

QI Summary Report – 2015 Baccalaureate Experience (BE) Survey

The Baccalaureate Experience (BE) survey was developed to measure the level of importance NMSU undergraduate students place on achieving NMSU BE learning outcomes, and the relative importance students perceive that NMSU places on students’ achieving those same outcomes. A second portion of the survey solicits information about students’ writing experiences at NMSU. In Spring 2015 approximately 400 students with “junior” standing participated in the survey.

Survey Part 1

Part 1 of the survey presents 14 learning outcome statements and asks students to rate how important it is for them to achieve each outcome. Response options include a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “extremely unimportant” to “extremely important.” Students are then asked to rate how important they believe it is to NMSU that they achieve the same outcomes, using the same scale. An “Importance Gap” was identified for each of the 14 outcome statements, which measures the difference between the mean importance to students and the mean importance to NMSU (as perceived by students).

The vast majority of students rated achievement of all BE outcomes as “important” or “extremely important.” Although most students also ranked achievement of these outcomes as important to NMSU, students indicated that they believe achievement of these outcomes is more important to them personally than it is to NMSU. (The one exception is “remain connected to NMSU.”) Outcomes with the widest Importance Gap are included in the Table 1.

Table 1 – Importance Gap between student rated importance, and perceived importance to NMSU

Category	Mean Importance (Students)	Mean Importance (NMSU)	Importance Gap (Mean Difference)	Std. Dev	Effect Size
Prepared academically to work in their chosen field	5.61	5.24	0.37	0.83	0.45
Think critically to solve problems	5.42	5.18	0.23	0.85	0.27
*Communicate effectively	5.41	5.17	0.23	0.89	0.26
Able to find trustworthy information	5.49	5.26	0.23	0.84	0.27

“Communicate effectively” had the 3rd largest Importance Gap, which has bearing on NMSU’s Quality Initiative to improve student writing. While we realize that not all

communication is necessarily in the form of writing, the Importance Gap here suggests there are opportunities to improve student perceptions about the value NMSU holds for effective communication generally, and written communication specifically. We also find it noteworthy that the items that rendered the first, second and fourth largest Importance Gap are inextricably associated with effective written communication (see Table 1 above).

Further analysis indicates that some Importance Gaps (IG) are exacerbated by student demographics. While demographically separated data reveal no statistically significant differences in the importance students placed on achieving these outcomes themselves, significant differences emerge in students' perceptions of how important achieving these outcomes are to NMSU.

Students in the College of Arts and Sciences are more likely than their peers in other colleges (aggregated) to think that success in effective communication and critical thinking is more important to them than it is to NMSU (both statistically and substantively).

Table 2 – Importance Gap (IG) differences: College of Arts & Sciences and all others

	A&S	All Others	Mean Difference
IG - Effective Communication	.32	.19	.13
IG - Critical Thinking	.37	.17	.20

Non-minority students are more likely than minority students to think that success in effective communication and critical thinking is more important to them than it is to NMSU.

Table 3 – Importance Gap (IG) differences: Non-minority and minority

	Non-minority	Minority	Mean Difference
IG - Effective Communication	.35	.15	.20
IG - Critical Thinking	.38	.13	.25

Non-Transfer students are more likely than Transfer students to think that success in effective communication is more important to them than it is to NMSU.

Table 4 – Importance Gap (IG) differences: Non-minority and minority

	Non-transfer	Transfer	Mean Difference
IG - Effective Communication	.31	.11	.20

Survey Part 2

Part 2 of the survey consisted of three open ended items that inquired about students' writing experiences at NMSU:

1. While a student at NMSU, what experiences or activities contributed to your written communication skills?
2. Where did these experiences and/or activities take place?
3. Provide an example of how NMSU communicates the importance or unimportance of written communication skills.

Over 60% of survey participants responded to each of the prompts. The vast majority of comments (around 90%) were 'positive,' meaning that respondents affirmed they had indeed experienced some level of growth and development regarding the quality of their written communication skills while students at NMSU. In their comments, students pointed out positive perceptions about developing their own writing skills and about the ways in which NMSU communicates interest in improving students' writing skills.

- Responses to items 1 and 2 were overwhelmingly positive, with 514 of the 537 total responses analyzed as positive (96%).
- Responses to item 3 were also quite positive, with 194 of the 242 total responses being positive (80%).
- Only 6% of respondents indicated they had not encountered any contributing experiences or activities at NMSU.

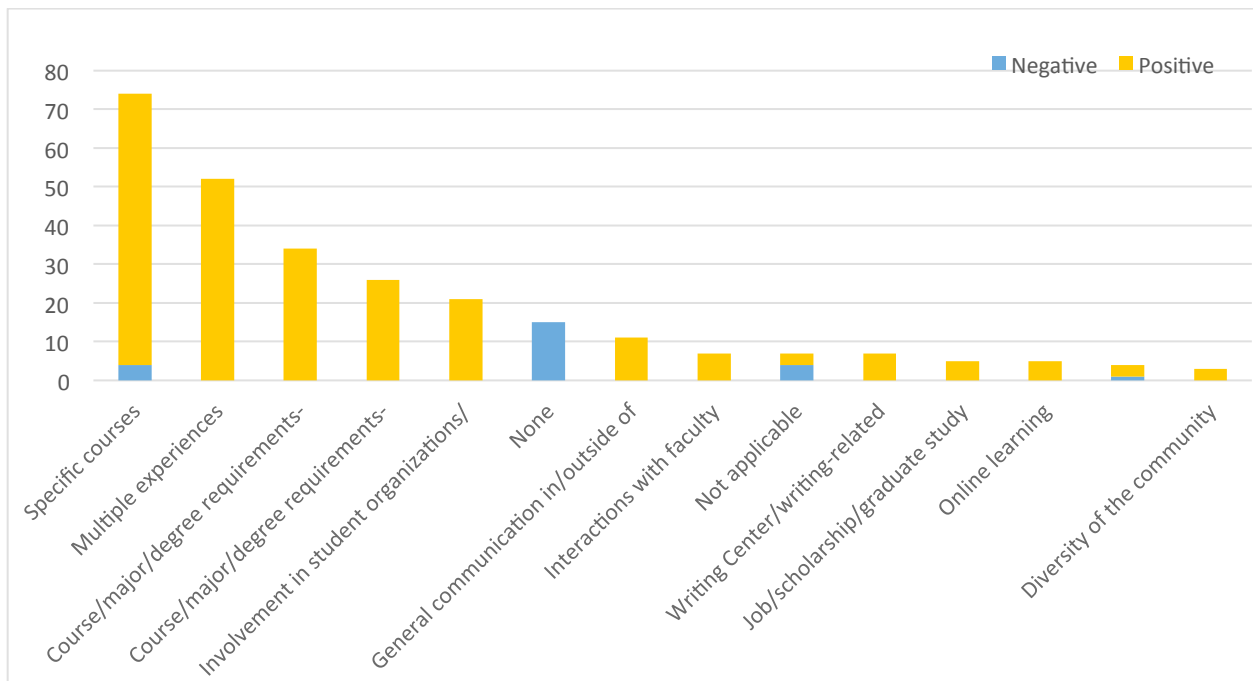
Overwhelmingly, student responses pointed to course-related requirements and activities as contributing to the development of their written communication skills:

- Experiences in specific courses – 27%
- Fulfilling course, major, and/or degree requirements – 23% of responses (13% in general; 10% writing-specific courses, e.g. ENGL 111)

In addition, approximately 20% - nearly one out of every five responses – highlighted multiple experiences, suggesting that many students are able to develop their written communication skills via a plurality of mechanisms.

Less frequent responses included involvement in student organizations or clubs, general communication in and out of the classroom, interactions with faculty, applying for jobs, scholarships and/or graduate studies, online learning, NMSU Writing Center, employment/job requirements (including internships) and diversity of the community. Table 5 shows category responses by count (271 total).

Table 5 – Experiences and activities that contribute to written communication skills, by count

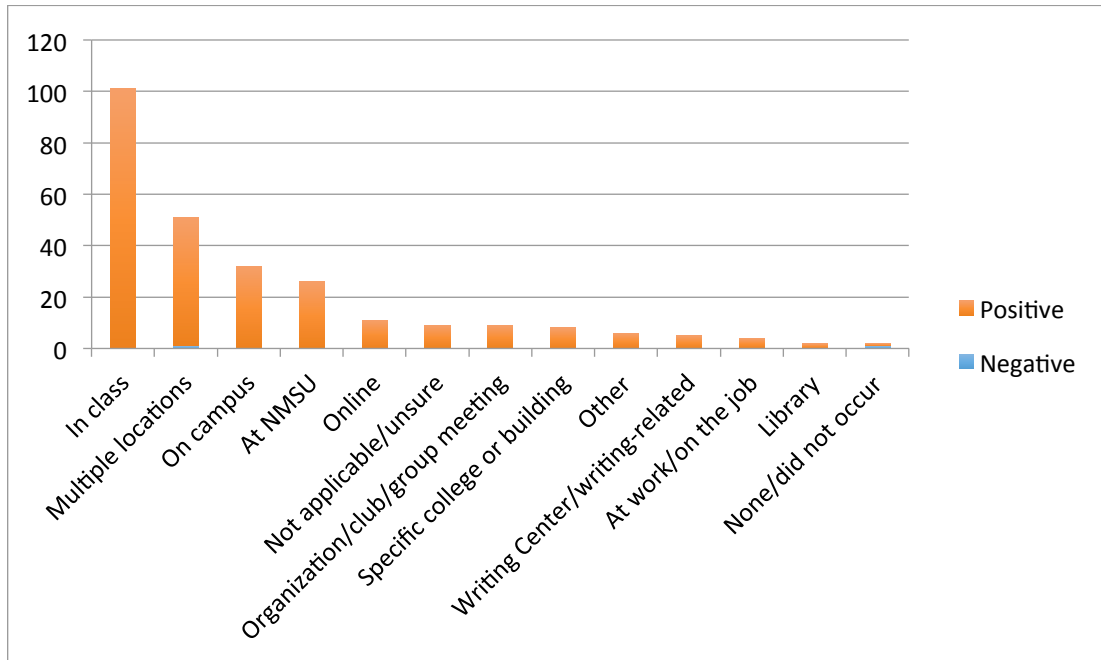


In response to “where” these experiences took place, students again overwhelmingly pointed to course requirements and activities. In total, 60% of responses point directly to NMSU locations (in class, on campus, at NMSU), and another 19% are likely to be at least partially inclusive of the same.

- 38% indicated “in class” as the primary location
- 12% indicated “on campus”
- 10% indicated “at NMSU”
- 19% indicated multiple locations

Table 6 shows category responses by count (264 total).

Table 6 – Where writing experiences took place, by count



When asked to provide an example of how NMSU communicates the importance or unimportance of written communication skills, almost 40% of responses were concentrated around course work.

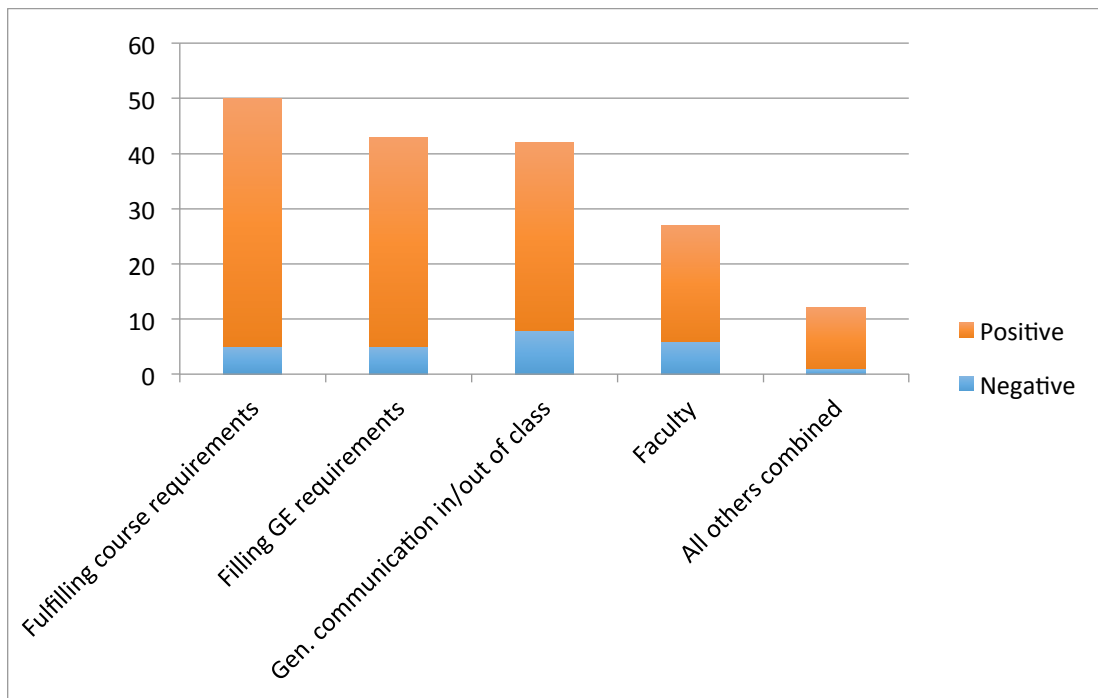
- 21% included “fulfilling course requirements”
- 18% included “fulfilling general education requirements”

In addition, students pointed to the following examples.

- 17% included “general NMSU communication in and/or outside of the classroom”
- 11% included “faculty”

Table 7 shows category responses by count (242 total).

Table 7 – How NMSU communicates the importance or unimportance of written communication skills



Examination of specific written responses reveals that many students identify English courses as contributing to development of their writing skills, followed by communication courses, and then by other courses across the curriculum. For example:

- “Experiences that contributed to my written communication skills were: Writing essays for ENGL 111H and COMM 265; EE, CHEM and PHYS lab reports based upon research done in those.”
- “Taking a philosophy course with professor X had a significant impact on my writing skills. His crash course in proper communication in Standard American English helped me improve my writing skills more than any English course prior to my college education.”
- “Taking communications helped me to be a better writer and speaker. Also, my English classes but not only those. My other classes had me write papers as well...”

Students also identified writing workshops that help them develop resumes and cover letters, and the Writing Center as evidence that NMSU values skill in written communication.

Summary

Results from this survey indicate that the strongest message NMSU sends its students about the importance or unimportance of writing is in actual course requirements – including required writing courses and the presence or absence of writing assignments within courses throughout the curriculum. From the wide variety of comments regarding

the perceived value of writing, the number and nature of those related to course requirements are striking. The two primary sources students point to as indicators of the institution's value for writing include

- 1) Specific required 'writing' courses (such as ENGL 111, COMM 265, Technical Writing, etc.)
- 2) Writing requirements (assignments) *within* 'non-writing' courses, specifically courses that are in or related to their discipline.

Many students point to the amount of writing required in their discipline courses or that "most classes require writing," as evidence that NMSU believes skill in written communication is important. Phrases such as "every class requires some level of written work," "...assignments in class," "memos or labs require... a very professional manner," "being precise when writing clinical reports," and "weekly papers, semester papers, discussion board communication,... intense note taking" barely scratch the surface.

Likewise, things students point to as evidence that NMSU does *not* think skill in written communication is important are grounded in course requirements.

- 1) NMSU does *not* require enough, or devalues required writing courses (again referring to ENGL 111, COMM 265, etc.)
- 2) Writing is *not* required or valued in their discipline/courses

Evidentiary statements from students include comments like "there is no real emphasis on improving writing ability in my program," "In [my discipline], there is not a lot of written communication skills needed," "I found a general disregard for writing abilities in all of my classes," "I have never been challenged to improve my writing skills," "many [of my discipline] courses include an embarrassingly high number of [grammatical] errors in the syllabi and on quizzes/exams," "NMSU requires an English and communications class. Not much after," "NMSU forces us to take English classes, but I feel like they are not very degree specific," and "Being at NMSU I have not had much experience with written communication assignments which indicates to me a lack of importance..."

As one student put it, "NMSU only communicates the importance of written communication skills with the classroom requirements of writing."

This study provides valuable information about the connection students make between the amount of writing required of them, and their perceptions of the importance of writing to the institution, and in their disciplines.