



Message from the Interim Associate Provost for Institutional Research and Analysis & Chief Data Officer

Ms. Tia Marie Doxey

Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of the OIRA Newsletter!

The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA) is pleased to share updates, insights, and resources that support data-informed decision-making across North Carolina Central University. In this issue, we highlight upcoming initiatives, including the launch of the 2026 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), share perspectives on how Academic Program Review can drive continuous improvement, and explore important institutional metrics such as time to degree and graduation rates.

We also provide updates on efforts to strengthen data quality through the Student Data Mart and invite you to join us at the upcoming OIRA Virtual Open House on April 7, 2026.

As NCCU continues to advance the goals of *Vision 2030: Soaring to New Heights*, OIRA remains committed to providing high-quality data, analysis, and reporting that help the university better understand its students, programs, and outcomes.

Tia Marie

2026 Spring Enrollment Data

Headcount 8,775 <small>(System Avg 15,152)</small>	% Undergraduate 79% <small>(System Avg 82%)</small>	% In-State 80% <small>(System Avg 82%)</small>
FTE 8,138 <small>(System Avg 13,643)</small>	Credit Hours 111,844 <small>(System Avg 188,536)</small>	Avg. Credit Hours Per Student 12.75 <small>(System Avg 12.44)</small>
% Minority 91% <small>(System Avg 54%)</small>	% Pell Offered* 51% <small>(System Avg 33%)</small>	% Rural* 26% <small>(System Avg 33%)</small>

The OIRA website offers many data resources.
<https://www.nccu.edu/oira>

Information includes data on the following:

- Admissions
- Core Metric Drivers
- Credit Hours
- Grades
- Enrollment Retention
- Financial Aid
- Employment

Links to important data resources include the UNC System Insight Dashboard, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center and Student Achievement Measure (SAM).

**Upcoming event:
OIRA
Virtual Open House**

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

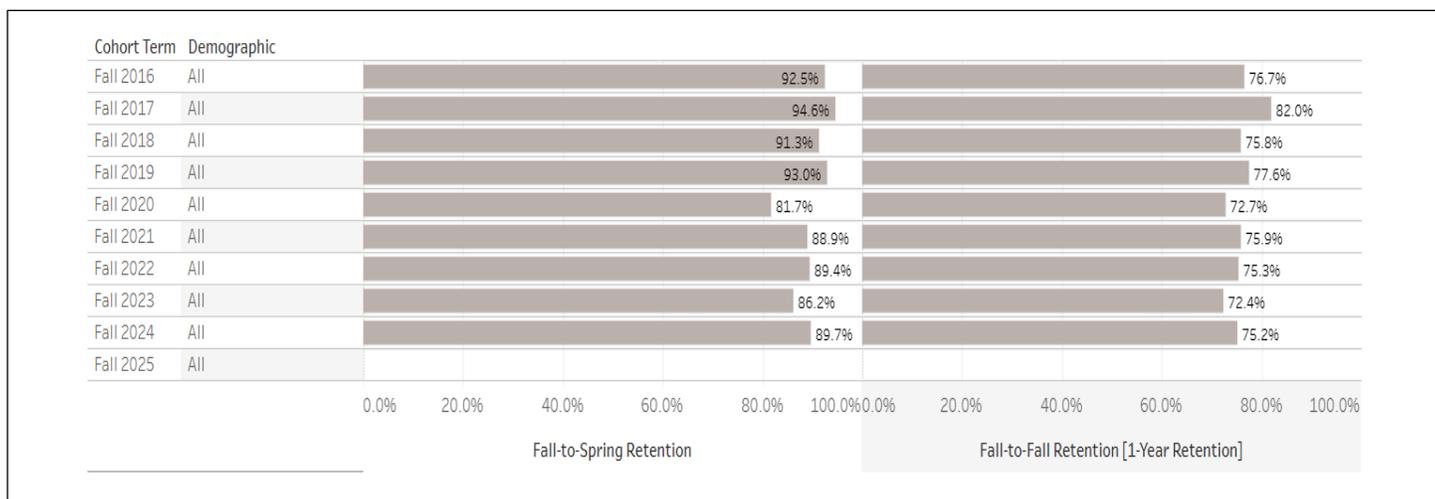
10:40 am – 1:00 pm

The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis invites you to join us for our Virtual Open House. You are welcome to drop in to learn more about our reorganization, dashboards, ways to access and use data, and more. The Virtual Open House will take place on Tuesday, April 7, 2026 from 10:40 AM 1:00 PM.

<https://nccu-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/CvIDXqSJS0mV5WH3aznkw>

[Click here for the ZOOM link.](#)

Retention Data



Closing the Loop: Turning Academic Program Review into Program Improvement

Larchin Leslie, Ph.D.

Academic Program Review (APR) should not end when the report is submitted. In fact, it should start here since APR is a cycle that happens every five years. Strategically, program review can become one of the most powerful tools departments have to strengthen curriculum, support faculty, improve student success, and align programs with workforce demand. Therefore, “Closing the loop” means using evidence from the review to describe and intentionally improve the program.

From Findings to Focused Action

Every major section of the academic review provides direction for decision-making.

Program Curriculum and Student Learning Outcomes

Data on time to degree, course sequencing, and student learning outcomes should prompt questions about curriculum alignment, advising effectiveness, and instructional design. If students are delayed in progression or outcomes are underperforming, departments may need to revise prerequisites, strengthen assessment practices, or redesign high-impact courses.

Faculty Overview Faculty productivity, turnover, mentoring processes, and recruitment plans provide

insight into program sustainability. Patterns in research output or retention may signal the need for structured mentoring, workload adjustments, or targeted hiring aligned with emerging program priorities.

Student Data Overview. Enrollment trends, retention rates, graduation data, employment profiles, and skill alignment (including specialized, common, and software skills) should guide strategic decisions about recruitment, curriculum updates, and workforce responsiveness. Multi-year trends, rather than single-year fluctuations, should inform planning.

The key is moving from descriptive reporting to strategic questioning:

- What is working well and should be scaled back/down?
- What is not working, and for whom?
- Where should we invest resources for the greatest impact?

Action Planning and Measurable Improvement

Closing the loop requires more than discussion. Each major finding should lead to a documented action plan that identifies issues and proposed interventions. Each department must reassess outcomes to determine whether improvement occurred. Closing the loop also means creating a continuous cycle and demonstrating meaningful program enhancement. Part of the improvement and the continuous cycle is to have a

proper document management system in place to store accreditation-related materials and artifacts.

The Importance of Document Management

Improvement efforts must be documented to have value. A centralized, organized repository for program artifacts ensures:

- Preservation of institutional memory
- Transparency and accountability
- Allows quick access to accreditation reports.

Conclusion

Closing the loop is not about compliance; it is about commitment. When departments intentionally use program review data to guide decisions, align resources, and document progress, they create a culture of evidence and continuous improvement. Academic program review then becomes more than a report; it becomes a roadmap for excellence.

Time to Degree vs. Graduation Explained

Becky J. Mussat-Whitlow, PhD

Time to degree and *graduation rate* are often used interchangeably in campus conversations, yet they measure different phenomena and can lead to different conclusions about student success. **Time to degree** captures the average elapsed time for **graduates** to complete a credential, emphasizing completion efficiency among completers, while **graduation rate** tracks the **proportion** of an entering cohort that completes within a prescribed time window (e.g., 100%, 150%, 200% of normal time) and is a formal federal accountability measure in IPEDS. These metrics may diverge: an institution can post fast time-to-degree among completers and still have low graduation rates if many students stop out or transfer away, highlighting the importance of reading them together and in context with IPEDS Outcome Measures for non-traditional populations. [\[iuiua.iu.edu\]](http://iuiua.iu.edu), [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov) [\[ihep.org\]](http://ihep.org), [\[puc.edu\]](http://puc.edu)

Introduction

Student success dashboards often display both *graduation rates* and *time to degree*, but stakeholders

may not realize that the metrics answer different questions and include different student universes.

Graduation rate in IPEDS stems from federal requirements under the Student Right-to-Know Act and follows **full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking (FTFT)** cohorts to 100%, 150%, and 200% of normal time to completion (e.g., 4, 6, and 8 years for a baccalaureate). **Time to degree**, by contrast, is typically computed institutionally as the average elapsed time among **graduates in a given year** (looking backward to first entry), and thus it excludes non-completers by design. Because these measures are built differently, they can move in opposite directions and must be interpreted with care. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov), [\[philander.edu\]](http://philander.edu) [\[iuiua.iu.edu\]](http://iuiua.iu.edu) [\[ihep.org\]](http://ihep.org)

Definitions and Measurement Foundations

Graduation Rate (IPEDS)

- **Definition & Cohort:** IPEDS defines graduation rate for FTFT undergraduates who are degree/certificate-seeking, tracking their completion status at 100% and 150% of normal time; GR200 extends the window to 200%. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov)
- **Purpose & Compliance:** The metric is part of IPEDS' winter collection cycle and is tied to federal reporting obligations for Title IV-participating institutions. [\[philander.edu\]](http://philander.edu)
- **Limitations:** Traditional IPEDS graduation rates exclude part-time entrants and transfer-in students, leading to incomplete pictures at institutions with highly mobile or non-traditional student bodies; the newer IPEDS **Outcome Measures (OM)** partially addresses this by including non-FTFT and part-time students, with milestones at 4, 6, and 8 years. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov), [\[airweb.org\]](http://airweb.org), [\[ihep.org\]](http://ihep.org)

Time to Degree (Institutional Practice)

- **Definition & Population:** Time to degree is generally computed as the **average elapsed calendar time** from first matriculation to degree

conferral **among those who graduated** in a given year or period. [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu)

- **On-Time Completion:** Institutions often classify 4 years for a bachelor's as "on time," mirroring the "normal time" concept used in IPEDS, even though the calculation method (completer-based vs. cohort-based) differs. [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu), [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov)
- **Practical Variants:** Some campuses also publish "registered time to degree" (terms enrolled) versus "elapsed time to degree" (calendar years), and report distributions (e.g., percent within 4 years) in addition to means/medians. (Practice varies; IPEDS does not prescribe a single method.) [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu)

Conceptual Differences

Numerator/Denominator Logic

- **Graduation Rate:** Numerator = number of cohort members who complete within the time window; Denominator = full FTFT cohort (minus allowable exclusions). The denominator includes **completers and non-completers**. [\[philander.edu\]](http://philander.edu)

Time to Degree: Calculated **only on completers**; there is no "non-completer" in the denominator, which yields an efficiency measure for those who finish but says nothing about those who do not. [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu)

Directionality and Interpretation

- A **lower** time to degree suggests faster progression among completers; however, it can coexist with a **low** graduation rate if many students never complete, transfer out, or time out beyond the window. [\[ihop.org\]](http://ihop.org), [\[puc.edu\]](http://puc.edu)
- Conversely, an institution may raise graduation rates by improving overall persistence and completion supports even if average time to degree remains flat due to complex student

pathways (e.g., major switching, stop-outs). [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov)

Data Sources and Methodological Notes

- **Graduation Rates (GR/GR200):** Defined and collected by IPEDS with detailed tutorials and statutory background; tracking points at 100%, 150%, and 200% of normal program time. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov), [\[philander.edu\]](http://philander.edu)
- **Outcome Measures (OM):** Broadens the universe to include non-FTFT and part-time students and reports completions at 4, 6, and 8 years—crucial context when interpreting graduation rates at institutions with high transfer-in or part-time populations. [\[airweb.org\]](http://airweb.org), [\[ihop.org\]](http://ihop.org)
- **Time to Degree:** Typically produced from student systems by linking graduates to their first entry term; institutions like Indiana University publicly describe such methods and emphasize "on-time" (4-year) completion as a benchmark for bachelor's degrees. [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu)

Use Cases

Strategic Planning and Student Success

- **Graduation rate** is ideal for **accountability**, benchmarking peers, and monitoring cohort-level interventions (e.g., first-year experience programs) because it captures *how many* students in the entering group finish in a defined window. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](http://nces.ed.gov)
- **Time to degree** is powerful for understanding **progression efficiency** among completers, diagnosing slowdowns tied to course availability, advising, or program sequencing, and projecting capacity (e.g., housing, upper-division course loads). [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](http://iuia.iu.edu)

Equity and Population Differences

- Because GR focuses on FTFT cohorts, it may understate success at institutions serving large

numbers of part-time students, adult learners, or transfer-ins; **OM** data can mitigate blind spots by

- capturing broader student populations and additional waypoints. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[airweb.org\]](https://airweb.org)
- Time-to-degree analyses should be disaggregated (e.g., Pell receipt, first-gen, race/ethnicity) to reveal structural delays (gateway bottlenecks, work obligations), even though the federal GR/GR200 components provide more standardized disaggregations (and, in recent years, Pell/loan status within GR). [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)

Worked Example (Hypothetical)

Consider a fall 2018 FTFT cohort of **1,000** bachelor's-seeking students.

- By year 6 (150% time), **600** have graduated at the same institution → **Graduation rate (150%) = 60%**. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov)
- Among the **2024–25 graduates**, analysis shows the average elapsed time from first matriculation to degree is **4.7 years** → **Time to degree = 4.7** (completers only). [\[iuiua.iu.edu\]](https://iuiua.iu.edu)

If **200** additional students transfer out in good standing and earn degrees elsewhere, IPEDS GR for the original institution **does not** count those completions in the numerator, which may depress the rate despite successful outcomes for those students; the **OM** component provides a supplemental perspective by including broader entrants and outcomes at multiple time points.

[\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[airweb.org\]](https://airweb.org)

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

- **Interpreting time to degree as a completion metric**

Time to degree excludes non-completers, so it cannot answer “What share finished?”—only “How long did finishers take?” Combine with GR/GR200 or OM for a complete picture.

[\[iuiua.iu.edu\]](https://iuiua.iu.edu), [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov)

Comparing graduation rates across institutions without acknowledging cohort definitions

- GR/GR200 cover FTFT only; institutions with high transfer-in or part-time populations may appear to underperform unless OM or other measures are considered. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)
- **Ignoring program length norms when benchmarking time to degree**
“Normal time” varies by credential (e.g., associate vs. bachelor’s vs. professional practice degrees), and some institutions operate on accelerated calendars. Use program-level norms when comparing. [\[kb.lightcast.io\]](https://kb.lightcast.io)
- **Relying on averages alone**
Mean time to degree can be skewed by a tail of stop-outs; report medians and distribution bands (≤4 years, 4.5–5, 5–6, 6+) for more nuance. (Institutional practice; IPEDS does not prescribe.) [\[iuiua.iu.edu\]](https://iuiua.iu.edu)

Policy and Compliance Context

- **IPEDS Graduation Rates** have been collected since the late 1990s to fulfill federal transparency requirements, and institutions are obligated to report them as part of Title IV participation. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[philander.edu\]](https://philander.edu)
- The **GR200** extension recognizes that some students require more than 150% time, providing an eight-year benchmark for bachelor’s programs. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov)
- The creation of **OM** reflects federal acknowledgment of changing student demographics and attendance patterns, expanding the lens beyond FTFT to include part-time and transfer students with outcomes at 4/6/8 years. [\[airweb.org\]](https://airweb.org), [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)

Practical Recommendations for Campus Reporting

- Publish both metrics with clear labels**
 Always state the population (e.g., FTFT cohort vs. completers) and the time window. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](https://iuia.iu.edu)
- Triangulate with OM**
 When communicating externally, pair GR/GR200 with OM to describe outcomes for non-traditional students and transfer mobility. [\[airweb.org\]](https://airweb.org), [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)
- Disaggregate thoughtfully**
 Where possible, show time-to-degree distributions and graduation rates by Pell status, race/ethnicity, and other equity markers; leverage GR's Pell/loan disaggregates and supplement with internal analyses for TTD. [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)
- Contextualize with program length and modality**
 Note normal time by credential and impacts of online, co-op, or accelerated pathways when interpreting both metrics. [\[kb.lightcast.io\]](https://kb.lightcast.io)
- Explain transfer dynamics**
 Where transfer-out rates are high, acknowledge that GR at the origin institution will not credit completions elsewhere and point readers to OM or state transfer dashboards. [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org), [\[puc.edu\]](https://puc.edu)

Conclusion

Graduation rate and time to degree are **complementary, not interchangeable**. Graduation rate is a **cohort-based**, federally standardized measure that answers *how many finish within a defined time frame*; time to degree is a **completer-based** institutional metric that answers *how long finishers take to complete*. In practice, institutions should report and interpret both alongside **Outcome Measures** to reflect the realities of modern student mobility and attendance patterns and to support sound decision-making in policy, resource allocation, and equity-oriented improvement. [\[nces.ed.gov\]](https://nces.ed.gov), [\[iuia.iu.edu\]](https://iuia.iu.edu) [\[airweb.org\]](https://airweb.org), [\[ihep.org\]](https://ihep.org)

References

- NCES/IPEDS—Measuring Student Success (GR, GR200, OM)** Overview of cohorts, time horizons, and limitations of FTFT measures. [NCES: Measuring Student Success in IPEDS](#).
- AIR/IPEDS Tutorial—Outcome Measures (OM)** Scope, milestones (4/6/8 years), and inclusion of non-FTFT students. [AIR: OM Measures of Success Tutorial \(PDF\)](#).
- IHEP—PostsecData Explainer** Comparative summary of GR, GR200, and OM, including discussion of disaggregations and coverage. [IHEP: Student Outcome Metrics in IPEDS](#).
- Indiana University—Time to Degree (institutional methodology)** Example of TTD defined as elapsed time among graduates and “on-time” completion expectations. [IU Institutional Analytics: Time to Degree](#).
- AIR/IPEDS Tutorial—Graduation Rates (GR) Overview.** Compliance context, collection timing, and definition of GR. [AIR: GR Overview Script \(PDF\)](#).
- IPEDS Glossary—Award and Degree Levels** Normative program lengths that inform “normal time” concepts. [Lightcast summary of IPEDS degree levels](#).
- Institutional Commentary on Mobility** Illustration of how high transfer mobility depresses reported GR despite successful outcomes for students. [PUC OIRAP: Graduation Rates note](#).

Data Requests

OIRA operates as the central unit for the collection, processing, analysis, interpretation, reporting and maintenance of official, historical, university data. Historical university data can be requested by clicking on either link: [OIRA Data Request Form](#) or [Service Catalog](#) **Please allow 14 days for all data requests.** Sufficient time is needed to schedule, process and quality check requests.

Strengthening the Student Data Mart Through Improved Warning Validation Review Processes

Robert Patrikios, Student Data Mart Business Analyst

In Spring 2025, the Student Data Mart (SDM) team launched an initiative to better understand and address Warning validations—alerts that do not stop SDM snapshots from migrating but often indicate potential data accuracy issues. With the Fall 2025 Census, we discovered we still had some work to do.

By early September 2025, the team identified mismatches in student counts and student type classifications. A detailed review revealed that 113 students had been incorrectly labeled as new rather than continuing, including 58 second-year law students, representing more than 60% of that cohort. The Fall 2025 Census also contained over 144 Warning validations tied directly to this issue. These misclassifications were corrected by the end of September through Snapshot Change Requests.

Although Warning reports had been shared with the team since February 2025, this discovery highlighted the need for renewed focus. In response, the SDM team hosted a Warning Validations Workshop on September 30 to review Fall 2025 End-of-Term (EOT) warnings. The workshop helped staff understand how to prioritize issues, distinguish between items needing immediate attention versus ongoing review, and recognize which warnings could be safely ignored. The team also committed to reviewing and documenting warnings for every snapshot.

The EOT snapshot became a valuable opportunity to put these improvements into practice. With fewer critical errors and several months before the December deadline,

the team concentrated on warnings and successfully resolved more than 1,800 of them. This included:

- 1,550 corrections made through a collaborative fix by Undergraduate Admissions, ITS, and the UNC System Office, which enabled accurate import of postsecondary GPAs.
- 162 corrections addressing non-foreign FICE code warnings.
- Complete review and resolution of all Student Type warnings by Admissions and the Registrar before snapshot migration.

While not every validation can be cleared each cycle, ongoing efforts to understand and address warnings continue to improve data quality. These collective accomplishments help ensure that NCCU's institutional data remains accurate, reliable, and reflective of the university's story.

Thank you to all SDM team members and campus partners for their commitment to strengthening our data systems as we continue to soar into the future.

NCCU Preparing to Launch the 2026 National Survey of Student Engagement

Tia Marie Doxey

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) will officially launch the **2026 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** on **March 17, 2026**. The survey will be administered to **first-year students and seniors**, providing them an opportunity to share feedback about their academic experiences, campus engagement, and the support services that contribute to their success. The **Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA)** in the **Division of Academic Affairs** partners with the **Division of Student Affairs** to administer the survey at NCCU. Through this collaboration, the university collects valuable student feedback that helps strengthen academic programs, improve student support services, and guide institutional planning. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to support this effort by reminding first-year students and graduating

seniors to complete the survey when it launches. Encouragement from faculty in the classroom, outreach from advisors, and campus-wide communication efforts play an important role in ensuring strong participation. When students share their experiences, they help NCCU better understand what is working well and where improvements can be made to enhance the student experience.

Why the NSSE Survey Matters

The NSSE is a nationally recognized survey that collects information about how undergraduate students spend their time and what they gain from their college experience. Colleges and universities across the country use NSSE results to better understand student engagement, improve teaching and learning practices, and strengthen student success initiatives.

At NCCU, NSSE results help inform efforts related to:

- Student success and retention initiatives
- Academic program improvement
- Institutional effectiveness and assessment
- Strategic planning and accreditation reporting

By examining student engagement data, NCCU can continue to develop programs and services that support academic excellence and student achievement.

Highlights from NCCU's 2022 NSSE Results

The most recent administration of the survey in 2022 provided valuable insight into the experiences of NCCU students. A total of **459 NCCU students** participated in the survey and shared feedback about their academic engagement, interactions with faculty, and campus environment.

Survey results show that NCCU students are actively engaged in their academic work. First-year students reported spending an average of 12 hours per week preparing for class, while seniors reported spending 14 hours per week studying and completing coursework. In addition, 45 percent of first-year students reported that their courses highly challenged them to do their best work, demonstrating the academic rigor students experience at NCCU.

Interactions with faculty also play an important role in the student experience. Forty-six percent of first-year

students and 56 percent of seniors frequently discussed career plans with faculty members, while 62 percent of first-year students reported that instructors clearly explained course goals and expectations. Students also indicated that they receive meaningful feedback on assignments, with 54 percent of first-year students and 58 percent of seniors reporting prompt and detailed feedback from instructors.

Collaborative learning is another key component of the NCCU experience. Forty-five percent of first-year students and 58 percent of seniors reported frequently working with classmates on course projects, while 39 percent of first-year students reported studying with peers to prepare for exams. These experiences help students build teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills.

The survey also highlights the supportive campus environment at NCCU. Sixty-six percent of first-year students reported that the university strongly encourages the use of learning support services, such as tutoring and writing assistance. Additionally, 53 percent of both first-year students and seniors rated their interactions with academic advisors highly. Overall satisfaction with the NCCU experience remains strong, with 71 percent of first-year students and 75 percent of seniors rating their overall educational experience as excellent or good.

Looking Ahead to NSSE 2026

The upcoming **2026 NSSE survey** will provide updated insight into student engagement and learning experiences across campus. These results will help NCCU continue strengthening programs and services aligned with **Vision 2030: Soaring to New Heights**.

Faculty, staff, and advisors are encouraged to support the survey by reminding eligible students to participate when the survey launches on **March 17, 2026**. Student feedback plays a vital role in shaping the future of NCCU and ensuring that the university continues to provide a high-quality educational experience for all Eagles.

Truth and Service begins with listening to the voices of our students.

NSSE 2022 Highlights

459 first-year and senior students responded

Academic Engagement

12 hours

Average hours first-year students spend preparing for class each week

14 hours

Average weekly study time for seniors

45%

First-year students who said their courses highly challenged them to do their best work

58 pages

Average pages of writing assigned to first-year students each academic year

78 pages

Average pages of writing assigned to seniors each academic year

Faculty Interaction

46% of first-year students and **56%** of seniors frequently discuss career plans with faculty

62% of first-year students say instructors clearly explain course goals and requirements

54% of first-year students and **58%** of seniors receive prompt and detailed feedback on assignments

Learning with Peers

45% of first-year students and **58%** of seniors frequently work with classmates on course projects

39% of first-year students frequently study with peers to prepare for exams

62% of seniors help explain course material to other students

Campus Environment

66% of first-year students say NCCU strongly encourages use of tutoring and learning support services

53% of both first-year students and seniors rate their interactions with academic advisors highly

71% of first-year students and **75%** of seniors rate their overall educational experience at NCCU as **excellent or good**

Experiential Learning

48% of seniors participated in internships, field experiences, or clinical placements

39% of seniors completed or were completing a culminating senior experience

59% of first-year students and **69%** of seniors participated in courses with **community-based service learning**

Coming Soon

NSSE 2026 launches March 17, 2026

First-year students and seniors are encouraged to participate and share their NCCU experience.