



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY | Institutional Report

NSSE 2020: Summary of the Qualitative Comments in the National Survey of Student Engagement

March 22, 2021

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Introduction

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from students studying in undergraduate and four-year degree-granting colleges and universities in North America to assess their levels of engagement and their post-secondary experience. [The survey](#) is fully administered by the Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University, in close collaboration with the University of Calgary (UCalgary). The NSSE survey is targeted to first year and senior-year students. NSSE results are used for institutional improvement, public reporting, and ultimately to enhance students' learning experiences.

NSSE Survey Distribution

At UCalgary, the survey is distributed on a 3-year cycle, with the latest reporting year being 2020, where 6,439 first year and 4,904 senior-year undergraduate students were invited to participate. First year students are generally defined as those who are in four-year direct-entry undergraduate degrees, while senior students are considered those who are in their final year of four-year undergraduate degree programs, including some upper-year entry programs. Approximately 45% of first year students and 44% of senior-year students completed the 2020 survey, which is the highest level of participation recorded out of Canadian NSSE participating institutions.

The 2020 NSSE survey opened to participating UCalgary students on February 13, 2020 and closed on May 22, 2020. 89% of NSSE responses were completed by the week of March 8-14, 2020 with the remaining 10% completed during the week of March 15-21. NSSE provided institutions with the option to exclude post-disruption survey responses from their reports due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. UCalgary elected not to exclude post-disruption survey responses as participation was almost complete at the time we moved to remote and online teaching and learning in mid-March as a result of public health measures for the pandemic.

Qualitative Data Analysis

NSSE reports on ten (10) engagement indicators calculated from 47 core NSSE items. Indicators are grouped within four (4) theme areas: academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty and campus environment. In addition to the main survey for 2020, UCalgary added a module on academic advising, another on First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions, and a set of consortium questions of the U15 institutions (outside Ontario).

There are three open-ended questions within the NSSE 2020 survey. Below we have summarized students' qualitative comments for these questions:

- 1) Please describe the most significant learning experience you have had so far at this institution.
- 2) Regarding academic advising, who has been the most helpful and in what way?
- 3) Is there anything your institution could have done better to prepare you for your career or further education?

The first two questions (significant learning experiences and academic advising) were distributed to both first year and senior-year students, while the third question (recommendations for improvement) was only distributed to senior-year students. The qualitative responses of the NSSE 2020 survey were analyzed using the NVivo 12 software, which is a program for qualitative data analysis. The NVivo software helped organize the raw data and texts into codes/themes. An inductive approach was also carried out for developing the themes and identifying the patterns of meaning within the data. Finally, to test the reliability of the developed themes, repeated and detailed reading of the raw data (text) and coding queries were implemented.

Relationship to the 2020 NSSE Quantitative Data Report

This report focuses directly on the qualitative responses to the three open-ended questions described above. Because the open-ended questions are not structured as opportunities to elaborate specifically on the 47 core NSSE items, the qualitative data summarized in this report do not directly correspond to the quantitative data but do provide valuable insights into student experiences and engagement. The themes evident in this report can help inform the interpretation of the quantitative data.

For context, the quantitative NSSE results reveal that across most engagement indicators, UCalgary's average engagement indicator scores are similar to or exceed those of the U15 and Canadian comparator groups. Average scores for most engagement indicators also exceed UCalgary's 2017 and 2020 results. In terms of student ratings of their overall experience, UCalgary now out-performs or ties with the Top 5 comparator institutions (McGill University, Université de Montréal, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto), for both first-year and senior students, an improvement over the 2017 results. On the question of whether students would choose to attend UCalgary again, we lag slightly behind the Top 5 comparator group, but the gap in percentages has narrowed for senior students. UCalgary average scores for the Supportive Environment indicator are lower than the Top 5 average among both first- and fourth-year students. Our average scores for this indicator also lag behind our 2014 and 2017 results. This is an area of NSSE that warrants further exploration to better understand the factors affecting student experience and perceptions of support in the indicators surveyed, which include areas such as helping students succeed academically, use of learning support services, opportunities for social involvement, support for overall well-being, and attending campus activities and events and/or events that address important social, economic and political issues.

Findings

The following section provides an overall summary of the qualitative comments for the above three open-ended questions included in the 2020 NSSE survey. For each question, the corresponding table includes the top 5 themes and/or subthemes starting with those most frequently mentioned. As these lists of themes are not exhaustive and because some lengthy responses were coded in multiple themes (e.g., a single response may include comments about more than one themed topic), the numbers in the tables do not reflect the total number of

responses received per question. The numbers are provided as indicators of how many student comments were related to a given theme rather than as an indication of the comparative importance of a theme.

Question 1: Significant Learning Experiences

Coming at the conclusion of the core 47 question survey, there were 2,052 responses recorded for the first open-ended question: **Please describe the most significant learning experiences that you have had so far at this institution.** The responses were grouped inductively into separate themes that capture the sentiment of students' comments regarding their university learning experiences. Table 1 includes the themes of high-quality learning experiences, faculty-student Interactions, personal growth, sense of community, and areas of concern.

Table 1: The top 5 themes, sub-themes and examples of participant comments on their most significant learning experiences at the University of Calgary (NSSE 2020).

| TOP 5 THEMES BY FREQUENCY | SAMPLE QUOTES |
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| <p>1. High-Quality Learning Experiences (850 references)</p> <p>Description: By far, the most frequently noted responses refer to a variety of high-quality learning experiences they have had at the University of Calgary. The theme includes 11 sub-themes to describe specific activities students mentioned as enhancing their learning experiences (such as field trips, studying abroad, coursework, conferences, capstones etc.). While these comments reveal students' appreciation of their learning experiences, they also suggest a desire to have even more learning experiences related to professional skills development and to "real" world applications.</p> <p>Sub-Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excellent coursework, class and lectures - Other Experiences - Service-Learning Experiences - Labs - Honours thesis and research opportunities - Case Competition, Programs and Projects - Capstone Courses - Fieldwork—Field-study - Study Abroad - Cohort Based Programs - Opportunities to attend conferences | <p><u>Excellent Coursework, Class and Lectures</u></p> <p>"One of the valuable things that I enjoyed from my experience at this school in my program is that as the classes became more specialized—that's when I had learned the most."</p> <p>"Any course that has made connections between the course material and realistic explanations for why it is relevant in a real-world setting. Some research-based courses are good but for the most part I feel that I get more out of course that actively connect what I'm learning and why I should be learning it, other than for research. Especially at a senior level."</p> <p><u>Honours Thesis and Research Opportunities</u></p> <p>"The most significant learning moment I have had so far is conducting my own research project. I've been able to complete all the skills that I have developed throughout my degree, and I am able to put them to use while answering my research question. It is effective because it prepares me well to do research in the future."</p> <p><u>Study Abroad</u></p> <p>"My best experience was going abroad and learning about many countries and how business is done."</p> <p><u>Labs</u></p> <p>"The most significant experience would be the X labs, where the goal was to be able to experience sport (especially for those not involved in athletics) and be able to apply the theories learned in lecture to our own</p> |

experiences. This really helped with understand and believing in the course material.”

Service-Learning Experiences

“The combination of learning the theory behind such a broad technical field, while discovering through trial-and-error how to interact and understand Canadian and other cultures and individuals from those cultures.”

Competition, Programs and Projects

“Participating in clubs and case competitions has helped me the most. They have allowed me to push myself out of my comfort zone and improve my communication and interpersonal skills.”

2. Faculty-Student Interactions (225 references)

Description: Many students commented on how the quality of their interactions with professors, instructors, and GATs supported their learning. This theme highlights the value of engaging teaching activities and respectful relationships in the learning environment.

Sub-Themes

- Help from Instructor and TA
- Instructor Approachability/Support

Instructor Approachability/Support

“Having a very good professor makes a big difference”

“The amount of collaboration the professors encourage in class make learning memorable. The lectures are less like lectures, but a large discussion among the whole group. Professors often give time for students to critically think of a solution before teaching how it works.”

Help from Instructor and TA

“My professor accommodated me very well when I was super sick with strep throat. After taking the statutory declaration he was happy to find a perfect time once I was feeling better to allow me to write my midterm.”

“Personal investment and kindness from professors, TAs, lab techs etc. means that world coming out of a high school with incredibly compassionate teachers. it provides motivation you otherwise lack and gives value to the university experience”

3. Personal Growth, Reflection and Skill Development (217 references)

Description: Personal development is a general term to describe all those activities that develop one’s capabilities and potential. The comments under this theme underline how specific experiences at the university led to self-reflection and personal development. Participants’ comments suggest that both positive and negative experiences have been an impetus for further reflection and growth.

“The most significant for me was being able to pick myself back up again after a poor exam. It has heled me build character and resilience as well as learn how to study effectively.”

“Being here has made me rethink a lot of the values and has allowed me to grow as a person. That’s something I am very thankful for”

“Learning how to improve myself, especially to take criticism. How to manage life in general.”

“I’ve learned to have confidence in my skills and abilities and working well with peers to obtain success. I believe that even if I don’t maintain a career related to my degree, it has taught me significant social skills and willingness to take risks in order to learn.”

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| <p>4. Areas of Concern (140 references)</p> <p>Description: The comments in this theme include students' dissatisfaction with various experiences at the university as well as concerns about teaching approaches and academic advising services. Comments in this theme also include descriptions of when students' expectations for learning practical or transferrable skills was not met.</p> | <p>"The majority of other courses feel like textbook learn style (memorization of theories and models) and little to do with real-life experiences"</p> <p>"The most significant learning experience is learning that the school doesn't do a good enough job of preparing students to face challenges they will inevitably come across in the workplace"</p> <p>"Learning that you can't rely on faculty to tell you what you need to know, and you need to find things out for yourself"</p> <p>"Learning to think for myself because information present in class was incorrect, misleading or not the entire picture."</p> |
| <p>5. Sense of Community (124 references)</p> <p>Description: In this theme, students express appreciation for social activities and interactive learning experiences (such as clubs, projects, extracurricular) that support their learning and help create a sense of community and belonging.</p> | <p>"How to generally associate with people within the community, care about health systems such personal hygiene, how to be more prosperous and how to be more focus. How to relate with people, connecting to people, assisting and have social interaction with the community and others".</p> <p>"most significant learning experience so far is that connection matters and being part of various clubs gets you opportunities."</p> <p>"Learning to build connection"</p> <p>"Just the overall interaction with such a diverse community of people. The interaction between students really elevates the experience academically and socially".</p> |

Discussion

The [University of Calgary Academic Plan \(2018-2023\)](#) highlights the commitment to design relevant, meaningful learning experiences which encompass all aspects of students' university engagements, including curricular and co-curricular learning experiences. Students' responses in the themes of high-quality learning experiences, faculty-student Interactions, personal growth, sense of community, and areas of concern reflect the fact that they, too, value learning both in and beyond the classroom.

Many students referenced the excellent learning experiences they had through formally designed academic opportunities starting with courses and labs. This was by far the most frequently noted theme in responses from both first year and senior year students. As one student put it, "*...as the classes became more specialized—that's when I had learned the most.*" Labs were also frequently mentioned as providing valuable opportunities "*to be able to apply the theories learned in lecture to our own experiences.*" While first year students frequently commented on other practical learning, such as time management, which enhanced their

educational success, senior year students more frequently mentioned activities such as work-integrated learning and research opportunities that would enhance their career success: *“The most significant learning moment I have had so far is conducting my own research project.”* Comments from senior year students particularly highlighted the value of experiential learning activities such as research opportunities, study abroad, and service-learning experiences. While students did not use the term “experiential learning,” they frequently highlighted activities such as study abroad, service-learning, and field work which are also foregrounded in the [Experiential Learning Plan for the University of Calgary 2020-2025](#).

Another frequently noted theme was the positive impact of having approachable, supportive instructors and teaching assistants (GATs). Students commented on teaching approaches like discussion and collaboration which *“make learning memorable”* as well as the positive impact of *“personal investment and kindness from professors, TAs, lab techs, etc.”* Fewer, but still notable, comments described concerns about these same areas. Some students commented on teaching strategies that had *“little to do with real-life experiences,”* and some expressed frustration that *“you can’t rely on faculty to tell you what you need to know.”* Students frequently expressed both appreciation for learning opportunities that were connected to the “real world” as well as a desire to have more of these experiences.

Many students also reflected on their university experience more broadly. They described their time at the University of Calgary as promoting personal growth and development in areas such as resiliency, self-reflection, and confidence. One student wrote, *“The most significant for me was being able to pick myself back up again after a poor exam. It has helped me build character and resilience as well as learn how to study effectively.”* Student responses also emphasized the value of belonging to a community which parallels the strategic focus of creating and sustaining a supportive campus environment in the [Campus Mental Health Strategy](#). Students frequently linked their most significant learning experiences to *“the interaction between students [which] really elevates the experience academically and socially.”*

Question 2: Academic Advising

The second question—**Regarding academic advising, who has been the most helpful and in what way?**—received 2,114 valid responses. The qualitative responses highlight satisfaction with academic advising provided by UCalgary services as well as the support received through students’ personal networks. The top five themes are student services, family and friends, academic and support staff, university peers/classmates, and online resources (Table 2).

Table 2: The top 5 themes, sub-themes and examples of participant responses regarding who has been most helpful in academic advising and in what way (NSSE 2020)

| TOP 5 THEMES | SAMPLE QUOTES |
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| <p>1. Student Services (713 references)</p> <p>Description: The largest number of responses described on-campus services that helped</p> | <p><u>Academic Advisor</u></p> <p>“The advisors in the undergrad office because they know exactly what courses I can take and are super helpful to plan my next few years.”</p> |

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| <p>students with academic advising. Some of these services are Student Success Centre, Career Advising, Counsellors, Student Accessibility Services, Academic Advisors and others. The comments suggest a broad recognition of the quality advising received through the services; however, some students also noted that they wished appointments were more readily available.</p> <p>Sub-themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic Advisor - Student Success Centre - Career Advising - Student Accessibility Services - Counsellors - Other - General Advice - Wellness Services - Writing Centre | <p>“The academic advising staff. Although they can be difficult to book an appointment with during peak seasons, they offer excellent long-term advising for the completion of your degree.”</p> <p>Student Accessibility Services</p> <p>“The accessibility services for students have been most helpful because they routinely check in with me and provided many resources. the regular communication has been most helpful.”</p> <p>Career Advising</p> <p>“Career services have helped me sharpen my resume, cover letter, and interviewing skills—a critical step in job-hunting process.”</p> <p>Student Success Centre</p> <p>“Advisors at UCalgary student success centre. They have been helped me prepare for professional opportunities and have supported me academically (study strategies, course selection).”</p> |
| <p>2. Family and Friends (590 references)</p> <p>Description: Comments associated with this theme highlight the academic support received from students’ personal networks. The comments suggest that family and friends who have been through similar experiences (i.e., completed an undergraduate degree) provided advice which helped students make decisions about courses and future direction.</p> | <p>“Family and friends because they have gone through parts of university and have the experience to help guide me.”</p> <p>“My Dad. Since he has gone through the same degree as me and knows generally what are good /interesting courses are to take. He has been able to help guide me in deciding what courses to take.”</p> <p>“Family, they know me best, able to suggest things that match my work ethic and goals with personality.”</p> <p>“Friends. We all help each other with our knowledge from past experiences.”</p> |
| <p>3. Academic and Support Staff (434 references)</p> <p>Description: This theme includes responses related to support received from professors, instructors, department staff and GATs. These comments underscore a sense of satisfaction and gratitude for the general advising support received from professors and instructors through their teaching approaches.</p> <p>Sub-themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professors and Instructors - Supervisor, Honours PI, Faculty assigned as an advisor | <p>Teaching Assistants</p> <p>“TAs and staff outside of class because they share their advice and their path with me.”</p> <p>Supervisor, Honours PI, Faculty Assigned as an Advisor</p> <p>“My supervisor who is also teaching a class at the university this term. He has talked to me about future goals and taught me many things”.</p> <p>Staff</p> <p>“A member of staff within my faculty has been the most helpful. She’s guided me and encouraged me to pursue my interests. She took a genuine interest in my career path...”</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching Assistants - Staff | <p>Professors and Instructors "Theory and Musicianship prof X, always will help you thoroughly understand the subject matter and make time to help you" "Faculty. By giving me realistic expectations about the workforce, academic life as an instructor/professor, etc. and by helping me know how to prepare and what to do to succeed in the workforce in the future".</p> |
| <p>4. University Peers/Classmates (184 references)</p> <p>Description: The comments under this theme describe how peers in similar classes and programs support academic decision-making.</p> | <p>"Peers in my own program—having someone go through the same experiences, knowing the difficulties, struggles, and helping each other emotionally + studying together".</p> <p>"Students in my program. Getting ideas from them and having conversations about what to do".</p> <p>"Fellow students encourage each other and help each other in stressful times".</p> <p>"The most significant learning experience I have had so far at this institution is that being able to connect with your peers and have people in each class that can help you and are reliable is important to one's success".</p> |
| <p>5. Online Resources (150 references)</p> <p>Description: Comments in this theme centre around online resources and highlight how students found university student portals, university websites, and other online services accessed to be helpful in providing academic advising.</p> | <p>"Online resources because they are applicable and accessible at all times. Information is easy to find and use".</p> <p>"Probably the online resources providing the necessary resources to figure out what needs to be taken next".</p> <p>"Online (My UCalgary) generating the report so I can see which I should enroll in".</p> <p>"Calendar because it's told me what I need to complete my degree."</p> |

Discussion

In the same way that student responses to Question 1 on significant learning experiences reflect a broad appreciation of learning both in and beyond the classroom, responses to Question 2 about advising refer to both formal and informal avenues for seeking academic advice and guidance. Student responses in the themes of student services, family and friends, academic and support staff, university peers/classmates, and online resources demonstrate that there are many different people to whom they turn for advising support.

By far, the most frequently mentioned sources of advising support were University of Calgary services such as those provided by faculty and department academic advisors, the Student Success Centre, Career Services, and Student Accessibility Services. Responses highlighted appreciation for these services which provide immediate guidance – *“they know exactly what courses I can take”* – as well as long term planning by helping students *“prepare for professional opportunities.”*

Students also frequently commented on the advising support received from family and friends who *“know me best”* and *“have the experience to help guide me.”* First year students actually mentioned family and friends more frequently than any other source of academic advising. While clearly of great value for those who have this option, this theme also highlights the importance of campus resources for the many students, particularly first generation and international students, who may not have these kinds of networks. While senior year students did frequently mention family and friends, they most frequently referenced campus services.

Students also referred to informal advising support from instructors, teaching assistants, and classmates in addition to online resources. There were many positive responses about individual academic and support staff who *“shared their advice and their path,” “took a genuine interest in my career path,”* and *“talked to me about future goals.”* Students also commented on support from campus peers, especially those in their own programs who *“encourage each other and help each other in stressful times.”* In addition to the many sources of personalized support, students also commented on the value of having advising resources online *“because they are applicable and accessible at all times.”*

Question 3: Recommendations for Improvement

This question was posed to senior-year students, and 707 valid responses were recorded: **Is there anything your institution could have done better to prepare you for your career or further education?** Students highlighted what has helped them in their learning experiences and commented on areas where the University of Calgary can improve and provide more learning opportunities. The top five themes are informal and formal advising, course learning experiences, work-integrated learning opportunities, skills growth and development, and unknown.

Table 3: The top 5 themes and examples of participant comments on what the institution could have done better (NSSE 2020).

| TOP 5 THEMES | SAMPLE QUOTES |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Informal and formal Advising (229 references)</p> <p>Description: This theme captures a range of student concerns about awareness of and availability of both formal and informal advising and support. As noted in responses to Question 2 (see Table 2), many students</p> | <p>Academic Advising</p> <p>“Have more advisors follow up on students, also have more non-coursework opportunities (e.g., internships, assistant jobs at labs, etc.), be more available for students.”</p> |

expressed appreciation for academic support from their professors and advisors; however, others expressed dissatisfaction with the support and stated that professors and advisors seemed unhelpful, and less passionate about teaching.

Sub-themes

- Academic Advising
- Professor and Instructor Advising
- Awareness about advising
- Student Success Centre Services

Awareness about advising

“Probably let students know everything the campus has to offer...”

“not a whole lot of information provided unless you really go digging for it.”

Professor and Instructor Advising

“Care about your students and providing professors who actually care about their students and the material they teach”.

“The school does offer a lot of opportunities for students. Even though the faculty members are kind and somehow willing to help, but they don’t feel the pain. They can’t give you the emotional support or any practical advice.”

Student Success Centre Services

“Student services does not have the outreach to effectively aid all students, and these combined factors can leave students lost for direction post-graduation”.

2. Course Learning Experiences (227 references)

Description: The comments in this theme around learning and teaching opportunities express students' desire and willingness to participate in more research-related projects, field trips, course content connected to industry and the "real" world.

Sub-themes

- Coursework, class and lecture
- Other experiences
- Competitions, projects, and programs
- Labs
- Research opportunities and honours thesis
- Service-learning experiences
- Capstone courses
- Cohort- based programs
- Fieldwork opportunities

Coursework, Class and Lecture

“More classes should emphasize assignments that are relevant to research and scientific work, i.e., grant applications, project planning, literature reviews, instead of just midterms and final exams.”

“Include content in courses or entire courses which cover important information and skill domains that are used in the industry.”

“More classes focused on real world applications”.

Capstone Courses

“Have more open-ended capstone like project courses.”

Other Experiences

“There are a lot of things that should be changed regarding the system of the education as it uses an old style and not a modern way to help students explore opportunities.”

“smaller classes.”

Competitions, Projects, and Programs

“More exposure to programs that are necessary for getting hired in my field.”

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| | <p><u>Labs</u> “Some labs were very simple and seemed to need updates or more budget.”</p> |
| <p>3. Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities (204 references)</p> <p>Description: The comments in this theme demonstrate an awareness of and appreciation for the learning opportunities received through co-op and internships. A large number of students expressed a desire for more of such learning experiences.</p> | <p>“During my time in the program, more could have been done to provide undergraduates with work experience relevant to their field. I wish there were more opportunities to gain field work experience and co-op opportunities”.</p> <p>“I think UofC could also help students who aren’t in the co-op program more to find internships or employment...it would be helpful if there were guides to help with internships outside of the co-op program”.</p> <p>“it would be nice to be able to talk about more options for careers and opportunities in my field because I am not confident in what my degree will do for me, career wise”.</p> <p>“Provide more opportunities to work with potential employers during coursework”.</p> |
| <p>4. Skills Growth and Development (76 references)</p> <p>Description: This theme is related to Theme 3. Work-Integrated Learning Experiences and highlights students’ focus on employment and employability. While co-ops and internships usually occur outside of regular courses, this theme focuses on responses from students who expressed the desire for course-based learning that is more practical and connected to industry and work settings.</p> <p><u>Sub-themes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional Skills - Programming Language based Courses | <p><u>Programming Language-based Courses</u> “After completing my internship, I realized that none of my courses applied to real world careers and I used very little of what I learned in school out in the workplace. I feel like core courses regarding people skills or leaderships/communication skills or management skills should be required courses for all degrees”.</p> <p>“Our classes could have done a better job of providing more practical examples instead of strictly learning and memorizing theory. A lot of practical skills I have related to my degree I learnt in my practicum or at work...”</p> <p>“A more integrated curriculum that allows students to have confidence in their skills while heading to a work setting would have been much appreciated”.</p> <p><u>Professional Skills</u> “I think education system needs to change in general, not just at university level, even secondary schools. For example, teaching students what actually will be useful to them in the industry. Coding should be taught in schools at a very young age because it is a growing field”.</p> <p>“more emphasis on skill building instead of theoretical work.”</p> |

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| <p>5. Unsure (49 references)</p> <p>Description: Some students were unsure of how to respond to this question and responded with comments like 'unsure' or 'not sure.'</p> | <p>"I won't know until I'm in my graduate program and I find out what I am lacking".</p> <p>"unsure, this is the only experience I know".</p> <p>"N/A"</p> <p>"Nothing".</p> |
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Discussion

Question 3 was posed only to senior year students. In response to this question, students elaborated on many of the same themes they had affirmed as valuable in Questions 1 and 2 by describing ways their expectations were not met as well as how the University of Calgary can continue to strengthen student learning experiences. The most frequent themes in the responses were informal and formal advising, course learning experiences, work-integrated learning experiences, skills growth and development, and unsure.

Student comments frequently referenced a desire for more advising support. In some responses, the concern was a lack of awareness of existing opportunities and supports – *"Probably let students know everything the campus has to offer"* – while other comments highlighted concerns about the limitations of existing supports, such as *"Have more advisors follow up on students"* and *"Student services does not have the outreach to effectively aid all students."*

The concept of practical, relevant, career-focused learning is evident across the themes of course learning experiences, work-integrated learning experiences, and skills growth and development. Many students expressed a desire for *"more classes that focussed on real world applications"* and *"courses which cover important information and skills domains that are used in the industry."* In addition, many students commented on the desire for more *"opportunities to gain field work experience and co-op opportunities"* along with internships and career exposure. Other students noted their desire to develop more work-oriented skills alongside discipline-based learning. For example, students described wanting to learn more *"people skills or leadership/communication skills or management skills," "coding,"* and practical applications of theory that could provide more *"confidence in their skills while heading to a work setting."*

Students also frequently expressed their uncertainty about what the University of Calgary could do better to prepare them for their future career or education. As one student put it, *"I won't know until I'm in my graduate program and I found out what I'm lacking."* For another student, *"this is the only experience I know."*

Overview and Next Steps

The University of Calgary NSSE 2020 qualitative results gave us rich data to consider as an institution. The survey, together with the added modules, contained three long-answer questions for first year and senior year students to complete that related to significant learning

experiences, academic advising and recommendations for improvement. A qualitative analysis team grouped responses for each question into five top themes. These themes reiterate the importance of academic experiences that provide opportunities for active learning, student engagement, experiential and work-integrated learning, as well as skills development. The findings also highlight the importance of ensuring ample access to informal and formal advising, developing further awareness of supports and opportunities available to students, and fostering a strong sense of community and belonging. The themes are meant to help guide the University to understand how to enhance student supports moving forward, while also indicating current or past work that has been received well from this undergraduate population.

For a more holistic institutional analysis, this qualitative data report can be paired with the NSSE 2020 Snapshot and detailed engagement indicator analysis of the quantitative data. While there are acknowledged limitations of either data set, together these data give a high-level overview of undergraduate experiences at the University of Calgary that encourages us to dive deeper into what is currently effective as well as how to continue to strengthen student engagement.

‘Making sense’ of the data from a faculty perspective is a critical piece to implementing change based on our NSSE results. Further extrapolation of faculty/unit-level data will be distributed to NSSE teams for each participating unit. Teams will gather to help make meaning of and contextualize student NSSE responses within their faculties and programs with the goal of developing action plans to further strengthen student experiences across UCalgary.