

Summary of Key Evidence for UCORE: 2021 National Survey of Student Engagement

UCORE Assessment | Washington State University

Introduction

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior student participation in activities and programs that promote their learning and personal development. More than 90% of participating institutions administer the survey on a periodic basis, generally every 2-3 years.

This document summarizes selected 2021 NSSE results related to WSU's Learning Goals of Undergraduate Education in the context of UCORE, as UCORE is bookended by a required first-year course [ROOT] and a senior capstone experience [CAPS]. Additionally, UCORE includes foundational courses, inquiry-based learning courses in the disciplines, and a diversity course requirement. See the [UCORE website](#) for more information.

Note: NSSE is an externally developed survey administered by the University of Indiana (Bloomington). As such, questions on the NSSE survey are not specifically tailored to WSU and/or UCORE. WSU's complete NSSE results (current and historic) are available on [IR's NSSE survey webpage](#).

Assessment

NSSE assesses the extent to which first-year and senior students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. At WSU, NSSE is offered to all first-year and senior students on all WSU campuses every other spring. With the census administration, students receive a survey invitation and reminders by email. The Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE), in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research (IR), coordinates the administration of NSSE at WSU, which many units help promote.

Participating institutions may also append up to two Topical Modules – short question sets on designated topics that allow for deeper exploration. In 2021, questions on the NSSE survey provided indirect evidence of student learning on five of WSU's Learning Goals of Undergraduate Education (Critical & Creative Thinking, Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Diversity, and Depth, Breadth & Integration of Learning).

Note: As with any voluntary survey, response rates and the presence of non-response bias should be considered when evaluating NSSE results. In other words, those who did not respond (non-respondents) may have different views than those who did respond and therefore the results may not be representative of all students.

2021 NSSE Results

Context: In 2021, 1,473 seniors and 1,038 first-year students responded to the survey at WSU. The WSU response rate was 24% for seniors and 27% for first-year students, compared to the average national response rate of 21% for participating institutions with undergraduate enrollments of 10,000 or more. Where survey results are displayed alongside a peer comparison, the comparison includes more than 25,000 seniors from 21 public doctoral universities with very high research activity that administered NSSE in 2021 (topical module results do not include peer comparisons for 2021, as the number of public doctoral universities with very high research activity administering the topical module did not meet the threshold for reporting). *Note: In spring 2020, WSU made the emergency move to distance education beginning March 23rd as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For fall 2020 and spring 2021, undergraduate courses at WSU were delivered at a distance and completed remotely, with limited exceptions for in-person instruction, due to the pandemic.*

In these results, percentages are weighted by institution-reported sex and enrollment status (and institution size for peer groups) and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. *Note: NSSE results are not longitudinal, but represent a cross-section of students. As such, NSSE results are not intended to show growth between first-year and senior responses.*

For additional NSSE results from WSU's past three administrations, in the context of UCORE assessment, see the [2021 Biennial UCORE Assessment Summary of Student Achievement](#).

SENIORS

WSU SENIOR CONTEXT: During the senior year, it is expected that most students will complete the senior capstone experience course [CAPS] requirement for UCORE, along with upper-division courses towards the major. Seniors may also complete coursework contributing to additional majors, minors, certificates, etc. It is also expected that most students will have completed the majority of their UCORE requirements prior to the senior year (especially the foundational and inquiry-based learning requirements).

Note: Senior eligibility for NSSE participation is primarily based on number of credits completed. As such, participating seniors may or may not complete NSSE in their final semester prior to graduation.

CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKING:

All UCORE-designated courses are required to advance Critical & Creative Thinking, including the senior capstone experience course [CAPS].

Thus, student experience with Critical & Creative Thinking includes 34 credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Critical & Creative Thinking.

- **93%** of seniors reported having “very much” or “quite a bit” of confidence in their ability to complete tasks requiring **creative thinking and problem solving** (Figure 1); additionally, 7% reported having “some” confidence, while 0% reported having “very little”
- **92%** of seniors reported having “very much” or “quite a bit” of confidence in their ability to complete tasks requiring **critical thinking and analysis of arguments and information** (Figure 1); additionally, 7% reported having “some” confidence, while 0% reported having “very little”
- **86%** of seniors reported that their experience at WSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in **thinking critically and analytically** “very much” or “quite a bit” (Figure 2); additionally, 12% reported that WSU contributed “some,” while 2% reported that WSU contributed “very little”

Figure 1

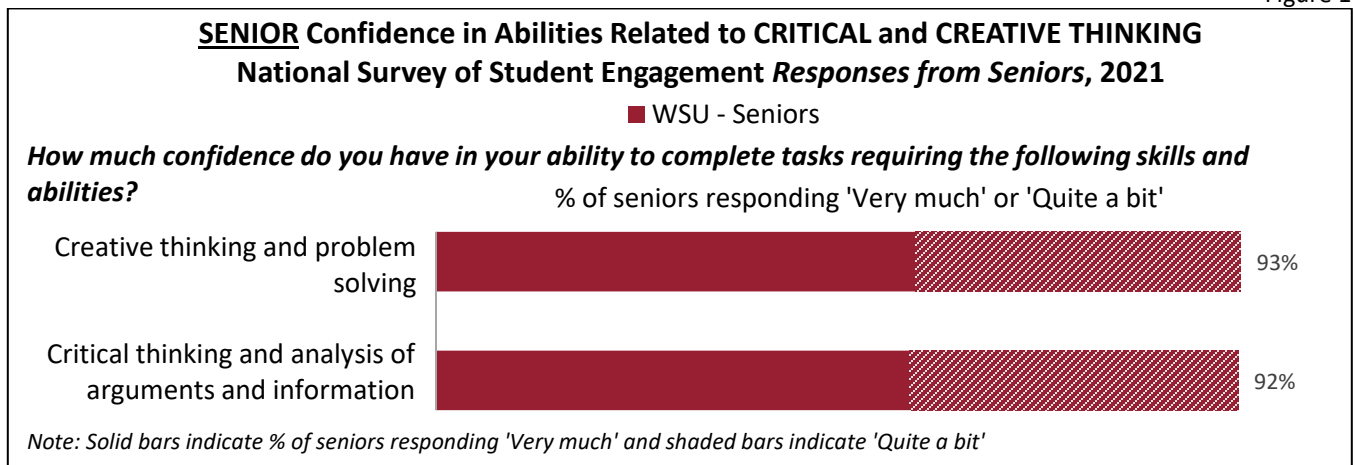
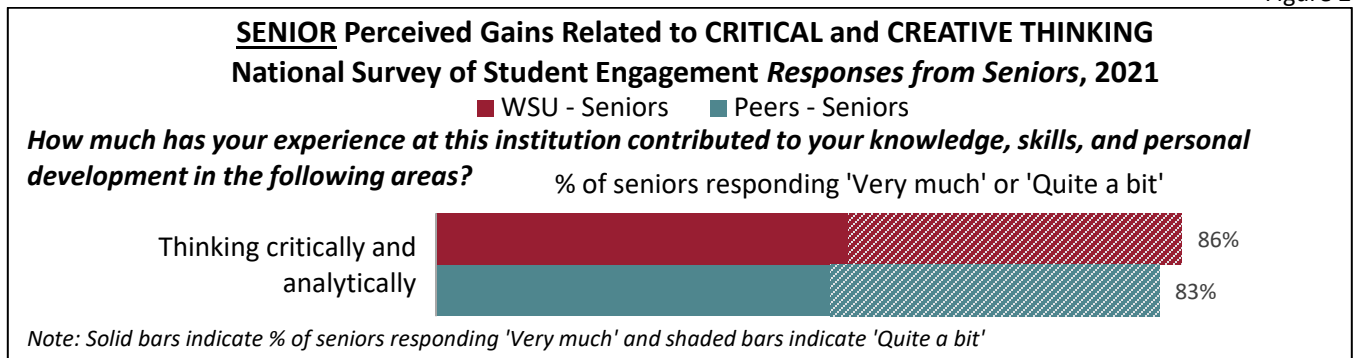


Figure 2



COMMUNICATION, WRITTEN:

All UCORE-designated courses are required to advance Written Communication, a sub-goal of the Communication Learning Goal, including the senior capstone experience course [CAPS].

Thus, student experience with Written Communication includes 34 credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Written Communication.

- **87%** of seniors reported having “very much” or “quite a bit” of confidence in their ability to complete tasks requiring **clear writing** (Figure 3); additionally, 12% reported having “some” confidence, while 1% reported having “very little”
- **73%** of seniors reported that their experience at WSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in **writing clearly and effectively** “very much” or “quite a bit” (Figure 4); additionally, 22% reported that WSU contributed “some,” while 5% reported that WSU contributed “very little”

Figure 3

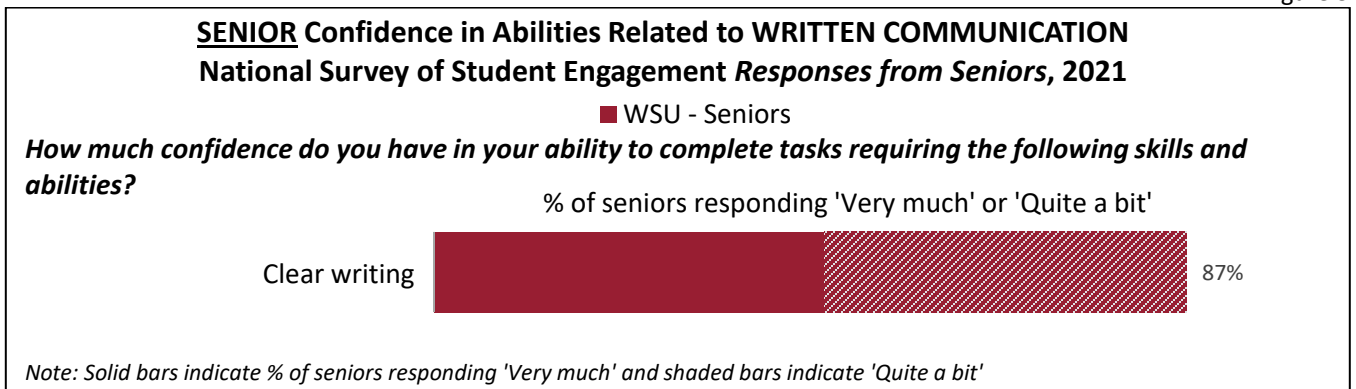
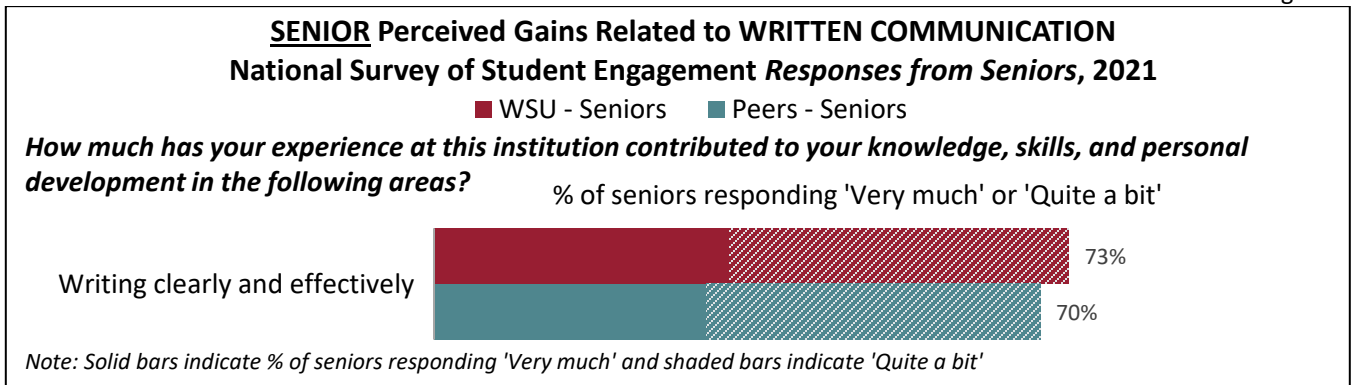


Figure 4



COMMUNICATION, ORAL:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Oral Communication, a sub-goal of the Communication Learning Goal, as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- Students develop oral communication skills through small-group discussion and debate in the required first-year experience course [ROOT]
- Students may complete a foundational Communication [COMM] course, which focus on non-written mediums (*Note: students can take a second [WRTG] course instead of a [COMM] course*)
- Oral Communication may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

Thus, student experience with Oral Communication varies, with a minimum of three credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Oral Communication.

- **91%** of seniors reported that their experience at WSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in ***speaking clearly and effectively***, while 9% reported that WSU contributed “very little” (Table 1)

Table 1

SENIOR Perceived Gains Related to ORAL COMMUNICATION				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from Seniors, 2021				
<i>How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?</i>	% of seniors			
	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
Speaking clearly and effectively				
WSU - Seniors	27%	38%	26%	9%
Peers - Seniors	29%	37%	25%	9%

QUANTITATIVE REASONING:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Quantitative Reasoning as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- Students complete a foundational Quantitative Reasoning [QUAN] requirement, intended to be completed in the first year
- Inquiry in the Social Sciences [SSCI] and Natural Sciences [BSCI][PSCI] courses are also required to advance the Quantitative Reasoning Learning Goal
- Quantitative Reasoning may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

Thus, student experience with Quantitative Reasoning varies, with a minimum of 13 credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Quantitative Reasoning.

- **94%** of seniors reported that their experience at WSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in ***analyzing numerical and statistical information***, while 6% reported that WSU contributed “very little” (Table 2)

Table 2

SENIOR Perceived Gains Related to QUANTITATIVE REASONING				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from Seniors, 2021				
<i>How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?</i>	% of seniors			
	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
Analyzing numerical and statistical information				
WSU - Seniors	36%	36%	22%	6%
Peers - Seniors	35%	35%	23%	8%

DIVERSITY:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Diversity as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- The required first-year experience course [ROOT] addresses multiple cultural, political, and disciplinary perspectives so that students are capable of engaging with the diversity of the human experience, across both time and space
- Students complete a Diversity course [DIVR] requirement, intended to introduce students to differences and similarities among cultures by exploring the multiplicity of individual and group experiences within and across various historical periods, societies, and cultures
- Diversity may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

Thus, student experience with Diversity varies, with a minimum of six credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Diversity.

- **88%** of seniors reported that their experience at WSU contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in ***understanding people of other backgrounds***, while 12% reported that WSU contributed “very little” (Table 3)

Table 3

SENIOR Perceived Gains Related to DIVERSITY				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from Seniors, 2021				
<i>How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?</i>	% of seniors			
	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
Understanding people of other backgrounds				
WSU - Seniors	28%	32%	28%	12%
Peers - Seniors	29%	34%	26%	11%

DEPTH, BREADTH, & INTEGRATION OF LEARNING:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Depth, Breadth, & Integration of Learning as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). The required first-year experience course [ROOT] and senior capstone experience course [CAPS] are required to advance Integrative Learning, specifically. However, [CAPS] courses can vary considerably. For example:

- Many [CAPS] courses ask students to demonstrate a depth of knowledge within their chosen academic field of study that integrates its history, core methods, techniques, vocabulary, and unsolved problems
- Other [CAPS] courses require students to apply concepts from their general and specialized studies to personal, academic, service learning, professional, and/or community activities
- Other [CAPS] courses ask students to demonstrate how the methods and concepts of a chosen discipline relate to those of other disciplines through engaging in cross-disciplinary activities

Thus, student experience with Depth, Breadth, & Integration of Learning varies, with a minimum of six credit hours in UCORE-designated courses that include instruction and/or engagement with Integrative Learning, specifically.

Note: NSSE does not ask seniors about their confidence or perceived gains related to Depth, Breadth, & Integration of Learning. However, NSSE does ask seniors to report how often they completed learning tasks related to Integrative Learning in the current school year.

- **98%** of seniors reported **connecting ideas from their courses to prior experiences and knowledge** during the academic year, while 2% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 4)
- **96%** of seniors reported **combining ideas from different courses when completing assignments** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 4)

Table 4

SENIOR Learning Tasks Related to INTEGRATIVE LEARNING				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from Seniors, 2021				
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>	% of seniors			
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge				
WSU - Seniors	36%	49%	14%	2%
Peers - Seniors	34%	46%	18%	2%
Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments				
WSU - Seniors	28%	43%	25%	4%
Peers - Seniors	25%	39%	30%	6%

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

WSU FIRST-YEAR STUDENT CONTEXT: During the first-year, it is expected that most students will complete the required first-year experience course [ROOT] requirement for UCORE, along with other UCORE foundational requirements (i.e., Quantitative Reasoning [QUAN], Written Communication [WRTG], and Communication [COMM]¹). First-year students may also complete introductory courses towards the major and may have made progress in completing the inquiry-based learning UCORE requirements.

¹Note: Students can take a second [WRTG] course instead of a [COMM] course.

Note: NSSE 2021 opened to WSU students in early March. As such, first-year student responses are typically based on experiences in fall semester and a portion of spring semester.

CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKING:

All UCORE-designated courses are required to advance Critical & Creative Thinking, including the required first-year experience course [ROOT] and other UCORE foundational requirements intended for first-year students.

- **96%** of first-year students reported **applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they did this “very little” during the academic year (Table 5)
- **96%** of first-year students reported **evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they did this “very little” during the academic year (Table 5)
- **96%** of first-year students reported **forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they did this “very little” during the academic year (Table 5)
- **95%** of first-year students reported **analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts** during the academic year, while 5% reported that they did this “very little” during the academic year (Table 5)

Table 5

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to CRITICAL and CREATIVE THINKING				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following?	% of first-year students			
	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	19%	45%	32%	4%
Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source	20%	49%	27%	4%
Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information	19%	49%	28%	4%
Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	20%	43%	31%	5%

COMMUNICATION, WRITTEN:

All UCORE-designated courses are required to advance Written Communication, a sub-goal of the Communication Learning Goal, including the required first-year experience course [ROOT] and other UCORE foundational requirements intended for first-year students. English 101/105 (College Composition), specifically, are key foundational written communication [WRTG] courses in the UCORE curriculum for many first-year students.

- **78%** of first-year students reported *being assigned three or more papers, reports, or other writing tasks of up to 5 pages in length* during the academic year, while 22% reported being assigned less than 3 papers, reports, or other writing tasks of up to 5 pages in length (Table 6)

Table 6

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to WRITTEN COMMUNICATION				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
<i>During the current school year, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following lengths have you been assigned?</i>	% of first-year students			
	More than 10 papers	6-10 papers	3-5 papers	Less than 3 papers
Up to 5 pages	28%	24%	26%	22%
Between 6 and 10 pages	5%	6%	18%	71%
11 or more pages	3%	2%	3%	92%

COMMUNICATION, ORAL:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Oral Communication, a sub-goal of the Communication Learning Goal, as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- Students develop oral communication skills through small-group discussion and debate in the required first-year experience course [ROOT]
- Students may complete a foundational Communication [COMM] course, which focus on non-written mediums (*Note: students can take a second [WRTG] course instead of a [COMM] course*)
- Oral Communication may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

- **96%** of first-year students reported **contributing to course discussions** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 7)
- **64%** of first-year students reported **giving a course presentation** during the academic year, while 36% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 7)

Table 7

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to ORAL COMMUNICATION				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>	% of first-year students			
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Asked questions or contributed to course discussions in other ways	17%	34%	45%	4%
Given a course presentation	4%	13%	47%	36%

QUANTITATIVE REASONING:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Quantitative Reasoning as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- Students complete a foundational Quantitative Reasoning [QUAN] requirement, intended to be completed in the first year
- Inquiry in the Social Sciences [SSCI] and Natural Sciences [BSCI][PSCI] courses are also required to advance the Quantitative Reasoning Learning Goal
- Quantitative Reasoning may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

- **89%** of first-year students reported **reaching conclusions based on their own analysis of numerical information** during the academic year, while 11% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 8)
- **84%** of first-year students reported **evaluating what others have concluded from numerical information** during the academic year, while 16% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 8)
- **84%** of first-year students reported **using numerical information to examine a real-world problem** during the academic year, while 16% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 8)

Table 8

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to QUANTITATIVE REASONING				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?	% of first-year students			
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)	14%	38%	37%	11%
Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	8%	30%	46%	16%
Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)	10%	30%	43%	16%

DIVERSITY:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Diversity as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). Briefly:

- The required first-year experience course [ROOT] addresses multiple cultural, political, and disciplinary perspectives so that students are capable of engaging with the diversity of the human experience, across both time and space
- Students complete a Diversity course [DIVR] requirement, intended to introduce students to differences and similarities among cultures by exploring the multiplicity of individual and group experiences within and across various historical periods, societies, and cultures
- Diversity may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

- **97%** of first-year students reported ***trying to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective*** during the academic year, while 3% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 9)
- **94%** of first-year students reported ***examining the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue*** during the academic year, while 6% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 9)
- **91%** of first-year students reported ***including diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments*** during the academic year, while 9% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 9)

Table 9

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to DIVERSITY				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>	% of first-year students			
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	22%	32%	43%	3%
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	17%	45%	34%	6%
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	18%	35%	38%	9%

DEPTH, BREADTH, & INTEGRATION OF LEARNING:

UCORE-designated courses are only required to advance Depth, Breadth, & Integration of Learning as appropriate to the designator (see the [UCORE website](#) for more information). For first-year students:

- The required first-year experience course [ROOT] addresses Integrative Learning by introducing students to how historical understanding enriches allied disciplinary approaches to critical global issues that affect human life in the 21st century
- Depth, Breadth, & Integration of Learning may be included in other UCORE-designated courses as appropriate to the course and discipline

- **96%** of first-year students reported ***learning something that changed the way they understand an issue or concept*** during the academic year, while 4% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 10)
- **92%** of first-year students reported ***connecting their learning to societal problems or issues*** during the academic year, while 8% reported that they “never” did this during the academic year (Table 10)

Table 10

FIRST-YEAR Learning Tasks Related to INTEGRATIVE LEARNING				
National Survey of Student Engagement Responses from First-Year Students, 2021				
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>	% of first-year students			
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	19%	45%	31%	4%
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	15%	36%	42%	8%