

What are students learning at The University of Iowa?



Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)

Putting Knowledge to Use

Student Experience in the Research University

Student learning in higher education is complex and multidimensional, leading to academic, social, and personal development. To gain a better understanding of student experiences at UI, we administered the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey to all degree-seeking undergraduates during Spring 2018.

Nearly 20% of students responded, and the profile of respondents was broadly representative of the undergraduate population in terms of academic characteristics, college, race/ethnicity, and year of study. This brief report provides an overview of student responses to questions about students using what they learned in settings beyond the classroom where the learning originally took place.

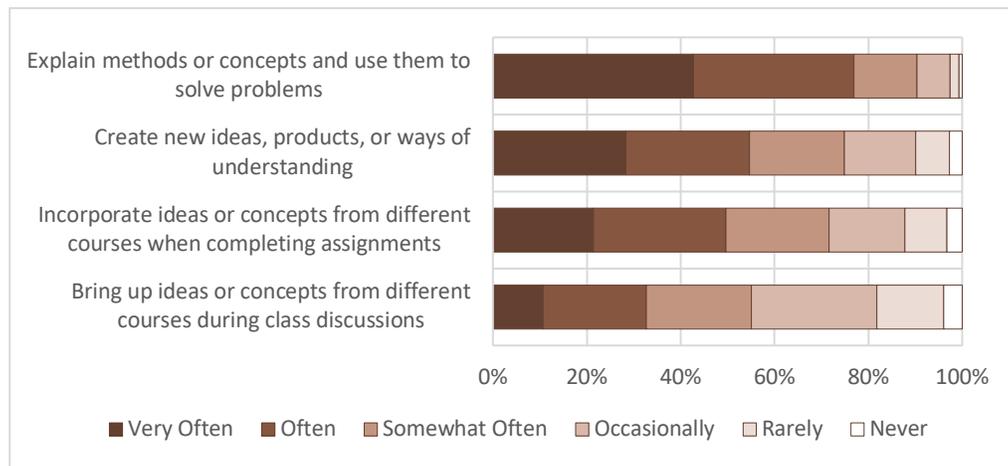
For more information about SERU, visit uiowa.edu/seru

This *SERU Brief* provides a sample of responses to SERU survey questions on how students use what they are learning. Respondents reported frequently putting their learning to use, both in classes where the learning occurred and also in other contexts. Many students counted these opportunities to apply and integrate their learning among their most meaningful learning experiences at the university.

SERU questions specifically ask students to consider how often they use or apply what they are learning in class. Counting students who responded “very often,” “often,” or “somewhat often,” over 90% indicated being asked to explain methods or concepts and use them to solve problems; 75% reported being asked to create new ideas, products, or ways of understanding.

More than 70% reported incorporating knowledge or ideas gained in their other courses when completing class assignments; over half reported bringing up ideas from different courses during class discussions (Figure One).

Figure One: Percent of students reporting how often they used their learning to ...



In open-text responses to the question, “What is one of the most meaningful learning experiences you have had at UI?”, many students described ways that they applied, integrated, or extended their learning.

Integration of Learning Across Contexts

In descriptions of their most meaningful learning experiences, some students wrote specifically about connecting learning in one course to experiences in another:

“Connecting different theories from multiple classes into one project. For example, I included information that I learned in my neurobiology class into a debate we were having in a philosophy class about human consciousness. This connection was really cool, and allowed me to use the information I learned on a higher level.”

“The times where my coursework has connected across disciplines are some of the most rewarding. I think learning about areas outside of your major area of study is very valuable and it has enriched my understanding of my own field.”

“I had a realization that all of my coursework was tied together -- parts of Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, and all of my public health classes are tying together for my future.”

Recognizing the Value of Learning for Future Contexts

Some described their most significant learning experiences in terms of recognizing the relevance of present learning to their post-graduation goals:

“I originally decided to take on a Global Health minor because I thought it would make me a better applicant for medical school. However, global health classes taught me to understand and appreciate a more diversified population [and] to see disease from more than just a biological standpoint but to understand each individual as a unique person. I truly believe that those Global Health courses will make me a better doctor.”

“The accounting program has really shown me a lot of professionalism and done a lot to teach me about how my classes are going to translate to real world things.”

“The UI STEP class ... has shown me how to apply everything I have accomplished at Iowa to life after college. The instructor has shown me the worth of my education and given me confidence for life after graduation. My student employment jobs have also helped me a lot.”

Realizing Unique Contributions They Can Make With Their Learning

For some, the most meaningful learning was their recognition of themselves as learners, with unique contributions to make and unique ways of seeing and understanding.

“Working with a real company in Entrepreneurial Finance, we got to help another student with their start-up’s finances. I felt like I got to use what I learned to make a meaningful change and help another student be successful.”

“I really enjoyed my interpretation of literature class where I analyzed a play from a perspective no one did before and my professor was very impressed and sent me an email congratulating me and telling me I got the highest score on the final assignment. It’s good to see that professors are interested in your voice and appreciate their students.”

“Every day I learn something new, helpful, and useful for my future. Or, I get to apply what I learned in different situations. I love that I am in charge of my own education.”

The SERU 2016 series, [In Their Own Words](#), further examines ways in which students describe applying, integrating, or extending their learning beyond the settings in which the learning first occurred.

Sample invitation to complete the SERU survey:

TELL US.

Student Voices Make a Difference

The University of Iowa has over 24,000 undergraduates, in more than 100 different fields of study, and we want to know what each of you thinks.

Tell us by taking a survey that lets us hear from all of you – about your classes, your major, life as a student here, and your overall experience at UI. When we hear from you, *everybody* benefits.

Digging Deeper

This *Brief* provides a snapshot of responses to just a few SERU questions. Other sections of SERU address a wide range of topics, including:

- how students use their time, in and out of class
- perceptions of majors
- future plans
- perceptions of their learning and development
- climate for diversity
- community involvement
- reflections on their most meaningful learning experience at UI

The full survey is online at uiowa.edu/seru

To view student responses to other SERU questions, or to explore responses by college, major, class level, or other demographic variables, contact seru@uiowa.edu