



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 institutional examples in this document were collected from representatives of participating colleges and universities who provided feedback at conferences, through NSSE Client Services teams, in response to our Report Card feedback process, and in response to direct solicitations. They represent a snapshot of changes in educational policy and practice informed by NSSE data, and they suggest ways colleges and universities can use their data productively.

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 are conducting interviews with representatives from selected institutions to learn more about how institutions use NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE. 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 workshops and Webinars for NSSE users to help institutions work with their results and learn how other institutions use NSSE results in institutional assessment and planning.

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

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

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Maximizing the Use and Impact of NSSE Data

NSSE was designed to provide information colleges and universities can use to improve the quality of undergraduate education. Below are some things to consider before, during, and after NSSE administration 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 academic departments and/or specific groups of students (e.g., students in scholarship programs, living-learning communities).
- Develop a communications strategy before and during survey administration in order that people will attend to and take interest in the findings.
- Identify peer or aspirational institutions to create customized comparison groups.
- 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.



Hamline University

Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

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

- **Make sure faculty and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.** The value of student engagement results for improving teaching and learning needs to be convincingly explained to those faculty less familiar with assessment in general and the engagement concept in particular.
- **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 institutions to drill down to the department or unit level, which may increase faculty interest in using engagement data.
- **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.
- **Report student engagement results in a responsible way.** NSSE encourages institutions to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of collegiate quality and that promote institutional improvement efforts.

NSSE TIP #1: NSSE on the Web

Many colleges and universities have published some or all of their results on the Web. This is an appropriate way to highlight institutional strengths and demonstrate your institution's commitment to quality improvement.

Some institutions display all their NSSE reports online, while others post selected results highlighting institutional strengths or news releases emphasizing institutional participation and findings relevant to institutional performance priorities. More institutions are posting their NSSE *Executive Snapshot* and the NSSE *Pocket Guide Report: "What Students are Saying..."*, two short reports that summarize key student engagement findings. Participants in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) that elect to feature NSSE results have the opportunity to post additional information about their performance (see the NSSE Web site for VSA-NSSE updates www.nsse.iub.edu/html/vsa.cfm).



West Texas A&M University

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

Establishing Standards of Comparison

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

Benchmarking

Institutions use two basic approaches to benchmarking with NSSE. 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 school, 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.

Indiana University South Bend's 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. As a one-person office, this approach was an efficient way to monitor students' responses and behavior patterns in a comparative way.

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 institution's results 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 Tulsa used NSSE data in several parts of their accreditation self-study report. In looking at the results, they were able to demonstrate how the institution achieves the goals set forth in their mission as well as meets accreditation standards.

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.

Jacksonville University triangulates NSSE's *Benchmark Comparisons* 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 (Table 1).

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.

At the University of Dayton, department chairs receive detailed analyses of NSSE data for students in their programs. In conjunction with other data, NSSE results are used by departments to better understand students and improve the curriculum.

Minot State University plans to facilitate seminars for faculty and staff to discuss NSSE results. They are also developing a seminar for students and parents to emphasize the importance of engagement.

At Ursinus College, an annual report is presented to the Academic Council and Campus Planning and Priorities Committee. This report includes detailed information on their NSSE results and

"We rely upon NSSE and FSSE data to encourage the campus community to take responsibility for student learning and engagement."

—Margaret W. Cohen, Associate Provost for Professional Development and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Missouri–St. Louis

recommendations on ways to increase student engagement at the institution.

Texas A&M University presents NSSE results at brown bag luncheons throughout the year that faculty are encouraged to attend. Also, comments from students referencing a specific professor are sent to the individual faculty and the department chair. Included with this is a link to other NSSE information to increase awareness and application of NSSE.

Montana State University plans to provide departments with NSSE results for their specific students, highlighting the Academic Challenge and Enriching Educational Experiences benchmarks. Presentations are also being developed for academic advising groups that consist of mostly faculty.

Using two meetings to focus on both strengths and areas for improvement, staff members from the St. Mary's University of Minnesota Office of College Assessment reported findings to the faculty senate. Among faculty, perceptions of the quality of the educational environment have improved, particularly around the areas of Student-Faculty Interaction and Supportive Campus Environment benchmarks.

Western Kentucky University (WKU) provides NSSE results to academic departments with the goal of helping 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

NSSE TIP #2: Comparisons Groups

To assist in benchmarking efforts, NSSE allows institutions to select other participating institutions to form comparison groups with a minimum of six other institutions. Using a Web-based tool, institutions determine the comparison groups included in their institutional reports based on criteria they establish or by selecting from the list of participating colleges and universities. Suggestions for creating meaningful comparison groups can be found in the *Customizing Your NSSE Report* document at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/current_users.cfm.

NSSE also conducts specialized analyses as requested to assist institutions to answer specific questions (e.g., how do our women engineering students compare with those at other institutions?). The fees for special analyses are based upon time required to complete the project. More details can be found at www.nsse.iub.edu/special_analysis/index.cfm.

Table 1
Data Sharing With and Use by
Internal Institutional Audiences

Institutional Stakeholders	Results were shared with:	Results were explicitly used by:
President/Senior Administration	98%	71%
Department Chairs/Deans	90%	63%
Faculty	85%	55%
Student Affairs Staff	84%	61%
Advising Staff	68%	41%
Admissions Staff	66%	31%
Public Affairs/News Office	65%	35%
Governing Board	54%	27%
Students	42%	11%
Campus Newspaper	24%	9%
Targeted Committees/Groups		
Accreditation	70%	49%
First-Year Experience	68%	52%
Teaching and Learning	61%	42%
General Education	60%	40%
Diversity	50%	30%
Writing Program	43%	29%
Technology	27%	12%

Note: Data were collected from 158 institutional respondents to the *NSSE 2007 Report Card*, an assessment of the spring 2007 NSSE survey administration.

departments with line graphs that allowed them to easily note how their department compares with college and university benchmark scores.

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.

Campus Wide

To distribute NSSE results broadly, many institutions 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.

At Texas A&M University, NSSE results are discussed on a blog, which includes downloadable copies of NSSE reports.

Westminster College posts an overview of NSSE results in an on-line facts book, with full reports also available on their Web site.

The University of North Carolina Wilmington distributes reports and presentations to campus leadership, from the chancellor down to the department chairs, that identify what students are doing, and how they compare to peers at other institutions. This effort identifies areas of institutional strength as well as identifying aspects of the undergraduate experience that might warrant greater attention. The emphasis is on data trends based on four consecutive years of NSSE survey administration.

Clayton State University (CSU) 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 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 surface in meetings and serve not only to spark further discussion but to provide information to guide decision-making.

Communicating Results Externally

Some institutions choose not to share their data with external audiences and use it solely for institutional improvement, while others delay public data sharing until they have corroborated the results with other institutional data. Accreditors are the most common external audience for NSSE results (Table 2). More than half of NSSE institutions tell us that they are using their results in self-studies and accreditation reports. Examples can be found on page 11 of this document and within the *Accreditation Toolkits* on the NSSE Web site at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/institutional_reports.cfm. Look for the *Institutional Report* year in which your college or university participated in NSSE to find the toolkit for your regional accrediting body.

Grand View College developed a section on their Web site intended for the families of students. This section stresses the importance of student engagement and includes information on NSSE results.

Iona College uses NSSE benchmark data in their communication with parents and students. To help increase students’ commitment to Iona, letters are sent to first-year parents and students over the summer discussing the institution’s emphasis on engagement.

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

Table 2
Data Sharing With External Institutional Audiences

External Audiences	Results were shared with:
Accreditation Agencies	56%
Prospective Students & Parents	40%
Media	36%
State Agencies & Commissions	29%
Alumni	22%
Schools/Counselors	19%

Note: Data were collected from 158 institutional respondents to the *NSSE 2007 Report Card*, an assessment of the spring 2007 NSSE survey administration.

“We’ve used our NSSE results to support major expansion of the learning communities, faculty development initiatives, and creation of a host of online student support tools including tutoring in math, statistics, and composition made accessible through a new Web network which was our BEAMS project.”

—Rosa L. Jones, Vice President for Student Affairs and Undergraduate Education, Florida International University

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.

Institutional Improvement Examples

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

General Education

General education courses (GECs) 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 vital to a liberally educated citizenry. They also are intended to help students develop such valuable skills as integrative thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking that will serve students over the course of their lives.

At Agnes Scott College, NSSE results are used to assess the written and oral communication skills of students. Through these assessments, faculty

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

Included with the *Institutional Report* is a PowerPoint template into which you can insert institution-specific results to introduce the student engagement construct and how NSSE measures it. There is also a professionally produced video on our Web site at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/info_video.cfm that provides an introduction to the student engagement construct and how it relates to assessment of educational quality. Institutions can use these materials as part of faculty workshop sessions or presentations to student government or trustees to give an overview of NSSE and the importance of student engagement.

gain an understanding of what is happening and why it is happening in order to better shape their classroom practices.

Morehead State University (MSU) is involved in an analysis of the current General Education program as part of an initiative to re-think and reformulate the general education experience. NSSE results are serving as key indicators on several general education goals. MSU also used NSSE to identify characteristics of their first-year students and then examined whether they were designing programs and services that addressed these characteristics. MSU anticipates making changes to the General Education program as a result of analyzing their NSSE and FSSE data. For example, changes have been made to the first-year experience course based on NSSE findings.

To enhance engagement in the first year at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), 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. The committee has begun to develop 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.

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.

University of Wisconsin-Stout formed a faculty committee to develop recommendations for increasing the level of student engagement at the institution.

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 working on strategies to improve academic challenge at SFA. Further assessment of academic challenge may need to be considered (e.g., 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 supportiveness, but was not meeting their expectations for collaborative learning, student-faculty 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 students 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.

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.

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 developed The Mentoring Institute as part of their Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) project. 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.

"NSSE complements our existing data sources to provide a more complete picture, and has been a catalyst on our campus for rethinking and reimagining the undergraduate learning experience."

—Brian D. Pettigrew, Assistant Vice President
(Institutional Research & Planning) & Registrar,
University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

Enriching the Undergraduate Experience

Several institutions 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 data contributed to heightened institutional collaboration at Carroll College in Montana. Results were discussed at department chair meetings, enrollment task force meetings, student life/academic affairs committees, and general faculty assemblies. As a result, efforts have been centered on improving co-curricular learning opportunities and study abroad programs.



Indiana University East

At Hastings College, NSSE results were shared at department, assessment team, and curriculum committee meetings. Action plans were developed, resulting in improvements to the student union and study abroad programs.

Bard College at Simon's Rock 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 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. The vice presidents for academic and student affairs are developing 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.

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 University 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.

Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) has participated in BCSSE and NSSE since 2004, and they are following cohorts of students who completed both BCSSE and NSSE to learn more about their college experiences and persistence toward a degree. They also track students in the cohort who have left SCSU through the National Student Clearinghouse. Their analyses indicate that the non-returning students had a different level of relationships with faculty members, peers, and administrative personnel and offices than did the returning students. At SCSU, one of the two most important predictors of whether students in the cohort persisted to their junior year was Supportive Campus Environment. Knowing students' scores on the items in this cluster can help predict if they are likely to persist at SCSU or leave.

Bennington College continues to be mindful of their scores on the Supportive Campus Environment

benchmark, which have improved over several years, but are still a priority given the small campus size and individualized mission. Staff members ran several focus groups to learn more about why students stayed and why they might have considered leaving at one point. In a new class on the senior experience at Bennington, they focused some of the agenda on finding out about students' experiences, tied to engagement benchmark issues. Bennington expects that small changes can make a difference and that asking students for broader input related to survey items can help elaborate responses and suggest possible solutions to problems. One change during registrations was for the registrar to set up a table in the dining halls to give all students a chance to ask any questions they might have.

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, co-curricular engagement, and satisfaction, all of which combined to reveal a snapshot of the female student experience.

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 life.

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

"For several years we debated the need for substantive reform of our first-year curriculum. NSSE results provided evidence to persuade the faculty to change, and helped inform the new curriculum that we are now implementing."

—Richard F. Vaz, Dean for Interdisciplinary and Global Studies, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

NSSE Research

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

Annual Report —The *Annual Report* (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_reports.cfm) summarizes major findings for the year and highlights ways that colleges and universities are using NSSE data to improve collegiate quality at their institutions. The report also provides an overview of NSSE's benchmarks of effective educational practice and lists all institutions that have participated in NSSE.

Conceptual Framework — This paper (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm) provides an overview of the NSSE conceptual framework and construction of the survey instrument as well as qualitative and quantitative efforts to ensure validity and reliability.

Psychometric Portfolio — The NSSE Web site (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm) and the *Psychometric Properties* document included in the *Institutional Report* binder answer questions about the development of the survey instrument and benchmarks as well as questions about the validity and reliability of NSSE survey data.

NSSE Technical and Norms Report — This historical document (www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/norms1.pdf), published after the inaugural administration of NSSE in 2000, provides a full description of NSSE's guiding principles and goals, technical information, administrative details, and descriptive statistics based on the NSSE 2000 data.

Grand Frequencies and Means — Tables in NSSE's online *Institutional Reports* (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/institutional_reports.cfm) provide frequencies, means, and standard deviations for first-year students and seniors, with items broken down by class and Carnegie Classification.

Comparative Data on NSSE Benchmarks — Tables on NSSE's Web site (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/institutional_reports.cfm) show descriptive statistics for the NSSE benchmarks by class and by Carnegie Classification. These tables also report results for schools scoring in the top ten percent and fifty percent of participating schools.

Research Papers — NSSE staff members have published a number of articles and presented a variety of papers focusing on specific areas of the results and research methodology. Details can be found on our Web site at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/research.htm.

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.

Fostering Collaboration and Focus

NSSE results can serve as a mechanism for fostering collaboration among campus constituencies and developing broader ownership in efforts to improve the educational experience. Some institutions invite their undergraduates to interpret NSSE results. Student representatives are included on assessment committees at some institutions, and 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.

Hope College facilitated student focus groups on engagement and NSSE results. This led to improvements in academic rigor and diversity at the institution.

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.

At Texas Christian University, NSSE and FSSE results were instrumental in helping increase the first-year to sophomore retention rate, as well as the graduation rate, by helping to ‘clear away the clutter’ and focus institutional energies on areas that seemed to really make a difference in students’ lives. Since beginning to use NSSE and FSSE in 2001, there has been a marked increase in collaborative efforts between Academic and Student Affairs to increase student engagement both in and out of the classroom.

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 (CASTL). Presenting student engagement data is one way to initiate

discussions about a variety of teaching and learning issues, and results from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) can be used to compare faculty and student perceptions.

Alaska Pacific University uses NSSE data for faculty development. At faculty retreats, discussions focus on promoting the application of NSSE results in improving pedagogical approaches. Both adjunct and full-time professors collaborate to create strategies that will lead to increased student engagement.

At Wichita State University, a faculty development session focuses on NSSE results and the institution’s emphasis on student engagement. Faculty orientation meetings also include discussions of NSSE data and implications.

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Iowa State University has sponsored campus-wide Faculty Forums that provide 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.

Table 3 NSSE Participation

Number of Participating Colleges & Universities

2000.	276	2005	529
2001.	321	2006	557
2002.	366	2007	610
2003.	437	2008	772
2004.	473		

Total Number of Different Colleges & Universities

2000 - 2008	1,323
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Participation Frequency of NSSE 2008 Institutions

First-Time Participants	137
Two to Three Time Participants	269
Four to Five Time Participants	200
Six to Eight Time Participants	166

Note: Participation numbers represent all colleges and universities that participated in a standard NSSE administration wherein all sampling and participant recruitment were administered by NSSE. Data summaries in some NSSE reports may exclude institutions where conditions (e.g., low respondent n, lack of data for weighting, international institutions) rendered data inadequate for standard comparisons.

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, 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.

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 institutions 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.

At Viterbo University, the admissions office and alumni office work together in using NSSE to improve their marketing efforts. NSSE results have been included in promotional materials and are shared at new student orientation.

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 rates.

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. In 2007, NSSE developed the *Pocket Guide Report: “What Students Are Saying...”* as a companion to the pocket guide. This report provides prospective students and families a user-friendly resource that responds to questions in the pocket guide with NSSE data collected from actual students attending a given institution. The pocket guide is available in PDF format at www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm.

Accreditation

As mentioned earlier, more than half of NSSE institutions annually use student engagement data in accreditation, both for regional and specialized reviews (e.g., teacher education, social work, music, nursing, business, etc.). For more information on applying NSSE to accreditation, see the Accreditation Toolkits at www.nsse.iub.edu/institute/index.cfm?view=tools/accred_index. The toolkits provides guidelines for using NSSE in accreditation self-studies and maps NSSE items to both regional and specialized accreditation body standards.

NSSE data at Medaille College informs its strategic planning and institutional assessment plan. Data

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. Because it is possible to identify individual student respondents, with local IRB approval NSSE results can be linked with information from academic and financial aid transcripts, retention studies, focus groups, and results from other surveys to develop a rich, comprehensive picture of the undergraduate experience.

Some institutions want multiple years of data before taking action. Other institutions corroborate NSSE results with existing evidence 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.

were reported to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in Medaille's Periodic Review Report and will be 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.

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.

First-Year Experience

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

NSSE TIP #5: Improving Campus Confidence in 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 institution.

In response to skeptics who question whether their results really capture student educational experiences, some institutions 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 done a lot to establish the robustness of the survey. Consider reviewing the *NSSE 2008 Psychometric Properties* document (in the NSSE tab of the *Institutional Report*) when planning a faculty or administrative retreat and plan to have a few copies on hand for those who want more details.

University of San Diego has made several improvements to their "Preceptorial Program," the institution's first-year student advising program. Advances were made to faculty advisor training and faculty advisor evaluations were created, resulting in the "outstanding preceptor" award for superior performance in advising. In addition, student mentor positions were created to work alongside the faculty advisors.



Fayetteville State University

Oakland University has used NSSE data to make the curriculum more engaging. As a result, improvements have been made to the first-year experience, specifically redesigning composition courses to function more as first-year seminars.

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 the 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

"BCSSE and NSSE results have helped guide our thinking and planning over the past two years as the campus engaged in a broad-based strategic planning process."

—Marianne D. Kennedy, Professor and Coordinator of Assessment and Planning, Southern Connecticut State University

NSSE Institute For Effective Educational Practice

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

Regional User Workshops and Webinars

— NSSE staff members and institutional representatives facilitate daylong workshops in different locations around the country and free, live, interactive Webinars to help schools make the most of their results.

Campus Audits — NSSE staff members can conduct comprehensive or targeted campus audits to identify institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Consulting — NSSE staff members can help develop improvement initiatives and address accreditation or other campus goals.

Presentations & Conferences — NSSE staff members are available to participate in panels or research presentations at professional meetings and conferences.

Workshops and Retreats — NSSE staff members can assist with presenting information at faculty and staff workshops and retreats.

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.

Northern Arizona University's first-year task force, 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, and 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.

University of Northern Iowa is using NSSE data in the Voluntary System of Accountability. Data are shared on the institution's "College Portrait" Web page: www.voluntarysystem.org.

Youngstown State University used NSSE data in developing a new strategic plan. To improve the enriching educational experiences of students, Youngstown State intends to increase internship opportunities and co-curricular programming.

Southeastern Bible College uses NSSE results in strategic planning. NSSE data support the assessment efforts of their college-wide educational goals.

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.

Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results

In the first nine years, more than 700 colleges and universities participated in 52 self-selected consortia that added to the NSSE core survey questions that related to shared institutional interests. The consortia represent very different types of institutions—women's colleges, urban universities, Jesuit institutions, engineering colleges, art and design colleges, and research universities.

Multi-campus university systems and state systems of higher education also regularly coordinate survey administration within the same year to standardize assessment initiatives. For example, the State University of New York (SUNY) System Administration and SUNY campuses have been working to implement Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment (SCBA), as directed in a SUNY Board of Trustees' June 2004 resolution. The SCBA plan encompasses professional development, the development and administration of rubrics and of nationally normed tests, and the administration of NSSE every three years, with the first administration in 2008. This work is a central

"NSSE is becoming increasingly helpful in improving student success and building public confidence in the commitment of colleges and universities to improve teaching and learning."

—Paul E. Lingenfelter, President, State Higher Education Executive Officers

component of the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) initiative, which is designed to provide ongoing review of campus-based general education assessment plans.

State & University Systems from 2000-08

California State University
City University of New York
Concordia University System
Connecticut State University System
Indiana University
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
New Jersey Public Universities
North Dakota University System
Ontario Universities
Pennsylvania State University
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
South Dakota Public Universities
State University of New York
Tennessee Public Colleges & Universities
Texas A&M University System
University of Hawai'i System
University of Maine
University of Maryland
University of Massachusetts
University of Missouri
University of North Carolina
University of Texas System
University of Wisconsin System
University System of Georgia

How Often to Use NSSE?

Institutional NSSE results generally 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 institutions want data every year for longitudinal tracking purposes or to monitor the impact of specific improvement initiatives. The new *Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide* (www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/2008_Institutional_Report/Multiyear_Data_Guide.pdf) was created to provide researchers interested in analyzing NSSE data across years with helpful resources and suggested approaches to multi-year analysis.

Sometimes NSSE participation is linked to an institution's accreditation cycle or to coordinated use by a group of institutions (e.g., university system or NSSE consortium participation). 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 Reporting of Student Engagement Results

Prospective students, parents, the media, researchers, and others have expressed interest in seeing institutionally specific NSSE results. Many NSSE institutions have made some or all of their results publicly available in some form (e.g. Web site, alumni magazine, press release). Others use NSSE primarily as a diagnostic tool for improvement. Some are triangulating the results with other data before deciding on appropriate communication strategies.

NSSE's Position on the Public Reporting of Student Engagement Information

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

Publicizing institutional results from the NSSE survey provides an opportunity to educate the public about the value of student engagement as an approach to assessing college 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 the decision to publicize NSSE results properly resides with 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 results available to third parties. Institutions are free to share their results, as stated in the NSSE Participation Agreement. After thoroughly vetting the results, they are encouraged to:

- Focus on educationally meaningful indicators that are linked to student success in the context of the institution's mission
- Provide a rationale for the choice of comparison groups so that others can draw their own conclusions about the merits of the comparisons
- Explain the types of students, variety of behaviors, and institutional conditions the indicators 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 ranking colleges and universities.

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, numerical rankings are inherently

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 various demographics of your NSSE respondent file to see how representative the sample is compared to your campus population. Review sampling error. In future administrations, consider oversampling to increase number of respondents, and promote survey participation.
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-respondent bias checks. The NSSE 2008 Psychometric Properties document (in the NSSE tab of the Institutional Report) provides information about these important issues.
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. All data files, reports, and supporting documents related to NSSE Institutional Reports are available in electronic format through the Institution Interface accessible from the NSSE home page at www.nsse.iub.edu , which allows for easier print or electronic distribution.
“Average” results across the board	Try using a different comparison group or consider a criterion-based approach to determine the degree to which student performance is consistent with institutional expectations. Analyze results by subgroups to reveal internal variation.
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.

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 institutions that differ with respect to mission, resources, structural features, and student characteristics.

Final Word

Collecting and documenting how NSSE colleges and universities are using their results is an ongoing process. We want to know how institutions 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

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
1900 East Tenth Street, Suite 419
Bloomington, IN 47406-7512

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