

# Interpreting the Means Comparison Report

## Variables

The items from the NSSE survey appear in the left column in the same order and wording as they appear on the instrument. Responses set values are also provided to help you interpret the statistics.

## Variable Names

The name of each variable appears in the second column for easy reference to your data file and the summary statistics at the end of this section.

## Benchmark

Items that comprise the five “Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice” are indicated by the following:

**LAC**=Level of Academic Challenge

**ACL**=Active and Collaborative Learning

**SFI**=Student-Faculty Interaction

**EEE**=Enriching Educational Experiences

**SCE**=Supportive Campus Environment

## Mean

The mean is the arithmetic average of student responses on a particular item. Means are provided for your institution, selected peers or consortium, Carnegie classification, and for the NSSE 2005 national sample.

## Class

Means are reported for first-year students (FY) and seniors (SR). If applicable, first-year and senior students that were part of an oversample are included in your institution’s data, but not in any of the comparison groups.

## Statistical Significance

Items with mean differences that are larger than would be expected by chance alone are noted with one, two, or three asterisks, referring to three significance levels ( $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $p < .001$ ). The smaller the significance level, the smaller the likelihood that the difference is due to chance. *Please note that statistical significance does not guarantee that the result is substantive or important.* Large sample sizes (like those produced by NSSE) tend to produce more statistically significant results even though the magnitude of mean differences may be inconsequential. It is recommended to start by interpreting only those items with three asterisks ( $p < .001$ ) and to consult effect sizes (see below) in order to make judgments about the practical meaning of the results.

## Effect Size

Effect size indicates the “practical significance” of the mean difference. It is calculated by dividing the mean difference by the standard deviation of the group with which the institution is being compared (consortium, Carnegie type, or NSSE 2005). In practice, an effect size of .2 is often considered small, .5 moderate, and .8 large. A positive sign indicates that your institution’s mean was greater, thus showing

**NSSE 2005 Means Comparison Report**  
**Nsseville University**

Variable	Benchmark	Class	Nsseville		Nsseville compared with:									
			Mean	SD	Selected Peers		Carnegie		NSSE 2005					
			Mean	SD	Mean	Sig *	Effect Size †	Mean	Sig *	Effect Size †	Mean	Sig *	Effect Size †	
<i>In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often</i>														
<b>1. Academic and Intellectual Experiences</b>														
a.	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	CLQUEST	ACL	FY	2.70	2.70			2.74			2.86	***	-.19
				SR	2.95	3.06			3.08			3.16	**	-.26
b.	Made a class presentation	CLPRESEN	ACL	FY	1.98	2.23	***	-.32	2.23	***	-.33	2.28	***	-.38
				SR	2.85	2.79			2.83			2.88		
c.	Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	REWROPAP		FY	2.66	2.74			2.69			2.65		
				SR	2.65	2.56			2.52			2.51	*	.15
d.	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	INTEGRAT		FY	3.15	3.07			3.06	*	.11	3.08		
				SR	3.39	3.32			3.34			3.37		
e.	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc) in class discussions or writing assignments	DIVCLASS		FY	2.74	2.74			2.75			2.77		
				SR	2.65	2.74			2.76			2.83	**	-.21
f.	Come to class without completing readings or assignments	CLUNPREP		FY	2.15	2.07			2.06	*	.12	2.03	**	.16
				SR	2.21	2.10			2.10			2.08	*	.17

an affirmative result for the institution. A negative sign indicates the institution lags behind the comparison group, suggesting that the student behavior or institutional practice represented by the item may warrant attention. An exception to this interpretation is the “coming to class unprepared” item (item 1f.) where a negative sign is preferred (i.e., meaning fewer students reporting coming to class unprepared).