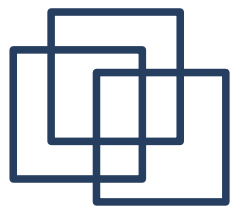


# Freshman Perceptions of the Level of Academic Challenge

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Report from the Faculty Senate  
Academic Standards Committee,  
Fall 2007  
Russell Herman, ASC Chair

Presented to Faculty Senate  
February 19, 2008



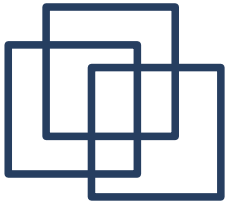
# The Charge

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The NSSE (National Summary of Student Engagement) Survey data from 2004 and 2005 indicates that first year students perceived UNCW to be less academically challenging than students at designated peer institutions.

In April 2007, the UNCW Faculty Senate discussed this topic and requested that the Academic Standards Committee look into the issue and report back to the Senate.

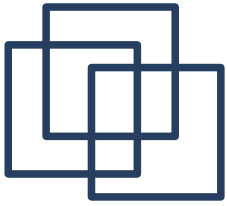
- freshmen perceived levels of academic challenge,
- grade distributions,
- focus on memorization, and
- student work (for pay) habits.



# Questions

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- Is there a real, and not only perceived, low level of academic challenge for first year students?
- Is there is grade inflation, possibly affecting student perceptions of the level of academic challenge at UNCW?
- Do our students work more than those at other institutions?
- Is there too much emphasis on memorization?
- Should students be writing more?



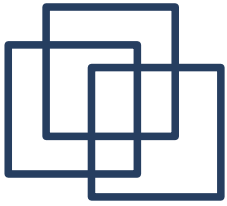
# NSSE

**Table I – First-Year Student Reponses**

	Average No. Respondents	UNCW	Selected Peers	Carnegie Peers	NSSE
2007	509	51.7	52.0	51.1	51.7
2006	444	52.0	51.4	51.0	51.8
2005	315	50.1	Xxx	Xxx	52.6
2004	292	51.2	Xxx	Xxx	53.6

**Table II – Senior Student Reponses**

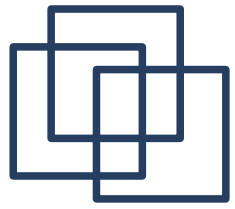
	Average No. Respondents	UNCW	Selected Peers	Carnegie Peers	NSSE
2007	449	55.1	55.0	55.5	55.6
2006	535	55.5	55.6	55.6	55.8
2005	345	56.4	Xxx	Xxx	56.5
2004	249	55.5	Xxx	xxx	57.6



# LAC

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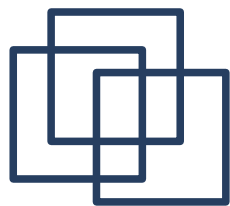
- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc.)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more; between 5 and 19 pages; and fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
- Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations



# 2007 Benchmark Comparison Institutions

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- Rowan University
- Sonoma State University
- The College of New Jersey
- The University of Texas at Dallas
- Truman State University
- University of Northern Iowa
- University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



# National Survey of Student Engagement 2007

## The College Student Report

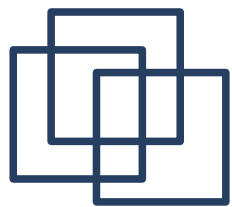
**1** In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? Mark your answers in the boxes. Examples: ☐ or ☐

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never		Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	r. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Made a class presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	s. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	t. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	u. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	v. Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Come to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
g. Worked with other students on projects <b>during class</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
h. Worked with classmates <b>outside of class</b> to prepare class assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
i. Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
j. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
k. Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
l. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
m. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
n. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
o. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
p. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
q. Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					

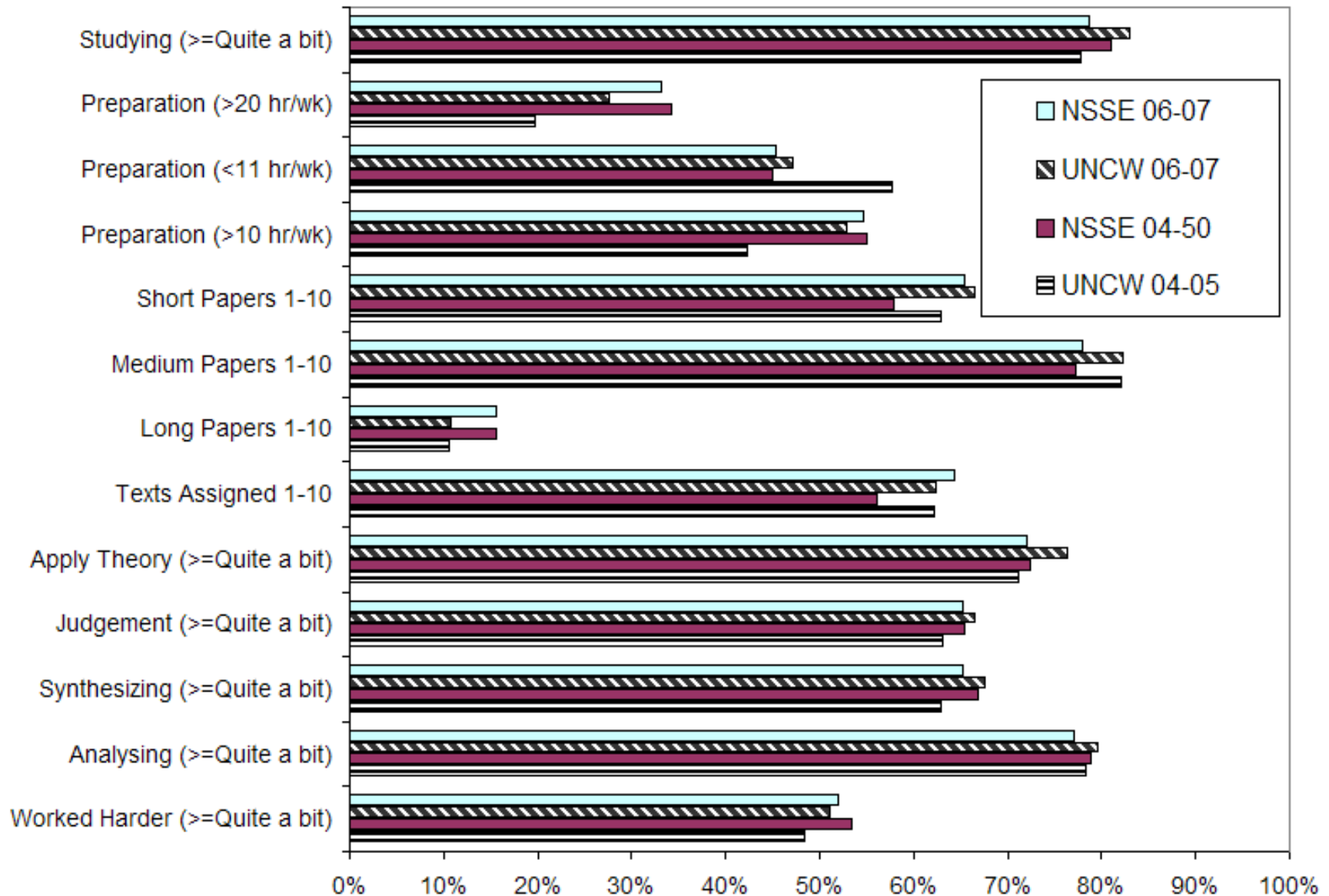
  

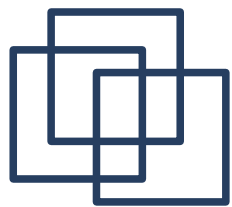
**2** During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
a. <b>Memorizing</b> facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. <b>Analyzing</b> the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. <b>Synthesizing</b> and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. <b>Making judgments</b> about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. <b>Applying</b> theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

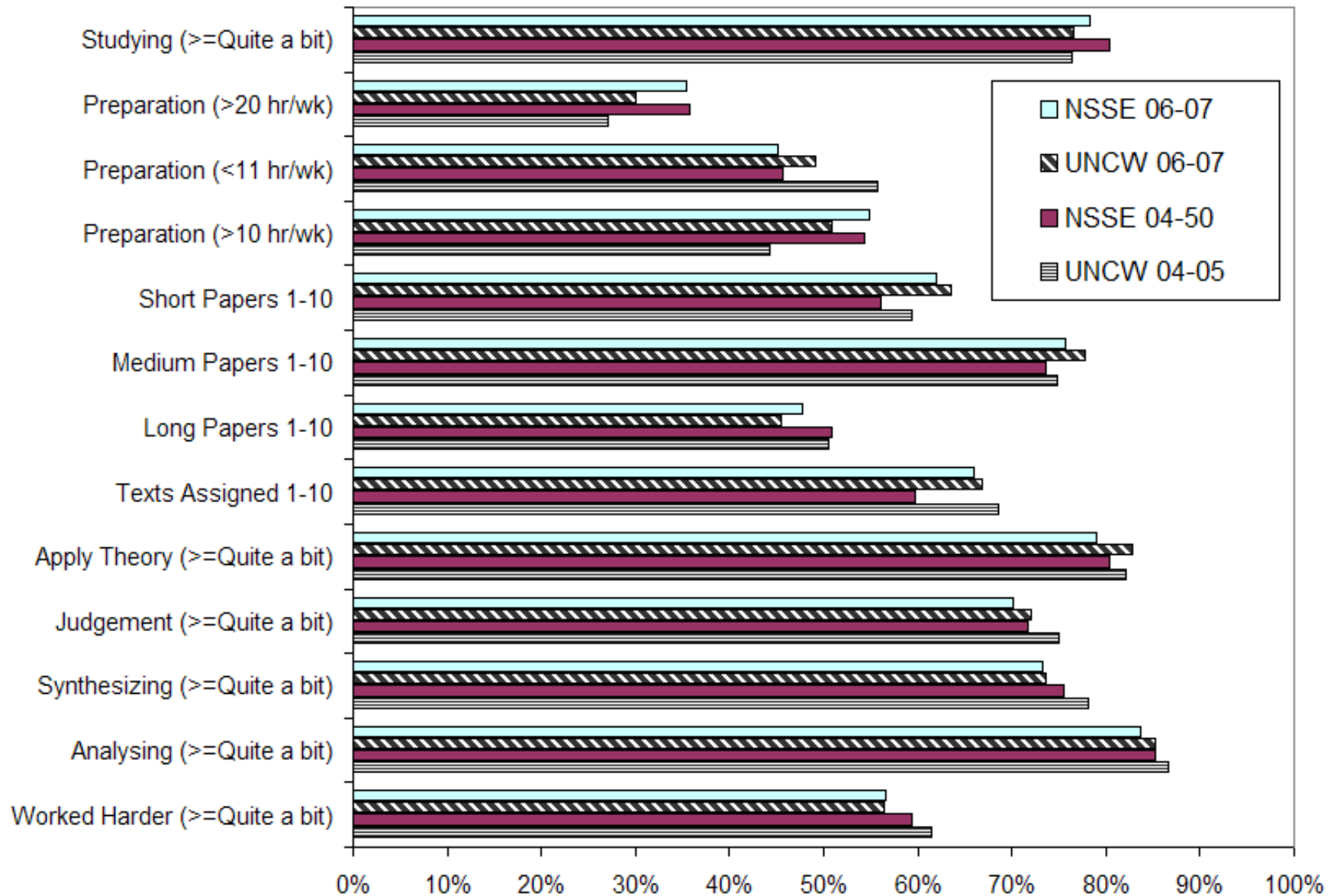


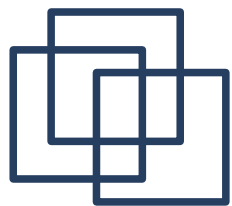
# LAC First-Year Students, Two Year Averages





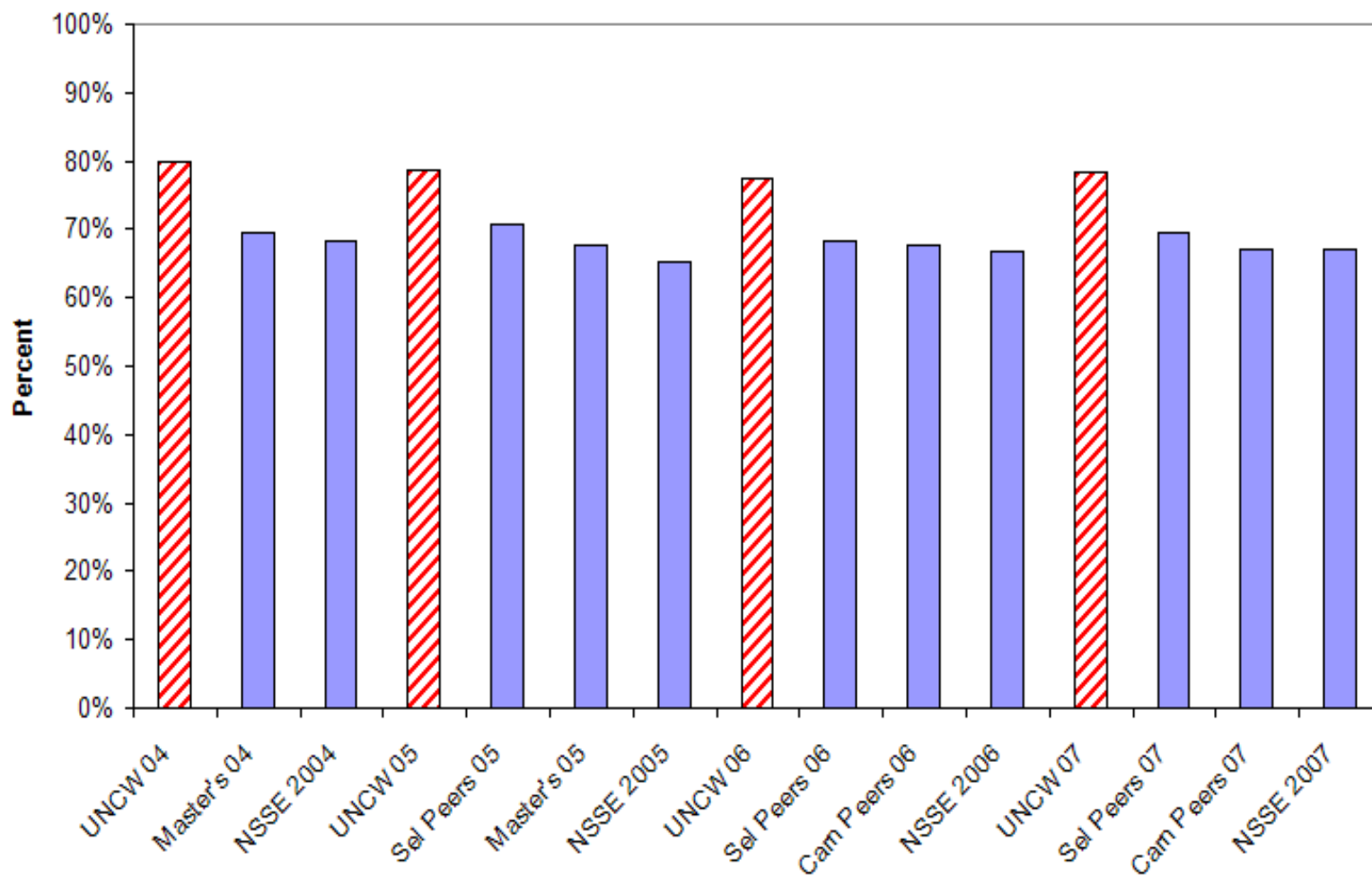
# LAC Seniors, Two Year Averages

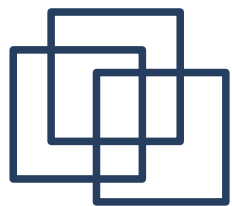




# Memorization – First Year

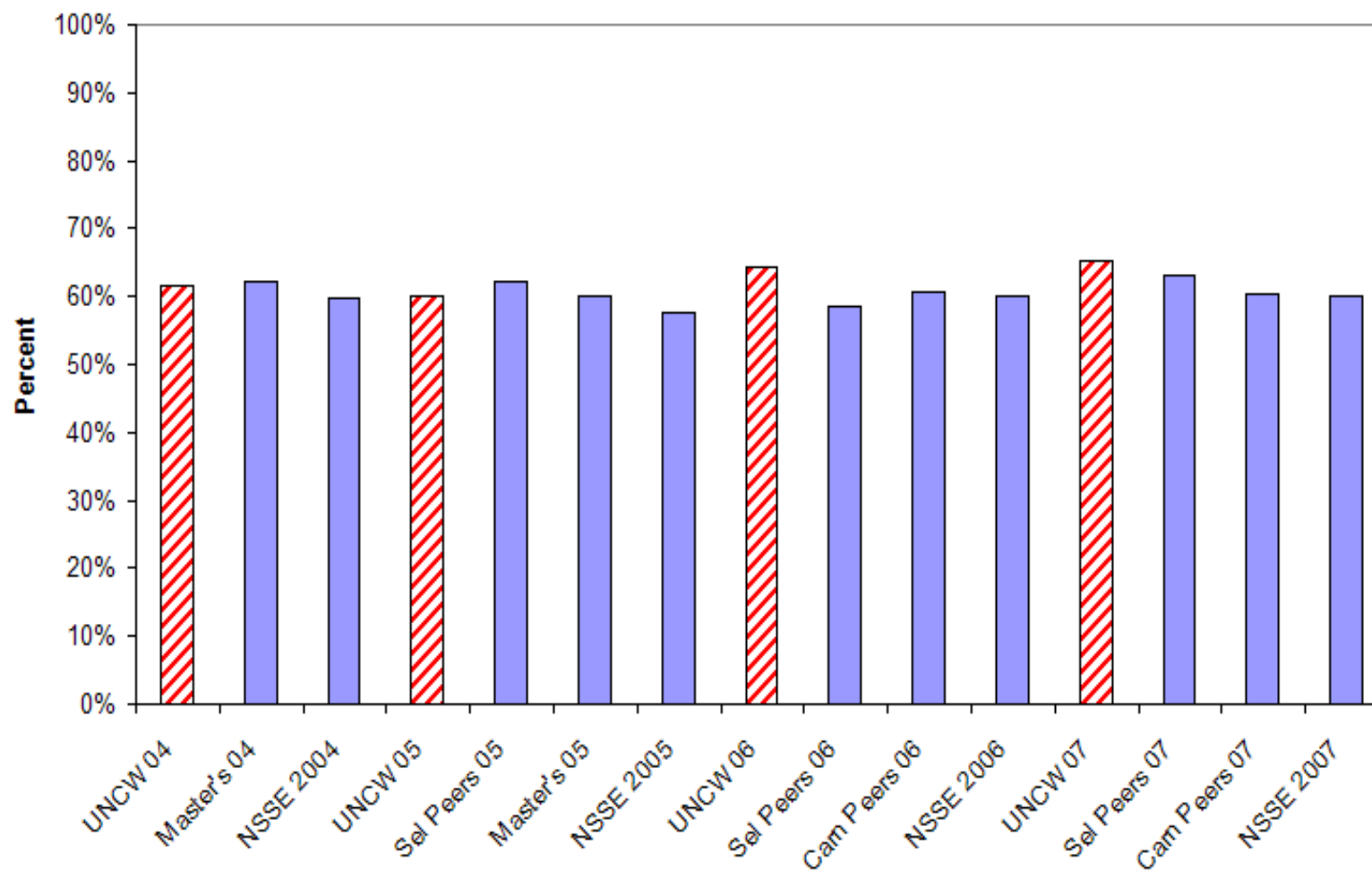
Coursework emphasizes: Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods  
from your courses and readings

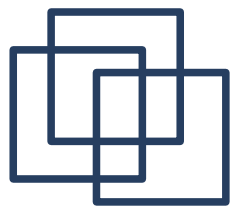




# Memorization - Seniors

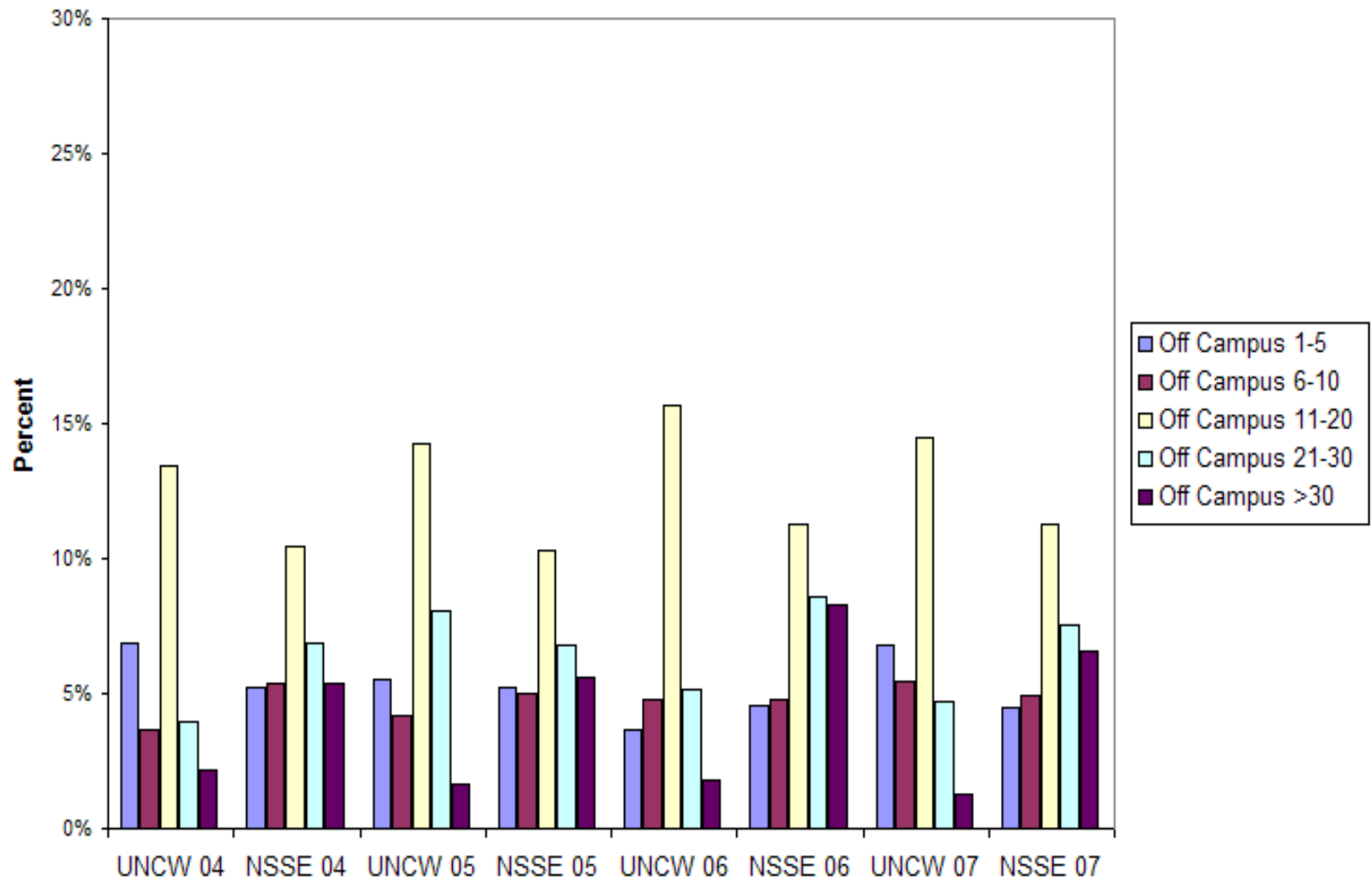
Coursework emphasizes: Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods  
from your courses and readings

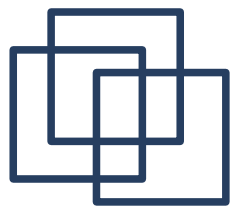




# Work Off Campus - First Year

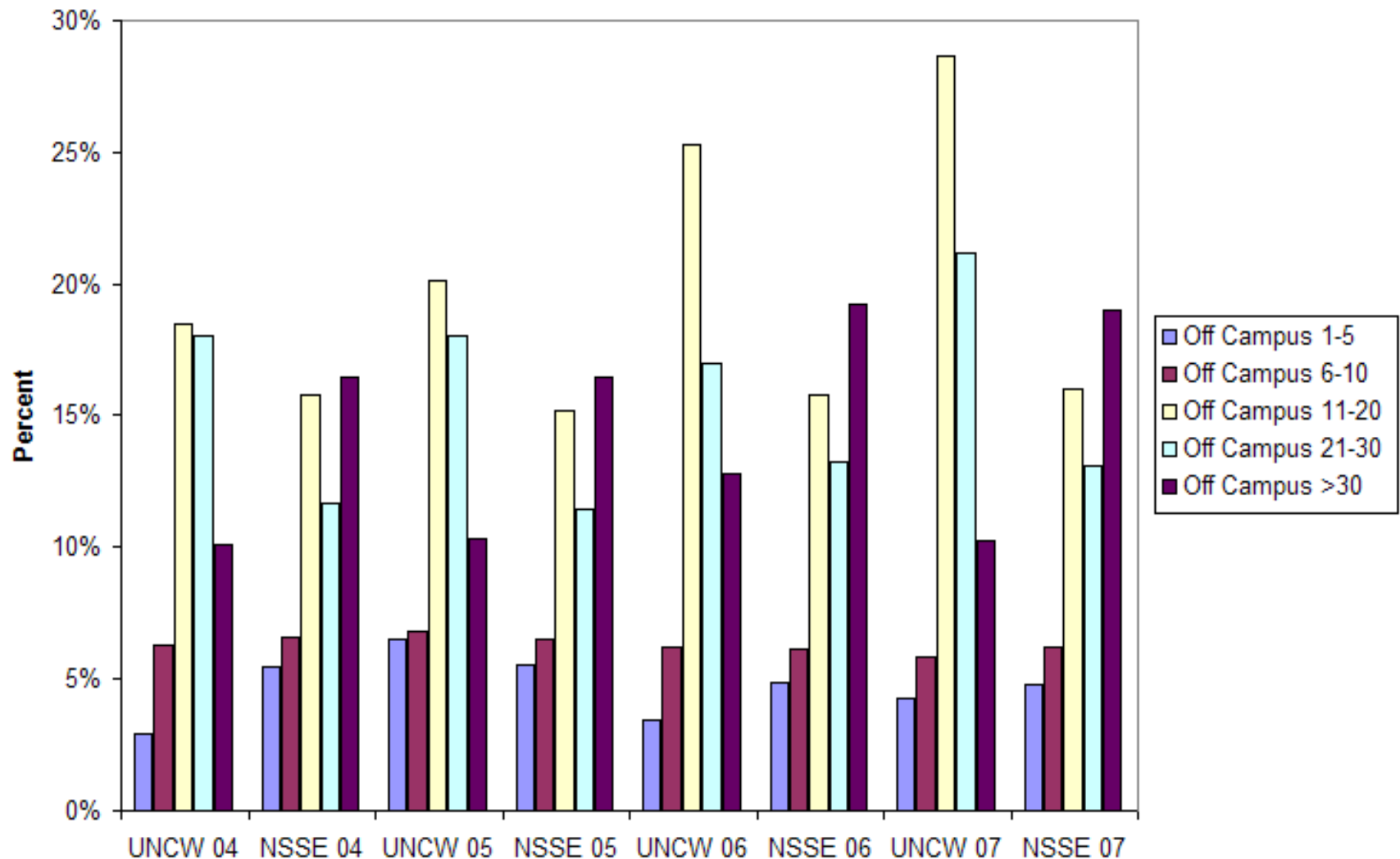
Time Spent Working for Pay Off Campus

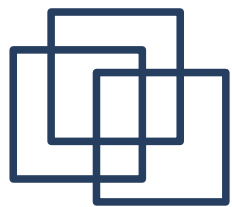




# Work Off Campus - Senior

Time Spent Working for Pay Off Campus

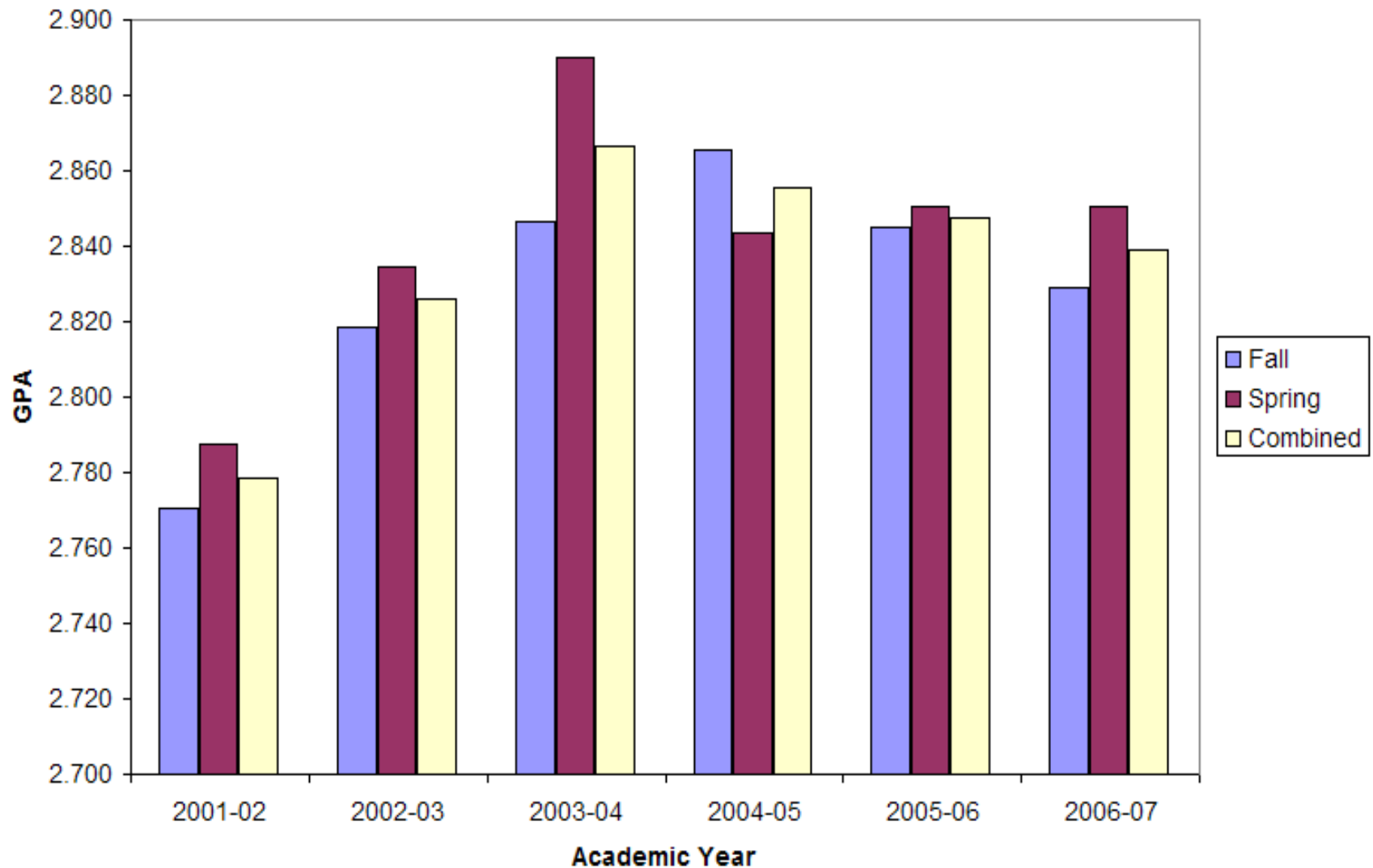


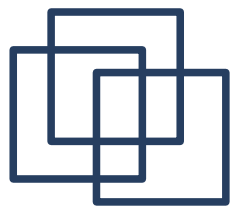


# GPA's - 2001-2007

## Lower Division Lecture Only

GPA's for 2001-2007

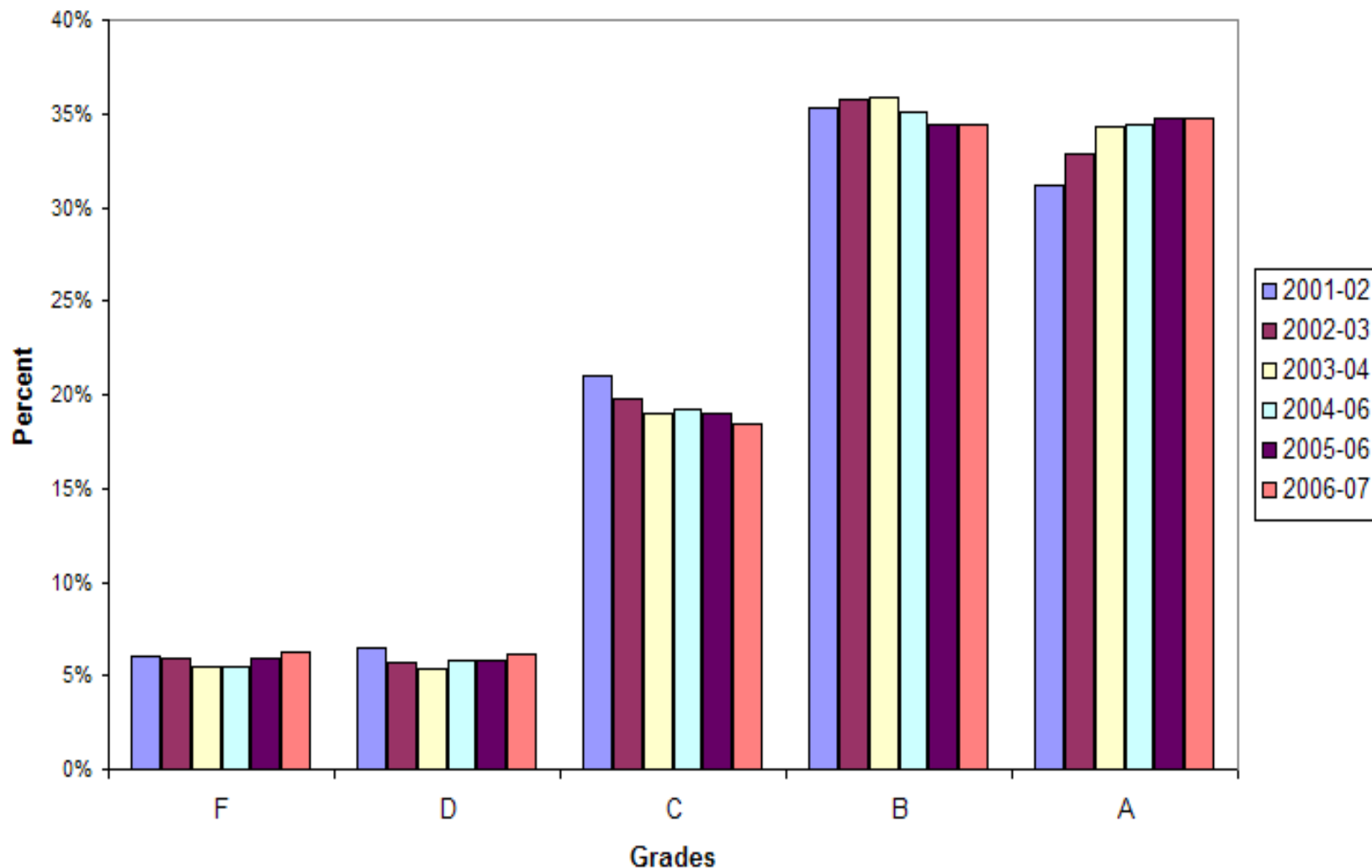


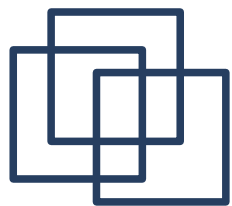


# Grade Distribution

## Lower Division Lecture Only

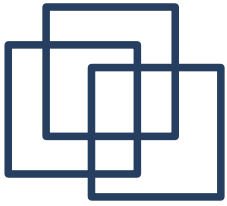
Academic Year Grade Group Distribution  
2001-02 to 2006-07





# Faculty vs Student Comparisons LAC 2006

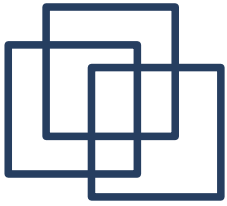
QUESTION (Scale: Somewhat or quite a bit)	FACULTY OVERALL	LOWER DIVISION FACULTY	FIRST YEAR STUDENTS
<b>Analyzing</b> the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth, and considering its components	91.0%	88.0%	80.2%
<b>Synthesizing</b> and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	86.0%	83.0%	66.5%
<b>Applying</b> theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	82.0%	74.0%	77.7%
<b>Making judgments</b> about the value of information, arguments or methods such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	70.0%	60.0%	67.0%
<b>Memorizing</b> facts, ideas, or methods from your course and readings so students can repeat them pretty much in the same form	26.0%	28.0%	76.7%



# Findings

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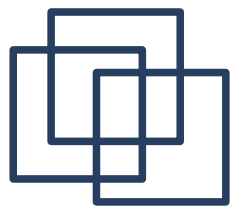
- UNCW's LAC index has significantly increased in 2006-2007 vs 2004-2005 for both first year students and seniors.
  - Students tend to be putting in more hours studying. There has been an increase in the percentage of students studying more than 20 hours per week and a decrease in the percentage studying less than 11 hours per week.
  - Our students perceive that they are writing a sufficient number of short and medium length papers, though they are not writing as many long papers in comparison to those at the benchmark institutions.
  - In the areas of applying theory, judgment, synthesizing and analyzing our students have significantly improved the last few years.
  - Students are now working harder than expected, though we have yet to surpass the national average.
  - Our students tend to be doing better as they progress from entry into UNCW to graduation. They are learning about what it takes, but the trends in particular areas tend to stay consistently behind or ahead of national trends. Thus, addressing any concerns at the entry level can have significant impact throughout their academic careers.



# Findings

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- The general grade distributions from 2001 to 2007 currently do not support the claim that there is grade inflation.
- Our students do not report any higher percentage of hours worked than reported nationally.
- Students and faculty have significantly different views as to the amount of memorization needed to succeed at UNCW.



# Recommendations

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- We should only be concerned if the data differs significantly from the benchmark groups
- How many long papers should be expected of first year students?
- We should communicate our expectations to students in all areas.
- We need to better communicate expectations of study habits.
- Clarify balance between memorization and critical thinking skills.