

University Connections Survey 2012

Executive Summary

Each Fall Semester USU offers the University Connections course for incoming freshman. This year there were 61 sections. The Connections course begins and students attend Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and half day on Saturday. They then meet three more times in the first three weeks of the semester for follow-up sessions. "This unique course focuses on developing critical college study skills, time-management techniques, and test-taking strategies. Through this course, students are connected to the University environment, including academic expectations, policies and procedures, resources, services, and physical layout. Through a common literature experience, students are provided with an introduction to the challenging academic environment of the University. Students are also introduced to extracurricular activities designed to enrich their overall educational experience. Most importantly, Connections allows students to develop a support network of classmates, faculty, and staff to help ensure a successful beginning to their academic experience" (USU 2012-2013 Catalog).

The Connections Survey was designed to assess how helpful Connections is, and to evaluate satisfaction with various components of the course. A total of 1,597 students were enrolled in the course and 1,512 students responded to the survey. This represents a return rate of 94.7%.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

- 60.6% of the respondents were female.
- 70.9% of the respondents graduated from a high school in Utah.
- 70.1% of the respondents are living on campus.

THE CONNECTIONS COURSE WAS PERCEIVED AS BEING MOST USEFUL IN HELPING STUDENTS TO:

- Get settled before school started (88.5%).
- Learn about opportunities to be involved on campus (88.4%).
- Learn about University policies (87.7%).
- Navigate the physical layout of the campus (86.7%).

PRIMARY REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN CONNECTIONS

- Earn two academic credits (81.6%).
- Learn about campus resources (65.4%).
- Learn the physical layout of the campus (63.5%).

SELECTED FINDINGS

- 86.2% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Connections Canvas website was easy to navigate.
- 85.6% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that because of the course they were more informed about campus events.
- 80% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the peer mentor assistance was important to the course.
- 79% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that that they were glad that there were evening activities for Connections students.
- 78.5% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Connections course helped ease their transition to USU.
- 78.2% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with their Connections experience.

INTRODUCTION

Each Fall Semester USU offers the University Connections course for incoming freshman. This year there were 61 sections. The Connections course begins and students attend Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and half day on Saturday. They then meet three more times in the first three weeks of the semester for follow-up sessions.

The University Connections course was designed to give students an early introduction to the expectations and challenges of university life; to the academic, geographic, social/communal, and procedural maps of the University. Connections 2012 also emphasized some of the learning skills students needed to achieve their university goals successfully. The course explored problems common in the transition of students from high school into university life. The course provided an orientation to University services and resources, an introduction to basic policies and procedures governing the conduct of staff and students, as well as the physical layout of the USU campus and the Cache County community.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the survey is to evaluate student opinion in the 61 sections of the Connections course. The survey consists of six parts: survey demographics, a section of questions evaluating students' experiences with the course, a section asking students how helpful the course was in meeting various goals, a section dealing with students' primary reasons for enrolling in the program, a section dealing with the effectiveness of their course instructors, and a set of four open-ended questions allowing students to make comments and give more specific feedback about their impressions of the course. The open-ended questions will be addressed in a separate report that the instructors will be able to access through the Connections Canvas website. The Connections Survey was placed on Connections Canvas website and all students were instructed to complete the survey.

A total of 1,597 students were enrolled in the Connections course during the Fall Semester of 2012 and 1,512 usable surveys were submitted. The response rate was 94.7%.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS (See Table 1)

Of the 1,512 respondents 60.6% were female. A majority of respondents (70.9%) graduated from a Utah high school. Seventy percent of the respondents were living on campus.

When students were asked to report their high school grade point average, a majority of respondents (72.5%) said they had a GPA of 3.5 to 4.0. When asked to predict their Fall Semester grade point average; 61.7% of the respondents anticipated getting between a 3.5 and 4.0 GPA. Students were then asked how difficult they expected their first semester of classes would be. A plurality of respondents (49.5%) said they thought classes would be moderately difficult, while 17.7% said they would be very difficult.

FINDINGS: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE CONNECTIONS COURSE (See Table 2)

The survey includes questions requiring students to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about Connections as it related to course content and assignments. Results are discussed in the order that the questions appear on the survey.

When asked if the Connections course helped ease their transition to USU, 78.5% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed while 6.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A slight majority of respondents (58.8%) strongly agreed or agreed that making friends at USU was easier because of Connections. Fifteen percent of these respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Students were asked if the literature assignment "The Beast in the Garden" helped introduce them to college-level academic work. A plurality of respondents (41.8%) agreed or strongly agreed, while 27.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. When asked if in the Connections course they received information that allowed them to know what was expected of them in their academic work, 75.1% agreed or strongly agreed. Eight percent of the respondents

disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy-six percent of the respondents said the course enabled them to feel more comfortable contacting their professors, but 7.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Eighteen percent of the respondents would not encourage friends to attend Connections, while 62.6% of the respondents would. A majority of respondents (85.6%) strongly agreed or agreed that because of the course they were more informed about campus events, while 4.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with their Connections experience, while 6.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

When evaluating whether the Connections course helped students learn how to manage their time more effectively, 62.4% agreed or strongly agreed that it did. Thirteen percent of the respondents indicated that it did not help them to manage their time more effectively. Students were then asked if the "Aggie Think, Care, Act" presentation provided useful information about decision making in college. Fifty-five percent of the respondents agreed or strong agreed that it did, but 15% indicated that it did not provide useful information about decision making in college. Seventy-three percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the technology workshop provided useful information, while 7% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Eighty percent of the respondents thought that the peer mentor assistance was important to the course, but 5.8% did not. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents said they were glad that there were evening activities for Connections students, while 4.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

When asked if the Connections course assignments helped students understand more about what is expected of them in their academic coursework, 65.5% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 12.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy percent of the respondents would recommend the Connections course to other students, but 9.6% would not. When evaluating the library workshop, only 17.9% of the respondents indicated that because of the workshop they would be more likely to ask library staff for assistance. Note that a majority of the respondents (62.7%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that they would be more likely to ask library staff for assistance because of the workshop. A majority of respondents (66%) said that the Convocations speaker made the literature assignment more meaningful and 14% said it did not.

Eighty percent of the respondents said that they learned how to use the Connections Canvas site during the technology workshop, while 8.2% did not. Eighty-six percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Canvas website was easy to navigate, while 3.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

When asked if the "Welcome to USU Fair" provided useful information that helped students feel more connected to USU and the local community, 64.3% agreed or strongly agreed. Nine percent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the "Welcome to USU Fair" helped them feel more connected to USU or the local community.

FINDINGS: THE HELPFULNESS OF THE CONNECTIONS COURSE (See Table 3)

Students were asked if they agreed or disagreed with nine statements about how helpful the Connections course was in achieving various objectives. They were to rate each statement as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. Results are discussed in the order that the questions appeared on the survey.

Seventy-four percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Connections was a good way of helping them make friends with other new students, 8.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Connections was helpful for learning about University policies. Only 2.9% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Connections was helpful in learning about University policies. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents thought that the Connections course helped them in navigating the physical layout of the campus, while 5.1% said it did not help them navigate the campus.

A majority of the respondent (88.5%) said that Connections helped them get settled before school started; 3.5% disagreed or strong disagreed that it helped them get settled. Fifty-four percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the course helped them learn more about a possible major, while 14.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. When asked if Connections was helpful for learning about opportunities to be involved on

campus, 88.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed and 2.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Connections helped them understand what there was to do in Logan, while 9.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sixty-three percent of the respondents said Connections was helpful for meeting faculty and staff, but 10.5% said it was not. When asked if Connections was helpful for students in obtaining valuable academic skills and techniques, 69% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed and 9.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

FINDINGS: REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN THE CONNECTIONS COURSE (See Table 4)

This section of the survey includes a series of statements relating to reasons students may have chosen to enroll in the Connections course. Results are presented in the order they appear on the survey.

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents said that Connections was very important in helping make friends with other new students, while 15.9% said this was not. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents said it was very important to learn about University policies, while 24.4% said it was not important. A majority of the respondents (63.5%) said that it was very important to learn the physical layout of the campus. Ten percent of the respondents said that learning the layout of the campus was not important to them. Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that it was very important to learn about campus resources, while 5.5% reported that it was not important.

A slight majority of respondents (53.4%) thought the course was very important in learning college-level study strategies, but 12.8% said this was not important. The most notable reason for attending Connections was to earn two academic credits. Eight-two percent of the respondents indicated that this was very important to them. Only 3.7% of the respondents thought that getting two academic credits was not important. Only 29.6% of the respondents wanted to learn more about a possible major, but 30.5% did not.

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents reported that it was very important to learn about opportunities to be involved on campus, while 7.5% reported that it was not. Forty-two percent of the respondents thought the course was very important in learning what there is to do in Logan, 20.4% said this was not important. Thirty-three percent of the respondents indicated that Connections was very important in helping them meet and interact with University faculty and staff, while 17.3% indicated this was not important.

Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that the course was very important in developing a clearer understanding of what attending college means to them, 13.8% said this was not important. Twenty-two percent said the course was very important because their friends were enrolling, but 54.6% said this was not important. Half of the respondents (50%) thought that the course was very important because they heard that the course was informative and fun, 16.7% indicated that this was not an important reason for attending Connections. Sixteen percent of the respondents marked "Other" as a very important reason for attending Connections.

FINDINGS: CONNECTIONS INSTRUCTOR PERFORMANCE (See Table 5)

This section of the survey includes a series of statements relating to how the instructors approached the subject matter and interacted with students. Answers available to students were: Hardly Ever, Occasionally, Sometimes, Frequently, and Almost Always. Results are presented in the order the statements were presented on the survey. The percentages presented are based on those indicating the response of "Almost Always".

Sixty percent of the respondents said their instructor almost always explained the Connections course objectives. Fifty-three percent of the respondents said instructors almost always made it clear how each topic and activity matched the course objectives. Fifty-five percent of the respondents reported that their instructor almost always communicated the importance of the Connections course subject matter. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their instructors almost always explained course materials and assignments clearly and concisely. Nearly 66% of the respondents said their instructor displayed a personal interest in them and in their academic success. Fifty-six percent of the respondents said their instructor almost always asked students to help each other understand ideas or concepts of the course. When asked if the instructor encouraged student-faculty interaction outside the class, 70.8% of the respondents indicated their instructor almost always did so. Only 4.8%

to 6.4% of the respondents indicated that their instructors hardly ever met any of the performance objectives above.