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Engaged Learning Benefits All Students

Findings from a national survey released today show that while student engagement helps all learners, those who come to college less well prepared academically or are from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to benefit even more. Being involved in educationally purposeful activities such as interacting with faculty members and working with peers on projects inside and outside of class has positive effects on grades and increases the odds that students will return to college for a second year.

Distance education and adult learners engage as often in many positive educational activities as do traditional-age students taking classes on campus. Compared with other students, part-time students who were working had less contact with faculty and were less likely to participate in enriching educational experiences such as community service or active and collaborative learning activities.

The 2006 report from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is based on information from about 260,000 randomly selected first-year and senior students at 523 four-year colleges and universities. The NSSE study, titled "*Engaged Learning: Fostering Success of All Students*," gives schools an idea of how well students are learning and what they put into and get out of their undergraduate experience.

"At a time when the quality of postsecondary education seems to be slipping, participating in engaged learning activities promises to prepare students for a lifetime of continuous learning so that they and the country stay competitive in the global marketplace," says George Kuh, the NSSE director and Indiana University Bloomington professor of higher education.

The survey findings annually provide comparative standards for determining how effectively colleges are contributing to learning. Five key areas of educational performance are measured: 1) level of academic challenge, 2) active and collaborative learning, 3) student-faculty interaction, 4) enriching educational experiences, and 5) supportive campus environment.

"NSSE findings provide faculty and staff with information they can readily use to strengthen the learning environment," says David Shulenburg, vice president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. According to Douglas Bennett, president of Earlham College, "NSSE provides prospective students and their parents with information and insights that will help them find a college or university that is a good fit for them."

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Other key findings from the 2006 report are:

- Both first-year and senior students spend on average only about 13-14 hours a week preparing for class, far below what faculty members say is necessary to do well in their classes.
- New students studied fewer hours during their first year than they expected to when they started college.
- Student engagement is positively related to grades and to persistence between the first and second year of college.
- Compared with campus-based students, distance education learners reported higher levels of academic challenge and engaged more often in deep learning activities.
- First-year students at research universities are more likely to participate in a learning community than their peers at other types of institutions.
- First-year students at liberal arts colleges more often participate in class discussions and view their faculty more positively than students at other institutions.
- Seniors at master's level colleges and universities more frequently make class presentations and work with their peers on problems in class than students at other institutions.

“NSSE is used more widely than ever as an effective way to assess what both institutions and students themselves do to foster student success,” says Belle Wheelan, president of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. According to Scott Evenbeck, dean of University College at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, “student engagement is a powerful concept guiding our efforts to increase student academic achievement.”

Kuh believes, “the seeds of innovation and improvement in undergraduate education are taking root and student engagement is essential to these efforts.”

The NSSE 2006 Report is sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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The NSSE 2006 Report, “*Engaged Learning: Fostering Success of All Students*,” may be obtained for \$20 from the National Survey of Student Engagement, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, School of Education, 1900 E. 10th Street, Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419, Bloomington IN 47406-7512. The NSSE Website: www.nsse.iub.edu.