

## **Award Title**

Building Better Community: How a small survey made a big difference

## **Awards Categories**

Athletics, Recreation, Physical Fitness, Non-Varsity Sports and related

## **Executive Summary**

New York University is the world's largest private university. It is an immeasurably diverse environment of high achievement. Its undergraduate campus is a complex urban cacophony in New York City. It is a part of NYU's Global Network University worldwide. It is a complicated setting to develop community. It is a problematic backdrop if you want to be heard.

22,000 full-time undergraduates call NYU home; they major in 230 academic disciplines and are offered 4,500 courses and participate in 450 clubs and organizations. They arrive from six continents and more than 130 countries after navigating a highly selective admissions process.

Athletically, NYU participates in one of the strongest conferences in the nation. Multiple NYU sports have captured National Championship titles. NYU is annually recognized as one of the top athletic Departments in the Director's Cup competition.

In contrast to other Universities, varsity athletes represent only 1.6% of NYU's student population. NYU owns no outdoor athletic fields; half its student-athletes train and compete in facilities located throughout the city. Compared to their conference counterparts, they receive tens of thousands of dollars less in financial assistance. The NYU student-athlete devotes more time to their sport than any academic or extracurricular activity. Yet athletes academically out-perform or match their non-athlete peers. They more quickly graduate, and at higher percentages than non-athletes. They remain connected to NYU as alumni and donors in greater numbers.

So who are these student-athletes? What can NYU learn from them? What voice does this engaged student population have on campus? What unique services correctly target the idiosyncratic needs of this group? How successful is NYU in achieving student development, and student learning outcomes over time for this population?

To examine these important questions, NYU implemented a comprehensive, anonymous, online survey assessing varsity athlete satisfaction, services and overall experiences on NYU's campus. The effort generated robust response rates: 63.7% in year one (2010) and an impressive 78.6% in year two (2011).

Amid the enormous diversity and fractured attention of NYU, varsity student-athletes now had a voice. And all of NYU listened.

A unique and valuable profile of these athletes emerged. And data powerfully supports the conclusion that varsity athletics uniquely impacts personal development, engagement and the creation of community.

Targeted athletic programs improved immediately. Even before the completion of its two year implementation, unambiguous messages could be applied to solutions quickly. From 2010 to 2011, overall satisfaction with the varsity program improved 10% from a healthy 60% to 70%. Students were 7% more likely to recommend the varsity program to a friend in 2011 than 2010. The number of athletes who intend to continue to participate in athletics also increased. The programs with the lowest satisfaction rates showed the most significant improvement, from 27% to a whopping 71% increase in satisfaction.

Variations were evident across gender, residence, employment status, satisfaction levels, program preferences, their overall NYU experience and many other separators.

Most importantly, NYU is now applying these learned principles of varsity athletics participation to the development of community University-wide. The "Little Survey that Could," a survey designed to give the tiniest of populations at NYU a voice, is contributing mightily to the largest NYU University Leadership Team dialogue and action campaign about how to engage students to build communities campus wide.

### **Award Description**

#### **Positive impact on student learning, transitions, retention, and/or success**

Giving a voice to the underrepresented student-population on NYU's campus through the varsity survey revealed powerful indicators for student success, not just for athletes, but for students overall.

Direct comparisons about social, academic and campus experiences of athletes could now be made to the overall student body and provided important perspective for the way in which the University assesses its techniques for community development University-wide.

Athletes more frequently agreed "socially and personally their experience at NYU has been a positive one," compared to the general student population; athletes reported feeling a part of the NYU community more frequently, and they feel more connected to their varsity team than their school, their residence hall, or the University! More athletes feel connected to a group of NYU friends compared to students overall and more NYU athletes feel connected to the University compared to NYU students overall.

Student-athletes outperformed or matched their non-athletic peers in the classroom at NYU for three decades despite spending on average more than 25 hours per week on their sport, and engaging in non-athletic organizations on campus in greater percentages than non-athletes.

The data confirmed participation in athletics positively impacts learning, student success, retention and the overall student experience. The message about the connection between student academic success, their connection to the University and a positive social experience is a strong

one. For the first time, NYU has real data to support those learning outcomes and is thoughtfully using this data to shape strategies across the broader student affairs and university community.

### **Relevance to institutional mission**

Never before has NYU taken such labor intensive steps to assess with real data how successful it is achieving the provision of services to its varsity student-athlete. In doing so, NYU exposed a powerful resource about one of its most engaged student populations and is applying the models of community to its larger student population.

Mirroring the University mission of attracting and supporting outstanding faculty and retaining innovative coaches, administrators, and staff, NYU employs the survey results to improve coaching, enhance awareness of student needs and support those whose innovation and coaching solutions more closely align with student demands.

### **Demonstration of success in addressing student needs and/or critical campus issues**

Undergraduate students across the nation face complicated social, academic and emotional issues. Adding rigors of athletic competition exasperates issues and creates new stressors. The unique athletic experience at NYU – as a tiny percentage of a very large population, where athletes train across the city and out of state daily – contributes to making the NYU varsity athlete even more susceptible to academic, social, emotional and physical stressors.

And yet the survey revealed critical data about just how well these students are coping: mechanisms intrinsic to varsity involvement help students manage college life, enhance learning, and create vital attachments to a social network so essential to handling emotional, social and academic stressors. Applying principles of varsity athletics participation to student outreach and community building across the Division of Student Affairs is an important outcome of the survey process.

The survey also included a comprehensive assessment of the primary human resource NYU provides athletes: the head coach. We received vital information measuring this resource. Successful methodologies from one coach are being used as models to professionally develop others in key areas including approachability, how aware they believe their coach is of alcohol and drug use on their teams, how coaches are handling harassment, eating disorders and other sensitive issues.

An overwhelming majority of athletes (86%) were comfortable engaging in one-on-one conversation with their head coach, emphasizing the important role a coach (or key university contact) can play in the lives of students.

Athletes may still be hesitant in some circumstances to bring sensitive concerns to coaches for a variety of reasons. NYU created the survey to allow student athletes to express affairs and raise sensitive or uncomfortable issues without the fear of repercussions to their status on the team.

### **Importance to one or more program areas included in this category**

This survey vehicle and dashboard is versatile. It can be adapted to every other constituent the Department of Athletics serves from the 1,200 non-varsity intramural and club athletes, to

recreational course participants, to community users. In total, one million users annually access services provided by NYU's two on-campus athletic facilities. The survey contributes significantly then to the University's capacity to collect and assess information about the needs of this large population and how it can more closely meet the fitness and recreational needs of the University community outside the classroom.

### **Collaboration with academic affairs and other departments**

Athletics collaborated with multiple University departments. Senior Athletic Administrators directed the project. Academic Affairs, the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, the Office of Assessment, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Office for Institutional Research supported its construction and research. Key administrators from the areas of Facilities, Sports Medicine, Sports Information, and Alumni Relations also contributed question design, and areas of focus.

Results and lessons learned are shared with the Vice President for Student Affairs, the University Leadership team and widely distributed among departments across the Division including Residence Life, Admissions, Wellness, Career Planning, and Assessment.

### **Effective use of technology and other resources**

NYU secured the services of web-based research firm, R Square, as the primary technology vendor to help design and execute the online survey. NYU also utilized Qualtrics software research suite. In doing so, we secured qualified researchers and an experienced project manager.

A critical result of these partnerships was the creation of a dashboard that allows powerful reporting; data can be sorted, cross-tabulated, drilled down, filtered, separated by subgroup, represented in time series, and queried by every question, every separator and every indicator in a 52 question survey. Statistical analysis is simple to generate for any report including minimum and maximum values, the mean, variance, standard deviation, and percentages. We instantly create reports, charts, graphs and tables which can seamlessly be exported to Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and as an Adobe pdf.

Logistically, the use of these technologies also increased efficiency and effectiveness: they eliminated technical difficulties distributing the survey to 400 athletes and allowed completed surveys to be tracked online in real time. The entire survey distribution and collection process took less than one week to execute.

The web-based tool allowed students to log-in to a secure site from any computer or mobile device with internet access and complete a lengthy survey in a reasonable amount of time (21 minutes). Students reported a very user-friendly, relatively painless process to complete the survey, despite doing so at peak points in the academic semester.

Safeguards eliminated duplicate surveys and non-name secure identifiers screened out unauthorized users.

Anecdotally, R-Square also lent credibility to the student's confidence in the anonymity of the survey

### **Evidence of sustainability**

The survey process included the collection of valuable current data, but also the construction of a comprehensive foundation for assessment and the capacity to produce important longitudinal data for the long term.

Securing long-term services with R Square, the development of the NYU Survey dashboard through Qualtrics, and the collaborative University-wide efforts involved in question design and structure, all serve to ensure the projects long term sustainability.

The end result of the two-year implementation of this program of survey design, execution, data collection and report design is an amazingly simple tool that can be repeated several times a year, for years to come, and it can easily be applied to other programs.

### **Assessment Data**

#### **OVERALL ASSESSMENT:**

The online varsity survey sought to accomplish several goals over the two-year time period it took to completely develop.

#### **Overall (and Year One):**

- **Obtain actual assessment data** to evaluate the effectiveness of the services NYU provides to its 375 varsity athletes, who at 1.6% of the student population may be underrepresented as a voice on campus but who represent a more robustly engaged subset of campus life.
- **Assess the validity of assumptions about varsity athletic participation learning outcomes** and goals regarding the impact varsity athletics makes on student welfare, learning and success, and the campus as a whole.
- **Create a survey tool**, starting with varsity athletics that will be **applied to non-varsity** club and intramural athletes, recreational course participants and general users of the facilities, who collectively total more than one million users of athletic services across the campus.
- **Distribute widely among University Leadership team**, the data which supports the mechanisms by which athletic participation helps form community and the positive outcomes related to varsity athletics.

#### **Year Two:**

- Increase student-athlete participation and **response rate**.
- **Decrease the time** needed to complete the survey.
- Edit crafting of questions to **improve readability** and make even more user friendly.
- **Reduce user error** rate and increase the number of completed surveys.
- Develop a 'student-athlete profile': **Learn more about who they are**.
- Create opportunities to **make comparisons** between student-athletes and the general student body.

- Develop a database for **longitudinal assessment** and time series evaluation.
- **Increase the timeliness** of survey result access and distribution.

### Year One and Overall Results:

- We successfully obtained statistically significant data to evaluate the effectiveness of the services NYU provides to its 375 athletes who represent a uniquely engaged and participatory group when compared to students university wide. ([Link here for a sample Summary of Findings.](#))
- Anticipated results about the importance athletics plays in student learning, success and the overall student experience were confirmed by the results of the survey.
- We accomplished the goal of developing an annual survey tool which once developed, could be applied to non-varsity club and intramural athletes.
- Results of the survey have been widely distributed across appropriate departments and the University Leadership Team and the lessons learned are being applied to building community and improving student engagement across the University, world-wide.

### Specific Year Two Results:

- **Response rate** from year one to year two improved by 14.9%.
- 287 varsity athletes completed the survey, for a 78.6% response rate, compared to 235 students and a 63.7% rate in year one. The increased numbers improved statistical significance across sports with few respondents in year one. Every sport was represented in statistically significant percentages.
- **We reduced the time** to complete the survey by 16%. Re-designed survey questions read easier, and reduced the time to complete the survey on average by 3.7 minutes.
- **Accuracy of results** and improved uniformity by standardizing timing of the survey distribution to correlate to specific sport seasons. Improved social media communication techniques through the SAAC aided in increasing awareness of survey launch and timeliness of high percentage of completed surveys.
- **Re-crafted questions and type to learn significantly more about ‘who our athletes are.’** 2011 results offered powerful student separators by how they self-describe their competitive role within their team, the time they spend competing, working, or preparing for class, their methods and time spent training in the off-season, membership in outside clubs and organizations, and more.
- Comparative Analysis: **Successfully created a tool to compare student-athletes to students overall** regarding the important university mission of community building, overall satisfaction with the NYU experience, to what extent they agree their NYU experience socially and personally has been a positive one, and others. ([Click here for three examples.](#))
- **Longitudinal Data:** This annual assessment survey tool represents the first longitudinal data available to a) evaluate the effectiveness of services provided to student-athletes, b) to understand the profile of who these students are, c) to assess how the student-athlete profile/ their satisfaction with services are trending over time, and d) to make direct comparisons in time series to students overall.

- **Reports: The dashboard successfully accomplished efficient and effective reporting.** Data can be sorted, drilled down, filtered, separated by subgroup, represented in time series, and queried by every question, every separator and every indicator in a 52-question survey. Statistical analysis is generated for any report, and every question and query including minimum and maximum values, the mean, variance, standard deviation, and percentages. We instantly create reports, charts, graphs and tables that can seamlessly be exported to Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Adobe pdf.

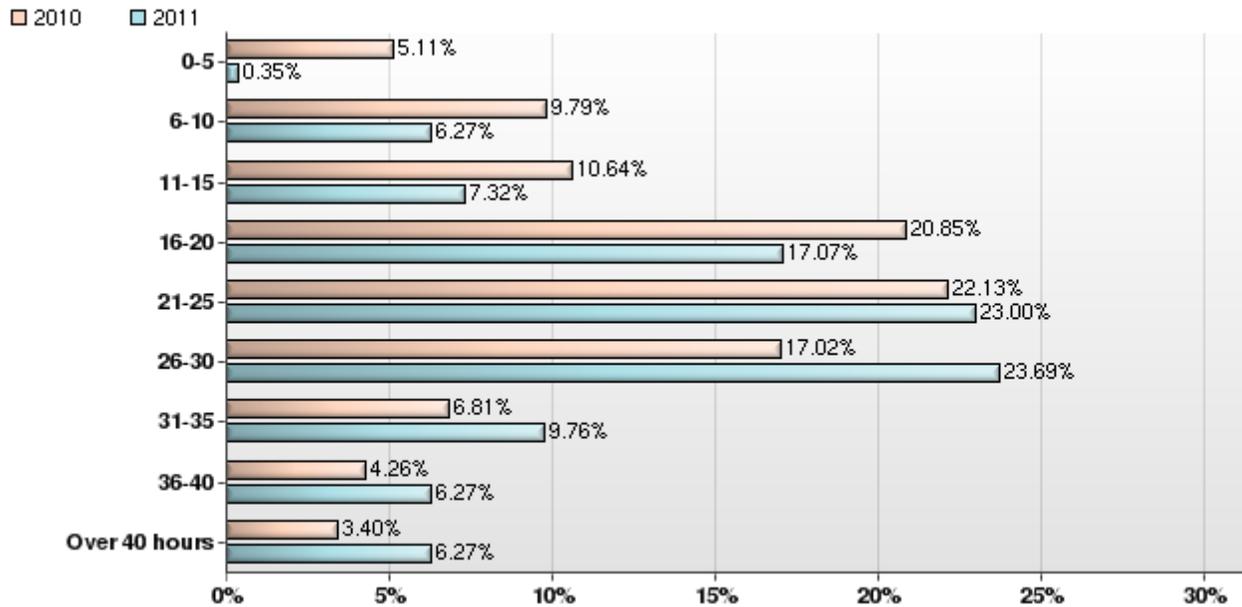
### **QUALITATIVE DATA:**

- **Open-ended text questions also provided student-athletes with the rare opportunity to provide subjective feedback in an open ended, non-structured format.** Hundreds of individual responses were collected as many students took the opportunity to respond to those open-ended questions.
- **Student Reaction Anecdotally:**  
Response by student-athletes to the survey was terrific. Some examples of student reactions include:
  - “This is really important because we know the administration really listens to us. They take what we write down and turn it into something positive.” (J.D.’12)
  - “Being able to give feedback was great- so glad someone is listening” (T.B.’12)
  - “We can actually see real changes in our coach since we did the survey.” (S.O.’11)
  - “We were able say what we needed the department to know.” (K.B. ’13)
  - “I can’t believe we have the varsity weight room by completing the survey.” (WR’ 12)

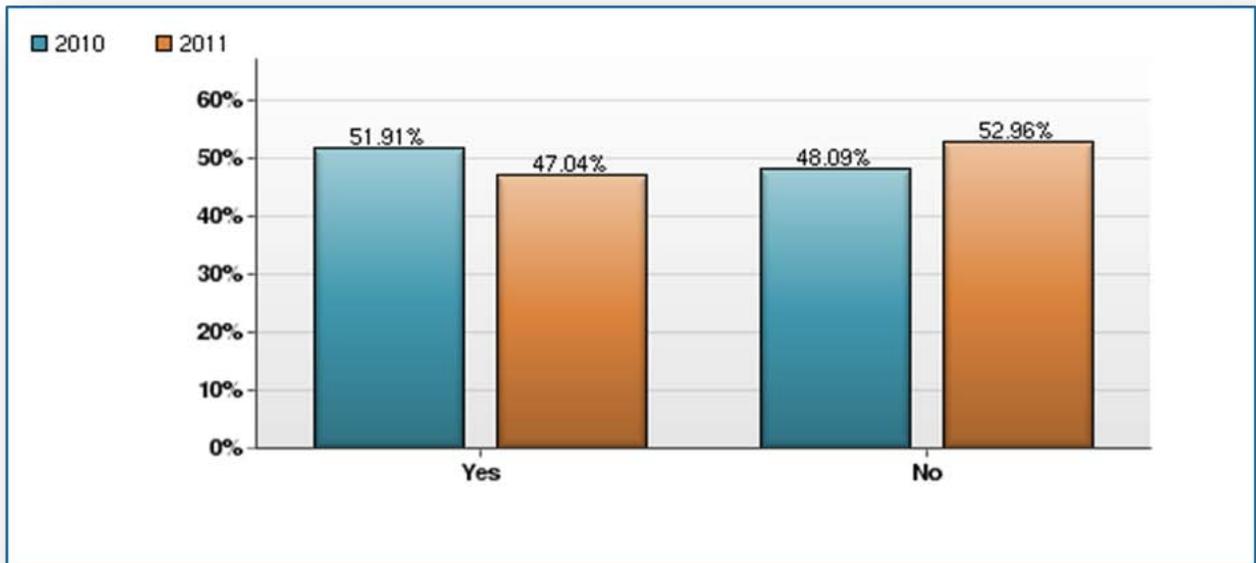
### **LONGITUDINAL DATA SAMPLES:**

*The amount of time student-athletes report they spend training and competing for their sport increased from 2010 to 2011. 68.93% reported spending 21-25 hours or more per week in 2011 compared to 53.62% in 2010. Similarly, 22.30% report spending 31-35 hours or more per week*

in 2011 compared to 14.47 in 2010.

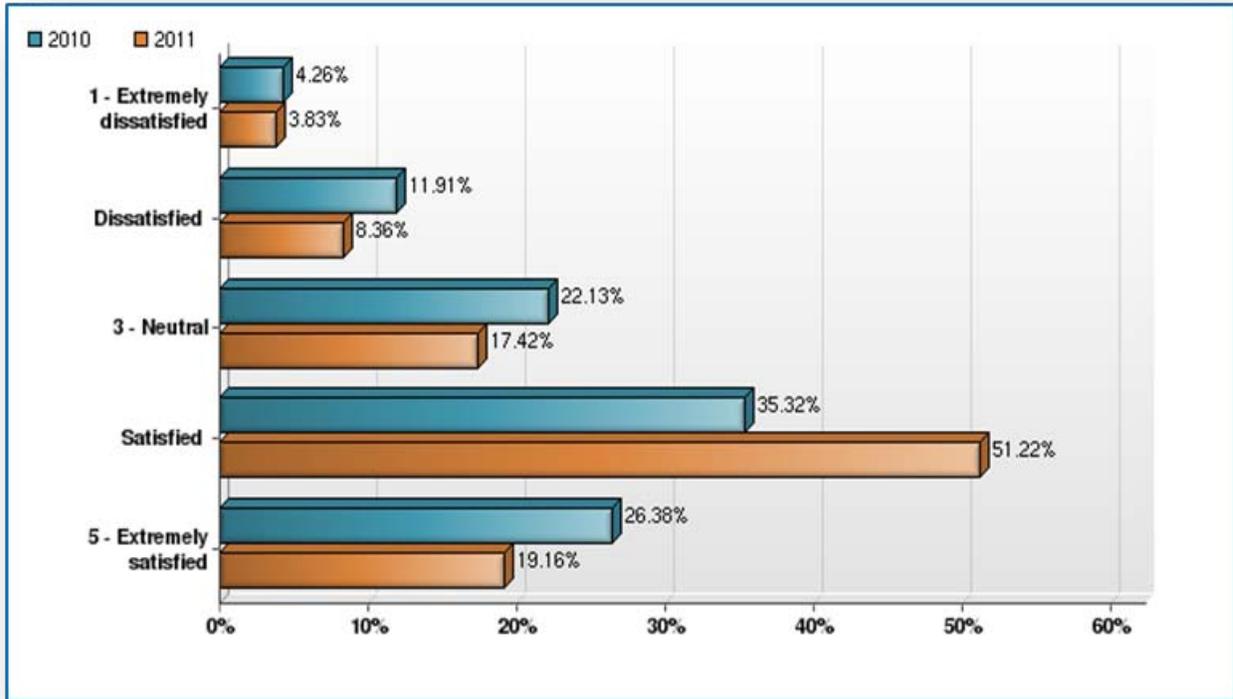


Nearly half of all student athletes participate in **community service** activities in addition to a) the time they spend on their varsity sport and b) in other non-athletic campus clubs and organizations. Over the two-year time period of this survey implementation, that percentage has dropped slightly from 51.91% in 2010 to 47.04% in 2011.

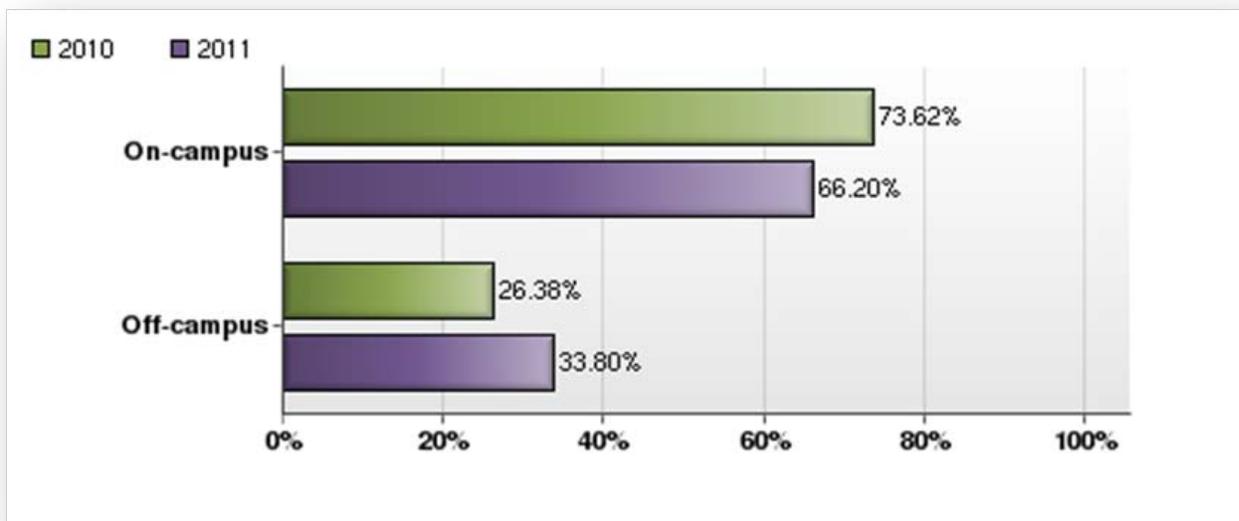


**Overall satisfaction** with the varsity program improved over the first two years of the study. More students reported being 'satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' (70.38%) with their varsity program in 2011, compared to 61.70% in 2010. The majority of the percentage increase is a

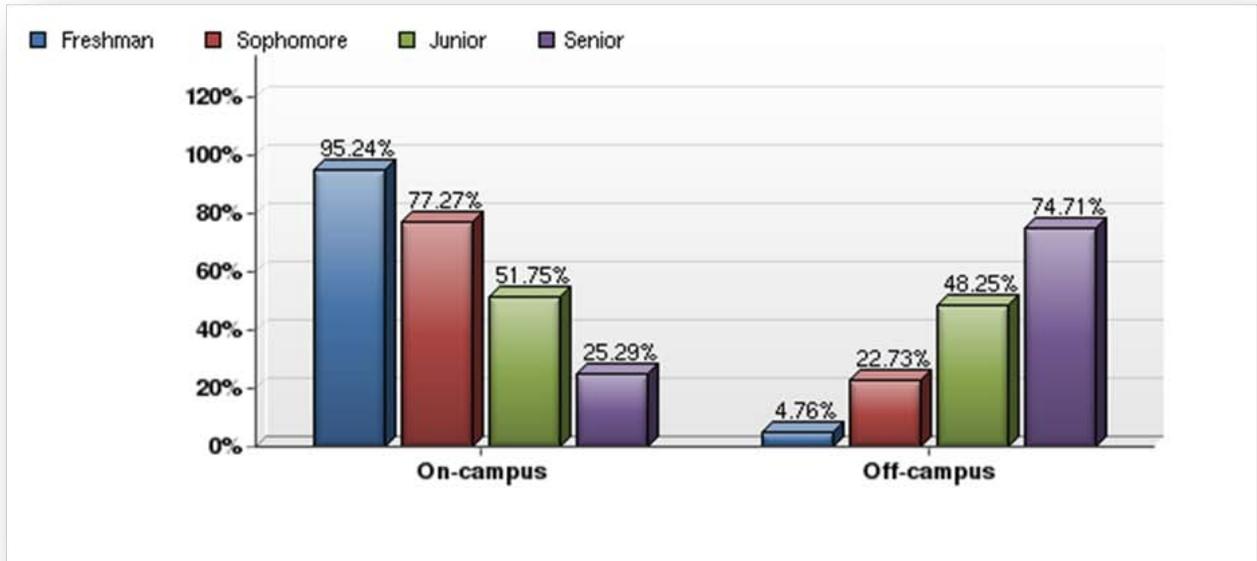
result of the increased 'satisfied'; those reporting 'extremely satisfied' actually decreased from 26.38% to 19.16%.



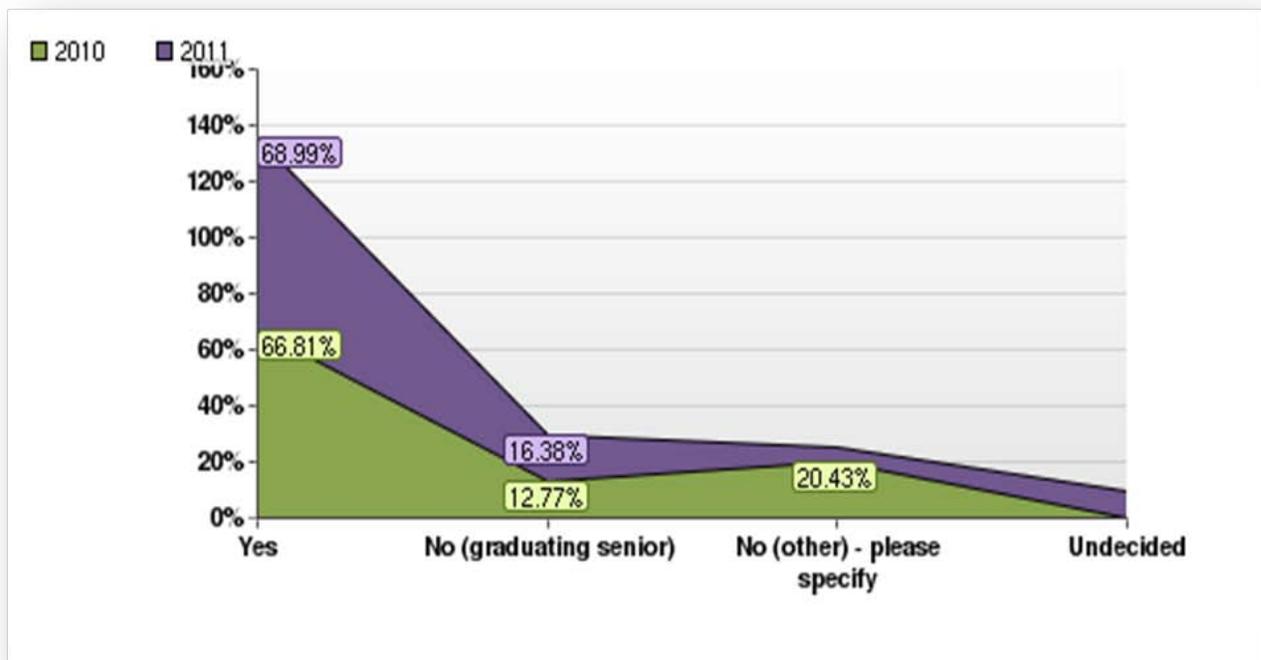
Fewer student-athletes report **residing on campus** in 2011 compared to 2010. Significant variations are evident by academic year:



More than 95% of freshmen reside on campus compared to 75% of seniors who report residing off campus.

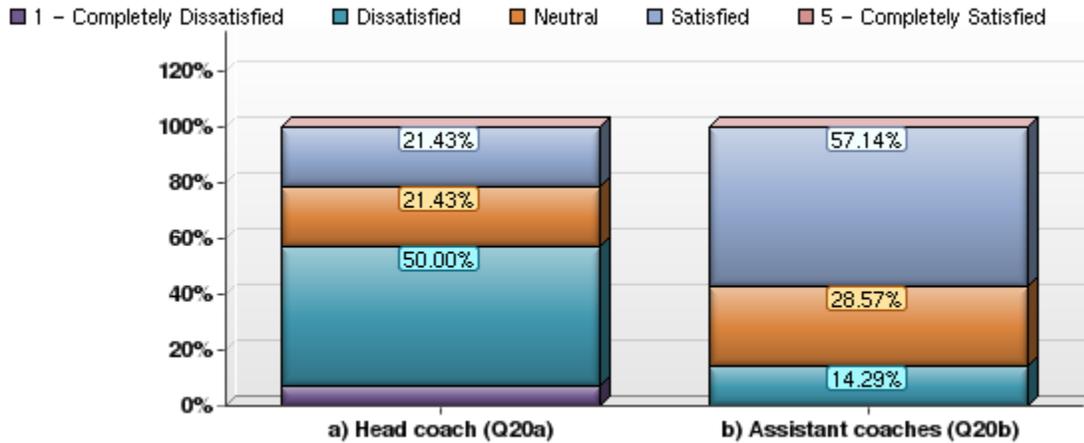


Varsity athletics retention rate improved over the two year implementation of the study. More student-athletes indicated they intend to continue participating in varsity athletics in 2011 than in 2010.

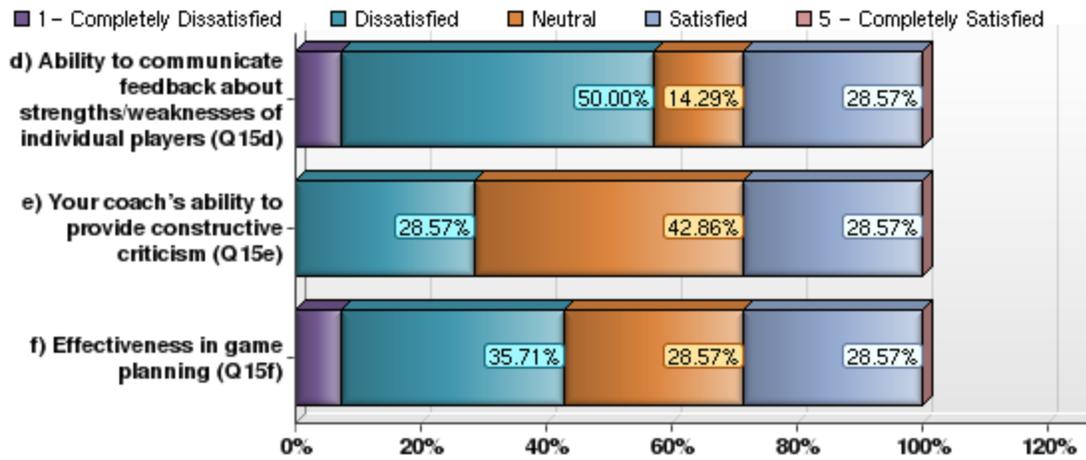
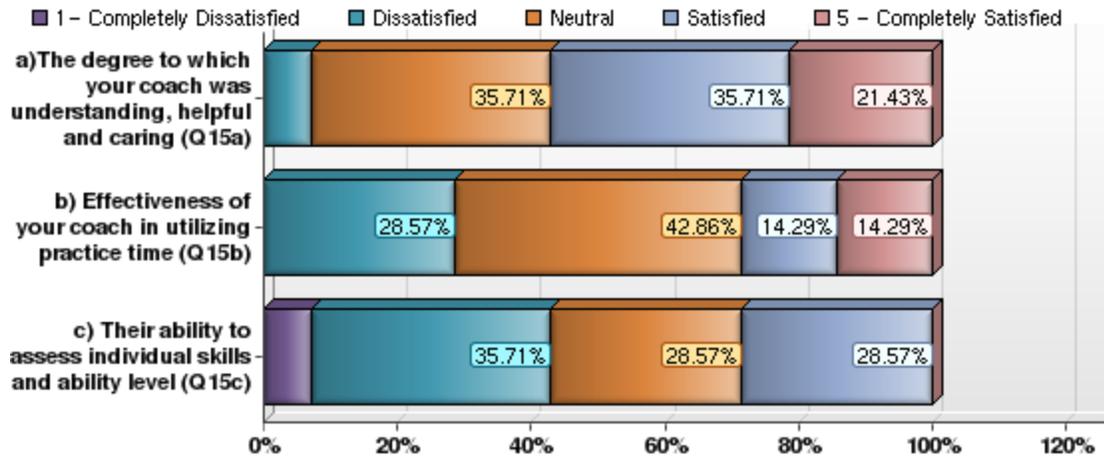


**SPORT SAMPLE, XYZ Report (Filter By: Report Subgroup; Drilling Down by: Year):**

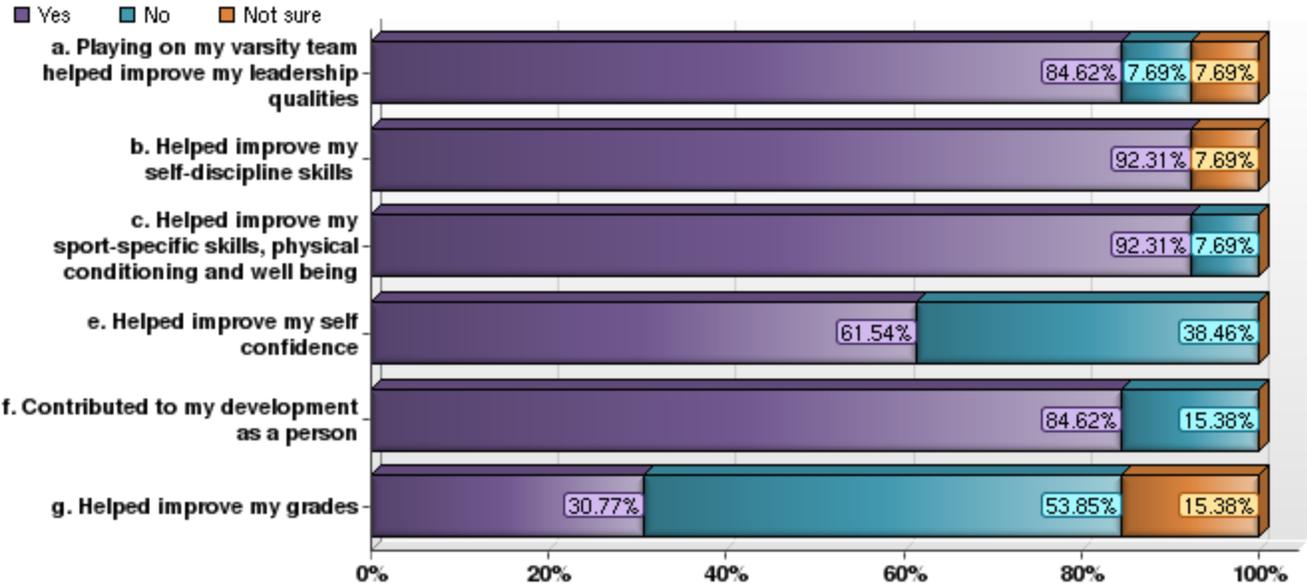
*(FOR SPORT XYZ) Please indicate your “overall satisfaction” with your head coach and assistant coaches. Use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “extremely dissatisfied” and 5 is “extremely satisfied.”*



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*(FOR SPORT XYZ) Impact of participation in varsity athletics on student-athletes personally:*



(FOR SPORT XYZ) Impact on academics of varsity athletic participation:

