



National Survey of Student Engagement

Using NSSE Data

NSSE results are being used across all sectors and types of institutions. Discovering and sharing ways student engagement results are being used is one of NSSE's most important activities. The examples in this document represent a snapshot of changes in educational policy and practice informed by NSSE data and suggest ways colleges and universities can use their data in a productive manner.

Several initiatives at NSSE in the upcoming year will provide opportunities for more in-depth exploration of how NSSE results can be incorporated into educational decision-making. We are constantly seeking examples and stories of NSSE data use to feature in publications and presentations. This year we intend to conduct a study of NSSE use. If you are interested in sharing your story, please send an e-mail to Jillian Kinzie at jikinzie@indiana.edu. Also, the NSSE Institute sponsors regional workshops for NSSE users to help schools better interpret their results and learn how other institutions are using their data.

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

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

Inside

- 1 Maximizing the Use and Impact of NSSE Data
- 2 Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data
- 2 Establishing Standards of Comparison
- 3 Communicating Results
- 5 Institutional Improvement Examples
- 12 Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results
- 12 How Often to Use NSSE?
- 13 Public Disclosure of Student Engagement Results
- 13 NSSE Institute For Effective Educational Practice
- 14 Overcoming Potential Obstacles to Using NSSE Data Effectively

Maximizing the Use and Impact of NSSE Data

NSSE was designed to provide information colleges and universities can use to improve the quality of the undergraduate education. In order to make the best use of NSSE data, institutions intentionally plan how to maximize the use of their results. Below are some things to consider before, during, and after the NSSE administration in order to make best use of student engagement data:

- Before survey administration begins, generate enthusiasm and commitment to the survey and its results across campus.
- Identify sub-populations of interest such as specific groups of students and/or academic departments.
- Develop a communications strategy before or during survey administration in order that people will attend to and take interest in the findings.
- Identify peer or aspirational institutions.
- Validate findings by linking NSSE to other data sources. Corroborating student engagement results with other data sources increases confidence in making policy decisions.
- Translate data into action.



Georgia Institute of Technology

Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of NSSE institutions, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating NSSE data in institutional change efforts.

- 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.
- 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.
- 6. Examine the results from multiple perspectives.** Use peer comparisons (normative perspective) to confirm or challenge assumptions about performance. As described later, also consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement

NSSE TIP #1: NSSE on the Web

Many colleges and universities have disclosed some or all of their results on the Web. This is an appropriate way to highlight institutional strengths and 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.

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.** The chances that changes in policy and practice will succeed tend to increase when campus teams are formed and institutions work together in consortial arrangements on topics of mutual interest. Even 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.



Eastern Connecticut State University

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 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.

Tarleton State University formed an ad hoc group of campus leaders and held ongoing discussions as a means to review Tarleton's NSSE results. The findings were thought-provoking when the University compared its scores with other Texas A&M University institutions, institutions within its Carnegie classification, and the 2006 NSSE cohort. In an attempt to gather additional insights, the newly formed group is now visiting with other Tarleton campus leaders to outline its discussions and to seek other thoughts and ideas.

The Indiana University South Bend Institutional Research Office is using specific metrics to track how much time students spend working off-campus. Institutional research staff compared their students' responses with other master's institutions. Being a one-person office, this approach was an efficient way to monitor students' responses and behavior patterns in a comparative way.

The United States Military Academy (USMA) currently assesses its academic program goals through surveys of cadets, surveys of graduates and commanders, and through indicators embedded in ongoing academic activities. NSSE data have the potential to provide an external point of reference with nationally normed data for assessing cadets' achievement of USMA academic goals.

Texas A&M University-Texarkana uses NSSE data from seniors to compare to the national mean, the A&M system mean, and master's group mean. NSSE helps the University to better understand its students for future program and learning improvements.

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.

University of South Florida-St. Petersburg uses NSSE annually to study the match between its University mis-

sion and student experiences. In particular, the campus is using the civic engagement data as a baseline to evaluate, on a university-wide level, the impact of its new Center for Civic Engagement and Citizen Scholar Program.

The College of St. Scholastica sets institutional strategic goals in order to monitor success and guide improvements. By administering NSSE annually, it provides year-to-year comparisons as to how they are meeting their performance indicators.

Saint Francis University revised their data report format to link all NSSE items with its new general education learning outcomes. These learning outcomes represent the institution's educational goals. This will help inform budgetary decisions and the institutional planning process.

Jacksonville University triangulates NSSE's Benchmark Report, its institutional mission statement, and specific strategic objectives. The data are used in combination to answer the question, "Are we on track to accomplishing our mission by 2010?"

Communicating Results

Institutions often report their results using several approaches because a combination of dissemination strategies is typically most effective.

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 may spark focused dialogue about implications of the findings for policy and practice.

Given that institutions now receive benchmark reports at the same time as their institution-level data, Western Kentucky University (WKU) now supplies all of this information at the same time to academic departments. The goal is for faculty members to evaluate the overall impact of their teaching approaches on student engagement as represented by the NSSE benchmarks. WKU enhanced the usability of its data by providing departments with line graphs that allowed them to easily note how their department compares with college and university benchmark scores.

"We are using the NSSE results both practically and visibly... sharing NSSE results with faculty and staff across the campus, and incorporating them into our campus focus group discussions that are part of our accreditation process."

—Mary B. Marcy
Provost and Vice President
Simon's Rock College of Bard

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's academic deans discussed NSSE data as an instructive resource for identifying potential improvements in the strategic enrollment management process. Rather than focusing on detailed results, faculty and staff members are provided with more general information about NSSE, as well as the kinds of information that would be available through several years of administration, such as the impact of engagement on student retention.

The University of Victoria distributes NSSE results that would be relevant to each academic unit on campus. The Institutional Planning and Analysis Office prepares individual reports for every academic area that compares students enrolled in that particular program of study. Results for each department are compared against University averages, Canadian peer averages, and NSSE averages. These reports are also posted on the institution's Web site.

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.

Clayton State University discusses their NSSE results at faculty council, presidential retreats, student success forums, and in various standing committee meetings. The president of the University has also led a discussion

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 annual 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.

regarding what the data mean and how CSU can use the data to enhance its institutional effectiveness.

At Providence College, the assessment director prepared a comprehensive special analysis. The special analysis included NSSE data as well as data from other assessments. The special analysis report was provided to several campus constituencies including the core curriculum committee, which is composed of faculty and other decision makers on campus.

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' Office of Institutional Research publishes a series of one- to two-page research briefs on their Web site for faculty and staff members. Each brief is dedicated to one aspect of NSSE, with topics ranging from "Diversity" to "Academic Experiences." The briefs are beginning to resurface in meetings and serve not only to spark further discussion but to provide information to guide decision-making.

Iowa State University has participated in NSSE since 2000 and uses the results in several ways. A summary of the results comparing Iowa State with the national norms and peer university benchmarks is prepared annually by the Office of Institutional Research and presented at a President's Council meeting. The summary report is posted at the Office of the President's Web site following the presentation.

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 10 of this document, and more detailed information is located in the Accreditation Toolkit section of the NSSE *Institutional Report* binder.

After several years of NSSE participation, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) staff compiled a comprehensive analytical report that tracked the University of Maryland Baltimore County's benchmark scores over



Wabash College

time. The comparisons included groups within the university community, comparisons to doctoral research extensive universities and a special science and technology public peer group. This report was posted to OIR's Web site and made available to the public. As a result, office staff members could refer prospective students' parents to the site to review the report on-line.

A number of colleges and universities, such as The University of Western Ontario and St. Ambrose University, provide information about their NSSE results via news releases and special feature articles for student, local, and regional newspapers. 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 they have corroborated the results with other institutional data.

How Schools Communicate NSSE Results

INTERNAL USE	%
President	81
Administrative Staff	75
Faculty Members	74
Department Chairs	64
Academic Advisors	49
Governing Board	35
Students	31
Other (Web site, fact book, etc.)	18
EXTERNAL USE	%
Accreditation Agencies	34
No External Disclosure	24
Web Site	22
Other	17
State Agencies	14
Media	13
Prospective Students	11
Parents	11
Alumni	10
Professional Conference Presentation	10

Source: NSSE 2005 Report Card



Institutional Improvement Examples

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

Civic Engagement

Research demonstrates that students who are more engaged in civic activities gain more during college in terms of ethical development and contributing to the welfare of their community. Participating in civic activities also helps students develop habits that will lead them to continue participating in civic affairs.

James Madison University's NSSE results indicated that first-year student involvement in service-learning programs was lower than desired. They addressed this shortfall by increasing the number and quality of class presentations about service-learning and by increasing the number of contacts with new faculty members regarding the importance of emphasizing service learning opportunities.

The State University of New York (SUNY) Plattsburgh's NSSE results were included in a recent audit of campus civic engagement. The results will also be compared with the SUNY Student Opinion Survey. SUNY Plattsburgh is now in its second year of a new first-year initiative and is looking at ways to strengthen student civic engagement. NSSE was not the impetus for this new initiative, but student engagement results are being used to assess the campus' current situation and how it compares with other institutions.

General Education

General education courses (GEC) are widely presumed to provide the foundation on which essential learning outcomes will be developed. Given the increasing focus on specialization and career preparation, GECs introduce students to a variety of topics thought to be necessary to become liberally educated citizens. They also are in-

“Although the NSSE alone does not satisfy requirements of assessment or institutional effectiveness, when used in conjunction with other measures, NSSE proves to be an invaluable resource.”

—Ann Lotven
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
Texas A&M - Texarkana

tended to help students develop such valuable skills as integrative thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking that will serve as life-long tools.

To enhance engagement in the first year at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a faculty-appointed committee defined five objectives: (a) to encourage critical thinking, information literacy, and evidence-based writing; (b) to engage first-year students with current events, societal problems, and human needs; (c) to promote in each first-year student a personal foundation for lifelong learning; (d) to cultivate a more intellectually stimulating environment at WPI; and (e) to contribute to civic engagement and community partnerships. In 2006, the committee began developing a new first-year general education curriculum featuring interdisciplinary, inquiry-based seminars, better integration of the disciplines, and broader, more engaging introductions to major areas of study.

The Division of Student Affairs at Plymouth State University reviews responses from first-year students to determine how well the institution is meeting student needs for out-of-class personal support. NSSE results and an institutional survey have been used to revise the general education program. NSSE results supported a grant application that was funded to establish a faculty development center charged with improving the first-year experience with special focus on undeclared students.

The 2006 NSSE/FSSE Summary Report compiled by the South Dakota Board of Regents presents data from both NSSE and FSSE. The report provides a brief background of the NSSE and FSSE surveys, past participation, system-wide findings broken down by benchmarks, and a plan for future analysis of NSSE data. The report closes with institution-specific examples of NSSE data usage, such as how Northern State University shares its data with campus stakeholders and the way Black Hills State University incorporates data into their strategic planning.

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

Included with the *Institutional Report* are a professionally produced video and a PowerPoint template into which you can insert institution-specific results to introduce 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.

NSSE Institute Services

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

Regional Users Workshops — NSSE staff and institutional representatives facilitate daylong workshops 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.



Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.

While very satisfied with their performance on several of the NSSE benchmarks, Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) decided that it needed to strengthen initiatives involved with SFA's level of academic challenge. FSSE data reaffirms several student perceptions regarding academic challenge. The Division of Academic Affairs is currently discussing strategies for improving academic challenge at SFA. Further assessment of academic challenge may need to be considered (student focus groups, additional assessments/measurement, etc.).

At the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, the Provost's Faculty Advisory Committee organized a meeting around its students' reading and writing abilities, and raised the question of how much writing students have to do as

undergraduates. A report providing an overview of both NSSE and FSSE included a set of questions that addressed essential aspects of academic challenge.

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 to solve problems prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily, during and after college.

Washington State University's (WSU) NSSE results indicated that students felt the campus was above average in terms of being supportive, but was not meeting their expectations for collaborative learning, faculty-student interaction, and educationally enriching experiences. WSU has a successful living-learning community but it was limited to a small number of students. Freshman Focus learning communities were created to provide all incoming freshmen with the opportunity to engage in an extensive living-learning community system.

Hendrix College monitors the success of some of its collaborative learning programs with NSSE data. The College recently established a program called "Your Hendrix Odyssey" that requires students to complete at least three experiential learning projects before graduation. The projects address areas ranging from global awareness to service. Different "Odyssey" experiences also are geared toward different student cohorts. For example, during the College's new student transition seminar course, first-year students complete "mini-Odyssey" projects. Hendrix's NSSE data from 2005 and 2006 for freshmen/first-year students in these engaged learning areas were significantly above peer and national comparison groups.

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



Newman University

institutional leaders expected. NSSE results related to student-faculty interaction are also disquieting for many research-intensive universities.

James Madison University's NSSE results for first-year student interaction with faculty indicated a need for increased interaction. This issue was addressed by sharing the data with the deans of each of the colleges who in turn shared the information with academic department heads. This was also addressed through increased advisor training.

To respond to its NSSE results, California State University–Fresno's president formed a student success task force to identify ways to improve student success based on NSSE results, which showed that student-faculty interaction was lower than expected. As a result, the University submitted a proposal to the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) program to develop the Mentoring Institute. After returning to campus from the BEAMS Summer Academy and implementing the Institute, more than 200 faculty members, staff and student mentors have been trained.

After reviewing its NSSE results, Grand View College initiated a faculty-student engagement grant program where instructors can apply for funds to host engagement activities with students outside of class. Faculty members have interacted with students by hosting a pizza study session the night before final exams, taking literature students to a coffee shop to enjoy a poetry slam, and inviting students into their homes for dinner. The program has been very successful as measured by the number of requests for Engagement Grants, which continues to increase.

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.

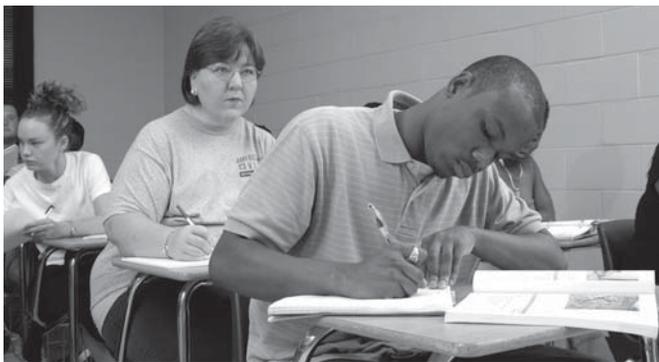
Simons Rock College of Bard is integrating NSSE results to consider how the College can assist in the enhancement of students' personal and intellectual life on campus, with particular emphasis on study abroad and senior

"NSSE results have been used to assist the campus community in developing an understanding of who our students are and how our educational and social engagement opportunities need to challenge and support our individual student profile."

—James E. Williams
Vice President of Student Affairs
Emporia State University

thesis projects. NSSE results for out-of-class engagement were not as strong as results on pure academic measures, so student affairs staff members are using the results to begin a campus discussion of new student activities and community engagement, and have shifted their personnel resources by adding a new professional position in student activities.

After reviewing its NSSE data, Jacksonville State University wanted to improve student engagement in Enriching Educational Experiences as defined by the NSSE items comprising that benchmark. As a result, the strategic planning committee focused on expanding service learning opportunities. Next year, the vice presidents for academic and student affairs plan to develop a new Office of Leadership and Service to coordinate service learning opportunities, promote service learning, and provide support to faculty interested in developing service learning courses.



Fayetteville State University

Saint Thomas University (FL), a member of the BEAMS Project, used its NSSE results to inform the restructuring of several areas of the Division of Student Affairs. To improve engagement and foster development of leadership skills, the Vice President for Student Affairs created the L.I.F.E.L.O.N.G. Center for Leadership and Student Engagement. The student affairs division developed courses, workshops, experiential learning exercises, online resources and developmental opportunities to build on the existing strengths and talents of students.

Residential students at Western Oregon suffer from a common problem: they leave campus on the weekends, creating the ubiquitous “suitcase” effect. Taking advantage of the fact that NSSE is administered to all students (residential and off-campus, traditional and distance-education), administrators are combing their data at the item level to identify initiatives that might keep residential students on campus and attract off-campus students as well. By combining NSSE results with those from ACUHO, ACUI, and ACT assessments, Western Oregon is augmenting effective programs and eliminating outdated ones in order to begin rebuilding its co-curricular campus community.

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.

The Division of Student Affairs at Bellarmine University used NSSE results to assess and better meet students’ needs by focusing on their performance on the Supportive Campus Environment NSSE Benchmark. Improving its performance on this benchmark is one of the goals of the University’s strategic plan. In addition, the Division used NSSE data to justify hiring new staff dedicated to overseeing the improvement of the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark with the implementation of a co-curricular transcript initiative, and increased assessment within the Division.

The Towson University women’s center added NSSE data to its ongoing assessment of programs and activities. Of particular value was the ability to view how women respond on individual NSSE items, allowing women’s center staff to develop from the results a narrative of the collegiate experience given gender differences. From this, the women’s center was able to strengthen programs that offer leadership opportunities and self-empowerment content and process. Individual items of importance included issues of affiliation, work and study habits, extracurricular engagement, and satisfaction, all of which combined to reveal a snapshot of the female student experience.

Based on NSSE results and collaborating data from other sources, Medaille College is examining how to enhance multiculturalism and internationalization long-term. As a result, the College’s general education goals and objectives were revised to reflect a greater emphasis on student recognition of diversity and understanding of cultural interactions and perspectives.

Involving Students in Interpreting NSSE Data

Some schools are inviting their undergraduates to interpret NSSE results. Student representatives are included on assessment committees at some institutions. Sharing results with student government and other student organizations is another approach to obtaining student insights into what NSSE data mean and suggestions for how the institution might respond.

For example, Washington State University conducted focus groups with students and shared NSSE results with the President’s Student Learning Academy, student leaders who have input on improving the undergraduate experience.

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.

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Iowa State University has sponsored campus-wide Faculty Forums that provided discussion about ways to enhance learning related to NSSE results, benchmarks, and student engagement. The benchmarks are also shared at the annual University Teaching Seminar, new faculty orientation, and at CELT workshops throughout the year.

Illinois State University uses NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE findings to guide campus conversations among students, faculty, student affairs personnel, and other stakeholders. Solution-based programming has been designed using data from NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE, providing a vehicle for meaningful conversations about student engagement and effective and timely support to faculty and staff. For example, this spring a four-part series co-sponsored with the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology titled “Improve Student Writing and Still Have a Life” was developed for faculty based upon the data from the FSSE and NSSE surveys. This series focused on the information learned about student and faculty perceptions of writing and manageable methods faculty can utilize to improve the quality of student writing in their classes.

The Scripps College Faculty Senate Assessment Committee was responsible for the administration, interpretation, and reporting of the NSSE results to the community. The committee presented a formal report to the full Faculty Senate in the spring, followed by several community conversations in the fall. Faculty from the four divisions (Engineering, Math and Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Professional Development) met to discuss how they might use NSSE data to improve their programs.

“NSSE concepts underlie many staff development initiatives in the Division of Student Life and inform the Division’s planning process...”

—Frank P. Ardaiolo
Vice President for Student Life
Winthrop University

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.

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 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 five 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 Web site (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/research.htm).



At the suggestion of NSSE staff, the University of Massachusetts-Lowell examined differences in NSSE responses between first-year students who had been retained and those who were no longer enrolled by the subsequent spring, computing benchmark scores for the two groups. The reported frequency of exposure to effective teaching and learning practices was greater for students who were retained. Since half of Lowell's students are commuter students, what goes on in the classroom is particularly vital. NSSE data supported the emphasis on students' classroom experiences in order to maintain high student persistence.

At Hanover College, NSSE data have helped steer the Strategic Plan in two ways. The strength of senior versus first-year results overall has caused them to focus improvement (enhanced programs and added faculty) disproportionately in the first two of the four years. Lower scores on Supportive Campus Environment compared with other areas led to two of the five initiatives in the strategic plan - developing a permanent Student Success structure within a new Enrollment Management framework, and a "campus culture and engagement" initiative.

The recently revised NSSE pocket guide, *A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College*, 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. The pocket guide is available in PDF format at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm.

Accreditation

As mentioned earlier, about one third of NSSE schools annually 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, see the Accreditation Toolkit, which is available under a tab in the *Institutional Report* binder or at the NSSE Web site: www.nsse.iub.edu. The toolkit provides guidelines for using NSSE in accreditation self-study and maps NSSE items to accreditation body standards.

At Agnes Scott College, NSSE data were used to help identify the focus and features of their Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and will serve as a baseline from which to measure the success of the interventions once they have been fully implemented. In addition, a variety of measures, including direct and indirect quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as a mix of institutionally

administered instruments and nationally normed surveys, will be used to assess the overall effectiveness of the plan.

The University of Texas at Arlington used NSSE and FSSE results to identify key issues to be addressed in developing its QEP. For example, a gap between faculty and students in their perception of active learning environments was revealed. This analysis, along with other institutional assessments, led to the conclusion that systematic, university-wide intervention in the classroom would enhance students' ability to take better advantage of faculty efforts.

NSSE Participation

Number of Participating Colleges & Universities

2000	276	2004	473
2001	321	2005	529
2002	366	2006	557
2003	437	2007	610

Total Number of Different Colleges & Universities

2000 - 2007	1,187
-------------	-------

NSSE 2007 Institutions Participation Frequency

First-Time Participants	104
Two to Three Time Participants	219
Four to Five Time Participants	166
Six to Eight Time Participants	121



“As might be evident by our theme, Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society, NSSE figures prominently as a QEP assessment tool at the institutional level.”

—Dennis K. George
Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness
Western Kentucky University



The University of Texas at Arlington

First-Year Experience

First-year experience programs are commonplace today. Student responses to these items can assist institutions in determining the effectiveness of those first-year experience programs.

California State University-Chico's Freshman Year Experience Initiative is based upon the University's primary goal, which is to assure student success. Driven by priorities of the University's Strategic Plan and its creation of and commitment to Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, the University analyzed student responses on selected NSSE items to determine whether or not the seven principles were being practiced and if the campus was engaged in practices that enhanced student learning.

The University of Akron used NSSE results for its Foundations of Excellence self-study to help identify areas for improvement. The areas included developing and distributing a campus-wide first-year philosophy; creating more exposure to diversity in first-year and general education courses; more professional development for faculty and administrators who work with first-year students; creation of more common components in the first-year curriculum; better and more effective ways of communicating with first-year students; and promoting service learning, mentoring, and undergraduate research programs as vehicles to foster student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom.

The Northern Arizona University first-year taskforce, a joint committee of academic affairs and student affairs staff, was established to review first-year students' success. Results from NSSE, Your First College Year (YFCY), and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) surveys are used to gauge students' progress. The taskforce examines the first-year experience, reviews program evaluations, and outcomes-based assessments.

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.

The University of Central Oklahoma's NSSE Action Team was comprised of representatives from a variety of administrative areas and from five undergraduate colleges. After identifying areas of concern, the team worked through cause-and-effect diagrams to uncover areas of concern and determine root causes. The team merged the root causes into two categories: (1) increased level of academic rigor is needed; and (2) the faculty and staff need better motivation to engage students on a personal level. Each issue was matched with corresponding recommendations and rationale.

NSSE data at Medaille College is informing its strategic planning and institutional assessment plan. Data will be reported to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in Medaille's June 2008 Periodic Review Report and in their next self study, by which time they will have two more rounds of NSSE data to draw on in evaluating overall mission effectiveness. Similarly, another institution indicated that they present NSSE-related reports and their own internal analysis of NSSE data to accreditors. In addition, they send those reports to the state's university system office where they prepare reports that are made available to the public.

NSSE data are being used to gauge progress on a number of Saint Anselm College's strategic indicators and goals. For example, one institutional goal is to implement a living and learning environment that promotes community and increases student engagement. Reporting the variety of measures of student engagement is an important way of supporting goals within their strategic plan.

Bridgewater State College uses NSSE data to inform their planning processes and to assess campus programs. As such, they have decided to move to an annual administration to better inform the institutional assessment process.

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.

Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results

In the first eight years, more than 610 colleges and universities participated in 52 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.

In July 2006, the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State University System adopted a resolution in support of enhancing student engagement at the four universities of the CSU System, affirming CSU’s commitment to becoming more student-centered. The Board agreed that it was important to establish benchmarks to measure progress toward accomplishing the goals set forth in the resolution. The four universities agreed to participate in the NSSE survey and use the results for improvement.

Because it is possible to identify individual student respondents with local IRB approval, 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.

NSSE TIP #5:

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” inside the NSSE tab of the *Institutional Report*) when planning a faculty or administrative retreat and, perhaps, have a few copies on hand.

State & University Consortia from 2000-07

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



Hanover College

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.

“We are continually making enhancements and improvements to many of our processes and procedures based on NSSE data as well as from other surveys and institutional data.”

—Carmen Williams
Director, Office of Institutional Research
University of North Dakota

Public Disclosure of Student Engagement Results

Prospective students, parents, the media, and others have expressed interest in seeing institution-level NSSE results. Up to now, it appears as if at least one quarter of NSSE schools have made some or all of their NSSE results publicly available in some form (e.g. Web site, 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 increase understanding of collegiate quality and 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.

Although making its performance public is up to the institution, NSSE endorses institutional transparency in ways consistent with the above statement.

As set forth in 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. After thoroughly vetting the results, schools are encouraged to:

- a) Focus on educationally meaningful indicators that are linked to student success in the context of the institution's mission.
- b) Provide a rationale for selecting institutions included in any comparison groups so that people can draw their own conclusions about the merits of the comparisons.
- c) Explain what types of students, kinds of behaviors, and institutional characteristics and actions the indicators represent and what they do not represent as well as what can and cannot be concluded from them.

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

NSSE's National Advisory Board and the NSSE project sponsor, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 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.

NSSE Institute For Effective Educational Practice

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

- Regional User 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.



St. Cloud State University

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.

<u>Obstacle</u>	<u>Approach</u>
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	The reports that NSSE sends institutions can be quickly packaged and sent to faculty and staff with little work.
“Average” results across the board	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) as a way to look 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.



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

Center for Postsecondary Research
Indiana University Bloomington
School of Education
1900 East Tenth Street
Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419
Bloomington, IN 47406-7512

Phone: 812-856-5824
Fax: 812-856-5150
E-mail: nsse@indiana.edu

www.nsse.iub.edu