

Institutional Analysis, Assessment & Reporting

A Comparison of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Benchmarks Over Time Research Report 2007-01

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Abstract: *This report looks at the five NSSE benchmarks and compares BSU student responses between 2002 and 2006. Findings indicate that (1) the campus environment has become more supportive and that active and collaborative learning has increased since 2002. However, student-faculty interactions and enriching educational experiences remain unchanged, and the reported level of academic challenge was highest for the 2004 administration. BSU's benchmark scores are similar to our urban peers in all areas except supportive campus environment, where we fall below for first-year students. We fall significantly below national benchmark scores in three areas: student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment.*

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has grown to become a well-regarded measure of institutional quality. The survey is so encompassing, however, that it is difficult to comprehend all the data provided. To focus discussions about the importance of student engagement and guide institutional improvement efforts, five benchmarks were developed that could be used to compare results over time or to other peer institutions for a particular administration. The benchmarks are: Level of academic challenge, Active and collaborative learning, Student-faculty interaction, Enriching educational experiences, and Supportive campus environment. Each benchmark is a summary number encompassing a group of items with a common theme.

The items which comprise the benchmarks are listed below:

Level of Academic Challenge:

- Time spent preparing for class
- Number of assigned textbooks, books or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experience into new, more complex interpretations or relationships
- Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods
- Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class

Student-Faculty Interaction

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements (2004 and 2006 only)

Enriching Educational Experiences (2004 and 2006 only)

- Participating in co-curricular activities
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework & study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

Supportive Campus Environment

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

The purpose of this report is to assess any changes that have occurred for the last three administrations of the NSSE that Boise State University participated in (2002, 2004, and 2006). In addition, comparisons of the 2006 administration to our urban peers on the benchmarks are provided.

Findings Across Time at Boise State University

Figure 1 below displays the benchmark results for the last three administrations of the NSSE for which comparable data was available. Statistical comparisons¹ indicate that:

- Students perceive that the campus environment has become more supportive since 2002
- Active and collaborative learning is up since 2002
- Student-faculty interactions have remained unchanged
- Level of academic challenge was highest for the 2004 administration

Figure 2 displays the results for the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark for 2004 and 2006 (items were worded differently in 2002 so could not be compared). In addition, the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark is shown again with the student/faculty research item included; this item was not similarly worded in the 2002 survey. Statistical comparisons indicate that:

- No significant changes in enriching educational experiences occurred between 2004 and 2006

¹ Multivariate analysis of variance was employed. Results were considered statistically significant if the alpha level was less than .05.

- Student-faculty interactions remain unchanged between 2004 and 2006, even with the addition of the student research item.

Figure 1. Benchmark Comparisons for 2002, 2004, and 2006

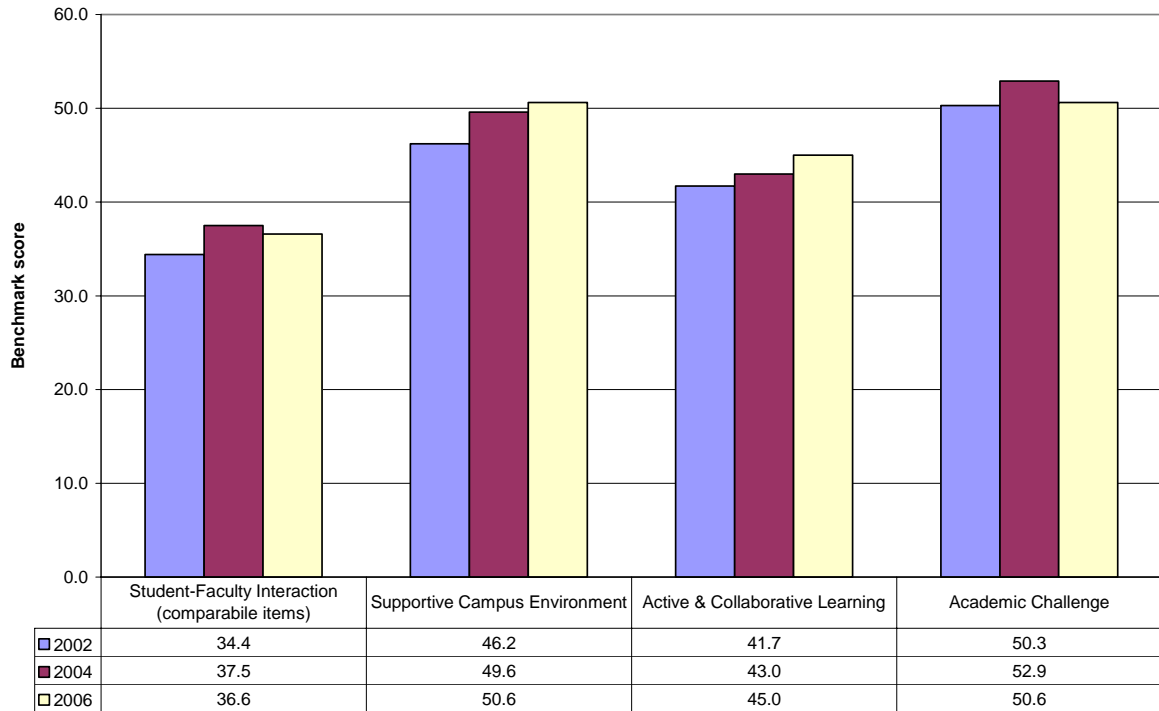
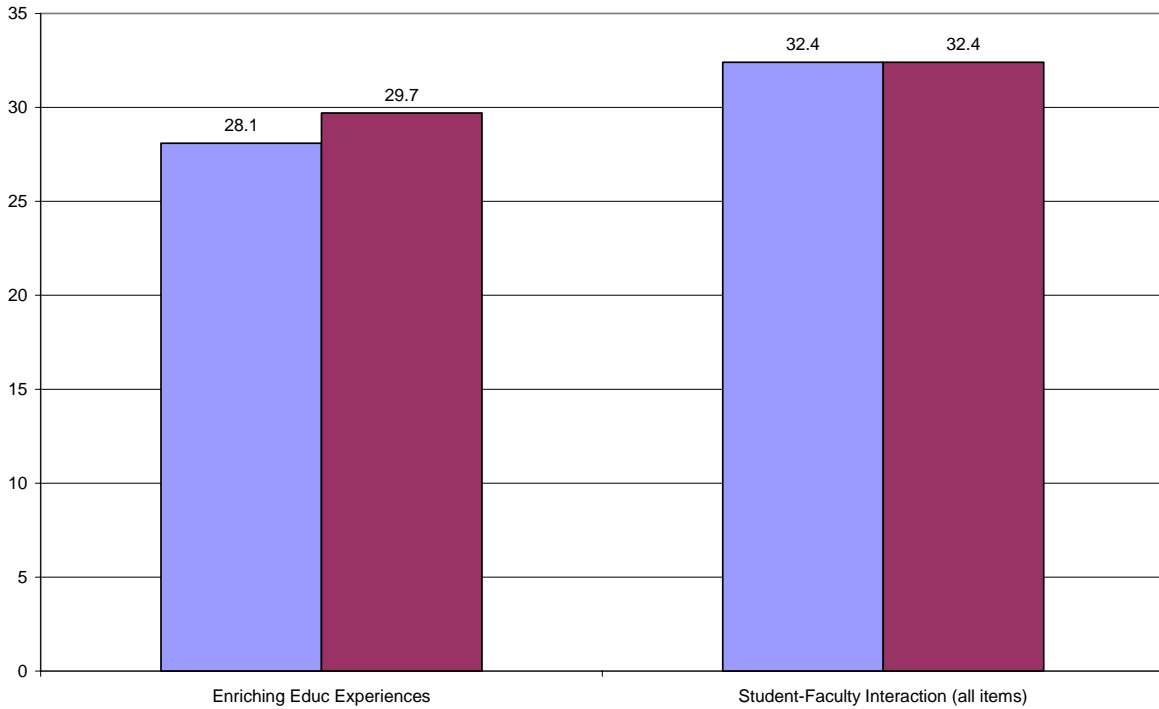


Figure 2. Benchmark Comparisons for 2004 and 2006



Comparisons of BSU 2006 Benchmark Scores to Other Institutions

For each administration, separate benchmarks are calculated for first-year (FY) and senior (SR) students, and comparisons are provided for urban consortium members² and national data. The benchmarks are weighted by gender, enrollment status (full- or part-time) and institutional size. Each benchmark is discussed separately below³.

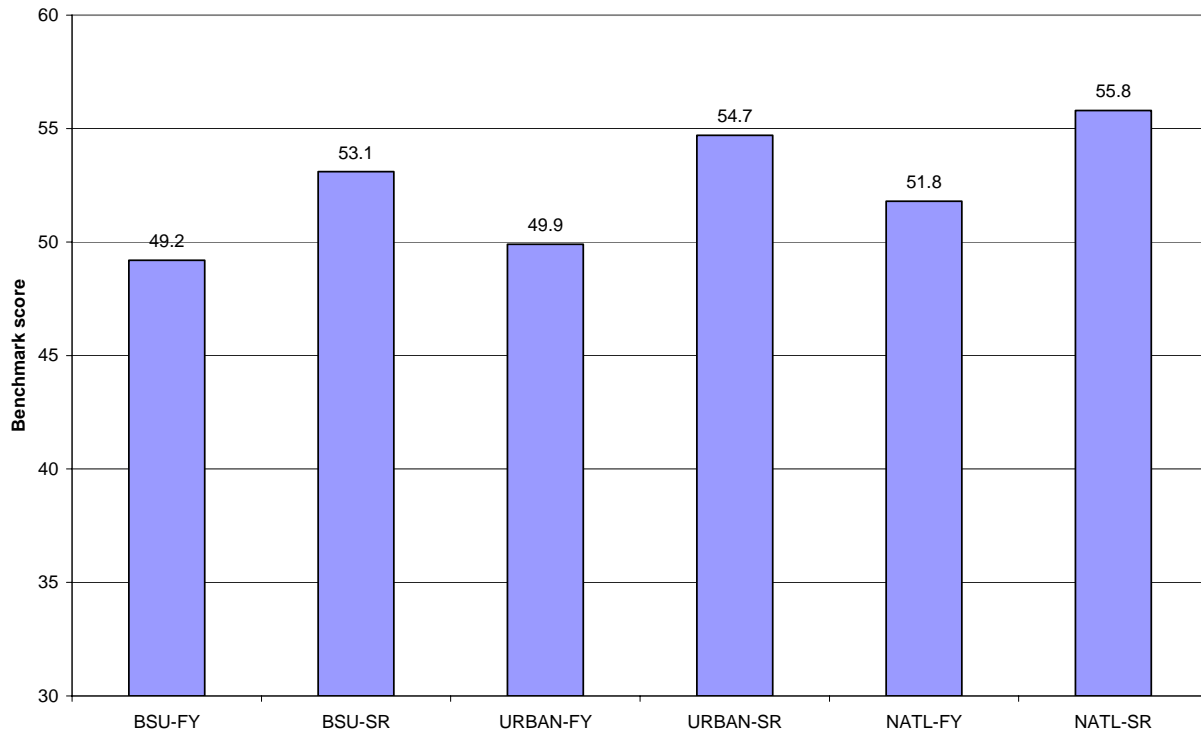
Level of Academic Challenge:

Boise State University is similar to its urban peers in level of academic challenge. The difference between BSU's benchmark and the national benchmark approaches statistical significance (effect size = -.19 for both first-year and senior students). Details can be found in Figure 3 below. Not surprisingly, seniors report more academic challenge than first-year students.

²The following 28 institutions were part of the 2006 Urban Consortium: Armstrong Atlantic State University, Columbia College Chicago, DePaul University, Indiana University-Northwest, Kennesaw State University, Metropolitan State College of Denver, Minnesota State University-Moorhead, Norfolk State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Pace University, Purdue University-Calumet Campus, Southern Connecticut State University, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, SUNY-Buffalo State College, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of Colorado at Denver & Health Sciences Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City, University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, University of South Alabama, University of Southern Maine, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Washburn University, Wayne State University, Wright State University, Youngstown State University

³ The difference between benchmark scores was considered statistically significant if the effect size was $\pm .20$ or greater.

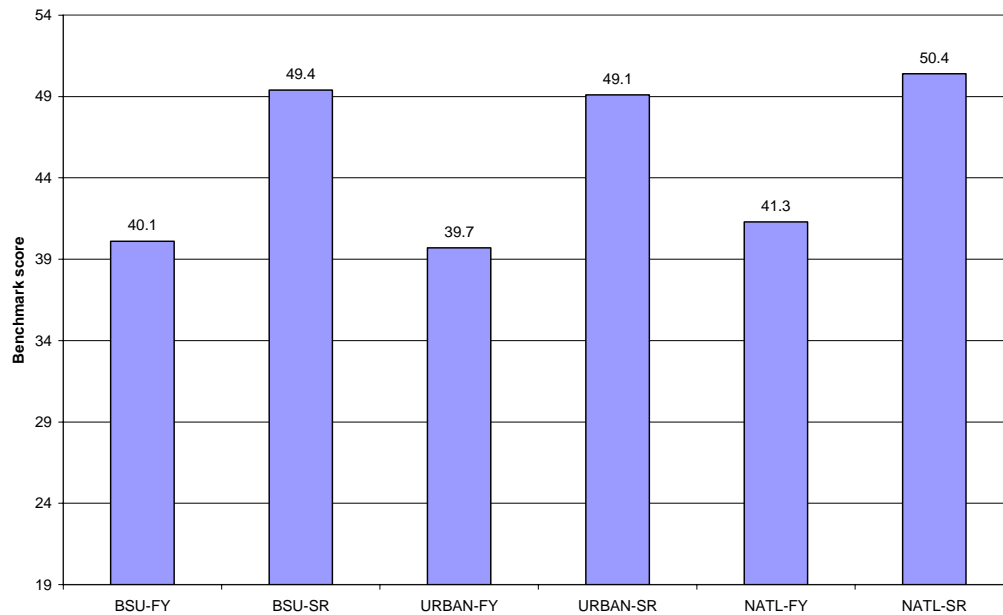
Figure 3. Level of Academic Challenge Benchmark Comparisons



Active and Collaborative Learning

There are only minor differences on this benchmark. Again, seniors have higher scores on this benchmark compared to first-year students. See Figure 4 for details.

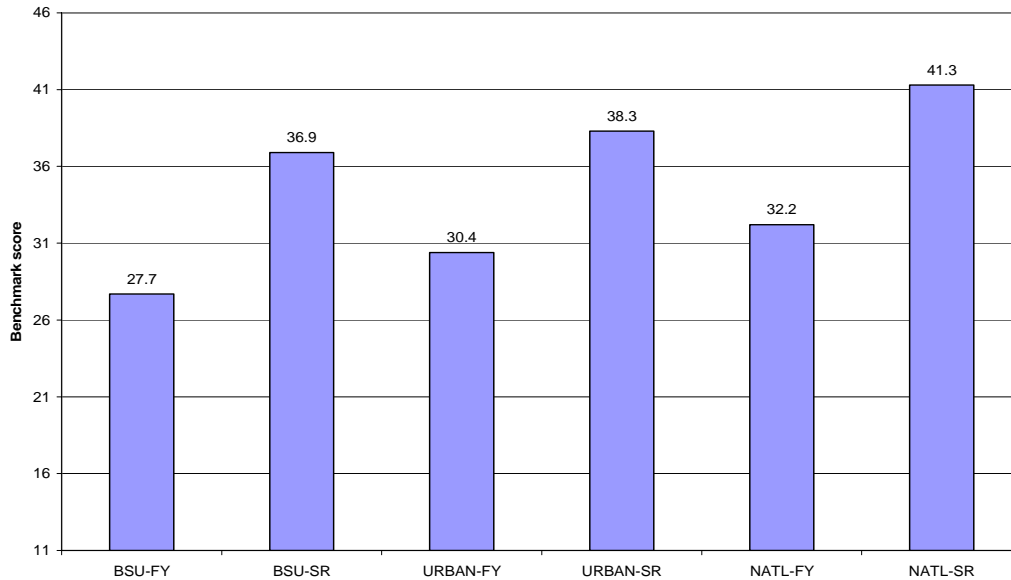
Figure 4. Active and Collaborative Benchmark Comparisons - 2006



Student-Faculty Interaction

While we are similar to our urban peers on this benchmark, we fall significantly below the national benchmark score particularly for first-year students. Again, more interactions with faculty take place as students progress through their programs. (see Figure 5.)

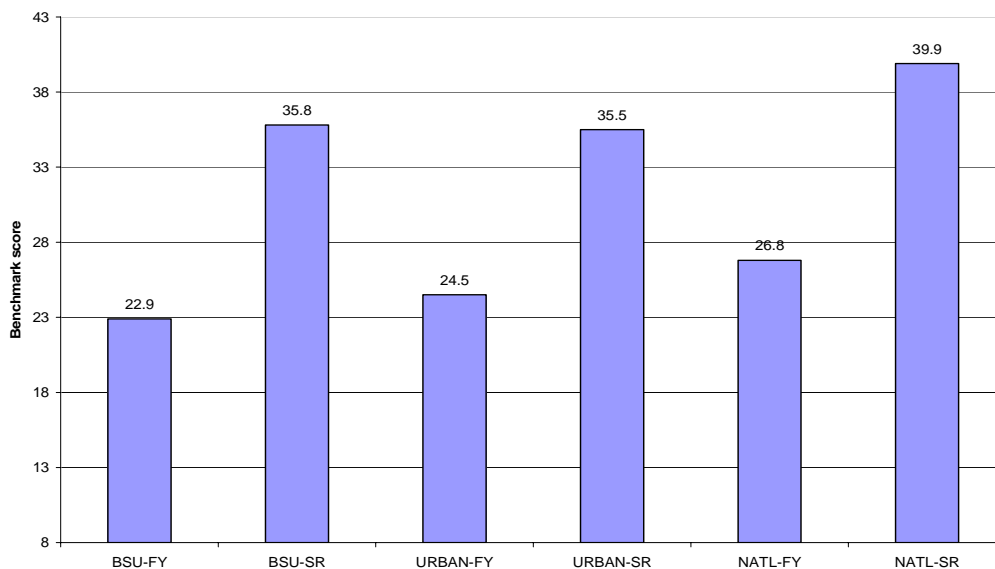
Figure 5. Student-Faculty Interactions Benchmark Comparisons - 2006



Enriching Educational Experiences

Again, we are similar to our urban counterparts but significantly different compared to the national norms. This is particularly true for first-year students where the effect size was $-.30$ on the national comparison. We again observe the familiar pattern of lower scores for first-year students compared to seniors. See Figure 6 for details.

Figure 6. Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark Comparisons - 2006



Supportive Campus Environment

The Supportive Campus Environment is the benchmark that BSU has had the most difficulty with over time. For the 2006 administration, our benchmark score remained low compared to our urban peers as well as nationally. Compared to the first-year benchmark at other urban institutions, our benchmark score was decidedly low (effect size=-.20). At the national level, we were even lower with an effect size of -.46 for first-year students and -.34 for seniors. Note that little difference was found between first-year students and seniors on this benchmark. See Figure 7 for more detail.

Figure 7. Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark Comparisons - 2006

