

What does “Supportive
Campus Environment” mean at
a commuter institution?

Analysis of a NSSE benchmark

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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:

- Extent 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
- $R^2 = .535$
- Sense of community on campus was most important, especially Membership and Connections with Faculty

Standardized Coefficients in Order of Importance

| Factor: | Beta Weight: |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Community – Membership | .379 |
| Community – Influence | .320 |
| Community – Faculty Connection | .263 |
| Community – Disconnection | -.186 |
| Community – Needs Fulfillment | .182 |
| Discrepancy – Classes & Study | .171 |
| Discrepancy – Affiliation | .094 |
| Discrepancy – Individual Attention | .089 |
| Discrepancy – High School Ways | .065 |

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