



**REVIEW OF RESULTS FOR  
THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON  
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 2020**

**AD-HOC REVIEW COMMITTEE  
FALL 2020**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In fall 2020, the Associate Vice-President (Teaching and Learning) organized an ad-hoc committee of representatives of the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) Advisory Council and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) to review the results of the 2020 National Survey of Student Experience (NSSE). The NSSE is a survey of universities and colleges that measures undergraduate students' levels of engagement with their institutions. The purpose of NSSE is to gather data that can inform efforts to improve undergraduate education.

Using the Canadian Comprehensive Universities group (CCU) for comparison, the ad-hoc committee identified the significant successes and areas for growth for Memorial University pertaining to the undergraduate student experience (see Appendix A for the list of CCU institutions).

## Memorial's Significant Successes

Overall, Memorial students are more satisfied with their experiences than students at the CCU.

- Memorial students reported a high satisfaction rate, with 80% of first-year students (FYS) and 83% of senior-level students (SLS) rating their educational experience as good or excellent compared with 77% of FYS and 74% of SLS for the CCU.
- 42% of Memorial FYS and 47% SLS rated the quality of their interactions with faculty as good to excellent compared with 37% and 41% respectively for the CCU.
- 43% of FYS rated their interactions with academic advisors good to excellent, 11% higher than the CCU (at 32%).
- 73% of FYS reported that the university encourages them to use learning services quite a bit or very much compared with 63% of the CCU.

## Areas for Growth and Development

The committee identified High-Impact Practices (HIPs) as a focus for growth and development at Memorial University, particularly for first-year students.

- The NSSE results indicate that work needs to be done on incorporating HIPs in the first-year experience. A total of 37% FYS participated in one HIP compared with 46% of the CCU, and 3% participated in two or more HIPs compared with 5% of the CCU.
- Participation in HIPs may have positive impacts on other elements captured by NSSE such as first-year experience, experiences with diversity, and student interaction/collaboration.

It is recommended that Memorial University should further its existing initiatives and develop new ones targeted at increasing HIPs, primarily for first-year students. Further, the university should identify how it can better support individual instructors and academic units to help them better integrate HIPs into their courses and programs. CITL can play a key role in educating the university on the concepts and terms of NSSE and developing resources to assist academic units and instructors in the design, implementation, and evaluation of new academic activities. The SCTL should recommend measures for evaluating initiatives, set policies and practices for evaluation, and monitor the outcomes of initiatives.

For the university community, particularly faculty and academic units, to respond to the findings of the NSSE results, the SCTL should discuss the report with the view to endorsing its findings that serve the university's priorities to Senate. Adopting initiatives of this report can play a key role in enhancing the academic experience and success of students and advance the identity of the university for its educational programming.

# INTRODUCTION

The following report is prepared for the Associate Vice-President (AVP), Teaching and Learning of Memorial University. In fall 2020, the AVP organized an ad-hoc committee of representatives of the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) Advisory Council and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) to review the results of the 2020 National Survey of Student Experience (NSSE). The ad-hoc committee was chaired by Dr. Kim Myrick (CITL) and included Ms. Jennifer Browne (Student Life), Ms. Janet Goosney (Libraries), Dr. Paula Mendonça (Technology, Transfer and Commercialization Office), Ms. Peggy Miller (CITL), Dr. Dennis Peters (Faculty of Engineering & Applied Science), Dr. Echo Pittman (Registrar Office), Mr. Chad Somerton (Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning), and Dr. Christina Thorpe (Faculty of Science).

The ad-hoc committee was asked to review 2020 NSSE reports and advise on:

1. What findings are significant or important (especially within the context of work undertaken by the University, or strategic priorities).
2. What has been done well and should be used to speak to Memorial's successes, publicly.
3. What the University could focus on improving, to inform internal conversation and future action.
4. What the priorities are (if any) for further analysis.

This report summarizes the significant findings of the NSSE results for Memorial University, pertaining to successes and areas for future growth and development, and concludes with recommendations for further analysis and use of the findings and of NSSE data in the future.

## BACKGROUND

The ad-hoc committee performed its work with consideration of the purpose and usage of NSSE and the priorities of Memorial University's Teaching and Learning Framework (TLF).

### NSSE

The NSSE is a survey of universities and colleges that measures undergraduate students' levels of engagement with their institutions. The purpose of NSSE is to gather data that can inform efforts to improve undergraduate education. The survey is administered on a three-year cycle to a census of all undergraduate first-year and senior fourth-year (and beyond) students who attend both the fall and winter semester for the respective academic year. Key definitions here are:

*First-Year Students (FYS):* students having less than 30 combined credit hours as of the winter semester (earned in Fall plus completing in Winter) and have no previous degree.

*Senior-Level Students (SLS):* students having less than or equal to 30 credit hours from graduation as of the Fall semester and must be attending in winter.

NSSE reports for Memorial University include results on student engagement for three comparison groups delineated as: 1) all participating Canadian institutions; 2) Canadian Comprehensive Universities (CCU), and 3) the Canadian U15 Research Institutions. The compositions of 2) and 3) are found in the appendix. NSSE results are analyzed using two NSSE reporting mechanisms.

## 1. Engagement Indicators (EIs)

NSSE questions are grouped into ten EIs that fit four larger themes as outlined below. [Click here](#) for definitions of themes and indicators.

Theme	Engagement Indicators	
<b>Academic Challenge</b>	Higher-Order Learning Reflective and Integrative Learning	Learning Strategies Quantitative Reasoning
<b>Learning with Peers</b>	Collaborative Learning	Discussion with Diverse Others
<b>Experiences with Faculty</b>	Student-Faculty Interaction	Effective Teaching Practices
<b>Campus Environment</b>	Quality of Interactions	Supportive Environment

## 2. High-Impact Practices (HIPs)

NSSE has designated certain undergraduate opportunities as “high-impact” due to their positive associations with student learning and retention. These opportunities are in the table below.

HIP	Item Wording
<b>Service Learning</b>	Number of courses that include a community-based project
<b>Learning Community</b>	A program where groups of students take two or more classes together
<b>Research with Faculty</b>	Work with a faculty member on a research project
<b>Internship or Field Experience</b>	Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement
<b>Study Abroad</b>	Participate in a study abroad program
<b>Culminating Senior Experience</b>	Complete a capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.

HIPs share several traits: they demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback. As a result, participation in these practices can be life-changing (Kuh, 2008; 2016).”

Memorial University has participated in the NSSE in 2014, 2017, and 2020. The Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning (CIAP) is the administrative home for the NSSE results. To date, there has been limited use of the NSSE results. *Maclean’s* magazine has used NSSE results for its University ranking publication and included Memorial. However, NSSE is not meant to be a ranking mechanism, and *Maclean’s* practice of using it has received criticism (Grayson, 2020). CIAP has simply presented results to Senate committees (e.g., Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies) and the Leadership Group (deans and directors) leaving it open for interpretations and conclusions.

NSSE offers a gauge for success and a helpful guide for strengthening the student educational experience at Memorial University.

## Priorities of Memorial University’s Teaching and Learning Framework

The TLF of Memorial University establishes priorities that can help guide the use of NSSE results to strengthen the student experience.

Overall, the TLF calls on staff, instructors, faculty, and academic leaders to articulate and undertake work to strengthen the student learning experience through initiatives that aim to: enable accessibility; deepen learners’ engagement; and facilitate student success.

Achieving the intended outcome for the TLF requires actions across academic and non-academic units at the level of the classroom, the program and the Faculty, School, or department.

Implementation includes a variety of strategies:

- Faculty and instructors designing and facilitating engaging learning experiences.
- Academic units innovating in program design and delivery methods.
- Support units collaborating with academic units on initiatives addressing student success.
- Academic leaders guiding the definition of their unit’s work and supporting initiatives.

The TLF also specifies resources and structures organized to support implementation and evaluation of initiatives, including:

- CITL, with advice of its Advisory Council, offers the institution expertise in: strategies for developing engaging learning experiences (across the domains of face-to-face or online learning); the incorporation of educational technologies to engage learners; the facilitation of course and program curriculum development and; faculty development.
- SCTL establishes measures for evaluating the framework, set policies and practices for evaluation, and monitor the outcomes of the framework.

## FINDINGS OF THE AD-HOC COMMITTEE

The ad-hoc committee conducted its analysis of NSSE 2020 results from the following reports:

- NSSE20 Engagement Indicators (MUN)
- NSSE20 Frequencies and Statistical Comparisons (MUN)
- NSSE20 High-Impact Practices (MUN)
- NSSE20 Multi-Year Report (MUN)
- NSSE20 Pocket Guide Report (MUN)
- NSSE20 Snapshot (MUN)
- NSSE20 Topical Module - First-year Experiences and Senior Transitions (MUN)

A total of 72 Canadian institutions participated in the 2020 NSSE. The committee found that it was most meaningful to use CCU as the comparison group because universities in the group held similar characteristics to that of Memorial. The following table summarizes the 2020 respondent groups. See Appendix B for more details on Memorial respondents.

		Total Sample	# Respondents	RESPONSE		
				Rate	% Female	% Full-time
<b>CCU</b>	<i>FYS</i>	75,000	25,551	34%	61.9%	92%
	<i>SLS</i>	61,000	17,751	29%	63.2%	73%
<b>Memorial</b>	<i>FYS</i>	2,561	1,060	41%	66%	96%
	<i>SLS</i>	1,971	645	33%	66%	87%

In analyzing the 2020 NSSE reports, the committee established that significant results for Memorial could be separated into either successes or areas for growth and development. The committee referenced the 2017 NSSE results on certain points of interest. However, analysis of the 2017 results was beyond the scope of this committee. Use of the 2017 results was not consistent or thorough and thus is not included in this report. Rather, the committee acknowledges that there is potential for further analysis of past and current results.

## Memorial's Significant Successes

Overall, students seem very satisfied with their experiences at Memorial University compared to the CCU group. Memorial students reported a higher satisfaction rate, with 80% of FYS and 83% of SLS rating their educational experience as good or excellent compared to 77% of FYS and 74% of SLS for the CCU. Furthermore, 86% of FYS and 85% of SLS would return to Memorial again if starting over, compared to 82% of FYS and 76% of SLS at CCUs. Areas of success are summarized below.

### High Quality Student/Faculty Interactions

Memorial students report higher quality interactions with faculty than students in the CCU. On a seven-point scale from poor (1) to excellent (7), FYS rated the quality of interactions with faculty as 5.2 compared with 4.9 for the CCU. This translates to 42% of Memorial FYS rating quality of interactions with faculty as either a 6 or 7 on the scale compared with 37% for the CCU. On the same scale, SLS rated the quality of interactions with faculty as 5.3 compared with 5.0 for the CCU. This translates to 47% of Memorial SLS rating quality of interactions with faculty as either a 6 or 7 on the scale compared with 41% for the CCU.

### Academic Advising and Learning Support Services

Quality academic advising plays a positive role in the student experience, enhancing students' sense of belonging and persistence as it facilitates the connections students have with their institution (Drake, 2011). Since 2018, a series of advising enhancement initiatives have taken place at Memorial University, particularly for FYS on the St. John's campus, to further enhance the student experience. The 2020 NSSE results indicate that Memorial students reported a higher quality of interactions with academic advisors relative to the CCU. Students reported positive experiences with student services staff and administrative staff. Notably, 43% of FYS rated their interactions with academic advisors with a score of 6 or 7 on a seven-point scale from poor (1) to excellent (7), 11% higher than the CCU (at 32%).

In relation to learning support services (tutoring services, writing centre, etc), 73% of Memorial FYS reported that the university encourages them to use the services quite a bit or very much compared with 63% at CCU. Successful communications about learning support services available at Memorial is represented in a rising number of students availing of these services. For example, since 2017 accessibility services at Memorial University have experienced a 55% increase in students availing of learning supports.

## Areas for Growth and Development

As Memorial has succeeded in the areas of student/faculty interaction, academic advising and learning support services, the university can further advance these successes and grow in other areas that are more directly related to academic programming and the student learning experience particularly of FYS.

### High Impact Practices (HIPs)

The committee identified HIPs as a key area for growth and development particularly for FYS. HIPs appear to be relatively strong for Memorial SLS, with 51% having participated in two or more HIPs compared with 50% of the CCU, and 76% having participated in at least one HIP compared with 79% of the CCU (just 3% lower). Memorial's SLS report positive engagement in HIPs, including:

- 27% have engaged in a research project with a faculty member compared with 19% at CCU.
- 20% have participated in a learning community compared with 15% at CCU.
- 12% have joined in study abroad initiatives which is comparable to CCU.
- 48% say that at least some of their courses have service learning which is on par with CCU.

However, the NSSE results indicate that work needs to be done on incorporating HIPs in the FYS experience. Only 37% participated in at least one HIP compared with 46% of the CCU, and only 3% of Memorial FYS participated in two or more HIPs compared with 5% of the CCU. The following table provides more detailed data that indicates where development could occur for FYS.

Question%	% Memorial	% CCU	Source
<b>Service Learning</b>	7% Most or all 27% Some 66% None	9% Most or all 33% Some 58% None	<i>NSSE 2020 High-Impact Practices</i> <i>handout</i>
<b>Learning Community</b>	5% Participated/ing 25% Plan to do	8% Participated/ing 27% Plan to do	<i>NSSE 2020 High-Impact Practices</i> <i>handout</i>
<b>Higher-Order Learning</b>	35%	36%	NSSE 2020 Engagement Indicators*
<b>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</b>	31%	34%	NSSE 2020 Engagement Indicators*
<b>Quantitative Reasoning Collaborative Learning</b>	21% 29%	25% 33%	NSSE 2020 Engagement Indicators* NSSE 2020 Engagement Indicators*

**\*Indicator scores are first produced at the student level, with the response set for each item that makes up the Indicator converted to a 60-point scale (e.g., Never = 0; Sometimes = 20; Often = 40; Very often = 60), and then the rescaled items are averaged.**

It is noteworthy here that on-campus employment is increasingly being recognized as another High Impact Practice (McClellan, Creager & Savoca, 2018). Memorial offers a variety of programs such as [MUCEP](#), [ISWEP](#), [GradSWEP](#) and [SWASP](#). Together, they provide approximately 2000 employment opportunities every year and opportunities for students to meaningfully connect with faculty, staff, and peers. These experiences lead to stronger connections and the development of sought-after employability skills (Keeling, 2004).

Overall, the above findings suggest that first-year experiences should be a priority for development, with emphasis placed on HIPs. Beyond the results in the official reports supplied by NSSE, it is perceived that participation in HIPs can have positive impacts on other areas captured by NSSE, including those below (first-year experience and experiences with diversity) that show room for growth and development at Memorial. Developing Learning Community participation, for example, may have positive impacts across a breadth of student learning experiences. This is not to say that one directly causes the other to improve, but rather that they may be expected to be positively related and that it may be reasonably deduced that increasing HIPs may help a broader positive educational experience.

## First-Year Experience

Indeed, the NSSE results above suggest some areas where Memorial's first-year experiences could have greater impact. When compared with the CCU, Memorial FYS appear to be working less with their classmates on things like course projects or assignments (37% for Memorial compared with 55% CCU), and participating less in class discussions (29% for Memorial compared with 39% CCU).



The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AACU) identifies First Year Seminars and Experiences as having a positive impact on student retention and engagement:

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research (High-Impact Educational Practices: a Brief Overview, <https://www.aacu.org/node/4084>).

The 2020 NSSE results suggest that Memorial FYS may require greater support in order to engage meaningfully with their peers in the academic environment. Related to this is that while NSSE results indicate that, in ways, Memorial provides a comparable or more supportive environment to the CCU, 41% of Memorial FYS attend campus activities and events quite a bit or very much, and 26% report feeling support for their non-academic work or family commitments quite a bit or very much, compared with 48% and 33% respectively of the CCU. Meanwhile, socialization and non-academic support also contribute to student success.

It is important to note that 85% of Memorial FYS are more likely to come to class having completed assignments and readings, indicating that they are arriving prepared, compared with 72% of the CCU. This suggests that it may be useful to create ways to help students transform their course preparation into active learning, by promoting opportunities for greater participation, interaction, and cooperation.

## Experiences of Diversity

Overall, Memorial students report having fewer conversations with others of different backgrounds (including race, ethnicity, economic, religious and political) when compared with the CCU. An average of 51% Memorial FYS have conversations with others of different backgrounds often or very often compared with 67% of the CCU, and an average of 55% of Memorial SLS report the same compared with 68% of the CCU. However, despite reporting limited opportunities for personal interaction, 63% of Memorial SLS indicate that their university experiences have contributed quite a bit or very much to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in understanding people of other backgrounds, compared with 58% of SLS at the CCU. Also, 53% of SLS indicate that they often or very often include diverse perspectives in their academic work as compared with 46% of the CCU.

Overall, this information suggests that it would be valuable for Memorial to investigate more intentional institutional strategies to support student experiences and understandings of diversity, and to create meaningful opportunities for students to work with and engage with diverse others.

# COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are recommendations that the committee believes are critical to further the use of this report and NSSE data in the future. These recommendations should help support the strategic development of the student experience at Memorial. As a result of implementing these recommendations, the committee would hope to see: the value of NSSE more widely recognized across the institution; more, higher-quality activities offered and evaluated across Memorial's campuses; and the student experience measured and recognized more formally by the university.

## Instructional Supports

Academic and non-academic units offer a variety of experiences for students. The NSSE data can inform the development and implementation of these opportunities for students. Units are encouraged to use the data to develop existing and new experiences and communicate them to their staff and students using the language and terms of NSSE (e.g., HIPs).

Memorial should identify how it can better support individual instructors and academic units to help them better integrate HIPs into their courses and programs. The university should consider what instructional and program development supports currently exist and additional ones that should be developed and made available. Importantly, Memorial should ensure that these programs and supports are created so that they are easy for instructors to implement, recognizing that most instructors are not trained in pedagogy and therefore straightforward, easy to implement practices are recommended.

CITL can play a key role in two ways:

1. Helping to educate university leadership, academic units, instructors, and staff on the concepts and terms of NSSE and encourage the use of related language (e.g., HIPs). Common language will help in the design and communication of more/higher quality student experiences.
2. Developing resources to assist faculty and instructors in the design, implementation, and evaluation of new academic activities such as:
  - Establishing learning communities for FYS, as well students at all levels across the university. The committee acknowledges that some academic units may have learning communities already in place, but other units may require support to integrate this HIP into their programs.
  - Advancing service-learning initiatives at Memorial. Service Learning supports interaction and engagement by bringing students together to work collaboratively toward shared goals.
  - Creating greater opportunities for student group work and learner-centered activities.

## Resource Support

Indeed, resource development and communications to support faculty, staff, and students will demand financial, human, and other resources in the face of difficult fiscal constraints. However, the findings of this report indicate that Memorial is doing comparably well with other institutions of greater resources. Memorial's leadership should be inspired by this achievement and strive for continued growth in opportunities to strengthen the student experience. It is recommended that growth should come from purposeful consolidation of resources as outlined in the TLF and recently seen with the newly established Academic Success Centre.

## Consultation

This report was developed by a small ad-hoc group of representatives of two groups (the CITL Advisory Council and the SCTL). It is recommended that the findings within should be advanced in broader discussion, particularly by the university leadership, additional Senate committees and other groups with lenses of teaching and learning and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## Senate Approval

For the university community, particularly faculty and academic units, to respond to the findings of the NSSE results, the committee recommends submitting this report to the SCTL. The SCTL should discuss the report with the view to endorsing its findings that serve the university's priorities to Senate.

## Evaluation

As set out in the TLF, the SCTL should recommend measures for evaluating initiatives resulting from the NSSE results, set policies and practices for evaluation, and monitor the outcomes of initiatives. CIAP, in consultation with the AVP Council (Office of the AVP, Teaching and Learning, AVP (Academic) Students, AVP (Academic) Graduate Students, and AVP (Academic) Faculty Relations) should work to implement the evaluation procedures.

## CONCLUSION

The ad-hoc committee has summarized the significant findings of the 2020 NSSE for Memorial University. It is the request of the committee that Memorial leverage the findings of this report and future NSSE data to strengthen and promote the university's student experience. The university should further its existing initiatives and develop new ones targeted at increasing HIPs, primarily among first year students. These initiatives will play a key role in enhancing the academic experience and success of students and advance the identity of the university for its educational programming.

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# APPENDIX A: NSSE COMPARISON GROUPS

## **CDN Comprehensive (N=13)**

Brock University  
Carleton University  
Concordia University  
Ryerson University  
Simon Fraser University  
Université du Québec à Montréal  
University of Guelph  
University of New Brunswick  
University of Victoria  
University of Waterloo  
University of Windsor  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
York University

## **U15 Members (N=15)**

Dalhousie University  
McGill University  
McMaster University  
Queen's University  
Université d'Ottawa / University of Ottawa  
Université de Montréal  
Université Laval  
University of Alberta  
University of British Columbia - Vancouver campus  
University of Calgary  
University of Manitoba  
University of Saskatchewan  
University of Toronto  
University of Waterloo  
Western University

# APPENDIX B: MEMORIAL NSSE 2020 RESPONDENT PROFILE

The following tables are a quick summary of the representativeness of the NSSE responses gathered versus the sampled population.

Citizenship is taken from Student Banner system as of Fall 2019 semester.

NSSE 2020		FYS		SLS	
Citizenship		Sample	Response	Sample	Response
<b>Canadian</b>	Count	2,197	915	1,811	579
	% of Total	85.8%	86.3%	91.9%	89.8%
<b>International</b>	Count	364	145	160	66
	% of Total	14.2%	13.7%	8.1%	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	Count	2,561	1,060	1,971	645
	% of Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The next table shows campus of registration.

NSSE 2020		FYS		SLS	
Campus		Sample	Response	Sample	Response
<b>St. John's</b>	Count	2,125	877	1,406	520
	% of Total	83.0%	82.7%	71.3%	80.6%
<b>Grenfell</b>	Count	341	139	459	26
	% of Total	13.3%	13.1%	23.3%	4.0%
<b>Distance</b>	Count	33	11	213	63
	% of Total	1.3%	1.0%	10.8%	9.8%
<b>CNS &amp; WRSN</b>	Count	62	33	234	36
	% of Total	2.4%	3.1%	11.9%	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	Count	2,561	1,060	1,971	645
	% of Total	100%	100%	100%	100%