



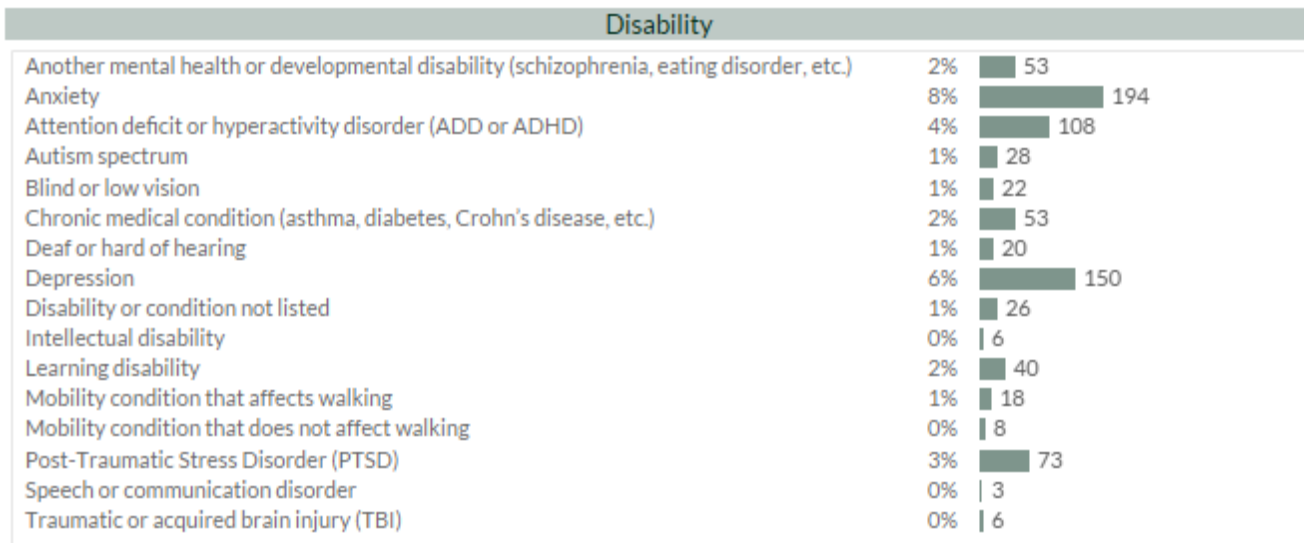
2023 NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

Submitted by: Serge Koblik, M.A., PPSC, NCSP, APCC

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The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is annually administered to entering freshmen and graduating seniors in nearly 517 universities across northern and central America. With over twenty years of data collection, the survey has become a powerful tool to aid in best practices of educational policy, faculty training, allocation of resources and student learning as well as health and overall success of students.

The 2023 California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) NSSE survey data includes 2,537 participants, out of which 48% self-identify as female, 24% as male, 10% as other gender identities, while 2% prefer not to respond. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents were reported by the institution as seniors and almost a quarter (23%) as freshmen. The majority (37%) of respondents self-identify as Hispanic-Latino, 23% describe themselves as White or Caucasian, while Asian-identifying students account for 21% of the respondents. Commensurate with national statistics on mental health¹, approximately 20% of the surveyed students report having mental health challenges. Of those 20%, 194 (8%) have anxiety and 150 (6%) have depression (see Graphic 1 below). When considering campus-wide initiatives, it is important to keep in mind that 56% of respondents indicate they live outside of walking distance to the campus. 27 respondents (1%) report homelessness or in transition.



Graphic 1: 2023 NSSE Survey Responses: Disability

Engagement Indicators

A total of ten engagement indicators of student participation and involvement are measured within 47 survey questions. The indicators are grouped into four themes: Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, and Campus Environment. Academic Challenge data will be discussed in a separate section following the other three themes.

¹ Henderson, Siomara. "Mental Health Awareness: The Ultimate Guide [2022]." *Mental Health Foundation*, Dec. 2021, https://mentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-awareness-the-ultimate-guide-2021/?gclid=Cj0KCCQjwpc-oBhCGARIsAH6ote9RTv-7SFB3RyH0egxD1Ul6ius-2imtoVTsq8YQMgOz7FTOh-BNKwaAhJ-EALw_wcB.

Learning with Peers

The Learning with Peers theme measures Collaborative Learning and Discussions with Diverse Others. Survey data from Collaborative Learning shows most students collaborate in class by asking questions (61%) and work with others on projects and assignments (60%) rather than explain course material to other students. Data from Discussions with Diverse Others shows discussion with race or ethnicity other than the respondents was the highest engaged category over religion, political status, country of origin, sexual orientation and economic status. 65% of respondents claim they did so during the current school year. As a result, students engage with peers whose race is different from any other aforementioned identity. The university departments are to be commended for encouraging collaboration in ethno-diverse formats. University departments may consider reviewing ways to continue fostering and increasing the number of participants who seek diverse environments for learning, group work and socialization.

Experiences with Faculty

The Experiences with Faculty theme covers Student-Faculty Interaction and Effective Teaching Practices. Students rate discussions with faculty over career and academic performance to be most frequent (28-36%). The least-often mentioned student-faculty interaction is working with faculty on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.) at just 21%. For Effective Teaching Practices, the students rate prompt and detailed feedback on work in progress and completed assignments as the most seldom form of support from their teachers, occurring only 22% of the time. The most common form of support from faculty is clearly explaining course goals and requirements (69%) and enabling students to demonstrate their learning through quizzes, assignments, and other activities (67%). Faculty have done well in involving students in career topics pertaining to their academics. Additionally, teaching in a clear and goal-oriented manner has proven to be a favored practice by students and emerged as a strength for faculty. To improve teaching outcomes, faculty may consider providing prompt and detailed feedback on student work as well as elevating the importance of student engagement in groups, committees, and other organizations on campus to provide students with other means of faculty interaction.

Campus Environment

The Campus Environment theme includes Quality of Interactions and Supportive Environment Indicators. Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents rate their interactions with fellow peers at the university as above average to excellent in quality. Faculty and advisors trail a few percent behind, but were fairly close at 59% and 54% respectively. Experiences with student services staff is the lowest-rated quality interaction at just 43% of the respondents claiming to have good experiences. Students also perceive study time and academic work as highly emphasized activities by the university for their students, with 62% of respondents claiming it was “very much” or “quite a bit” emphasized. 67% of students perceive the university places the least emphasis on helping them manage non-academic activities (work, family, etc.). Though faculty spend the majority of the time with students, the university may seek ways to improve processes for student services. A needs-based analysis into the type of non-academic support students require would be beneficial.

Higher Order Learning, Reflective & Integrative Learning, Learning Strategies and Quantitative Reasoning are four indicators that make up this theme. Students perceive memorization of information as least emphasized in their coursework at 59%, while forming new ideas or understanding from various pieces of information is the most emphasized at 65%. The most common reflective learning strategy perceived by students is connecting prior knowledge and experience to what they are learning, with 74% of respondents claiming this happens often or very often in their courses. The most-often utilized learning strategy in student coursework is reading (63%), which outweighs note-taking (54%) and summarizing (53%). NSSE's quantitative reasoning questions illustrate personal efforts to reach conclusions are most utilized by students in their learning (45%) as opposed to numerical information (39%) or the conclusions of others (39%). Going beyond rote memorization of information, staff and faculty have done well in teaching students how to apply learned knowledge and reason with it, according to the task at hand. Furthermore, it appears from reading, note taking and summarizing, students prioritize their views and opinions of those of their peers.

High Impact Practices

High Impact Practices (HIPs) are time- and labor-demanding activities that promote learning beyond the classroom involving faculty, staff and experiences outside of the campus boundaries. These practices have shown to be effective tools in equipping well-rounded learners beyond the mere lecture material presented in class. Service Learning includes classes that have community-based projects that extend outside of the classroom. Only 12% of students say "all" or "most" of their classes have a service learning component. Learning Community explores students seeking groups or communities of shared interest with others. In this NSSE survey, 12% of students responded to having done or are doing such activity while 15% "plan on" participating in such learning communities in the future. Research with Faculty investigates whether students completed or plan to work with faculty on research projects. Only 8% of responders share that they completed or are currently working on research with faculty members. 15% of students plan on involving themselves with research that includes faculty in the future. Internship or Field Experience was the most common High Impact Practice indicated by students. 22% of the students completed/are completing field experience or internships. 32% indicate they plan on participating in internships or field experience in the future. Study Abroad is not a common High Impact Practice. Only 3% of respondents completed or are currently studying abroad. 12% of students would like to study abroad in the future but have not yet done so. Culminating Senior Experience involves capstone project, thesis or some sort of finished product that demonstrates learning in a particular field of study. 21% of students plan to or have completed Culminating Senior Experience.

After analyzing the data, one may conclude that culminating experience for seniors is the most common High Impact Practice at Sacramento State. Furthermore, there appears to be a large interest from students in participating in internships or field experience. Sacramento State could improve on advertising the benefits of the study abroad program to generate interest, which understandably, is a hefty commitment beyond the academic rigor. Additionally, it appears there is a need for more promotion and creation of opportunities for students to conduct research alongside faculty to help improve the rate of faculty-aided research.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental Health and Wellbeing is a new theme introduced this year in the NSSE survey. The theme focuses on student emotional, psychological, social wellness, and functioning. Out of thirteen different factors (social, financial, mental, physical, academic, etc.), students report to have the most difficulty with finances (39% rated “Difficult” or “Very Difficult”) and mental/emotional exhaustion (38% rated “Difficult” or “Very Difficult”). To support their mental wellbeing, students most often turn to friends (41% “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much”), family (38% “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much”) and significant others or romantic partners (32% “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much”). The least-utilized mental health support is counseling services (13% “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much”) and student services staff (9% “Quite a Bit or “Very Much”).

Regarding student satisfaction with their overall wellbeing, 44% responded that they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they have access to affordable healthy food. However, only 22% of students agree that they are satisfied with the amount of exercise they get. The Mental Health and Wellbeing theme also surveys the students on their knowledge of where to get help at Sacramento State for a number of different concerns. 55% of students know where to get help at Sacramento State for food insecurity. 50% of students surveyed know where to get help at Sacramento State for depression or anxiety. Only 26% of students know where to get help for difficulty sleeping - an opportunity for Sacramento State to explore further.

The final set of survey questions for Mental Health and Wellbeing deal with investigating student perception of the adequacy of resources on campus. 49% of students believe they have access to reliable internet. 37% of surveyed students feel there are adequate resources on campus for health services for physical health needs and counseling services for mental health needs. Only 25% of students report there are adequate dining options on campus that meet their dietary needs, while 21% don’t know. There is an opportunity here for a campus-wide knowledge campaign of Sacramento State dining options. For example, on the campus eateries website in the dining eateries list, add a “tag” next to each dining eatery clearly marking the dietary choices they offer (vegetarian, kosher, halal, gluten-free, etc.). Finally, only 16% of students say there are adequate campus resources for addressing affordable housing for students. This is another area of opportunity Sacramento State can explore. A few suggestions would include increasing the number of emergency beds available for students experiencing homelessness, offering university grants specific to housing affordability, and launching email campaigns at the beginning of each semester from the Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support (CARES) office to highlight the resources available to students.

These data reflect national and international trends of increased anxiety and depression in children and young adults². With post-COVID lockdowns ending and economic instability, students have shown greater impact from mental health issues that often manifest in impacted sleep, excessive technological use, substance abuse and lower socialization. Coupled with rigorous learning demands and limited resources in quickly-evolving learning environments, more than ever before, students require support from multiple sources. These include family, friends and partners, institutional assistance in mental health, financial support and academic growth.

² World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Covid-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>.

Inclusiveness and Engagement with Diversity

The Inclusiveness and Engagement with Diversity theme aims to measure student belonging and feelings of inclusion. Diversity, multicultural approaches to education, and understanding of differences are some of the topics addressed in this theme.

When asked how much of their coursework emphasized certain ideas, 51% of students report their coursework emphasizes developing the skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds. 56% of students surveyed report their coursework emphasizes respecting the expression of diverse ideas. Only 44% of students say their coursework emphasizes exploring their own background through projects, assignments, and programs. These data illustrate a small gap between the large emphasis on respecting the diversity in others while failing to nurture and offer self-reflection on students' own backgrounds.

60% of students surveyed say Sacramento State demonstrates a commitment to diversity. Only 48% say Sacramento State helps students develop the skills to help confront discrimination and harassment. These data provide Sacramento State with an opportunity to train students in confronting discrimination and harassment by including such training in freshman seminar courses.

Students were asked how much Sacramento State provides a supportive environment for different forms of diversity. The majority of students agree that Sacramento State provides a supportive environment for racial and ethnic diversity (61%), gender identity (60%), sexual orientation (57%), citizenship or immigration status (51%), but only 41% of students agree that Sacramento State provides a supportive environment for diversity in political affiliation.

Student participation and engagement on campus was analyzed as well. Students were asked how often they participated in various activities focusing on engagement with diversity. Of the students surveyed, 32% of students say they self-reflect on their own cultural identity. In contrast, only 10% of students say they participated in a demonstration for a diversity-related cause such as a rally, protest, or event. This illustrates student interest in self-reflection of their own diversity, but unwillingness to take that reflection into practice.

The above data highlights Sacramento State's strength in the ability to help students cultivate interest in inclusiveness and engagement with diversity. Sacramento State excels in providing a supportive environment for diversity in race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. However, with the 2024 national election approaching, it would be beneficial for Sacramento State to foster discussion and expression of diverse political affiliations and preferences. Beyond that, promoting events, rallies and other community engagements will help increase active participation in improving diversity and openness to different views on and off campus.

Further Research Considerations

Further efforts on this body of research can include data comparison from prior years of this survey. Furthermore, longitudinal data may show trends of strengths and areas of improvement over time. The data can also be compared to other institutions, including CSUs and UCs in the state.

2023 NSSE Summary

The 2023 NSSE survey data emphasizes Sacramento State's strength in supporting students in their early stages of learning through completion of their undergraduate careers. Despite facing challenges of both material and academically-unrelated issues, Sacramento State students emphasize the value of faculty communication and support. Sacramento State students triumph over adversities with University support that stretches beyond the syllabus and course learning outcomes. The availability of healthy food, healthcare, socialization opportunities, internships and fellowships, and so many other invaluable benefits are but a few factors that keep Sacramento State students physically and mentally healthy and engaged.

Recommendations

The following list of recommendations is based on the concept of data-informed decision-making and strategic change in policies, practices and culture of Sacramento State. Utilizing the plethora of student survey responses in the 2023 NSSE survey, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Faculty may consider providing prompt and detailed feedback on student work as well as elevating the importance of student engagement in groups, committees, and other organizations on campus.
2. Faculty may consider presenting material in independent reading format or small group reading during class to help students form productive study habits during lecture and outside of class.
3. Sacramento State may seek ways to improve processes for student services via a needs-based analysis.
4. Sacramento State may advertise the benefits of the study abroad program to generate interest.
5. Sacramento State may launch a campus-wide knowledge campaign of dining options to showcase the dietary choices offered (vegetarian, kosher, halal, gluten-free, etc.).
6. Sacramento State may increase the number of emergency beds available for students experiencing homelessness, offer university grants specific to housing affordability, and launch email campaigns at the beginning of each semester from the Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support (CARES) office to highlight the resources available to students.
7. Sacramento State may include training as part of the freshman seminar course material to identify and confront discrimination and harassment.
8. Sacramento State may foster discussion and expression of diverse political affiliations and preferences.
9. Sacramento State may promote events, rallies and other community engagements to increase active participation in improving diversity and openness.
10. Sacramento State may consider equitable opportunities for students to participate in events virtually or asynchronously to help with inclusion.
11. Sacramento State may provide multi-modal methods of engagement opportunities for academics and campus life.
12. Sacramento State may allocate resources such as increased mental health staff at the Wellness Center.

About the Author

Serge Koblik, M.A., PPS, NCSP, APCC

www.linkedin.com/in/serge-koblik

Serge immigrated to the United States from Ukraine with his family when he was in third grade. He attended community college after high school, where he discovered his interest for psychological studies. This motivated him to transfer to CSU, Sacramento to pursue undergraduate and graduate education in psychology and school psychology respectively. He has consulted and trained educators in the area regarding immigrant inclusion in education and cultural competency with eastern European students. Serge practices as a School Psychologist for a local school district and holds an Associate Professional Clinical Counselor certification for Board of Behavioral Sciences.

