



# National Survey of Student Engagement

## Using NSSE Data

### Introduction

Now seven years into the NSSE project, we continue to seek new examples of how student engagement data are being used across all sectors and types of institutions. The examples in this document represent a snapshot of changes in educational policy and practice informed by NSSE data, giving schools a broad overview of the possibilities for using their data in meaningful ways.

Several initiatives in the upcoming year at NSSE will provide opportunities for more in-depth exploration of the processes by which NSSE data can be incorporated into educational decision-making. The NSSE Institute continues to schedule regional workshops for NSSE users to help schools better interpret their results and learn how other institutions are using their data. The Institute is also developing a web resource that will collect more detailed examples to provide a richer guide for schools seeking to get the most from their data. Please share your success stories with us so other institutions can learn from your experience.

### Multiple Uses of NSSE

Because NSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practice, colleges and universities have found many different, productive ways to use survey results:

- Assessment and improvement
- Benchmarking
- Accountability
- Institutional research
- Accreditation & self-studies
- Retention
- General education reform
- Alumni outreach
- Grant writing
- Institutional advancement
- Faculty and staff development
- State system performance reviews

Later we describe how selected institutions are using their results. In most instances, a communication strategy is needed in order to get people to attend to and take interest in the findings.

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## Communicating Results Internally

Institutions often use several approaches to share their results. It's usually most effective to use a combination of dissemination activities.

### Selected Audiences

Targeting specific audiences that may have expressed an interest in, or that should be aware of, one or more aspects of the results can facilitate focused dialogue about implications of the findings for policy and practice.

Marlboro College published a NSSE article in its parent newsletter.

The College of Wooster published its means scores in the annual Fact Book, a resource distributed to their Board of Trustees. Results were also presented to the faculty as a way to provide credible evidence regarding various student needs and areas of improvement for the new strategic plan. Benchmark reports were presented to the Executive Staff, which makes decisions about new programs and modifications to existing ones.

When preparing NSSE reports and presentations for various campus constituencies, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay assessment services office highlights results that link to ongoing activities of the target audience. Reports indicate areas of relative strength and weakness and attempt to distill faulty beliefs about student engagement on campus.

### Campus Wide

To distribute NSSE results broadly, many schools post summaries of important findings and invite colleagues to review the full report online or by request through the appropriate office. Another way to share results is to post them to internal or public web sites or create displays in public areas such as student unions or dining halls.

To foster broad access to NSSE results, Adelphi University printed a large number of NSSE reports for distribution to faculty, administrators, staff, and trustees. Reports were also available on the campus intranet, and a four-page research bulletin summarizing NSSE and FSSE results was distributed to all full-time faculty and most staff.



*“We want to know how we are doing in a comparative fashion. It (NSSE) helped us see more clearly where we are doing very well and where we have room for improvement.”*

—Denise Doyle,  
Vice President of  
Academic and  
Student Affairs,  
University of the  
Incarnate Word

### NSSE TIP #1: NSSE on the Web

Many colleges and universities have disclosed some or all of their results on the Web. Publishing NSSE results on the Web in an appropriate way is not only a way to highlight institutional strengths, but can also demonstrate your school's commitment to quality improvement.

Some NSSE schools display their entire means and frequency reports. Others post selected results highlighting particular strengths or news releases emphasizing institutional participation and the importance of the study.

After an initial presentation reviewing NSSE general background, format, implementation rationale, mode of administration, and summary results, SUNY Plattsburgh scheduled a more interactive session to consider possible action plans. Following another brief NSSE overview, the audience was separated into groups with a specific dimension to review and use as a basis for improvement plans. These group discussions were then shared with the whole audience.

## Communicating Results Externally

Accreditors are the most common external audience for NSSE results. About one third of NSSE schools tell us that they are using their results, or expect to refer to them, in self-studies and accreditation reports. Examples can be found on page 8 of this document, and more detailed information is located in the Accreditation Toolkit section of the NSSE Institutional Report binder.

Governing boards, state oversight agencies, and university systems also see value in student engagement data. “We are using NSSE to help us improve institutional effectiveness and will develop systemwide norms on the five benchmarks of effective educational practice. Our goal is to enhance student success system wide,” said Pedro Reyes, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Planning and Assessment.

A number of colleges and universities provide information via news releases and special feature articles for student, local, and regional newspapers. Some of these are included on the NSSE web site at <http://www.nsse.iub.edu/news/index.htm>. Although some schools choose not to share their data with external audiences and use it solely for institutional improvement, others delay public data sharing until triangulation with other institutional data can provide greater context.

## Establishing Standards of Comparison

NSSE data serve a diagnostic function by identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses in terms of effective educational practices. Comparisons with peer institutions and the national averages help reveal aspects of institutional and student performance not readily available from other sources.

### Benchmarking

There are two basic approaches to benchmarking that NSSE schools are using. One or both may be appropriate, depending on your institution’s situation.

### Normative Approach

The normative approach compares your students’ responses to those of students at other colleges and universities. If enough students have participated, this can also be done at the department or major field level—a particularly effective way of stimulating faculty interest in the findings.

NSSE scores have been identified as key indicators of the University of Kentucky's goal to "attract and graduate outstanding students." Indicators have been pegged to the Institutional Engagement Index, with the goal to exceed the predicted levels of attainment for all five NSSE benchmarks.

### Why Schools Use NSSE

To participate in a national effort to improve undergraduate quality

To use a research-based, psychometrically sound tool

To compare performance against peer institutions

To compare first-year and senior student experiences, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches

To add a new, much-needed dimension to the institutional assessment strategy

To link information about student engagement and the teaching and learning environment

To incorporate student engagement results in self-studies, accreditation, and accountability

To guide and monitor institutional improvement

Source: Interviews with NSSE Participants

At the University of Puerto Rico in Humacao, NSSE's status as an independent research project with a broad representation of institutions facilitated greater faculty acceptance of normative comparisons.

### Criterion Approach

A second approach to benchmarking is criterion-referenced, whereby you compare your school's performance against a predetermined value or level that you and your colleagues deem appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth.

Washington State University's student affairs and enrollment management councils created student affairs division benchmarks based on NSSE items that will be related to budget and planning decisions.

University of Wisconsin-Stout has set NSSE benchmarks for themselves within the context of their strategic plan. Several strategic indicators were set for each goal in the plan, and NSSE represents one of the indicators the school is tracking to measure success.

Responding to a proposal to implement performance funding in the state of Washington, The Evergreen State College identified several NSSE indicators as performance contract measures (e.g. participation in community service, internships, and NSSE benchmarks). Although performance funding has not been enacted, the exploration process exposed legislative liaisons and college decision-makers at other Washington public baccalaureate institutions to the NSSE benchmarks and other NSSE indicators, which Evergreen uses as measures for its mandatory annual state accountability review. Evergreen also tracks several NSSE indicators of growth in learning, participation in diversity activities and other enriching educational experiences, and quality of academic advising as part of their annual assessment of general education for accreditation purposes.

### Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of NSSE early adopters, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating NSSE data in institutional change efforts. Details can be found on pages 18-20 of the NSSE 2002 Annual Report, available on the Web at [http://www.nsse.iub.edu/2002\\_annual\\_report/index.htm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/2002_annual_report/index.htm).

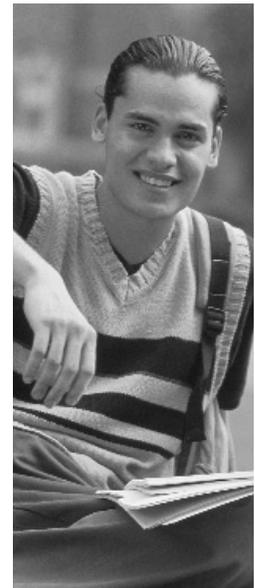
1. **Make sure faculty and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.** The value of student engagement results to improving teaching and learning needs to be convincingly explained to those faculty less familiar with assessment in general and the engagement concept in particular.
2. **Collect results from enough students so the information is usable at the department or unit level.** Surveying more students than called for by NSSE's standard sampling strategy can allow schools to drill down to the department or unit level, which may increase faculty interest in using engagement data.
3. **Understand what student engagement data represent and use the results wisely.** It takes time, perspective, and experience to understand and make the best use of NSSE results.

### How Schools Communicate NSSE Results

<i>Internal Use</i>	%
President	85
Faculty Members	77
Administrative Staff	75
Department Chairs	72
Academic Advisors	54
Governing Board	38
Students	33
Other (web site, fact book, etc.)	19
<i>External Use</i>	%
Accreditation Agencies	34
Web Site	23
Media	16
Prospective Students	12
Alumni	12
Parents	11
State Agencies	12
Professional Conference Presentation	11
Other	34
No External Disclosure	12

Source: NSSE 2004 Report Card

4. **Report student engagement results in a responsible way.** NSSE encourages schools to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of collegiate quality and promote institutional improvement efforts.
5. **Don't allow the numbers to speak for themselves.** Every number and comparison reported should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results. Unclear results can provide opportunities for dialogue that can provide greater clarity.
6. **Examine the results from multiple perspectives.** Use peer comparisons to confirm or challenge assumptions about performance quality, but also consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement in the context of the school's mission. It is also wise to compare the engagement levels of specific student groups, such as first-year women students or seniors in various majors.
7. **Link the results to other information about the student experience and complementary initiatives.** The positive impact of student engagement results will be multiplied if the data can be made relevant to groups of faculty and staff working on different reform efforts around the campus.
8. **Don't go it alone.** Experts argue that the chances of successful innovation improve when campus teams are formed and institutions work together in consortial arrangements on topics of mutual interest. Greater success may be achieved when institutions develop these partnerships at the start of a NSSE administration cycle to make early decisions about strategic use of the data.



“The ability to compare to other similar schools has great traction here as we have a ‘world class’ slogan we are trying to live up to and these results help us see how far we have to go.”

—Randy Jorgensen,  
Associate Director of  
Student Affairs  
Research and  
Assessment,  
Washington State  
University

## Institutional Improvement Examples

In this section we've grouped examples of how colleges and universities are using NSSE data into the following categories: civic engagement, general education, technology, active and collaborative learning, first-year experience, involving students in interpreting NSSE data, enriching the undergraduate experience, faculty and staff development, enrollment management and recruiting, accreditation, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environment, and planning and accountability.

### NSSE TIP #2: Peer Comparisons

To assist in benchmarking efforts, NSSE allows schools to select other participating institutions for peer comparison reports with a minimum of six schools in the aggregated request.

Starting with the 2005 administration, in addition to the standard comparison groups, schools not already participating as part of a consortium or state system were given the opportunity to select an additional group of peer institutions within the 2005 survey cohort at no charge.

NSSE also conducts specialized analyses on an as-needed basis to assist schools in answering specific questions (e.g. how do our women engineering students compare with other women engineering students from across the country?). The fees for special analyses are based upon time required to complete the project. Please contact your NSSE representative for more details.

### **Civic Engagement**

The American Democracy Project, a joint venture of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and The New York Times, seeks to increase undergraduate participation in civic life. NSSE's assessment of student and civic engagement at participating colleges and universities will help gauge the effectiveness of programs designed to foster this involvement.

### **General Education**

Occidental College triangulates its general education assessment by rotating NSSE, the College Student Survey, and Higher Education Data Sharing surveys on its campus. A recent review of these data showed Occidental lagging behind peers in the area of scientific literacy, prompting faculty to begin investigating ways to improve this.

As the result of its participation in the BEAMS program, Spelman College has decided to focus on developing critical thinking through an emphasis on student writing. They used the NSSE items related to writing assignments to assess the current student experience in this area, and will use subsequent administrations for indications of change.

Information generated from NSSE and subsequent discussions at Taylor University indicated a need to develop support for a more engaged model of teaching on campus. The result was the development of the "Center for Teaching Excellence," designed to facilitate effective teaching and student learning on campus.

Faculty at Illinois State University have begun adjusting their courses and teaching practices based on their growing awareness of the student learning experience at their school. Consideration of their NSSE data has spurred a focus on educational quality within academic departments and university administration.

Dickinson State University revised its general education requirements to include more coursework in critical thinking and multicultural areas, as well as placing more emphasis on reading, writing assignments, and internship placement.

One of Plymouth State College's general education goals is for students to develop "an appreciation of the process by which different approaches to scholarship can be brought to bear on the same problem." NSSE items related to problem solving, analyzing, and synthesizing, combined with items regarding writing, speaking, and listening informed the decision to infuse these elements throughout the general education program.

### **Technology**

Saint Xavier University faculty used NSSE data in their application for a Title III grant to increase retention through student engagement and technology.

Lower scores on the use of computing and information technology at Saint Louis University prompted initial concern after NSSE 2002. The more detailed experimental items about technology on NSSE 2003 provided greater context that clarified there was not as much reason for concern as originally thought.



## **NSSE Research**

The following publications provide detailed information about national data and benchmarks.

**NSSE Viewpoint** — This annual publication provides a condensed overview of NSSE findings for that year as well as guidelines for interpreting the data.

**Annual Report** — The annual report summarizes major findings for the year and highlights ways that schools are using NSSE data to improve collegiate quality at their institutions. The report also outlines the NSSE conceptual framework and lists which schools have participated.

**NSSE Technical and Norms Report** — This report provides technical and statistical information, in addition to descriptive statistics for first-year students and seniors, broken down by class, sex, race, age, enrollment status, major field of study, and by Carnegie classification.

**Comparative Data on NSSE Benchmarks** — Tables on NSSE's web site show the specific items that make up the benchmarks by class and by Carnegie classification. Another column reports results for schools scoring in the top 5 percent nationally.

**Research Papers** — NSSE staff have published a number of articles focusing on specific areas of the results, as well as the research methodology. Details can be found on our website (<http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/research.htm>).

## **Active and Collaborative Learning**

Research shows students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings.

Collaborating with others in solving problems prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily, during and after college.

At the University of Charleston (West Virginia), increasing faculty awareness of students' perceptions about their engagement has encouraged efforts to support active learning and co-curricular development of team-building, leadership skills, and service-learning opportunities that are beginning to receive academic credit as part of their outcome-based learning environment.

For nearly a decade, Cal State University-Chico has been emphasizing Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, which highlights active learning as a core practice. Because NSSE is grounded in these principles, this institution used it to assess efforts in these areas. Faculty are encouraged to engage students earlier in the semester and implement the seven principles in their classrooms.

## **Supportive Campus Environment**

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success as well as the working and social relations among different groups on campus.

NSSE results at the University of Dubuque pointed to the need for a stronger focus on working students and those who travel long distances for classes.

Noting a higher proportion of its students were working off campus, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has concentrated on increasing need-based financial aid and developing campus employment opportunities.

At the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, NSSE results have been used as an indicator of the institutional goal to "provide a campus environment that fosters learning and personal growth."

Kalamazoo College secured funding to bring together faculty, staff, and students to explore lower-than-predicted scores in the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark. The resulting report and recommendations for improvement will be shared with the campus community.



### **Involving Students in Interpreting NSSE Data**

Some schools are making strong efforts to share their NSSE data with undergraduates and interpret the results in ways that are meaningful for students. Student representatives are included on assessment committees at some institutions. Sharing results with student government and other student organizations is a typical way to inform students.

A market research course at William Woods University used NSSE data as part of a year-long learning exercise. Students developed focus groups to explore how their peers interpreted the vocabulary and questions from the survey instrument as a way to understand better what student responses might really mean. They zeroed in on areas where they thought William Woods students might interpret survey items differently, such as how equestrian science students might answer a question about time spent on homework when much of their work is done in stables.

At Oregon State University, first-year students in a leadership development program examined assessment data, including NSSE results, as a way to learn how to make informed decisions about organizational improvement. Students were allowed to plan how they would use the information to lead in a positive direction. The students presented recommendations based on their analysis to administrators, who used this information to make institutional changes.

### **Enriching the Undergraduate Experience**

Several schools have responded to their NSSE results by increasing opportunities to study abroad, adding service-learning components to courses, creating living-learning communities, and further developing capstone experiences for seniors.

### **NSSE Tip #3: Using NSSE Multimedia Resources to Increase Awareness and Buy-in**

A professionally produced video as well as a PowerPoint template into which you can insert institution-specific results is included with the institutional reports as a tool for introducing the student engagement construct and how NSSE measures it.

Schools can use these materials as part of faculty workshop sessions or presentations to student government or trustees to give an overview of what NSSE entails.

In order to encourage student involvement in summer research with faculty, Centre College has increased student stipends and expanded the number of research opportunities in the grants they seek.

A review of NSSE data by a Jackson State University team representing a cross section of university faculty and staff recommended stronger encouragement for students to join professional organizations related to their major.

Faculty at Towson University used NSSE data as a starting point and dug deeper into the research on effective educational practice in which NSSE is grounded. One strategy that emerged was to implement capstone experiences, prompting faculty in several academic programs to begin exploring ways to add capstone experiences to their curricula.

After discovering their students did not compare favorably to peer institutions in the area of interacting with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, the University of Wisconsin-Platteville initiated a series of campus discussions on topics such as multiracial dating. They also created diversity advocate groups that implement multicultural activities in residence halls.

In an effort to increase student volunteerism as measured by NSSE, the University of Kentucky has implemented several initiatives: development of a Student Volunteer Center as a clearinghouse for information on volunteer opportunities; creation of the UK Fusion program that takes students to various community venues for a day of service; expansion of living-learning communities, including one that may focus on community service; and efforts to introduce students to the larger Lexington community through the freshman orientation seminar. NSSE data will be used to compare courses that utilize service-learning versus those that do not.

### **Faculty and Staff Development**

NSSE results may be appropriate for faculty and staff development workshops and retreats, such as those sponsored by the local chapter of The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL). Presenting student engagement data is one way to initiate discussions about a variety of teaching and learning issues, and the use of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) can be used to compare faculty and student perceptions.

*“I think it (NSSE) has prompted administrative cohesion in addressing some of our shortcomings. It was easier to convene a team, given that data were available to document the actual areas needing improvement.”*

—Debra Buchanan  
Vice Provost,  
Jackson State  
University

### **NSSE Tip #4: Linking NSSE Data with Other Sources**

NSSE results can and should be linked to other data sources on campus to determine whether improvement efforts are having the desired effect.

Some schools want multiple years of data before taking action. Other institutions corroborate NSSE results with existing evidence and are confident in moving ahead to address areas of concern, such as student use of technology, increasing the amount of assigned reading and writing in certain majors, and quality of academic advising.

Comparing NSSE and FSSE results helps Drake University faculty explore differences and similarities between faculty and student views of the classroom experience in relation to the Drake mission statement and mission explication. Starting in 2006, Drake will add data from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) to better understand the impact of the first-year experience.

Grand View College hosted an open forum for faculty and staff to discuss their data and develop action plans based on the concerns they identified. Starting with small group sessions that devised improvement plans in areas where they scored below national or comparison group norms, the larger group then narrowed the focus to a list of top concerns. Plans were then posted on the college website where all faculty and staff could access them, and the College Success Committee has woven these ideas into overall campus planning.

The University of Hawai'i-Hilo used NSSE results to demonstrate to faculty how it measures areas of desired improvement with relation to Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven principles for good practice in higher education*. Experienced UH-Hilo faculty then led workshops about those practices, using examples such as a large lecture class where active learning was fostered by calling students up on stage to dance out the structure of DNA. Other faculty discussed ways to involve students in community research projects.

### **Enrollment Management and Recruiting**

NSSE data are also used to provide more accurate and realistic descriptions of campus life to prospective students and parents. Some schools use NSSE data to present empirically-derived portraits of the typical student in viewbooks, recruitment literature, brochures, and gatherings of prospective students to accurately convey expectations for college life. Others use NSSE results to guide decisions about institutional size.

By looking at NSSE results from first-year students, Antioch College gets a better feel for current attitudes and backgrounds of its students to inform future student recruiting efforts.

NSSE findings indicating a marked decline in student engagement at institutions with an undergraduate student body exceeding 4,000 were used to support a recommendation for Butler University's strategic planning initiative to limit the size of their student body for the next five years.

By disaggregating NSSE data on seniors according to those who entered as first-year students compared to those who entered as transfer students, Towson University began to realize their limited understanding of the transfer student experience at their institution. As a result, they are administering the CIRP to all incoming transfers as well as first-year students and will oversample seniors in their next NSSE administration to develop a fuller portrait of the transfer student experience.



*Western Illinois University uses NSSE "to help develop a culture of assessment on our campus by emphasizing evaluation, feedback, and change as a necessary cycle of improvement."*

—Teresa North  
Assistant to the Vice  
President for  
Student Services,  
Western Illinois  
University

Indiana University Bloomington, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and other schools link first-year student NSSE data with fall sophomore enrollment records to discover student engagement factors that predict persistence, with an eye toward developing an early warning system to identify students at risk of premature departure.

The NSSE pocket guide, *College. What You Need to Know Before You Go*, provides prospective students with a list of questions organized around NSSE benchmarks to help them focus on issues of student engagement as they investigate various college options. The guide is provided free to high school guidance offices as well as college and university admissions offices. Schools with NSSE data can design publications and train staff to answer the questions students might ask based on this guide.

### **Accreditation**

As mentioned earlier, about one third of NSSE schools use student engagement data in accreditation, both for regional and discipline-specific reviews (teacher education, social work, music, nursing, business, etc.). For more information on applying NSSE to accreditation please see our Accreditation Toolkit, which is available under a tab in the Institutional Report binder or at the NSSE website: <http://www.nsse.iub.edu>. The toolkit provides guidelines for using NSSE in accreditation self-study and maps NSSE items to accreditation body standards.

Marlboro College credits NSSE for providing focus to their efforts to track and analyze data on student experiences, which helped them provide the assessment data sought by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Rockhurst University's assessment office prepared a NSSE report to include with its progress report to the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Rockhurst education department and the school of management are also using NSSE data in their accreditation self-studies.

The external review of Ursinus College by the Middle States Periodic Review noted that the school's overall performance on the NSSE survey and the Project DEEP team visitation concurred with their findings. The reviewers also noted that "Ursinus seems to understand the adage that assessment involves 'multiple measures over time.' And the college also is willing to spend the time necessary for the analysis of the results of its assessment activities and make changes based on them."

*"We are able to analyze the results of the NSSE in the context of our institution's student outcomes assessment framework, which helps our institution — as well as our individual schools, colleges, and programs — actually use the data for assessment purposes."*

—Ken Boning,  
Research  
Coordinator  
Saint Louis  
University

### **NSSE Tip #5: Faculty Development Activity**

Before reviewing any NSSE data, start the dialogue by using institutional written materials (mission statements, course bulletins, etc.) to bring the focus on shared learning objectives. Then these objectives can be linked to NSSE findings that indicate the degree of success in specific areas.

Once these linkages have been made, provide an opportunity for small groups of faculty to discuss specific programs or teaching practices that could improve student learning along desired dimensions. Use these ideas as a guide for active shaping of educational policy and practice.

(Based on a successful program at Drew University)

### **Student-Faculty Interaction**

The level of student interaction with faculty members is a frequently expressed concern. For instance, some small liberal arts colleges were surprised to find that students did not report as much contact with faculty as institutional leaders expected. NSSE results related to student-faculty interaction are also disquieting for many research-intensive universities.

NSSE data were used as a foundation for creating a first-year student mentoring program at Thomas University.



Regis College implemented a new mentoring program for members of the Class of 2007 who experienced academic difficulty their first year, plus a mentoring program for the Class of 2008 for the first six weeks of the academic year.

Based on a discussion of their student-faculty interaction results, Pace University is discussing the following action steps: providing more informal places for faculty and students to meet, developing more faculty-student seminars, increasing faculty availability before and after class to supplement face-to-face instruction, and providing more opportunities for students to research with faculty.

### **First-Year Experience**

The Policy Center on the First Year of College has adopted NSSE as one of the assessment measures for its “Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year” study, a project aimed at detailing the nature of high-achieving programs for students entering college at a variety of colleges and universities.

Brigham Young University-Hawaii initiated a first-year experience program and learning communities with a limited number of freshmen based on a review of NSSE results related to first-year students.

NSSE data at the University of Charleston (West Virginia) was used to support a successful five-year Title III grant to develop their Dimensions of the First-Year Experience program, as well as several other grant proposals. The director of first-year experiences programming uses NSSE data to inform development of strategies for assisting first-year students.

### **NSSE Tip #6: Improving Campus Confidence in Your Results**

Faculty members and administrative staff often raise questions about the validity and reliability of student self-reported data. It may be helpful to build a case for the validity of the findings at your school.

In response to skeptics who question whether their results really capture students’ educational experiences, some schools have administered local instruments with items similar to those in NSSE to validate their NSSE results to the campus community. The use of additional instruments may help build a stronger sense of the validity of the findings.

NSSE has amassed a good bit of information to establish the robustness of the survey. Consider reviewing the “Frequently Asked Questions About NSSE’s Psychometric Properties” (see “Additional Information” section) when planning a faculty or administrative retreat and, perhaps, have a few copies on hand.

## Planning and Accountability

NSSE results are used along with other surveys and existing institutional data for strategic planning and key performance indicators to fulfill standards established by state systems and other governing agencies.

Adelphi University uses NSSE data as assessment indicators for strategic planning, such as general education, student-faculty interaction, student life, technology use, and student satisfaction.

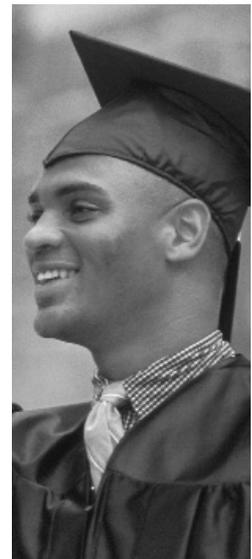
While developing plans for a new campus, Thomas University is considering the relationship between student engagement and physical space.

Student-faculty engagement initiatives have been incorporated into the expectations for every college dean's performance at Wichita State University.

Cazenovia College integrated NSSE into its strategic planning structure as a source of national comparative data to match against their own internal curricular and co-curricular student engagement measures. NSSE is one of several national instruments administered to supplement internal assessment measures.

Some state and university systems are incorporating NSSE data as indicators of institutional effectiveness, such as the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the University of Wisconsin System, and the University of Texas System.

A committee of Elon University trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students formulated New Century at Elon, the institution's ten-year planning document. Much of this strategic plan contains strategies designed to strengthen components of an Elon education reflective of the five NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice. Strategies include strengthening the general studies program, developing an undergraduate research program, increasing to 80% the number of students participating in internships and service, and providing additional living-learning options for students.



### NSSE Tip #7: Drilling Down with NSSE

Increasing your survey sample size may allow you to “drill down” to the school, major, or department level. This gives faculty members confidence that the data represent their students and also reduces sampling error.

Larger sample sizes for schools using web-based survey modes typically yield an adequate sample size to drill down, but schools may want to consider a NSSE oversample or locally administering an oversample on campus via classrooms, residence halls, or campus mail.

## Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results

In the first six years, more than 400 colleges and universities participated in 47 self-selected consortia. The consortia represent very different types of institutions — women’s colleges, urban universities, Jesuit institutions, engineering colleges, art and design colleges, and research universities. Institutions participating in consortia or state systems typically share results with a central office, though some communicate directly with other members of the group. Schools in two consortia exchanged student-level records after removing individual student identification information. One group was composed of four public universities in Ohio, the other of 15 Doctoral-Extensive universities.

### NSSE Participation

*Number of Participating Colleges & Universities*

2000	276
2001	321
2002	366
2003	437
2004	473
2005	529

*Number of Different Colleges and Universities*

2000–2005	971
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*NSSE 2005 Institutions Participation Frequency*

First-Time Participants	114
Two-Time Participants	128
Three-Time Participants	109
Four-Time Plus Participants	178

The eleven campuses in the University of Wisconsin system have coordinated NSSE administrations as a system twice, yielding comparable indicators for the system’s annual Achieving Excellence accountability reports. This approach allows for system-wide assessment while also providing each institution with data to guide local initiatives.

NSSE results can be linked with information from academic transcripts, retention studies, focus groups, and results from other surveys to develop a rich, comprehensive picture of the undergraduate experience.

### State & University Consortia from 2000-05

California State University	Texas A&M
City University of New York	University of Hawaii
Connecticut	University of Massachusetts
Georgia	University of Missouri
Indiana University	University of New Hampshire
Kentucky	University of North Carolina
Maryland	University of Texas
New Jersey	University of Wisconsin
North Dakota	West Virginia
South Dakota	

### How Often to Use NSSE?

On average, a school’s NSSE results do not change dramatically from one year to the next. Knowing this, NSSE recommends that an institution use the survey every 3-4 years. That said, some colleges and universities have specific reasons for using NSSE more frequently, even annually. For example, some schools want data every year for longitudinal tracking purposes or to monitor the impact of specific improvement initiatives. Sometimes NSSE participation is linked to an institution’s accreditation cycle. Still others are using NSSE to obtain information they can use in funding proposals. Ideally, NSSE should be used in combination with other assessment tools to capture a comprehensive picture of the college student experience.

## Public Disclosure of Student Engagement Results

Prospective students, parents, the media, and others have expressed interest in seeing institution-level NSSE results. So far, at least one quarter of NSSE schools have made some or all of their NSSE results available to the public (e.g. website, alumni magazine, press release). Other schools see NSSE primarily as a tool for internal improvement initiatives. Some schools are triangulating the results with other institutional data before deciding on appropriate communication strategies.

### **NSSE's Position on the Public Disclosure of Student Engagement Data**

*NSSE encourages public disclosure of student engagement results in ways that serve to increase understanding of collegiate quality and that support institutional improvement efforts.*

Disclosing institutional results from the NSSE survey provides an opportunity to help educate the public about the value of student engagement as a new metric for defining and examining collegiate quality. NSSE especially supports public reporting of student engagement results in ways that enable thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons while encouraging and celebrating institutional diversity.

*Whether a participating institution makes public its student engagement results is up to the institution.*

Consistent with the NSSE Participation Agreement, NSSE does not make institutional scores available to third parties. Institutions may do so if they wish as stated in the NSSE Participation Agreement. While organizations and individuals are entitled to request NSSE results from participating schools, NSSE is neutral as to whether institutions supply their results. In the near term, some colleges and universities will be understandably cautious about releasing their scores with only one or two years of information available, or if the institution has not thoroughly vetted and had an opportunity to take action on the results. Premature disclosure could inadvertently divert the focus away from improvement if the data are used in inappropriate or irresponsible ways.

*NSSE does not support the use of student engagement results for the purpose of rankings.*

The NSSE National Advisory Board and NSSE co-sponsors—The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning—believe that reducing student engagement to a single indicator obscures complex dimensions of student behavior and institutional performance. For this and other reasons, rankings are inherently flawed as a tool for accountability and improvement, whatever the information on which they are based. Such comparisons become even more problematic in the case of schools that differ in terms of mission and resources and percentages of students who are enrolled full- or part-time, who are transfers, or who major in various fields.



## Overcoming Potential Obstacles to Using NSSE Data Effectively

Converting assessment information into action is a challenge for all colleges and universities. Below we provide ways to address some of the more common obstacles.



<i>Obstacle</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Small number of respondents	Check to see how representative the sample is compared to the respective populations. Review sampling error. Try over-sampling to increase number of respondents.
Questions about validity and reliability	NSSE has conducted a number of studies to document the validity of the instrument, including stability analyses, test-retest, focus groups, and non-responder bias checks. The FAQ section of the NSSE psychometrics report (located in the Additional Information section of this report) provides more information about this important set of issues.
Inappropriate comparison group	Contact NSSE for another peer comparison or special analyses to capture a better fit.
Limited capacity to analyze and report results “Average” results across the board	The reports that NSSE sends institutions can be quickly packaged and sent to faculty and staff with little work. Try using a different comparison group or consider a criterion-based approach to determine to what degree student performance is inconsistent with institutional expectations.
Lack of faculty awareness of, or interest in, learning about and using student engagement results	Consider administering the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), a modified version of NSSE that looks at student engagement from the faculty perspective. Results may be useful to discuss at a retreat or workshop. Also, make available a summary of the literature on the value of effective educational practices.

### NSSE Institute For Effective Educational Practice

NSSE Institute associates are available to provide direct assistance to individual institutions or university and state systems.

- Regional Users’ Workshops — NSSE staff and institutional representatives facilitate several daylong workshops in different locations around the country throughout the year to help schools make the most of their data.
- Campus Audits — NSSE staff can conduct comprehensive or targeted campus audits to identify institutional strengths and weaknesses.
- Consulting — NSSE staff can help develop improvement initiatives and address accreditation or other campus goals.

- Presentations & Conferences — NSSE staff may be available to participate in panels or research presentations at professional meetings and conferences.
- Workshops and Retreats — NSSE staff can assist with presenting information at faculty and staff workshops and retreats.

## **Final Word**

Collecting and documenting how NSSE colleges and universities are using their results is an ongoing process. We would very much like to hear about how you are using your NSSE data. Please send us specific examples of internal reports or brochures highlighting NSSE data, usage strategies, and special activities. These examples will form a shared resource for colleges and universities and assist in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience for all students.



### **National Survey of Student Engagement**

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