

**Predictors of Students' Overall Evaluation of Their
First Year Experience:
Results from the Fall 2007 Foundations of Excellence®
Student Survey**

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Executive Summary

Multiple regression analyses were conducted on The Foundations of Excellence® Student Survey to identify what aspects of students' experience best predict their overall evaluation of the first college year on the Toledo- and Findlay-area Owens Community College Campuses.

Results

- Student responses to the survey questions are good predictors of their overall evaluation of the first year experience
- Past studies have shown that student satisfaction is closely related to retention
- General factors that predict students' overall evaluation on the *Toledo Campus* (in rank order from most predictive to least)*:
 - Campus Environment: Extent to which the College helps students to feel safe, welcome, and as if their academic and social needs are being met
 - Advising: Degree to which advisors offer academic counsel
 - Instruction: Effectiveness of instructors in helping students learn
 - Pre-Enrollment Communication: Degree to which the College accurately communicates to students prior to their enrollment
- General factors that predict students' overall evaluation on the *Findlay Campus* (in rank order from most predictive to least)*:
 - Campus Environment: Extent to which the College helps students to feel safe, welcome, and as if their needs are being met
 - Motivation & Goals: Degree to which College helps students understand the benefits of receiving a college education
 - Instruction: Effectiveness of instructors in helping students learn

Conclusions

- Results suggest that the most effective way to improve students' first year experience across both campuses is to develop initiatives that build a sense of belonging among students, help to meet students' academic and social needs, and increase student learning
- Small but important differences between the two campuses suggest that on the Toledo Campus additional resources focus on increasing student advising and improving pre-enrollment communications while on the Findlay Campus additional resources focus on marketing or advising aimed at helping students to understand the value of completing a college education

*Note: Specific survey questions associated with each factor that predict students' overall evaluation of their first year experience for each campus are included on pages 10 and 11 of the report.

Methodology

The purpose of this analysis was to identify what aspects of students' experience best predict their overall evaluation of the first college year. Analyses were conducted on The Foundations of Excellence® Student Survey. This survey consists of 77 scaled questions (e.g., not at all, slight, moderate, high, very high) that are designed to assess students' perception of institutional efforts during the first college year. These 77 questions are grouped into 14 factors that represent a common underlying theme or concept: 11 factors related to specific areas and 3 overall evaluation factors. The fourteen factors and their related survey items include:

Organization: Degree to which students know where to go if they have questions

- To what degree do you understand how this college is organized so that you know where to go if you have an administrative question (e.g., financial aid, registration, tuition payments)?
- To what degree do you understand how this college is organized so that you know where to go if you have a question about academic rules (e.g., withdrawal, academic probation)?
- To what degree do you understand how this college is organized so that you know where to go if you need help with your coursework (e.g., tutoring, academic support)?
- To what degree do you understand how this college is organized so that you know where to go if you need help with non-academic matters (e.g., money management, family matters)?
- To what degree do you understand how this college is organized so that you know where to go if you want to be involved with a college-sponsored organization/event?
- To what degree do faculty/staff refer you to the right office when you have questions?

Pre-Enrollment: Degree to which the College accurately communicates to students prior to their enrollment

- Prior to attending this college, to what degree did this college accurately communicate academic expectations for students?
- Prior to attending this college, to what degree did this college accurately communicate available programs and majors?
- Prior to attending this college, to what degree did this college accurately communicate tuition and living expenses?
- Prior to attending this college, to what degree did this college accurately communicate financial aid opportunities?

Connections: Degree to which the College has helped students to make academic and social connections

- As a new student, to what degree has this college connected you with other new students?
- As a new student, to what degree has this college connected you with continuing students?
- As a new student, to what degree has this college connected you with faculty members outside of class?
- As a new student, to what degree has this college connected you with academic support outside the classroom (e.g., tutoring, advising)?
- As a new student, to what degree has this college helped your family feel a part of your college experience?
- To what degree has this college communicated the importance of out-of-class activities?
- To what degree has this college provided opportunities for involvement in out-of-class activities that interested you?

Advising: Degree to which advisors offer academic counsel

- To what degree have faculty/staff advisors explained the requirements for specific programs and majors?
- To what degree have faculty/staff advisors helped you select courses?
- To what degree have faculty/staff advisors discussed what it takes for you to be academically successful?
- To what degree have faculty/staff advisors discussed your future enrollment plans (e.g., stay, drop-out, transfer)?

Standards of Behavior: Degree to which College communicates the importance of honest and appropriate behavior

- To what degree does this college communicate the importance of standards of behavior in an academic community?
- To what degree does this college communicate the importance of acknowledging the source of ideas not your own?
- To what degree does this college communicate the importance of academic honesty?
- To what degree does this college communicate the importance of ethical conduct?

Campus Environment: Extent to which the College helps students to feel safe, welcome, and as if their academic and social needs are being met

- To what degree do you feel physically safe on campus?
- To what degree do you feel respected by others?
- To what degree do you feel you can express your beliefs without concern about how others will react?
- To what degree do you feel your academic needs are met?
- To what degree do you feel your social needs are met?
- To what degree do you feel you belong?
- To what degree do instructors treat all students fairly regardless of gender/race/ethnicity?

Instruction: Effectiveness of instructors in helping students learn

- To what degree is course material valuable to you?
- To what degree do instructors help you learn the course material?
- To what degree do instructors provide individual attention?
- To what degree do instructors provide prompt feedback about how well you are doing in a course?
- To what degree do instructors encourage you to ask questions in class?
- To what degree do instructors effectively organize course material?
- To what degree do instructors communicate concepts clearly?
- To what degree do instructors use effective teaching methods?
- To what degree do instructors communicate academic expectations to you?
- To what degree do instructors encourage you to participate in course-related, out-of-class events (e.g., lectures, concerts, exhibits)?
- To what degree do instructors make themselves available outside of class?

Course Placement: Degree to which courses are appropriate for students' level of academic preparation

- To what degree are courses appropriate for your level of academic preparation regarding writing skills?
- To what degree are courses appropriate for your level of academic preparation regarding reading skills?
- To what degree are courses appropriate for your level of academic preparation regarding library research skills?
- To what degree are courses appropriate for your level of academic preparation regarding mathematical skills?
- To what degree are courses appropriate for your level of academic preparation regarding computing skills?

Diversity Exposure: Degree to which College exposes students to diverse ideas

- To what degree is this college exposing you to different world cultures?
- To what degree is this college exposing you to different world religions?
- To what degree is this college exposing you to different political perspectives?
- To what degree is this college exposing you to different issues related to social class/economic status (poverty vs. privilege)?

Diversity Interaction: Degree to which College provides opportunities for interaction with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures

- To what degree does this college provide opportunities for interaction with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures: Other students at this college?
- To what degree does this college provide opportunities for interaction with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures: Faculty and staff at this college?
- To what degree does this college provide opportunities for interaction with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures: People outside this college?
- To what degree does this college communicate the importance of respecting others with differing opinions?

Motivation & Goals: Degree to which College helps students understand the benefits of receiving a college education

- To what degree have faculty/staff advisors discussed how college can help you achieve your life goals?
- To what degree have faculty/staff helped you examine your personal reasons for getting a college education?
- To what degree does this college help you understand how attending college increases knowledge for your future employment?
- To what degree does this college help you understand how attending college increases knowledge for your personal growth?
- To what degree does this college help you understand how attending college prepares you to be an involved member of your community?
- To what degree does this college help you understand how attending college prepares you to contribute to the betterment of society?

Overall Evaluation, Academic Gains: Degree to which College helps students to discuss, defend, and evaluate a broad range of issues

- To what degree has your college experience allowed you to expand your awareness of issues?
- To what degree has your college experience allowed you to discuss a broader range of topics?
- To what degree has your college experience allowed you to better defend your position on issues?
- To what degree has your college experience influenced your ability to make better decisions?
- To what degree has your college experience influenced your ability to objectively evaluate information?

Overall Evaluation, Transition & Support: Degree to which College has provided support to help students to transition to college

- To what degree has this college provided you the right amount of attention and support?
- To what degree has this college helped you make the transition to college?
- To what degree has this college been a good place for college students like you?
- To what degree has this college helped you succeed as a student?

Overall Evaluation, First Year Experience: Overall measure of student satisfaction with their first college year

- To what degree would you recommend this college to friends?
- To what degree are you satisfied with your decision to attend this college?
- To what degree is this college committed to the success of new students?
- Comparing the cost of attending this college to the quality of the educational experience, please rate the overall value of the experience.

The survey was administered via the web to all enrolled first-year students (defined as those with 30 cumulative earned credit hours or less) at the Toledo and Findlay Campuses in the Fall of 2007. The survey was launched on October 29, 2007 and a total of three reminders were sent (November 2nd, 7th, and 12th) before data collection closed on November 16, 2007. A total of 8,948 surveys were attempted and 580 were completed. Although the response rate of 6.5% is relatively low, the large raw number of responses permits for reliable analysis with a margin of error of only 3.9%.¹ Although the ethnic diversity of survey respondents is similar to that of the overall Owens student population, females (71% of respondents), full-time students (70% of respondents), and students under the age of 24 (58% of respondents) are over-represented in the survey.

Analyses and Results

The purpose of this analysis was to identify what best predicts students' overall satisfaction with their first college year. To begin to address this question, multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the survey factors that best predict students' overall evaluation of their first year experience on each campus.² Some students will rate their first year experience very high and others may rate their experience very low. What the multiple regression analyses tell us is how much of the variation in students' Overall Evaluation of the First Year Experience can be predicted by the other survey factors and which of those factors predict the best.

As can be seen in Table 1, four survey factors significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Toledo Campus: Campus Environment, Advising, Instruction, and Pre-Enrollment. As a way to put into perspective the magnitude of each factor's level of prediction, R² values are included which reflect the percentage of variation in students' Overall Evaluation of the First Year Experience that is explained by each factor (out of 100%). Campus Environment predicts 51% of the variation in students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience, Advising predicts 7%, Instruction 3%, and Pre-Enrollment 2%. Table 2 shows the survey factors that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Findlay Campus. Like the Toledo Campus, Campus Environment is the most predictive, accounting for 60% of the variation in students Overall Evaluation scores. Although Advising and Pre-Enrollment were not significant predictors on the Findlay Campus, Motivation & Goals predicted 7% of the variance and Instruction (like Toledo) accounted for 3%.

¹The 3.9% margin of error, which is calculated based on a 95% confidence interval, means that if 73% of students say that they know where to get help with coursework, then if we were to redo the survey 100 times, 95 times the percentage would fall between 69.1% and 76.9%.

²Composite scores for the Organization, Pre-Enrollment, Connections, Advising, Standards of Behavior, Campus Environment, Instruction, Course Placement, Diversity Exposure, Diversity Interaction, and Motivation & Goals were included as predictor variables and a composite score for the Overall Evaluation of the First Year Experience factor was used as the outcome variable. Composite scores were calculated for each student and each factor by averaging students' responses to the questions making up that factor. The Overall Evaluation of Academic Gains and Overall Evaluation of Transition and Support factors were not included in the analysis because they are so highly related to the Overall Evaluation of the First Year Experience factor that they are almost identical to it ($r = .76$ and $r = .82$, respectively).

Table 1. Survey factors that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Toledo Campus.

Toledo Campus	
Survey Factors	% of Variation in Students' Overall Evaluation Explained*
Campus Environment	51%
Advising	7%
Instruction	3%
Pre-Enrollment	2%

*Note: Percentages are provided to give perspective as to the magnitude of each factor's level of prediction and are based on the R² measure.

Table 2. Survey factors that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Findlay Campus.

Findlay Campus	
Survey Factors	% of Variation in Students' Overall Evaluation Explained*
Campus Environment	60%
Motivation & Goals	7%
Instruction	3%

*Note: Percentages are provided to give perspective as to the magnitude of each factor's level of prediction and are based on the R² measure.

After identifying the survey factors that are most predictive of students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience, the next step was to drill down and identify the *specific survey questions* from those factors that predict the best. This was done in much the same way as the initial analyses, using stepwise multiple regression.³ Table 3 shows the survey items making up the Campus Environment, Advising, Instruction, and Pre-Enrollment factors that best predict students' Overall Evaluation on the Toledo Campus. Survey items reflecting Campus Environment that predict the best include the degree to which students feel their academic needs are met, the degree to which they feel that they belong, and the degree to which instructors treat students fairly regardless of their gender/race/ethnicity. The best predictors from the Advising factor include the degree to which advisors explain program and major requirements, the degree to which advisors help students select courses, and the degree to which advisors discuss with students what it takes to be academically successful. Items from the Instruction factor that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation include the degree to which instructors help students learn the course material, the degree to which instructors organize course material, the degree to which students find course material valuable, and the degree to which instructors provide individual attention. Predictors from the Pre-Enrollment factor include the degree to which the institution accurately communicates available programs and majors, academic expectations, and financial aid opportunities prior to students' enrollment.

³ Separate regressions were conducted for each of the significant factors on each campus using students' raw scores for survey items making up the factor as predictor variables and students' composite score for the Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience factor as the outcome variable.

Table 3. Survey items from the Campus Environment, Advising, Instruction, and Pre-Enrollment factors that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Toledo Campus.

Toledo Campus

Significant Survey Items	% Variation in Students' Overall Evaluation Explained
Campus Environment	
To what degree do you feel your academic needs are met?	44%
To what degree do you feel you belong?	8%
To what degree do instructors treat all students fairly regardless of gender/race/ethnicity?	3%
Advising	
To what degree have advisors explained the requirements for specific programs and majors?	33%
To what degree have advisors helped you select courses?	5%
To what degree have advisors discussed what it takes for you to be academically successful?	2%
Instruction	
To what degree have instructors helped you learn the course material?	28%
To what degree do instructors effectively organized the course material?	5%
To what degree is course material valuable to you?	2%
To what degree do instructors provide individual attention?	1%
Pre-Enrollment	
To what degree did this college accurately communicate available programs and majors?	26%
To what degree did this college accurately communicate academic expectations?	7%
To what degree did this college accurately communicate financial aid opportunities?	2%

^aNote: Percentages are provided to give perspective as to the magnitude of each survey question's level of prediction for that factor and are based on the R² measure.

Table 4 shows the survey items making up the Campus Environment, Motivation & Goals, and Instruction factors that best predict students' Overall Evaluation on the Findlay Campus. Survey items reflecting Campus Environment that predict the best include the degree to which students feel their academic needs are met, the degree to which students feel their social needs are met, and the degree to which instructors treat students fairly regardless of their gender, race or ethnicity. The best predictors from the Motivation & Goals factor include the degree to which faculty and staff help students to examine their personal reasons for getting a college education and the degree to which the college helps students to understand how attending college increases their knowledge for future employment. Items from the Instruction factor that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation on the Findlay Campus include the degree to which instructors communicate concepts clearly, the degree to which instructors provide prompt feedback about how well students are doing in a course, and the degree to which instructors provide students individual attention.

Table 4. Survey items from the Campus Environment, Motivation & Goals, and Instruction factors that significantly predict students' Overall Evaluation of their First Year Experience on the Findlay Campus.

Findlay Campus	
Significant Survey Items Associated with Each Factor	% Variation in Students' Overall Evaluation Explained
Campus Environment	
To what degree do you feel your academic needs are met?	53%
To what degree do you feel your social needs are met?	7%
To what degree does the instructor treat all students fairly regardless of gender/race/ethnicity?	2%
Motivation & Goals	
To what degree have faculty and staff helped you examine your personal reasons for getting a college education?	53%
To what degree does this college help you understand how attending college increases knowledge for your future employment?	1%
Instruction	
To what degree do instructors communicate concepts clearly?	42%
To what degree do instructors provide prompt feedback about how well you are doing in a course?	5%
To what degree do instructors provide individual attention?	2%

*Note: Percentages are provided to give perspective as to the magnitude of each survey question's level of prediction for that factor and are based on the R² measure.

Conclusions

The purpose of this analysis was to identify what aspects of students' experience best predict their overall evaluation of the first college year on the Toledo and Findlay Campuses. Several conclusions can be drawn from results. First, as a general statement, students' responses to specific questions on the Foundations of Excellence® student survey did a good job of predicting students' overall evaluation of their first year experience on both campuses. Past studies have shown that student satisfaction is closely related to retention. Therefore, it can be concluded that the survey is a good tool for assessing students' first year experience and can be used to help guide retention efforts.

Second, campus environment (defined as the extent to which students feel safe, welcome, and as if their academic and social needs are being met) and quality of instruction (defined as instructor effectiveness in helping students learn) are among the best predictors of students' overall satisfaction with their first year experience on both campuses. These results suggest that the most effective way to improve students' first year experience across both campuses is to develop initiatives that build a sense of belonging among students, help to meet students' academic and social needs, and increase student learning.

Third, while there are more similarities between the campuses than there are differences, some small but important differences were also revealed. Advising (the degree to which advisors

offer academic counsel) and pre-enrollment communication (the accuracy of information students receive prior to their enrollment) tend to be slightly more related to the overall evaluation of students' experience on the Toledo Campus, while exploration of students' motivation and goals (the degree to which the College helps students understand the benefits of receiving a college education) is slightly more important on the Findlay Campus. Although these differences are small in magnitude, they indicate that each campus has its own uniqueness and that initiatives intended to improve students' first year experience may need to be tailored a little differently across the two Owens' campuses.