

Institutional Analysis, Assessment and Reporting

Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) Initial Results for Fall 2007 Research Report 2008-01

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The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE, pronounced “bessie”) measures entering first-year students’ pre-college academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their interest in and expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during college. It is designed as a companion to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

This report focuses on some of the initial results of the BCSSE. When the NSSE is administered in spring 2008 to a sample of freshmen and seniors, an additional report will be produced that matches what students said at the beginning of their college career with what they actually did and experienced later in their first year of college. Therefore, many of those items are not included in this preliminary report.

The BCSSE was given to first-time full-time students via the web during the several weeks leading up to the beginning of the semester and into the first two weeks of the semester. Of the 1,956 students invited by e-mails to their Boise State address to complete the survey, 395 or 20% did. This was a lower response rate than expected and may be due to new students not yet having acquired the habit of checking their Boise State account frequently.

What kinds of coursework did students take in high school?

As shown by Figure 1 below, while a majority completed pre-Calculus/Trigonometry, most students arrived at college without a background in Calculus or Probability/Statistics. Figure 2 displays the percentage of students completing four years of coursework in the subject areas. Almost everyone (89%) completed four years of English. However, only slightly more than half completed four years in math and history/social science. Students were particularly under-prepared in the areas of science and foreign language where only 38% and 11% respectively completed four years. However, over 80% completed at least three years of science courses and 29% completed at least three years of a foreign language.

Approximately half of the respondents reported taking at least some advanced placement (AP) classes or honors classes. Almost 60% reported doing “quite a bit” or “very much” assigned reading during their last year of high school. While 64% reported writing “quite a few” papers or reports of less than five pages, only 24% reported writing “quite a few” longer papers or reports. As shown by Figure 3, only half of the respondents thought their high school experience was academically challenging when measured on a 6-point scale where 1=“not at all challenging” and 6=“extremely challenging.”

Figure 1. Percent Taking and Passing High School Math Courses

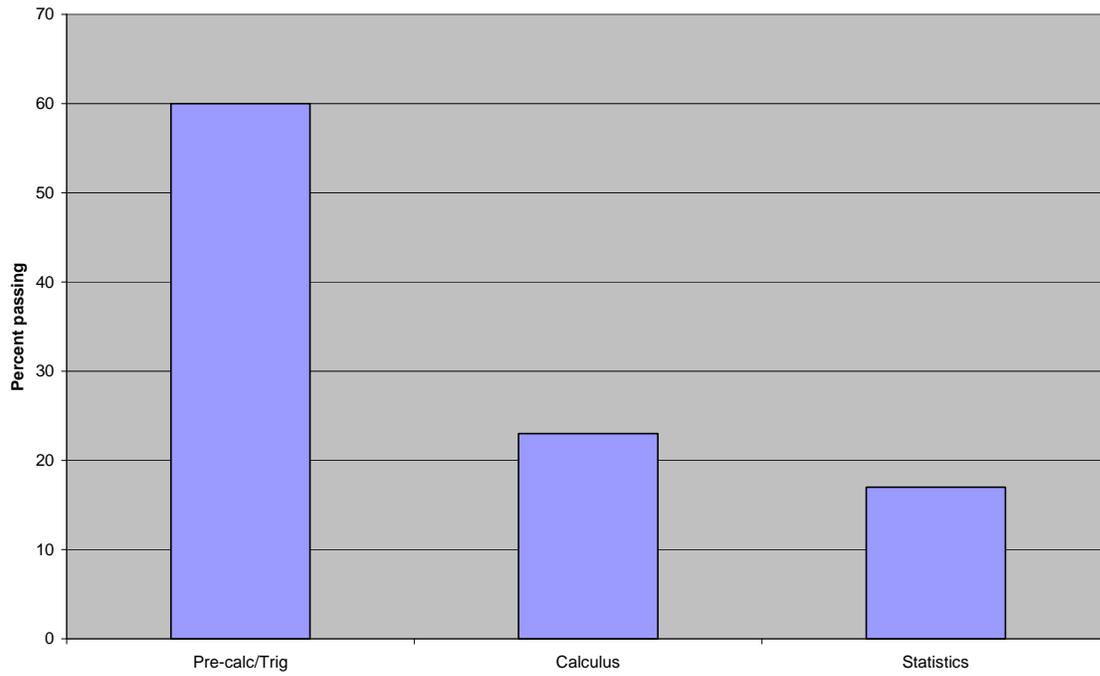


Figure 2. Percent Taking Four Years of Coursework in the Subject

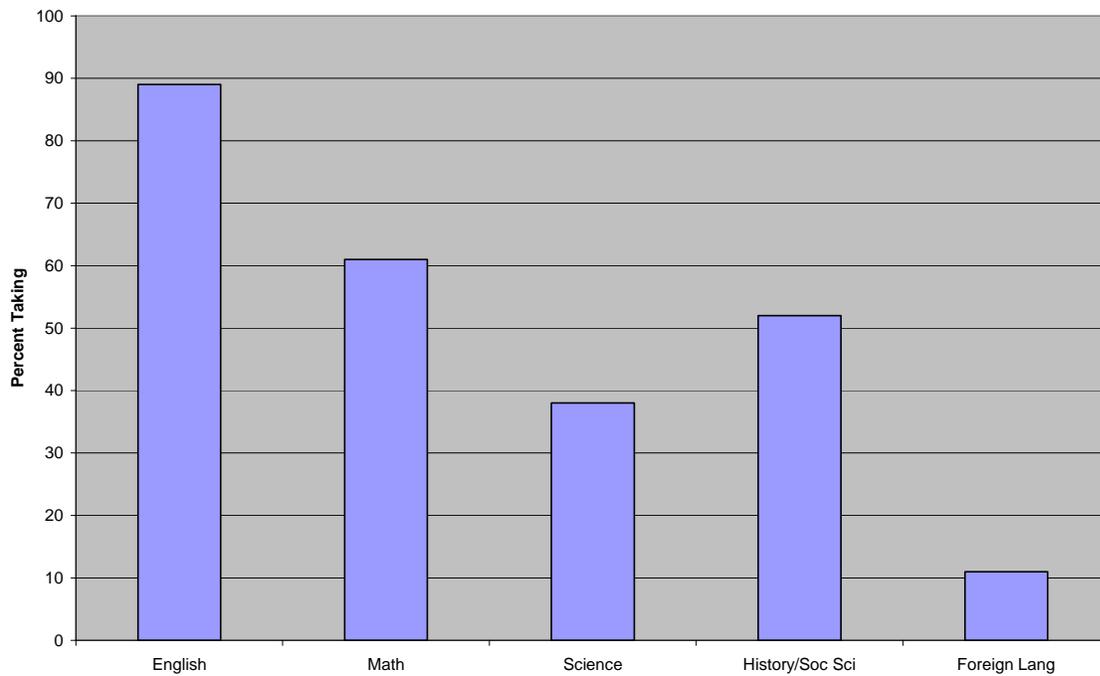
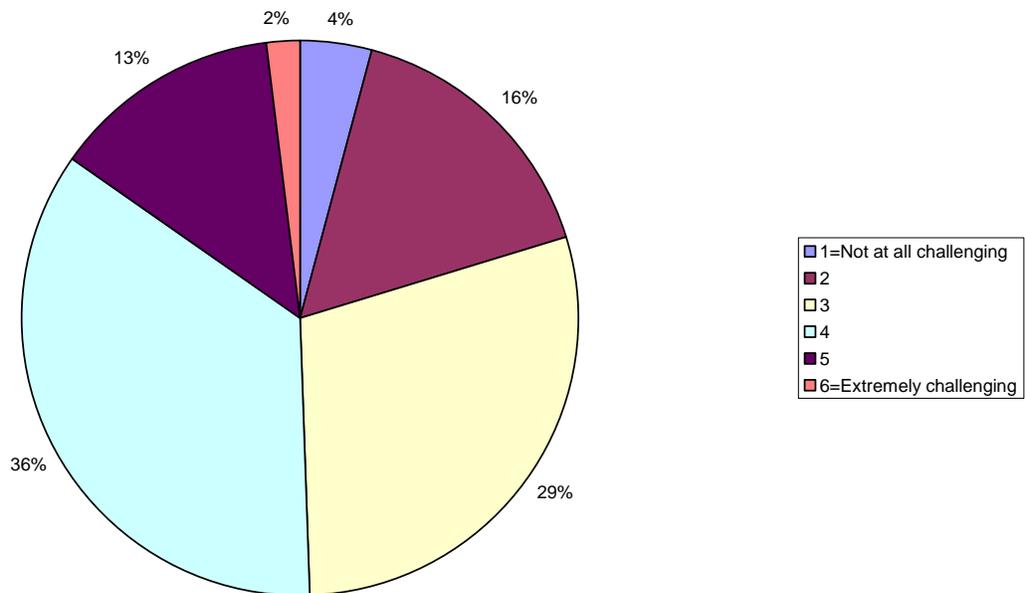


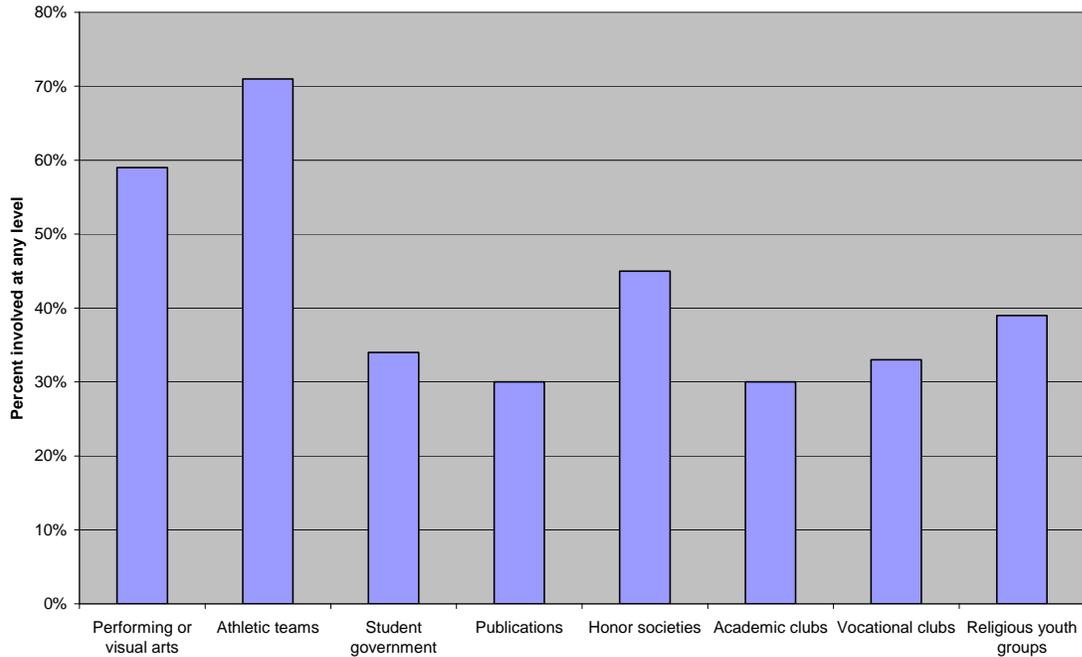
Figure 3. Overall, how academically challenging was your high school?



What activities were students involved in during high school?

New students were most involved with athletics during high school with over 70% reporting at least some involvement with athletics and 31% reporting that they were “highly involved.” Almost 60% were involved with the performing or visual arts program (band, chorus, theater, art, etc.) and 23% were “highly involved.” At least 30% of students reported some involvement with other areas with less than 10% indicating that they were highly involved, except for religious youth groups where 13% reported that they were highly involved. See Figure 4 for details.

Figure 4. Involvement in activities in high school



How prepared were students to take on college-level work?

Many students felt unprepared to take on college-level work. About two-thirds felt prepared to work effectively with others and to learn on their own. As shown below, only about a third felt prepared to analyze math or quantitative problems. Other areas hovered around 50% in students' feelings of preparedness.

How prepared are you to:	Percent who felt very prepared: (defined as a 5-6 on a 6-point scale)
Write clearly and effectively	48%
Speak clearly and effectively	51%
Think critically and analytically	52%
Analyze math or quantitative problems	34%
Using computing and information technology	49%
Work effectively with others	67%
Learn effectively on your own	64%

How important did students think outside-the-classroom experiences were?

Students were most interested in obtaining the support they needed to help them succeed academically. However, only half felt a challenging academic experience was very important to them. Instead, they were slightly more interested in interacting with others who differed from them and attending campus events and activities.

How important is:	Percent who felt it was very important: (defined as a 5-6 on a 6-point scale)
A challenging academic experience	52%
Support to help you succeed academically	88%
Opportunities to interact with students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	55%
Assistance with coping with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	43%
Support to help you thrive socially	47%
Opportunities to attend campus events and activities	64%

What difficulties did students expect to experience during their first year?

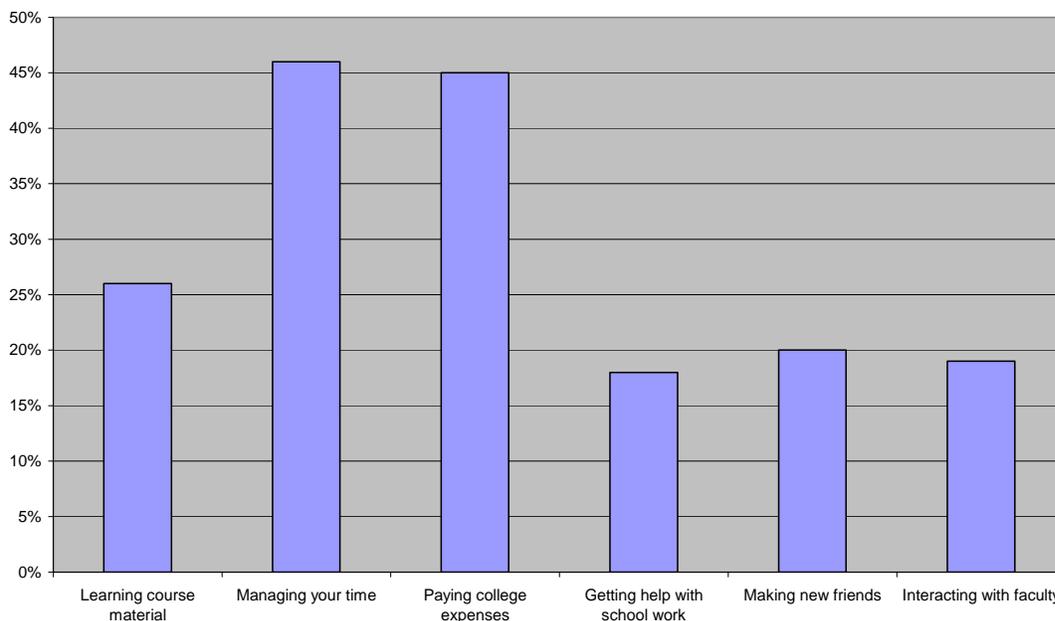
The greatest difficulties that students expected to experience were managing their time and paying for college. Slightly less than half of students thought they would have great difficulty in these two areas (defined as a 5 or 6 on a 6-point scale). Learning course material was an issue for approximately 25% of the student respondents. See Figure 5 for more details.

Demographic Information on Students

All students who completed the BCSSE were enrolled full-time. About 65% were female, which indicates that females were more likely to respond to the survey than males were. About 75% described their race/ethnicity as “White non-Hispanic.” The next largest ethnic group at 9% were students who preferred not to respond. About 5% each described themselves as Asian, Mexican, or multiracial.

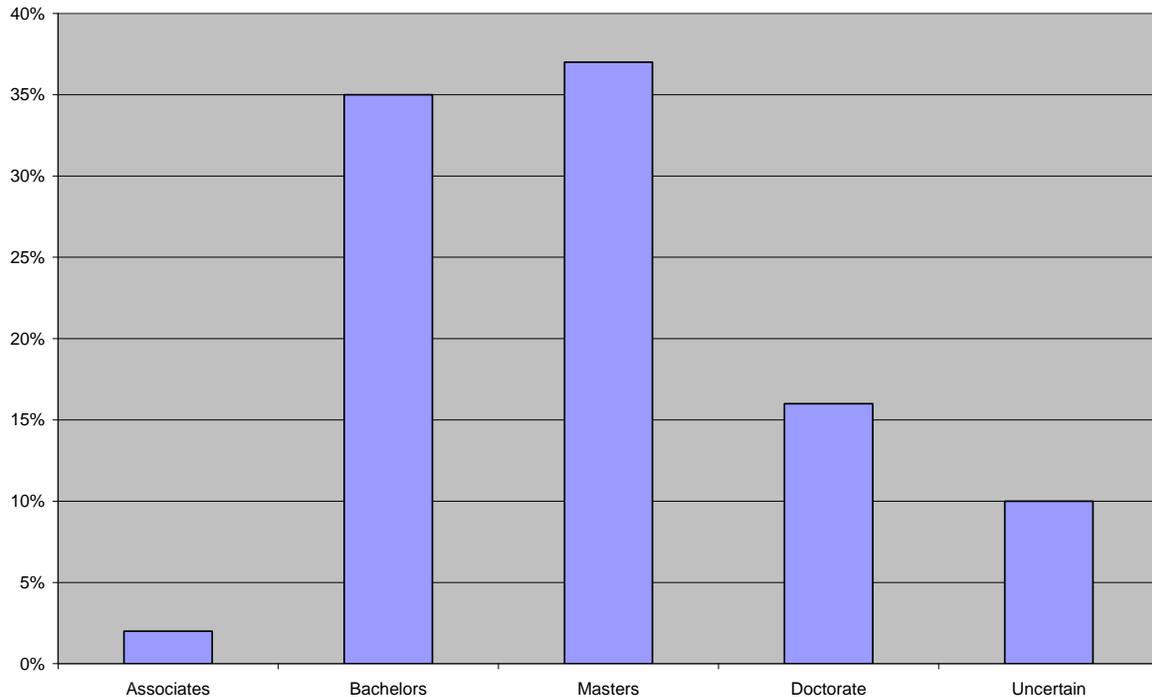
Almost half (48%) were first-generation college students. Most students (59%) had at least one close friend who also was attending Boise State University. Only 38% of students reported that their home was 20 miles or less from college.

Figure 5. How difficult do you expect the following to be?
(5 or 6 on 6-point scale)



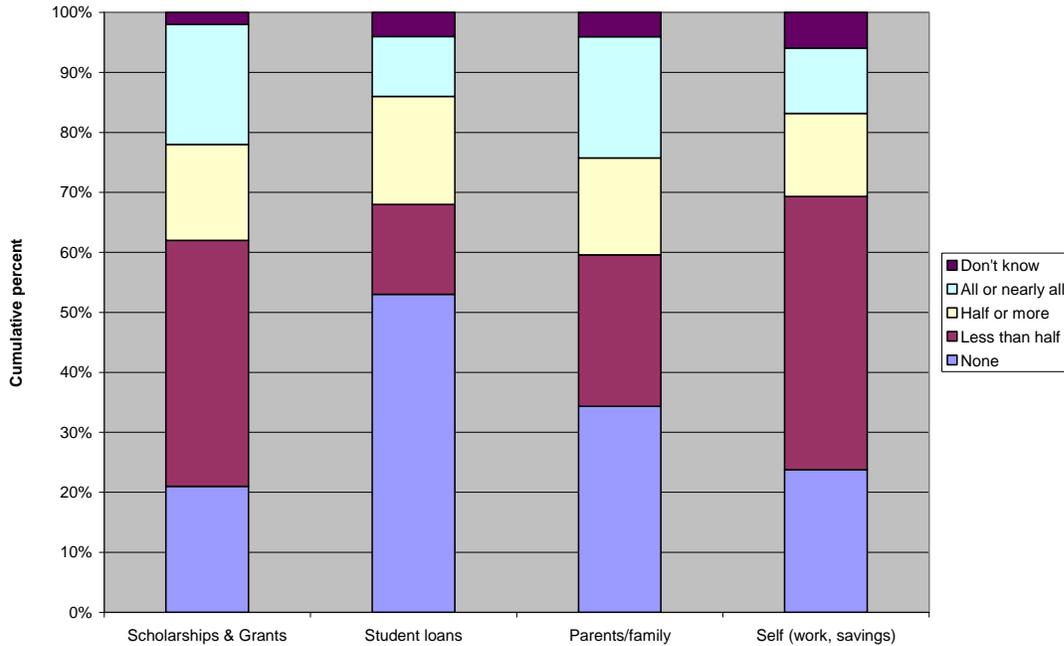
Most students (69%) intended to graduate from Boise State University, though 27% were uncertain and 4% did **not** plan to graduate from here. As shown by Figure 6, students had high academic aspirations with over half (53%) planning to obtain advanced degrees.

Figure 6. Highest academic degree students intend to obtain



Students also were asked about the proportion of their college expenses to be paid by scholarships and grants, student loans, parents/family, and by themselves, as shown by Figure 7. Because so many students were just out of high school (78% of respondents graduated in 2007), we see a greater reliance on parents/family than we probably would find for the general student population. Almost two-thirds were relying on their family to some extent to help pay for college, while more than 75% were relying on scholarships and grants to help cover expenses. Students were least likely to rely on student loans with over half indicating that loans would not be used to cover their expenses.

Figure 7. How college expenses will be paid for



This report was prepared by Marcia Belcheir, Institutional Analysis, Assessment, and Reporting. For questions or further details, please contact her at mbelcheir@boisestate.edu. Besides the questions covered here, additional information is available on:

- the amount of time spent in high school on preparing for class, working for pay, participating in co-curricular activities
- expected amount of time spent in college on preparing for class, working for pay, participating in co-curricular activities
- frequency of academic engagement behaviors in high school (e.g., asking questions in class, making a class presentation)
- expected frequency of the same academic engagement behaviors in college
- expectations to persevere under difficulties (e.g., study when there are other interesting things to do, ask instructors for help when you struggle with course assignments)