

Significant Learning Experiences at UTC: An Analysis of NSSE Qualitative Responses

September 30, 2019

This analysis was produced by OPEIR in response to a request by the UTC Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Results are not necessarily generalizable and attempts to use results outside the scope of this project should be avoided.

“Please describe the most significant learning experience you have had so far at this institution”

Highlights

UTC students rate their experiences highly.

The vast majority of UTC student rate their experience as excellent or good (84% of first years and 81% of seniors).

Experiential learning makes an impact

Students who rated their experience as excellent were more likely to name an experiential learning experience such as an internship or study abroad opportunity as their most significant learning experience.

UTC is providing significant learning experiences both in and outside the classroom

Students named a diverse set of experiences as their most significant learning experiences, from classes that changes the way they considered a topic to a faculty member who made a difference to them to how their experiences made them better able to complete projects on a diverse team.

Experiences in particular courses or programs were the most commonly cited and these responses cited a wide range of courses and programs offered at UTC.

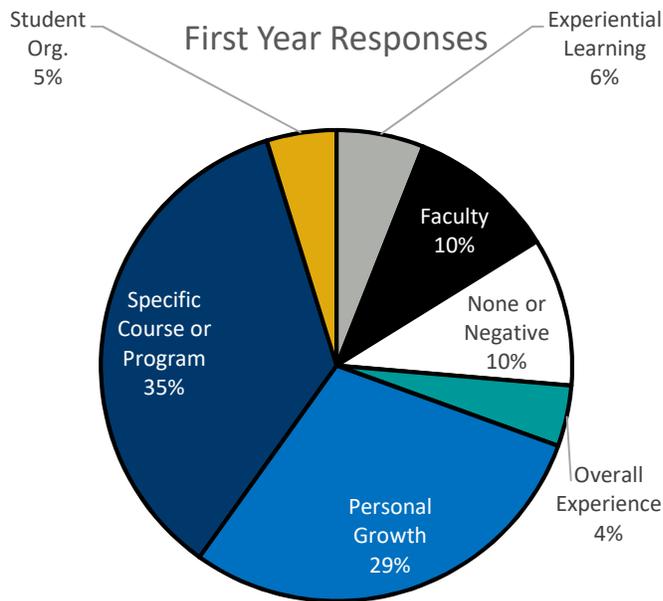
Themes Among Comments

Student comments could be characterized in broad categories, listed below with representative quotes from responses. Each comment was characterized in one of the categories below, although natural overlap occurred.

Category Name	% in Category	Representative Quote (emphasis added)
Experiential Learning	15%	"I believe the best learning experience I had was doing my internship. I was able to apply the school work I was learning to actual real life job and see the results of my work . I loved the opportunity to grow in my learning as well as my personal work experience."
Faculty	10%	"The faculty in my department have been personable, relatable, and extremely helpful . They've helped me talk through graduate school programs and find job/internship opportunities . I've also loved getting to know the different paths they've taken professionally to end up where they are now."
None or Negative	11%	"No matter how many faculty members you consult about your concern with the unfairness of a course or the aggressive behavior of a professor that is making you and other students perform badly in other courses from stress, anxiety, and pressure, they will only tell you to put it in your review."
Overall Experience	6%	"The most significant learning experience has been a combination of my experiences here, both inside and outside the classroom ."
Personal Growth	21%	"Most significant learning experience was time management . I never realized how important it was until I moved into UTC and had to divide my free time and my school time and focus more."
Specific Course or Program	33%	"The most significant learning experience I've had is in my English class because I've learned so much about many different topics and things going on in the world and learned a lot about citations and writing papers."
Student Organization	4%	"Being a majorette in the band has taught me so much about leadership, time management, flexibility, and teamwork . It's led me to an understanding of what kind of leader and team player I hope to be in my future career. It has increased my knowledge and love of music. It exposes me to people I probably would never know otherwise . We all come together from different backgrounds, different personal views, different majors, and different goals. We meet on common ground, and we get to create something powerful and beautiful together."

There were differences between First Year and Senior responses.

Seniors were more likely to cite experiential learning as their most significant experience, while first years were more likely to cite personal growth.



Interactions with specific faculty was cited at a similar rate among both groups, suggesting that faculty influence students at every stage of their educational journey at UTC.

Experiential Learning Responses

First year students had limited responses about experiential learning.

Senior responses indicated a range of activities were impactful including study abroad opportunities, internships, and student teacher or field work placements.

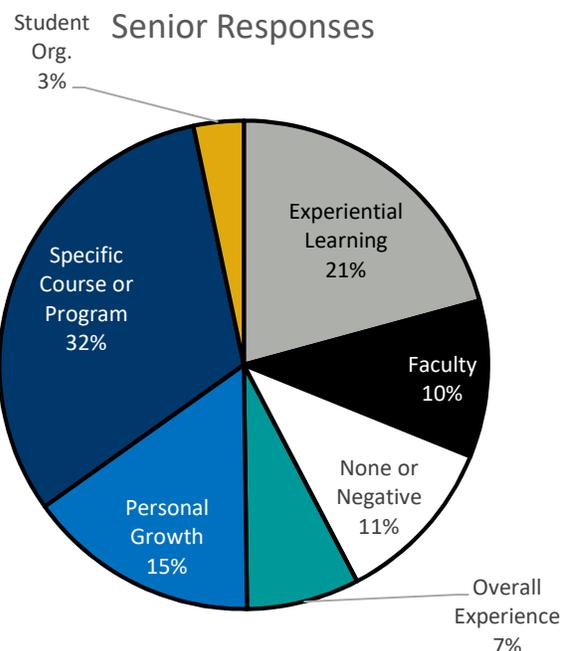
Faculty Responses

Several responses indicated that a particular faculty member made a difference but did not name the individual. Faculty who were specifically named by responders are included in Appendix A. The UTC website was cross-referenced to provide more information on individuals. Faculty represented are a mix of tenured faculty and adjunct faculty.

No Response or Negative Responses

First year students were more likely to have no response to the question while seniors were more likely to cite a negative response.

Negative responses had themes like a sense that the experience was not worth it (i.e.: “the whole thing is a... scam.”) or discussion of a specific incident or incidents, usually involving a faculty member or dean.



Overall Experience Responses

These responses emphasize either all the classes the student has taken, both in and outside of their major, or discuss college as the sum of many parts (i.e.: “There has not been a particular experience, my whole first year of college has been an amazing experience.”)

Personal Growth Responses

Responses tended to focus on growth in three areas:

- (1) accepting different viewpoints while living and learning together;
- (2) growth in academic mindset and understanding the self as a learner;
- (3) time management and work/life balance.

First years were fairly evenly split among these categories while seniors tended to emphasize the first two rather than the third.

Specific Course or Program Responses

Responses within this category were extremely varied.

Among first year students, the most common response by department was English, followed by History, Political Science, and Honors College.

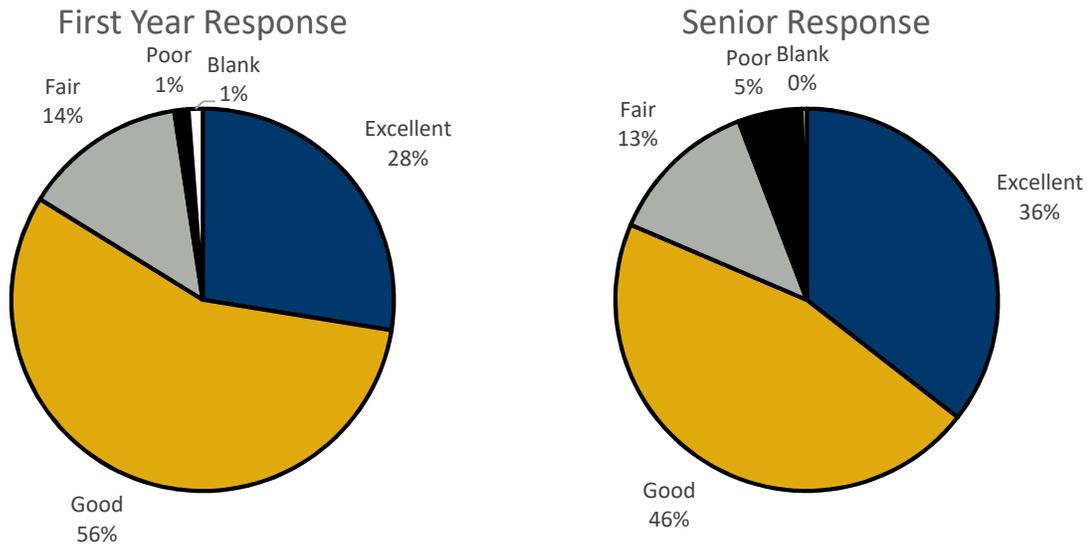
Among seniors, the most common responses were within the Honors College, especially the Innovation Lab course. This was followed by English, Nursing, Psychology, and Women’s Studies.

Student Organization Responses

Student organizations named include Greek Life, Band and Drum Line, Freshmen Senate and Student Government, Mosaic, and the Hispanic Outreach Leadership organization, among more general references.

Overall Assessment of the Experience

The vast majority of responses rated the experience at UTC as Excellent or Good (84% for First Year and 81% for seniors). In comparison with first year responders, seniors were more likely to rate their experience at the extremes of excellent or poor.



Students who rated their experience as excellent

- Among these students, both first year and senior students were more likely to name an experiential learning opportunity as their most significant learning experience than the response group as a whole.
- First years were more likely to name personal growth, a specific course or program, or a student organization as their most significant learning experience than the response group as a whole. Multiple students mentioned the Business LLC in their comments.
- Male first years were more likely to rate their experience as excellent.
- Seniors were more likely to name their overall experience as their most significant experience than the response group as a whole.

Students who rated their experience as poor

- Male seniors were much more likely to rate their experience as poor – 14% of all senior males rated their experience as such
- Some students did identify positive experiences (i.e.: “I’ve appreciated my time with my fiction writing classes the most”)
- Most used the comment to discuss specific grievances. Comments express a sense of disconnection (i.e.: “the university doesn’t care at all... all they care about is my money.”)

Appendix A: Faculty Named in Student Responses on Most Significant Learning Experience

Faculty Name - Department	Selected Comments from Survey
Pamela Ashmore - Anthropology	"...always went above and beyond for her students"
Jose Barbosa - Biology	"... both challenged and supported me through extremely difficult course material, while also presenting the information to me in a way that piqued my curiosity... gave me my interest in genetics and gave me the motivation and confidence to further my academic career after getting my undergraduate degrees."
Gary Behler – Criminal Justice	"I took 2 of his night classes and loved every second of them both. He taught me many things not only in my studies but in life as well. He cared about us outside of the classroom as well. He made sure we weren't overloaded and were actually enjoying our college experiences. He was genuinely engaged in . our outsides lives and wanted us to succeed. He made a great impact in my life too by writing me a letter of recommendation to get an internship"
Kristopher C. Erskine - History	"He taught me many historical things however it was his views on really going in depth on work that has made me a better student"
Zibin Guo - Anthropology	"I have... Dr. Zibin Guo, my advisor, to thank for my success."
Carmen Jimenez - Spanish	"...positively impacted my life" and "made learning spanish enjoyable and were always there for me."
Joseph Jordan - English	"... exposed me to certain poets that I now currently rely on for help with my emotional stability when I'm stressed"
Robert Kippes – Philosophy & Religion	"... the best class of anything I have ever taken. He is excited about everything he teaches and has frequently stayed with me after class to talk about topics that I was interested in learning more about."
Margaret Kovach - Biology	"... both challenged and supported me through extremely difficult course material, while also presenting the information to me in a way that piqued my curiosity... gave me my interest in genetics and gave me the motivation and confidence to further my academic career after getting my undergraduate degrees."
Charles Margraves – Mechanical Engineering	"His obvious passion and excitement are contagious and inspiring."
Laura Marsh – Environmental Science	"...taught me a substantial amount of applicable information for life after college."
Ray Padron - Art	"... challenged my class in a healthy way but was also supportive of every student's different views and ideas."
Joshua Parks - English	"showed me how to view things from other perspectives and step out of my comfort zone as well as think more deeply about certain philosophical ideas."
Lynn Purkey - Spanish	"...positively impacted my life" and "made learning spanish enjoyable and were always there for me."

Faculty Name - Department	Selected Comments from Survey
Bradley Reynolds – Environmental Science	“... taught me a substantial amount of applicable information for life after college.”
Sean Richards – Environmental Health	“... took me under his wing, and he has challenged me by having me conduct research and write scholarly papers. He has also advised my future plans, giving me options for completing my goals.”
Jucinta Rome – Social Work	“... she makes us think and push barriers and I enjoy the class very much”
Manuel Santiago – Chemistry & Physics	“The class was open and we could literally talk about anything. I had an advisement meeting with him and when we talked he gave me advice that lifted me up instead of tore me down. First Year Experience was more than a class to me. It really made my first semester of college. I learned more about myself and others which helped my advancement in communicating with others. Dr. Santiago gave us assignments that were meaningful and I enjoyed it.
Aaron Shaheen - English	“... taught me a lot about school and life as well. A really amazing professor.”
Aaron Shaheen (and Hannah Wakefield) - English	“I deeply enjoyed their methods of teaching. Both professors are challenging and by taking their classes simultaneously... I was able to personally combine concepts from both classes as I studied, which made learning... easier to manage.”
Gwendolyn Spring Kurtz - English	“... has allowed me to learn a higher standard in my writing.”
Hannah Wakefield (and Aaron Shaheen) - English	“I deeply enjoyed their methods of teaching. Both professors are challenging and by taking their classes simultaneously... I was able to personally combine concepts from both classes as I studied, which made learning... easier to manage.”
Paul Watson - Psychology	“... was the best professor I ever had and the man that sparked my interest in psychology, my current minor. Being one of his students was the most significant learning experience I've had. He genuinely was interest in his subject and wanted us to learn; he encouraged us to learn more for ourselves but also expected us to complete all the readings and assignments. He was not scared to have an opposing opinion to the popular one and kept a straight forward attitude, not allowing any petty drama to enter into his class through politics or any other means. He is a great professor that truly welcomed all different backgrounds, not just the democratic side, and wanted a discussion full of varying perspectives.”
Oren Whightsel- English	“showed me how to view things from other perspectives and step out of my comfort zone as well as think more deeply about certain philosophical ideas.”
Adam Wolcott – Marketing & Entrepreneurship	“He really cares about his students and made class enjoyable. I highly recommend him to other students and have learned a lot from his class. He made me really consider starting a few businesses in my life and get fired up about making a mark in the area.”