



NSSE 2006 BENCHMARK REPORT

Office of Institutional Research

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Montclair State University

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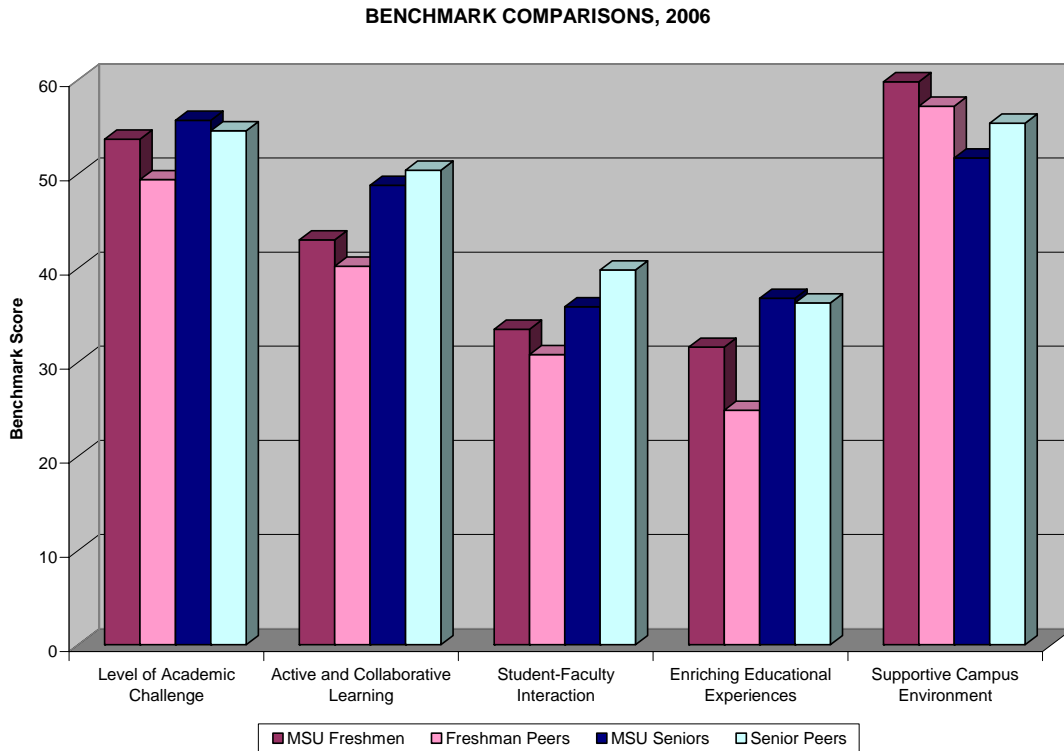
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Participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement is intended to help institutions determine the extent to which their students are being exposed to those conditions deemed essential for success in college. NSSE calls these essential ingredients of success “benchmarks,” and they include: 1) Level of Academic Challenge, 2) Active and Collaborative Learning, 3) Student-Faculty Interaction, 4) Enriching Educational Experiences, and 5) Supportive Campus Environment.

The degree to which students are exposed to these positive factors in the learning environment is measured by a benchmark score. A benchmark score is the weighted average of the sum of individual scores across all questions selected for inclusion in the benchmark. From six to 12 questions are included in each of NSSE’s five benchmarks. Benchmark rankings are determined by comparing an institution’s scores with those of its peers.

2006 Benchmark Scores

Table 1 shows Montclair State University’s spring 2006 NSSE benchmark scores for both freshmen and seniors, with comparisons made to freshmen and seniors attending peer institutions. Looking within, we see that benchmark scores for MSU’s seniors exceeded those of the University’s freshmen on four out of five measures. Seniors described higher levels of academic challenge, more active and collaborative learning experiences, greater student-faculty interaction, and more enriching educational experiences. MSU freshmen, on the other hand, described a more supportive campus environment. The following chart depicts these differences.



Compared to our peer institutions, benchmark scores for MSU's freshmen exceeded those of freshmen at peer institutions across all five areas, and the differences were all statistically significant (see Table 1). Benchmark scores for MSU's seniors exceeded those of seniors at our peer institutions for academic challenge and enriching educational experiences, but neither of these differences was statistically significant. Senior scores were below those of their peers on the other three benchmarks, and all three differences were statistically significant.

It should be noted that, with respect to the benchmark related to a Supportive Campus Environment, MSU freshmen had the highest, and MSU seniors, the lowest benchmark scores. In addition, MSU seniors had the highest benchmark scores on both Levels of Academic Challenge and Enriching Education Experiences.

Disaggregated Benchmark Scores

Table 2 shows mean comparisons for each of the 11 questions that are used to generate the benchmark score for Level of Academic Challenge. Scores for both MSU freshmen and seniors exceeded those of their peers on this benchmark, but at the freshman level the difference was statistically significant.

Compared to their peers, MSU freshmen spent more time on class preparation, they were assigned more reading, they wrote more, and their coursework involved more use of higher-order skills. However, they were less likely than their peers to say that they worked harder than they thought they could, and that the campus environment emphasized study.

MSU seniors said they wrote more than their peers, they were assigned more reading, and more of their coursework involved synthesis. More MSU seniors also said they worked harder than they thought they could. Their peers said they studied more and were more likely to make judgments or apply theory in their courses. Seniors at peer institutions also said that studying was emphasized more at their campuses.

With respect to Active and Collaborative Learning, interesting behavioral similarities appear among both MSU freshmen and seniors compared to their peers (see Table 3). Both freshmen and seniors at MSU were more likely than their peers to ask questions in class, participate in class discussions, and make class presentations. At the same time, they were less likely than their peers to work collaboratively with other students either in or out of class, and they were less likely to discuss ideas from their classes or readings with others outside of class. These findings suggest that our students are engaged in more individualized than group learning activities. There is clearly involvement in learning and engagement in the classroom, but not of a form that promotes interpersonal interaction and a sense of learning community.

Table 4 includes mean comparisons of those questions relating to Student-Faculty Interaction. MSU freshmen were more likely than their peers to interact with faculty in all areas except for career plans. In contrast, MSU seniors were less likely than their peers to interact with faculty in all areas except for conducting research.

MSU freshmen and seniors both had higher benchmark scores than their peers related to Enriching Educational Experiences (see Table 5). MSU freshman scores exceeded those of their peers on 10 of 12 questions tied to this benchmark, and for 9 of those 10 questions, the differences were statistically significant. MSU freshmen participated more in co-curricular activities, internships, foreign language studies, study abroad programs, and learning communities. They were also more likely to interact with students from varied backgrounds.

MSU seniors were also more likely to have interacted with students different from themselves, and to have availed themselves of opportunities to study abroad or to study a foreign language. Clearly, MSU's students thrived in the University's diverse environment.

More freshmen from MSU said that the campus environment supported the achievement of their academic and personal goals. MSU freshmen were also more positive about the quality of their relationships with other students, faculty, and staff (see Table 6). MSU seniors, on the other hand, were less likely than their peers to describe the campus environment as supportive. They were also less positive than their peers about the quality of their relationships at the University.

Trends

A review of NSSE benchmark scores over five years reveals some positive trends (see Table 7). In spring 2002, MSU freshmen benchmark scores were higher than those of their peers in only two areas: Level of Academic Challenge (+1.3 points) and Enriching Educational Experiences (+1.5 points). In the remaining three benchmark areas, MSU's freshmen fell short of the scores of their peers: Active and Collaborative Learning (-1.7 points), Student-Faculty Interaction (-2.7 points), and Supportive Campus Environment (-1.3 points).

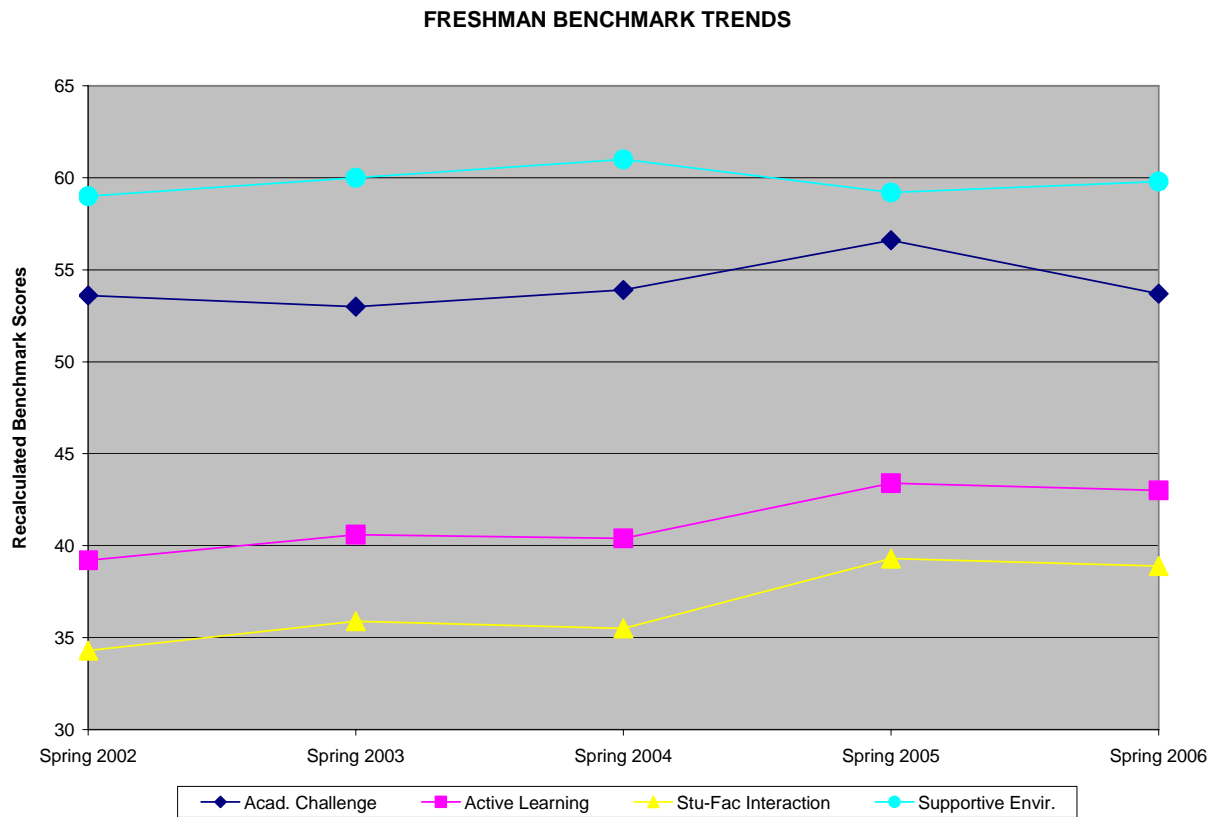
The situation for MSU seniors in spring 2002 was even worse. Senior benchmark scores were below those of their peers in all five areas: Level of Academic Challenge (-3.2 points), Active and Collaborative Learning (-5.1 points), Student-Faculty Interaction (-8.4 points), Enriching Educational Experiences (-6.1 points), and Supportive Campus Environment (-7.7 points).

By spring 2006, the situation for both MSU freshmen and seniors had changed dramatically. As noted above, by 2006 MSU freshman benchmark scores exceeded those of their peers across all five benchmarks. These differences ranged from +2.6 points for a Supportive Campus Environment, to +6.7 points for an Enriching Educational Experience. All of the differences between MSU freshmen and their peers were statistically significant at the .001 level.

Benchmark scores of MSU seniors had also improved relative to their peers. By spring 2006, the benchmark scores of MSU seniors were lower than their peers in only three areas (as opposed to all five areas in 2002). Their scores actually exceeded those of their peers with respect to Level of Academic Challenge (+1.1 points) and Enriching Educational Experience (+0.5 point). In the other three benchmark areas, the gaps had also narrowed. For Active and Collaborative Learning the gap shrank from -5.1 points to -1.6 points, for Student-Faculty Interaction it shrank from -8.4 points to -3.9 points, and for Supportive Campus Environment it shrank from -7.7 points to -3.7 points.

Finally, NSSE staff recently began to recalculate benchmark scores to enable institutions to view movements in benchmark scores over time. They successfully “recalibrated” scores for four of the five benchmarks. Only scores for Enriching Education Experience could not be recalculated due to the significant changes that had occurred to the survey questions over time.

Table 8 shows these recalculated scores for MSU freshmen and seniors. Again, for both freshmen and seniors, scores rose across all four benchmark measures between 2002 and 2006. Scores rose most for freshman and seniors with respect to Active and Collaborative Learning, and Student-Faculty Interaction. The charts below and on the following page depict these changes in benchmark scores over time for freshmen and seniors, respectively.



Summary

The benchmark scores of Montclair State University’s freshmen exceed those of freshmen at peer institutions across-the-board. Clearly, MSU freshmen find the campus environment academically challenging, engaging, rich with opportunity, and supportive of their goals.

Compared to MSU freshmen, the University’s seniors find the campus environment even more academically challenging, engaging, and enriching, though perhaps less supportive. However, when compared to seniors at peer institutions, the benchmark scores of MSU’s seniors fall a little short. In particular, MSU seniors are less likely to be active and collaborative learners, and they

interact with faculty less. MSU seniors also find the campus environment less supportive than do seniors at peer institutions.

Despite these apparent weaknesses at the senior level, over the past five years the benchmark scores of both MSU freshmen and seniors have improved in relative and absolute terms. In 2002, MSU's freshman benchmark scores exceeded those of their peers in only two of five areas. Now, MSU freshman scores are significantly higher in all areas. Seniors have also improved relative to their peers, and now find their environment more challenging and enriching than do seniors at other institutions in our peer group. Clearly, MSU is moving in the right direction.

However, more might be done to sustain the clear successes seen at the freshman level throughout students' careers. In particular, strategies could be developed to strengthen the support network for seniors at MSU. Opportunities for interpersonal interaction and collaborative learning could be expanded for seniors that might promote a greater sense of community. Learning communities, now limited to the freshman year, might be extended to the senior year. For example, some colleges have introduced interdisciplinary senior seminars (i.e., a capstone general education experience) to compliment senior seminars in the major. This has enhanced seniors' interactions with faculty across the University, and promoted collaborative learning.

SENIOR BENCHMARK TRENDS

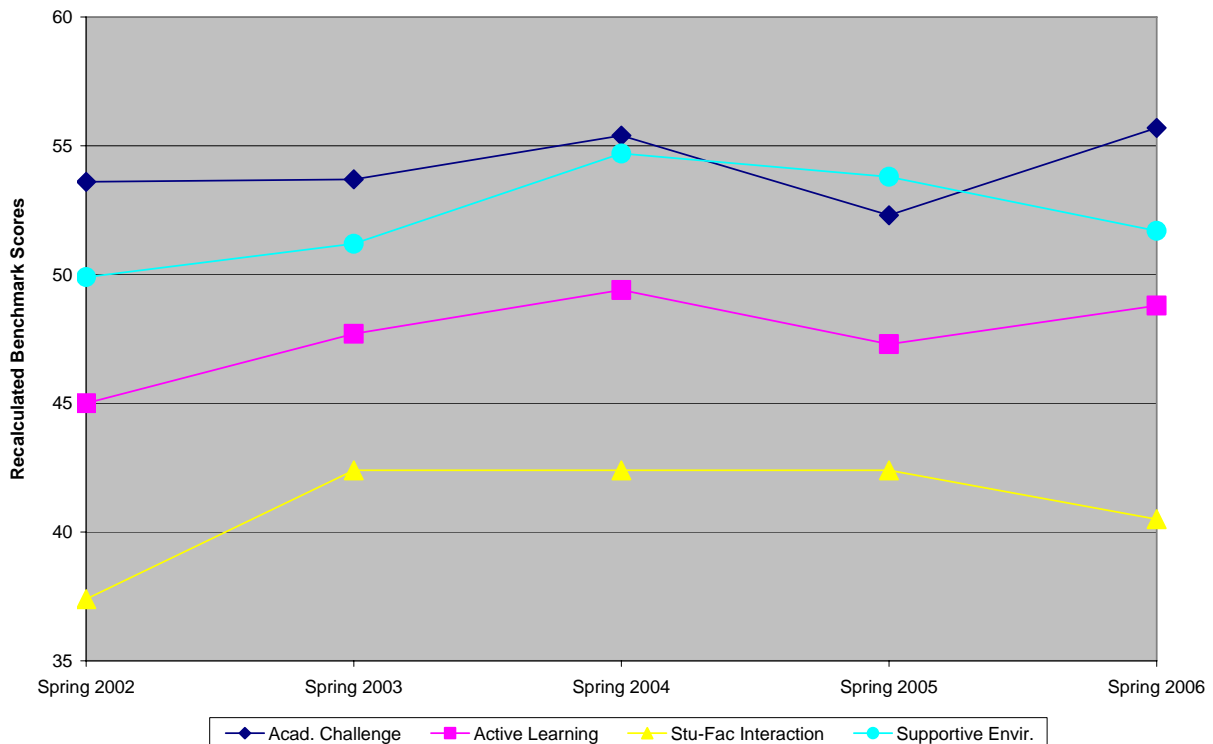


TABLE 1: BENCHMARK COMPARISONS, 2006

Benchmarks	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
Level of Academic Challenge	53.7	49.4	***	55.7	54.6	
Active and Collaborative Learning	43.0	40.2	***	48.8	50.4	*
Student-Faculty Interaction	33.5	30.8	***	35.9	39.8	***
Enriching Educational Experiences	31.6	24.9	***	36.8	36.3	
Supportive Campus Environment	59.8	57.2	***	51.7	55.4	***

* T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, $p < 0.05$

** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, $p < 0.01$

*** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, $p < 0.001$

TABLE 2: LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

Benchmark Questions	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
How many hour during a typical week are spent preparing for class	3.76	3.69		3.94	3.98	
Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	3.42	3.13	***	3.09	3.08	
Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	1.37	1.23	***	1.80	1.61	***
Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	2.51	2.17	***	2.61	2.50	**
Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	3.44	2.96	***	2.98	2.92	
Coursework emphasizes analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	3.12	2.97	***	3.18	3.18	
Coursework emphasizes synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	2.94	2.74	***	3.02	2.97	
Coursework emphasizes making judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	2.88	2.79	*	2.85	2.91	
Coursework emphasizes applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	2.97	2.90		3.10	3.14	
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	2.50	2.55		2.84	2.72	***
The campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	2.96	3.00		2.93	3.04	***
BENCHMARK	53.7	49.4	***	55.7	54.6	

* T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.05

** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.01

*** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.001

TABLE 3: ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Benchmark Questions	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3.05	2.72	***	3.14	3.05	**
Made a class presentation	2.62	2.23	***	2.89	2.83	
Worked with other students on projects during class	2.39	2.44		2.56	2.61	
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	2.19	2.26	*	2.55	2.72	***
Tutored or taught other students	1.65	1.62		1.71	1.84	***
Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	1.48	1.45		1.65	1.69	
Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class	2.57	2.64		2.69	2.81	***
BENCHMARK	43.0	40.2	***	48.8	50.4	*

* T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.05
 ** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.01
 *** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.001

TABLE 4: STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION

Benchmark Questions	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	2.63	2.53	**	2.71	2.80	*
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	2.04	2.08		2.26	2.37	**
Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with faculty members outside of class	1.81	1.75		1.93	2.04	**
Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	2.70	2.54	***	2.69	2.76	*
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework	1.59	1.49	**	1.47	1.74	***
Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	0.08	0.04	**	0.15	0.14	
BENCHMARK	33.5	30.8	***	35.9	39.8	***

- * T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.05
- ** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.01
- *** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.001

TABLE 5: ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Benchmark Questions	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
Participating in co-curricular activities	2.15	1.96	*	1.49	1.87	***
Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op, etc.	0.16	0.07	***	0.47	0.48	
Community service or volunteer work	0.31	0.33		0.49	0.52	
Foreign language coursework	0.32	0.17	***	0.52	0.32	***
Study abroad	0.07	0.03	***	0.11	0.09	
Independent study or self-designed major	0.03	0.03		0.13	0.15	
Culminating senior experience (capstone)	0.04	0.01	**	0.19	0.28	***
Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	2.64	2.63		2.65	2.67	
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	2.72	2.50	***	2.76	2.62	***
Used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment	2.78	2.60	***	2.81	2.86	
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	2.69	2.49	***	2.45	2.38	
Learning community	0.40	0.15	***	0.22	0.23	
BENCHMARK	31.6	24.9	***	36.8	36.3	

* T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.05
 ** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.01
 *** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.001

TABLE 6: SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Benchmark Questions	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance	MSU	MSU Peers	Statistical Significance
Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically	2.93	2.91		2.63	2.81	***
Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	2.26	2.07	***	1.80	1.86	
Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially	2.46	2.30	***	2.07	2.07	
Quality of relationships with other students	5.42	5.38		5.32	5.58	***
Quality of relationships with faculty members	5.27	5.11	**	5.19	5.39	***
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices	4.56	4.52		4.08	4.48	***
BENCHMARK	59.8	57.2	***	51.7	55.4	***

* T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.05

** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.01

*** T-tests: group means; 2-tailed, equal variance assumed, p<0.001

TABLE 7: NSSE BENCHMARK COMPARISON TRENDS

FRESHMEN Benchmarks	Spring 2002				Spring 2003				Spring 2004				Spring 2005				Spring 2006			
	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]
Level of Academic Challenge	53.5	52.2	1.3		53.0	52.7	0.3		53.9	52.6	1.3		56.6	49.8	6.8	***	53.7	49.4	4.3	***
Active and Collaborative Learning	39.2	40.9	-1.7		40.6	41.1	-0.5		40.4	41.6	-1.2		43.4	40.7	2.7		43.0	40.2	2.8	***
Student-Faculty Interaction	32.3	35.0	-2.7		34.6	35.7	-1.1		30.1	32.3	-2.2		34.8	32.3	2.5		33.5	30.8	2.7	***
Enriching Educational Experiences	55.5	54.0	1.5		59.1	55.4	3.7		28.2	25.8	2.4		31.5	25.1	6.4	***	31.6	24.9	6.7	***
Supportive Campus Environment	58.9	60.2	-1.3		60.0	61.1	-1.1		61.0	62.3	-1.3		59.2	57.8	1.4		59.8	57.2	2.6	***

SENIORS Benchmarks	Spring 2002				Spring 2003				Spring 2004				Spring 2005				Spring 2006			
	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]	MSU	Peers	Diff.	Sig.[1]
Level of Academic Challenge	52.9	56.1	-3.2		52.8	56.4	-3.6		55.4	56.8	-1.4		52.3	54.9	-2.6		55.7	54.6	1.1	
Active and Collaborative Learning	45.0	50.1	-5.1		47.6	50.2	-2.6		49.4	51.2	-1.8		47.3	51.3	-4.0	*	48.8	50.4	-1.6	*
Student-Faculty Interaction	33.5	41.9	-8.4		38.6	42.4	-3.8		38.4	42.5	-4.1		38.3	42.1	-3.8		35.9	39.8	-3.9	***
Enriching Educational Experiences	39.6	45.7	-6.1		42.2	46.6	-4.4		37.7	38.6	-0.9		36.6	37.7	-1.1		36.8	36.3	0.5	
Supportive Campus Environment	49.9	57.6	-7.7		51.1	58.6	-7.5		54.7	59.4	-4.7		53.8	56.3	-2.5		51.7	55.4	-3.7	***

[1] * = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = p<.001 (2-tailed). Significance not calculated prior to spring 2005.

TABLE 8: NSSE BENCHMARK TRENDS USING RECALCULATED SCORES [1]

FRESHMEN Recalculated Benchmarks	Spring 2002 Mean	Spring 2003 Mean	Spring 2004 Mean	Spring 2005 Mean	Spring 2006 Mean	MSU	
						Difference 01 to 06	Difference 05 to 06
Level of Academic Challenge	53.6	53.0	53.9	56.6	53.7	0.1	-2.9
Active and Collaborative Learning	39.2	40.6	40.4	43.4	43.0	3.8	-0.4
Student-Faculty Interaction	34.3	35.9	35.5	39.3	38.9	4.6	-0.4
Enriching Educational Experiences [2]							
Supportive Campus Environment	59.0	60.0	61.0	59.2	59.8	0.8	0.6

SENIORS Recalculated Benchmarks	Spring 2002 Mean	Spring 2003 Mean	Spring 2004 Mean	Spring 2005 Mean	Spring 2006 Mean	MSU	
						Difference 02 to 06	Difference 05 to 06
Level of Academic Challenge	53.6	53.7	55.4	52.3	55.7	2.1	3.4
Active and Collaborative Learning	45.0	47.7	49.4	47.3	48.8	3.8	1.5
Student-Faculty Interaction	37.4	42.4	42.4	42.4	40.5	3.1	-1.9
Enriching Educational Experiences [2]							
Supportive Campus Environment	49.9	51.2	54.7	53.8	51.7	1.8	-2.1

[1] NSEE recalculated benchmark scores to factor-in changes in survey items and permit more accurate interpretation of longitudinal trends.

[2] Recalculation of this benchmark is not possible due to changes in item construction over time.