



Office of Institutional Research  
& Strategic Planning

## **National Survey of Student Engagement; Insights for Trent University and its Stakeholders**

“The voluminous research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development<sup>1</sup>.”

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) obtains, on an annual basis, information from hundreds of North-American universities and four-year colleges about student participation and perceptions. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending university. The survey measures empirically confirmed "good practices" in higher education. That is, they reflect behaviours by students and institutions that are associated with the desired outcomes of a university.<sup>2</sup>

### **Purpose**

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) gathers information from first-year and final-year students about the nature of their undergraduate experiences. The survey examines five benchmarks that indicate good practice in higher education: Each benchmark is made up of responses to clusters of questions from the Survey.

- 1) The Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) benchmark includes items that describe such things as the number of readings and assignments, course content and the extent to which the campus culture emphasizes academic work.
- 2) The Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) benchmark combines questions about working in groups, making presentations in class, participation in community-based projects, etc.
- 3) The Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI) benchmark includes items such as the feedback received from instructors, time spent discussing coursework or career plans with instructors, and interaction with faculty members outside of course requirements.
- 4) The Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE) benchmark combines items about learning communities, co-curricular activities, internships or field-work, studies abroad, use of technology, and interactions with people of different economic, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, etc.
- 5) The Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) benchmark includes questions that explore the quality of participants' relationships with fellow students, faculty and other campus personnel, and the supports available to help students cope with academic and non-academic challenges.

### **Background**

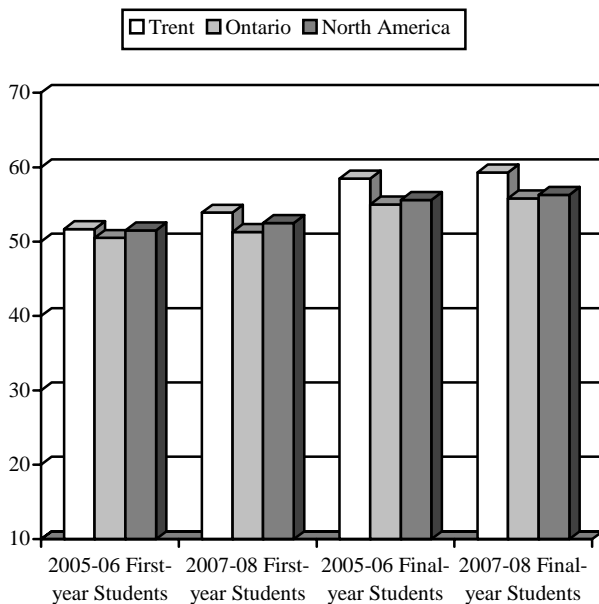
NSSE was created in the United States by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research. The latter, together with the University's Center for Survey Research now administers the Survey annually. As independent, not-for-profit organizations that specialize in post-secondary education practices and survey methods, these centres are able to provide useful, impartial information about the nature of the undergraduate experience. The Survey results are helpful to students, their parents and advisors, and governments. The NSSE provides valuable insights for participating universities, identifying strengths and weaknesses within each institution. Trent University joined the Survey in 2005-06 and also participated in 2007-08. This report summarizes those results.

For each item participants are asked to choose from a selection of possible responses, such as “never, sometimes, often, very often.” These responses are converted to a 0 - 100 point scale and all items that contribute to one of the above clusters are averaged into a benchmark score for each student. Finally, institutional benchmarks are created by calculating the average of the student scores in each participant group (i.e. first- or fourth-year).<sup>3</sup>

## Results

Each time a university participates in NSSE, the Center for Postsecondary Research creates a report summarizing the benchmark results for that university as well as comparisons to other institutions. Trent University’s benchmarks were compared with results from other Ontario universities and from all NSSE participants for those years. The following graphs show Trent’s results for each of the five benchmarks, as well as those of all publicly funded universities in Ontario, plus results for all of the universities and four-year colleges in North America that participated that year.

### *Levels of Academic Challenge*



In 2005-06, first-year students’ ratings of the Level of Academic Challenge they experienced at Trent University were quite similar to those of other Ontario students rating their universities, and similar to those across North America. Two years later, first year Trent students rated this benchmark slightly higher than the rest of Ontario and North America. Final-year students in both 2005-06 and 2007-08 also rated Trent’s Level of Academic Challenge higher than other Ontario students did for their universities, and higher than those across North America.

## Participants

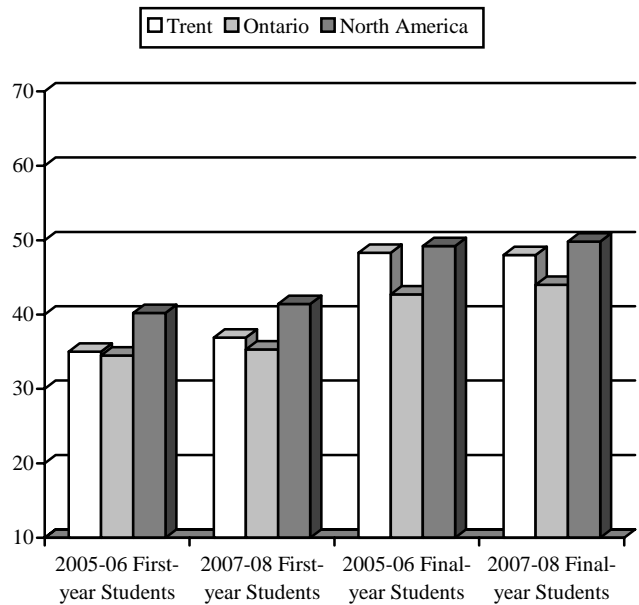
The Survey was administered in February and March. Students received letters via email from Trent’s Vice President Academic, encouraging them to complete the NSSE online, anonymously.

During the 2005-06 academic year, almost 3000 students at Trent University were invited to participate.<sup>4</sup> The response rate was 36% with 472 first-year students and 612 final-year students completing the Survey. In the same year, a total of 18,033 first-year students and 16,069 final-year students from Ontario universities completed the survey (a response rate of 41%) and 158,766 first-year students and 153,185 final-year students across Canada and the United States completed the survey (a response rate of 36%).

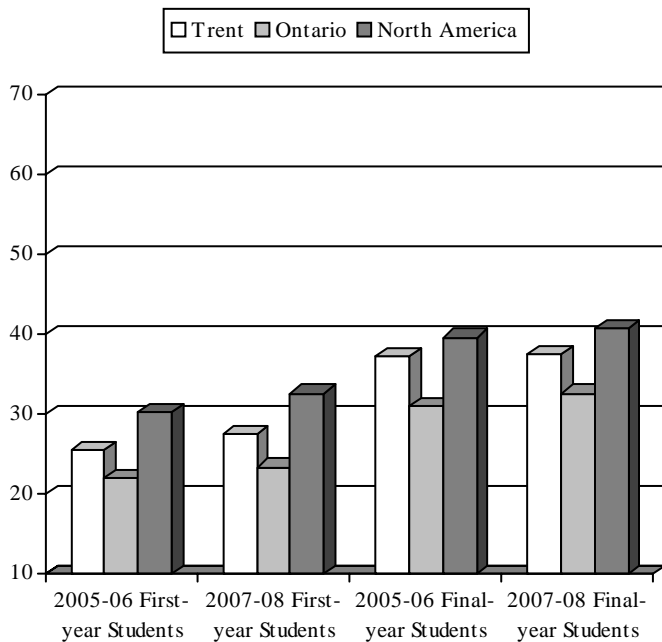
In 2007-08 academic year, over 3800 Trent students were invited to participate.<sup>5</sup> The response rate was 32% with 509 first-year students and 694 final-year students completing the Survey. That year a total of 22,006 first-year students and 18,517 final-year students from Ontario universities completed the survey (a response rate of 37%) and 223,262 first-year students and 227,967 final-year students across Canada and the United States completed the survey (a response rate of 33%).

### Active and Collaborative Learning

In 2005-06, first-year Trent students' ratings for Active and Collaborative Learning were similar to other Ontario students. In 2007-08, first year Trent students rated this benchmark slightly higher than the rest of Ontario. Senior Trent students in both sample years rated Active and Collaborative Learning significantly higher than did other Ontario students and comparably to those across North America. It is encouraging that by their final year, all students felt more positive about this benchmark than first year students. All Ontario universities hope to learn from their North American counterparts how to better engage first year students in Active and Collaborative Learning.

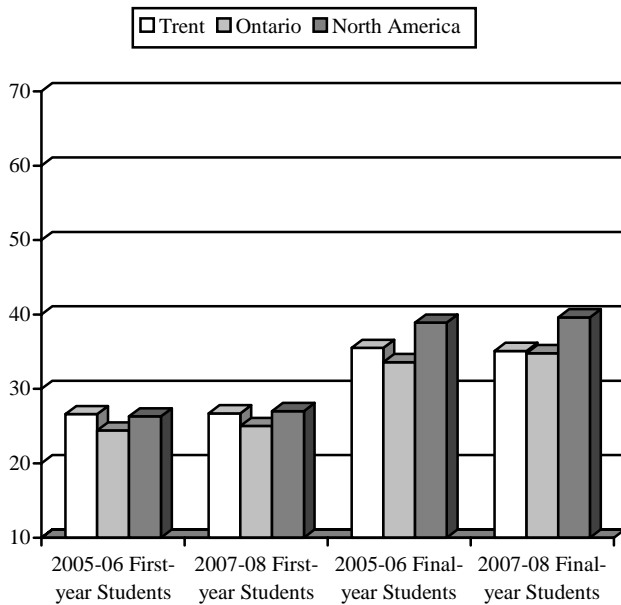


### Student Faculty Interaction



For this benchmark the pattern is consistent in both sample years and both groups of students. All North American universities could improve the intensity of Student-Faculty Interaction, and Ontario universities should strive to achieve levels comparable to the rest of the continent. However, Trent is proud that the emphasis it places on Student-Faculty Interaction is indeed born out in these results which are much higher than other Ontario universities.

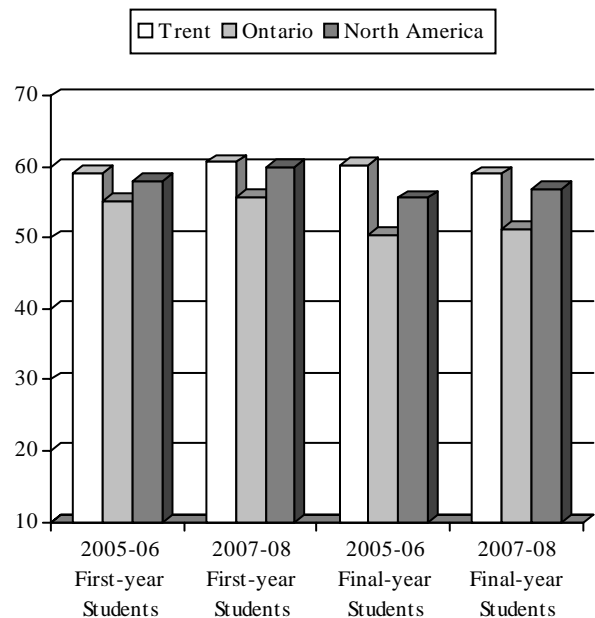
## Enriching Educational Experiences



First-year Trent students in both sample years rated their University higher for this benchmark than other Ontario students did, and the same as other North American students. Senior Trent students in both sample years rated their educational experience as enriching as other Ontario students'. As with the benchmarks above, final year students perceived their university experience as more enriching than did their first year counterparts.

## Supportive Campus Environment

Compared to others in Ontario, all Trent students who responded (first- and final-year; 2005-06 and 2007-08) rated their Campus Environment as significantly more supportive. On this benchmark, Trent's rating is quite similar to other North American Universities for first-year students, and better than the rest of the continent for final-year students.



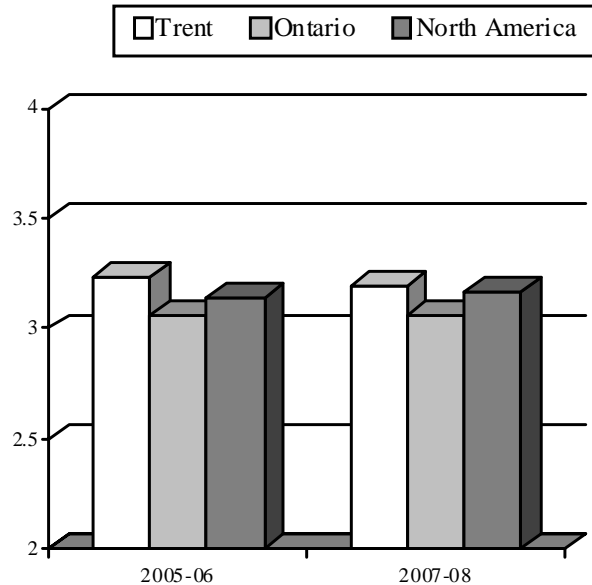
### Overall Satisfaction

The NSSE includes one additional question, which is not used for the benchmarks: “How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?” Students respond with one of four ratings, ranging from “poor” to “excellent.” Responses to this item were also compared among Trent University, Ontario, and all North American students who participated in the Survey.

#### Satisfaction with Entire Educational Experience by First-Year Students

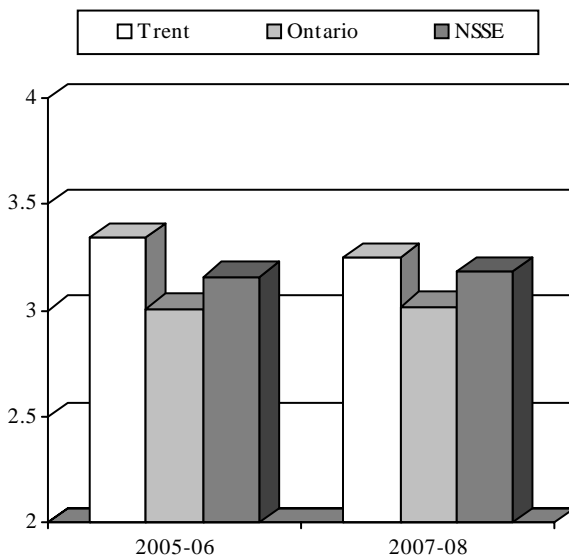
(Rated 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, and 4 = excellent)

Rating their satisfaction with their entire educational experience, first-year Trent students in 2005-06 and 2007-08 were quite positive. Trent’s rating on this question is higher than its counterparts in Ontario and those across North America.



#### Satisfaction with Entire Educational Experience by Final-Year Students

(Rated 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, and 4 = excellent)



Final-year Trent students also rated their entire educational experience as quite positive. Trent’s “good” rating from this group is significantly higher than other Ontario final-year students and notably better than the North American average.

## Conclusions

The results from the 2005-06 and 2007-08 National Survey of Student Engagement reveal that Trent students (both first- and final-year) are quite well engaged and satisfied overall with their experiences at the University. They report experiences and perceptions that are consistently more positive than students of other Ontario universities. A summation of the five benchmarks established by NSSE shows that Trent can learn from its North American counterparts, particularly with respect to Active and Collaborative Learning among first-year students, and Student-Faculty Interaction for both groups. However, beside other Ontario universities — Trent's closest comparators geographically, and in terms of funding, government regulation and student pool — Trent rates very favourably.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuh, G.D. (2003) *The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties* Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning: [http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/conceptual\\_framework\\_2003.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/conceptual_framework_2003.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from NSSE website; for more information visit: [http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick\\_facts.cfm](http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick_facts.cfm)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted and abbreviated from NSSE website; for more information visit: [http://nsse.iub.edu/html/PsychometricPortfolio\\_SurveyDevelopment.cfm#construction\\_of\\_nsse\\_benchmarks](http://nsse.iub.edu/html/PsychometricPortfolio_SurveyDevelopment.cfm#construction_of_nsse_benchmarks)

<sup>4</sup> 2005-06 first-year student respondents (n) = 1514; final-year student respondents (n) = 1483

<sup>5</sup> 2007-08 first-year student respondents (n) = 1733; final-year student respondents (n) = 2079