![NSSE national survey of student engagement logo]

Using NSSE Data

Student engagement results are used across all sectors and types of institutions. Discovering and sharing how this happens is one of NSSE's most important activities. In addition to this document, we have published *Lessons from the Field, Volume 1: Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education* and *Volume 2: Moving from Data to Action,* to provide richer, more detailed narratives about how institutions put their results into action. The documents provide in-depth accounts of ways institutions use NSSE results to improve the undergraduate experience.
nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons_home

Each year, more campuses use their NSSE results in innovative ways. We've highlighted these examples in publications including *Using NSSE Data* and *Lessons from the Field*. All examples are searchable via a new database of more than 500 examples of NSSE use. You can search for examples by keyword, institution name, or Carnegie classification; by type of use, such as for accreditation or general education assessment; or by using results to study retention or strengthen advising. These campus examples provide instructive accounts and inspiring examples of how other colleges and universities are using their NSSE results to improve undergraduate education.
nsse.iub.edu/html/using_nsse_db.cfm

Using NSSE Data contains snapshots of data use, educational policy and practice informed by NSSE results, and suggests ways colleges and universities can use their data productively. The institutional examples in this document were collected from representatives of participating colleges and universities who provided feedback at conferences, through NSSE Project Services teams, and in response to our report card feedback process and other direct solicitations.

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

Stephens College

Tell Us Your Story

Collecting and documenting ways that NSSE colleges and universities are using their results is an ongoing process. We want to know how institutions are using their NSSE data. 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. Please contact your NSSE Project Services team if you wish to send specific examples of internal reports or brochures highlighting NSSE data, usage strategies, and special activities.
nsse.iub.edu/html/staff.cfm

Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of NSSE users, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating NSSE data in institutional improvement efforts:

1. Encourage faculty and staff to understand and endorse the concept of student engagement. The concept of student engagement and the value of engagement results for improving teaching and learning need to be convincingly explained to those less familiar with assessment.

2. Consult the NSSE Psychometric Portfolio. In the Findings section of our Web site, users can review information about NSSE's validity, reliability, and other data qualities.
   nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

3. Review department or unit level data. NSSE's census administration enables institutions to drill down to the department or unit level, which may increase faculty interest in using engagement data. The *Major Field Report* also facilitates department level work.
   nsse.iub.edu/html/major_field_report.cfm

4. Link 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 combined with other student information and made relevant to groups of faculty and staff working on different reform efforts around the campus.

5. 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.

6. Don't allow the numbers to speak for themselves. Numeric results and statistical comparisons are more accessible when accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from them.

7. Examine results from multiple perspectives. Normative comparisons may confirm or challenge assumptions about performance relative to other institutions. You may also consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement in the context of your institution's mission or program offerings.

8. Don't go it alone. The likelihood that changes in policy and practice will succeed 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 priorities and 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. It is also important to examine internal variation in student engagement to identify groups of students who are least engaged and what may be done to improve their experience.

University of Texas at Brownsville

Benchmarking

Institutions use two basic approaches to benchmarking with NSSE: normative and criterion. One or both may be appropriate, depending on institutional priorities.

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 to review Tarleton's NSSE results. Thought-provoking findings emerged when the university compared its scores with those of other institutions within its Carnegie classification and the full NSSE cohort. In an attempt to gather additional insights, the group visited with other Tarleton campus leaders to outline its discussions and to seek other thoughts and ideas.

Criterion Approach

With the criterion approach, you compare your institution's results against a predetermined value that you and your colleagues deem appropriate, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth.

Tulane University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) established the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT). The center is the hub for fostering engaged learning experiences in four core areas: research engagement, social innovation engagement, classroom engagement, and experiential engagement. Tulane used NSSE results along with other indicators of students' interest in public service and research to establish the warrant for the project. NSSE item responses of "expect to do" for first-year students showed high levels of interest in three High Impact Practices: Internships (71%), Undergraduate Research (44%), and Study Abroad (62%). This suggested the need to expand opportunity based on student interest. NSSE results related to the types of engaged learning activities indicative of CELT serve as baseline indicators and subsequent results will be used to continuously monitor student participation and educational effectiveness.

Communicating Results

Institutions often share their results using a combination of dissemination strategies (Table 1).

Selected Audiences

Targeting specific audiences who may have expressed an interest in one or more aspects of the results may spark focused dialogue about implications of the findings for policy and practice.

Clemson University created specialized reports to reflect the interests of various constituencies including student affairs, student government, and academic affairs. The data are also used extensively in presentations to the Board of Trustees and department head meetings.

Selected NSSE results are shared with faculty during Fall Faculty Workshops at **Lindenwood University**. Faculty are asked to consider the results as they plan and develop their curriculum and interact with students. Faculty members of the Retention Committee are working on identifying key areas that can be improved and ways to foster a more supportive campus environment.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) developed a computer program that allows departments and colleges to generate a set of PowerPoint presentations for each of the five benchmarks and all other survey items. This program and NSSE data are provided to each department and college to promote a clearer understanding of engagement indicators.

Prompted by the findings in recent studies and Policy Recommendations from the SSRC-CLAA Longitudinal Project, members of the Academic Affairs subcommittee of the Board of Directors at **Walsh University** requested more information from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) about the kinds of data being collected on the academic performance of Walsh students. In response, OIE staff created a PowerPoint presentation charting 5 years of NSSE data that show longitudinal comparisons with Carnegie peers and overall NSSE cohorts.

NSSE questions used in the benchmark comparison included analyzing and synthesizing information, making judgments about information, applying

Table 1
Data Sharing With and Use by Internal Institutional Audiences

Institutional Stakeholders	Results shared with	Results explicitly used by
President/Senior Administration	94%	52%
Department Chairs/Deans	84%	48%
Faculty	84%	39%
Student Affairs Staff	81%	51%
Advising Staff	59%	30%
Admissions Staff	60%	17%
Public Affairs/News Office	56%	22%
Governing Board	50%	10%
Students	44%	3%
Campus Newspaper	21%	4%
Targeted Committees/Groups		
Accreditation	68%	51%
First-Year Experience	62%	47%
Teaching and Learning	52%	26%
General Education	55%	31%
Diversity	43%	21%
Writing Program	40%	19%
Technology	32%	9%

Note: Data were collected from 124 institutional respondents to the *NSSE 2011 Report Card*, an assessment of the spring 2011 NSSE survey administration.

theories or concepts to practical problems, as well as amount of reading and writing students did, and how much time they spent on academic tasks and how hard they worked. All these factors were tied to cognitive development in the studies named above.

The subcommittee members had a lively discussion about the data during which they asked perceptive questions. They recommended the presentation be given to the full Board at a future meeting.

Wofford College designed a four-page brochure, *Measuring Student Engagement—Learn What Your Student Will Actually Get*, for distribution to support groups, such as the Alumni Executive Council, and for use by admissions staff with visiting prospective students and high school counselors. The brochure provides a context for student engagement and describes how purposeful activities promote student learning. Graphs of NSSE benchmark results illustrate the Q&A format. Questions such as "How does the survey of student engagement work at Wofford and other participating colleges?" and "How do colleges measure their performance in engaged learning?" help to intrepret and explain Wofford's NSSE results.

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

NSSE encourages public reporting of student engagement results in ways that increase understanding of college quality and support institutional improvement efforts. Publicizing institutional results from the NSSE survey provides an opportunity to educate the public about the value of student engagement in assessing college quality. NSSE supports public reporting of student engagement results in ways that enable thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons while encouraging and celebrating institutional diversity. nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Engagement_Data.cfm

---

Campus Wide

To distribute NSSE results broadly, many institutions post summaries of important findings online and invite colleagues to review the full report or request it through the appropriate office. Others share results through displays created in public areas such as student unions or dining halls.

Clayton State University (CSU) discusses their NSSE results at faculty council meetings, 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.

Utah Valley University first administered NSSE in 2008 and has been very active in disseminating the results and fostering a campus dialogue about improving the undergraduate experience. Presentations have been given on the findings and reports were posted on the institution's Web site. NSSE data were disaggregated by school and provided to deans. This helped faculty recognize the importance of NSSE data and ways they can be used to inform their efforts.

External Audiences

Prospective students, parents, the media, researchers, and others express interest in seeing institutionally specific NSSE results. Many NSSE institutions have publicized some or all of their results in some form (e.g., Web site, alumni magazine, press release) (Table 2).

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

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 research universities, and a special science and technology public peer group. This report was posted to OIR's Web site. As a result, office staff members could refer prospective students and parents to the site to review the report online.

Table 2
Data Sharing With External Institutional Audiences

External Audiences	Results shared with
Accreditation Agencies	72%
Prospective Students and Parents	32%
Media	23%
State Agencies and Commissions	25%
Alumni	14%
Schools/Counselors	11%
Others	8%

Note: Data were collected from 124 institutional respondents to the *NSSE 2011 Report Card*, an assessment of the spring 2011 NSSE survey administration.

Seton Hall University

Institutional Improvement Examples

In this section we present examples of how colleges and universities use NSSE data in the following categories: academic advising, general education, academic challenge, 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, planning and accountability, and writing programs.

Academic Advising

Academic advisors play an integral role in fostering student engagement through early contact with new students and shaping their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. NSSE results can inform institutional efforts to improve academic advising.

The **University of Tennessee, Knoxville** (UT Knoxville) sought to improve the effectiveness of advising programs. To accomplish that goal, the university administration and advising community examined a number of indicators such as the ratio of students per advisor, information from student focus groups regarding their advising experiences, and a comprehensive program review by external consultants. They also used NSSE responses to explore students' use of academic support programs, frequency of discussions about career plans with advisors or faculty, perceptions of the academic experience, level of participation in service-learning and undergraduate research, and their experiences with diversity.

All of these indicators align with the university's advising program goals and learning outcomes, and are related to the overall undergraduate academic experience. Advisors are expected to guide students

toward academic support services, programs in service-learning and undergraduate research, co-curricular opportunities, and a comprehensive campus initiative on understanding the diversity of our world and global affairs. As a result of this two-year assessment process, the university has increased the number of full-time academic advisors; restructured orientation advising for first-year students, which includes extended contact with college academic advisors and individual advising sessions; and implemented a new advising policy that targets students who are most at-risk not to progress to graduation, such as new transfers, students on probation, and those without declared majors.

General Education

General education (GE) provides the foundation on which essential learning outcomes are developed. Given the increasing focus on specialization and career preparation, GE introduces students to a variety of topics vital to a liberally educated citizenry. It is also intended to help students develop valuable skills—such as integrative thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking—that will serve them over the course of their lives.

> **The University of North Carolina Wilmington** (UNCW) has used five administrations of NSSE and one administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) as indirect and direct measures, respectively, to assess and guide revision of its general education core curriculum, the Basic Studies Program. UNCW is an AAC&U VALUE Partner

University of Nevada, Reno

campus, part of a multi-year, national project to develop rubrics for assessing general education learning outcomes. In 2008, UNCW's efforts focused on developing 37 common learning outcomes that were used to select departments and courses from which student work would be assessed. CLA scores were used to assess critical thinking and written communication skills. NSSE results were used to establish trends and to plan for longitudinal disaggregation of data by department and school. Concern over lower than desired results on NSSE items relating to integrating ideas or information from various sources also generated a rubric-based plan for assessing information literacy.

High Impact Practices (HIPs)

Because of their positive effects on student learning and retention, special undergraduate opportunities such as learning communities, service-learning, research with a faculty member, study abroad, internships, and culminating senior experiences are called high-impact practices (HIPs) (See G. D. Kuh, *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter,* AAC&U, 2008).

High-impact practices share several traits. They:

- Demand considerable time and effort
- Provide learning opportunities outside of the classroom
- Require meaningful interactions with faculty members and students
- Encourage interaction with diverse others
- Provide frequent and meaningful feedback.

Participation in these activities can be life-changing.

> The Committee on Student Engagement at **Ramapo College of New Jersey** was charged to develop a comprehensive plan to more fully engage students in their undergraduate college experience, motivated in large part by a thorough examination of NSSE results relating to high-impact practices and comparisons to institutions with similar missions. The committee held a series of retreats and meetings that reviewed results, created an inventory of campus experiences that meet student engagement outcomes, placed these activities on a four-year continuum, and identified how students benefit from the experiences. The committee then created a four-year development model that included four student learning goals for academic, social, personal, and campus/civic engagement. They also identified Key Points of Student Engagement (KPEs)—high-impact activities that contribute to student learning and achieve the four goals. For example, existing first-year KPEs are the summer reading program, Convocation, Orientation,

and Welcome Week activities. KPEs provide an explicit indicator about factors important to achieving student learning goals, and they represent institutional commitments to supporting and strengthening student engagement.

Currently, the model is available for first-year and sophomore students. Future plans include creating a model for juniors and seniors, determining the best way to incorporate transfer students, and offering a co-curricular transcript that records student progress throughout the collegiate journey. Long-term assessment of the model will include a triangulation of NSSE data with other institutional data sources, such as retention data and student satisfaction surveys, to determine the validity and effectiveness of the overall model.

Transfer Students

Transfer students who attend more than one institution are increasingly common. Indeed, more than 40% of seniors responding to NSSE in 2008 started at a different institution. Understanding the experiences of this large subpopulation should be of keen interest to faculty and administrators.

The Citadel

As part of **Western Michigan University**'s (WMU) planning priorities for 2011–12, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) presented findings to the Provost's Council about how engagement for transfer students (growing in number at WMU) differed from students who began their undergraduate careers at WMU. Staff examined NSSE data from 2008–2010 because it was the first time WMU participated in consecutive years. Selected findings showed that transfer students were less likely to work with faculty outside of class, complete a field-based experience, carry out community service, or complete a culminating senior project—important goals of WMU's strategic plan.

"We have made several presentations including one at the Celebration of Teaching and Learning, which over 200 faculty attended. We have formed a university-wide committee called Persistence to Graduation Committee in which there is a strong faculty representation. We are using the results from the NSSE especially from Student-Faculty Interaction to help with strategic planning and programming to improve retention and graduation of our undergraduates."

—Cheryl Gilchrist, Director of Retention Management and Research, University of Louisville

Furthermore, transfer students were less likely to participate in co-curricular activities due to family responsibilities and time spent commuting to campus. These were important considerations for university programs and practices that support the nonacademic responsibilities of students. Recommendations included a range of initiatives to support transfer student transition, including more evening course offerings and expansion of WMU offerings at local community colleges to ensure smooth transfer.

In addition, WMU implemented a plan to facilitate NSSE data use at the college level to examine other high-priority planning outcomes. WMU developed long-term trend workbooks that display comparison results for individual survey items—over seven years for NSSE and six years for FSSE. The workbooks are posted on the WMU institutional effectiveness Web site.
http://www.wmich.edu/assessment/inst-assess.html

University of Maine at Augusta

Experiences with Faculty

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.

Winona State University (WSU) in Minnesota has a long history of assessment and evaluation of student engagement and learning outcomes. Most notably, since 1998 they have conducted an institution-wide Assessment Day to gather feedback from students, faculty, and staff and to evaluate student learning outcomes. WSU administered NSSE for the first time in 2009. Results comparing NSSE data to data from a WSU preenrollment survey were analyzed and

presented to all Student Life and Development (SLD) staff and to the campus committee preparing for WSU's upcoming accreditation visit. NSSE results showed that WSU students were very likely to engage in collaborative learning, volunteerism, and service-learning—recent areas of focus at WSU—but were not experiencing as much student-faculty interaction as they had anticipated, especially in the first year. These findings persuaded SLD staff to focus on programming efforts that would involve faculty and promote student-faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom. Additionally, some sections of the first-year orientation course were linked to other courses taught by the same faculty member, serving to increase the amount of contact students had with that instructor.

NSSE results also indicated that more attention was needed to increase student interaction with peers from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. This was not surprising given the relatively homogeneous student body at WSU, but the finding underscored the need for WSU to put increased emphasis on the importance of diversity in multiple arenas. In addition, WSU has administered BCSSE for the first time in 2012 to explore entering students' experiences and expectations for engagement and has developed a reporting tool that allows faculty and staff to quickly and easily view NSSE results broken down by class, gender, and ethnicity.

Enriching the Undergraduate Educational Experience

Several institutions 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.

Norfolk State University (NSU) has participated in numerous administrations of NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE. Results from all three surveys were used for the Walmart Minority Student Success Grant. NSU was concerned about the gaps between faculty perceptions and students' expectations and experiences. Results from interviews with students and faculty members indicated that more faculty involvement was needed to improve the student experience. The grant provided funding for a faculty-led mentoring program for students who participate in the Summer Bridge Program, an orientation program for first-generation, potentially at-risk students who are about to enter their first semester at NSU. Mentoring clusters consist of five to seven students, one faculty member, and peer leaders.

Service Learning

Students who are engaged in service learning activities create meaningful connections with the community, as well as with their faculty and peers.

NSSE data revealed that **University of Georgia** (UGA) students wanted more opportunities to engage in service-learning experiences. The institution responded by creating the Office of Service-Learning in 2005. The office has sought to provide students and faculty with opportunities to integrate service-learning into the formal curriculum, and in 2006 it created the Service-Learning Fellows Program, a development program to assist faculty in their efforts to incorporate service-learning into their teaching, research, and service. More than 40 faculty members from various disciplines across campus have already participated in the program.

Tulane University used NSSE results related to students' expectations for and involvement in service-learning, undergraduate research, and internships—plus other indicators of students' interest in public service and research—to establish the warrant for the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT). Developed as part of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation, CELT will be the hub for fostering four core areas of engagement: (1) research engagement; (2) social innovation engagement; (3) classroom engagement; and (4) experiential engagement. Growing out of Tulane's recognized strength in public service and service-learning, as well as students' keen interest in engaging

NSSE TIP #2: 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 the NSSE data file identifies individual student respondents, with local Institutional Review Board 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 students' use of technology, the amount of assigned reading and writing in certain majors, and the quality of academic advising.

in public service programs, the project will expand opportunities for more students and faculty to participate in meaningful, high-impact practices and learning experiences that complement their academic and career goals.

NSSE data related to the activities of CELT will be used as baseline indicators, and future results will be used to monitor student participation and educational effectiveness. For example, NSSE items related to working with other students on projects during class will serve as a proxy for engaged classroom activity, and participation in undergraduate research and service-learning will provide feedback on participation in high-impact activities. Highlights of Tulane's assessment plan include the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment activities and the use of multiple measures and methods. To assess the extent to which involvement in CELT activities relates to the learning outcome "effectively live and work in a culturally complex society," Tulane will collect evidence using the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Intercultural Knowledge and Competence rubric and review NSSE results on diverse interactions. Tulane's plan promises to create an enriched environment for student learning and promote innovative approaches to teaching.

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 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.

In its 2012 self-study for NEASC reaffirmation, **Worcester State University** shared data from 2008 and 2011 NSSE administrations via roundtable discussions as well as provided results at the program and department levels. Results from a 2012 FSSE administration will be compared with previous NSSE responses as indirect measures of student and faculty engagement indicators to support Standard 4, The Academic Program, Assessment of Student Learning. A third survey, the Commuter and Off-Campus Student Experience Survey (COSES), administered in 2012, will provide additional data on the needs and experiences of commuter students. These three surveys will continue to be administered over time to identify long-term trends and patterns.

In addition, Worcester State plans to use combined data from NSSE and FSSE as a knowledge base to bolster its retention efforts. Campus-wide discussions are planned to gather ideas on ways to support students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Faculty and Staff Development

NSSE results are appropriate for faculty and staff development workshops and retreats, such as those sponsored by 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 results from the FSSE can be used to compare faculty and student perceptions.

Denison University places great emphasis on effective teaching practices and establishing a community of learning. As a result, student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning, and undergraduate research are prioritized by faculty members across disciplines. Denison administers various assessment tools in order to show evidence of effective teaching and student learning. NSSE serves as an example of such efforts. Denison administered NSSE from 2002 to 2006 and in 2008 and 2010. NSSE is used as an indirect measure of student learning that serves as a complement to the direct measures being used in the academic departments. Denison strives to further the level of student-faculty interaction. In doing so, they reduced the teaching load for faculty from six courses per academic year to five in order to provide faculty with more opportunities for one-on-one interaction with students. Denison also

---

NSSE TIP #3: 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.

NSSE is committed to data quality and continuous improvement and embraces the responsibility to share detailed information about the survey with the higher education community. The Psychometric Portfolio is a framework for presenting our studies of validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE's data, including breakdowns by a variety of student and institutional characteristics. It serves higher education leaders, researchers, and professionals who have a vested interest in using NSSE data and trusting their results.
nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

---

established the Summer Scholars Program, which provides students with the opportunity to spend the summer engaged in research with a faculty member.

Illinois State University uses NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE findings to guide campus conversations among students, faculty, student affairs personnel, and other stakeholders. Solution-based programming has been designed using data from NSSE, FSSE and BCSSE, providing a vehicle for meaningful conversations about student engagement and effective and timely support to faculty and staff. For example, a four-part series cosponsored with the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology titled "Improve Student Writing and Still Have a Life" was developed for faculty based upon results from the NSSE and FSSE 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.

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.

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. 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.

Accreditation

Accreditors are the most common external audience for NSSE results (Table 2, p.5). More than half of NSSE institutions tell us that they use their results in self-studies and accreditation reports.

The State University of New York Potsdam (SUNY Potsdam) used its results from nine NSSE administrations to support its 2010 Self-Study for reaffirmation of accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Specific NSSE items were aligned with MSCHE standards to report levels of student participation in undergraduate research and service-learning, as well as to measure the degree of student interaction with faculty,

administrators, and student affairs personnel. NSSE results were also used to review general education and academic advising at the institution.

SUNY Potsdam has made great efforts to encourage data use at the department level. NSSE results are featured on the institution's Web site and use of NSSE data has been promoted across campus. Department chairs disseminate disaggregated results in breakout reports and facilitate getting the data into the hands of faculty to help improve pedagogical practice.

Georgia State University's QEP for SACS, *Critical Thinking Through Writing* (CTW), used NSSE results to assess gains in work-related knowledge and critical thinking skills. The CTW initiative is nested within academic departments where faculty members serve as CTW ambassadors and train instructors in CTW classes. As a new graduation requirement, GSU students must pass two CTW courses. The QEP will use direct assessments including departmental annual reports of student learning outcomes by major, surveys of instructors and students, written reports from CTW faculty ambassadors, as well as indirect assessments such as NSSE results and senior exit surveys.

Other examples can be found in the regional *Accreditation Toolkits* on the NSSE Web site.
nsse.iub.edu/links/accred_resources

First-Year Experience

First-year experience programs are commonplace today, and students' responses to relevant survey items can assist institutions in determining their effectiveness.

The College of Saint Rose participates in NSSE on a two-year cycle and uses the results to assess the First-Year Experience. In addition, the Resident Life Office conducts an internal survey of students' experiences in REAL LIFE, a resident-life program in first-year residence halls. The First-Year Advisory Group analyzes the data collected along with assessment data from several other first-year programming initiatives such as orientation and academic advising.

In their matrix of "student outcomes," many specific NSSE items are mapped to each goal. For example, Goal 1 explores how well students connect to (a) their peers, faculty, and other campus constituents; (b) the institution's mission; (c) their major discipline or department; and (d) the college community at large. NSSE items 1 and 8 are used to assess this goal. Goal II addresses developing the skills for academic success such as critical thinking, effective written and oral communication, leadership abilities, and so on. Results on NSSE survey items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, and 11 are triangulated with other institutional data to provide evidence of how well students are meeting this goal.

The University of Akron used NSSE results for its Foundations of Excellence® self-study to help identify areas for improvement. These 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.
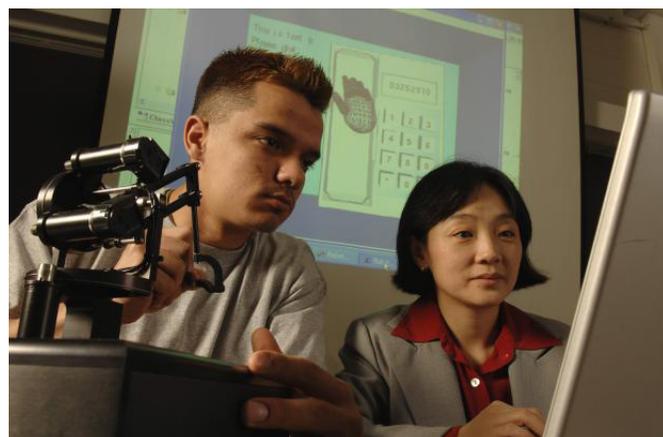
Purdue University Calumet

Reporting by Majors and Programs

NSSE results disaggregated by categories of related majors and programs may be used for assessment by deans, department chairs, and faculty. NSSE's *Major Field Report* facilitates department-level work.

A cycle of student surveys including NSSE are administered by the office of Institutional Analysis at the **University of Colorado Boulder** (CU–Boulder) to emphasize program-level data, benchmarking, and student reflection on learning, and other campus goals. Results are reported publicly by college, school, division, and department. CU–Boulder is also the national coordinator of the Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) program. The AAUDE–NSSE consortium allows institutions to add

"We promote the NSSE results in meetings with faculty committees, the University Senate, and occasionally with smaller faculty groups. Because we have participated for a number of consecutive years, we are also now able to pool results by college within the university, which really helps get deans' attention."

— Iryna Johnson, Associate Director for Assessment, Auburn University

optional questions and/or share NSSE response-level data among participating institutions. Information gathered from these efforts was used in the CU–Boulder Self-Study, *Shaping the New Flagship,* for reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC–NCA).

At **Fayettville State University**, NSSE data are disaggregated by major and provided to department chairs so that they can determine areas of improvement. Student participation in a capstone course or learning community has been of particular interest. The institution has invested more in learning communities and developing capstone courses in an effort to strengthen writing across the curriculum and increase the amount of time students spend preparing for class.

Student Affairs

Student affairs departments use NSSE data to create programs that support a climate of success on their campuses. Through collaborative ventures with academic affairs, they have initiated numerous assessment and improvement efforts:

University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler) uses NSSE data as indicators of student learning and a positive overall college experience. Directors within the student affairs division have identified NSSE items
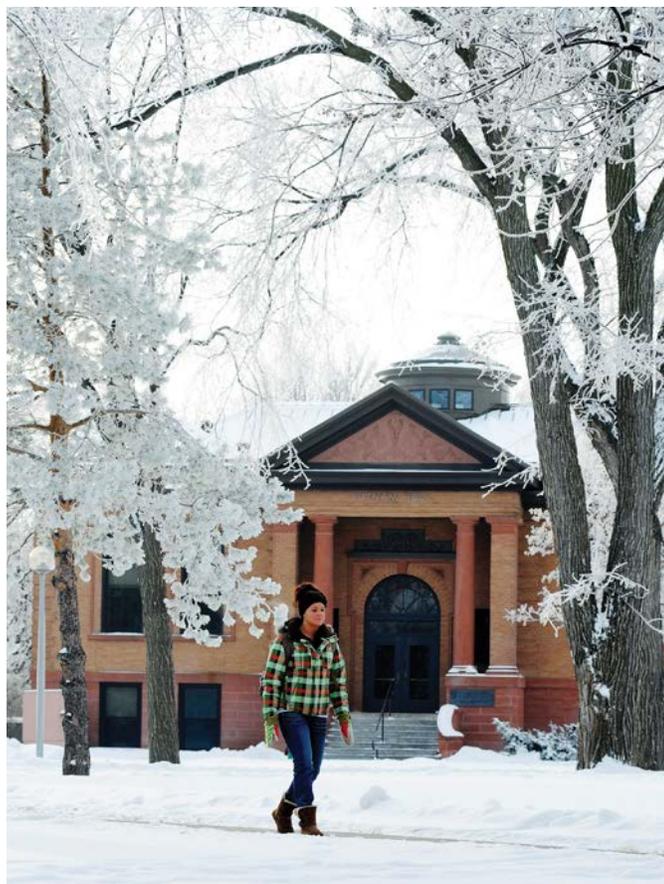
North Dakota State University

that are specifically related to their unit mission, goals, and expected outcomes. Each year, the directors and staff review these items and track longitudinal progress on both internal and external comparisons. Action plans for improvement are determined using the comparative data. The staff has identified the selected NSSE items in the annual assessment plan so that the results and action plans and follow-up are reported annually. The assessment plans are reviewed formally by members of the University Assessment Committee, the Assessment & Institutional Effectiveness staff, and by the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) prepares targeted reports for individual departments in the Division of Student Affairs, such as first-year programs and student housing, that include longitudinal analysis of relevant NSSE items. For example, University Center and Campus Activities receives results on the time students spend in co-curricular activities and the extent to which students perceive an emphasis on attending campus events. A main report for University Housing examines whether students who live on campus are more engaged than students who live off campus. These results provide evidence to support departments' assessment reports for the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). In addition, breakout reports comparing NSSE and BCSSE data have been used by first-year programs to better understand how the institution is meeting first-year students' expectations.

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.

In fall 2009, a task force composed of faculty, administrative staff, and one student was charged with establishing a plan to highlight the "distinctiveness" of the **The State University of New York Oneonta** (SUNY Oneonta) from other comparable institutions. To derive "important attributes" and "distinguishing strengths," the task force reviewed numerous resources including internal and external survey results (Student Opinion Survey [SOS], NSSE, Collegiate Learning Assessment [CLA]), strategic planning documents, and enrollment data. Additional information was collected through an email survey of academic department heads and an open forum held for the campus community. Four themes of "distinctiveness" emerged: reputation, engagement, service, and environment. Scores from the SOS from 2009, admissions data, a rigorous assessment

program, and participation as an early adopter in the VSA program were used as evidence of SUNY Oneonta's reputation of excellence in teaching and learning. NSSE benchmark scores from 2008 provided support that SUNY Oneonta fostered high levels of student engagement inside and outside the classroom. In addition, NSSE results for seniors on survey items related to technology demonstrated that students were using computer and information technologies more frequently than their SUNY system counterparts.

Wagner College links NSSE data with other results to inform programmatic change. Wagner's distinctive curriculum, The Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts, combines interdisciplinary learning with experiential learning in New York City through three learning community formats across students' undergraduate experience. To develop The Wagner Plan to its full potential, Wagner administrators and faculty wanted to determine if there were variations within subgroups of students on a number of NSSE benchmarks.

NSSE TIP #4: Contextualize Your NSSE Data Using Cognitive Interviews and Focus Groups

Techniques such as cognitive interviews and focus groups can be used by institutions to provide a more contextualized understanding of students' responses to NSSE. Cognitive interviewing can be employed to gain an enriched sense of respondents' perceptions of particular items. Focus groups provide an opportunity to contextrualze and validate the meaning of NSSE aggregate results and can help enhance understanding of results to increase the likelihood that reform efforts based on survey results would prove effective. NSSE has created a step-by-step guide to conducting cognitive interviews and focus groups. A PDF is available on the NSSE Web site. **nsse.iub.edu/links/cognitive_interviews**

Following NSSE's recommendations for predictive validity studies (see NSSE's Psychometric Portfolio), Wagner linked NSSE data with students' SAT scores, enrollment records, and GPAs. Results revealed that for most students across all five benchmarks, higher levels of engagement were associated with higher rates of retention after one year. For students with SAT scores in the low to middle ranges, engagement was a better predictor of retention than SAT scores. In an effort to assess engagement early in the fall semester, Wagner devised a survey that first-year students will complete in learning community courses during the third week of the semester. Students will be asked about how they spend their time, if they have missed any classes or assignments (and in which courses), what they anticipate as a major, and how they feel they fit in on campus. Results will be shared with the learning community faculty, who are also the students' advisors, and with campus life administrators so that appropriate follow-up contact can be made with students as needed to support their persistence and success.

In fall 2010, the Student Learning, Assessment, and Teaching Effectiveness (SLATE) committee at **McKendree University** renewed focus on its assessment plans. The SLATE team developed seven learning outcomes derived from the four principles of McKendree's institutional mission: Responsible Citizenship, Engagement, Academic Excellence, and Lifelong Learning. The seven learning outcomes are (1) Appreciation of Diversity; (2) Personal, Social, Ethical, and Civic Responsibility; (3) Engagement; (4) Effective Communication; (5) Inquiry and Problem Solving; (6) Discipline-Specific Competence; and (7) Lifelong Learning.

This new phase of McKendree's assessment activity emphasizes the systematic assessment of programs, services, and student learning by selecting an individual learning outcome to focus on annually. This focused work is conducted by subcommittees of faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals using a three-year cycle of planning, development, and implementation. The learning outcome of "Engagement" was developed during the 2010–11 academic year and implemented the following year. The "Year of Engagement" as an institutional theme quickly became a catalyst for many changes across the McKendree campus. All major divisions, including the president and provost, incorporated the theme of Engagement into programming efforts.

NSSE results were an obvious data source to assess the Engagement outcome. Though McKendree first-year students scored at or above the mean for many items in the Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark, the SLATE committee wanted to improve areas where seniors scored below the mean. NSSE 2011 results were used in conjunction with results from their Fall Student Survey to demonstrate the need for increased service-learning opportunities and improvements in teaching resources for faculty. Specifically, the Provost's Office dedicated its Teaching for Excellence fall and spring workshops to the institutional theme. McKendree plans to administer NSSE every three years to continuously measure student engagement scores.

Writing Programs

NSSE results can be helpful for institutions seeking to improve the use of student writing for learning in their courses. Faculty and staff can explore the extent to which students engage in writing experiences and the relationship between student engagement and writing experiences. Through consortium participation or addition of NSSE survey modules, institutions can gain a deeper understanding of student writing.

Auburn University has participated in 11 NSSE administrations since 2002. While it reviews NSSE results at the institution level to provide a general view of the student experience, Auburn also drills down to specific department data. When comparing its students' scores to those of students at peer institutions, Auburn identified areas of concern with student writing skills. Coupling NSSE results with similar results from the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), the institution targeted writing for improvement and launched an initiative that established an Office of University Writing and a formal University Writing Committee. The new committee and newly hired Director of University Writing outlined specific practices to help departments improve their students' writing skills. These included common program-level practices, such as identifying competencies expected of graduates in the department, and common course-level practices, which provided students the opportunity to revise their writing after receiving feedback from peers and the instructor.

Auburn University monitors progress on the student writing plans through its participation in NSSE and the NSSE Consortium for the Study of Writing in College. By reviewing results on the consortium items and surveying faculty to gain a better understanding of how faculty approach writing in the classroom, Auburn continues to assess and foster improvement in the writing skills of its students. In addition, the University Writing Committee is charged with regularly reviewing the plans developed by programs and the Office of University Writing supports faculty as they make decisions about how to continue to improve student writing and writing instruction provided in the majors. The Office of University Writing has also launched a longitudinal study of faculty conceptions of writing and their practices in teaching writing in upper level courses. The study includes analysis of teaching documents, interviews with faculty, classroom observations of writing instruction, and focus groups with students in those classes.

Results from the participation of **Harvey Mudd College** (HMC) in the 2008 NSSE administration revealed that students felt they were not acquiring as high a level of professional writing skills as the other students in their peer comparison group institutions. Viewed in light of findings from its Strategic Planning Process (SPP), HMC began an overhaul of its core curriculum. A Writing Course Subcommittee was charged with working on a new curriculum. The committee recommended the addition of two required writing courses—research-based and academic writing —to help bridge what was seen as the gap in skills. The core curriculum was implemented in 2010 and HMC continues to assess its progress.

See also the consortium example listed below under "Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results."

Experiences with Diversity

Engaging diverse perspectives is an important goal and effective educational practice to promote learning and development. Several NSSE items indicate students' experience with diversity and can be a meaningful gauge.

Earlier NSSE results from **Allegheny College** indicated that students had limited experiences with diversity. The findings were shared with deans and faculty and informed the goal-setting process for Allegheny's strategic plan, in effect through 2010. The strategic focus on diversity helped Allegheny to increase the diversity of faculty, staff, and students and to advance diverse experiences in the curriculum. A continued focus on diversity is evident in the "Global & Local Diversity" initiative, one of the four goals of Allegheny's new strategic plan, Combinations 2020. Other initiatives to increase diversity on campus provide international students with more opportunities to join the Allegheny community; require students to participate in study "away," either traditional study abroad or domestic internships; and offer an increased number of scholarship awards to students with limited financial resources to expand the socioeconomic background of Allegheny's student population. The continuing need to increase diversity in terms of faculty and students at Allegheny emerged as an important part of strategic planning in 2009. NSSE results directly influenced this inclusion in the plan and were used to drive decision-making.

NSSE results at the **State University of New York at Geneseo** revealed that diversity and academic advising were two important areas of concern. Responses to items related to diversity reinforced the need to address issues repeatedly brought up by students. A number of initiatives were implemented including the Campus Diversity Plan, Real World Geneseo, and Deliberative Dialogues. The Multi-Cultural Organization Space for Activities, Inclusion, and Collaboration (MOSAIC) was also installed on campus. The goals of the Campus Diversity Plan included recruitment, support,

and retention of a diverse student body, faculty, staff, and administration; addition of international learning, experiences, and important components to the curriculum; promotion of an inclusive campus community; and enhancement of students' knowledge and appreciation of diverse populations and cultures.

MOSAIC provides a dedicated meeting space where activities such as the Deliberative Dialogues sessions led by faculty, staff, and student moderators provide opportunities to discuss diversity issues and suggest solutions. "Real World Geneseo," modeled on MTV's "Real World," is a four-day intensive workshop, held in a Rochester hotel, in which students explore their differing perspectives on such issues as race, gender, sexual identity, and class differences.

All major divisions at Geneseo also sponsor diversity-related activities. The Vice President's Diversity Grant provides funding for innovative programs that promote campus diversity. Departments report to Academic Affairs annually on progress made toward advancing diversity through their curricular offerings and opportunities for research with Geneseo faculty. A number of administrative departments also sponsor workshops and speakers as evidence of a continued commitment to diversity on campus.

Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results

From 2000 to 2009, more than 750 colleges and universities participated in 55 self-selected consortia that supplemented the NSSE core survey with questions related to shared interests. In 2010, 177 institutions participated in 15 different consortia. Consortia often represent very distinctive 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.

Data from a national pilot of a joint NSSE and Writing Program Administrators survey of student engagement and writing allows the **University of Colorado Boulder** to assess connections between good writing practices and student learning. Over 24 survey items related to writing skills will allow CU–Boulder's data to compare its performance to that of other schools in the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (CSWC).

A major focus of CU–Boulder's NCA Self-Study described the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) and the creation of the campus Writing Center to address a decentralized and diffuse writing curriculum and a lack of focus on first-year writing programs. PWR expanded upper-division courses, redesigned lower-division courses, and established a full-service Writing Center to reinforce pedagogical reforms driven by assessment. Results on several NSSE survey items related to student writing from the 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2009 NSSE administrations showed that CU–Boulder students improved over time and compared well to students at peer institutions.

How Often Should an Institution Participate in NSSE?

Table 3 details institutional participation patterns. The most appropriate participation cycle for each institution depends on the purposes for the assessment, but four considerations might influence these decisions. Specifically, your institution may be:

1. **Conducting NSSE as part of a regular assessment plan.** Institutions that include NSSE in their assessment plans establish a cycle of administration that fits their assessment needs. A standard assessment plan might place NSSE administrations on a three-year cycle to collect periodic information about educational quality.

Table 3
NSSE Participation

Number of Participating Colleges & Universities

2000	276	2007	610
2001	321	2008	772
2002	366	2009	642
2003	437	2010	603
2004	473	2011	761
2005	529	2012	584
2006	557	2013	621

Total Number of Different Colleges & Universities

2000–2013   1,554

Participation Frequency of NSSE 2013 Institutions

First-Time Participants	32	5%
Two- to Three-Time Participants	110	18%
Four- to Five-Time Participants	168	27%
Six- to Twelve-Time Participants	312	50%

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 count, lack of data for weighting, international institutions) rendered data inadequate for standard comparisons.

2. **Evaluating the effectiveness of a new programmatic offering or change in the curriculum.** If your institution is considering implementing a change in undergraduate education, then scheduling a NSSE administration both before and after the reform can help assess the impact of the initiative on student engagement.

3. **Using engagement data for accreditation.** One of the most common uses of NSSE data is for accreditation. If an institution is conducting its self-study over a three-year time span, the most useful time to register for NSSE is in year one. In years two and three of the self-study, an institution can review and share results across campus and determine a course of action to improve in specific areas. On a longer accreditation cycle, it may be wise to administer NSSE more than once. In the first year or two of the self-study, NSSE results can assist in determining where to focus attention. After obtaining results and implementing campus improvement plans, another NSSE administration three to four years later would help determine the impact of such changes. This would allow ample time for assessment of results and perhaps additional adjustments to priorities in subsequent progress reports.

4. **Benchmarking performance against similar institutions.** A key benefit of your NSSE participation is the ability to customize up to three comparison groups from a list of all current-year NSSE participants. This feature allows building comparison groups based on similar peer groups, aspirational groups, or pre-existing groups. Sometimes NSSE participation is linked to membership in or affinity with a group of institutions such as consortia or state systems. Consortia are formed for a number of reasons including institutional mission (e.g., religious-affiliation, arts, engineering). Multi-campus state and university systems (e.g., The University of Texas) can also coordinate their NSSE participation. A regular cycle of participation in a consortium or university system allows institutions to benchmark performance against peer institutions and to work collaboratively on mutual interests. Since consortia can append additional questions to NSSE, institutions can better measure institutional effectiveness in key areas of interest and explore data over time.

5. **Other considerations**. These might include the general allocation of institutional assessment resources such as costs, staff time, the desire to collect other data for triangulation purposes, and generally making time to put the data you have to good use before collecting more. Then, you will need to consider your schedule of undergraduate surveys to avoid survey fatigue among students. Given the varied purposes and aims involved in NSSE participation, we recommend institutions let their assessment and improvement agendas guide their cycle of participation.

Recommendations for Using NSSE Results

A decade of working with NSSE data and interviews with campus project managers led to the following recommendations:

1. Create a NSSE committee, team, or task force on your campus.
2. Share NSSE results widely throughout the campus to stimulate action.
3. Share NSSE results at the department level.
4. Validate findings by linking NSSE data to other data sources.
5. Post NSSE results on your institutional Web site to enhance communication and promote transparency.

Using NSSE Data to Address Campus Issues and Problems

NSSE results can be used as a lens into current campus issues or concerns. Institutions often share common challenges, such as less than desired retention or completion rates, or are simply interested in improving the learning environment. There is no single approach to tackling these issues. However, when examining your NSSE data and considering possible strategies for your action plan, consider the following questions:

- What data confirm known facts?
- What results are surprising?
- What areas appear to meet your expectations?
- What areas appear to need further investigation?

Answers to these questions can provide a framework for a more substantive action plan to tackle an issue.

Overcoming 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.

Obstacle	Approach
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. Average response rate based on institution type can help put response patterns in perspective. Use appropriate cautions with low participation rates. If possible, combine two years of data to increase numbers.
Questions about validity and reliability	NSSE has conducted a number of validity and reliability studies including a study of the role of response rates in college surveys, stability analyses, test-retest, focus groups, and nonrespondent bias checks. The Psychometric Properties section of the NSSE Web site provides information about these important issues. **nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio**
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 extra analysis. All data files, reports, and supporting documents related to NSSE *Institutional Reports* are available through the Institution Interface accessible from the NSSE home page in electronic format, allowing easy print or electronic distribution. **nsse.iub.edu**
"Average" results across the board	If your results are comparable to your select comparison groups, try using a different comparison group or consider a criterion-referenced approach to determine the degree to which student performance is consistent with institutional expectations. Analyze results by subgroup (e.g., departments or special programs) to reveal variation within your institution.
Lack of faculty awareness or interest in 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 student engagement in effective educational practices.

NSSE
national survey of student engagement