

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2003 NSSE FACULTY SURVEY CHALLENGES OF TEACHING COMMENT RESPONSES

DECEMBER 11, 2003

This report presents the results of the 2003-2004 NSSE Faculty Survey Challenge of Teaching comment section. Of 612 total responses to this survey, 530 responses to open-ended question 7 “To you, what are the greatest challenges of teaching undergraduates at a large public university?” were received. Comments were carefully reviewed for recognition of common themes. Main themes then provided for a method of categorical analysis of the data. The comment response data provided in this report was not edited for grammatical errors or inconsistencies in formatting. If respondents included their identity within their comments, this was also not removed. Some comments included responses with multiple themes requiring the separation of data for accurate categorization. The categorical analysis produced 15 categories. A list of those categories and the frequency of comments follows:

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Student Engagement, Motivation & Responsibility	194
Class Size/Facilities/Resources Comments	99
Student Preparedness	58
Variability in Student Ability	56
Distractions from Academics	41
Time/Calendar	34
Critical Thinking	27
Miscellaneous Comments	27
Diversity Comments	24
Faculty Collaborations Comments	14
Teaching & Research Comments	10
Academic Standards Comments	7

Curricular Issues Comments	6
Administration Comments	4
Advising Comments	3

Description of Categories

Student Engagement, Motivation & Responsibility

Many respondents commented on the concept of student engagement. Some respondents commented as to the importance of student engagement in learning while others discuss some of the issues with trying to implement student engagement at a large public university. Respondents indicate that the problem with trying to engage students is the students' lack of initiative, motivation, and responsibility for their own learning.

Class Size/Facilities/Resources

Many respondents listed class size as a major challenge of teaching at a large public university. Respondents also feel that large class sizes are also a limitation to student engagement.

Student Preparedness

Respondents indicate that a major challenge to teaching at a large public university is the students' preparedness for college. Specifically, respondents point to the lack of ability in the basic skills such as reading and writing.

Variability in Ability

The level of ability of most students varies enough that it affects how respondents must teach. Respondents indicate that this dynamic poses a real classroom teaching dilemma. Respondents explain that often they must teach to those at a lower level, which leaves those at a higher level less engaged.

Distractions from Academics

Respondents describe the many social, family, and work distractions that many student encounter as they also try to receive their education. These distractions are often priorities over students' academic responsibilities.

Time/Calendar

Respondents report a concern for the amount of time they spend with students. Not only do respondents feel that this is a limitation of the quarter system, but they also report just not having enough time to spend on teaching considering many other responsibilities (research, service, administrative duties, etc.).

Critical Thinking

Respondents described the difficulty in getting students to think critically and to move beyond the memorization and cramming method of learning.

Miscellaneous

Comments were recorded on a variety of themes not listed above.

Diversity

Several comments point to Ohio University's lack of diversity in its student body. This is a challenge to teaching because students aren't sensitive to the importance of diversity, nor does it allow for the application of diversity concepts presented in the classroom.

Faculty Development & Collaboration

Some respondents felt that a challenge to teaching at a large public university is faculty attitudes and a lack of communication among faculty.

Teaching and Research

Respondents reported feeling conflicted between spending time on teaching or spending time on research, which is viewed as the main criterion for promotion and tenure at a large public university.

Academic Standards

Respondents indicated concern that academic standards are being compromised by student satisfaction. Some also see grade inflation as an important issue which also provides for the de-emphasis on academic standards.

Curricular Issues

A few respondents indicated that their greatest challenge is dealing with curriculum issues. Some believe that students need more interdisciplinary courses, while others feel that students need to be able to have more freedom in their selection of courses.

Administration Comments

Some respondents indicate that administrative lack of trust and support of faculty and bureaucracy, are the greatest challenges to teaching.

Advising Comments

Respondents indicate that more of an emphasis needs to be placed on advising. Students, especially in the first year, are not receiving the support they need. Spending enough time with students is an issue because of the large number of advisees faculty members have.