NSSE national survey of student engagement

Using Topical Module Results to Advance Institution Goals

Institutions participating in NSSE have provided hundreds of examples demonstrating wide-ranging uses of NSSE data. Diagnostic, actionable information on student engagement catalyzes vital, sometimes challenging conversations on campus about the quality of undergraduate education. This brief focuses on one theme among these examples.

Since the introduction of NSSE's Topical Modules in 2013, 1,165 institutions have administered at least one module with the core survey. The nine modules currently offered give institutions more detailed information on Academic Advising, Civic Engagement, Development of Transferable Skills, Experiences with Diverse Perspectives, Experiences with Information Literacy, Experiences with Writing, First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions, Global Learning, and Learning with Technology. This brief highlights institutions that have used module results to gain insight into progress toward specific goals and to justify curricular changes. Visit our website to learn more about NSSE's Topical Modules.
nsse.indiana.edu/html/modules.cfm

EXPERIENCES WITH WRITING

The focus on writing in **Harvey Mudd College**'s 2010 core curriculum revision, based in part on the observation that students reached capstone without advanced writing skills, led to the requirement for first-year students to take Introduction to Academic Writing (Writ 1), a half-semester course taught by faculty from all disciplines. NSSE and FSSE results—in particular, responses to the Experiences with Writing Topical Module—have been important in assessing the course's impact and in identifying approaches for improvement.

Prior to teaching Writ 1, faculty attend an intensive one-week workshop on current composition theory and pedagogy and on lessons learned the previous semester. At the 2015 Writ 1 workshop, looking at patterns in NSSE and FSSE results for where to expand effective practices, faculty discussed strategies to encourage reflection and to clarify and foster the application of Writ 1 skills across disciplines.

As Writ 1 approached its fifth year, both NSSE and FSSE results suggested Harvey Mudd's students and faculty compared favorably to those of its Carnegie peer group. Additionally, since the implementation of Writ 1, survey responses from first-year students and seniors have indicated that most writing assignments asked students to use evidence

Harvey Mudd College

and reasoning to argue a position, to explain the meaning of numerical and statistical data, and to write in the style and format of a specific field—all outcomes stressed in Writ 1.

Going forward, by disaggregating NSSE results, the college seeks to better understand how students access resources and how faculty meet the needs of a diverse student body. These results will help bring the benefits of Writ 1 to all students— by defining expectations, addressing learning preferences, and uncovering underlying assumptions.

WHAT IS YOUR NSSE DATA USE STORY?

Our growing collection of stories about how NSSE institutions use their results is a shared resource for colleges and universities, and assists in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience. Please contact your NSSE Project Services team to share examples highlighting your institution's uses of NSSE data, usage strategies, and special activities.
nsse.indiana.edu/html/staff.cfm

EXPERIENCES WITH DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

In keeping with its deep commitment to diversity and to developing students' appreciation for human differences, in 2013, **Lebanon Valley College** (LVC) administered the Experiences with Diverse Perspectives Topical Module to learn more about student engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities related to diversity. While module results showed equal if not greater attendance by first-year and senior students at events or activities encouraging them to examine their understanding of diversity issues, the core survey results indicated less engagement among LVC students with people different from themselves. Combined, the module and core survey findings helped the college understand that while attendance at inclusive events and discussions about topics related to diversity remain important, greater emphasis should be given to encouraging students to interact with people from various backgrounds.

In 2013–14, LVC's General Education Advisory Committee planned revisions to the college's general education curriculum, resulting in "Constellation LVC"—a general education curriculum that is more intentional about developing students' intercultural competence, providing opportunities for students to see themselves as members of a global community, and developing students' understanding of and respect for multiple cultural perspectives. This focus on diversity was echoed in the launch of LVC's new strategic plan, *Envision 2020,* which emphasizes inclusive excellence, and in the establishment of President Lewis Thayne's Inclusive Excellence Fund, which provides financial resources for curricular and co-curricular enhancements in support of diversity.

Lessons from the Field

See our *Lessons from the Field* series for many more instructive and inspiring narratives from colleges and universities describing the innovative ways they put NSSE results into action.

nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons_home

ACADEMIC ADVISING

The most pressing goals at the **University of Colorado Denver** (CU Denver) and the NSSE data that best address these goals are identified by a team including the assistant vice chancellor for institutional research and effectiveness, the associate deans of education and arts and sciences, the director of CU Online, the registrar, the associate vice chancellor for undergraduate experiences, and other members of the academic and student affairs staff. In 2013, because of significant momentum to improve advising at CU Denver but little data to inform these changes, the team elected to administer the Academic Advising Topical Module. After that administration, an advising task force ensured each unit received its own module report with comparisons to other campus units as well as to selected peer groups; the assistant vice chancellor for institutional research and effectiveness also shared complete module results with all academic advisors and the student government. CU Denver has since set a goal to be more purposeful in creating consistency in advising between academic units and among faculty and staff advisors.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) prides itself on graduating students who go on to positively impact their communities, yet results in 2015 from the Civic Engagement Topical Module indicated students felt UDEM could do more to prepare them for informed, active citizenship. In response to these results, a committee of faculty and student affairs staff identified more than 15 experiences that can be used to promote students' civic engagement, including courses, community service activities, internships, and student organization membership. Campus actors responsible for these experiences then set benchmarks and goals for improvement and collaborate in revising initiatives to promote civic engagement more deliberately. For example, manuals for leadership development programs now include strategies for stimulating dialogue with students on themes related to community and citizenship. Both faculty and staff at UDEM are enthusiastic for the potential positive change in these areas and will assess the impact of these changes in future administrations of Civic Engagement.