Woodbury University Scores High in Student Engagement

What is student engagement?

Educators consider engagement the most important characteristic of an excellent university.

Engagement refers to the way that institutions involve students in their own education. A good university will provide an environment of active learning in the classroom that is reinforced in the general environment. In the last 20 years, we have learned that when students engage with their education and environment, they are more successful in college and thereafter.

Students who engage develop differently from ones who do not. Engaged students become self-starters, risk-takers, and life-long learners. Engagement helps students learn to use multiple processes of higher order thinking, and it allows them to guide their learning processes. Engagement creates motivation, control, and optimism.

While engaged students seek intellectual challenge, work with intensity, and show enthusiasm, disengaged students are passive. They do not try hard. When challenged, they become bored, give up, or grow angry. Because of what we know about the best types of learning environments for students, Woodbury has been trying to create experiences both inside and outside the classroom that will strengthen student engagement.

How do we measure how well a university is doing?

For seven years the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, aka “Nessie”) has tried to map and encourage engagement at campuses across the country. Collecting data from Woodbury University and its students, along with data from nearly 1000 other colleges and
universities and nearly one million students, NSSE creates a picture of national student engagement against which the success of Woodbury and other universities can be measured.

Woodbury University was measured against three peer groups:

1. All students who participated in the survey

2. Students from universities offering Master’s programs

3. Students from a select group of institutions from Southern California that ranged from privates like Whittier and Chapman to publics like Cal Poly Pomona and San Marcos.

The data collected from Woodbury students also allows the university to find ways to become even more effective. Because NSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practice, colleges and universities have found many productive uses for the results to assess and improve their programs, to help their students, faculty and staff, and to advance their institution.

NSSE Shows that Woodbury University helps students engage better than its peer institutions.

Woodbury scored higher than its peer institutions in 59% of the areas measured. Woodbury scored significantly higher in 33%. Only in 14% did Woodbury score lower, and much of that was good news too. Woodbury University students spend less time than their peers watching television or socializing.

In the section on “Academic and Intellectual Experiences,” Woodbury students scored high in areas that indicate collaborate and active learning, such as the number of class presentations they
make and how much they work with other students. Woodbury students also scored high in completing assignments that draw from what they have learned in different courses.

Woodbury students encountered greater diversity of perspectives in their classes. In fact, they felt that the environment encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. They learned to understand people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, and they had serious conversations with students who are very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.

Woodbury students came away from their classes with greater experience in analyzing and then synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships. More than their peers, they learned to apply theories or concepts to practical problems and new situations.

More than seniors at peer institutions, seniors at Woodbury University agreed when asked, “Did you work harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations?” Of course, they also said they spent more time studying and on academic work than their peers did. In many ways, Woodbury students learn how to exceed their expectations.

To exceed one’s grasp, requires a supportive environment. Like students at their peer institutions, they credited the faculty with helping them. But more than other students, Woodbury students said they had strong relationships with other students. They also had better relationships with administrative personnel and offices and credited the school with helping them cope with their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.).
More than their peers, they gave great credit to the university for both their educational and personal growth. Seniors said they learned to speak clearly and effectively, use computing and information technology, and solve complex real-world problems. More than students at other institutions they felt they had acquired job or work-related knowledge and skill. More frequently than students at their peer institutions, they learned something that changed the way they understood an issue or concept. And most important of all, more than at other universities, Woodbury students learned to understand themselves.

NSSE is a great tool. We will continue using it every 3 to 4 years as is recommended. We will dig deep into the data to continue improving the engagement and success of our students. The good news for now is that Woodbury students are engaged, and that are learning more here than at other institutions. The whole community can take pride in that.

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