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, 2002 and 2003. With three years of NSSE participation behind us, patterns of strength and weakness are becoming unmistakable. The scores reported in this document are the raw scores reported by NSSE in its reports over three years. Differences in UH Hilo’s scores over time, especially small ones, may not be statistically significant because of the small numbers in the UH Hilo sample. Benchmark scores are composite scores derived from mean scores on multiple items, making testing for significance problematic. Extreme caution must be taken before claiming that any differences in UH Hilo scores over time are meaningful.

The response rate nearly doubled between 2001 and 2002 (from 206 to 356 respondents), but then dropped again to 325 respondents in 2003 (a 42% response rate). Getting an adequate response rate to the on-line NSSE survey was very difficult. 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 recorded benchmark score for Level of Academic Challenge increased from 46.6 in 2001 to 48.9 in 2003. This increase is most probably not statistically significant.

• The average score on this item for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities was 57.9.
• The average score on this item for the National sample was 53.9.
• NSSE computes a predicted score for each institution, which has been statistically adjusted for the types of students that attend the school and other institutional characteristics. The predicted score for schools like UH Hilo is 52.3; UH Hilo falls 3.8 points below its predicted score in Level of Academic Challenge for First Year students.
• According to the NSSE 2003 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 52.6).
• More than 90% of the national sample also scored higher on this benchmark (first decile score was 48.9).
Looking at the Level of Academic Challenge for seniors, UH Hilo’s score dropped more than two points, from 57 to 54.6, between 2001 and 2003. Whether or not this small decrease is statistically significant is not known at this time.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 61.1.
- The average score for the national sample was 57.3.
- UH Hilo’s predicted score on this benchmark was 56.7. UH Hilo’s score of 53.8 falls three points below the predicted score.
- More than 90% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities scored higher on this item than UH Hilo (first decile score 52.0).
- More than 70% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on this item (third decile, 54.2).

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.)

**NSSE Benchmark Scores 2001 - 2003**

**Active and Collaborative Learning**

**First Year Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UHH</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40.9</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UH Hilo’s 2002 score on this benchmark for first-year students increased only 0.1 points between 2001 and 2003. This difference is not statistically significant.

• The average score on this item for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities was 44.2.
• The average score on this item for the national sample was 41.8.
• UH Hilo’s score for Active and Collaborative Learning for UH Hilo was 0.9 points below its predicted value of 39.2.
• More than 90% of the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts institution had higher first-year student scores on this item than UH Hilo (first decile 35.9).
• More than 70% of the national sample had higher scores for first year students (third decile, 39.1).
UH Hilo’s scores on this benchmark for seniors dropped 0.8 points between 2001 and 2002: from 50.3 to 49.5. This difference is not significant.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 51.8.
- The average score for the national sample was 50.1.
- The predicted score for seniors was 47.9. UH Hilo scored 1.6% above its predicted value.
- More than 80% of the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Institutions scored higher on this item than UH Hilo (second decile 48.9).
- 60% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this item (fourth decile 48.9).

**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 class work (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 2.2 points: from 31.1 to 33.3. Whether or not this small difference is significant is doubtful.

• The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities was 42.5.
• The average for the national sample was 37.2.
• UH Hilo’s benchmark score on this item was 0.8 points above its predicted value of 32.5.
• More than 90% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Institutions scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark (first decile 35.8).
• More than 70% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on this item (sixth decile at 33.7)
The UH Hilo score on this benchmark for seniors increased by 0.1 of a point between 2001 and 2003. This difference is not significant.

- The average score for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities on this item was 51.5.
- The average score for the national sample was 44.2.
- UH Hilo’s predicted score on this item was 39.2. UH Hilo actual score on this item exceeded its predicted score by 7.7%, indicating that **UH Hilo is doing better than expected on faculty interaction with senior-level students**.
- More than 80% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Universities scored above UH Hilo on this item (second decile 47.0).
- **Nationwide, only 30 to 40% of the institutions scored at or above the UH Hilo score (sixth decile 45.3).**

**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 conservations 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Benchmark Scores 2001 - 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Year Students</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UH Hilo first-year students increased their score on this benchmark by 0.2 points between 2001 and 2003. This difference is not significant.

• The average score on this benchmark for Baccalaureate Liberal Arts universities was 65.7.

• The national average was 57.7.

• UH Hilo scored 1.2 points below its predicted score of 60.1.

• More than 80% of Baccalaureate Liberal Arts universities scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark (second decile 59.5).

• Only 40% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this item (sixth decile 59.3).
The score for UH Hilo seniors dropped 0.7 points between 2001 and 2003. This difference not significant.

- The average score for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities on this benchmark was 57.3.
- The average score for the national sample was 49.1.
- UH Hilo exceeded its predicted score for 2003 by 0.6.
- More than 70% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (third decile 53.8).
- Only about 20% of the universities in the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (eighth decile 55.1).

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 0.3 points between 2001 and 2002. This difference is not significant.

- The average for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities is 65.6.
- The national average on this benchmark is 61.8.
- **UH Hilo exceeded its predicted score of 53.5 by 4.9 points.**
- More than 90% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored higher on this benchmark than UH Hilo (first decile 59.7).
- More than 70% of the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (third decile 58.7).
Seniors at UH Hilo dropped 0.9 points on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark between 2001 and 2003: from 62.4 to 61.5. This difference is not significant.

- The average score on this benchmark for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities was 62.6%.
- The average score for the national sample was 58.8%.
- UH Hilo exceeded its predicted score of 59.2 by 2.4 points.
- More than 60% of Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts universities scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (fourth decile 61.7).
- Only 30% of the institutions in the national sample scored above UH Hilo on this benchmark (seventh decile 61.8).

Conclusions:

As was evident from examining the NSSE 2002 results, UH Hilo 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 at this than we do).
- Active and Collaborative Learning in classes serving first year students: More than 70% of the national sample had higher 2003 scores than UH Hilo for this benchmark.
- Interaction of faculty with first year students: more than 70% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark.
- Supportive Campus Environment for First-Year Students. UH Hilo is doing better than expected, given institutional and student characteristics, but still, more than 70% of other universities do a better job of this than we do.

What is especially troubling in the last three years of NSSE benchmark results—especially given UH Hilo’s comparatively low first year retention rate—is that the learning experience of first year students at UH Hilo lags so far behind the experience of students in the senior class.

- Level of Academic Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning are still issues for seniors, though less so than for freshmen. More than 70% of the national sample scored higher than UH Hilo on Level of Academic Challenge, and more than 60% scored higher on Active and Collaborative Learning.
- Where seniors are concerned, UH Hilo is doing better than expected, given institutional and student characteristics, on Student-Faculty Interaction and Supportive Campus Environment. Nationwide, only 30 to
40% of the institutions participating in NSSE 2003 scored at or above the UH Hilo score for Student Faculty Interaction, and only 30% of the institutions in the national sample scored above UH Hilo (for seniors) on Supportive Campus Environment.

The Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark scores for both first year and senior students indicate that this benchmark is an area of strength for UH Hilo with scores for both groups of students exceeding the national average:

- Only 40% of the national sample of first-year students scored above UH Hilo on this item and
- Only 20% of the national sample of senior level students scored higher than UH Hilo on this benchmark.

The UH Hilo faculty is working to address UH Hilo’s 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 more 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.

**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 student-faculty interaction and supportive campus environment for seniors (but not freshmen).