

Disappointment, Misunderstanding and Expectations: A Gap Analysis of NSSE, BCSSE and FSSE

By: Maureen Mancuso, Serge Desmarais, Kelly Parkinson and Brian Pettigrew of the University of Guelph

What expectations do students have regarding the university experience and are those expectations being met? What expectations do faculty have of students, and will students or should students measure up to faculty expectations? And to what extent do faculty expectations influence student expectations and the overall experiences of students? These three questions are addressed in a new report published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario entitled *Disappointment, Misunderstanding and Expectations: A Gap Analysis of NSSE, BCSSE and FSSE*, written by Maureen Mancuso, Serge Desmarais, Kelly Parkinson and Brian Pettigrew of the University of Guelph.

Using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Beginning College Student Engagement Survey (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), the authors calculate what are known as “gaps” or measures of how much experiences diverge from expectations. Between the BCSSE (which collects data on the expectations that beginning students have about university) and the NSSE (that measures student engagement while in first year) lies a “disappointment gap”, which shows how much students’ actual experiences differ from their original expectations. Between the NSSE and the FSSE (which surveys faculty on their impressions of student experiences and motivations) lies a “misunderstanding gap”, which measures the gap between what instructors think students should accomplish and what they are actually accomplishing or will accomplish.

The research found that for the most part, students’ expectations of university do not meet actual experiences during first year. Students express the most disappointment with activities linked to student-faculty interaction, such as the frequency of communications with faculty in and out of the classroom and the availability of faculty for career planning discussions. Faculty on the other hand, express satisfaction with the overall interactions with students.

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