



## **NSSE 2006 Summary Report:**

# **An Overview of the National Survey of Student Engagement 2006 Results for UW-Madison**

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[http://apa.wisc.edu/NSSE/2006\\_NSSE\\_report.pdf](http://apa.wisc.edu/NSSE/2006_NSSE_report.pdf)

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a survey of college freshmen and seniors designed to assess student involvement in practices associated with high levels of learning. In 2006, a total of 557 colleges and universities across the United States and Canada participated. NSSE is based at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research under the direction of Professor George Kuh. A detailed description of NSSE is available on-line at <http://www.indiana.edu/~nsse>.

The University of Wisconsin-System Administration Office of Policy Analysis and Research uses findings from the NSSE survey to prepare its Accountability Report, *Achieving Excellence*, sent annually to legislators, the Board of Regents, and other university stakeholders. (See <http://www.uwsa.edu/opar/accountability> for copies of the reports.) All UW system institutions were required to participate in NSSE in 2001, 2004, and 2006 as a way to gather information and data for the annual accountability reports. The results are also used at this institution for self-assessment. In addition, the survey responses from UW-Madison students are used along with results at other colleges and universities nationwide to establish national benchmarks about student participation in programs and activities and what they gain from attending college.

### Survey administration

In fall 2005 UW-Madison sent NSSE a data file that contained contact information for all first-year students and seniors. NSSE drew a random sample of 5,000 (2,500 first-year students and 2,500 seniors) and sent them information about participating in the survey via e-mail from the UW-Madison Provost's office. The e-mail directed students to the survey instrument found on the NSSE web site.

A random sample is a practical, less expensive method of gathering data on a population (in this case, university undergraduates). However, since only a portion of the population is surveyed, results from a random sample may not match the actual opinions or experiences of the entire student body. Thus it is important to be aware of a margin of error around the responses. When comparing groups (such as seniors and first-year students), small differences in responses could be due to sampling error rather than a real difference in opinion or behavior. Statistical tests can be used to distinguish between what appears to be random variation and what is likely a true difference between groups. Statistically significant differences between student groups (probability less than 5% that the difference is really due to chance, based on Chi-squared test) are available from the Office of Academic Planning and Analysis.

Results shown are weighted to reflect the distribution of students by gender and full-time or part-time status in the student population. The weights are designed to adjust for the fact that some students are more likely to answer surveys than are other students. For example, women tend to be more likely to respond to surveys. If UW was 50% female and 80% of female students and 60% of male students made a class presentation very often, we would expect for the student body as a whole that 70% of students made a presentation very often. If only women answer the survey, however, the percent of students who made class presentations would appear to be 80%, which would overestimate the true percentage. When we use weights, we are correcting for that bias.

Many of the measures included in this survey focus on experiences and perceptions. When interpreting this data, it is important to remember that differences across groups or across time could be the result of real differences in experiences, different aspects or different perceptions of the same experience, or differing expectations. For example, two students may each have visited a professor outside of class three times in the past semester. When asked how often did you talk with your instructors outside of class, one of them might call that “very often” and the other “sometimes”.

The Office of Academic Planning and Analysis (APA) is the institutional repository for UW-Madison data from the NSSE survey. Further information on the survey, including methodology and breakdowns by categories such as student level, gender, minority status, and transfer status, is available at the NSSE website: <http://www.indiana.edu/~nsse> and at the APA website: [http://apa.wisc.edu/performance\\_student\\_surveys.html](http://apa.wisc.edu/performance_student_surveys.html). Individuals interested in conducting their own analyses of the survey data from 2006 or prior years may contact APA for information on obtaining access to the data.

The UW-Madison response rate was 34 percent – 721 first-year students (30%) and 916 seniors (38%) answered the survey. In comparison, the average response rate for all institutions participating in NSSE in 2006 was 39 percent.

The table below shows the distribution of students enrolled in the fall semester of 2005-06 (those eligible to be included in the NSSE survey, compared with the actual respondents to the survey. The demographic characteristics of total students enrolled appear very similar to NSSE respondents.

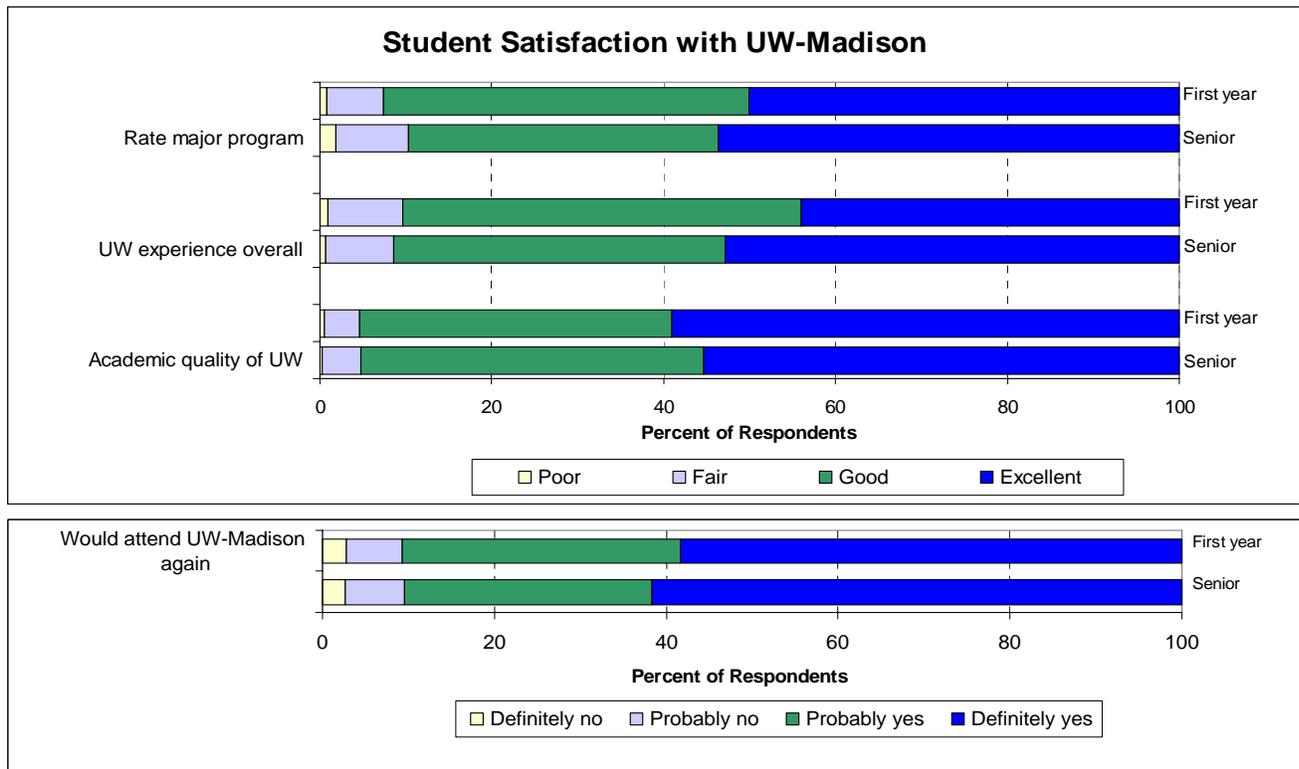
**Table 1: Comparison of UW-Madison Students and NSSE 2006 Respondents**

Percent of Students:	UW-Madison Student Enrolled Fall 2005-06		Un-weighted NSSE Respondents		Weighted NSSE Respondents	
	First Year	Seniors	First Year	Seniors	First Year	Seniors
19 years old or younger	98	1	98	1	98	1
20-23 years old	1	87	2	90	2	89
Female	56	53	60	58	56	54
Student of Color	13	10	12	10	12	10
International student	3	3	3	2	3	2
Began college at UW-Madison	99	76	99	81	99	80
Enrolled full-time	99	90	96	92	96	89
Total Students	6373	9384	721	916	721	916

## OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

### Student Satisfaction

Overall, students are very satisfied with their educational experience. Over 90 percent of first-year students and 91 percent of seniors rated their overall educational experience at UW-Madison as good or excellent. Seniors are more likely than freshmen to rate their overall experience as excellent, however. When asked whether they would choose the same institution if they could start over again, 91 percent of first-year students and seniors report that they probably or definitely would choose UW-Madison again.

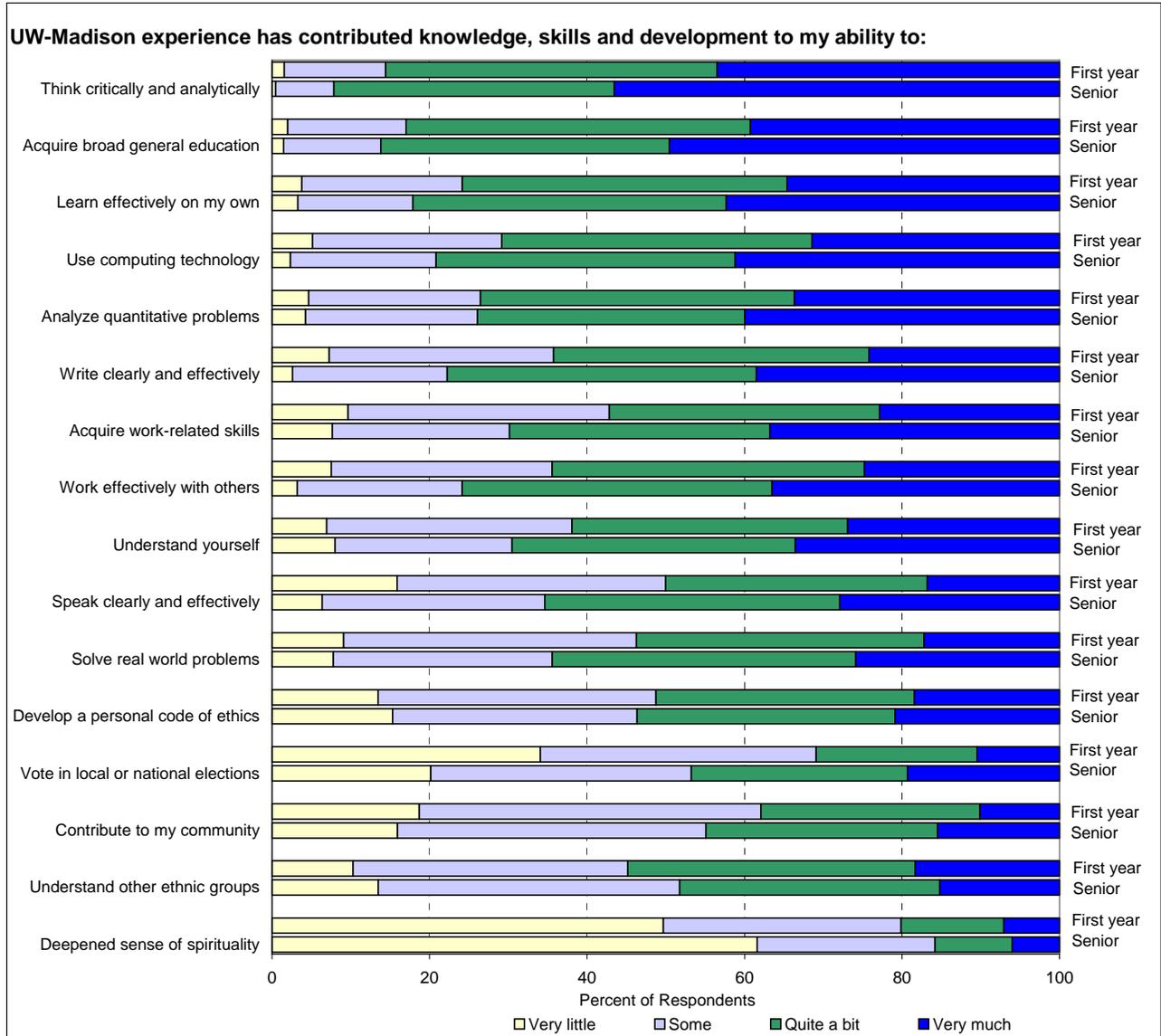


### Educational and Personal Growth

Students report that their experience at UW-Madison has contributed to their educational and personal growth in many areas. Over 80 percent of UW-Madison students state that their educational experience has added quite a bit or very much to their ability to think critically and analytically and to acquire a broad general education. Over two-thirds of students indicated that skills used in areas such as analyzing quantitative problems, computing, writing clearly and effectively, working with others, and understanding oneself were increased by their studies at the university. About half of seniors and first-year students report that UW-Madison has contributed quite a bit or very much to their understanding of other racial and ethnic backgrounds and to developing a personal code of ethics.

As expected, in most areas, seniors reported greater contributions to skills and knowledge from their educational experience than did first-year students. About 50 percent of freshmen and two-thirds of seniors asserted that their education contributed quite a bit or very much to their skills related to speaking clearly and effectively and solving real-world complex problems. A significantly larger proportion of seniors was also more likely to report that their ability to write clearly, think critically, contribute to the welfare of their community, acquire job skills, vote, use computers, and work effectively with others was influenced by their time at UW-Madison.

**Education and Personal Growth**



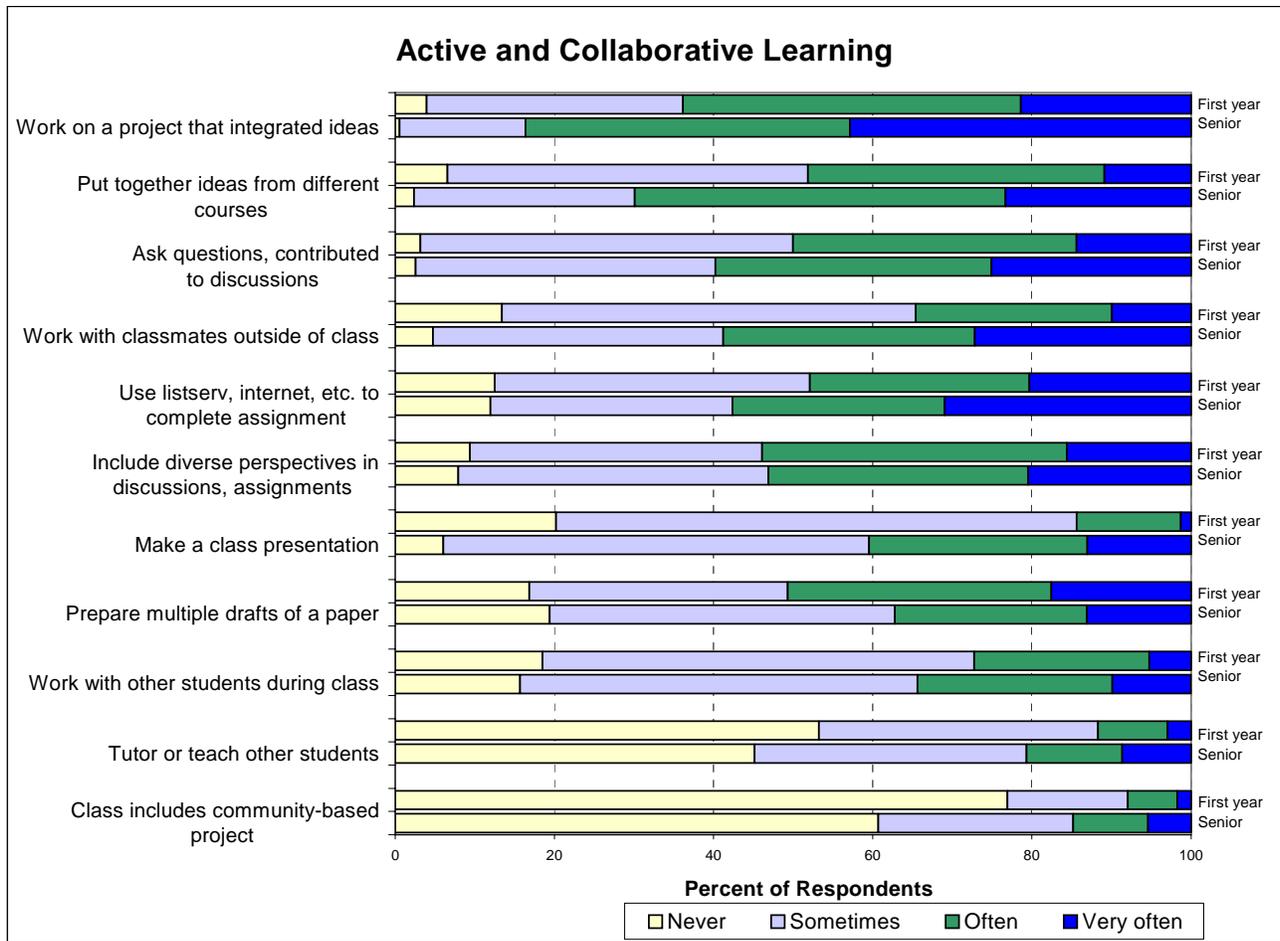
## **Active and Collaborative Learning**

Because people vary in learning styles and abilities, it is important to use a mixture of educational techniques to ensure we reach all students. Research shows that active and collaborative learning approaches are more likely to foster greater achievement and persistence than traditional lecture-format instruction. The survey asked students about opportunities to work on group projects, put together ideas from different courses, ask questions in class, make a class presentation, write multiple drafts of papers, and other activities related to active and collaborative learning.

During the past year, for at least some classes, over 90 percent of students recounted that they worked on a project that integrated ideas from various sources, asked questions or contributed to discussion, put together ideas from different courses when working on assignments or in class discussion, discussed ideas from class with others outside of class, worked on assignments outside of class with their classmates, and included diverse perspectives in class discussions or assignments.

In many writing-intensive courses, including those that fulfill the General Education Communication A and B requirements at UW-Madison, students are required to submit multiple drafts of a paper. Communication A courses are typically taken in the freshman year; B courses may be taken in the first year or later. First-year students were more likely to report writing multiple drafts of papers – about half stated that they often or very often wrote multiple drafts.

Seniors were more likely than freshmen to work on projects that integrate ideas – 84 percent of seniors and 64 percent of first-years reported often or very often working on a project which required integrating ideas from various sources. Nearly 95 percent of seniors and 80 percent of first-year students sometimes or often made a presentation in class. Seniors were also more likely to put together ideas or concepts from different courses in their class discussions or assignments – almost half of first-year students and 70 percent of seniors report often or very often integrating ideas from different courses. About 40 percent of seniors and one-fourth of first-year students participated in community-based projects as part of a regular course during 2005-06.

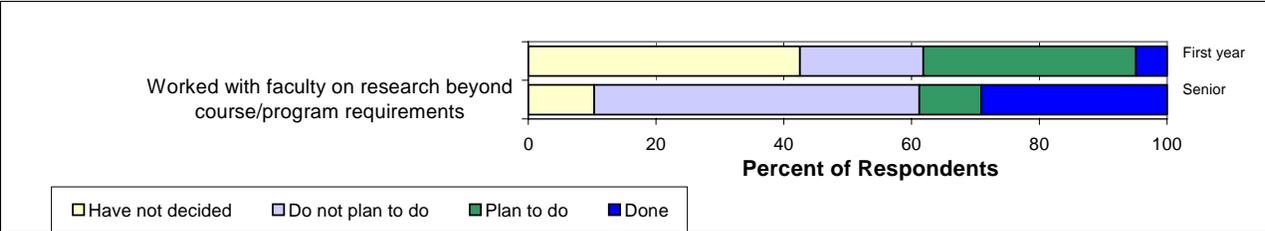
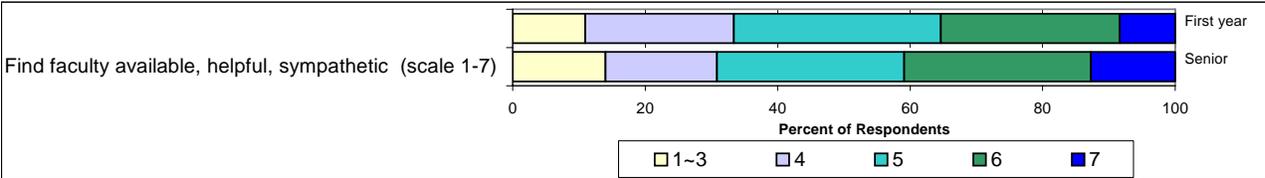
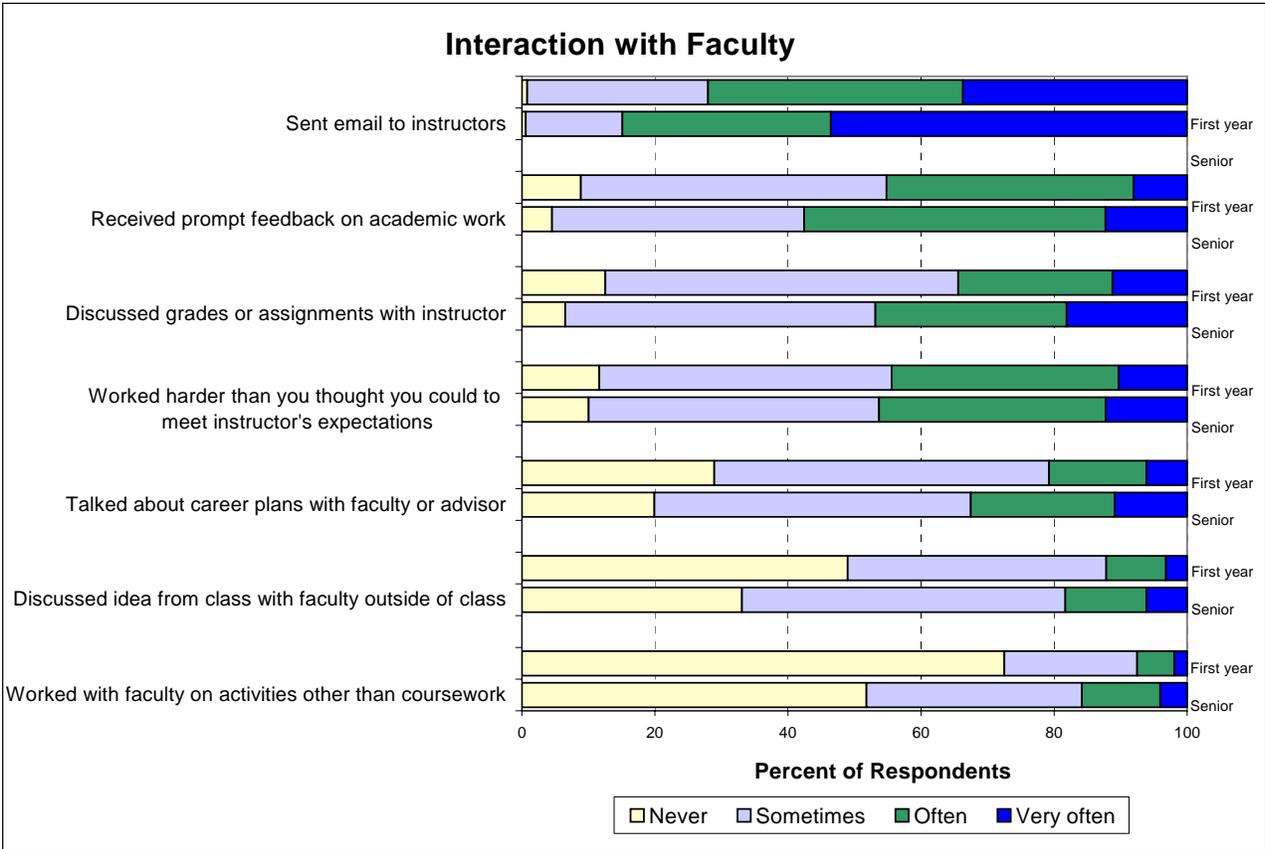


## Interaction with Faculty Members

UW-Madison students interact with faculty in a variety of ways. Almost all students use e-mail to communicate with instructors. About 90 percent of students discussed grades or assignments with their instructors and reported receiving prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance. Three-fourths of students talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor. Most students found faculty members to be available, helpful, and sympathetic. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 is most helpful and available, 79 percent gave faculty members a score of 5 or higher.

Freshmen and seniors were equally likely to report that they worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s expectations – almost 50 percent of students often or very often did so and nearly 90 percent maintained that at least sometimes they did so. One-fourth of seniors indicated that they worked on a research project with faculty outside of a course. An additional ten percent planned to do so before graduation. Similarly, over one-third of freshmen plan to or have already worked on research project with a faculty member.

UW-Madison students do not report much interaction with faculty outside of class. Less than 20 percent said they often or very often worked with faculty on activities outside of class or discussed ideas from class with faculty members outside of the classroom.



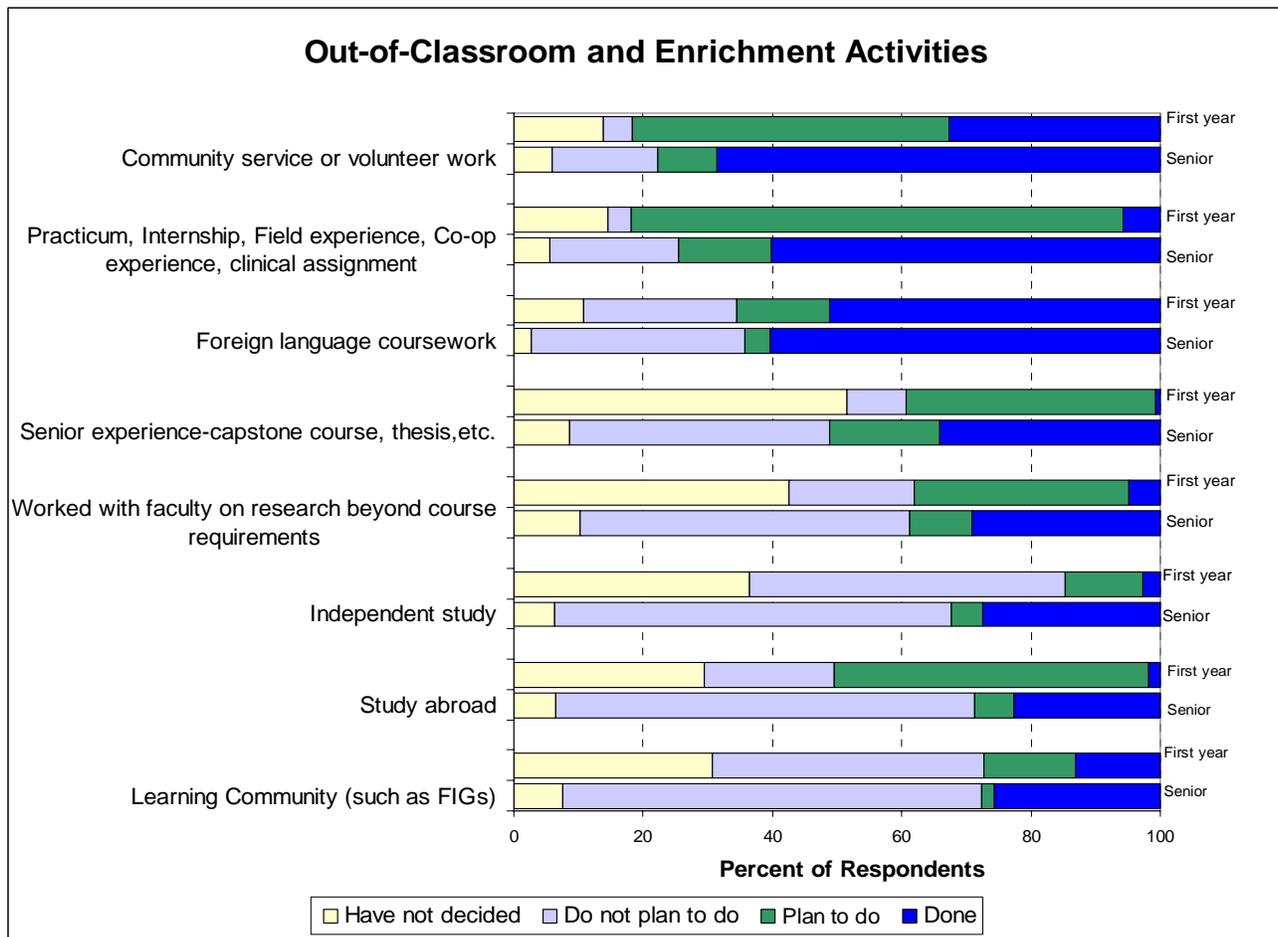
**Out-of-Classroom and Enrichment Activities**

A variety of out-of-classroom and enrichment activities are available to UW-Madison students. As expected, seniors are significantly more likely to have done the measured activities; first year students are more likely to plan to do so or remain undecided. Two-thirds of students have

completed or plan to complete foreign language coursework. Of seniors, 23 percent have already studied abroad and another 6 percent plan to do so; half of first-year students plan to study abroad. One-third of first-year students and two-thirds of seniors have participated in community service or volunteer work while attending UW-Madison. An additional 49 percent of freshmen and 9 percent of seniors plan to do so before graduation.

A majority of seniors reported practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience or clinical assignment as part of their educational experience. Sixty percent of seniors had already completed a practicum or similar experience and 14 percent planned to do so before graduation. Half of all seniors have completed or expect to complete a capstone course, senior project or thesis, or other culminating senior experience. Twenty percent of students participated in a learning community or other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together (such as UW’s First-Year Interest Groups).

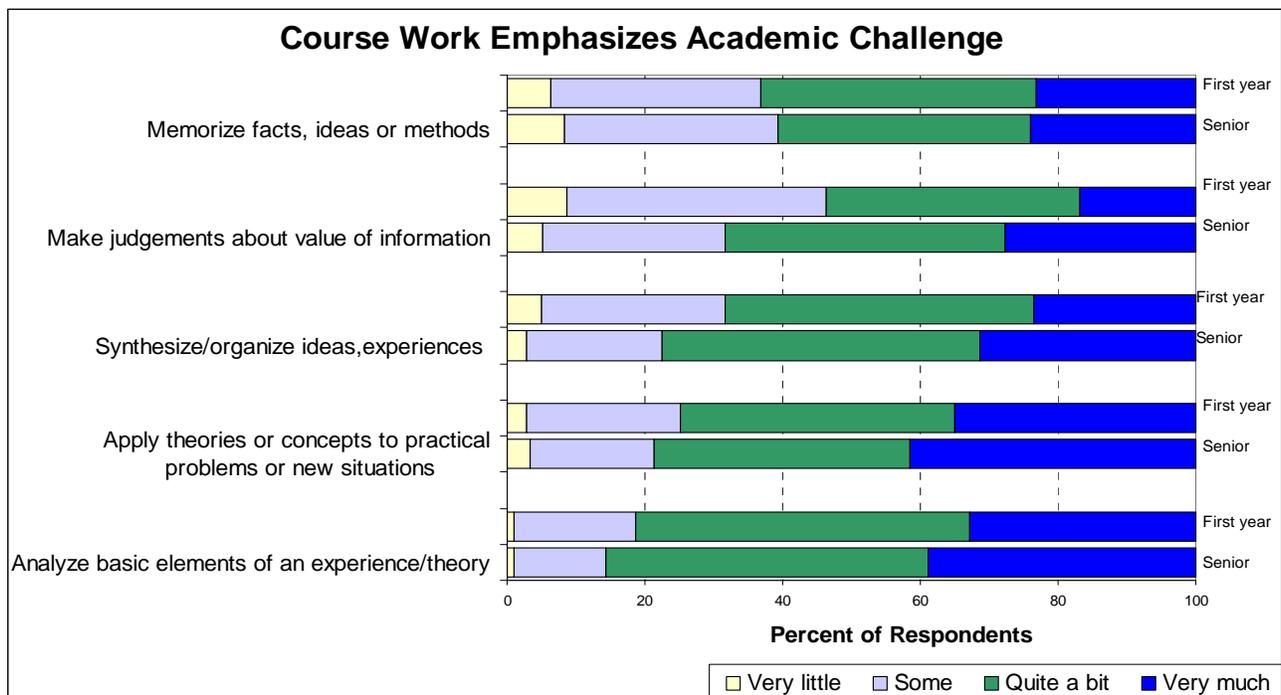
Most UW-Madison seniors engage in these out-of-classroom and enrichment experiences – about 85 percent of seniors had participated in studying abroad, internship or practicum, research project with a faculty member, culminating senior experience, independent study course, learning community or service learning course. Nearly 60 percent of seniors took part in two or more.



### Coursework Emphasizes Academic Challenge

One of the important goals of an undergraduate education is to challenge the students beyond the memorization of facts and to learn the skills needed to critique an idea or approach, apply it to a new situation, and other skills necessary for life-long learning. The survey instrument includes a set of questions about the extent to which the respondent’s coursework during the past year emphasizes skills such as analysis, synthesis, and making judgments about information.

Over 80 percent of students reported that their coursework often emphasized analyzing the basic elements of an idea or theory. Nearly as many stated that their coursework frequently requires them to apply theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations. Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organization of ideas or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships occurred “quite a bit” or “very much” according to about three-fourths of survey respondents. About two-thirds of seniors and over half of first year students reported often making judgments about the value of information. Seniors were also more likely than first-years to report synthesizing and organizing ideas or experiences, analyzing the basic elements of an idea or theory, and applying theories to new situations.

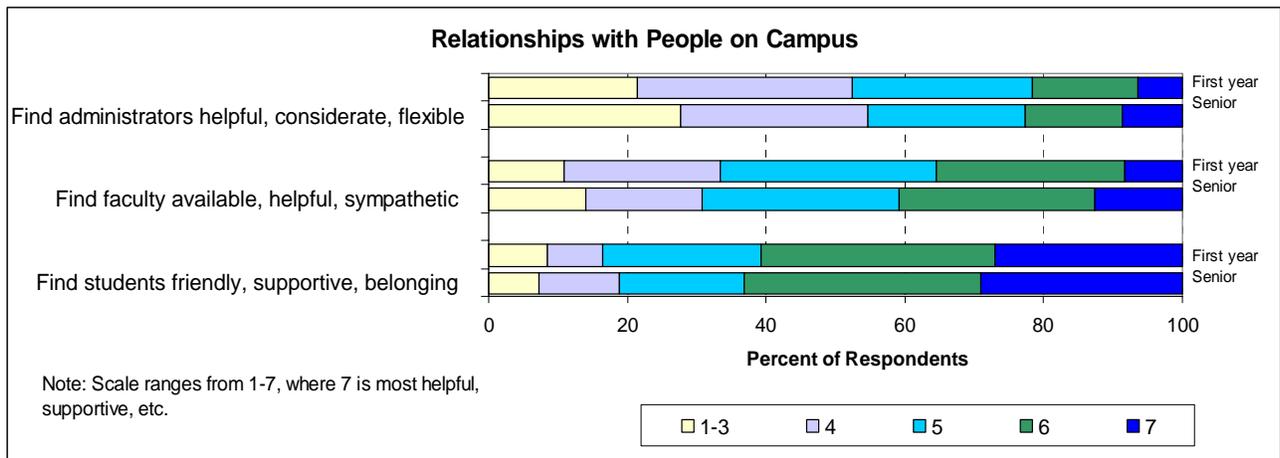


### Supportive Campus Environment and Understanding Diverse Perspectives

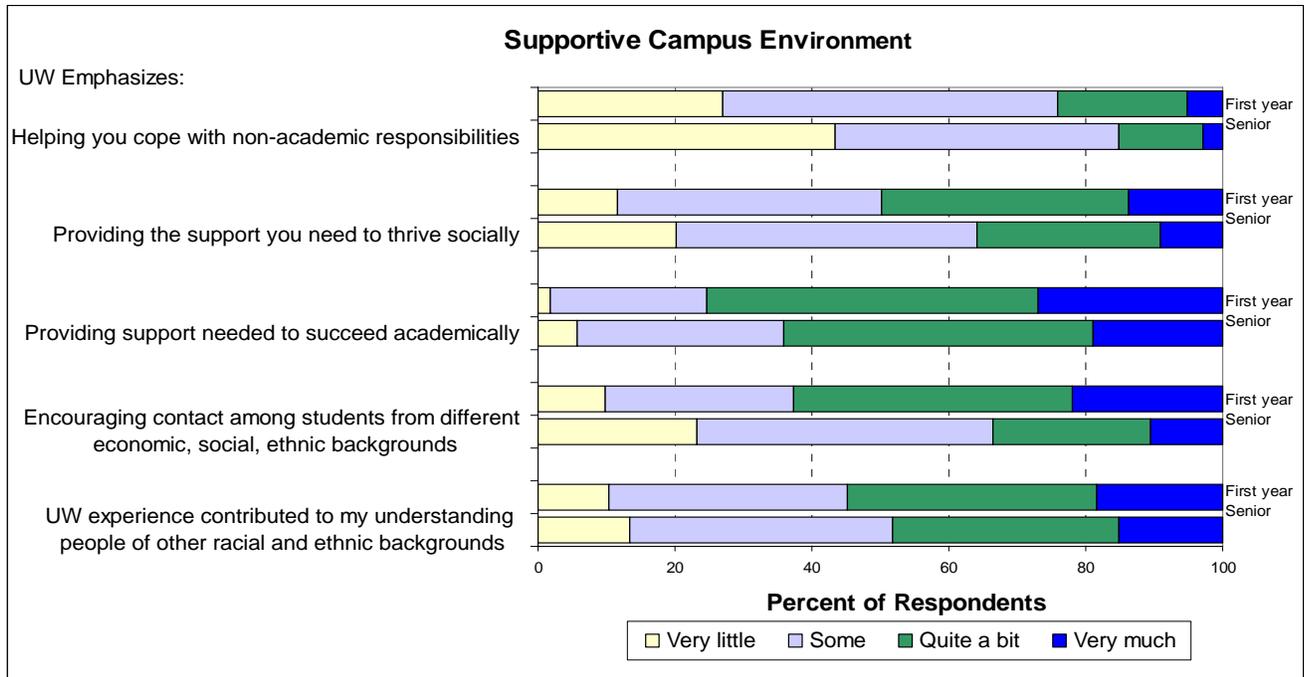
Research underscores the importance for academic success of social integration into a campus community, both with other students and with faculty. Preparation for life after college also requires that students become familiar with and interact with a wide range of people, including people who are very different from themselves. Several NSSE questions address whether the

university provides the support needed for students to thrive. Other questions focus on interactions with others of diverse backgrounds on campus.

Students were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with faculty, students, and administrators on campus. Over 80 percent of students ranked their relationships with other students at five points or higher on the scale (scale ranges from one to seven, where seven is most friendly, supportive, and creating a sense of belonging). Respondents were less enthused about their relationships with university administrators – only about half of seniors and first year students rated administrators five or higher.

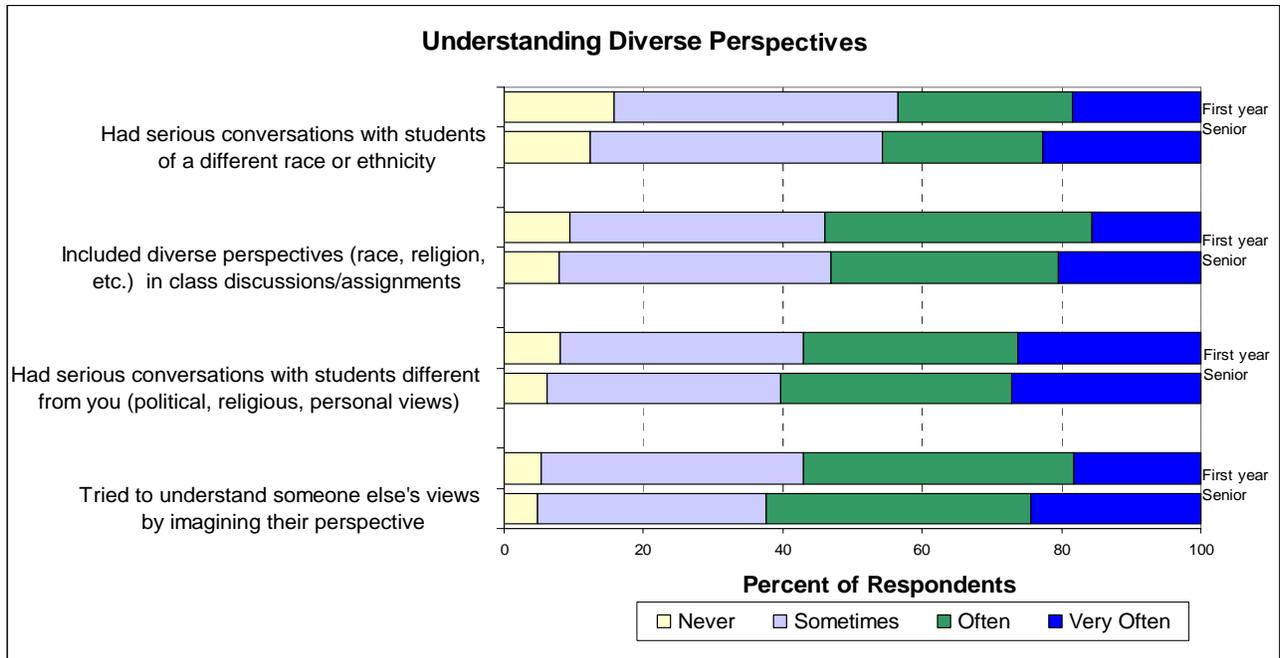


The majority of students acknowledge that UW-Madison emphasizes providing them with the support that they need to succeed academically – about three-fourths of first years and two-thirds of seniors report that it emphasizes this “quite a bit” or “very much”. The university places less emphasis on providing the support needed to thrive socially – half of freshmen and over a third of seniors report UW-Madison emphasizes this quite a bit or more. Only about 15 percent of seniors and one-fourth of freshmen think the university places quite a bit of emphasis on helping them cope with non-academic problems.



Many at UW-Madison place high importance on providing students with an opportunity to understand diverse perspectives and interact with people of different backgrounds. However, only 34 percent of seniors and 63 percent of first year students attest that the university places quite a bit of emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. About half of the students surveyed indicated that their experience at UW-Madison contributed quite a bit or very much to their understanding of people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

During the past year, about 85 percent of students surveyed reported that they had serious discussions with students of a different race or ethnicity; about half indicated they had such conversations often or very often. Over 90 percent of both first years and seniors reported having conversations with students with views very different from theirs in terms of political opinions, religion, or personal values – about 60 percent stated these discussions were often or very often. Class discussions and assignments during the past year included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) for the vast majority of students polled, and occurred often or very often according to about half of the students. The survey also asked students whether they tried to understand another person’s views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective. Sixty percent of students reported that they often or very often tried to see things from another person’s perspective.



### Student Time Use

Students have many competing demands on their time. Those who can devote a significant amount of time to studying and preparing for classes and involvement in co-curricular activities are more likely to make the most of their educational experience. First year students spend more time than seniors socializing; seniors are more likely to spend time studying and working. Two-thirds of students are active in co-curricular activities such as campus publications, student government, sports, fraternities or sororities, organizations, etc. Over 10 percent are involved in such activities more than 10 hours per week. About 30 percent of students spend on average over 20 hours per week preparing for class. Three-fourths of seniors and two-thirds of freshmen spent more than 10 hours per week preparing for class.

Almost 80 percent of seniors and 44 percent of first-year students engage in work for pay. Nearly half of seniors and one-fifth of freshmen work on campus. Eleven percent of seniors and four percent of freshmen work both on and off campus. Working more than 20 hours per week is reported by over 20 percent of seniors and about four percent of freshmen. Only a small percentage of students – less than ten percent of first years and about 12 percent of seniors – spent any time during a typical week caring for dependents.

