

*NSSE NOTES*  
*SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT*

*Introduction*

Among the harder tasks in assessing the success of a college or university are separating reputation from action, and untangling the quality of the students coming in from the quality of the students going out. Even if this can be done, there remains the not-so-simple task of knowing if the college in question is doing poorly, average, or well compared to other institutions. Finally, there is the need of colleges to take action to improve itself. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is an effort to deal with all of these issues. By concentrating on student engagement, the survey seeks to untangle reputation from quality. It seeks to ask what a college does, not how good the students are. The results are then broadly benchmarked to allow comparison to similar institutions. Finally, the creators of NSSE emphasize that the intent is to improve colleges, not just measure them.

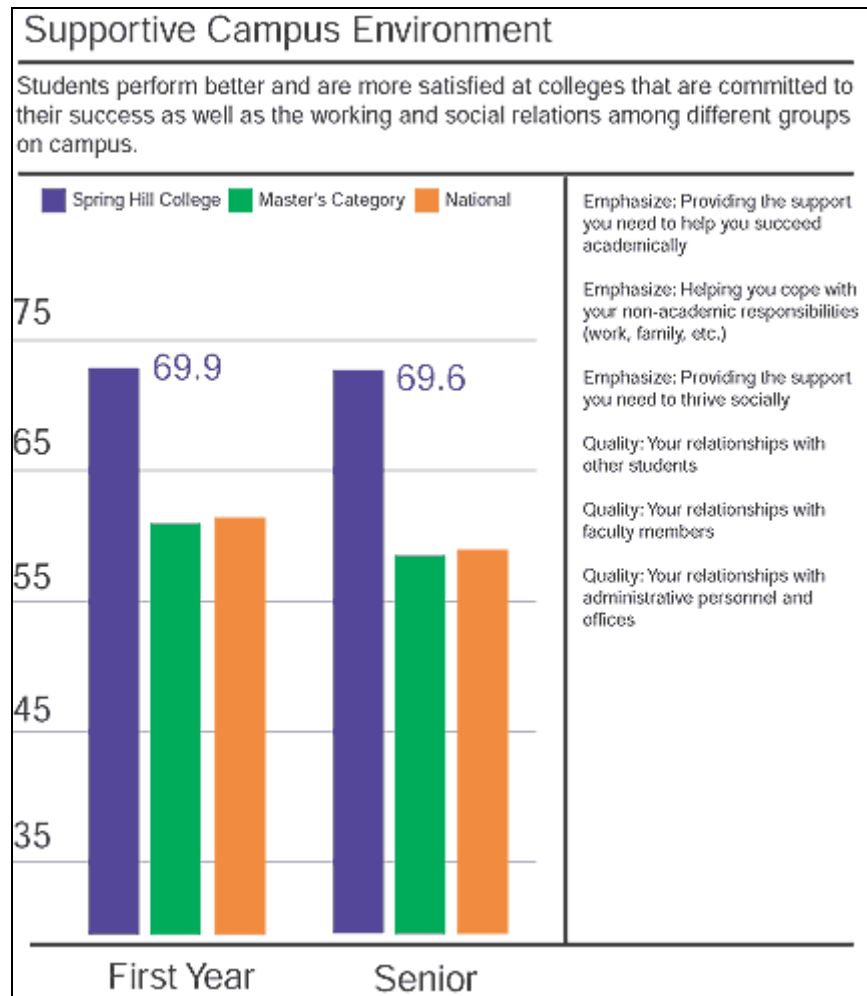
Spring Hill College participated in NSSE in 2002. The survey, done near the end of the spring semester, asked a series of questions of first-year students and students about to graduate. The results have been aggregated into five main benchmarks of “effective educational practices:”

- Level of academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment

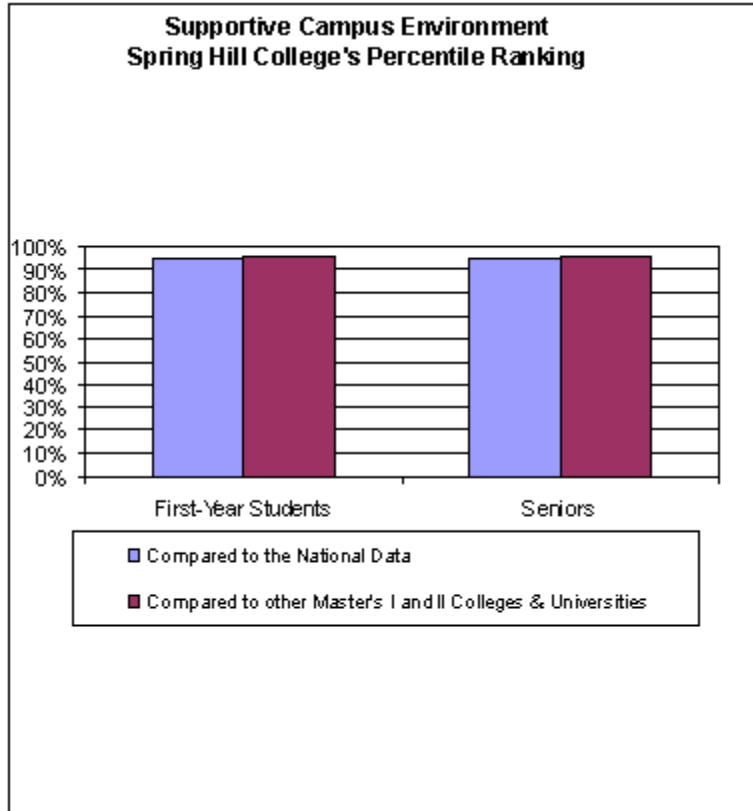
To explore the results more fully, the College conducted a “NSSE Summit” during the beginning of the Spring 2003 semester. At this gathering, a cross-section of 63 students discussed the results with 13 faculty facilitators. In this fourth in the series of *NSSE Notes*, we summarize results from both the Survey and the Summit and, we hope, point us in the direction of making Spring Hill College an even stronger institution than we currently are.

## SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

### Overall Benchmark Results



The numbers in the chart represent index numbers that can hypothetically range from zero to 100. An institution would receive a ranking 100 if 100% of survey participants answered each question in the index with the most favorable possible response. Actual values do not vary by the fullest possible extent. For example, for senior-year students at master's institutions, the highest score any school received on the "Supportive Campus Environment Index" was 72.3, while the lowest was 41.7.



These results show that Spring Hill’s supportive campus environment index score for both first-year and senior students ranks among the highest in the nation. This is true whether scores are compared with Master's institutions or with the national sample. In every case, the ranking is at or near the 95th percentile. These results are the best the College received on any of the indexes. The sense of community at Spring Hill is evident from these results.

Supportive Campus Environment							
2002 NSSE Results	First-year students			Seniors			
Item	Spring Hill College	Master's Institutions	National Results	Spring Hill College	Master's Institutions	National Results	Scale
Overall Index Score	69.9	60.2	60.7	69.6	57.6	57.7	0 to 100
Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically	3.36	2.97	3.01	3.33	2.86	2.86	1 = very little 2 = some 3 = quite a bit 4 = very much
Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	2.78	2.09	2.10	2.35	1.91	1.92	
Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially	2.78	2.28	2.31	2.52	2.08	2.10	
Quality of relationships with other students	5.51	5.61	5.66	5.98	5.68	5.70	1 = unfriendly, unhelpful, unsympathetic
Quality of relationships with faculty members	5.68	5.38	5.39	6.15	5.56	5.55	7 = friendly, supportive, sense of belonging
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices	5.15	4.86	4.88	5.23	4.59	4.57	
significantly better than at least one reference group:							
significantly worse than at least one reference group:							

## ***Supportive Campus Environment***

### **Student Reflections from the “NSSE Summit”**

#### **Which, if any, of these results surprise you and why?**

- None
- I find that more seniors didn't have quality relationships with friends. It seems that it would be more common in freshmen to not have a quality relationship because they are just meeting new people.
- I'm really not surprised by any of these statistics
- The quality of relationships with other students is slightly lower (in both freshmen & seniors) than faculty members
- Average on relationships with other students—this is a small school, one would think that relationships would be above normal since everyone should know each other
- Seniors & Freshmen rank the quality of relationship higher with faculty than with fellow students—you would think it would be the other way around.
- The fact that students reported a higher scale of “quality of relationships” with faculty than with students.
- It surprises me that the overall scores reflect such positive attitudes from students; this response is very reassuring.
- Quality of relationships w/ other students. I thought that it would be high in freshmen & seniors.
- The most outstanding difference lies in the quality of relationships with faculty members. While this seems as though it would be higher, it is the only relationship that seems significantly better.
- There aren't any surprises when it comes to the results of this part of the survey. SHC is a very supportive school and there are many resources on campus for students in this area.
- I am surprised that the “campus environment provides the support you need” figures decreased between freshman and senior year. It would seem that as an individual spent more time at SHC, their support network would build, but apparently such is not the case.
- Surprising that the student interactions are low because of small school size and Freshmen Seminar

#### **Can you think of any situations you have experienced that demonstrate how/why the results on any individual items are higher or lower?**

- Students are getting to know the faculty more and more as they go through college so the seniors have higher numbers than freshmen
- Every time you go into the café you will always see seniors sitting together. It always looks like they have good relationships
- I think the slightly lower score for freshmen relationships with other students might have to do with the early cliques that form within the class. The substantially higher score for “coping with non-academic responsibilities” reflects well on Student life and Campus Ministry offices.
- The administrative personnel is “lowest” (compared to student & faculty; I've overheard and seen staff lose the “community” feeling more than other categories
- The faculty here are overall helpful and approachable and it makes sense that SHC is above average in quality of relationships with students
- SHC is such a small community that it is not surprising that students feel comfortable academically and socially.
- Faculty interaction. Our faculty, for the most part, really do work hard to get to know the students. This probably has a lot to do with our size, but it is a great achievement nonetheless.
- The campus environment provides support for students in need through the Wellness Center & Campus Ministry and these services are readily available.
- I think the scores are high because of small classes, resulting in a low teacher/student ratio. Personal attention is very effective.
- There are numerous opportunities to get involved; there is something for everyone.
- Regarding the faculty's relationship with the student, I have always felt comfortable in confronting an instructor and would not hesitate to do so.
- Many resources; smaller class sizes contribute to faculty & staff concern for the students; diversity allows you to find people you have a likeness with; faculty cares about the needs of students; administrators are

understanding and not just focused on their particular job. They care about assisting the individual and will “bend-over-backwards” for you.  
--Since this is a small school, people tend to associate with certain people

**In the classes in which you feel “engaged,” what’s happening? What are you doing? What is the faculty member doing?**

--Participating more in class, sharing ideas; the faculty member is more supportive, and less intimidating.  
--In classes that I feel engaged I am moving around the class and interacting with students  
--The faculty member is interacting with the class, but not straight lecturing. In addition, there are no pointless assignments. I find the really engaging classes are those that treat the semester as a way to gather information for one particular question or topic that you build toward all the time.  
--The professor is directing questions to individual students (sometimes by name)—(It is an acting class or communication class usually) me=listening—note taking—faculty—making things more personal.  
--In the classes where I’m engaged, it is a very hands on environment. We, the students, are participating in discussion and the professor is not just lecturing, he/she is able to joke around and be lighthearted about the class. Know your name  
--#1 they know your name and say hello. The faculty engage us in a mutual conversation & provide a variety of ways to present the material. They make learning FUN!  
--Not just pure lecture. Interesting activities, stories, etc.  
--Faculty member asking questions that lead to discussion; engaging students through interesting discussions regarding everyday occurrences. Student asking & answering questions; participating in discussion  
--Both the student and teacher are really listening to one another. The communication is right on target and this makes for a good learning environment.  
--I’m focused on the topic & remain interested. The faculty member is explaining the material in detail & answering all questions. S/he is speaking to you NOT down to you.  
--The most engaging classes are classes where students are called to actively participate in discussions. The student response is just as valuable as the lecture.  
--The better classes are those where physical activity takes place. The student is active in the teaching and learning process. Students help teach the class.  
--In classes in which I am engaged, the instructor’s knowledge of his subject is unassailable, and this expertise is asserted in demeanor and speech. The instructor fields questions well and leaves room for discussion and personal development of understanding.  
--There is less lecture and more discussion. I find when the teacher tries to make the students comfortable and less formal, the students will speak up more

**Can your group agree on one item that faculty and students should focus on for further discussion and improvement?**

Group 7: --school spirit  
Group 8: --1. school spirit  
--2. Commuter student environment

## **Supportive Campus Environment**

### **Faculty Notes (of student responses) from the “NSSE Summit”**

#### **Which, if any, of these results surprise you and why?**

- Question raised --was this a representative sample?
- Freshmen are very “cliquish”
- School is very small
- Surprised that the administrative offices are as high as they are . . . most students don’t even know where the administrative offices are or who the administrators are . . . even the President!
- Some staff seem to have lost community feeling
- Situations in which particular staff have felt left out . . . excluded—mistreated, both by the administration as well as students
- Mention of some faculty/staff members not helping with school spirit
- Note--very low school spirit - nationally ranked teams and students do not even care . . . horrible
- Figures fell from freshman to senior year
- Treating us like babies freshman year, but by senior year you’re on your own
- Higher level of satisfaction with faculty than students—Reason: cliques?

#### **Can you think of situations you have experienced that demonstrate how/why the results on any individual items are higher or lower?**

- We’re a small community; also commuters are much more engaged than at other colleges
- Friendliness of students—people went out of way to meet new students/prospects
- Very comforting to students who are far away from home
- Campus environment helps you cope with academic responsibility
- Lots of new clubs starting all the time
- Tutoring—awesome help in Logic—especially with a peer
- Wellness Center—counseling very helpful—open door. Mary York leaves home number, calls students to check on them
- Social events okay for school our size

#### **In the classes in which you feel “engaged,” what’s happening? What are you doing? What is the faculty member doing?**

- Number one: they know your name
- Faculty are supportive of participation
- Faculty tend to want to be there themselves
- Humor in class
- Faculty eat with students & at same place
- Teacher interested in your understanding. Not babied, but concerned. Positive attitude (both student & teacher).
- Students involved in teaching too.
- Faculty member becomes student in some ways—aids student. Instructor draws learning out of students.
- Like to know faculty member personally. There is more of this here. Example—registration via net sucks

#### **How can faculty help you to become more engaged in your learning?**

- Class sizes small enough to lead to collaborative/interactive learning but they don’t always
- Let students know questions are ok.
- Feel comfortable w/ students.
- All faculty show willingness to take extra time.
- Know students personally (we have that).
- Show a passion for subject.

#### **Can your group agree on one item that faculty and students should focus on for further discussion and improvement?**

- Group 7-- School spirit;      Group 8 – School spirit, and commuter issues a close second