



Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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NSSE News

In Spring 2017, Eastern participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as one of over 600 four-year institutions that participated last year. Eastern last participated in AY13.

FA16 new freshmen and graduating seniors received emails from President Glassman asking that they complete the survey. These students were also reminded to take the survey when they logged into PAWS. Students were offered a chance for a \$100 Visa card as an incentive. The average participation rate was 30%; Eastern's freshman rate was 32% (an increase of 16% from AY13) and the senior rate was 37% (increase of 14% from AY13).

NSSE offers Eastern comparisons with other Midwest, public institutions as well as comparisons to the other Illinois public universities. Many of the questions covered are directly related to retention and student success.

NSSE breaks the 103 questions asked into 10 engagement indicators. Eastern's scores were in the top 10% of all institutions in discussions with diverse others and student-faculty interactions for freshmen, and in effective teaching practices for seniors.

For freshmen and

seniors, Eastern was in the top 50% of all institutions in providing a supportive environment, quality of interactions, effective teaching practices, reflective and integrated learning, discussions with diverse others, and student-faculty interactions. Freshmen were also in the top 50% in higher order learning and quantitative reasoning.

When looking at Eastern's NSSE data in comparison to our peers, we were above our Midwest, public, master's level peers in several questions; the top five high performing questions for freshmen were:

- ◆ Discussions with people of a race or ethnicity other than your own (+25%)
- ◆ The number of courses that included a community-based project (+21%)
- ◆ How often students had talked to a faculty member about career plans (+18%)
- ◆ Instructors provide prompt and detailed feedback (+18%)
- ◆ Discussions with people from an economic background other than your own (+14%)

Eastern's seniors were likewise higher than our peers in five top performing areas:

- ◆ Talked about career plans with a faculty

- ◆ member (+15%)
- ◆ Discussions with people of a race or ethnicity other than your own (+12%)
- ◆ Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member (+12%)
- ◆ Institution emphasis on helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (+11%)
- ◆ Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (+11%)

Compared to our peers, EIU's student averages were significantly lower on only one indicator for each level and only in one comparison group. Freshman averages were lower than all Illinois public institutions in the collaborative learning indicator, but there was no significant difference with Midwest peers, and senior averages were below all Illinois publics in quantitative reasoning, but had no significant difference with Midwest peers.

At both the freshman and senior levels, Eastern was above our Midwest and Illinois public peers in student-faculty interaction and effective teaching practices:

- ◆ Talked about career plans with a faculty

NSSE cont.

- member (+18% FR/+15% SR)
- ◆ Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework (+13% FR/+11% SR)
- ◆ Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class (+12% FR/ +7% SR)
- ◆ Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member (+14% FR / +12% SR)

Students indicated that our faculty clearly explain course goals and requirements, taught courses in an organized way, used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points, provided feedback on a draft or work in progress, and provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments.

Freshman students were significantly below our peers in questions related to critical thinking and how often they were asked to analyze and evaluate data. Seniors were below peers in quantitative reasoning questions: how often they were asked to reach conclusions based on their own analysis of numerical information, how often they used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue, and how often they evaluated what others concluded from numerical information.

Several questions surrounding campus environment suggested that our freshmen and seniors found us to have an excellent environment for engagement; these questions concern student-to-student interaction, faculty-to-student interaction, student services staff, providing support for students to succeed academically, providing opportunities to be involved socially, and helping students manage their non-academic responsibilities.

Eastern, however, was below our Midwest and Illinois public peers in advising encounters and using learning support services for freshmen, and in other administrative staff and offices and being encouraged to attend campus activities and events for seniors. While these areas may be places for improvement, the numbers indicate that our students are largely satisfied. For example, the EIU average mean for academic advisors was 5.2 compared to 5.3 for our Midwest peers with a 7 being excellent and 1 being poor, so students are still rating the quality of these interactions

highly.

Areas that may affect retention that are difficult to resolve include items such as how many students work for pay off campus. This was an item where we were below our peers, and given the struggles many of our students have with paying for school, could be a factor leading to attrition. Other lifestyle concerns include a lack of care for dependents.

NSSE also offers data related to high impact practices such as service learning, learning communities, research with faculty, internship or field experiences, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences. Sixty-four percent of freshmen had participated in one high impact practice compared to 49% of freshmen at our Midwest peers and 41% at the other Illinois public institutions. Of the EIU freshmen who had participated, 75% had done service learning. Sixty-six percent of seniors had participated in one HIP during their tenure at EIU compared to 64% of Midwest senior peers and 62% of seniors at other Illinois public universities.

In addition to the NSSE that everyone completes, EIU chose to disseminate an additional module on first-year experiences and senior transitions. Although Eastern freshmen seriously considered leaving the institution in lesser numbers than our peers, the top reasons given for considering leaving were: 48% personal reasons (family, health, homesickness, stress); 43% financial concerns; 21% relationships with other students; and 16% academics were too difficult or major not offered. Eastern freshmen were more likely than peers at other institutions to seek help from faculty and advisors with coursework.

Thirty-one percent of Eastern's seniors planned to attend graduate school following attainment of their bachelor's degree compared to 23% of our peers' seniors; 46% of students planned to obtain full-time employment.

NSSE data indicate that students on Eastern's campus are engaged, and we need to continue offering those high impact practices and showing our students the caring and helpful attitudes that contribute to student success, retention, and ultimately to graduation.

The NSSE presentation given to the BOT is available on-line at <http://www.eiu.edu/assess>.

"The friendly environment and the smaller size of the university made me feel like an individual, and I know I was given opportunities I could not get at a big institution."

"I found a lot of friends in a community that I feel comfortable with. I feel the professors in my major and advisors really work to give me a great experience and education."

NSSE senior respondents

FA16 to FA17 Retention Picture

Like most other institutions, Eastern reports fall first-year to fall second year retention rates for IPEDS. The FA16 new freshman cohort was retained at 74%, which is an increase of 3% from the previous year. The national mean for master's level public institutions is 69.9%, and the national mean for four-year, traditionally selective institutions is 70.4% (traditional selectivity is indicated by an ACT average of 18-24). National data is taken from the 2017 ACT Institutional Data File (www.ruffalonl.com).

CORE also examined the retention of students with the at-risk factors revealed by our retention model. FA15 to FA16 retention percentages are given in parentheses where the at-risk categories were the same; the need gap changed from \$9000 to \$7000 in the new model, but the at-risk factor remained the same, for example.

Students with a need gap of \$7,000 or more were retained at 64.8% (67.6%) while students who had 60% or less of their financial need met were retained at 79.2% (74.6%). Once again, we see that the need gap is a strong predictor of attrition freshman to sophomore year.

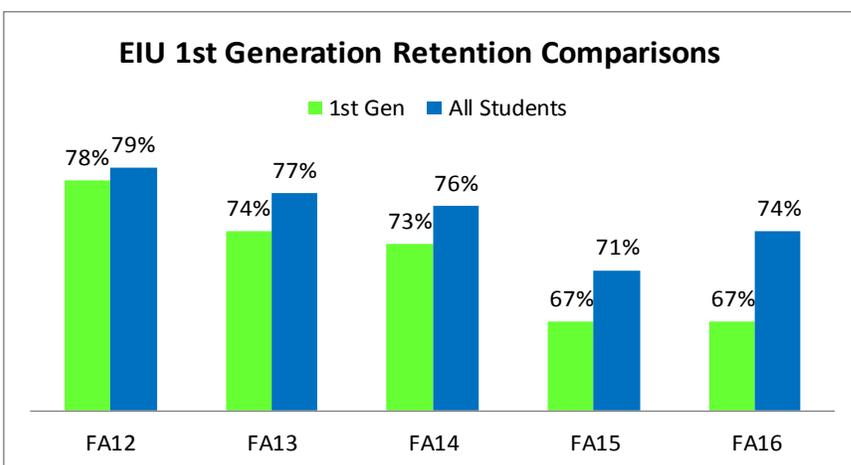
The third financial risk factor was financial aid verification. With new procedures that were put into place to help students at orientation and in their first semester, only 18 students remained in this category by 10th day of their freshman year, and those students were retained at 61.1%; there were over 220 students in this category at the beginning of orientation.

Students with a low academic index, a calculation of ACT composite and high school gpa, made up 41% of the FA16 freshman class, and they were retained at 70.8%. Another factor related to academics, high school grade point average below 2.9, had a retention rate of 63.6% for this cohort (FA15 was 61.6%).

Similarly, students who were admitted in March or after for the following fall term were retained at 63.3%. This percentage indicates how important it is to encourage early application and admission.

Students who indicated they were of Hispanic, African-American, multiple ethnicities, and international students are also at-risk of attrition. This population was retained at 67.45%. Prior to the new retention

continued to have lower retention rates than standard admits with review admits retained at 70.2% and Gateway students at 56.7%. First generation students had a 66.88% retention rate. This year and the previous year saw a greater gap between first generation retention and the entire class. In prior years, first-generation students' retention rates were only 1-3% below the



model, only students of Hispanic ethnicity were on the at-risk list; in FA15 these students were retained at 76.2%.

The final at-risk variable is students who attended Chicago Public Schools; this population had a 56.8% retention rate. Students in this category are likely to have more than one risk factor.

With the retention prediction model, CORE has looked at majors whose students were retained below the class average. Collectively, those majors had a 71.6% retention rate; however, this year, seven of those 12 majors saw retention percentages above the class average with Mathematics and Computer Science leading the departments with a 92.8% retention rate followed by the School of Technology with 82.3%.

Special admit populations

class average. This 7% gap is troubling (See chart below).

Students who lived on-campus had a 74% retention rate compared to those off-campus at 71.9%.

In AY17, CORE focused its efforts on the new verification procedures, academic at-risk factors, and students with ethnic risk factors. CORE members met with departments whose majors were retained at lower levels than the class average and discussed those factors and ideas for departments to intervene.

In AY18, the CORE focus will be on generating strategies for first-generation students and continue to work on ways to help students with academic risk factors. CORE will also continue its work with financial aid verification and registration alerts.

Supporting Our First Generation Students

For years, studies have shown that first-generation college students were less likely to persist and graduate than students whose parents went to college. However, at Eastern, our first-generation retention and graduation rates were very close to our average rates. Lately, the retention rates of our first-generation students are not as high as non-first-generation students (see retention rate article on previous page), so CORE has decided to focus on this student population.

First-generation students make up 45-49% of Eastern's student body, and as the chart to the right indicates, graduate at rates within 2-3% of all students.

However, as the retention gap widens, the graduation gap will as well. Finding ways to retain and graduate

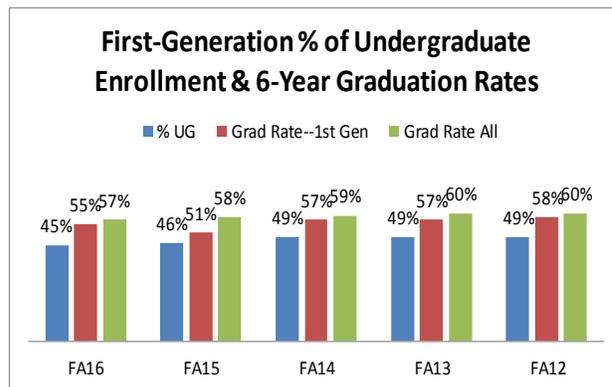
these students will help serve nearly half of our student body.

First-generation students come to us with a variety of high school and transfer experiences, but as people who are first in their families to attend college, they do not come equipped with understanding of the college culture. Their families cannot share their own experiences to ease the transition for their students. Oftentimes, the families themselves do not know what questions to ask.

All offices that work with students and their families can have an impact on first-generation student success by anticipating what students need to know and making finding that information easy—both on-line and in print.

Being explicit about how and when we communicate with students and their families is also important as we help them navigate higher education for the first time. Most of the time, first-generation students will not need to be singled out for new information; what is helpful to all students can aid the first-generation student. An example of this is the academic advising calendar that was

created to tell students when to set up advising appointments, when to see their advisor, when to register, and so forth. All students receive this calendar at orientation. Another example is the flyer that Making Excellence Inclusive (MEI) has prepared for Open Houses that focuses on services Eastern offers to support student success. Each office is described along with the services it provides to give students a roadmap to finding help with study skills,



finances, choosing a major, building a resume, and counseling.

Many best practices lists expound on the success of mentors for first-generation students, so peer helpers or mentors within majors or activities could support students in those areas as well as give guidance needed for first-generation students. First in the Family, an organization that promotes first-generation students going to college, indicates that students are more receptive to hearing about tutoring and other support services from other students than from faculty and staff. CORE would welcome hearing from departments and programs implementing peer mentors.

A recent dissertation at North Dakota State University by Jessica Jorgenson Borchert argues for a variety of techniques that can be used in the classroom to facilitate first-generation student success. First-generation students are sometimes hesitant to speak up in class or join in on discussions, so facilitating their participation can help ease that first-time hurdle of volunteering a thought or idea.

One-on-one time with faculty is important for first-generation students. Underscoring the importance of using office hours to clarify information or brainstorm paper ideas can be useful for new students. For those of you teaching undergraduate students in small classes, holding conferences to force students to come to office hours may be necessary to help students over that initial hesitancy about bothering you in your office. First-generation students may not understand the point of office hours is for faculty to be accessible to students with questions and concerns.

Borchert also argues that small group work in college classes as well as outside of class can help facilitate this time with the faculty member and can help students form supportive relationships that contribute to success. In fact, she posits that many first-generation students remain in school and graduate because of those personal relationships that are hard to mandate and replicate. With our small class sizes and personal touch, Eastern is in a good position to provide the supportive and instructional environment needed for first-generation students and their families.

- ◆ Learn about the students working in your offices and taking your classes.
- ◆ Be explicit about your expectations in the classroom and the workplace. Explain attendance policies, how to alert faculty/supervisors when a student is ill, etc.
- ◆ Provide information that does not assume prior knowledge.
- ◆ Take into account what families may need to know but don't know to ask.

More information, including videos of student voices can be found at www.firstgenerationfoundation.org and www.firstinthefamily.org.