

What are students learning at The University of Iowa?



Senior Survey Update - Spring 2012

"I made a point to find things I'm passionate about"

Iowa Outcomes Assessment Papers

At the time they file to graduate, undergraduates are asked to complete a 10-question survey on their learning experiences at UI.

Around 90% of students typically respond.

This series of occasional papers presents analysis of student responses to particular survey items, along with suggestions for steps that faculty, staff, and students might take to improve UI student learning experiences.

This Senior Survey Update focuses on what students say about engaging in campus life and learning beyond the classroom.

What Graduating Seniors Say About the Importance of Engaging in Learning Opportunities Beyond the Classroom

The UI Senior Exit Survey asks graduating students to think back on their overall undergraduate experience. As noted in Survey Update #1, the overwhelming majority of students during Spring 2011 agreed or strongly agreed that their UI experiences have helped them achieve their own educational goals and four broad learning outcomes widely shared by UI undergraduate programs.

Students are also asked three questions about specific types of experiences at UI. (Questions vary depending on which form of the survey the student receives.) These questions are tied to components of the IOWA Challenge, as well as aspects of their involvement with faculty and relationships with fellow students.

This paper focuses on student learning and engagement on campus beyond the classroom by looking at their responses related to the following question:

"My out-of-class experiences helped me connect what I learned in the classroom with the real world."

Nearly 75% of UI graduating seniors agreed that out-of-class experiences often or very often helped them connect classroom learning to the real world. These students were among those most likely to strongly agree that their UI experience helped them learn and contributed to the achievement of their educational goals. The only survey item associated more highly with achievement of learning goals was being challenged to excel in their classes (see Update #1).

Student Comments

In responses to the final open-ended question on the Senior Exit Survey, students reported benefiting in many ways from getting involved on campus:

"Student organizations I was involved in helped me along both socially and from an educational stand point."

"I made a point to find things I'm passionate about. By doing this, I surrounded myself with good people and meaningful organizations that helped form a memorable college experience!"

Involvement was not only in student organizations. Here are examples of other students who responded to the question, “What helped you be successful at UI?” by identifying a variety of learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

“Being involved in work-study positions, internships, networking with people smarter than myself ... By being here I have experienced tremendous growth outside of the classroom.”

“Hands-on experience gained from undergraduate research, work experience as a Chemistry tutor ... volunteering experience”

“The incredible opportunities at UI helped me succeed inside and outside of the classroom. The encouragement to team up with other students outside of the classroom has allowed me to gain appreciation for being a part of a team and also being a leader.”

“The incredible opportunities at UI helped me succeed inside and outside of the classroom.”

For students such as these, engagement in learning activities outside of class clearly paid an important role in their academic and professional development.

Student Participation

While many students report benefiting from learning outside the classroom, it’s also true that the lowest-scoring items on the Senior Exit Survey are those which asked students how often they engaged in out-of-class opportunities such as:

- Student organizations, community groups, or volunteer service
- Interactions with faculty outside of class
- Opportunities to give something back to the community

In response to the question, “What would you do differently if you could begin your UI career again?”, many students commented on wishing they had gotten more involved in learning opportunities beyond the classroom. For example,

“I would try harder to get into some research and also work harder in trying to find an internship.”

“I would participate in more activities and group organizations to become more involved within the community.”

“When I interviewed for jobs, my lack of leadership was the recurring negative aspect of my resume. This makes me wish that I would have been more involved in student organizations and pursued a leadership role.”

“I would have been more involved with student organizations, and ... I would have been more interactive with my professors by attending office hours more frequently.”

In short, graduating seniors reported benefiting greatly from these opportunities when they experienced them, but responses also suggest that more students could benefit from taking advantage of these opportunities, and more often.

Communicating the Value of Campus Engagement

In recent years at UI, the Student Success Team has initiated the IOWA Challenge, Pick One, and other programs to foster student engagement right away during their first semester. Other programs have expanded to involve students more extensively in campus and community life throughout their first year.

But the importance of student engagement doesn’t end with the first year. We can continue to challenge students to apply and extend their learning outside the classroom through internships, research, service, student organizations, and even campus employment.

When faculty and staff help students recognize and make sense of their learning in these contexts, we are creating a seamless learning environment that supports student success and challenges them to continue learning well beyond their time in the classroom.

