

2012 National Research Report

How students rate the quality service climate on campus

Excerpted data from the 2012 Noel-Levitz National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

How satisfied are students with the service they receive—and how important is it to them?

This report documents significant strides that colleges and universities have made in recent years to improve service quality and their overall campus climate, yet also finds that campuses still have room for improvement.

A few highlights:

- While progress is evident, students continue to observe gaps in many specific areas, with varying issues on four-year public and private, two-year, and career/private campuses.
- One specific challenge students identify—“concern for the individual”—is particularly widespread across institution types.
- Five-year trend data show the importance of continuously working to improve service quality.

The report begins by identifying specific strengths and challenges by institution type. In a subsequent section, the report provides trend data from 2007–2012 to show the changes in student expectations and satisfaction over a longer period.



Noel-Levitz®

The source of data

The findings in this report were excerpted from the 2012 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report, the 19th annual study of student satisfaction conducted by Noel-Levitz. You may download the complete report, without charge, at www.noellevitz.com/Benchmark.

The 2012 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report was based on survey data gathered between the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2012 from students attending 820 colleges, universities, community colleges, and career and private schools. Sample sizes were as follows: 97,084 students from four-year publics; 259,740 from four-year privates; 191,857 from two-year community, junior, and technical colleges; and 88,589 from career and private schools.

The survey instrument used in the study was the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI). This instrument consists of over 70 items that cover the full range of college experiences. Each item is expressed as a statement of expectation. Each statement includes a rating scale of 1 to 7 (7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all). Students were asked to rate the level of importance they assign to the expectation as well as their level of satisfaction that the expectation is being met.

The 70-plus items on the survey instrument are grouped into 11 scales. These include:

- Academic Advising Effectiveness
- Academic Services (two-year and career/private schools)
- Campus Climate
- Campus Life (four-year schools)
- Campus Support Services
- Concern for the Individual
- Instructional Effectiveness
- Recruitment and Financial Aid Effectiveness
- Registration Effectiveness
- Safety and Security
- Service Excellence
- Student Centeredness

Recent research has confirmed the strong connection between how students feel on campus and their likelihood to stay enrolled at the institution. In the 2009 research study, *Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention*, creating an inviting climate on campus was cited as an important factor in increasing a student's odds of persisting by as much as 80 percent. The four-year institution research confirms, "Students who feel welcome, know what's happening on campus, and feel that they belong are more likely to return the following year." Campuses that want to improve their persistence rates should pay particular attention to their campus climate. The full white paper can be downloaded at www.noellevitz.com/retentionlink.

"Quality customer service, like effective student retention, does not just 'happen' on an institutionwide basis. Both are products of carefully planned and integrated systems and strategies that cross the lines of traditional academic and administrative units."

**Jo Hillman, senior director of retention solutions
Noel-Levitz**

There is widespread dissatisfaction in areas that matter to students—the service “run-around” and concern for students as individuals.

Key findings, section one: Strengths and challenges

Students' responses to the 70-plus individual survey items were analyzed to determine strengths (high importance/high satisfaction) and challenges (high importance/low satisfaction). Strengths were defined as survey items that students rated above the mid-point in importance and in the top quartile of satisfaction. Challenges were defined as items that were above the mid-point in importance and in the bottom quartile of satisfaction and/or the top quartile of performance gaps.

For the purposes of this report, only items relating directly to quality service are highlighted. Among the strengths and challenges identified by institution type are the following:

Four-Year Public Colleges and Universities

Strengths

Survey items students rated as most important/most satisfying:

- *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.*
- *My academic advisor is approachable.*
- *Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.*

Challenges

Survey items students rated as most important/least satisfying:

- *Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.*
- *Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.*
- *Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.*
- *This institution shows concern for students as individuals.*
- *I seldom get the “run-around” when seeking information on this campus.*
- *Financial aid counselors are helpful.*

Four-Year Private Colleges and Universities

Strengths

Survey items students rated as most important/most satisfying:

- *My academic advisor is approachable.*
- *The campus staff are caring and helpful.*
- *Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.*
- *Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.*

Challenges

Survey items students rated as most important/least satisfying:

- *Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.*
- *Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.*
- *Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.*
- *Financial aid counselors are helpful.*
- *Faculty take into consideration student differences as they teach a course.*
- *I seldom get the “run-around” when seeking information on this campus.*

Two-Year Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges

Strengths

Survey items students rated as most important/most satisfying:

- Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.
- Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.
- It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.

Challenges

Survey items students rated as most important/least satisfying:

- The school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.
- My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.
- The college shows concern for students as individuals.
- Financial aid counselors are helpful.

Career/Private Schools

Strengths

Survey items students rated as most important/most satisfying:

- Students are made to feel welcome at this school.
- My academic advisor is approachable.
- The school staff are caring and helpful.
- Administrators are approachable to students.
- The personnel involved in registration are helpful.
- Admission staff are knowledgeable.

Challenges

Survey items students rated as most important/least satisfying:

- Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.
- The school shows concern for students as individuals.
- Faculty are understanding of students' unique life circumstances.
- This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.

Special note on concern for students and the service “run-around”

As indicated, there is widespread dissatisfaction in areas that matter to students—the service “run-around” and concern for students as individuals. These challenges, evident for each institution type, have also been identified in a separate companion study focusing on students 25 years and older, the 2012 National Adult Student Priorities Report. You may download the complete report, free of charge, at www.noellevitz.com/Benchmark.

While the service “run-around” and concern for students as individuals sound like specific problems, they aren't. They are symptoms of several problems as we've noted in the Noel-Levitz online training program curriculum, Connections NOW™.

- Staff may lack knowledge of campus systems, policies, and procedures.
- Staff may be too busy to help.
- Staff may not take responsibility for customer problems.
- Staff may have poor access to information from other offices.
- The institution may have fragmented processes without concern for how students and other customers use them.
- Staff may not be empowered to seek solutions.

Key findings, section two: Five-year trends

The 70-plus survey items are grouped into 11 scales, of which three relate directly to the quality service climate on campuses: Concern for the Individual, Campus Climate, and Service Excellence.

Below are the three scales, the student scores, and the items that make up each scale by institution type. The 2011-2012 results show that performance gaps have increased in most areas, which means quality service is declining on campuses. However, performance gaps improved at career and private schools in 2011-2012. The accompanying importance and satisfaction scores show the continuing importance students place on service quality. It is also interesting to note that the largest performance gap at all four institution types for the 2011-2012 academic year was in the Concern for the Individual scale. This is an area of opportunity for all types of campuses to further improve.

Four-Year Public Colleges and Universities

For four-year public institutions, the largest 2011-2012 gap score among the three scales was in Concern for the Individual, which assesses the institution's commitment to treating each student as an individual. Gaps for all three scales have declined this year.

Note that the sample sizes for these scores were 26,933 for 2007-2008; 19,658 for 2008-2009; 35,384 for 2009-2010; 30,333 for 2010-2011; and 33,148 for 2011-2012.

<i>Concern for the Individual 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all</i>					
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.12	6.16	6.18	6.16	6.15
Satisfaction	5.02	5.12	5.12	5.09	5.21
Performance Gap	1.10	1.04	1.06	1.07	0.94
<i>Items comprising this scale: Faculty care about me as an individual; My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual; Counseling staff care about students as individuals; Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students; Residence hall staff are concerned about me as an individual; This institution shows concern for students as individuals.</i>					

<i>Service Excellence 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all</i>					
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.03	6.08	6.09	6.07	6.05
Satisfaction	4.97	5.06	5.08	5.04	5.17
Performance Gap	1.06	1.02	1.01	1.03	0.88
<i>Items comprising this scale: The campus staff are caring and helpful; Library staff are helpful and approachable; The staff in health services are competent; Counseling staff care about students as individuals; The personnel involved with registration are helpful; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; I generally know what is happening on this campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are available.</i>					

Campus Climate 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.11	6.18	6.17	6.14	6.15
Satisfaction	5.08	5.22	5.23	5.15	5.28
Performance Gap	1.03	0.96	0.94	0.99	0.87

Items comprising this scale: Most students feel a sense of belonging here; This institution shows concern for students as individuals; It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus; I feel a sense of pride about my campus; This institution has a good reputation within the community; There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus; The campus staff are caring and helpful; Students are made to feel welcome on this campus; Administrators are approachable to students; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; I generally know what's happening on campus; Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment; There is a strong commitment to racial harmony on this campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available; Freedom of expression is protected on campus; Faculty care about me as an individual; The campus is safe and secure for all students.

Four-Year Private Colleges and Universities

For four-year private colleges and universities, the largest 2011-2012 gap scores were in the Concern for the Individual and Campus Climate scales. All three gap scores declined this year.

Note that the sample sizes for these scores were 96,730 for 2007-2008; 75,284 for 2008-2009; 97,625 for 2009-2010; 83,918 for 2010-2011; and 89,051 for 2011-2012.

Concern for the Individual 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.17	6.16	6.17	6.19	6.24
Satisfaction	5.21	5.25	5.28	5.25	5.41
Performance Gap	0.96	0.91	0.89	0.94	0.83

Items comprising this scale: Faculty care about me as an individual; My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual; Counseling staff care about students as individuals; Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students; Residence hall staff are concerned about me as an individual; This institution shows concern for students as individuals.

Service Excellence 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.02	6.04	6.02	6.07	6.09
Satisfaction	5.09	5.16	5.16	5.16	5.30
Performance Gap	0.93	0.88	0.86	0.91	0.79

Items comprising this scale: The campus staff are caring and helpful; Library staff are helpful and approachable; The staff in health services are competent; Counseling staff care about students as individuals; The personnel involved with registration are helpful; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; I generally know what is happening on this campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are available.

Campus Climate 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.17	6.17	6.18	6.20	6.24
Satisfaction	5.22	5.29	5.30	5.28	5.41
Performance Gap	0.95	0.88	0.88	0.92	0.83

Items comprising this scale: Most students feel a sense of belonging here; This institution shows concern for students as individuals; It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus; I feel a sense of pride about my campus; This institution has a good reputation within the community; There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus; The campus staff are caring and helpful; Students are made to feel welcome on this campus; Administrators are approachable to students; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; I generally know what's happening on campus; Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment; There is a strong commitment to racial harmony on this campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available; Freedom of expression is protected on campus; Faculty care about me as an individual; The campus is safe and secure for all students.

Two-Year Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges

For two-year community, junior, and technical colleges, the largest 2011-2012 gap score among the three scales was also for Concern for the Individual, by a large margin. Gap scores have improved for all three scales.

Note that the sample sizes for these scores were 60,206 for 2007-2008; 62,875 for 2008-2009; 60,695 for 2009-2010; 73,316 for 2010-2011; and 64,493 for 2011-2012.

<i>Concern for the Individual 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all</i>					
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.08	6.11	6.08	6.14	6.13
Satisfaction	5.24	5.25	5.21	5.24	5.29
<i>Performance Gap</i>	<i>0.84</i>	<i>0.86</i>	<i>0.87</i>	<i>0.90</i>	<i>0.84</i>

Items comprising this scale: Faculty care about me as an individual; My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual; Counseling staff care about students as individuals; Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students; This college shows concern for students as individuals.

<i>Service Excellence 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all</i>					
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	5.95	5.99	5.95	6.02	6.00
Satisfaction	5.27	5.29	5.27	5.31	5.33
<i>Performance Gap</i>	<i>0.68</i>	<i>0.70</i>	<i>0.68</i>	<i>0.71</i>	<i>0.67</i>

Items comprising this scale: The campus staff are caring and helpful; Library staff are helpful and approachable; The personnel involved with registration are helpful; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; I generally know what is happening on campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are available; People on this campus respect and are supportive of each other; Administrators are approachable to students; Bookstore staff are helpful.

Campus Climate 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	5.97	6.01	5.97	6.03	6.03
Satisfaction	5.31	5.33	5.30	5.34	5.37
Performance Gap	0.66	0.68	0.67	0.69	0.66

Items comprising this scale: Most students feel a sense of belonging here; The campus is safe and secure for all students; It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus; Students are made to feel welcome here; This institution has a good reputation within the community; This college shows concern for students as individuals; Faculty care about me as an individual; People on this campus respect and are supportive of each other; The campus staff are caring and helpful; I generally know what is happening on campus; This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals; Administrators are approachable to students; New student orientation services help students adjust to college; I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus; Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.

Career and Private Schools

For career and private schools, the largest 2011-2012 gap score among the three scales was also for Concern for the Individual. All three reflect very positive shifts in satisfaction scores in 2011-2012.

Note that the sample sizes for these scores were 8,155 for 2007-2008; 13,311 for 2008-2009; 35,346 for 2009-2010; 45,479 for 2010-2011; and 18,724 for 2011-2012.

Concern for the Individual 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.16	6.23	6.23	6.28	6.32
Satisfaction	4.99	5.23	5.00	5.19	5.46
Performance Gap	1.17	1.00	1.23	1.09	0.86

Items comprising this scale: Faculty care about me as an individual; My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual; Advising staff care about students as individuals; Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students; This school shows concern for students as individuals.

Service Excellence 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.05	6.10	6.09	6.15	6.21
Satisfaction	5.01	5.21	4.93	5.13	5.43
Performance Gap	1.04	0.89	1.16	1.02	0.78

Items comprising this scale: The campus staff are caring and helpful; Library staff are helpful and approachable; The personnel involved with registration are helpful; I seldom get the “run-around” when seeking information at this school; I generally know what is happening at this school; Channels for expressing student complaints are available; People at this school respect and are supportive of each other; Administrators are approachable to students; Bookstore staff are helpful.

Campus Climate 7 = very important/very satisfied; 1 = not important/not satisfied at all

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Importance	6.11	6.17	6.19	6.24	6.27
Satisfaction	5.03	5.28	4.99	5.19	5.49
Performance Gap	1.08	0.89	1.20	1.05	0.78

Items comprising this scale: Most students feel a sense of belonging here; The campus is safe and secure for all students; It is an enjoyable experience to be a student at this school; Students are made to feel welcome at this school; This institution has a good reputation within the community; This school shows concern for students as individuals; Faculty care about me as an individual; People at this school respect and are supportive of each other; The campus staff are caring and helpful; I generally know what is happening at this school; This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals; Administrators are approachable to students; New student orientation services help students adjust to school; I seldom get the “run-around” when seeking information at this school; Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.

Key indicators of a service culture

Here are some of the things you'll see at a college or university that has a service culture:

- People take responsibility.
- There are few barriers to communication and action.
- People are responsive to the needs of internal and external customers.
- People are friendly and courteous toward each other.
- Front-line staff frequently ask if they can be of service.
- People smile and look like they enjoy their work.
- People continuously look for ways to improve.
- Staff feel empowered to act.
- People receive positive feedback from colleagues.
- Customers are pleased after their interactions with staff.
- Administrators help staff work to improve service.
- Everyone works to identify and prevent problems.
- People work to develop customer-oriented systems, policies, and procedures.
- Staff anticipate the needs of their internal and external customers.

Summary

The quality service climate on campuses is getting better, but there is still room for improvement. Campuses that are serious about service quality will look at this national trend data as a valuable source of information, but they will not stop there. To serve students well, it is even more critical for each institution to listen to its own students' unique needs and priorities by conducting campus-specific satisfaction assessments. Resulting gaps and priorities can then be used to develop targeted action plans for retaining and serving specific student populations.

For more information

For more information on enhancing service quality on your campus or for more information on the survey instrument used in this study, the Student Satisfaction Inventory, please contact Noel-Levitz at 1-800-876-1117 or e-mail ContactUs@noellevitz.com.

A word about Noel-Levitz

A trusted partner to higher education, Noel-Levitz helps systems and campuses reach and exceed their goals for enrollment, marketing, and student success. Over the past three decades, the higher education professionals at Noel-Levitz have consulted directly more than 2,700 colleges and universities nationwide in the areas of:

- Student retention
- Staff and advisor development
- Student success
- Marketing and recruitment
- Financial aid services
- Research and communications
- Institutional effectiveness

Noel-Levitz has developed an array of proven tools and software programs; diagnostic tools and instruments; Web-based training programs; and customized consultations, workshops, and national conferences. With the Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys, including the Student Satisfaction Inventory, the firm brings together its many years of research and campus-based experience to enable you to get to the heart of your campus agenda.

Except where cited otherwise, all material in this paper is copyright © by Noel-Levitz, Inc. Permission is required to redistribute information from Noel-Levitz, Inc., either in print or electronically. Please contact us at ContactUs@noellevitz.com about reusing material from this report.

How to cite this report

Noel-Levitz (2012). 2012 national research report on quality service. Coralville, Iowa: Author. Retrieved from www.noellevitz.com/Benchmark.

Find it online.

This report is posted online at: www.noellevitz.com/Benchmark

Sign up to receive additional reports and updates. Visit our Web page: www.noellevitz.com/Subscribe