

Miami University
Assessment

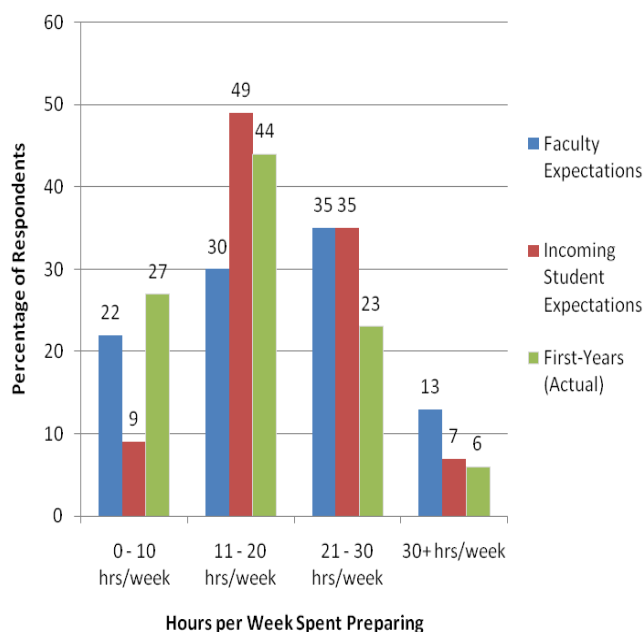
Through the Eyes of a First-Year Student: Incoming Students' Expectations about College

How does the class of 2013 envision college life, and how do their expectations match the reality of the college experience? A set of three national surveys helps us answer these questions. In 2008, incoming Miami undergraduates participated in the Beginning College Student Survey (BCSSE) (N = 343), while first-year students and seniors completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in the Spring 2009 semester (First-Years: N = 536; Seniors: N = 684). Faculty members completed a related survey, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), in the Spring 2009 semester (N = 376). The following results are based on Oxford campus students and faculty.

Expectations about Academic Activities

In general, incoming students expect to engage in more academic activities than the first-years students actually report doing. When asked how much time they expect to spend preparing for class during a typical 7-day week, most of the incoming students expected to spend at least 11 hours per week, with 42% expecting to spend at least 21 or more hours per week preparing for class.

Time Spent Preparing for Class



These expectations are relatively consistent with faculty expectations; 48% of faculty expected students to spend 21 or more hours preparing for class each week. However, only 29% of first-year students reported spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class.

Similarly, 83% of incoming students expected to ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions often or very often while only 62% of first-years reported doing so; 65% of incoming students expected to make class presentations often/very often while only 32% of first-years reported doing so; and 79% of incoming students expected to work with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments often/very often while only 55% of first-years reported doing so.

Student Concerns

When asked how certain they were that they would engage in various activities during the coming school year, incoming students were least confident about their ability to participate in discussions. Only 40% of the incoming students were certain they could “participate regularly in course discussions, even when [they] didn’t feel like it.”

In addition, incoming students were more concerned about their ability to manage their time than their ability to learn the course material. Although 36% of the incoming students expected that learning the course material would be difficult, 50% expected that managing their time would be difficult.

Maintaining High Expectations

When students first enter Miami, they expect to work hard and engage fully in many academic activities. While faculty should sustain this engagement by holding first-year students to high standards, they may also need to offer them more assistance on how to manage the workload than they do for more experienced students. Similarly, first-year students may need more encouragement to participate in class discussions.