



Academic Rigor and Challenge at Miami

Students' Experiences During Their First Year of College

Survey Overview

The information in this brief was gathered through two separate national surveys: the "National Survey of Student Engagement" (NSSE) and the "Your First College Year" (YFCY) survey. The NSSE, which was administered to first-year students and seniors in the spring of 2003, contained 30 questions designed to assess the extent to which students engage in a variety of effective educational processes. The YFCY, which was administered to first-year students in the spring of 2004, contained 56 questions pertaining to students' experiences during their first year at college, 30 of which were designed specifically for Miami students. The following brief is based only on the responses of first-year students on the Oxford campus.

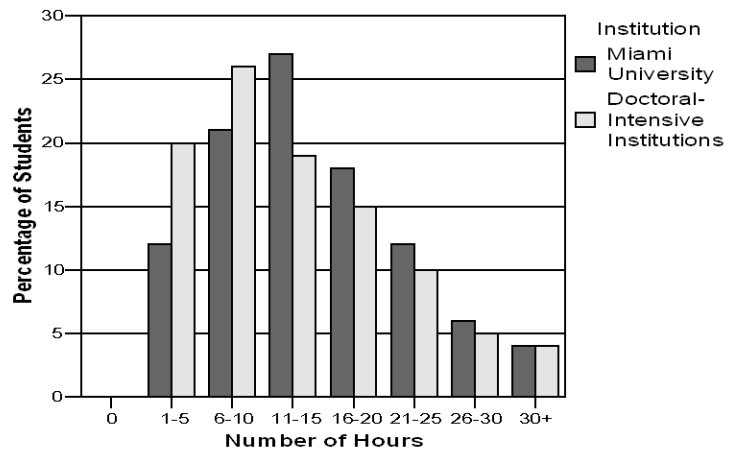
Academic Rigor and Challenge

Results from the surveys suggest that although first-year students at Miami report being somewhat challenged in their academic work, the amount of time they put into their studies is not indicative of rigorous and challenging endeavors. When asked to rate the difficulty of their freshmen courses, Miami students rated their courses an average of 2.38 on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely difficult) to 4 (not at all difficult), suggesting that they believed their courses were somewhat difficult to difficult [YFCY].

Compared to first-year students at other doctoral-intensive universities, Miami first-year students are significantly more likely to report that their exams challenged them to do their best work [NSSE]; Miami students reported being challenged an average of 5.72 on a scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 7 (very much). Miami students were also significantly more likely to report that their institution emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying [NSSE].

On average, first-year students at Miami also reported spending more time preparing for class (e.g., studying, reading) than did freshmen at other doctoral-intensive universities [NSSE]. However, approximately 33% of Miami first-years reported spending 10 hours or less preparing for their classes each week.

Number of Hours Spent Preparing for Class in a Typical Week [NSSE]



Overall, first-year students at Miami reported that they were being challenged to do their best in their academic endeavors and that their courses were somewhat difficult. However, despite feeling challenged to work hard, a noteworthy proportion of students work fewer hours than would be expected of a student engaged in rigorous coursework. These results suggest the possibility that first-year students, in their transition from high school to college, may not fully appreciate the greater academic expectations of college courses.

How Can Miami Ensure Academic Challenge?

Miami University hosts the annual Lilly Conference on College Teaching, which runs this year from Nov. 18-21. Registration is free for Miami faculty and staff, who can register at the Marcum Conference Center. If you are interested in learning more about how to ensure academic challenge, CELT recommends the following Lilly Conference sessions.

- Using Cooperative Activities to Capitalize on How Students Learn (Nov. 18, 9:30am-4:30pm)
- Productive Classrooms, Productive Curricula: More Student Learning, Less Faculty Work (Nov. 19, 10:05am-11:35am)
- Or see the CELT website to learn more about the numerous Lilly Conference sessions.

www.muohio.edu/CELT

CELT also recommends the following reading:

Schilling, K. M., & Schilling, K. L. (1999). Increasing expectations for student academic effort. *About Campus*, 4 (2), 4-10. (Available online through the Miami Library website.)