Level of Academic Challenge Fact Sheet
Enhancing Student Engagement

Student Engagement: Academic Challenge
Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning. Universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance (NSSE Benchmark Scale, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2012).

Measuring Academic Challenge (NSSE Survey Items)
- Time spent preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc. related to academic program)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more; number of written papers or reports of between 5 and 19 pages; and Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and 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

Areas of Success and Opportunities for Action
Minnesota State Mankato performed well on items such as the amount of time seniors reported spending preparing for class, the number of short papers (less than 5 pages) first-year and senior students reported writing during an academic year, or the extent to which first-year and senior students reported courses emphasized applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.

There were also areas where survey responses suggested opportunities for action. Survey items within the Academic Challenge Benchmark were reviewed to identify areas of significant difference between Minnesota State Mankato, MnSCU Universities, and Carnegie Peers with an effect size equal to or greater than .10. In addition, where relevant, student high school, student beginning of college expectations, and faculty observations are noted.

To what extent do students work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations?
- 12% of first-year students reported that they very often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations in comparison to 15% at MnSCU Universities and 21% at Carnegie Peers.
17% of senior students reported that they very often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations in comparison to 20% at MnSCU Universities and 24% at Carnegie Peers.

38% of faculty reported that the typical student often or very often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations in comparison to 47% at Carnegie Peers.

What types of thinking do assignments require?

First-year students reported substantial emphasis on:
  - Analyzing basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
    - 70% at Mankato, 76% at MnSCU Universities, and 80% at Carnegie Peers
  - Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information or experiences
    - 59% at Mankato, 62% at MnSCU Universities, and 70% at Carnegie Peers
  - Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
    - 64% at Mankato, 65% at MnSCU Universities, and 72% at Carnegie Peers

Senior students reported substantial emphasis on:
  - Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information or experiences
    - 69% at Mankato, 75% at MnSCU Universities, and 77% at Carnegie Peers

During the school year about how many assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings do students have?

16% of first-year students reported 11-20 in comparison to 23% at MnSCU Universities and 21% at Carnegie Peers.

How much writing is expected?

21% of first-year students reported writing 5 or more papers between 5 and 19 pages in comparison to 30% at MnSCU Universities and 28% at Carnegie Peers.

33% of senior students reported writing 5 or more papers between 5 and 19 pages in comparison to 49% at MnSCU Universities and 47% at Carnegie Peers.

31% of senior students reported writing 1-4 papers of 20 or more pages in comparison to 44% at MnSCU Universities and 40% at Carnegie Peers.

How much time do students spend preparing for class each week?

3% of first-year students reported spending more than 20 hrs/wk preparing for class in high school; 20% reported spending between 11 and 20 hrs.

22% of first-year students expected to spend more than 20 hrs/wk preparing for class in college; 54% expected to spend between 11 and 20 hrs.

15% of first-year students reported spending more than 20hrs/wk preparing for class in comparison to 17% at MnSCU Universities and 20% at Carnegie Peers. 40% of first-year students reported spending between 11 and 20 hrs.

To what extent do students spend significant amounts of time studying and on academic work?

77% of first-year student reported spending substantial amount of time studying and on academic work in comparison to 79% at MnSCU Universities and 82% at Carnegie Peers.