



Miami University  
Assessment

# Faculty and Student Learning Experiences: Similarities & Differences

## Origins of the Data

Miami participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). Both surveys address students' experiences in the classroom environment and how these experiences contribute to their intellectual development. Participating in both the NSSE and the FSSE allows us to examine students' experiences in the classroom and their skill development from multiple perspectives.

## The Questions

The NSSE was administered to a random sample of 873 first-year students and seniors. The FSSE was administered to a random sample of 569 faculty. The NSSE data reported below is from 2005 and the FSSE data is from 2006. These surveys include a number of questions that are the same on both the student and faculty forms. Students were asked, "To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?" Faculty members were asked, "To what extent do you structure your selected course section so that students learn and develop in the following areas?"

Five items were selected for presentation:

- Writing clearly and effectively
- Speaking clearly and effectively
- Thinking critically and analytically
- Learning effectively on your own
- Solving complex real-world problems

Both students and faculty answered the questions on a four point scale: 1 = very little; 2 = some; 3 = quite a bit; and 4 = very much.

## Results

For a number of these items, there is a discrepancy between faculty reports of how they structure the course and student reports of their experiences within Miami courses.

Faculty were more likely to report that their course emphasized critical thinking, learning independently, and solving complex, real-world problems than students were to report that their experiences contributed to learning these skills. (See table.) On the other hand, students were more likely to report that

their experiences contributed to their writing and speaking skills than faculty were to report that their courses were designed to encourage student development of writing and speaking skills.

	Faculty	Students
Writing clearly	64.8	75.4
Speaking clearly	46.5	64.0
Critical thinking	93.6	88.4
Learning on own	85.6	71.7
Real world problems	61.4	53.5

Of the five skills identified, students reported that their experiences were least likely to help them to develop skills in solving real world problems. Faculty reported that they were least likely to structure their courses to help students to develop their speaking skills.

Both students and faculty reported a strong emphasis on developing critical and analytical thinking skills. Faculty indicated that their course emphasized critical thinking skills significantly more than any of the other skills identified. Similarly, students reported that their experiences at Miami contributed more to their critical thinking skills than to any of the other skills identified above.

## Summary

Although the results indicate that faculty design their courses to encourage critical thinking, independent learning, and solving complex real-world issues, student responses suggest that students do not believe they are developing these skills as much as intended. Despite differences in perceptions of learning experiences, both faculty and students indicate that courses at Miami are designed to encourage the development of critical thinking skills. Miami should celebrate the acknowledgment of critical thinking as a key skill in students' learning experiences, while at the same time continuing to assess actual student development (versus student perceptions) of critical thinking skills.