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Expectations & Experiences: Assessment at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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Executive summary

During the 2010-2011 academic year, several new assessment instruments were used at UNCP. Two of these were the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). The CSEQ assesses the quality of effort students expend in using institutional resources and opportunities provided for their learning and development. The CSXQ is designed to evaluate new student expectations for college including their goals, motivations, and future plans. When paired with the CSEQ administered toward the end of students' first year in college, it is possible to assess the degree to which student and institutional expectations are met. Information obtained from using the CSXQ and the CSEQ at UNCP was intended to serve multiple purposes: (1) To inform marketing, recruiting, and other intervention efforts in such a way as to increase student/UNCP "fit" and thereby increase student retention; (2) To fulfill an obligation to the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA); and (3) To gather information on how first-year experiences compare to those later in a student's college career. The CSXQ was administered early in the fall semester of 2010 to 671 students in freshmen seminar courses. The CSEQ was administered late in the spring semester of 2011 to 326 students (of all classes) in English 1060 courses. The cost of purchasing sufficient copies of the two instruments was shared by the Office of Enrollment Management and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The students who took the CSXQ and those first-year students who took the CSEQ were very similar in terms of demographic profile. There were also few differences in the percent of students (~80%) who wanted to continue their education after the baccalaureate years. Students at the beginning of their first year were overly optimistic about the grades they would receive (with the majority indicating they thought they would end their first year with a GPA equivalent to a A- or B+). By the end of the year, students reported having earned GPAs that were more in line with the average first-year GPA at UNCP (~C). On almost all other measures where there were significant differences between the two groups of students, CSXQ scores were higher than CSEQ scores. It was anticipated that beginning students would have unrealistic expectations of college and these expectations would underestimate the amount of work needed to be successful. However, students' unrealistic expectations were in the opposite direction. That is, students come in expecting to work harder, do more, and like college more than they actually do during their first year. Approximately 43% of students reported on the CSXQ that they intended to spend 10 hours or fewer on academic activities outside of class whereas 60% of freshmen had actually done so.

The information about senior experiences that will be reported on UNCP's College Portrait (as part of our participation in the VSA) is included in this report. Comparisons among students in different classes indicated that students at the end of the first year differed significantly (on a variety of items on the CSEQ) from juniors, seniors, or both. These items were predominantly in the areas of computer use, course requirements, content application, interaction with faculty, campus involvement, and broadened knowledge base. The differences were in the expected direction. That is, students at the end of their first year were less likely to report they had engaged in these activities than were students in their junior and/or senior years. Although juniors and seniors were a little more likely to report that they were enthusiastic about college than were first- or second-year students, the differences across classes in enthusiasm for college were small. In response to the question "If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution?" seniors were much more likely than first-year students to answer "Yes, definitely" or "Probably yes."

Background

During the 2010-2011 academic year, several new assessment instruments were used at UNCP. Two of these were the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Available from Indiana University Bloomington (http://cseq.iub.edu/index.cfm), the CSEQ was first published in 1979 and is currently in its fourth edition; the CSXQ (adapted from the CSEQ) was created in 1997 and is in its second edition. The CSEQ assesses the quality of effort students expend in using institutional resources and opportunities provided for their learning and development. The CSXQ is designed to evaluate new student expectations for college including their goals, motivations, and future plans. When paired with the CSEQ administered toward the end of students' first year in college, it is possible to assess the degree to which student and institutional expectations are met. Both instruments ask about: College Activities (library, information technology, expectations related to faculty, course learning, use of campus facilities, clubs, organizations, service projects, experiences with other students, scientific/quantitative experiences, conversations), Reading, Writing, Satisfaction, and the College Environment. The CSEQ shares 87 items with the CSEQ (not including background information questions).

Information obtained from using the CSXQ and the CSEQ at UNCP was intended to serve multiple purposes:

(1) To inform marketing, recruiting, and other intervention efforts in such a way as to increase student/UNCP "fit" and thereby increase student retention. The guiding question in this regard was: what do incoming students expect of college and how do these expectations compare with their actual experiences?

(2) To fulfill an obligation to the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). As a member of VSA, UNCP must maintain an online College Portrait. Assessment of student experiences is a mandatory part of the College Portrait and the CSEQ is one of four instruments approved for this purpose by the VSA. (It replaces the previously-used NSSE as our assessment of student experiences.)

(3) To gather information on how first-year experiences compare to those later in a student's college career. Because the CSEQ was administered to both students at the end of their first year and students approaching the end of their college careers, comparisons could be made between those two groups that might serve to inform both services and pedagogy at UNCP.

The CSXQ was administered early in the fall semester of 2010 to 671 students in freshmen seminar courses. The CSEQ was administered late in the spring semester of 2011 to 326 students in English 1060 courses. Of these 326, 109 were first-year students and 99 were seniors (with the remaining students unequally divided among other class levels (38 sophomores, 69 juniors, 7 unclassified, and 4 unreported). The cost of purchasing sufficient copies of the two instruments was shared by the Office of Enrollment Management and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

First-year expectations and experiences

The table below contains some descriptive information about the beginning students who completed the CSXQ (Fall, 2010) and the students at the end of their first year who took the CSEQ (Spring, 2011).

Attribute	CSXQ (N=671)	CSEQ (N=109)
Age	97%, 19 or younger	94%, 19 or younger
Gender	54% female	62% female
Race/Ethnicity	40% Caucasian, 33% African American, 13% American Indian	39% Caucasian, 28% African American, 16% American Indian
First-generation college	40%, neither parent graduated from college	47%, neither parent graduated from college
On-campus	71% living in campus housing	72% living in campus housing
Credit hours	74% taking 15 or more hours	62% taking 15 or more hours
Employment	84%, no on-campus job; 63%, no off-campus job	92%, no on-campus job; 73%, no off-campus job
Most popular expected majors	Business, Education, & Health-related fields	Health-related fields, Education, & Social sciences

The following charts illustrate some of the differences between these two groups in the areas of academic preparation, grades, and plans for the future:

Academic Preparation: During the time school is in session, about how many hours a week do you expect (or usually) spend outside of class on activities related to your academic program, such as studying, writing, reading, lab work, rehearsing, etc.?
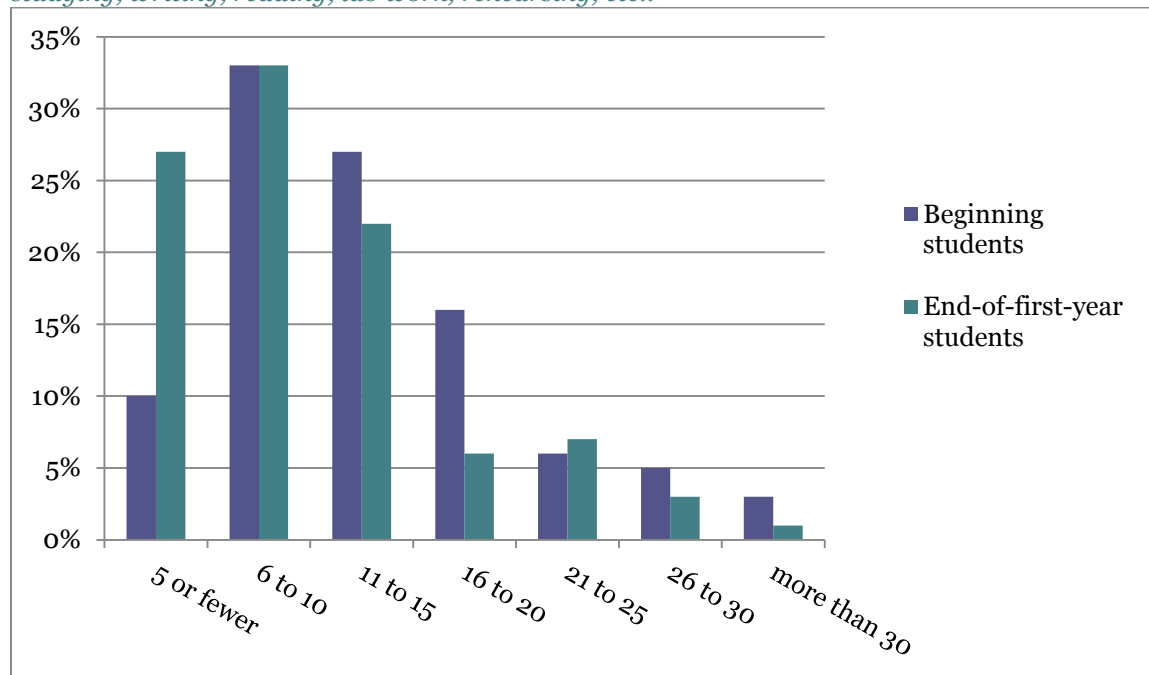
Grades: What do you expect your grades to be (or what have most of your grades been up to now) at this institution?
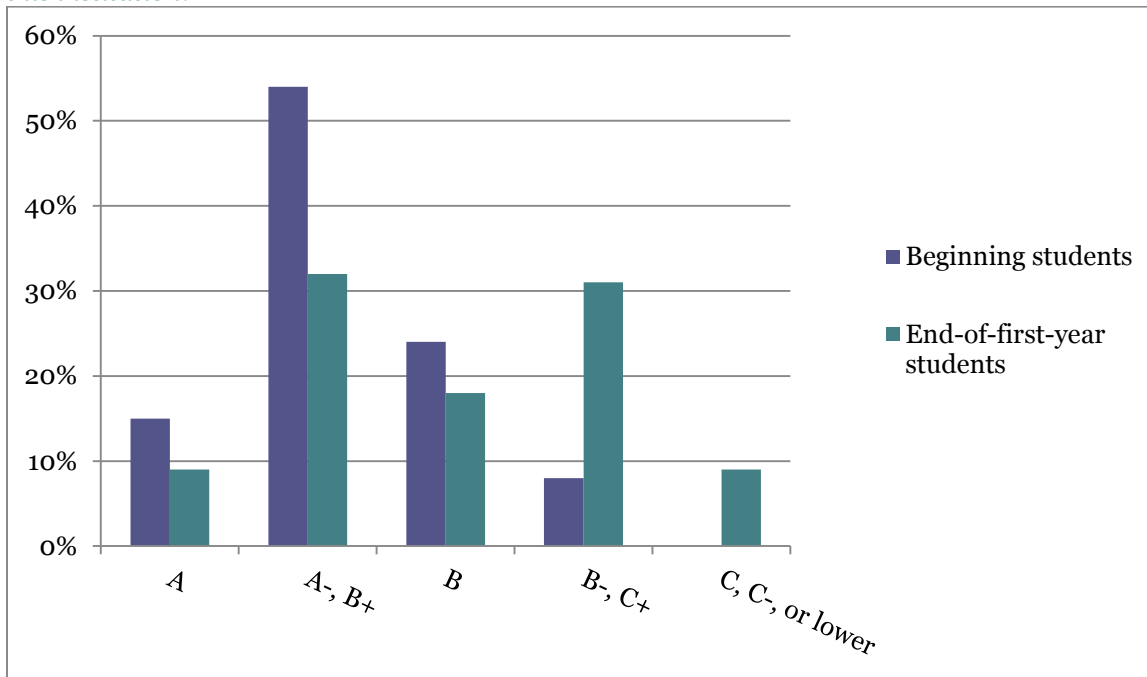
Plans for the future: Do you expect to enroll for an advanced degree when, or if, you complete your undergraduate degree?
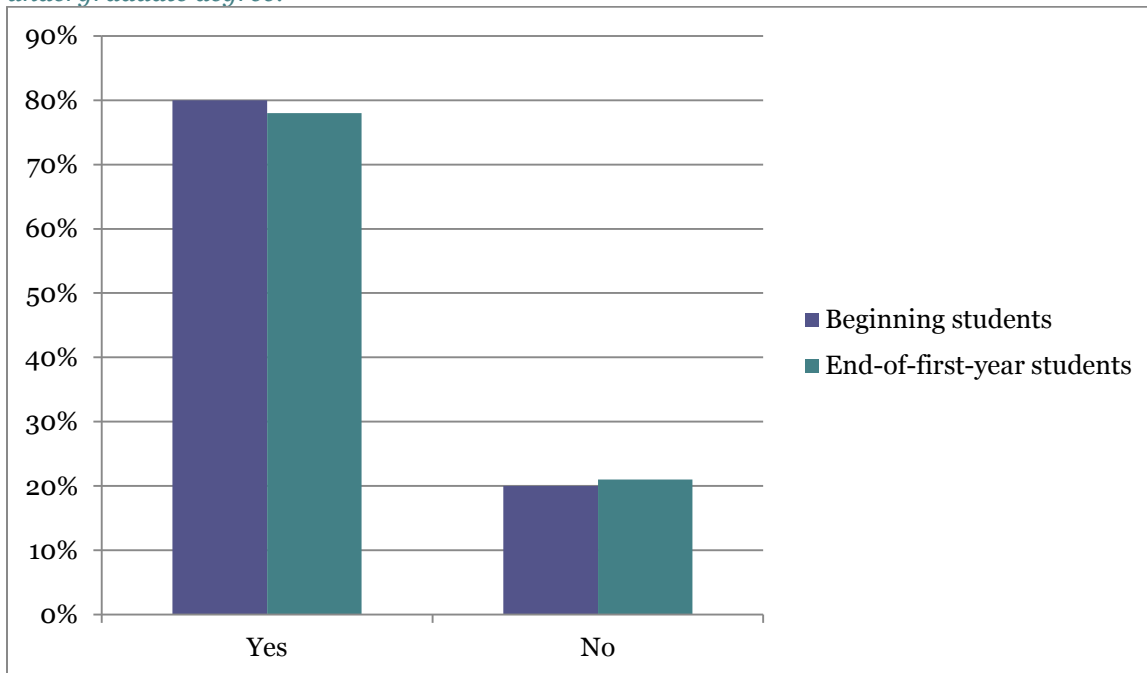
Although over 600 entering students took the CSXQ in the fall of 2010 and over 100 first-year students took the CSEQ in the spring of 2011, it was possible to match only 43 students from fall to spring in order to make a longitudinal comparison. (In order to match responses, students had to include their Banner ID on both forms and not all students did so.) The table below includes only those items that **differed significantly** between incoming and end-of-year freshmen as well as an interpretation for each. Keep in mind that incoming students were asked what they expected to do and end-of-year students were asked what they had done.

Item	Entering FR average	End-of-year FR average
Responses on a 4-point scale: 1=Never; 2=Occasionally; 3=Often; 4=Very Often		
Used an index or database (computer, card catalog, etc.) to find material on some topic.	3.00	2.65
Read assigned materials other than textbooks in the library (reserve readings, etc.).	2.35	1.72
Used a computer to retrieve materials from a library not at this institution.	1.67	2.07
Asked your instructor for comments and criticism about your academic performance.	2.53	2.05
Worked with a faculty member on a research project.	1.70	1.35
Completed the assigned readings for class.	3.53	3.23
Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together.	3.21	2.70
Applied material learned in a class to other areas (your job or internship, other courses, relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.)	3.16	2.53
Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussion or assignments.	3.05	2.51
Prepared a major report for a class (20 pages or more).	1.56	1.09
Went to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance, on or off the campus.	2.33	1.95
Attended a concert or other music event, on or off the campus.	2.35	2.07
Went to a lecture or panel discussion.	2.05	1.70
Played a team sport (intramural, club, intercollegiate).	2.12	1.69

Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.)	1.65	1.28
Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	1.58	1.23
Managed or provided leadership for a club or organization, on or off the campus.	1.58	1.23
Became acquainted with students whose family background (economic, social) was different from yours.	3.33	2.88
Had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values were very different from yours.	2.79	2.40
Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs were very different from yours.	2.70	2.26
Had serious discussions with students whose political opinions were very different from yours.	2.49	2.05
Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background was different from yours.	3.00	2.51
Read articles about scientific or mathematical theories or concepts in addition to those assigned for a class.	2.12	1.60
Completed an experiment or project using scientific methods.	2.49	1.81
Include science (theories, experiments, methods, etc.) in your conversations.	2.19	1.72
Include international relations (human rights, free trade, military activities, political differences, etc.) in your conversations.	2.44	1.98
Referred to something one of your instructors said about a topic in a conversation.	2.84	2.49
Changed your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others in a conversation.	2.49	2.09

Responses on a 5-point scale: 1=None; 2=Fewer than five; 3=Between five & ten; 4=between ten & twenty; 5=More than twenty

How many non-assigned books read?	2.40	1.79
How many textbooks or assigned books read?	3.65	2.60
How many term papers or other reports written?	3.55	3.21
How many essay exams written for courses?	3.48	2.93

Responses on a 4-point scale: 1=I don't like it; 2=I am more or less neutral about it; 3=I like it; 4=I am enthusiastic about it

How well like college?	3.21	2.93

Responses on a 7-point scale: 1=weak emphasis, 7=strong emphasis

This university places an emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual activities.	6.00	5.31
This university places an emphasis on developing aesthetic, expression, and creative qualities.	5.52	4.95
This university places an emphasis on developing, critical, evaluative, and analytical qualities.	5.69	5.21
This university places an emphasis on developing vocational and occupational competence.	5.48	4.86
This university places an emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses.	5.76	4.86
This university places an emphasis on relationships with other students.	5.90	5.33

Interpretation of CSXQ and CSEQ results for freshmen

It was anticipated that beginning students not only would have unrealistic expectations of college but that these expectations would underestimate the amount of work needed to be successful. The significant differences listed in the table above indicate that incoming students do indeed have some unrealistic expectations. However, in all but one case (Used a computer to retrieve materials from a library not at this institution) CSXQ scores were higher than CSEQ scores. That is, students come in expecting to work harder, do more, and like college more than they actually do during their first year. They also report higher expectations at the beginning of their first year than at the end that the university emphasizes developing (in its students) a variety of activities and competences (e.g., intellectual, creative, analytical, occupational). Although this was an unexpected finding, there is precedence for it in the literature on first-year college experiences. For example, Smith and Wertleib (2005) found a "decline in student expectations of academic rigor over the course of their first year. They concluded that students 'adjusted their "high" or "low" expectations and modified their approach to college based on their experiences'" (cited in Borden & Evenbeck, 2007).

Senior experiences

The table below presents the information requested by the VSA and which will be displayed on UNCP's College Portrait. Except for items marked with an asterisk, percentages represent a total of Very Often, Often, and Occasionally responses; that is, the percent of seniors who did not respond "Never."

CSEQ Survey Data	
Group Learning Experiences	
Participated in discussions with other students and faculty members outside of class	74.7%
Worked on class assignments and projects with other students	98.0%
Managed of provided leadership for a club or organization	48.4%
Active Learning Experiences	

*Spent at least 6 hours per week outside of class on academic activities	82.8%
Worked on a research project with a faculty member	41.4%
Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or project	63.7%
Applied material learned in class to other areas such as jobs or internships	100.0%
Institutional Commitment to Student Learning and Success	
Discussed career plans with a faculty member	88.9%
Used a learning lab or center to improve skills	66.0%
Talked with a faculty or staff member about personal concerns	50.5%
Reported working harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	95.0%
Student Satisfaction	
*Would attend this institution if they started over again	75.5% (Yes, definitely + Probably yes)
Student Interaction with Campus Faculty and Staff	
Worked harder after receiving feedback from an instructor	96.9%
Discussed grades, make-up work, or assignments with their instructor	96.0%
Discussed ideas for term papers or other class projects with a faculty member	92.9%
Requested feedback from instructors about academic performance	81.7%
*Found campus staff to be helpful, considerate, and flexible	78.4% (5, 6, & 7 on a 7-point scale)
Experiences with Diverse Groups of People and Ideas	
Had discussions with students from a different country than their own	74.5%
Had discussions with students whose philosophy of life and personal values were very different from their own	90.9%
Had discussions with students whose race or ethnic background was different from their own	89.7%

Comparison of first-year student experiences with those of other classes (CSEQ)

Item	FR average (N=109)	Significantly different from
Responses on a 4-point scale: 1=Never; 2=Occasionally; 3=Often; 4=Very Often		
Used an index or database (computer, card catalog, etc.) to find material on some topic.	2.72	Seniors (2.29)
Used a computer tutorial to learn material for a course or developmental/remedial program.	2.17	Juniors (2.72)

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Participated in class discussions using an electronic media (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, etc.)	2.57	Seniors (3.16)
Used a computer to retrieve materials from a library not at this institution.	1.99	Seniors (2.57)
Used a computer to produce visual displays of information (charts, graphs, spreadsheets, etc.).	2.42	Juniors (3.07), Seniors (3.25)
Used a computer to analyze data (statistics, forecasting, etc.).	2.04	Juniors (2.79), Seniors (2.62)
Developed a web page or multimedia presentation.	1.94	Juniors (2.62), Seniors (2.63)
Developed a role play, case study, or simulation for class.	1.90	Juniors (2.60), Seniors (2.55)
Worked on a class assignment, project, or presentation with other students.	2.75	Juniors (3.32), Seniors (3.30)
Applied material learned in a class to other areas (your job or internship; other courses; relationships with friends, family, co-workers, etc.).	2.69	Juniors (3.07), Seniors (3.29)
Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, internship, interactions with others) in class discussions or assignments.	2.25	Juniors (3.16), Seniors (3.36)
Tried to explain material from a course to someone else (another student, friend, co-workers, family member).	3.00	Seniors (3.31)
Asked an instructor or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing.	2.92	Seniors (2.47)
Prepared a major written report for a class (20 pages or more).	1.29	Juniors (1.78), Seniors (1.88)
Discussed your academic program or course selection with a faculty member.	2.72	Juniors (3.18)
Participated with other students in a discussion with one or more faculty members outside of class.	1.75	Juniors (2.38), Seniors (2.23)
Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.).	1.54	Seniors (2.09)
Met with a faculty member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	1.40	Seniors (1.81)
Managed or provided leadership for a club or organization, on or off the campus.	1.39	Seniors (2.00)

Included current events in the news in a conversation	2.61	Seniors (3.00)

Responses on a 4-point scale: 1=Very Little; 2=Some; 3=Quite a Bit; 4=Very Much

Gained knowledge and skills applicable to a specific job or type of work (vocational preparation).	2.58	Seniors (3.29)
Gained background and specialization for further education in a professional, scientific, or scholarly field.	2.66	Seniors (3.16)
Gained a range of information that may be relevant to a career.	2.82	Seniors (3.31)
Broadened acquaintance with and enjoyment of literature.	2.19	Seniors (2.56)
Became aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life.	2.71	Seniors (3.09)

## *Interpretation of CSEQ results for freshmen and other classes*

On the items listed in the previous table, students at the end of the first year differed significantly from juniors, seniors, or both. These items were predominantly in the areas of computer use, course requirements, content application, interaction with faculty, campus involvement, and broadened knowledge base. The differences were in the expected direction. That is, students at the end of their first year were less likely to report they had engaged in these activities than were students in their junior and/or senior years.

Final comparisons among classes are illustrated in the two charts below. The first indicates that although juniors and seniors were a little more likely to report that they were enthusiastic about college than were first- or second-year students, the differences across classes were small. The second graph illustrates responses to the question: If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution? Seniors were much more likely to answer "Yes, definitely" or "Probably yes" to this question than were first-year students. (Scores rose gradually from the first-year to the last.) This may be an artifact that students who would not have chosen UNCP again have left the university by the time they reach their senior year.

How well do you like college?
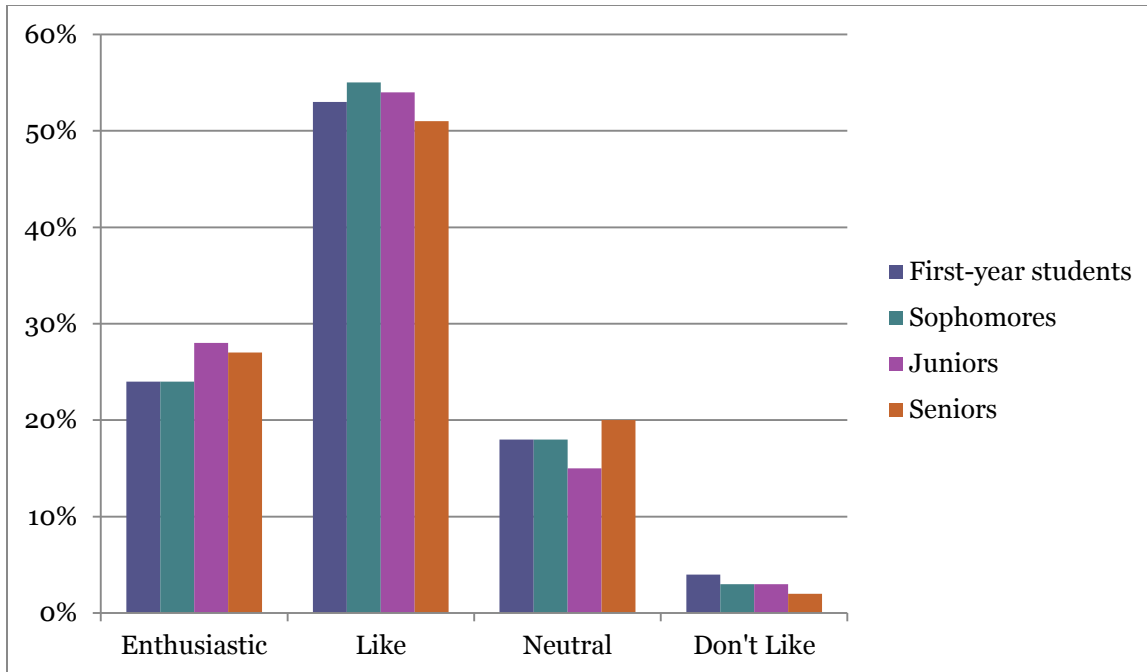
If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution?
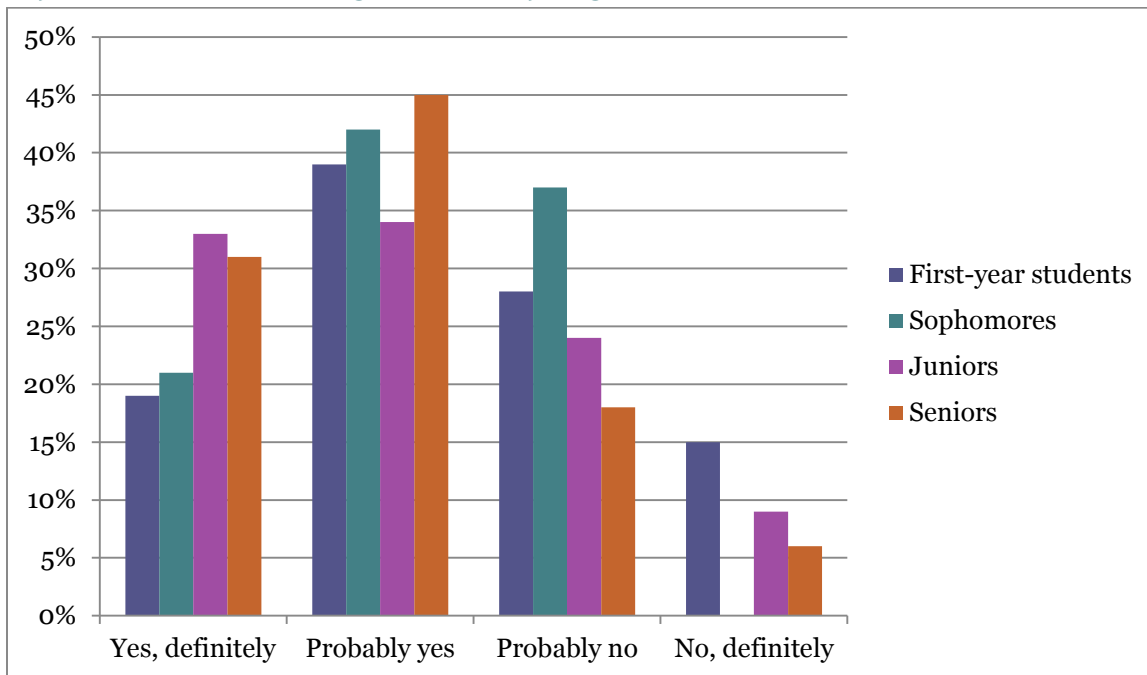
Reference

Borden, V. M. H., & Evenbeck, S. E. (2007). Changing the minds of new college students. *Tertiary Education and Management, 13* (2), 153-167.