**What are our College Undergraduates Thinking?**

**College of Arts & Sciences NSSE Survey Analysis**

*Wendy McEwen, Director of Institutional Research*

Four hundred thirty-eight (438) College of Arts & Sciences undergraduates participated in the National Survey for Student Engagement conducted in May, 2012. Of the participants, 250 were freshmen (42% of the freshmen class) and 188 were seniors (33% of the senior class) at the time of the survey. Because of the fairly high percentages, the survey responses give us information on how students think they are doing, and how they think we are doing.

This paper highlights questions and responses to a small number of the more than 100 questions asked on the NSSE. I selected the questions based on whether or not they might provide us with more insight into an ongoing discussion, or because they might generate a worth-while discussion about our students, our program, and our University. Each of the responses is segmented by Freshmen and Seniors.

**Community Service Learning and Diversity Questions**

Community Service Learning is an emphasis for the University of Redlands. From the NSSE survey responses, many freshmen are already participating in organized community service learning. Only 45 (24%) of the seniors responded that they had never participated in community service learning as part of a regular course, while 9 others did not respond. Diversity is another emphasis. From the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute Surveys (CIRP), we know that our students actively participate in activities with students unlike themselves. The responses to the NSSE survey also show this to be the case.

**During the current school year, how often have you participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course?**

**During the current school year, how often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?**

**During the current school year, how often have you had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values?**

**Coursework Questions**

Many of the NSSE survey questions ask about behaviors – time spent writing, applying, synthesizing, etc. While recognizing that these responses are only a student’s self-assessment, the responses tell us that students feel they are academically challenged and are engaged in a robust learning environment. Seniors, more than freshmen, report working harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s expectations. They also are writing more than freshmen, but possibly not as much as some faculty would expect.

**During the current school year, how often have you worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations?**

**During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships?**

**During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how other gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions?**

**During the current school year, how much writing have you done?**

**About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week preparing for class?**

**Institutional Emphasis Questions**

The NSSE survey asks how much a student’s institution emphasizes several different activities. Below is the table of the responses. Note that in the interest of presentation, I’ve not included the “No Response” categories. For each of the questions, 29 to 31 freshmen and 16 to 19 seniors did not respond. For both groups, supporting the students academically and using computers in academic work have very strong responses. Helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities ranks much lower.

**Institutional Contribution Questions**

The final set of responses answer the question to what extent the University of Redlands has contributed to knowledge, skills, and personal development in selected areas. Once again, I’ve not included the “No Response” categories. For each of the questions, 37 to 42 freshmen and 16 to 21 seniors did not respond.

**Conclusion**

One of my intentions in sharing these selected responses to NSSE’s questions is to help generate more discussion and more questions about how our students think they are doing and how they think we are doing. Please contact me or Ed Wingenbach if you’d like more information on our NSSE participation or to see if NSSE can help generate discussion or potentially inform answers to some of your questions. As a final note, below is the chart with the response for the question – **How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?** Three hundred fifty-seven (357) of the 438 responses were excellent or good, with 217 responding excellent. I thought that would be a nice note to end on.