollege experiences of our students as well as their perceptions about college and their expectations for their first year. The NSSE, administered to second semester first-year students and seniors, provides data about students' actual experiences and their perceptions about their college experience. Use of BCSSE and NSSE allows us to track students' expectations and perceptions over time during their college years as well as to match their survey results with their academic records. Results are also analyzed by major (if there are at least 20 respondents) so that departments can see how their students respond compared to all SCSU student respondents¹.

Trends from NSSE

We currently have three years of NSSE data. (We have just concluded our fourth administration; these results will be available in the fall.) *Overall, results have been quite stable, providing us with a baseline to evaluate in future years the effect of recently implemented major initiatives.* For example, second semester seniors evaluated Southern's impact on their learning in 16 general areas of knowledge, skills, and personal development. Seniors reported higher levels of impact than freshmen respondents. Table 1 shows the percentage of seniors who assessed their educational growth as being substantially impacted by SCSU in the 16 learning outcome areas over the past three years.

¹ In the NSSE 2007 administration, we had an overall response rate of 28% (N=915). Because BCSSE is administered in paper format during orientation, we had a 100% response rate.

Table 1. Rank-Ordered Percent of Seniors Reporting Substantial Impact on Their Learning in 16 General Education Areas².

Learning Outcome Area		% Rating SCSU Impact as Substantial		
		2007 (N=446)	2006 (N=618)	2005 (N=369)
1	Acquiring a broad general education	81%	80%	84%
2	Thinking critically and analytically	83%	79%	81%
3	Writing clearly and effectively	75%	76%	82%
4	Using computing and information technology	75%	74%	76%
5	Working effectively with others	73%	70%	73%
6	Speaking clearly and effectively	69%	69%	73%
7	Analyzing quantitative problems	67%	69%	69%
8	Acquiring job or work related knowledge and skills	67%	66%	70%
9	Learning effectively on your own	67%	62%	67%
10	Understanding yourself	60%	56%	58%
11	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	57%	51%	53%
12	Solving complex real-world problems	52%	51%	52%
13	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	53%	49%	52%
14	Contributing to the welfare of your community	38%	37%	33%
15	Voting in local, state, or national elections	29%	26%	33%
16	Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	22%	23%	20%

Longitudinal Data – Cohort Study

We are tracking the experiences of a cohort of students who participated in the 2004 BCSSE pilot at orientation (our first year of participation). The following spring (2005), 354 of these students completed the NSSE. In the end, 67% persisted at SCSU to their senior year.

The study revealed that the non-returning students scored significantly lower than the currently enrolled students on items which asked about their relationships with faculty members, peers, and administrative personnel and offices. The other predictor of whether students in the cohort persisted to their junior year was their score on the Supportive Campus Environment cluster. Students who continue at Southern tended to rate these items higher than the students who have left. The NSSE cluster of Enriching Educational Experiences also emerged as important in terms of whether students were engaged. The students who persisted tended to have contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, they tended to have had serious conversations with students who were very different from themselves in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.

² Percent responding “quite a bit” or “very much” to the question, “To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?”

Understanding the students' cognitions, emotions, and behavior provides insight into which students are likely to persist. In terms of behavior, for example, the highest risk group of students earned less than 20 credits during their first year of college. Moreover, the students in the lowest GPA quartiles had significantly lower scores on the NSSE clusters that measure Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning. In addition, the students of the cohort who left after their first year tended to have significantly lower scores on Active and Collaborative Learning.

The two most important predictors of whether students persist to their senior year are cumulative GPA and their scores on NSSE items that measure Supportive Campus Environment.

This means that if we know students' scores on these items, we are likely to know whether they will persist at SCSU—or leave. According to the NSSE institute, “Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.” A key component of Supportive Campus Environment is the quality of the relationships that the students have with faculty, administrative personnel and offices, and other students.

These results have been extremely useful in educating the campus about our students' experiences and in guiding the development of our First-Year Experience and the redesign of New Student Orientation.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the First-Year Experience Pilot Program

Assessment has been an integral part of the pilot First-Year Experience program. In fall 2007, first-year students were part of one of four groups, all of which included a learning community. Cohorts of 20 students shared at least two courses in common (clusters), one of which was an English composition class. The four groups were (1) students whose clusters include an FYE seminar; (2) students in the LINKS program; (3) students in the Honors College; and (4) students whose clusters do not include an FYE seminar. The First-Year Experience program also included a series of workshops especially designed for first-year students; attendance at these was not mandatory, but highly encouraged.

All first-year students were asked to complete a series of three surveys over the course of the 2007 fall semester to gauge adjustment to college and the development of strategies needed to be successful in college. The BCSSE was administered at the New Student Orientation during the summer and served as the baseline measure. Students' BCSSE responses, responses to the three surveys, and academic performance were analyzed. Students' academic performance and persistence in the four groups will be compared. Students were also encouraged to complete the NSSE survey during the spring 2008. NSSE results will be available in fall 2008 and will be compared with baseline information and academic performance. In addition to the student data, informal feedback and anecdotal data from faculty teaching in the FYEP were also collected.

Findings from the student surveys included:

- SCSU was the first choice school for 44%.
- 90% said that their family is proud and supports that they are a student at SCSU.

- 40% indicated that their broad goals were either “Get degree to improve pay” or “Learn or update job-related skills.”
- Less than 25% disagreed with the statement, “General education requirements get in the way of the classes I really want to take.”

We conducted a factor analysis on the students’ responses to the self-assessment surveys. Two factors (“themes”) emerged: academic habits of mind and the development of self-advocacy skills. Some examples are provided to illustrate these factors.

- Academic habits of mind
 - The majority of students reported gaining knowledge to understand the research process (72%)
 - The majority of students reported that they are active participants in class discussions and are learning to effectively present a position, although students in the LINKS program were more likely to report this than the students in the FYE seminars
- Development of self-advocacy (transitioning from high school to college/ social skills competence)
 - The majority reported that they have learned where to go for help when they need it (71%)
 - The majority take the initiative to talk with professors (76%)
 - Most students want more help with managing time and study skills.

While most findings were positive, others continue to challenge us. For example, some students

- tell us that they come to campus only when they have class.
- indicate that they study enough . . . but the faculty don’t agree.
- also say that their courses are not challenging (34%)

In the 2008-2009 academic year, these two factors will be used as outcome measures for the revised FYE Program.

Based on the data collected, the FYE program was revised for the 2008-09 year. Changes included modification of the learning outcomes for the seminars, development of a more structured co-curricular companion program, and changes in the academic advisement process. All first year students will be part of a learning community. What we learned from our pilot was also used as part of the foundation for an enhanced faculty development program that included a 3-day Teaching Academy in June 2008 with a 2-day follow-up planned for August.

Academic histories of students who entered in fall 2007 show some very positive results compared to students entering the past five years: fewer students are academic probation and more students are in good standing. We will continue to monitor and assess our First-Year programs.

Student Satisfaction

Undergraduate Students

Three items on the NSSE directly assess students' satisfaction with their experiences at SCSU. The items are as follows:

- Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?
- How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
- If you could start over again, would you go to the SAME INSTITUTION you are now attending?

In Figures 1 and 2, the 2007 responses of SCSU's first-year students and seniors are shown in comparison to the rest of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS), SCSU's Carnegie Peers, and the overall national respondent group³. For ease of use, the mean scores of the SCSU students were converted to a 1 to 100 point scale in all of the following charts (values do not indicate percentages).

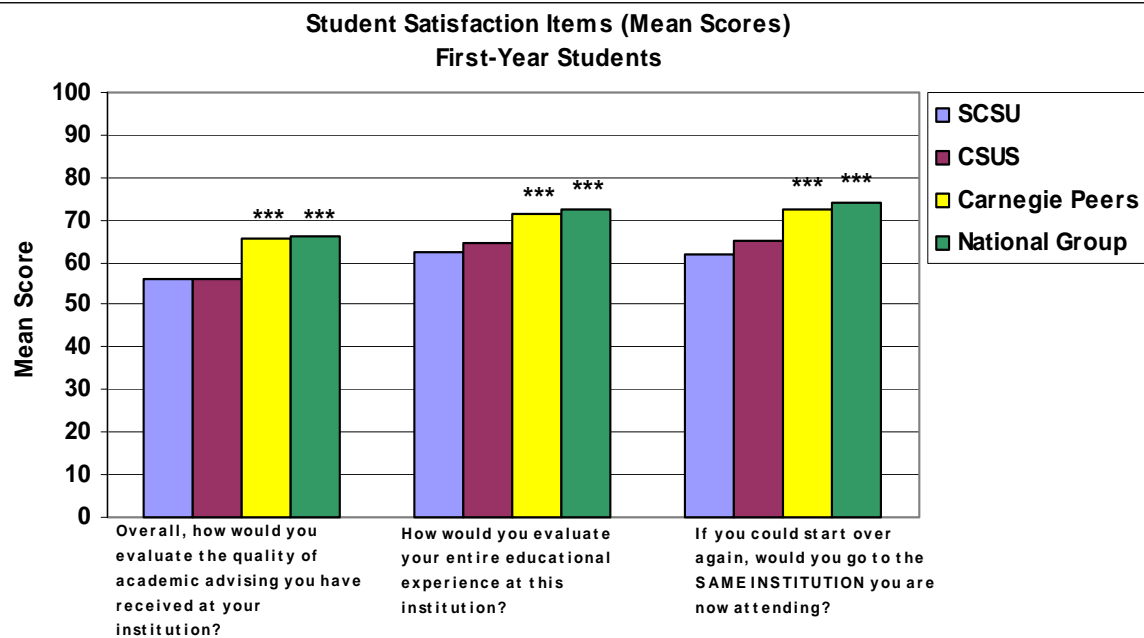


Figure 1. *NSSE 2007 Student Satisfaction Items, First-Year Students.* Responses for First-Year students ($n = 370$), in comparison with CSUS, our Carnegie Peers, and the 2007 National respondent group.

³ Asterisks on the following charts indicate groups whose scores differed significantly from the scores of SCSU's respective group. The notation is as follows:

* = $p < 0.05$

** = $p < 0.01$

*** = $p < 0.001$

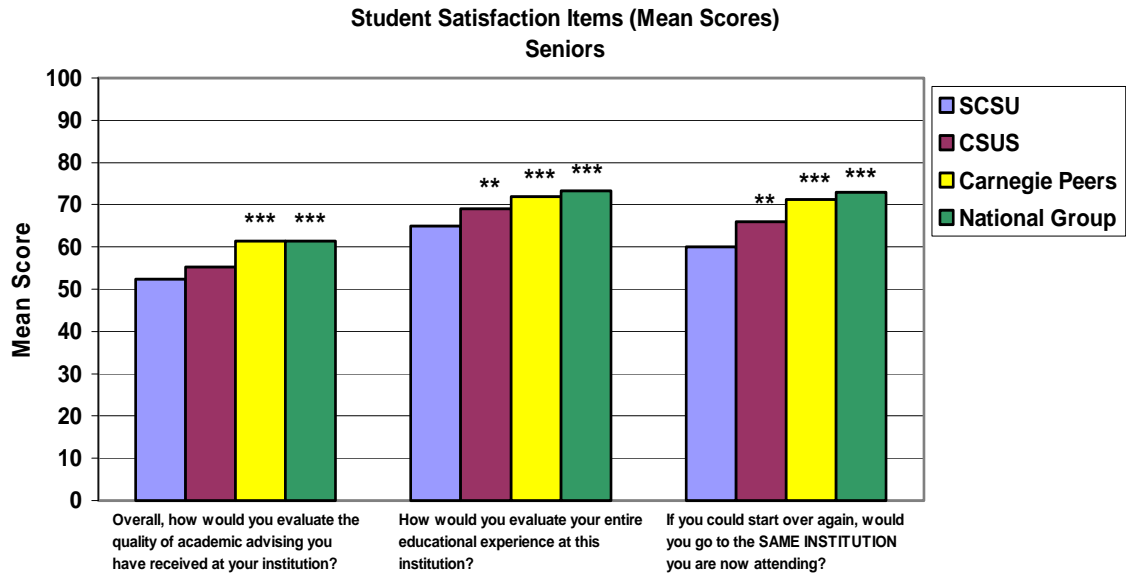


Figure 2. NSSE 2007 Student Satisfaction Items, Seniors. Responses for Seniors ($n = 382$), in comparison with CSUS, our Carnegie Peers, and the 2007 National respondent group.

Figures 3 and 4 compare these three satisfaction items among SCSU students over time (2005, 2006, and 2007). For ease of use, the mean scores of the SCSU students were converted to a 1 to 100 point scale in all of the following charts (values do not indicate percentages).

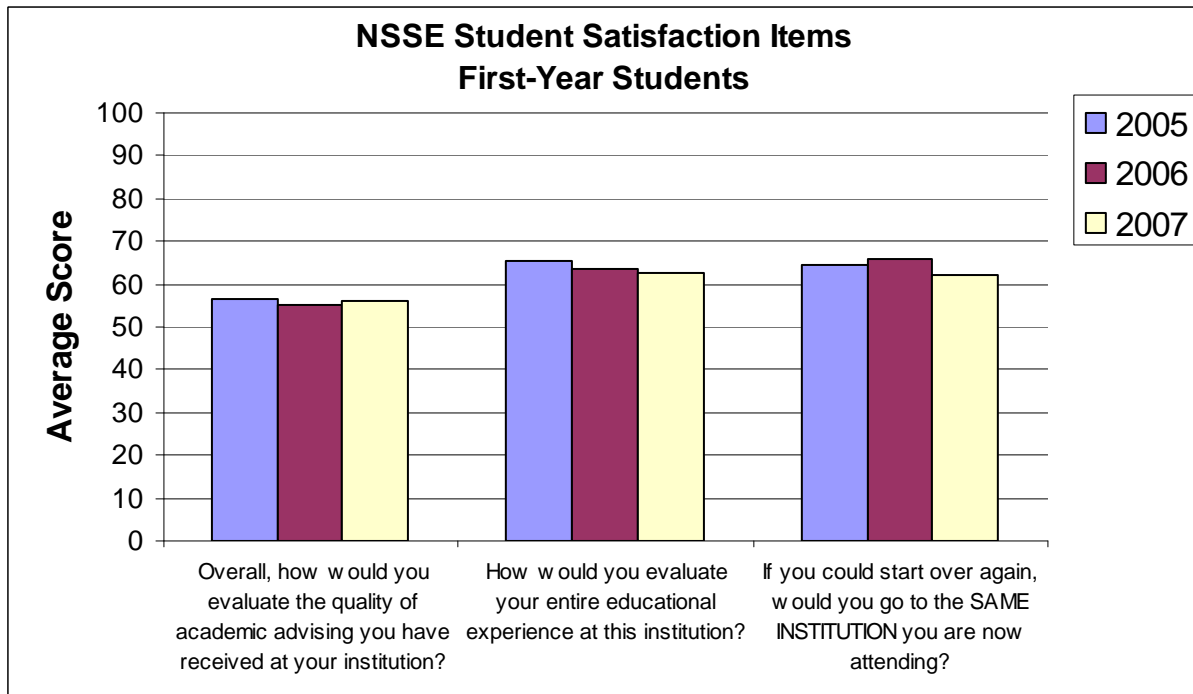


Figure 3. NSSE 2007 Student Satisfaction Items, First-year Students 2005-2007.

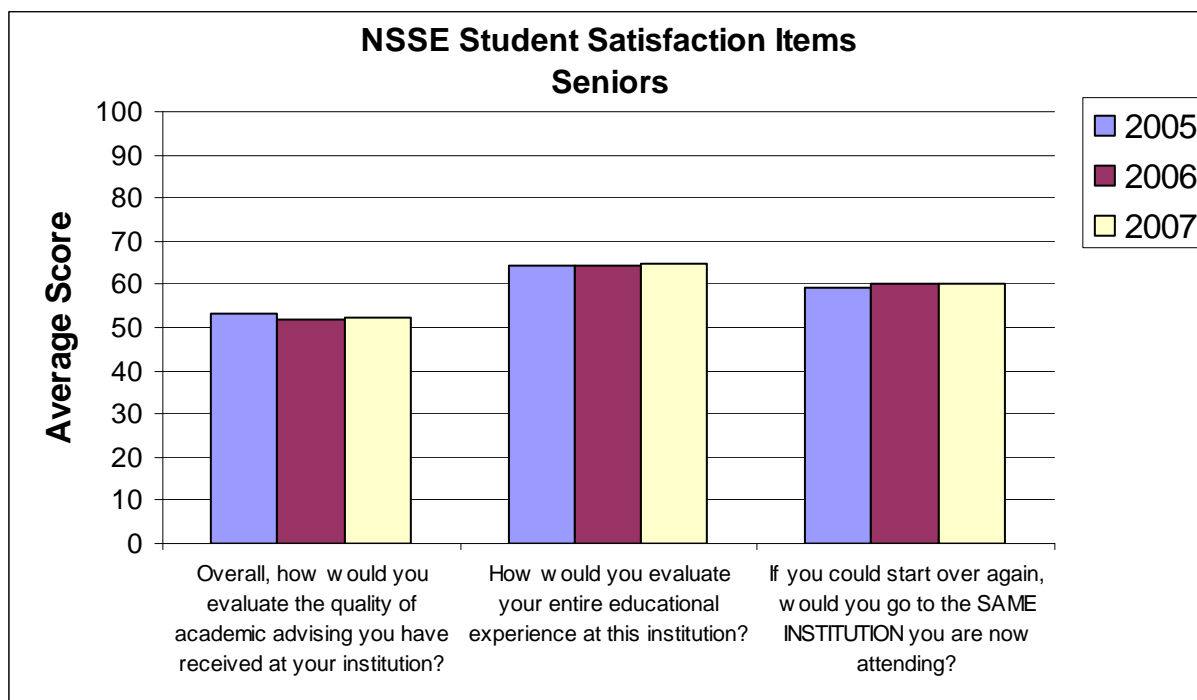


Figure 4. *NSSE 2007 Student Satisfaction Items, Seniors 2005-2007.*

In order to address student concerns, advisement for first-year students has been completely revamped as part of the revised First-Year program. First-year seminar instructors (INQ) serve as academic advisors for their students. This relationship is continued into the spring semester; seminar instructors assure that students make connections with faculty in the department of their chosen major. Faculty receive specific training in academic advisement, and a manual has been created to guide them in advising students. During New Student Orientation, teams of faculty and professional advising staff worked together to plan appropriate programs for incoming students. We will be assessing the impact of this new model.

Graduate Students

The Noel-Levitz Adult Priorities Survey has been administered to graduate students annually since 2003. The most recent results available are from the 2007 administration which included students who received degrees in January, may, and August 2007. (The 2008 administration has just concluded; these results will be available in the fall.) Of the 706 surveys distributed, 334 were returned for a 47% response rate.

Graduate students identified the following areas of strength:

- The content of courses within my major is valuable.
- Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.
- The quality of instruction I receive in most classes is excellent.
- My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.
- Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.

Three major themes were identified as challenges: parking, safety and security (primarily as related to parking), and the registration process. Students also reported course availability as a challenge (“My courses are available when I need them in order to graduate on schedule.”) While results have been mostly stable over the past five years, there has been an increase in satisfaction with registration services. Findings have been reported to the President’s cabinet, faculty, staff, and student constituencies. Focus groups with graduate students have been conducted as a follow-up to understand the results better.

Several steps have been taken (and are planned) that will address student concerns, including enhanced lighting in parking areas, increased police patrols, and addition of food service to Davis Hall (where many graduate students have evening classes). Plans for construction of a new parking garage are underway. Departments are examining course offerings and scheduling to better meet the needs of adult learners. For example, the Department of Social Work will inaugurate a weekend program. In addition, the number of online course offerings have increased. In Fall 2006, there were 45 sections. The following year, there were 52 sections. By Fall 2008, this had increased to 65 sections (and registration is still open).

Faculty Development

Activities to increase campus awareness about assessment and the participation of faculty in the assessment of student learning were continued in the 2007-08 year.

- Provost Williams and the Faculty Senate co-sponsored a Faculty Forum on Assessment in November 2007. The forum included presentations by four panelists and was followed by a discussion. Approximately 50 faculty were in attendance.
- Results from 10 assessment projects were presented by 19 faculty members at the 2008 annual CSUS Assessment Conference which was hosted by Southern this year. Seventy-one faculty and staff from Southern participated in the conference
- Southern has continued to support training for faculty in the area of assessment. During the 2007-08 academic year, faculty attended various regional and national conferences related to assessment issues, including the annual Assessment Institute at IUPUI (October 2007); the New England Educational Assessment Network Assessment Forum (November 2007) and Dialogues in the Disciplines (March 2008), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges conference (December 2007), and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) assessment in general education conference (February 2008). These professional development experiences are serving two purposes: (1) to provide support for those faculty with limited experience and expertise in assessment; and (2) to develop a cadre of faculty trained in institutional assessment who provide support and peer mentoring to their colleagues in this important area.
- As part of the Teaching Innovation Program (TIP), funded by a 3-year Davis Foundation grant, faculty have developed and presented workshops around successful strategies that involve assessment of student learning as well as innovative use of technology and other innovative pedagogies.
- More than 100 faculty participated in an intensive 3-day Teaching Academy in June 2008. Although all faculty were welcome, the focus of the academy was on working successfully with first-year students and implementing writing across the curriculum.

Feedback from participants was extremely positive, and we hope to institutionalize this model. Several follow-up events are planned to continue the momentum. A two-day event is planned for August 2208 to coincide with orientation for our incoming new faculty, and a one-day “reunion” is planned for October.

The faculty were asked to rate their knowledge prior to their participation in the academy and afterwards (“now”). In all cases, mean scores increased between “prior” and “now,” and the difference was statistically significant; that is, the differences were not due to chance. The average rate of change was calculated for all the items on the assessment to discern in which areas the faculty experienced the greatest growth. The results appear in Figure 5. We will be following up in the fall to ascertain the long term effectiveness of this model of faculty development.

Average Rates of Change

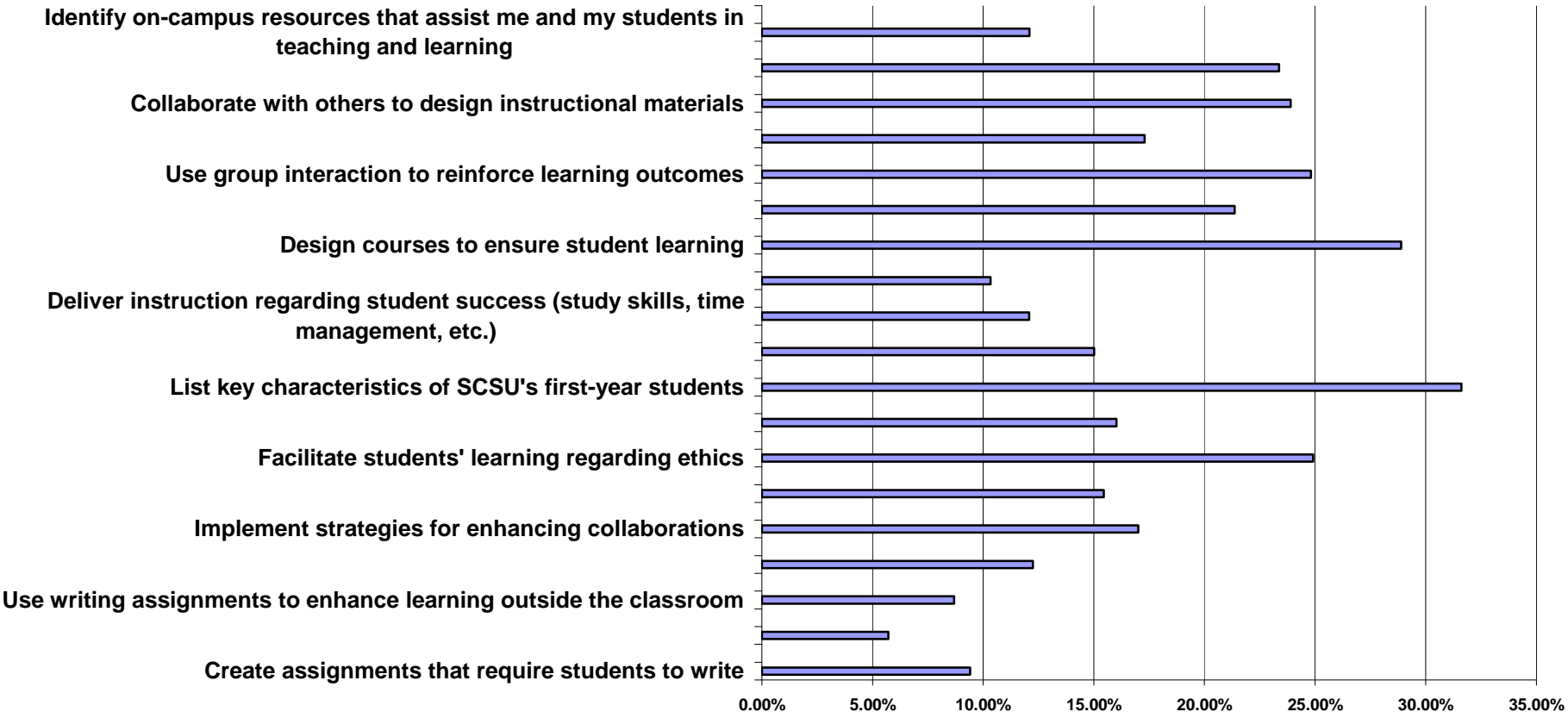


Figure 5. Average rate of change reported by participants in the June 2008 Faculty Academy.

Program Level Assessment

Southern continues to make progress in the assessment of student learning in academic programs. We continue to increase the numbers of academic programs that actively participate in assessment activities. The greatest gain this past academic year was the increase in the number of programs that have identified appropriate assessment measures and are actively collecting student learning data.

All departments have identified an assessment coordinator or liaison, and many departments are establishing assessment committees. Our goal is that assessment work be integrated into the normal business of the department in the same way as curriculum implementation and revision function. Assessment activities are monitored and technical assistance is provided to departments by the Office of Assessment and Planning.

The current status of program-level assessment of student learning is summarized here. Figure 6 shows the changes in departmental assessment activities from 2203-04 to 2007-08.

- 89% of academic programs (40 of 45) have identified program-based student learning outcomes for their majors (including undergraduate and graduate); an additional 9% (4 of 45) have commenced work to identify program-based student outcomes.
- 73% of programs (33 of 45) have clearly identified assessment measures at the program level; an additional 16% (7 of 45) have commenced work on identifying program level measures. Most of these programs are now collecting and analyzing program level data.
- 29% of programs (13 of 45) have provided evidence that they are actively using assessment data to inform departmental decision making and program improvement; an additional 27% (12 of 45) have provided plans for doing so.

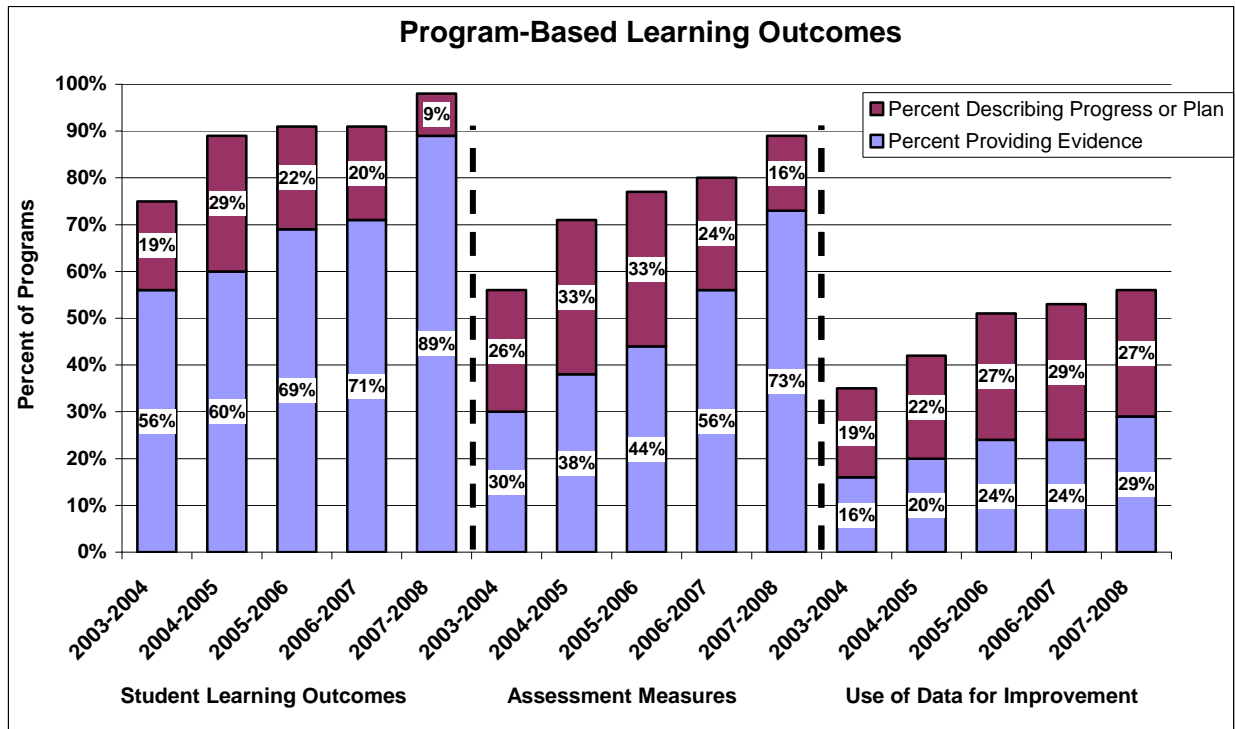


Figure 6. Change in assessment activities, 2004-2008.

Closing the Assessment “Loop”

Although we have made significant gains over the past several years, it is clear that much work remains to be done, particularly in “closing the assessment loop,” in the active use of student learning data for program improvement. The following case examples illustrate some of the good work being done by departments in using program-level student learning data.

- Exercise Science.

The department changed the structure of student teaching so that during the year prior to student teaching, the teacher candidates observe the teachers who will be their cooperating teachers. In this way, they are able to “hit the ground running” when they actually begin their teaching assignments. The change was made based on interviews with the students that indicated that the first several weeks of their student teaching was limited to just observing. One (1) credit will be added to EXS 394 Elementary Physical Education Methods and EXS 495 Secondary Physical Education Methods (2 credits total). Teacher candidates will be placed with a qualified elementary and secondary physical educator and have the opportunity to spend a great deal of time in practical settings applying concepts they are learning in their elementary and secondary physical education methods courses. Whenever possible, teacher candidates will be placed with the teachers that will supervise them during their student teaching experience during the following spring semester.

Each semester, the faculty meet with student teaching university supervisors (retired physical education teachers). During these meetings feedback is elicited on the progress

of teacher candidates. One issue that has come up that we have addressed is our teacher candidates' lack of ability to write proper behavioral objectives. We have addressed this by ensuring that behavioral objectives are reviewed in each teacher education course within our program.

- Communication

During the past two years, senior communication students in the capstone course have participated in presentations to the faculty for assessment purposes. The department has developed an assessment rubric that faculty use to evaluate the critical thinking outcomes for the major. This rubric was piloted last spring. After feedback from faculty and students, the rubric was modified for the 2008 capstone presentations. Results will now be re-evaluated and the tool will undergo further refinement. In addition, the department's assessment committee is working on a curriculum map to identify in which course each learning outcome is introduced, reinforced, emphasized and evaluated.

- School Health

The School Health Education program has made several changes as a result of student assessments and feedback. Course scheduling and course offerings have been modified. For example, the program added online components to several courses in order to accommodate students that must travel long distances. In addition, they added more courses during the summer so students can take 12 credits, and they will rotate summer offerings so students can enroll in a full graduate load. In addition, they have increased the field experience requirements in three courses, SHE 302, SHE 552, and SHE 558 and have added a graduate course in Methods of Teaching Health Education for the upcoming academic year.

- English

Grading a representative sample of papers randomly selected from English majors in upper division courses and equally weighted among sophomores, juniors, and seniors provided significant data about students' analytical reading and writing skills. These data are helping us make informed decisions about improving student learning as we both overhaul the curriculum in our major and reconsider instructional methods we can share to maximize the effects of pedagogical unity and diversity.

We learned two things: First, we discovered that our English majors do not read and write as well as we expect. We are not sure how much this is due to students' capacities and how much is due to departmental inadequacies. Second, and just as significantly, we learned the difficulties of developing a strong and valid assessment program. We spent about eight months developing and refining the rubrics we used in the project. Part of the difficulty in developing the rubric was deciding on wording that would allow us to accurately assess writing from classes taught by instructors with different styles. We consider this pedagogical diversity an asset to the department, and continue to strive for an assessment program that will preserve this diversity.

Comparing the mean scores of each group, we primarily considered the similarities and differences (if any) between essays in the three groups. We asked:

- Are students improving as they progress through the program?
- Are there identifiable weaknesses that seem to be department wide?
- Are there identifiable strengths that seem to be department wide?
- At what levels are students when they start the major?
- At what levels are students when they graduate?
- Have students shown any significant improvement in their reading and writing?

Given the discrepancies among the groups, we proposed to the department that our current course English 301 be required before students can take any further courses in the major. While we now strongly recommend that students do so, it is clear that the foundation provided by this course (which is informally known as the “introduction to the major” course) will benefit students in their more advanced literary study. This change to the curriculum has been discussed by the department, and we believe this study provides evidence to persuade our colleagues to see it through.

- History

The department is assessing the ability of their senior majors to demonstrate effective research and writing skills by producing a significant research paper that makes extensive use of primary source material. Instructors applied a 4-point rubric to students’ research papers in HIS485. Results showed that while the mean score was 2.2, (slightly above adequate), approximately one third of the students had deficiencies in at least one area identified as important by the faculty. The department is now examining its curriculum sequence in depth and will be undertaking a self-study in the fall of 2008.

Assessment of Student Learning in Teacher Certification Programs

For accreditation of the university’s undergraduate and graduate certification programs by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the *Candidate Information Management and Assessment System*, a web-based tool developed at SCSU is used to track students’ academic progress. Since the certification programs are larger than the School of Education, NCATE refers to all the programs collectively as the “Unit.” The Unit Assessment Board (UAB) has developed an assessment system which demonstrates that the Unit is in compliance with the NCATE standards.

There are three layers of key assessments: (1) ongoing research studies; (2) annual Unit evaluations; and (3) program specific assessments of teacher candidates conducted each semester that are linked to the Unit’s conceptual framework. In the first layer, longitudinal cohort studies are conducted that cut across academic years and the four transition points that the Unit created. For example, we have investigated whether all the candidates progress through their coursework and transition points at the expected level, regardless of ethnicity or gender. A second layer of assessment encompasses the Unit’s annual evaluations of candidates, cooperating teachers, principals, and alumni. The third layer is program specific. Each program has designed at least 5 assessments for each component of the conceptual framework at each of the four transition points (a typical program, for example, would have 25 assessments of the candidates).

The Unit seeks to create professionals who are able to impart the knowledge and expertise their students will need to thrive in a technologically-changing and culturally-rich society. At the initial level, scholarship involves both acquiring a theoretical knowledgebase and developing the technical and communication skills to link scholarship and practice. Scholarship at the advanced level involves extending that knowledgebase through the higher levels of research, practice, and professional expertise. Scholarship, which includes content knowledge, is measured through 5 assessments. Advanced artificial intelligence data mining techniques revealed that these Scholarship assessments and GPA measure distinct and separate aspects of teacher candidates' content knowledge. Scholarship encompasses not only the demonstration of the candidates' content knowledge, but also the use of this knowledge in the service of the communities in which they work, live, or learn. During 2007-2008, 80% of the program completers affirmed that they use their content knowledge in this way.

Five-Year Academic Program Review

Undergraduate Programs

Following a two year effort by a Program Review Task Force and the Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) of the Undergraduate Curriculum Forum (UCF), the UCF approved a new process for the review of academic programs on a 5-year rotation. The program review process is based on the successful process at the graduate level. Each department will complete a self-study and provide evidence that it meets the 17 standards. Assessment of student learning and the use of data-based decision making are emphasized throughout the process. The program review includes a site visit by external reviewers in order to provide external perspectives about the program. The process will be phased in over the next three years. PRAC will implement the program reviews with technical assistance from the Office of Assessment and Planning.

Graduate Programs

Graduate programs undergo program review on a 5-year rotation. This process is coordinated by the Academic Standards Committee of the Graduate Council and has been successfully implemented for a number of years.

As part of the graduate program review, programs administer student and alumni surveys. The results of these surveys have only been analyzed, to date, on a program level. While, these data have been extremely useful to improve individual programs, there are two problems with this. First, many departments have too few respondents to have an acceptable level of significance; and second, one can not see what problems face the whole university, as opposed to individual programs. Thus, a meta-analysis of alumni and student surveys was conducted to observe trends that occur across programs and to identify key areas in which improvement is necessary.

The meta-analysis revealed that programs are improving, especially in terms of advisement. For example, a marked improvement was observed over time on the scores of the following three items: (1) "I had opportunities to talk with my advisor about my experiences in this program;" (2) "I felt that my advisor understood and considered my background and prior experiences;" and

(3) “My advisor was knowledgeable and provided accurate guidance.” On other items dealing with the relationships between faculty and students, a clear pattern did not emerge.

Two items stood out with relatively low levels of agreement. They were “Sufficient courses were scheduled each semester to permit me to follow my planned program” (71% alumni and student agreement) and “There are sufficient opportunities for graduate student input in departmental decisions affecting graduate programs” (54% students; 44% alumni agreement). As a commuter campus, scheduling courses that meet the candidates’ academic, work, and personal schedules continues to be a challenge as well as involving the candidates’ in Graduate Student Council and Departmental meetings. These results are consistent with findings from the Noel-Levitz satisfaction survey discussed earlier in this report.

Overall, the scores are very positive. These results demonstrate that the programs are not only meeting expectations, but also scoring within the “Exemplary” range.