

Student Learning, Satisfaction and Experiences at Oberlin College Results from the 2003 Enrolled Student Survey

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June 30, 2003**

During the 2003 spring semester, Oberlin participated with twenty-five other peer colleges and universities in the Enrolled Student Survey (ESS). This survey was written by an advisory group consisting of institutional researchers from peer institutions as a response to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). We believed we could develop a better instrument than the NSSE and by using our own survey, eliminate concerns we have about how NSSE uses the data they collect including ownership of the data.

The ESS was designed to capture information on how and where our students experience facets of college/university life and the extent to which important skills and knowledge sets are developed. This report summarizes seven topic areas: overall satisfaction, skills/knowledge enhancement, time devoted to a variety of academic and extra-curricular activities, how students learn, residential experiences, sources sought for advice on a variety of topics and student finances.

Survey Procedures

The ESS was the first survey offered by this consortium that was administered exclusively on the web. MIT served as the web-host and by all accounts there were no technical problems. Students were able to log in without difficulty and most of the respondents completed the entire survey. Oberlin elected to select a stratified random sample of eight hundred students enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences. Sixty-one percent responded giving us the highest response rate ever for this kind of survey. The results presented here have been weighted to reflect the sample composition, response rate and total enrollment in the participating institutions during the spring semester. Most of the tables contain information for Oberlin and other peer schools. Those that represent responses only from Oberlin students are formatted differently and provide information for respondents by class standing (weighted).

Student Satisfaction and Endorsement

While most of the survey asks students to respond based on their experiences during the current academic year, for this section they were asked to reflect on their entire educational experiences regardless of class year. We have noted an increase in student satisfaction over the last several years and respondents to the ESS report a level higher than seen in any previous survey. As in past years, Oberlin students are more likely to rate their experiences as "Good" rather than "Excellent" than students at the other colleges. The sum of the two responses equals those from the other colleges.

How would you evaluate your education?	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Excellent	47%	53%	50%	43%
Good	45%	39%	42%	44%
Fair	7%	7%	7%	10%
Poor	0%	1%	1%	2%

A second measure of satisfaction is asking students if they would choose their institution over again.

Would you go here again?	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Definitely yes	46%	48%	42%	47%
Probably yes	41%	39%	42%	39%
Probably no	10%	10%	12%	11%
Definitely no	2%	3%	4%	3%

It is not unusual to see a slight decline in these responses but they still represent the highest level we've ever seen and are equal to or better than the responses from the other institutions. As we saw in the 2002 Parents Survey, satisfaction with Oberlin has improved in both absolute and relative terms.

Skill/Knowledge Enhancement

The ESS was designed primarily as a tool to capture data on student experiences. An important element of all of our standard surveys is also to assess student learning. One way to do this is to ask students to rate their improvement in a variety of skills and knowledge sets generally considered central to a liberal arts education. All of these can be related to our stated goals and objectives for students and allow us to measure the extent to which we are achieving those goals. Since these goals relate to the entire educational experience, it is wise to focus on the responses from third and fourth year students rather than students who are closer to the beginning of the college career. It is nonetheless interesting to see how development changes across years. The response scale in the ESS is slightly different from those in previous surveys so it's difficult to judge whether students are reporting higher or lower levels of development. General patterns within surveys are holding though. Analytical, writing and problem-solving skills development is rated highly, while scientific, quantitative and foreign language skills are rated lower.

Percent responding "stronger now" or "much stronger now" to "How has your ability changed since you first enrolled at this college?"

	Year in college					All Students
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Other	
Write effectively	65%	81%	82%	92%	100%	79%
Communicate well orally	48%	76%	76%	84%	100%	70%
Acquire new skills/knowledge on own	82%	92%	91%	92%	100%	89%
Think analytically and logically	68%	90%	89%	92%	100%	84%
Formulate original ideas/solutions	64%	82%	83%	84%	100%	78%
Evaluate/choose courses of action	64%	79%	70%	81%	100%	74%
Lead and supervise tasks and groups	37%	60%	66%	87%	100%	62%
Relate well to different peoples	59%	57%	60%	68%	100%	61%
Function effectively as team member	30%	40%	49%	65%	100%	45%
Use quantitative tools	23%	52%	49%	59%	100%	45%
See current problems in past context	72%	87%	94%	91%	100%	85%
Identify moral and ethical issues	63%	74%	77%	80%	100%	73%
Understand own abilities/interests/limits	82%	92%	89%	93%	100%	89%
Function independently	69%	85%	76%	79%	100%	77%
Gain in-depth knowledge of a field	75%	95%	91%	97%	100%	89%
Plan and execute complex projects	56%	76%	84%	88%	100%	75%
Read or speak a foreign language	36%	42%	37%	41%	0%	39%
Appreciate art, literature, music, drama	70%	77%	76%	79%	100%	76%
Acquire broad knowledge	81%	85%	87%	88%	100%	85%
Develop an awareness of social problems	79%	84%	86%	90%	100%	85%
Develop self esteem/confidence	51%	65%	66%	79%	100%	65%
Resolve interpersonal conflicts positively	42%	62%	60%	73%	100%	59%
Synthesize/integrate ideas/information	60%	78%	86%	89%	100%	78%
Understand scientific process	36%	50%	52%	55%	100%	48%
Evaluate role of science/tech. in society	38%	61%	68%	67%	100%	58%
Prepare for a career	54%	79%	78%	80%	100%	72%
Adapt to change	64%	80%	72%	85%	100%	75%
Respondents	592	557	451	543	6	2149

Scale: 1 = "Weaker now," 2 = "No change," 3 = "Stronger now," 4 = "Much stronger now."

Compared to the other institutions, Oberlin's self-ratings are comparable, though noticeably lower in foreign language, quantitative and teamwork skills, while higher in appreciation for art, literature, music and drama, acquiring broad knowledge, awareness of social problems and putting current problems in past context. It is important for Oberlin to carefully review the responses to these questions and determine the extent to which they are congruent with our goals and objectives. Assessment demands that we take data such as these and use them to help us improve our academic program. For example, if we believe that the improvement in quantitative skills should be greater, we need to review both our curriculum and how our students navigate it to develop ways to improve these skills. It is clear however that our students are reporting significant improvement in areas that we believe are important.

How And Where Students Spend Their Time

The modal student course load at Oberlin is fourteen hours per week. This leaves a lot of time open for organized activities also central to the Oberlin experience such as homework, unstructured learning opportunities and general relaxation and recreation. We know from the Freshmen Survey and admissions application data that Oberlin students are engaged in intellectual activities to a greater extent than students from peer institutions and are less likely to spend their time in traditional organized activities.

The first table provides information solely on academic work and employment. Two things in particular should be noted; the time devoted to homework doesn't come close to the standard two hours for every one hour of class rule unless one believes that academic computer use was *not* included in the estimates of homework. It is peer's opinion that this is the case. Also, despite the variation across institutions in how course load is measured (hours, units, simple course counts) the number of hours spent in the classroom is very similar.

Average Hours Per Week This Year	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Scheduled classes/labs	14.4	13.6	14.9	15.1
Homework	16.0	16.1	16.5	15.8
Other academic work	4.0	4.1	4.8	4.5
Academic computer use	9.1	9.0	10.6	10.3
Total academic including computer use	43.5	42.5	46.5	45.5
Total academic excluding computer use	34.4	33.6	36.0	35.2

The responses for extra-curricular activities are similar to those from previous surveys. Oberlin students are less likely to participate in health and fitness activities and other organized activities and more likely spend time considered as recreational in the ESS. Our students spend very little time on passive activities such as watching television. Taken together, our students spend about the same time on non-academic activities as those considered academic.

Average Hours Per Week This Year	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Intercollegiate athletics	1.9	4.5	2.1	2.7
Cheerleading/marching band	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.3
Intramural athletics	0.8	1.1	0.5	0.8
Exercising/fitness room	3.3	4.3	4.0	4.3
Informal "pick-up" sports	0.7	0.9	0.4	1.0
Total Health and Athletics	6.8	10.7	7.0	9.0

(cont.)

Average Hours Per Week This Year	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Student government	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.4
Student newspaper	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.5
Literary magazine	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
Fraternity or sorority	0.2	0.6	0.3	2.4
Orchestra, band, choral group	1.6	1.3	0.9	1.1
Theatrical production	1.4	0.9	0.9	0.9
Religious group	0.6	0.5	1.1	1.0
Volunteering in community	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.5
Political group	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5
Minority/ethnic group	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7
Other student club/activity	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.4
Total Extra-curricular	9.0	8.5	8.8	11.5
Work-study on campus	2.2	1.9	1.8	2.3
Non-work-study campus job	2.5	2.7	3.4	2.0
Work-study off campus	1.0	0.8	2.3	1.4
Non-work-study off-campus job	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.3
Total Job	6.2	5.6	7.7	6.0
Socializing/talking with friends	13.4	13.9	12.2	13.0
Watching TV	1.3	2.9	2.9	3.4
Computer games	4.6	4.5	4.6	5.2
Partying	3.7	5.1	3.1	4.7
Recreational e-mail/Instant Messenger	4.3	4.9	6.2	6.0
Praying or meditating	0.9	0.7	1.1	1.0
Reading for pleasure	2.6	1.9	2.2	2.0
Visiting family or friends off campus	1.3	1.8	3.9	2.1
Relaxing by yourself	4.9	4.8	4.6	4.7
Total Recreation	36.7	40.3	40.7	41.8

Residential Experiences

Recently, Oberlin has been re-considering the residential experience on campus with an eye towards bringing more students into campus housing. Reasons for this are many and include financial, academic and social considerations. The ESS provides information on the kinds of experiences students have in their place of residence and the Campus Center, regardless of the type of housing they have chosen. This allows us to determine if students spend their time differently depending on their class year, and by association, their type of residence. Twenty-five percent of the respondents report living in non-college housing which is slightly lower the total population but close enough to assume representation. We cannot assume that any differences or similarities across class year are directly related to the type of residence but comparisons are still useful as we try to determine if students spend their time differently depending on where they live.

**How often have you done the following activities in the residence where you live
and in the Campus Center?**

	Year in college					
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Other	All Students
Preparing for Courses						
Your/friend's room - weekday	65%	62%	59%	45%	100%	58%
weekend	52%	51%	44%	42%	100%	48%
Dormitory lounge - weekday	22%	23%	23%	19%	0%	22%
weekend	20%	18%	22%	16%	0%	19%
Campus Center Lounge weekday	23%	17%	17%	20%	0%	19%
weekend	15%	13%	10%	18%	0%	14%
Watching TV/other recreation on own						
Dormitory - weekday	18%	18%	17%	18%	0%	18%
weekend	29%	41%	31%	39%	100%	35%
Campus Center - weekday	3%	2%	0%	1%	0%	2%
weekend	5%	7%	1%	2%	0%	4%
Relaxing on own around dormitory						
weekday	14%	10%	5%	24%	0%	14%
weekend	29%	31%	26%	32%	0%	30%
Socializing with other students in lounge						
Dormitory - weekday	29%	12%	12%	20%	0%	19%
weekend	36%	19%	12%	26%	100%	24%
Campus Center - weekday	12%	20%	10%	10%	0%	13%
weekend	13%	17%	5%	17%	0%	14%
Having serious discussions with students						
Dormitory - weekday	53%	57%	48%	47%	0%	51%
weekend	56%	58%	46%	47%	0%	52%
Campus Center - weekday	21%	31%	21%	24%	0%	24%
weekend	20%	26%	19%	24%	0%	22%
Attending social event						
Dormitory - weekday	16%	8%	16%	14%	0%	13%
weekend	41%	39%	43%	38%	0%	40%
Campus Center - weekday	14%	11%	10%	19%	100%	14%
weekend	33%	29%	22%	22%	0%	27%
Serving on a committee						
Dormitory - weekday	9%	3%	11%	3%	0%	6%
weekend	5%	2%	3%	4%	0%	4%
Campus Center - weekday	11%	7%	8%	9%	0%	9%
weekend	5%	1%	3%	3%	0%	3%
Taking course for credit						
Dormitory - weekday	53%	40%	41%	34%	0%	42%
weekend	4%	6%	4%	4%	0%	5%
Attending speaker program						
Dormitory - weekday	9%	8%	12%	6%	0%	9%
weekend	4%	7%	6%	6%	0%	5%
Campus Center - weekday	13%	13%	15%	13%	0%	13%
weekend	8%	6%	5%	8%	0%	7%
Meeting with a faculty member						
Dormitory - weekday	7%	8%	12%	8%	0%	9%
weekend	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Campus Center - weekday	7%	10%	8%	5%	0%	7%
weekend	1%	3%	3%	0%	0%	2%
Meeting with academic advisor						
Dormitory - weekday	1%	6%	7%	2%	0%	4%
weekend	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Campus Center - weekday	3%	7%	2%	1%	0%	3%
weekend	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Respondents	592	562	451	543	6	2154

Compared to respondents from the other institutions, Oberlin students are more likely to spend time in the Campus Center. It's possible that this reflects the greater number living off campus but time spent in the Campus Center is greater even when comparing to university respondents who are also more likely to live off campus. Another pattern that is evident elsewhere in the survey is that Oberlin students spend more time generally having serious discussions with other students.

Academic Experiences

How students learn can be just as interesting as *what* they learn. The following set of responses represent the extent (percent responding 'often' or 'very often') students participate in or perform various tasks related to their course and classroom experiences during this academic year. We again see the pattern that Oberlin students are more likely to work with other students and the beginning of the pattern that our students are more engaged with faculty members. Likewise we note that students from the other institutions are more likely to have experience in areas resulting in the development of quantitative skills.

Responding often or very often	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Worked with other students	45%	37%	40%	43%
Worked to integrate ideas	77%	73%	78%	68%
Participated in class discussion	79%	78%	79%	73%
Made class presentation	16%	22%	31%	23%
Prepared with study group	32%	25%	25%	29%
Wrote major paper (20+ pages)	7%	8%	13%	10%
Discussed ideas with students	85%	79%	79%	73%
Conducted primary research	37%	30%	38%	29%
Revised paper at least twice	49%	45%	55%	45%
Published or presented research	3%	2%	2%	3%
Attended campus concert	73%	46%	45%	38%
Participated in music event	32%	23%	18%	17%
Participated in art or theater	30%	22%	23%	16%
Did creative writing project	18%	10%	12%	9%
Read and discussed critics	49%	33%	37%	28%
Project with scientific method	29%	34%	37%	36%
Practiced with lab equipment	22%	25%	30%	29%
Read science articles on own	20%	19%	20%	26%
Used math and formulae	33%	36%	34%	44%
Computer for visual display	34%	43%	48%	53%
Computer for statistics	28%	35%	36%	41%
Developed web page	12%	8%	11%	12%

(cont.)

Responding often or very often	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Worked harder for faculty	45%	44%	57%	47%
Worked w faculty on credit research	20%	15%	17%	16%
Worked w faculty on ncredit research	6%	6%	7%	10%
Discussed career w faculty	33%	28%	37%	24%
Discussed academic work w faculty	51%	46%	50%	34%
Discussed course selection w faculty	38%	32%	38%	24%
Intellectual discussion w faculty	30%	26%	28%	19%
Faculty at social event	19%	17%	15%	11%
Asked librarian for help	19%	15%	23%	14%
Used library special collection	26%	19%	28%	20%
Browsed in library	56%	40%	49%	34%
Used library to study	65%	55%	57%	54%
Computer for library search	55%	42%	49%	36%

Sources of Advice

We mentioned in the previous section that Oberlin students tend to be more engaged with the faculty than students at other peer institutions. We see that more clearly in the portion of ESS dealing with where students go for advice in four different areas; courses, academic goals, career goals and personal problems. Though reliance on faculty is greatest in academic areas, they also discuss other areas of concern with both their advisors and other faculty members. Students from all institutions rely very heavily on other students and their parents for all kinds of advice. The latter underscores what we have learned from our surveys of parents - it is in both our and our students' best interests that parents are well-informed about all areas of campus life. The most recent Parents Survey showed improvement in our communication with parents and that progress must continue.

People relied on this year for advice about courses	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
academic advisor	89%	82%	83%	73%
faculty member	58%	54%	52%	43%
dept chair	31%	26%	28%	16%
academic dean	10%	10%	29%	13%
career services	3%	2%	3%	5%
psychologist	1%	3%	4%	2%
student life dean	6%	5%	8%	4%
chaplain	1%	1%	1%	2%
res life staff	8%	13%	15%	11%
significant other	52%	45%	44%	42%
another student	88%	90%	88%	89%
parent	72%	74%	77%	71%

People relied on this year for advice academic goals	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
academic advisor	73%	64%	64%	55%
faculty member	60%	57%	55%	45%
dept chair	27%	23%	23%	13%
academic dean	10%	11%	23%	11%
career services	7%	6%	7%	7%
psychologist	4%	4%	6%	3%
student life dean	8%	6%	7%	4%
chaplain	2%	1%	2%	2%
res life staff	5%	9%	11%	9%
significant other	52%	46%	47%	45%
another student	85%	84%	84%	83%
parent	76%	82%	81%	81%

People relied on this year for about career goals

academic advisor	50%	37%	45%	35%
faculty member	48%	44%	47%	39%
dept chair	16%	13%	13%	7%
academic dean	5%	5%	12%	6%
career services	22%	29%	34%	27%
psychologist	4%	3%	5%	3%
student life dean	5%	4%	5%	3%
chaplain	2%	2%	3%	3%
res life staff	3%	7%	9%	7%
significant other	56%	49%	50%	47%
another student	85%	85%	86%	83%
parent	83%	87%	88%	87%

People relied on this year for about personal problems

academic advisor	16%	11%	15%	8%
faculty member	21%	16%	20%	12%
dept chair	4%	2%	3%	1%
academic dean	7%	6%	11%	4%
career services	0%	1%	2%	1%
psychologist	15%	14%	19%	10%
student life dean	10%	8%	6%	3%
chaplain	3%	3%	4%	5%
res life staff	13%	13%	18%	10%
significant other	61%	55%	53%	53%
another student	93%	91%	91%	88%
parent	81%	80%	84%	81%

Financial Aid and Income

We know from a number of data sources that Oberlin tends to have a higher percentage of students on institutional financial aid than other peer schools. Information from the ESS provides us with a bit more detail and shows that in terms of financial profile, Oberlin is very similar to the Women's colleges. Two pieces of information that is new is the amount of credit card debt incurred by our students and the average educational loan indebtedness by class year.

Family Income	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Under \$25,000	8%	8%	12%	7%
\$25,000 - \$49,000	15%	9%	15%	11%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	17%	13%	17%	13%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	16%	15%	12%	14%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	13%	14%	13%	15%
\$125,000 - \$149,000	8%	8%	7%	8%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	6%	7%	5%	6%
\$175,000 - \$199,999	3%	5%	4%	5%
\$200,000 or more	13%	22%	15%	21%
Average Income	\$102,730	\$122,241	\$104,178	\$121,332

Consistent with past surveys, Oberlin has about the same percentage of students in the lowest income category but far fewer in the highest range. This results in expected differences in the percentage of students on need-based financial aid.

Financial Aid Profile	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
Did you receive need-based aid?	58%	50%	58%	48%
Received a grant	54%	42%	52%	41%
Received a loan	48%	38%	50%	37%
Received work-study	34%	38%	45%	27%
Received other financial aid	16%	9%	12%	10%

Students were asked to report the total amount of educational loans (excluding funds borrowed by their parents) for the current academic year. Overall, Oberlin students are borrowing slightly more than students at the other co-ed colleges, with the higher amounts occurring during the second and third year. Compared to all peer institutions, Oberlin's average loan is lower. All schools show the general trend of greater borrowing as students progress. Credit card debt does not appear to be a major issue at this point and Oberlin has the highest percentage (40%) of students reporting no credit card.

Average Educational Loan	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
First Year	\$3,955	\$3,924	\$4,169	\$4,778
Sophomore	\$4,770	\$4,009	\$4,469	\$4,911
Junior	\$4,858	\$4,640	\$5,232	\$5,282
Senior	\$4,714	\$4,978	\$5,260	\$5,403
Total	\$4,597	\$4,379	\$4,766	\$5,100
Average credit card debt	\$363	\$324	\$566	\$431

Finally, students were asked to rate the impact of paying for college on their families. Oberlin students are less likely to report no or little impact and slightly more likely to report moderate to considerable impact.

Impact on family paying for college	Oberlin	Other Co-ed	Women's	Universities
None/Slight	13%	19%	14%	16%
Moderate	34%	32%	27%	29%
Considerable	35%	34%	36%	35%
Severe	14%	12%	18%	16%
Not Applicable	4%	3%	6%	4%

Overall, we should note that the results from the ESS are positive. Oberlin students are satisfied with their experiences and take advantage of the many opportunities they have here. We should also carefully think about the areas where ratings are relatively low; the development of quantitative and scientific skills and knowledge for example. In all respects, we should review these results in the context of our statement of goals and objectives for students and target those areas we believe should be improved in order to meet those goals.