

Student Experiences in the Research University, Spring 2016

Executive Summary

Prepared by the NDSU Office of Institutional Research and Analysis
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Introduction

The undergraduate Student Experiences in the Research University (SERU) survey was administered in Spring 2016 to nearly all degree-seeking undergraduates at NDSU. The SERU survey collects data about “student engagement in activities that have been empirically shown to influence student learning and positive educational outcomes, both inside and outside of the classroom¹.” Additionally, the SERU survey collects critical demographic, social, and student activity data that had previously not been collected simultaneously with engagement data. NDSU is one of only two non-AAU institutions participating in SERU 2016.

Why SERU?

Student enrollment, persistence, and graduation at NDSU have been mostly stable over the last 10 years. First- to-second year retention hovers at 78-80 percent (approximately the same as the 4-year national average) with 4-year and 6-year graduation rates slowly but steadily trending upward to 25% and 55% (respectively), but remaining lower than that of other 4-year institutions, and especially 4-year research universities. In between those two critical student milestones exist several years of student experiences that impact the day-to-day progress and final outcome of the student.

Student experience research at NDSU has mostly focused on engagement and satisfaction metrics relevant to students in the general realm of higher education. What has been absent from this body of knowledge at NDSU is information about how experiences *at a research university* impact the student. Additionally, the years of experience between the critical milestones of early retention and near-graduation (i.e., sophomore and junior years) have been previously unassessed.

The Student Experiences in the Research University, often compared to the National Survey of Student Engagement, provides NDSU with the opportunity to gain insight into each of these areas that are critical to enhancing the success and engagement of our students.

Administration

In Spring 2016, North Dakota State University administered the Student Experiences in the Research University survey via Qualtrics, with project management assistance from the University of Minnesota. Most degree-seeking undergraduates were eligible for and invited to take the survey through a series of emailed invitations and reminders. The survey was open for six weeks (Feb. 1-Mar. 11). Of 10,232 students invited to take the survey, 2,432 students participated (24.1% response rate). NDSU’s response rate was third highest of the 12 institutions participating in SERU 2016.

Results

NDSU students report that they experience high levels of satisfaction, seek out academic challenges, engage with peers and faculty in meaningful ways, and feel pride in their majors and NDSU. Student also report that teaching, advising, and student engagement in research and creative activity continue to be opportunities for improvement at NDSU.

The following page summarizes several indicators of global student satisfaction and engagement. Summaries of response data can be found at <https://www.ndsu.edu/oira/seru/>. We encourage you to explore the results and to look for more targeted data analysis from the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis.

¹ <http://www.seru.umn.edu/about-seru/survey>

Overall Summary

Satisfaction

- 81.2% of students reported positive levels of satisfaction with the value of education for the price they are paying. Satisfaction increased incrementally from freshmen to seniors, and was statistically significantly higher among juniors and seniors compared to freshmen.
- 89.8% of students reported positive levels of satisfaction with their overall academic experience; no differences existed between academic levels.
- 86.4% of students reported positive levels of satisfaction with their overall social experience; this outcome peaked among the juniors.
- All academic levels reported moderate satisfaction with their own GPAs (4.5 on 6 pt scale). These values were highest for sophomores and seniors, with juniors reporting decreased GPA satisfaction (though still higher than freshmen).
- 33.8% of students reported that they are Concerned or Very concerned about paying for their next year of education.

Academics

- Students reported progressively increasing gains in higher-order thinking skills, coupled with a decrease in self-rating of how well they performed when they started at NDSU; i.e., although the rating of “Now” does not increase substantially, the self-identified gap between “When you started here” and “Now” increases more sharply over time.
- Sophomores reported that they are taking challenging classes by choice (even at risk of lower GPA) and spending more time studying compared to freshmen. Both of these increased for juniors and then again for seniors.
- Understanding of the cohesiveness of their major curriculum was reported as similarly high for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Freshmen rated this item lower than upper-level peers, but not significantly so.
- Sophomores were least likely to report receiving prompt and useful feedback on their work; other groups were similar to one another.
- Sophomores were also least likely to report having an instructor who increases their enthusiasm for the subject.

Campus Climate

- 72% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable with the climate for diversity and inclusiveness at NDSU. Seniors reported feeling the least, and they were significantly lower than sophomores and juniors.
- 74% of students agreed or strongly agreed that NDSU is a welcoming campus.
- 75% of students agreed or strongly agreed that NDSU is a safe and secure campus. Feelings of safety and security on campus were similar for all academic levels, as well as for males and females.

Making a connection

- 82.2% of students agreed that they felt valued as an individual at NDSU. Freshmen, sophomores, and seniors report similar levels of feeling valued as an individual – all nearly one point **lower** than that of juniors.
- 87.9% of students reported that they felt they belonged at NDSU. Sophomores reported the highest feeling of belonging NDSU.
- 88.3% of students reported that they would choose to enroll at NDSU again. Seniors rated this item the lowest on average; the distribution of their answers was flatter than that of other academic levels, and still 85.5% of seniors responded favorably to this item.
- 59% of students reported that they currently or have in the past participate(d) in student organizations; of those, 37% report that they have served as a student organization officer.

¹ <http://www.seru.umn.edu/about-seru/survey>