



2017-2018 Institutional Assessment: BCSSE/NSSE/FSSE and HEDS Alumni Survey Results September 2018

Executive Summary

In accordance with St. Olaf's [data collection schedule](#)¹, the college administered four institution-level surveys in 2017-18: the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Alumni Survey. Key findings include the following:

In many areas, St. Olaf students' engagement in academics and college life is on par with students from similar institutions. While longitudinal data from prior administrations of the NSSE reveal no or slightly negative change for 2018 across most of the NSSE Engagement Indicators², it is difficult to draw conclusions about trends from three administrations. Additionally, the rapidly changing demographics of the student body have likely impacted the "average" student experience. Nonetheless, it will be important to continue to monitor these trends and address any concerns if or when they emerge.

St. Olaf students (both first-years and seniors) interact more frequently with individuals from different religious backgrounds compared to students at similar institutions. St. Olaf seniors have significantly fewer interactions with individuals with different political views than themselves compared to seniors at other institutions. Among students' reported interactions with individuals from different racial/ethnic, religious, economic, or political backgrounds, both first-years and seniors have the fewest interactions with individuals with different political views.

The vast majority of alumni report positive interactions with faculty members. However, there are sizeable gaps between first-year students' expectations for the frequency with which they will interact with faculty and the interactions that they actually report during their first year. Both first-year and senior students' mean responses to questions about faculty interactions are significantly lower than students at other institutions. By contrast, faculty report much more frequent interactions with students compared to students' self-reports on their interactions

¹ The current document does not include the 2017-18 academic year; however, the 2017-18 institution-level survey schedule corresponds to AY 2020-21 in the data collection schedule

² The 10 Engagement Indicators include: Higher-Order Learning, Reflective & Integrative Learning, Learning Strategies, Quantitative Reasoning, Collaborative Learning, Discussions with Diverse Others, Student-Faculty Interaction, Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment. More information about the Engagement Indicators can be found in Appendix C of the full report.

with faculty. This may be due to the fact that faculty meet with many students, but perhaps not regularly with all of them. Additionally, students may not take advantage of the opportunities that exist to meet with faculty. Advising remains an additional area of focus, with little change in student responses from 2013. As St. Olaf fully implements its new advising model in the coming years, the NSSE module on academic advising will continue to be an important measure of progress.

Students of color and first-generation students have lower scores on many of the indicators of student engagement. However, the differences between domestic White students and students of color, as well as between non-first-generation and first-generation students, are less pronounced in many cases for first-years compared to seniors. This may suggest that St. Olaf is improving in serving students from diverse backgrounds. Through the college's [diversity and inclusion initiative](#) and the work of [To Include is To Excel](#), St. Olaf will continue to strive for a more inclusive and equitable community. Ideally, student responses on future administrations of the NSSE will be one area that reflects positive change.

Significantly fewer seniors complete a culminating senior experience, such as a capstone course or senior thesis, compared to seniors at other institutions similar to St. Olaf. St. Olaf does not currently require a capstone experience for all seniors; whether this practice is altered will depend in part on the outcome of the General Education curriculum revision. First-years at St. Olaf are much more likely to participate in learning communities, and seniors are much more likely to report studying abroad, compared to students at other institutions.

The full report on these four surveys includes comparisons between incoming first-years' high school experiences or expectations for college and their experiences during their first year at St. Olaf, organized around the ten NSSE Engagement Indicators. Seniors' experiences, faculty expectations and practices, and alumni reflections are also included where relevant. Data on the Engagement Indicators are also further disaggregated by student race/ethnicity and first-generation status. Finally, the full report discusses students' participation in various high-impact practices and their experiences with academic advising.