

NSEE Report #1: How is the Whitman Experience Unique?
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During the spring of 2005, Whitman participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) along with 528 other four-year colleges and universities. This survey collects data from first-year students and seniors, and provides benchmark statistics representing effective educational practice. The resulting data allow for comparisons between Whitman students and students at other liberal arts colleges, which provide a good picture of how the Whitman experience is unique. Of the 445 Whitman students sampled, about 55% returned a completed survey (N = 243).

Table 1 highlights many areas where Whitman students positively differ from their peers at other liberal arts colleges. Academically, examinations at Whitman often challenge students to do their best work. Whitman students rise to their academic challenges by spending more time preparing for class than students at other liberal arts colleges. They are also less likely to come to class without completing the readings or assignments. Furthermore, Whitman students are more likely to have discussions outside of class with faculty and other students, and are more likely to ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions. Whitman students are also able to devote more time to their academic lives, as they spend significantly less time working for pay off campus, commuting to class, and caring for dependents than students at their peer institutions.

Whitman students were also more likely to have certain enriching educational experiences, as they were more likely to study abroad and undertake a culminating senior year experience. In addition, Whitman students were more likely to report that the college provides an environment that allows them to thrive both socially and academically. Indeed, Whitman students reported significantly stronger relationships with other students, faculty, and administrators than did students at other liberal arts colleges. As far as how the Whitman experience has impacted their knowledge, skills, and personal development, Whitman students were more likely than students at other liberal arts colleges to cite the following areas: thinking critically and analytically, writing clearly and effectively, acquiring a broad general education, voting in elections, learning effectively on your own, and understanding yourself. Finally, Whitman students are more satisfied with their college experience than are students at other liberal arts colleges.

Table 1: Positive Differences between Whitman College and other Liberal Arts Colleges

Category	Whitman Significantly Higher than Other Liberal Arts Colleges on These Items
Academic, Intellectual, and Social Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc) (Both) 2. Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral) (FY only) 3. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions (FY) 4. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own (FY) 5. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class (FY)
Mental Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components (Both) 2. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships (Both) 3. Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form (Both <i>lower</i>)
Reading and Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings (Both) 2. Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages (FY)
Examinations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extent examinations challenged you to do your best work (FY)
Additional Collegiate Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities (SR) 2. Examined the strength and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue (FY) 3. Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theatre performance (Both) 4. Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept (Both) 5. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how and issue looks from his or her perspective (Both)
Enriching Educational Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study Abroad (SR) 2. Culminating senior experience (capstone course, thesis, project, comprehensive exam, etc.) (SR)
Quality of Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationships with administrative personnel (Both) 2. Relationships with other students (Both) 3. Relationships with faculty members (Both)
Time Usage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing,

	doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities) (Both) 2. Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.) (FY)
Institutional Environment	1. Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.) (Both) 2. Providing the support you need to thrive socially (Both) 3. Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically (Both) 4. Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work (Both) 5. Using computers in academic work (SR) 6. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (Both)
Educational and Personal Growth	1. Thinking critically and analytically (Both) 2. Writing clearly and effectively (Both) 3. Acquiring a broad general education (Both) 4. Voting in local, state, or national elections (FY) 5. Learning effectively on your own (SR) 6. Understanding yourself (Both)
Academic Advising	1. Quality of academic advising (FY)
Satisfaction	1. Entire educational experience (Both) 2. Would attend same institution if given the chance to start over again (Both)

Table 2 also shows there are some areas where Whitman students scored significantly *lower* than their counterparts at other liberal arts institutions. For example, Whitman students were less likely to engage in in-class collaborative learning by working on projects with other students during class. They were also less likely to participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course. Furthermore, when asked how their college experience had impacted their educational and personal growth, Whitman students were less likely than students at other liberal arts colleges to cite the following areas: acquiring job/work related skills, developing a deepened sense of spirituality, using computing and information technology, analyzing quantitative problems, and solving complex real-world problems. Some of these areas, however, cannot necessarily act as a direct comparison between Whitman's performance and other liberal arts colleges. For example, Whitman's lower score for foreign language coursework may be due to the fact that Whitman does not have a foreign language requirement, rather than a reflection on the student body.

Table 2: Negative Differences between Whitman College and other Liberal Arts Colleges

Category	Whitman Significantly Lower than Other Liberal Arts Colleges on These Items
Academic, Intellectual, and Social Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worked with other students on projects during class (Both) 2. Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course (Both) 3. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in (Both) 4. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment (SR) 5. Made a class presentation (Both) 6. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor (Both) 7. Come to class without completing readings or assignments (FY) 8. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.) (SR)
Reading and Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of papers or reports of 20 pages or more (FY)
Problem Sets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of problem sets that take you less than an hour to complete (Both) 2. Number of problem sets that take you more than an hour to complete (SR)
Additional Collegiate Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participated in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.) (Both)
Enriching Educational Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foreign language coursework (SR) 2. Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together (FY) 3. Study Abroad (FY)
Time Usage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for pay off campus (Both) 2. Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.) (Both) 3. Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.) (Both)
Educational and Personal Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acquiring job or work related knowledge and skills (Both) 2. Developing a deepened sense of spirituality (Both) 3. Using computing and information technology (Both) 4. Analyzing quantitative problems (SR) 5. Solving complex real-world problems (SR)

The results from the 2005 NSEE survey show significant differences between Whitman and other liberal arts colleges in a variety of areas and skills. These differences can be used to argue that Whitman does create a unique, positive experience for its students. Whitman students tend to rate both their overall educational experience more positively, and indicated higher levels

of satisfaction with their institution. Yet these results also indicate that areas exist where Whitman can continue to improve.