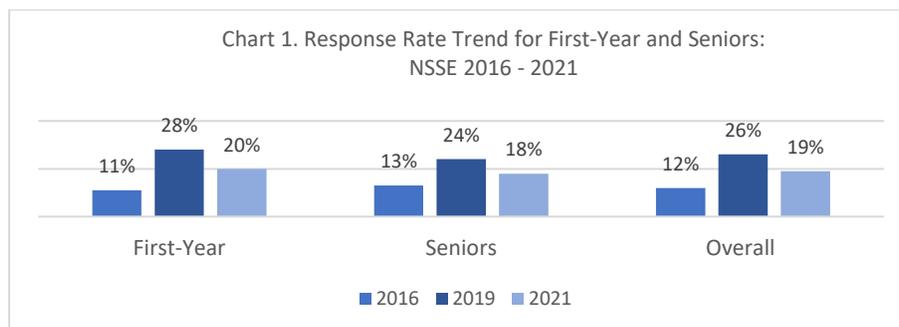


Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in Spring 2021 in accordance with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) 2020-25 Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) guidelines; previously, MTSU participated in Spring 2016 and 2019. As part of continuous improvement efforts in higher education, THEC incentivizes institutions to submit annual updates on its efforts to improve the quality of programs and student learning outcomes.

MTSU routinely solicits feedback from its students with surveys. NSSE captures the academic experience of first-year students and seniors attending four-year institutions. NSSE examines the quality of the undergraduate experience as it relates to universities' efforts to engage students and to promote learning and personal development. Thus, NSSE results provide decision-makers insight into how students spend their time as well as students' perception of what they gained from attending the University. MTSU uses NSSE results to evaluate the effectiveness of existing supports and services and to identify and close persisting gaps.

In Fall 2020, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) provided a student file to the Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR) at Indiana University School of Education. The sample file consisted of students classified as first-year students (FY) and seniors (SR) the following spring. Thus, NSSE surveyed 4,828 students at MTSU: FY (n=2,647), SR (n=2,181). A total of 927 students responded (response rate of 19.2%).

This summary report provides an overview of the latest NSSE results. More detailed analyses and reports for subgroups (e.g., college, department, major, etc.) will be provided in the near future.



The Office of IE launched the NSSE Campaign (2021) to encourage and to increase student participation. Similar efforts in 2019 resulted in a substantial increase in the overall response rate from 2016: an increase of 14 percentage points. NSSE 2021 response rate (19%) fell short compared to Spring 2019 (26%). In part, the response decline is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in the implementation of campus-wide safety protocols. Thus, students were less likely to be on campus to view NSSE reminders and advertisements. According to CPR (2021), the average response rate was 21% for institutions with enrollment of 10,000 or more students (undergraduate), so the University's rate was slightly under by 2 percentage points. Nevertheless, the current overall response rate still exceeded Spring 2016 by 7 percentage points—see Chart 1.

To summarize current NSSE results, they could be described as the tale of two paths traveled. First-year (FY) students and seniors had very different experiences, and the former group fared worse. Figure 1 compares engagement indicator results for both student groups to their peers: Southeast (SE) Public. FY students' means were significantly lower in four of the ten engagement areas compared to the SE in 2021: *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussion with Diverse Others*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, and *Supportive Environment*. In contrast, the FY students' means were significantly higher on half of the engagement indicators in 2019 compared to the SE: *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussion with Diverse Others*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, and *Effective Teaching Practices*.

Trends in engagement outcomes for seniors were less extreme. Seniors had a single area where the mean was significantly lower than the SE in 2021: *Collaborative Learning*. Furthermore, means for this group were significantly higher for *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, *Learning Strategies* and *Student-Faculty Interaction* compared to the SE. For the remaining six indicators, there were no significant differences compared to the SE.

Figure 1. National Student Survey of Engagement (NSSE) Engagement Indicators Comparison: MTSU 2019 and 2021

Themes	Engagement Indicators	First-Year		Seniors	
		2019	2021	2019	2021
Academic Challenge	Higher-order Learning	--	--	--	--
	Reflective & Integrative Learning	▲	--	--	▲
	Learning Strategies	--	--	--	▲
	Quantitative Reasoning	--	--	--	--
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	▲	▼	--	▼
	Discussion w/Diverse Others	▲	▼	▲	--
Experience w/Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	▲	▼	▲	▲
	Effective Teaching Practices	▲	--	--	--
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	--	--	--	--
	Supportive Environment	--	▼	--	--

Comparison Group: *Southeast Public*, $p < 0.05$

▲ significantly higher with effect size less than 0.3 magnitude
▼ significantly lower with effect size less than 0.3 magnitude

▲ significantly higher with effect size at least 0.3 in magnitude
▼ significantly lower with effect size at least 0.3 in magnitude

Satisfaction declines observed for FY students in thematic categories like Learning with Peers, Experience with Faculty, and Campus Environment are unsurprising in the age of COVID-19. The pandemic greatly impacted how this group experienced their first year at MTSU. Figure 2 and Table 1 provide greater context to how FY students navigated the system as most student-faculty interactions at MTSU moved online.

Figure 2. Individual Items Comprising Engagement Indicators and Themes (2021)

	First-Year Students		
	MTSU	Southeast Public	Effective Size Indicator
Learning with Peers			
Collaborative Learning			
Asked another student to help you understand course material	2.2	2.5***	▼
Explained course material to one or more students	2.2	2.6***	▼
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	2.0	2.4***	▼
Worked with other students on course projects or assignments	2.1	2.5***	▼
Discussion with Diverse Others			
People of a race or ethnicity other than your own	2.8	3.0***	▼
People from an economic background other than your own	2.8	3.0***	▼
People with religious beliefs other than your own	2.7	2.9***	▼
People with political views other than your own	2.8	2.9***	▼
Experience w/Faculty			
Student-Faculty Interaction			
Talked about career plans with a faculty member	2.2	2.3***	▼
Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)	1.6	1.7***	▼
Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	1.8	1.9*	▼
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	1.9	2.1***	▼
Campus Environment			
Supportive Environment			
Providing support to help students succeed academically	2.9	3.0*	▼
Providing opportunities to be involved socially	2.7	2.9***	▼
Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)	2.7	2.9**	▼
Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	2.1	2.3***	▼
Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)	2.6	2.8***	▼
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	2.3	2.4*	▼

MTSU's FY students tended to interact less frequently with fellow students compared to their peers at SE as shown in Figure 2. The former group reported collaborating less with peers on course material and assignments. Additionally, this group reported less exposure to and opportunities to interact with diverse others (Learning with Peers).

FY students at MTSU were less likely than their SE peers to report speaking with faculty members about careers or to discuss their academic performance. This group also described the overall environment as less supportive than their SE peers.

At face value, FY students in 2019 had an uninterrupted transition to life on campus with greater access to the many student supports and services provided by the University. From Spring 2020 through Spring 2021, students missed out on establishing connections and relationships that stem from face-to-face contact with peers and faculty/staff. To some degree, seniors endured similar pandemic struggles as FY students, but their familiarity with the University and existing relationships likely aided them in navigating and overcoming their struggles with greater ease.

Figure 3. Individual Items Comprising Engagement Indicator and Themes (2021)

Academic Challenge	Seniors		
	MTSU	Southeast Public	Effective Size Indicator
Reflective & Integrative Learning			
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	2.8	2.7*	▲
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	2.7	2.5*	▲
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	2.9	2.8*	▲
Learning Strategies			
Reviewed your notes after class	3.0	2.9*	▲
Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials	3.1	2.9*	▲
Learning with Peers			
Collaborative Learning			
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	2.3	2.5**	▼
Worked with other students on course projects or assignments	2.6	2.8***	▼
Experience w/Faculty			
Student-Faculty Interaction			
Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	2.3	2.1**	▲
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	2.3	2.2*	▲

MTSU seniors' means were significantly higher than SE peers in the thematic area for Academic Challenge and Experience with Faculty (see Figure 3). Seniors at MTSU were more likely to report connecting their learning to societal problems or issues, or to report re-examining their own views on topics. Additionally, this group also was more likely than their peers to report reviewing class notes after class or to summarizing course material. MTSU seniors interacted more frequently with faculty to discuss course topics and their academic performance than their SE peers.

Table 1 revisits and examines mean scores for MTSU's engagement indicators from Figure 1. The means for FY students were lower in 2021 compared to 2019 for each indicator. Furthermore, the difference was greater than five percentage points for three indicators: *Collaborative Learning* (-12.0), *Discussion with Diverse Others* (-7.5) and *Student-Faculty Interaction* (-6.3).

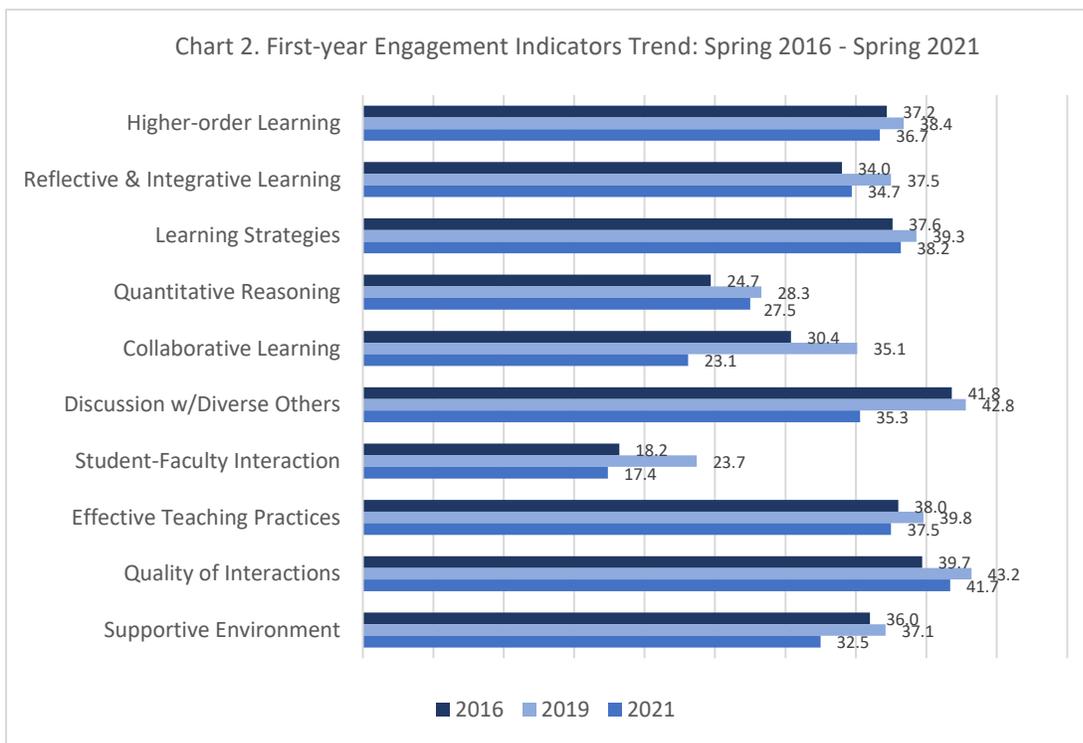
Table 1. Engagement Indicator Trends for First-year and Seniors at MTSU: Spring 2016 – Spring 2021

Themes	Engagement Indicators	First-Year			Seniors		
		2016	2019	2021	2016	2019	2021
Academic Challenge	Higher-order Learning	37.2	38.4	36.7	37.4	39.8	40.8
	Reflective & Integrative Learning	34.0	37.5	34.7	34.7	38.3	39.0
	Learning Strategies	37.6	39.3	38.2	37.5	39.2	41.4
	Quantitative Reasoning	24.7	28.3	27.5	27.0	29.9	31.8
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	30.4	35.1	23.1	29.1	34.3	30.3
	Discussion w/Diverse Others	41.8	42.8	35.3	38.7	43.5	40.7
Experience w/Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	18.2	23.7	17.4	22.5	27.4	25.8
	Effective Teaching Practices	38.0	39.8	37.5	38.4	40.1	40.1
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	39.7	43.2	41.7	41.7	43.0	42.2
	Supportive Environment	36.0	37.1	32.5	29.0	32.4	34.1

Red font: Mean (2021) at least five points lower than mean in 2019; **Green font:** Mean (2021) greater than or equal to mean in 2019

In contrast, Table 1 shows that MTSU seniors' means increased or did not change for six of the 10 areas in 2021 compared to 2019: *Higher-order Learning*, *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, *Learning Strategies*, *Quantitative Reasoning*, *Effective Teaching Practices*, and *Supportive Environment*. The largest gains were for *Learning Strategies* (+2.2) and *Quantitative Reasoning* (+1.9). There were

decreases for *Collaborative Learning* (-4.0), *Discussion with Diverse Others* (-2.8), *Student-Faculty Interaction* (-1.6) and *Quality of Interactions* (-0.8).



Charts 2 and 3 visualize trends for the engagement indicators for the last three NSSE cycles: 2016, 2019 and 2021 for FY students and seniors, respectively. Chart 3 shows the upward trend for seniors with the exception of *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussion with Diverse Others*, *Student-Faculty Interaction* and *Quality of Interactions*. Chart 2 reflects the opposite trend with 2021 means showing a decline compared to 2019 for FY students.

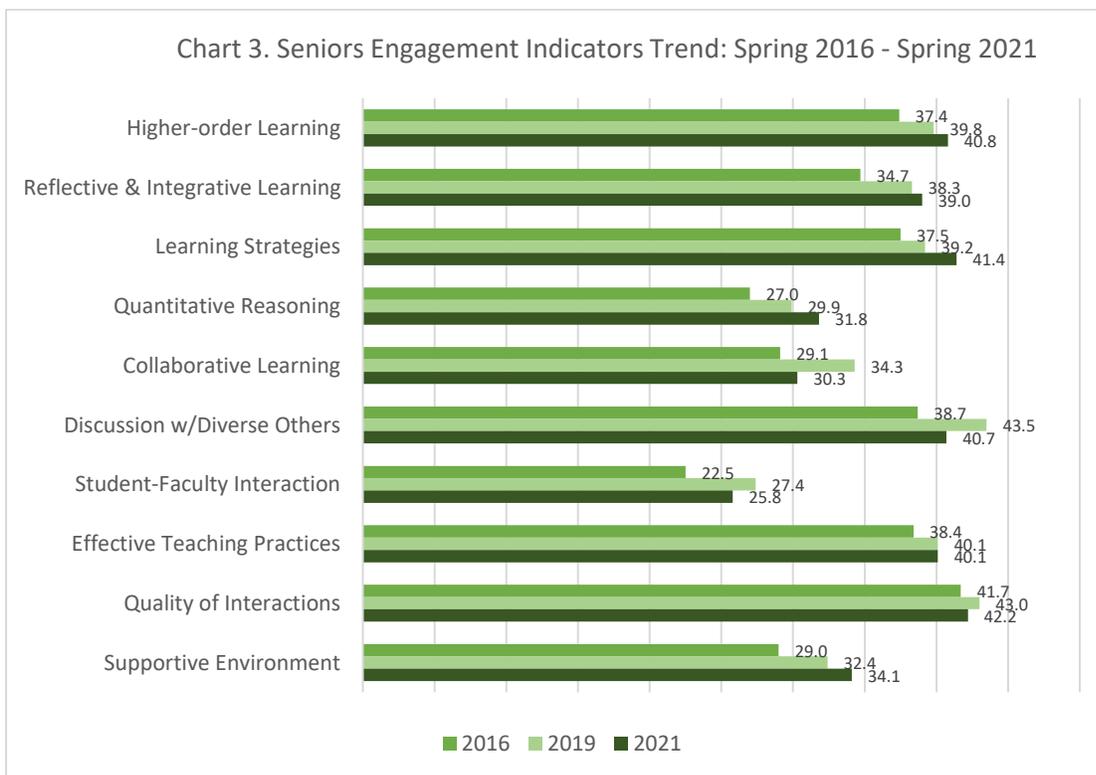
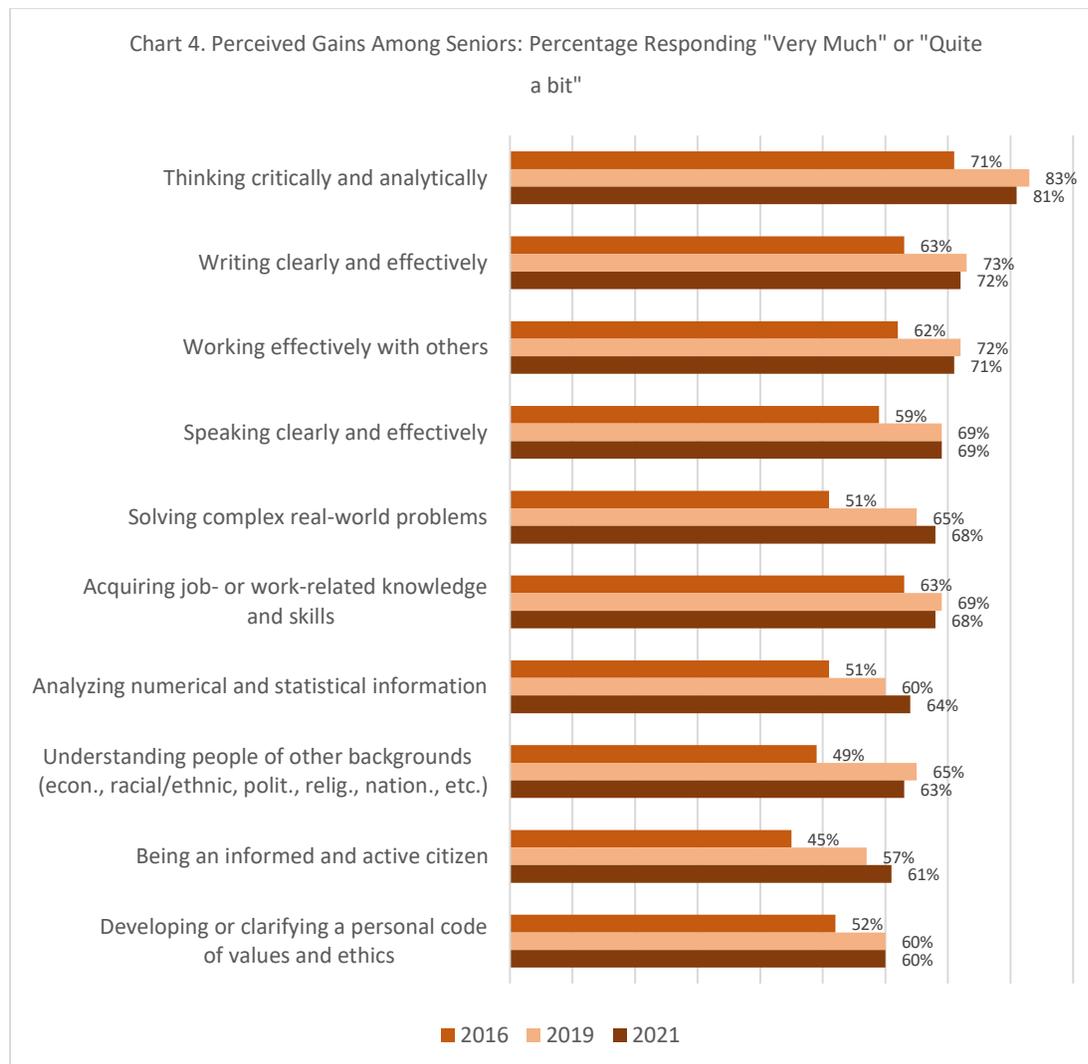
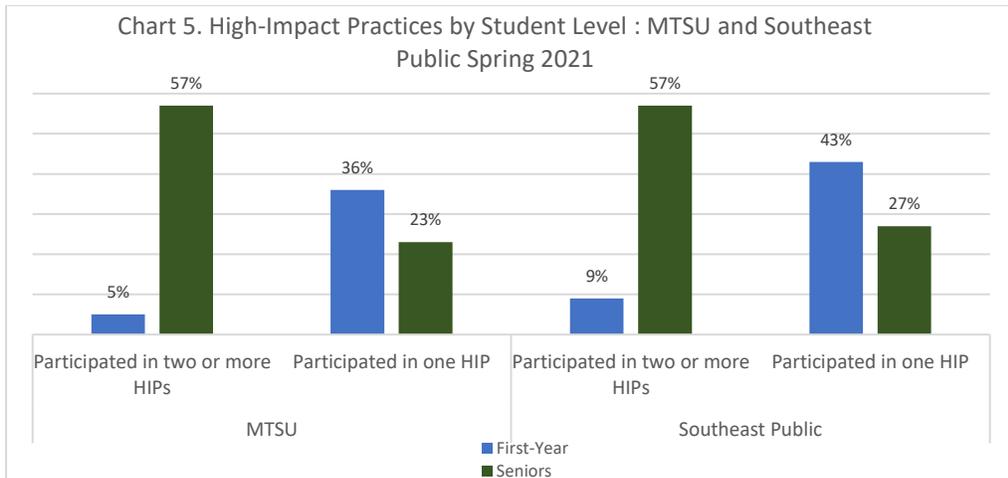


Chart 4 examines how seniors assess their overall academic experience and their perceived cognitive and affective developmental gains while attending the University. Seniors report how their experience at the University contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in ten key areas.

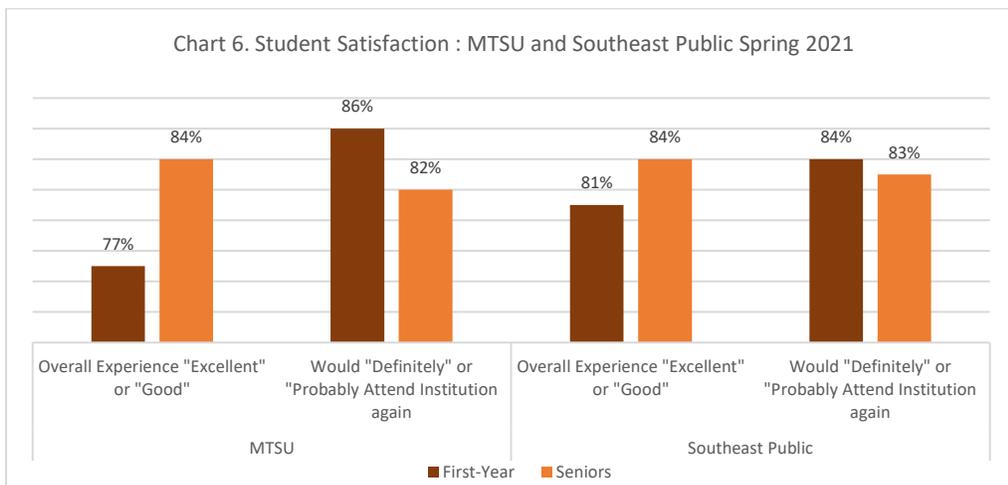


Among the items NSSE uses to measure seniors’ perceived gains, MTSU seniors’ perceived gains have trended upward (or stabilized) since 2016 in 5 of the 10 areas: *speaking clearly and effectively*; *solving complex real-world problems*; *analyzing numerical and statistical information*; *being an informed and active citizen*; and *developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics*. Conversely, there were slight drops for the remaining five areas in 2021 compared to 2019: most items dropped no more than two percentage points. Nevertheless, all ten areas for 2021 exceeded 2016 results.

Chart 5 shows that 41% of FY students at MTSU reported having participated in one or more High Impact Practice (HIP) courses compared to 52% of peers at SE. Of the former group, 36% participated in a single HIP course compared to 43% of SE students. Alternatively, MTSU’s seniors participated in HIPs at a similar rate as their SE peers: 80% and 84%, respectively.



On a high note, while FY students were less likely to rate their overall experience at the University as “Excellent” or “Good” (77%) compared to SE peers (81%), the former group was more likely to indicate they would “Definitely” or “Probably attend the same University” (86%) at a slightly higher rate than their peers (84%) as shown in Chart 6: a difference of two percentage points.



The sentiments for seniors were very similar for both MTSU and SE: 84% of seniors described their overall experience as “Excellent” or “Good”. Unlike FY students, seniors at MTSU were slightly less likely than SE peers to respond affirmatively to attending the same university: 82% and 83%, respectively.

In summary, NSSE data suggest that the traditional FY transition from high school was up-ended by the pandemic in Spring 2021, and this negatively impacted this group’s ability to navigate the full range of supports and student services offered at MTSU. Furthermore, FY students’ opportunities to build and enjoy meaningful relationships with their peers and with faculty/staff were limited as life-saving protocols were put in place to protect the University’s community. Seniors’ outcomes offer insight and a counter-perspective in support of the resilience of our students as well as the effectiveness of the University’s efforts to support and foster success for every student. It is likely that post-pandemic outcomes for FY students will return to the positive trends observed in 2019: MTSU is scheduled to participate in the Spring 2023 cycle of NSSE, and this assumption can be tested.