

Cynthia Belletti

Dr. Blue Brazelton

CCHE 687

12 February 2023

Mid-Course NSSE Exercise: Understanding Out-of-Class Preparedness and Constructing an Action Plan

Out-of-class preparation for courses has significantly decreased over the past two years where students are not ready to participate in discussions or articulate ideas and thoughts related to the course content. The expectations that faculty have set for students in the past are no longer being met in more recent years. This is alarming because students will fail to meet learning goals and faculty will not be able to move further into curriculum that scaffolds and spirals course information. In order to address these issues, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data will be analyzed in order to simulate an action plan to increase student preparedness and other assessment methods will be reviewed in order to gain insight on this rising issue.

In order to understand why students are not coming to class prepared, institutions can analyze how much time students are actually committing to class preparedness. According to the 2010 NSSE for Northern Arizona University (NAU), “33% of FY students spend more than 15 hours per week preparing for class. 17% spend 5 hours or less” (Academic Challenge). Therefore, 33 percent of first year students are meeting or exceeding the expectation for class preparedness depending on their course load. The current expectation for students in Arizona higher education institutions is that 45 hours of work is done for every unit in the course (Course Credits and Units of Credit). While NSSE data demonstrates that there is a percentage of the population meeting these expectations, there is still 50 percent of the student population unaccounted for in this survey. Therefore, there could be 50 percent of students not preparing for class at all. More survey data would have to be collected to further understand information on

this portion of the first year student population. Overall, the NSSE data for class preparedness is eye opening for faculty and will lead to implementation of an action plan.

To address these pressing issues with student readiness, faculty could implement interactive course assignments that are linked to out-of-class preparedness such as presentations, essays, short essay discussions, etc. Data for NAU from the 2010 NSSE states, “32% of FY students report that they make frequent presentations in class” (Active Learning). Presentations require that students learn new information ahead of time and create an engaging avenue for delivery of that information. While 32 percent is a decent amount of students involved in creating presentations, more faculty should incorporate presentations into their coursework to address lack of student preparedness. Additionally, faculty should create an action plan that implements presentation assignments that require students to collaborate with their peers and instructors outside of class before their presentation date. This will create accountability amongst the students and instructors while addressing out-of-class preparation.

Lastly, faculty members should create opportunities for students to collaborate and ask questions around in-class sessions. According to 2010 NSSE data for NAU, “42% of FY students say their faculty are available, helpful and sympathetic” (Student-Faculty Interaction). This statistic is alarming because less than 50 percent of students said that their faculty were available and helpful. Faculty can meet students where they are at by finding ways to advise students outside of course hours. In addition, they can create assignments that engage them or motivate them to dig deeper into course content and prepare for their upcoming course discussions. Dan Berrett (2010) argues, colleges must find ways that curate experiences through learning outcomes that aim for students to piece together parts of their education and make sense of the world around them. If faculty geared their learning outcomes in this sense, students might find

themselves articulating thoughts and ideas towards their courses. Furthermore, faculty are not meant to handhold their students through each step of their courses, but they can meet them where they are at by implementing assignments that are relevant and geared for the students in their classroom. If they do this, more students may feel that their instructors are helpful and available for them.

Overall, all three of the previously addressed NSSE statistics are a call to action for faculty to innovate a plan that increases student readiness and contributes to out-of-class preparedness. Faculty may not be able to change expectations on how many hours students should spend towards each credit unit, but they can create methods that will engage students and increase class readiness. This could be in the form of collaborative work that lessens the load for the individual student, but gets all students involved in furthering their learning and becoming articulate in their course subjects. Furthermore, faculty can find ways to engage with and understand students when creating office hours and assignments that are relevant to today's population of students. Altogether, the NSSE statistics were eye opening when exploring why out-of-class preparedness among students has been in decline and should be considered when formulating an action plan to address this issue.

While NSSE statistics are an important piece of understanding the issue of lack of out-of-class preparedness, there is other information that would be beneficial to fully comprehending the underlying causes contributing to student readiness. For example, collection of data from students who are not in their first year of higher education would be beneficial to understanding the lack of preparedness. Many higher education students seek employment throughout their degree or may come from a diverse background. It would be useful to survey students for extenuating circumstances as to why they are no longer able to prepare before

attending class. Moreover, the impacts of COVID-19 could be contributing to the decline in out-of-class preparedness and survey questions related to this would help faculty gain better understanding of the issue at hand. Overall, there have been many significant changes in society and with today's culture since the 2010 NSSE for NAU that could be formulated into survey questions that would help further understand students and where they are at with out-of-class preparedness.

Web-based surveys in addition to the NSSE could be beneficial for faculty to gain insight on issues at hand such as the decline in student preparedness the past few years. Umbach (2004) suggests that web-based surveys have social advantages such as reaching populations that are difficult to access or socially threatening questions being more likely answered since they are online (p. 25). If faculty members sent out web-based surveys regarding out-of-class preparedness, they have the potential to reach students who are difficult to access as well as having the opportunity for students to answer without being pressured through in-person methods. The data may demonstrate an enlightening and honest response that addresses current student issues. Overall, multiple surveys with a wide array of questions will help identify causes to the issues in courses with lack of student readiness.

Student surveys are important for understanding parts of the student population, however, there are other forms of assessment that can give faculty a deeper understanding of rising issues such as out-of-class preparedness. For example, interviews and focus groups have the potential to give faculty specific and immediate information on why something is occurring. Bresciani and Anderson (2004) argue, interviews and focus groups allow for immediate clarification and opportunity to gather information of subjects where little is known about (p. 48). Faculty should seek to find first hand information from interviews in order to solve the problem with lack of

preparedness. They might discover unique information that would not have been available otherwise. Therefore, interviews and focus groups are crucial when developing an understanding of a specific population, in this case, students who are not prepared for class.

In conclusion, lack of out-of-class preparation for courses has become an increasing issue over the past two years and students are not ready to participate in discussions or articulate ideas and thoughts related to the course content. In order to address these issues, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data should be considered when implementing an action plan and other assessment methods can be used in order to gain insight on this rising issue. NSSE data can assist faculty in understanding student groups through concise statistics where other assessment methods can be beneficial in understanding students first hand. It is important that faculty go beyond NSSE data because it may not portray the entire situation that students are experiencing. They can do this through interviews or focus groups that will give immediate, detailed responses to the issues at hand. Overall, faculty should strive to incorporate multiple types of assessment and survey data to where they can simulate an action plan that meets students where they are at by creating experiences that are relevant and beneficial for students while addressing out-of-class preparedness.

## Reference List

- Berrett, D. (2014). Now, Everything Has A Learning Outcome. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/now-everything-has-a-learning-outcome/>.
- Bresciani, M., Zelna, C., & Anderson, J. (2004). Assessing Student Learning and Development: A Handbook for Practitioners. Washington, D.C.: NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Course Credits and Units of Credit*. (2017 March 23). Definition of a Unit of Credit (per Arizona Board of Regents policy). Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/Course-Credits-and-Units-of-Credit-EXISTING.pdf>.
- National Survey of Student Engagement. (2010). *The Student Experience in Brief: NAU*.
- Umbach, P. D. (2004). Overcoming Survey Research Problems. *Web Surveys: Best Practices*, 121(1), 23-38.