

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
2000 TASK FORCE**

September 2001

Background

The first National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405) was released on November 13, 2000. President Glidden discussed the survey with the Faculty Senate on January 8, 2001, and on January 10 wrote to the Provost and the Chair of the Faculty Senate to ask that a task force be established to review the survey, discuss its implications for Ohio University, and make recommendations to him based on concerns raised in the survey and in the task force's discussions. Provost Brehm asked the Chair of the Faculty Senate to solicit faculty and staff to serve on a NSSE-2000 Task Force and to chair its discussions.

The Task Force members were: Kristin Buhn, Dean's Office, University College; Luke Ellwood, Senior undergraduate; Terry Hogan, Dean of Students; Peter Johnson, Department of Biomedical Sciences; Jan Palmer, Chair, Department of Economics; Ann Paulins, Director, Human and Consumer Sciences, Chair, General Education Committee; Richard Linn, Director of Pre-College, University College; Gitanjali Kaul, Associate Provost for Assessment; Gary Pfeiffer, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Chair, Faculty Senate and Chair NSSE-2000 Task Force; Karin Sandell, School of

Telecommunications, Director, Center for Teaching Excellence; Dale Tampke, Office of the Vice President for Administration, Director of Program Assessment; Janice Walter, Freshman undergraduate; Matthew White, Department of Biological Sciences, Member, Greek Life Committee; Michael Williford, Director, Office of Institutional Research; Matthew Ziff, Human and Consumer Sciences, Member General Education Review Steering Committee.

The Task Force met three times during the Winter and Spring Quarters 2001. In addition to reading the NSSE-2000 report, the Task Force read several reports previously prepared by the Office of Institutional Research: 1) "First-Year (Freshman) Undergraduate Involvement at Ohio University over Five Years: 1995-1996 to 1999-2000" (May 2000); 2) "Change in Student Involvement From the First (Freshman) Year to the Senior Year at Ohio University" (November 2000); 3) "Factors Associated with First-Year Student Attrition and Retention at Ohio University, Athens Campus" (October 2000). In addition, the Office of Institutional Research supplied the Task Force with the following data: 1) "Ohio University Athens Campus: First-Year (Freshman) Undergraduate Profile" (this data covered freshman classes from Fall 1994 to Fall 2000) 2) "Ohio University Athens Campus: Freshman GPA Statistics" (this data covered freshman classes from Fall 1996 to Fall 2000); 3) "Ohio University Athens Campus: Most Frequently-Enrolled Freshman Courses: Fall 1996-Fall 2000"; 4) "Ohio University Athens Campus: Most Frequently-Enrolled Freshman Courses: Fall 2000: Type of Instructor".

Report

Our approach to the NSSE-2000 survey is to ask what it tells us about the progress of our freshman and senior students toward Ohio University's goals for undergraduate education. Drawing on the "Shared Vision" statements from the Pew Roundtable discussions of 1996-1998, discussions at the Fall 2000 Presidential Retreat, and presentations at the Winter 2001 "Pew Roundtable Revisited" retreat, we find that it is Ohio University's expectation that its students will gain a firm appreciation of the following:

- (i) The importance of diversity in furthering their understanding of culture, societal needs and the tenets of good citizenship;
- (ii) The importance of civility in discourse and decision making;
- (iii) The importance of organizational, university and community service toward furthering responsible citizenship;
- (iv) The importance of a broad background of study to gain the perspective needed for informed citizenship;
- (v) The importance of disciplined habits of thought, work and play to further the goal of productive citizenship;
- (vi) And a deep understanding of one's major to further the goal of discovering and recognizing new knowledge through advanced study and research.

In addition to the educational goals of Ohio University outlined above, we will use our students' responses to the NSSE-2000 report to gauge how well they find that their

educational experiences follow a “best practices” model, developed for the most part by the General Education Review Task Force, that recommends the following pedagogy:

- (i) Smaller class sizes to allow more active student participation and closer faculty-student interactions;
- (ii) Group work with fellow students through class projects and learning communities;
- (iii) Classroom emphasis on writing and oral communication skills;
- (iv) Increased facility with mathematical-scientific reasoning;
- (v) Increased student-faculty interactions both inside and outside the classroom;
- (vi) Technology enhancements that will augment learning and encourage contacts between instructor and students;
- (vii) Widespread opportunities for undergraduate scholarship and research.

The NSSE-2000 asked students to evaluate their academic, intellectual, and social experiences at their college or university through responses to a series of questions about their actual activities, and their perceptions of their university environment. The Survey’s responses from freshmen and seniors at Ohio University offer information about our students’ participation in those educational experiences that we have listed above as most conforming to Ohio University’s mission and values. We have three sets of data to consider. There are the responses from our students (316 Ohio University students took part in the Survey), responses from students at other Research I and II schools (13,072 students in this category), and finally responses from students at all of the 276 four-year

colleges and universities participating in the study (63,067 students in this category). We will group the questions and responses, for each cohort of students, in such a way that each group of responses comments on one of the stated educational goals of Ohio University, or on one of the pedagogical “best practices” listed above. We then compare the responses of our students to those of their peers in the “research” and “national” cohorts. By analyzing the Survey in this way, we also hope to identify patterns in the data that may in fact be more informative than single responses to individual questions.

Each of the following paragraphs addresses one of the educational goals identified earlier. The questions that seemed most germane to that goal are described (there is some overlap here as some responses seem to comment on more than one goal) together with our comments about the statistical significance of differences between Ohio University student responses and those of their peer groups.

Diversity: (Here we should be aware that student responses to questions in this group may be affected by the disparate ethnic populations of Ohio University and other schools in the Survey. For freshmen, 94.1% of the Ohio University respondents were white, while 74.8% of Research I and II respondents, and 77.7% of the national cohort of respondents were white.) Ohio University freshmen report significantly fewer “serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity” compared to their peer groups. (The Office of Institutional Research’s Undergraduate Involvement Survey for 1999-2000 found that only 40% of freshmen were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their degree of interaction with people of different races at the University. A companion

inquiry in the Involvement Survey found that only 51% of freshmen in 1999-2000 thought that interaction with people of different races was “very” or “somewhat” important. This points out another significant hurdle for enhanced diversity engagement.) On the other hand, there were no statistically significant differences, in the responses to this question by Ohio University seniors, and seniors in either the “research” or “national” peer groups. In addition, there were no significant differences between Ohio University responses, for either freshmen or seniors, and their colleagues in other schools, to the following inquiries: “[number of] serious conversations with other students whose religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values were very different from yours”; the student’s perceived personal development toward “understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds”; and the student’s perception of his/her institution’s emphasis on “encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds”.

Civility: One of Ohio University’s distinguishing values is the civility that characterizes interactions among members of the University community. To comment on this attribute we examined student responses to such Survey inquiries as the students’ degree of “participating in co-curricular activities”; and their perceptions of their abilities to “work effectively with others”, to being “honest and truthful”, and the quality of their “relationships with other students”. To all of these questions, with two exceptions, the Survey responses of Ohio University freshmen and seniors were quite similar to those of their peers, both the “research” cohort and the “national” cohort. The exceptional responses were from our seniors who rated themselves significantly higher than did their

“research” peers in their ability to “work effectively with others”, and in the “friendly quality of their relationships” with other students. (Freshmen responses to the Undergraduate Involvement survey for 1999-2000 showed that 74% were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with “having close friends at Ohio University” and 73% said they were likewise satisfied with having “establishing personal relationships with peers at Ohio University”.)

Service: Part of the Ohio University mission is to make service, integrated with learning, part of our students’ educational experience. NSSE-2000 inquiries that seemed to comment on the idea of service were: “Tutored or taught other students”; “participated in a community-based project as part of a course”; “worked with faculty on activities other than coursework”; “participating in co-curricular activities”; “providing care for dependents living with you”; and “contributing to the welfare of your community”. To the inquiry regarding care for live-in dependents, Ohio University students reported significantly less care giving than their “research” and “national” peer groups. The rural, and somewhat isolated, setting for Ohio University probably explains this difference in student activity. Ohio University students would be less likely to be living with, or near, dependents needing live-in care. Our freshmen also showed less activity than their peers (significantly, compared to the national cohort) in their degree of participation in community-based projects. (Freshmen responses to Institutional Research’s Undergraduate Involvement survey for 1999-2000 showed that about 9% of freshmen were involved in “service activities”.) However, in a turnaround very commonly seen in the NSSE-2000 survey, our seniors were more involved than their peers at other

universities in service projects. Indeed, for all the questions that we have grouped into the “service” category, except for live-in dependent care, Ohio University seniors consistently scored higher than their peers with regard to their participation in organizational and community service.

Broad background of study: This goal of the Ohio University educational experience is institutionalized in the General Education Program as Tier II (current program) and Breadth of Knowledge (revised program). From the NSSE-2000 report, we found the following questions most responsive to this topic: (under reading) “number of assigned textbooks” and “number of books read on your own”; (and under knowledge development) “acquiring a broad general education”. In their responses to these questions, our freshmen reported significantly fewer assigned textbooks. Although the responses are not significantly different, our freshmen also report reading fewer books of their own choosing than their peers. (Institutional Research’s Undergraduate Involvement survey shows a decline of freshmen personal reading from 2.5 books/year in 1995-1996 to 1.9 books/year in 1999-2000). Our seniors, however, equal or exceed their peers in their positive responses to this set of questions.

Disciplined habits of thought: There was a large number of questions in the NSSE-2000 survey which could be used to probe the seriousness and the rigor of Ohio University studies in comparison to such study at Research I and II schools and the entire national sample. These survey responses also compared the discipline with which our students approach their studies. These questions concerned the students’ experiences:

“came to class unprepared”; “received prompt feedback from faculty on performance”;
 “worked harder than you thought you could”; the character of the mental activities
 required of students: “Analysis”; “Synthesis”; “Judging the value of information”;
 “Application of Theory”; weekly activities: “Preparing for class”; “Relaxing,
 Socializing...Exercising”; personal development: “Learning effectively on you own”;
 institutional factors: “Number of assigned textbooks”; “Nature of the examinations taken
 this year”; “Spending significant amounts of time on academic work”. Compared to the
 national cohort, Ohio University freshmen were significantly less likely to use synthesis
 in their coursework and to have experience in judging information sources. Although not
 statistically significant, this pattern persists as Ohio University students report less use of
 analysis and theory application. In addition, Ohio University freshmen have a
 significantly lower ranking than their peers in the number of assigned textbooks they
 must master. In another response, Ohio University freshmen report experiencing
 significantly more multiple choice and short answer examinations than their peers. Essay
 and open-ended questions are significantly more common on other Research I and II
 campuses than at Ohio University. (The Undergraduate Involvement (freshmen) Survey
 shows a decline from 12.8 hours/week in 1995-1996 to 10.6 hours/week in 1999-2000 for
 the time Ohio University freshman students spend studying for classes.) Only in their
 responses to the question about the number of hours per week spent on “relaxing,
 socializing, exercising, etc.” do Ohio University students significantly outpace their
 peers. (The Undergraduate Involvement Survey of Ohio University freshmen shows an
 increase in the number of on-campus parties attended each month from 4.6 in 1995-96 to
 6.2 in 1999-2000.) Perhaps the Ping Center has made exercising an important part of

Ohio University students' activities, or perhaps a number of students are determined to uphold the "party-school" image of Ohio University. In their replies to the other questions in this group, Ohio University student responses were not significantly different from their peers.

Deep understanding of major: We want our students to secure the depth of understanding in their chosen fields that will make them well qualified to contribute to those fields in the future. Many of the questions in the survey referring to the depth of understanding have already been examined in other categories: "Number of assigned textbooks"; "Nature of examinations"; Types of mental activities: "Memorization"; "Analysis"; "Synthesis"; "Judging information"; "Theory application". New questions from the survey are: "Tutored or taught other students" and, under knowledge development, "Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills". Unfortunately, Ohio University freshmen responses show that they were called upon to memorize facts and ideas, in order to demonstrate their understanding of course material, significantly more than were their Research I and II, and national peers. This finding is complemented by the previous observation that Ohio University freshmen use "synthesis" and "judgment of information sources" significantly less than their peers. From other responses, we note that Ohio University freshmen and seniors engage in tutoring to the same extent as their peers and Ohio University seniors are significantly more positive about their job related skill development than their Research I and II counterparts. (The Undergraduate Involvement Survey showed only 63% of Ohio University freshmen in 1999-2000 to be "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with instruction

in their major courses. The same survey showed that 65% of Ohio University freshmen were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with their progress toward career goals.)

In addition to commenting on the progress made by our freshmen and seniors on broad institutional goals, the NSSE-2000 responses also tell us about the University’s current use of “best practices” in pedagogy. The NSSE-2000 Task Force, and the General Education Review Committee, believe that the learning goals of our students have a better chance for realization if pedagogy at Ohio University can increase the use of factors such as small class size, active student participation, group work, more emphasis on writing and oral communication, etc. Some understanding of the current status of these factors at Ohio University can be gleaned from looking for patterns in student responses when the NSSE-2000 survey questions are “rebinned” to fit these new categories. Again there will be some overlap because of our placement of certain questions with more than one factor. The factors, and our grouping of the questions, follows:

Small class size: We believe the following questions about students’ academic experiences give information about class size, and the degree of active participation in class: “Asked questions in class”; “Made a class presentation”; “Received prompt feedback on academic performance”; and again, the question about the “Nature of exams taken this year”. Ohio University freshmen asked questions, and presented in class, in a comparable manner to their Research I and II peers, but were significantly less active than their peers in the national cohort. Also, as we have previously noted, Ohio

University freshmen encountered significantly more multiple-choice type examinations than any of their peers. By placing this question with this factor we emphasize our belief that it is the relatively large class sizes for freshmen at Ohio University that determines the nature of the examinations they receive. The situation changes for Ohio University seniors. Their responses show that our seniors made significantly more class presentations, and had prompter feedback on their work, than their peers in other Research I and II schools. Also, our seniors have fewer multiple-choice type examinations and experience essay-type tests to about the same extent as their peers at other schools.

Group work: An emphasis on group work in college is considered good preparation for the “team” approach found in many work environments. In addition, the peer-to-peer learning that is inherent in group-work is known to be an important and effective mode of education. Questions from the NSSE-2000 survey germane to this topic were: “Worked with other students on projects during class”; “Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments”; “Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class”; and under personal development, “Working effectively with others”. Considering responses to these questions, Ohio University students, both freshmen and seniors, answer in comparable ways to their peers. In fact, the group work experiences of Ohio University seniors are significantly more positive than their Research I and II peers. These welcome trends are shown explicitly in responses to projects undertaken both inside and outside of class, and in the effectiveness of those interactions. Since learning communities (group work) are

becoming more prevalent at Ohio University, and are further encouraged in the new General Education Program, we can expect a continued educational benefit from this factor.

Writing, Oral and Mathematical-Scientific skills: “Writing Across the Curriculum” has been a program at Ohio University for several years. To this emphasis, the new General Education Program has proposed adding oral communication and mathematical-scientific reasoning as additional “foundational skills” desired for every Ohio University student. Questions on the NSSE-2000 survey that illuminate the current status of such experiences at Ohio University are: “Asked questions in class/contributed to class discussions”; “Made a class presentation”; “Rewrote a paper or assignment several times”; “Number of papers equal or greater than 20 pages in length”; “Number of papers less than 20 pages in length”; and under knowledge and skill development, “Speaking clearly and effectively”; “Writing clearly and effectively”; “Thinking critically and analytically”; “Analyzing quantitative problems”; and “Using computing and information technology”. As mentioned earlier, the responses from Ohio University freshmen show that they participate significantly less often than their peers in the activities “asking questions in class” and “making a class presentation”. Responses to the other questions show Ohio University students to have experiences very similar to all of their peers. There is one notable exception to this trend, considering the question on “use of computing and information technology”. Here, Ohio University seniors report themselves having significantly more experience than do their fellow students in the Research I and II, and national pools.

Student-Faculty Interactions: The residential nature of Ohio University is one of its distinguishing characteristics. This, coupled with the University's relatively isolated setting should be a positive factor in fostering student-faculty interactions. The following questions from the survey show our students' perceptions of such interactions: under academic experiences "Used e-mail to communicate with instructor/other students"; "Discussed grades or assignments with instructor"; "Talked about career plans with faculty advisor"; "Discussed ideas from readings with faculty outside of class"; "Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework". In addition, students were asked their perceptions of their university's emphasis on "Providing the support you need to succeed"; and the quality of "Relationships with faculty". Although both Ohio University freshmen and seniors were more prone to use e-mail communications than their comparison cohort groups, many of those e-mails may have gone to their fellow students. This is suggested when Ohio University freshmen report themselves significantly less likely to discuss grades, assignments, and "ideas from reading" with their professors than their Research I and II and national cohort peers. On the other hand, Ohio University seniors were significantly more likely to talk to their advisors about career plans than were their peers. (These relationships should be put in context by noting that the NEES-2000 survey reports that at doctorate granting institutions 53% of first year students and 35% of seniors report that they "'never" discussed ideas from their readings or classes with a faculty member outside the classroom.) Both Ohio University freshmen and seniors assessed the quality of their relationships to faculty as being more supportive than that recorded by other Research I and II students. (Findings from the

Undergraduate Involvement (Freshman) Survey for 1999-2000 that further describe the attitudes of Ohio University freshmen toward “student-faculty interactions” include: 1) for the academic year students report having, on average, two conversations with their academic advisors and two conversations with faculty members in general; 2) 49% of freshmen report themselves “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with advising; 59% are similarly satisfied with “faculty availability outside of class”; and 35% are satisfied with “social contacts with faculty”.)

Technology Enhancements: The University has put significant resources into support of the proposition that information technology enhancements will aid the learning process and encourage student-student and student-faculty interchanges. Three items on the NSSE-2000 survey address the technology factor: “Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor or with other students”, “Used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment”, and “To what extent has your university education contributed to your skill in using computing and information technology?” The responses of Ohio University students to these survey items were uniformly positive. Freshmen students at Ohio University regarded themselves as equally knowledgeable and skillful in this area as their peer groups while Ohio University seniors rated their experience significantly higher than their peer groups, particularly in comparison to the national peer group.

Undergraduate Research and Scholarship: Finally, what does the survey tell us about the relative involvement of Ohio University students with undergraduate research? One of the important attributes of Ohio University is its ability to offer students an

enormous variety of research experiences to complement their textbook, and in-class instruction. Only one item on the survey addressed the research factor directly, “Worked with a faculty member on a research project.” None of the student groups in the NSSE study indicated much activity in this area with all mean responses falling between “never” and “occasionally”. (Commentary in the NSSE-2000 report stated that only 17% of freshmen and 36% of seniors do “research” at doctoral extensive universities.) Ohio University freshmen did report significantly less research activity than their national peer group while Ohio University seniors reported a slightly higher research work level than both of their peer groups.

Summary of Conclusions from Survey Responses

A common theme in examining the responses of Ohio University students to the NSSE-2000 survey was to find that whereas freshmen students report several of their educational experiences less positively than do their Research I and II and national peer groups, senior respondents often showed quite different perceptions. Seniors at Ohio University report quite positive engagements, often significantly more so than their peer groups. Certainly, satisfaction can be taken from the survey’s findings of important growth in our students’ performance levels, both individually and in group-work, and in their confidence in their own abilities as they progress from freshmen to seniors.

Less heartening, however, is the current engagement level of OU freshmen. In some cases, improvements seem to defy all efforts to implement them. In the important area of experiencing diversity through contact with different races and ethnic groups, our

freshmen are hampered by the inability of the University to attract a heterogeneous student body. Efforts are ongoing, and expanding, to increase diversity among students, staff, and faculty but the NSSE-2000 findings, that our current freshmen experience significantly fewer interactions with students of different races and ethnic groups, are not surprising.

Other areas of concern are more amenable to treatment. Ohio University freshmen report their perception that the University places less emphasis on “amounts of time studying and on academic work” than their peer groups report about their institutions. (The Undergraduate Involvement (freshman) Survey for 1999-2000 reports that 71% of first year students are “very” or “somewhat” satisfied that Ohio University furnishes an “adequate academic/intellectual atmosphere”.) Perhaps because of this, our freshmen report spending less time in class preparation than their peers while at the same time OU students are significantly more engaged in relaxing, socializing, and exercising than is reported by students at other Research I and II schools and in the national peer group.

Ohio University freshmen report significantly fewer assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings than other students in the survey and they also read somewhat fewer books on their own. Our freshmen report a significantly higher number of multiple choice and short answer examinations than their peers. Ohio University students also indicate that they felt that memorization was more important for examination preparation than was indicated by other students in the survey. Finally, our

freshman students report less demand in their studies for “synthesis” and “search for new relationships in presented data”.

In other factors that comment on our student’s engagement with learning we have noted that our freshman students ask fewer questions in class and make fewer class presentations than others in the survey. Our freshmen report about the same amount of group work, use of technology, and development of writing, oral and mathematical scientific skills as their peers while our seniors report significantly higher involvement in these activities than their peers, particularly in the use of computing and information technology tools. Freshmen at Ohio University also report significantly lower levels of student-faculty interactions, from discussing grades and assignments to talking about ideas outside of class. At the same time, both freshmen and seniors at Ohio University report a higher perception of the quality of their relationships to faculty than do their peers. Finally, although undergraduate research is not well developed among any of the peer groups in the study, our freshmen reported less activity than the means of either of the other Research I and II schools or the national cohort.

Recommendations

Based on responses to the NSSE-2000 survey it is clear that the degree of engagement of Ohio University seniors with the educational goals of the University is equal to, and in many instances significantly better than, the comparable engagements of their peers in other Research I and II universities and in the national group of colleges and universities as well. The recommendations of the NSSE-2000 Task Force will

therefore be directed to the concerns raised by the survey regarding the freshman year experiences of our students.

The freshman year is particularly important in the career of a student because studies have shown that attitudes and habits formed during the first year at college persist for a considerable part of the student's academic experience. We will group our recommendations under the following categories: orientation (pre-college), advising, instruction, student-life outside the classroom and student-faculty engagement.

Orientation

- (1) Students should be convinced, beginning with pre-college orientation that Ohio University emphasizes academic work. Pre-college advisors should articulate clearly the high expectations that the University has for each student. Orientation advisors should focus on process and make clear to students those "best practices" of academic life that will enable the student to achieve the University's standards for knowledge, skills and capabilities. As a start, some of the orientation sessions themselves should be organized so as to demonstrate to new students how their studies can be enhanced by their active participation.
- (2) Students should be advised to set aside their high school study habits where information was memorized in short time periods sandwiched between classes, meals, and social and recreational

activities. Learning in college requires uninterrupted periods, sometimes lasting for hours, to master the material. An orientation session on learning styles would be valuable to help new students evaluate these techniques and guide them to effective personal study and learning routines.

- (3) Renewed efforts should be made to assure the availability of sufficient sections of classes for first year students. A significant commitment of new faculty should be made to alleviate closeout problems. In particular, the New Faculty Initiative should help furnish staffing for freshmen instruction. Additional help would come if more seats in these classes were saved/created for incoming freshmen. [Note: the Office of Institutional Research's "Involvement Survey" of freshmen finds that only 65% of our first year students feel that they have made progress toward their career goals by the Spring Quarter.]

Advising

- (1) Academic advising resources for first year, and undecided students, should be enhanced. Special considerations should be given to undecided students, as they often feel particularly disengaged from academic life at the University.
- (2) Academic advising by faculty members should reach more students, especially freshmen. Increased contact through advising

would improve faculty-student understanding. Since “undecided” students are often poorly engaged with academic life they would particularly benefit from increased advising efforts by faculty and staff. [Notes: (i) The “Involvement Survey” of freshmen reports that only 49% of first year students are satisfied with their academic advising. (ii) K.J. Light, author of “Making the Most of College” (Harvard University Press), says that “...good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience”.

Instruction

- (1) **Efforts should be made to decrease the average class size for first year students.** Access to smaller classes is especially important to freshmen struggling to establish connections in a new environment. Efforts to lower class size should be linked with the closeout problem of freshmen classes. Again, additional faculty positions should be targeted to increasing our commitment to freshmen instruction. Lowering class sizes will increase student-faculty interactions and enhance student engagement with the academic side of university life.
- (2) **Learning communities should be encouraged,** especially for freshmen. These communities can be residential, or they can be a component of large introductory classes. Faculty members,

graduate students, or (especially effective) peers of the community members can mentor these groups. Opportunities for active participation in discussion, writing, skill development, and instructor-student interaction are much enhanced in such communities.

- (3) In classes of all sizes, students should be encouraged to be more active participants. The Task Force endorses the recommendation of the General Education Review Task Force that classes “incorporate active learning strategies, reflected in the grade, by using one or more of the following: a) writing, speaking, or other forms of expression; b) information-gathering, analysis, and synthesis; c) collaborative learning and teamwork; d) service-learning; e) problem-solving”.
- (4) Departments and individual faculty members need to evaluate the intellectual challenge offered to students by their courses. Is the level of challenge sufficient for our best students? If Ohio University students are to be able to work in the 21st century, then the challenges of our coursework must not be content with memorization, and short-answer responses, but exhibit critical analysis and synthesis.

Student Life Outside the Classroom

- (1) Every effort should be made to make hall (dormitory) life more amenable to academic pursuits. Real study rooms should be made part of every hall. Such rooms would not only be used by individuals but also would encourage group work, either spontaneous, or through structured learning communities. With renovations, and possibly replacements, of East Green and South Green buildings now underway we should ensure that sufficient student learning space is incorporated into the planning for these new halls. Making classroom buildings, Alden Library, and Baker Center readily available for group study access would be further encouragement for peer engagement and team projects. In addition, mixing upper classmen with freshmen in the same hall would give the latter role models for both academic and social guidance. Another tactic that fosters engagement is to group students with similar interests in the same hall. Language halls are well-known examples of such grouping. In all these endeavors it is important that the residence life program have a clear focus of supporting students in their academic achievement, not as one of several goals, but as the primary mission.
- (2) Increase the opportunity to integrate service work with appropriate freshmen courses. Such opportunities would add active components to our students' studies and promote freshmen engagement with the community. The "community" service can be done on-campus or off-

campus. Service as members or officers of student organizations can be very effective in promoting engagement with both the University and surrounding region.

- (3) Extracurricular activities should be recognized as offering opportunities for students to improve their social skills. Such appropriate social skills can be important factors in post-college relationships and should be considered part of the University's contribution to career development and good citizenship.

Student-Faculty Engagement

- (1) Every freshman student should have at least one faculty member who knows him/her by name. Students should be encouraged to reciprocate, they should have a quarterly goal to get to know one faculty member reasonably well.
- (2) Smaller classes, improved advising, and increased opportunities for out-of-the-classroom contacts should be actively promoted as fostering better student-faculty engagement.
- (3) Systematic opportunities should be created by faculty and staff to engage students in qualitative discussions about their experiences. Monthly or quarterly focus groups of members of a single class, or of a larger cohort, should meet with their instructor, or with a group of faculty and staff, to talk about academic and social

concerns. Through such interactions student would gain an enhanced role in determining their academic and social environments.

- (4) Research opportunities for undergraduate students should be continued and expanded. Ohio University's strong commitment to research offers a wide variety of exploratory projects for students at all levels and should be a distinguishing feature of our educational program. Besides introducing students to analysis of techniques and concepts and the recognition of patterns in data, research creates close faculty-student interactions. A bonus is the additional contacts the student will make with the graduate student community during research, which often brings with it a new appreciation of international cultures.
- (5) Increased faculty involvement with students, whether in an active classroom, in giving feed-back on frequent writing assignments, in supervision service-learning projects, in facilitating learning communities, in mentoring undergraduate research, etc. should be encouraged by being given explicit acknowledgement in reward systems such as promotion, tenure and merit pay.

These recommendations have been chosen to contribute toward a goal stated in the NSSE-2000 report: "...key players – presidents, academic and student life administrators, faculty members, and students – must work together to structure learning opportunities

and arrange institutional resources so that more students take part in a variety of coherent, challenging and complimentary educational activities, inside and outside the classroom...The stakes are too high to do anything less.”