NSSE 2005: How UVa Fared

The National Survey of Student Engagement (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 for additional information about NSSE, use the subject portion of the popup menu to the left, or the text links at the bottom of the page. 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 University of Virginia, participating in the NSSE for the third time, continued to excel in most areas, but also showed room for improvement. There are several important and positive findings about UVa from NSSE 2005:

- UVa faculty members continue to maintain a learning environment in which students are academically challenged and engaged.
- The co-curricular environment at UVa is strong and improving.
- UVa continues to excel at providing students the support they need academically and socially.
- UVa students are highly satisfied overall with their experience at UVa, more so than many peer institutions.
- Students who were part of the AccessUVa financial aid program are doing very well in their first year.

NSSE 2005 results point to two particular areas that may need improvement: (1) Student-Faculty Interaction and (2) Active and Collaborative Learning. UVa did least well overall on the Student-Faculty Interaction index. And despite the slight increase on the Active and Collaborative
Learning index from 2002 to 2005, UVa still scored lower than other doctoral-extensive universities.

- From the Student-Faculty Interaction index, only 8% of first-years and 19% of fourth-years reported working with faculty members on activities other than coursework "often" or "very often," very similar to peers at other doctoral-extensive research institutions. 14% of first-years and 23% of fourth-years discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class "often" or "very often," again very similar to peers at other doctoral-extensive research institutions.
- From the Active and Collaborative Learning index, 13% of first-years and 39% of fourth-years at UVa made a class presentation "often" or "very often," compared to 22% and 52% of their peers at doctoral-extensive institutions. 29% of first-years and 39% of fourth-years at UVa worked with other students on projects during class "often" or "very often," compared to 39% and 42% of doctoral-extensive first and fourth-years, respectively.

**Analysis Plan:**
**Benchmarks, Individual Questions of Interest, and Comparison Groups**

In addition to reporting the 2005 results by academic level (first and fourth year), we will examine the responses of African-American students and compare them to the rest of the University. We also examine the responses of students who are on need-based financial aid, particularly the “high need” group that benefits from AccessUVa's no loan program.

Our object was to shed light on the following questions about the University:

- What are the University’s strengths and weaknesses?
- How does the University compare to other, similar institutions that participate?
- How does the University’s 2005 performance compare to 2002?
- Do African-American students do as well as their peers while attending the University?
- Is AccessUVa having an effect on the ability of low income students to engage in the same activities as their peers?

The most interesting data that NSSE provides to help answer those questions are their five National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, derived from survey questions which are correlated with desired educational outcomes, e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship. These benchmark indices allow participating institutions to compare results with peer institutions, and see how the institution performs over time. The benchmarks are: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Interactions with Faculty Members, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. Each benchmark is standardized to a 100-point scale.

UVa’s comparison groups for NSSE are doctoral-extensive research universities and AAUDE (Association of American Universities Data Exchange) institutions.
How the University Fared on the Five NSSE Benchmarks

On three of the indices, UVa students were near the top among doctoral-extensive research institutions.

- **Academic Challenge:** UVa’s average score was 56 – higher than approximately 70% of doctoral-extensive universities in the NSSE 2005 sample.
- UVa students received an average score of 40 on the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark, higher than approximately 80% of doctoral-extensive universities.
- Supportive Campus Environment scores held steady. UVa scored a 59 in 2005, higher than half of other doctoral-extensive universities.

On one of the other two indices, Student-Faculty Interaction, UVa was above average for fourth-year students but not for first-years. On Active and Collaborative Learning, UVa did not fare as well as other doctoral-extensive research institutions, but the difference was small. First-years scored about ten points lower on this benchmark than did fourth-years. Please see Figure 1 for all UVa first- and fourth-year benchmark scores.

When comparing UVa’s 2005 benchmark results with those from 2002, the results indicate stability for both first- and fourth-years. Differences were slight on all benchmark scores.

The index score for Level of Academic Challenge declined a bit for first-years in 2005 (from 57 to 53) and remained the same for fourth-years (59). In 2005, these scores were higher than UVa’s doctoral-extensive comparison group (51 for first-year students and 55 for fourth-years). In the past, UVa consistently scored in the 90th percentile on the Level of Academic Challenge Benchmark. In 2005, however, NSSE discontinued the use of percentile scores, so this kind of comparison with AAUDE and doctoral-extensive universities is no longer possible.
Academic Challenge

The Academic Challenge benchmark remains UVa’s greatest area of strength on NSSE. UVa students read more than students in comparison groups and spent more time preparing for class.

- Half of UVa first-years and 54% of fourth-years students read more than 10 assigned books during the school year, higher than other doctoral-extensive universities (39% and 35%) and AAUDE institutions (45% and 39%).

- More than a quarter of UVa students spent more than 20 hours weekly preparing for class, a somewhat higher proportion than the comparison groups.

The flip side of those numbers suggest possible areas for improvement:

- Half of first-years and about 45% of fourth-years are reading 10 or less books or book length packets per year, approximately one per class per semester.
- 30% of first-years and 37% of fourth-years are studying only 10 hours a week or less. This finding is cause for concern.

Enriching Educational Experiences

The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark scores were restructured in 2005 – NSSE changed the questions that comprise this benchmark—so UVa’s scores of 31 for first-years and 49 for fourth-years are not comparable to 2002’s numbers of 65 for first-years and 53 for fourth-years. More on the reasons for the restructuring UVa did fare well when compared to other doctoral-extensive universities, with all UVa students scoring significantly higher than their peers. Since UVa ranked in the top 90% compared to other doctoral-extensive universities in 2002, it is reasonable to assume (percentiles were not calculated in 2005) that we are still doing well on this benchmark.

One distinguishing element of the UVa experience is how highly UVa students are engaged in activities that enrich their education.

- 45% of first-years and 69% of fourth-years reported studying a foreign language, compared to 24% and 48% of doctoral-extensive universities and 28% and 53% of AAUDE universities.
- Nearly all students (88% of first-years and 87% of fourth-years) were involved in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.), compared to 65% and 57% for other doctoral-extensive universities and 72% and 64% at AAUDE institutions.

Results are also encouraging for students’ co-curricular experience of diversity: most UVa students are engaging in activities that provide diverse perspectives and allow deeper
engagement with those that may disagree with their world view (see later section on diversity for more information).

**Student-Faculty Interaction**

One way that research universities have met the need for stronger student-faculty interaction is by advancing undergraduate research opportunities—bona fide collaborations with faculty members’ ongoing research. Often, there is a double advantage to these research partnerships: faculty members receive time-saving help on literature reviews, laboratory set-up, and other tasks, and students gain access to the tacit and formal knowledge that comes from working alongside a professional scholar. While these experiences are available to all UVa undergraduates, most often students majoring in science and engineering disciplines take advantage of them. University faculty could take the initiative to substantially increase undergraduate involvement in research.

- UVa first-years scored 28 on the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark in 2005, a decrease of 6 points since 2002, and a significantly lower score than both peer groups.

- UVa fourth-years did predictably better and also improved slightly over time, scoring 44 in 2005 v. 42 in 2002 – higher than both peer groups.

- In 2005, 36% of first-years and 47% of fourth-years said they discussed grades or assignments with their instructors “often” or “very often.” AAUDE numbers were similar, but the doctoral-extensive group scored higher, 45% and 66%, respectively.

Student involvement in research with UVa faculty members is somewhat higher at UVa than for peer institutions, but there is room for improvement.

- 38% report that they **plan** to participate in a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements. The peer groups reported similar numbers.
- The UVa figures are up for first-years compared to 2002, when 32% reported that they planned on participating in faculty research.
- UVa again leads the peer groups in the percentage of fourth-years reporting that they have, or are currently, working on a research project with a faculty member—29%, compared to 23% of AAUDE fourth-years and 21% of doctoral-extensive fourth-year students.
- On the negative side, in 2002 36% of UVa fourth-years reported that they had engaged in research with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements, higher than the 2005 figure (29%).
- Moreover, the fact remains that the vast majority of undergraduates are not involved with faculty members' research.
One question that showed stability from 2002 to 2005 was receiving prompt feedback from faculty on students’ academic performance. In 2005, 57% and 66% of first- and fourth-years said they received such feedback “often” or “very often.” Scores for fourth-years on this item were significantly higher than their counterparts at AAUDE institutions.

Only 13% of UVa first-years reported that they “talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor” “often” or “very often,” compared to 22% for AAUDE and 30% for doctoral-extensive first-years. The numbers were higher for UVa fourth-years (39%), similar to the comparison groups.

News that Student-Faculty Interaction declined slightly between 2002 and 2005 is problematic mostly because the benchmark scores are low overall – 28 for first-years and 42 for fourth-years (out of a possible 100). In 2005, the range of scores for other institutions on this index was between approximately 11 and 80.

Student-faculty interaction increases markedly from first- to fourth-year (see Fig. 2). Fourth-years are far more involved than first-years in research (27% versus 2%) and are more likely to work on activities with faculty members other than coursework (19% versus 8%). The vast majority of students are receiving prompt feedback from faculty—nearly two thirds often or very often.

A higher percentage of UVa students are participating in undergraduate research than at peer institutions—an advantage that may be helpful in recruiting top-flight students. Interactions between a larger percentage of both faculty and students, within the context of a research project, may help increase UVa’s score on the benchmark overall.

Fig. 2

![2005 Student-Faculty Interaction Items](chart)
Active and Collaborative Learning

UVa’s benchmark scores on the Active and Collaborative Learning index did not change significantly from 2002 to 2005: 37 for first-years (38 in 2002) and 47 for fourth-years (45 in 2002).

The differences in the Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark scores for first-years are significantly lower than the doctoral-extensive cohort. This difference was largely due to a couple of questions:

- 29% of UVa first-years and 30% of fourth-years said that they worked with other students on projects during class “often” or “very often” while 39% of first-years and 42% of fourth-years at doctoral-extensive universities report the same.
- When asked in 2005 how often they had made a class presentation in the past year, just 13% of first-years and 39% of fourth-years said “often” or “very often,” compared to 22% of first-years and 52% of fourth-years at other research universities and 19% of first- and 42% of fourth-years at AAUDE institutions.

This may indicate an area on which UVa could concentrate some effort to improve students’ active learning experiences.

Supportive Campus Environment

UVa’s results remain positive, with almost no change from 2002. In 2005, first-years scored 61 and fourth-years scored 57 on this index. One question particularly distinguished UVa:

- About half of UVa students overall answered “quite a bit” or “very much” to the question of “whether the campus environment emphasized providing the support students needed to thrive socially” compared to about a third of students from doctoral-extensive universities and AAUDE institutions.

Individual Questions of Interest

Overall Educational Experience

An overwhelming majority of UVa students evaluate their entire educational experience at UVa very highly.

- 52% of UVa first-years and 58% of fourth-years rated their experience as “excellent,” compared to 33% and 34% for doctoral-extensive first- and fourth-years, respectively.
- Only 9% of first-years and 7% of fourth-years rated their UVa experience as “fair” or “poor.”
- AAUDE students also reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction: 38% and 39% of first- and fourth-year students rating their experience, respectively, as excellent. See Fig. 5 and Table 1.
Academic Advising

Student ratings of UVa’s undergraduate advising system, a topic of much concern at the University, improved substantially for some University schools between 2002 and 2005.

- Overall, in 2002, 55% of first-year UVa students reported that the academic advising they received in their department or school was “good” or “excellent.” In 2005, this number increased to 59%.
- For fourth-years, the numbers were 52% in 2002 and 63% in 2005, a noteworthy improvement.

When the results are separated by school an interesting pattern emerges. College of Arts and Science undergraduate students are least satisfied with advising and the improvement between 2002 and 2005 was minimal.

- In 2005 42% of College students rated their advising as “poor” or “fair,” compared to 26% of Nursing students, 13% of Architecture students, 32% of Commerce students, and 31% of Engineering students.
- Schools other than the College seem to have improved advising since 2002. In 2002, 48% of first-years and 58% of fourth-years outside the College reported that advising was “poor” or “fair”. In 2005, only 31% of first-years and 28% of fourth-years reported the same. In the College, there was little change between 2002 and 2005.

Comparisons with other Doctoral-Extensive research institutions and AAUDE schools are even less favorable for first-year advising. The differences were not marginal:
72% of first-years at AAUDE institutions, and 71% of first-years at doctoral-extensive universities rated their advising “good” or “excellent,” compared to 59% of UVa first-years. However, UVa fourth-years report slightly higher levels of satisfaction with advising (63% "good" or "excellent") when compared to their AAUDE and doctoral-extensive student counterparts (61% of students for both comparison groups).

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<td>2005 Results, by School</td>
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<td>Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?</td>
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<td>Student Year</td>
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**African-American Students at the University**

On four of the five benchmarks, African-Americans scored similarly to other UVa students—Academic Challenge, Student Faculty Interaction, Supportive Campus Environment and Active
and Collaborative Learning. Only on Enriching Educational Experiences was there a statistically
significant difference between African-American students and white students. On the vast
majority of individual questions, few statistically significant differences between African-
American and other students were identified. There were two important differences:

- Only 62% of African-American students reported spending more than five hours a week
  relaxing and socializing, compared to 83% of whites and 74% of all other students.

- African-American students had a significantly lower mean score than other students on
  the scale of the quality of their relationships with other students.

Since these were the only two significant differences for African-American students, they may
account for African-Americans being much less likely than others to rate their overall
educational experience at UVa as “excellent.”

- In 2002, only 21% of African-Americans rated their overall educational experience at
  UVa “excellent,” compared to 55% of other students.

- There was improvement in 2005, with about 32% of African-American students rating
  their overall experience at UVa as “excellent,” compared to 57% of all other students.

To learn more about African-Americans’ evaluations of the University, see IAS’ 2003 report on
a survey addressing those issues: the Enrolled Undergraduate Student Relations Survey and a
2005 newsletter article on African-Americans and extra-curricular activities.

Diversity at UVa

NSSE asks several questions about diversity in the university environment and, comparatively
speaking, there was no bad news for UVa on these questions: UVa scored as high or higher than
other major research universities. The good news is that in 2005, as in 2002, nearly two-thirds of
UVa students have had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than
their own “often” or “very often” during the school year. This compares to 54% of students in
other major research universities. The bad news is that UVa's percentages declined between 2002
and 2005, while their peer groups increased.
In 2005 nearly 60% of UVa students, both first- and fourth-years, said that diverse perspectives were included in their class discussions and assignments often or very often. This finding is the same at other research institutions.

When asked in 2005 “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,” 55% of first- and fourth-year UVa students answered “very much” or “quite a bit.” This is a bit higher than other research universities (51%). There was little change at UVa or nationally between 2002 and 2005.

In 2002, only 44% of UVa students 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?” In 2005, that number rose to 52%, about six points higher than other research universities. There is, however, a disturbing difference between the responses of first- and fourth-year UVa students, with first-years much more likely than fourth-years to respond “very much” or “quite a bit” (61% v. 42%). This is similar to the pattern at other research universities. Still, the increases for both first- and fourth-years between 2002 and 2005, and the high percentage of first-years giving substantial credit to the University for encouraging diverse contact when compared to its peers are noteworthy, given the University's efforts to enhance diversity.
To summarize our look into racial patterns and race-related data on NSSE, there is much good news for the University. African-American students are engaged to the same extent as their peers academically and UVa compares favorably to other doctoral-extensive research institutions on several questions related to racial diversity on-Grounds.

There is some negative news from NSSE 2005 with respect to race in the experiences of some African-American students, and the gap in diverse perspectives between first- and fourth-year students. African-Americans are not as engaged with extra-curricular activities as other students, and there appears to be a small but measurable minority of African-American students who are not having good relationships with their peers and their overall experience at UVa, although overall satisfaction improved a bit between 2002 and 2005 for African-Americans.

**Access UVa Analysis**

As part of a comprehensive plan to access the effectiveness of the AccessUVa program, a four-year panel study was begun in 2004-05 to see how students benefitting from AccessUVa are doing in comparison to their peers. More about AccessUVa assessment Results from 2004-05 are primarily to determine baseline figures for comparison purposes--how fourth-year students whose incomes place them in the high-need group but are not receiving the benefits of AccessUVa are doing compared to their fourth-year peers, and how first-year students who are receiving the benefits of AccessUVa are doing compared to their first-year peers. For the purposes of this examination, students who qualified in 2004-05 for need-based financial aid were oversampled and divided into four comparison groups: first- and fourth-year students whose family incomes were at or below 150% of the poverty level (“high-need”) and first- and fourth-year students who did not receive need-based aid (“no-aid”). View the in-depth IAS report of results on AccessUVa and NSSE
Differences on the benchmarks tended to be between first- and fourth-years, rather than between the high-need and no-aid groups, although some interesting differences were seen there as well. The similarities that were found between the high-need and no-aid groups were good news in light of the University goal of providing increased support to low income students. An interesting pattern observed is that on every benchmark, first-year high-need students had either higher or similar scores as the no-aid students; however, fourth-year high-need students, who have not had the benefit of AccessUVa, lagged behind their fourth-year no aid peers on every benchmark. While some of these differences among fourth-years were small, this pattern may portend well for the success of AccessUVa. This could mean that first-year high-need students, due in part to interventions such as AccessUVa, are able to be more engaged in college from the start when compared to fourth-year high-need students who have not had the benefit of the program and therefore might be less engaged than they otherwise would be. This insight is tentative, and far from probative, and will be better tested by examining the data again when the first-year students are fourth-years (2007-08), and comparing the scores of current first-year students, who have had the benefit of AccessUVa for all four undergraduate years, with the scores of fourth-year students who did not have the benefit of AccessUVa. Specific findings from 2004-05 about each of the five benchmarks follow.

**Academic Challenge Benchmark:** The biggest difference (and the only one that is statistically significant) between groups was first-year no-aid students and fourth-year no-aid students (53 v. 59, respectively). This pattern did not hold true for first- and fourth-year high-need students (57 v. 58, respectively). First-year high-need students scored somewhat higher than the first-year no-aid group (57 v. 53), yet fourth-year high-need students scored a bit lower than the no-aid group (58 v. 59).

**Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark:** The only statistically significant differences in this benchmark were between first-years and fourth-years in both aid groups. First-years scored significantly lower than fourth-years (high-need: 39 v. 45; no-aid: 38 v. 47). First-year high-need students scored similarly to first-years in the no-aid group (39 v. 38).

**Student-Faculty Interaction Benchmark:** Here again, first-year students in both groups scored significantly lower than fourth-years (high-need: 39 v. 45; no-aid: 38 v. 47). First-year high-need students scored similarly to first-years in the no-aid group (39 v. 38).

**Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark:** This is the only benchmark on which first-years scored higher than fourth-years, 61 for both first-year high-need and first-year no-aid, v. 53 and 58 for fourth-year high-need and no-aid students. First-year high-need and no-aid students both scored 61. It is worth noting that the gap between first- and fourth-year high-need students is larger (about 8 points lower) than is the gap between first- and fourth-year no-aid students (about 3.5 points lower).

**Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark:** First-year high-need students scored similarly to first-year no-aid students (31 v. 32), while fourth-year high-need students scored
significantly lower than fourth-year no-aid students (40 v. 50). As was the case with other benchmarks, fourth-year students tended to score higher on enriching educational experiences than first-year students.

IAS also examined the responses of high need students on individual questions on the following topics: working and finances, co-curricular and academic experiences, University resources and satisfaction, and demographics.

**Working and Finances** Overall (including those who are not working for pay at all), first-year high-need students reported working more than no-aid students (estimated mean hours per week of 3.5 v. 1.1). Fourth-year high-need students worked about the same amount as fourth-year no-aid students (5.2 v. 5.4). While 53% of first-year high-need students reported working for pay, this was not significantly higher than the 44% of no-aid first-years. Seventy-three percent of fourth-year high-need students reported working for pay, compared to 64% of no-aid fourth-years. High-need students were about twice as likely to say that they worked to earn money for basic expenses: 31% v. 15% of first years; 53% v. 24% of fourth years. It is interesting to note that a majority of fourth-year high-need students reported that their reason for working was to meet basic expenses, compared to less than a third of first-year high-need students.

Unsurprisingly, first-year high-need students were overwhelmingly more likely to say that scholarships and grants were their major source of funding, 73% v. only 8% of no-aid students. Parents/family were, of course, the major source of funding for no-aid students (80%). Only 10% of high-need students cited parents as a major source of funding.

**Co-curricular and Academic Experiences** Compared to their no-aid peers, both first-year and fourth-year high-need students reported spending a similar amount of time:

- Studying (estimated means of 14.9 and 13.7 hours a week), compared to first and fourth-year no-aid students (15.6 and 14.6 hours a week).
- Relaxing and socializing (10-12 hours a week). High-need students reported spending less time than no-aid students involved with student organizations: 5.5 hours v. 7.4 for first-years, and 4.7 hours v. 8.3 for fourth-years.

While first-year high-need students were equally likely as their no-aid peers to exercise or participate in physical fitness activities (78% v. 71% often or very often), fourth-year high-need students were less likely (53% v. 74%).

First-year high-need students were equally likely as their no-aid peers to report having done community service or volunteer work (45%). Interestingly, fourth-year high-need students were far less likely than fourth-year no-aid students to report doing so (57% v. 80%).

**University Resources and Satisfaction** First-year high-need students reported using academic assistance such as tutoring and writing assistance at about twice the rate of their no-aid counterparts (29% v. 14%). Forty percent of first-year high-need students reported that UVa helped them cope with their non-academic responsibilities such as work and family quite a bit or very much – not particularly high, but significantly higher than fourth-year high-need students (15%). Interestingly, the gap in support between first- and fourth-year high-needs (25%) is much
larger than first- and fourth-year no-aid students (11%). In other words, for no-aid students there was only a small difference between first- and fourth-years in the non-academic support reported; high-need students were significantly more likely to feel supported in this area than their fourth-year peers. High-need students were somewhat less likely than other students to rate their entire UVa educational experience as good or excellent: 79% of high-need first-years and 86% of high-need fourth-years, vs. about 93% of first- and fourth-year no-aid students.

**Demographics** Both first- and fourth-year high-needs were much less likely to report that either their father or their mother had completed a college degree (bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate), compared to their no-aid peers. The most interesting difference, however, is found between first- and fourth-year high-need students. Thirty-two percent of first-year high-need fathers completed a college degree, compared to 59% for fourth-year high-need. Thirty percent of first-year high-need students reported that their mother had completed a college degree, compared to 44% of high-need fourth years. It would appear that first-year high-need students are from even less privileged families than fourth-year high-need students. Fourth-year high-need students were a bit more likely than no-aid students to live on-campus, 32% vs. 22%. More importantly, fourth-year high-need students were much less likely than no-aid students to live in a residence within walking distance of UVa, 38% vs. 68%.

NSSE 2005 was used to establish baseline figures for comparison to determine how well AccessUVa is doing supporting high needs students. While the 2005 results do not prove the success of the program, the results do indicate that first-year high need students benefiting from AccessUVa are doing well, as well as their more well off peers. In 2007-08, comparisons between students who have received four years of the benefit of AccessUVa can be made with those fourth-years students from the class of 2005 that did not receive the benefit of AccessUVa. Comparisons can also be made with students who receive no financial aid. Alumni followup surveys can provide additional information about how high need and other graduates do after leaving the University.

**Summary and Conclusion: What Can We Learn from NSSE 2005?**

Between 2002 and 2005, the University's performance on NSSE was stable for the most part. The strengths are still strengths and the weaknesses, while showing some signs of improvement, still need attention. NSSE 2005 results have identified significant strengths for the University in the following areas:

- Maintaining a challenging academic environment for all its students.
- UVa’s scores on the Enriching Educational Experiences (co-curricular) benchmark were quite good--higher than our doctoral-extensive peers.
• Providing the support its students need to succeed academically, socially and in extracurricular activities.

• Improving the interaction between students and faculty, especially among fourth-year students.

• Undergraduate advising appears to be improving in most University schools, especially for fourth-year students outside of the College.
• Providing support to low income students to be equally engaged in important areas of the college experience.

The results of NSSE 2005 have also pointed to three possible areas in need of improvement:

• The NSSE area in which UVa did least well overall was the Student Faculty Interaction, which attempts to measure the extent to which students learn how experts think about and solve practical problems, both inside and outside of the classroom. Items comprising this benchmark included discussing grades or assignments with an instructor, talking about career plans, discussing ideas from readings or classes with a faculty member outside of class, and similar items.
• Despite the slight increase on the Active and Collaborative Learning index from 2002 to 2005, UVa’s score is still low in comparison to the theoretically possible score of 100. On this benchmark, UVa’s first- and fourth-years had scores that were slightly lower than other doctoral-extensive universities. In percentile terms, UVa ranks in the bottom 50% on this benchmark for both first- and fourth-year students.
• Although ratings of UVa’s undergraduate advising have improved, considerable improvement is still needed in the College in order to bring student ratings of undergraduate advising up to the level of other AAUDE and doctoral-extensive university ratings.

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. In the future, the University should consider oversampling students by school so that the results can be reported by school.

For more information on this article or NSSE, contact the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies 4-3417 or IAAS@virginia.edu.
More Information about NSSE

Background information on NSSE, and the theory behind it:
The NSSE and the College Student Report: Overview

Reports from other years:
The NSSE and the College Student Report: Reports

Data from other years:
The NSSE and the College Student Report: Data

NSSE questionnaires:
The NSSE and the College Student Report: Questionnaires

Notes

For this article the Carnegie Classification “Doctoral-Extensive Research Institutions” will be used as the main comparison group. Those participating institutions in NSSE 2005 in this Carnegie Classification represented 11%, or 58 of the 529 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 website.

In 2005, UVa can also be compared to the following AAUDE institutions: Indiana University—Bloomington, Iowa State University, Rutgers University—New Brunswick, The University of Texas at Austin, University of California—Davis, University of Maryland—College Park, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Washington—Seattle.

More on Statistical Significance

Individual question means were tested for statistical differences, comparing the University to doctoral-extensive research institutions and AAUDE institutions. 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 .07 and .48. This means that the magnitude of the differences between UVa students and other students in the national sample was small to moderate. This is an important point to keep in mind. Click to see the individual question mean scores.

More on the Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark

Although UVa has participated in NSSE about every three years (in 2000, 2002, and 2005), the survey and analysis provided by the staff of the survey (based at Indiana University in
Bloomington) has undergone significant revision. Two major changes were announced in 2005. They are: a) an additional calculation of the five benchmarks (Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Campus Environment) at the student level to assist Universities with being able to compare differences between students within institutions. The standard calculation was an institutional score for comparisons between institutions; b) some changes to the way the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark was calculated, making year-to-year comparisons on this benchmark impossible and: c) UVa’s benchmark scores are no longer presented as percentile scores relative to other doctoral-extensive universities, AAUDE peers, and the entire NSSE cohort for 2005. This means that we are unable to tell whether or not UVa improved its scores on each benchmark relative to our peers for 2005 in relative terms.

NSSE has included a new benchmark report, “Comparisons with Highly Engaging Institutions” that compares UVa’s benchmark scores to the top 50% and 10% of the entire NSSE cohort for 2005. This means that UVa’s benchmark scores are compared to many small, selective liberal arts colleges, master’s level regional state universities, and a relatively smaller number of doctoral-extensive institutions.