

Student Engagement, Learning and Experiences Results from the 2007 Enrolled Student Survey

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Oberlin College participates in a wide-ranging survey program that includes admitted students, enrolled students, graduating seniors, alumni and parents. The Enrolled Student Survey (ESS) was developed by a consortium of thirty-one private colleges and universities as a response to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

The consortium believes that the ESS is more comprehensive and better suited to the types of institutions that belong to it. The 2007 administration was the second time this instrument was used with some minor modifications to the inaugural 2003 instrument. Unlike the other surveys in which Oberlin participates, the ESS is largely inappropriate for Conservatory students so the sample included only those students enrolled in Arts and Sciences. Oberlin achieved a 53% response rate (47% completing the entire survey) compared to the consortium-wide response rates of 41% and 37% respectively.

This report will focus on six areas of the survey: satisfaction, engagement, sources of advice, student time diaries, skills and knowledge development and student demography. The consortium responses will be divided into three groups: universities, women's colleges and co-ed colleges.¹ All responses have been weighted to approximate actual population by class and total enrollment.

Satisfaction and Endorsement

Since the late 1990's we have seen Oberlin's student satisfaction improve to levels close to our peers in the consortium. As in recent years, Oberlin students are still slightly less likely to respond 'excellent', but we note that more Oberlin students respond "good" or "excellent" than those from the three other groups of colleges. This is the first time we have seen that.

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
How would you evaluate education?	Excellent	47.5%	46.4%	51.6%	46.1%
	Good	42.8%	43.8%	40.5%	47.5%
	Fair	8.5%	8.8%	6.5%	5.3%
	Poor	1.3%	1.1%	1.4%	1.1%

¹ The comparison with co-ed colleges is obvious but Oberlin also shares characteristics with the other two groups. Our academic and financial profiles are similar to those of the women's colleges while our size and cross-admission patterns encourage comparisons with universities.

A second measure of student satisfaction is a so-called endorsement measure and simply asks if the respondents would enroll in their home institution knowing what they know now. As in past surveys there is a slight drop in the percentage choosing definitely or probably yes but in Oberlin's case, the percentage choosing definitely yes is actually higher than the top satisfaction response.

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Would you go here again?	Definitely yes	52.9%	40.5%	47.3%	49.7%
	Probably yes	36.3%	41.1%	37.8%	39.6%
	Probably no	8.8%	13.8%	11.6%	7.4%
	Definitely no	2.1%	4.6%	3.3%	3.2%

Overall we continue to see improvements in student satisfaction in both relative and absolute terms.

Student Engagement

The part of the survey most like NSSE includes questions about how students are engaged in the learning process. The 2003 ESS results showed Oberlin students generally more likely to work with other students and to be more engaged with faculty members. In 2007 we see some differences. Oberlin has the lowest percentage of students in the consortium responding that they work with other students "Often" or "Very often" which is a complete turnaround from 2003. Oberlin students still are more likely to have discussed ideas with students though percentages for all four groups of institutions are slightly lower than the prior administration. One other major difference in this set of questions from 2003 is probably due to a difference in wording though the response patterns across institutions are similar. In 2003, students were asked if they had written a major paper of over 20 pages in length. Only 8% of Oberlin students responded that they had at least "Often" or "Very often". This year the question provides examples of major papers rather than a page length and all institution groups show increases but Oberlin remains at the back of the pack.

Course or Classroom Experiences Percent responding Often/Very Often	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Worked with other students	43.5%	39.5%	43.8%	38.1%
Worked to integrate ideas	69.5%	77.5%	76.0%	74.5%
Participated in class discussion	75.3%	79.6%	80.5%	75.6%
Made formal class presentation	25.9%	31.6%	27.5%	19.5%
Prepared with study group	29.2%	24.5%	29.9%	27.7%
Wrote major paper	24.7%	29.0%	27.6%	20.0%
Class in lecture hall	68.8%	35.0%	28.0%	29.0%
Class with graduate TA	75.1%	17.5%	8.1%	1.3%
Discussed ideas with students	70.7%	74.9%	76.9%	81.5%
Revised paper at least twice	31.7%	40.7%	33.5%	30.3%
Published or presented research	3.3%	3.0%	2.7%	1.6%

In the following series of questions Oberlin's exceptional opportunities in the arts are evident. Note also the question about reading and discussing critics.

Course or Classroom Experiences Percent responding Often/Very Often	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Attended concert on or off campus	34.5%	38.4%	46.0%	68.8%
Participated in music event on or off campus	17.2%	17.0%	21.8%	27.5%
Participated in art or theater on or off campus	15.7%	21.2%	21.2%	26.1%
Did creative writing project	8.8%	11.7%	9.9%	13.1%
Read and discussed critics	26.3%	34.6%	30.5%	41.5%

In what is a consistent pattern, and we will see more evidence of this in the skills/knowledge development section, Oberlin students report lower levels of engagement in math and science areas.

Course or Classroom Experiences Percent responding Often/Very Often	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Project with scientific method	35.4%	33.7%	34.8%	27.2%
Practiced with lab equipment	29.8%	28.7%	27.2%	22.8%
Read science articles on own	26.8%	21.4%	23.3%	18.6%
Used math and formulae	41.8%	32.0%	36.2%	29.7%
Computer for visual display	52.1%	48.9%	47.3%	32.0%
Computer for statistics	41.8%	38.9%	40.0%	25.3%
Developed web page	7.5%	6.7%	5.3%	4.7%

Engagement with faculty also appears to have taken a hit in the 2007 ESS. In the next section of the report we will see how faculty remain important sources of advice but here we see a general pattern of decreased engagement relative to the two college groups compared to 2003.

Course or Classroom Experiences Percent responding Often/Very Often	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Worked harder for faculty	46.5%	53.8%	48.1%	39.4%
Worked w faculty on credit research	16.2%	16.9%	16.5%	13.4%
Worked w faculty on ncredit research	10.0%	7.5%	6.6%	3.7%
Discussed career w faculty	24.5%	34.9%	30.6%	29.2%
Discussed academic work w faculty	32.5%	49.1%	48.3%	45.4%
Discussed course selection w faculty	22.8%	39.0%	35.3%	33.1%
Intellectual discussion w faculty	19.0%	27.4%	26.6%	23.8%
Faculty at social event	11.8%	15.9%	18.9%	14.4%

The following five questions come directly from NSSE and were not part of the 2003 ESS. Generally Oberlin students are less likely to report these activities than students from the other institutions but all three groups report high levels in all but memorization.

Course or Classroom Experiences Percent responding Often/Very Often	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Memorizing	52.8%	48.2%	39.8%	39.0%
Analyzing	86.1%	89.4%	88.9%	86.9%
Synthesizing	77.4%	82.8%	82.4%	79.3%
Making judgments	63.7%	72.1%	69.8%	64.9%
Applying	71.7%	71.8%	71.9%	66.9%

An interesting measure of *civic* engagement is voting in the most recent election. Oberlin students are more likely to be registered and to have voted which is consistent with a similar question from the 2003 survey.

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Registered to Vote?	Not eligible	9.5%	10.2%	7.4%	3.7%
	Not registered	15.7%	15.7%	12.8%	7.7%
	Not voter	31.8%	26.2%	26.9%	24.5%
	Absentee voter	26.4%	29.5%	31.9%	37.1%
	Local voter	16.6%	18.4%	21.1%	26.9%

Academic Advising and Sources of Advice

Over the last several years, Oberlin’s academic advising program has undergone changes with the goal of improving student focus on education goals and persistence to graduation. In terms of both quality and availability, Oberlin students rate the formal advising more highly than students from universities and co-ed colleges and comparably to women’s colleges. Note however that Oberlin students are just as likely to rate advising as “poor” as students from the other colleges. It has been a while since one of our surveys addressed this directly but these responses do indicate positive movement for Oberlin.

Quality of Academic Advising

	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Excellent	14.6%	23.3%	19.5%	23.4%
Very Good	37.1%	43.8%	42.9%	43.1%
Fair	36.3%	27.0%	30.5%	26.0%
Poor	12.0%	6.0%	7.1%	7.5%

Availability of Academic Advising

	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Always	32.9%	42.8%	39.0%	48.7%
Usually	35.0%	35.4%	38.2%	32.3%
Sometimes	19.2%	14.3%	14.0%	12.8%
Hardly ever	7.8%	5.5%	5.9%	4.7%
Not at all	5.1%	2.1%	2.9%	1.6%

Recognizing that students seek and get advice from a variety of sources for a variety of reasons, the ESS asked students to indicate on whom they relied this year for advice about courses, academic goals, career goals, personal problems and college finances. The first table represents course advice and, not surprisingly, the academic advisor is the most frequently selected person with Oberlin showing the greatest frequency. In the other tables we see an interesting theme developing – at Oberlin the academic advisor plays an important role in most areas of advice while Career Services is generally used to a lesser extent than at the other colleges. This has been apparent in other surveys and represents a special challenge for Oberlin. Our students do not utilize formal career planning services to the extent they should and by the time they are seniors are further behind in their job searches than students from the other institutions.²

Course Advice	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
academic advisor	69.9%	83.8%	82.0%	88.6%
other faculty member	40.4%	51.8%	53.8%	47.1%
advising staff	18.1%	15.4%	12.3%	12.2%
dept chair	16.0%	29.4%	28.9%	28.2%
academic dean	14.5%	28.1%	8.2%	9.0%
career services	4.0%	2.9%	3.3%	0.8%
psychologist	1.7%	3.5%	2.8%	2.4%
student life dean	3.3%	7.4%	4.6%	5.9%
athletic coach	3.4%	4.4%	6.3%	4.5%
chaplain	1.4%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%
res life staff	9.9%	14.8%	11.7%	6.1%
significant other	36.0%	37.8%	38.5%	44.1%
another student	83.1%	82.8%	85.0%	85.1%
parent or guardian	67.0%	71.9%	70.0%	72.1%
I found no one	1.0%	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%

Academic Advice	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
academic advisor	52.4%	66.3%	60.9%	75.4%
other faculty member	45.3%	56.1%	58.3%	55.6%
advising staff	15.9%	14.8%	12.1%	12.3%
dept chair	13.1%	22.8%	24.3%	24.1%
academic dean	12.4%	24.3%	8.2%	9.9%
career services	6.2%	6.0%	6.5%	3.7%
psychologist	3.0%	5.8%	4.7%	4.8%
student life dean	3.7%	6.9%	6.3%	5.6%
athletic coach	4.1%	4.8%	7.2%	4.5%
chaplain	2.3%	1.6%	1.9%	1.6%
res life staff	7.6%	11.5%	8.8%	3.5%
significant other	38.5%	42.1%	40.4%	44.1%
another student	75.4%	78.6%	78.0%	78.9%
parent or guardian	76.6%	77.9%	77.0%	76.5%
I found no one	1.7%	1.1%	1.2%	1.6%

² 2004 and 2006 Senior Surveys

Career Advice	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
academic advisor	31.3%	42.0%	33.7%	44.9%
other faculty member	39.1%	45.5%	45.9%	37.8%
advising staff	12.2%	12.1%	11.0%	7.7%
dept chair	6.9%	12.9%	13.2%	13.2%
academic dean	7.1%	12.3%	3.6%	5.5%
career services	26.2%	28.9%	30.3%	19.2%
psychologist	2.9%	5.2%	3.9%	3.6%
student life dean	3.0%	4.6%	4.3%	4.1%
athletic coach	4.9%	4.3%	8.7%	6.3%
chaplain	3.8%	2.4%	2.9%	2.2%
res life staff	5.8%	8.0%	6.4%	2.7%
significant other	41.2%	45.1%	42.7%	43.0%
another student	77.2%	78.7%	79.4%	77.3%
parent or guardian	83.9%	82.9%	84.0%	80.8%
I found no one	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%	3.0%

Personal Advice	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
academic advisor	8.2%	16.5%	12.4%	17.0%
other faculty member	11.5%	20.8%	17.7%	17.6%
advising staff	3.6%	4.1%	3.4%	3.3%
dept chair	1.3%	3.3%	3.0%	3.0%
academic dean	4.7%	14.3%	6.5%	4.7%
career services	1.1%	1.5%	1.2%	0.8%
psychologist	10.9%	20.7%	14.9%	16.5%
student life dean	3.4%	6.9%	8.8%	8.5%
athletic coach	5.7%	7.9%	10.9%	7.4%
chaplain	5.7%	4.4%	4.6%	4.1%
res life staff	8.3%	18.1%	12.1%	9.9%
significant other	47.3%	49.6%	48.9%	53.6%
another student	81.9%	86.7%	87.0%	88.5%
parent or guardian	78.9%	81.5%	80.2%	77.5%
I found no one	1.7%	1.3%	1.3%	2.2%

Financial Advice	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
academic advisor	3.1%	4.2%	3.0%	2.8%
other faculty member	4.2%	5.4%	4.7%	5.2%
advising staff	3.1%	3.6%	3.2%	3.8%
dept chair	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%	0.7%
academic dean	1.3%	4.7%	1.7%	1.4%
career services	1.5%	2.9%	3.2%	2.8%
psychologist	0.9%	1.8%	0.9%	0.3%
student life dean	0.9%	2.1%	2.1%	1.4%
athletic coach	1.3%	0.6%	1.7%	1.4%
chaplain	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%
res life staff	1.2%	2.4%	1.8%	1.0%
significant other	18.0%	25.4%	17.9%	21.1%

Financial Advice (cont)	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
another student	25.2%	36.7%	28.0%	33.6%
parent or guardian	90.3%	89.0%	90.4%	91.7%
I found no one	5.1%	4.1%	4.5%	5.5%

We also note in these tables that the residence life staff at Oberlin plays a comparatively smaller role in providing advice to students. We should ask ourselves if this is a lost opportunity or consistent with our goals and philosophies.

How and Where Students Spend Their Time

The institutions in the consortium represent a variety of course load requirements. Some count each class as one unit, others like Oberlin, assign hours to every class, while others employ some variation of those two. The mean number of hours reported in the class room varies across institution type as does the number of hours doing academic work outside of class. Note that Oberlin students spend less time doing academic work of all kinds than students from the other institutions³ with the lone exception of spending more time in the class room than students from the co-ed colleges.

Academic Work	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Attending scheduled classes or labs	15.0	14.7	13.3	14.1
Working on scheduled courses outside of class or lab (i.e., homework)	16.4	16.7	16.9	16.2
Doing other academic work (e.g. thesis, internship, research)	4.9	5.2	4.3	3.2
Total Academic Work	36	37	35	34

Spending less than forty hours a week on academic work leaves a lot of time for other activities. Consistent with other surveys Oberlin students spend less time on health/fitness activities than students from co-ed colleges and the universities and about the same amount of time on other activities.

Health and Fitness	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Participating in Intercollegiate Athletics (during practice and playing season)	2.3	1.9	4.1	2.5
Participating as a cheerleader, mascot, or member of the marching band	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0
Playing on intramural athletic or club sport team(s)	1.3	0.9	1.6	1.3
Exercising or using a fitness or weight room	3.7	3.4	4.0	2.7
Competing informally on a team or sport (e.g., 'pick-up' game)	0.7	0.3	0.8	0.5
Eating meals	9.3	9.3	9.4	9.4
Total Health and Fitness	18	16	20	16

Clubs and Organizations	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Participating in student government	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3
Working on a literary magazine	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Participating in a Fraternity or Sorority ('Eating Club' or 'Secret Society')	2.1	0.3	0.6	0.4
Playing or singing in an orchestra, band, choral or other musical group	1.1	0.9	1.2	1.4
Working on a theatrical production	0.9	1.0	0.9	1.4

³ significant at the .05 level

Clubs and Organizations (cont)	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Participating in a religious organization or religious service	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.5
Volunteering in the community	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.0
Participating in a political organization	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.5
Participating in a minority or ethnic organization	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5
Participating in another organized student activity or club	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.4
Total Clubs	11	8	8	9

Recreation	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Socializing and talking with friends	12.3	11.6	13.6	13.8
Watching TV	3.2	2.8	2.8	1.6
Using a computer for non-academic activity (e.g., video games, Facebook, IM)	8.4	8.1	7.9	8.1
Reading for pleasure	2.0	2.4	2.0	2.5
Visiting with a family or friend off campus	2.0	3.9	1.9	1.4
Relaxing by yourself	5.5	5.6	5.7	6.8
Total Recreation	34	34	34	34

Past surveys have included questions on the amount of time spent “partying”. Oberlin students consistently reported less time engaging in that activity than students from universities and co-ed colleges. The following question on binge drinking could be considered consistent with those differences.

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Occasions of five or more drinks	0 occasions	57.2%	72.9%	48.4%	61.8%
	1 occasion	16.4%	15.1%	18.7%	16.3%
	2 occasions	10.8%	6.6%	13.8%	9.5%
	3 occasions	6.9%	3.0%	8.3%	5.3%
	4+ occasions	8.7%	2.4%	10.7%	7.1%

Skills and Knowledge Development

An important reason for participating in the survey program is to collect indirect evidence of student learning for assessment purposes. Though self-reported, responses to these questions help guide the general education assessment process and are remarkably (and sometimes unfortunately) consistent across surveys. Of particular concern is the relative lack of development in the quantitative and scientific areas.⁴ As we review our general education goals we should pay special attention to these areas in light of our quantitative proficiency requirement and 9-9-9. In terms of developing broad knowledge, capacity to judge moral issues and, somewhat ironically, career preparation, Oberlin students report relatively high gains. Of course development in arts and literature remains high.

⁴ Conversely we have seen relative improvement in leadership and teamwork development over time.

Percent Responding Stronger/Much Stronger	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
writing	73.0%	78.4%	79.1%	75.8%
communicate orally	67.0%	69.2%	69.3%	66.6%
new knowledge	84.9%	83.8%	85.1%	81.0%
thinking	85.1%	82.8%	85.7%	83.2%
original ideas	75.3%	74.5%	76.3%	76.7%
make decisions	70.5%	68.9%	68.9%	68.8%
leadership	60.4%	58.2%	56.5%	54.8%
relate to others	59.9%	59.5%	58.0%	56.8%
function on a team	55.2%	48.7%	50.9%	49.3%
quantitative skills	57.6%	52.2%	56.0%	35.5%
problem perspectives	69.3%	75.2%	76.8%	80.0%
moral issues	63.1%	66.7%	67.1%	70.4%
understand self	85.7%	85.8%	86.0%	86.1%
be independent	76.5%	73.0%	77.3%	77.3%
in-depth knowledge	89.6%	89.4%	88.8%	89.6%
complex projects	75.9%	73.8%	75.7%	73.3%
foreign language	50.9%	61.4%	50.6%	49.7%
arts & literature	54.7%	59.8%	61.4%	75.2%
broad knowledge	70.1%	75.4%	77.6%	86.6%
awareness of social problems	72.0%	77.5%	77.2%	80.2%
self esteem	58.3%	64.8%	59.4%	61.8%
conflict resolution	57.2%	58.5%	57.7%	55.1%
integrate ideas	77.0%	75.8%	78.5%	79.0%
understand science	55.5%	49.2%	50.9%	43.6%
evaluate science	59.0%	53.8%	55.5%	49.7%
career preparation	76.9%	73.5%	70.8%	68.8%
adapt to change	77.2%	74.8%	75.0%	71.5%

Selected Demographic Measures

The socio-economic status of our students compared to the other schools in the consortium is consistent with past surveys. Oberlin students are more likely to come from the middle-income strata and, except for the women’s colleges, have a lower estimated mean family income.⁵ Responses to political views are predictable and consistent. The religious affiliations of our students are also similar to those reported at time of entry, however the percentage of students claiming “none”, though still higher than all three groups, is lower. The difference there is much greater when students begin their college careers.⁶

⁵ The mean is estimated by weighting the mid-point of each income category.

⁶ 40-45% of entering Oberlin students generally claim no religious affiliation. Interesting in its own right, this can also be seen as a marker for predicting attrition.

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Income	under \$25,000	6.3%	11.9%	7.7%	5.8%
	\$25,000-49,999	8.5%	12.6%	9.1%	5.8%
	\$50,000-74,999	11.3%	14.4%	10.5%	13.5%
	\$75,000-99,999	12.4%	12.5%	11.9%	14.6%
	\$100,000-124,999	14.4%	13.1%	13.3%	17.8%
	\$125,000-149,999	7.3%	5.6%	7.0%	7.3%
	\$150,000-174,999	6.5%	5.2%	7.3%	8.8%
	\$175,000-199,999	5.0%	4.4%	5.3%	5.6%
	\$200,000-249,000	7.6%	5.5%	7.3%	6.7%
	\$250,000-299,000	5.1%	3.5%	5.8%	3.5%
	300,000 or more	15.6%	11.1%	14.7%	10.5%
Mean		\$157,658	\$129,121	\$155,329	\$143,165

		Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Political Ideology	Far left	6.3%	11.4%	12.6%	18.7%
	Liberal	49.4%	57.5%	56.4%	66.1%
	Middle	31.3%	25.7%	23.0%	14.4%
	Conservative	12.5%	5.2%	7.5%	0.8%
	Far right	0.6%	0.2%	0.5%	0.0%

Religion Affiliation	Univ	Womens	Co-ed	Oberlin
Baptist	3.6%	2.2%	1.9%	2.0%
Buddhist	2.1%	2.7%	1.8%	0.8%
Church of Christ	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.6%
Eastern Orthodox	1.4%	1.6%	1.0%	0.6%
Episcopalian	4.2%	5.7%	6.5%	5.3%
Hindu	2.5%	2.1%	1.3%	1.4%
Islamic	1.6%	2.2%	1.2%	0.3%
Jewish	14.2%	13.3%	15.5%	17.9%
LDS (Mormon)	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.6%
Lutheran	2.7%	2.2%	3.0%	2.0%
Methodist	3.6%	2.7%	3.1%	4.2%
Presbyterian	5.2%	3.9%	4.9%	6.1%
Quaker	0.4%	1.2%	1.1%	2.0%
Roman Catholic	24.7%	20.5%	19.9%	11.7%
Seventh Day Adventist	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.0%
Unitarian Universalist	1.1%	2.6%	2.6%	4.2%
United Church of Christ/Congregationalist	1.2%	2.3%	2.7%	2.5%
Other Christian	7.2%	6.4%	6.1%	4.7%
Other Religion	2.1%	2.8%	2.7%	4.2%
None	20.7%	24.2%	23.4%	29.1%

The Enrolled Student Survey, in conjunction with the other surveys Oberlin administers, provides important information on student learning and institutional effectiveness. These surveys do not stand alone however and are used as part of a larger program involving all aspects of the institution. Learning assessment at the academic department level, administrative department reviews of effectiveness and contributions to student learning, and institution-wide strategic planning efforts build on the results gleaned from these surveys and are essential to Oberlin's ability to measure and improve the student experience.