

A focus on students' engagement

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) is a quality enhancement activity managed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Student engagement is an idea focused on learners and their interactions with university. It rests on the premise that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities, and on how institutions and staff generate conditions to stimulate involvement.

Assessing students' involvement with activities and conditions that research has linked with high-quality student outcomes provides data for framing conversations about quality, and a stimulus for guiding new thinking about best practice.

Population and sample summary

29 institutions participated in the 2008 AUSSE, growing from 25 in 2007. 769 institutions took part in the 2008 USA National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The AUSSE 2008 population includes

83,720 first-year and 83,736 third-year on-shore bachelor degree students.

A systematic random sample of 3644 first-year and 4000 later-year students was drawn at La Trobe University. 1388 students responded in total, giving an overall institutional response rate of 18 per cent. The response sample was weighted to ensure that results reflect your institutions' population as a whole.

Key results

Six key areas of student engagement are measured by the AUSSE survey instrument, the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ): Academic Challenge, Active Learning, Student and Staff Interactions, Enriching Educational Experiences, Supportive Learning Environment, and Work Integrated Learning. Scale scores are reported using a metric that runs from 0 to 100.

Figure 1 presents results for first- and later-year students at La Trobe University, for your benchmark group, for Australasia, and for the USA. It is best to compare results across groups within each scale, rather than make comparisons across scales. In general, a difference of five scale points may be considered a meaningful educational effect.

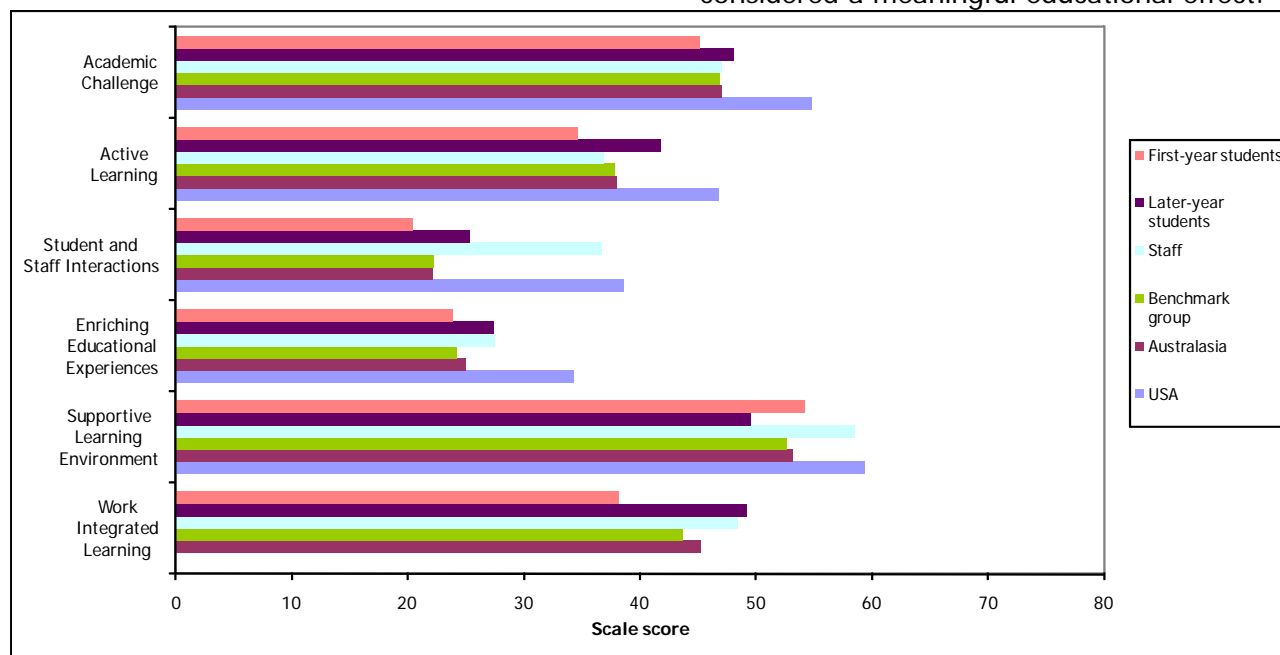


Figure 1 Summary student engagement report

The Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) measures six key outcomes: overall

satisfaction, student retention intentions, average overall grades, general development

outcomes, general learning outcomes, and higher-order thinking outcomes. Figure 2

reports average scores on the 0 to 100 point metric.

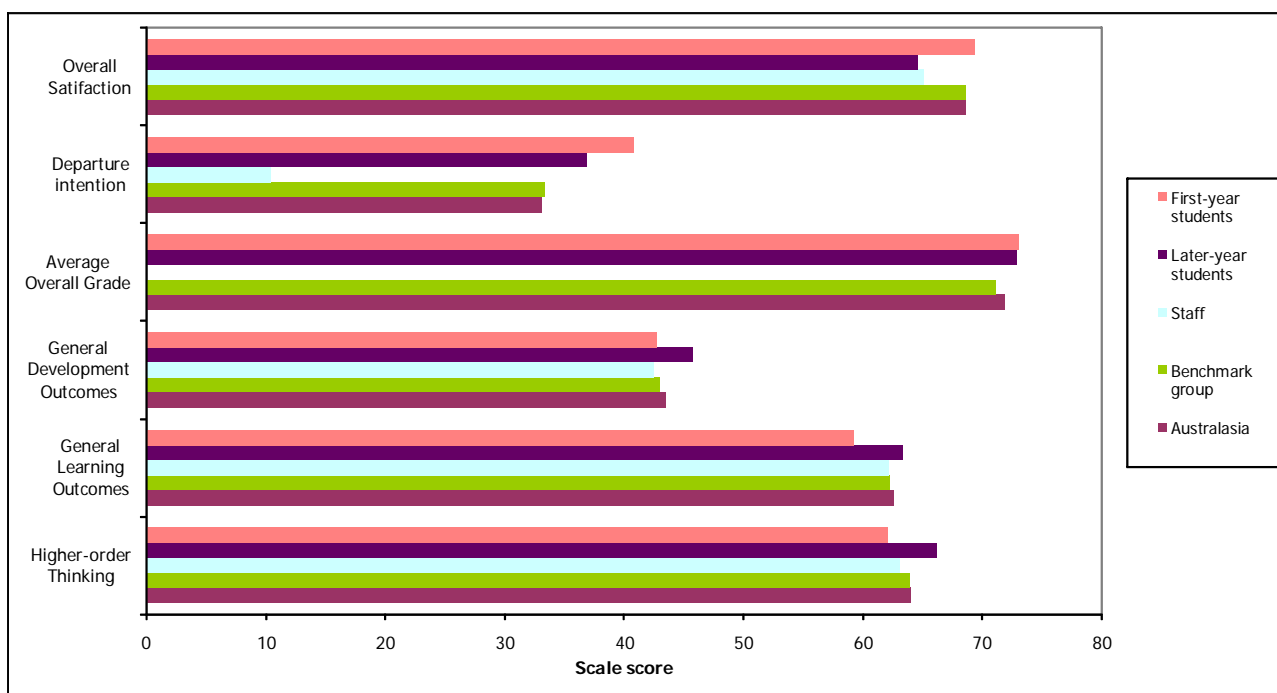


Figure 2 Summary student outcomes report

Around 100 specific learning activities and conditions are measured in the AUSSE. Table 1 summarises the areas in which La Trobe

University is performing above and below the national average. These items are not ordered.

Table 1 Performance above and below national average

Performance below national average
Providing care for dependents
Working for pay off campus
Using computing and information technology
Encouraging contact with people of different backgrounds
Using computers in academic work
Managing personal business
Relationships with administrative personnel and services
Providing support to socialise
Blended academic learning with workplace experience
Acquiring job-related or work-related knowledge and skills

Performance above national average
Spent on campus including classes
Spent on campus excluding classes
Used student learning support services
Used library resources on campus or online
Community service
Culminating final-year experience
Relaxing and socialising
Discussed ideas from your classes with teaching staff
Foreign language
Conversations with students who are very different

Summary subgroup results

Engagement varies across groups of students. The average age of respondents in La Trobe University's sample was 21. 75 per cent were female, 9 per cent were international, 1 per cent were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and 1 per cent were of Maori or Pacific Islander, 12 per cent spoke a language other than English at

home, and 56 per cent were the first in their immediate family to attend higher education.

Most students in La Trobe University's sample studied in the Society and Culture and Health fields of education. In total, 91 per cent studied on campus and 93 per cent were mainly full time. 78 per cent reported doing more than half of their study online, and 15 per cent living on campus.

While only 9 per cent of students worked for pay on campus, 30 per cent spent more than 15 hours in off-campus paid work per week. La Trobe University students spent on

average 6 hours per week travelling to campus, 10 hours preparing for class, 19 hours on campus, and 4 hours participating in 'extracurricular' activities.

Table 2 and Table 3 report engagement scale and outcomes measure average scores for key subgroups

Table 2 Summary engagement scales by subgroup

Engagement scale	La Trobe University	Over 20	Equity student	Part time or external	International	First in family
Academic Challenge	47	48	47	45	47	47
Active Learning	38	41	38	37	39	39
Student and Staff Interactions	23	25	24	24	27	24
Enriching Educational Experiences	26	27	25	25	27	25
Supportive Learning Environment	52	50	51	51	52	52
Work Integrated Learning	44	47	43	44	39	45

Table 3 Summary outcomes measures by subgroup

Outcomes measures	La Trobe University	Over 20	Equity student	Part time or external	International	First in family
Higher-order Thinking	64	65	65	62	62	65
Learning Outcomes	61	63	61	59	61	62
Development Outcomes	44	46	45	44	52	45
Average Overall Grade	73	73	72	71	70	73
Departure Intention	39	37	40	45	39	41
Overall Satisfaction	67	65	66	65	59	67

Opportunities for change

AUSSE results provide a foundation of evidence for planning and monitoring change.

A range of resources are available to assist individual institutions, including:

- AUSSE 2008 Institution Report, which includes a copy of your institutions' unit-record data file
- student engagement enhancement guides.

So far, institutions have used their data to:

- run seminars with students, managers and teachers
- benchmark results between institutions
- prepare reports for specific divisions
- run student focus groups and interviews
- enhance teaching practices and learning space designs
- hold institution-wide meetings to address problem areas
- integrate student management activities.