

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Satisfaction Surveys of Current Undergraduate Students and Parents of Current Students

*University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa*

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Introduction and Methodology

During the fall 2008 semester Noel-Levitz conducted satisfaction surveys of two key constituencies at the University of Northern Iowa: current undergraduate students and parents of current students. Current students completed the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI), which is a nationally normed instrument whose purpose is to measure student satisfaction on a range of college experiences.

For the parents of current students we adapted the 83 questions (73 standard, nationally normed questions and 10 customized for UNI) used in the SSI to reflect the same topics, but framed from the perspective of a parent. Since this was a customized survey for UNI, there are no norms available to compare the responses of UNI parents with parents at other institutions.

The SSI was administered online during the fall of 2008. Six hundred and thirteen students completed the survey. The parent survey was administered online between September 29 and October 13, 2008. One thousand and ten parents completed the survey.

Both surveys calculate “satisfaction” based upon the difference between importance to respondents of a set of programs and services and how well those same areas are meeting their expectations. Thus, there are three scores for each of the inventory items: an importance score, designed to measure the strength of the respondents’ expectations; a satisfaction score, designed to measure the respondents’ actual experiences; and a performance gap score – the discrepancy between the importance and satisfaction scores. By examining these “performance gaps,” we can assess respondents’ satisfaction within the context of their expectations.

In the tables on the next few pages, we have summarized data that depict the importance, satisfaction, and performance gap scores for UNI. For responses from the students we also compared results with the national norms for four-year public institutions on the same scales and items. Note that the abbreviation “NN” indicates statistics for the national norms. The national comparison group includes all students attending four-year public institutions who have participated in the Student Satisfaction Inventory.

To understand how the responses are scored and interpret what the average scores reflect, please note the rating scales:

Importance		Satisfaction	
1	not important at all	1	extremely dissatisfied
2	not important	2	not satisfied
3	fairly unimportant	3	somewhat dissatisfied
4	neutral	4	neutral
5	somewhat important	5	somewhat satisfied
6	important	6	satisfied
7	extremely important	7	extremely satisfied

Sample Demographics

The following tables provide summaries of the various demographic questions asked on both surveys. Parents were first asked questions about the demographic characteristics of their child, summarized in the first set of tables, before answering a few questions about their own demographic characteristics. There was a good mix of class levels, on- and off-campus residence, and academic performance levels (GPA) in the survey population.

Demographics of Students

GENDER	SSI	Parent Survey
Female	68%	64%
Male	32%	36%
AGE	SSI	Parent Survey
18 and under	14%	28%
19 to 24	71%	72%
25 to 34	8%	0%
35 to 44	5%	0%
45 and over	2%	0%
ETHNICITY/RACE	SSI	Parent Survey
African-American	3%	1%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	LT 1%	LT 1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3%	1%
Caucasian/White	86%	95%
Hispanic	3%	1%
Other race	1%	LT 1%
Race - Prefer not to respond	4%	2%

CURRENT CLASS LOAD	SSI	Parent Survey
Full-time	94%	100%
Part-time	6%	0%
CLASS LEVEL	SSI	Parent Survey
Freshman	21%	35%
Sophomore	16%	28%
Junior	23%	19%
Senior	26%	17%
Special student	LT 1%	0%
Graduate / Professional	13%	LT 1%
Other class level	1%	LT 1%
CURRENT GPA	SSI	Parent Survey
No credits earned	13%	20%
1.99 or below	1%	LT 1%
2.0 - 2.49	5%	5%
2.5 - 2.99	16%	13%
3.0 - 3.49	31%	25%
3.5 or above	34%	26%
EDUCATIONAL GOAL	SSI	Parent Survey
Associate degree	1%	3%
Bachelor's degree	60%	72%
Master's degree	27%	17%
Doctorate or professional degree	8%	7%
Certification (initial/renewal)	LT 1%	1%
Self-improvement/pleasure	1%	0%
Job-related training	1%	0%
Other educational goal	1%	1%
EMPLOYMENT	SSI	Parent Survey
Full-time off campus	10%	2%
Part-time off campus	28%	24%
Full-time on campus	4%	5%
Part-time on campus	30%	27%
Not employed	29%	41%

CURRENT RESIDENCE	SSI	Parent Survey
Residence hall	45%	65%
Fraternity / Sorority	1%	1%
Own house	11%	1%
Rent room or apt off campus	36%	29%
Parent's home	4%	2%
Other residence	3%	1%
RESIDENCE CLASSIFICATION	SSI	Parent Survey
In-state	92%	94%
Out-of-state	5%	6%
International (not U.S. citizen)	4%	LT 1%
DISABILITIES	SSI	Parent Survey
Yes – Disability	3%	5%
No – Disability	97%	95%

NOTE: Parents were asked to report the characteristics of their son or daughter for these questions.

Demographics of Parents (from Parent Satisfaction Survey)

GENDER	Parents
Female	74%
Male	26%
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Parents
Elementary school	0%
High school diploma or GED	12%
Some college, but no degree	22%
Associate's degree	15%
Bachelor's degree	34%
Master's degree	13%
Doctoral or professional degree (medicine, dentistry, law, veterinary)	3%
What state do you live in?	Parents
Iowa	91%
Illinois	3%
Minnesota	1%
Wisconsin	1%
All other states	4%

UNI Strengths

Items with high importance scores and high satisfaction scores are those which we can regard as strengths from the perspective of your current students and their parents. The following two tables list those items that met the criteria for identifying marketing strengths in these surveys.

The UNI strengths identified by students are significant and substantial when viewed in the context of institutional marketing.

Student Responses	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
81. The overall quality of my academic major at UNI is excellent. (Campus item 8)	6.66	6.00	1.17	
78. I am confident that UNI will prepare me for my chosen career path. (Campus item 5)	6.65	5.95	1.19	
83. I feel confident that I will be successful academically at UNI. (Campus item 10)	6.63	6.09	1.04	
68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	6.59	5.97	1.02	+
75. UNI faculty are highly qualified in the fields they teach. (Campus item 2)	6.58	5.95	0.63	
7. The campus is safe and secure for all students.	6.57	5.99	1.04	+
82. I can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when I need to. (Campus item 9)	6.54	5.98	1.14	
77. The overall quality of UNI's academic resources and facilities is excellent. (Campus item 4)	6.53	5.95	1.08	
79. UNI is known as a school with strong academics. (Campus item 6)	6.52	6.03	1.10	
80. My program offers opportunities for hands-on experience such as internships and undergraduate research projects. (Campus item 7)	6.52	5.97	1.19	
29. It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	6.49	5.98	1.19	+
69. There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	6.48	5.99	1.10	+
39. I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	6.46	5.99	1.01	+
41. There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.	6.40	5.88	1.10	+
45. Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	6.40	5.91	1.23	+
72. On the whole, the campus is well-maintained.	6.34	6.14	1.07	+
26. Computer labs are adequate and accessible.	6.33	6.02	1.16	+
51. This institution has a good reputation within the community.	6.28	6.23	0.97	+

NOTE: UNI's institutional strengths from the SSI survey are identified using the following criteria: items with SSI importance scores above the median (6.06 on a 7.0 scale) and SSI satisfaction scores in the top quartile (5.84 and above). The "NAT" column in the following chart designates items for which satisfaction scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other public four-year institutions. Items in this chart are listed in order of importance.

Parent Responses	IMP	SAT	GAP
7. The campus is safe and secure for all students.	6.90	6.23	0.66
83. I feel confident that my child will be successful academically at UNI. (Campus item 10)	6.81	6.17	0.65
78. I am confident that UNI will prepare my child for her/his chosen career path. (Campus item 5)	6.81	6.05	0.76
8. The content of the courses within your child's major is valuable.	6.75	6.04	0.71
81. The overall quality of my child's academic major at UNI is excellent. (Campus item 8)	6.75	6.06	0.69
36. Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.	6.73	5.97	0.76
39. Your child is able to experience intellectual growth here.	6.70	6.21	0.50
41. There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.	6.69	6.10	0.59
2. The campus staff are caring and helpful.	6.68	6.04	0.65
79. UNI is known as a school with strong academics. (Campus item 6)	6.62	6.15	0.47
1. Most students feel a sense of belonging here.	6.61	6.21	0.40
29. It is an enjoyable experience for a student on this campus.	6.60	6.20	0.40
77. The overall quality of UNI's academic resources and facilities is excellent. (Campus item 4)	6.60	6.13	0.46
45. Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	6.50	6.16	0.34
4. Admissions staff are knowledgeable.	6.50	6.04	0.46
51. This institution has a good reputation within the community.	6.44	6.44	0.00
69. There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	6.44	6.09	0.34

NOTE: UNI's institutional strengths from the parent satisfaction survey are identified using the following criteria: items with SSI importance scores above the median (6.38 on a 7.0 scale) and SSI satisfaction scores in the top quartile (5.96 and above). Note that since there are no national norms for this survey we are not able to flag items significantly below or above the national norms.

We would make the following observations about UNI's strengths:

- There is substantial overlap in the parent and student lists, with the following strengths common to both:
 - 7. The campus is safe and secure for all students.
 - 29. It is an enjoyable experience for a student on this campus.
 - 39. I am (Your child is) able to experience intellectual growth here.
 - 41. There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.
 - 45. Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.
 - 51. This institution has a good reputation within the community.

- 69. There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.
- 77. The overall quality of UNI's academic resources and facilities is excellent. (Campus item 4)
- 78. I am confident that UNI will prepare me (my child for) my (her/his) chosen career path. (Campus item 5)
- 79. UNI is known as a school with strong academics. (Campus item 6)
- 81. The overall quality of my (my child's) academic major at UNI is excellent. (Campus item 8)
- 83. I feel confident that I (my child) will be successful academically at UNI. (Campus item 10)
- Items that are strengths from a parent's perspective but not among the list of strengths identified by students include:
 - 1. Most students feel a sense of belonging here.
 - 2. The campus staff are caring and helpful.
 - 4. Admissions staff are knowledgeable.
 - 8. The content of the courses within your child's major is valuable.
 - 36. Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.
- Items that are strengths from a student's perspective but not among the list of strengths identified by parents are as follows. Some of these are areas that parents may not have an opportunity to evaluate first-hand.
 - 26. Computer labs are adequate and accessible.
 - 68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.
 - 72. On the whole, the campus is well-maintained.
 - 75. UNI faculty are highly qualified in the fields they teach. (Campus item 2)
 - 80. My program offers opportunities for hands-on experience such as internships and undergraduate research projects. (Campus item 7)
 - 82. I can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when I need to. (Campus item 9)
- Most of these items refer to aspects of a student's academic experiences, which is an indication that the academic dimension of the UNI experience is one we can confidently promote to prospective students and their parents. These items include:
 - 41. There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.
 - 69. There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.
 - 77. The overall quality of UNI's academic resources and facilities is excellent. (Campus item 4)
 - 79. UNI is known as a school with strong academics. (Campus item 6)
 - 81. The overall quality of my child's academic major at UNI is excellent. (Campus item 8)

- 83. I feel confident that my child will be successful academically at UNI.
(Campus item 10)
- 8. The content of the courses within your child's major is valuable.
- 68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.
- 75. UNI faculty are highly qualified in the fields they teach. (Campus item 2)
- 80. My program offers opportunities for hands-on experience such as internships and undergraduate research projects. (Campus item 7)
- 82. I can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when I need to. (Campus item 9)
- Several items also indicate high levels of satisfaction with the overall experience of being a student at a university, especially one that feels like a friendly and caring community:
 - 29. It is an enjoyable experience for a student on this campus.
 - 39. Your child is able to experience intellectual growth here.
 - 1. Most students feel a sense of belonging here.
 - 2. The campus staff are caring and helpful.

UNI's Marketing Position

One of the first indicators we consider to assess market position is the overall levels of satisfaction that students and parents report. High levels of satisfaction indicate a strong market position, while low levels of satisfaction are a sign that there are aspects of the student experience that are not meeting students' or parents' expectations. If so, this can threaten market position.

For both students and parents, the overall satisfaction questions for UNI have very high scores, indicating that there are unlikely to be substantial numbers of students or parents expressing dissatisfaction with the university.

Student Responses	Mean (UNI)	Mean (NAT)
Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far.	5.77	5.21
All in all, if you had to do it over, would you enroll here again?	5.98	5.29

Parent Responses	Mean (UNI)
Rate your overall satisfaction with your child's experience here thus far.	6.12
All in all, if you had it to do over again, would you want your child to enroll here?	6.48

An additional summary question, "So far, how has your college experience met your expectations?" uses the following scale:

1 = Much worse than expected
2 = Quite a bit worse than I expected
3 = Worse than I expected
4 = About what I expected
5 = Better than I expected
6 = Quite a bit better than I expected
7 = Much better than expected

For this question, the average scores (4.78 for parents and 4.81 for students) indicate that for most students and parents their UNI experience is meeting or exceeding their expectations.

Finally, we also review the percentage of respondents who say that UNI was their first choice. The higher this percentage, the more successful UNI is at attracting students who regard UNI as a good fit for them. For both students and parents at least four out of every five report that UNI was their (their child's) first choice, a very high percentage.

By comparison, just 63 percent of students at four-year public institutions nationally indicate that their institution was their first choice.

- First choice: 80 percent (Students); 87 percent (Parents)
- Second choice: 17 percent (Students); 13 percent (Parents)
- Third choice or lower: 3 percent (Students); 1 percent (Parents)

Opportunities for Improvement

We also look at those items that are among the highest in importance, but have the lowest levels of satisfaction. While these are often items for a campus retention agenda, they also have marketing implications because they indicate areas that may be important to prospective students when they are considering an institution, but could frustrate them if they were led to believe that they would be satisfied with their experience of these items. Satisfaction is largely dependent on the expectations of an individual, so it is critical that the appropriate expectations are set initially.

Both students and parents register higher levels of satisfaction, across all items, than we typically encounter. Our procedure for identifying opportunities for improvement should be understood to be one whereby we isolate those items with low satisfaction scores *relative* to the levels of satisfaction reported by your students and parents across all items. So while we find high levels of satisfaction among your students and parents when compared with other institutions, we still recommend investigating those opportunities for improvement specified in this section to determine where UNI can further enhance the already high levels of satisfaction being reported.

Student Responses	IMP	SAT	GAP	NAT
8. The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	6.64	5.77	1.20	+
16. The instruction in my major field is excellent.	6.63	5.73	1.19	+
76. The cost of attending UNI is reasonable. (Campus item 3)	6.63	5.24	1.46	
58. The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	6.61	5.66	1.16	+
74. UNI faculty are excellent classroom teachers. (Campus item 1)	6.59	5.68	1.11	
34. I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	6.57	5.26	1.62	+
66. Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	6.56	5.48	1.41	+
25. Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	6.46	5.60	1.31	+
6. My academic advisor is approachable.	6.45	5.53	1.63	
17. Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	6.43	5.05	1.55	+
47. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	6.39	5.26	1.37	+
14. My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.	6.34	5.33	1.63	+
23. Living conditions in the residence halls are comfortable (adequate space, lighting, heat, air, etc.)	6.30	5.24	1.38	+
73. Student activities fees are put to good use.	6.27	5.18	1.55	+
12. Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.	6.24	5.33	1.43	+
57. I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	6.24	5.29	1.51	+

NOTE: For students the opportunities are identified as follows: SSI importance scores above the median (6.06) and SSI satisfaction scores in the lowest quartile (5.46) or item performance gap

scores in the top quartile (1.37 and above). The “NAT” column in the following chart designates items for which agreement scores were significantly higher (+) or significantly lower (-) than those of the national averages for other institutions of your type. Items are listed in order of importance.

Parent Responses	IMP	SAT	GAP
16. The instruction in your child's major field is excellent.	6.80	5.89	0.92
58. The quality of instruction your child receives in most of their classes is excellent.	6.80	5.81	0.99
74. UNI faculty are excellent classroom teachers. (Campus item 1)	6.76	5.83	0.94
33. Academic advisors are knowledgeable about requirements in your child's major.	6.74	5.62	1.12
68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	6.72	5.81	0.92
6. Academic advisors are approachable.	6.70	5.47	1.23
3. Faculty care about students as individuals.	6.69	5.73	0.96
14. Academic advisors are concerned about a student's success as an individual.	6.67	5.40	1.27
76. The cost of attending UNI is reasonable. (Campus item 3)	6.62	5.53	1.10
34. Students are able to register for classes they need with few conflicts.	6.60	5.35	1.24
82. My child can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when needed. (Campus item 9)	6.60	5.82	0.78
25. Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	6.52	5.51	1.02
19. Academic advisors help students set goals to work toward.	6.47	5.31	1.16
17. Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	6.46	4.93	1.53
47. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	6.45	5.40	1.06
49. There are adequate services to help your child decide upon a career.	6.38	5.51	0.87
70. Graduate teaching assistants are competent as classroom instructors.	6.36	5.35	1.01
22. Counseling staff care about students as individuals.	6.33	5.43	0.90
61. Adjunct faculty are competent as classroom instructors.	6.28	5.42	0.87

NOTE: For parents the opportunities are identified as follows: importance scores above the median (6.38) and satisfaction scores in the lowest quartile (5.51) or item performance gap scores in the top quartile (0.86 and above).

We would make the following observations about UNI’s list of opportunities:

- The following items were common to both students and parents:
 - 6. Academic advisors are approachable.

- 14. Academic advisors are concerned about a student's success as an individual.
- 16. The instruction in your child's major field is excellent.
- 17. Adequate financial aid is available for most students.
- 25. Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.
- 34. Students are able to register for classes they need with few conflicts.
- 47. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.
- 58. The quality of instruction your child receives in most of their classes is excellent.
- 74. UNI faculty are excellent classroom teachers. (Campus item 1)
- 76. The cost of attending UNI is reasonable. (Campus item 3)
- Items that may be concerns from a parent's perspective but not among the list of opportunities identified by students include:
 - 3. Faculty care about students as individuals.
 - 19. Academic advisors help students set goals to work toward.
 - 22. Counseling staff care about students as individuals.
 - 33. Academic advisors are knowledgeable about requirements in your child's major.
 - 49. There are adequate services to help your child decide upon a career.
 - 61. Adjunct faculty are competent as classroom instructors.
 - 68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.
 - 70. Graduate teaching assistants are competent as classroom instructors.
 - 82. My child can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when needed. (Campus item 9)
- Items that may be concerns from a student's perspective but not among the list of opportunities identified by parents include:
 - 8. The content of the courses within my major is valuable.
 - 12. Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.
 - 23. Living conditions in the residence halls are comfortable. (adequate space, lighting, heat, air, etc.)
 - 57. I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.
 - 66. Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.
 - 73. Student activities fees are put to good use.
- There are several items that refer to faculty and the quality of instruction. It is essential that the university identify more specifically what might be fueling these apparent concerns. At the heart of a student's experience at a university is the teaching-learning relationship, and if students don't find their professors engaging and effective as well as challenging then it will be difficult for UNI to establish a strong reputation for academic quality.

The "Strengths" list showed that UNI students are happy with the faculty's knowledge

and qualifications; the “Opportunities” list would suggest a review of actual pedagogy or instructional styles.

- 16. The instruction in your child’s major field is excellent.
- 25. Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.
- 47. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.
- 58. The quality of instruction your child receives in most of their classes is excellent.
- 74. UNI faculty are excellent classroom teachers. (Campus item 1)
- 3. Faculty care about students as individuals.
- 61. Adjunct faculty are competent as classroom instructors.
- 68. Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.
- 70. Graduate teaching assistants are competent as classroom instructors.
- 82. My child can meet one-on-one with a faculty member when needed. (Campus item 9)
- Several items that refer to advisors show up on these lists. The university should attempt to identify what it is about the advising relationship that doesn’t appear to be meeting students’ and parents’ expectations. In much of the other research UNI seems to enjoy a strong reputation for personal attention. If students or parents feel that advisors aren’t paying sufficient attention to student needs this can undermine this overall reputation.
 - 6. Academic advisors are approachable.
 - 14. Academic advisors are concerned about a student’s success as an individual.
 - 19. Academic advisors help students set goals to work toward.
 - 22. Counseling staff care about students as individuals.
 - 33. Academic advisors are knowledgeable about requirements in your child’s major.

Importance of College Decision Factors

After examining the various strengths and opportunities for improvement, it helps to understand the relative importance of different decision factors as these students made their decisions about whether or not to enroll at the University of Northern Iowa. The following table compares the average importance rating of nine separate decision factors.

Student Responses	UNI Mean	National Mean
92. Academic reputation	6.11	5.91
90. Cost	6.06	6.15
91. Financial aid	5.89	5.92
93. Size of institution	5.82	5.28
96. Geographic setting	5.54	5.49
97. Campus appearance	5.54	5.25
98. Personalized attention prior to enrollment	5.51	5.23
95. Recommendations from family/friends	5.17	4.80
94. Opportunity to play sports	3.35	3.51

This table shows the average importance rating assigned to these same items by parents.

Parent Responses	UNI Mean
93. Academic reputation	6.64
91. Cost	6.28
92. Financial aid	6.07
99. Personalized attention prior to enrollment	5.87
94. Size of institution	5.79
98. Campus appearance	5.78
97. Geographic setting	5.24
96. Recommendations from family/friends	5.06
95. Opportunity to play sports	2.99

The most important factor for both students and parents is academic reputation. Given that such large percentages of students and parents indicated that UNI was their first choice, this is an endorsement of the university's academic reputation. The importance placed on academic reputation by UNI students is greater than that reported by students at four-year public universities nationally, for whom cost is the most important consideration. UNI's students are much more likely to be focused on considerations of academics than is the typical student. **This suggests that an increased marketing emphasis on UNI academics may be appropriate.**

Cost and financial aid are the next two factors in terms of importance. These factors generally rate among the top considerations for students and parents, and the data on students at four-year public universities bears this out.

We note that the size of the institution had a higher average rating for students at UNI than it did for students at four-year public universities generally. This also suggests that students regard the size of UNI as about what they're looking for.

Note finally that personalized attention prior to enrollment ranks higher for parents than for students. Admissions and financial aid representatives should be prepared to engage not only with prospective students but with their parents as well in order to provide the kind of personalized attention that parents expect.