

# National Survey of Student Engagement, Spring 2008 The University at Albany, SUNY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February and March, 2008, all SUNY 4-year colleges and universities participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE is “designed to assess the extent to which students participate in empirically-derived effective educational practices and what they gain from the college experience.”<sup>1</sup>

A total of 478,079 first-year students and seniors at 769 colleges and Universities in the U.S. and Canada participated in 2008, with a response rate of 37%. At the University at Albany, a total of 1,052 students participated between February 13<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 – including 538 first-year students and 514 seniors – with a response rate of 21%.

### *Peer Comparisons: Student Characteristics*

In analyzing NSSE results, we compare UAlbany student characteristics and survey responses to those of students in three peer groups: UAlbany Peer Institutions, Applicant Overlap schools, and Carnegie Peers that do not have medical schools.<sup>2</sup>

In comparing UAlbany students to those of the comparison groups, we find several striking differences:

- UAlbany has a higher percentage of historically underrepresented minority students than our peers – 14% compared to 11%.
- UAlbany seniors are much more likely to have begun their undergraduate education elsewhere – 46% transfer admissions, compared to an average of 33% at the comparison institutions.
- UAlbany students are more likely than those at our peer institutions to have parents without college degrees. 56% of UAlbany fathers and 57% of mothers do not have bachelor’s degrees, compared to 42% and 46% respectively.
- At the other end of the spectrum, only 20% of UAlbany fathers and 19% of mothers have advanced degrees, compared to 28% and 22% respectively at the comparison institutions.
- UAlbany provides housing for more of our students than do the comparison institutions – 89% of freshmen and 32% of seniors, compared to 80% and 17% respectively.

Taken as a whole, these numbers provide compelling evidence that the University at Albany serves a more broadly diverse population, and does better than our peers at fulfilling this aspect of its mission as a public university.

### *Peer Comparisons: Survey Responses*

NSSE asks students to describe their educational experiences in a variety of areas, summarized by five benchmark scales shown in the chart below.<sup>3</sup>

- In four of the five benchmarks, UAlbany students – like those in the comparison groups – show marked improvement in their ratings between their first year and their senior year. In the fifth benchmark – Supportive Campus Environment – UAlbany students show a decline between first and senior year, as do our peers.

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<sup>1</sup> “NSSE 2008 Psychometric Properties,” Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

<sup>2</sup> A complete description of peer groups is included in “University at Albany NSSE 2008 Benchmark Comparisons.”

<sup>3</sup> A complete description of the benchmarks is contained in the “NSSE Benchmark Comparison Report.”

- Overall, UAlbany’s benchmark scores are systematically below those of the comparison institutions, differences which are nearly all statistically significant.
- The benchmarks showing the largest discrepancies between UAlbany and our comparison groups are the two most directly linked to instruction – “Level of Academic Challenge” and “Active and Collaborative Learning.”
  - On both of these benchmarks, differences between UAlbany and the comparison groupings are greater for first-year students than for seniors.

*Summary and Conclusion*

While UAlbany’s scores are generally below those of our peers, responses to individual survey items vary considerably; on some items UAlbany is equal to or better than the comparison institutions, but on most items we are lower, and in some areas the differences are striking. A careful look at the detailed frequency and mean comparison reports provided by NSSE will thus allow the identification of specific areas in and out of the classroom that are believed to be important to providing the highest quality education, services, and overall undergraduate experiences to our students.

