What does “Supportive Campus Environment” mean at a commuter institution? Analysis of a NSSE benchmark

Marcia Belcheir
Boise State University
What is a supportive campus environment when:

- Fewer than 10% live on campus
- 75% report spending 10 hours or less per week on campus outside of class
- 70% report spending some time working off-campus and 30% report spending 30+ hours a week at a job
- 40-45% report more than 5 hours per week on dependent care
NSSE Supportive Campus Environment Items:

 extents that the institution emphasizes:

 - Providing support students need to help them succeed academically
 - Helping students cope with their non-academic responsibilities
 - Providing the support students need to thrive socially

 quality of relationships with:

 - Other students
 - Faculty
 - Administrative personnel
Areas to Explore in the Study:

- Do students’ feelings of a sense of community or connectedness also influence their feelings about a supportive campus environment?
- Does greater discrepancy between students’ “ideal college” perceptions and their experiences at BSU relate to perceptions of a supportive campus environment?
- What role does stress play? Do students with more stress perceive BSU as less supportive?
Measuring Sense of Community

- Membership – 4 items
  - My individuality is accepted

- Needs fulfillment – 4 items
  - All the work I’m putting forth now will be worth it some day

- Faculty connection – 5 items
  - I feel comfortable asking questions in class

- Influence – 4 items
  - I’m getting involved in activities on campus

- Disconnection – 4 items
  - I have felt lost and alone on campus
Measuring discrepancy between ideal perceptions and experiences

“If you could shape your ideal college to fit you, what would it look like? To what extent would it have the following.....
- 15 items, 4-point scale where 1=very little and 4=very much

“Now think about your experience at Boise State. To what extent does it have the following....
- Same 15 items, same 4-point scale

Discrepancy was difference between ideal and actual ratings
Discrepancy items covered four areas:

- **Affiliation (4 items)**
  - Opportunities to get together socially with other students, students I can form new friendships with

- **Classes and study (5 items)**
  - Places on campus where it's easy to study by myself, faculty to are intellectually stimulating

- **Individual attention (4 items)**
  - Small classes, tutoring if I need it

- **High school ways (2 items)**
  - Easy courses, old friends who go to my college
Measuring stress

- Emotional stress – 5 items
  - Depression, Lack of support from family & friends
- Time stress – 6 items
  - Not enough time in the day to accomplish necessary tasks, Exhaustion
- Physical illness – 2 items
  - Compared to last fall, how much have you been sick?
  - How many days have you missed class or work because of illness?
Did students assigned to the 4 quartiles on the NSSE benchmark differ:

- On community perceptions?
  - YES on all 5 factors

- On discrepancies between their ideal and actual experience?
  - YES on Affiliation, Classes & Study, and Individual Attention
  - NO on High School Ways

- On measures of stress?
  - YES for Emotional and Time stress
  - NO for Physical illness
How well do these measures predict NSSE Supportive Campus Benchmark score?

- Almost all factors were needed to adequately predict NSSE Supportive Campus Benchmark scores.
- Only factors excluded were all three of the stress factors.
- \( R^2 = 0.535 \)
- Sense of community on campus was most important, especially Membership and Connections with Faculty.
Standardized Coefficients in Order of Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Beta Weight:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community – Membership</td>
<td>.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community – Influence</td>
<td>.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community – Faculty Connection</td>
<td>.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community – Disconnection</td>
<td>-.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community – Needs Fulfillment</td>
<td>.182</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrepancy – Classes &amp; Study</td>
<td>.171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrepancy – Affiliation</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy – Individual Attention</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy – High School Ways</td>
<td>.065</td>
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</tbody>
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Recommendations for Improving NSSE Benchmark Scores

- Improve faculty connections
  - 59% were comfortable asking questions in class
  - 47% agreed that faculty care if they succeed
  - 56% had talked to faculty outside class

- Improve student influence
  - 29% were getting involved in activities
  - 25% thought they’d make a difference at BSU
Recommendations Based on Discrepancies Between Ideal and Real

- Again, improve faculty connections
  - Want faculty who are stimulating, want them to succeed, and understand students have a life outside class

- Help college fit into students’ outside lives
  - Easy to get off and on campus
  - Schedule of classes that meets needs