

Parents Newsletter  
President's Message 12-'08

Dear Parents,

Last year at this time I wrote about the National Survey of Student Engagement, an analysis of how satisfied students are with their college experiences. The survey was released last month, and once again Niagara University's students rated their experience very well in comparison to students at more than 700 other colleges and universities.

While that is an encouraging finding, NSSE administrators this year are advising participating institutions to use the survey as a tool to examine themselves rather than as a means of comparison to other colleges and universities. As NSSE noted, decades of research on college students finds that "student experiences and outcomes are more varied among students *within* institutions than *between* institutions."

To make the point, let's look at one of the five benchmark areas, namely, supportive campus environment. (The other benchmarks are level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions and enriching educational opportunities.) Supportive campus environment is a measure of how students feel about an institution's commitment to their success. NU ranked significantly higher than the national averages in this category for both freshmen and seniors, with median scores of 65 and 64, respectively. The median, however, is the middle, and that means there are students who rate NU above and below that point.

Following NSSE's challenge to "look within," and "to examine variation" in student experiences, our task is to find the reasons why some students are extremely convinced that the university is committed to their success, while others are less inclined to think so. Several studies are under way on campus to help us better understand the survey's findings and how they relate to our various programs and colleges.

Since it is a well-known fact that the more engaged students are on their campuses, the more likely they are to learn, we have to identify those students who are least engaged and find a way to improve their experience. That's where parents can help. Just as last year, I again ask you to talk to your sons and daughters while they're home for Christmas break. Ask them how they are doing academically and what the university is doing to support them. Ask them about their interactions with faculty members and about their active and collaborative learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Ask them about the campus environment and how they are getting along with the other students, faculty and staff members they encounter in academic and social settings.

Ideally, these conversations will help students examine the last semester and determine how it went. I trust it has gone well, based on what our students are telling us. But if you detect anything you think needs attention, kindly let us know and we will do everything

we can to address it. We are committed to providing an education that makes a difference in students' lives.

If you would like to take a closer look at the NSSE data, go to the USA Today Web site, where the newspaper and NSSE have created an interactive database. It shows participating schools' average scores in the five key areas, and compares those scores with national averages for similar types of institutions. This year, 386 four-year colleges and universities are participating, and NU is proud to be one of them in an effort to help students and parents make informed decisions about college.

During this holiday season, I ask for God's blessings on the university community, especially its students, and I extend best wishes to all for a blessed and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Joseph L. Levesque, C.M.  
President