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.

2014 BCSSE Survey Report

{A CLOSER LOOK}
Focus on Student Affairs Assessment

Volume 14, 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 2014, the paper survey was administered during orientation and 2,528 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 Research Assistant.

RESPONDENT PROFILE
- 99% full-time, 1% part-time
- 70% men, 29% women
- Racial or Ethnic Identification:
  - 2% American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 5% Asian
  - 20% Black or African American
  - 6% Hispanic or Latino
  - 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 37% White
  - 2% Other
- 3% international or foreign national students
- 97% graduated high school in 2014, 2% in 2013, and 1% in 2012
- 46% first generation (FG) college students\(^2\)
- 48% reported UNCG as their 1st choice, while 30% reported it as their 2nd choice
- 78% living on campus and 12% in a residence farther than walking distance

\(^1\)Racial or Ethnic Identification includes American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Other.

\(^2\)First 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
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.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses were common for students as 58% (n=1337) completed 1-4 classes during their high school experience. When asked about the number of college or university courses completed for credit, 25% (n=636) of students said they had already completed one or more. Moreover, writing papers/reports of varying page lengths was something that nearly all students did in their last year of high school as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Number of Papers Written per Length**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 pages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 and 10 pages</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 pages or more</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During their last year in high school, students spent several hours per week engaging in personal, academic, and social activities. The greatest number (29%, n=729) said they spent 1-5 hours participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, student government, sports, etc.). In terms of relaxing and socializing, 29% (n=714) self-reported
spending 6-10 hours per week doing so. Conversely, 41% of students (n=1031) indicated that they spent 10 plus hours per week working for pay.

On the academic front, 1-5 hours per week was the average time spent preparing for classes. Students were asked about the extent to which their courses challenged them to do their best work during their last year in high school. Most (31%, n=759) indicated they felt "somewhat" challenged.

**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 2. It should be mentioned that the frequencies, amongst all of the responses, are very similar for each group.

**Table 2. Collaborative Learning Practices Anticipated During First Year in College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>A- or higher</th>
<th>B+ or lower</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask another student to help you understand course material</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explain course material to one or more students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work with other students on course projects or assignments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student-Faculty Interaction**
Students plan to interact with faculty throughout their first year in college.

- 68% percent 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 (39%, n=918) anticipate interactions of this type will be occasional or sometimes.
Nearly seven out of ten students (67%, n=1552) intend to discuss their academic performance with a faculty member.

**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 “often” (57%, n=1284, 53%, 50%, and 48% respectively) throughout their first year. 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” (76%, n=1324 – also referenced on page 5).

*Figure 2. How Often Students Expect to Have Discussions with Persons of Another Race*

![Figure 2. How Often Students Expect to Have Discussions with Persons of Another Race](image)

**Expected Academic Perseverance**
When asked about academic adversities during the course of their first year, many students were optimistic about their ability to persevere.
- 37% (n= 820) reported that they were “very certain” that they will find additional information for course assignments when they don't understand the material
- 45% (n= 982) were also “very certain” they will ask instructors for help when they struggle with course assignments
- Almost eight out of ten students (75%, n=1627) affirmed that they are “very certain” or “somewhat certain” that they will finish something they started even when they encounter challenges
- Majority of students (34%, n= 724) 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. 38% (n=851) of students said they were only “slightly certain” that they will do so during their first year.

**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 areas, above all, that students anticipated having difficulty with – “managing your time” and “learning course material” (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Expected Academic Difficulty](image)

Interestingly, students expected minimal to no difficulty with “getting help with school work” and “interacting with faculty” (Figure 5).

![Figure 4. Minimal to No Expected Academic Difficulty](image)

**Perceived Academic Preparation**

In general, survey participants had a high estimation of their academic preparedness for college. “Very prepared” (42%, n= 807) is how most respondents felt in regards to their ability “to work effectively with others.” Figure 5 shows students’ top three responses across several academic competencies.

![Figure 5. Perception of Academic Preparation](image)
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 (63%, n=1121)
- Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.) (49%, n=869)
- Help managing non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (34%, n=582)
- Opportunities to be involved socially (45%, n=775)
- Opportunities to attend campus activities and events (48%, n=824)
- Learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.) (59%, n=1011)

Academic rigor or “a challenging academic experience” was one characteristic in which students reported a degree of indifference, “somewhat important” (32%, n=576), about.

In terms of time spent during a typical 7-day week, most students (54%, n=1305) plan to devote 10-20 hours preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities). 38%, 37%, and 36% 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. 89% (n=1531) of students intend to earn a B or higher in their classes throughout their freshman year.

As for concerns regarding their first year, “paying college expenses” was one area almost seven out of ten students (66%, n=1373) anticipate some degree of difficulty. The primary sources used to pay for college include, “support from parents or relatives” (80%, n=1332), “grants or scholarships,” and “job or personal savings.”

Finally, on the whole, students expect to graduate from UNCG. 85% (n=1440) said “yes” they plan to do so.

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 3 (page 6).

Overall, the mean scores across all scales for UNCG in 2014 are quite similar to those reported in 2013. The same is true for 2014 national doctoral institutional scores. Table 3 indicates the scales and means in which there was the highest increase or change between 2013 and 2014 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 2014, UNCG students demonstrated a slightly higher expectation to participate in discussions with diverse others during their first year of college than new students in
2013. Going further, as compared to all doctoral institutions, UNCG students in 2014 also showed a higher expectation to engage in conversations with diverse others.

The mean scale score for 2014 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. Conversely, UNCG students showed, on average, higher expectations to interact and engage with faculty and placed a greater importance on the institution providing a challenging and supportive environment. Across the board, at UNCG and all doctoral institutions, the importance of campus environment was the scale reported with the highest mean scale score.

Table 3. 2013 UNCG and 2014 Doctoral Institutions Mean Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select BCSSE Scales</th>
<th>2013 UNCG</th>
<th>2014 UNCG</th>
<th>2014 Doctoral Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>38.80</td>
<td>39.38</td>
<td>38.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>37.15</td>
<td>37.15(^2)</td>
<td>34.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Discussions with Diverse Others</td>
<td>46.19</td>
<td>47.56(^1)</td>
<td>45.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Academic Perseverance</td>
<td>44.88</td>
<td>44.92</td>
<td>44.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Academic Difficulty</td>
<td>29.62</td>
<td>29.94</td>
<td>29.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic Preparation</td>
<td>43.25</td>
<td>43.33</td>
<td>45.19(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Campus Environment</td>
<td>48.62</td>
<td>48.55(^2)</td>
<td>46.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Denotes an increase of 1.0 or more from UNCG 2013 to 2014 data
\(^2\)Denotes a difference of 1.5 or more between UNCG 2014 and 2014 Doctoral Institutions

To examine more closely how UNCG students compare to those at all doctoral institutions in 2014, select questions have been reviewed. The results of this comparison are as follows:

**UNCG has more students...**
- From public schools
- Who anticipate working for pay on- of 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, at least “often” or “very often” their academic performance with a faculty member
- Who expect to have discussions, at least “often” or “very often” with people of a race or ethnicity other than their own
- Who believe that UNCG providing opportunities for them to interact with diverse

**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” or to “analyze numerical and statistical information” in their first year of college
- Who expect their grades to be an A- or higher during their first year
UNCG has more students...cont’d

- others is "very important" or "important"
- Who indicated help with managing work, family, etc. is "very important" or "important"
- Who affirmed learning support services as being "very important" or "important"
- Who use loans to cover their education expenses
- Who identify as first-generation
- Whose home, during their senior year in high school, was within an hour drive from campus

UNCG has fewer students...cont’d

- 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. Another notable limitation is the response rate at the end of the survey. Specially, the number of students who responded, per question, tapered toward the end of the assessment. This noticeable difference may be due to the survey length. BCSSE asks thirty-five questions, but each question has several components (e.g., a-f). There was also a minor, but possibly contributable, change to the survey administration in the fall.

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 thoroughly expect to engage with diverse others, both inside and outside the classroom. 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 should provide a supportive environment, both academically and socially. An emphasis on learning support services, like the aforesaid, and social involvement opportunities through students' residential experience or campus programming should be highlighted. 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.