

Assessing and Improving Undergraduate Education in the United States: The National Survey of Student Engagement




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Agenda

- ♦ Context: U.S. higher education
- ♦ Origins of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- ♦ NSSE overview
- ♦ Using NSSE data
- ♦ Cautions

Context: Higher Education in the United States


- ♦ No national system of higher education
- ♦ Autonomy of institutions
- ♦ Diversity of institutions
 - ♦ 4,400 colleges and universities
 - ♦ Public and private
 - ♦ Universities (undergraduate and graduate degrees)
 - ♦ Colleges (undergraduate only)
 - ♦ 4-year bachelor's degree
 - ♦ 2-year associate's degree (community colleges)



Context: Higher Education in the United States (2)

Diversity of students


- ♦ Full- and part-time
- ♦ Traditional college-age
- ♦ Older and returning students
- ♦ Diversity of preparation



Context: Higher Education in the United States (3)

Dominant understandings of "quality"

- ♦ Accreditation
 - ♦ Limited public understanding
 - ♦ Traditional emphasis on capacity and resources
 - ♦ Less attention to learning outcomes
- ♦ Newsmagazine rankings
 - ♦ Emphasize reputation, inputs, resources
- ♦ Research rankings
 - ♦ Blind to undergraduate education



Why NSSE?

To shift the conversation about college quality

- ♦ **Away from**
 - ♦ Reputation
 - ♦ Resources
 - ♦ Research function
- ♦ **Toward**
 - ♦ Undergraduate teaching and learning



Why NSSE? (2)

- ◆ Direct assessment of learning is problematic
 - ◆ Diversity of U.S. institutions and missions
 - ◆ Diversity of fields of study
 - ◆ Measurement challenges
- ◆ Focus instead on **effective practices**
 - ◆ Grounded in research on student learning
 - ◆ Quality of student effort
 - ◆ Principles of good practice



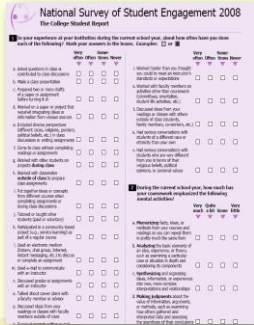
Why Student Engagement?

The time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development.



The NSSE Survey

- ◆ Assesses how much students engage in and are exposed to proven educational practices
- ◆ Institutions participate voluntarily
- ◆ Random sample of first- and final-year undergraduates
- ◆ NSSE provides detailed reports and data to institutions
- ◆ Results are confidential





Survey Content

- ♦ Academic activities & experiences
- ♦ Mental activities in courses
- ♦ Reading & writing
- ♦ Homework
- ♦ Academic challenge
- ♦ Co-curricular activities
- ♦ Enriching educational experiences
- ♦ Campus relationships
- ♦ Time usage
- ♦ Institutional emphases
- ♦ Cognitive & noncognitive gains
- ♦ Satisfaction
- ♦ Demographic & enrollment characteristics



Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice





NSSE Products

- ♦ Institutional Report
 - ♦ Custom Comparison Reports
 - ♦ Respondent characteristics
 - ♦ Survey item means & frequencies
 - ♦ Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice
- ♦ User Resources
 - ♦ Using NSSE Data
 - ♦ Data Facilitator's Guide
 - ♦ Accreditation Toolkit
- ♦ Student Data File
- ♦ Annual Report
 - ♦ National perspective
 - ♦ Examples of NSSE data use



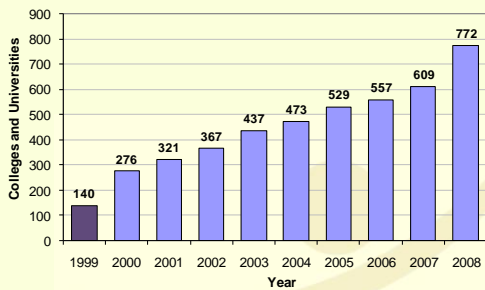


Using NSSE Results

- ◆ **Diagnostic purpose:** analyzing the undergraduate experience
- ◆ Identify strengths and weaknesses, areas where improvement is needed
- ◆ Stimulates conversations about quality
- ◆ Informs decision-making with “actionable” information



NSSE's Acceptance and Use





Related Surveys

- ◆ Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
- ◆ Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement
- ◆ Law School Survey of Student Engagement
- ◆ Community College Survey of Student Engagement*
- ◆ High School Survey of Student Engagement*

*Not administered by the IU Center for Postsecondary Research



Cautions

- ◆ NSSE is no "magic bullet": Best used in combination with other information
- ◆ Change ultimately comes from the faculty
- ◆ Most variation is between *students*, not *institutions*
- ◆ Danger in making NSSE a high stakes test
 - ◆ Diagnostic value can be undermined
 - ◆ Institutions will not participate if *public relations cost > institutional benefit*



Gathering Data: One Step in the Improvement Cycle





More Information

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