



Some Potential Uses of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Results for 2010

Abstract: *This report provides information from the latest NSSE results to illuminate an on-going campus issue—low graduation rates—and to illustrate progress toward reaching academic excellence and a vibrant campus culture using NSSE’s five benchmark scores. Based on several NSSE items that address graduation expectations, it appears that Boise State students begin college expecting to take longer than students at other urban institutions. They are also more likely to believe that family and finances could delay their graduation.*

Using NSSE benchmark scores, it appears that Boise State is either making progress or holding steady on all NSSE benchmarks. In relation to academic excellence, first year students are reporting higher levels of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning compared to prior years. However, first-year Boise State students in 2010 report lower levels of active and collaborative learning compared to first year students at other urban universities. Scores are also lower on the student-faculty interaction benchmark compared to other urban universities at both the first-year and senior levels. In relation to establishing a vibrant campus culture, scores on the supportive campus environment benchmark have continued to improve at both the first-year and senior levels. However, compared to other urban institutions, Boise State’s benchmark score in this area remains low.

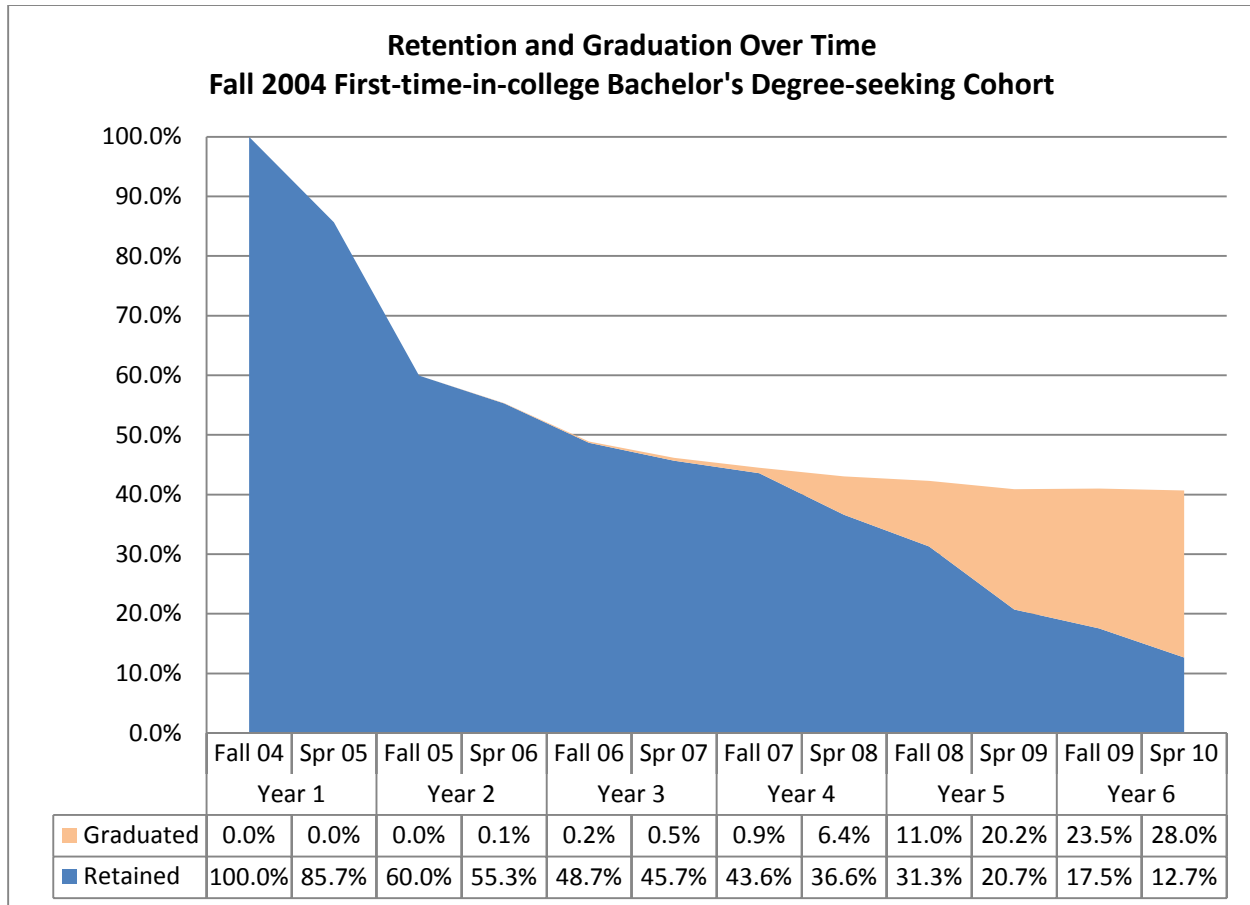
The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a large national survey given annually to freshmen and seniors at participating institutions. The purpose of the NSSE is to provide a measure of the student learning environment as part of institutional quality. For the 2010 administration, 595 four-year institutions participated in the NSSE with 393,630 students responding. The average institutional response was 37%. At Boise State, 2,275 freshmen and seniors responded to the survey for a 35% response rate. Boise State has participated in the NSSE on a biannual basis since 2000.

Boise State is also a member of the Urban Universities consortium. For the 2010 administration, the other institutions in this consortium included Morgan State University (Baltimore), Northeastern Illinois University (Chicago), Pace University (New York), Purdue University-Calumet Campus (Hammond, IN), Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Colorado Denver, and Youngstown State University. Participation in the Urban Universities consortium provides a more comparable peer group and allows the addition of questions of particular interest to urban institutions.

The NSSE covers a wide range of topics related to student engagement. This report will cover two main uses at Boise State: (1) as part of better understanding a particular issue, in this case lagging graduation rates, and (2) as key indicators in measuring progress toward the goals of academic excellence and a vibrant campus culture. Other potential uses of the NSSE include use of engagement activities related to learning and reports on the first-year experience at Boise State compared to other institutions.

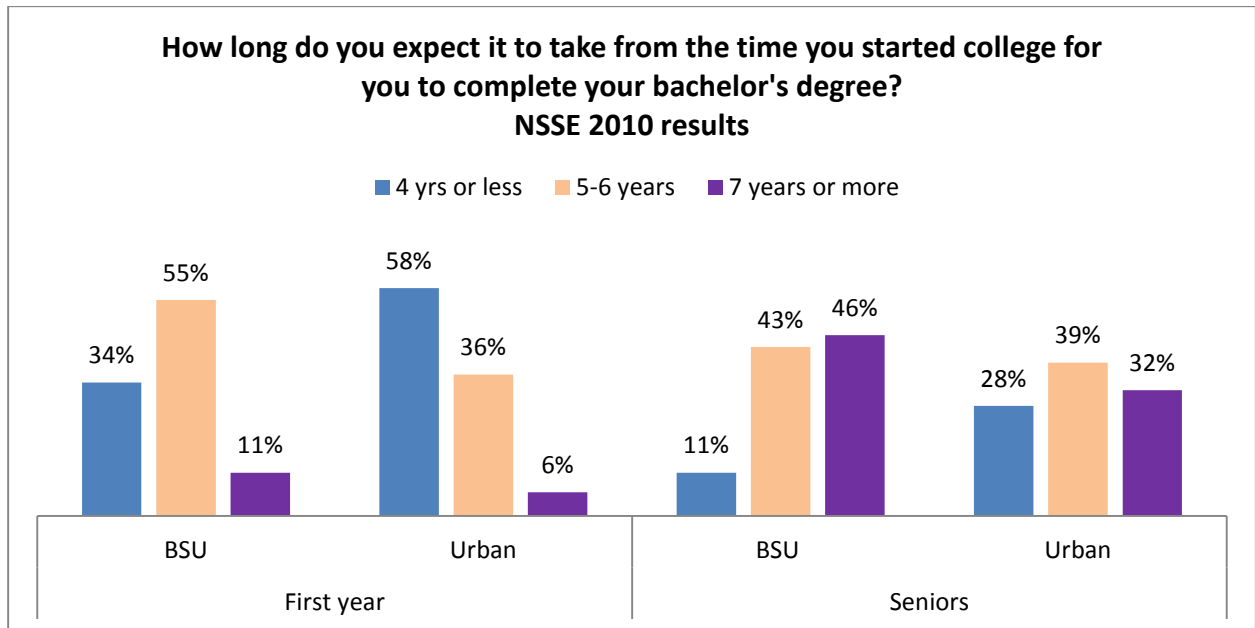
Using NSSE to Study the Issue of Lagging Graduation Rates

Boise State's graduation rates have lagged behind many other institutions, even behind other urban institutions. The latest six-year graduation rate based on first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who began in fall 2004 is 28% (see the chart below for details). Nationally, the six-year graduation rate is about 56% for public institutions, according to the National Center for Education Statistics¹.

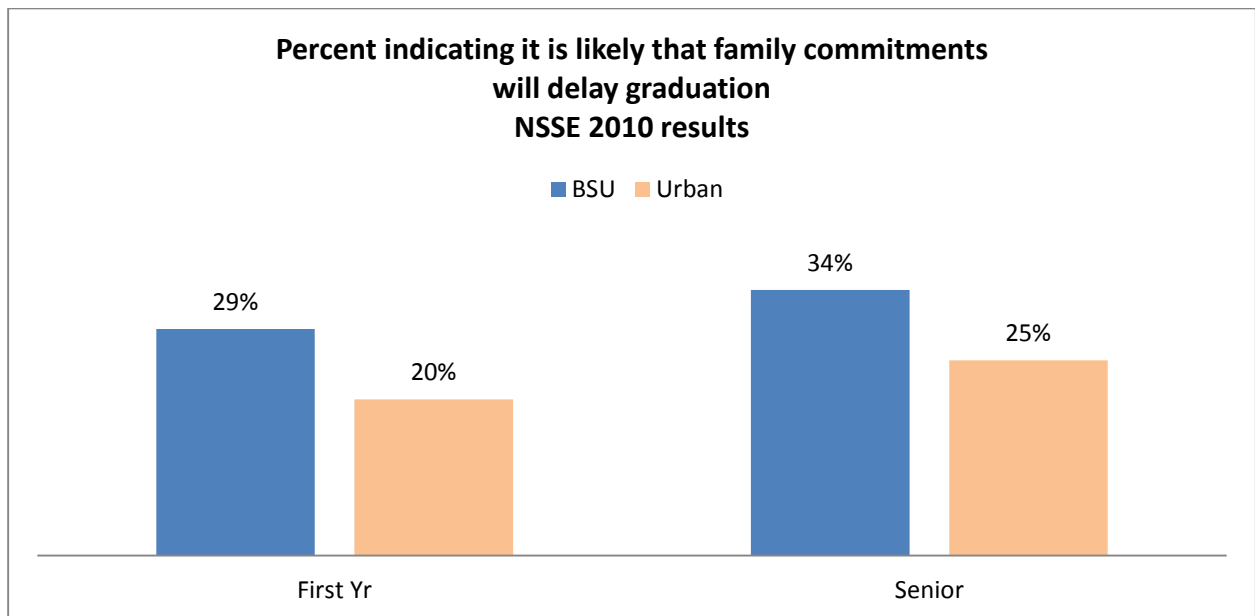


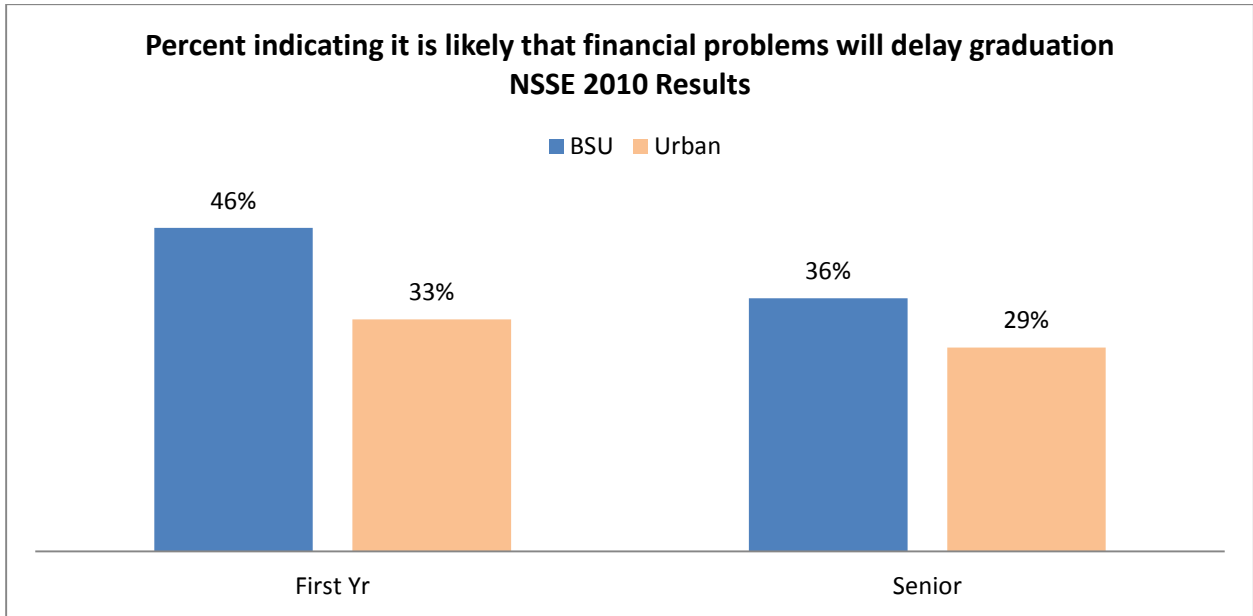
Why do so few students graduate within six years? One peek at students' thinking about graduation can be found in some of the items that members of the NSSE urban consortium ask their students. First-year students and seniors are asked to estimate how long they expect to take to earn a bachelor's degree. As shown by the chart below, only 34% of first-year students expect to earn a degree in four years compared to 58% at other urban institutions. At the senior level, only 11% of Boise State seniors expect to earn a degree in four years compared to 28% at other urban institutions.

¹ From Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2009; Graduation Rates, 2003 & 2006 Cohorts, and Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2009 First Look published by NCES



Students were also asked about the likelihood that family commitments and financial problems would delay their graduation. As shown by the charts below, Boise State students believe they are more likely to experience problems in both areas. An additional 9% of Boise State first-year students and seniors think that family commitments will delay graduation compared to students enrolled at other urban universities. Differences, however, are most dramatic for the financial difficulties question where almost half of Boise State freshmen think they may experience financial difficulties that will delay graduation compared to about one-third of first-year students at other urban institutions. By the senior year, results for Boise State and other urban universities are more comparable, though Boise State's results remain somewhat elevated.





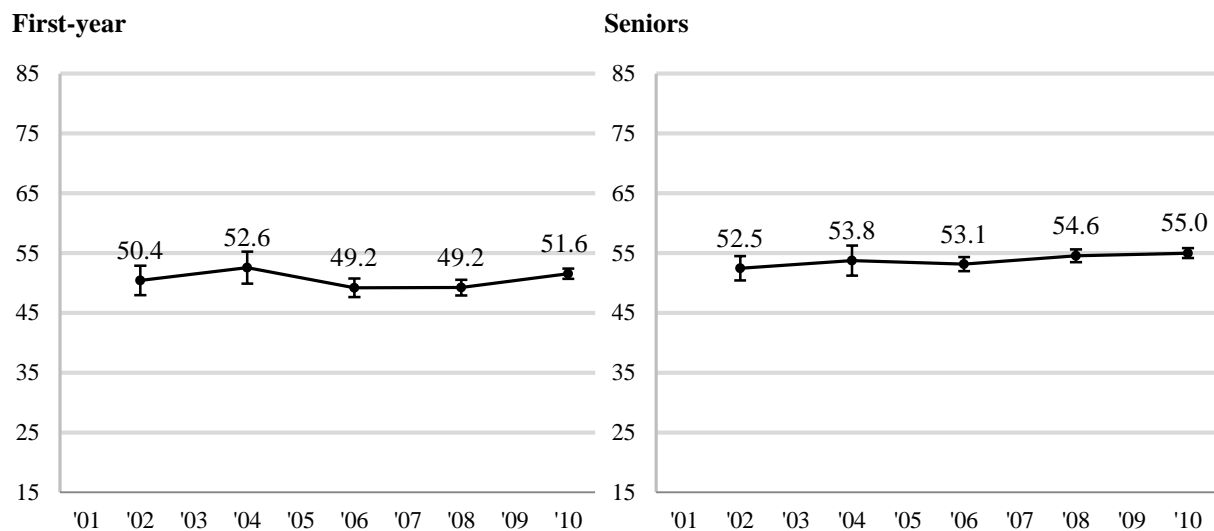
Results from another part of the NSSE survey that contain questions asking students about the amount of time they spend on various activities confirm that our students spend more time taking care of dependents and working off-campus compared to both other urban students and students nationally.

Use of NSSE benchmarks in assessing progress in academic excellence and vibrant culture

NSSE personnel have developed five benchmark scores by grouping together responses to a series of items. The benchmarks are: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Enriching Educational Experiences, Student-Faculty Interactions, and Supportive Campus Environment. The first four benchmarks are especially related to academic excellence, while the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark is a good measure of progress toward establishing a vibrant culture on campus. The NSSE items that comprise each benchmark can be found in Appendix A. Discussion of each benchmark includes a look at Boise State's scores across time as well as a comparison to scores at other urban institutions for 2010. When Boise State's scores are significantly below those of other urban universities for a particular benchmark, follow-up information on individual items where some of the greatest differences occur is provided.

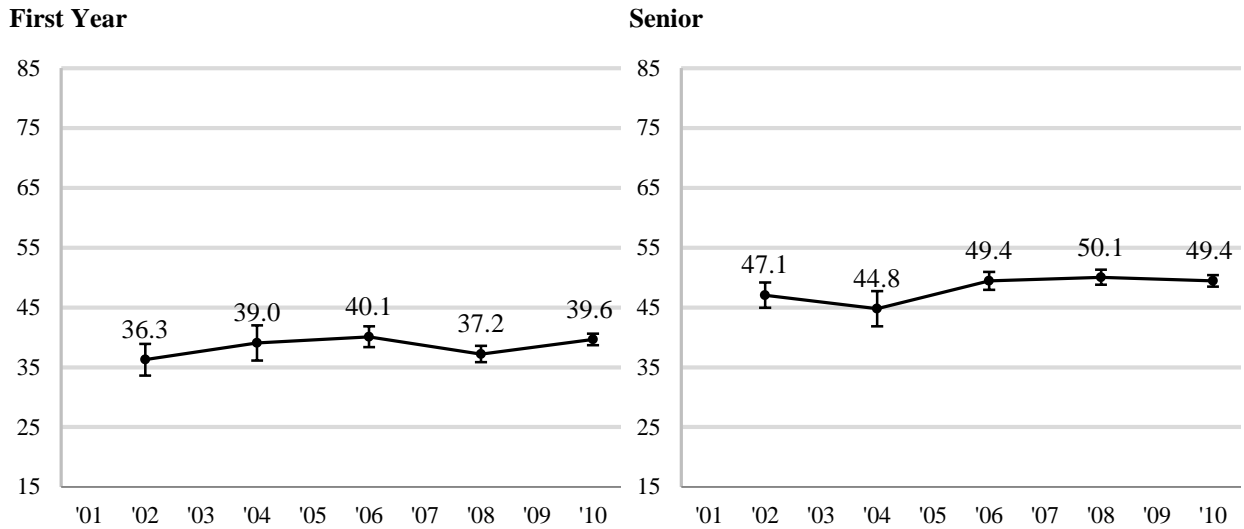
Level of Academic Challenge: Boise State's freshmen report higher levels of academic challenge compared to both 2008 and 2006, while seniors' scores remain stable. Boise State's average scores for freshmen and seniors on Level of Academic Challenge are similar to other urban institutions for the 2010 administration. This benchmark includes items such as hours spent studying, amount of assigned papers and texts and cognitive levels that are emphasized.

Level of Academic Challenge

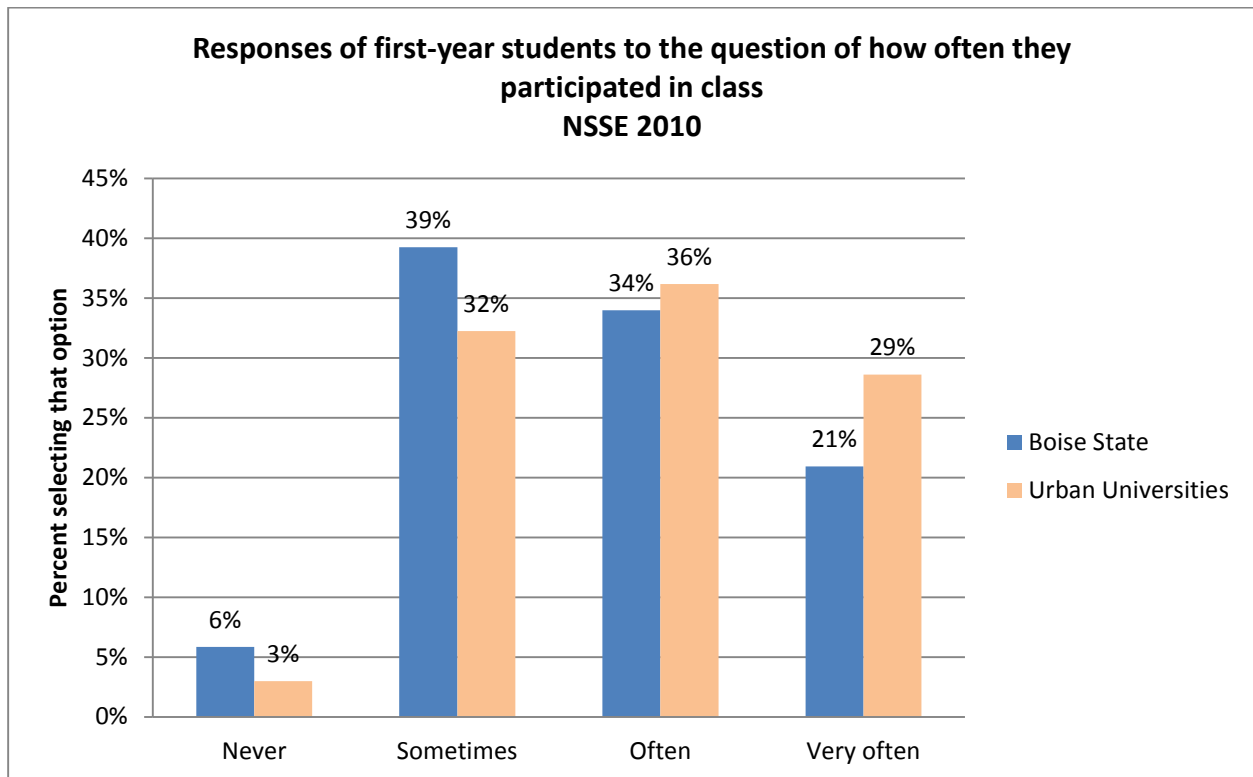


Active and Collaborative Learning: Boise State's freshmen report more active and collaborative learning compared to 2008, when the average score on this benchmark dipped. Seniors' average score on this benchmark has remained stable. Boise State's freshmen report less active and collaborative learning in 2010 compared to students at other urban institutions, while seniors' results are similar. This benchmark includes items such as asking questions in class, making presentations, and participating in community-based projects.

Active and Collaborative Learning

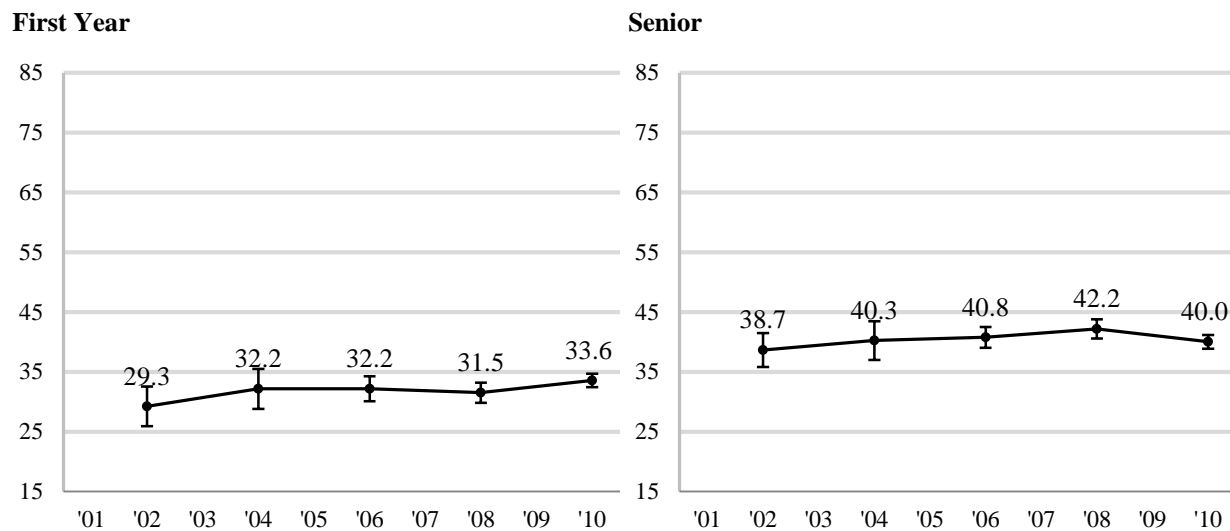


A full listing of the items included in this benchmark can be found in Appendix A. One item where Boise State first-year students had especially low responses compared to first-year students at other urban universities was the frequency that they participated in class by asking questions or contributing to class discussions. As shown by the chart below, Boise State students reported less classroom participation.

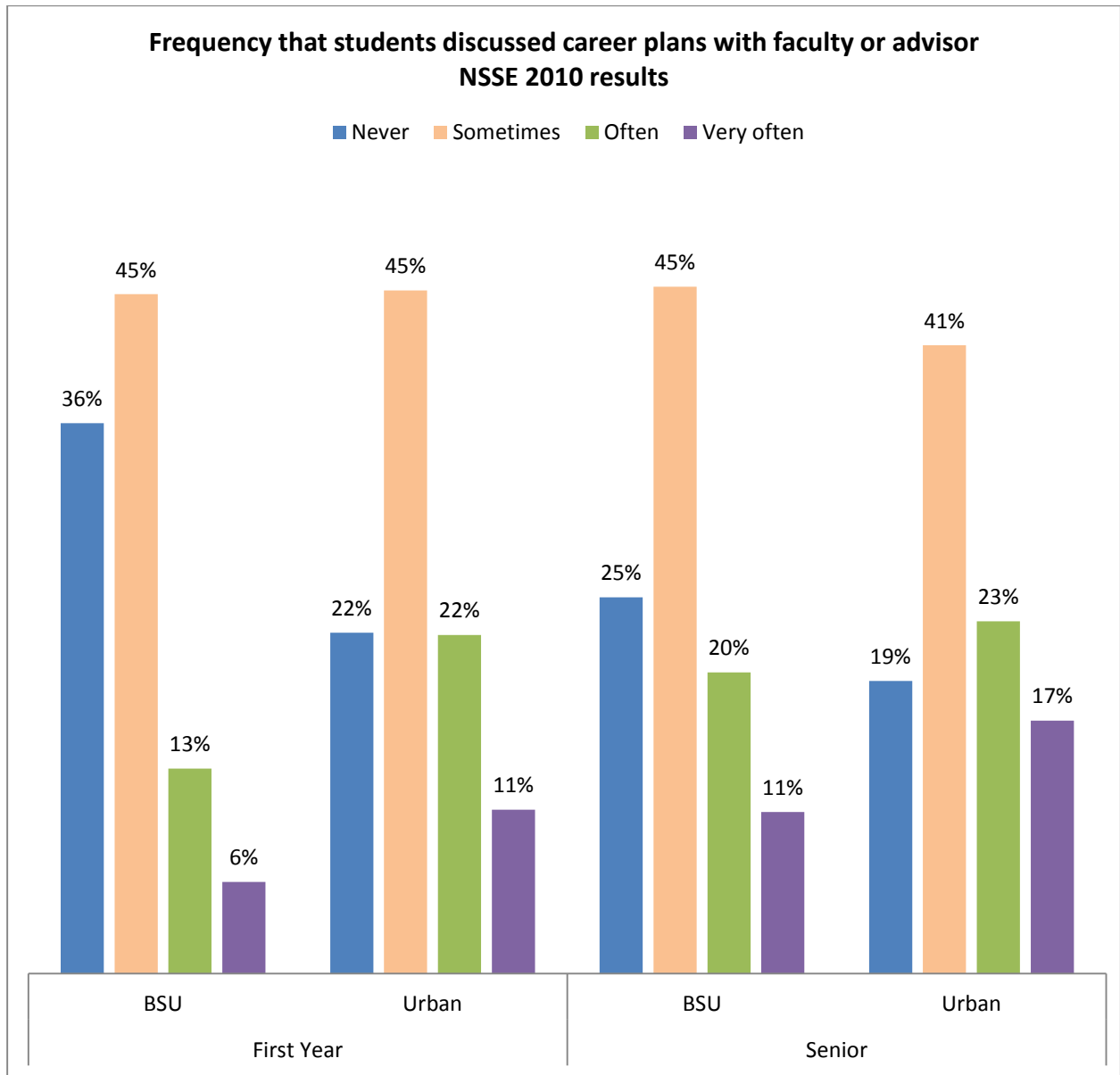


Student-Faculty Interaction: Despite slight fluctuations, Boise State’s average scores remain stable for both freshmen and seniors. In 2010, Boise State had lower student-faculty interactions scores than other urban institutions participating in the NSSE had at both the first-year and senior levels. This benchmark includes items ranging from discussing grades to talking about career plans to receiving prompt feedback to working with faculty on activities and research projects.

Student-Faculty Interaction

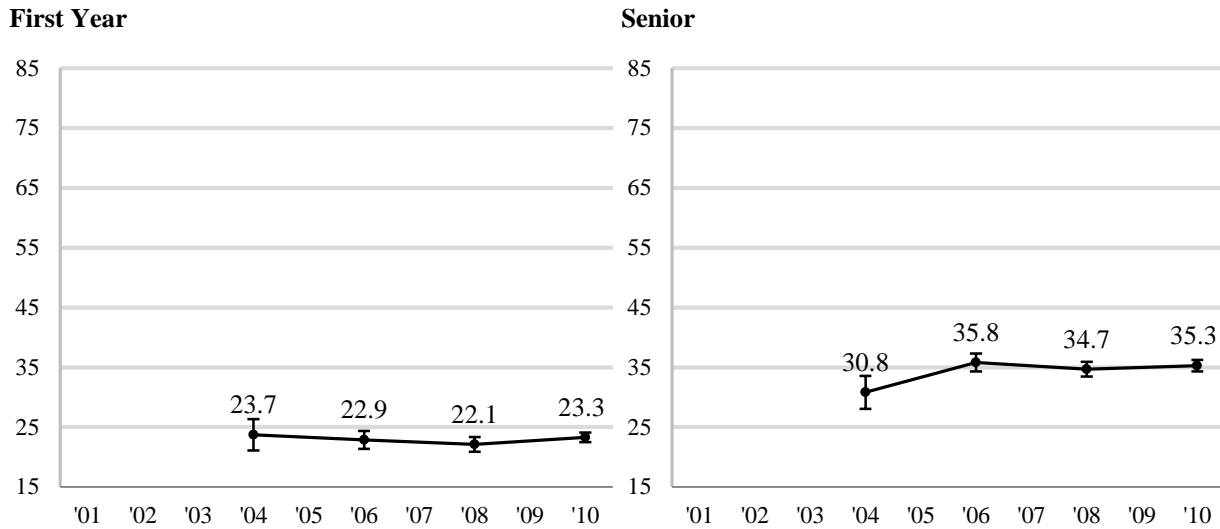


A look at the items that make up this benchmark shows that one of the items where the greatest differences occur involves talking to faculty or advisors about career opportunities. As shown by the chart below, Boise State students are less likely to have career conversations at both the freshman and senior level compared to students at other urban universities. The difference is largest at the first-year level where 36% of Boise State first year students report that they've never had a conversation with faculty or an advisor about careers compared to 22% at other urban institutions.



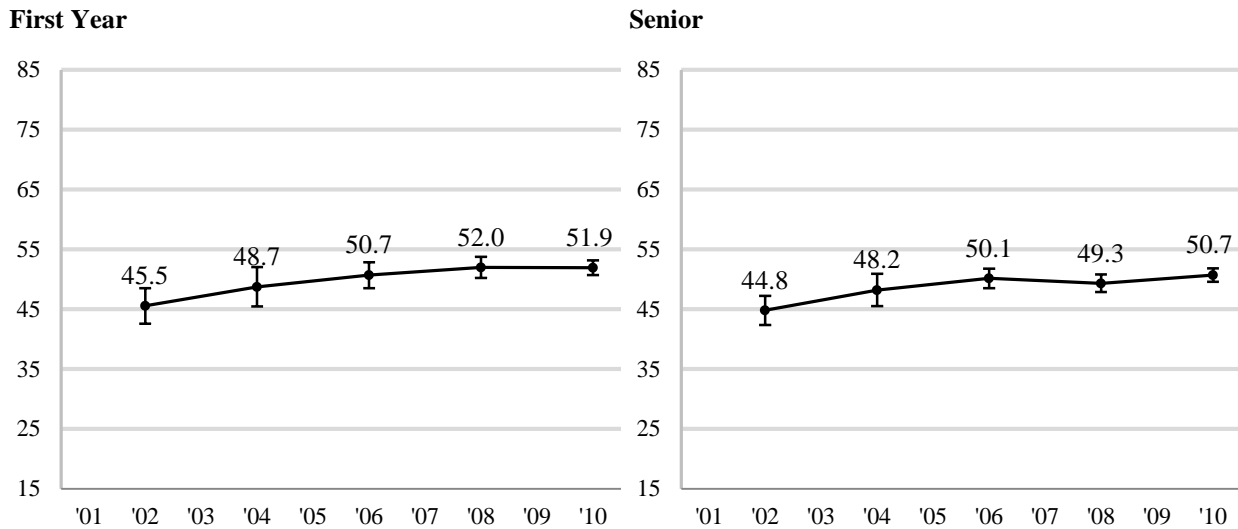
Enriching Educational Experiences: Average scores remain stable for Boise State freshmen on this benchmark. Seniors' average scores are also similar to prior years' scores, except when compared to 2004. Boise State's 2010 average scores for freshmen and seniors are close enough to be judged as similar on this benchmark when compared to results for other urban institutions. As shown by the listing of items in Appendix A, this benchmark covers a broad range of items including participation in co-curricular activities, community service, and studying abroad.

Enriching Educational Experiences



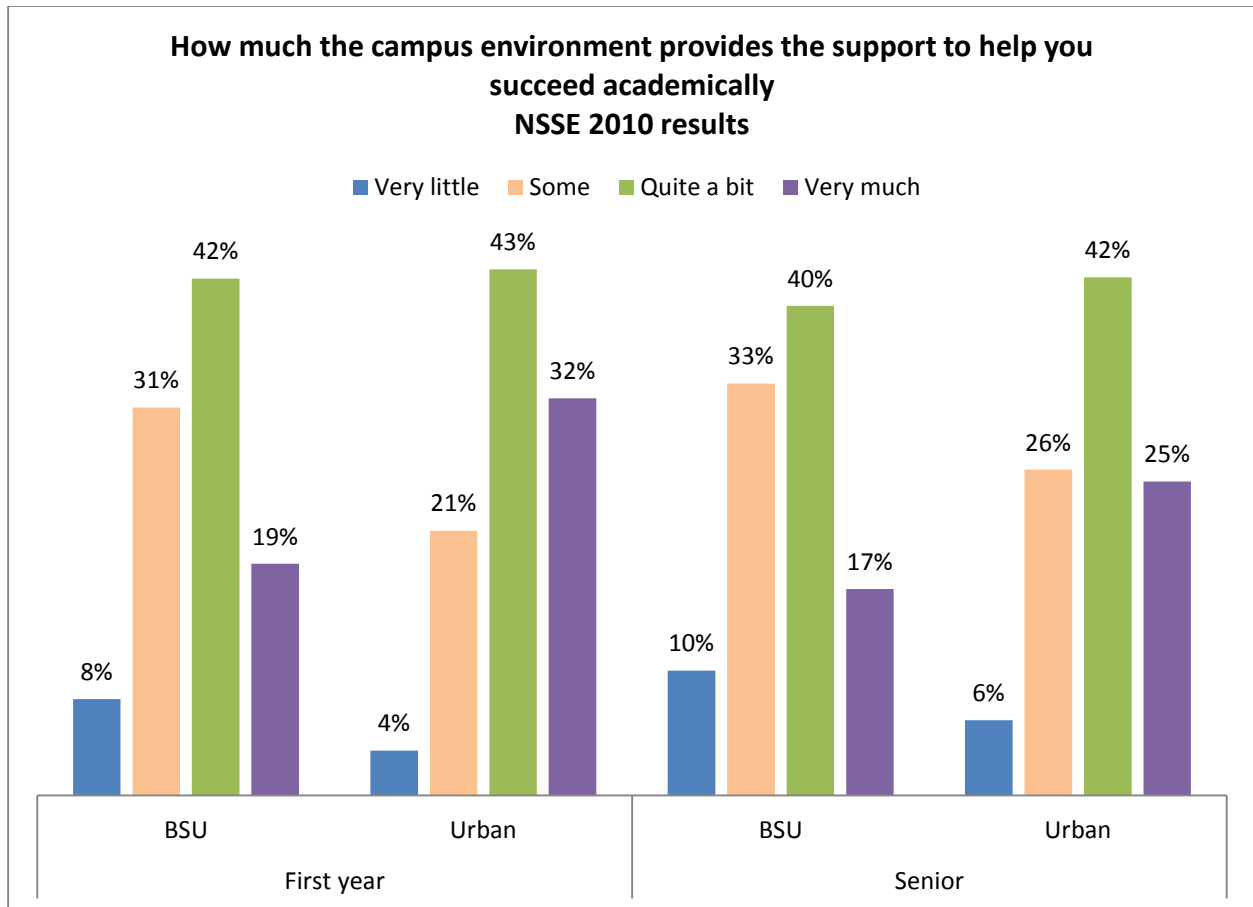
Supportive Campus Environment: Improvements on this benchmark have been gradual and significant for both freshmen and seniors when compared to 2002. However, Boise State was again below other urban institutions on students' perceptions of a supportive campus environment for both first-year and senior students. This benchmark consists of items asking about support to succeed academically, cope with non-academic responsibilities, and thrive socially. Three additional items ask about the quality of relationships with other students, faculty, and administrative personnel (see Appendix A).

Supportive Campus Environment



Almost all of the individual items that comprise this benchmark show significantly lower responses for Boise State compared to other institutions, with the three campus environment items showing greater differences than the quality-of-relationships items. The chart below illustrates the differences for the item that asks about

campus support to succeed academically, but the results are also similar for the items on support to thrive socially and help in coping with non-academic responsibilities.



Summary

NSSE results can be used in many ways to better understand student engagement. This report has illustrated the use of the NSSE to provide information on a campus issue, in this case lagging graduation rates and to document progress in the areas of academic excellence and a vibrant campus culture. Results indicate that our students arrive on campus expecting to take longer to graduate and that they probably experience significantly more family and financial issues that slow progress to graduation compared to students at other urban institutions. Benchmark results show stability or improvement in all areas; however, scores remain lower than other urban universities in several areas.

Appendix A: Items included in Benchmarks

Level of Academic Challenge:

- Hours spent preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, etc. related to academic program)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more, between 5 and 19 pages, and fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizes: **Analysis** of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizes: **Synthesis** and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
- Coursework emphasizes: **Making of judgments** about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Coursework emphasizes: **Applying** of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizes: Spending significant amount of time studying and on academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects **during class**
- Worked with classmates **outside of class** to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Enriching Educational Experiences:

- Hours spent participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, etc.)
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework and study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own
- Using electronic medium (e.g., listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

Student-Faculty Interaction:

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements

Supportive Campus Environment:

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

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