
NSSE 2021 Topical Module Report

First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions

Washington State University

This module includes a set of items only for first-year students and a set only for seniors, with questions adapted from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement and the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, respectively. The first-year items focus on academic perseverance, help-seeking behaviors, and institutional commitment, while the senior items explore post-graduation plans, links between the academic major and future plans, and confidence with skills developed during college.

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First-Year Students

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b		
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU	Omitted (low count)	
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean	Effect size ^d
1. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?										
a. Studied when there were other interesting things to do	FYSfy01a	1	Never	50	6			2.7		
		2	Sometimes	314	36					
		3	Often	316	38					
		4	Very often	177	20					
		Total		857	100					
b. Found additional information for course assignments when you didn't understand the material	FYSfy01b	1	Never	29	3			2.8		
		2	Sometimes	265	31					
		3	Often	387	45					
		4	Very often	171	21					
		Total		852	100					
c. Participated in course discussions, even when you didn't feel like it	FYSfy01c	1	Never	46	6			2.7		
		2	Sometimes	323	38					
		3	Often	340	39					
		4	Very often	147	17					
		Total		856	100					
d. Asked instructors for help when you struggled with course assignments	FYSfy01d	1	Never	143	17			2.3		
		2	Sometimes	396	46					
		3	Often	228	27					
		4	Very often	86	10					
		Total		853	100					
e. Finished something you have started when you encountered challenges	FYSfy01e	1	Never	11	1			3.1		
		2	Sometimes	168	19					
		3	Often	402	47					
		4	Very often	274	33					
		Total		855	100					
f. Stayed positive, even when you did poorly on a test or assignment	FYSfy01f	1	Never	50	6			2.7		
		2	Sometimes	318	36					
		3	Often	336	40					
		4	Very often	149	18					
		Total		853	100					
2. During the current school year, how difficult have the following been for you?										
a. Learning course material	FYSfy02a	1	Not at all difficult	21	3			3.7		
		2	2	112	14					
		3	3	220	26					
		4	4	304	35					
		5	5	131	15					
		6	Very difficult	68	8					
		Total		856	100					
b. Managing your time	FYSfy02b	1	Not at all difficult	36	4			4.0		
		2	2	88	11					
		3	3	182	21					
		4	4	227	27					
		5	5	175	20					
		6	Very difficult	147	17					
		Total		855	100					

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (2-tailed); Refer to the endnotes page for the key to triangle symbols.

First-Year Students

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b		
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU	Omitted (low count)	
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean	Effect size ^d
c. Getting help with school work	FYSfy02c	1	Not at all difficult	80	10			3.4		
		2	2	173	21					
		3	3	215	25					
		4	4	189	22					
		5	5	111	13					
		6	Very difficult	89	10					
Total				857	100					
d. Interacting with faculty	FYSfy02d	1	Not at all difficult	94	11			3.3		
		2	2	182	22					
		3	3	197	23					
		4	4	179	21					
		5	5	117	13					
		6	Very difficult	85	10					
Total				854	100					
3. During the current school year, about how often have you sought help with coursework from the following sources?										
a. Faculty members	FYSfy03a_16	1	Never	188	22			2.1		
		2	Sometimes	473	54					
		3	Often	154	18					
		4	Very often	40	5					
		Total				855	100			
b. Academic advisors	FYSfy03b_16	1	Never	370	44			1.8		
		2	Sometimes	347	40					
		3	Often	109	12					
		4	Very often	29	4					
		Total				855	100			
c. Learning support services (tutoring, writing center, success coaching, etc.)	FYSfy03c_16	1	Never	510	61			1.6		
		2	Sometimes	232	26					
		3	Often	79	10					
		4	Very often	31	4					
		Total				852	100			
d. Friends or other students	FYSfy03d_16	1	Never	91	12			2.5		
		2	Sometimes	323	38					
		3	Often	281	32					
		4	Very often	158	17					
		Total				853	100			
e. Family members	FYSfy03e_16	1	Never	348	42			1.9		
		2	Sometimes	271	31					
		3	Often	174	20					
		4	Very often	61	7					
		Total				854	100			
f. Other persons or offices	FYSfy03f_16	1	Never	606	71			1.4		
		2	Sometimes	184	22					
		3	Often	46	5					
		4	Very often	16	2					
		Total				852	100			

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First-Year Students

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b		
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU	Omitted (low count)	Effect size ^d
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean	
4. During the current school year, have you participated in a first-year seminar or other course that introduces students to expectations of the academic community and college success skills (goalsetting, study skills, campus resources, etc.)?^j (Comparison data are limited to NSSE 2021.)										
FYSfy06_21		Yes		374	44			44%		
<i>(Means indicate the percentage who responded "Yes.")</i>		No		297	35					
		Unsure		179	21					
		Total		850	100					
5a. During the current school year, have you seriously considered leaving this institution?^j										
FYSfy04a		No		628	74			26%		
<i>(Means indicate the percentage who responded "Yes.")</i>		Yes		224	26					
		Total		852	100					
5b. [If answered "yes"] Why did you consider leaving? (Select all that apply.)										
FYSfy04b_1_16	—	Academics are too difficult		43	19					
FYSfy04b_2_16	—	Academics are too easy		8	4					
FYSfy04b_3_16	—	Other academic issues (major not offered, course availability, advising, credit transfer, etc.)		29	12					
FYSfy04b_4_16	—	Financial concerns (costs or financial aid)		77	34					
FYSfy04b_5_16	—	To change your career options (transfer to another school or program, military service, etc.)		48	22					
FYSfy04b_6_16	—	Difficulty managing demands of school and work		64	27					
FYSfy04b_7_16	—	Too much emphasis on partying		20	10					
FYSfy04b_8_16	—	Not enough opportunities to socialize and have fun		61	30					
FYSfy04b_9_16	—	Relations with faculty and staff		26	12					
FYSfy04b_10_16	—	Relations with other students		33	15					
FYSfy04b_11_16	—	Campus climate, location, or culture		48	22					
FYSfy04b_12_16	—	Unsafe or hostile environment		4	2					
FYSfy04b_13_16	—	Personal reasons (family issues, physical or mental health, homesickness, stress, etc.)		110	47					
FYSfy04b_14_16	—	A reason not listed above, please specify:		58	26					

First-Year Students

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b			
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU		Omitted (low count)	Effect size ^d
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean		
6. How important is it to you that you graduate from <i>this institution</i>?											
	FYSfy05	1	Not important	17	2			5.2			
		2	2	33	4						
		3	3	42	5						
		4	4	91	11						
		5	5	129	16						
		6	Very important	533	62						
			Total	845	100						

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (2-tailed); Refer to the endnotes page for the key to triangle symbols.

First-Year Students

Variable name	N	Mean		Standard error ^f		Standard deviation ^g		DF ^h	Sig. ⁱ	Effect size ^d
	WSU	WSU	Omitted (low count)	WSU	Omitted (low count)	WSU	Omitted (low count)	Comparisons with: Omitted (low count)		
FYSfy01a	856	2.72		.029		0.85				
FYSfy01b	851	2.83		.027		0.79				
FYSfy01c	855	2.67		.028		0.82				
FYSfy01d	852	2.29		.030		0.87				
FYSfy01e	854	3.11		.026		0.75				
FYSfy01f	852	2.70		.028		0.83				
FYSfy02a	855	3.67		.041		1.19				
FYSfy02b	854	3.99		.047		1.38				
FYSfy02c	856	3.36		.050		1.45				
FYSfy02d	853	3.31		.051		1.48				
FYSfy03a_16	855	2.06		.027		0.78				
FYSfy03b_16	855	1.75		.028		0.80				
FYSfy03c_16	851	1.56		.028		0.81				
FYSfy03d_16	854	2.55		.031		0.92				
FYSfy03e_16	854	1.91		.032		0.95				
FYSfy03f_16	851	1.38		.023		0.68				
FYSfy06_21 ^k	850	.442		.0170		--				
FYSfy04a ^k	851	.256		.0150		--				
FYSfy05	843	5.20		.044		1.28				

Seniors

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b			
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU		Omitted (low count)	Effect size ^d
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean		
1. Do you expect to graduate this spring or summer?											
	FYSsr01_16	No		409	32						
		Yes		875	68						
		Total		1,284	100						
1a. [Excludes those who answered "No," not expecting spring/summer graduation] After graduation, what best describes your immediate plans?											
	FYSsr01a	—	Full-time employment	495	57						
		—	Part-time employment	31	3						
		—	Graduate or professional school	164	18						
		—	Military service	6	1						
		—	Service or volunteer activity (AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Teach for America, etc.)	3	0						
		—	Internship (paid or unpaid)	64	7						
		—	Travel or gap year	43	5						
		—	No plans at this time	46	5						
		—	Other, please specify:	23	3						
		Total		875	100						
1b. [If immediate plans included full- or part-time employment] Do you already have a job for after graduation?^j											
	FYSsr01b	No		323	61						
	(Means indicate the percentage who responded "Yes.")	Yes, I will start a new job		95	19					39%	
		Yes, I will continue in my current job		104	20						
		Total		522	100						
2. [Excludes those who answered "No," not expecting spring/summer graduation] To what extent have courses in your major(s) prepared you for your post-graduation plans?											
	FYSsr02	1	Very little	55	6						
		2	Some	210	25						
		3	Quite a bit	354	40						
		4	Very much	256	28						
		Total		875	100					2.9	
3. Do you intend to work eventually in a field related to your major(s)?^j											
	FYSsr03	Yes		1,114	85						
	(Means indicate the percentage who responded "Yes.")	No		51	4					85%	
		Unsure		115	10						
		Total		1,280	100						
4. Do you plan to be self-employed, an independent contractor, or a freelance worker someday?^j											
	FYSsr04	Yes		260	21						
	(Means indicate the percentage who responded "Yes.")	No		650	49					21%	
		Unsure		369	30						
		Total		1,279	100						

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Seniors

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b		
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU	Omitted (low count)	
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean	Effect size ^d
5. Do you plan to start your own business (nonprofit or for-profit) someday?^j										
	FYSsr05		Yes	306	25			25%		
			No	560	42					
			Unsure	416	33					
			Total	1,282	100					
6. How much confidence do you have in your ability to complete tasks requiring the following skills and abilities?										
a. Critical thinking and analysis of arguments and information	FYSsr06a		1	Very little	5	0			3.5	
			2	Some	92	7				
			3	Quite a bit	494	38				
			4	Very much	691	54				
				Total	1,282	100				
b. Creative thinking and problem solving	FYSsr06b		1	Very little	5	0			3.5	
			2	Some	87	7				
			3	Quite a bit	485	37				
			4	Very much	703	55				
				Total	1,280	100				
c. Research skills	FYSsr06c		1	Very little	28	2			3.2	
			2	Some	223	17				
			3	Quite a bit	521	41				
			4	Very much	510	40				
				Total	1,282	100				
d. Clear writing	FYSsr06d		1	Very little	16	1			3.3	
			2	Some	144	12				
			3	Quite a bit	536	42				
			4	Very much	583	45				
				Total	1,279	100				
e. Persuasive speaking	FYSsr06e		1	Very little	49	4			3.0	
			2	Some	311	24				
			3	Quite a bit	507	39				
			4	Very much	414	33				
				Total	1,281	100				
f. Technological skills	FYSsr06f		1	Very little	28	2			3.1	
			2	Some	279	21				
			3	Quite a bit	516	39				
			4	Very much	458	37				
				Total	1,281	100				
g. Financial and business management skills	FYSsr06g		1	Very little	194	14			2.5	
			2	Some	474	37				
			3	Quite a bit	385	31				
			4	Very much	228	19				
				Total	1,281	100				
h. Entrepreneurial skills	FYSsr06h		1	Very little	334	25			2.3	
			2	Some	465	36				
			3	Quite a bit	295	23				
			4	Very much	185	15				
				Total	1,279	100				

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Seniors

Item wording or description	Variable name	Values ^c	Response options	Frequency Distributions ^a				Statistical Comparisons ^b		
				WSU		Omitted (low count)		WSU	Omitted (low count)	
				Count	%	Count	%	Mean	Mean	Effect size ^d
i. Leadership skills	FYSSr06i	1	Very little	41	3			3.2		
		2	Some	227	18					
		3	Quite a bit	474	37					
		4	Very much	541	42					
		Total		1,283	100					
j. Networking and relationship building	FYSSr06j	1	Very little	77	6			2.9		
		2	Some	332	26					
		3	Quite a bit	463	36					
		4	Very much	408	31					
		Total		1,280	100					
7. To what extent has your coursework in your major(s) emphasized the following?										
a. Generating new ideas or brainstorming	FYSSr07a	1	Very little	38	3			3.1		
		2	Some	236	19					
		3	Quite a bit	533	42					
		4	Very much	475	36					
		Total		1,282	100					
b. Taking risks in your coursework without fear of penalty	FYSSr07b	1	Very little	321	25			2.4		
		2	Some	384	30					
		3	Quite a bit	321	25					
		4	Very much	253	20					
		Total		1,279	100					
c. Evaluating multiple approaches to a problem	FYSSr07c	1	Very little	53	4			3.0		
		2	Some	267	21					
		3	Quite a bit	522	41					
		4	Very much	439	34					
		Total		1,281	100					
d. Inventing new methods to arrive at unconventional solutions	FYSSr07d	1	Very little	155	13			2.7		
		2	Some	415	33					
		3	Quite a bit	405	32					
		4	Very much	300	23					
		Total		1,275	100					
8. Have you been creating an ePortfolio or other collection that includes samples of your work over time, shows your progress, and helps you reflect on the knowledge and skills you have gained?^j (Comparison data are limited to NSSE 2021.)										
	FYSSr09_21	Yes		360	28			28%		
		No		801	62					
		Unsure		119	10					
		Total		1,280	100					

9. Is there anything your institution could have done better to prepare you for your career or further education? Please describe.

This final question asked students to respond in an open text box. Comments were recorded for 446 seniors. Responses are provided in your NSSE21 Student Comments Report and in a separate SPSS data file.

These open-ended responses appear exactly as respondents entered them and may not be suitable for distribution without prior review.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (2-tailed); Refer to the endnotes page for the key to triangle symbols.

Seniors

Variable name	N	Mean		Standard error ^f		Standard deviation ^g		DF ^h	Sig. ⁱ	Effect size ^d
	WSU	WSU	Omitted (low count)	WSU	Omitted (low count)	WSU	Omitted (low count)	Comparisons with: Omitted (low count)		
FYSsr01b ^k	523	.394		.0214		--				
FYSsr02	867	2.90		.030		0.89				
FYSsr03 ^k	1278	.855		.0099		--				
FYSsr04 ^k	1279	.212		.0114		--				
FYSsr05 ^k	1280	.251		.0121		--				
FYSsr06a	1,280	3.46		.018		0.65				
FYSsr06b	1,279	3.47		.018		0.64				
FYSsr06c	1,280	3.19		.022		0.79				
FYSsr06d	1,277	3.30		.021		0.73				
FYSsr06e	1,280	3.01		.024		0.85				
FYSsr06f	1,280	3.12		.023		0.81				
FYSsr06g	1,279	2.54		.027		0.95				
FYSsr06h	1,278	2.29		.028		1.01				
FYSsr06i	1,282	3.17		.023		0.83				
FYSsr06j	1,279	2.93		.025		0.90				
FYSsr07a	1,281	3.11		.023		0.82				
FYSsr07b	1,278	2.40		.030		1.07				
FYSsr07c	1,279	3.04		.024		0.85				
FYSsr07d	1,273	2.65		.027		0.97				
FYSsr09_21 ^k	1,278	0.28		.0126		--				

Endnotes

- a. Column percentages are weighted by institution-reported sex and enrollment status (and institution size for comparison groups). Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Counts are unweighted; column percentages cannot be replicated from counts. Comparison group details are in the Selected Comparison Groups report.
- b. All statistics are weighted by institution-reported sex and enrollment status (and institution size for comparison groups). Unless otherwise noted, statistical comparisons are two-tailed independent t-tests. Items with categorical response sets are left blank.
- c. These are the values used to calculate means. For the majority of items, these values match the codes in the data file and codebook.
- d. Effect size for independent *t*-tests uses Cohen's *d*; *z*-tests use Cohen's *h*.
- e. Statistics are weighted by institution-reported sex and enrollment status (and institution size for comparison groups). Categorical items are not listed.
- f. The 95% confidence interval for the population mean is equal to the sample mean plus or minus 1.96 times the standard error of the mean.
- g. A measure of the amount individual scores deviate from the mean of all the scores in the distribution.
- h. Degrees of freedom used to compute the t-tests. Values differ from *N*s due to weighting and whether equal variances were assumed.
- i. Statistical comparisons are two-tailed independent *t*-tests or *z*-tests. Statistical significance represents the probability that the difference between your students' mean and that of the students in the comparison group is due to chance.
- j. Statistical comparison uses *z*-test to compare the proportion who responded (depending on the item) "Done or in progress" or "Yes" with all who responded otherwise.
- k. Mean represents the proportion who responded (depending on the item) "Done or in progress" or "Yes."

Key to symbols:

- ▲ **Your students' average** was significantly higher ($p < .05$) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.
- △ **Your students' average** was significantly higher ($p < .05$) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.
- ▽ **Your students' average** was significantly lower ($p < .05$) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.
- ▼ **Your students' average** was significantly lower ($p < .05$) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.

Note: It is important to interpret the direction of differences relative to item wording and your institutional context.