

**EVIDENCE OF CONVERGENT FACULTY AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON  
THE ENGAGING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AT KSU:  
SELECTED RESULTS FROM COMPARISONS  
OF THE 2004 FSSE AND NSSE**

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The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) is intended to complement the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and serve as a catalyst for productive change and campus conversations related to improving teaching, learning, and the quality of students' educational experiences. Kennesaw State University participated in the 2004 FSSE and 2004 NSSE. Results from 170 usable survey responses of full-time and part-time KSU faculty (24%) were generated from the FSSE. Roughly half of the responses were from faculty who completed the bulk of the FSSE questions based upon one particular undergraduate course section they were teaching at the lower division level. The other half based their responses on one particular upper division course section they were teaching. The faculty's response rate to the FSSE was modest, but the two respondent groups appeared to be reasonably representative of the faculty as a whole at both levels of undergraduate instruction.

A parallel set of topics on student engagement served as a common foundation for the development of most of the questions in FSSE and NSSE. However, the specific wording and context of many FSSE items did not match their counterparts in the NSSE. Potentially confounding effects of the different designs of these items in FSSE and NSSE should not be ignored. To do so could produce misleading comparisons and conclusions about faculty and student perspectives on these topics. From an educational research perspective, such comparisons would be unsound and suspect.

The faculty and student participants in FSSE and NSSE were asked relatively few similar or identical questions, precluding valid or fair comparisons of faculty and student responses on many of the NSSE and FSSE items. When questions were worded similarly, more often than not, the context for the faculty's responses in FSSE was defined as their perceptions of student engagement in "one particular lower or upper division course section" of the respondent's choosing. In contrast, the context for the freshmen and senior responses in NSSE was much broader and ranged from "during the current school year" to the "overall experience at this institution." In instances where NSSE and FSSE questions and their contexts were identical or very similar, comparisons were analyzed and interpreted for this report (FSSE items 1-5). In other cases (FSSE items 6-19), the nature of the questions asked and the differences of their contexts were too great between FSSE and NSSE to support further analysis or valid comparisons between faculty and student perspectives.

Even though the contexts for responding to NSSE and FSSE items on undergraduate learning outcomes and critical thinking skills (FSSE items 20 and 21) were not comparable across the surveys, patterns in the faculty's reported instructional emphasis in these two domains were extracted and examined from the FSSE results for this report. In most instances, the faculty's reported instructional emphasis in their lower or upper division courses was consistent and converged with KSU's findings for its first-year and senior experiences as reported by

students in NSSE. However, direct comparisons between student and faculty frequency distributions were not made or tested here since that would have been analogous to comparing apples and oranges as a result of the confounding differences in the design of these items on the two surveys.

### **Faculty and Students Agree that Student Relationships with Administrative Personnel Are Not as Strong as Relationships Between Students and Faculty or Other Students**

Faculty and students were asked virtually identical questions about the quality of student relationships at KSU with the faculty, students, and administrative personnel. Agreement between faculty and student responses to these questions was high. The vast majority of faculty (eight out of 10) and students (nine out of 10) reported that students are more friendly, supportive, and inclusive than not at KSU. An equally large proportion of faculty and students reported that KSU faculty were more available, helpful, and sympathetic than not. In contrast, less than half of the faculty and a little more than half of students rated administrative personnel as more helpful, considerate, and flexible than not. These findings suggest that the faculty agrees with students that there is substantial room for improvement in "customer relations" in the quality of the relationship between administrative personnel and students at KSU. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1**

#### **Percent of Faculty and Students Giving Favorable Ratings to the Quality of Student Relationships at KSU**

<b>Student Relationships Evaluated</b>	<b>% giving a rating of 5, 6, or 7</b>	
	<b>Students</b>	<b>Faculty</b>
Relationships with other students who were rated more friendly, supporting, and inclusive than not*	88%	78%
Relationships with faculty who were rated more available, helpful, and sympathetic than not	85%	85%
Relationships with administrative personnel who were rated more helpful, considerate, and flexible than not*	63%	46%

\*Differences between students and faculty were significant using Chi Square at  $p < .05$ , d.f. = 1

### **Faculty and Students Agree on KSU's High Levels of Support for Academic Success and Lower Emphasis on Support for Social and Non-Academic Success**

Faculty and students were asked identical questions in the FSSE and NSSE about KSU's emphasis on support for student success. Interestingly, faculty responses were very similar to those of the students. About seven out of every ten students and faculty reported that KSU provided "quite a lot" or "very much" of the support needed for students to succeed academically. In contrast, only about a third of both groups observed that KSU provided students with high levels of support needed to thrive socially. In addition, low percentages of both groups felt that KSU provided substantial support to help students cope with their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.). In this non-academic area of support for student success, significantly fewer students than faculty reported high levels of institutional assistance. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2**

#### **Percent of Faculty and Students Reporting High Levels of Institutional Support for Student Success**

<b>KSU Support for Student Success</b>	<b>% "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much"</b>	
	<b>Students</b>	<b>Faculty</b>
Provides Support Needed for Academic Success	72%	77%
Provides Support Needed to Thrive Socially	30%	36%
Provides Support Needed to Cope Non-Academically*	19%	42%

\*This difference between students and faculty was statistically significant using Chi Square at  $p < .05$ , d.f. = 1

### **Faculty More Than Students Believe that the Institution Encourages Students to Attend Special Events on Campus**

In answer to identical questions on the FSSE and NSSE, significantly more faculty than students reported that KSU encourages students to attend special events on campus. Nearly six out of every 10 faculty members said KSU's encouragement was "quite a bit" or "very much" compared to only four in 10 of the students who reported such encouragement. Why this difference in perceptions was reported is not readily explained. On another item that was not duplicated similarly in NSSE, a little less than half of the faculty reported in FSSE that KSU strongly encourages students to participate in co-curricular activities.

Regrettably, FSSE did not include other identical questions to those in NSSE (items 9 b, c, d, or f) about the faculty's perceptions of student participation in co-curricular events or the faculty's perceptions of the non-academic demands that students carry in work and family responsibilities. Contrasting faculty perceptions of student engagement in those areas with the students' reported levels of engagement would have been interesting had that been possible.

### **Nearly All Faculty and Students Reported that KSU Strongly Encourages Students to Use Computers**

Rarely did nearly all faculty members or nearly all students share similar opinions about any of the same items in the FSSE and NSSE. They did so, however, in regard to their belief that KSU strongly encourages students to use computers in their academic work. Nearly all respondents, more than nine out of every 10, affirmed the institution's strong commitment to and advancements in the use of technology in KSU's educational experience.

On the other hand, it is unfortunate that the questions and response options in FSSE about the students' use of email to communicate with instructors or the students' use of an electronic medium to complete assignments were worded so differently from the related questions and response options in NSEE. Confounding differences in the context in which those questions were asked were also present (i.e., in one selected course for FSSE versus in the entire educational experience at KSU for NSSE). Consequently, the faculty's responses to these items (FSSE 12d and 13d) were not usable for this report.

### **Faculty and Students Share Similar Views on the Value of Student Participation in Learning Communities**

In NSSE, students were asked if they had participated or planned to participate in a learning community before they graduated. About four in 10 students felt strongly enough about the value of participating in a learning community that they responded affirmatively to that question. When faculty were asked in FSSE a slightly different question of how important it is for students to participate in a learning community at KSU, four in 10 responded that it was "important" or "very important." Remarkably, the levels of faculty and student support for participating in learning communities were nearly identical. On the other hand, it must be noted that a majority in both groups reported a lack of value and support for participation in learning communities. Clearly, there is much work to be done with students and the faculty in persuasively articulating and building support for the value of learning communities in the KSU educational experience.

### **Half of All Faculty and Students Reported that KSU Strongly Encourages the Interaction of Students from Diverse Backgrounds**

KSU's commitment to promoting and honoring the value of diversity and inclusion were equally affirmed as strong by half of the student and faculty respondents when responding to identical questions on the NSSE and FSSE. KSU's success in achieving the interaction of students from diverse backgrounds was documented in the NSSE results and is due in part to this widespread recognition of KSU's strong commitment. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement since half of the students and faculty are not aware of or have not yet recognized KSU's commitment to bringing people of difference together.

NSSE asked students how often they had serious conversations with students of different races or beliefs at KSU during the current academic year. Those conversations could have taken place as part of their coursework or in their student life beyond the classroom. FSSE asked faculty two similar questions, but restricted the context for their answers very narrowly to the one selected lower or upper division course section. Consequently, these items and their responses are not comparable, and the results from FSSE are not particularly useful for this report.

### **The Faculty's Instructional Emphasis on Learning Outcomes in Selected Courses is Consistent with the Students' Perceptions of KSU's Overall Contributions to Their Educational Experience**

Students responding to NSSE were asked a slightly different set of questions about learning outcomes (item 11) in a very different context than the faculty who responded to FSSE (item 21), precluding direct comparisons of faculty and student perceptions. Students were asked to report the level of the institution's overall contribution to their development on 16 specific outcomes. In contrast, faculty members were asked to report the extent to which they structured one particular lower or upper division course to help students develop in 14 of those 16 identical learning outcomes. The two learning outcomes which were included in NSSE, but were absent in FSSE, were "Contributing to the welfare of your community" and "Voting in local, state, or national elections" (which would have been two interesting items to examine for the American Democracy Project initiative had they been included in FSSE).

Because of the confounding differences in the survey design of FSSE and NSSE, direct comparisons of frequency distributions of student and faculty responses on the 14 common learning outcomes would not be methodologically sound. It is quite appropriate, however, to extract patterns of emphasis on the 14 learning outcomes that faculty reported for their courses and comment on the degree to which such findings appeared consistent with student perceptions of the contributions of the overall KSU experience toward their achievement of those same 14 learning outcomes. In that regard, the faculty's reported instructional emphasis on learning outcomes was highly consistent and convergent with student perceptions of their overall KSU experience.

Among the faculty who evaluated the contributions of one selected lower division course to the achievement of learning outcomes, very high percentages (at least seven out of 10) emphasized thinking critically and analytically, learning effectively on your own, acquiring a broad general education, and using computer and information technology. (See Table 3.) A little more than half emphasized writing clearly, solving complex problems, acquiring job-related education, working effectively with others, and understanding self. A little less than

half emphasized speaking effectively, understanding other races, analyzing quantitative problems and developing personal values. Very few faculty emphasized developing a deepened sense of spirituality.

**Table 3**

**Percent of Faculty Who Structured Their Selected Course to Greatly Facilitate Undergraduate Learning Outcomes and the Significance of Differences Between the Lower Division and Upper Division Courses**

<b>Selected Course Contribution to Learning Outcome</b>	<b>% "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much"</b>		
	<b>Lower Div</b>	<b>Upper Div</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Nine Fundamentals</b>			
Thinking critically & analytically	95%	99%	Not Significant
Learning effectively on their own	93%	82%	Significant
Acquiring a broad general education	76%	59%	Significant
Using computing & info technology	68%	56%	Not Significant
Writing clearly & effectively	60%	82%	Significant
Solving complex real-world problems	57%	67%	Not Significant
Acquiring job or work-related education	55%	83%	Significant
Working effectively with others	55%	74%	Significant
Speaking clearly & effectively	39%	60%	Significant
<b>Four Additional Notables</b>			
Understanding themselves	53%	55%	Not Significant
Understanding people of other races	47%	45%	Not Significant
Analyzing quantitative problems	48%	40%	Not Significant
Developing personal values & ethics	41%	58%	Significant
<b>Weakest Outcome</b>			
Developing deepened spirituality	11%	13%	Not Significant

\*Significance of differences tested using Chi Square at  $p < .05$ , d.f. = 1.

Among the faculty who evaluated the contributions of a selected upper division course to the achievement of learning outcomes, the emphases remained strongest for thinking critically and analytically and working effectively on your own. However, equally high percentages of faculty also emphasized writing effectively, acquiring job-related education, and working effectively with others. Speaking effectively and developing personal values and

ethics were emphasized by significantly more faculty in upper division courses than lower division courses. The greatest gains from the lower division to the upper division were noted in the proportions of faculty who emphasized in their selected course writing effectively, speaking effectively, acquiring job-related education, working effectively with others, and developing personal values.

These findings from FSSE were very consistent with the findings from NSSE. The list of nine fundamental learning outcomes from the students in NSSE overlapped the faculty's in FSSE in all cases except one. Analyzing quantitative problems was one of the nine highly rated fundamentals for the students, but solving complex real-world problems took its place in the list of nine fundamentals from the faculty's reports of their emphasis in selected courses. The substantial overlap between what faculty say they emphasize in their courses and what students report they experience as KSU's greatest educational impact helps to confirm that the faculty's curricular intentions are achieving their expected results.

### **The Faculty's Emphasis on Critical Thinking Skills in Selected Courses is Largely Consistent with Students' Perceptions of the Emphasis in Their KSU Coursework**

A substantial majority of the faculty (seven to nine out of 10) who focused on one lower division course when responding to FSSE reported a heavy emphasis on the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation and a significantly lower emphasis on lower-order memorization. That finding was also true for faculty who focused on one upper division course when responding to the NSSE. These results are consistent for the most part with the students' perceptions of their coursework's emphasis on critical thinking skills. The only notable divergence between faculty and student perceptions on this topic is that students reported greater emphasis on the lower-order skills of memorization in their coursework in general than faculty reported emphasizing in their selected courses. (See Table 4.)

**Table 4**

#### **The Faculty's Emphasis on Critical Thinking in A Selected Lower Division or Upper Division Course**

<b>Course Emphasis</b>	<b>% "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much"</b>		
	<b>Lower Div</b>	<b>Upper Div</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Analyzing	90%	88%	Not Significant
Synthesizing	84%	88%	Not Significant
Applying	84%	90%	Not Significant
Evaluating	70%	83%	Significant
Memorizing	29%	22%	Not Significant
Difference Between Memorizing and All Other Higher-Order Skills	Significant	Significant	

\*Significance of differences tested with Chi Square,  $p < .05$ , d.f.=1.

### **Comparisons of Faculty and Student Responses on Academic Rigor, Nontraditional Student Characteristics, Academic Advising, Physical Activity, and Community Service Were Precluded by Confounding Differences in the Survey design of FSSE and NSSE**

Many of the Nuggets from NSSE on these topics could not be contrasted with the Findings from FSSE because the wording of related questions and response categories as well as the context for responses were so different between the two survey instruments. Such differences in survey design potentially confound comparative analyses and interpretations of the data. FSSE could have complemented NSSE more strongly and on more topics of student engagement had faculty and students been asked more of the same questions, with the same response categories, and in the same institutional context.

### **Opportunities for Follow-up and Faculty Conversations on the Findings of FSSE**

When sound comparisons could be made of the results from FSSE with those from NSSE, the findings were more often convergent than divergent. This convergence of the faculty's perspectives with the students' responses serves to mutually reinforce the validity and meaningfulness of the Nuggets from NSSE and Findings from FSSE. Consequently, many of the same follow-up questions listed at the end of the earlier reports on NSSE are applicable here as well. There is nothing more to add to those lists at this time other than to underscore the relevance of those follow-up conversations for improving student engagement at Kennesaw State University in the future.