

## Office of Institutional Effectiveness

# NSSE AND HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES: AN OVERVIEW

September 2016 | by Dana Zupanovich Lucka, Ed.D., CFRE

### High Impact Educational Practices

Through research and reflection, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has identified 10 practices and activities, referred to as “high impact educational practices,” which have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for today’s diverse college student population<sup>i</sup>. Kuh states that when these practices are approached systematically, they contribute to students’ cumulative learning. These practices are (a) first-year seminars and experiences; (b) common intellectual experiences; (c) learning communities; (d) writing-intensive courses; (e) collaborative assignments and projects; (f) undergraduate research; (g) diversity/global learning; (h) service learning, community-based learning; (i) internships; and (j) capstone courses and projects. Kuh further notes that these practices and experiences, in and out of the classroom, enrich the educational experience and make education more meaningful to students.

Brownell and Swaner found that high impact activities “live up to their name, leading to a range of positive outcomes for students” (p. 30)<sup>ii</sup>. Students participating in these activities show a greater degree of persistence and academic performance. Overall, the authors state that students who participate in high impact practices consistently “persist at a higher rate than those who do not” (p. 27)<sup>ii</sup>. The authors point out that a majority of college students do not have the opportunity to participate in high impact activities, and first-generation college students and students of color are less likely to participate (p. 26)<sup>ii</sup>. With this in mind, the authors state concern that little research looks specifically at underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation students and said data is often used in describing the sample rather than providing effect size and other data analysis. With 66% of Fresno State students being first-generation college students and 50% from underrepresented minorities, these much needed practices that increase student success should be fully examined and explored using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and other relevant assessment tools.

### The NSSE and High Impact Practices

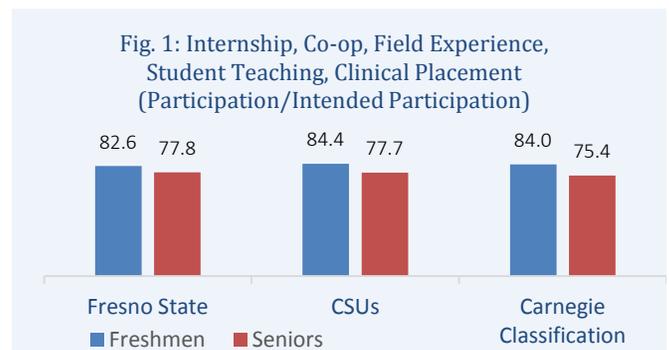
The NSSE measures 6 of 10 high impact practices. It measures college students’ attitudes towards their college and their college experience (for more details, please see the brief, “Introducing the NSSE”). The NSSE data can be stratified to explore race, ethnicity, gender, first-generation status and Pell grant eligibility thus allowing Fresno State to target specific demographics when examining high impact practices. A section of the NSSE is aimed at determining the percentage of students, freshmen and seniors, who participated or plan to participate in the following 6 high impact practices.

- learning communities;
- undergraduate research;
- global learning/study abroad;
- service learning/community-based projects;
- internships; and
- capstone courses and projects.

Of note, the NSSE measures service and community-based learning by examining the percentage of coursework that focuses on these elements. This is a judgment based on the students’ understanding of the course focus and content rather than their personal actions or intent. Therefore, these data are not discussed in this brief.

### Highest Participation in Internships, Co-Op, Field Experience, Student Teaching and Clinical Placements

**Internships.** A majority of Fresno State students indicated they have done or plan to participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching assignment or clinical placement. Freshmen showed a higher percentage of participation at 83% (n = 436) compared to seniors at 78% (n = 927). These numbers are similar to other CSU participants with 85% of freshmen and 78% of seniors indicating participation. As shown in Figure 1, Fresno State student participation was comparable to other colleges in the same Carnegie Classification of Larger Master’s Universities (Carnegie Classification). Of the high impact learning activities, internships and other similar experience that are connected to career skills help them develop the skills necessary to



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compete in tomorrow's workforce<sup>i</sup>. Of the 6 high impact practices, internships, co-op, field experience, student teaching and clinical placements show the highest participation at Fresno State. Therefore, forthcoming briefs will include a more in-depth look at internships, co-ops, field experience, student teaching and clinical placements and their effect on student satisfaction, as well as their perception of analytical abilities and critical thinking skills.

**Culminating senior experiences.** Reviewing the responses of seniors relating to their participation in, or completion of, culminating senior experiences (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.) slightly over 52% (52.1%, n = 914) of seniors indicated that they have completed or plan to complete a culminating senior experience. In looking ahead, the forecast shows little difference. Of the freshman participants responding to this question, 52% (n = 433) indicated their intent to participate in a culminating senior experience. Culminating senior experiences rank as the high impact practice with the second highest participation at Fresno State; however, compared to other participating CSUs and other colleges in the same Carnegie Classification, Fresno State students had lower participation rates.

**Learning Communities.** Ranking third in Fresno State participation, 39% (n = 919) of seniors and 47% (n = 433) of freshmen indicated that they have participated or plan to participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together. Participation rates among other CSUs were similar while other colleges in the same Carnegie Classification were slightly lower with 32.9% of seniors and 42.5% of freshmen participating.

**Undergraduate research.** Compared to internships and culminating experiences, a small percentage of Fresno State students participate in undergraduate research projects with faculty. Thirty-five percent (n = 914) of Fresno State seniors and 39% (n = 426) of freshmen indicated that they have worked or intend to work with a faculty member on a research project. The CSU participants mirrored these percentages with the Carnegie Classification participation rates slightly lower for both seniors and freshmen.

**Global learning/study abroad.** A small percentage of Fresno State seniors (23%, n = 921) indicated that they have participated or intend to participate in a study abroad program. Freshmen, however, were 18% higher with 41% (n = 434) of Fresno State freshmen stating that they have studied or intend to study abroad.

### Why High Impact Practices Matter at Fresno State

The 2015 NSSE data indicates that, regardless of class, 90% of Fresno State students surveyed have participated in or are interested in one or more of the high impact educational practices that have been shown to increase student success. Of course, seniors have had more time to act on that interest. Overall, 68% (n=627) of seniors have completed or are working on one or more of the high impact practices. For freshmen, only 21% (n=89) have completed or are working on one or more high impact practices. With the current demographics at Fresno State, attention should be paid to those activities and courses that integrate high impact educational practice thus ensuring that all students are aware of the educational opportunities that can lead to their success. Future briefs will focus on the impact of these practices on student engagement, satisfaction, perceptions of abilities, as well as the influence of these factors on alumni and community engagement.

### How to Get More Information

To see these High Impact Practices and other questions, as well as how they differ between groups, use OIE's NSSE dashboard. If you have additional questions about how we conducted these analyses, or if you are interested in analyzing the results from a particular group, please email [Matthew Zivot](mailto:Matthew.Zivot@fresnostate.edu) of the [Office of Institutional Effectiveness](http://oie.fresnostate.edu).

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<sup>i</sup> Kuh, G. (2008). Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*.

<sup>ii</sup> Brownell, J. & Swaner, L. (2009). High-impact practices: Applying the learning outcomes literature to the development of successful campus programs. *Peer Review*, 11(2), 26.

<sup>iii</sup> Bampasidou, M., Grogan, K., Clark, J., & Sandberg, M. (2016). Career Skills: Perceptions of Importance and High Impact Learning Activities for Skill Development in Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness Programs 1. *NACTA Journal*, 60(1a), 36.