An analysis of the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) addressing students’ academic and co-curricular experiences in high school and their expectations for their first year in the college. Key findings and implications for practice are highlighted.

2015 BCSSE Survey Report

{A CLOSER LOOK}
Focus on Student Affairs Assessment

Volume 15, Issue 1
INTRODUCTION
The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) is a national assessment that collects data about entering college students' high school academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during their first year in college. Annually, the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) administers the survey to all incoming first-year students throughout new student orientation.

Between June and August 2015, 2,192 students participated in the study. Completed surveys were sent to the Office of Student Affairs Assessment, and then to the BCSSE Coordinator for processing and analyses. The sections that follow highlight the major survey findings. For additional information about this study and/or the data collected, please contact Ayeesha Hankins, Office of Student Affairs Assessment, Graduate Research Assistant.

RESPONDENT PROFILE
- >99% full-time, <1% part-time
- 33% men, 66% women
- Racial/Ethnic Identification:
  - 6% Asian
  - 30% Black or African American
  - 6% Hispanic or Latino
  - 44% White
  - 10% Multiracial
  - 1% Other
  - 2% “I prefer not to respond”
- 3% international or foreign national students
- 97% graduated high school in 2015, 2% in 2014, and 1% in 2013
- 58% first generation (FG) college students²
- 52% reported UNCG as their 1st choice, while 32% reported it as their 2nd choice
- 81% living on campus and 5% in a residence farther than walking distance

1000+ first-year students report UNCG was their 1st choice!

Figure 1. College Major

1Survey participants were asked to “check all that apply.” Percentages reported correspond to the proportion of all responses rather than the proportion of individuals that responded.
2First generation is defined as no parent or guardian having graduated with a 4-year college degree. See BCSSE survey instrument for additional information.
KEY FINDINGS

Majority of new students (97%, n=2,099) self-report that most of their high school grades were A's or B's.

Figure 2. HS Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Algebra II and Pre-calculus/Trigonometry were two courses, in particular, in which most students self-reported earning a “C” or better.

Nearly four out of ten students (37%, n=745) indicated that they completed 1-2 advanced placement (AP) classes in high school. In terms of college credits, 16% (n=262) said they completed 1-2 college or university courses for credit. Moreover, writing papers and/or reports of varying page lengths were something that nearly all students had done in their last year of high school as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 3. Math Classes HS Students Earned a “C” or Better In

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algebra II</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-calculus/Trigonometry</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability or Statistics</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Papers or Reports HS Seniors Wrote by Length

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Length</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 pages</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 and 10 pages</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 pages or more</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During their last year in high school, students reported spending several hours in a typical 7-day week preparing for class. 76% (n=1621) said they spent an average of 1-10 hours per week studying, reading, or doing homework. In terms of relaxing and socializing, 48% (n=1054) self-reported spending 1-10 hours per week doing so. Conversely, there was a dichotomy in the number of hours, on average, that high school students worked for pay. 49% (n=1061) said they worked 0-5 hours per week, while nearly the same number (51%, n=1,117) reported working 5-30 plus hours per week.

BCSSE SCALES
Questions on the BCSSE survey were grouped into nine scales according to specific high school student behaviors and expectations for their first year in college. A description of each of the scales is as follows:

- **Quantitative Reasoning**: High school engagement with analysis and numerical information
- **Learning Strategies**: Use of effective learning strategies in high school.
- **Collaborative Learning**: Expectation to interact and collaborate with peers
- **Student-Faculty Interaction**: Expectation to interact and engage with faculty
- **Expected Discussions with Diverse Others**: Expectation to engage in discussions with diverse others
- **Expected Academic Perseverance**: Student certainty that they will persist in the face of academic adversity
- **Expected Academic Difficulty**: Expected academic difficulty during the first year of college
- **Perceived Academic Preparation**: Student perception of their academic preparation
- **Importance of Campus Environment**: Student-rated importance that the institution provides a challenging and supportive environment

Student responses are explained below. Select items and scales are also described followed by historical and national comparison information.

**Collaborative Learning**
Throughout the survey participants were queried about what they anticipate their academic collaborations with their peers will be like during their first year in college. The questions within this scale hinge on the academic practices a student may or may not have utilized throughout their high school experience, thus likened comparisons have been made with several subgroups of students as noted in Table 1. It should be mentioned that the frequencies, amongst all of the responses, are very similar for each subgroup.
Table 1. Collaborative Learning Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following?</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
<th>Self-Reported High School grades</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>A- or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask another student to help you understand course material</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain course material to one or more students</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with other students on course projects or assignments</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The frequencies of each response option are very similar across all students as compared to the four identified subgroups.

Students expect to interact with faculty throughout their first year in college

Student-Faculty Interaction
67% (n=1453) of respondents self-reported that they expect to talk about their career plans with a faculty member, either “often” or “very often.” In terms of working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.), majority of students (42%, n=909) anticipate interactions of this type will occur “sometimes.” Nearly seven out of ten students (67%, n=1453) intend to discuss their academic performance with a faculty member “often” or “very often.”

Expected Discussions with Diverse Others
UNCG students expect to engage in meaningful discussions with people from varying racial and ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and political groups “very often” throughout their first year (56%, n=1,219). Also, these interactions are particularly important to students. When asked about the importance of having opportunities to interact with people, students in particular, from different social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc. backgrounds, majority of respondents said “important” or “very important” (74%, n=1,543).

It is “very important” UNCG provide opportunities for students to interact with others from different backgrounds
Expected Academic Perseverance
When asked about academic adversities during the course of their first year, many students were optimistic about their ability to be resilient.

- 38% (n=818) reported that they were “very certain” that they will find additional information for course assignments when they don’t understand the material.
- 51% (n=1106) were also “very certain” they will ask instructors for help when they struggle with course assignments.
- Almost eight out of ten students (74%, n=1,588) affirmed that they are “very certain” or “certain” that they will finish something they started even when they encounter challenges.
- Majority of students (32%, n=682) said they too were “very certain” that they will stay positive, even when they do poorly on a test or assignment.

There were a few questions that students reported a slight uncertainty as to how they will respond to specific academic challenges, one of which pertained to foregoing participation in activities on campus in order to study. 37% (n=791) of students said they were only “somewhat certain” that they will do so during their first year. The other question asked students about their participation in class discussions. Majority of students indicated “somewhat certain” when asked if they will regularly engage in this manner even when they do not feel like it.

Expected Academic Difficulty
It is important for students to be able to foresee the academic challenges they may experience during their first year in college. A series of questions on the BCSSE required students to give some forethought to what, if any, challenges they expect to face throughout their freshman year at UNCG.

There were two academic related areas that students anticipated having difficulty with – “managing your time” and “learning course material” (see Figure 6). Another, seemingly unrelated, concern that students reported was “paying college expenses.” 65% (n=1,396) of students said they anticipate having some degree of difficulty paying for these expenses (i.e. tuition, fees, books, meal plan, housing costs etc. – also see page 8).

Managing time, learning course material, and paying for college expenses are the primary concerns of first-year students.
Interestingly, students expected minimal to no difficulty with “getting help with school work” and “interacting with faculty” (Figure 7). Aside from academics, 70% (n=1511) students reported that they anticipate minimal difficulty “making new friends.”

Figure 8. Perceptions of Academic Preparation

- Write clearly and effectively
- Speak clearly and effectively
- Think critically and analytically
- Analyze numerical and statistical information
- Work effectively with others
- Use computing and information technology
- Learn effectively on your own

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Importance of Campus Environment
There were several institutional characteristics that students were asked to rate according to their degree of importance. More specifically, students were given the opportunity to describe what campus environment elements they consider to be particularly important to their college experience. Student said it is “very important” that UNCG provide each of the following:

- Support to help students succeed academically (66%, n=1,381)
- Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.) (49%, n=1011)
- Help managing non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (33%, n=677)
- Opportunities to be involved socially (44%, n=913)
- Opportunities to attend campus activities and events (45%, n=928)
- Learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.) (58%, n=1191)

Academic rigor or “a challenging academic experience” was one characteristic in which students reported a degree of indifference, “somewhat important” (36%, n=744), about.

ADDITIONAL FIRST-YEAR CHARACTERISTICS
- In terms of time spent during a typical 7-day week, most students (53%, n=1144) plan to devote 11-20 hours preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities).
- 36% (n=777), 38% (n=834), and 34% (n=740) said they will commit the same amount of time to working for pay on or off-campus, relaxing and socializing, or participating in co-curricular activities, respectively.
- 91% (n=1848) of students intend to earn a B or higher in their classes throughout their freshman year.
- The primary sources used to pay for college include (listed in order):
  - support from parents or relatives (82%, n=1654)
  - grants or scholarships
  - job or personal savings
  - loans
- On the whole, students expect to graduate from UNCG as 84% (n=1726) reported “yes” they plan to do so.

Students expect that most of their grades will be a B or higher during their first year at UNCG

HISTORIC AND NATIONAL COMPARISON DATA
Mean scale scores were calculated by converting the responses for each item to a 0 (minimum) to 60 (maximum) point scale (see the BCSSE Scales and Component Items for complete scale descriptions and component items). The mean scale scores, per scale, for UNCG in 2013, 2014 and 2014 doctoral institutions are included in Table 2 (page 9).

Overall, the mean scores across all scales for UNCG in 2015 are quite similar to those reported in 2014. The same is true for 2015 national doctoral institutional scores. Table 2 indicates the scales and means in which there was the highest increase or change.
between 2014 and 2015 or in comparison to doctorate granting colleges and universities. Although these differences may seem negligible, there is some practical significance that can be gleaned.

In 2015, UNCG students demonstrated a slightly higher expectation to engage with faculty both inside and outside the classroom. Going further, as compared to all doctoral institutions, in 2015 UNCG students also showed higher expectations regarding engaging in conversations with diverse others, preserving in the face of academic challenges, and the importance that the campus environment providing a challenging and supportive environment.

The mean scale score for 2015 doctoral institutions was higher than that of UNCG students for the perceived academic preparation scale. Our students perceive themselves to be slightly less academically prepared for their first year in college than students nationally.

Table 2. 2014-2015 UNCG and 2015 Doctoral Institutions Mean Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select BCSSE Scales</th>
<th>2014 UNCG</th>
<th>2015 UNCG</th>
<th>2015 Doctoral Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>39.38</td>
<td>39.41</td>
<td>38.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>37.15</td>
<td>36.90</td>
<td>34.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Discussions with Diverse Others</td>
<td>47.56</td>
<td>46.81</td>
<td>45.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Academic Perseverance</td>
<td>44.92</td>
<td>44.96</td>
<td>43.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Academic Difficulty</td>
<td>29.94</td>
<td>30.19</td>
<td>29.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic Preparation</td>
<td>43.33</td>
<td>43.40</td>
<td>45.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Campus Environment</td>
<td>48.55</td>
<td>48.33</td>
<td>46.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Denotes a difference of 1.0 or more between 2015 UNCG and 2015 Doctoral Institutions

To examine more closely how UNCG students compare to those at all doctoral institutions in 2015, select questions have been reviewed. The results of this comparison are as follows:

**UNCG has more students…**
- From public schools
- Who worked for pay more than 5 hours per week in high school
- Who anticipate working for pay on- or off-campus per week
- Who expect to talk, at least “often” or “very often” with a faculty member about career plans
- Who expect to discuss their academic performance with a faculty member “often” or “very often”
- Who expect to have discussions with people of a race or ethnicity other than their own

**UNCG has fewer students…**
- With B+ or higher grades in high school
- Who completed 1-4 college or university courses for credit in high school
- Who studied more than 5 hours per week in high school
- Who were involved in co-curricular activities more than 5 hours per week during their senior year
- Who feel “very prepared” or “prepared” for “writing clearly and effectively,” “speak clearly and effectively,” “think critically and analytically,” and “analyze
UNCG has more students...cont’d

“often” or “very often”
- Who believe that UNCG providing opportunities for them to interact with diverse others is “very important” or “important”
- Who believe that UNCG providing help with managing work, family, etc. is “very important” or “important”
- Who believe that UNCG providing learning support services (i.e. tutoring services, writing center) is “very important” or “important”
- Who are using loans to cover their education expenses
- Who identify as first-generation

UNCG has fewer students...cont’d

- numerical and statistical information” in their first year of college
- Who expect their grades to be an A- or higher during their first year
- Certain that they will graduate from UNCG
- Who indicated that UNCG (or, rather, the institution they are enrolled to attend for their first year) was their 1st or 2nd choice

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to consider when looking at the 2014 BCSSE data. The first pertains to the instrument itself. In 2013, the survey underwent a major revision to better align the survey with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The recent changes to the instrument limit the degree to which comparisons prior to this date can be made. Furthermore, the design of the survey and format of the questions make statistical analyses, in particular, difficult. BCSSE asks thirty-five questions, but each question has several components (e.g., a-f).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

UNCG administrators, particularly student affairs professionals, should pay special attention to students’ experiences, academic and otherwise, during their senior year as well as their expectations for college. Academically, incoming students had a high view of their ability to persevere in the face of academic adversity and many noted areas in which they expect difficulties to arise during the first year of college. Providing the academic support services that enable students to preserve and overcome such difficulties is essential. Additionally, our students expect to engage with diverse others, both inside and outside the classroom. They also indicate that these types of interactions are important to them. Thus, it would behoove faculty and staff to work together to ensure that all students reap the benefits of a college experience that is richly diverse in cultural backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. Besides that, students were very explicit that the institution provide a supportive environment, both academically and socially. Integrating learning support services and social involvement opportunities throughout students’ residential experience or campus programming should be a priority. Finally, further study that examines, through comparison and statistical analyses, student subpopulations such as male/female, students of color, and first-generation status should be done to better understand our diverse student body, their experience and expectations, and provide insight into how we can individually and collectively better serve all students at UNCG.