Since its inception in 2000, more than 1,400 undergraduate colleges and universities have participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement, with 572 U.S. institutions in 2010 (National Survey of Student Engagement 2010) and 683 in 2011 taking part (National Survey of Student Engagement 2011). This survey, commonly called the NSSE (pronounced “nessie”), consists of 97 items, with 5 National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practices (Figure 1). These benchmarks represent the key aspects that research studies show to be significant to student learning (Kuh, Hayek, Carini, Ouimet, Gonyea, & Kennedy 2001).

The objective of the survey is to “provide data to colleges and universities to assess and improve undergraduate education, inform state accountability and accreditation efforts, and facilitate national and sector benchmarking efforts, among others (National Survey of Student Engagement 2010).” An institution’s results may provide that campus with a better understanding of students’ perceptions about areas of engagement (or lack thereof), and facilitate administrators to identify where continuous improvements could be made on their campuses.

There are numerous studies on student engagement and all of its predictors. One example was a study focused on academics (Steele, & Fullagar 2009), in which the researchers gave an online survey to their participants in order to determine intense engagement, which they called “Flow.” In another study, researchers investigated issues impacting students of color (Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes 2007). In this study, using NSSE data from Hispanic-serving colleges was examined in comparison with predominantly white colleges.
There has also been research conducted using the NSSE focused on the use of open-ended responses (Chambers 2010). Still others have examined the effects of gender (Tison, Bateman, & Culver 2011) on student engagement.

Research that examines factors similar to those examined in the current study is that of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), which looked at the impact of student engagement as a result of living on or off-campus. They found that residence halls tended to promote on-campus engagement and interaction, while living off-campus caused less involvement and more isolation. Another important aspect that has been researched before is that of the relationships that college students have with other people at the college (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler 2005). The common theme for all of these studies is student engagement, and how vital it is to the continuing success of colleges and universities today.

The purpose of this article is to examine the effectiveness of a few questions from the 2010 and 2011 NSSE which could be significant to the future retention of LaGrange College students. The central item is Question 14, which asks the students “If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?” Figure 2 illustrates the responses for item 14 for each year. The results show that most respondents definitely would consider choosing LaGrange College again. The accuracy of this question, in conjunction with other data from the NSSE and the college, is essential in predicting whether students feel engaged and connected to LaGrange College.

Figure 2 shows that for 2010 and 2011, there was a much higher percentage of students who would choose to come back to LaGrange College than who would not. Moreover, from 2010 to 2011, the total percentage of students who responded with Yes (Definitely Yes and Probably Yes) increased from 80% to 82%, while the total percentage of students who responded with No (Definitely No and Probably No) decreased from 20% to 13%.

**Figure 2: Question 14: If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?**
Methods

Participants

At LaGrange College for 2010, the overall total number of students who participated in the NSSE survey was 340 (58%) students, of which 199 (55%) were first year students and 141 (45%) were seniors. For the first year students, men and women were equally represented (50%), while females (62%) outnumbered males (38%) for the seniors. The majority of first year and senior students were traditional students; under 24 years of age (99% and 91%, respectively) and lived on campus (89% and 67%, respectively). Also, first year and senior students who identified themselves as being Caucasian (74% and 81%, respectively) outnumbered those who identified themselves as being a racial minority (22% and 12%, respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010 Respondents to the NSSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Year Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived On-campus</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Off-campus</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For 2011, the overall total number of students who participated in the NSSE survey was 295 (53%) students, of which 159 (47%) were first year students and 136 (60%) were seniors. For both first year and senior students, women (75% and 71%, respectively) outnumbered men (25% and 29%, respectively). The majority of first year students lived on campus (84%), while about half of the seniors did so (48%). The majority of first year and senior students were traditional students (100% and 78%, respectively), and first year and senior students who identified themselves as being Caucasian (83% and 73%, respectively) outnumbered those who identified themselves as being a racial minority (15% and 18%, respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011 Respondents to the NSSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Year Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived On-campus</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Off-campus</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing LaGrange College respondents to the total population of respondents from similar participating institutions in the United States, LaGrange College had a higher percentage of respondents, with institutions from the Southeast only responding 30% in 2010 and 26% in 2011, as shown in Figure 3. Other Baccalaureate Colleges (Arts and Sciences) in the nation have a smaller response rate than LaGrange College, with 20% responding in 2010 and 17% responding in 2011. Also,
institutions with undergraduate enrollment of 1,000 – 2,499, which is similar to LaGrange College’s enrollment, had response rates of 13% and 10% in 2010 and 2011. In effect, LaGrange College has been much more effective than other institutions at getting students to respond to the NSSE for the years covered in this research.

![Figure 3: NSSE Response Rate](image)

At LaGrange College, preparations to administer the NSSE each spring actually begin the previous fall, starting with the registration deadline in mid-September and the population file deadline in November. During the spring semester, the selected participants, first year and senior students, begin receiving notifications about the NSSE. The first invitation to take the survey is mailed at the beginning of March, and the subsequent reminders are sent in mid-March, late-March, and early April. The final reminder is mailed in mid-April. The survey is administered through an online link that is specific to each student at LaGrange College who is invited to take the survey.

**Results**

**Co-curricular Activities**

A Chi square test was computed, which found that in both 2010 and 2011, students living on campus spent significantly more time participating in co-curricular activities than those living off campus, $X^2 (3) = 36.290$, $p < 0.001$ and $X^2 (3) = 31.618$, $p < 0.001$, respectively.

In 2010, off campus residents spent significantly less than expected time in co-curricular activities for each of the categories for hours (1-10 hours, 11-20 hours, and More than 20 hours), $(fo = 11, 6, 3; fe = 16.3, 8.9, 7.6$, respectively), while the number of students who had No Engagement at All (0 hours) had significantly higher observed frequencies $(fo = 20, fe = 7.2,).$. On campus residents, in contrast, had significantly lower observed frequencies for No Engagement at All than was expected, $(fo = 13, fe = 25.8).$
The same trend holds true for 2011, with off campus students having significantly higher observed frequencies than expected for the No Engagement at All category, \((fo = 23, fe = 10.2)\), while on campus residents had significantly lower observed frequencies than was expected, \((fo = 8, fe = 20.8)\). For both 2010 and 2011, living on campus had a significant effect on the involvement and engagement of students. Thus, students who live on campus are significantly more likely to devote more of their time to participating in co-curricular activities than students who do not live on campus.

Furthermore, the 2010 NSSE data show that on campus residents were significantly more likely to be student athletes, \(X^2 (1) = 16.933, p < 0.001\). On campus residents were significantly more likely to be a student athlete than was expected, \((fo = 78, fe = 66.5)\), while off campus residents were just the opposite, \((fo = 7, fe = 18.5)\). Thus, students who live on campus are more likely to be involved in athletics on campus, but students who do not live on campus were less likely to be involved.
The 2011 NSSE data show that on campus residents were not only significantly more likely to be student athletes, $X^2 (1) = 7.812, p = 0.05$, but also members of social fraternities or sororities, $X^2 (1) = 5.386, p = 0.02$. On campus residents were members of fraternities or sororities significantly more than expected, $(fo = 39, fe = 32.8)$, whereas off campus residents were significantly less likely to be a member than expected, $(fo = 10, fe = 16.2)$. Students living on campus were also significantly more likely to play an institution-sponsored sport than expected, $(fo = 46, fe = 38.3)$, while those living off campus were significantly less likely to play a sport, $(fo = 11, fe = 18.7)$. Those who live on campus are significantly more likely to be involved in other aspects of college life besides academics, such as sports and Greek Life.

From 2010 to 2011, student involvement has slightly decreased in terms of co-curricular activities. On campus students participated in co-curricular activities less in 2011. However, students who lived on campus were more likely to be student athletes on institution-sponsored teams or members of fraternities or sororities in 2011. Thus, the indicators of student engagement in 2010 were different than those in 2011.

**Residence Life**

Question 26 asks students which best describes where they are living now while attending college, and was compared to Question 14 using a Chi Square test. In both 2010 and 2011, the Chi Square was non-significant, $X^2 (1) = 0.550, p = 0.458$ and $X^2 (1) = 0.8, p = 0.371$, meaning that those who live on campus are not more likely than those who live off campus to come back to the college if they got a second chance. In other words, residence life was not a significant indicator of whether students would choose the college again if they started over.

**Relationships with Students, Faculty, and Administration**

In the NSSE, there are three questions that assess the quality of relationships with people at the institution; they are relationships with Other Students, Fac-
ulty Members, and Administrative Personnel and Offices. The possible responses for each question range from negative (Unfriendly, Unavailable, etc.) to positive (Supportive, Helpful, etc.).

For 2010, a one-way between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the effects of whether students would choose LaGrange College again if they started over (Question 14) on relationships with Other Students, Faculty, and Administrative Personnel. There was a significant effect for Question 14 (i.e., Would you choose LaGrange College again, if you started over) on all three relationships, student, faculty, and administration, respectively \([F (3, 185) = 15.710, p < 0.001]\), \([F (3, 185) = 9.239, p < 0.001]\), and \([F (3, 185) = 15.319, p < 0.001]\).

Post Hoc Comparisons using Tukey HSD were used to examine the relationship items. The mean score for Student Relationships for those who selected Definitely No (M = 4.36) and Probably No (M = 4.81) on Question 14 was significantly different from the mean score for the Probably Yes (M = 5.71) and Definitely Yes (M = 6.23) responses.

The Post Hoc Tukey HSD comparison of means test for the Faculty Relationship item showed that the mean score for the Definitely No response (M = 4.91) and the Probably No response (M = 5.23) on Question 14 were significantly different from the mean score for the Probably Yes response (M = 5.75), which subsequently was significantly different from the Definitely Yes response (M = 6.23).

The mean score for Administration Relationships for those who selected Definitely No (M = 3.55) on Question 14 was significantly different from the mean score for the Probably No response (M = 5.08) and the Probably Yes response (M = 5.33). The mean score for those who selected Probably Yes (M = 5.33) was also significantly different from the mean score for those who selected Definitely Yes (M = 6.09).

For 2011, there was also a significant effect for Question 14 on all three relation-
ships, student, faculty, and administration, \(F(3, 144) = 7.041, p < 0.001\), \(F(3, 145) = 14.805, p < 0.001\), and \(F(3, 144) = 10.901, p < 0.001\) (see Figure 8, respectively). Post Hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test were used to examine all three relationship items. The mean score for Student Relationships for those who selected Definitely No (M = 4.71) and Probably No (M = 5.00) on Question 14 was significantly different from the mean score for the Probably Yes (M = 5.70) and Definitely Yes (M = 6.19) responses.

The Post Hoc Tukey HSD comparison of means for the Faculty Relationship item indicated that the mean score for the Definitely No response (M = 4.14) on Question 14 was different from the mean scores for the Probably No (M = 5.92), Probably Yes (M = 5.73), and Definitely Yes (M = 6.43) responses. Likewise, the administration relationship item showed a difference between the mean for the Definitely No (M = 3.29) response on Question 14 and the Probably No (M = 4.67), Probably Yes (M = 5.40), and Definitely Yes (M = 5.80) responses.

These results suggest that a better relationship with Other Students, Faculty, and Administrative Personnel at LaGrange College does have an effect on student persistence. Specifically, the results suggest that if the quality of relationships is more friendly and supportive rather than unavailable and unhelpful, students will be more likely to return to LaGrange College if they had to choose where to go to college over again.

**Cultural Enrichment Events**

At LaGrange College, a requirement to graduate is attending a set number of Cultural Enrichment (CE) events. These events include plays, concerts, art exhibits, lectures, and some sporting events, to name a few. The question from the NSSE that corresponds with this is, “To what extent does your institution emphasize attending campus events and activities, special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc. (question 10f)?” LaGrange College students’ total number of CE
events attended will also be used. A Chi Square test was conducted to compare the emphasis on attending campus events with whether students would choose the college if they started over. Students who believe that the college emphasizes campus events are more likely to choose the college again, both in 2010, $X^2 (3) = 17.873, p < 0.001$, and 2011, $X^2 (3) = 20.614, p < 0.001$.

In 2010, students who would choose LaGrange College again felt that the college did emphasize attending campus events (Very Much) significantly more than was expected, $(fo = 90, fe = 85.1)$, and they were significantly less likely than expected to think the college only emphasized campus events Some or Very Little, $(fo = 8, fe = 11.2$, and $fo = 1, fe = 4$, respectively). In contrast, students who would not choose the college again felt that the college did not emphasize attending campus events (Some and Very Little) significantly more than was expected, $(fo = 6, fe = 2.8$, and $fo = 4, fe = 1$, respectively). The responses for 2011 were similar, with students who would not choose LaGrange College again saying that the college does not emphasize campus events (responding Some) more than expected, $(fo = 8, fe = 2.8)$. These results suggest that if students perceive that LaGrange College emphasizes attending campus events, they are more likely to choose the college again.

![Figure 9: 2010 Students Who Would Choose LaGrange College Again and Question 10f](image)

The total number of CE events, which is collected by LaGrange College separately from the NSSE, was compared to Question 14 in 2010 and 2011 using a one-way between subjects ANOVA. Students who attended more CE events in 2010 were more likely to choose LaGrange College again, $[F (3, 184) = 5.963, p = 0.001]$, but in 2011 the results were non-significant, $[F (3, 145) = 1.646, p = 0.181]$. For 2010, Post Hoc Comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores $(M = 2.45, M = 2.69)$ for the No responses (Definitely No and Probably No) to Question 14 were significantly different than the Yes responses (Probably
These results suggest students who attended more CE events in 2010 were significantly more likely to choose LaGrange College again, but students in 2011 who attended more events were not significantly more likely to choose the college again.

**Figure 10: 2010 CE Events and Question**

If you could start over again, would you go to the same university you are now attending? 

- Definitely Yes
- Probably Yes
- Probably No
- Definitely No

Mean scores:

- 0
- 0.5
- 1
- 1.5
- 2
- 2.5
- 3
- 3.5
- 4

**Discussion**

This study was conducted in order to determine if student engagement at LaGrange College had an impact on whether they would choose LaGrange College again, if they had it to do over again. The results show that, with a few exceptions, students who are more involved or engaged in activities and with other people at the college are significantly more likely to choose LaGrange College again.

These results support previous research, which claimed that student engagement is an extremely vital aspect of student persistence in college. Specifically, one previous study focused on residence life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and whether it had an effect on student retention. Another study supported by the results was on the influence that good relationships at the college have on student retention (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005).

An unexpected result was the non-significance of residence life on whether students would come back to LaGrange College if they had a second chance. Since on campus residents were more involved in co-curricular activities, it was expected that the student involvement due to on campus living would lead to a higher likelihood of choosing the college again. Another surprising result was that attendance at CE events was significant in 2010, but not in 2011. The college policy concerning CE events has not changed in those two years, so it is interesting that one year there was a significant difference noted, but the subsequent year there was not.

In future research, including academic aspects, such as working on a research project or having an internship, may add another dimension to student en-
gagement. In addition, the NSSE items that deal with community service would be interesting to examine, since LaGrange College puts a strong emphasis on service. Additionally, analyzing more than two years of LaGrange College NSSE responses would also be good for more research in order to see if any patterns exist for certain indicators of student engagement.

Despite the few exceptions, the 2010 and 2011 NSSE data show that LaGrange College students, who are engaged, involved, and who form better relationships with others at the college, are more likely to choose LaGrange College again if they could start over. Overall, students who chose LaGrange College would do it again.

References
Chambers, T. (2010). What I hear you saying is...: Analysis of student comments from the NSSE. College Student Journal, 44(1), 3-24