

## **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2001-2004 Comparison Report: Executive Summary**

Radford University has taken part in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) since its pilot administration in 1999. The 2004 Report only incorporates the findings of the most recent four administrations (2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004) since the survey instrument went through significant redesigns in 1999 and 2000. The 2004 administration was the first to be solely conducted on-line with a final response rate of 41% (773 respondents).

Data comparisons for the four administrations were conducted in two different ways. First, the responses made by participating students during each of the time periods are compared to the responses from the other three time periods. Senior and freshmen level respondents are also compared within each administration. The second overall analysis compares the 2004 responses from Radford University to the respondents of students from both the participating Master's level institutions and the overall NSSE 2004 sample.

This is a brief summary of some of the more compelling findings. To read the full report please log on to: <http://www.radford.edu/~assessmt/> and click on the link for the Survey Research.

### **Radford University: 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 Comparison Highlights**

#### Activities Participated in by Students during the Current School Year

In several areas, senior-level students are often significantly more likely to have participated in a number of engagement activities. For the following items significant differences were found between the first-year student responses and the senior student responses during each administration time period (with seniors being more likely to participate in the activity):

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)

In addition, for four items in this survey section, the responses of senior-level students have significantly changed over the four administration periods.

- Seniors from 2004 responded that they “used email to communicate with an instructor” more often than senior-level respondents in 2001 or 2002.
- Seniors from 2004 responded that they “talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor” more often than seniors from the 2001 and 2002 administrations reported doing so.

#### Mental Activities Utilized in Coursework and Homework Problems / Reading and Writing

In order to complete coursework students need to engage in various mental activities depending on what is required of them in the course. The NSSE asks students, “During the current school year, to what extent has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities?” Two of the more interesting findings are for the 2004 administration with seniors reporting engaging in these mental activities more often:

- Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions
- Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

Students were also asked about the numbers and types of homework problems they were assigned during the course of the year in a typical week. Significant differences were found in 2003 and 2004 for the item, “Number of problem sets that take you less than an hour to complete.” Freshmen students reported doing significantly more problems than senior level students. However, seniors from all four administrations reported completing more papers 20 pages or more in length as compared to first-year students.

### College Activity Participation and Hours Spent Each Week Participating in Various Activities

During 2003 and 2004 administrations, a larger percentage of freshmen stated “Yes” they plan to complete a “Practicum, internship, field experience, or clinical assignment” than seniors reported. However, during this same time period, more senior respondents reported participating in a “Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.) than freshmen expected.

Overall, senior respondents reported spending significantly more time working (both on and off campus) for pay than first-year respondents. In fact, in 2004, senior respondents reported spending significantly more time participating in each of the various activities covered in this section. Senior respondents in 2004 also reported spending significantly less time than the 2003 seniors “relaxing and socializing.”

### Institution Contribution to Your Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development and Institutional Emphasis on College Activities

One major part of the NSSE asks students about the contributions their institution has made to their development in certain knowledge, skills, and personal life areas.

For the items listed below, senior respondents during all four administrations reported more development due to their institutional experiences than responding first-year students.

- Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills
- Speaking clearly and effectively
- Analyzing quantitative problems
- Using computing and information technology
- Working effectively with others

In addition, senior respondents in 2004 reported obtaining significantly more development in two areas as compared to senior-level students from the 2003 administration:

- Learning effectively on your own
- Solving complex real-world problems

### Quality of Relationships on Campus and Academic Advising

Students participating in the NSSE were asked about the quality of their relationships with students, faculty, and administrative personnel. Overall, the responses were quite high. One significant difference found was that, in 2004, senior respondents reported having significantly higher quality relationships with faculty members. However, in 2003 and 2004, first-year respondents rated their experiences with academic advising higher than the senior respondents.

### Overall Education Evaluation

The last two items on the NSSE national survey asked the participants to evaluate their entire educational experience and if they would attend the same institution. For the item, “How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?” senior respondents in 2003 rated their experience significantly lower than any senior respondents during any other administration. However, for the 2001, 2003, and 2004 administrations, senior respondents rated their experience significantly higher than freshmen respondents during those same administration periods.

## **Radford University compared to National Master’s Institutions and the Entire NSSE 2004 sample**

### Introduction

The next section of this report outlines the comparison of Radford students’ responses on the 2004 NSSE to two other groups of respondents: students at other Master’s level institutions and the entire NSSE 2004 sample. This comparison is only being made for the 2004 sample for ease of reporting.

### Activities Participated in by Students during the Current School Year

When comparing the responses of Radford University students to those of the two comparison groups on items housed under the overall question, “In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?”, a number of significant differences occurred.

There were five items in which Radford first-year students reported participating significantly less during the school year than both the first-year Master's Institutions Respondents and the entire NSSE 2004 first-year Respondents. They are as follows:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Participated in activities to enhance your spirituality

There were four items in which both first-year and senior year Radford respondents reported participating significantly more than both the other two comparison groups.

- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
- Used email to communicate with an instructor
- Used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

There are also a number of other items in which senior level Radford University respondents reported significantly higher levels of participation than students responding from either one or both comparison groups.

- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or adviser
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty member outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework

#### Mental Activities Utilized in Coursework and Homework Problems / Reading and Writing

Items in the next section pertained to the type of mental activities that students need to utilize in order to complete assignments or coursework during the current school year. A few of the differences between the Radford University students and Master's or NSSE 2004 respondents are presented below.

- First-year Radford students reported significant less emphasis on, "Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components" than the two comparison groups.
- For the item, "Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships," RU first-year respondents reported participating in this mental activity less often than the comparison students.
- Senior year Radford respondents reported participating in, "Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations" more often than the comparison group students.

The next section of the NSSE asks students about the amount of reading and writing that was required in their courses during the school year. Radford respondents reported having less reading and writing in almost all categories. However, for the item "Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages" RU seniors reported higher requirements than did the other two groups. For homework problems, although first-year students were asked to complete fewer problem homework assignments that took them more than an hour to complete, they were assigned a greater number of problem sets that took less than an hour to complete.

#### College Activity Participation and Hours Spent Each Week Participating in Various Activities

The next section of the NSSE national survey asks students about engagement activities that they have participated in (Senior students) or plan on participating in (First-year students). For several items, Radford University students reported not having participated in or planning on participating in significantly less than students at the comparative institutions. Some of the more notable findings include:

- Foreign language coursework. Both RU first-year and senior students report participating less than Master's level students or NSSE 2004 students.
- Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.). RU seniors report participating less than Master's level seniors or NSSE 2004 seniors.

- Community service or volunteer work. RU seniors report participating less than Master’s level seniors or NSSE 2004 seniors.

For two items, however, the Radford senior students reported having participated in or planning on participating in significantly more than students at the comparative institutions:

- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together
- Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program

There were many significant differences between Radford University respondents and the respondents at either Master’s level institutions or the entire NSSE sample on items asking about time spent in various academic and personal activities. The item asked students to report, “About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?” Radford University first-year students and seniors reported spending less time preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program), working for pay on campus, or working for pay off campus than students in either of the two comparison groups.

#### Institution Contribution to Your Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development and Institutional Emphasis on College Activities

One section of the NSSE survey instrument asks students about the extent their experiences at the institution contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in a number of academic related activities.

RU Seniors felt that the institution contributed to their acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills more than the other two comparison groups. This same holds true for the items related to using computing and information technology and working effectively with others. However, they feel that the institution contributed less to their development in analyzing quantitative problems. Radford University first-year students felt the institution contributed less to their development in speaking clearly and effectively and thinking critically and analyzing quantitative problems.

Both senior and first-year students at Radford University reported less institutional emphasis on “spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work” as compared to students from either the Master’s level comparison group or the National group.

#### Overall Education Evaluation

The last two items on the NSSE 2003 survey ask students to evaluate their entire education experience at their current institution and if they would choose the same institution again. There were no significant differences found between the Radford respondents and the respondents from the two other comparison groups.