

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Summary

2008

NSSE uses five benchmarks of effective educational practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. In the Benchmark Comparison Report, Mesa State College is compared with Selected Peers. The following is a summary of the findings in each of the five benchmark areas as described by the Mesa State College Assessment Committee.

Level of Academic Challenge

Compared to Selected Peers (51.1), Mesa State College is roughly the same for First-Year Students (51.2). Seniors are slightly lower (53.2) than the Selected Peers (55.0).

Strengths: Mesa State College students report spending more time studying compared to the Selected Peers. If students take a 12 hours course load they should report studying 24 or more hours per week (2 hours per class). Sixteen percent of Mesa State First-Year Students and 28% of Seniors report studying 21 or more hours per week. This compares to 11% of First-Year Student and 18% of Seniors from the Selected Peers. The majority of First Year-Students and Seniors at Mesa State College ranked the extent to which examinations challenged them to do their best work a 4 or higher (on a 7 point scale; 72% and 75% respectively). This is comparable to the Selected Peers (78% and 77%, respectively) but still notable.

Weaknesses: Fewer Mesa State students report making a presentation in class compared to the Selected Peers. Only 24% of Mesa State First-Year Students report making a presentation often or very often compared to 36% of the First-Year Students from the Selected Peers. Fifty-two percent of Mesa State Seniors report making a presentation often or very often compared to 63% of the Seniors from the Selected Peers. Fewer Mesa State students report that they prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment compared to the Selected Peers. Only 50% of Mesa State First-Year Student report that they prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment compared to 56% of the First-Year Students from the Selected Peers. Forty-six percent of Mesa State Seniors report that they prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment compared to 53% of the Seniors from the Selected Peers. Seniors at Mesa State College report less of an emphasis on writing clearly and effectively in their classes compared to the Selected Peers (69% and 75% respectively).

In all other areas, Mesa State College was very similar to the selected peers (e.g., number of assigned textbooks, coursework emphasizing analysis, synthesis, making of judgments and applying theories or concepts). Recommendations for improvement include an increased emphasis on writing in general (e.g., drafts and writing clearly and effectively) and presentations.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Compared to Selected Peers (41.1), Mesa State College is slightly lower for First-Year Students (40.2). Seniors are roughly the same (49.4) compared to the selected peers (49.6).

Strengths: Eighty percent of Mesa State College Seniors report that they asked questions or contributed to discussions in class. Only 75% of seniors in the Selected Peers report that they asked questions or contributed to discussions in class. Thirty-four percent of Mesa State College Seniors report that they discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class whereas only 28% of seniors in the Selected Peers report that they discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.

Weaknesses: As was noted in the section above, fewer Mesa State students report making a presentation in class compared to the Selected Peers. Only 24% of Mesa State First-Year Student report making a presentation often or very often compared to 36% of the First-Year Students from the Selected Peers. Fifty-two percent of Mesa State Seniors report making a presentation often or very often compared to 63% of the Seniors from the Selected Peers.

In all other areas, Mesa State College was very similar to the selected peers (e.g., worked with other students on projects during class and outside of class and tutored or taught other students). Recommendations for improvement would be to increase the emphasis on class presentations and community based projects (service learning). Only 10% of Mesa State First-Year students and 15% of Seniors participated in this type of projects. These percentages are similar to the selected peers but are very low.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Compared to Selected Peers (33.7), Mesa State College is lower for First-Year Students (31.6). Seniors are slightly higher (41.3) compared to the selected peers (39.7).

Strengths: Overall student-faculty interaction increased to a greater degree than the Selected Peers. Mesa State College went from 31.6 to 41.3 compared to our peer group who went from 33.7 to 39.7. There was some improvement from First Year Students (30%) to Seniors (37%) in career planning with a faculty member and/or advisor at Mesa State College. Although these numbers are comparable to the Selected Peers (28% to 39%), they are relatively low.

Weaknesses: Forty-nine percent of Mesa State First Year Students report that they received prompt feedback from faculty. This is compared to 57% of First Year Students from the Selected Peers. Interestingly, 34% of Mesa State First Year Students report that they worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements and only 27% of Seniors report that they worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.

Recommendations include communicating to faculty the need to give student prompt feedback and encouraging students to visit with them for advising.

Enriching Educational Experiences

Compared to Selected Peers (24.4), Mesa State College is higher for First-Year Students (25.7). Seniors are slightly lower (34.1) compared to the selected peers (34.7).

Strengths: Sixty-five percent of Mesa State College First Year Students and 50% of Seniors either plan to or have taken foreign language coursework. This is compared to 44% of First Year Students and 39% of Seniors from the Selected Peers. Thirty-three percent of Mesa State Seniors report either planning to or having already participated in an independent study or self-designed major whereas only 26% of Seniors from the Selected Peers report either planning to or having already participated in an independent study or self-designed major. Seventy percent of Mesa State Seniors either plan to or having already participated in a culminating senior experience. This is the same as was reported from the Selection Peers Senior but still notable.

Weaknesses: Thirty-five percent of Mesa State First Year Students report either planning to or have studied abroad but only 16% of Mesa State Seniors report that they either plan to or have studied abroad. These numbers are similar to the Selected Peers but may indicate that students want to study abroad but lack opportunity. Only 36% of Mesa State Seniors compared to 43% of seniors from the Selected Peers report that the campus environment encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic background.

Recommendations include providing more opportunities to study abroad and targeting recruits from more diverse populations.

Supportive Campus Environment

Compared to Selected Peers, Mesa State College is roughly the same for both First-Year Students and Seniors (Mesa State First Year 55.4, Selected Peers First Year 56.4; Mesa State Senior 55.0, Selected Peers Senior 54.6).

Strengths: Ninety percent of Mesa State First-Year Students and 87% of Seniors ranked their relationship with other students a 4 or higher (on a 7 point scale). This is comparable to the Selected Peers which was 86% and 90% respectively but notably high. Eighty-six percent of Mesa State First-Year Students and 91% of Seniors ranked their relationship with faculty a 4 or higher (on a 7 point scale). This is comparable to the Selected Peers which was 87% and 89% respectively but again notably high. In addition it is encouraging that the percentage of students who ranked their relationship with faculty as 4 or higher increased from the First-Year to the Senior level, indicating that students build relationships with faculty over the course of their tenure at Mesa State College.

Weaknesses: Thirty-four of Mesa State First-Year Students and 23% of Seniors ranked their relationship with administrative personnel and offices a 3 or lower (on a 7 point scale). This is comparable to the Selected Peers which was 26% and 29% respectively, but is still troubling. Even more troubling is that 69% of Mesa State First-Year Students and 82% of Seniors reported that the campus provided either very little or some help coping with non-academic responsibilities. This, too, is comparable to the Selected Peers which was 69% and 78% respectively. Sixty percent of Mesa State First-Year Students and 76% of Seniors reported that the campus provided either very little or some support needed to thrive socially. This is comparable to the Selected Peers which was 62% and 73% respectively.

Collectively this information would indicate that students do not feel a personal connection with the campus. This problem is not unique to Mesa State College since our percentages are comparable to our peers. It may be that with the increasing use of technology for registration, financial aid, and the like, students interact less and less with people in various offices around campus and more with only the computer. In addition, with many of our General Education classes being taught online, students may not be coming to campus even for classes. Because of this trend colleges may have to work much harder to make that personal connection with students.

Several other questions asked by NSSE are also important to this issue of developing a connection with the campus. Only 43% of the First-Year Students at Mesa State live on campus or within walking distance and that number decreases to 36% for Seniors. Only 22% of First-Year Students and 17% of Seniors participate in 6-30hr/wk of co-curricular activities with the rest reporting either zero or 1-5hr/wk. Forty-four percent of First-Year Students and 40% Seniors report working 16 or more hours per week off-campus. Twenty-nine percent of First-Year Students and 43% of Seniors report that they spend 6 or more hr/wk caring for dependents (22% of seniors report 30+hr/wk!). Finally, 69% of First-Year Students and 63% of Seniors report that they never or sometimes talked about career planning with a faculty member or advisor.

Some recommendations for improvement in this area are to align the Mesa State academic calendar with District 51 in terms of the semester start time and holidays such as Labor Day. If classes are in session on a legal holiday it may be impossible for students with children to find childcare so they can attend class. In addition, making it mandatory to visit a faculty advisor at least once prior to turning in a graduation petition may be helpful for students to get information they may need. A hold is put on a student's account if they have not declared a major at the end of their sophomore year. It would be easy to add to this that a student also has to visit with a faculty advisor to make sure they are on the right track. Perhaps MavZone could be set up so that once the student has visited with the faculty advisor the faculty member could remove the hold.

