NSSE 2002: How UVa Fared

The NSSE subject part of IAS Reports is divided into five sections: an overview, reports and articles written about NSSE, data, questionnaires, and methodology. To link to the overview, reports, data, questionnaire or methodology sections, use the subject portion of the popup menu to the left, or the text links at the bottom of the page. IAS' analysis of the 2002 NSSE follows. For detailed information about the questions making up the five NSSE benchmarks (Academic Challenge, Enriching Educational Experiences, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Campus Environment), see benchmark descriptions.

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Introduction

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is gaining national attention as an alternative for prospective students to evaluate colleges and universities. For the first time, the U.S. News and World Report college rankings in 2002 asked colleges and universities for NSSE data. Smaller Universities such as Longwood in Virginia have used positive results from NSSE to promote its strengths (Click here to see how). However, most of the larger, more prestigious universities either don't participate in NSSE or don't publicize the results. The University of Virginia is a notable exception, as reported in a Nov. 2002 article in The Washington Post. According to that article, "With some exceptions, such as the University of Virginia and Rice University, the better known and more selective a college is, the less likely it is to allow NSSE on its campus." The article goes on to credit UVa for releasing its NSSE data in great detail.

The most important benefit of NSSE, however, is not self promotion but rather self improvement. That is, participating institutions can use the results of NSSE to improve the delivery of educational and administrative services. Indeed, this is the main purpose behind the survey, according to NSSE:

"Institutions will use their data to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom that can be improved through changes in policies and practices more consistent with good practices in undergraduate education."

Participating in NSSE for the second time in 2002, the University has the opportunity to continue its institution-wide effort to improve its educational and administrative services for
undergraduate students. The results from 2002 not only allow the University to examine its current strengths and identify areas for improvement but also for the first time UVa can see how it is doing over time. The results are promising. While the University still has some relatively weak areas, on several of the important NSSE benchmarks, the University's 2002 results show improvement over the 2000 results.

This article will concentrate on the 2002 results and any differences with the 2000 results. For more general information about the design and administration of the survey, and details about the theory and operationalization of NSSE variables, see IAS' 2000 report or the NSSE overview. In addition to reporting the results by academic level (first and fourth year), we will examine the responses of minority (African-, Asian-, and Hispanic American) students and compare them to the rest of the university. This is possible because of an oversampling plan designed by IAS to ensure a sufficient number of responses for these three minority groups.

Four Sets of Data Reviewed

We have examined four sets of data compiled from NSSE to determine how the University fared in 2002. First, and most interesting, NSSE established five National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice from 40 questions on the survey which measure desired educational outcomes (critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship). These benchmark indices allow participating institutions to see how they measure up to peer institutions, as well as how the institution performs over time. The benchmarks are called: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Interactions with Faculty Members, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. Each benchmark is standardized into a 100 point scale. Percentiles were computed for each of the benchmarks for different groups of participating institutions. For example, the Carnegie Classification, "doctoral-extensive research institutions" is the closest comparison group for UVa. The entire sample, including all two- and four-year colleges and universities, is another group for which percentiles and benchmark scores were calculated.

The second set of data is an index created by NSSE called the "Institutional Engagement Index." This index consists of three measures: the actual score on the five benchmarks, predicted benchmark scores based on ordinary least squares regression models using data from the Integrated Post secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and residuals, the results of subtracting the predicted scores from the actual scores. These residuals, either positive or negative, might be considered a measure of "educational effectiveness." To learn more about the IPEDS variables used to calculate the predicted score or to see the predicted scores and residuals, go to the Institutional Engagement Index page.

A third set of data includes the University's mean scores and frequencies on individual questions. Individual question means were tested for statistical differences, comparing the University to doctoral-extensive research institutions and, when necessary, to the entire NSSE sample. However, because of the large number of respondents, many comparisons were statistically significant. Therefore, the statistical differences were also measured in terms of their substantive effect by dividing the mean difference by the standard deviation of the mean of the comparison group, producing an "effect size" measure between 0.2 and 0.9 (0.2 to 0.5 can be considered a
small effect; 0.5 to 0.8 moderate; above 0.8 large). All of the University's individual question "effect size" comparisons, both positive and negative, were between .08 and .69. This means that the magnitude of the differences between UVa students and other students in the national sample was no greater than small to moderate. This is an important point to keep in mind. Click here to see the individual question mean scores.

Finally, we examine some questions written by a consortium of sixteen American Association of University Data Exchange (AAUDE) universities that participated in NSSE 2002. UVa is a member of AAUDE. None of the AAUDE questions were used in the creation of the five NSSE benchmarks, or the Institutional Engagement Index. However, some of the AAUDE questions addressed issues not part of the NSSE but which the University has considered important in its assessment efforts. Most of these are satisfaction questions, e.g., satisfaction with academic advising. Click here to see the AAUDE consortium question frequencies.

These four sets of data will be used in this report to shed light on the following questions about the University and NSSE:

- What are the University's strengths and weaknesses?
- How does the University compare to other, similar institutions that participate?
- How does the University's 2002 performance compare to 2000?
- How do the major racial groups at the University--African-, Hispanic-, and Asian-American students do?

**How the University Fared on the Five NSSE Benchmarks**

Each of the five benchmarks NSSE created is composed of 6-12 questions and has been thoroughly tested and adapted to create meaningful indices which gauge important student experiences in college. More about how the indices were created and the factor analysis statistics can be found by clicking here. Below we provide brief descriptions of the five benchmarks.

**Level of Academic Challenge** looks at the quantity and quality of academic work assigned, the cognitive complexity of work, and the standards faculty use to evaluate student work. The Academic Challenge Index was composed of 10 items. Click here to view the questions composing this index.

**Active and Collaborative Learning** attempts to measure the extent to which students take advantage of opportunities in and outside of the classroom to actively participate in the learning process. Seven questions make up this index. Click here to view the questions composing this index.

**Student Interactions with Faculty** tries to get at how closely and how often students interact with their professors. Six items make up the index. Click here to view the questions composing this index.

**Enriching Educational Experiences** looks at the opportunities students have to learn in a diverse environment, both in and outside of the classroom. Exposure to differing points of view,
the use of technology in the educational environment, and the opportunities to participate in educational activities such as internships, volunteer work, and study abroad are all areas which contribute to an enriching educational experience. The index consists of 11 items. Click here to go to the 2000 report and view the questions composing this index.

The **Supportive Campus Environment** index looks at the extent to which the school is actively committed to helping students succeed academically and socially. This index was composed of six items. Click here to go to the 2000 report and view the questions composing this index.

On three of these indices, **Academic Challenge**, **Enriching Educational Experiences**, and **Supportive Campus Environment**, UVa students were near the top among doctoral-extensive research institutions. On one of the other two, **Student Interactions with Faculty Members**, UVa was above average and for the other, **Active and Collaborative Learning**, UVa did not fare well compared to other doctoral-extensive research institutions. See Fig. 1.

![Fig. 1](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**NSSE Benchmark Percentiles: UVa First and Fourth Years**

![Bar chart showing percentile comparison](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

We also compared UVa's 2002 benchmark results with those from 2000. In percentile terms, the results indicate improvement for three of the five benchmarks--**Level of Academic Challenge**, **Enriching Educational Experiences**, and **Supportive Campus Environment**.
Student Interactions with Faculty Members, and Supportive Campus Environment. For Active and Collaborative Learning, there was little change and for Enriching Educational Experiences there was no change. See Fig. 2.

![Fig. 2](image)

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*UVa's benchmark scores as a percentile of all doctoral-extensive research institutions participating in NSSE 2002

The index score for Level of Academic Challenge improved for first- and fourth-years, from 53.2 and 55.7 in 2000 to 57.1 and 58.6 in 2002, respectively. UVa increased its ranking one decile to the 90th percentile for first-years in 2002. Fourth-years remained in the 90th percentile. The institutional engagement index which in effect introduces further controls for UVa's student population and institutional characteristics, indicates that first-year students exceeded their predicted score to a moderate degree; in standardized terms, UVa's residual score was higher than 70% of other doctoral-extensive universities. Fourth-years exceeded their predicted score only slightly.

Two individual questions which demonstrate the strength of UVa on this index compared to other doctoral-extensive universities are: how many assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings a student read and how many hours per week a student spent preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to their academic
program). For the former question, more than 60 percent of UVa students read more than 10 assigned books during the school year, compared to less than 43 percent of students at other doctoral-extensive universities. On the second question, how much time a student spent preparing for class, UVa's first-years stood out most. More than 40 percent spent more than 20 hours weekly preparing for class, compared to 21 percent of first-years from other doctoral-extensive universities. UVa fourth-years also out studied their peers but to a more moderate degree. Level of Academic Challenge remains UVa's greatest area of strength on the NSSE. It was a strong area in 2000 and even stronger in 2002.

Despite this strength, there is still room for improvement, especially among fourth-years. Just over a third of first-years and about 45 percent of fourth-years are reading 10 or less books or book length packets per year, approximately one per class per semester. In addition, about one-quarter of first-years and one-third of fourth-years are studying only 10 hours a week or less. These numbers indicate that the senior slump is a reality for perhaps 10 percent of the graduating class. See Figs. 3 & 4.
Fig. 3

How many assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings a student read

Source: NSSE 2002
Enriching Educational Experiences are another strong area for UVa, which improved its score for first-years substantially, from 57.7 in 2000 to 64.9 in 2002. Fourth-years remained around 53. UVa exceeded predictions on the institutional engagement index for first-year students to a moderate degree, outperforming about two-thirds of doctoral-extensive institutions in terms of the standardized residual score. For fourth-year students UVa's standardized residual was just a bit higher than average.

There were four particular questions which showed UVa's strengths for the Enriching Educational Experiences index: whether a student had foreign language coursework; how many hours per week a student participated in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.) and two similar questions about how often a student had serious
conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and how often a student had serious conversations with other students holding religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values very different from their own. Just over two-thirds of UVa students had taken a foreign language, compared to 42 percent of students at other doctoral-extensive institutions. Only 19 percent of UVa students had not participated in co-curricular activities over the past academic year, in contrast to 45 percent of students at other doctoral-extensive institutions. For the questions about having serious conversations with students of a different race or belief system, just under three-quarters of UVa students answered "often" or "very often." Over half of students from other doctoral-extensive research institutions answered similarly.

An area which showed some weakness for UVa in 2000, Student Interactions with Faculty showed substantial improvement in 2002, especially for first-years. In 2000, UVa's score on the index was 25.4 for first-years, the 20th percentile for doctoral-extensive universities. The score improved to 34.4 in 2002, a 40% improvement over 2000 and raised UVa to the 60th percentile for doctoral-extensive universities. There was also improvement for fourth-years, though not as dramatic. In 2000, the score for fourth-years was 37.1, while in 2002 the score rose to 41.6. This bumped UVa up one decile to the 70th percentile for doctoral-extensive research institutions in 2002.

A closer examination of the individual questions making up the Student Interactions with Faculty index show where the improvement was most notable. For the question, "how often students discussed grades or assignments with their instructor," in 2000 31.2 and 35.9 percent of first- and fourth-years, respectively, answered "often" or "very often." In 2002, the percentages increased to 44.3 and 50.2 percent for first- and fourth-years, respectively. Another question which show marked improvement was receiving prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance. In 2000 49.1 and 46.9 percent of first- and fourth-years answered "often" or "very often." In 2002, the percentages increased to 54.1 and 57.1. While these increases are modest, when combined with smaller increases for the four other questions making up the index (discussing career plans, discussing ideas outside of class, working with faculty outside of class on activities not related to coursework and working with faculty on research), UVa substantially improved its index score and percentile compared to other research institutions.

Nevertheless, the news that Student Interactions with Faculty improved between 2000 and 2002 is tempered by the still low scores overall on the index—34.4 for first-years and 41.6 for fourth-years. These scores are out of a total possible of 100. The range of scores on this index for all institutions participating in NSSE 2002 was 23 to 74. Moreover, the institutional engagement index shows a negative residual, meaning that UVa scored lower that what one would predict for both first- and fourth-years. Compared to other research institutions, in standardized terms, UVa's residual score for was lower than about two-thirds of all schools participating in NSSE in 2002.

UVa did not fare well on the Active and Collaborative Learning index. This was true in both 2000 and 2002. First-year UVa students scored in the 50th percentile, and fourth-year students in the 30th percentile. Similar results overall were found in 2000. When asked in 2002 how often they worked with other students on projects during class, 25 percent of UVa first- and fourth-years said "often" or "very often," compared to 38 percent for other research institutions. When
asked in 2002 how often they had made a class presentation in the past year, 25 percent of UVa students said "often" or "very often," compared to 34 percent for other research institutions. While these differences are modest, the cumulative effect for the seven questions making up the index is that UVa does not score well compared to other research institutions.

On the fifth benchmark, **Supportive Campus Environment**, UVa's results were positive. The index scores improved from 2000 to 2002 slightly for first-years and more markedly for fourth-years. In 2002 the University found itself one decile higher for both first- and fourth-years compared to other research institutions. In 2000, the scores for first- and fourth-years were 60.3 and 53.5 which put the University in the 80th and 70th percentiles, respectively. In 2002, the scores were 60.5 and 56.3 which put the University in the 90th and 80th percentiles, respectively. Moreover, the **institutional engagement index** indicates that UVa's **Supportive Campus Environment** exceeded expectations by a substantial margin for both first- and fourth-years. In standardized terms, UVa's residual score exceeded about 75% of all participating schools' residual scores.

"Whether the campus environment emphasized providing the support students needed to thrive socially" was the individual question from the **Supportive Campus Environment** index which separated UVa the most from other research institutions--48 percent of UVa students overall answered "quite a bit" or "very much," compared to 34 percent of students from other research institutions.

**Individual Questions of Interest to the University**

A couple of individual questions are of particular interest to the University. In answer to the question, "how would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?" 52 percent of UVa first- and fourth-years rated their experience "excellent," compared to 32 percent for doctoral-extensive institutions. See Fig. 5.
Student ratings of UVa's undergraduate advising system, a topic of much concern at the University, seemed to improve somewhat between 2000 and 2002 but these differences were not statistically significant. In 2000, only 32 percent of UVa first-year students felt the quality of the academic advising they received in their department or school was "good" or "excellent." In 2002, this number increased to 41 percent. For fourth-years, the numbers were 41 percent in 2000 and 49 percent in 2002. As was the case in 2000, first-year UVa students were less satisfied with academic advising in 2002 than their peers at other AAUDE institutions. The difference was substantial (62.5 percent of AAUDE first-years rated their advising "good" or "excellent," compared to 41 percent of UVa first-years). Fourth-year UVa and AAUDE students had similar feelings about academic advising (49 percent of UVa fourth-years and 54 percent of AAUDE fourth-years rated the advising "good" or "excellent").

### Racial Patterns and Race-Related Questions

Recent concerns over race relations at the University warrant a look at NSSE data by race. Here we will examine the students' responses to see how African-, Asian-, and Hispanic-American students may have answered NSSE differently from other students. We ran the data for these groups individually and statistically compared the responses of each ethnic group to the rest of the sample. We also examine several individual questions that specifically mention race or ethnicity and compare UVa's 2000 and 2002 results and against other participating institutions. Because the differences found were unique to each ethnic group, we will examine each separately, beginning with African-Americans. While we found some differences for each racial group, there were far more similarities, which is good news for the University.

### African-American Students
On three of the five benchmarks, African-Americans score similarly to other UVa students—Academic Challenge, Enriching Educational Experiences and Active and Collaborative Learning. For the other two indexes, Student Faculty Interaction and Supportive Campus Environment, there were notable differences. On the vast majority of individual questions, no statistically significant differences between African-American and other students were identified. A few did emerge that are worth mentioning.

Some small differences can be seen in how African-American students spend their time compared to other students. African-Americans spend somewhat less time preparing for class (an estimated average of 15 hours a week compared to 17 for others), relaxing and socializing (an estimated average of 13 hours a week compared to 15 for others), and working for pay off grounds (an estimated average of 10 hours a week compared to 11 for others).

Another area where differences emerge is in relationships with with other students and faculty. African-Americans feel less close to their fellow students and faculty members than other students. About 13% less African-Americans rated the quality of their relationships with other students on the positive end of a 7-point scale (friendly, supportive, sense of belonging). While this is not an alarming number, it should be of some concern. Similarly, about 10% less African-Americans rated the quality of their relationships with faculty on the positive end of a 7-point scale (available, helpful, sympathetic).

The differences on these individual questions are reflected on two NSSE indexes--Student Faculty Interaction and Supportive Campus Environment, both of which indicated African-Americans rated UVa lower than other students. On 100-point scales, the differences were 3.8 and 5.5, respectively, which seems small. However, considering that the ranges (the difference between the highest and lowest scores) were 50 and 40, these differences should not be ignored.

The final area of difference is perhaps the most significant--students' overall evaluation of UVa. Only 21% of African-Americans rated their overall educational experience at UVa "excellent," compared to 55% of other students. Moreover, twice as many African-Americans rated their experience "poor" or "fair" compared to others (16% v 8%). While the vast majority of African-Americans were positive ("good" or "excellent") about their overall educational experiences at UVa (84%), they were less enthusiastic than other students and a small minority were negative. See Fig. 6. To learn more about African-Americans' evaluations of the University, go to IAS' recent article on that subject: African-Americans at the University of Virginia: A Comparative Overview of Survey Data.

Hispanic-American Students

The few differences between Hispanic-American and other UVa students were positives for UVa and the Hispanic-American community, which rated their relationships with faculty and administrators better than other students. As a percentage of the race group, half as many Hispanic-American students (5.5 percent) were on the negative end of the 7-point scale rating the quality of their relationships with faculty (unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic). A few percent more Hispanic-Americans rated UVa faculty very positively. More Hispanic-American students
likewise rated the quality of their relationships with administrative personnel and offices positively (helpful, considerate, flexible).

On two of the benchmark indexes, Enriching Educational Experiences and Supportive Campus Environment, Hispanic-Americans came out ahead of their peers. Hispanic students scored 4.5 points higher than other students on the former (57.6 v. 53.1) and 4.2 points higher on the latter (65.6 v. 61.4). While these mean differences are small, they are worth noting. See Fig. 6.

Asian-American Students

Asian-American students and other students scored similarly on all the NSSE benchmarks. A few differences on individual questions were identified. The largest difference, interestingly, is that Asian-American students report spending less time relaxing and socializing than other students. In percentage terms, 54 percent of Asian-American students reported relaxing and socializing less than 11 hours a week, compared to 37 percent of other students. This works out to be an estimated average of 2 hours a week less. Asian-American students do not work for pay off grounds as much as other students. Only 1 percent report working for pay off grounds more than 10 hours per week, compared to 12 percent of other students. Asian-American students were less likely to ask questions in class (43 percent said often or very often, compared to 59 percent of other students), more likely to work with other students outside of class preparing for class (61 percent often or very often, compared to 51 percent of other students), more likely to tutor other students (21 percent often or very often, compared to 14 percent of other students), and more likely to work harder than they thought they could to meet instructor's expectations (55 percent often or very often, compared to 49 percent of other students). These differences are small and there does not seem to be a discernible pattern. Asian-Americans students do not seem to be having any significant difficulties at the University. See Fig. 6.
Four Questions on NSSE about Race

The four questions (and their response scales) on NSSE that specifically mention race are:

1. In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs) in class discussions and assignments? 1-4 (Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)

2. In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own? 1-4 (Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)

3. To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following area: understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds? 1-4 (Very little, Some, Quite a bit, Very much)

4. To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following: encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds? 1-4 (Very little, Some, Quite a bit, Very much)

Comparatively speaking, there was no bad news for UVa on these four questions. In other words, UVa scored as high or higher than other major research universities on all four questions. The
best news is that in 2002 UVa students, by a large majority of both first- and fourth-years, have had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own “often” or “very often” during the school year (73%). This compares to only 50% of students in other major research universities. This also represents a substantial increase for UVa over 2000, when 58% reported having serious conversations with other students “often” or “very often.” Nationally, there was no change between 2000 and 2002. See Fig. 7.

![Fig. 7](image)

Similarly, in 2002 a substantial majority of UVa students, both first- and fourth-years, said that diverse perspectives were included in their class discussions and assignments (61% said this happened often or very often). This is a bit higher than other research institutions (52%).

When asked in 2002 “to what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds,” 58% of first- and fourth-year UVa students answered “very much” or “quite a bit.” Again, this is somewhat higher than other research universities (50%). There was little change at UVa or nationally between 2000 and 2002.

On the last question, the news for UVa is more mixed. In 2002, less than half (44%) responded “very much” or “quite a bit” when asked “to what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?” While this is about the same as other major research universities (42%), there is a disturbing difference between the responses first- and fourth-year UVa students gave. That is, first-year students are more likely to report this than fourth-years (52% v. 36% responding experience “very much” or “quite a bit”).
This is similar to the pattern at other research universities. These numbers improved slightly between 2000 and 2002, both at UVa (39% in 2000 to 44% in 2002) and nationally (43% in 2000 and 47% in 2002). See Fig. 8.

To summarize our look into racial patterns and race-related data on NSSE, there is much good news for the University. African-American, Hispanic-American and Asian-American students are engaged to the same extent as their peers academically, socially and in extracurricular activities. Moreover, UVa compares favorably to other doctoral-extensive research institutions on several questions related to racial diversity on grounds. Perhaps the only negative news from NSSE with respect to race is the experiences of some African-American students. There appears to be a small but measurable minority of African-American students who are not having good relationships with their peers or UVa faculty and who do not evaluate the University as positively as their peers. To learn more about African-Americans' evaluations of the University, go to IAS' recent article on that subject: African-Americans at the University of Virginia: A Comparative Overview of Survey Data.

Summary and Conclusion: What Can We Learn from NSSE?

A concern noted in our examination of NSSE 2000 was the relatively low number of respondents (318) and response rate (46 percent), a concern which has been addressed in 2002, where the number of respondents increased to 947 and the response rate was a more respectable 54 percent. In addition to a more adequate sample size, IAS devised an over sampling plan for 2002 which allowed analyzing the results by race.
Aside from methodological concerns, some have criticized the value of NSSE because the more elite institutions are less likely to participate. Colgate University has stated that it will not participate in future surveys because its peer institutions are not participating, according to an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 17, 2000. For UVa this is somewhat of a problem also. Berkeley has chosen not to participate, as well as the University of Pennsylvania. Other top-tier state universities have participated, most notably the University of Michigan. The AAUDE institutions on the whole are not UVa peers. However, even if the comparative value of the survey is not ideal, the University still can use NSSE to identify its strengths and weaknesses, particularly if the University continues to participate over time.

On the whole, the NSSE 2002 results have identified several significant strengths where the University is:

- Maintaining a challenging academic environment for both its first-year and fourth-year students. Some improvement occurred in this area compared to 2000, putting UVa in the 90th percentile of doctoral-extensive research institutions for both first- and fourth-years.
- Creating an outstanding extracurricular environment, in the 90th percentile of doctoral-extensive research intuitions for both first- and fourth-years.
- Providing the support its students need to succeed academically, socially and in extracurricular activities. The University improved its rating over 2000, particular for fourth-years.
- Improving the interaction between students and faculty, especially among first-year students. This improvement between 2000 and 2002 occurred both in terms of the absolute scores on the index and the percentiles. In 2000 UVa was in the 20th percentile among doctoral-extensive institutions for first-years. In 2002, UVa was in the 60th percentile.

The results of NSSE 2002 have also pointed to two possible areas in need of improvement:

- The NSSE area in which UVa did least well was the Active and Collaborative Learning Index, which attempts to measure the extent to which students take advantage of opportunities in and outside of the classroom to actively participate in the learning process. For both first- and fourth-year students, the University ranked significantly below average, and lower than expected. The importance of such learning experiences in a large research university is certainly open to debate. When looking at some of the measures making up this index--making a class presentation, working with classmates outside of class, tutoring other students--one can argue that such experiences are not only less feasible in a large research university, they might also be less appropriate in a University whose students are as highly regarded as UVa's. Nevertheless, other aspects of the index--participating in a community-based project as part of a course and discussing ideas from readings or class with others outside of class--would still seem to be areas of potential weakness that the University would not want to ignore.
- Despite the increase on the Student Interactions with Faculty index from 2000 to 2002, both in percentile and absolute terms, UVa's score is still low in comparison to the theoretically possible score of 100. Approximately 30-40% of doctoral-extensive research institutions outscored UVa on this index. When looking at the entire sample of
institutions participating in NSSE, the very top schools on the Student Interactions with Faculty index scored in the 70s, a full 30 points higher than UVa, showing there is still substantial room for improvement.

A note of caution is in order about interpreting the changes between 2000 and 2002. While the differences noted between 2000 and 2002 are statistically significant, it is still possible that one of the years was an aberration. Thus, any conclusions reached from these two studies should be considered tentative. It will be informative to learn what the results are in two more years, when UVa participates in NSSE again.

The NSSE is a thoroughly-tested and informative assessment tool for an institution that is looking for ways to improve the undergraduate educational experience. To that end the University community should take note of its strengths and weaknesses. The good news for the University is that its strengths outnumber its weaknesses, and the amount of change required for improvement does not seem to be outside the realm of possibility.

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1 For this article the Carnegie Classification "Doctoral-Extensive Research Institutions" will be used as the main comparison group. Those participating institutions in NSSE 2002 in this Carnegie Classification represented 14%, or 51 of the 366 participating institutions. NSSE does not provide a list by Carnegie Classification. An alphabetical list of all participants, or by regions or state, can be found on NSSE's web site by clicking here. Return to text.

2 In 2000, the question on academic advising was asked only in a supplemental section for participating AAUDE institutions. While NSSE did ask about academic advising in 2002, the numbers reported here are for the AAUDE question. This allows comparisons with 2000 but only with the participating AAUDE institutions, not all doctoral-extensive research institutions. Participating AAUDE institutions in the 2000 NSSE were: University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Florida, Indiana University Bloomington, Iowa State University, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, College Park, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan State University, University of Missouri-Columbia, SUNY Buffalo, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Campus, University of Texas Austin and U.Va. Return to text.