



**NSSE 2008 Summary Report:**

**An Overview of the National Survey of Student Engagement  
2008 Results for UW-Madison**

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[http://apa.wisc.edu/NSSE/2008\\_NSSE\\_report.pdf](http://apa.wisc.edu/NSSE/2008_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 2008, a total of 769 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 Alexander McCormick. A detailed description of NSSE is available on-line at <http://www.nsse.iub.edu>.

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, 2006, and 2008 as a way to gather information 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

NSSE chose a random sample of freshmen and senior students enrolled at UW-Madison during both fall and spring semesters of 2007-08 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. In order to have enough sample cases to make reliable statistical estimates, some categories of students – minority students, those who had studied abroad, and seniors in Nursing, Human Ecology, or Agricultural and Life Sciences – were sampled at a higher rate. Responses are weighted in the analysis to account for over-sampling and differential response rates. In total, 2,784 first year students and 3,915 seniors were included in the stratified random sample.

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 male and female 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 percent that the difference is really due to chance, based on Chi-squared test) are available from the UW-Madison Office of Academic Planning and Analysis.

Results shown are weighted to reflect the distribution of students by gender and by minority status in the student population. In addition, senior responses are weighted to reflect oversampling by school/college and by whether the individual studied abroad. The weights are designed to adjust for the fact that the sample included proportionately more students from some groups (such as minority students and seniors in Nursing) and 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 percent female and 80 percent of female students and 60 percent of male students made a class presentation very often, we would expect for the student body as a whole that 70 percent 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 percent, which would overestimate the true percentage. We use weights to correct for this 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 year. When asked how often they talked with 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 about the survey, including methodology and breakdowns by categories such as gender, minority status, and transfer status, is available at the APA website: [http://apa.wisc.edu/performance\\_students\\_surveys.html](http://apa.wisc.edu/performance_students_surveys.html). Individuals interested in conducting their own analyses of the survey data from 2008 or prior years may contact APA for information on obtaining access to the data.

The UW-Madison response rate was 33 percent – 909 first year students (30 percent) and 1,368 seniors (35 percent) answered the survey. In comparison, the average response rate for all institutions participating in NSSE in 2008 was 37 percent.

The table below shows the distribution of students enrolled in the fall and spring semesters of 2007-08 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 2008 Respondents**

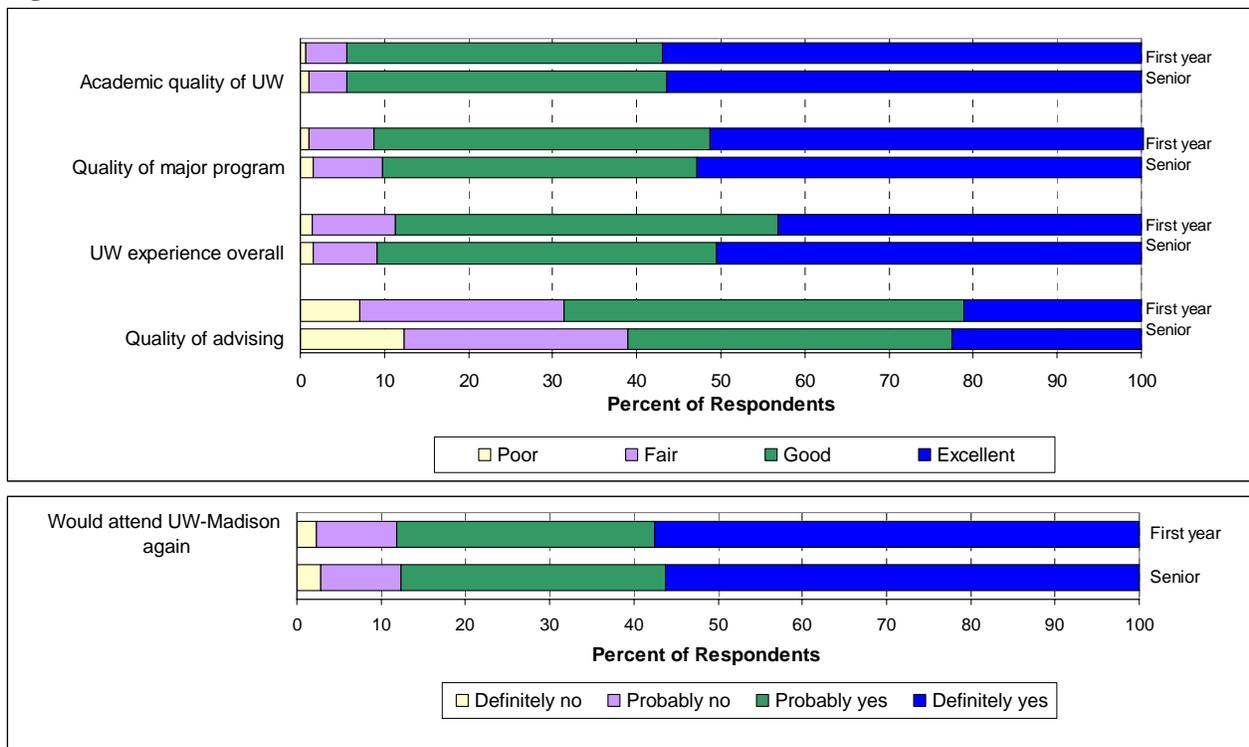
Percent of Students:	UW-Madison Student Enrolled 2007-08		Un-weighted NSSE Respondents		Weighted NSSE Respondents	
	First Year	Seniors	First Year	Seniors	First Year	Seniors
19 years old or younger	98	1	98	1	98	1
20-23 years old	1	87	2	88	2	88
Female	53	54	59	65	53	54
Minority (excluding international)	14	11	20	14	14	11
International student	3	3	7	3	7	3
Began college at UW-Madison	99	76	99	81	99	81
Enrolled full-time	99	89	99	93	99	93
Total Students	5876	7696	909	1368	909	1368

## OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

### Student Satisfaction

Overall, students are very satisfied with their educational experience. About 90 percent of first year students and 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, nearly 90 percent of first year students and seniors report that they probably or definitely would choose UW-Madison again. Fewer students are satisfied with the academic advising they received – roughly 60 percent of seniors and 70 percent of freshmen rate advising as good or excellent.

**Figure 1: Student Satisfaction with UW-Madison**

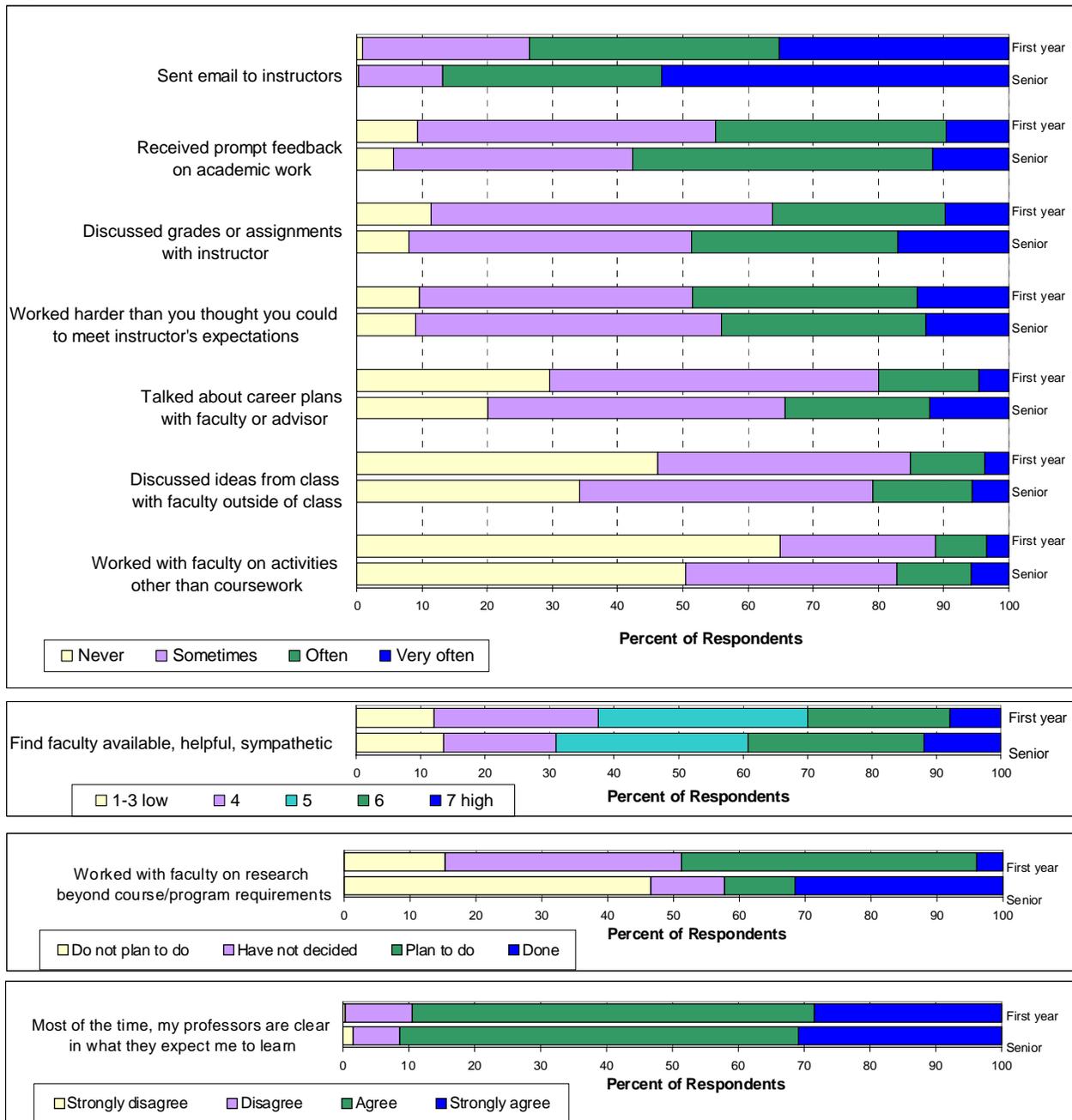


### Interaction with Faculty Members

UW-Madison students interact with faculty in a variety of ways outside of the classroom – from research projects to campus committees and career advising, to name a few. One-third of seniors indicated that they worked on a research project with faculty outside of a course. An additional 11 percent planned to do so before graduation. Similarly, about half of freshmen plan to or have already worked on a research project with a faculty member. Three-fourths of students talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor. UW-Madison students do not report much other interaction with faculty outside of class. Fewer 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.

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, 62 percent of freshman and 69 percent of seniors gave faculty members a score of 5 or higher. About 90 percent of respondents agreed that instructors are clear in what they expect students to learn. About 90 percent of students discussed grades or assignments with their instructors and reported receiving prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance. 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 90 percent maintained that at least sometimes they did so.

**Figure 2: Interactions with Faculty**



## **Educational and Personal Growth**

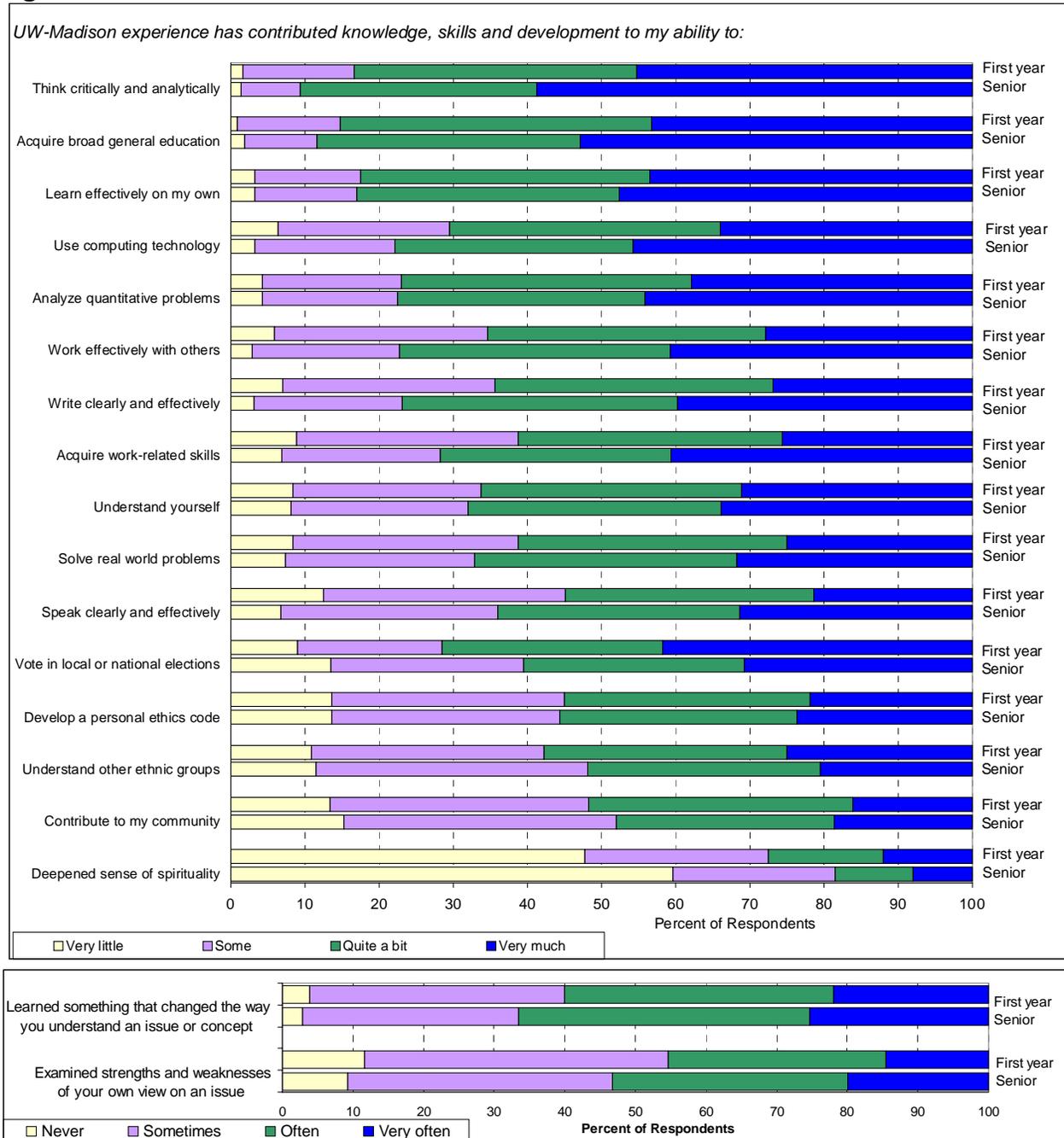
A successful collegiate experience involves development of critical skills associated with deep learning, such as effective writing, speaking, and quantitative analysis, as well as working in a group and learning on one's own. Additionally, attending college provides ample experiences leading to personal growth and becoming a productive member of society in areas such as understanding oneself, developing a personal code of ethics, voting, contributing to the community, solving real-world problems, and understanding people who are different from you.

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, learn on their own 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, acquiring job-related skills, and working with others were increased by their studies at the university. About 64 percent of seniors and 55 percent of first year students report that UW-Madison has contributed quite a bit or very much to their ability to speak clearly and effectively.

At least two-thirds of surveyed students reported UW-Madison contributed quite a bit to their abilities to understand themselves, solve complex real-world problems, and vote in elections. About half of respondents noted that their abilities to understand people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds and to contribute to the community were increased very much or quite a bit by their university experience. Approximately two-thirds of students indicated that they often learned something while at UW-Madison that changed the way they understood an issue or concept. Examining the strengths and weakness of their own views on an issue happened often or very often in their studies according to half of students surveyed.

As expected, in many areas, seniors reported greater contributions to skills and knowledge from their educational experience than did first year students. About 64 percent of freshmen and 77 percent of seniors asserted that their education contributed quite a bit or very much to their skills in writing clearly and effectively. Significantly larger proportions of seniors were also more likely to report that their ability to think critically, acquire job skills, speak clearly and effectively, use computers, and work effectively with others was influenced by their time at UW-Madison.

**Figure 3: Education and Personal Growth**

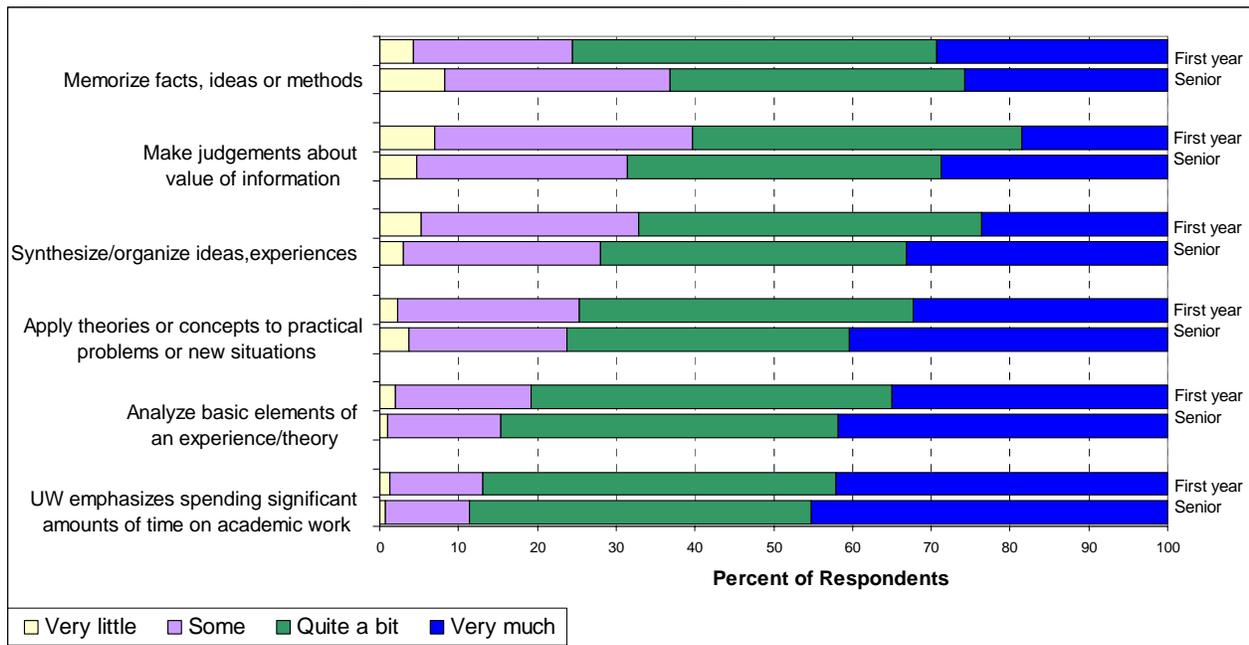


**Coursework Emphasizes Academic Challenge**

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 courses frequently required 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 70 percent of survey respondents. Over two-thirds of seniors and about 60 percent of first year students reported often making judgments about the value of information such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data. Seniors were also more likely than first years to report synthesizing and organizing ideas or experiences, and analyzing the basic elements of an idea or theory.

**Figure 4: Coursework Emphasizes Academic Challenge**



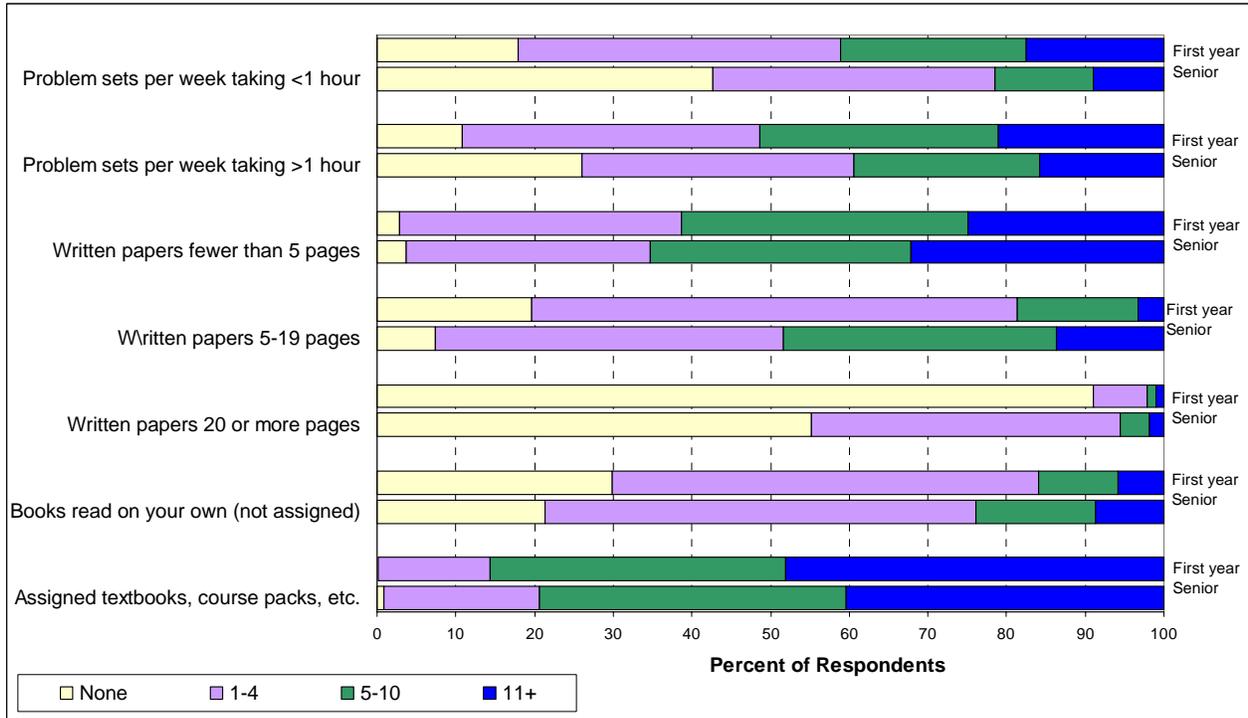
**Reading and Writing Assignments**

Effective writing and critical reading skills represent an important component of a quality liberal education and are highly valued by employers. NSSE asks a battery of questions about the quantity of reading and writing required of students. UW-Madison places a great deal of emphasize on reading. Over 40 percent of students report being assigned 11 or more textbooks, books, or book-length course packs – 80 percent report five or more. Writing serves to help students hone their critical skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Over 60 percent of first years and seniors wrote at least five short papers (fewer than five pages) during the year. Half of seniors and 19 percent of first year students wrote at least five papers between 5 and 19 pages long. Papers over 20 pages long were assigned to about 45 percent of seniors and fewer than ten percent of freshmen, according to the survey.

Some types of courses emphasize problem sets rather than papers written. NSSE asks about two types of problem sets: longer (taking more than one hour to complete) and shorter (taking less than

one hour). Over half of first year students and about 40 percent of seniors stated they were assigned an average of at least five longer problem sets per week. In addition, about one-fourth of seniors and 40 percent of freshmen reported an average at least five shorter problem sets weekly.

**Figure 5: Frequency of Homework Assignments**



**Active and Collaborative Learning**

Because people vary in learning styles and abilities, it is important to use a mixture of educational techniques to ensure reaching 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.

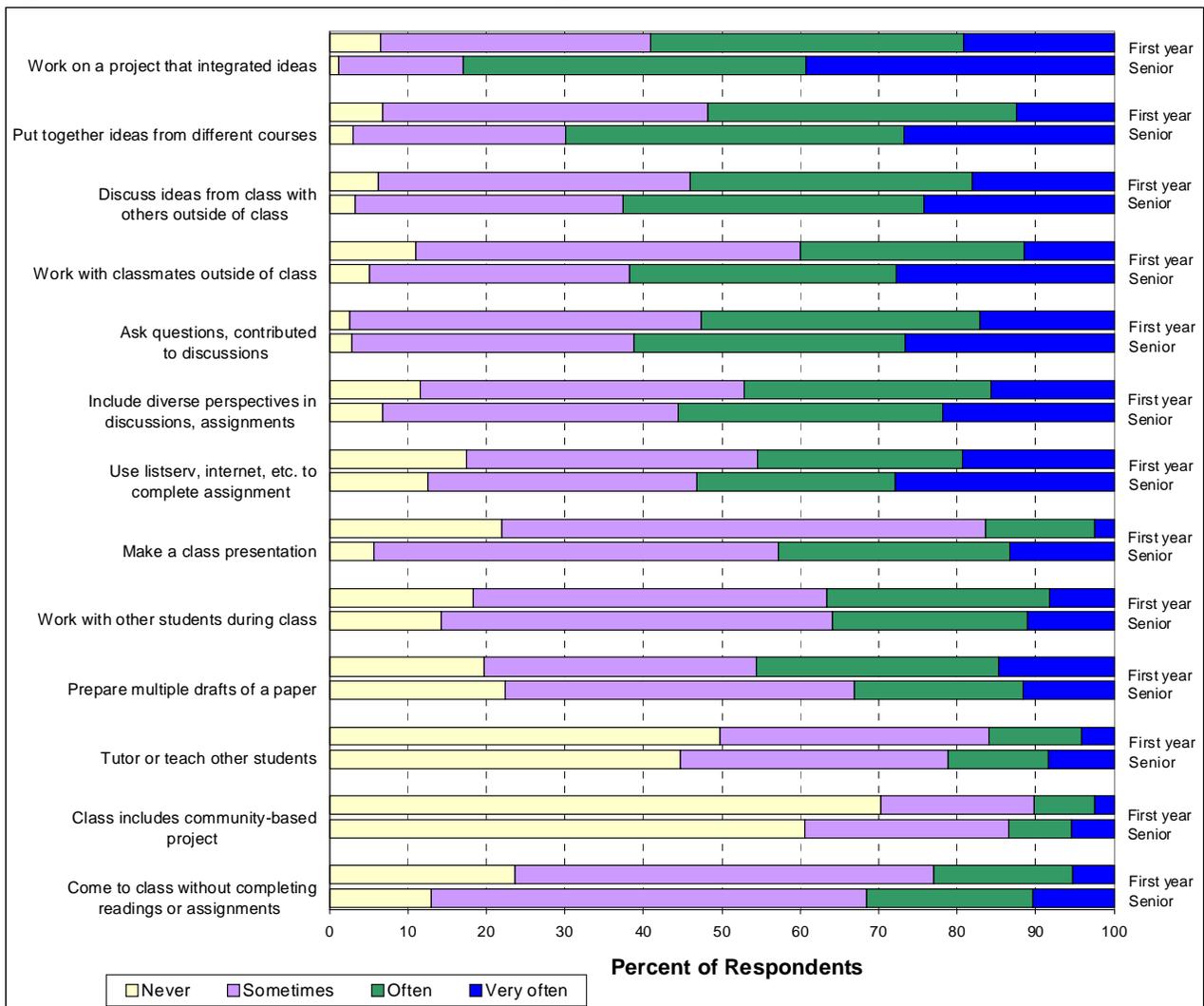
During the past year, for at least some classes, over 90 percent of students recounted that they worked on a project that integrated ideas from various sources, asked questions or contributed to discussion, put together ideas from different courses when working on assignments or in class discussion, 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 – nearly half stated that they often or very often wrote multiple drafts, compared to about one-third of seniors. About 80 percent of both freshmen and seniors reported writing multiple drafts of papers at least sometimes during the past year.

Seniors were more likely than freshmen to work on projects that integrate ideas – 83 percent of seniors and 59 percent of first years reported often or very often working on a project which required integrating ideas from various sources. About 94 percent of seniors and 78 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 – about half of first year students and 70 percent of seniors report often or very often integrating ideas from different courses. About 39 percent of seniors and 30 percent of first year students participated in community-based projects as part of a regular course during 2007-08.

**Figure 6: Active and Collaborative Learning**

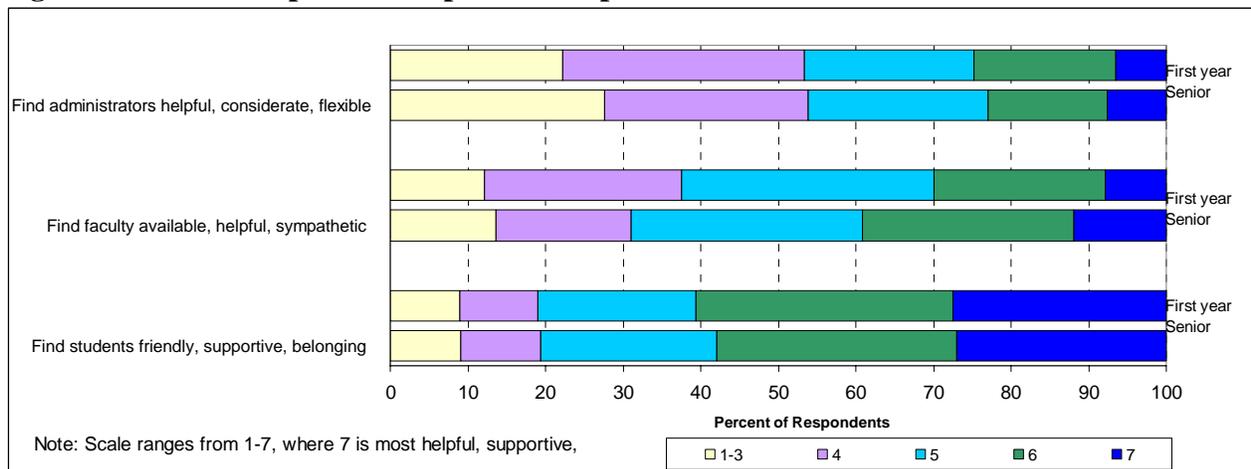


### Supportive Campus Environment and Understanding Diverse Perspectives

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.

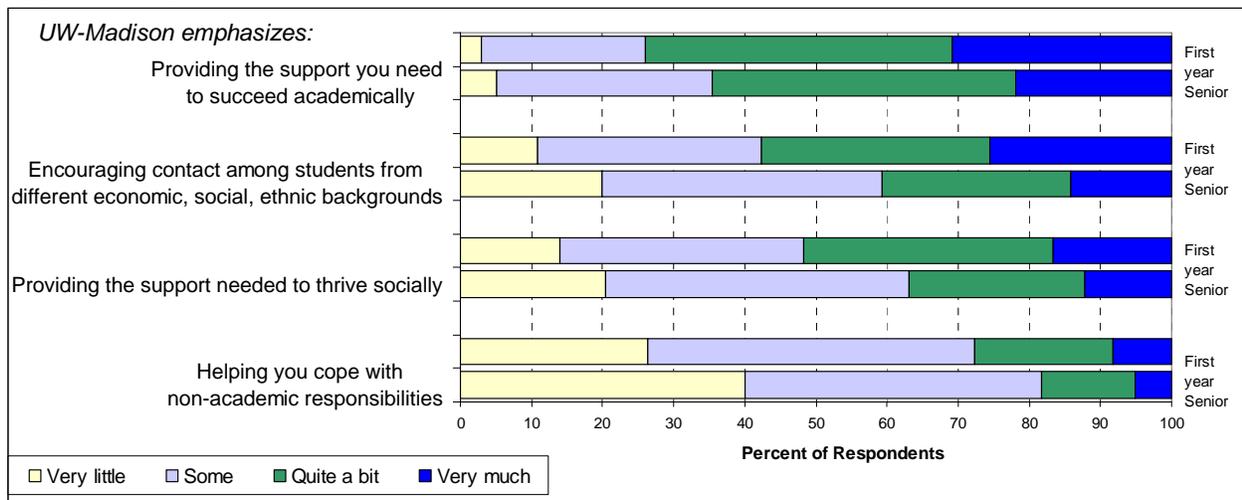
Students were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with faculty, students, and administrators on campus. Over 80 percent of students ranked their relationships with other students at five points or higher on the scale (scale ranges from one to seven, where seven is most friendly, supportive,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

**Figure 7: Relationships with People on Campus**



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”. Students feel that 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 18 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.

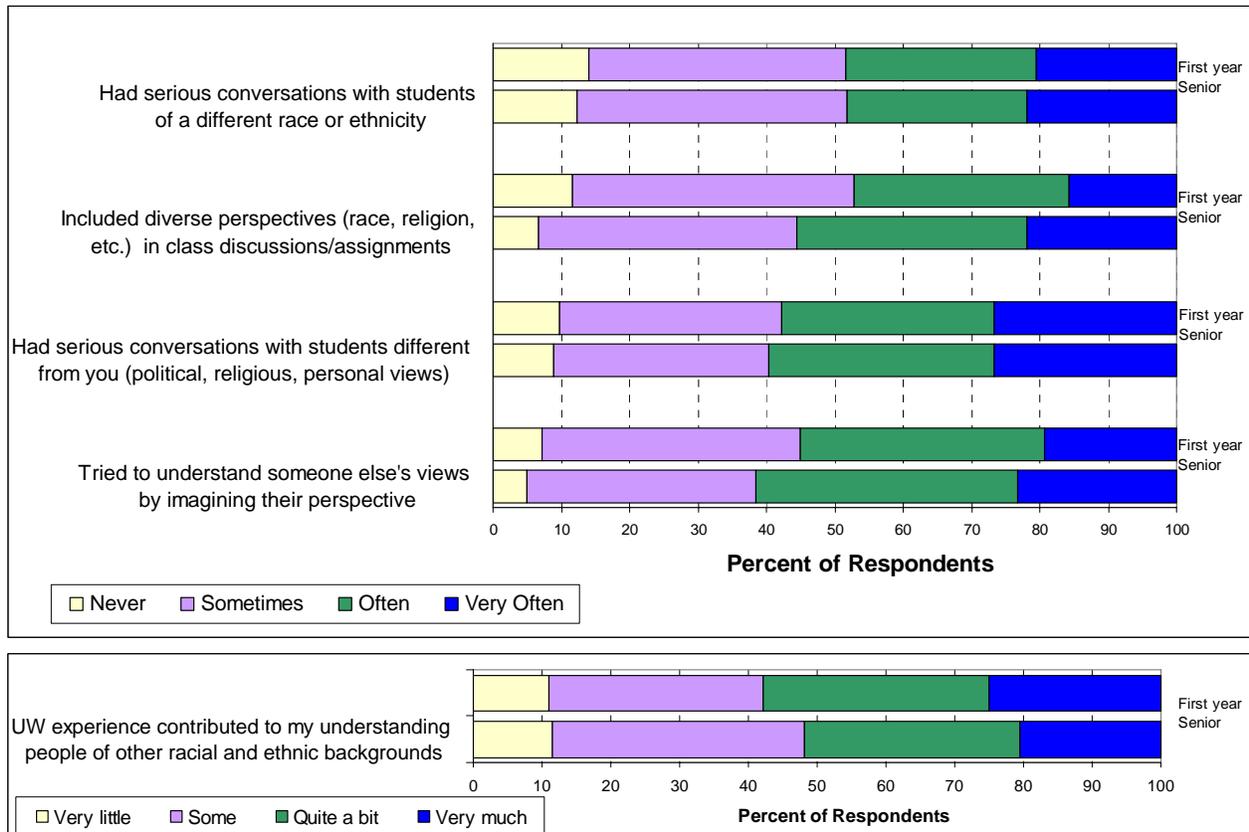
**Figure 8: Supportive Campus Environment**



UW-Madison’s diversity goals place high importance on providing students with an opportunity to understand diverse perspectives and interact with people of different backgrounds. However, only 41 percent of seniors and 58 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 seniors surveyed and 58 percent of first year students 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 87 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. Ninety 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-two percent of seniors and 55 percent of first year students reported that they often or very often tried to see things from another person’s perspective.

**Figure 9: Understanding Diverse Perspectives**



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

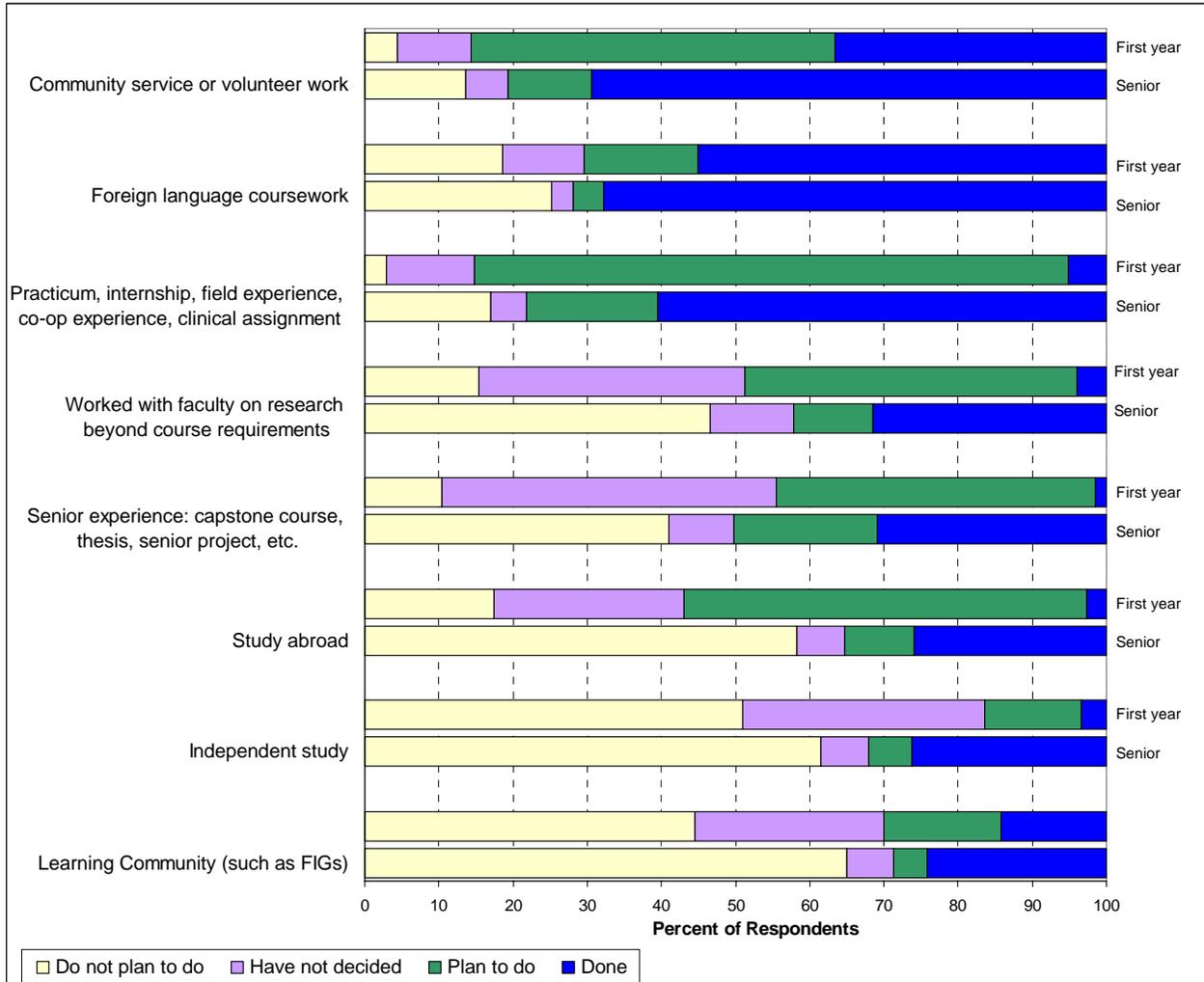
A variety of out-of-classroom and enrichment activities are available to UW-Madison students. As expected, seniors are significantly more likely to have done the measured activities; first year students are more likely to plan to do so or remain undecided. About 70 percent of students have completed or plan to complete foreign language coursework. Of seniors, 26 percent have already studied abroad and another nine percent plan to do so; more than 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 11 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-one percent of seniors had already completed a practicum or similar experience and 18 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-four percent of seniors and 14 percent of first year 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 surveyed 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.

**Figure 10: Out-of-Classroom and Enrichment Activities**



**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. About three-fourths of students are active in co-curricular activities such as campus publications, student government, sports, fraternities or sororities, organizations, etc. Over 15 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. Two-thirds of seniors and three-fourths of freshmen spent more than 10 hours per week preparing for class.

UW students frequently participate in athletic activities – about two-thirds of the respondents reported they often exercise or engage in physical fitness activities. About half of students state they often or very often spend time in spiritual activities such as worship or meditation.

The university provides many opportunities to attend cultural events. About 80 percent of surveyed students indicated that they had attended a play, art exhibit, dance, concert, or other performance.

Seventy-five percent of seniors and 40 percent of first year students engage in work for pay. Nearly half of seniors and 31 percent of freshmen work on campus. Eleven percent of seniors and four percent of freshmen work both on and off campus. Few students work more than half-time – about one-fifth of seniors and fewer than five percent of freshmen work more than 20 hours per week. Only a small percentage of students – fewer than ten percent of first years and about 12 percent of seniors – spent any time during a typical week caring for dependents.

**Figure 11: Student Time Use**

