

University of Rhode Island Overview of Results from the First Year

Introduction

This overview highlights some of the findings for the University of Rhode Island students who participated in the first year of the Wabash National Study, fall 2007 – spring 2008. This document touches on a small slice of the information about students' responses to the many tests and surveys they completed for the study, and is presented to spark conversations and pique curiosity about the more detailed information contained within the rest of the Wabash National Study first-year report.

In the first section of the overview, we focus on student reports about their experiences at your institution. The survey results we summarize here, as well as those contained in the rest of the first-year report, can be thought of as students' observations about URI's teaching and learning environment. Although students' reports about, for example, the degree to which they receive prompt feedback or the extent to which their assignments require them to integrate information are subjective—and may not align with faculty and staff perceptions—they *do* matter. All of the student experiences discussed in this overview predict growth on a variety of independent outcome measures.

The second section of this overview summarizes the extent to which your students changed on some outcome measures. Outcomes are simply students' skills and capacities—such as critical thinking, moral reasoning, or interest in contributing to the arts—that should be influenced by their experiences at URI.

The next section focuses on two specific student activities: time spent preparing for class and binge drinking. Our research suggests that these behaviors play an especially powerful role in students' growth on outcomes.

The overview concludes with some observations about the range of student experiences and growth within your institution. Although asking how student experiences at URI compare with those at other large institutions can be informative, it is perhaps even more important to ask about the range of student experiences within the University of Rhode Island. On virtually every measure that we have, the range of student experiences within an institution is far greater than the average difference among institutions.

Section I: Summary of Student Experiences In and Out of the Classroom

In our research thus far, we have found that four broad categories of teaching practices and institutional conditions promote student growth on a wide variety of qualities, including critical thinking, moral reasoning, leadership, openness to diversity and challenge, political and social involvement, and positive attitude toward literacy. These good practices and conditions are as follows:

- *Good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty*
- *Academic challenge and high expectations*
- *Diversity experiences*
- *Deep learning*¹

To facilitate analysis and conversations about study data, we have subdivided each of these four good practice areas into clusters of related activities below:

Table 1: Level of High-Impact Experiences Reported by URI Students

<p>Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Faculty interest in teaching and student developmentPrompt feedbackQuality of nonclassroom interactions with facultyTeaching clarity and organization <p>Academic Challenge and High Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Academic challenge and effortFrequency of higher-order exams and assignmentsChallenging classes and high faculty expectationsIntegrating ideas, information, and experiences <p>Diversity Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Meaningful interactions with diverse peers – IMeaningful interactions with diverse peers – II <p>NSSE Deep Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Higher-order learningIntegrative learningReflective learning

These URI students reported similar levels of prompt feedback, higher order learning, and integrative learning as students at other large universities. Our research indicates that these experiences are especially beneficial for students, however, these students reported lower levels of many experiences related to good teaching, high-quality interactions with faculty, academic challenge, and diversity experiences. Finally, like students at other large institutions, the majority of these URI students do not report experiencing good practices and conditions at high levels.

Another way to look at data on student experiences is to examine particular questions about good practices to see how your students compare to students at other universities in the study. In the following tables, we highlight your students' responses on a few of our individual good practice questions.²

This group of University of Rhode Island students indicated that faculty are interested in their development beyond academics. However, they were less likely to report that they had developed a close relationship with a faculty member. They also rated faculty lower on aspects of teaching clarity and organization such as being well prepared for class and knowledge of course material.

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Faculty are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
University of Rhode Island	16%	49%	27%	6%	2%
Other 9 Large Universities	17%	48%	26%	8%	1%
I have developed a close personal relationship with at least one faculty member.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
University of Rhode Island	7%	19%	31%	25%	17%
Other 9 Large Universities	12%	26%	21%	27%	14%
Faculty were well prepared for class.	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University of Rhode Island	23%	50%	22%	2%	1%
Other 9 Large Universities	31%	50%	17%	2%	<1%
Faculty had a good command of what they were teaching.	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University of Rhode Island	20%	52%	25%	1%	1%
Other 9 Large Universities	36%	46%	15%	2%	<1%

URI students were more likely than their peers at other large universities to report that they are willing to work hard to meet faculty’s expectations. They also report being a little more likely to make class presentations and write multiple drafts of their papers and assignments.

How often did you work harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
University of Rhode Island	16%	48%	31%	5%
Other 9 Large Universities	17%	36%	39%	8%
How often did you make a class presentation?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
University of Rhode Island	8%	30%	58%	5%
Other 9 Large Universities	7%	26%	58%	9%
How often did you prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
University of Rhode Island	19%	39%	29%	13%
Other 9 Large Universities	19%	32%	35%	14%

URI students reported doing less reading and writing overall. They were also less likely to indicate that assignments asked them to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their own views or to defend their arguments.

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How many book-length assignments did you read?	None	1-4	5-10	11-20	More than 20
University of Rhode Island	<1%	14%	44%	31%	11%
Other 9 Large Universities	1%	13%	35%	34%	18%
How many 5-19 page papers did you write?	None	1-4	5-10	11-20	More than 20
University of Rhode Island	7%	60%	23%	7%	1%
Other 9 Large Universities	5%	48%	33%	12%	2%
How often did assignments require you to write essays?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University of Rhode Island	25%	35%	27%	10%	2%
Other 9 Large Universities	36%	38%	17%	6%	1%
How often did you examine the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never	
University of Rhode Island	8%	29%	51%	11%	
Other 9 Large Universities	15%	35%	42%	8%	
How often did assignments require you to argue for or against a particular point of view and defend your argument?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University of Rhode Island	10%	31%	30%	21%	8%
Other 9 Large Universities	20%	32%	28%	14%	5%

Finally, this group of URI students reported that they were more likely to have participated in a racial or cultural awareness workshop than their peers at other large universities. At the same time, they also reported having fewer serious conversations with diverse peers.

How often did you participate in a racial or cultural awareness workshop?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University of Rhode Island	0%	3%	25%	38%	33%
Other 9 Large Universities	2%	3%	10%	23%	62%
How often did you have serious discussion with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never	
University of Rhode Island	15%	30%	38%	18%	
Other 9 Large Universities	26%	27%	34%	14%	

How often did you have serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values?	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
University of Rhode Island	20%	33%	39%	8%
Other 9 Large Universities	28%	30%	34%	8%

It is important to consider what programs, courses, or other parts of our campus may be supporting those students who responded “very often” or “often” to these questions, and which programs, courses, or other parts of our campus may impact students who reported “sometimes” or “never” to these questions.

For detailed data on effective practices and experiences, go to:
http://www.uri.edu/assessment/media/Practices_Experiences.pdf

Section II: Overview of URI Students’ Growth on Outcome Tests and Surveys

The Wabash National Study measures student development (outcomes) in twelve areas listed in Table 2 below. These students were tested both near the beginning of the fall semester and near the end of the spring semester to measure change during their first college year. Table 2 summarizes whether your students were more likely to improve, decline, or remain unchanged on the outcomes during their first year at URI. The table also compares the changes your students experienced to those of students at other large universities in the study.³

Table 2: Students' Change on Wabash National Study Outcome Measures

Outcome	First-Year Change at University of Rhode Island	First-Year Change at Large Universities Overall
Critical Thinking	Small Increase	No Change
Moral Reasoning	Small Increase	Small Increase
Need for Cognition	No Change	No Change
Psychological Well-Being	No Change	No Change
Socially Responsible Leadership	No Change	No Change
Positive Attitude Toward Literacy	No Change	No Change
Contribution to the Arts	No Change	Small Decrease
Universality-Diversity Awareness	Small Decrease	No Change
Contribution to the Sciences	Small Decrease	Small Decrease
Political and Social Involvement	Small Decrease	Small Decrease
Openness to Diversity/Challenge	Small Decrease	Small Decrease
Academic Motivation	Small Decrease	Medium Decrease

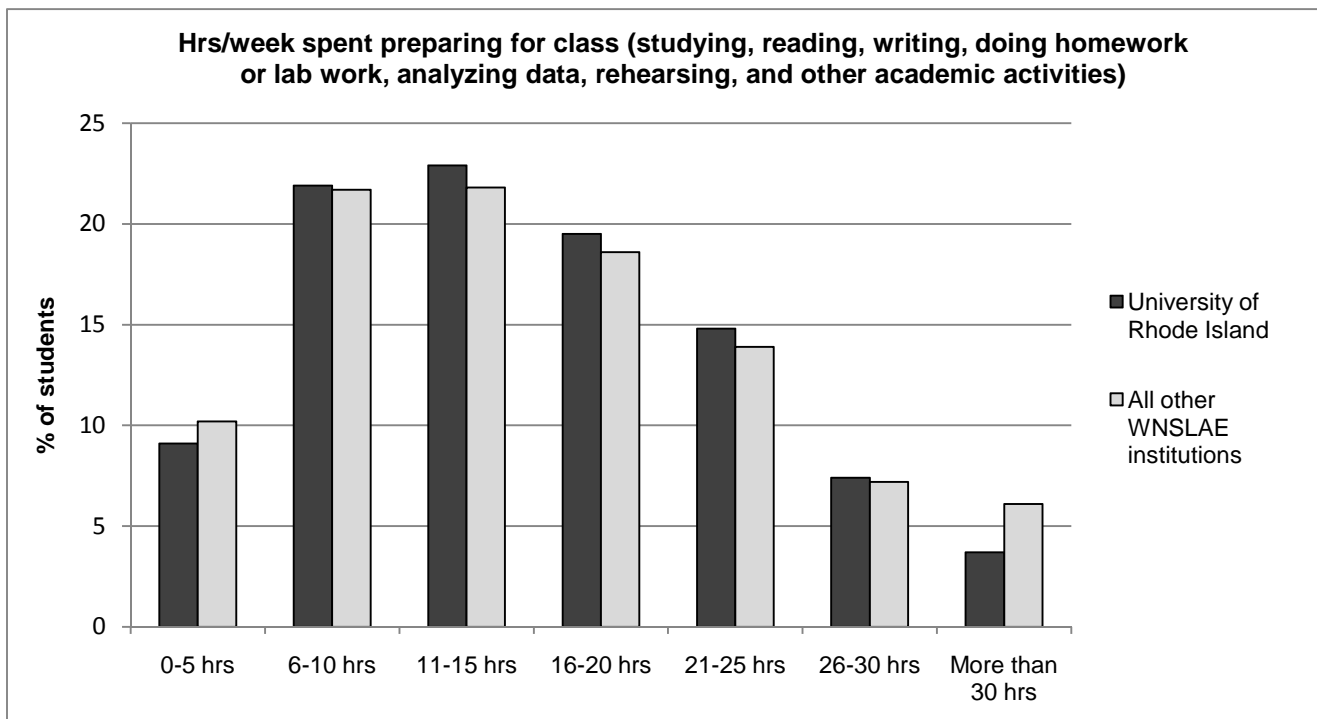
URI students reported small gains in critical thinking and moral reasoning over their first year of college. Although the other changes noted for URI students in Table 2 may raise concerns, it is important to note that your students’ change on many measures—including well-being, leadership, and political and social involvement—is comparable to that of students at other large universities in the study. Unfortunately, a consistent finding across institutions in the study so far has been the general lack of growth over the first year.

Section III: Important Predictors of Student Growth on Outcomes

A. Time on Task

It is clear from our work over the past few years that the amount of time students spend on academic work plays a critical role in their growth on our outcomes. Unfortunately, faculty are almost always disappointed by the amount of time that students work on academics outside of class. Overall, 54% of all students who participated in the Wabash National Study report spending 15 hours or less in a typical week preparing for class. Figure 1 below shows the amount of time URI students reported preparing for class compared to students at other study institutions.

Figure 1: Time Spent Preparing for Class



URI students reported spending about the same amount of time preparing for class as students at all other institutions, with approximately one-third of these students spending 10 hours or less per week preparing for class.

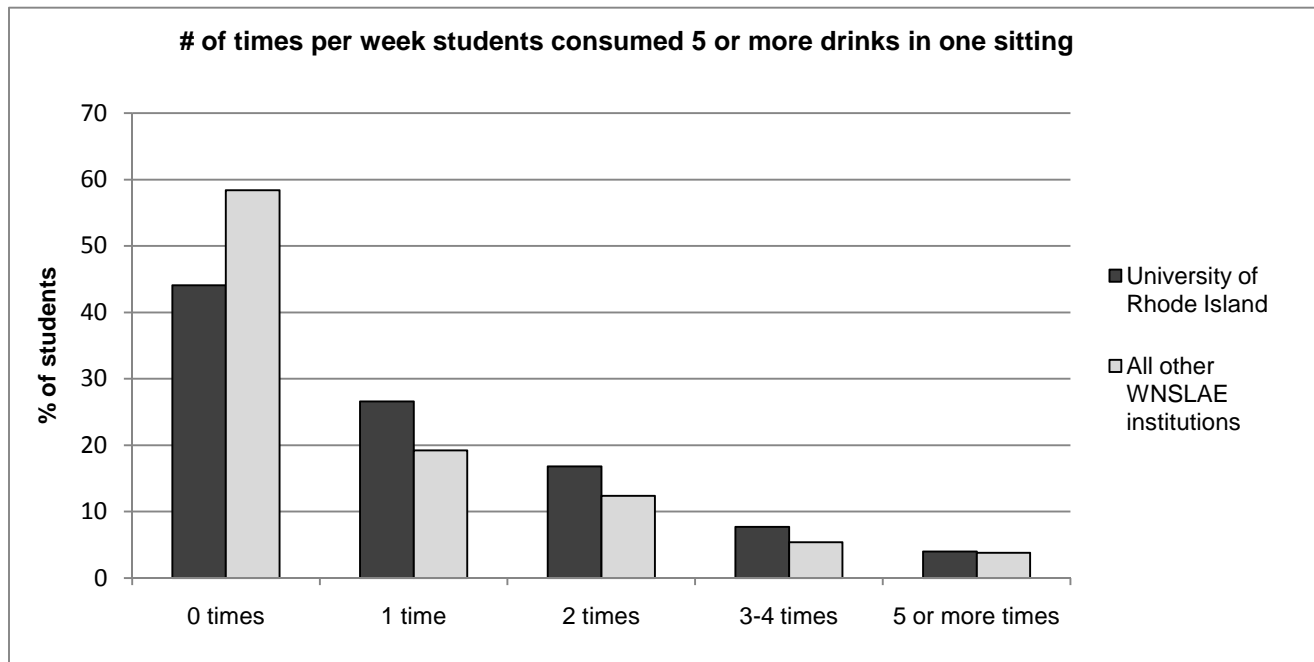
B. Binge Drinking

Analysis of Wabash National Study data also shows that binge drinking (defined as having five or more drinks in one sitting) has a negative impact on students’ growth during their first year of college. Specifically, binge drinking, especially at higher levels, is associated with significant reductions in the

growth of socially responsible leadership, openness to and interest in diversity, well-being, and academic motivation. This negative impact occurs regardless of the kinds of good practices and high-quality institutional conditions these students may experience when they do not drink. In other words, good practices do not appear to inoculate students against the negative effects of binge drinking.

As Figure 2 below shows, URI students report binge drinking more than students at other institutions. About 55% of URI students report binge drinking once or more per week, and 28% report binge drinking two or more times a week.

Figure 2: Frequency of Binge Drinking



Binge drinking frequencies that we observe in Wabash National Study data probably underestimate the true frequencies of binge drinking at both the University of Rhode Island and other institutions. Research indicates that students typically underreport the amount and frequency that they binge drink.⁴

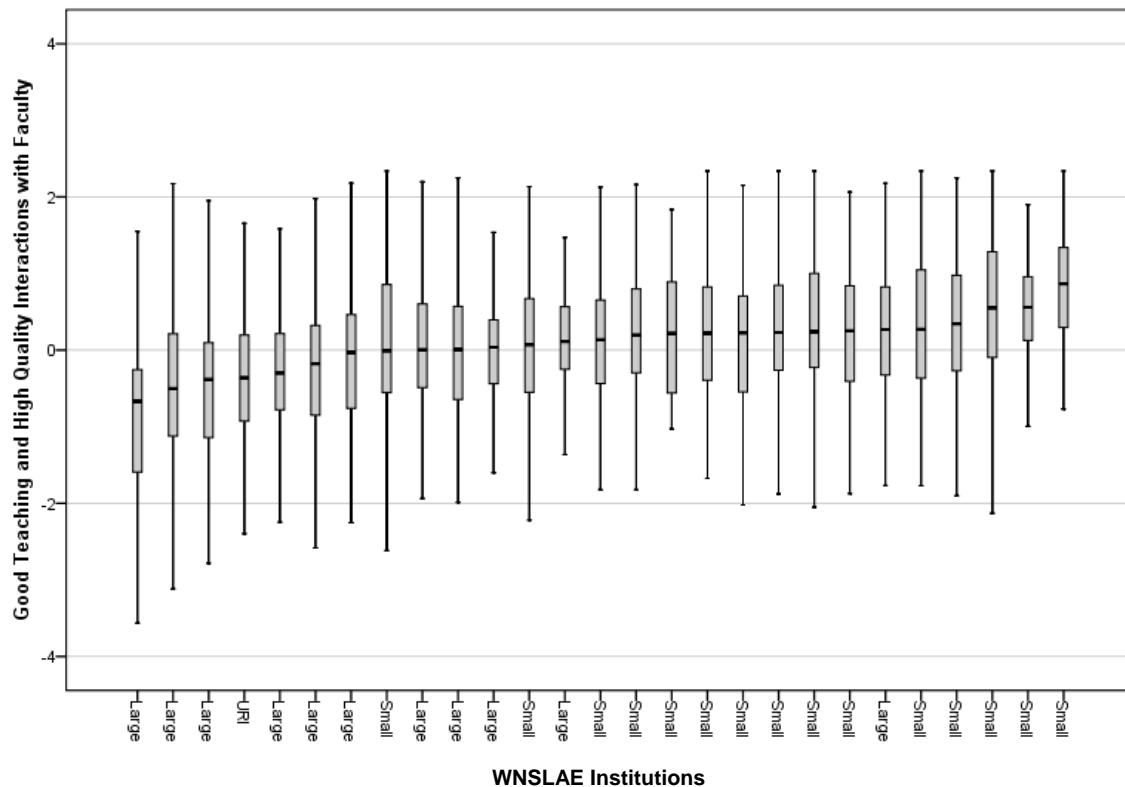
Section IV: Variation within the University of Rhode Island

Much of this overview has focused on how URI students compare to their peers at other large institutions in the Wabash National Study. While those comparisons can be useful, it is also critical to examine the variation *within* the University of Rhode Island. Box plots, like the one in Figure 3 below, can be used to highlight the range and variation of students' scores within the institutions in the Wabash National Study.

In box plots, the vertical rectangular boxes represent the middle 50% of students at each institution. The bottom of each box marks the students at the 25th percentile, the horizontal line in the middle represents the median or 50th percentile, and the top of the box designates the score at the 75th percentile. Finally, the point at the bottom of the lower line indicates the score at the 5th percentile, and the point at the top of the upper line represents the 95th percentile. Thus, the box plots show the range of scores for the middle 90% of students at each institution.

These plots help illustrate a key point—across virtually all of our measures, the differences among students at your institution is much larger than the typical difference between your institution and any other institution in the study. There are students at your institution who are having experiences as good as those of the best students at any other institution. The opposite is also true.

Figure 3: Range of Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty across all Wabash National Study Institutions



Even though URI students report lower levels of good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty on average, Figure 3 above shows that URI also has students who report very high levels of these experiences—as high as students at the top-ranked institutions. At the same time, URI also has students reporting levels well below the average, although not as low as at most other large institutions. It is important to explore the range of student experiences within the University of Rhode Island: Which students are most likely to have these high-impact experiences? Which students are least likely to have these experiences? The answers to these questions represent potential action points for your institution. How can you increase the number of students having high levels of these experiences? What can you do to increase the chances that students in the lower end of the distribution will have experiences more like students at the top of the range?

For a complete set of box plots representing outcome measures and effective practices and experiences, go to: http://www.uri.edu/assessment/media/Box_Plots.pdf

This overview refers to only a small portion of the information that is contained in the complete report.

¹ These four categories were derived from survey questions in the Wabash National Study about student experiences. The questions come from both the Student Experiences Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The deep learning questions all come from the NSSE.

² Percentages in these and other tables in the overview may not add to 100% due to rounding.

³ First-year change is calculated as the difference between students' fall and spring scores. The descriptions indicate the magnitude of the change according to the National Survey of Student Engagement's revised Cohen's *d* interpretations: 0.1=small effect size, 0.3=medium effect size, 0.5=large effect size, 0.7=very large effect size. (See "Contextualizing NSSE Effect Sizes: Empirical Analysis and Interpretation of Benchmark Comparisons" at http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/effect_size_guide.pdf.) For more detailed information about outcome changes, please see the complete set of tables in the Outcomes section of your full first-year report.

⁴ White, A. M., Kraus, C. L., Flom, J. D., Kestenbaum, L. A., Mitchell, J. R., Shah, K., et al. (2005). College students lack knowledge of standard drink volumes: Implications for definitions of risky drinking based on survey data. *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, 29, 631–638.