

# Assessing the First Year Experience at Memorial University

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First Year In Focus  
Maximizing Retention:  
Everyone's Responsibility

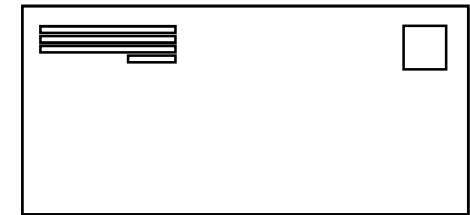
# History

- Analysis of first year student academic performance
- Regular surveying of first year students began about 10 years ago
- The First Year Experience (FYE) student survey was administered for the first time in 2001

# Technology Transition

- Mail & telephone

- High response rate
- Control over administration
- Resource intensive



Replaced by

- Web-based / Online

- Email, MUN Survey Tool, StudentVoice (Student Affairs) / iPad, Twitter / Facebook
- Convenient, minimal resources
- Ease of use means proliferation of surveys
- Survey fatigue and lower response rate



# Other Trends in Institutional Research

- Collaborative work occurring more often
- Overlap between institutional/administrative survey research and academic research
- Considerations related to ethical review, data sharing, privacy protection



# Tools for Assessing Student Experience

- In-house
  - First Year Experience (FYE) survey
  - Graduating Student survey
  - Student Voice
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party instruments
  - CUSC
  - NSSE

CANADIAN UNIVERSITY SURVEY CONSORTIUM



**NSSE** national survey of  
student engagement

# Tools for Assessing Student Experience

- In-house surveys allow for control and selection of questions asked, and general administration
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party surveys allow for institutional comparisons and benchmarks
- The things we are assessing have evolved over time

# In-house Surveys

- Focus on institution specific issues and questions

The FYE survey:

- Standard set of questions
- Can include customized questions for other units, committees, etc.
  - *From your perspective, which of the following was the most effective recruitment tool used by the university?*
  - *How significant was the scholarship offer to you in your decision to attend Memorial?*

# FYE 2009

- Transition to MUN from High-school
- Initial reasons for choosing MUN
- Expectations for academic achievement
- How students decide on a program of study
- What services/offices students are using and their opinion of the experience.

# CUSC – First Year Survey 2010

- The Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) is a group of Canadian Universities working cooperatively to gain a better understanding of the Canadian undergraduate student population.
- Surveys a sample of first-year students
- The survey provides comparative information on student characteristics and experiences.

# CUSC – First Year Survey 2010

## **Academic Adjustments**

- Choosing a program of studies to meet my objectives
- Finding help with questions or problems
- Getting academic advice
- Performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills

# CUSC – First Year Survey 2010

## **Practical Adjustments**

- Finding my way around the campus
- Using the library
- Finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations
- Finding suitable and affordable housing

# CUSC – First Year Survey 2010

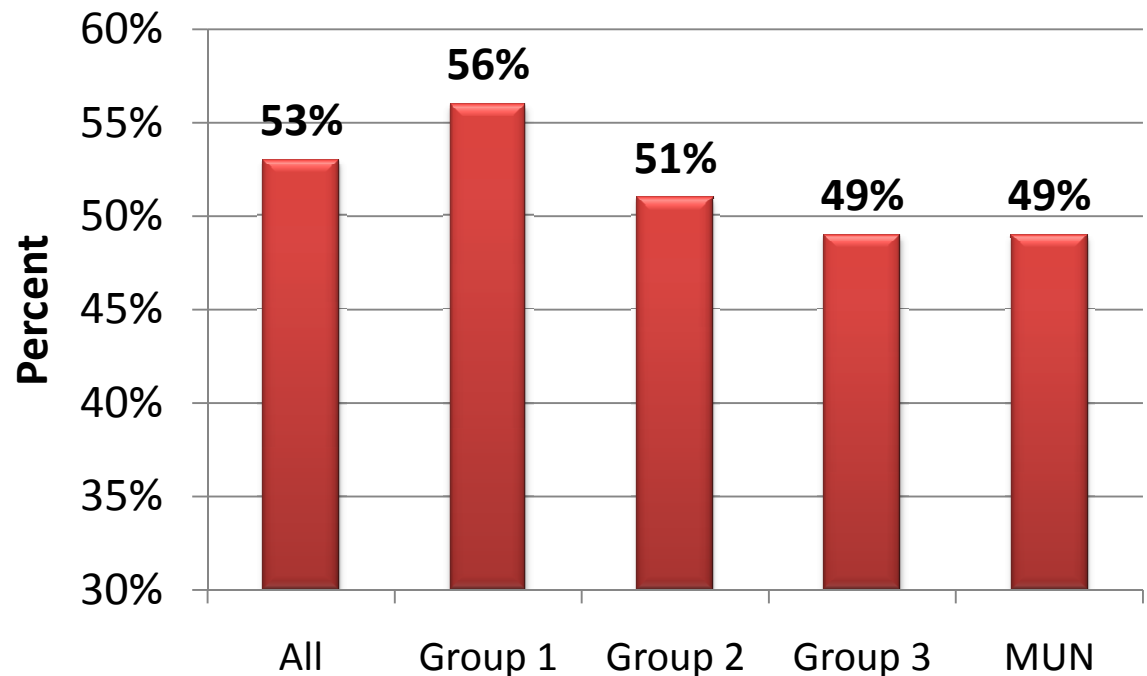
## **Personal Adjustments**

- Organizing my time to complete academic work
- Making new friends with other students
- Feeling as if I belong at university
- Becoming involved in campus activities
- New living arrangements

# CUSC – First Year Survey 2010

- Nationally, the least success in the ‘personal’ adjustments was in *becoming involved in campus activities* (53%).

**% Very much or Some Success:  
Becoming involved in campus activities  
(N = 281)**



# NSSE 2008

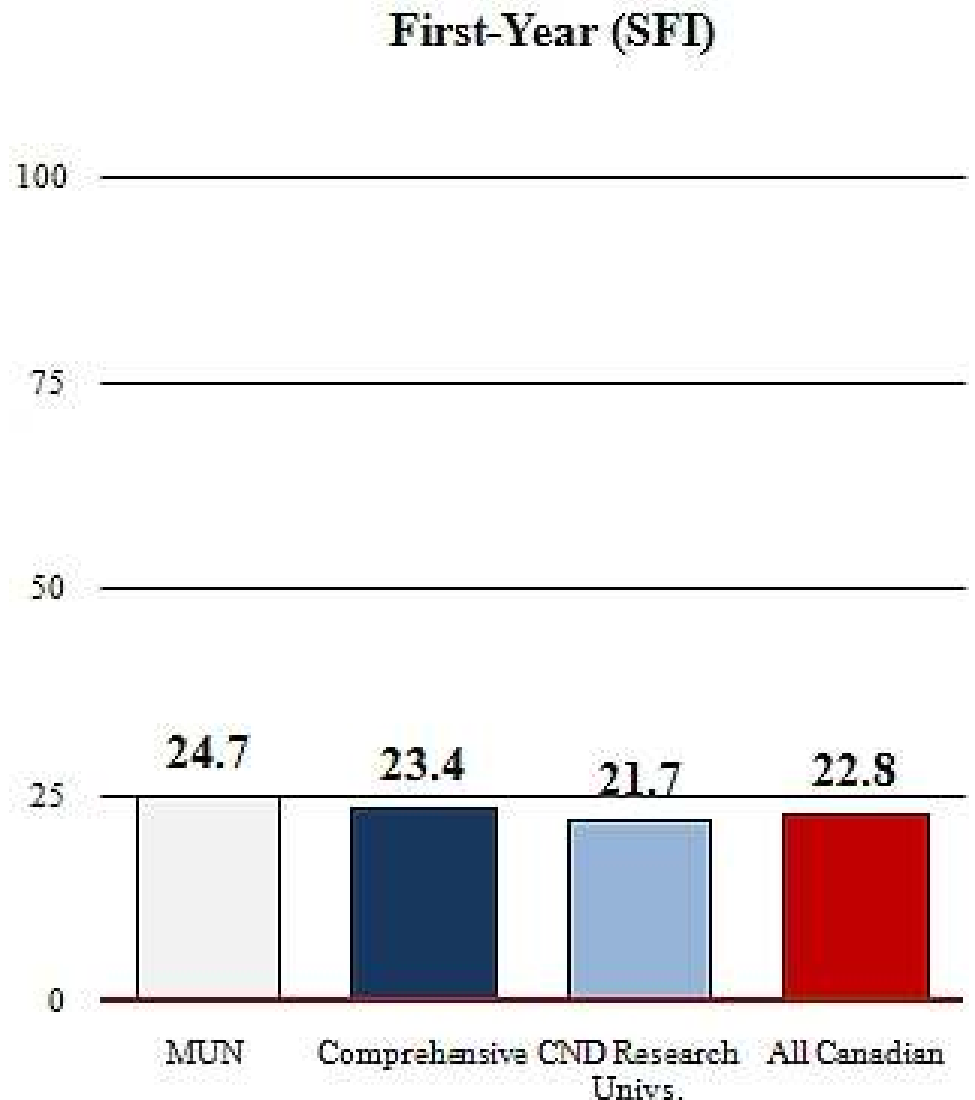
- Amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities.
- Student perception of how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities linked to student learning.

# NSSE - Benchmarks

## Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI)

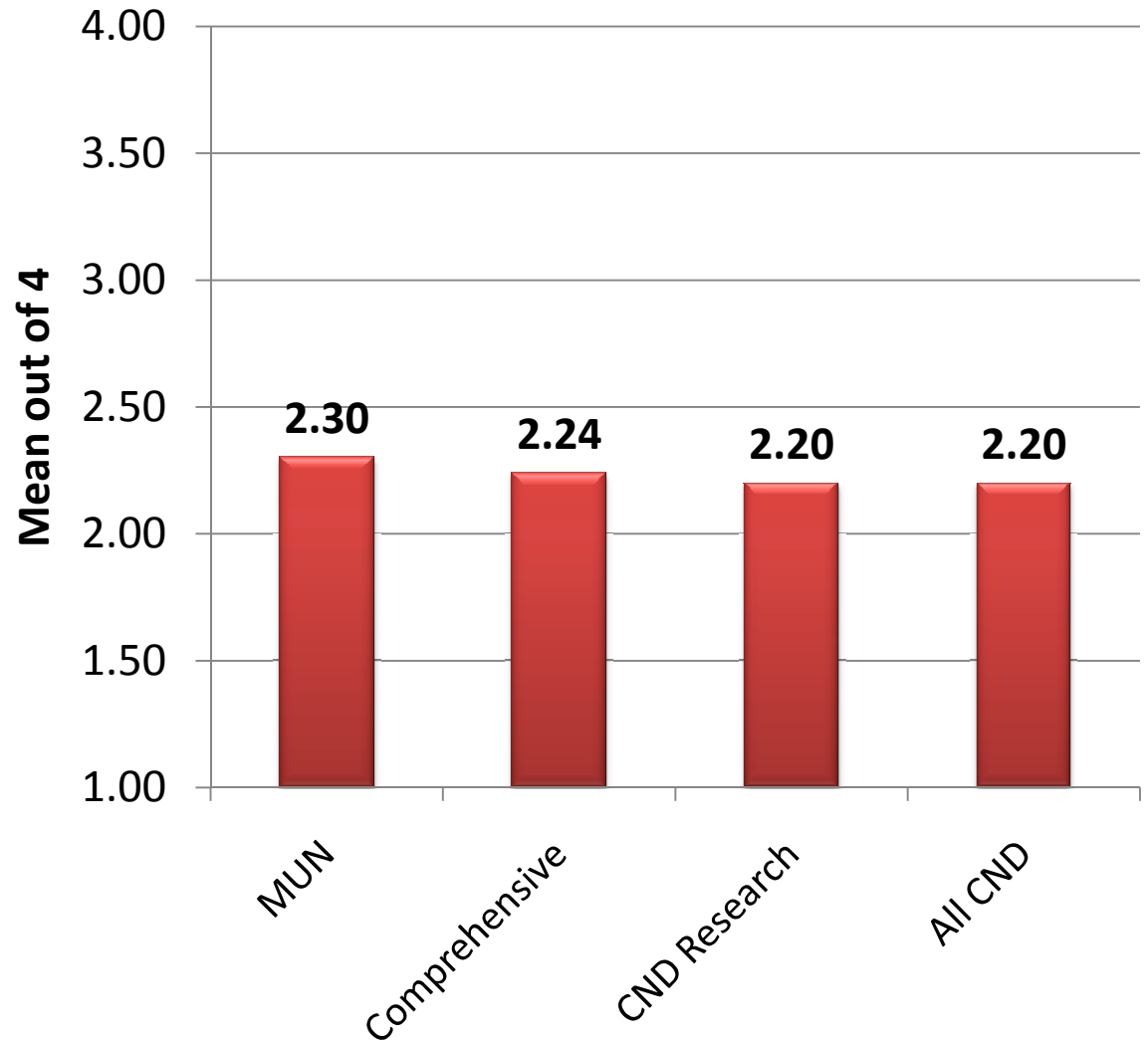
“Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.”

\*Data shown is from 2008



# NSSE - Benchmarks

- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance

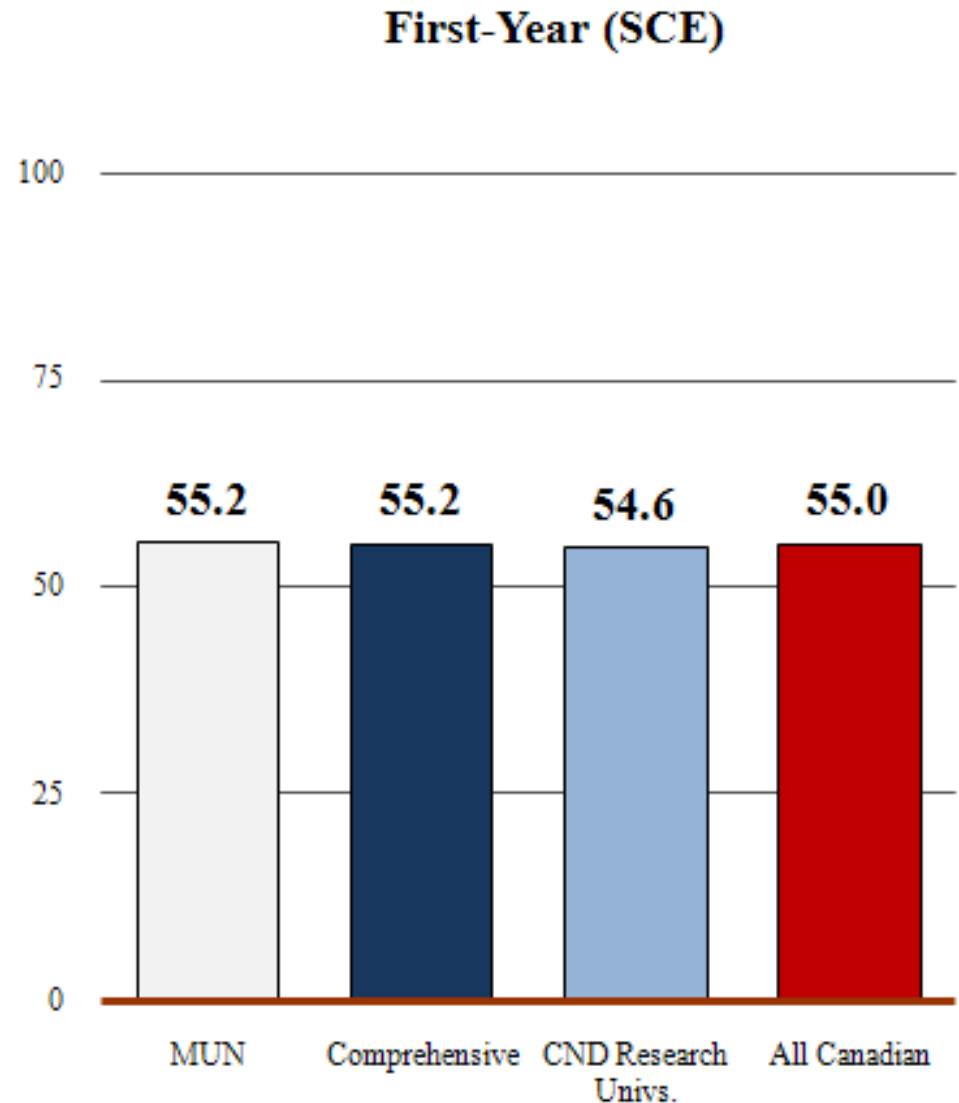


# NSSE - Benchmarks

## Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)

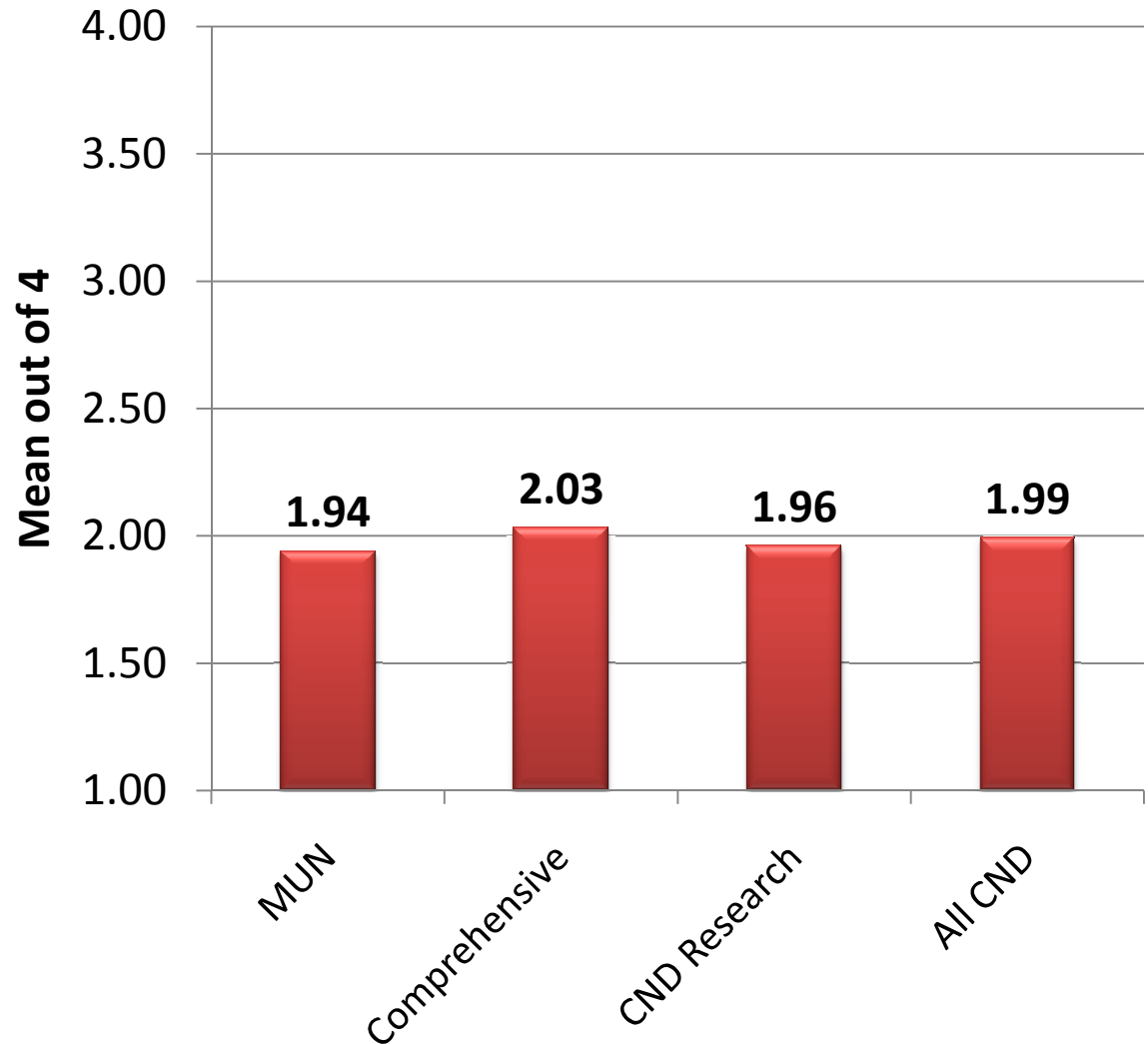
“Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.”

\*Data shown is from 2008



# NSSE - Benchmarks

- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc)



# NSSE National Project

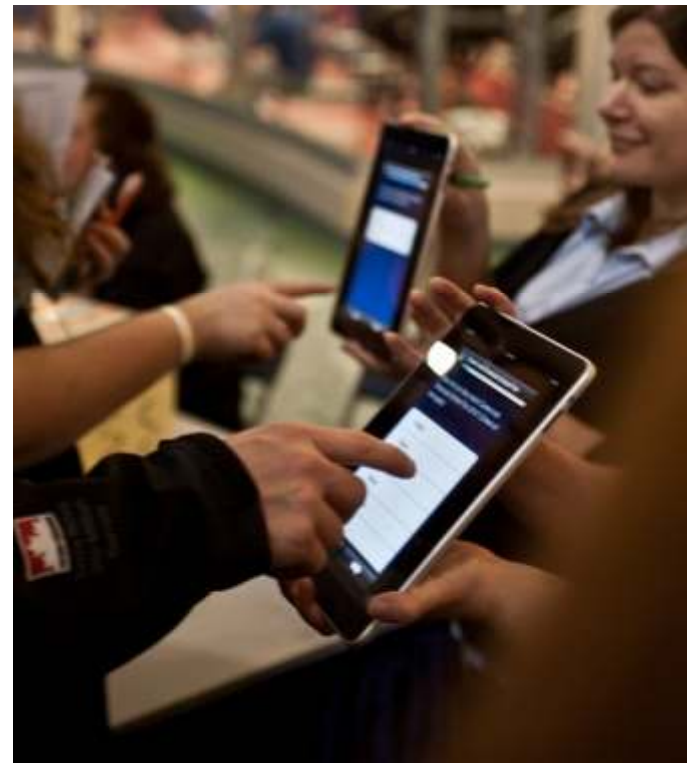
- National comparisons with other institutions
- Faculty comparisons between institutions
- Creation of detailed NSSE reports at the academic unit/program level and for various student subgroups
- The roles of program mix, student characteristics and institutional character and context in determining institutional engagement measures

# Collaboration

- The SCE Benchmark is a good example of how data collection and data use can tie into a collaborative approach.
- Student Affairs and Services has been one of the offices most interested in NSSE results

# Student Affairs and Services

- History of Assessment within the Division
  - Champions
  - Technology
  - Assessing Outcomes
    - Operational
    - Satisfaction
    - Student Learning
    - Social Inclusion
- Building a culture of assessment





- Assessment Team
  - Completing a Professional Development certificate in assessment
  - Certificate corresponds to international standards of assessment (NASPA, ACPA)
  - Launched in Fall 2010
  - Building capacity: each department has at least one ‘junior expert’ in assessment

# Needs of First Year Students (2009)

- Collaboration between CIAP and departments in SAAS



# Needs of First Year Students

- Asked about:
  - Health
    - Alcohol/energy drink/drug use
    - Sleep
    - Nutrition
    - Stress & anxiety
  - Financial concerns
  - Quality of life

# Needs of First Year Students

- Key Findings
  - Sleep, nutrition, time management all key concerns for students
  - Alcohol, drug use, gambling not serious problems for the students who took our survey

# Orientation Fall 2010

- New format
  - Benchmark items from StudentVoice institutional survey
  - Timing
  - Surveyed those who did attend and those who did not



# Orientation Fall 2010

- “I met new people at Orientation that I am still friends with”
- “I know at least one person (faculty or staff) at this institution that I can turn to if I have questions or concerns”
- “Orientation helped me feel connected to this university”

# Orientation Fall 2010

- “How would you describe your transition from high school to Memorial?”
  - Smooth from the start
  - Rough at first, but okay now
  - Still challenging
  - Overwhelming
  - N/A: I did not enter Memorial directly from high school

# Retention & Success

- Understanding the First Year Experience
  - Stressors
  - Barriers
  - Characteristics
  - Responsive programming and services
  - Moving from quality assurance to knowledge creation



# Discussion

- How do you assess your first year experience?
- Do you have any creative or innovative ways to collect data?
- How do you use your results to support retention? Do you have an established process for turning information into action?

Thank you!

