"The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annually assesses the extent to which undergraduate students are involved in educational practices empirically linked to high levels of learning and development. In an effort to make it easier for people on and off campus to more easily talk about student engagement and the importance to student learning, collegiate quality and institutional improvement, NSSE created the National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice. They are: 1) level of academic challenge, 2) active and collaborative learning, 3) student-faculty interactions, 4) enriching educational experiences and 5) supportive campus environment."—NSSE 2002 Institutional Benchmark Report

The graphs below show UH Hilo NSSE results for 2001 and 2002. With two years of NSSE participation behind us, patterns of strength and weakness are becoming unmistakable. The response rate nearly doubled between 2001 and 2002 (from 206 to 356 respondents). When “decile” results are added into the interpretation, UH Hilo’s strengths and weaknesses are thrown into even sharper relief. Deciles indicate what percentage of the comparison groups have benchmark scores above or below those of UH Hilo.

Level of Academic Challenge

The Level of Academic Challenge benchmark consists of the following questionnaire items:

- 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
For first-year students, UH Hilo’s benchmark score for Level of Academic Challenge rose slightly from 46.6 to 47.3.

- The average score on this item for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities was 57.7
- The average score on this item for the National sample was 53.4
- According to the NSSE 2002 decile scales, more than 90% of UH Hilo’s peer group (other Baccalaureate Liberal Arts universities) scored higher on this item than UH Hilo (first decile score was 51.9).
- More than 90% of the national sample also scored higher on this benchmark (first decile score was 48.2).
Looking at the Level of Academic Challenge for Seniors, UH Hilo’s score dropped more than two points, from 57 to 54.6.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 61.0.
- The average score for the national sample was 57.0.
- More than 90% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities scored higher on this item than UH Hilo (first decile score 56.1).
- More than 70% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on this item (third decile, 54.8).

**Active and Collaborative Learning**

The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark includes the following questionnaire items:

- *Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions*
- *Made a class presentation*
- *Worked with other students on projects during class*
- *Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments*
- *Tutored or taught other students*
- *Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course*
- *Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)*
UH Hilo’s 2002 score on this benchmark for first-year students increased 1.4 points from 2001, from 38.2 to 39.6.

- The average score on this item for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities was 44.0.
- The average score on this item for the national sample was 36.2.
- More than 90% of the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts institution had higher first-year student scores on this item than UH Hilo (first decile 39.7).
- More than 60% of the national sample had higher scores for first year students (fourth decile, 39.8).
UH Hilo’s scores on this benchmark for first-year students dropped 2.8 points between 2001 and 2002: from 50.3 to 47.5.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 51.7.
- The average score for the national sample was 49.9.
- More than 80% of the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Institutions scored higher on this item than UH Hilo (second decile 48.4).
- 70% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this item (third decile 47.5).

**Student Interactions with Faculty**

Student-Faculty interaction items include the following:

- *Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor*

- *Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor*

- *Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class*

- *Worked with faculty members on activities other than classwork (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)*

- *Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (writer or oral)*

- *Worked or planned to work with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements.*
The Student-Faculty Interaction score for first-year students increased by 3.4 points: from 31.1 to 34.5.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts University was 41.1.
- The average for the national sample was 36.2.
- More than 80% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Institutions scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark (second decile 36.8).
- More than 50% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on this item (fifth decile at 35.7)
The UH Hilo score on this benchmark for seniors dropped 3.4 points between 2001 and 2002: from 46.8 to 43.4.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 50.9.
- The average score for the national sample was 43.5.
- More than 80% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities scored above UH Hilo on this item (second decile 46.4).
- Nationwide, more than 40% of the institutions scored at or above the UH Hilo score (sixth decile 44.6).

**Enriching Educational Experiences**

The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark includes the following questionnaire items:

- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.)
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework & study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.
UH Hilo first-year students dropped three points on this benchmark between 2001 and 2002: from 58.7 to 55.7.

- The average score on this benchmark for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts universities was 64.4
- The national average was 56.3.
- More than 80% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts universities scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark (second decile 58.5).
- More than 50% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this item (fifth decile 56.0).
The score for UH Hilo seniors dropped 2.4 points between 2001 and 2002: from 53.5 to 51.1.

- The average score for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities on this benchmark was 56.2.
- The average score for the national sample was 48.0.
- More than 70% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (third decile 52.4).
- Only about 30% of the universities in the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (seventh decile 51.8).

**Supportive Campus Environment**

The Supportive Campus Environment benchmark includes the following questionnaire items:

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices
The first-year student scores on this benchmark dropped nearly four points between 2001 and 2002: from 58.7 to 55.

- The average for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities is 64.5.
- The national average on this benchmark is 60.7.
- More than 90% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored higher on this benchmark than UH Hilo (first decile 59.2).
- More than 80% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (second decile 55.8).

![Supportive Campus Environment-Seniors](chart)

Seniors at UH Hilo dropped 2.1 points on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark: from 62.4 to 60.5.

- The average score on this benchmark for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities was 61.8%.
- The average score for the national sample was 57.7%
- More than 60% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (fourth decile 60.6).
- Between 60 and 70% of the institutions in the national sample scored below UH Hilo on this benchmark (seventh decile 61.3).
Conclusions:

What we must address immediately:

We must address the “Freshman Experience” at UH Hilo. We are simply doing a terrible job, when compared to other universities, at providing a quality experience for our first-year students. Aspects of the freshman experience, which need the most attention are:

- Level of Academic Challenge for our First-Year Students (90% of other universities do better on this than we do)

- Supportive Campus Environment for First-Year Students (More than 80% of other universities do a better job of this than we do)

- Active/Collaborative Learning for First-Year Students (60% of the national sample—90% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts Institutions—scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark).

UH Hilo faculty will work together to address these areas of weakness. Some suggestions that have come forth already are to require the freshman orientation course for all freshmen. Another suggestion is to match our best teachers with freshman classes and to limit the size of those classes. Other suggestions include making training available to faculty in active/collaborative teaching techniques and developing a mentoring program that puts upper classmen/women together with first-year students so freshmen form early relationships at the university and are guided toward rewarding co-curricular activities and needed student services.

- Level of academic challenge and active and collaborative learning continue to be problems as students move toward graduation. UH Hilo scored below 70% of the national sample for seniors on these two important benchmarks.

Where UH Hilo is strong:

- UH Hilo is strong, in comparison with other universities, when it comes to enriching educational experiences for both first-year and senior students. It is also very strong when it comes to a supportive campus environment for seniors and fairly strong in student-faculty interaction for seniors.