Overview of Activities of the NSSE Institute

The NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice develops user resources and responds to requests for assistance in using student engagement results to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness. Since its inception in 2003, Institute staff and associates have completed a major national study of high performing colleges and universities, made dozens of presentations at national and regional meetings, and worked with many campuses to enhance student success.

Here are a few examples of how Institute associates have been involved with other institutions, state systems and organizations:

- Designed a day-long retreat with administrators and faculty at an urban research university to review their NSSE and FSSE data and identify institutional policies and practices that promote and inhibit student persistence and academic success.

- Reviewed student engagement data with small groups of faculty, administrators, and staff at colleges and universities to identify areas where the institutions could focus to improve student engagement.

- Presented a workshop at a system-level conference for faculty members interested in using NSSE data in their scholarship of teaching projects.

- Worked with representatives from dozens of colleges and universities that participated in regional workshops (Texas, Illinois, Florida, Oklahoma, Connecticut, Kansas, Nevada, and Kentucky) on using NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE results for accreditation and institutional improvement initiatives.

- Advised teams at an annual summer institute on learning communities about using NSSE results to develop and assess the effectiveness of learning communities.

These examples illustrate the range of services we offer and the diverse institutions and organizations we serve. The rest of this section provides additional information about the NSSE Institute.

Outreach Services

NSSE Users Workshops

Users workshops provide institutional researchers, faculty, administrators, and staff an opportunity to gain ideas about using NSSE data from their colleagues at peer institutions and NSSE staff members. Workshops topics address how to use NSSE results in assessment, accreditation, self-studies, general education reviews, reviews of academic and student life programs, and faculty development initiatives. These ideas are presented in a collaborative environment over a one- or two-day period. Through a combination of plenary talks, concurrent interest sessions, group activities, and hands-on sessions, participants learn more about linking NSSE data to other institutional data, as well as to BCSSE and FSSE results to better understand educationally effective practice.

The fall 2008 users workshop was held at the State University of New York, Brockport, October 16-17, 2008. Over 100 representatives from 67 U.S. and Canadian institutions attended the workshop. Participants took advantage of opportunities to learn more about using NSSE data from colleagues at peer institutions and from NSSE staff members.

Representatives from institutions in Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and from as far as Mexico, participated in the spring 2009 users workshop hosted by Northern Kentucky University. The workshop took place in NKU’s new Student Union building, which features state-of-the-art conference and meeting facilities.

Highlights of the workshop included a plenary by NSSE Director Alex McCormick, entitled “Accountability and Improvement: Don’t Let Proving You’re Good Interfere with Getting Better,” and a featured presentation by Robert Springer, Director of Institutional Research at Elon University, on “Practical Applications for Using BCSSE-NSSE Data.”
Presentations from all past NSSE users workshops are available on the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/workshop_presentations.

If you have questions about NSSE users workshops or are interested in hosting an event at your institution, please contact Jillian Kinzie at 812-856-1430 (toll free 866-435-6773) or jikinzie@indiana.edu.

NSSE Webinars

The 2009 NSSE Tuesday Webinar series includes new topics that focus on how to integrate NSSE data with institutional data, use NSSE in accreditation, move beyond benchmark results, customize comparison groups, and dig deeper into your institutional results.

Each hour-long Webinar includes a PowerPoint presentation and a question and answer period. Recorded Webinars in the NSSE archive include topics such as “Assessing the First-Year Experience,” “Using NSSE Data for Student Affairs,” and “Introduction to BCSSE.” All sessions are available for viewing on the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/Webinars.

Resources

Guide to Online Resources

The Guide to Online Resources was revised and expanded for the Institutional Report 2009 and can be found under the User Resources tab in the binder. The document provides an annotated list of user resources that are available in the binder and for download from the NSSE Web site. A Web version of the guide with active links can be found at: www.nsse.iub.edu/2009_Institutional_Report.

A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College and The Student Experience in Brief

NSSE’s guide to exploring colleges, A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College: Are You Asking the Right Questions? was created as part of an ongoing public awareness campaign to refocus the national conversation about what constitutes quality in the college experience. Designed to help prospective college students and their parents in the college decision-making process, the pocket guide is also a useful resource for college admissions staff. A Spanish version of the pocket guide, Una Guía de Bolsillo Para Escoger una Universidad, is also available. Counselors and college admissions staff can request free copies of the pocket guide at: www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm.

Questions drawn from the pocket guide, along with responses from the students on your campus, are provided in The Student Experience in Brief, an updated version of the pocket guide report, What Students Are Saying..., included in previous institutional reports. The retitled report contains the same companion display of pocket guide questions and NSSE results. It is provided in Word and PDF formats to allow institutions to edit content as well as insert campus logos and photographs.

Research Initiatives

Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS)

The Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS) project which ended in December 2007, was a partnership among the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), NSSE, and more than 100 four-year institutions in the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education. Having administered NSSE at least once, these institutions committed to implementing action plans to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience on their campuses and conducting another NSSE administration to assess success.


In addition, the project resulted in 10 practice briefs that focus on aligning multiple campus initiatives, campus leaders’ support, co-curricular activities, collecting survey data for assessment, engagement among campus constituencies, faculty development, first-year programs, student support services technology, and writing across the curriculum. Find brief titles and links to PDF copies in the Guide to Online Resources section under the User Resources tab of the Institutional Report 2009 binder.

CIC-CLA Consortium Project

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) continues to work with a consortium of institutions that are using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) instrument, an evaluation tool for measuring the cognitive growth of students. The goal of the CIC-CLA project is to learn more about programmatic features that correlate with “institutional effects” associated with larger-than-expected gains in students’ analytical reasoning, critical thinking, and writing skills. NSSE is one diagnostic tool that schools can use in their efforts. NSSE is working with CIC and CLA to explore the potential for participating institutions to: 1) administer BCSSE, CLA, and NSSE surveys to match first-year data to outcomes for in-depth analysis of the
First-Year Experience, including relationships among high school experiences, college expectations, engagement, self-reported gains, and all measures and success indicators; and 2) administer NSSE and CLA to seniors to examine the relationship between experiences and CLA scores.

**National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)**

Established in 2008, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) assists institutions in discovering and adopting promising practices in the assessment of college student learning outcomes. NILOA’s primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education as well as externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

The NILOA project is based at the University of Illinois and Indiana University. Stan Ikenberry and George Kuh serve as co-principal investigators. Additional project research staff members include NSSE Associate Director Jillian Kinzie, and several doctoral students in the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. The initiative is guided by a National Advisory Panel and supported by foundations including Lumina Foundation for Education, The Teagle Foundation and others. Find details on the NILOA Web site, www.learningoutcomesassessment.org.

**NSSE Change Study**

Work progresses on our investigation into how NSSE results are used to inform or to help launch campus improvement initiatives and to what extent such changes have resulted in increases to an institution’s NSSE scores. We further analyzed multi-year results for all institutions that have participated in at least three NSSE administrations from 2005-2009. Using a variety of statistical methods, we identified a set of institutions whose NSSE scores on select scales have changed significantly. To learn more about what might have accounted for these changes, we will begin interviews with institutional contacts and conduct case studies in fall 2009.

**Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts Projects (CILA)**

NSSE continues its collaborations with CILA and arranged a licensing agreement for NSSE to be used with the 2009 cohort of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE), a longitudinal project to assess liberal arts outcomes. The project aims to explore not only whether and how much students develop because of their collegiate experiences, but also why and how this development takes place.

One of the benefits of NSSE’s involvement in this project is the potential for exploring the relationship between engagement and a variety of outcomes measures, such as critical thinking as measured by the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) Critical Thinking Test, and moral reasoning and character as measured by the Defining Issues Test (DIT-2). Findings from the first year of the WNSLAE show promising results regarding the relationship between effective educational practice measured on NSSE and key outcomes assessed in the study. NSSE and the WNSLAE research team will conduct further analysis of NSSE data and key outcomes to support cross-validation activities. For details on the project, visit the Wabash College Center of Inquiry Web site, www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/overview.

**Teagle Foundation Grant to Evaluate Assessment Efforts**

NSSE Institute staff completed the Teagle Foundation Evaluation project in the spring of 2008. The Teagle Foundation funded six “collaboratives” involving 30 colleges for three years of work focused on using assessment instruments and data to cultivate a culture of evidence on their campuses. These efforts aimed to advance the adoption and use of assessment models and tools in liberal arts colleges and to develop additional approaches that are sensitive to educational processes valued in the liberal arts tradition. The larger goals of this initiative were to stimulate faculty-driven assessment, to produce evidence of deeper, engaged learning by undergraduates, to develop a capacity for ongoing assessment in liberal arts colleges, and, ultimately, to enhance student learning.

**Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education: Lessons from the Field 2009**

To gather additional information from college and university educators on how they are utilizing their institution’s NSSE, FSSE and BCSSE results, NSSE staff conducted interviews with representatives from 35 institutions throughout the summer of 2008. Staff members from the NSSE Institute and doctoral students from NSSE client service teams chose institutions from a comprehensive list of participating colleges and universities. The institutions represented a range of size, Carnegie type, region, locale, and private or public control.

The interviews were completed in September 2008 and compiled into the report, *Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education: Lessons from the Field 2009*. The document includes three longer
“stories” that highlight Pace University, Youngstown State University, and Viterbo University as illustrative cases for the successful use of NSSE results. We also feature shorter descriptions of the approaches institutions have taken to move from data to action. The shorter pieces are organized by topic such as “Making NSSE Data Part of a Systematic Assessment Approach,” “Promoting Student Engagement through Shared Leadership and Collaboration,” “Empowering Institutional Stakeholders to Convert NSSE Results into Action,” and “Student Faculty Interaction.”

*Lessons from the Field 2009* serves as a repository of practical ideas for NSSE institutions to improve evidence-based assessment and improvement initiatives. We plan to publish the report biennially and will continue to conduct interviews and feature additional examples of institutions that use NSSE data in assessment and planning. The report is included in the *Institutional Report 2009* and can be downloaded from the NSSE Web site, [www.nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons).

**Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)**

The NSSE Web site contains resource pages on the VSA project developed through a partnership of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). This section of the Web site describes how NSSE results may be used to complete the Student Experiences and Perceptions section in the College Portrait. NSSE has been selected as one of four assessment instruments about students’ experiences and perceptions for the VSA. The College Portrait template provides a number of opportunities for an institution to use its NSSE results to demonstrate institutional strengths in six specified areas that academic research has shown to be correlated with greater student learning and development: group learning, active learning, experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas, student satisfaction, institutional commitment to student learning and success, and student interactions with faculty and staff. Read more about VSA on the NSSE Web site at: [www.nsse.iub.edu/html/vsa.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/vsa.cfm).