



California State University, Chico

## Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)

2019 Results for California State University, Chico &  
Comparison with National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

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## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of results from the 2019 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) for California State University, Chico, and compares these results alongside historical responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from 2014, 2016, and 2018. While CSU, Chico has not yet completed a full BCSSE – NSSE cycle for the 2019/2020 academic year, this report leverages historical responses given by first year students in previous NSSE years to see how the more current BCSSE results for beginning first-year students compare and contrast with historical trends among outgoing first-year students. Misalignment between current incoming student expectations and historical first-year student perceptions and practices can indicate areas for potential institutional focus and improvement, particularly when the distributions of responses to parallel questions across the two surveys are highly dissimilar.

In sum, the areas of greatest misalignment between 2019 BCSSE respondent expectations and historical NSSE respondent practices and perceptions for first-year CSU, Chico students are in the following areas:

1. Academic help-seeking and utilization of support from institutional sources (as opposed to peer sources);
2. Student interactions with faculty;
3. The difficulty of and need for support in managing non-academic responsibilities such as work and family.

In each of these areas, incoming first-year student respondents in 2019 either expected to engage in such practices relatively more frequently, or feel that the institution should place relatively greater emphasis on providing such services to students, than the participation or perceived level of emphasis reported by their first-year counterparts in previous NSSE cycles.

In contrast, the expectations of 2019 BCSSE respondents were relatively to strongly consistent with the historical practices and perceptions of NSSE respondents in the following areas:

1. Engagement with diverse student populations;
2. Provision of a challenging / supportive / stimulating environment (with the exception of non-academic support services);
3. Perceived versus experienced academic difficulties;
4. Engaging in collaborative learning practices.

## Introduction

The Beginning College Survey of Student Enrollment, or BCSSE, collects data from entering college students about their high school and co-curricular experiences and their expectations regarding their educational activities during their first year of college. The BCSSE survey is administered prior to the start of classes at hundreds of participating four-year institutions, and is overseen by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. California State University, Chico's first year of participation in the BCSSE survey was in 2019.

Because BCSSE assesses incoming first-year student's previous experiences and expectations about college prior to the start of college coursework, it pairs well with its broader companion survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is administered biennially in the Spring. CSU, Chico participated in the NSSE survey in 2014, 2016, and 2018, and will be participating in the 2020 survey cycle. Some NSSE questions have direct parallel questions in the BCSSE: for each of these parallel items, BCSSE assesses first-year student expectations prior to the start of the first year, while NSSE assesses student practices and perceptions at the end of that same academic year. While many of the questions across the two surveys are directly comparable, and can thus be used to assess how the expectations of entering first-year students relate to the experiences of those finishing their first year, it is important to note that neither survey is longitudinal in nature as BCSSE and NSSE use independent student samples.

CSU, Chico has not yet completed a full BCSSE-NSSE survey cycle for the 2019-2020 academic year. However, 2019 BCSSE results can be indirectly compared with historical NSSE results for CSU, Chico students finishing their first year, in order to gain insight into how current first-year student expectations compare with the prior experiences of outgoing first-year cohorts in 2014, 2016, and 2018. Since the historical NSSE results for CSU, Chico examined here are by and large quite stable for most indicators across the three historical survey years, we can expect that future NSSE data (to be collected in Spring 2020) will be relatively similar to those collected in the three previous cycles. Future research products from the Office of Institutional Research at Chico State will include a systematic comparison of 2019 BCSSE and 2020 NSSE results for first-year students, which will enable comparisons of perceptions and behaviors within the same academic cohort as they move through their first year of study. The Office of Institutional Research also looks forward to exploring the use of BCSSE data alongside institutional data to generate predictive analytics that will help identify students who may need targeted interventions during their first year of study at CSU, Chico.

Educational research has generally demonstrated continuity between pre-college expectations and college experiences<sup>1</sup>. However, it is also important to note that experiential outcomes are the product of numerous personal, environmental, and institutional factors, and that the expectations of students entering college are often overestimated relative to actual practices and perceptions once they are engaged in study.

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<sup>1</sup> Cole, James S., Marianne Kennedy, and Michael Ben-Avie. 2009. "The Role of Precollege Data in Assessing and Understanding Student Engagement in College." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 141: 55-69. For discussion of relevant studies on the relationship between pre-college expectations and first-year experiences, see pp. 56-60.

## BCSSE 2019 Respondent Profile

1,718 incoming first-year students participated in the 2019 BCSSE survey at CSU, Chico, with all surveys administered on paper forms by CSU, Chico campus officials. The summary profile of respondent characteristics is provided in Figure 1 below. Frequencies and percentages are not shown for null values (i.e., non-responses) but are reflected in the percent of total for each indicator.

As can be seen, there was a slightly higher proportion of female than male respondents, and over three quarters of respondents identified as either White (44%) or Hispanic/Latino (35%). Almost half of respondents identified themselves as first-generation students<sup>2</sup> and about three quarters of respondents identified themselves paying for educational expenses through some form of financial aid (whether a grant, scholarship, or loan). An overwhelming majority of respondents (roughly 92%) graduated from public high schools, with an additional 5.7% percent having graduated from private religiously-affiliated schools. Roughly 29% of respondents generally received “B” grades in high school, followed by roughly 24% of students who generally received “A” grades. Just over 50% of respondents indicated that CSU, Chico was their first choice when selecting a college to attend.

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<sup>2</sup> For BCSSE results, “first-generation” status is given to any respondent who noted that neither their mother, father or legal guardian(s) possessed a college degree.

Figure 1. BCSSE 2019 Respondent Profile for CSU, Chico

Gender	Number	Percent of Total
Woman	975	56.75%
Man	713	41.50%
Another Gender Identity	2	0.12%
I Prefer Not to Respond	5	0.29%
<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian or Alaska Native	40	2.33%
Asian American	165	9.60%
Black or African American	74	4.31%
Hispanic or Latino	606	35.27%
Middle Eastern or North African	20	1.16%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	20	1.16%
White	758	44.12%
Other	5	0.29%
No Response	13	0.76%
<b>International</b>		
International Student	38	2.21%
<b>First Generation</b>		
First-Gen	812	47.26%
<b>Financial Aid</b>		
Financial Aid Recipient	1,283	74.68%
<b>High School Type</b>		
Public	1,585	92.26%
Private, Not Religiously-Affiliated	12	0.70%
Private, Religiously-Affiliated	98	5.70%
Home School	5	0.29%
Other	12	0.70%
<b>High School Grades</b>		
A+	21	1.22%
A	407	23.69%
A-	258	15.02%
B+	350	20.37%
B	496	28.87%
B-	80	4.66%
C+	28	1.63%
C	13	0.76%
<b>Number of Friends Attending</b>		
None	654	38.07%
1	353	20.55%
2	271	15.77%
3	140	8.15%
4 or More	274	15.95%
<b>Choice of Institution</b>		
1st Choice	860	50.06%
2nd Choice	593	34.52%
3rd Choice or Lower	237	13.80%

## BCSSE 2019 Results and Comparison with Historical NSSE Results

The discussion of BCSSE 2019 results for CSU, Chico below focuses on key aspects of first-year students' expectations of their college experience and is organized into seven thematic areas, each of which is comprised of several more specific survey questions:

1. Collaborative Learning
2. Discussions with Diverse Others
3. Student-Faculty Interaction
4. Challenging, Supportive, and Stimulating Environment
5. Academic Perseverance
6. Academic Difficulty
7. Academic Help-Seeking

For greater ease of comparison of results across surveys, all 4- and 6-point response scales have been recoded into dichotomous response scales. Within each thematic area, 2019 BCSSE results are presented in bar charts alongside results for parallel questions asked of first-year students in the 2014, 2016, and 2018 NSSE surveys. NSSE comparison data are provided for each year in which parallel results are available. Each chart area represents the proportion of total responses within each answer category on the Y-axis, and the number of respondents is listed atop each bar item. Null / non-responses are not included in response proportions.

While comparisons between the responses of students about to begin their first year of college in 2019 with students finishing their first year of college in 2014, 2016, and 2018 do not allow for direct assessments of the current adequacy and impact of various campus programs and initiatives, the comparisons provided in the sections below are intended to highlight how current first-year student expectations may compare and contrast with the historical practices and perceptions of first-year students. Misalignment between current expectations and historical experiences can indicate areas for potential institutional focus and improvement, particularly when the distributions of responses to parallel questions across the two surveys are highly dissimilar. However, a more conclusive assessment of responses to the 2019 BCSSE cycle will require incorporation of these data alongside institutional data to compare student perceptions with less-subjective indicators, as well as use of the 2020 NSSE cycle data to make comparisons within the same academic cohort.

## Collaborative Learning

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following?

NSSE Survey Text: During the current school year, how often have you done the following?

*Response options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often*

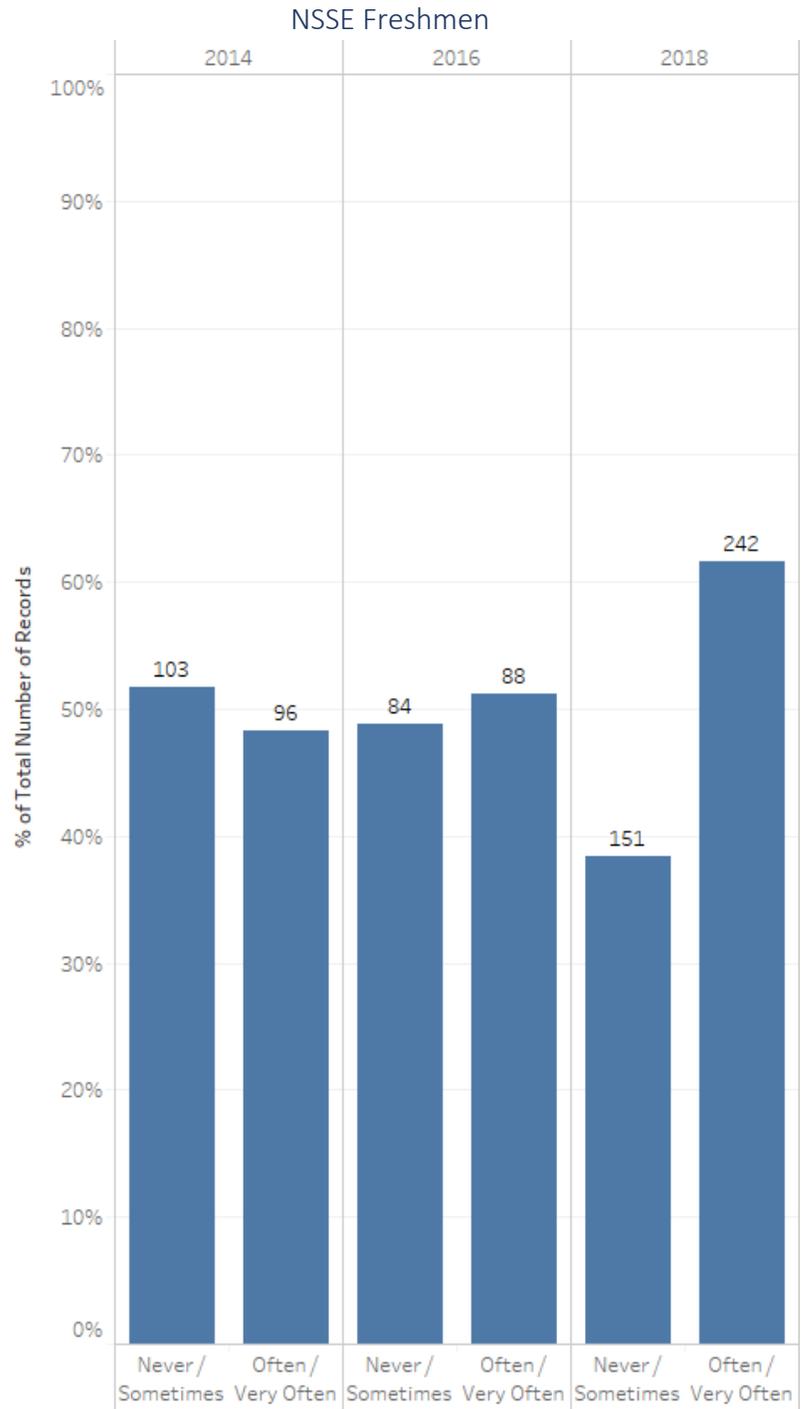
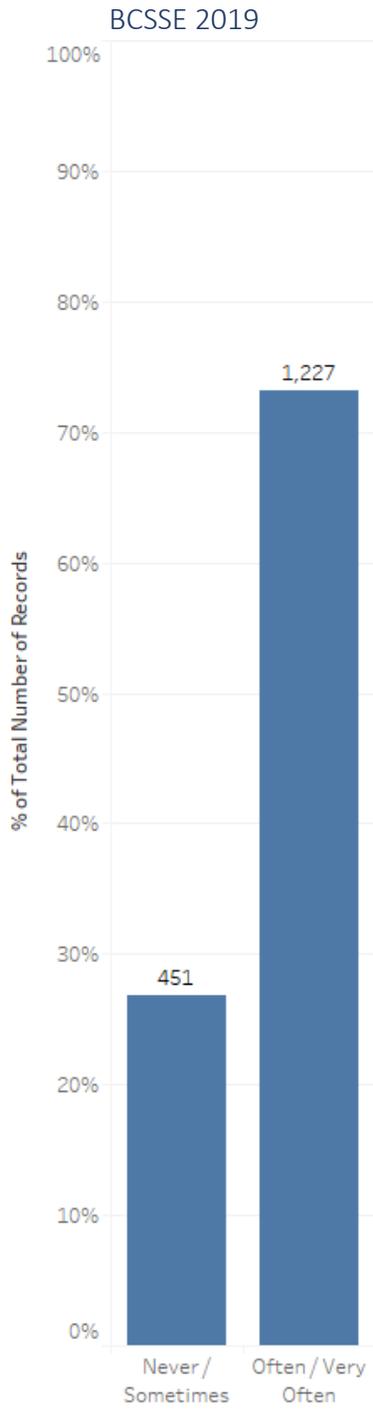
*Recoded responses: Never / Sometimes, Often / Very Often*

### *Analysis*

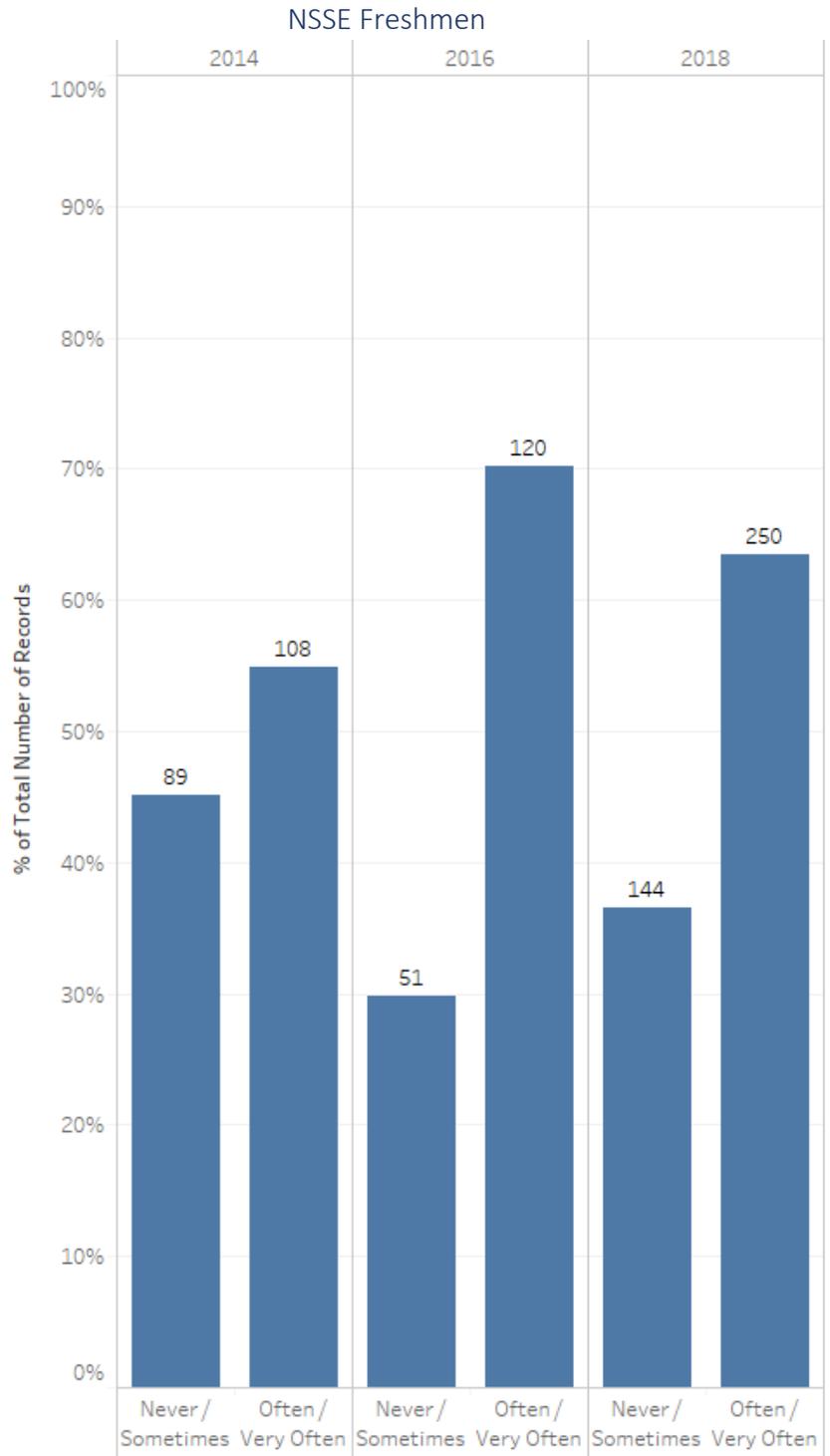
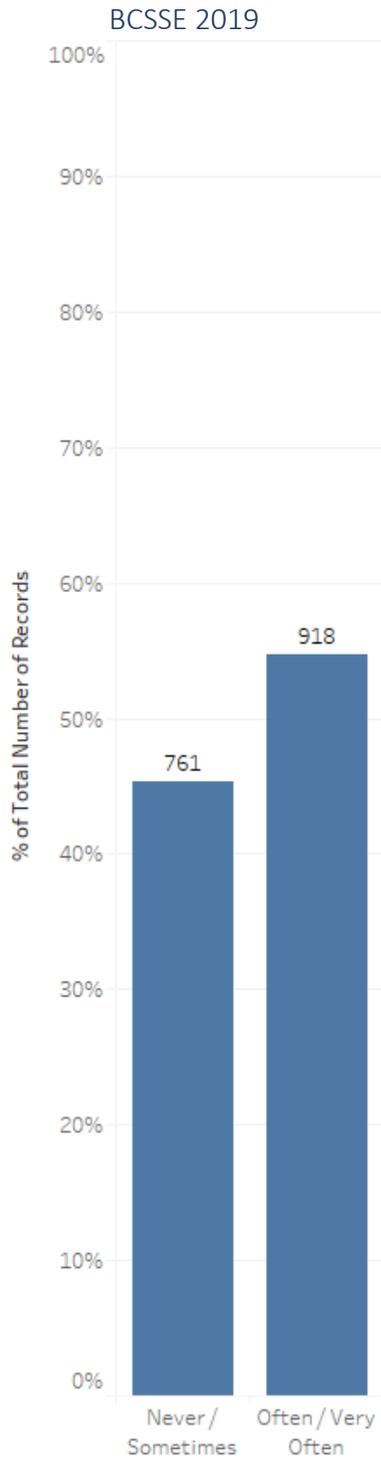
2019 BCSSE respondents indicated that they expected to frequently engage with other students to learn course material, complete projects, and study for tests. This pattern is largely reflected in historical NSSE responses, although students tended to indicate greater frequencies of collaboration on projects and explaining material to others, as opposed to asking others for help or studying together.

Specifically, BCSSE results for 2019 indicate that most first-year students expect that they will frequently engage in collaborative learning practices with other students, and in particular to prepare for exams (86% Often / Very Often) and when completing projects and assignments (84% Often / Very Often). When compared with historical NSSE results for first-year students, the reported frequency of collaboration to better understand course material and to prep for exams appears to have been more mixed, although 2018 NSSE freshmen more frequently engaged in both of these collaborative practices than in the previous two survey years. Exiting freshmen in 2016 and 2018 also more frequently explained course material to other students than incoming 2019 freshmen.

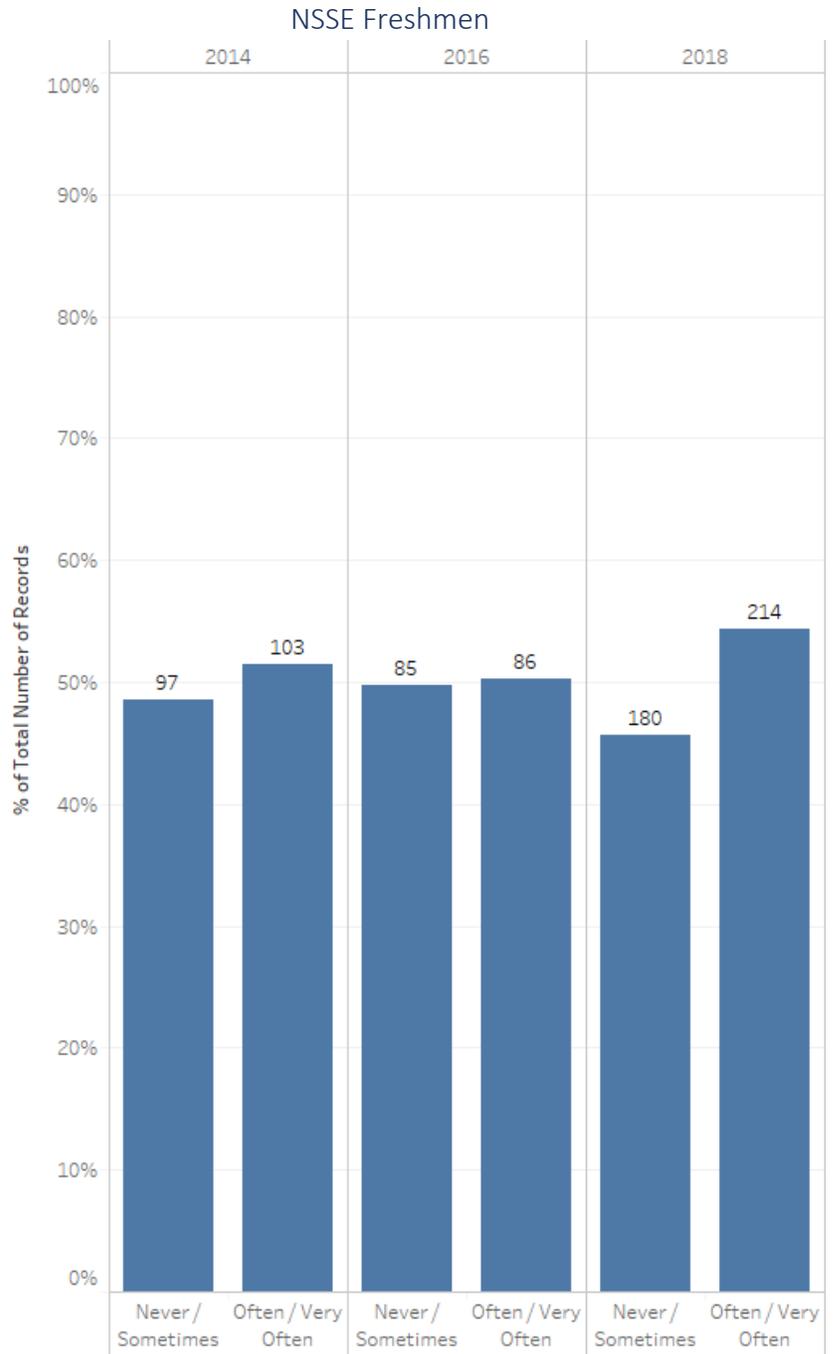
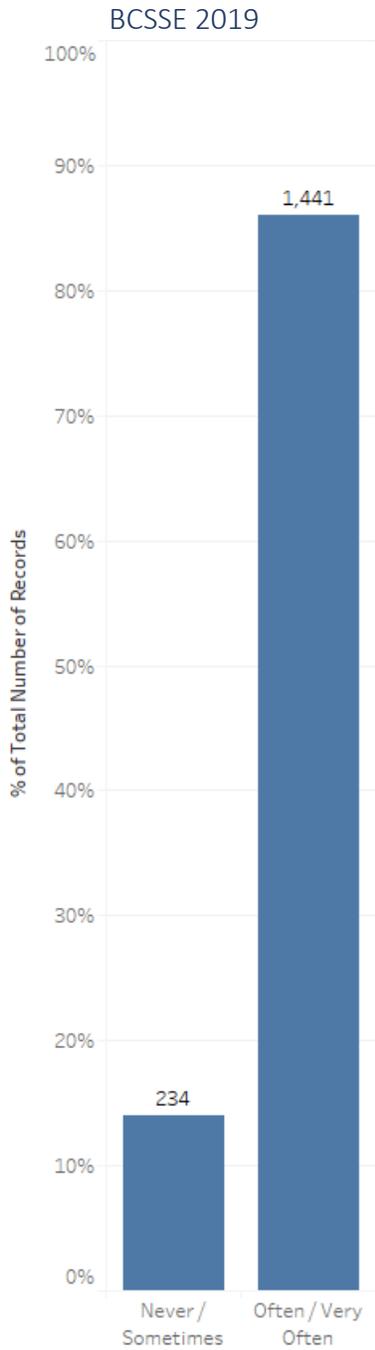
Question 1: Ask another student to help you understand course material?



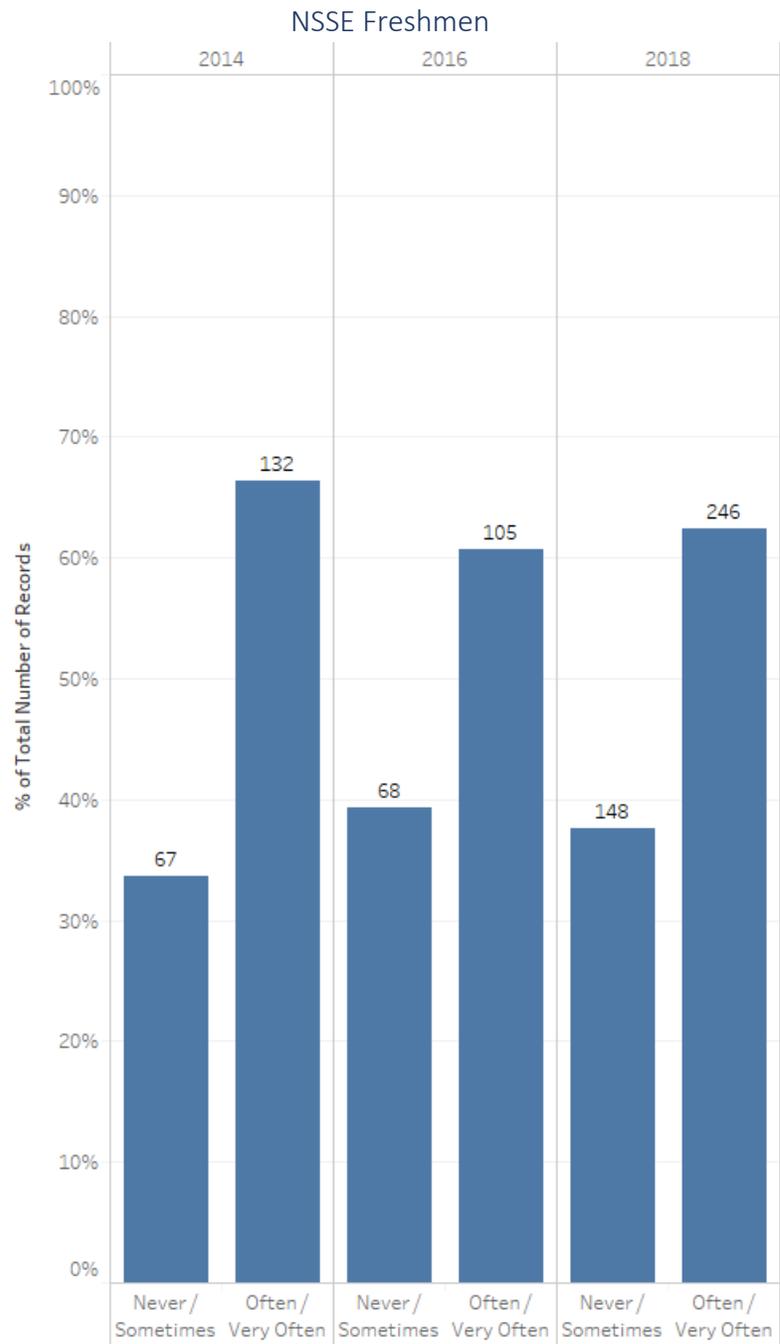
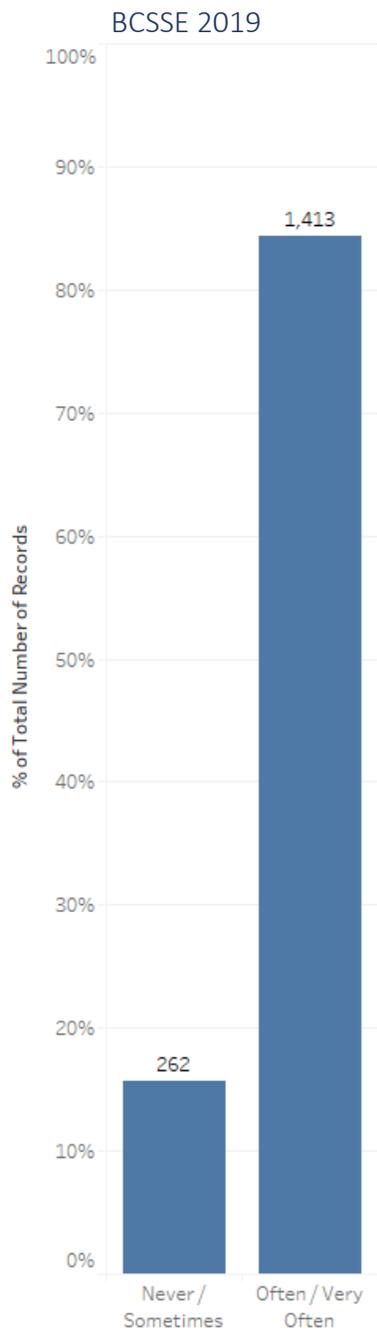
Question 2: Explain course material to one or more students?



Question 3: Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students?



Question 4: Work with other students on course projects and assignments?



## Discussions with Diverse Others

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to have discussions with people from the following groups?

NSSE Survey Text: During the current school year, how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?

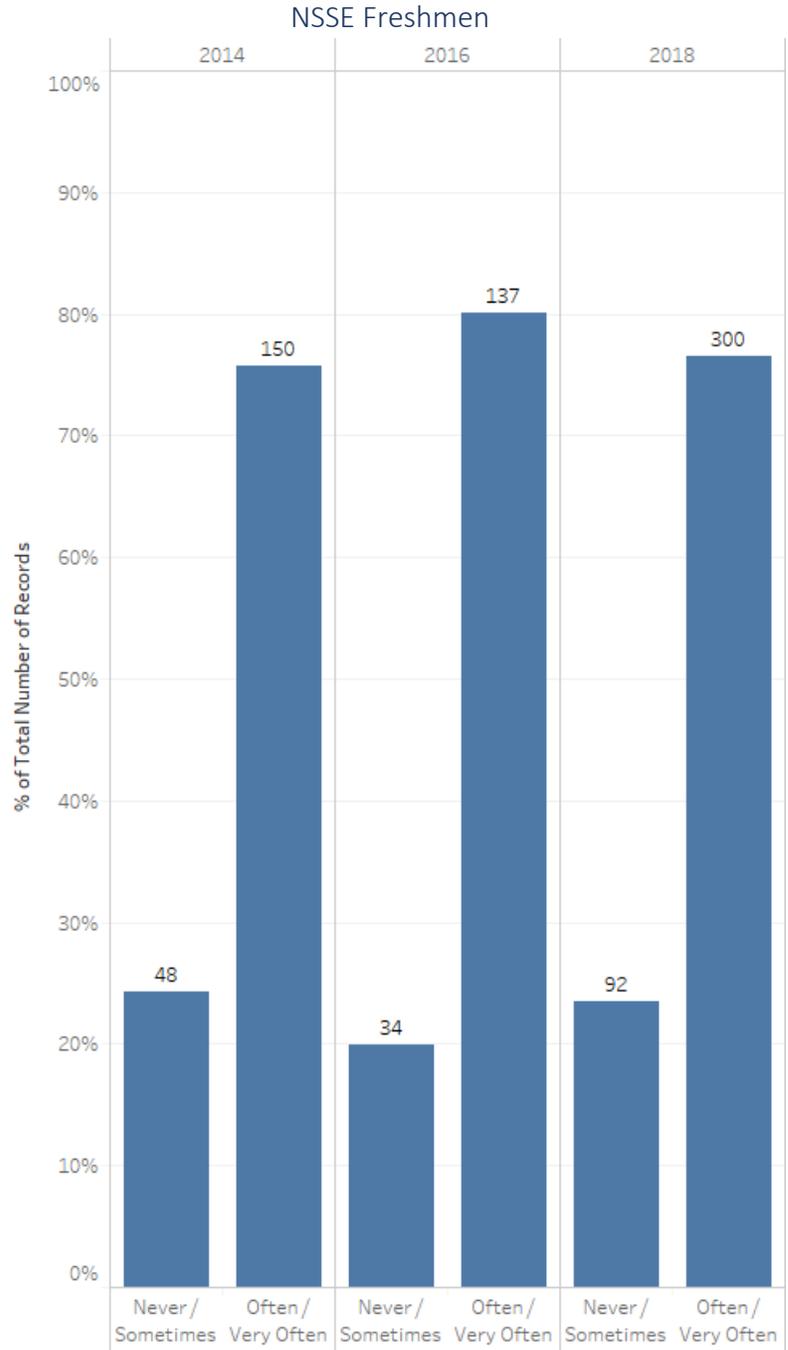
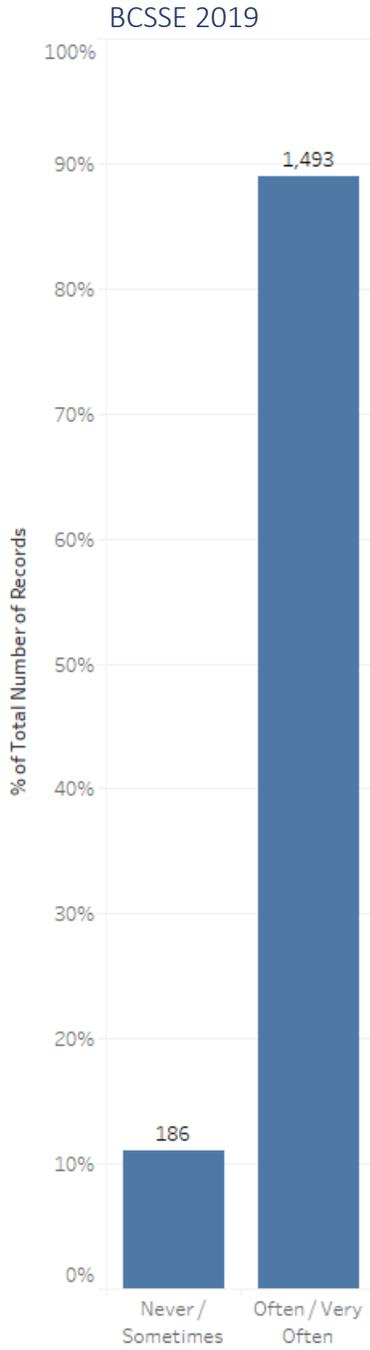
*Response options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often*

*Recoded responses: Never / Sometimes, Often / Very Often*

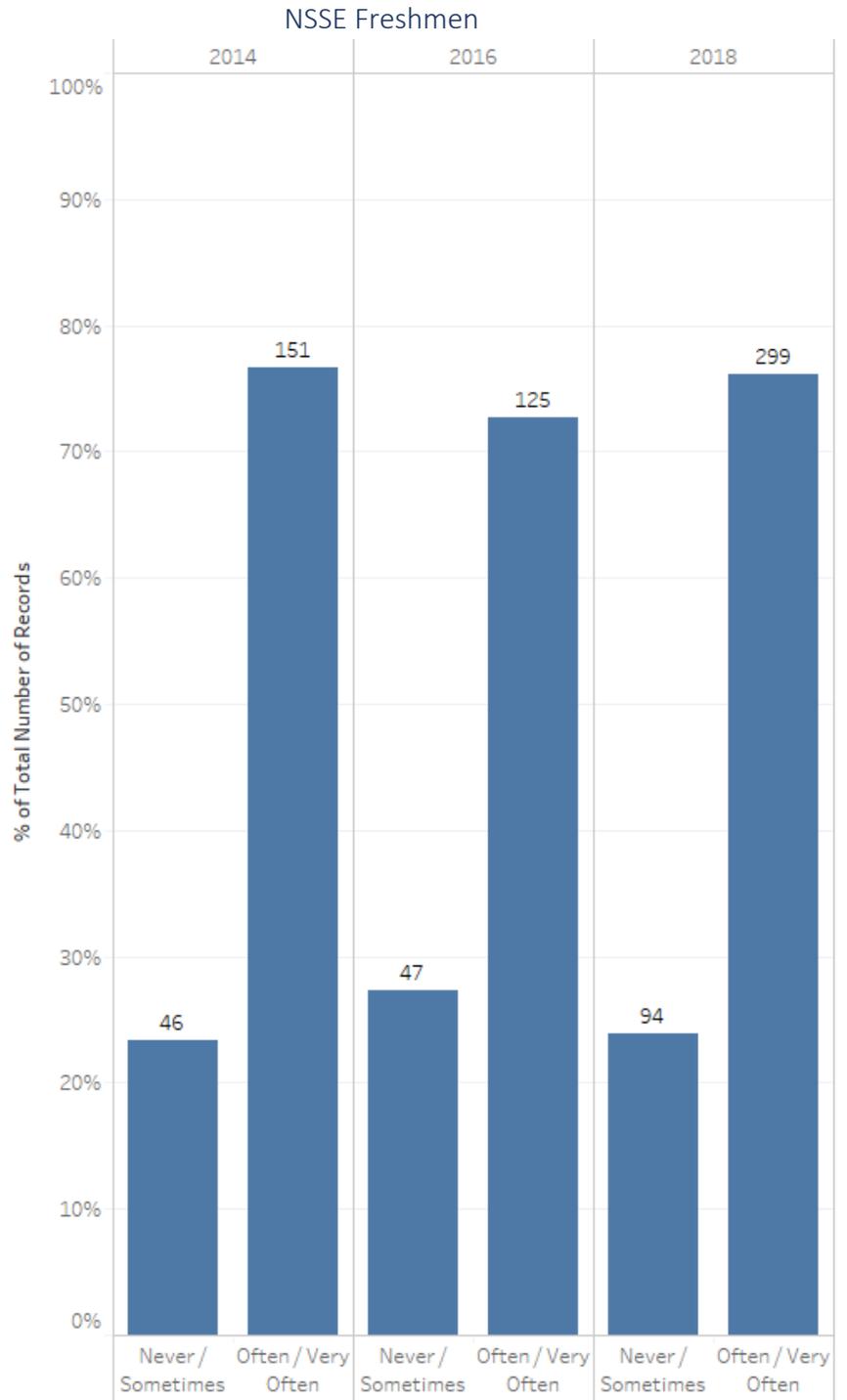
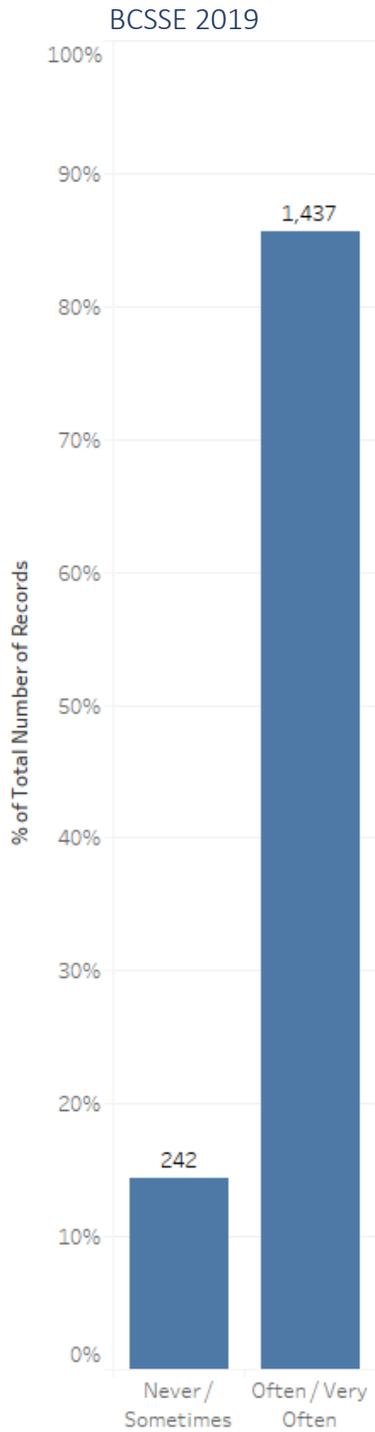
### *Analysis*

BCSSE results for 2019 first-year students indicate that a majority of incoming students expect to be frequently interacting with diverse student populations, although the magnitude of this majority is lowest for students expecting more frequent interactions with those holding different political views (roughly 78% responded that they expect such interaction “Often” or “Very Often”, compared with almost 89% expecting to interact with members of other racial or ethnic groups). When compared with historical NSSE results for outgoing freshmen in 2014, 2016, and 2018, the gap between the “Never / Sometimes” minority and “Often / Very Often” majority declines somewhat, but the shapes of the overall distributions of historical NSSE responses remains quite similar to the stated expectations of 2019 students in BCSSE.

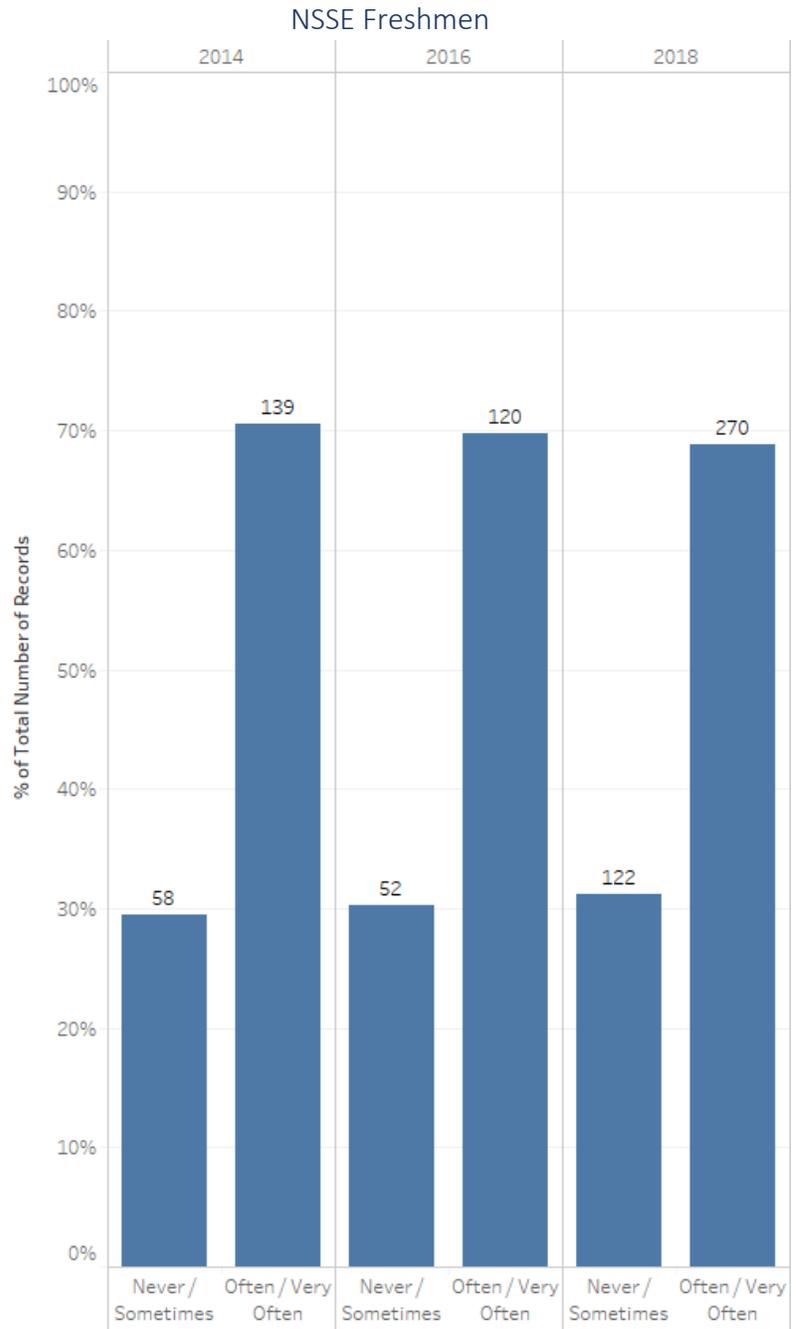
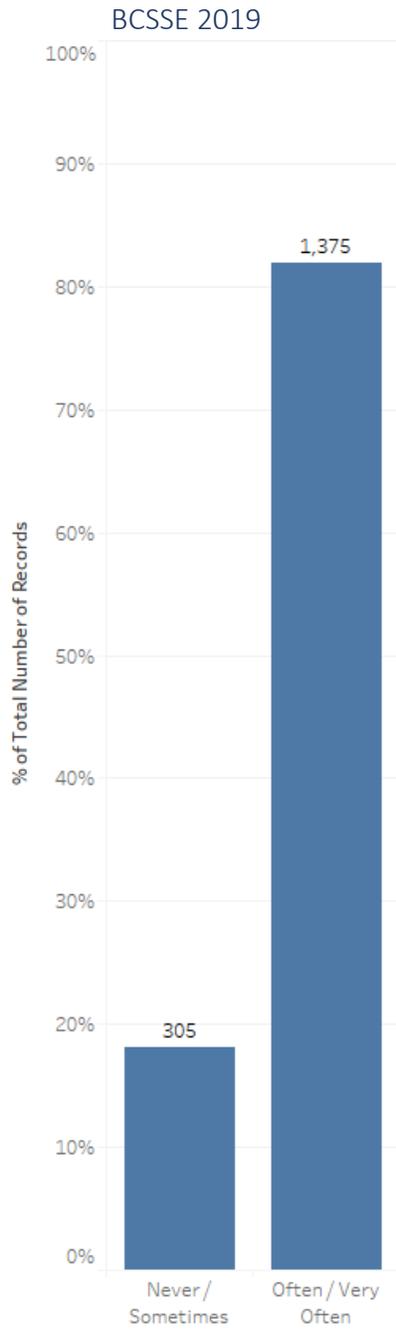
Question 1: People of a race or ethnicity other than your own?



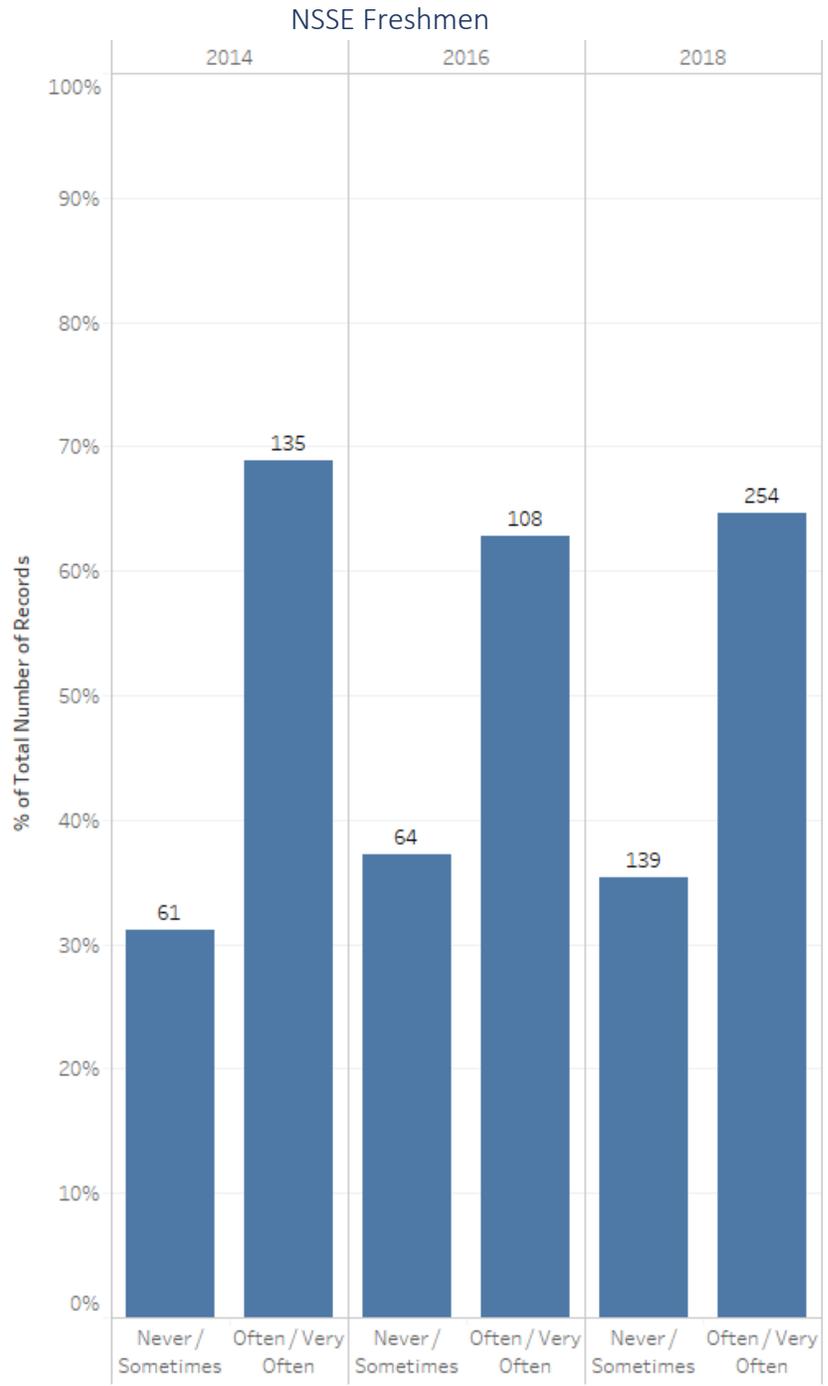
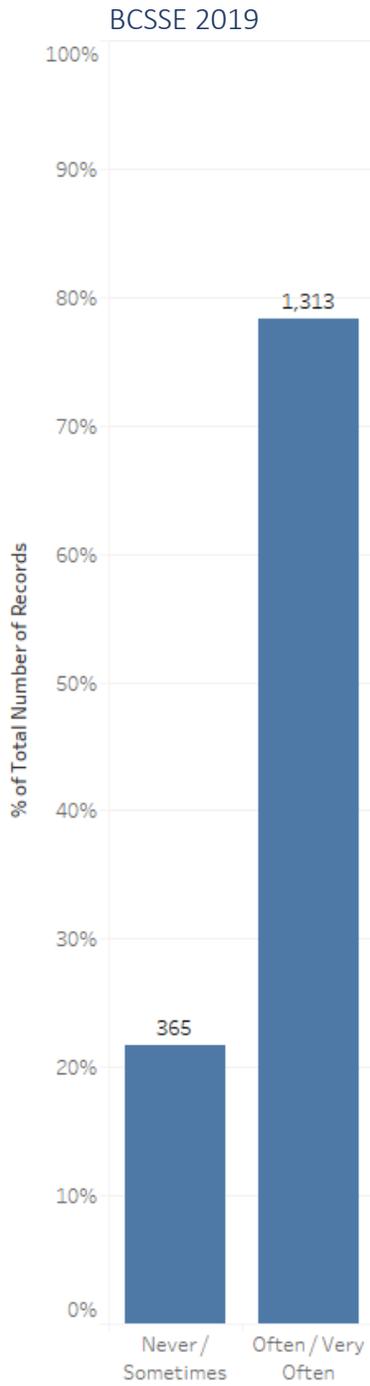
Question 2: People from an economic background other than your own?



Question 3: People with religious beliefs other than your own?



Question 4: People with political views other than your own?



## Student-Faculty Interaction

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following?

NSSE Survey Text: During the current school year, how often have you done the following?

*Response options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often*

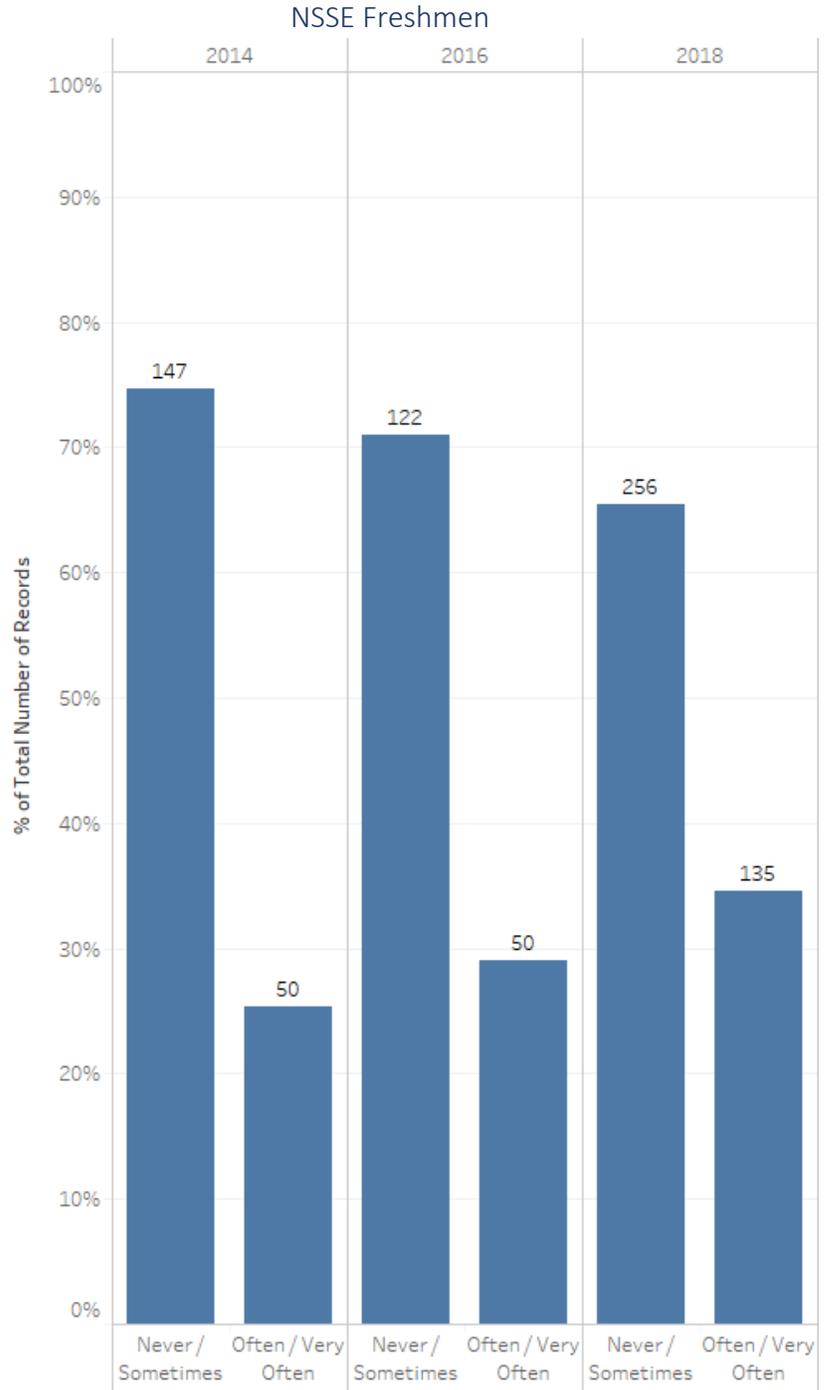
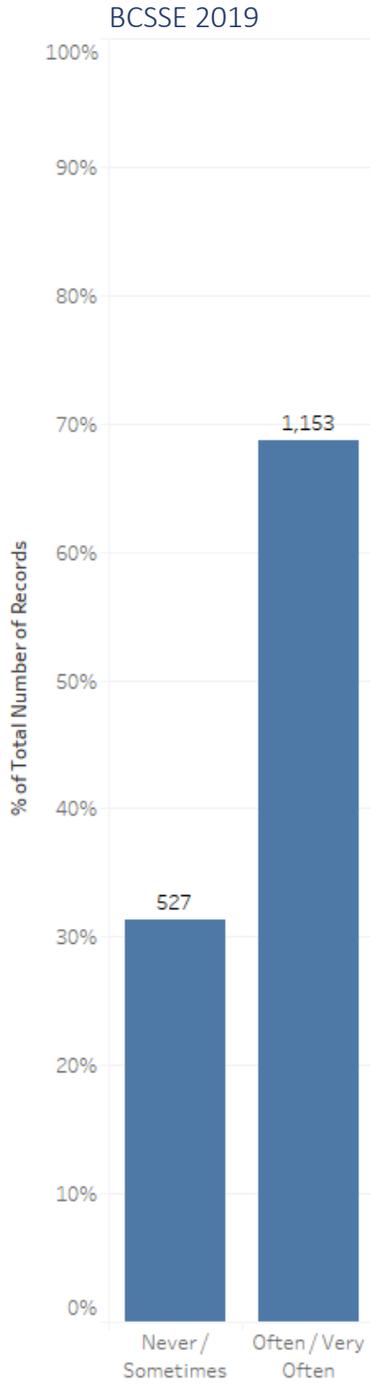
*Recoded responses: Never / Sometimes, Often / Very Often*

### *Analysis*

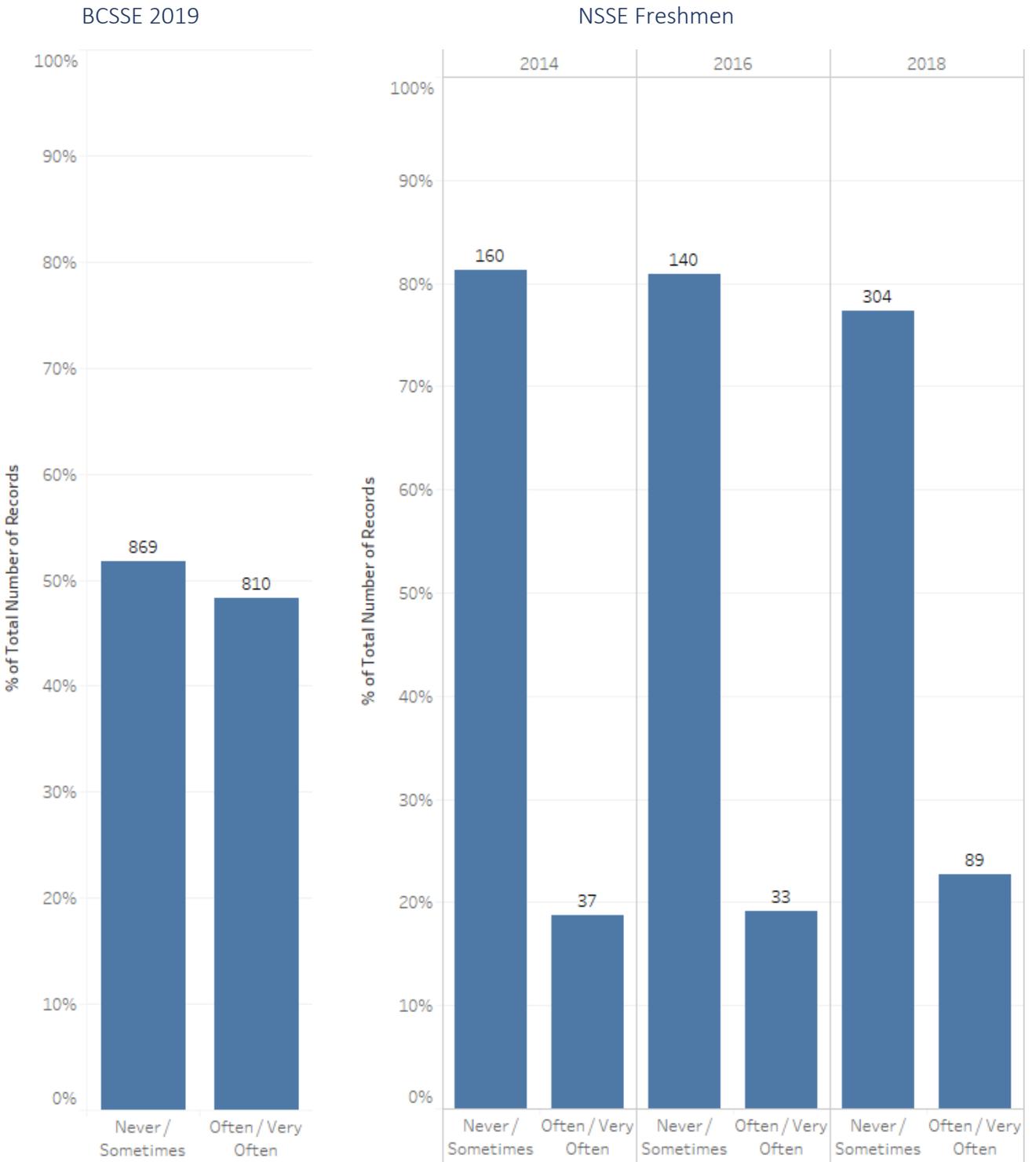
BCSSE results for 2019 first-year students indicate that a majority of incoming students expect to be frequently interacting with faculty members regarding their career plans and academic performance, while a slimmer majority of incoming students expect to frequently discuss course topics, ideas, and concepts outside of the classroom. In contrast, a slight majority of incoming students felt that they would work less frequently with faculty members on activities other than coursework. For many incoming first-year students, it may be less clear why one would be interacting with a faculty member regarding non-course-related tasks than on their academic performance and career goals. This may also help explain the slimmer majority of students who expect to have frequent course-related interactions with faculty outside of class, since for many the classroom might appear to be the most proper place to have such interactions.

Historical NSSE results for outgoing freshmen in 2014, 2016, and 2018 contrast sharply with the BCSSE results for 2019, with a clear majority of first-year students indicating that they either never interacted or infrequently interacted with faculty members regarding all four of the subjects listed (career plans, non-coursework activities, academic performance, and course-related discussions outside of class). While these historical results do not permit direct inferences to be made about faculty interactions with current first-year students, the relative durability of the frequency distributions across historical NSSE cycles suggests that a similar pattern is likely to be observed for current first-year students in the 2020 NSSE survey. If this pattern does hold, it strongly suggests that first-year students are entering Chico State with the expectation and willingness to frequently interact with faculty, but that such expectations are not being realized. As stated earlier, prior research on college entrance surveys has shown that incoming college students tend to overestimate how frequently they will engage in future behaviors, and this may account for some of the difference between incoming 2019 student expectations relative to outgoing freshmen practices.

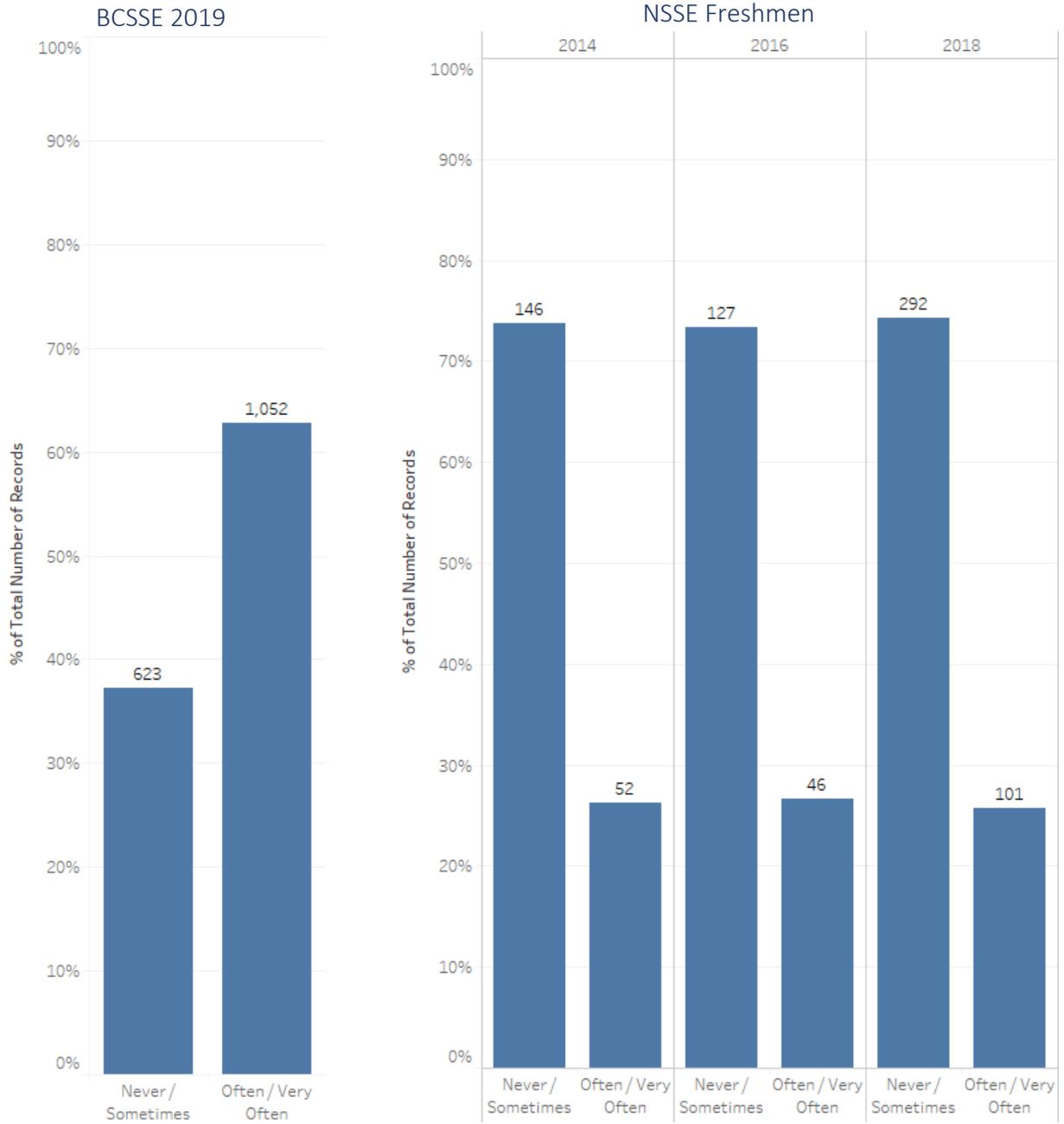
Question 1: Talk about career plans with a faculty member?



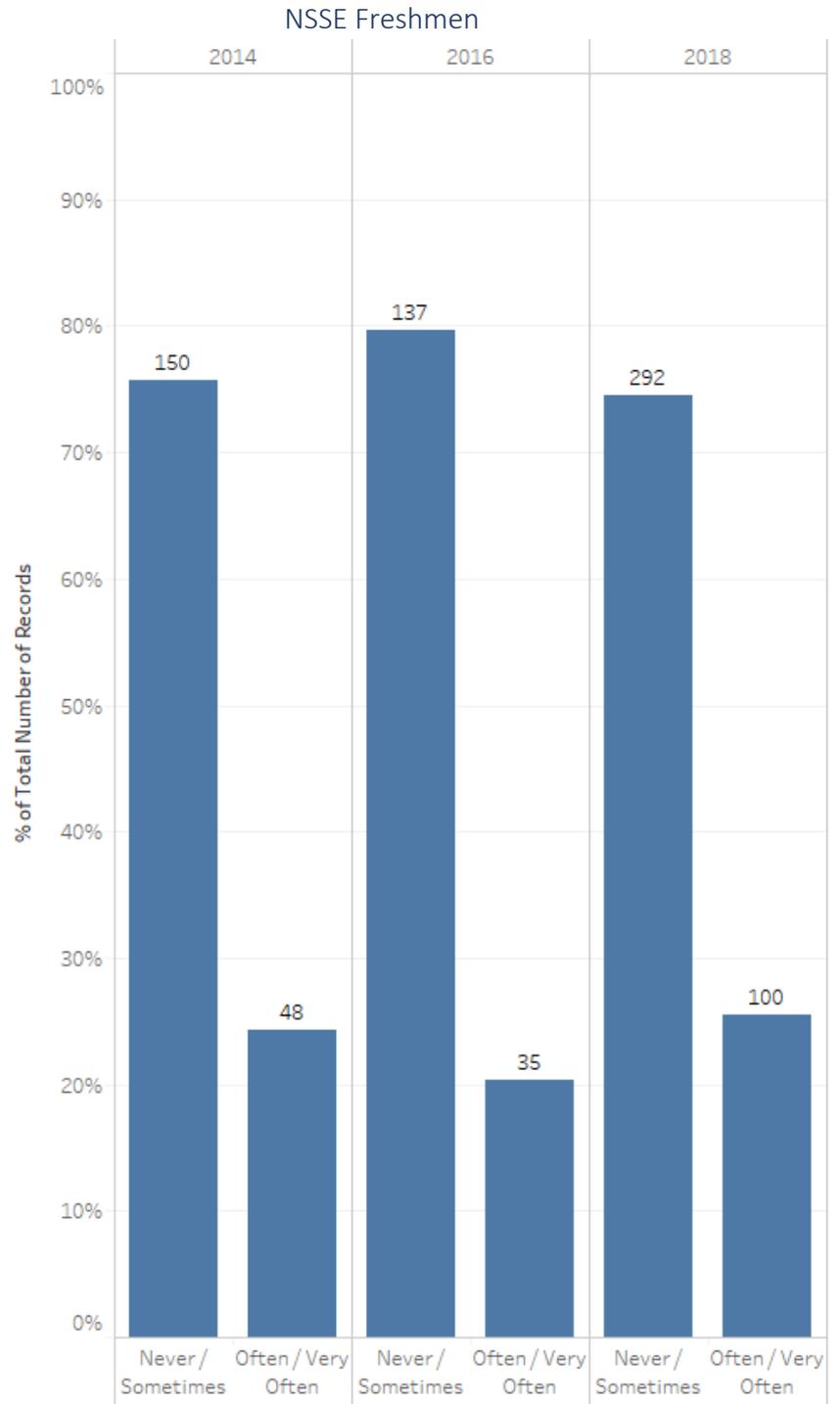
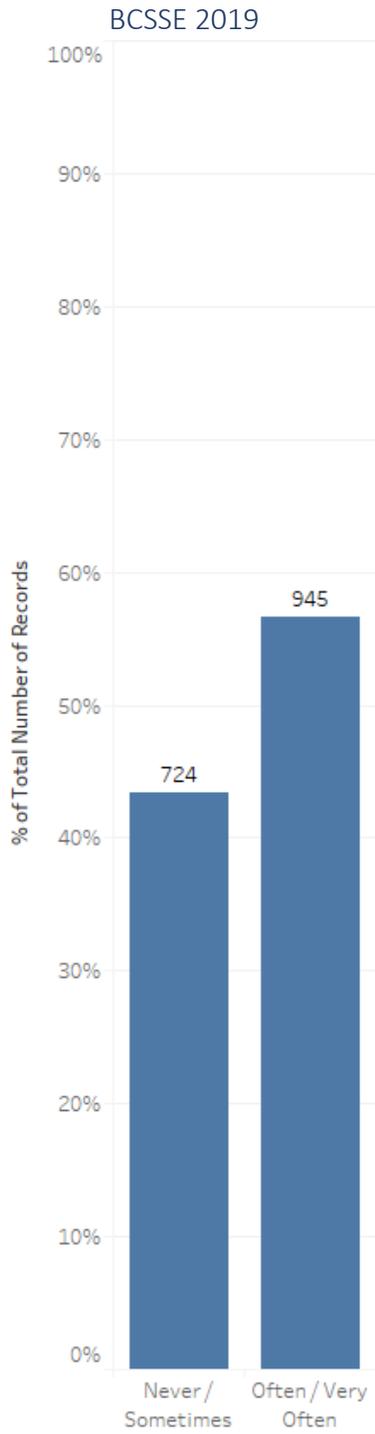
Question 2: Work with a faculty member on activities other than coursework?



Question 3: Discuss your academic performance with a faculty member?



Question 4: Discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class?



## Challenging, Supportive, and Stimulating Environment

BCSSE Survey Text: How important is it to you that your institution provide each of the following?

NSSE Survey Text: How much does your institution emphasize the following?

*BCSSE Response Options: Not important (1) to Very Important (6)*

*Recoded BCSSE Responses: Less Important (1-3) to More Important (4-6)*

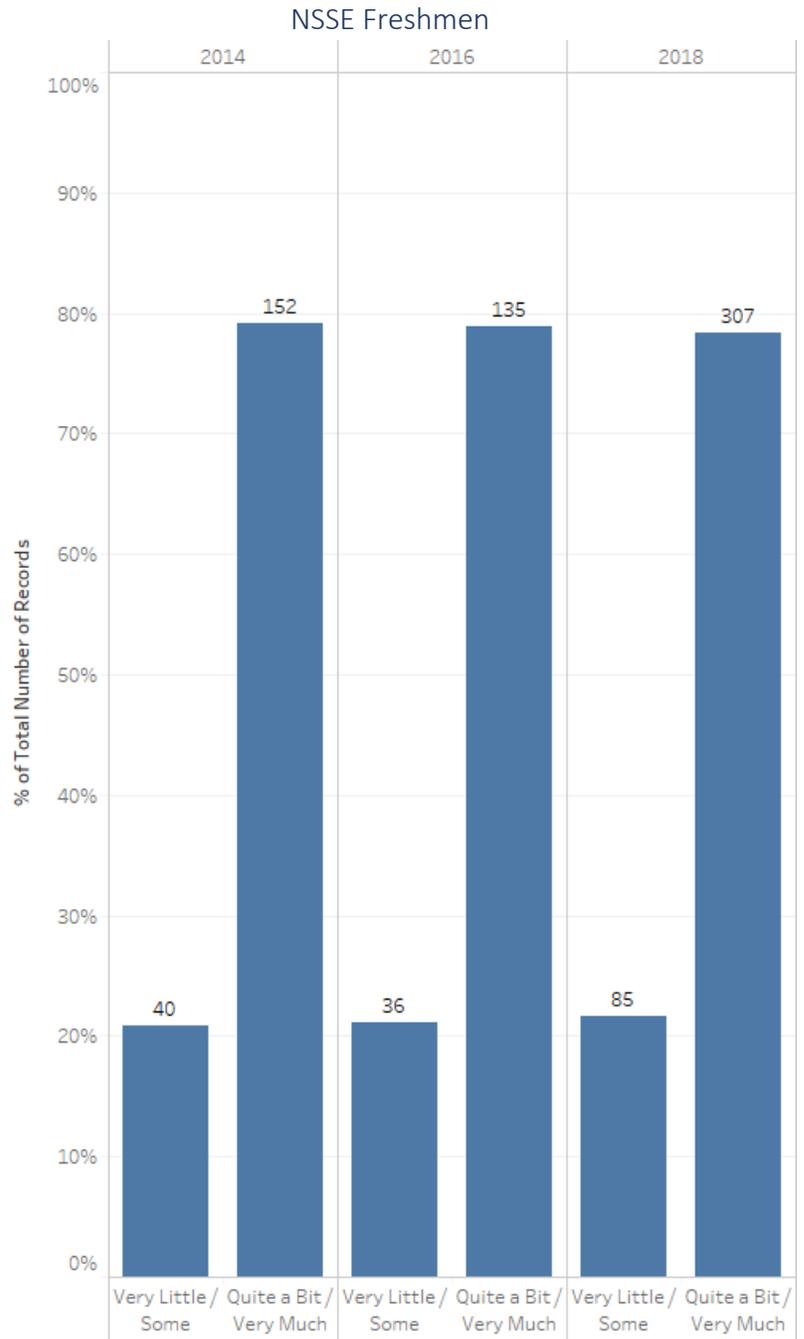
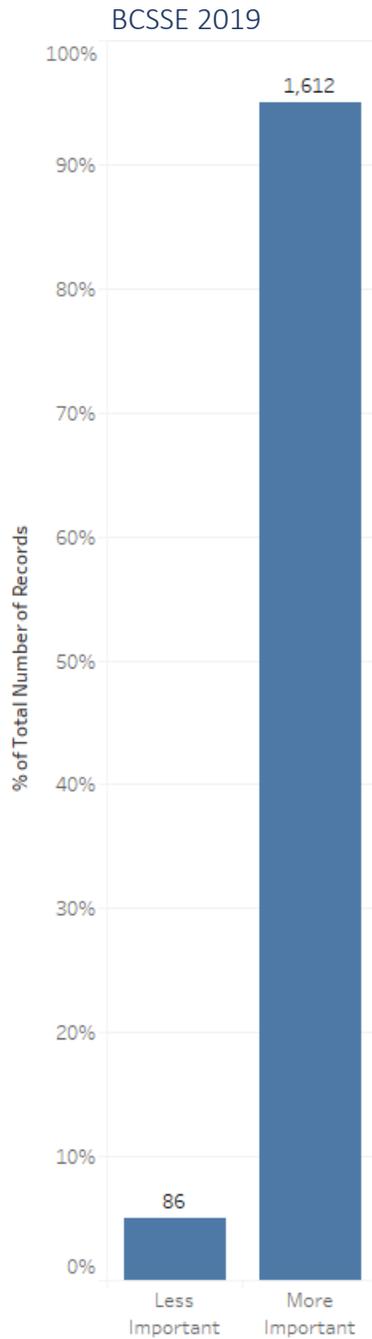
*NSSE Response Options: Very Little, Some, Quite a Bit, Very Much*

*Recoded NSSE Responses: Very Little / Some, Quite a Bit / Very Much*

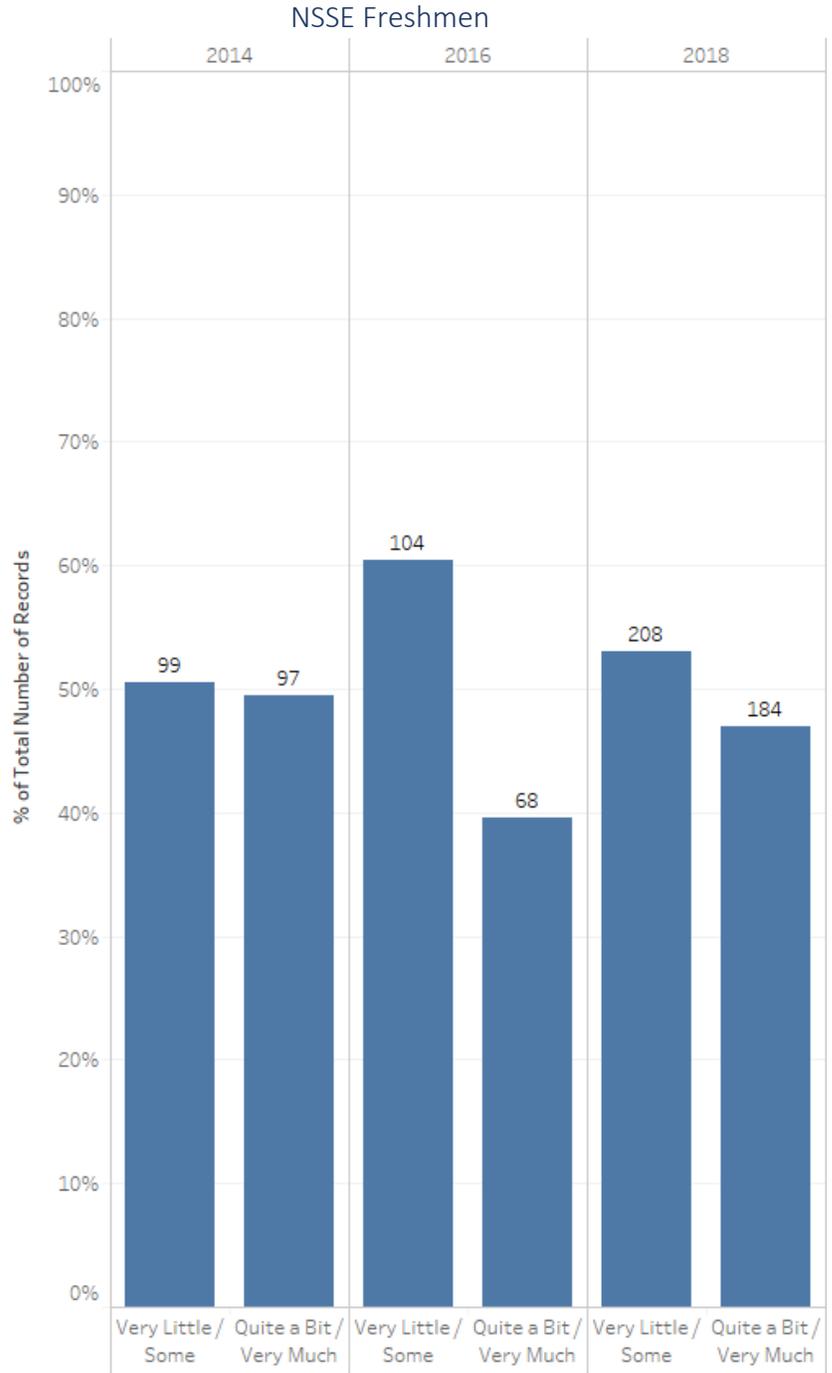
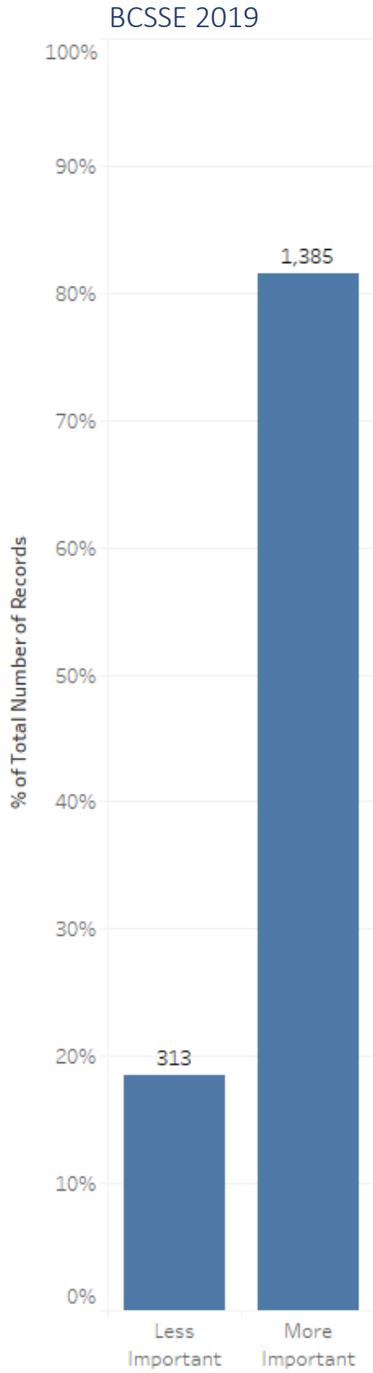
### *Analysis*

BCSSE results for 2019 indicate that an overwhelming majority of incoming first-year students feel that providing support for academic and non-academic obligations and responsibilities, as well as providing opportunities for social interaction, engaging with diverse populations, and attending campus events were quite important. When compared with historical NSSE results for outgoing first-year students in 2014, 2016, and 2018, the distributions are most similar for responses to the emphasis placed on academic support and social opportunities. Opportunities for diverse interactions also appear to have increased in their perceived emphasis since 2016, while the perceived emphasis on attending campus events has tended to decrease somewhat between the 2014 and 2018 NSSE cycles. The greatest single-item contrast between the 2019 BCSSE and historical NSSE results for freshmen is regarding the perceived emphasis on non-academic support. Specifically, roughly 82% of incoming students in 2019 felt that it was quite important for the university to offer support for non-academic responsibilities, but slim majorities of historical NSSE respondents finishing their first year felt that the university placed relatively little emphasis on such support. Importantly, the proportion of students noting this lack of emphasis enlarged in 2016 and 2018, relative to 2014. If the observed historical distribution pattern is found to repeat in the NSSE 2020 results, this would provide evidence that this is an important area of student support that is not receiving an appropriate level of emphasis in the campus community.

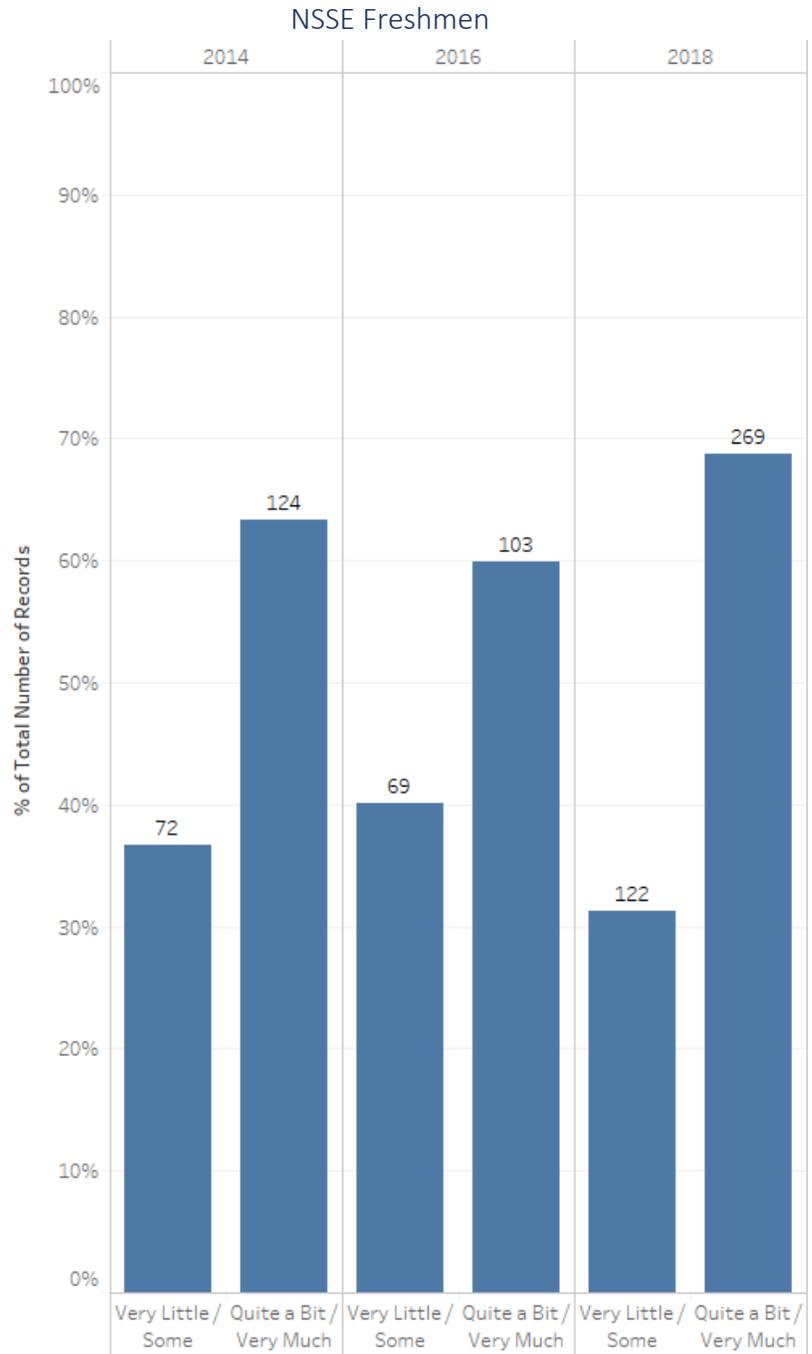
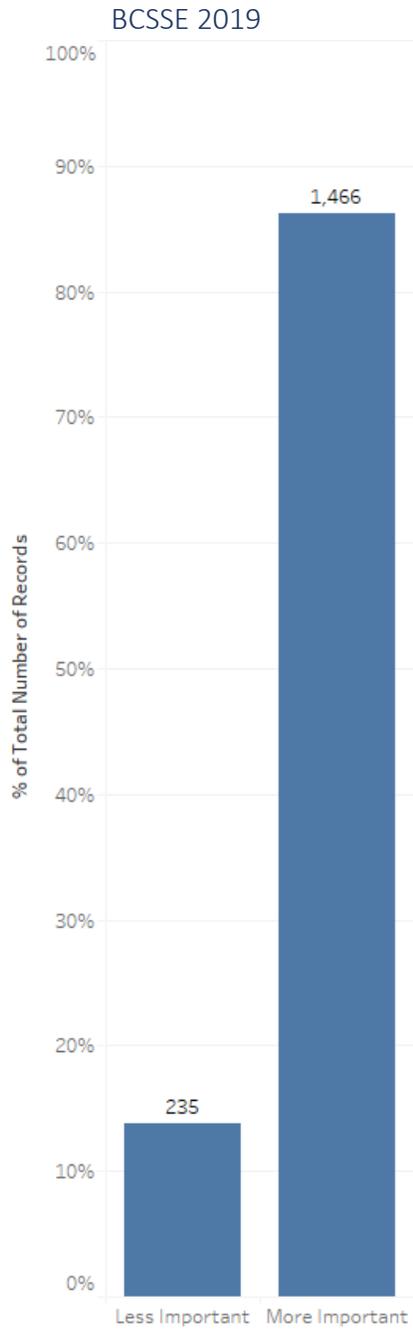
Question 1: Provide support to help students succeed academically?



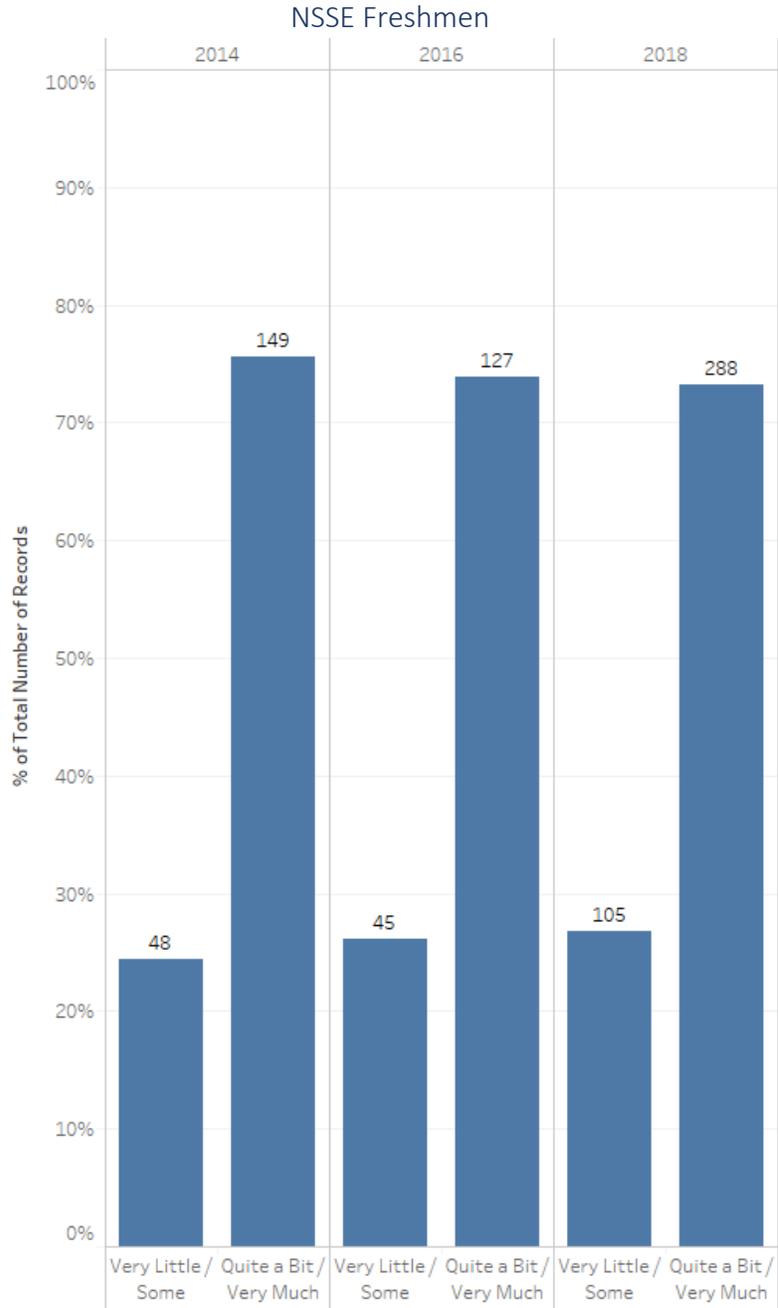
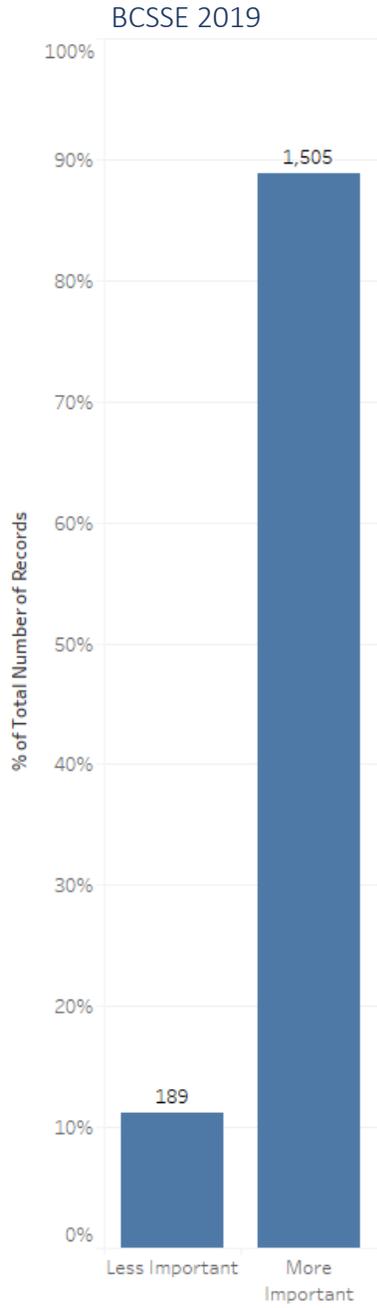
Question 2: Help managing your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)?



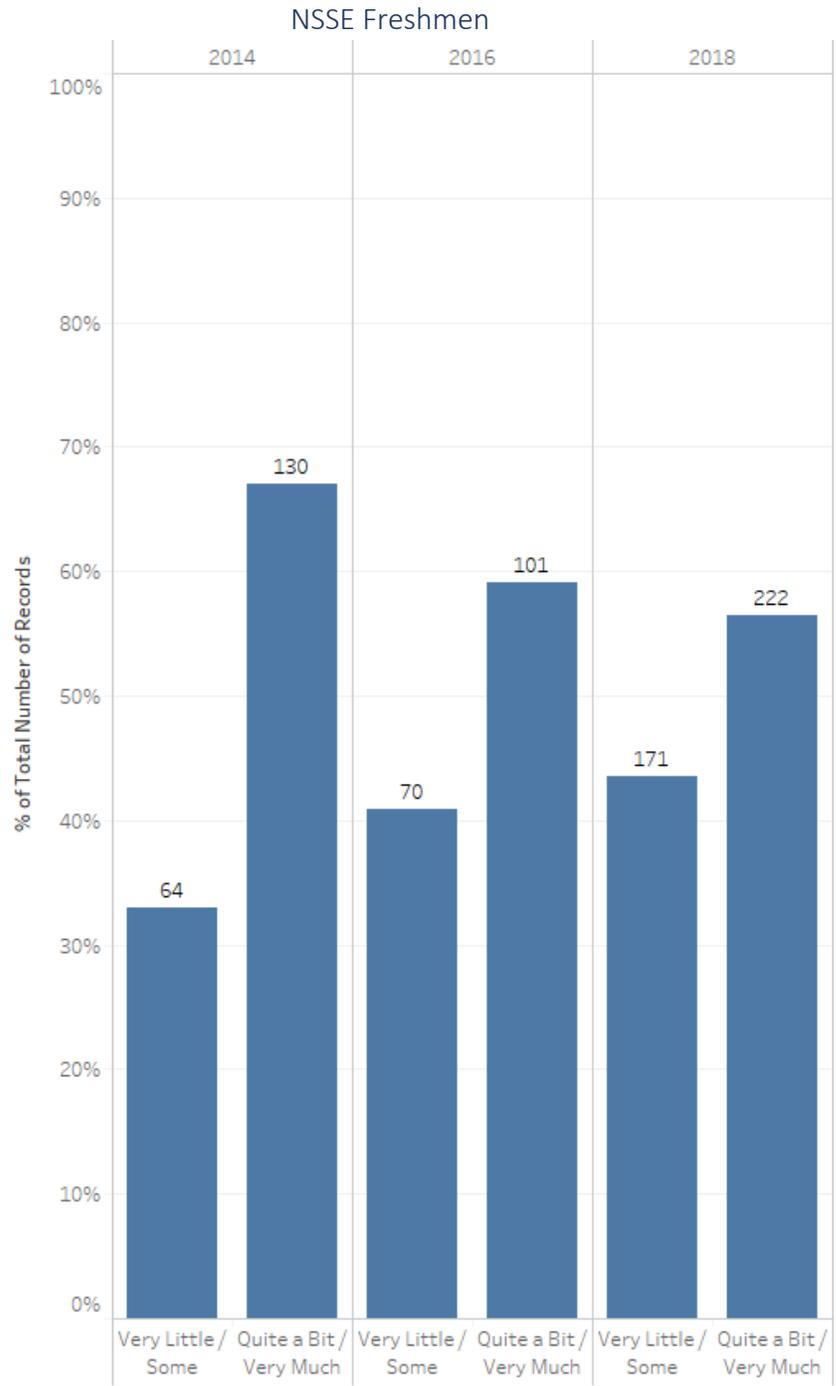
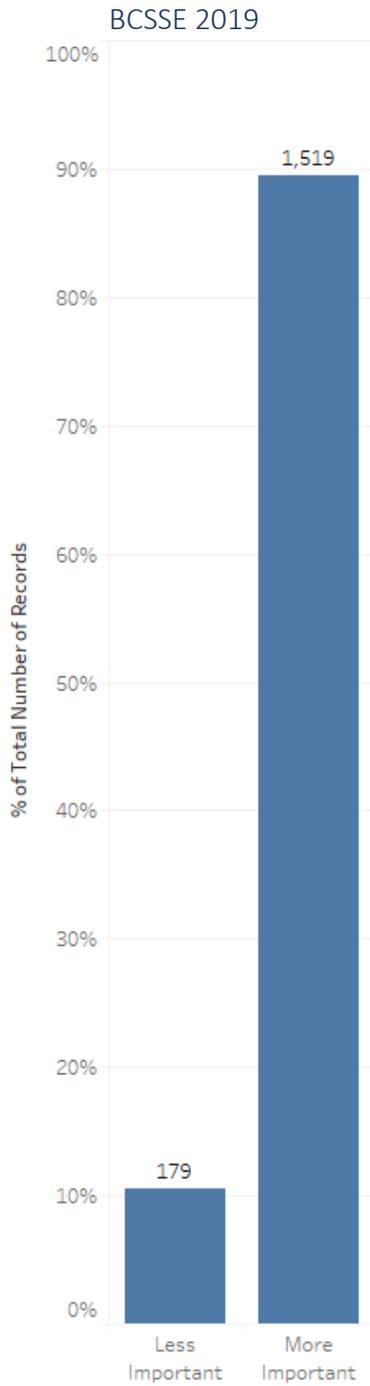
Question 3: Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)?



Question 4: Opportunities to be involved socially?



Question 5: Opportunities to attend campus activities and events?



## Academic Perseverance

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, how certain are you that you will do the following?

NSSE<sup>3</sup> Survey Text: During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

*BCSSE Response Options: Not at all certain (1) to Very certain (6)*

*Recoded BCSSE Responses: Less Certain (1-3) to More Certain (4-6)*

*NSSE Response Options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often*

*Recoded NSSE Responses: Never / Sometimes, Often / Very Often*

## Analysis

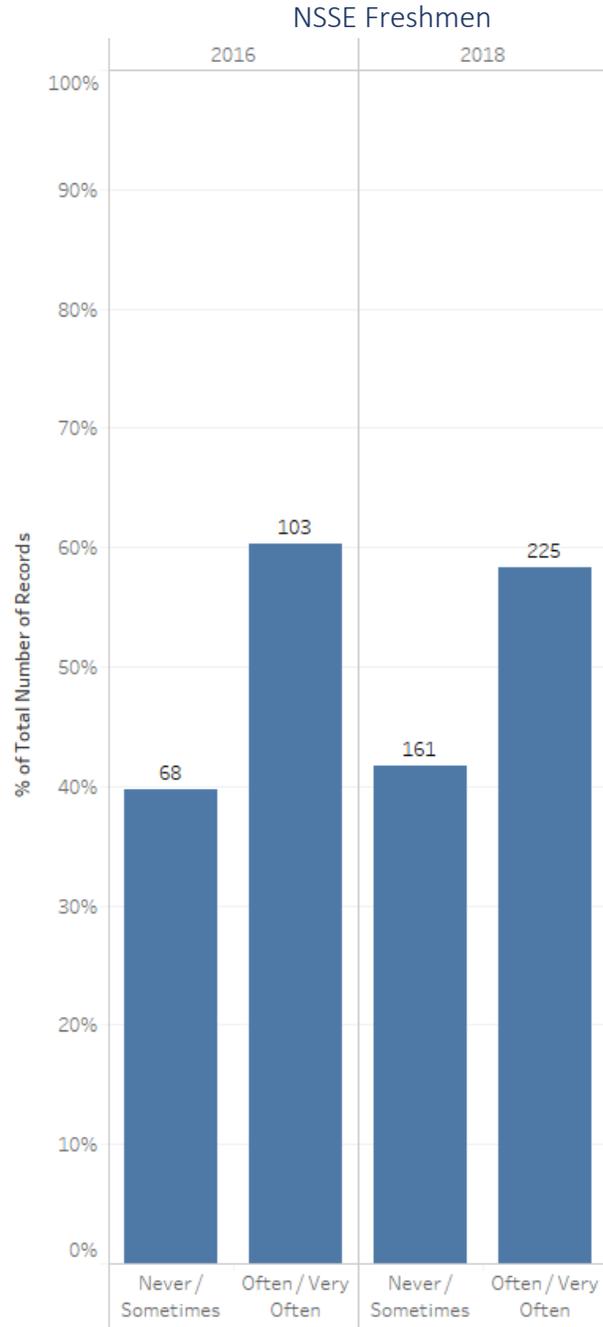
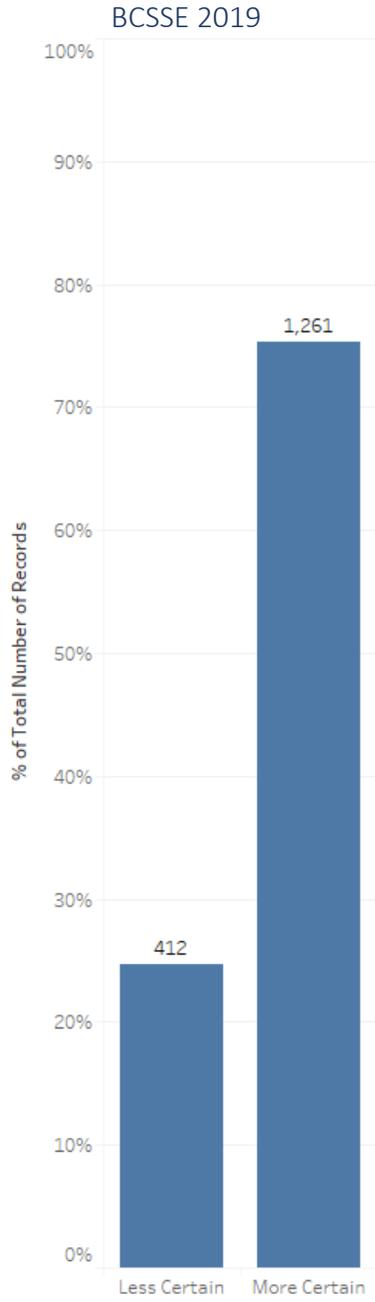
BCSSE results for incoming first-year students in 2019 show that a majority of students have a strong degree of certainty that they will engage in academic perseverance behaviors. The largest proportions of those feeling strong certainty are found for those who believe they will finish a task regardless of the challenges encountered (92%), seek out additional information for course assignments when they are difficult to understand (90%), and ask an instructor for help when struggling with an assignment (89%). Somewhat lower proportions of incoming students expressed strong certainty that they would participate in classroom discussions when they don't feel like it (74%), and study when there are other interesting things to do (75%).

When compared to historical NSSE responses from students finishing their first year in 2014, 2016, and 2018, the expectations of the incoming 2019 class were largely consistent with these reported behaviors for three of the five perseverance behaviors: studying despite potential distractions, seeking additional information, and pushing through challenges to complete a task. However, the distribution of historical NSSE responses for the remaining two perseverance behaviors (participating in classroom discussion when not feeling like it; asking instructors for help when struggling with assignments) contrast sharply with the expected behaviors of incoming 2019 first-year students.

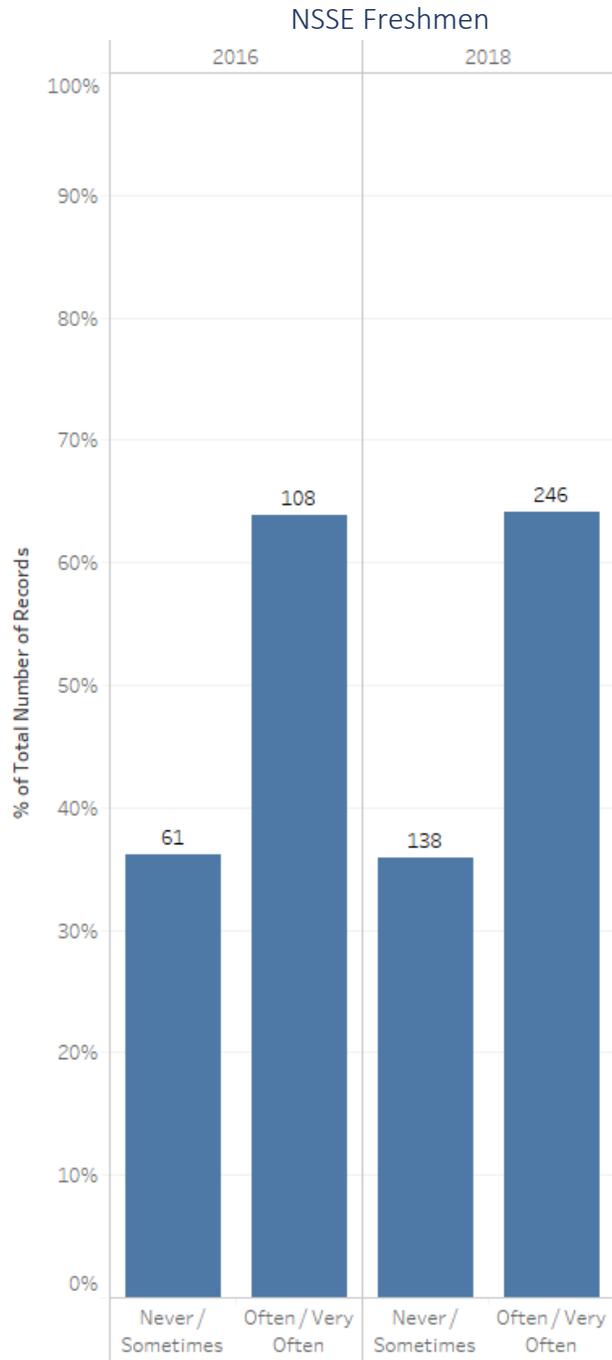
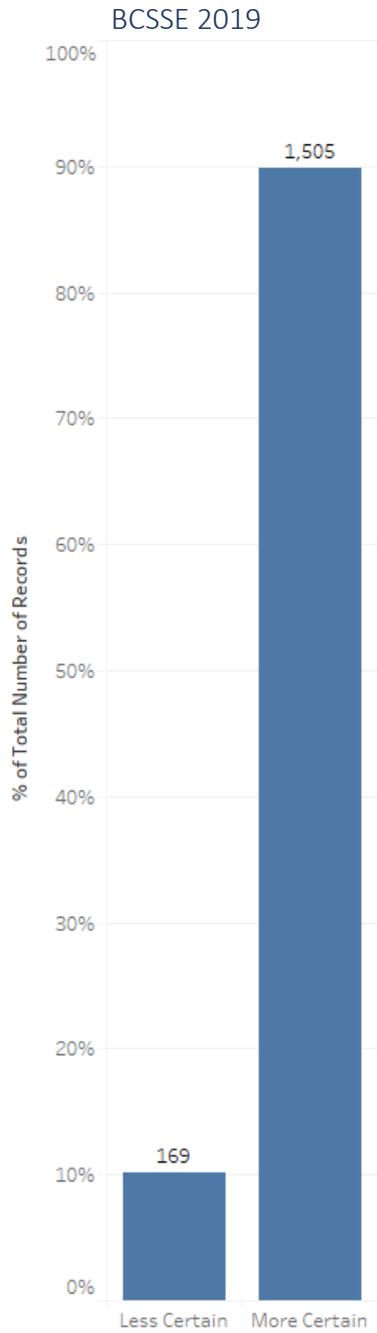
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<sup>3</sup> The parallel NSSE questions in this section were administered using an additional topical module, rather than the main NSSE questionnaire form, and thus data are only available for 2016 and 2018.

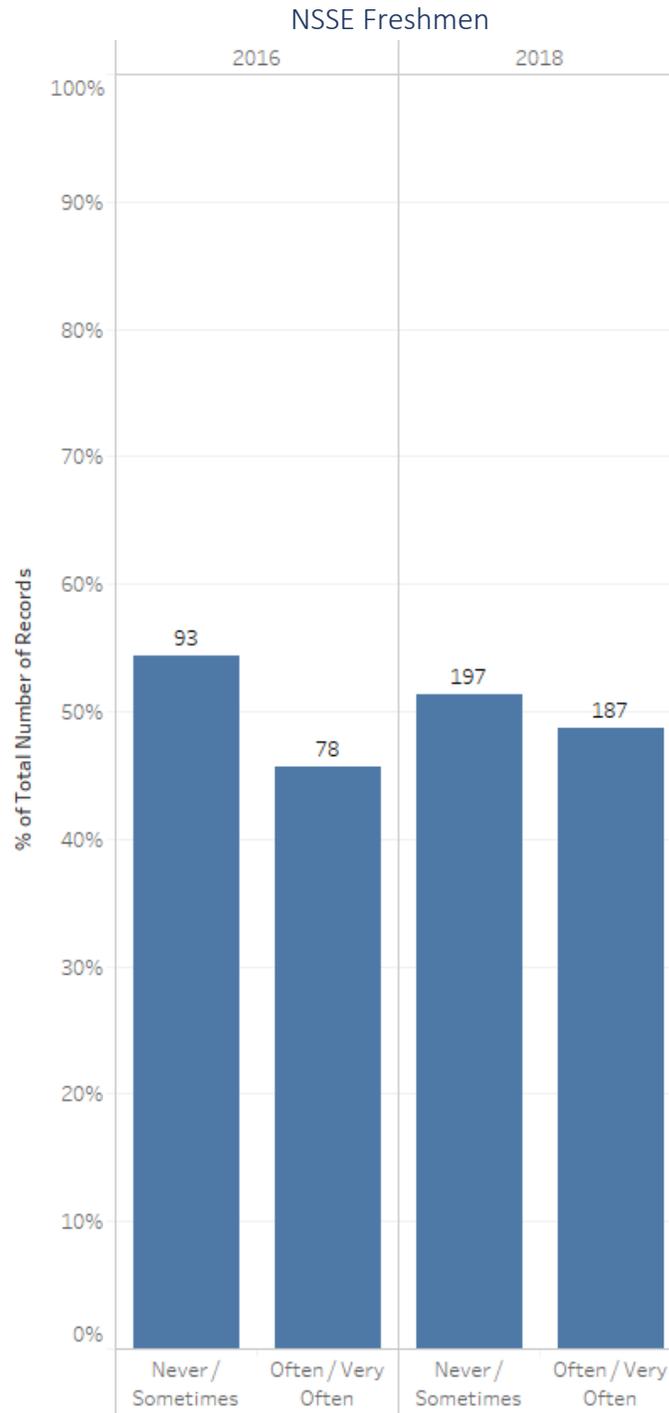
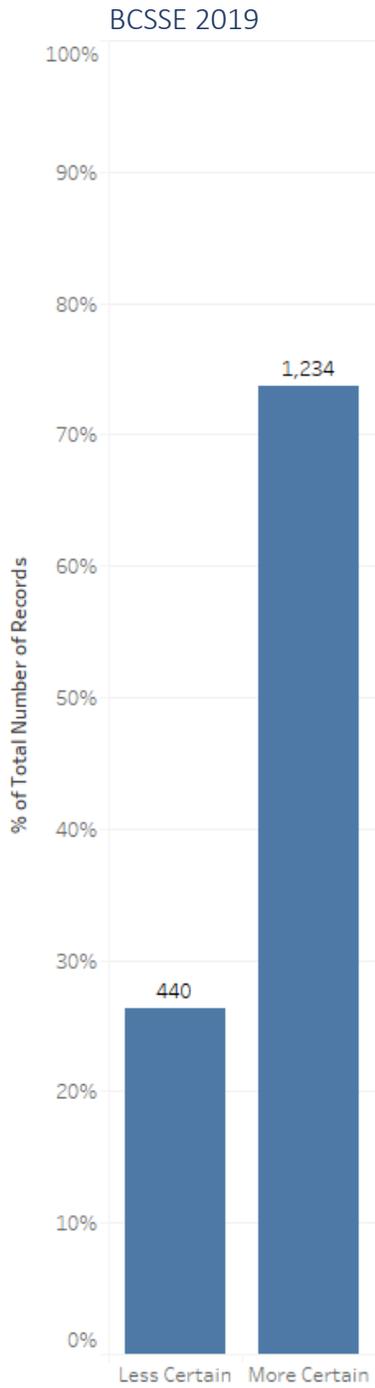
Question 1: Study when there are other interesting things to do?



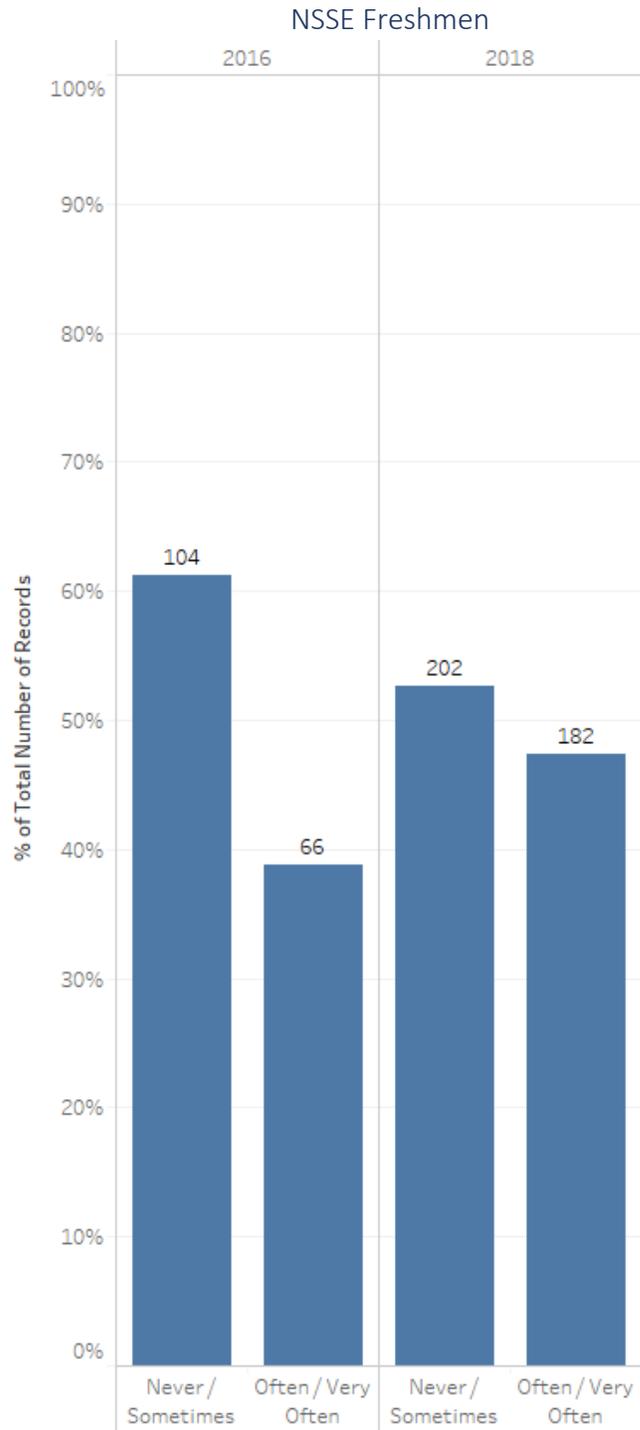
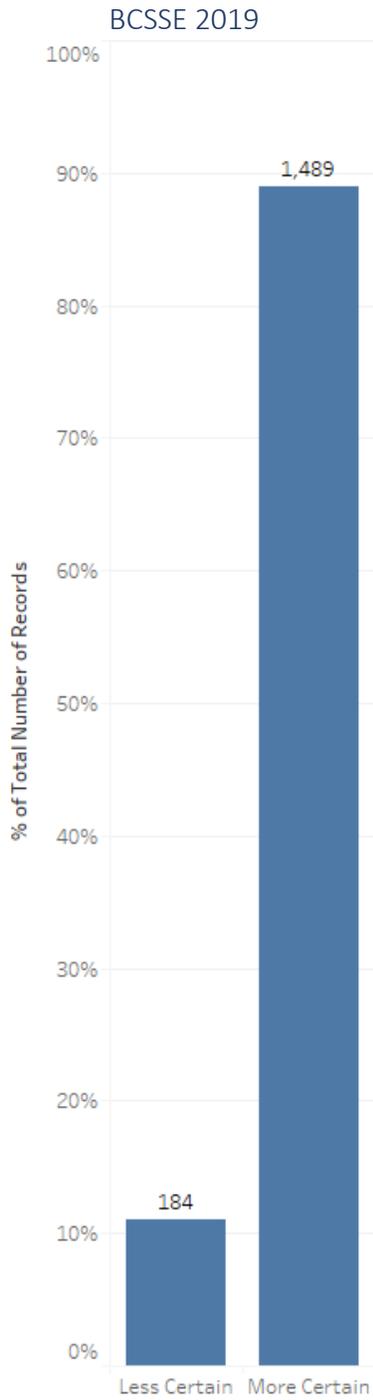
Question 2: Find additional info for course assignments when you don't understand the material?



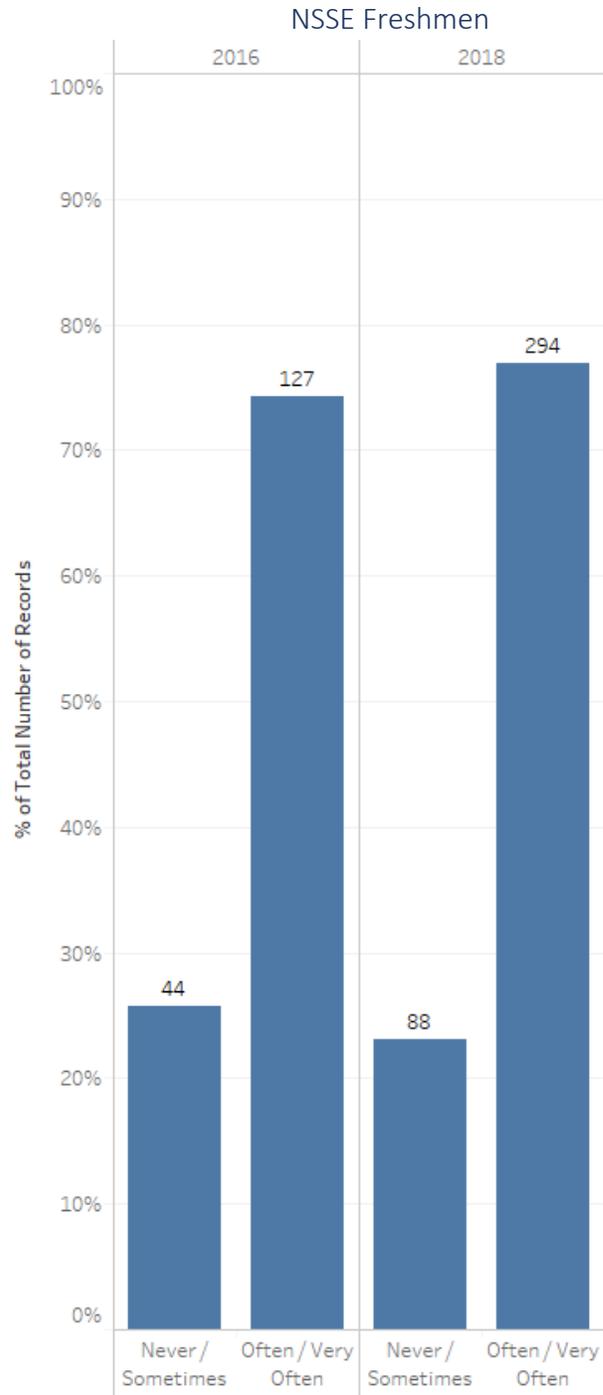
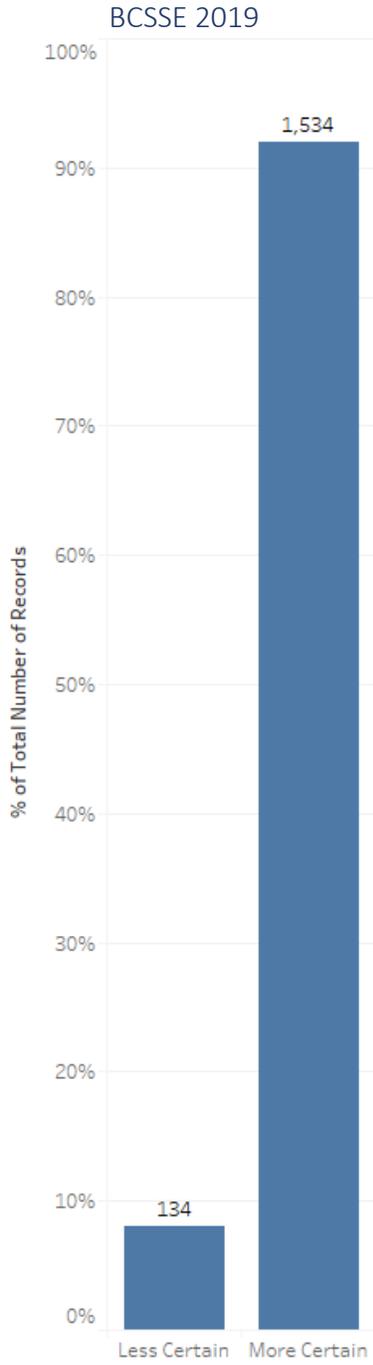
Question 3: Participate in course discussions, even when you don't feel like it?



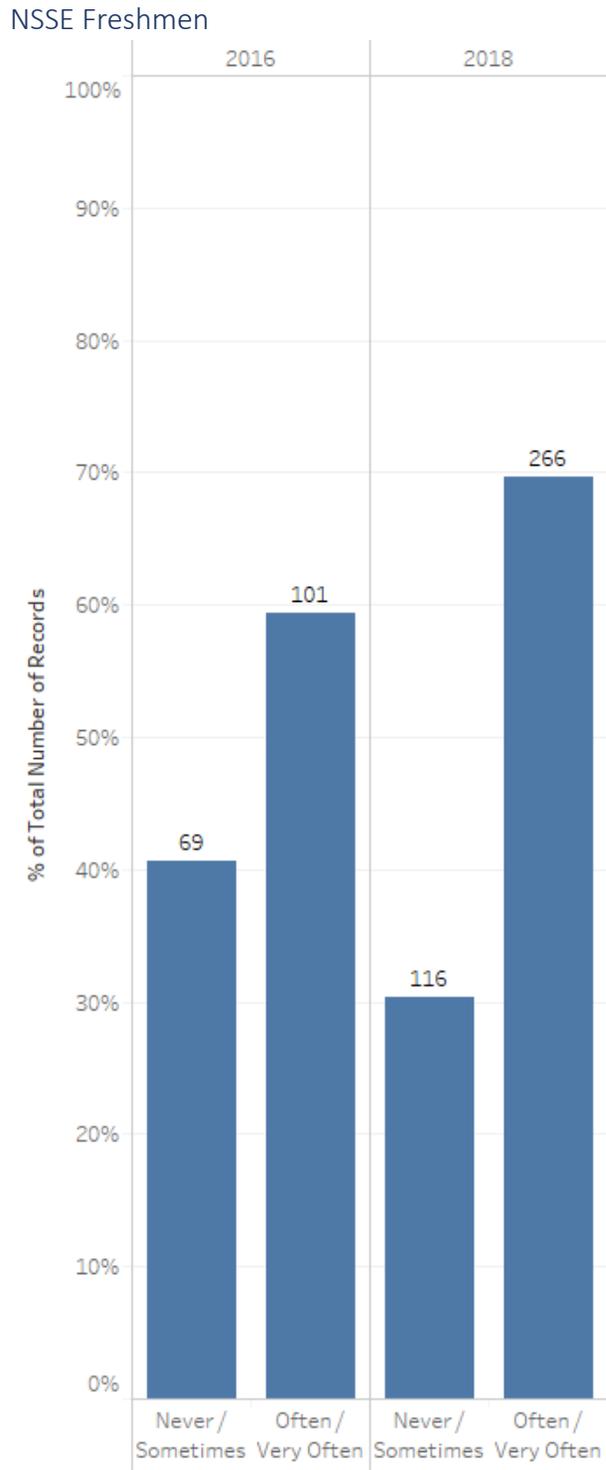
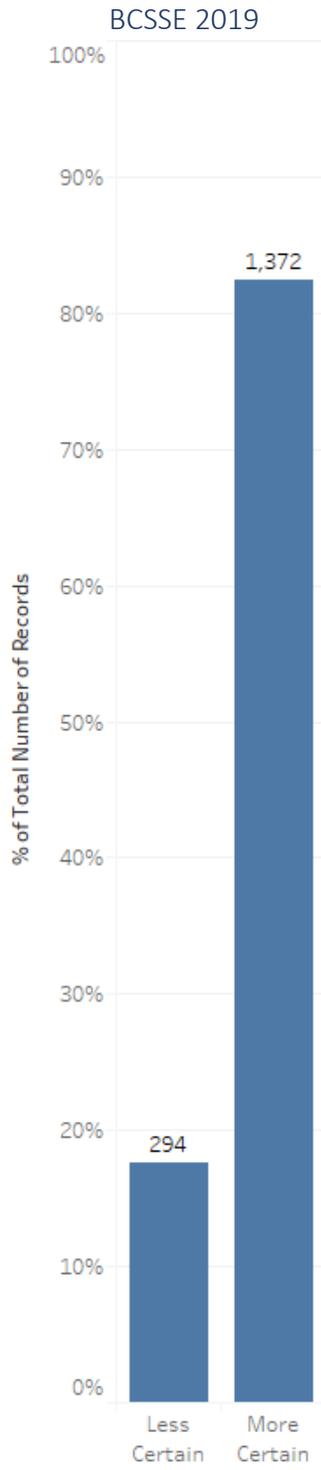
Question 4: Ask instructors for help when you struggle with course assignments?



Question 5: Finish something you started when you encounter challenges?



Question 6: Stay positive, even when you did poorly on a test or assignment?



## Academic Difficulty

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be?

NSSE<sup>4</sup> Survey Text: During the current school year, how difficult have the following been for you?

*Response Options: Not at all difficult (1) to Very difficult (6)*

*Recoded Responses: Less Difficult (1-3) to More Difficult (4-6)*

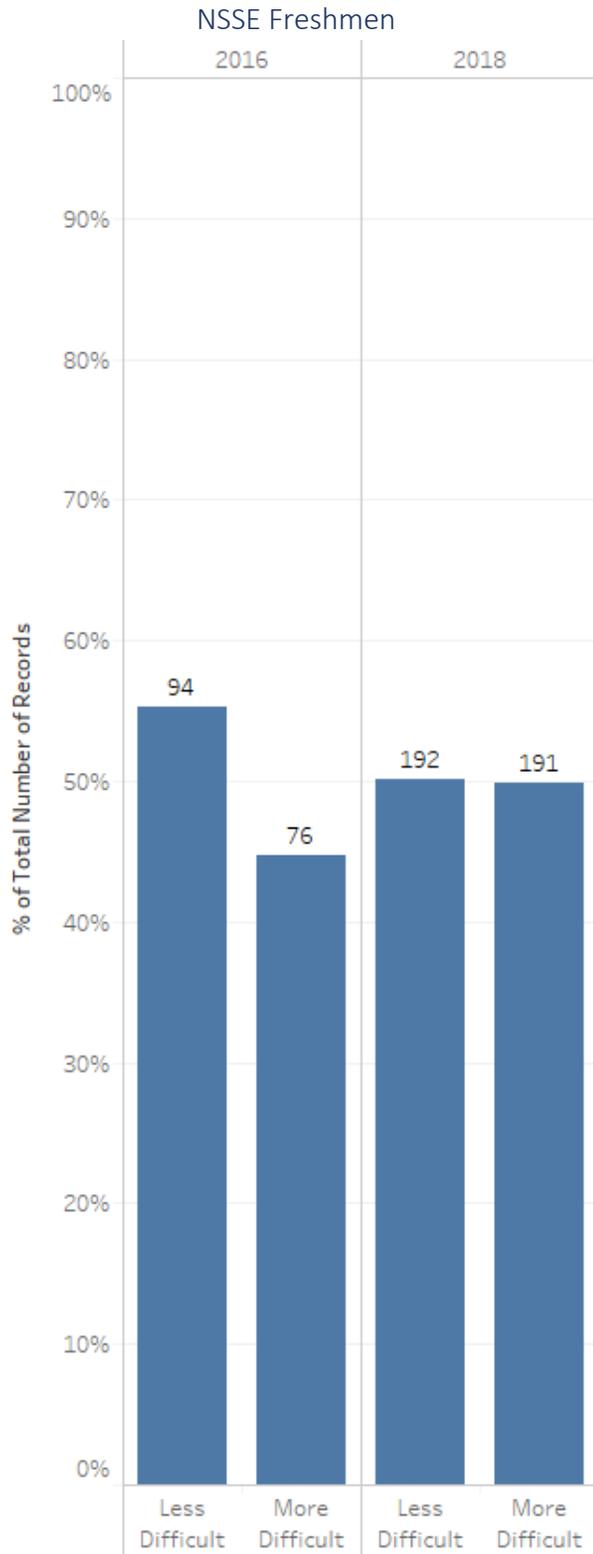
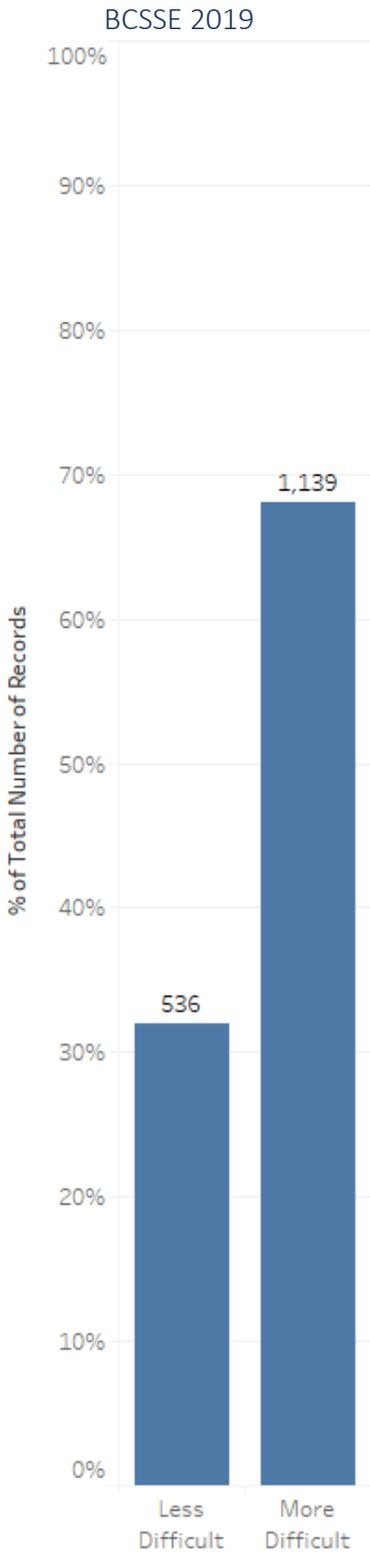
### Analysis

BCSSE results for incoming 2019 first-year students show that majorities of students felt that they would have relatively more difficulty learning course material and managing their time, and relatively less difficulty getting help with school work and interacting with faculty. When compared with historical NSSE responses for students finishing their first year of college in 2016 and 2018, the sentiments of first year students in 2019 were largely shared on three of the four measures: a larger proportion of those students reported experiencing more difficulty in managing their time, and less difficulty interacting with faculty and getting help with coursework. Historical NSSE responses to the “Learning course materials” measure present a more significant contrast with 2019 BCSSE responses, and show that a relatively even split of surveyed students reported experiencing more or less difficulty in learning course materials, as opposed to a majority of incoming freshmen in 2019 feeling that this task would be more difficult.

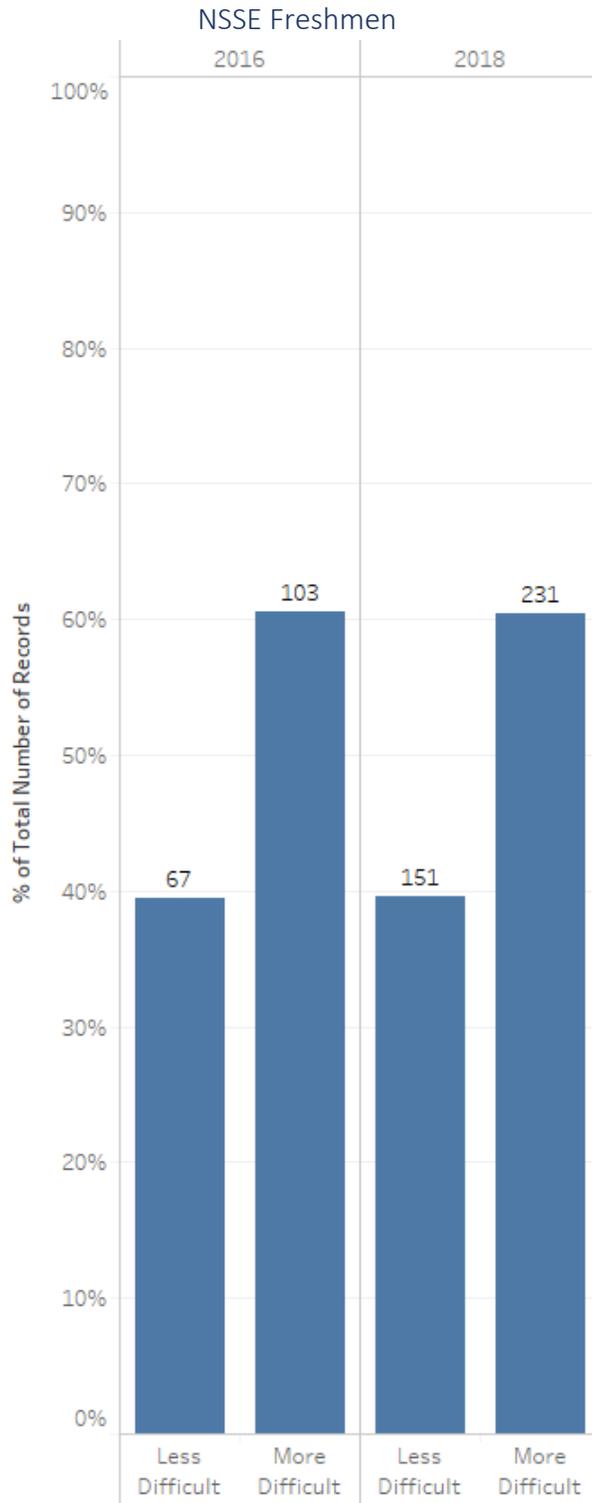
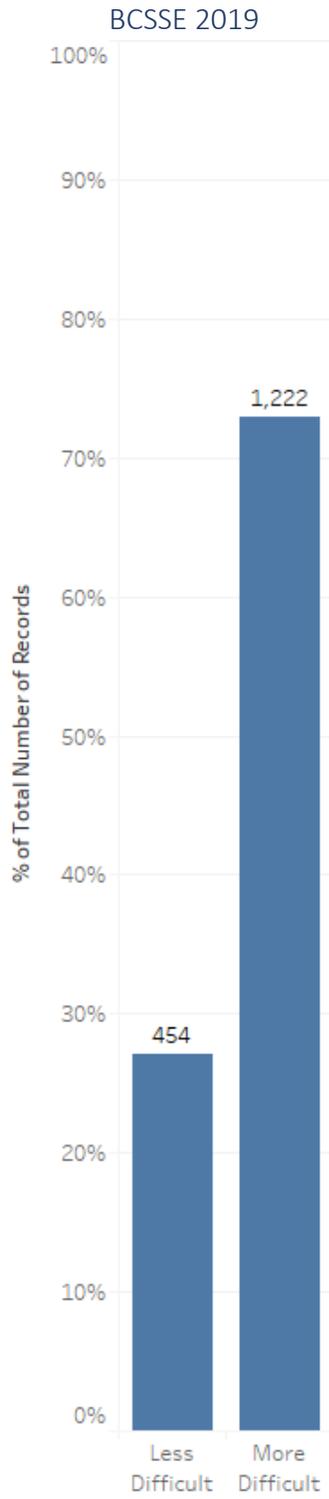
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<sup>4</sup> The parallel NSSE questions in this section were administered using an additional topical module, rather than the main NSSE questionnaire form, and thus data are only available for 2016 and 2018.

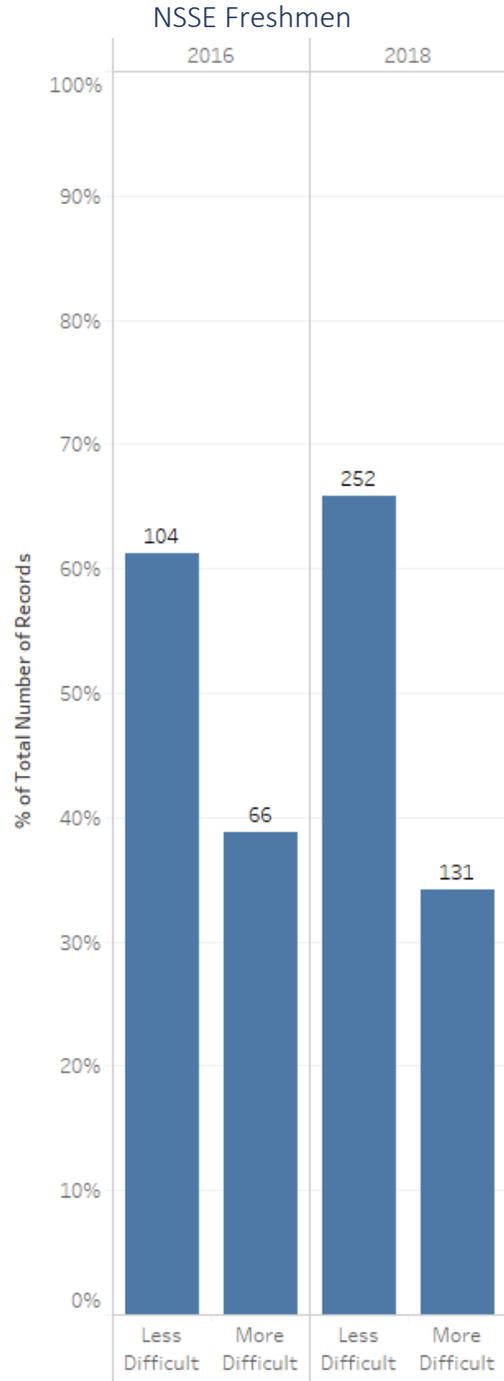
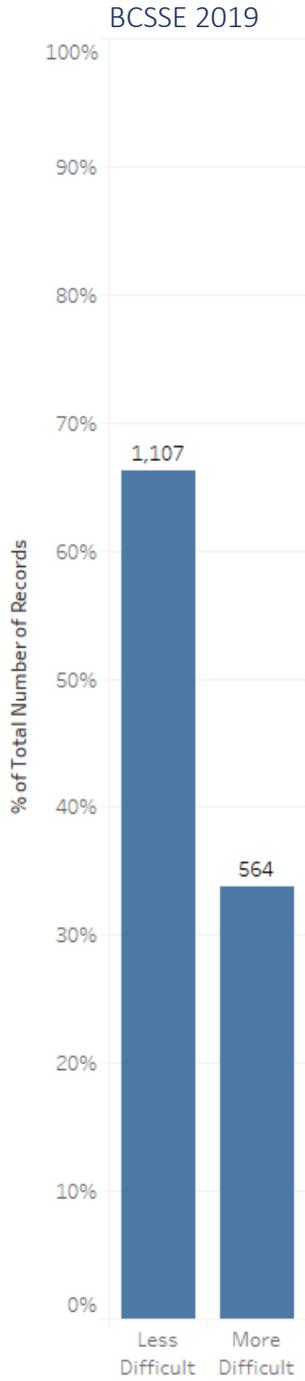
Question 1: Learning course material?



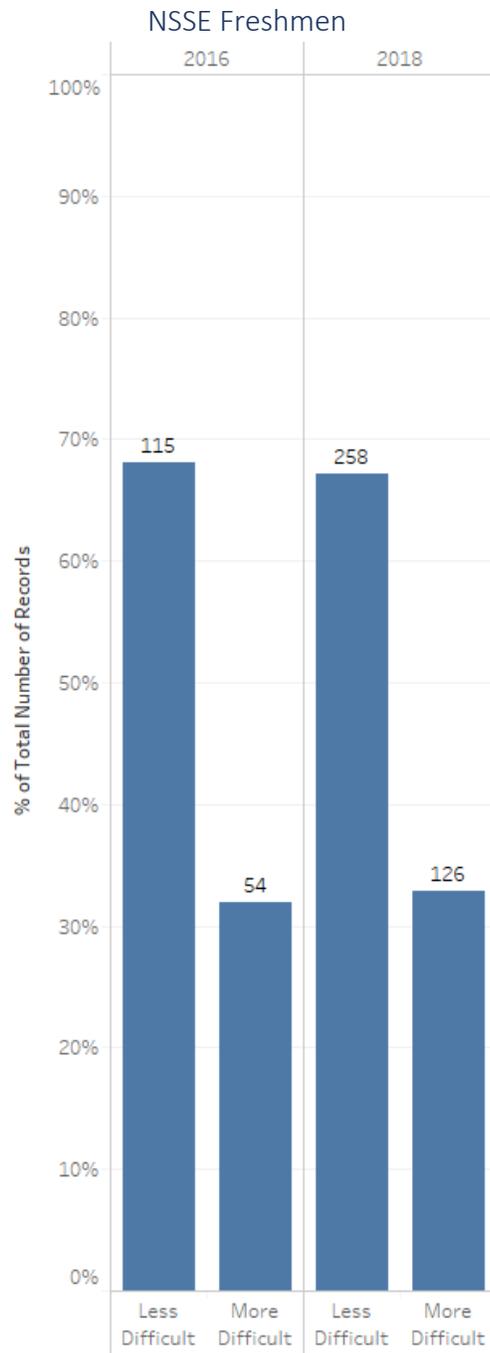
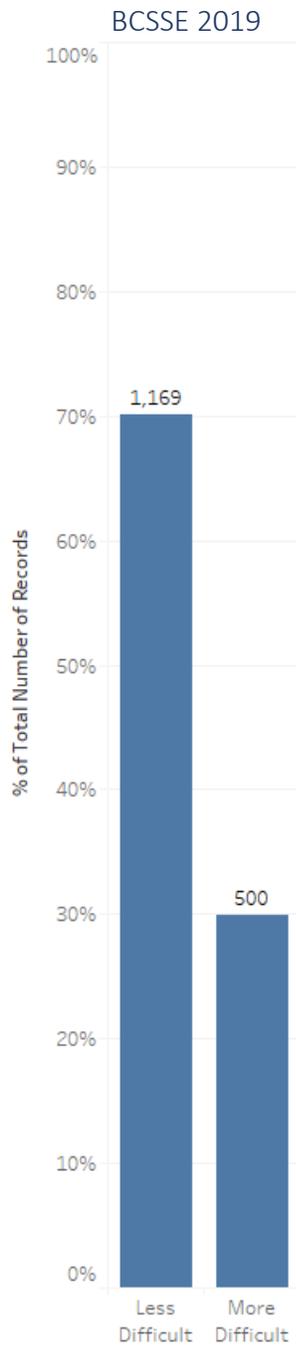
Question 2: Managing your time?



Question 3: Getting help with school work?



Question 4: Interacting with faculty?



## Academic Help-Seeking

BCSSE Survey Text: During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to seek help with coursework from the following sources?

NSSE<sup>5</sup> Survey Text: During the current school year, about how often have you sought help with coursework from the following sources?

*Response Options: Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often*

*Recoded Responses: Never / Sometimes, Often / Very Often*

### Analysis

BCSSE 2019 results indicate that a majority of incoming first-year students felt that they would frequently seek help with academic coursework from faculty members, academic advisors, learning support services, and friends or other students. The largest proportion of students noted that they would seek help relatively often from friends and other students (82%) and from learning support services (72%).

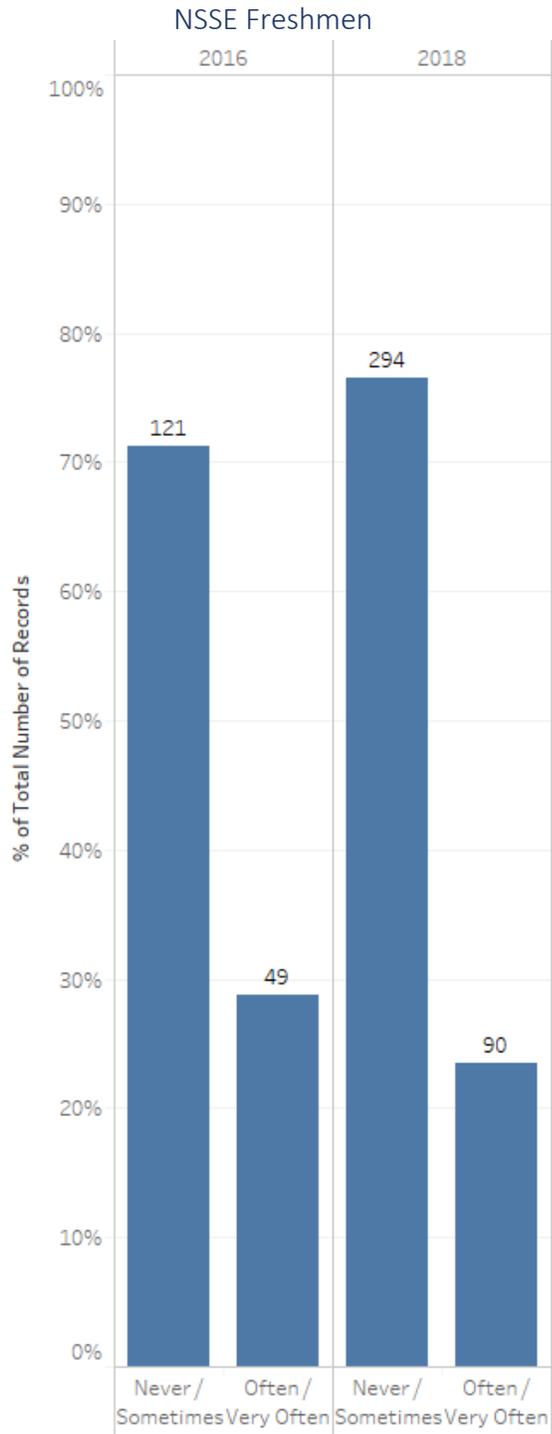
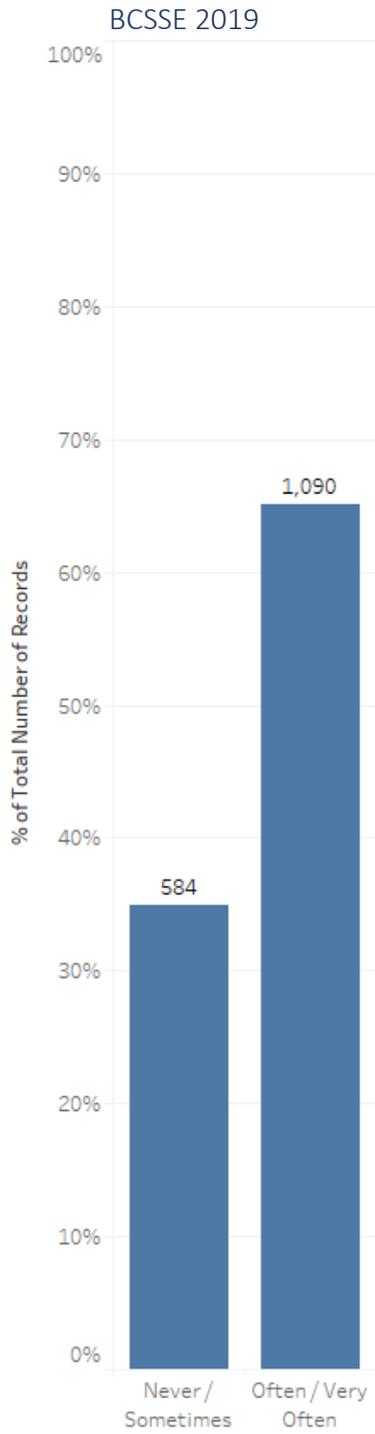
Historical NSSE responses from students finishing their first year of study in 2016 and 2018 contrast sharply with responses to three of the four BCSSE 2019 indicators, with the single exception being the stated frequency of seeking help from friends or other students. Notably, between 80% and 90% of respondents indicated that they either never or infrequently sought help from academic advisors, and between 70% and 80% of respondents indicated that they either never or infrequently sought help from faculty members and learning support services. If responses for freshmen in the 2020 NSSE cycle hold to this same pattern (expecting to engage in many help-seeking behaviors relatively frequently and actually engaging in such behaviors relatively infrequently), this may suggest potential concerns with the perceived availability, accessibility, and efficacy of these institutional support services amongst current first-year students, relative to the support available through friends and peers.

If this pattern does indeed bear out in the 2020 NSSE cycle, there are of course several interpretations of such a mismatch in the distribution of responses across the two surveys: some students either may not be pursuing, or may not feel they have access to, institutional assistance options to the degree they need to ensure academic success. However, for other students there is likely some over-estimation of the degree of support that they feel they will need relative to the actual degree of support required. Further analysis of these items in relation to covariates of academic success and likelihood to seek institutional support services would be needed to make such contrasting results more explicable. The misalignment of current first-year student expectations with historical student practices is certainly a potential area of concern.

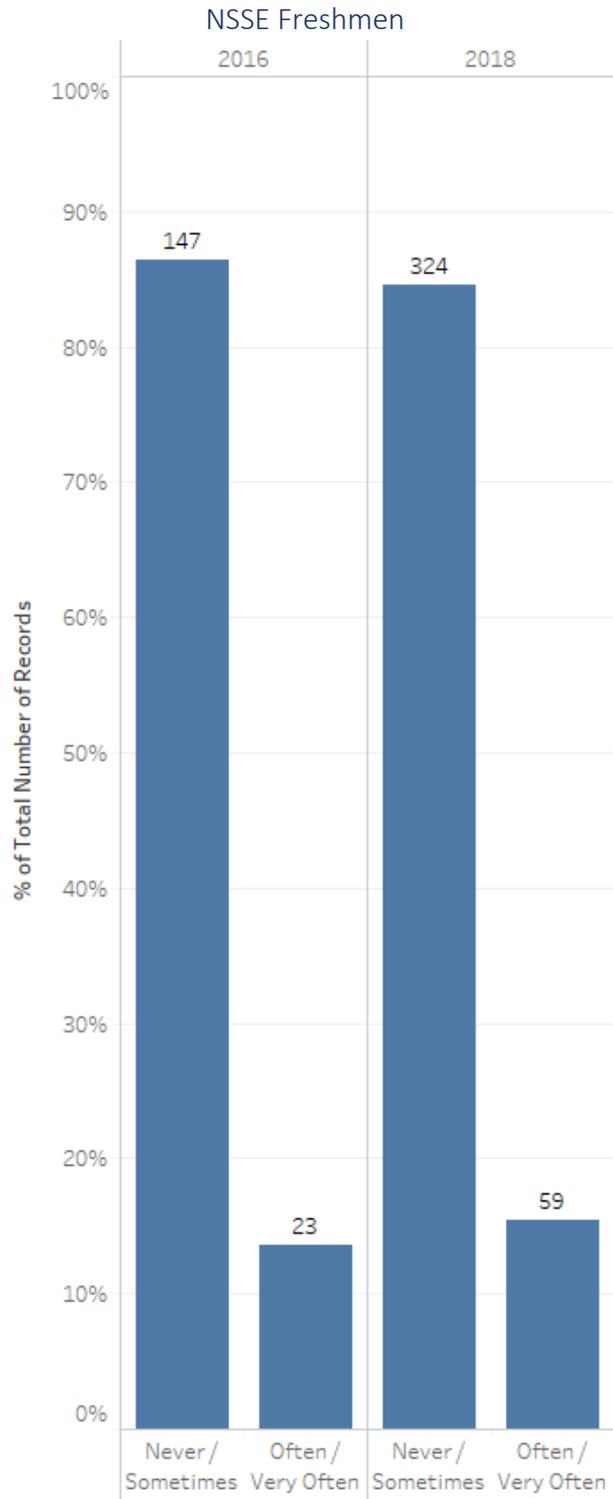
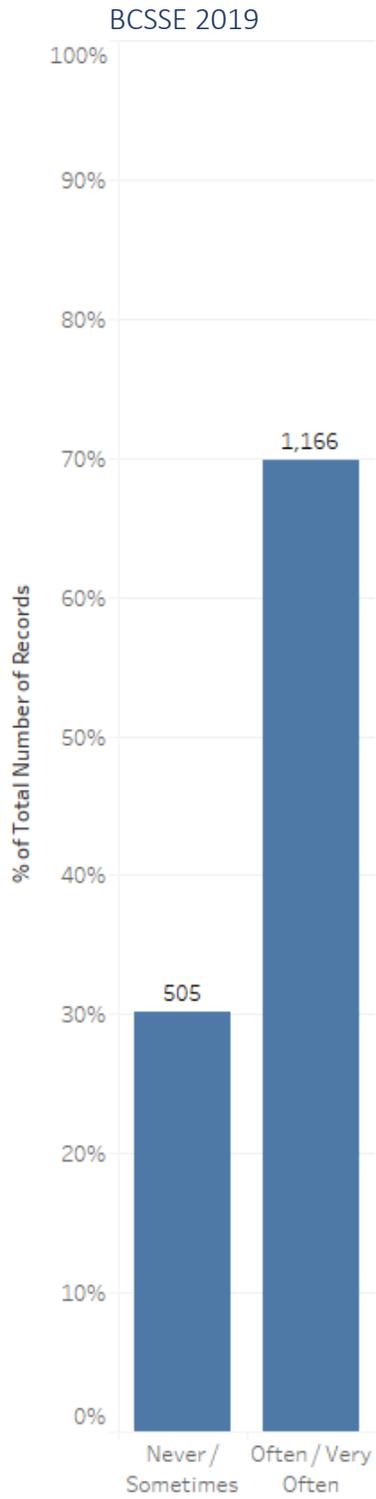
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<sup>5</sup> The parallel NSSE questions in this section were administered using an additional topical module, rather than the main NSSE questionnaire form, and thus data are only available for 2016 and 2018.

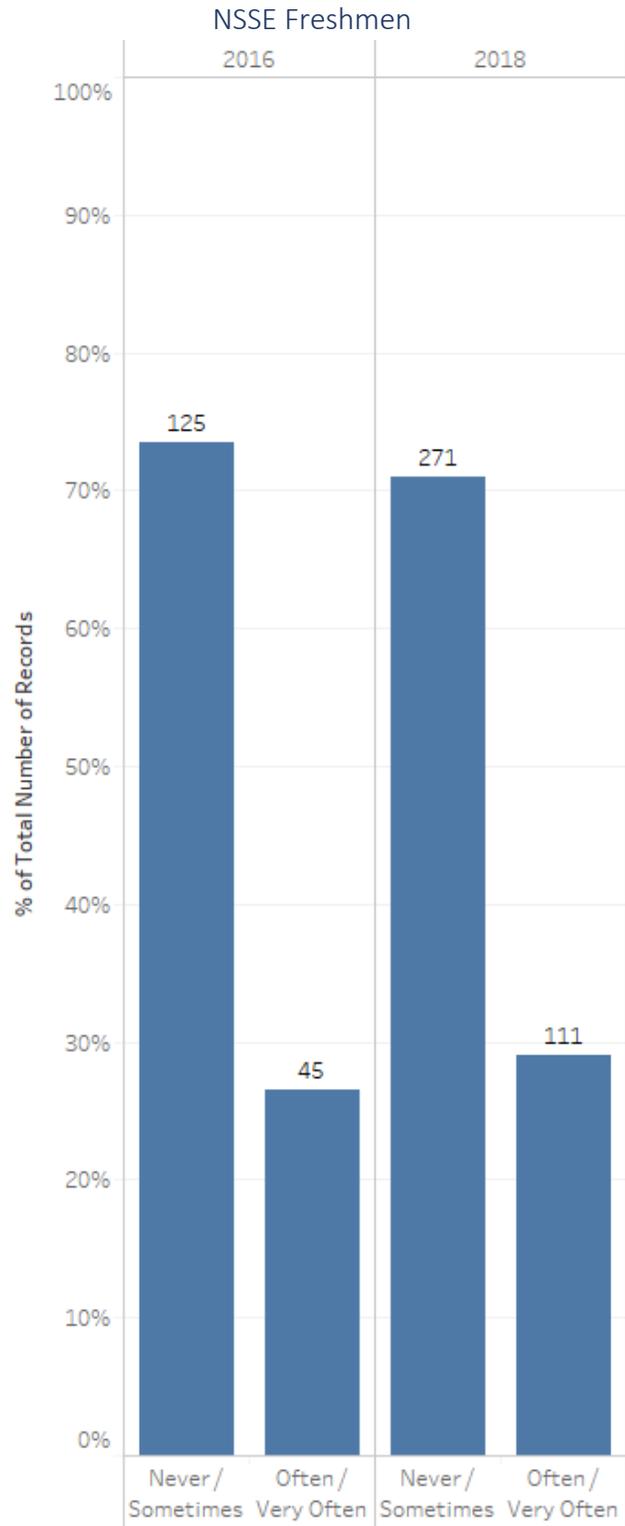
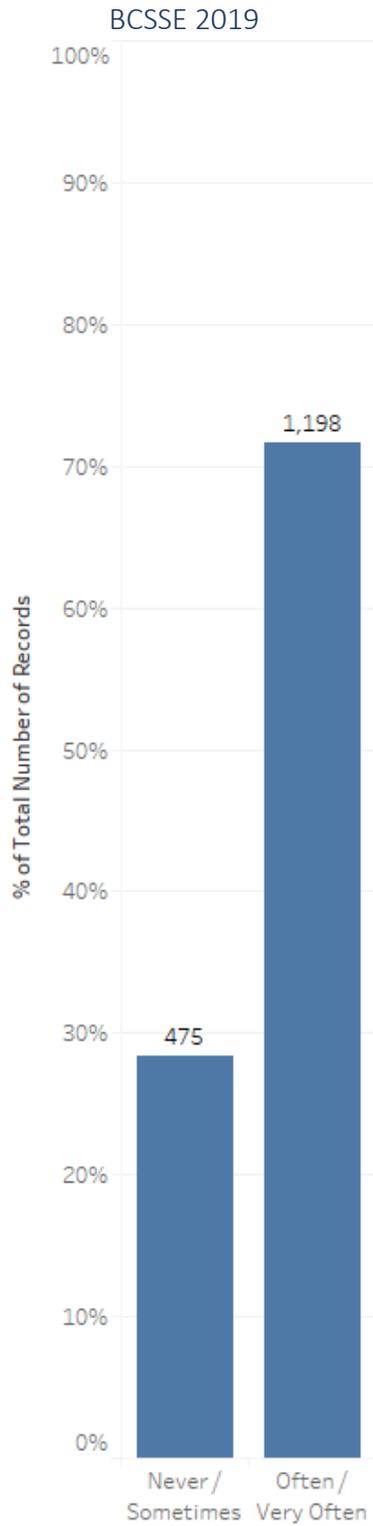
Question 1: Faculty members?



Question 2: Academic advisors?



Question 3: Learning Support Services?



Question 4: Friends or other students?

