

NSSE 2018 and Graduating Senior Survey 2018 Selected Results on Civic Engagement and Other Student Outcomes

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning | George Mason University

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The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was administered to Mason first-year (FY) and senior (SR) students in 2018 to collect information about the characteristics and quality of their college experiences, for a total response rate of 18%. The Graduating Senior Survey (GSS) was also administered to 5,506 seniors in the 2018 academic year (summer and fall 2017, spring 2018), with a response rate of 31%. This document presents selected results from the NSSE and GSS data at the SR level. Complete NSSE and GSSE results are available at <http://ira.gmu.edu>.

The results summarized in this report were based on two-step analyses: (1) grouping students by civic engagement behaviors based on a cluster analysis and (2) further exploration on how various student groups perform on outcome measures such as perceived gains, competency, and satisfaction. It was hypothesized that students who were actively engaged in civic activities were more likely to do well on other relevant measures.

Highlights of Major Findings

Student Groups by Civic Engagement

- Mason SR respondents clustered into three groups¹ based on their performance on the NSSE civic engagement scales of Knowledge/Informing, Organizing, and Conflict Resolution: Activists (above average on all three scales), Allies (above average on Conflict Resolution only), and Non-active (below average on all three scales) (Figure 1). The proportion of Activists at Mason (24%) was slightly lower compared to the national average of 27% (Table 1). See Appendices A and B for more information on the NSSE scales and student groups.
- Variations emerged in subgroup comparisons. For example, female students had a higher percentage of Activists than male counterparts (26% vs 21%); those who started at Mason (referred as “native” hereafter) were more likely to be Activists than transfer students (28% vs. 22%); honors students demonstrated a commanding lead with 39% Activists compared to 23% of non-honors students (Table 2).

Engagement Indicators and Perceived Gains by Student Groups

- Overall, students who were more involved in civic activities outperformed those less involved on most NSSE engagement indicators including Reflective and Integrated Learning, Collaborative Learning, Discussion with Diverse Others, and Student-Faculty Interaction (Table 3).
- Activists reported growth at significantly higher rates than their peers in multiple areas (e.g., working effectively with others, understanding people of other backgrounds, and being an informed and active citizen), a finding also true for Allies compared to Non-activists (Table 4).
- Involvement in community-based learning was significantly associated with civic engagement. For example, 68% of Activists were involved in three or more community-based learning activities while at Mason compared to 37-40% of Non-activists and Allies, respectively (Figure 2).

¹ The group labels are consistent with those adopted in a study of 24 minority-serving institutions by Fassett, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, and Kinzie (2018)

Competency and Satisfaction by Student Groups

- 74-96% of Activists reported competency in critical thinking and analysis, connecting concepts across disciplines, ability to engage in civic activities, and oral communication, significantly higher rates compared to 43-91% of Non-activists (Figure 3).
- Overall, students who were actively engaged in civic activities were more likely to be satisfied with their college experience at Mason. For example, 79-94% of Activists reported satisfaction on seven of the 11 measures, significantly higher rates compared to 59-92% of Non-activists (Table 5).

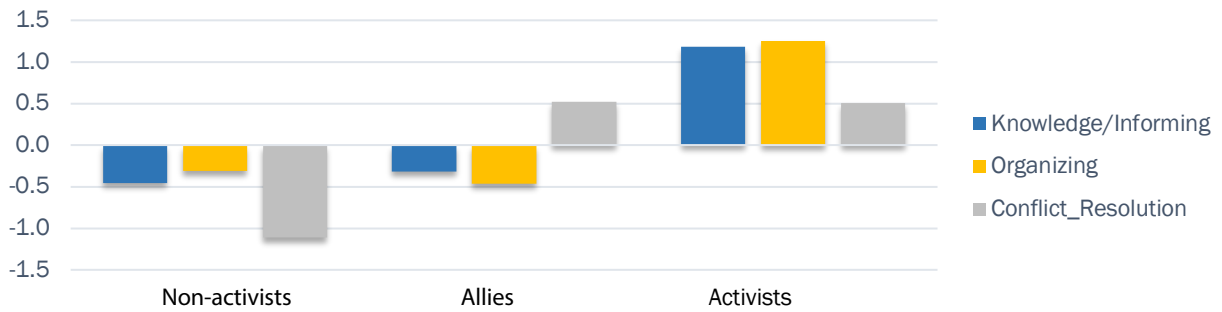
Implications

- Compared to the national average², Mason has room for improvement. Efforts should focus on engaging more students in civic events and activities, particularly those that involve organizing/raising awareness of others as the Organizing scale emerged as the most important predictor of student membership based on analyses.
- Overall, the findings from the study lend support to the conclusion that engagement in civic activities is positively associated with students' academic and social engagement on campus, perceived growth, competency, and satisfaction. The positive effect of involvement in civic activities should be communicated to students, especially subgroups with lower participation rates (e.g., male, Asian), to help them optimize their college education through participation in enriching experiences outside the classroom.

² Based on a study with 24 minority-serving institutions by Fassett, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, and Kinzie (2018).

Student Groups by Civic Engagement

Figure 1. Visual Representation of 3-Cluster Solution (Standardized)



n=887, based on cluster analysis of NSSE civic engagement scales of Knowledge/Informing, Organizing, and Conflict Resolution³

Table 1. Student Groups⁴ Based on Cluster Analysis of Civic Engagement Scales

Civic Engagement Scales	Non-active (<i>n</i> =281, 31%)	Allies (<i>n</i> =395, 44%)	Activists (<i>n</i> =217, 24%)
Knowledge/Informing	24.7	26.6	48.2
Organizing	9.3	6.9	33.4
Conflict Resolution	54.7	93.4	93.1

Unless specified otherwise, the numbers represent average scores on the scales.

For Knowledge/Informing, Organizing, and Conflict Resolution, range: 0-60, 0-60, and 1-120; mean=31.3, 14.1, and 81.2, respectively.

Table 2. Proportion of Civic Engagement Student Groups by Demographics

		Non-active	Allies	Activists
First-Generation (FG) Status	FG (<i>n</i> =200)	27%	49%	25%
	Non-FG (<i>n</i> =300)	32%	40%	29%
Gender	Female (<i>n</i> =557)	29%	45%	26%
	Male (<i>n</i> =336)	36%	43%	21%
Race/Ethnicity	Asian (<i>n</i> =169)	36%	41%	23%
	Black (<i>n</i> =78)	24%	49%	27%
	Hispanic (<i>n</i> =125)	30%	47%	22%
	White (<i>n</i> =420)	30%	43%	27%
	Other (<i>n</i> =101)	36%	47%	18%
Transfer Status	Native (<i>n</i> =351)	29%	44%	28%
	Transfer(<i>n</i> =536)	33%	45%	22%
Honors College	Honors (<i>n</i> =69)	26%	35%	39%
	Non-Honors(<i>n</i> =824)	32%	45%	23%

³ The scale labels are consistent with those adopted in a study by Fassett, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, and Kinzie (2018). In the NSSE 2018 – Selected Results on Civic Engagement Report, the three scales were referred to as Participation-Oriented Civic Engagement, Influence-Oriented Civic Engagement, and Ability to Make a Difference through Civic Engagement.

⁴ The group labels are consistent with those adopted in a study by Fassett, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, and Kinzie (2018).

Engagement Indicators and Perceived Gains by Student Groups

Table 3. Selected Engagement Indicators by Civic Engagement Student Groups

	Non-active	Allies	Activists	Sig.	Post-Hoc Comparison
<i>Engagement Indicators</i>	1	2	3		
Reflective and integrative learning	30.6	36.3	44.4	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Collaborative Learning	27.9	31.0	34.9	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Discussions with Diverse Others	36.4	43.9	47.4	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Student-Faculty Interaction	17.4	19.5	28.7	***	3>1,2
Quality of Interactions	36.1	41.0	41.3	***	3>1; 2>1
Supportive Environment	27.9	31.4	35.7	***	3>1,2; 2>1

Numbers represent average scores (range 0-60). N=255-280, 361-395, 206-217 or Non-active, Allies, and Activists, respectively.

Data source: NSSE.

*** $p < .001$, ANOVA.

Table 4. Perceived Gains by Civic Engagement Student Groups

	Non-active	Allies	Activists	Sig.	Post-Hoc Comparison
<i>How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?</i>	1	2	3		
Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills	48%	62%	71%	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Working effectively with others	56%	71%	82%	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics	43%	62%	74%	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)	50%	70%	83%	***	3>1,2; 2>1
Being an informed and active citizen	41%	54%	78%	***	3>1,2; 2>1

The response scale ranges from 1(Very little) to 4(Very much).

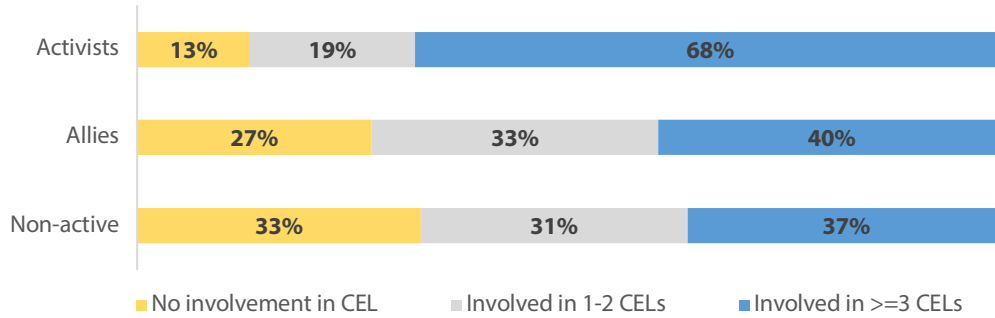
The percentages are for "Quite a bit" and "Very much" combined.

N=278-280, 393, 215-217 or Non-active, Allies, and Activists, respectively.

Data source: NSSE.

*** $p < .001$, ANOVA.

Figure 2. Involvement in Community-Based Learning (CEL) Activities by Civic Engagement Student Groups



N=85, 114, and 68 for Non-active, Allies, and Activists, respectively.

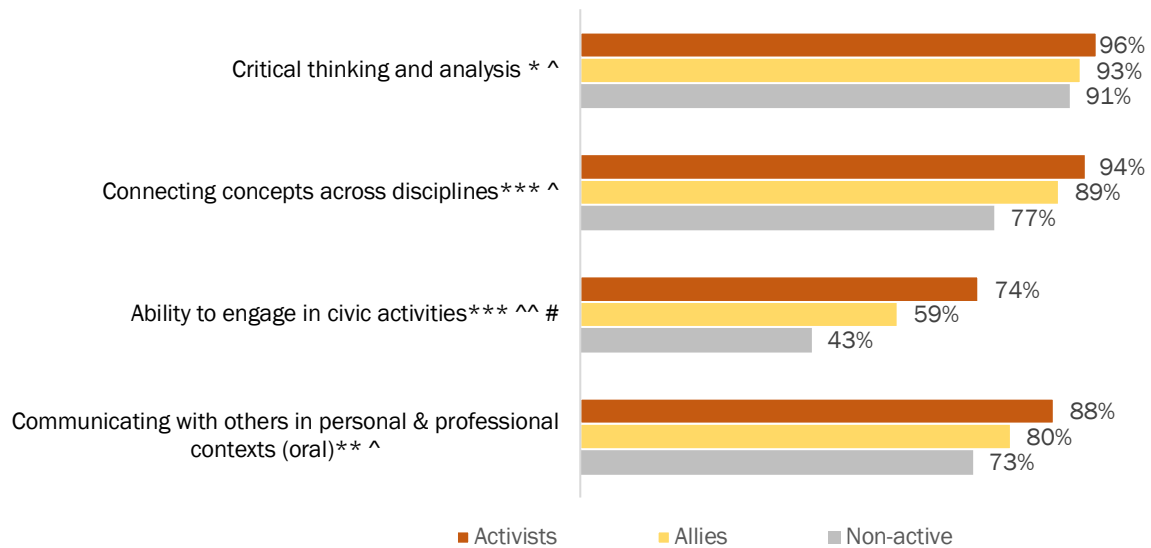
Data source: NSSE and GSS.

Significant at $p < .001$, Chi-Square.

Based on summary responses to the GSS question: While you were a student at Mason, were you involved in any of the following kinds of community-engaged learning?

Competency and Satisfaction by Student Groups

Figure 3. Competencies Contributed by Education in the Major by Civic Engagement Student Groups



The response scale ranges from 1(Not at all) to 4(A great deal).

The percentages are for "A fair amount" and "A great deal" combined.

N=86, 117-119, and 68 for Non-Active, Allies, and Activists, respectively.

Data source: NSSE and GSS.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, ANOVA.

Post-Hoc Comparison: ^^ Activists significantly higher than Allies and Non-activists; ^ Activists significantly higher than Non-activists; # Allies significantly higher than Non-activists; all significant at .05.

Table 5. Satisfaction by Civic Engagement Student Groups

	Non-active	Allies	Activists	Sig.	Post-Hoc Comparison
<i>How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your education at Mason?</i>	1	2	3		
Sense of belonging at Mason	78%	83%	82%		
Overall Mason experience	82%	88%	88%		
Education you received in your major	92%	88%	94%	*	3>1,2
Academic advising	78%	85%	89%	*	3>1
Your level of involvement in campus activities	59%	77%	84%	***	3>1; 2>1
Career support from faculty and staff (e.g., assistance with career planning, job search)	72%	73%	85%		
Preparation for work	73%	77%	86%	*	3>1
Preparation for post-baccalaureate study	71%	76%	83%	*	3>1
Mentoring (e.g., support of professional growth)	61%	65%	79%	*	3>1
Overall quality of course instruction	88%	94%	94%	*	3>1
If you were to do it all over again, would you attend George Mason University?	75%	82%	85%		

The response scale ranges from 1(Very dissatisfied) to 4(Very satisfied).

The percentages are for "Satisfied" and "Very satisfied" combined.

N=84-85, 111-113, and 64-65 for Non-Active, Allies, and Activists, respectively.

Data source: NSSE and GSS.

** p<.05, *** p<.001, ANOVA.*

Appendix A. Civic Engagement Items and Scales and Student Groups

Civic Engagement Scales and Items	Non-active	Allies	Activists
Knowledge/Informing Scale <i>During the current school year, whether course-related or not, about how often have you done the following? (Response options: Very Often, Often, Sometimes, Never)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informed yourself about local or campus issues Informed yourself about state, national, or global issues Discussed local or campus issues with others Discussed state, national, or global issues with others 	▽	▽	△
Organizing Scale <i>During the current school year, whether course-related or not, about how often have you done the following? (Response options: Very Often, Often, Sometimes, Never)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raised awareness about local or campus issues Raised awareness about state, national, or global issues Asked others to address local or campus issues Asked others to address state, national, or global issues Organized others to work on local or campus issues Organized others to work on state, national, or global issues 	▽	▽	△
Conflict Resolution Scale <i>Select the response that best represents your ability to do the following: (Response options: 1(poor) to 7(Excellent))</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help people resolve their disagreements with each other Resolve conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, and prejudice Lead a group in which people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included Contribute to the well-being of your community 	▽	△	△

N=281, 395, and 217, for Non-active, Allies, and Activists, respectively. △=above average on the scale; ▽=below average on the scale.

Appendix B. A Brief Description of the Student Groups

As defined by their performance on the civic engagement scales, the student groups are likely to display the following characteristics and behaviors:

- Activists** view themselves as champions for a cause, staying informed of social issues, and on the front line engaging others and organizing events.
- Allies** excel in helping others resolve conflicts, standing by the side of their Activist peers, but doing little of the organizing themselves.
- Non-activists** are less likely to engage in social issues even though they stay informed of those issues, and lack notable amount of skills in conflict resolution.

(Adapted from the description by Fassett, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, and Kinzie (2018)).