

# **University of Victoria 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement**

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University of Victoria – Institutional Planning and Analysis  
February, 2007

# 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement Report

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## Institutional Planning and Analysis – University of Victoria

### Executive summary

Student engagement is a key predictor of student learning and success, and can be used as an overall measure of educational quality. Specific strategies to increase students' engagement in their studies can be identified by examining results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Five benchmarks were created by NSSE to facilitate the evaluation of student engagement at post-secondary institutions. Universities use benchmarks to compare themselves with system averages and to evaluate institutional changes over time. The benchmarks are comprised of individual questions that are combined to create indices. They encompass constructs of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriched educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment.

First-year students (both at UVic and at most universities across Canada) have lower engagement scores than fourth-year students on most of NSSE's benchmarks: the Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Enriching Educational Experiences. First-year students did, however, report more positive experiences on the benchmark called Supportive Campus Environment, both at UVic and overall.

The results showed that, overall, students at the University of Victoria were engaged in their education and gave positive responses to benchmark questions. In particular, students at UVic gave the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark a high score compared with other Canadian universities in the peer group and first-year UVic students felt especially supported in this area.

In order to discover specific ways to improve student engagement at UVic, individual questions that make up the benchmarks were analysed. For example, one of the questions from the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark asked: "To what extent did your coursework emphasize

synthesizing ideas into more complex relationships?” Students in fourth-year rated this item positively, but those from first-year were significantly less positive. On the other hand, students from both groups said they spent significant time studying.

The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark combined questions such as: asking questions in class, working with classmates on projects, and participating in community-based projects. Differences between first-year and fourth-year results are significant, with fourth-year students demonstrating much higher levels of engagement in collaborative learning, both at UVic and other institutions across North America.

Questions relating to the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark also show significant differences between first- and fourth-year experiences. Fourth-year students are more likely to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor, talk about career plans with faculty or an advisor, and receive prompt written or oral feedback on academic performance.

Complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs—the benchmark called Enriching Educational Experiences involves practicum and co-op experiences, community service, participation in culminating senior experiences such as a senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, or “capstone course,” and experiences with students from different social and racial backgrounds. University of Victoria students are on par with or exceed their national peer group engagement results for most of these items, except for the completion of a culminating senior experience.

The benchmark called Supportive Campus Environment combined questions relating to academic and non-academic support, as well as the quality of relationships with faculty, administrative personnel and other students. The results for UVic were favourable for all of these questions.

In addition to questions used to create student engagement benchmarks, the NSSE survey asked students to evaluate their overall educational experience at UVic and whether they would choose to go to UVic again if they started over. Both questions received very positive responses from first- and fourth-year students.

Integrating the National Survey of Student Engagement into UVic’s overall quality assurance procedures and academic review process is consistent with the university’s strategic plan—*A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*. The University of Victoria will continue to monitor student engagement through a commitment to administer the survey and produce results every few years.

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# Background

Student engagement, a proxy for overall educational quality, is emerging as an area of interest for both educators and administrators as a means to attract and retain students who aspire to receive an excellent education. The level of student engagement at an institution is determined by the time and energy spent on educationally focused activities. For example, reading, writing, meeting with faculty and peers, participating in discussions inside and outside the classroom, and joining in co-curricular activities reflect students being engaged in their education. George Kuh, Chancellor's Professor at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, is the founder of the National Survey of Student Engagement and his conceptual framework has summarized student engagement research.<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which students are engaged in their education impacts their learning and personal development as well as their level of satisfaction and achievement. As such, student engagement can be utilized as a proxy for overall quality of education. Institutional practices that facilitate high levels of student engagement include student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active and collaborative learning, prompt feedback, time spent on task, high expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey was developed to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are related to academic learning, personal development, student satisfaction, retention and completion. The University of Victoria participated in the NSSE survey for the first time in 2006, and the results are integrated into UVic's overall quality assurance procedures and academic program review. By highlighting specific educational practices that are present or absent at the university, improvements in educational quality can be facilitated.

In addition to NSSE, there are a number of other recurring surveys and focus groups at the University of Victoria, each with a specific purpose, population and time-frame. The annual Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC) survey has a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year—all current undergraduates, first-year undergraduates or all graduating students (last administered in 2006). Respondents are asked to evaluate facilities and services, to assess instruction, and to rate their overall educational experiences.

The BC Baccalaureate Graduate Survey is conducted annually to assess student outcomes after they have graduated from university. The survey has been designed to gather information on baccalaureate graduates' level of satisfaction with their education, financing and student debt as

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<sup>1</sup> Kuh, George D., *The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties*, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning  
[http://nsse.iub.edu/2004\\_annual\\_report/pdf/2004\\_Conceptual\\_Framework.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/2004_annual_report/pdf/2004_Conceptual_Framework.pdf)

well as further education and employment outcomes. The project has adopted a model of interviewing graduates two and five years after graduation, in alternate years. The universities, together with The University Presidents' Council of BC and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, collaborate on the project.

The National Survey of Student Engagement, in existence since 2000, surveyed about 60,000 students at 31 Canadian universities and about 270,000 students at 526 American institutions in 2006. Results from UVic are compared to aggregated results from a select group of Canadian universities. Before the survey was administered UVic was asked to choose institutions that were comparable to it—very small or affiliated colleges were not included in this group. This comparative group of 18 Canadian universities is called “Selected Peers” and the institutions included in the group are listed in Appendix 1.

The results from the University of Victoria are also compared with NSSE results from all institutions. The overall NSSE results reflect mostly American colleges and universities, which comprise 94 percent of institutions who participated in the 2006 survey. It is worth noting that many of the participating American post-secondary institutions were smaller than their Canadian counterparts, therefore their engagement scores could be higher in situations where smaller class sizes affect students’ level of engagement. However, the intent of this paper is not to explore the reasons behind Canadian and American differences but to offer a broader context with which to gauge student engagement at UVic.

Student engagement is an integral part of UVic’s mission and latest strategic plan, *A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*. Some of the themes in the plan that are integral to student engagement are:

- Quality of academic programs
- Broader learning environment
- Experiential learning and community engagement
- Internationalization and diversity
- Development of support services

These themes are reflected in the NSSE survey results and now that a baseline has been established, monitoring progress towards realizing the strategic goals can be achieved by re-administering the survey in future years.

# Methodology

## *Response rates*

In the spring of 2006, 4,940 first- and fourth-year UVic students were randomly selected by NSSE to participate in the NSSE survey. A total of 2,635 students completed the on-line survey—1,406 were in first year and 1,229 were in the fourth year of their studies. The response rate for UVic was 53 percent; the response rate for Canadian selected peer universities was 43 percent, and for all North American institutions it was 35 percent.

## *Sampling methodology*

NSSE used a sampling methodology to enable generalization from the sample results to the entire UVic first- and fourth-year population—responses were received from over 2,600 students. The overall sampling error was 1.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level—for first-year results the sampling error was 1.8 percent and for fourth-year results it was 2.3 percent<sup>2</sup>. In future NSSE surveys UVic can request an over-sample—that is, additional students could be surveyed so that the sampling error would decrease. Results could be disaggregated with greater confidence and would allow for more robust analyses for sub-groups, such as departmental level profiles.

NSSE weighted the frequency distributions, means, and benchmark scores by gender, enrolment status (part- or full-time) and institutional size to gain a more accurate representation of UVic students. Weights were computed by NSSE separately for first- and fourth-year students. Respondent characteristics are shown in Appendix 2 and counts of respondents, where reported, are not weighted.

## *Benchmark and correlations with student outcomes*

NSSE created five benchmarks of effective educational practice that encompass a range of educational experiences, including student learning and personal development. Principal component and oblique factor analysis, as well as theoretical considerations, were used in the creation of these benchmarks. The scores were calculated out of 100.

In addition to survey questions used in the creation of benchmarks, NSSE queried students about their educational and personal growth, grade point average, and satisfaction with their educational experience at the institution. An exploratory factor analysis performed by NSSE yielded four factors related to student outcomes: personal and social development, practical competence,

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<sup>2</sup> Sampling error is an estimate of the margin by which the true score for University of Victoria students on a given item could differ from the reported score.

general education and satisfaction. These factors correlated with NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practices as outlined in the following table. All correlations were significant at the  $p < .01$  level. It is worth noting that student satisfaction correlates the highest with the benchmark Supportive Campus Environment, and therefore initiatives to support students academically and non-academically would increase the level of student satisfaction with their studies.

NSSE Benchmarks	Practical Competence		General Education		Personal / Social		Grades		Satisfaction	
	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year	1st year	4th year
<b>Level of Academic Challenge</b>	.42	.37	.49	.47	.43	.41	.16	.13	.28	.27
<b>Active &amp; Collaborative Learning</b>	.34	.34	.35	.34	.39	.38	.15	.15	.24	.23
<b>Student Faculty Interaction</b>	.35	.31	.36	.35	.42	.40	.08	.16	.24	.28
<b>Enriching Educational Experiences</b>	.27	.21	.28	.30	.36	.36	.10	.14	.21	.22
<b>Supportive Campus Environment</b>	.47	.46	.51	.51	.58	.59	.10	.13	.55	.58

Further information about the survey and sampling methodology used by NSSE can be viewed at their website: [www.nsse.iub.edu/html/NSSE\\_Psychometric\\_Portfolio.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/NSSE_Psychometric_Portfolio.cfm). NSSE addresses topics such as response bias, validity and reliability, and concerns about self-reported data.

## Results

NSSE created five benchmarks or indices that institutions can use to compare themselves to system averages or to evaluate institutional changes over time. Benchmarks combine a number of questions from the NSSE survey that are similar enough to be able to create indices that reflect various aspects of student engagement.

To help evaluate the level of student engagement at the University of Victoria, a number of comparison groups are used to report results. Prior to the administration of the survey, institutions were asked to choose a group of institutions with which they wished to be compared. UVic chose to be compared to a group of 18 Canadian universities, called “selected peers” in this report. Smaller universities and affiliated colleges were excluded from this group.

Another key comparison in this report is between first- and fourth-year students, as results typically differ between these two groups, both at UVic and nationally.

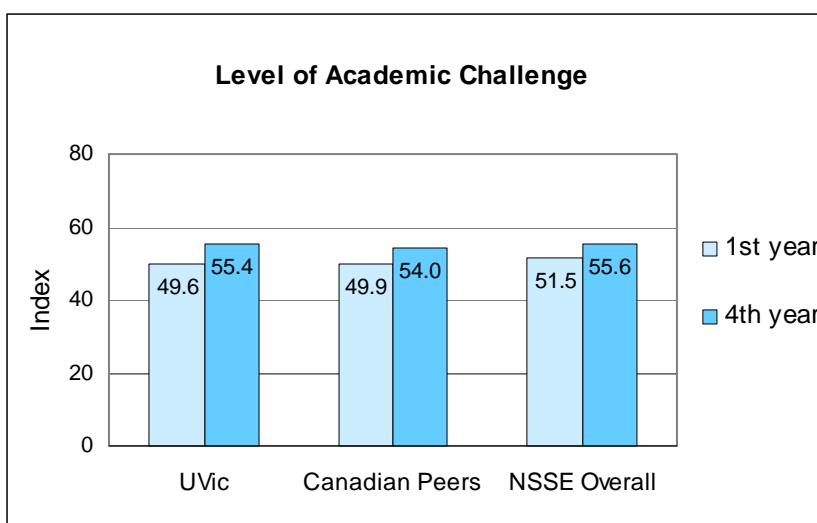
The results from the University of Victoria are also compared with the overall NSSE results for 557 institutions that participated in the 2006 survey. However, the overwhelming majority of participating institutions were American—526 compared to 31 Canadian institutions. Therefore, the overall results reflect mostly the conditions in the United States, not Canada. There are clearly inherent differences in the educational systems between the two countries, but this paper will not be exploring further the reasons behind these differences.



## Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and educational quality. Universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. There were nine items that were combined to create the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark—they included the amount of time spent preparing for class, the amount of reading and writing that students completed, and using higher order thinking skills.

Fourth-year students typically scored significantly higher than first-year students on the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark, both at UVic and across Canada. Students rated this benchmark favourably compared to the national average, especially students in their last year of studies.

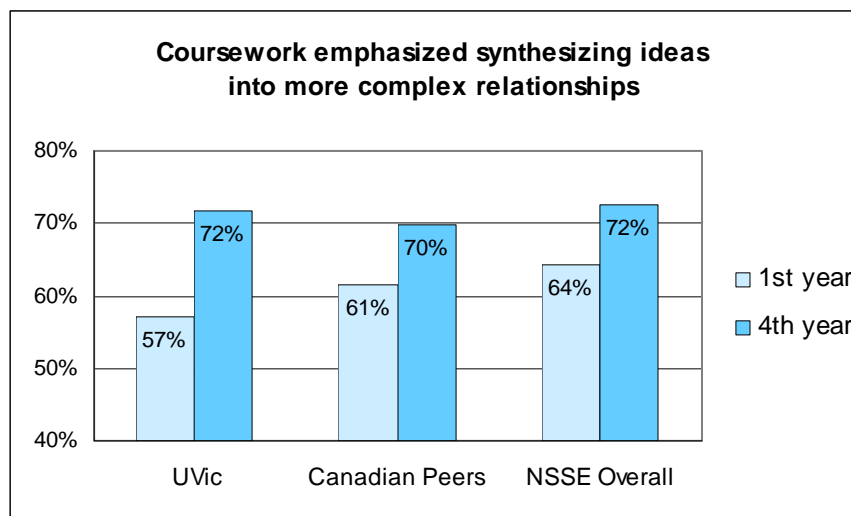


The nine items that were combined to create the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark are listed in the following table.

Level of Academic Challenge	
Amount of time spent preparing for class	
Number of assigned textbooks or readings	
Number of written papers or reports	
Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory	
Coursework emphasizing synthesis of ideas or experiences into more complex relationships	
Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information or methods	
Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems	
Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	
Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work	

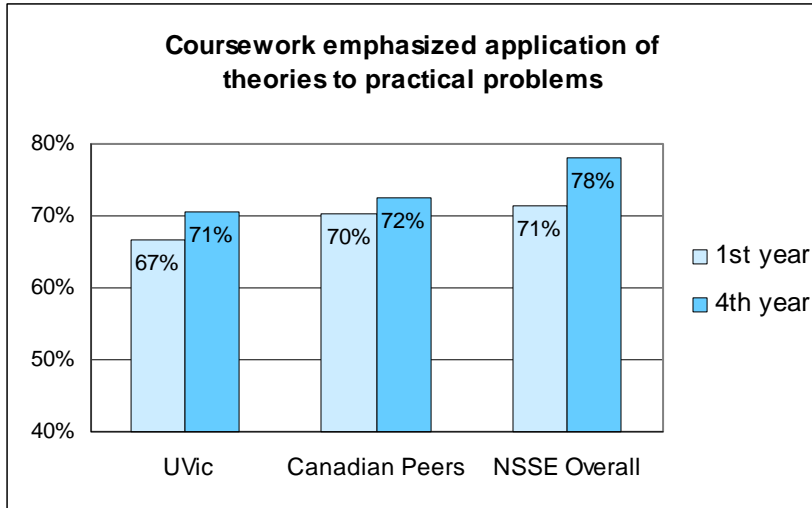
In order to further explore the Level of Academic Challenge benchmark, results from a selection of individual questions were analyzed and reported below. Students were asked to what extent their coursework emphasized certain activities—very much, quite a bit, some or very little. The following results show the percentage of students answering “very much” or “quite a bit,” the top two categories of the four-point scale.

Students were asked a series of questions about their usage of higher-order thinking skills—for example, the extent to which their coursework emphasized memorizing, analyzing, synthesizing, making judgements and applying theories or concepts. One of the items—synthesizing and organizing ideas—was given a very positive score from fourth-year students, but respondents from first-year gave substantially lower ratings. In fact, students in first year at UVic were more likely to say that their coursework emphasized *memorizing facts or ideas*—a total of 71 percent said they memorized facts or ideas “very much” or “quite a bit,” compared with 54 percent of fourth-year students.



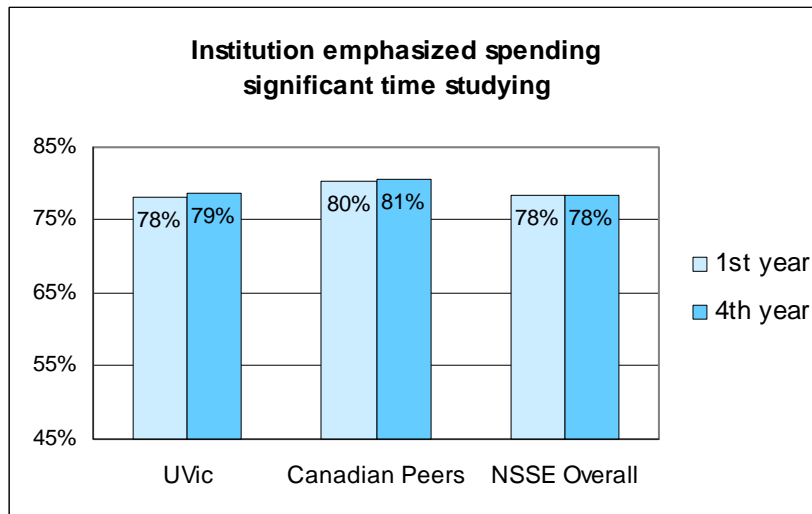
Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

Students were also asked to what extent their coursework emphasized applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations. Fourth-year students were more likely to give a positive response than were first-year students, and the gap between first- and fourth-year respondents was slightly larger at UVic than at other Canadian universities.



Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

The extent to which institutions encourage students to put effort into their studies is an important gauge of student engagement and satisfaction. At the University of Victoria, approximately 78 percent of all respondents said the institution emphasized spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work. Results were similar across first- and fourth-year levels of study and across institutions in North America.

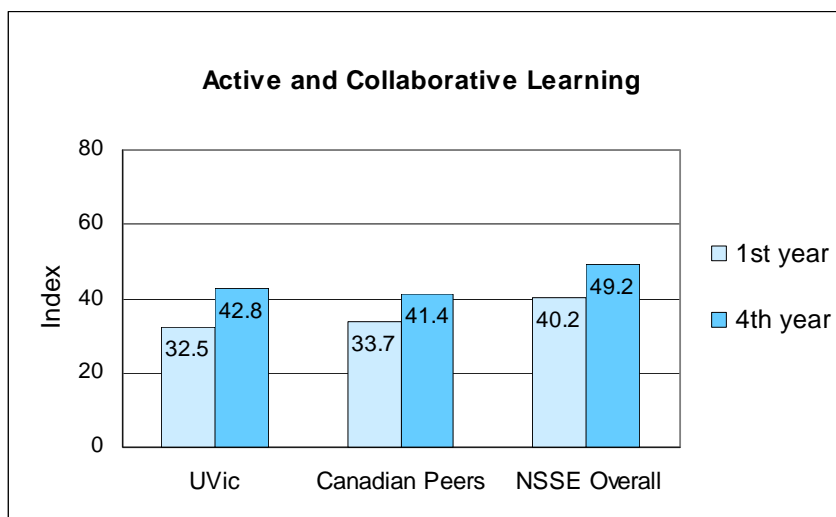


Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

## Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for problems they will encounter during and after university.

Respondents from the University of Victoria are relatively engaged in active and collaborative learning at their institution. First-year students at UVic were slightly less engaged than those from other Canadian peer institutions, while fourth-year UVic students were somewhat more engaged than students from the Canadian peer group. In general, fourth-year students score significantly higher than first-year students on this benchmark, both at UVic and at other post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States.



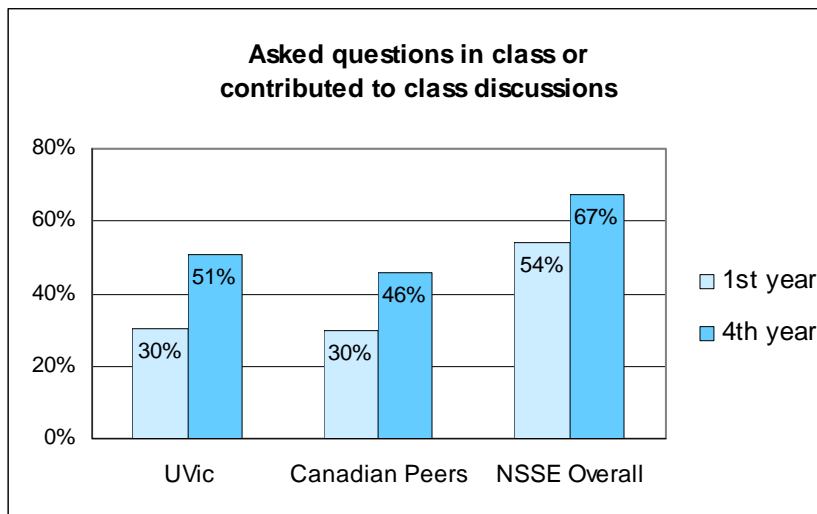
The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark includes individual questions that are listed in the table below. Students were asked to describe how often they did a number of in-class or out-of-class activities—student engagement increases with active participation in these activities. Universities that are committed to increasing student engagement can focus on fostering and promoting these effective institutional practices.

### Active and Collaborative Learning

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your classes with others outside of class

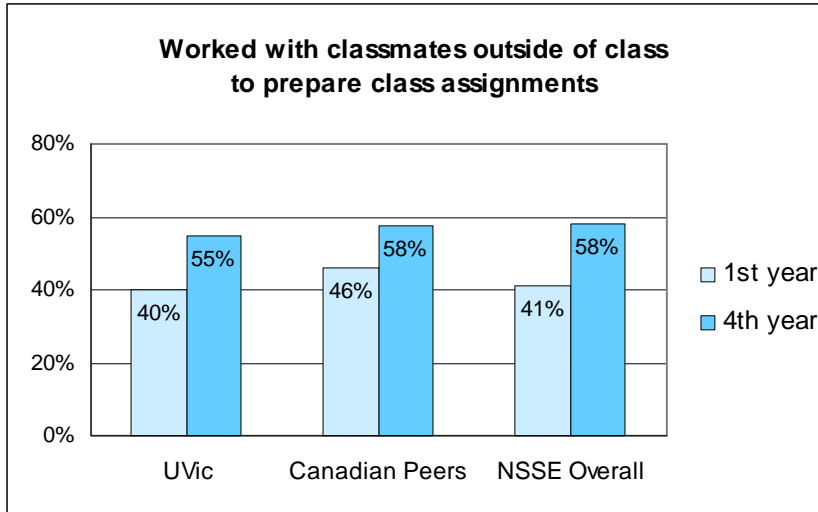
The results for selected Active and Collaborative Learning items show the percentage of students answering “very often or often,” the top two categories of a four-point scale (“very often, often, sometimes, never”).

Asking questions and having class discussions are important aspects of active and collaborative learning. There is evidence that first-year students participate in class discussions significantly less often than do fourth-year students, both at UVic and other post-secondary institutions. Undoubtedly, one of the important issues facing first-year students and the faculty teaching them during this initial exposure to university are large class sizes—efforts to make the experience more engaging are necessary to overcome this difficulty.



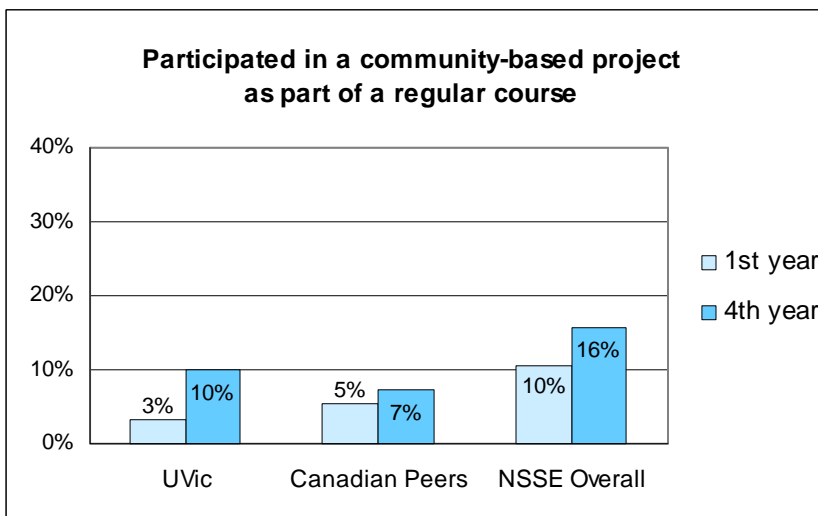
Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very often or often”

Working with classmates on projects increases students’ engagement in their education. The majority of fourth-year students gave a positive response to this item, while only 40 percent of first-year UVic students said they prepared class assignments often or very often with others outside of class—almost 20 percent of first-year respondents said they *never* did this.



Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very often or often”

Increased opportunities for experiential learning and community engagement are key initiatives in the University of Victoria’s strategic plan. Fourth-year students currently report significantly more participation in community-based projects as part of their regular courses, compared with first-year students. The gap between first- and fourth-year experiences is larger at UVic than other institutions. Future NSSE surveys will give evidence of any changes in the level of community and civic involvement, for both first- and fourth-year students.

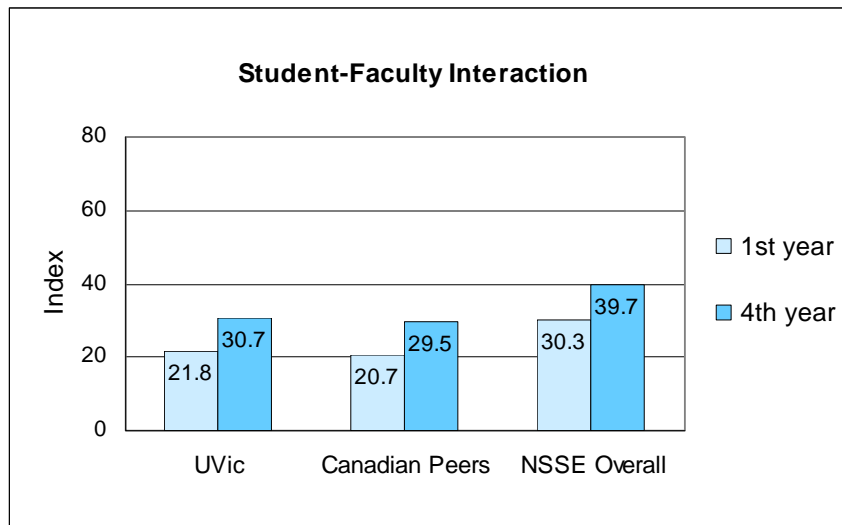


Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very often or often”

## Student-Faculty Interaction

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. Teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.

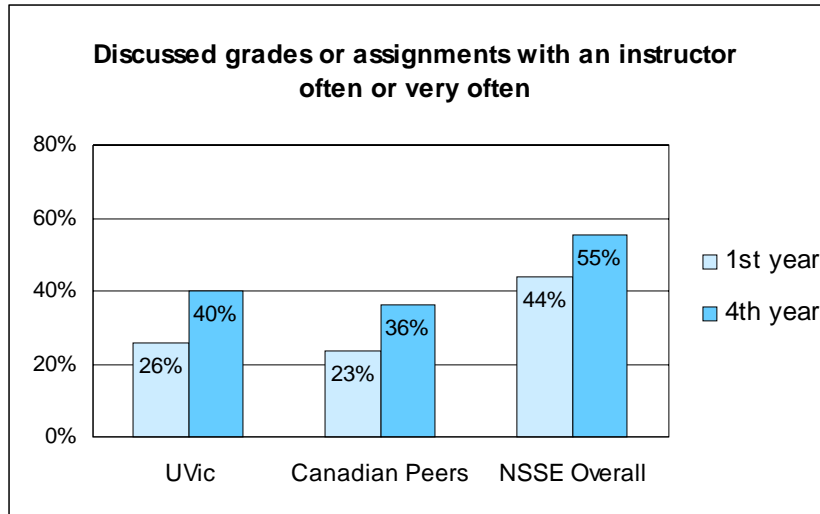
As with benchmarks previously discussed, there are significant differences between first- and fourth-year results. Fourth-year students score much higher on the Student-Faculty Interaction index than do first-year students.



The questions that were combined to create this benchmark focussed on the frequency with which students discussed grades, assignments, ideas, or career plans with their instructors. They were also asked if they worked with faculty on research projects or other activities outside of course or program requirements.

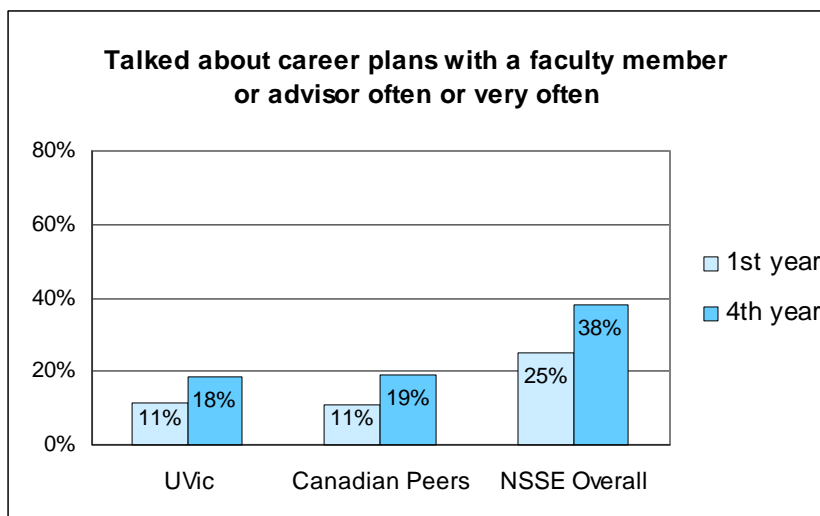
Student-Faculty Interaction	
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework	
Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	
Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements	

A significantly larger proportion of fourth-year students said they discussed grades or assignments with their instructor than did first-year students. In fact, about one-quarter of first-year students said they *never* talked with an instructor about assignments or grades compared with 10 percent of fourth-year students.



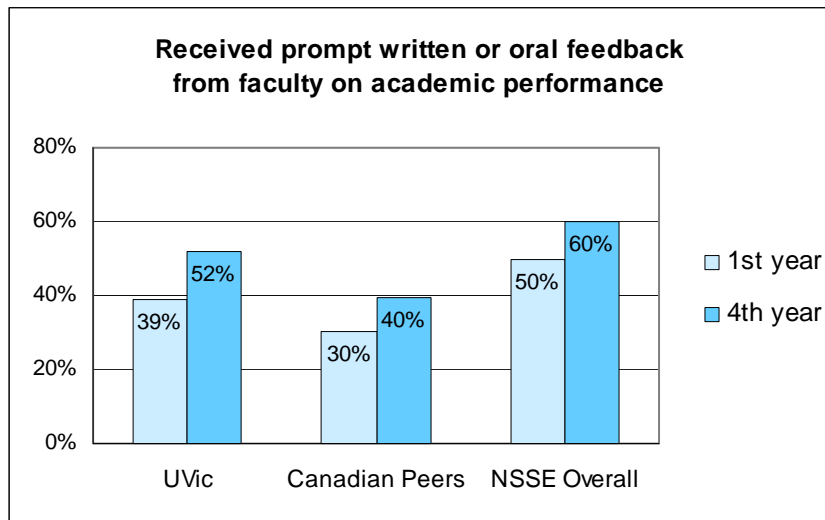
Planning and discussing career plans is important for students, and making courses relevant beyond the classroom through experiential learning and career exploration is central to increasing student engagement. Although about 30 percent of UVic first-year students had *sometimes* talked about their career plans with a faculty member or advisor, almost 60 percent had *never* done so. This figure improves somewhat for UVic fourth-year students—46 percent had *sometimes* discussed while 35 percent had *never* discussed career plans with staff or faculty.

Results for Canadian universities differ substantially from the overall (primarily American) results on this item. Students from (primarily) American institutions are twice as likely as those from Canadian peer institutions to say they discussed career plans with a university faculty member or advisor “often or very often.”



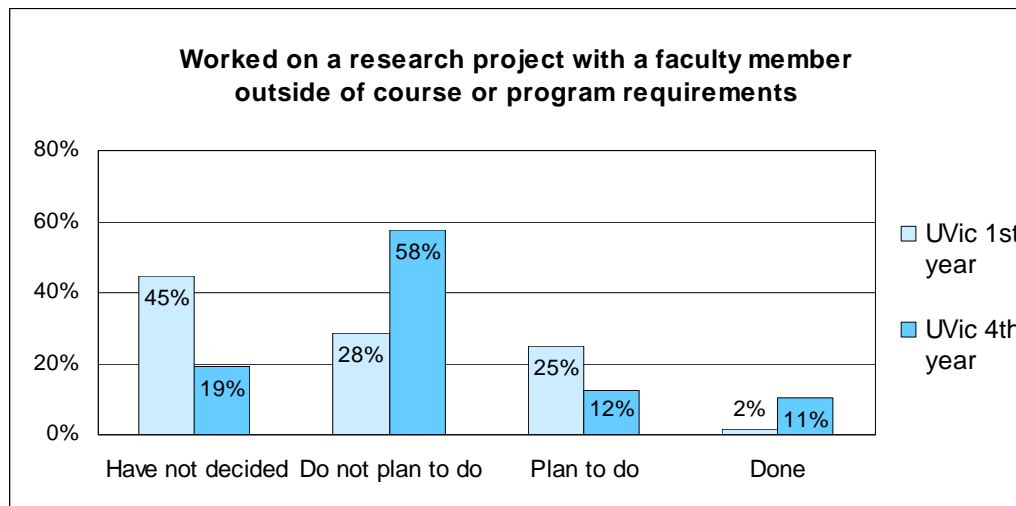


According to Chickering and Kuh<sup>3</sup>, “students learn best when the strengths and weaknesses of their products and performances are carefully evaluated and they receive specific suggestions for how to improve their work.” A substantial proportion of students from UVic reported receiving prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on academic performance. Respondents from fourth-year were more likely to report receiving prompt feedback—only 10 percent said they *never* received prompt feedback compared with 18 percent of first-year students.



Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very often or often”

One of the key strategies outlined in UVic’s strategic plan is to integrate learning and research, both for graduates and undergraduates<sup>4</sup>. In 2006, one-quarter of first-year students reported they *planned* to work on a research project with a faculty member outside of program requirements, while only 11 percent of fourth-year students had done so. Future iterations of the survey will provide an opportunity to monitor this initiative.



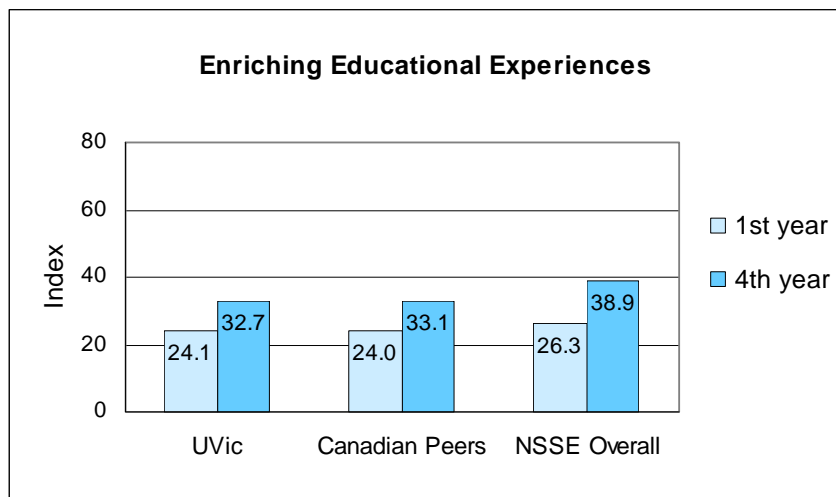
<sup>3</sup> Chickering, A.W., & Kuh, G.D. (2005). *Promoting student success: Creating conditions so every student can learn* (Occasional Paper No. 3). Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

<sup>4</sup> *A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*— <http://web.uvic.ca/strategicplan/>

## Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities enhance academic programs, and diversity experiences teach students valuable ideas about themselves and others. Technology facilitates collaboration between peers and instructors while internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge learned throughout the educational experience.

Overall, scores for UVic students on the benchmark Enriching Educational Experiences are on par with Canadian peers, both for first- and fourth-year respondents.

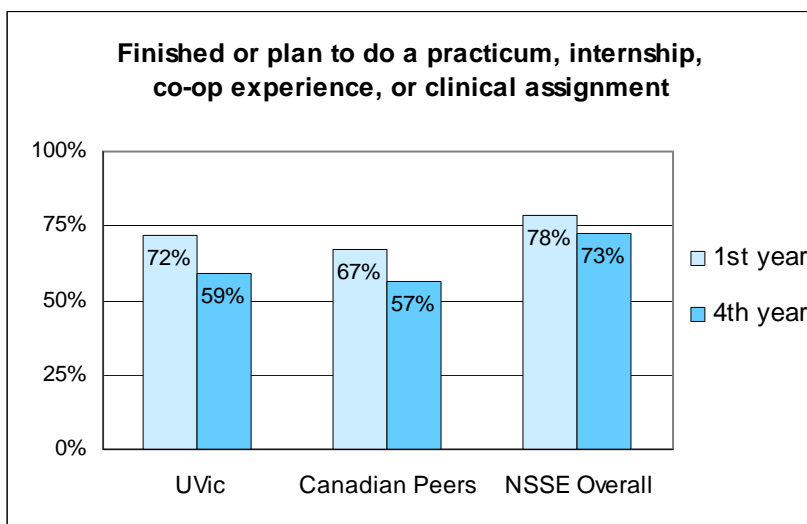


Students were asked whether they had participated in a variety of co-curricular and civic activities, or conversed with other students from diverse backgrounds. These questions relating to Enriching Educational Experiences are listed in the following table.

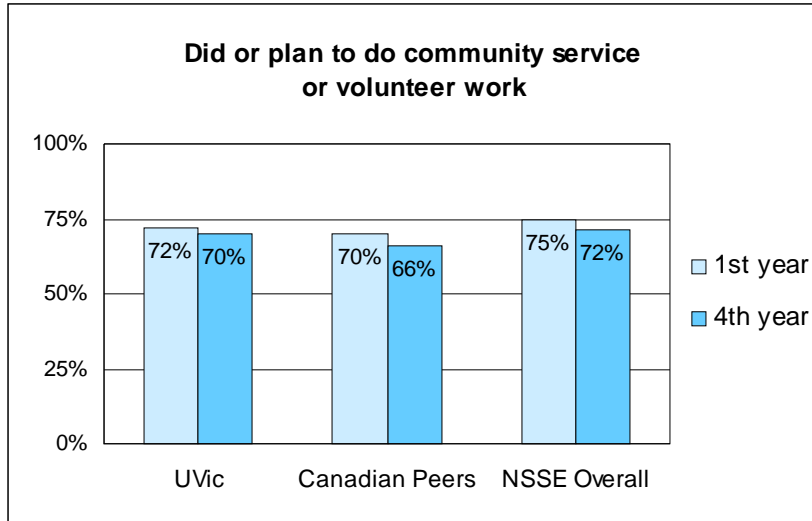
Enriching Educational Experiences
Participating in co-curricular activities (publications, student government, sports, etc.)
Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
Community service or volunteer work
Foreign language coursework & study abroad
Independent study or self-designed major
Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, etc.)
Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
Campus environment encourages contact among students from different social or ethnic backgrounds
Participate in some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

For seven of the questions in this benchmark, respondents were asked if they had participated in certain activities or *planned* to participate. If neither response was appropriate, they could indicate “do not plan to do,” or “undecided.” The benchmark score was calculated using only the response “done” versus “not done.” Fourth-year students received a higher overall benchmark score because they were more likely to have already completed the activity. The results for individual questions shown in the following two charts display the percentage of students who had done or planned to do the activity. More first-year students *plan* to participate, therefore show more positive results.

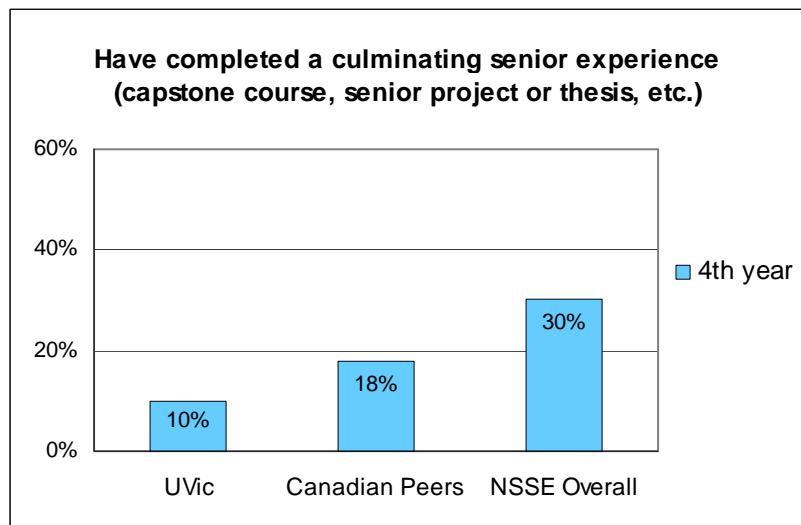
One of the key strategies outlined in UVic’s strategic plan is to increase the availability of experiential learning offerings for students in all programs. Almost three-quarters of first-year UVic students had done, or planned to do, a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment during their studies. By the time students reached fourth year, 43 percent had actually completed one of those experiential learning activities—16 percent were still planning to do so before graduating from the university.



Creating opportunities and encouraging students to be involved in some aspect of community engagement is a noteworthy objective at UVic. Seventy-two percent of first-year and 70 percent of fourth-year students had already done, or plan to do, community service or volunteer work. Although just over one-quarter of first-year students had *completed* some form of civic service (28 percent), by the time students are in fourth-year this proportion had almost doubled (to 51 percent).



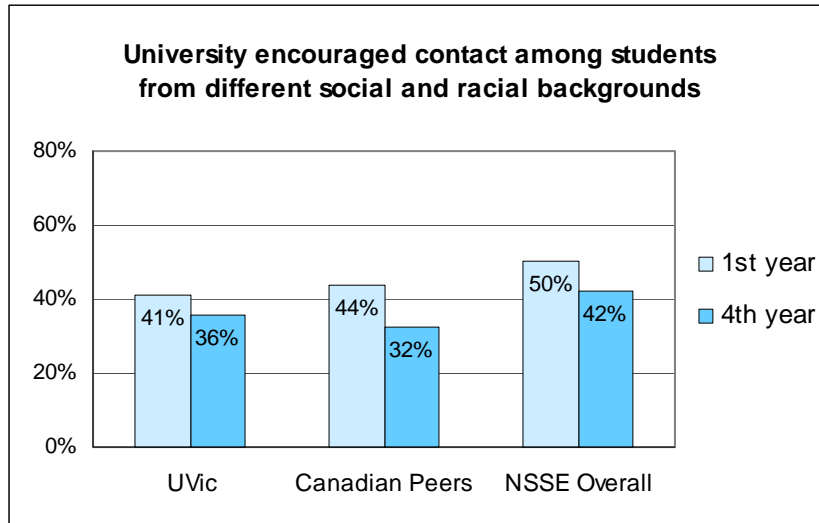
Students' engagement in their education is enhanced by integrating what is learned throughout their undergraduate experience at university, through the completion of a culminating senior experience such as a capstone course, a comprehensive exam or a senior project or thesis. Most UVic fourth-year students reported that they had not completed such an experience. The findings show a substantial gap between UVic and selected peer Canadian universities, and an even larger difference between Canadian and (mostly) American institutions.



Key to enriching students' educational experience is increasing their knowledge of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. In order to enhance a sense of campus community, universities can encourage contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Students were asked if their institution emphasized communication and contact among students of diverse backgrounds "very much," "quite a bit," "some," or "very little." Students from UVic

were quite positive in their response, but there is evidence that diverse contact could be improved for both first- and fourth-year students. A total of 41 percent of first-year students felt that diversity was encouraged “very much” or “quite a bit,” while fourth-year students were slightly more critical—26 percent said multicultural contact was encouraged “*very little*” compared to 21 percent of first-year respondents.

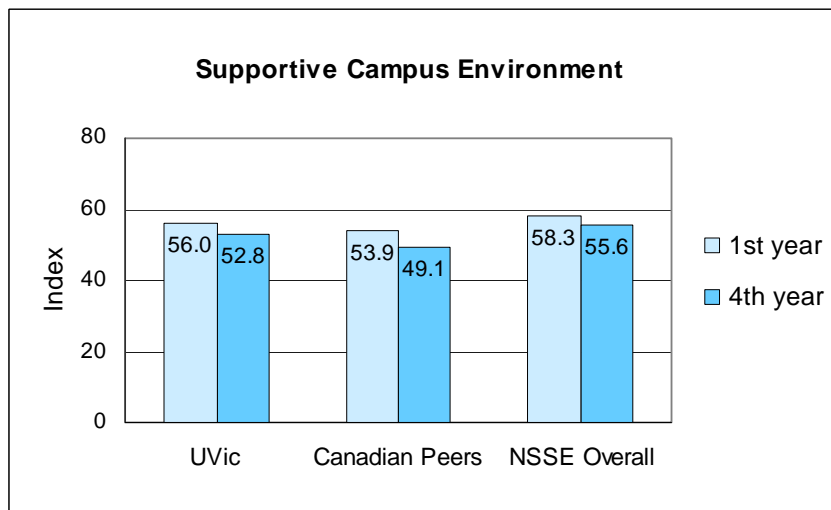


Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

## Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at universities that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.

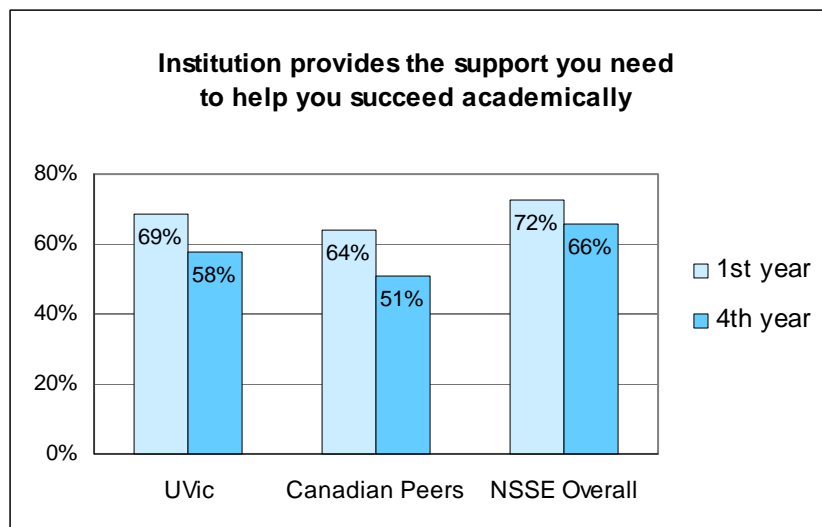
According to respondents from the NSSE survey, the University of Victoria successfully promotes a supportive campus environment. First-year students were more positive about their experience on campus than were fourth-year students, although UVic fourth-year respondents were more positive about their campus environment than their Canadian peers.



A supportive campus environment involves providing academic and social support in a friendly, supportive and helpful manner. The six questions used to create the benchmark are listed in the following table.

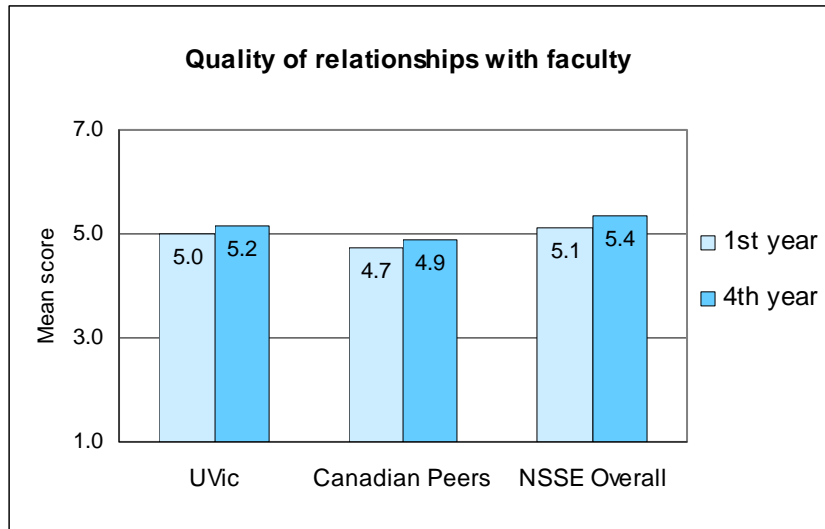
<b>Supportive Campus Environment</b>	
Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically	
Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	
Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially	
Quality of relationships with other students	
Quality of relationships with faculty members	
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices	

One of the questions included in this benchmark asked students to rate the extent to which their institution emphasized providing the support they needed to succeed academically. Students were given the following response options: “very much,” “quite a bit,” “some,” or “very little.” UVic respondents were very positive about the academic support they received and first-year students felt particularly supported.



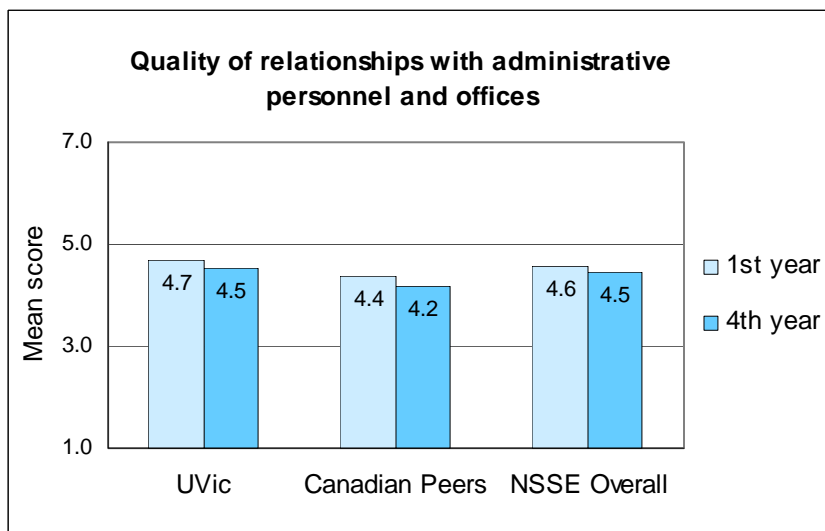
Note: Percentage of respondents who said “very much or quite a bit”

Another question included in the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark asked students to describe the quality of their relationships with faculty members on a seven-point scale from 7 (“available,” “helpful” or “sympathetic”) to 1 (“unavailable,” “unhelpful” or “unsympathetic.”) University of Victoria respondents were positive in their assessment of faculty; evaluations were even higher if they were in fourth-year. Average scores are shown in the chart below—the maximum score was seven and the minimum was one.



Note: Average scores are reported—possible responses range from 7 (most positive) to 1 (least positive)

The quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices was also assessed—on a seven-point scale from 7 (“helpful,” “considerate” or “flexible”) to 1 (“unhelpful,” “inconsiderate” or “rigid.”) Again, the results were favourable for UVic and help explain why the university is highly rated for its overall supportive campus environment. Average scores are shown on the chart, with a maximum possible score of seven and a minimum of one.

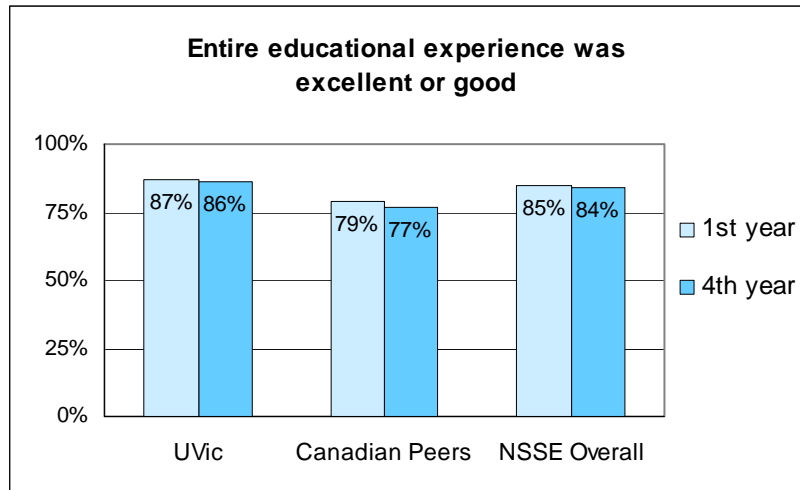


Note: Average scores are reported—possible responses range from 7 (most positive) to 1 (least positive)

## Overall Quality of Education

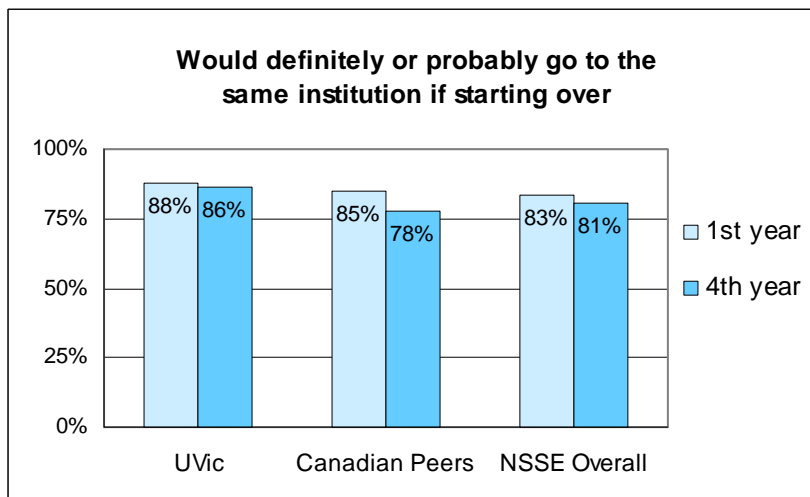
In addition to the questions used to create student engagement benchmarks, the National Survey of Student Engagement asked students about the overall quality of education. Both first- and fourth-year students gave high ratings to their overall educational experience at UVic.

Respondents were asked to indicate on a four-point scale whether their entire educational experience was “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” or “poor” and, overall, 86 percent of respondents at the University of Victoria indicated their education was “excellent” or “good.”



This overall measure of educational experience is highly correlated with the benchmark called Supportive Campus Environment.<sup>5</sup> The implication is that efforts to create a supportive campus environment will improve students’ evaluations of their overall educational experience.

Students were also asked if they would attend the same institution if they could start over again. The results were very positive, with 87 percent of respondents reporting they would definitely or probably return to UVic if starting over. Only 13 percent said probably or definitely not, with a slightly higher proportion of fourth-year students in this category.



<sup>5</sup> See table on page 7 in Methodology section



# Conclusions

Student engagement is a key predictor of student learning and success, and is a proxy for overall educational quality. Specific strategies to increase student engagement can be identified by examining the NSSE survey results.

First-year students generally have lower engagement scores than fourth-year students on most of NSSE's benchmarks. First-year students did, however, report more positive experiences on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark, both at the University of Victoria and other post-secondary institutions.

Engagement results for UVic students were favourable compared to the national average and benchmarks as well as individual questions were analyzed. The Level of Academic Challenge benchmark, for example, included questions about the amount of time spent preparing for class, the amount of reading and writing that students did, and the use of higher order thinking skills. Results are comparable between UVic students and the peer group for this benchmark, but the results for specific questions show substantial differences, depending on the comparison group.

The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark included questions such as asking questions in class, working with classmates on projects, and participating in community-based projects. Fourth-year students demonstrated much higher levels of engagement in collaborative learning, both at UVic and other institutions across North America, compared with first-year students.

Questions relating to the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark also show significant differences between first- and fourth-year experiences. Fourth-year students are more likely to discuss grades or assignments with an instructor, talk about career plans with faculty or an advisor, and receive prompt written or oral feedback on academic performance.

The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark includes questions about the completion of practicum and co-op experiences, community service, and experiences with students from different backgrounds. Except for the completion of a culminating senior experience, University of Victoria students are on par with or exceed national peer student engagement results.

The Supportive Campus Environment benchmark combined questions relating to academic support, the quality of relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, and other students. UVic students gave positive responses to all of these questions.

In addition to questions used to create student engagement benchmarks, the NSSE survey asked students to evaluate their overall educational experience at UVic and whether they would choose

to go to UVic again if they started over. Both questions received very positive responses from first- and fourth-year students.

Integrating the National Survey of Student Engagement into UVic's overall quality assurance procedures and academic review process is consistent with the university's strategic plan—*A Vision for the Future: Building on Strength*. The University of Victoria will continue to monitor student engagement through a commitment to administer the survey and produce results every few years.

# Recommendations and Best Practices

As evidenced in this paper, students at the University of Victoria are engaged in their education to the same extent or more than selected Canadian peers. Students gave high evaluations to their entire educational experience at UVic and were more likely to say they would go to the same institution if starting over again. There were certain areas where UVic students gave particularly high ratings, compared to the overall NSSE results.<sup>6</sup> Some of these highly rated items were:

- Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others (students, family members, co-workers) outside of class
- Number of books read on your own for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment
- Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities
- Number of hours spent preparing for class (studying, writing, doing homework, etc)
- Voting in local, state, or national elections

Comparing the results from UVic students with the overall North American NSSE results provides an opportunity to target areas where improvements could be made, in order to further increase student engagement.<sup>7</sup> A number of individual questions that were used in the creation of NSSE benchmarks show specific areas where adjustments in educational practices could enhance student engagement.

- Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions
- Make a class presentation
- Work with other students on projects *during class*
- Participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discuss grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talk about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Receive prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on academic performance
- Work with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc)
- Foreign language coursework
- Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc)

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<sup>6</sup> Differences are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and the effect sizes are between .2 and .4

<sup>7</sup> Differences are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and the effect sizes are between .3 and .7

A number of initiatives to address student engagement are already in process at the University of Victoria through the Learning and Teaching Centre.<sup>8</sup> The well-known Course Redesign Workshop is an intensive week long opportunity for faculty to re-design a course from start to finish. It focuses on the student experience by helping colleagues to line up learning outcomes, teaching methods and effective assessment in their course curriculum design.<sup>9</sup>

Other practical recommendations and “best practices” to increase student engagement will continue to be addressed as the University of Victoria continues to focus on delivering quality education.

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<sup>8</sup> The Learning and Teaching Centre’s website is: <http://web.uvic.ca/terc/index/index.htm>. The latest issue of their newsletter is dedicated to the subject of student engagement:

[http://web.uvic.ca/terc/newletter/documents/VoIIINo3Aug2006FINAL\\_000.pdf](http://web.uvic.ca/terc/newletter/documents/VoIIINo3Aug2006FINAL_000.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> For this event at the Learning and Teaching Centre see their calendar: <http://web.uvic.ca/terc/events/2007/April.htm#CRW>

# Appendix 1

## Selected peers

Before the survey was administered by NSSE, the University of Victoria was asked to select a group of institutions called “selected peers.” NSSE produced results for this group so that UVic results could be compared against a system average.

This is the list of institutions in the University of Victoria’s “selected peers” comparator group. There are 18 Canadian universities in this group—smaller universities and affiliated colleges were excluded from the selection.

<b>NSSE 2006 Selected Peers University of Victoria</b>	
<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Carleton University	Ottawa, Ontario
Concordia University	Montreal, Quebec
Dalhousie University	Halifax, Nova Scotia
McGill University	Montreal, Quebec
McMaster University	Hamilton, Ontario
Queen's University	Kingston, Ontario
Université Laval	Quebec City, Quebec
University of Alberta	Edmonton, Alberta
University of British Columbia	Vancouver, BC
University of Guelph	Guelph, Ontario
University of New Brunswick - Fredericton Campus	Fredericton, New Brunswick
University of Ottawa	Ottawa, Ontario
University of Saskatchewan	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
University of Toronto	Toronto, Ontario
University of Waterloo	Waterloo, Ontario
University of Western Ontario	London, Ontario
University of Windsor	Windsor, Ontario
York University	Toronto, Ontario

# Appendix 2

## Respondent characteristics

Respondent characteristics (gender, enrolment status and class level) were used to weight means, frequency distributions and benchmark scores.

<b>Student Characteristics*</b>			
		First year	Fourth year
<b>Respondents</b>			
	Number in sample	2,490	2,450
	Respondents	1,406	1,229
	Response rate	56%	50%
<b>Enrollment Status</b>			
	Full-time	89%	71%
	Less than full-time	11%	29%
<b>Gender</b>			
	Female	62%	66%
	Male	38%	34%
<b>Place of Residence</b>			
	On-campus	50%	5%
	Off-campus	50%	95%
<b>Transfer Status</b>			
	Transfer students	9%	42%
<b>Age</b>			
	Non-traditional (24 or older)	6%	43%
	Traditional (less than 24)	94%	57%

\* These results are not weighted

## Appendix 3

Detailed frequencies and mean results:

<http://www.inst.uvic.ca/>

## Appendix 4

2006 NSSE survey instrument:

<http://www.inst.uvic.ca/>