



**Southern Connecticut  
State University**

Assessment Report, 2008-09

June, 2009

*Report to the Connecticut State University System Board of Trustees*

# Southern Connecticut State University

## Assessment Report – June 30, 2009

### Overall Philosophy and Organizational Structure

SCSU's assessment process is guided by the university's core values of excellence, student success, life-long learning, community involvement, diversity, and access. The university's assessment philosophy, derived from the core values, underscores the belief that evidence-based decisions promote students' learning and positive developmental outcomes.

Assessment activities are coordinated through the university's Office of Assessment and Planning. Faculty governance bodies responsible for ensuring curricular quality are integrally involved in assessment of student learning and program review. The Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC), a standing committee of the Undergraduate Curriculum Forum (UCF), provides peer review and support for undergraduate assessment and academic program review. The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) of the Graduate Council provides the same function at the graduate level. University-wide initiatives, such as the First-Year Experience Program, Writing Across the Curriculum, and the new Liberal Education Program all have structures into which assessment is embedded. At the program level, all departments have a faculty assessment coordinator, and many departments have formed assessment committees. The Office of Assessment and Planning provides technical assistance and support to all of these entities. In addition, the Office works closely with the Office of Management, Information and Research (OMIR) to provide timely information to support the operations and decision-making of the university leadership and all university departments and offices. Findings from assessments and other analyses are presented regularly to the campus in various forums, such as the Enrollment Management Council, Dean's Council, and faculty governance groups. In these forums, the findings are discussed and course corrections are made as needed.

### 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. We have performed a number of analyses with this rich dataset; several examples are provided in the following section.

The results of this year's *NSSE* administration have been shared with faculty and staff. For example, each department received a report that provided a side-by-side comparison of the scores of the students in their department vs. the scores of students in the rest of the university. Reports were also prepared that showed the results by school. Presentations were made to the following groups: the Enrollment Management Council, Residence Life staff, faculty at the Teaching Academy, and the Dean's Council. In addition, statistical analyses were performed to observe the progress of the students from different ethnic groups. The information was shared with SCSU's Office of Diversity and Equity Programs.

*Longitudinal studies.* We continue to track the cohort of students who entered SCSU as freshmen in the fall of 2004 and completed the *BCSSE* at their new student orientation. The following spring, 354 of these students completed the *NSSE*. As seniors in 2008, this cohort of students once again completed the survey. In addition to their scores on these surveys, the Office of Assessment and Planning conducted a trend analysis each academic year to document the progress of the students over their college years. Indicators included GPA, Dean's list, academic probation, commuter vs. residential status, full-time vs. part-time status, and so forth. In addition, the ID numbers of the students no longer attending SCSU were submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse<sup>1</sup> in order to document their subsequent enrollment in other institutions of higher education. In order to provide insight into how the students in this cohort changed over time, all the different sources of data were linked together by the students' ID numbers.

To further strengthen the investigation, complementary studies were conducted. For example, a cross-sectional analysis was also conducted in which the responses of the freshmen in 2005 and the seniors in 2008 were compared. Due to attrition of the original cohort and the transfer students who grafted onto the cohort, the freshmen in 2005 and the seniors in 2008 were not completely identical—with the notable exception, of course, of the students who completed *NSSE* both in their freshmen and senior years (i.e., the students in the longitudinal study).

Evidence was found that lends credence that SCSU is indeed fulfilling its mission. In particular, positive changes in the students' learning and development were observed in terms of academic excellence, education in the liberal arts, and service for the public good. The higher scores of the seniors were not due to chance, that is, statistically significant differences were found between the scores of the freshmen and seniors.

The following table provides examples in which the seniors (*2008 NSSE*) had significantly higher scores than the freshmen (*2005 NSSE*). The examples were selected to illustrate how these positive changes align with the university's Core Values.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Student Clearinghouse is a non-profit organization that offers the service of student degree, diploma, and enrollment verification.

Core Value	Item	Freshmen	Seniors
Excellence	Coursework emphasized: APPLYING theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.	2.92	3.25
Excellence	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.	3.06	3.38
Student Success	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.	1.67	1.98
Student Success	Institutional contribution: Speaking clearly and effectively.	2.80	3.15
Life-Long Learning	Institutional contributing: Acquiring a broad general education.	3.07	3.43
Life-Long Learning	Institutional contribution: Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills.	2.59	3.29
Life-Long Learning	Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.	1.77	2.23
Community Involvement	Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course.	1.30	1.69
Community Involvement	Community service or volunteer work.	2.67	3.18
Diversity	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own.	2.56	2.65
Diversity	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.	2.54	2.57

*N of cross-sectional study = 460 first-year students, 497 seniors; N of longitudinal study = 354. Mean scores based on a scale of 1-4, with 1= "never" or "very little"; 2= "sometimes" or "some"; 3= "often" or "quite a bit"; 4= "very much" or "very often"*

#### Access

SCSU continues to serve a significant number of first-generation college students, although this number has decreased over the past few years. In 2008-2009, 519 (49%) incoming first year students responded on the *BCSSE* that neither parent had completed a 4-year degree.

The first-generation college students tend to have greater financial difficulties than their peers, according to their responses to the FYE Self-Assessments that were developed by the Office of Assessment and Planning. For example, they work more off campus and

they own older computers. They live off-campus at a far higher rate and agreed that they tend to be on campus only when they have class. They agreed at a higher rate that “Financial concerns keep me from fully enjoying the college experience.”

The first-generation college students tended to have significantly lower scores on the SAT Critical Reading test, the SAT Mathematical test, and the SAT Writing test. It could have been expected that they would have lower GPAs and lower rates of course hours earned than their peers. The first-generation college students did not differ in any way from their peers in terms of hours attempted, hours earned, and GPA. This is a strong indication that SCSU’s commitment to the Core Value of Access does not compromise the Core Value of Student Success. In fact, the first-generation college students had significantly higher scores on the following items: “I am gaining the knowledge to understand the research process and to use the academic resources available to me” *and* “As a result of my learning community, I examine all sides of an argument before reaching a conclusion.” They also tended to disagree more with the statement that “General education requirements get in the way of the classes I really want to take.”

### **Voluntary System of Accountability**

SCSU participates in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). During 2008-09, Southern’s initial College Portrait was completed and is now available online at <http://www.southernct.edu/collegeportrait/> During 2009-2010, we plan a pilot of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

### **Accreditation Updates**

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) – As per NEASC’s request following the submission of our 5-year interim report in 2006, we submitted a progress report in August 2008 detailing our continued progress on five areas of emphasis that had been identified in our 2001 site visit. In its letter of January 16, 2009, the Commission responded:

The report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) was accepted because it was substantially responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of January 11, 2007. The University has continued to consider its vision and mission statements in light of the most recent strategic planning deliberations; implementation of the strategic plan is being monitored by a newly constituted University-wide committee. We are gratified to learn that student assessment continues to be a priority at the institution, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Revision of the general education curriculum has continued, with the final stages of approval scheduled to have been completed in Fall 2008; we note with approval the significant progress achieved in the areas of Writing Across the Curriculum and the First-Year Experience. The information provided in the present report suggests that the concerns previously identified with respect to SCSU's online instructional technologies and its attendant administrative processes are on their way to becoming fully addressed. Finally, the

institution is giving due diligence to the evolution of its doctoral program in educational leadership with respect to curriculum design, program rigor, and systematic evaluation.

Southern's 10-year reaccreditation site visit will be scheduled in fall 2011. We are assembling a steering committee, and work on our self-study will begin in fall 2009.

Council on Academic Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) – Southern's graduate program in Marriage and Family Therapy concluded a successful site visit for reaffirmation of accreditation in November 2008. The program received renewal of accreditation for six years with several stipulations that will be addressed in our annual report to the accrediting commission.

Public Health Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) – The Department of Public Health had a successful site visit in December 2008 for reaffirmation of its accreditation. For the first time, the accreditation includes the undergraduate program as well as the graduate program (a new feature of CEPH accreditation). Although we have not received official notification yet, preliminary indications are that we will receive full reaccreditation.

National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) – Southern hosted the NCATE site visit team in April 2009, and all indications are that we had a very successful site visit. Our preliminary report indicates that SCSU met all six of the NCATE national standards. SCSU pioneered a very comprehensive assessment system to measure student and candidate learning, established a diverse network of professional development schools to provide for required field experiences, and delivered competent and comprehensive courses of instruction that demonstrated clear linkages to national and state standards of practice. More details are provided in a later section.

Several reaccreditation site visits are scheduled for 2009-2010. Currently, self-studies are underway for: the American Library Association (ALA), the American Counseling Association Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and the Computing Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

## **Assessment in Degree Programs**

### **Five-Year Academic Program Review**

Undergraduate Program Review. Following a two year effort by a Program Review Task Force and the Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) of the Undergraduate Curriculum Forum, a new process for the review of academic programs was approved in May 2008. On a rotating basis, each department completes a self-study every five years and provides 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 is being phased in over

three years. During the 2008-09 year, seven programs completed modified self-studies and underwent review by PRAC.

With technical support of the Office of Assessment and Planning, PRAC developed new student, faculty, alumni, and employer surveys this year. During spring 2009, surveys were piloted in the Nursing Department, the Computer Science Department, and throughout the School of Business.

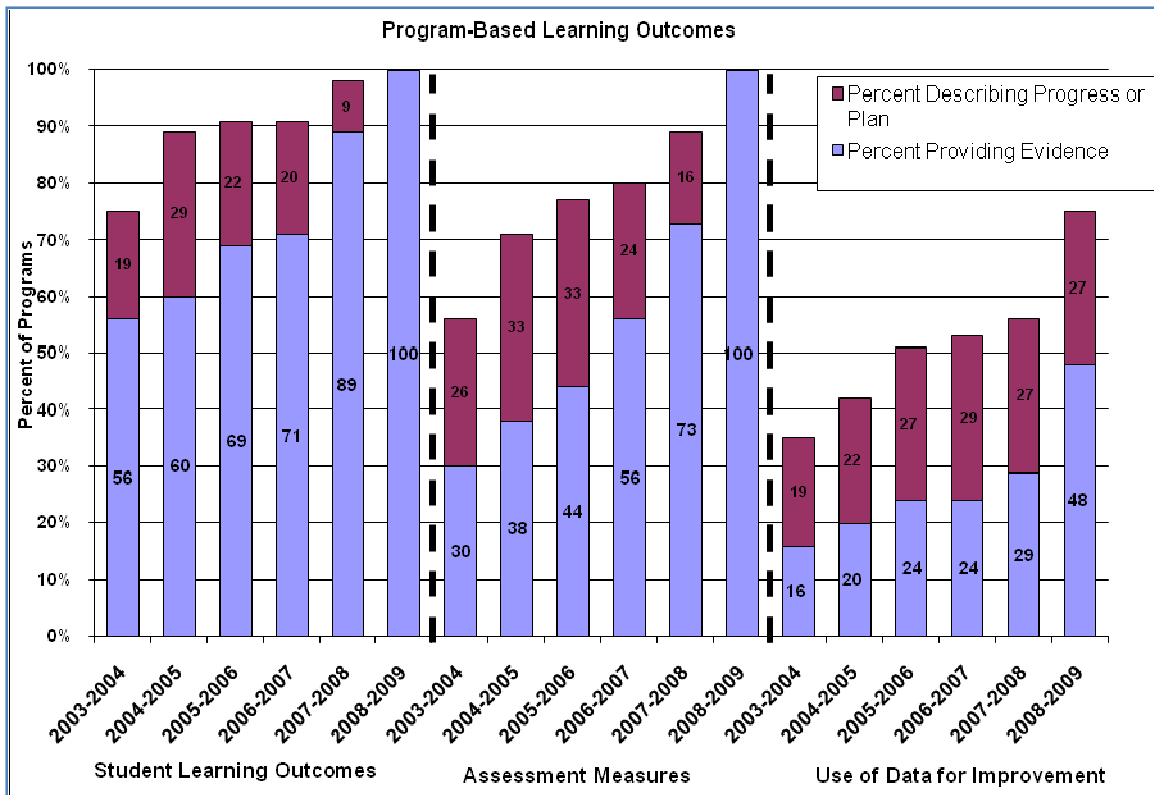
Graduate Programs. Graduate programs undergo program review on a 5-year rotation. This process is coordinated by the Academic Standards Committee of the Graduate Council and has been successfully implemented for a number of years. During 2008-09, six programs underwent review.

The Academic Standards Committee worked with the Office of Assessment and Planning to update and modify the student, faculty, and alumni surveys used in the reviews. A draft employer survey was also developed and will be piloted.

### **Student Learning Outcomes in the Major**

Southern continues to make progress in the assessment of student learning in academic programs. The number of programs that actively participate in assessment activities continues to grow. All programs now have identified student learning outcomes for the major, and all have identified appropriate assessment measures. In addition, 68% of programs (30 of 44) have collected data related to their identified student learning outcomes, and 48% of programs (21 of 44) have completed some data analysis which has been used by the department to make changes the curriculum or some other aspect of the program. These programs have provided evidence that they are actively using assessment results to inform departmental decision making and program improvement; an additional 27% of programs (12 of 44) have provided plans for doing so.

The following figure shows the changes in departmental assessment activities from 2003-04 to 2008-09.



### Closing the Assessment “Loop”

In this section, several examples are provided to illustrate the type of assessment work currently underway in departments.

#### Communication

The primary assessment measure for outcomes is our capstone course presentation. Over the past three years, students enrolled in the capstone courses representing the major’s four specializations gave presentations that were expected to address learning outcomes. Based on evaluation of the 2007-2008 data collected, it was determined that the format of the capstone presentations did not give an accurate depiction of the program outcomes. Part of this was due to the presentation definition, as well as a lack of clarity of expectations among the faculty coders observing the presentations. During 2008-2009, the departmental Assessment Committee conducted a qualitative analysis of the data collected through the 2007 capstone presentations. The analysis included categorization of comments by two separate coders. The two lists were then combined, attending particularly to those areas that had clear agreement or inconsistencies. Data consisted of statements recorded on the capstone presentation worksheet by faculty observers. Statements were grouped by departmental goal and specialization. Further grouping of statements was made based on curriculum related issues. Major conclusions made from the analysis were:

- There was no clear indication from student presentation that writing is a critical component for the curriculum.

- There was no evidence in the presentations that ethical standards or diversity issues are adequately addressed in courses or by the student projects
- There was some discussion of how technology may have been used in projects, but not to the extent expected for the capstone.
- It was difficult to determine whether students were reporting what they learned or what they believed the faculty audience wanted to hear.

In addition to the capstone analysis, the Assessment Committee created a curriculum map that will be used to further develop outcome assessment for the program. The curriculum map was developed using existing course objectives listed on syllabi that were in the office files. Our 5-person committee evaluated the objectives based on the stated department goals/objectives. This allowed us to identify what our expectations should be in relation to the capstone in its current state. For each course we identified whether the course introduces, reinforces, or assesses the department goals. As part of the process, notes were made with regard to those places in the curriculum where introduction or reinforcement was expected (by the committee), but no evidence was provided in the course objective statements. The curriculum mapping process raised important issues for our curriculum as a whole, including the following:

- Many of the course objectives were vague and did not necessarily reflect all of the content or expectations embedded within the respective course.
- Though there was general agreement on departmental goals/objectives, some terms and expectations are still not consistent among faculty. The mapping helped define and clarify some of these terms and expectations.
- A number of courses in the curriculum had expectations that content was introduced in previous courses, but there was no evidence of that from the objectives.

It was clear from both analytical projects that adjustments need to be made to our curriculum. Some of this is simply a matter of more clearly articulating expectations that are already in place. However, some issues relate to course flow. One direct change related to this was a departmental policy change to require all core courses to be completed before a student can register for upper level courses.

One clear initiative moving forward is to introduce a standard suggested format for learning objectives for courses that directly reflect instructor expectations. This will assist in maintaining consistency of course outcomes between different sections of courses, particularly if they are taught by different instructors. Clarification of the learning objectives across courses will also help address the revealed issue that students are adequately prepared for courses with pre-requisites. Currently we have no assessment mechanism in place to monitor how well pre-requisite courses are preparing students for subsequent courses. This clarification is a first step in establishing tracking of progress throughout the program based on pre-requisites.

### English

The department is engaged in a long-term assessment study of its majors using qualitative means to measure two fairly broad questions: How well do our majors read? How well do our majors write? The department is taking a patient approach to developing not only our assessment process, but more specifically our assessment measurements. We have been

through several revisions and refinements of the rubric we use to measure reading and writing ability. Our current rubric seeks to measure these broad outcomes by focusing on several specific skills: for reading, the ability to read closely and to interpret texts; for writing, the ability to develop a thesis and support that thesis with each paragraph in the text, to develop a topic sentence for each paragraph, to create sentences with clear boundaries and that employ standard English usage, and to integrate quotations properly.

The department has nearly completed its second round of assessment of its majors. At the end of the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters, the Assessment Committee requested that instructors of 300- and 400- level courses focusing on literary study collect an anonymous copy of the final paper from each English major in the class. A total of 172 student papers were collected. By the end of June 2009, the committee will look at a small sample of these papers for norming purposes, and will then select 20% of the remaining papers to assess. Each of the four members of the committee will read each of the papers and score them using the revised rubric developed and refined over the past two years. Our analysis will consist of several steps: determining which reading and writing issues stand out as exceptionally positive or negative; comparing the results across students' class year (senior, junior, etc.); and making tentative comparisons to the results from our first round (tentative because the rubric has been changed in several ways).

For the first round of assessment in the summer 2008, the Assessment Committee determined which trends in the data were most significant. While we discussed implications and potential changes amongst ourselves, we decided not to share them with the department, so as to allow for more freedom of discussion. The strategy was successful; when the department met in fall 2008, its members enthusiastically discussed the data, but opted not to consider in a formal way what the implications might be for the major curriculum. Instead, they asked the committee to complete a second round of assessment to determine if the trends hold true. The Assessment Committee plans a similar process for this round of assessment: we will discuss amongst ourselves what the data might mean, but we will allow any curricular implications to be generated by the full department.

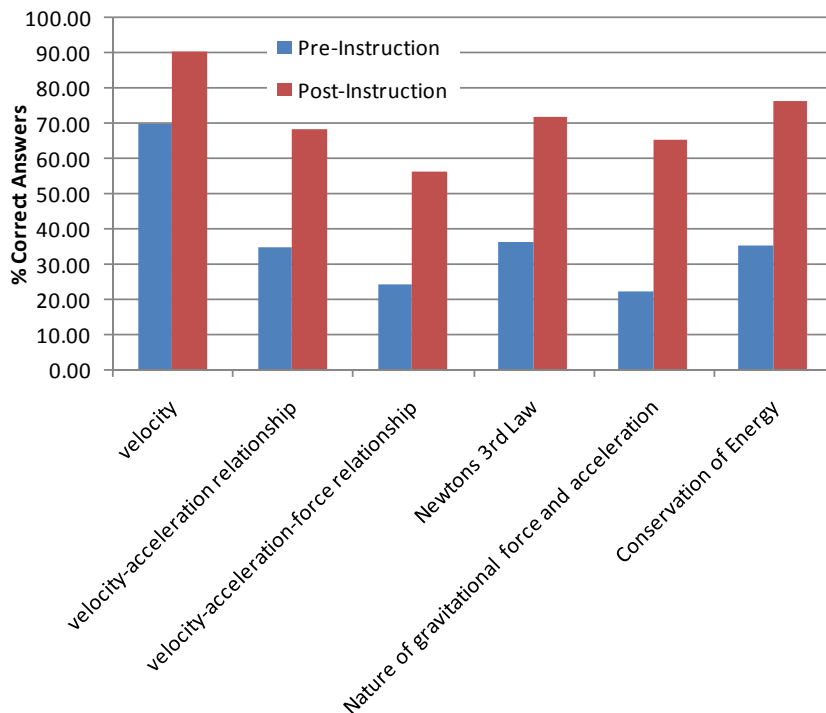
### Physics

Data on student learning outcomes were collected this year using externally developed, statistically validated multiple choice assessments and a pre instruction/ post instruction methodology in PHY101 (general education course for pre-service elementary school teachers), PHY 230 (calculus-based introductory physics course for physics majors and students from other science/technology oriented disciplines) and PHY231 (second semester of calculus-based introductory physics for physics majors and students from other science/technology oriented disciplines). Data were also collected using common final exam questions in PHY 230, PHY 231 and PHY400 (advanced mechanics course for physics majors).

The physics department uses assessment data for program improvement in several ways: First, pre-instruction data are used to inform instructors of the level of preparation of the

class as a whole at the beginning of the semester. This helps to ensure that the starting level and pace of the course is optimized for that specific group of students. Instructors may choose to increase or decrease focus on fundamental material based on the assessment data. For example, pre-instruction assessment of students' understanding of mechanics concepts indicated that before instruction, most PHY230 students understand the concept of velocity while far fewer understand the concept of acceleration. As a result, the instructor in the course shortened instruction time on velocity in order to increase the time spent on acceleration. As another example, comparison of the scientific reasoning ability before instruction for PHY101 students (pre-service elementary school teachers) and PHY230 students (physics majors and students in other science and technology oriented disciplines) indicated that instruction time was well spent helping the PHY101 students to understand conservation of mass and volume, while such an emphasis was not warranted for the PHY230 population when taken as a whole. Pre-instruction data are also used to help remediate individual student deficiencies before they have a chance to interfere with the learning of new material.

The department compares pre-instruction results to post-instruction results in order to identify areas in which student learning is unsatisfactory and changes in curriculum or pedagogy might be expected to improve that outcome. For example, the comparison of pre-instruction and post-instruction levels of PHY230 student understanding of mechanics concepts shown in indicates good levels of student learning (figure below). We credit the assessment of student learning of mechanics concepts and principles done in our PHY210 course over the last several years for this, since those assessments informed the curriculum and pedagogical approaches used in the PHY230 course this year.



A new method was piloted this year to assess the impact of the program on students' understanding of the nature of science (especially physics), the scientific enterprise, and the connection between physics and society. All published data show a degradation of student attitudes about the field as a result of taking a physics course. This was not the case at SCSU. The department administered the *Colorado Learning About Science Survey* (CLASS), which was developed at the University of Colorado. CLASS probes students' views of the field in eight categories, including "conceptual understanding," "how much effort one should expect to put into trying to make sense of a scientific outcome," and "what it takes to solve problems in physics." Student responses to the CLASS are categorized according to whether their scores reflect a "favorable" or "unfavorable" attitude. At SCSU, the attitudes of the pre-service elementary school teachers who were enrolled in PHY101 experienced a positive shift in their scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

### Theatre

During 2008-09, the department developed and piloted drafts of two assessment measures: a junior year gateway exam assessing the 24-credit core curriculum of the major and an online employer/supervisor survey. The curriculum broadly educates across the theatrical spectrum and prepares students for participating in the production of theatre. This entails imparting both theoretical empirical knowledge and applied artistic skill. So, it was important to the department to have tools that could measure both ends of the theatrical pedagogy spectrum.

The pilot exam was administered to 25 junior and senior majors (approximately 40% of the departmental population), all of whom have completed the core requirements. Students were asked to fill out a scantron answer sheet and also write feedback on the test itself. After Institutional Research ran a simple item analysis on the exams, theatre department faculty were asked to take the test themselves, compare their answers with the students' answers, and make note of items that deviate from testing our learning goals or items with formatting issues. In lieu of a formal item discrimination analysis, this more anecdotal feedback was used to refine and expand the item pool. Three bad items were eliminated, twelve new items were added, and fifteen were rewritten.

Administering the pilot exam to the full theatre faculty was most interesting. Reminding ourselves of the breadth of the education we provide our students, and understanding more fully what each of us teaches, has had an immediate and positive impact on us as a team. After analyzing the results of our gateway exam, the department is considering pursuing two curricular changes. One is standardizing the syllabus for Theatre 121, Introduction to Performance – a course that has a rotating pool of instructors, both full time and adjunct. A second is mandating a professional internship as a part of our degree requirements.

The draft online survey tool was developed using Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide in order to establish our students' skill levels in an applied context. The survey went through several drafts with feedback from on-campus employers, employers at local theatre companies, and the SCSU assessment office. The final pilot survey had 33 questions in

four sections. To date, completed surveys from seven employers have been received. Changes are planned for next year to increase the response rate to the survey. First, we will be recasting the survey as an “inventory” of skills to help differentiate it from a personnel evaluation. An inherent challenge has been to present the survey as a measure of the department’s teaching through the application by the students of these skills, not as an evaluation of a student’s personal traits. Second, we will be more proactive about administering the survey. We plan to have the students provide us with employer contact information well in advance instead of after the fact, and give the students responsibility for helping ensure that the employers respond. Employers will be contacted as early as possible, perhaps even before employment begins, to make them stakeholders in the process.

### World Languages and Literature

We have collected a wide range of data to benchmark students’ proficiency levels in Italian, French, German, and Spanish 100, 101, 200 and 210 level classes. The procedure involved TestPodium, an instrument that tested each student on structural, lexical, reading and listening development. Oral proficiency was evaluated via oral tasks in the class setting. These data will be analyzed during the summer and early fall and will be used in the preparation for the move toward proficiency requirement in World Languages.

The department uses several instruments for assessment and program development. Most recently we introduced Test Fabrique – an assessment tool that allows us to assess students’ performance in aural, oral, and written modes of communication in the target language. These tests are computer-based and therefore, are preserved in our database for analysis. The test results from fall 2008 and spring 2009 clearly show that there is obvious growth in lexical development in all students, and there is a considerable improvement of aural skills and communicative skills in each stage of language development. However, we noticed that students’ progress in syntactic accuracy remains limited and does not satisfy our requirements. This information will be used in the preparation of the curriculum for the fall 2009 semester. We are planning to put more emphasis on incorporating contextualized instruction of structure into culture-driven course content.

## **Assessment Across Programs/In Special Programs**

### **Assessing the First-Year Experience Program**

After considering the data from the 2007 pilot FYE program, the FYE Program Committee recommended refinements for the 2008-2009 academic year. For example, the FYE 101 seminar was reconceptualized as INQUIRY 101 in order to clarify the distinction between the seminar and the larger FYE Program, which includes objectives related to student life and university resources (health and wellness; life in the residence halls; community-based initiatives, career planning, etc.). Thus, INQ 101 was designed to have fewer objectives than the previous FYE 101. In the words of the committee: “reducing the number of objectives by letting the larger FYE program absorb some of the student-life and university resource objective—and focusing the remaining objectives

more on the academic core of the course—will create a consistency across sections of INQ 101.”

At the heart of the refined First-Year Experience (FYE) Program are learning communities. All first-time, first-semester students take part in seminars affiliated with one of three learning communities during their first semester: INQUIRY Learning Communities, LINKS Learning Communities, or for selected students, the Honors Program Learning Community. Complementing the INQUIRY course is an English composition course that is designed specifically to develop the students’ reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Students move through these two courses together in groups of 20, forming connections and friendships with their peers, as well as with the faculty who teach these courses and the staff who supports them. LINKS Learning Communities are comprised of two general education courses organized around a common theme. Professors organize their courses to emphasize the interrelations between disciplines, to coordinate schedules, and to facilitate fellowship among students. Above and beyond the seminars, the hallmark of the First-Year Experience Program is the collaboration among Academic Affairs, Student Life, and such university resources as advisement, co-curricular programs, health and wellness, residential life, community-based initiatives, diversity and equity, academic support services, and career planning.

#### Follow-Up: FYE Pilot Year 2007-08

During the FYE pilot in fall 2007, all first-year students were in one of four types of learning communities:

- 1. Academic Cluster with FYE Seminar (N=561)
- 2. Academic Cluster without FYE Seminar (N=564)
- 3. Honors (N=36)
- 4. LINKS (N=79)

There were two types of “academic cluster” learning communities. In both, groups of 20 students were enrolled as a cohort in a composition class and at least one general education course. The sole difference between the two was that one group participated in FYE 101, a seminar designed for first-year students and the other group did not. There were not enough FYE 101 sections to accommodate all the incoming first-year students. While this was unfortunate for the students, this provided the opportunity to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the pilot FYE Program in which the outcome data of two similar groups were compared (in terms of their demographics, the two groups were virtually identical).

There are notable outcomes from last year’s FYE pilot that have become available only now. For example, the first to second year retention rate for those students who participated in a first-year seminar course was 80%. For the non-seminar students, it was 74%. In spring 2008, the students completed the *NSSE*. The students who did not return to SCSU for their sophomore year had significantly lower scores than the returning students on the following *NSSE* items:

- Quality: Relationships with other students

- Quality: Relationships with faculty
- Quality: Relationships with administrative personnel and offices.

There was an upward trend in the percent of students who ended last year in “good standing.” Along with this, there was a downward trend in the percent of students on academic probation. Moreover, at the end of their third semester at SCSU (fall 2008), the FYE seminar students had higher cumulative GPAs (mean=2.763) than the non-seminar students (mean= 2.629), and the difference was not due to chance [ $p = .001$ ].

#### FYE Program 2008

To measure the impact of the First-Year Experience (FYE) Program, the university is conducting longitudinal, cohort studies. This section presents initial results of the cohort study of the Class of 2012 (first-year students who entered SCSU in fall 2008). The longitudinal, cohort study of the Class of 2012 is a panel study in that (1) the progress of the students will be tracked during their enrollment at SCSU and beyond; and (2) these subsequent sources of data about their progress will be linked by their unique ID numbers. The cohort study began during the students’ 2008 New Student Orientation. The following sources of information were used during the first year of this longitudinal study:

- Student Questionnaire at New Student Orientation (n = 1,269)
- *Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement* (n = 1,270)
- Two Self-Assessments during fall 2008 (n = 984 and 992)
- BANNER (for demographic data, including SAT scores, high school rank, English and math placement scores, gender, and ethnicity)
- Fall 2008 GPA
- The *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* was administered in the spring 2009. Results will be available in August 2009.

In the learning communities, students practice the process of academic inquiry common to all university disciplines. The following comment written by a student captures the nature of this process:

As a result of my INQ instructor promoting classroom discussions, I have become more open-minded. With this opportunity, I was able to absorb a certain topic through the multiple perspectives of my peers, rather than remaining caged within my own mindset.

Students’ responses to FYE self-assessment items related to academic inquiry are shown in the following table.

<b>Academic Inquiry</b>	<b>Percent Agreement<sup>2</sup> (Fall 2008)</b>
I am gaining the knowledge to understand the research process and to use the resources available to me.	79

<sup>2</sup> The responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were combined to calculate the “percent agreement.”

<b>Academic Inquiry</b>	<b>Percent Agreement<sup>2</sup> (Fall 2008)</b>
I am being taught how to effectively express my position during classroom discussions.	72
I am being taught to examine all sides of an argument before reaching a conclusion.	77
In my courses, I am learning to identify problems, analyze them, and arrive at more than one possible solution.	72
When I am searching online for a specific fact, I typically take the time to check out other links, even if they do not appear to be immediately relevant to the question I need to answer at that moment.	54
Sometimes when I don't understand something in my textbook, I will go to the library or search online for another book or resource that may explain the same point in a different way.	34
When I am reading my course assignments, I often find myself either strongly arguing or agreeing with the author(s).	47
In general, I continue to think about something I learned in class or while doing homework, even after the professor has moved on to another topic.	54
When reading my textbooks, if there is a word that I don't know, I look it up.	46
If I make a mistake in class or on a homework assignment, I re-study the material so that I'll never make the same mistake again.	44

New items were added to this year's self-assessments in order to fine-tune the learning and developmental outcomes that may be attributed to the FYE program. The students were asked to indicate whether they attribute their growth as students to their learning communities. The initial results are positive. Changes in these indicators will be tracked in subsequent years.

<b>Outcomes: As a result of my learning community . . .</b>	<b>Percent Agreement<sup>3</sup> (Fall 2008)</b>
I have gained confidence in my ability to defend my position on an issue.	57
I effectively express my position during classroom discussions.	57
I examine all sides of an argument before reaching a conclusion.	63
I now have a clearer sense of my most preferred learning style.	66
I have a fairly clear idea of what I need to study now in order to have the career that I want.	60
My experiences in an academic learning community have significantly enhanced my ability to meet college-level academic expectations.	61
I have a clearer sense of my most preferred learning style.	66
I apply the skills that I am learning in my learning community to other courses I am also taking this semester.	62

<sup>3</sup> The responses of "strongly agree" and "agree" were combined to calculate the "percent agreement."

Future assessments of the FYE program will focus on direct assessments of student learning in the Inquiry course and will include portfolio assessment and analysis of additional reflective writing by the students.

### General Education Assessment

Since 2005, the Office of Assessment and Planning has conducted a trend analysis of the scores of the students on the *NSSE*. The following table, for example, is a summary of seniors' responses from 2005-2008 to the *NSSE* item "To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?" The table is rank-ordered in percent of seniors reporting substantial impact on their learning in 16 areas.

Learning Outcome Area	% Senior Rating SCSU Impact as Substantial <sup>4</sup>			
	2008 (N=497)	2007 (N=446)	2006 (N=618)	2005 (N=369)
1 Thinking critically and analytically	85%	83%	79%	81%
2 Acquiring a broad general education	84%	81%	80%	84%
3 Writing clearly and effectively	83%	75%	76%	82%
4 Using computing and information technology	78%	75%	74%	76%
6 Speaking clearly and effectively	75%	69%	69%	73%
5 Working effectively with others	74%	73%	70%	73%
7 Acquiring job or work related knowledge and skills	72%	67%	66%	70%
8 Learning effectively on your own	71%	67%	62%	67%
9 Analyzing quantitative problems	69%	67%	69%	69%
10 Understanding yourself	64%	60%	56%	58%
11 Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	55%	57%	51%	53%
12 Solving complex real-world problems	54%	52%	51%	52%
13 Developing a personal code of values and ethics	54%	53%	49%	52%
14 Contributing to the welfare of your community	39%	38%	37%	33%
15 Voting in local, state, or national elections	28%	29%	26%	33%
16 Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	25%	22%	23%	20%

With the approval of the new Liberal education Program (LEP) by faculty referendum in April 2009, we have begun to plan for the implementation of the program. In spring

<sup>4</sup> Percent of seniors 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?"

2009, we gathered data from several areas (written communication, quantitative reasoning, multilingual communication) that will be part of the new Tier I competencies. These data are being analyzed this summer and will serve as a baseline measure for the new program. The analyses will also inform our assessment structure that will be built into the new program. A committee has started work on developing this assessment structure.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program was fully implemented during the 2007-2008 academic year. The program is overseen by a director, and a subcommittee of the UCF (Writing Across the Curriculum Committee) reviews all W-course proposals. Assessment activities during 2008-09 for the WAC program are described in this section.

A survey was administered to students enrolled in W-courses. Although the survey provides only indirect measures of student learning, it does present some preliminary information about the success of the program. The results of the fall 08 survey showed that students were generally positive about their experiences in their W-courses and believed that the course had helped to improve their ability to organize their writing and better express their ideas. Mean scores for the seven survey items ranged from 3.93 to 4.46 on a scale of 1-5. Results of the spring 09 surveys are currently being analyzed. In response to the survey data, a new WAC brochure has been developed for students. The brochure explains the SCSU W-course requirement, the program guidelines, and lists contact persons and resources for students.

In spring 2009, faculty were asked to respond to an online survey regarding various aspects of the W-course program (e.g., type of writing to be done by students, types of assignments, training for faculty teaching W courses, the ease of the W-course proposal and approval process). To date, 33 faculty have completed the survey. We are planning to continue collecting data during the fall 2009 semester. The results will be used to inform program revisions. Preliminary results indicate that faculty feel strongly that students should be required to complete one W-course in their major.

Direct measures of student learning are planned as follows. As part of the June 2009 Teaching Academy, a group of nine faculty members worked to revise the previously submitted assignments for their fall 2009 W-course. New assignments were also developed during the workshop. Participants received tips and resources in addition to peer mentoring. During the fall 2009 semester, participants will incorporate the revised assignments into their course. Student responses to those assignments will be collected and submitted to WAC for assessment purposes. In January 2010, the participants will meet again, document again their own reflection on how well the revised assignments met the learning objectives, and informally share their experiences with the group.

In the next phase of the WAC assessment plan, the WAC Committee will work with academic departments to develop rubrics to assess critical/analytical writing in each of the disciplines. The student papers collected during 2009-2010 will be scored by a panel of faculty, according to the rubrics developed. Scoring of student papers by a faculty

panel will provide direct evidence of how well students' writing meets the Writing Across the Curriculum guidelines. Despite some appropriate variations for individual academic disciplines, the rubrics will, in general, aim to assess

- Clear statement of thesis/results
- Effective use of specific, relevant evidence
- Significant evidence of original thought
- Clear and logical arguments
- Well-developed paragraphs
- Appropriate tone and word choices
- Correct Mechanics: punctuation; spelling; style and formatting

Student papers will be read by at least two faculty members and scored according to the rubrics developed by departments in January 2010. Both first drafts and revised papers will be scored. The rubrics will include interval-level scales of measurement, which will allow for comparisons, across disciplines and course levels, of students' meeting the writing assignment criteria. The specific analyses will address how well students' writing meets each of the program guidelines.

### **Teacher Education Program Assessment**

An assessment body that cuts across programs is the Unit Assessment Board (UAB). Comprised of 18 faculty members from the Schools of Education and Arts and Sciences, the UAB involves all departments that have teacher certification programs. The UAB met monthly for three years to prepare for this year's NCATE accreditation visit. There are three layers of the Unit's assessment system: (1) ongoing research studies; (2) annual Unit evaluations; and (3) formative assessments of candidates' emerging proficiencies conducted each semester to improve their performance.

In the first layer, the Unit conducts longitudinal cohort studies that cut across academic years and the gate status of the candidates. For example, the Unit investigates whether all the candidates progress through their coursework and the gates 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. These annual evaluations were developed based on INTASC standards and the Unit's conceptual framework. The third layer is comprised of program-specific assessments that are aligned with state and professional standards. Through these three layers of the assessment system, the Unit systematically gathers data, analyzes the data for patterns and anomalies (to discern how well the Unit and its programs are functioning), and prepares both unit-wide reports and program-level reports. Data are disaggregated to provide such information as breakdown of results by initial and advanced candidates; undergraduates and graduate students; and by gate.

The Unit Assessment Board designed the *Candidate Information Management and Assessment System* (CIMAS) in order to more closely align our professional and state standards, curriculum, instruction, and unit assessment system with our conceptual framework (SAILS). CIMAS is a dynamic database that was constructed with an Oracle web-based programming tool. Each program has designated a CIMAS program coordinator who is responsible for the integrity of the program's data as well as data

entry. The most useful feature of CIMAS is that it was designed to permit trend analyses that cut across semesters and the different programs that comprise the Unit. These trend analyses provide insight into the conceptual framework and how well the Unit is functioning. Moreover, the analyses shed light on how well the candidates are progressing through the gates.

Consistent with the university's philosophy of assessment, research findings inform curriculum development. For example, major gaps in the curriculum were identified that reduced the adequacy of the learning experiences for students in the School of Education. Gaps included a writing course for the undergraduates and more courses at the graduate level for developmental disabilities within the Autism program. Elementary Education identified its weakest areas as classroom management and special education content; the proposed action step is the creation of a blended/collaborative graduate Special Education and Elementary Education program. For Exercise Science, the identified priority was the re-establishment of a Masters in Physical Education. Special Education identified the need to expand its Autism and Developmental Disabilities area. The Reading program seeks to add a multi-credit interdisciplinary research symposium as well as introduce an evidence-based reading seminar course for new candidates upon their entry into the program.

While we will receive the official, final report from NCATE in June, we did receive a summary report from the NCATE co-chairs. Not only did we meet all six NCATE national standards, we received two areas of commendations: our assessment system and the strength of our faculty. The first area of commendation reflects the Unit Assessment Board's development of an assessment system, the CIMAS database, the conceptualization of assessment within the unit of educator preparation, and the actualization of these conceptualizations into a living, working process of measuring candidate learning. The NCATE team was impressed with the faculty's knowledge of assessment, the ways it was integrated into the unit, and the evidence provided regarding how programs have actually used the data to make decisions. The second area of commendation was the strength of the faculty. The team was impressed with not only the ability of the faculty to demonstrate effective teaching, but also the breadth of the faculty in terms of their knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of instruction and its application to P-12 schools.

### **The Galileo Project**

The Galileo Project is a multi-year project initially funded through a Connecticut Department of Higher Education grant and designed to foster partnerships between SCSU and three area high schools (Hamden, Maloney, and Hillhouse High Schools). The project reflects SCSU's core values, in particular the values of providing access and championing diversity. All three high schools are in priority school districts that have historically low graduation rates and high percentages of non-white students. The project's purpose is to better prepare students for university-level work. Specifically, the project aims to minimize a major impediment to students obtaining their degrees: initial placement into ENG 110 and especially placement into MAT 095, our developmental courses. According to Dr. Emmett Dennis, SCSU's coordinator of developmental mathematics, the average rate of failure to pass MAT 095 for fall 2007, spring 2008, and

fall 2008 was 27%. Even when students pass the course, there remain at least two additional mathematics courses before students have met the all-university requirement.

The project assists high school teachers in developing pedagogical strategies in English and math for underperforming students who either (1) would not typically qualify for college admissions, or (2) would enter college at the developmental level. Among many other activities, high school teachers and SCSU faculty participating in The Galileo Project have tested high school and SCSU students at various class levels. The goal was to determine which components of the Connecticut Grades 9-12 Standards students struggle with most. Based on this information, high schools are better able to align their curriculum with the expectations of universities.

In order to support high school educators as they prepare students to approach college academics, two working groups were established, one for English composition and another for Mathematics. SCSU faculty are paired with a teacher counterpart in each high school.

SCSU mathematics faculty developed and administered a seven-question test about performing mathematical functions with fractions. Seventy-nine high school students and 36 SCSU students in MAT 102 and MAT 122 took the test. Results are being analyzed.

The English composition placement tests of those incoming freshmen at SCSU from these three high schools were analyzed. To date, in the first four of six placement tests, 23 incoming students from these high schools have taken the composition placement test, with 4 students (17%) placing into ENG 110.

The high school transcripts for all 76 first-time, first-year students from all three high schools who attended SCSU in 2008-2009 were analyzed. The transcripts were then compared with the results of placements for mathematics and English composition, as well as the students' academic performance in mathematics, English, and overall in the fall semester. An analysis focused on the rates of academic probation for graduates from these schools in comparison with the overall rate among SCSU's first-time, first-year students. While the overall rate is 14.6%, the rates for the three high schools are as follows: 27.6% for Hamden, 50.0% for Maloney, and 50.0% for Hillhouse. Furthermore, it was found that students from two of the three high schools were disproportionately more likely to place into MAT 095, "Algebra I," than the average SCSU student. While the overall average at SCSU for placement into MAT 095 is approximately 50%, that percentage was matched (actually 50.0%) for the Maloney cohort, while 70.0% of the first-time, first-year students from Hamden H.S. placed into MAT 095 and 80.0% of those from Hillhouse did so.

To complete the feedback loop, a two-day teaching academy (June 29 and 30) is currently underway to encourage teachers' development of strategies that address the curricular challenges they confront when educating students. Participants include English and mathematics teachers from all three high schools as well as teacher-certification candidates from all four CSUS campuses. We will continue to follow these students and assess the effectiveness of the intervention with the participant high schools.

## Faculty Development

Faculty development is an integral element in the assessment process. Our research findings pointed out the need for faculty to gain even more knowledge about how students learn. The Office of Faculty Development proactively supports the enhancement of student learning through a variety of professional development events and workshops aimed at enhancing teaching effectiveness. In 2008-2009, the Office of Faculty Development offered 31 events, for a total of 70 hours of professional development opportunities. Workshop topics are devised after consulting data gained through the Office of Assessment and Planning, SCSU's institutional leaders, and faculty advisory boards. Key workshop topics include: advising and mentoring students, using various forms of emerging instructional technologies, employing a variety of classroom assessment techniques, supporting writing and critical thinking across the curriculum, applying universal design principles to reach all learning styles, collaborative learning, and enhancing student engagement.

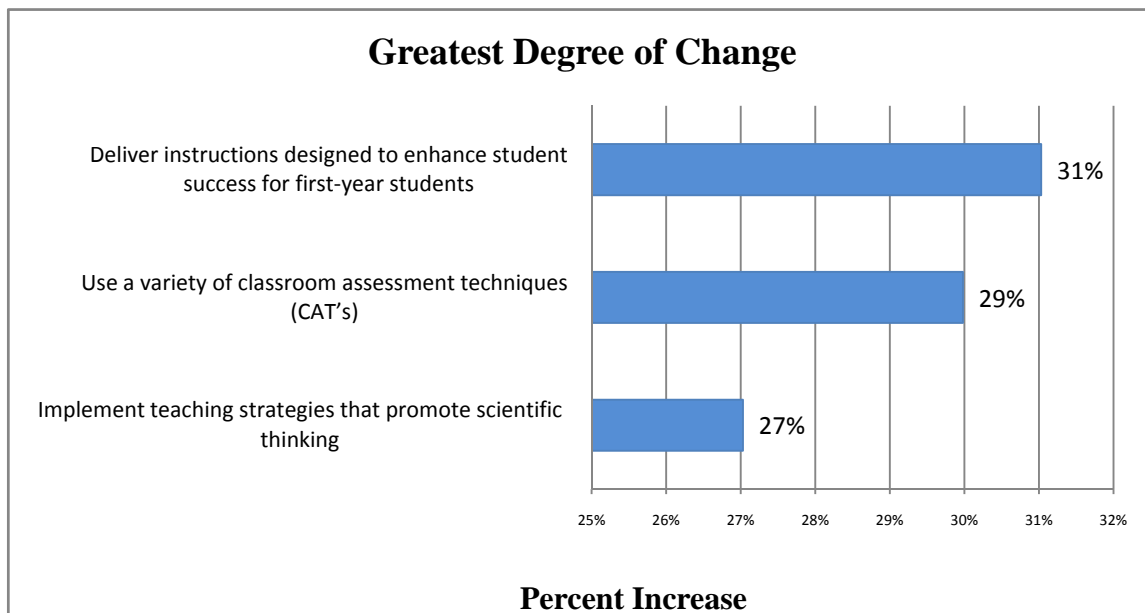
The Office of Faculty Development also administers the Teaching Innovation Program (TIP). Funded by a 3-year grant from the Davis Education Foundation, the TIP awarded fellowships for innovative faculty to research, implement, evaluate, and disseminate instructional technologies and innovations. The TIP also provided funding for faculty to attend teaching conferences, brought experts on teaching and learning to the SCSU campus, and rewarded master teachers for facilitating hands-on workshops on pedagogy and technology. In addition to providing faculty with new technologies and strategies for enhanced learning, the program contributed to a culture where teaching excellence is encouraged and rewarded, where explicit attention is paid to the learning process, and where faculty are actively engaged in assessing and enhancing their teaching. The SCSU Teaching Academy, instituted in 2008, was designed to offer faculty hands-on instruction relative to teaching first-year students, writing across the curriculum, curriculum design and assessment, and effective pedagogy. In June 2009, 78 faculty participated in the second annual intensive, 3-day teaching conference. The theme of this year's academy, "Engaging All Learners," is consistent with the university's core values of diversity, access, and student success. In addition to two keynote speakers, 34 SCSU faculty presented workshops to their colleagues, serving as both master teachers and mentors.

The following table summarizes the results of the 2009 teaching Academy. The highest rates of agreement were for the three objectives of "Enhancing teaching effectiveness for increased student engagement" (97% agreement), "Engaging me in workshops to enhance learning outcomes" (97% agreement), and "Helping to build a culture of teaching excellence" (91% agreement).

Teaching Academy module	Percent Agreeing that Teaching Academy module was "Effective"	Percent Agreeing that the Teaching Academy module was "Very Effective"
Supporting my efforts in Writing Across the Curriculum	33.3%	45.5%
Increasing my knowledge about our first-year students	21.9%	46.9%

Teaching Academy module	Percent Agreeing that Teaching Academy module was “Effective”	Percent Agreeing that the Teaching Academy module was “Very Effective”
Engaging me in workshops to enhance learning outcomes	47.1%	50.0%
Providing me with curriculum design experience	42.4%	30.3%
Increasing my awareness of assessment strategies	32.4%	52.9%
Exposing me to emerging trends in higher education	35.3%	35.3%
Providing me with training in classroom facilitation techniques	35.3%	47.1%
Encouraging cross-disciplinary exchange	41.2%	44.1%
Helping to build a culture of teaching excellence	29.4%	61.8%
Enhancing teaching effectiveness for increased student engagement	36.4%	60.6%

The evaluation measured the degree of change that the faculty experienced as a result of the Teaching Academy. Faculty were asked to indicate their knowledge of each day’s key topics prior to attending the Teaching Academy and afterwards. The average rate of change for each topic was computed by averaging the differences of the scores observed over time (that is, the “Prior” scores were subtracted from the “Now” scores).



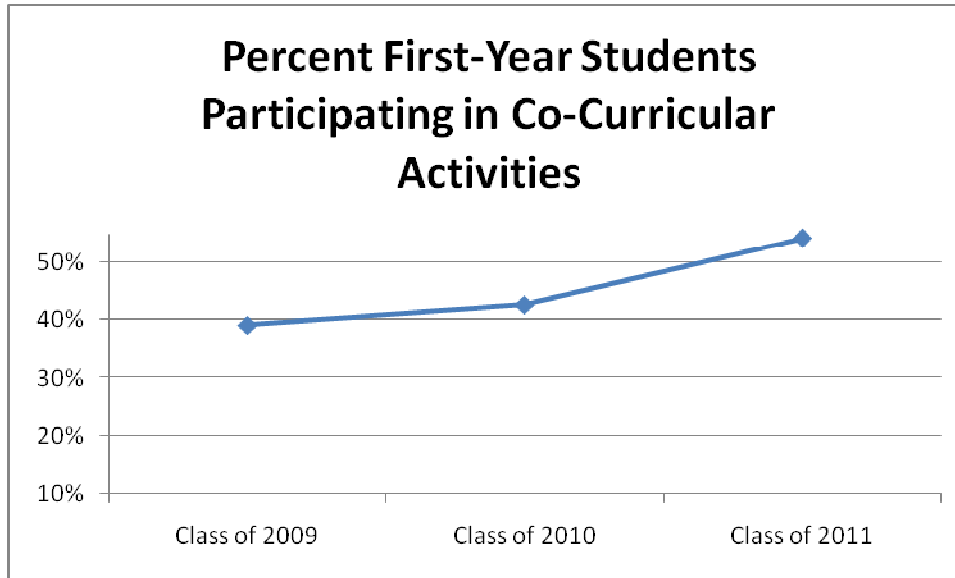
Follow-up sessions will be held in the fall, and further assessment will be completed to ascertain the long term impact of the program.

### Assessment of Extra and Co-Curricular Experiences

Student participation in co-curricular activities has increased steadily over the past three years. An item on the *NSSE* asks students to indicate the number of hours per 7-day week they spent participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus

publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.). The level of participation of first-year students is noted below<sup>5</sup>.

<b>NSSE Year of Administration</b>	<b>Percent First-Year Students Participating in Co-Curricular Activities</b>
2006 (n = 511)	39.1%
2007 (n = 471)	42.6%
2008 (n=452)	54.2%

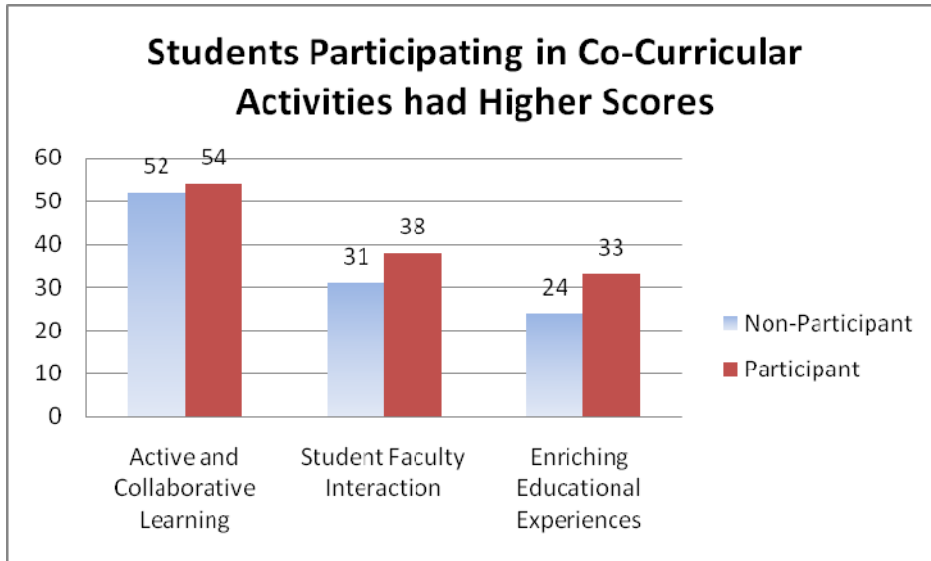


It is noteworthy that the first-year students who participated in the 2007 pilot of the First-Year Experience (FYE) had significantly higher rates of participation in co-curricular activities than the students who were not part of FYE: (1.52 vs. 1.38;  $p = .022$ ).

The participating students also tended to have significantly higher scores on the series of items on the 2008 *NSSE* that measured Active and Collaborating Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Enriching Educational Experiences.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the new student center opened in January 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Scores were converted to a scale of 0-100 for ease of comparison.



In addition to the *NSSE*, SCSU regularly conducts research on student participation in co-curricular activities as part of the effectiveness studies of the First-Year Experience. The scores on the self-assessments that the Office of Assessment and Planning developed and administered to all first-year students were examined to see differences among subgroups of students. For example, the scores of the students who participated in co-curricular activities were compared with the scores of those of the students who did not participate. Participating students tended to have far more positive interactions with upperclassmen, faculty, and others who may help them to be successful in college. One may think that participation in co-curricular activities comes at the expense of academics. However, the reverse seems to be true. The participating students were more likely to spread out the work on a long assignment and not wait until the last moment to complete it. They were also more likely to express success in balancing their course load and social life. Moreover, the participating students expected to graduate from SCSU at a statistically significant higher rate.

The following table displays instances in which the participating students had higher scores than the non-participating students, and the difference was not due to chance. Students' responses to selected FYE self-assessment items were categorized based on students' responses to the following item: "This semester, I joined a club on campus or participated in a performing arts or musical production."

Item of the FYE Self-Assessment	Percentage Agreement <sup>7</sup>		Difference
	No Participation N=530	Yes Participation N=720	
I would use, or have used university resources to help me deal with demands of college life.	53%	72%	+19%

<sup>7</sup> Responses of "strongly agree" and "agree" were combined to calculate the "percentage agreement."

I seek out others who can help me to be successful in college.	56%	70%	+ 14%
I am able to spread out the work on a long assignment and not wait until the last moment to complete it.	44%	51%	+ 7%
The upperclassmen are friendly and helpful.	55%	72%	+ 17%
I take the initiative to talk with my professor(s) when an issue arises.	74%	84%	+ 10%
As a result of being a student here, I now have a clearer sense of my most preferred learning style.	62%	73%	+ 11%
I have been successful in balancing my course load and my social life.	67%	75%	+ 8%
My interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom are generally positive.	72%	81%	+ 9%
I expect that I will graduate from Southern.	64%	71%	+ 7%

By the end of their third semester at SCSU, the participating students had earned more total credits than the non-participating students, and the difference was not due to chance. The total number of credits for participating students was 39 while the total number of credits for non-participating students was 35. Hence participation in co-curricular activities is apparently not a barrier to credit completion.

**Program/service effectiveness.**

Within the past year, various units within the division of Student and University Affairs have conducted either alone or in consort with Academic Affairs and the Office of Assessment and Planning various assessment/evaluation initiatives designed to determine program/service effectiveness. Among those efforts are

1. Post program participation surveys of students’ experiences with, for example,
  - a. The general career fair
  - b. The nursing/education career fair
  - c. New Student Orientation
  - d. SEOP and ConnCAS assessments at the end of the summer program, as a gateway to full matriculation in the following Fall Semester
  - e. Interventions sponsored by the Drug and Alcohol Resource Center
2. Demographic data on students with respect to housing choices
3. Demographic data on graduate student yield as a result of financial aid policy/program changes
4. Post service periodic surveys administered to clients of DRC
5. A study of part-time students’ demographics and experiences

### **Student Satisfaction.**

While admittedly not an indicator of learning outcomes per se, these efforts assist us in managing whether or not the perceived needs of students are being met, where deficiencies occur, and how best we can address those in our overall effort to improve the quality of the environment which supports student learning. Notable among these efforts is the on-going, comprehensive survey/evaluation of student experiences with the radically transformed dining program in 08-09. Those data, coupled with the use of the Dining Service Advisory Committee (which serves as a consistent focus group for validation/explanation of data from the surveys) have served as the basis for further program planning and refinement.

### **Student Learning/Outcomes**

The units which have undertaken assessment in this domain are those that, interestingly, are closely related to the academic mission of the institution, notably the values of access, equity and success. SEOP and ConnCAS undertake pre-program assessments (written and oral via interview) of each student's current skill/attitude/motivation level, mid program assessments of student progress toward program goals, and end-of-program assessments (paper and interview and self assessment) to determine continuation in the program/SCSU. Our retention and attrition data indicate that this kind of intensive monitoring of student learning goals and progress toward them contribute directly to the success of students in these programs. As such, this model is worthy of emulation with other special populations, and, indeed with virtually the entire entering class.

In addition, the student leadership development programs which involve over 250 students each year and which are offered through the Office of Residence Life and the Office of Student Life, have included ( in a non systematic fashion) pre-entry guided self-assessments of leadership skills/attitudes/understandings. These form the basis of each annual pre-service training program, as well as follow up in –service training programs throughout the semester. The post-service follow up assessment of the achievement of longer lasting learning outcomes has not yet been undertaken.

SCSU has established a model of collaboration between and among units within both Academic Affairs and Student and University Affairs. In fact, those collaborations have been the hallmark of our emerging model NSO/FYE program which has resulted in such impressive gains in the retention of first-year to second-year students, and in the level of their academic performance. Building on their joint commitment, the Provost and the Vice President for Student and University Affairs (in response to the system wide initiative directed at a comprehensive assessment of the in and out of class learning outcomes of the FYE program) constructed in the spring 2009 a small “team” charged with developing the conceptual framework for these outcomes, including specific language for desired learning outcomes and how each could/would be measured in meaningful way – to enhance student success. This group has only just begun this process and it is expected that, with significant progress during the summer and early fall, a draft document for wider distribution and discussion can emerge by no later than December 2009.