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Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

2015 Graduating Senior Survey: Most Engaging Experiences

Keene State College surveys graduating students every two years, asking them about their overall satisfaction with their time at KSC as well as various activities they may have engaged in. The survey is administered online as part of registration to participate in commencement. In spring 2015, there were 879 graduating students who provided usable responses to the survey. A separate report contains a detailed analysis of the questionnaire items. This report deals solely with the responses to this open-ended survey question: **During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?**

Responses were analyzed using emergent-theme coding. While the question asks respondents to name only one experience, many students wrote about more than one, and codes were assigned for each theme mentioned. Most respondents gave permission for their words to be shared with the person or department they wrote about, as a way of saying thank you to those who had made a difference in their time at KSC. Each of those comments has been shared with the people involved. Since individuals have already been thanked, this summary focuses on the larger themes within the responses, and names of particular faculty and staff members have been omitted here.

KEY FINDINGS

- The great majority of respondents wrote about academic experiences. The largest number of comments praised faculty and academic majors, study away, student teaching and education methods courses, internships, and capstone courses. Graduates from all three academic schools praised faculty who cared about them, and who challenged them to think in new ways, and they looked back with pride on mastering courses that were difficult but worth the effort. In addition there was a group of comments that focused on the theme of service-learning and other community service that bridges curricular and co-curricular experiences.
- Respondents also wrote about the value of activities that were entirely outside the classroom. These comments clustered around student organizations and student leadership, athletics and recreational sports, residence life, student employment, and the orientation team. While the students wrote about the particular places outside of class at KSC that they had connected, the broader themes that underlie all of these comments are the opportunity to challenge oneself in new and uncomfortable ways, to develop deep and lasting relationships, to learn teamwork and leadership skills, and to connect out-of-class activity either to academic work or to future careers. Each of these co-curricular venues provided that opportunity for these graduating students.
- No matter whether respondents wrote about academic or co-curricular experiences, the overarching themes were the same: students' best experiences at KSC were ones that challenged them to leave

their comfort zone, to try new and difficult things, to develop leadership skills, and to explore the connection between academic endeavors and future careers, all in the context of deep and supportive relationships. This finding is consistent with the scholarly literature, that students who find a deep and meaningful connection to the college are those who persist to graduation, and those connections can occur either inside or outside the classroom.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Academic Experiences

The great majority of respondents wrote about academic experiences. The largest number of comments praised faculty and majors, study away, student teaching and education methods courses, internships, and capstone courses. In addition there was a group of comments that focused on the theme of service-learning and other community service that bridges curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Student Teaching, Internship, Practicum, Clinical Experience

There were 123 respondents who wrote about their courses that offered hands-on work experience (student teaching, internship, practicum, and clinical experience). These courses were both challenging and rewarding for these students.

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“The semester I spent student teaching was extremely rewarding. I really felt that I was getting experience of what it feels like to be a teacher.”

“Student Teaching has been one my memorable experiences at Keene State College. It has given me the experience to learn what it is like to be in a professional world. not just teaching in a classroom. through student teaching I have felt more part of school community as a teacher than I did in my methods classes and any other education class. I have only been doing student teaching for a month but I feel as though I have learned many great things and have grown as a teacher and as a person.”

“My student teaching experience really challenged me to grow. I gained so much from the amazing experience and really understand what teachers have to do every day. I feel very prepared to have my own classroom after my experience here.”

“During my senior year in the Health Science major I had the opportunity to intern at the Kid's CATCH Club at the Keene Recreation Center. At the internship I practiced food service management techniques such as recipe development and expansion, budgeting, developing weekly meal plans, and designing and facilitating cooking programs for children of disadvantaged socioeconomic background. My practicum experience required me to use my creativity in the kitchen, expanding on ways to introduce fruits and vegetables into one's diet. Independently I was able to introduce and incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables into snacks with nearly 90 children, demonstrating my skills in mentoring and leadership. This experience also developed my ability to effectively communicate with people of different gender, age, and socioeconomic background in order to advocate for the health needs of children in my community. For example, I created a recipe book full of simple, healthy, and affordable recipes for the children to take home and share with their

families. Such skills broaden the range of patients I will be able to successfully work with as a future dietician.”

“I obtained two internships during the summer which helped me to see what career path would be best suited for me post-graduation. I gained valuable real life work experience through these opportunities.”

“I believe the Sociology practicum is something that every student should partake in. Through this class I interned at the Child Advocacy Center in Keene and it was the best experience I had at Keene State. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and really encouraged me to think about my future. It gave me a lot experience in the field I would like to work in someday. Both my professor and supervisor were very helpful and motivational throughout the whole process.”

“My spring semester preceptorship opportunity for nursing in the operating room at Cheshire Medical Center. I gained valuable hands on experience working 250 hours in the surgical department putting my lab skills to work.”

“My rotation at the Sports Med Orthopedic Clinic in Keene. Helped me gain a vision for my future.”

“Clinical experiences in the nursing program! I grew from a student to a nurse”

Faculty, Departments, and Majors

There were 97 comments that praised specific faculty members or academic departments or the value of a course or a major in general. Graduates from all three academic schools praised faculty who cared about them, and who challenged them to think in new ways, and they looked back with pride on mastering courses that were difficult but worth the effort. These are examples of comments in this category:

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“[My department] is phenomenal; the professors are highly engaged in a variety of subjects, and are willing to work with you on projects that you value in independent studies.”

“She is a phenomenal teacher.... I developed a great personal relationship with her and am able to discuss issues regarding my education and my personal life with her.... She challenges us to really think and she is always pushing us to go beyond what we think we are capable of. I have so much respect for her. She brought in new and current material to both classes and introduced us to books that have changed my life.”

“The professors [in my department] in general engaged my interest and challenged me to grow; they're inspirational and passionate and always push me to do the best I can do.”

“Professors engaging themselves with the students was the best part of my experience here at KSC. Too many teachers these days don't seem to care about the students and give boring monotone lectures. However at Keene State many professors really show they care about the students and work with us to learn at the highest level possible.”

“I took a class ... my junior year and it really made me think about what I wanted to do with my life and reiterated the fact that I chose the right major and was going in the right direction in my life.”

“I really enjoyed [the] classes that I took for my minor. They challenged me to think and perform in ways I haven't experienced before. I now have a better appreciation for the world around me.”

Capstone Courses, Senior Seminar, Thesis Project

There were 54 comments about capstone courses and other culminating experiences that require students to bring together all they have learned at KSC. Respondents were proud of their accomplishments in these courses, and many wrote about the value of seeing all their prior coursework come together into a meaningful whole. The following are sample comments for this theme:

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“My capstone class works on a semester long research project that we have to present at the end of the semester. I'm doing a presentation on a marketing campaign that Nike uses. Seeing as marketing is something I am extremely interested in doing after I graduate, I feel like this is something that I can gain a lot of knowledge from and hopefully use it towards my career in the future.”

“My senior capstone class challenged me. I had to choose a mathematics article, read, comprehend, write an 8-10 page paper on it, then give a presentation about it. This presentation I am also giving at a conference.”

“My capstone white collar crime course taught me a lot, and I learned a lot about different theories, and the social structures affecting our criminal justice system. I now am more critical and well-read as I apply myself into the real world outside of college.”

“My most engaging experience at Keene State College were my senior seminar classes. The specialized subjects and smaller class sizes provided plenty of incentive for the intensive long-term projects; through this, I gained valuable information for autonomous learning and am excited to apply those skills after graduation as I continue to chase experience the topics I love.”

“My current senior seminar requires me to venture out of the classroom and do research. It taught me how to be self-dependent and explore different places and ways of gaining information than just through the Keene State College Library.”

“My senior seminar project in the Geography Department was both engaging and challenging. It required navigating the dynamics of group work; contacting and working with community members and officials; collecting and analyzing data; and honing synthesis and writing skills alongside public speaking/ presentation skills. From this experience I've gained insight into what it is like to facilitate a project from the ground up. I've become more confident in the skill set required to tackle a large caliber project, and I have something awesome to put on my resume!”

Study Away

Study Away was the focus of 36 comments. Respondents wrote at length about the challenge of figuring out how to manage on their own in another country, and the life-changing value of living in another culture for a time. These are examples of comments in this category:

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“Travelling abroad to Nepal and France were two very rewarding experiences. I learned a great deal about myself, and about the cultural norms that we in America and how those are different from cultures around the world.”

“Studying Abroad in Florence, Italy had an enormous impact on me. I was also lucky enough to take [a course] that included a two week trip to Ireland and Northern Ireland. Prior to attending Keene State I had never left the country, and I got so much out of these two experiences. I learned how to engage with different cultures, how to respect and understand differences between our cultures, and how to appreciate the opportunities I was given.”

“Study Away most engaged my interest because I was able to travel to places outside the country, which was an opportunity I never had before. My experience taught me how to travel on my own, make friends in unfamiliar places, and how to interact with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds. It taught me about privileges I didn't know I had and the views others have about our country based largely upon the media we produce. Studying in another country gave me a chance to reshape and surpass (in a good way) the preconceptions about myself and American stereotypes in general. At the same time, it opened my eyes to my own preconceptions about other people and places, which I gladly broke free of. Ultimately, it left me with the beautifully simple realization that you can find friendship anywhere in the world, you need only be open to the thoughts and values of others.”

Service-Learning and Community Service

Twenty-seven comments mentioned service-learning or co-curricular community service. These students wrote about seeing the world from a new perspective, meeting new challenges, gaining leadership skills, and the core value of service to others, as these comments show:

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“From [my] service learning I gained experience with conducting a focus group for a population, and developing a health intervention using focus group discussion. My group designed a presentation around stress management for middle school aged children in the Keene community using behavior change theories. In the end, we received positive feedback from the students which was rewarding.”

“When I did a community service trip to Boston working for the Homeless. I gained so much experience in how to conduct myself and how to not judge a person based on their background.”

“I participated in two Alternative Break trips. I fell in love with being part of a different community and helping those in need. It challenged me to come out of my shell and be myself around people I didn't really know. I have long-lasting friendships and wonderful experiences I can look back on and smile. I can also take my growth as a person, a leader, a friend, a supporter into everything else I do for the rest of my life. I would do it all over again if given the opportunity.”

“As a KSC Student I participated in academic courses that required me to do volunteer work at the local homeless shelter called 100 Nights. I went to 100 Nights as an overnight volunteer which is something I had never done before or even could imagine myself doing because it was so out of my

comfort zone. I had never experienced being around the homeless before so this experience challenged my beliefs and helped me grow as a person.”

Co-Curricular Experiences

The theme of service, displayed above, bridges the broad categories of academic and co-curricular experiences. Respondents also wrote about the value of activities that were entirely outside the classroom. While the students wrote about the particular places at KSC that they connected, the broader themes that underlie all of these comments are the opportunity to challenge oneself in new and uncomfortable ways, to develop deep and lasting relationships, to learn teamwork and leadership skills, and to connect out-of-class activity either to academic work or to future careers. There were 82 comments about co-curricular experiences. The following comments are examples:

During your time at KSC, what one experience - inside or outside the classroom - most engaged your interest and challenged you to grow?

“One experience I've had at Keene outside that has most engaged my interest has been serving as President/co-founder of Keene State College Hillel, the Jewish organization on campus. By serving as a president of an organization, it has helped me develop strong leadership skills, educate and inform the academic community more about Judaism, and develop skills relating to what I want to do in my career, such as public relations.”

“The Social Activities Council, along with my communication courses, allowed me to grow within the event industry and has provided me with the tools to succeed in this field post-graduation. I would not have had the experiences of working with Kenan Thompson, Gabriel Iglesias and Dan Gheesling. I would not have attended five regional and national conferences within the National Association for Campus Activities. I would not have formed the bonds I did with classmates, friends and staff-members. My entire college career was successful because of the Social Activities Council and the organizations I had been a part of.”

“Joining Common Ground and participating with other students who appreciate differences and celebrate life and culture. I learned that there is not just one way of doing something but accepting others ideas and working together in a joint goal.”

“I think that outside activities helped me grow. For example events that were held by the college but wasn't class involved, spring weekend and events like that. It helped get you involved without feeling pressured to.”

“In my four years as a Keene State student, I have found myself growing up and changing more than I ever thought I would. I came in thinking I knew exactly who I was, what I wanted out of life, and what I was going to do to get there. However, since walking through those arches on the first day of orientation to now where I will soon walk through those arches at graduation, I couldn't be more different. Freshman year I joined the Delta Phi Epsilon sorority and became a Keene State College tour guide. Both experiences I have found to intertwine into one. As part of the Greek community here at Keene I have seen the immense positive impact we have on our society and community through community service and philanthropic events. It amazed me that I could be so much more than just myself. I could be part of a group of amazing individuals who all strive to better our campus community and Keene, NH community. As a tour guide, I had the opportunity to highlight and show possible new, incoming students all that our amazing school has to offer. I was able to see

how the outside world viewed our Keene State community, and I realized how badly I wanted each and every student to love Keene State as much as I do. Being a member of these two organizations, I challenged myself to uphold all of the good qualities that I wanted to embody Keene State College. Being a member of a sorority and a tour guide has made me push myself into being more involved in the community and promoting a positive image of all Keene State students.”

“Joining the Greek community definitely caused me to grow in every aspect. I became more involved in the community, learned critical public speaking and leadership skills, and learned the value of friendship. Though most people claim that FSL is a detriment to the Keene State campus, I urge you to look at the positive things that we have done for the college and the Keene Community.”

“Mentors in Violence Prevention allowed me to learn professional and personal skills that I will be able to apply to future careers and relationships, both professional and nonprofessional. It has given me an accepting, loving, understanding community that has allowed me to impact the KSC community while growing in these different skills I've picked up on the way. I see MVP as something that will pretty much always be on my resume, and hopefully give me the further connections and skills to help secure my future. MVP has been a large majority of my college experience and has allowed me to come out of my shell and thrive.”

“Playing Soccer at KSC interested me greatly and challenged me to grow both as a person in a social context, and also as a leader and teammate.”

“Keene State College has given me two years of being an RA in a freshman residence hall, and this experience has shaped me in more ways that I can count. It has helped me practice program planning, work directly with a staff of similar interests, and most of all, it has helped me to work directly with residents. This experience has helped me to understand how I can make the most of my psychology degree by knowing the basic needs of this particular type of population.”

“One experience at KSC that engaged my interest and challenged me to grow was being a member of the Orientation program. In this program I was able to grow tremendously as a leader, introduce me to support across campus, make lifelong friends, and gain self-esteem. This experience really changed my time at KSC because I felt like I was part of something larger than myself which helped new students transition to the campus. After my first year in this program, my GPA went from a 2.7 to a 3.3 that I am proudly graduating with. I have not received a semester GPA lower than a 3.5 since my first semester Junior year. This program also gave me many opportunities on this campus: one opportunity being an employed Peer Advisor and helping first and second year students with their schedule, volunteering at the Job and Internship Fair, and becoming a resume trainer, in turn teaching me presentation skills and preparing my own resume.”