

Know before you go: Academic and social growth at
Texas A&M University¹

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¹ Copies of this report are available from Measurement and Research Services.

Overview: Assessing academic and social growth

Universities can vary distinctly in terms of the factors related to students' academic and social growth. Students are well-advised to consider these factors when choosing a school. This report describes some of these general factors and how current Texas A&M students view specific aspects of their campus environment relating to these factors.

To help students find the best fit for them, the National Survey of Student Engagement has put together a number of questions that students and parents should consider when choosing a college. These questions address factors that research has shown to be positively correlated with high levels of learning and student development in college. NSSE distributes the questions in a booklet available to high school guidance counselors, college admissions officers, parents and students on their web site. http://nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm. In this report, we provide the answers to those questions.

The data in this report come from the 2005 administration of the NSSE, and represent responses from over 2400 freshmen and seniors at Texas A&M University. Table 1 (see below) gives an overview of the specific questions associated with each broad factor discussed; then survey results relevant to each question are presented in accordance to the factors presented.

Academic and social growth factors

Briefly, the broad factors identified from in the NSSE Institutional Report (2005) include:

- *Academic challenge*: Measures time spent preparing for class, amount of reading and writing, deep learning, and institutional expectations for academic performance (see p. 4).
- *Active and collaborative learning*: Measures extent of class participation, working collaboratively with other students inside and outside of class, tutoring and involvement with a community-based project (see p. 6).
- *Student-faculty interaction*: Measures extent of talking with faculty members and advisors, discussing ideas from classes with faculty members outside of class, getting prompt feedback on academic performance, and working with faculty on research projects (see p. 7).
- *Enriching educational experiences*: Measures extent of interaction with students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds or with different political opinions or values, using electronic technology, and participating in activities such as internships, community service, study abroad, co-curricular activities, and culminating senior experience (see p. 8).
- *Supportive campus environment*: Measures extent to which students perceive the campus helps them succeed academically and socially, assists them in coping with non-academic responsibilities, and promotes supportive relations among students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative personnel and offices (see p. 10).
- *Additional sources for academic and personal development*: Additional considerations such as financial support and various student services (see p. 11).

Table 1. Specific questions associated with broad academic and social factors.

<p>Academic challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what degree is studying and spending time on academic work emphasized?• Do faculty hold students to high standards?• How much time do students spend on homework each week?• What type of thinking do assignments require?• How much writing is required?• How much reading is expected?• Do exams require students to do their best work?
<p>Active and collaborative learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How often do students discuss ideas in class?• How often are topics from class discussed outside the classroom?• Do students work together on projects?• How often do students make class presentations?• How often do students participate in community-based projects in regular courses?• Do students apply learning to real life through field experience?• Do students have opportunities to tutor or teach others?
<p>Student-faculty interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are faculty members accessible and supportive?• Do students work on research with faculty?• Do students receive prompt feedback on academic performance?• Do students talk with their teachers about what they're learning in class?• How often do students talk with advisors or faculty about career plans?• Do faculty and students work together on committees and projects outside of classes?
<p>Enriching educational experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent are honors courses, learning communities, and other distinctive programs offered?• In what ways do faculty use technology in their classes?• How often do students interact with peers from different backgrounds, or with different views?• How many students study abroad?• Do students participate in activities that enhance their spirituality?• Do students engage in community service?• What kind of activities are students engaged in outside the classroom?
<p>Supportive campus environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How well do students get along with other students?• Are students satisfied with their overall educational experience?• How much time do students devote to co-curricular activities?• How well do students get along with administrators and staff?• To what extent does the school help students deal with their academic and social needs?
<p>Additional sources for academic and personal development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What types of financial aid or scholarships are available to students?• How accessible are library services?• What types of health and counseling services are available?• What types of career planning and job placement services are available?

Academic challenge

(1) To what degree is studying and spending time on academic work emphasized?

(I.e., preparing for class by studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)

- 85% of the students say Texas A&M places quite a bit of emphasis on students' spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work. [NSSE 10a²]

(2) Do faculty hold students to high standards?

- The average Texas A&M student says they exceed their usual levels of effort to meet an instructor's standards or expectations. [NSSE 1r]

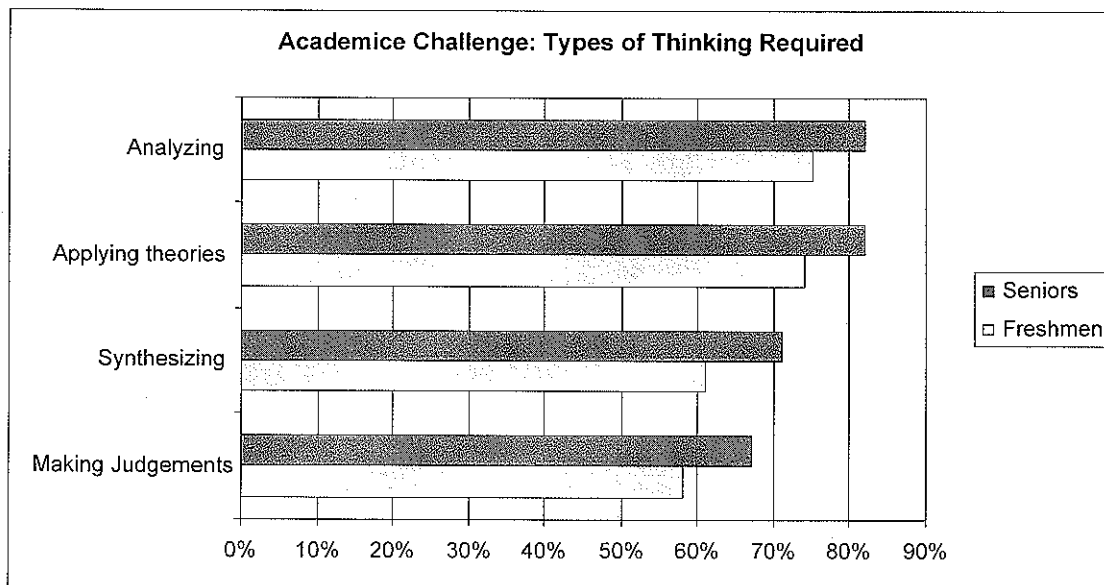
(3) How much time do students spend on homework each week?

- The average freshman and the average senior spent *at least 11 hours* per 7-day week [NSSE 9a]
- One-fifth of freshmen and one-fifth of seniors spent *20 hours or more* per 7-day week [NSSE 9a]

(4) What type of thinking do assignments require?

Coursework emphasized these following types of thinking:

- 55% of the freshmen and 79% of the seniors say that they often *integrate* ideas or information from multiple sources to complete a project [NSSE 1d]
- Over 80% of students reported having quite a bit of confidence that this university has contributed to their ability to *think critically and analytically*. [NSSE 11e]



² Labels in brackets correspond to item numbers in the 2005 NSSE college report for Texas A&M and are presented for reference.

Academic challenge (cont'd)

(5) How much writing is required?

- 70 to 80% of students say they prepare *at least two drafts* of a paper before turning it in [NSSE 1c]
- 50% of students write at least 1 report that is *between 5 and 19 pages* each year [NSSE 3d]
- 50% of students wrote at least 1 report of 20 pages or more in their senior year [NSSE 3c]

(6) How much reading is expected?

- Over 70% of the freshmen and 50% of the seniors were assigned *between 5 and 20* textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings in the school year of the survey [NSSE 3a]

(7) Do exams require students to do their best work?

- 90% of students say they were challenged to do their best on exams [NSSE 5]

Active and collaborative learning

(1) How often do students discuss ideas in class?

- 30% of freshmen and 58% of seniors often asked questions in class [NSSE 1a]

(2) How often are topics from class discussed outside the classroom?

- 57% of freshmen and 61% of seniors discussed ideas from their classes or readings outside of class [NSSE 1t]

(3) Do students work together on projects?

- 31% of freshmen and 41% of seniors say they often work with other students on projects *during class* [NSSE 1g]
- 49% of freshmen and 72% of seniors say they often work with classmates on projects *outside of class* [NSSE 1h]

(4) How often do students make class presentations?

- 11% of freshmen and 50% of seniors say they often make class presentations [NSSE 1b]

(5) How often do students participate in community-based projects in regular courses?

- 12% of freshmen and 15% of seniors have participated in a community-based project as part of a regular class [NSSE 1k]

(6) Do students apply learning to real life through field experience?

- Over 50% of seniors have participated in a practicum, internship, field experience, co-op, or clinical assignment [NSSE 7a]

(7) Do students have opportunities to tutor or teach others?

- 66% of freshmen and 71% of seniors say they have tutored or taught other students [NSSE 1j]

Student-faculty interaction

- (1) Are faculty members accessible and supportive?
 - Yes, according to 66% of freshmen and 76% of seniors [NSSE 8b]
- (2) Do students work on research with faculty?
 - By the time they are seniors, 20% of students have worked on research with faculty [NSSE 7d]
- (3) Do students receive prompt feedback on academic performance?
 - 43% of freshmen and 61% of seniors often discuss their grades with an instructor [NSSE 1n]
 - 53% of freshmen and 68% of seniors say their instructors often give prompt feedback [NSSE 1q]
- (4) Do students talk with their teachers about what they're learning in class?
 - 45% of freshmen and 65% of seniors talk about ideas from courses with faculty outside of class [NSSE 1p]
- (5) How often do students talk with advisors or faculty about career plans?
 - 70% of freshmen and 86% of seniors talk about career plans with faculty or an advisor [NSSE 1o]
- (6) Do faculty and students work together on committees and projects outside of classes?
 - 57% of students have worked with faculty on projects and committees [NSSE 1s]

Enriching educational experiences

- (1) To what extent are honors courses, learning communities, and other distinctive programs offered?
 - 33% of seniors have participated in some type of distinctive program [NSSE 7c]
 - Close to 13% of the students have conducted independent study or self-designed major [NSSE 7g]

 - (2) In what ways do faculty use technology in their classes?
 - 88% of students use some type of electronic medium like listservs and chat groups to discuss or complete an assignment [NSSE 1l]
 - Almost all students (i.e., 99%) email their instructors [NSSE 1m]

 - (3) How often do students interact with peers from different backgrounds, or with different views?
 - 26% of students report having serious conversations very often with people who have different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values [NSSE 1r]

 - (4) How often do students interact with peers from different racial or ethnic backgrounds?
 - 86% of all students have had serious conversations very often with those of a different race or ethnicity [NSSE 1u]
 - 88% of students believe that Texas A&M contributes quite a bit to their understanding of people with different racial and ethnic backgrounds [NSSE 11l]

 - (5) How many students study abroad?
 - 30% of the students have or plan to study abroad [NSSE 7f]
 - 40% of students have taken or plan to take an additional foreign language coursework [NSSE 1e]

 - (6) Do students participate in activities that enhance their spirituality (e.g., worship, meditation)?
 - 81% of students have done so [NSSE 6c]
 - 73% of students say Texas A&M helped them develop a deepened sense of spirituality [NSSE 11p]

 - (7) Do students engage in community service?
 - 55% of freshmen and 78% of seniors have engaged in community service or volunteer work [NSSE 7b]
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Enriching educational experiences (cont'd)

(8) What kind of activities are students engaged in outside the classroom?

- Almost 70% of students have attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance or other theater performance [NSSE 6a]
- 96% of students exercise or participate in physical fitness activities [NSSE 6b]
- About one-fifth of students work *at least an hour* per week ON campus [NSSE 9b]
No more than 4% work *more than 20 hours* per week ON campus [NSSE 9b]
- About 20% of freshmen and 40% of seniors work OFF campus *at least 1 hour* per week [NSSE 9c]
About 10% of freshmen and 30% of seniors work OFF campus *more than 10 hours* per week [NSSE 9c]
- About 60% of students spend *1 – 10 hours* per week relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.) [NSSE 9e]
About 40% of students spend *more than 10 hours* per week [NSSE 9e]
- About 80% of students spend *5 hours or less* per week commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.) [NSSE 9g]

Supportive campus environment

- (1) How well do students get along with other students?
 - 75% of students report very high levels of friendly, supportive relations with other students [NSSE 8a]
- (2) Are students satisfied with their overall educational experience?
 - 93% of the respondents rated their experience as good or excellent [NSSE 13]
- (3) How much time do students devote to co-curricular activities?
 - 76% of students engage in some sort of co-curricular activity on a regular basis (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.) [NSSE 9d]
- (4) How well do students get along with administrators and staff?
 - 57% of students reported that personnel tend to be helpful, considerate and flexible [NSSE 8c]
 - 92% of students describe the staff as knowledgeable in their area [TAMU1b]
- (5) To what extent does the school help students deal with their academic and social needs?
 - Over 50% of students say that Texas A&M provides quite a bit of support needed to thrive socially [NSSE 10e]
 - 75% of students describe the quality of academic advising as good or excellent [NSSE12]

Additional sources for academic and personal development

- (1) What types of financial aid or scholarships are available to students?
 - 38% of freshmen report that scholarships and grants are a major source of payment for expenses [Ex05f04c]
 - 25% of freshmen have loans that act as a major source of payment for expenses [Ex05f04d]

- (2) How accessible are library services?
 - Over 90% of students agree that the library staffs are helpful in finding needed resources [TAMU1a]
 - About 50% of students agree that the library has the resources that they need [TAMU 7d]

- (3) What types of health and counseling services are available?
 - Over 90% of students agree that information about student services is easy to obtain [TAMU 2b]

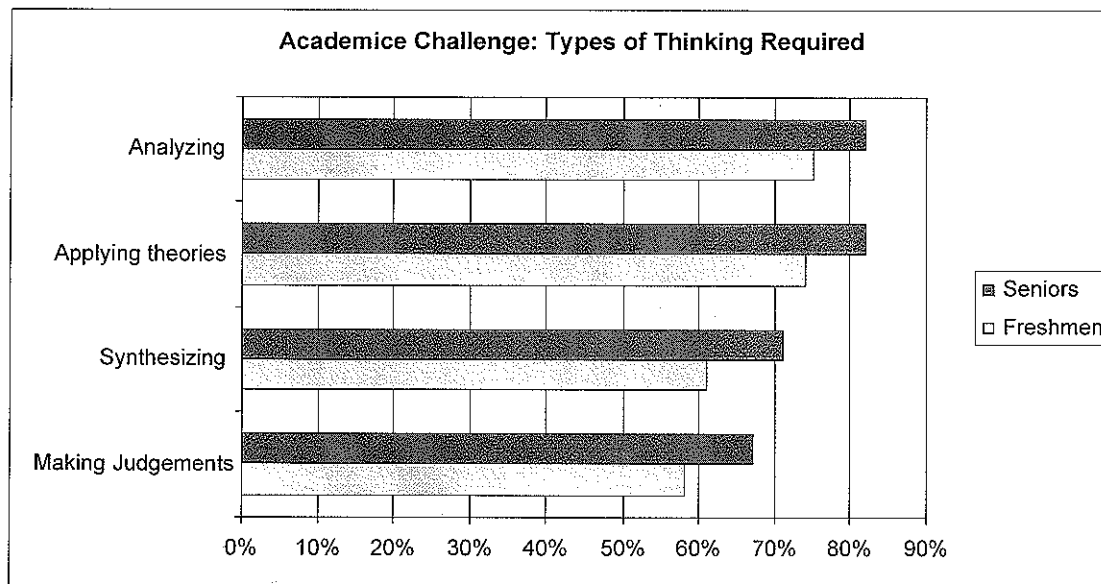
- (4) What types of career planning and job placement services are available?
 - About 50% of students report using career advising or planning services [Ex05f03b]

Academic challenge (ADDENDUM to p.4)

(4) What type of thinking do assignments require?

Coursework emphasized these following types of thinking:

- 55% of the freshmen and 79% of the seniors say that they often *integrate* ideas or information from multiple sources to complete a project [NSSE 1d]
- Over 80% of students reported having quite a bit of confidence that this university has contributed to their ability to *think critically and analytically*. [NSSE 11e]



- **ANALYZING:** 75% of the freshmen and 82% of the seniors report *analyzing* basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory quite a bit to very much [NSSE 2b]
- **SYNTHESIZING:** 61% of the freshmen and 71% of the seniors report *synthesizing* and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships quite a bit to very much [NSSE 2c]
- **MAKING JUDGEMENTS:** 58% of the freshmen and 67% of the seniors report *making judgments* about the value of information, arguments, or methods quite a bit to very much [NSSE 2d]
- **APPLYING THEORIES:** 74% of the freshmen and 82% of the seniors report *applying theories* or concepts to practical problems or in new situations quite a bit to very much [NSSE 2e]