

USING THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) TO INVESTIGATE THE WSCUC CORE GRADUATION COMPETENCIES

University of San Francisco

Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support

About NSSE

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a survey of first year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate education. While NSSE does not directly assess student learning, the survey does reflect self-reported behaviors associated with desired outcomes of an undergraduate education.

About this Report

In this report, we use NSSE to investigate how USF students evaluate their own mastery of the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) core graduation competencies. Outlined in WSCUC's (2013) [Handbook of Accreditation](#), the competencies are critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy. WSCUC requires colleges and universities to demonstrate student achievement in these domains.

Two sets of NSSE items were used to examine students' evaluation of their own mastery: perceived gains and confidence in ability. Perceived gains are defined as the extent to which students perceive that USF has contributed to their knowledge. These items were administered to USF first year and senior students and allowed us to assess four competencies: critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, and quantitative reasoning. Confidence in ability and skills is defined as the extent to which students feel good about their ability or skill to demonstrate the competencies. These items were administered to USF seniors only as a part of the Senior Transitions module administered in 2015 and 2016, but allowed us to assess all five of the competencies. The items presented in this report are a snapshot of the available NSSE data.

This report presents data from 2014 – 2017, the four years that USF administered NSSE since it was revised and piloted in 2012. We provide comparisons between first year and senior students, the four years in which NSSE was administered, and institutions to USF (Jesuit schools, Carnegie institutions with doctoral programs and moderate research activity, and in 2017, peer institutions of our choosing).

Summary

Perceived Gains

- Overall, first year and senior students favorably evaluated the gains made by their USF education in the four core graduation competencies examined (critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, and quantitative reasoning). For first year students, means range from 2.43 to 3.16 and for seniors, means range from 2.68 to 3.46 on a 4-pt. scale.
- The year-to-year trends in perceived gains are consistent for first year and senior students across the four competencies. When making comparisons between first year and senior students, seniors typically report higher perceived gains than first year students. In both 2016 and 2017, seniors reported higher perceived gains than first year students in all four of the core graduation competencies measured.
- Both first year and senior students are largely comparable to Jesuit schools and similar Carnegie and peer institutions in the area of the four competencies.

Confidence in Skills and Abilities

- Overall, seniors favorably evaluated their confidence in skills and abilities in the five core graduation competencies. For 2015, means range from 3.30 to 3.51 and for 2016, means range from 2.98 to 3.50 on a 4 pt. scale.
- The longitudinal trends in confidence in skills and ability are consistent for seniors across the five competencies examined (critical thinking, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, written communication, and information literacy) for the two years in which these questions were administered to participants.
- With the exception of information literacy, USF seniors are generally comparable to Jesuit schools and similar Carnegie institutions in their confidence in skills and abilities in the area of the five competencies. USF seniors are less confident in their information literacy skills compared to other Jesuit schools and similar Carnegie institutions.

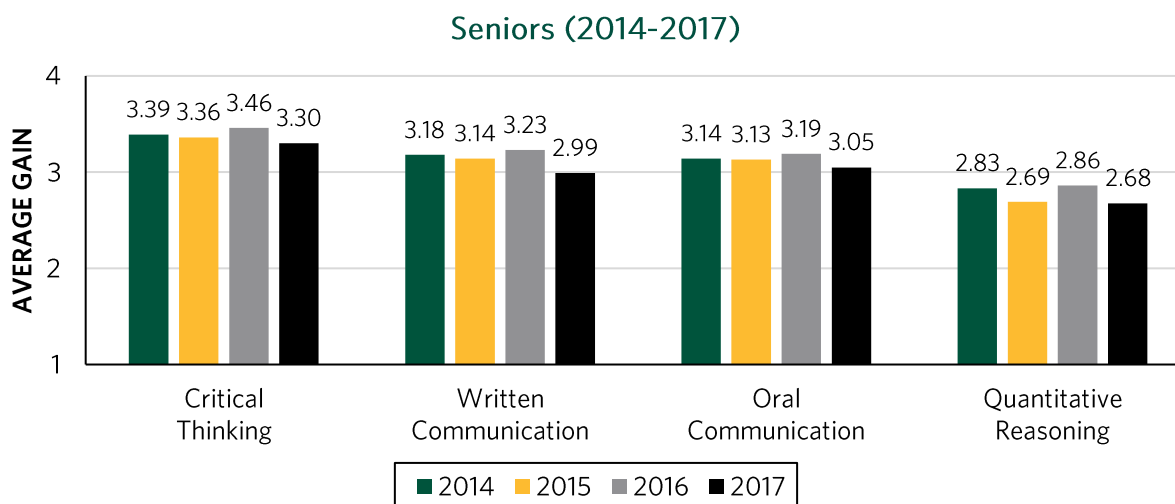
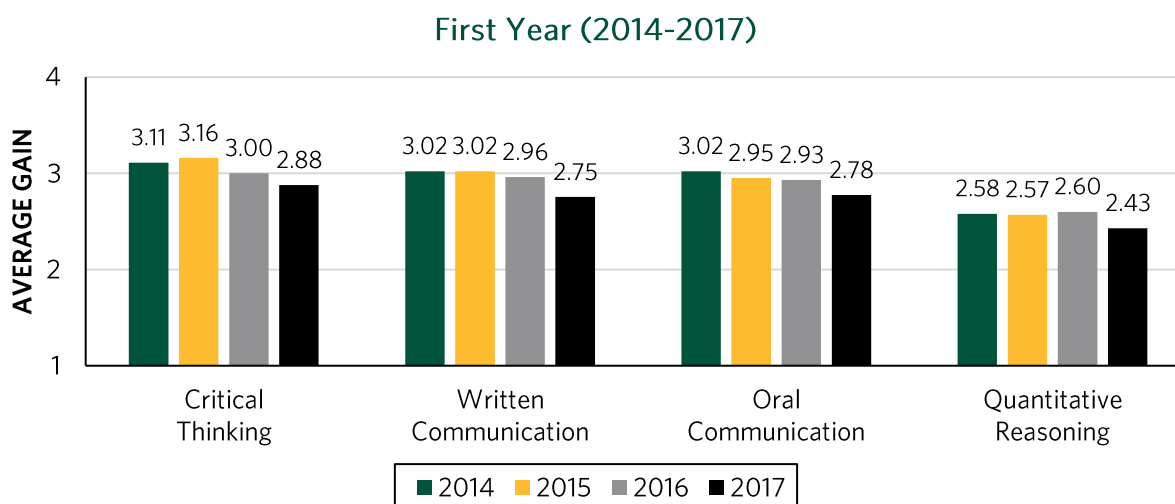
Perceived Gains

First year and senior students responded to “How much has the University of San Francisco contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?” using a 4 pt. scale (1 = *Very little*, 4 = *Very much*). Four items from this series were used to measure four of the five core graduation competencies. The competency appears in bold with the corresponding questionnaire item below:

1. **Critical thinking:** Thinking critically and analytically
2. **Written communication:** Writing clearly and effectively
3. **Oral communication:** Speaking clearly and effectively
4. **Quantitative reasoning:** Analyzing numerical and statistical information

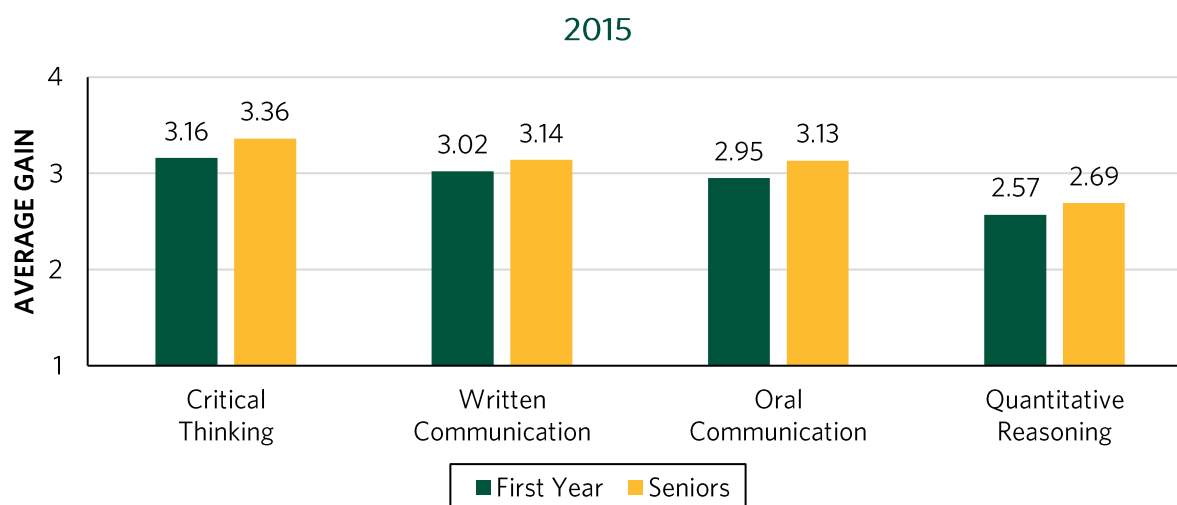
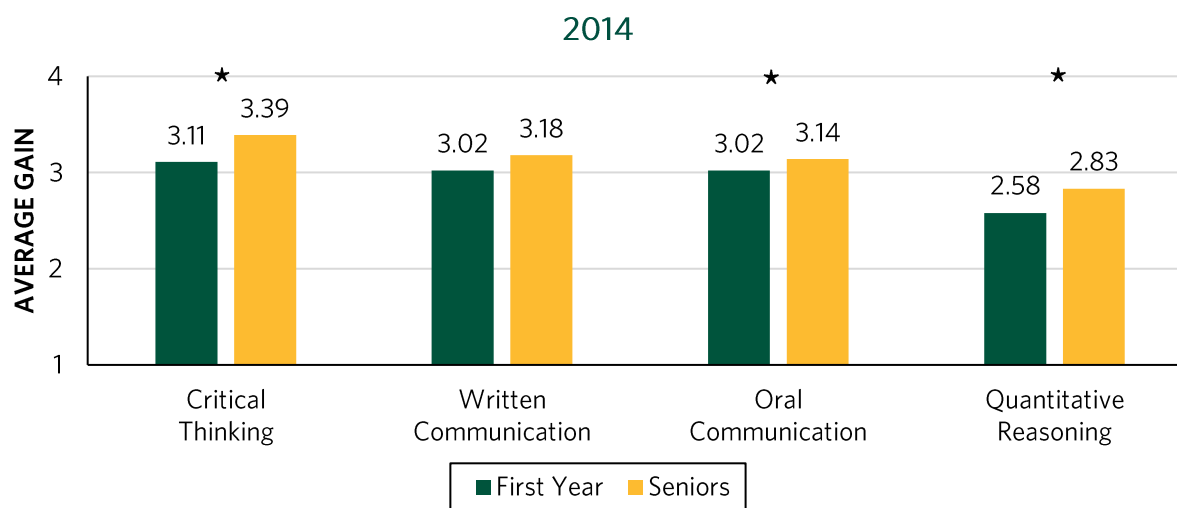
Year-to-Year Comparisons

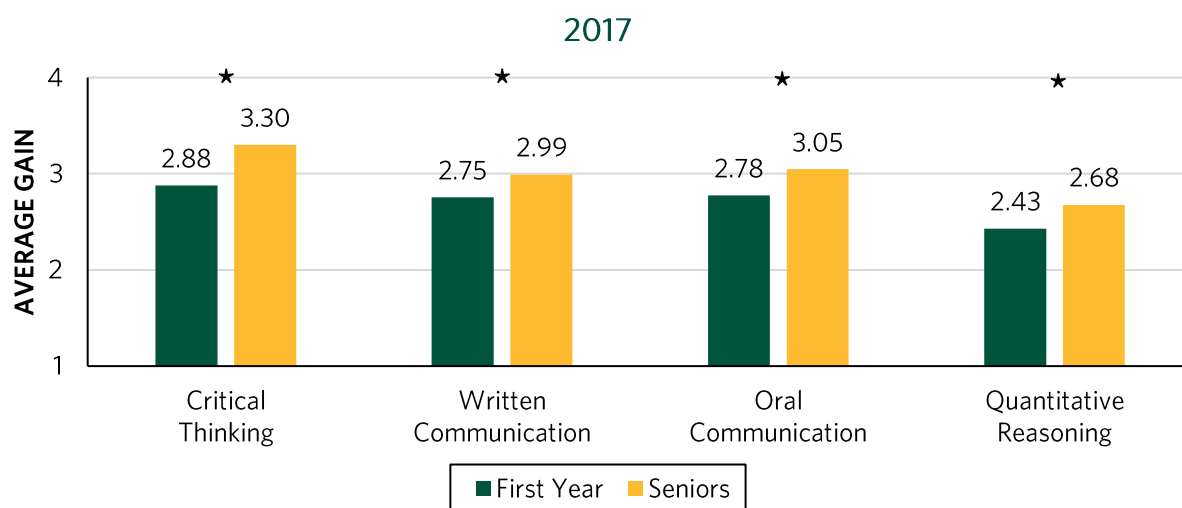
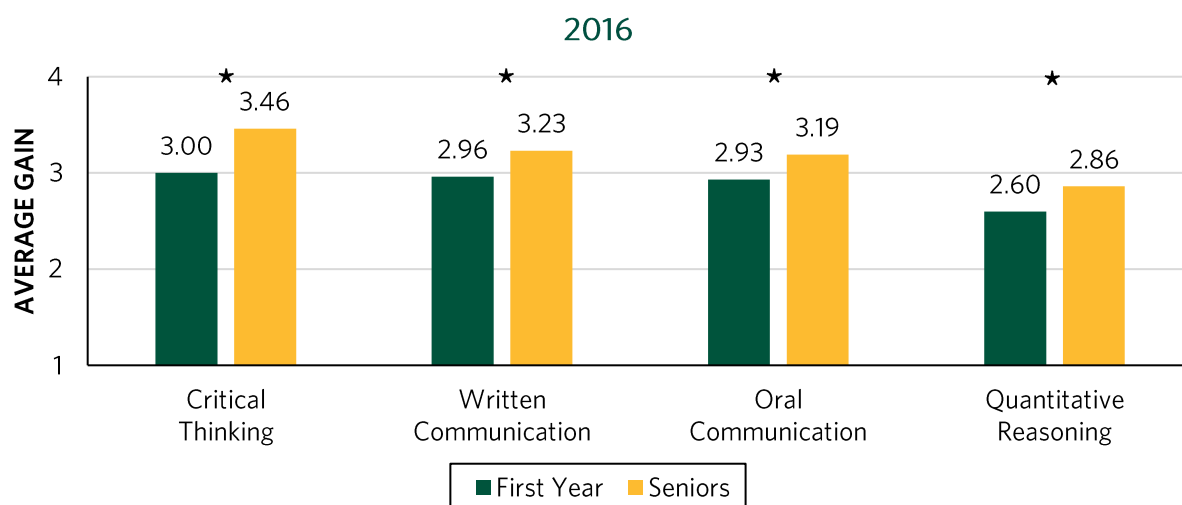
The figures below depict how much students, on average, perceive that USF has contributed to their knowledge, skills, and abilities for 2014 to 2017.



First Year to Senior Comparison

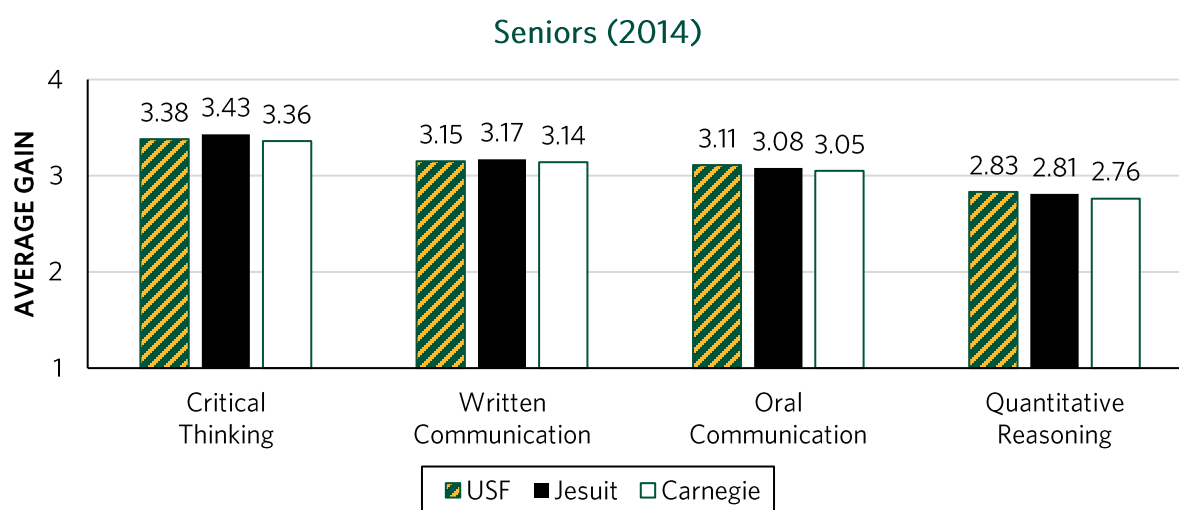
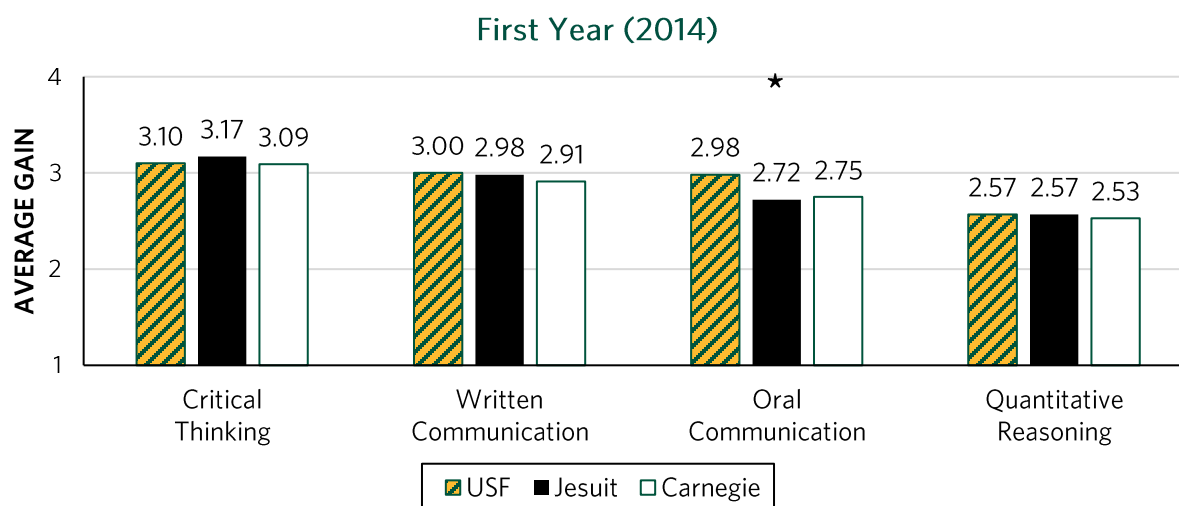
The figures below depict first year to senior comparisons by year. Significant differences between first year and seniors at $p < .05$ are denoted with an asterisk (*).

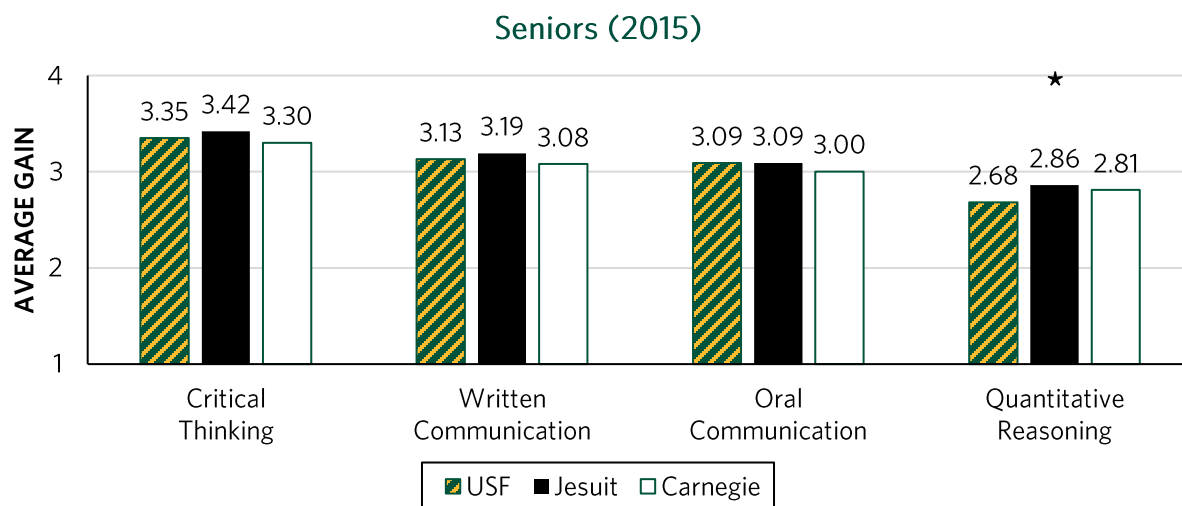
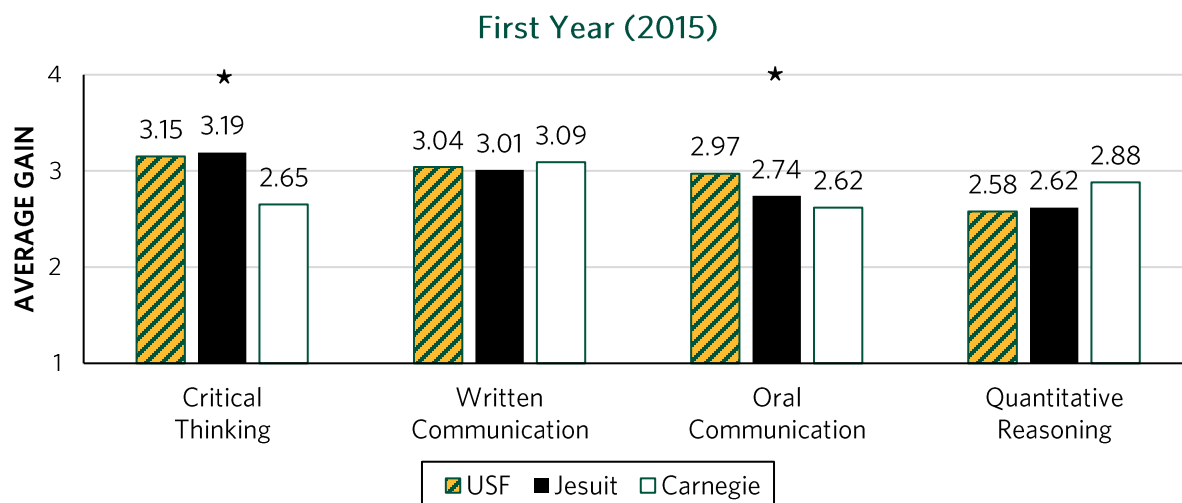


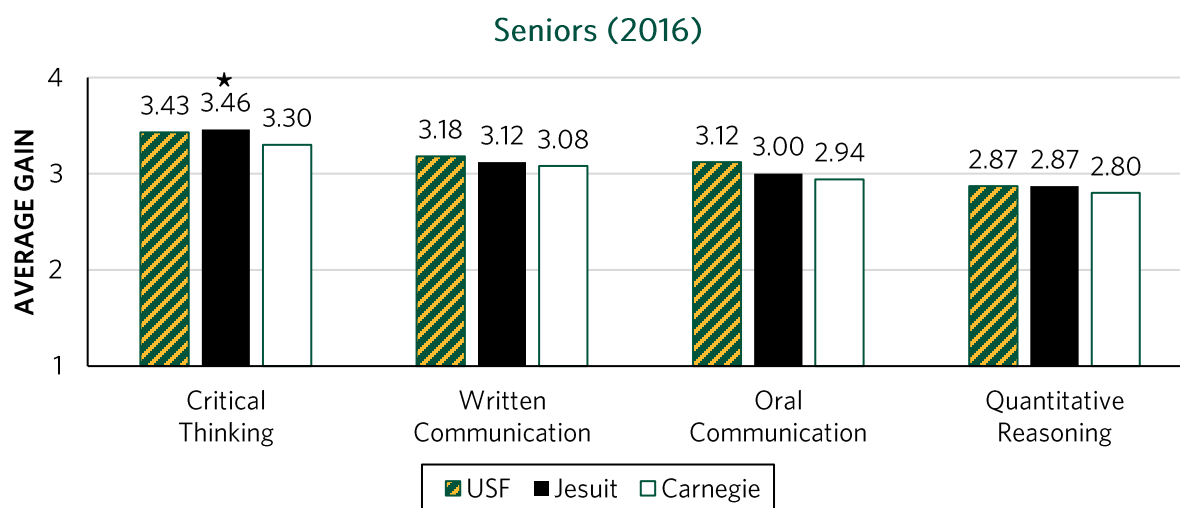
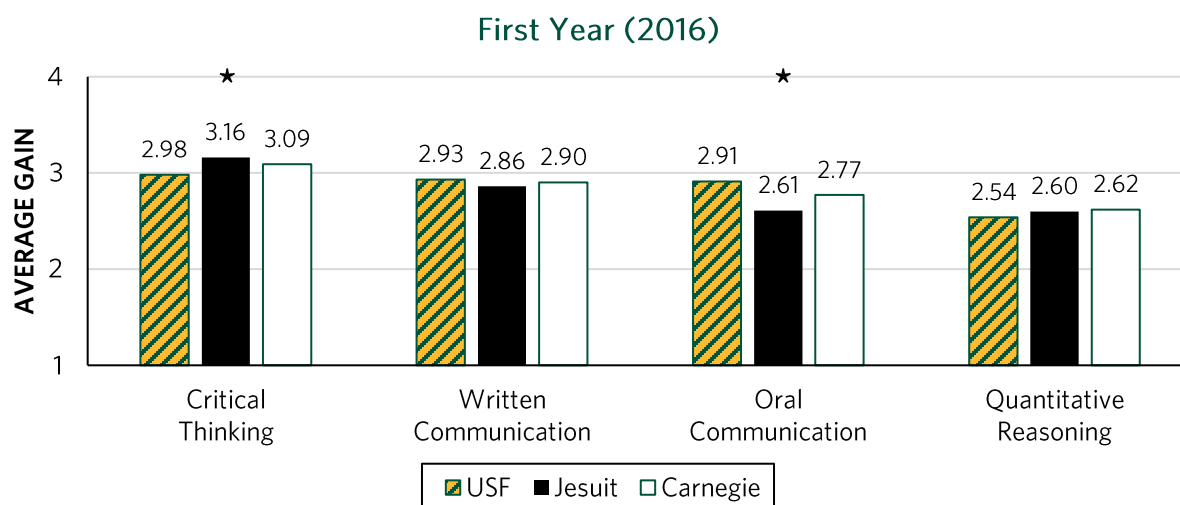


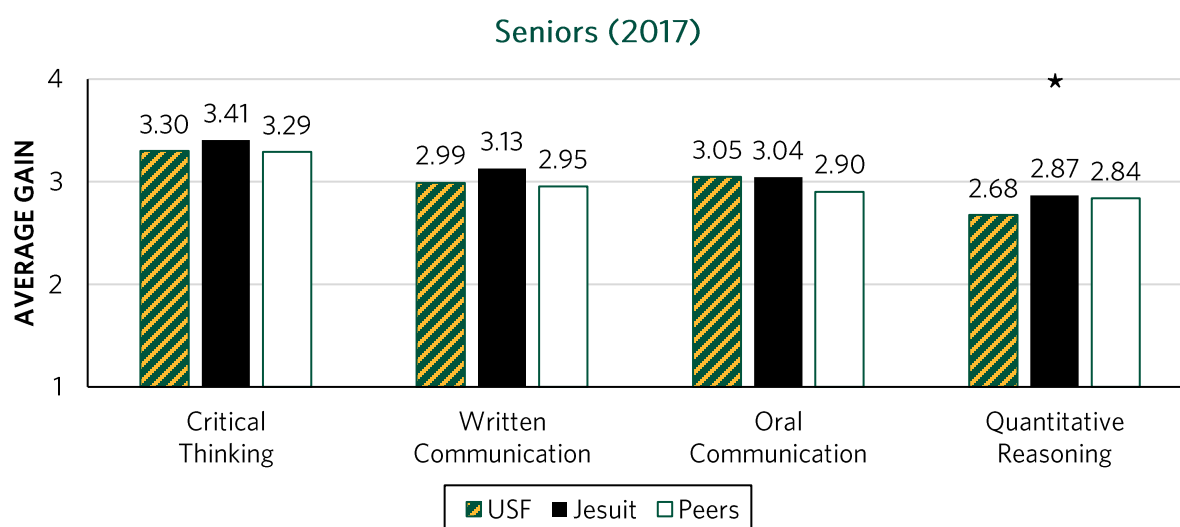
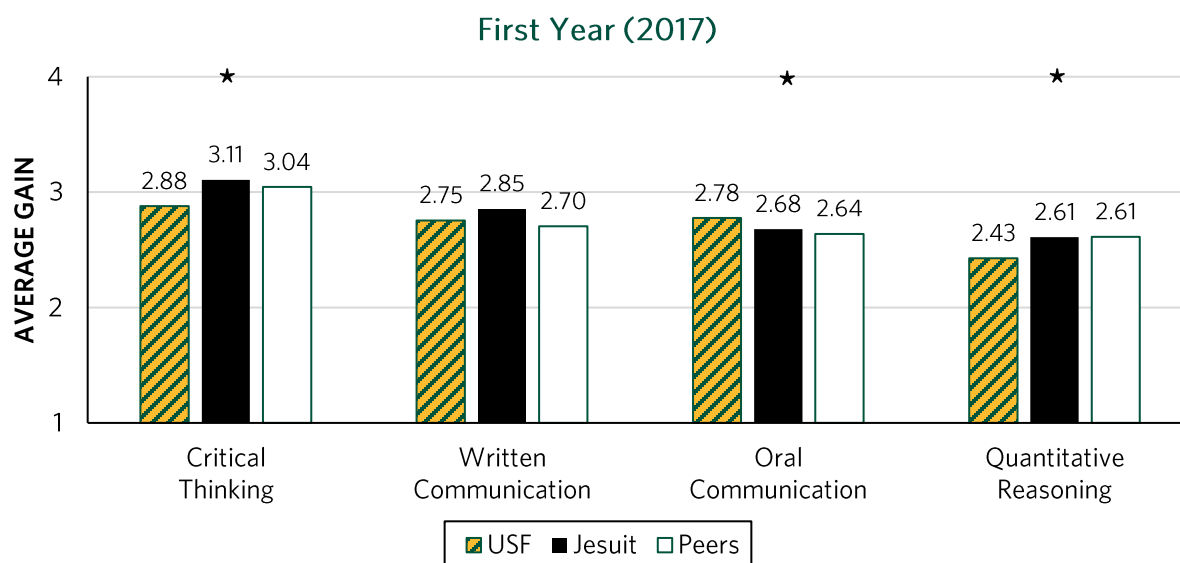
Institutional Comparisons

The figures below depict how USF compares to other Jesuit schools and similar Carnegie institutions. Significant differences between institutions at $p < .05$ are denoted with an asterisk (*).









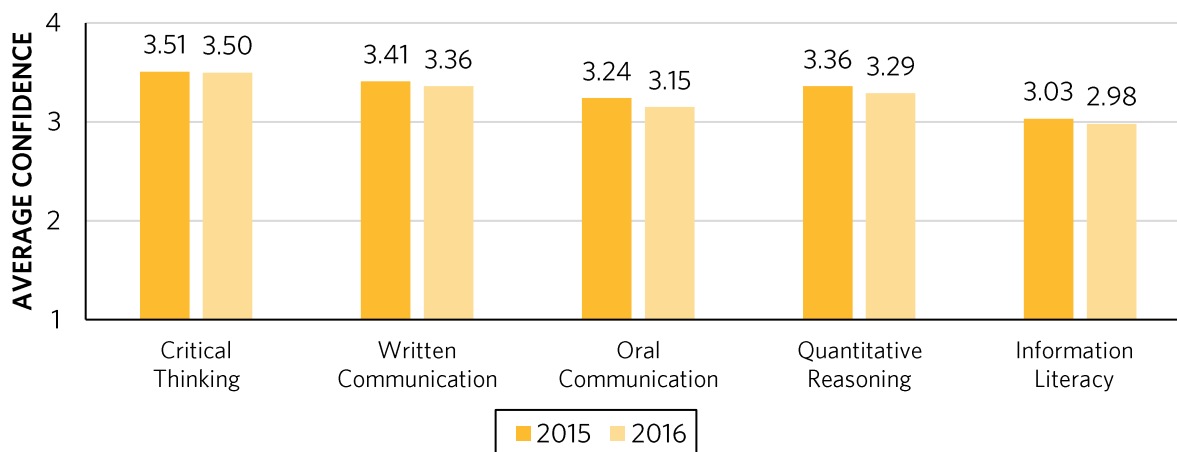
Confidence in Skills and Abilities

Seniors responded to “How much confidence do you have in your ability to complete tasks requiring the following skills and abilities?” on a 4-pt. scale (1 = *Very little*, 4 = *Very much*). Six items were used to measure the five core graduation competencies. The competency appears in bold with the corresponding questionnaire item below:

1. **Critical thinking:** a) Critical thinking and analysis of arguments, and b) information and Creative thinking and problem solving¹
2. **Oral communication:** Persuasive speaking
3. **Quantitative reasoning:** Research skills
4. **Written communication:** Clear writing
5. **Information literacy:** Technological skills

Year-to-Year Comparisons

The figure below depicts how confident seniors, on average, evaluate their skills and abilities relative to the five competencies for 2015 and 2016. First year students are not administered these items and seniors were not administered these items in 2014 and 2017.



¹ These two items were summed together and then averaged to create a single item.

Institutional Comparisons

The figures below depict how USF compares to other Jesuit schools and institutions with the same Carnegie classification. In 2015, there were not a sufficient number of Jesuit schools that were administered these items making comparisons unreasonable. Significant differences between institutions at $p < .05$ are denoted with an asterisk (*).

