

Incoming Students' Expectations about College-Level Work

Survey Overview

At the beginning of the 2004-2005 academic school year Miami was one of 28 institutions nationally to participate in a pilot version of the "Beginning College Student Survey" (BCSS). The BCSS was completed by 624 first-year students during the first week of classes on Miami's Oxford campus. The 34-question survey is designed to assess students' expectations about their college experience as well as the behavioral patterns they established prior to entering college. The BCSS survey is intended to go hand in hand with the 30-question "National Survey of Student Engagement" (NSSE). The NSSE results presented here are based upon the responses of 440 first-year students who completed the NSSE during the Spring 2003 semester.

Student Perceptions of Readiness for College

Results from the BCSS suggest that incoming first-year students at Miami feel prepared for the college-level work in which they will be engaging.

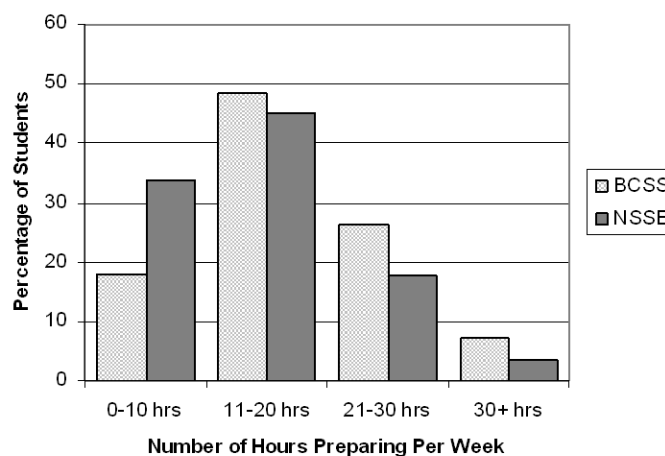
Participants rated their level of preparedness for each of a variety of activities on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 ("Not prepared") to 4 ("Very prepared"). On average, students rated themselves as "quite prepared" to do each of the following at Miami. (Mean ratings are provided in parentheses.)

- Write clearly and effectively (3.11)
- Speak clearly and effectively (3.04)
- Analyze mathematical problems (2.87)
- Use computing and information technology (2.94)
- Work effectively with others (3.44)
- Learn effectively on your own (3.34)

Student Expectations of College-Level Work

The BCSS results suggest that incoming first-year students expect to often "work harder than ever before to meet an instructor's standards or expectations," with students providing an average rating of 3.16 on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Very often). In addition, comparing results from the BCSS to the NSSE suggests that incoming students' expectations for the amount of time they will spend preparing for class do not necessarily match the actual amount of time that first-year students spend preparing for class. (See graph.)

**Number of Hours Spent Preparing for Class:
Expectations vs. Actual**



While 18% of incoming students expect to spend 10 hours or less per week preparing for class (BCSS data), 34% of first year students actually report spending 10 hours or less per week preparing for their classes (NSSE data). Similarly, while 34% of incoming students anticipate spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class (BCSS data), only 21% of first-year students report spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class (NSSE). These results suggest that first-year students spend considerably fewer hours preparing for class than is anticipated by incoming students.

Implications for Faculty

Talk with your students early in the semester about the time commitment they will need to make in order to be successful in your course. Because students expect to spend more time preparing for class than they actually do, set high standards for how much time you expect students to spend outside of class preparing. Include these expectations in your syllabus and remind students of your expectations throughout the semester. Use strategies like a short quiz, brief discussion, or a written response to readings to hold students accountable for outside preparation.