



NSSE 2011 Summary Report:
An Overview of the National Survey of Student Engagement
2011 Results for UW-Madison

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http://apa.wisc.edu/NSSE/2011_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 2011, a total of 751 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, 2008, and 2011 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

All of freshmen and senior students enrolled at UW-Madison during both fall and spring semesters of 2010-11 were sent 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 total, 5,861 first-year students and 8,730 seniors in UW-Madison were invited to take part in the survey. Of those, 21% responded to the survey.

Results shown are weighted to reflect the distribution of students by gender and by enrollment status (part-time or full-time) in the student population. The weights are designed to adjust for the fact that proportionately more students from some groups (such as female students and full-time) are more likely to answer surveys than are other students.

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. Individuals interested in conducting their own analyses of the survey data from 2011 or prior years may contact APA for information on obtaining access to the data.

The UW-Madison response rate was 21% – 1,189 first-year students (20%) and 1,830 seniors (21%) answered the survey. In comparison, the average response rate for all institutions participating in NSSE in 2011 was 33%.

The table below shows the distribution of students enrolled in the fall and spring semesters of 2010-11 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 2011 Respondents

Percent of Students:	UW-Madison Student Enrolled 2010-11		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	1	89	1	88
Female	53	54	62	59	52	52
Minority (excluding international)	14	11	11	11	11	11
International student	3	3	6	4	6	4
Began college at UW-Madison	99	76	99	81	99	81
Enrolled full-time	99	89	99	92	99	91
First generation	19	NA	20	21	20	21
Total Students	5876	7696	1189	1830	1189	1830

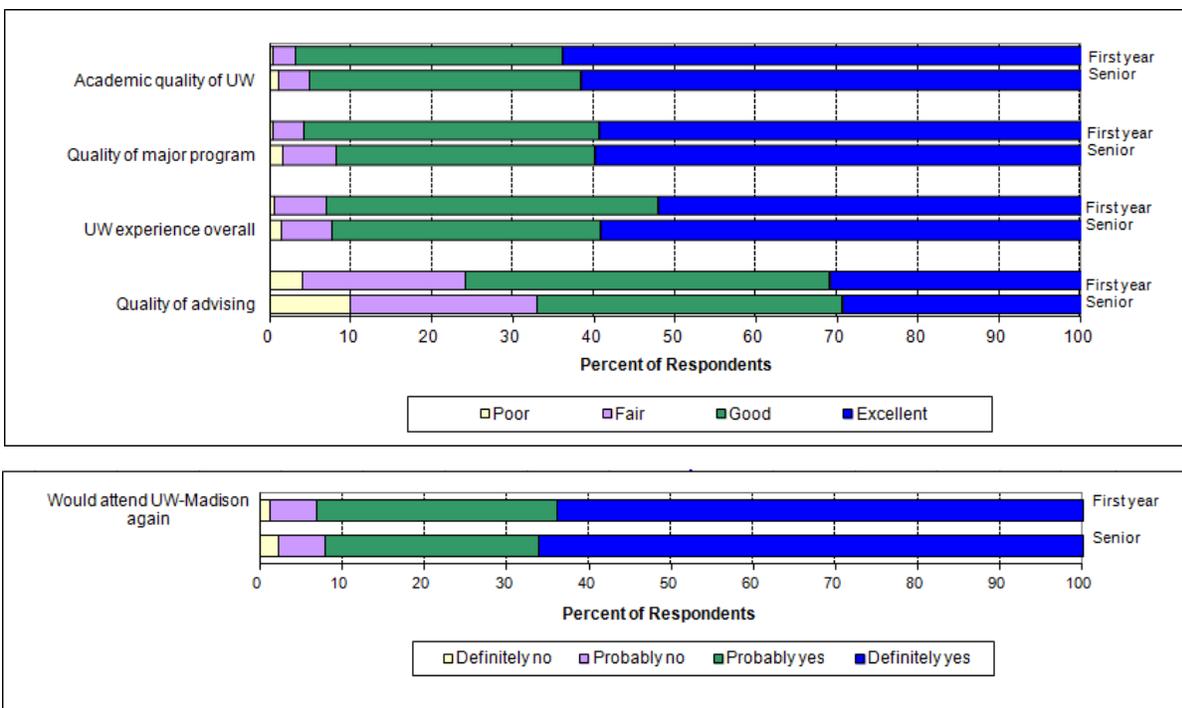
Note: UW-Madison students enrolled in 2010-11 in this table includes those students who were first-year or senior students in fall 2011 and enrolled in both fall and spring semesters. Weighted responses are adjusted to reflect the distribution of students by gender and by enrollment status (part-time or full-time) in the student population.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

Student Satisfaction

Overall, students are very satisfied with their educational experience. Over 92% 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, more than 92% 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 67% of seniors and 76% of freshmen rate advising as good or excellent.

Figure 1: Student Satisfaction with UW-Madison

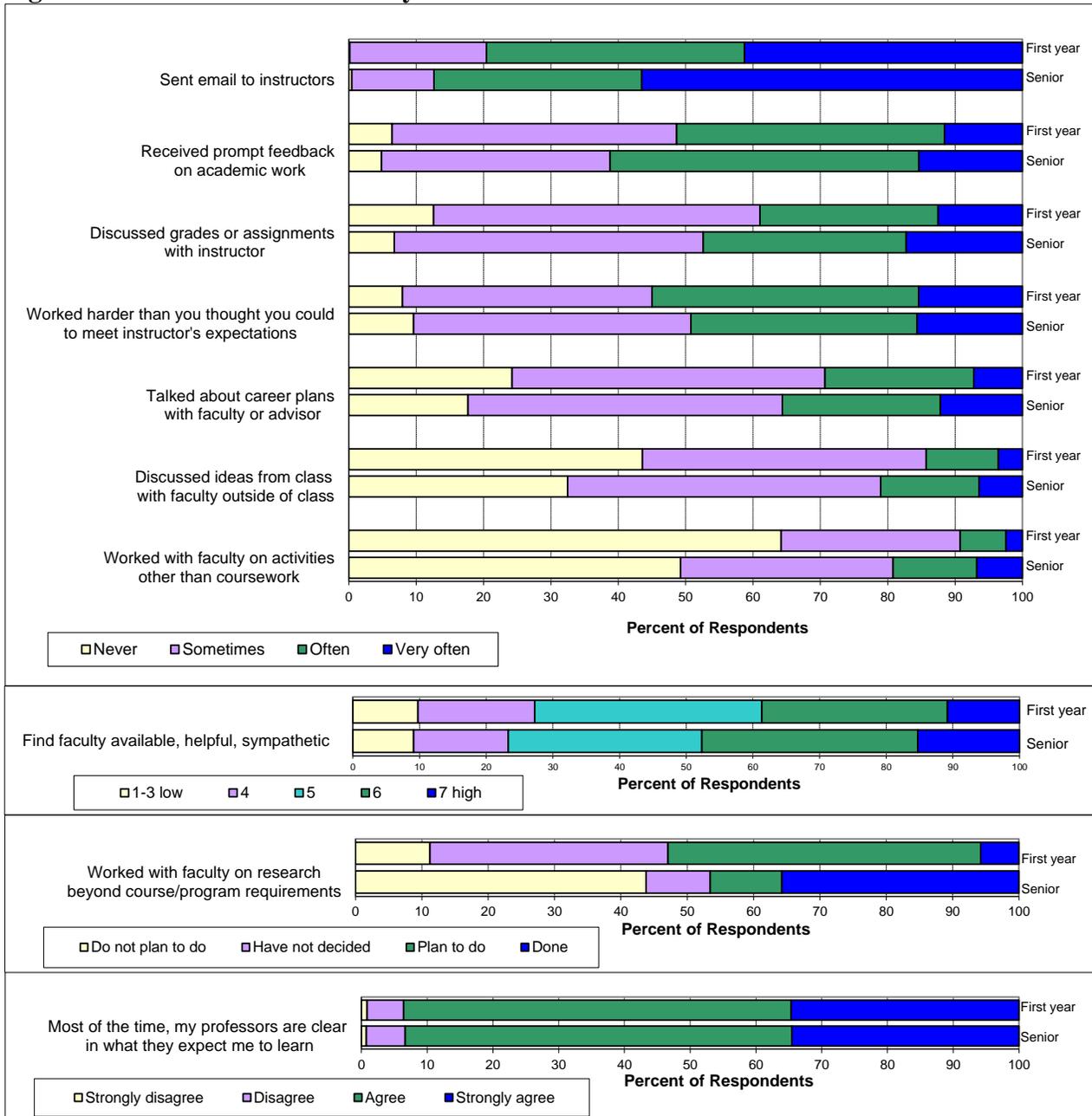


Interaction with Faculty Members

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. Thirty-six percent of seniors indicated that they worked on a research project with faculty outside of a course and an additional 11% planned to do so before graduation. Over 53% of freshmen plan to or have already worked on a research project with a faculty member. Three-fourths of first-years and four-fifths of seniors talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor. About 36% of seniors did so often or very often. UW-Madison students do not report much other interaction with faculty outside of class. Fewer than 20% 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, 73% of first years and 77% of seniors gave faculty members a score of 5 or higher. About 93% of respondents agreed that instructors are clear in what they expect students to learn. Over 90% of respondents agreed that instructors are clear in what they expect students to learn. Over 90% of students discussed grades or assignments with their instructors and reported receiving prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance at least sometimes. Freshmen were slightly more likely to report that they worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s expectations– 55% of first-year students often or very often did so and 92% maintained that at least sometimes they did so.

Figure 2: Interactions with Faculty



Educational and Personal Growth

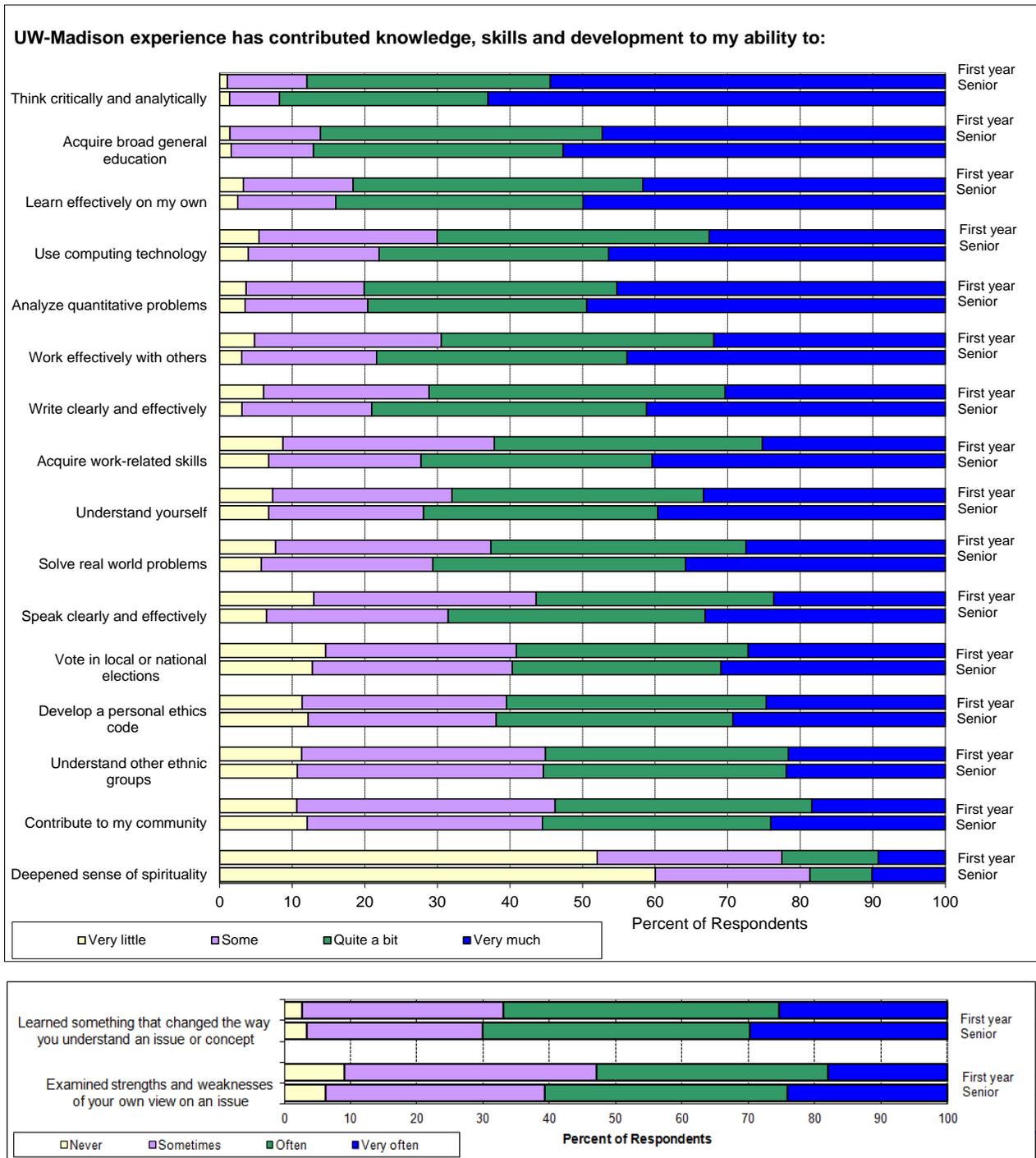
A successful collegiate experience involves development of critical skills associated with deep learning, such as effective writing, speaking, and quantitative analysis, as well as working in a group and learning on one's own. Additionally, attending college provides ample experiences leading to personal 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. Ninety percent of students state that their UW-Madison experience has added quite a bit or very much to their critical thinking and analytical skills. Over 80% of students reported their ability to learn on their own, analyze quantitative problems and to acquire a broad general education increased quite a bit or very much. More than three-fourths of students indicated that skills used in areas such as computing, writing clearly and effectively, and working with others were increased by their studies at the university. Nearly 70% of students indicated that they often learned something while at UW-Madison that changed the way they understood an issue or concept.

At least two-thirds of surveyed students reported UW-Madison contributed quite a bit to their abilities to understand themselves, acquire job-related skills, and solve complex real-world problems. Over 60% of students state that their time at UW-Madison contributed quite a bit to their public speaking skills, ability to vote, and development of a personal code of ethics. About 55% 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. Examining the strengths and weakness of their own views on an issue happened often or very often in their studies according to 53% of first-year students and 61% of seniors surveyed.

As expected, in many areas, seniors reported greater contributions to skills and knowledge from their educational experience than did first-year students. About 57% of freshmen and 68% of seniors asserted that their education contributed quite a bit or very much to their skills in speaking clearly and effectively. Significantly larger proportions of seniors were also more likely to report that their ability to think critically, acquire job skills, write clearly and effectively, use computers, solve real-world problems, and work effectively with others was influenced by their time at UW-Madison.

Figure 3: Education and Personal Growth

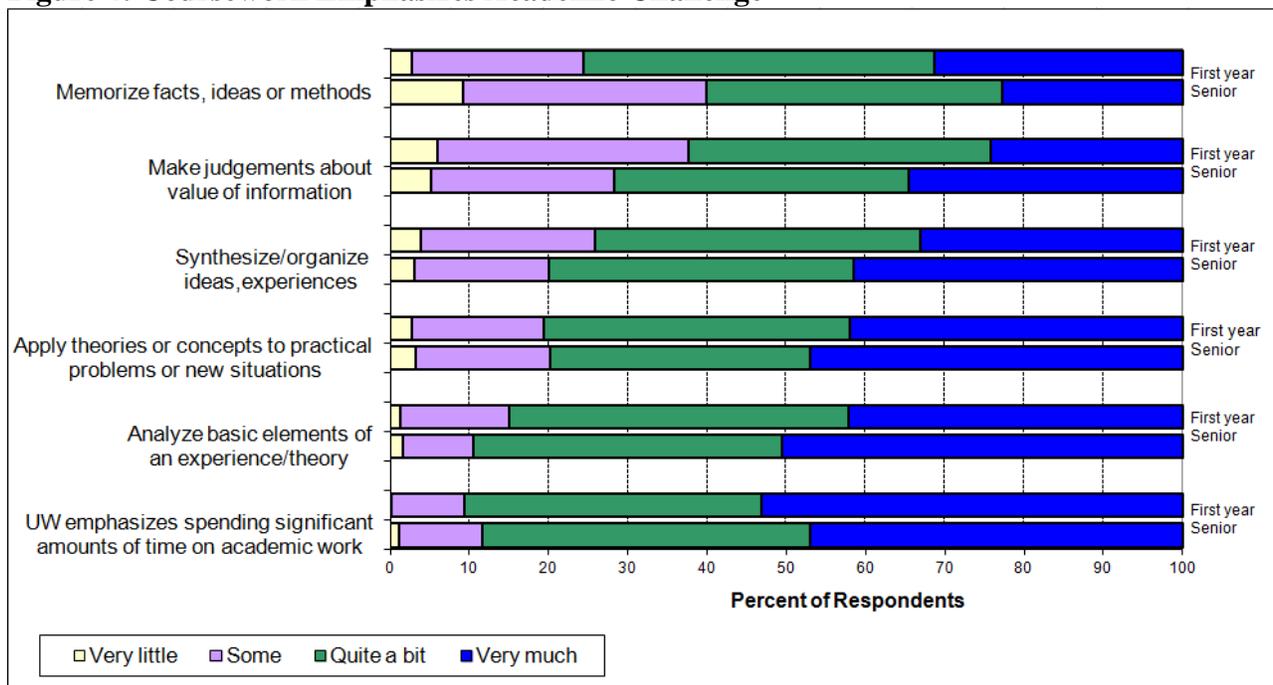


Coursework Emphasizes Academic Challenge

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 85% 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 more than three-fourths of survey respondents. About 72% of seniors and 62% 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

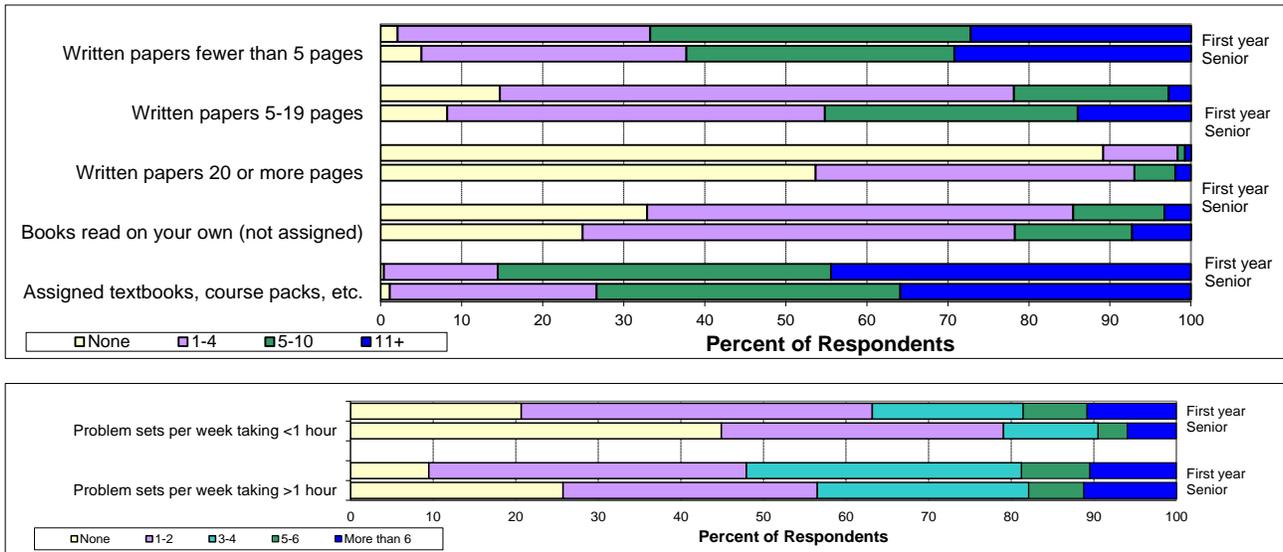


Reading and Writing Assignments

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. About 40% of students report being assigned 11 or more textbooks, books, or book-length course packs – 78% report five or more. Writing serves to help students hone their critical skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Over 60% of first-years and seniors wrote at least five short papers (fewer than five pages) during the year. Forty-five percent of seniors and 22% of first-year students wrote at least five papers between 5 and 19 pages long. Papers over 20 pages long were assigned to about 46% of seniors and 11% 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 43% of seniors stated they were assigned an average of at least three longer problem sets per week. In addition, 21% of seniors and 37% of freshmen reported an average of at least three 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.

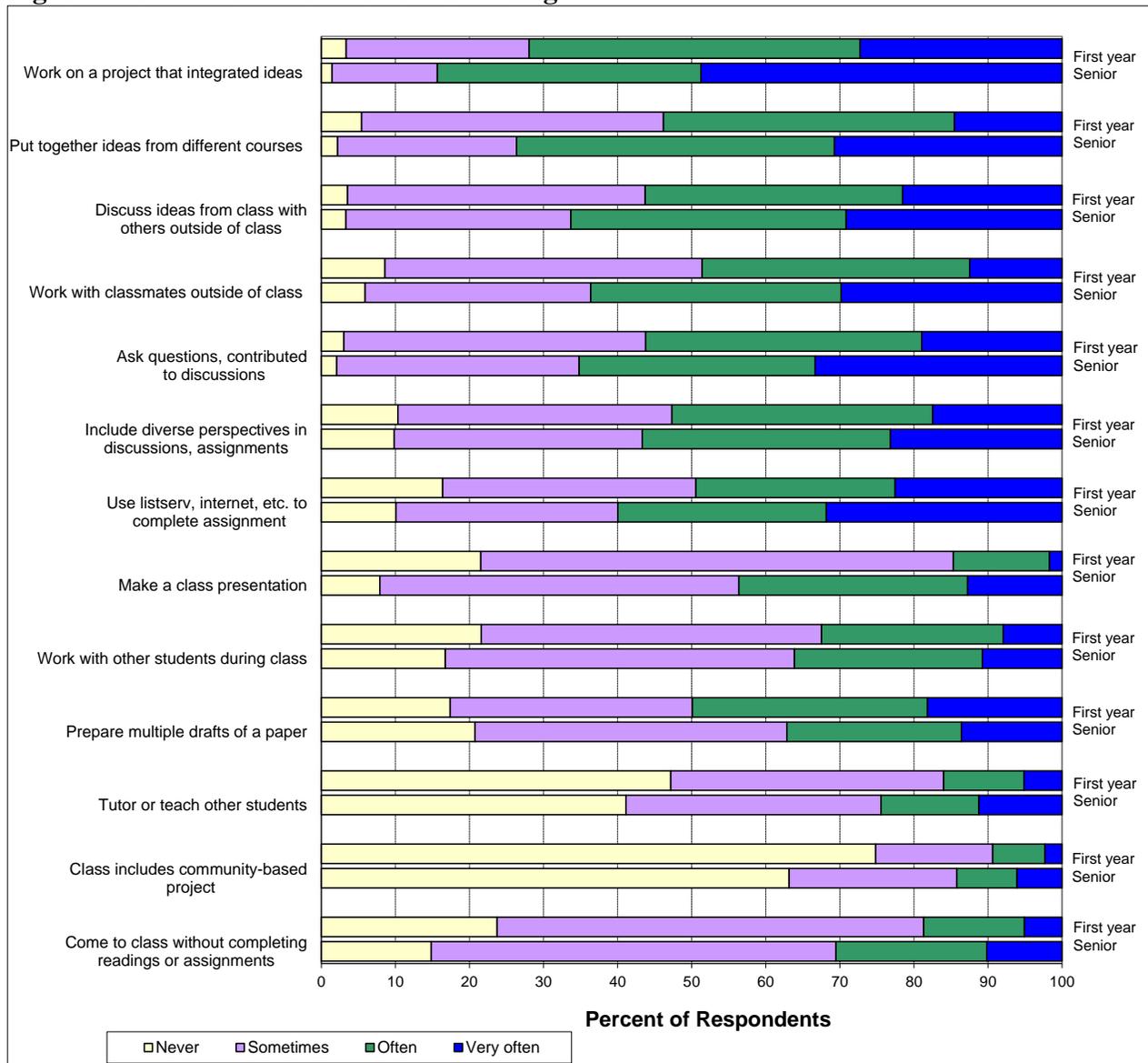
During the past year, for at least some classes, over 90% of students recounted that they worked on a project that integrated ideas from various sources, asked questions or contributed to discussion, put together ideas from different courses for class discussion or assignments, discussed ideas from class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

Seniors were more likely than freshmen engage in these active and collaborative learning practices. Eighty-four percent of seniors and 72% of first-years reported they often or very often worked on a project which required integrating ideas from various sources. About 93% of seniors and 78% 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 – 54% of first-year students and 74% of seniors report often or very often integrating

ideas from different courses. About 37% of seniors and 25% of first-year students participated in community-based projects as part of a regular course during 2010-11.

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 – half stated that they often or very often wrote multiple drafts, compared to about 37% of seniors. About 80% of both freshmen and seniors reported writing multiple drafts of papers at least sometimes during the past year.

Figure 6: Active and Collaborative Learning

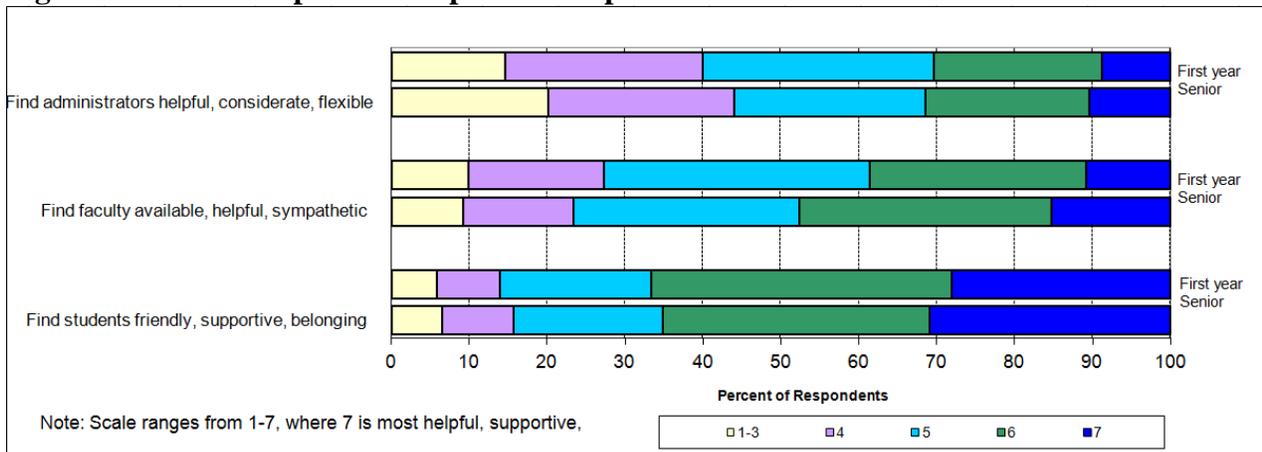


Supportive Campus Environment and Understanding Diverse Perspectives

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.

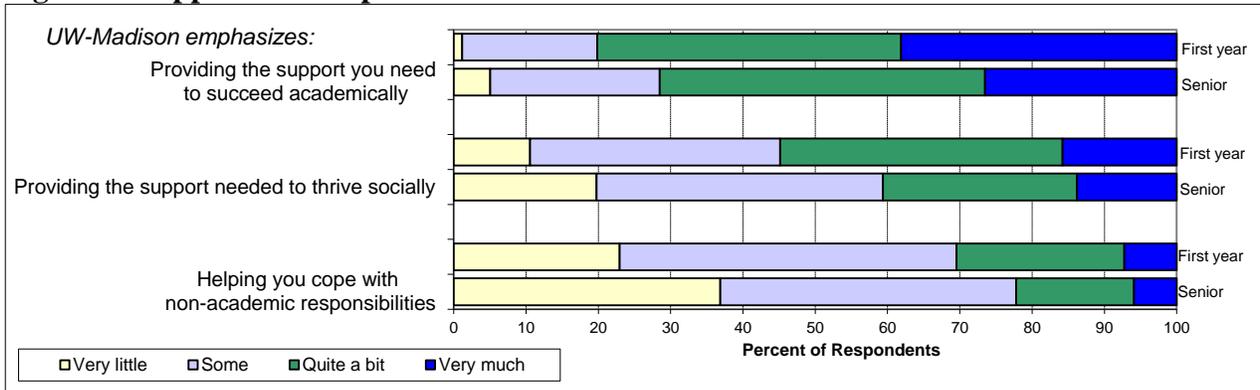
Students were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with faculty, students, and administrators on campus. About 85% of students ranked their relationships with other students at five points or higher on the scale (scale ranges from one to seven, where seven is most friendly, supportive, and creating a sense of belonging). Respondents were less enthused about their relationships with university administrators – 56% of seniors and 60% of first-year students rated administrators five or higher. More than 75% 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 – 80% of first-years and 72% 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 – 55% of freshmen and 41% of seniors report UW-Madison emphasizes this quite a bit or more. Only 22% of seniors and 30% of freshmen think the university places quite a bit of emphasis on helping them cope with non-academic problems.

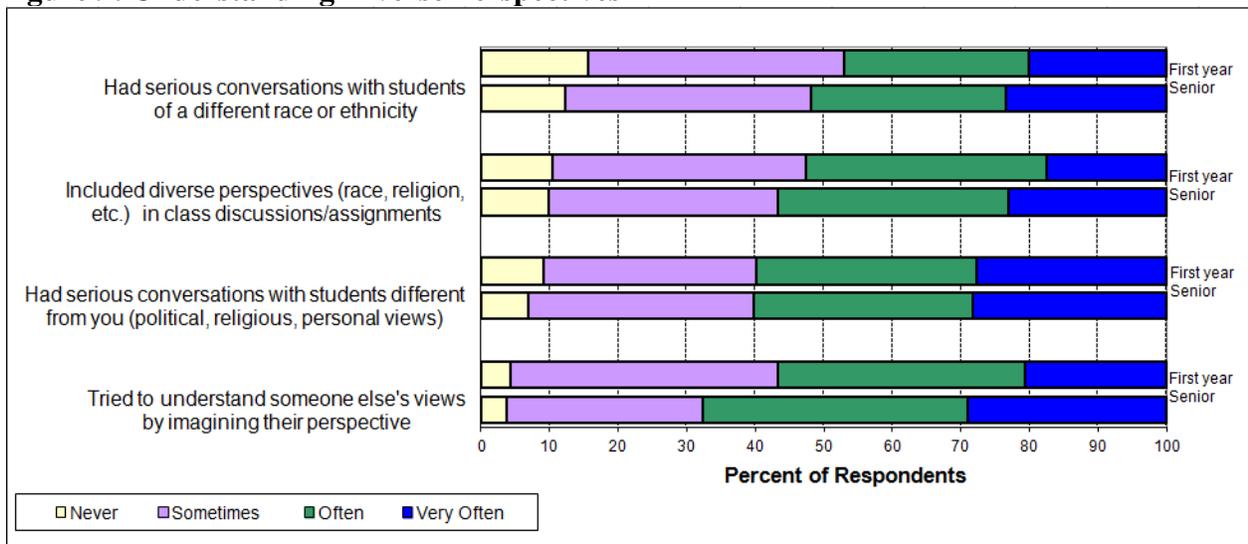
Figure 8: Supportive Campus Environment

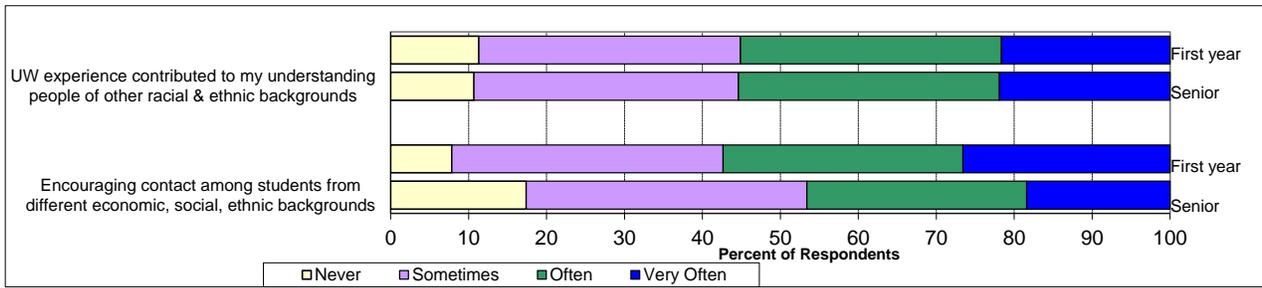


During the past year, 86% of students surveyed reported that they had serious discussions with students of a different race or ethnicity; about half indicated they had such conversations often or very often. Over 90% of both first-years and seniors reported having conversations with students with views very different from theirs in terms of political opinions, religion, or personal values – 60% 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 90% of students polled, and occurred often or very often according to 55% of respondents.

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. Over 95% reported they did so at least sometimes in the past school year; 68% of seniors and 57% 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





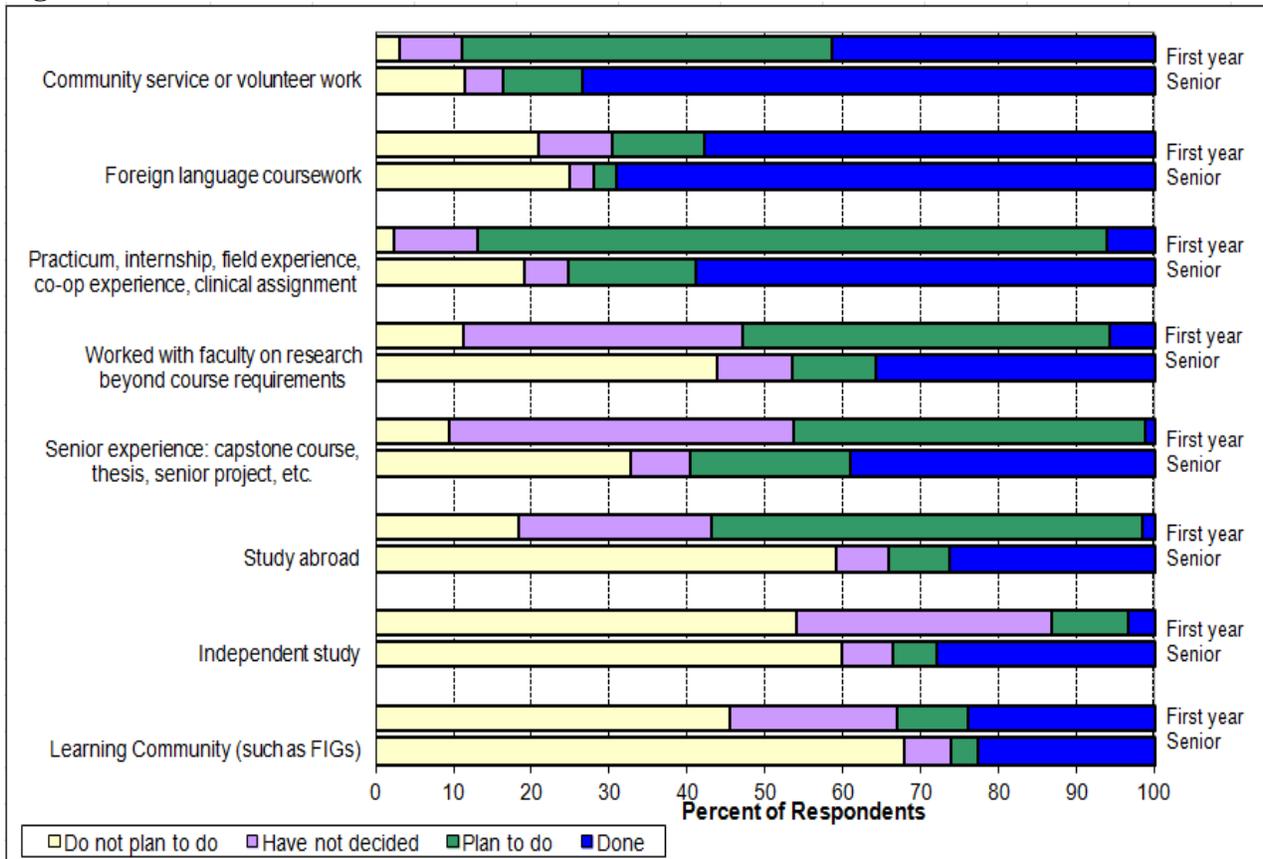
Out-of-Classroom and Enrichment Activities

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. Over 70% of students have completed or plan to complete foreign language coursework. Of seniors, 26% have already studied abroad and another eight percent plan to do so; more than half of first-year students plan to study abroad. About 41% of first-year students and 73% of seniors have participated in community service or volunteer work while attending UW-Madison. An additional 47% of freshmen and 10% 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. Fifty-nine percent of seniors had already completed a practicum or similar experience and 16% planned to do so before graduation. Three-fifths of all seniors have completed or expect to complete a capstone course, senior project or thesis, or other culminating senior experience. Twenty-three percent of seniors and 24% 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-Madison’s First-Year Interest Groups).

Most UW-Madison seniors engage in these out-of-classroom and enrichment experiences – about 85% 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. About 63% 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. About three-fourths of students are active in co-curricular activities such as campus publications, student government, sports, fraternities or sororities, organizations, etc. About 17% are involved in such activities more than 10 hours per week. Approximately 39% of students spend on average over 20 hours per week preparing for class. An additional 41% of students spent between 10 and 20 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 20% 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. Nearly 80% of surveyed students indicated that they had attended a play, art exhibit, dance, concert, or other performance.

Seniors are more likely than freshmen to be employed: 77% of seniors and 34% of first-year students engage in work for pay. About 54% of seniors and one-fourth of freshmen work on campus. Over one-third of seniors work off-campus and 11% of first-years reported off campus employment. Twelve percent of seniors work both on and off campus. Few students work more than half-time – about one-fifth of seniors and fewer than two percent of freshmen work more than 20 hours per week. Only a small percentage of students – about 7% of first-years and 12% of seniors – spent any time during a typical week caring for dependents.

Figure 11: Student Time Use

