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Working with NSSE Data: A Facilitator's Guide

A guide to help institutional leaders facilitate workshops, presentations, and discussions with campus stakeholders on using NSSE data

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About This Guide

Purpose

NSSE provides information that colleges and universities can use to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience. The initial steps in putting data to use are to understand what the results mean and then to disseminate the findings to people who can do something about student engagement. However, simply reporting NSSE results will not by itself lead to action. Many institutions have found that sharing the results at retreats, faculty workshops, first-year experience task forces, and other groups is a productive way to stimulate action. This guide is designed to help institutional leaders facilitate workshops, presentations, and discussions about NSSE data with campus stakeholders.

How the Guide Can Be Used

This guide is akin to an instructor's manual. It provides suggestions for leading a workshop or session on understanding, interpreting, and taking action on NSSE data.

The guide includes:

- Preparation notes for facilitators
- Outlines for addressing topics related to NSSE data
- Exercises and worksheets

We have included step-by-step instructions for facilitating group sessions using the data reports provided in the *Institutional Report*. Each section contains a sequenced program that may include an overview of the data report, suggestions for how the facilitator can prepare for the individual topic, definitions of key terms, exercises, FAQs, and questions for further discussion. Worksheets are provided to accompany the exercises.

Introduction

The first step in getting your colleagues to take your institutional data seriously is to ensure that the concepts of student engagement and effective educational practice are understood. NSSE provides quantitative information on the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities and students' perceptions of the quality of other aspects of their college or university experience.

Data Reporting Opportunities

NSSE results can be used in many ways. Possibilities include:

- assessing institutional performance
- monitoring learning outcomes
- informing improvement efforts
- supporting student learning and development
- developing a cohort of experiences for groups of students
- facilitating student retention and engagement
- monitoring academic standards
- accountability and transparency
- managing resources, programs, and services
- guiding staff development efforts
- improving internal communication
- marketing to prospective students
- communicating with alumni
- fostering other stakeholder engagement

Additional copies of this document are available on the NSSE Institute Web site:
nsse.iub.edu/links/facilitators_guide.

The most effective uses of NSSE results take into consideration how reporting is most likely to enhance education policy and practice. This involves identifying the audiences and contexts that surround the reporting activities.

Identify Audiences

A useful first step is to determine the audiences to whom the data will be presented. Determine what data is most relevant for each of these audiences (i.e., overview or “big picture” information or more nuanced or targeted data). Effective internal communication systems are critical in establishing, maintaining, and increasing interest in the concept of student engagement.

Using NSSE Internally

1. Strategies and review

Ideas about student engagement can be fused into strategic planning in relation to research, internationalization, community engagement, infrastructure, resources, and student access and equity.

2. Link institutional data

Analysis of NSSE data with institutional data on persistence exposes patterns of behavior or interaction that are specific to students who leave school. These findings may help in the development of strategies to manage enrollments.

3. Promote teaching and learning collaborations

Student engagement is a campus-wide initiative that involves the support of faculty who develop courses, learning activities, and assessments, and student affairs staff who manage many diverse non-academic aspects of the student experience.

4. Academic staff development

Infuse the idea of student engagement into formal and informal discussions about teaching. Include as part of new faculty orientation.

5. Involve students in improvement activities

Focus groups, student colloquia, and targeted reports for student publications can help stimulate discussions with students on engagement.

Laying the Groundwork

Explaining the Importance of Student Engagement

Research that shows that engagement, the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities, is the best single predictor of their learning and personal development. Certain institutional practices lead to higher levels of student engagement. The best known set of engagement indicators is the “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.”¹ These indicators include:

1. student-faculty contact

2. cooperation among students
3. active learning
4. prompt feedback
5. time on task
6. high expectations
7. respect for diverse talents and ways of learning

Emphasizing good educational practice helps focus faculty, staff, students, and others on the tasks and activities that are associated with higher yields in terms of desired student learning outcomes.

Answering Questions about the NSSE Survey Instrument

It is important to answer any questions that may arise regarding the validity and reliability of the NSSE survey before introducing the data to the workshop group. Staff may more readily accept the findings and consider changes to their practice if their questions are adequately addressed before the workshop begins.

Validity of Self-Reported Data

The validity of self-reported data can be affected by the ability of respondents to provide accurate and truthful information in response to a question. Research shows that people generally tend to respond accurately on questions about their past behavior unless the questions are sensitive or make them uncomfortable.

The validity of self-reported time estimates has also been examined. To provide a frame of reference to respondents, items on the NSSE survey include specific periods of time to aid memory recall and to reduce the distortion that may occur when respondents remember events over time.

Further research suggests that self-reported data are valid under five conditions:

1. information requested is known to respondents
2. questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously
3. questions refer to recent activities
4. respondents take questions seriously
5. questions do not threaten, embarrass, or violate respondents' privacy

NSSE was designed to satisfy these conditions.

The “halo effect,” where some students may inflate performance, grades, or personal gains and efforts, appears to be fairly consistent across student populations. Thus, although what students report may differ somewhat from what they actually do, the effect does not appear to advantage or disadvantage one institution or student group compared with another.

Research on self-reported data is available in the Psycho-

¹ Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.

metric Portfolio on the NSSE Web site. The portfolio is a framework for presenting studies on the validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE's data, including analysis of data subsets defined by a variety of student and institutional characteristics.

nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio.

Learning from NSSE

The following are suggestions for workshop participants to guide the use of NSSE data in institutional change efforts:

1. Make sure staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.
2. Understand what student engagement data represent and use the results carefully.
3. Report student engagement results in a responsible way.
4. Do not allow the numbers to speak for themselves. Accompany reports with explanations and interpretations.
5. Examine the results from multiple perspectives
6. Link the results to other information about student experiences and complementary initiatives.

Getting Acquainted with the NSSE Survey and What It Measures

One approach to introducing faculty and staff to NSSE is to invite them to identify the items in NSSE question #1 (**Worksheet #1, "Predict Your Results - Benchmarks"**) that they believe are most important to student learning (do separately for first-year students and seniors). Participants can spend a few minutes in pairs or small groups discussing their perspectives.

To get participants thinking about student engagement at your institution, ask them to select several survey items (**Worksheet #1**) or benchmarks (**Worksheet #2, "Predict Your Results"**) that most interest them. Ask them to record their predictions of students' scores, then the scores they would prefer. Finally, enter the actual scores from your NSSE results. This informal exercise provides a useful comparison of gaps between student responses and faculty and staff predictions and preferences and can be a starting point for discussions about educational practices, priorities, and institutional change.

Working with Institutional Reports

This section addresses the six main reports from the *Institutional Report*:

- Respondent Characteristics
- Frequency Distributions
- Mean Comparisons

- Benchmark Comparisons
- Multi-Year Benchmark Report
- Major Field Reports

Topics at a Glance

Topic 1: Respondent Characteristics

Facilitator leads an initial examination of a) how representative respondents are of the institution's student body, and b) a comparison of descriptive information about survey respondents at the institution with the characteristics of the three comparison groups.

Topic 2: Benchmark Comparisons

Facilitator leads group discussion on benchmarks.

Topic 3: Mean Comparisons

Facilitator leads group in reviewing the *Mean Comparisons* report to develop an understanding of the statistical information such as means, statistical significance, and effect sizes. Facilitator leads group in exercise to find survey results that are of "practical significance."

Topic 4: Pattern Analysis

Using items of "practical significance" identified in the exercise in Topic 3, facilitator assists group in plotting them to the scales that form the NSSE benchmarks and other scales and groupings of items to look for possible patterns in the institutional data.

Topic 5: Frequency Distributions

Facilitator leads a review of and an exercise on frequency distributions. Invite group to identify percentages of "never" that cause them some concern and identify items with "positive percents" in which the majority of students report that they "very often" or "often" engage in this activity.

Topic 6: Multi-Year Comparisons

Facilitator leads a review of the *Multi-Year Benchmark Report* to develop an understanding of trends in benchmark scores over more than one administration period.

Topic 7: Major Field Reports

Facilitator leads a review of the *Major Field Reports* to examine the variation in the student experience at your institution for up to eight groups of majors (reports are subject to a minimum number of respondents).

Facilitator Notes:

1. In advance of the workshop, make copies of selected survey results from your *Institutional Report* for each group or individual as needed.
2. Create a statement of objectives and desired outcomes for the workshop or discussion.

Topic 1: Respondent Characteristics

Purpose:

1. Compare demographic and statistical data on first-year and senior respondents in *Institutional Report* with student body profile.
2. Compare institution's survey respondents to the institution's three comparison groups.

Key points to cover:

- Compare institutional survey respondents' demographic characteristics in *Respondent Characteristics* report of the *Institutional Report* with institutional data files for first-year and senior students.
- Explain that weights are applied to all comparison reports to adjust for respondents within schools by sex and enrollment status and between schools to reflect the institution's relative population sizes. Weights are calculated separately for first-year students and seniors.
- Clarify that the determination of student year in school ("first-year" or "senior") is based on information from the electronic data file that your institution provided.
- Emphasize that sampling error is based on the population of interest. To estimate the sampling error for first-year male students, calculate using first-year male student population size. Increasing the number of respondents relative to the total population reduces sampling error. The formula to do this is available on the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/html/error_calculator.cfm.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review *Respondent Characteristics* terms and definitions. Be prepared to explain response rate, sampling error, and student characteristics.
2. Prepare an institutional student body profile in advance of the session.

Exercise 1: Facilitator leads group in review of demographic features of student respondents:

1. Does the NSSE sample reflect our student body profile? If sample seems skewed, what cautions might be exercised?
2. How does our institutions compare to other institutions in terms of demographic features?
3. What generalizations are or are not possible based on these data?
4. How does our institution's response rate stack up against other institutions?

Terms and Definitions

Response rate: % Response rate=number of respondents/sample size

It is important to remember that non-deliverable addresses are subtracted from the denominator. Find a breakdown of response rate by Carnegie classification, control, enrollment, location, and other institution types, on the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2007_Annual_Report/response_rate_summary.cfm.

Sampling Error:

Margin by which "true" scores for an institution on a given survey item could differ from the reported NSSE score due to random sampling.

Example: If 60% of an institution's students replied "very often" to a particular item and the sampling error was +/-5%, the "true" value is most likely between 55% and 65%. A reasonable sampling error is around 5%. However, a lower percentage is even better.

NSSE Sample Size vs. Number of Respondents:

NSSE Sample Size is the number of students randomly drawn from the population file submitted by the institution and contacted to participate. The Number of Respondents is how many students actually completed the survey.

Weighting

Weighting is the process of adjusting data to reflect differences in the number of population units that each respondent represents.

Example: If a student population is 50% male but respondents are only 33% male, then male respondents are given more weight and female respondents are given less weight in the data so that the results more accurately reflect the student population. In practical terms, a weight is a number in a data file assigned to each respondent, and is used as a multiplier to adjust the number of cases used in a calculation.

Topic 2: Benchmark Comparisons

Purpose:

Focus discussion on the importance of student engagement and institutional improvement efforts using NSSE's five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, which are:

- **Level of Academic Challenge:** the extent to which expectations and academic work challenge students to learn
- **Active and Collaborative Learning:** students' efforts to actively construct knowledge
- **Student-Faculty Interaction:** level and nature of students' contact and interaction with faculty
- **Enriching Educational Experiences:** students' participation in activities that broaden their experience and knowledge
- **Supportive Campus Environment:** students' perceptions about the institution's commitment to their success and cultivation of positive relationships among different groups on campus

Key points to cover:

- Means are reported for first-year students and seniors.
- The *Benchmark Comparisons* are intended to help institutions determine if the engagement of their typical student differs in a statistically significant and meaningful way from the average students in various comparison groups.

Terms and Definitions

Benchmark Description and Survey Items:

Each benchmark offers a short summary of the construct measured by the scale and survey items that contribute to the scale.

Included Students:

Benchmark scores are based on survey responses from first-year and senior students who were part of the base random sample or random oversample. Students who were part of a targeted oversample or local oversample are not included. This is true for all reports.

Detailed Benchmark Statistics and Effect Sizes:

The *Benchmark Comparisons* report offers specific information about all benchmarks and an institution's results compared to three comparison groups, and above-average and high-performing institutions. Tables include: sample size, means, standard deviations, standard errors, percentile distributions, mean differences, and effect sizes.

Standard Error:

Standard error is an estimate of random fluctuation in the sample, based on sample size. Standard errors are smaller when the number of responses increases. Smaller standard errors indicate a more precise estimate of an institution's true score.

Percentile Distribution Statistics:

A percentile is a score at or below which a given percentage of scores fall. For example, the 50th percentile represents the benchmark score at or below which 50 percent of the students' benchmark scores fell for the respective comparison group.

Mean Difference:

The mean difference is the difference between the institution's mean and the mean of the various comparison groups.



Regis University

Topic 2: (continued)

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review *Benchmark Comparisons* report.
2. Consider using **Worksheet #1** in workshop.
2. Make a list of areas of small and large differences.
3. Identify scores, patterns, or trends that might be of interest to the particular group attending the session. Consider presenting these separately to participants as a way to capture their interest.
4. It might be useful to prepare and distribute a short summary of each benchmark and a list of survey items that contribute to the benchmark.
5. Be prepared to explain key terms and discuss comparison options including “above average institutions” and “high-performing institutions.”

Exercise 2: Lead group discussion on the following questions:

1. Download and print *Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice* from the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf.
2. Complete **Worksheet #1** to encourage participants

to learn about the benchmarks and their perceptions of institutional performance.

3. Are there particular items or groups of items within a benchmark that factor heavily in our scores?
4. What patterns emerge from the benchmark results?
5. Areas of strength? Areas that need improvement?
6. What are the differences between first-year and senior responses?
7. How does our institution perform, given our student and institutional characteristics?
8. Does our institution compare, given our student and institutional characteristics?

Facilitator Notes:

1. Summarize work session using Exercise 2.
2. Review objectives and outcomes of session.
3. Refer participants to further information sources including the NSSE Web site.
4. Suggest strategies for follow up sessions.

Exercise 3: Consider the following questions:

1. What was surprising about the results?
2. What campus assumptions were confirmed or refuted?

Topic 3: Mean Comparisons

Purpose:

1. Review mean scores for each survey item.
2. Compare institutional results against three comparison groups.

Key points to cover:

- In the *Mean Comparisons* report asterisks (*) indicate that your students’ responses differ at a statistically significant level from students at schools in your comparison groups.
- More asterisks for a particular item indicate a smaller probability that the difference is due to chance. Even so, the actual magnitude of some item score differences may seem trivial, even though they are statistically significant.
- **Important Note:** Statistical significance does not guarantee that the result is important. Effect size should also be taken into account.
- Look carefully at items with large effect sizes. NSSE reports the Cohen’s *d* effect size for all comparisons. The effect size represents the magnitude of the difference in the student or institutional behavior represented by the item. When the effect size is large, or a pattern of moderate effect sizes exists, it is likely that the quality of the student experience is appreciably different

and, therefore, may be of practical importance in the respective area of student engagement. Find more information in *Contextualizing NSSE Effect Sizes: Empirical Analysis and Interpretation of Benchmark Comparisons*, nsse.iub.edu/pdf/effect_size_guide.pdf.

- Large effect sizes are uncommon in most areas of non-experimental social science research, including the NSSE project. If your results include some medium or large effects, something may be going on that warrants immediate attention, especially if other empirical or anecdotal information corroborate the NSSE data. Here are some general guidelines for determining the relative importance of a Cohen’s *d* effect size:

.20 is a small effect

.50 is a medium effect

.80 is a large effect

- The *Mean Comparisons* report indicates which items are included in the benchmarks.

Terms and Definitions

NSSE Survey Items:

Items appear in the first column of the report table in the same order and wording as they appear on the instrument. Response values for each question are listed in italics above the results table to help in interpreting statistics for specific items.

Variable Names:

Variables assigned to each survey item appear in the second column and match those in the institution data file.

Mean Comparisons:

The mean is the arithmetic average (sum of scores divided by total number of responses) of student responses on a particular item. Means are provided for three comparison groups. Means are reported separately for first-year students and seniors.

Statistical Significance:

Mean differences that are larger than would be expected by chance alone are noted with one, two, or three asterisks, referring to three significance levels (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$).

- The smaller the significance level, the more confidence one can have the result is not due to chance.
- Non-significant results are left blank in the significance columns.

Effect Size: **Effect size = mean difference/pooled standard deviation of institution and peer group**

Standard deviation is average deviation from the mean. A positive value indicates that the institution's mean was greater or showed a more affirmative result than the comparison group. A negative value indicates that institution lags behind the comparison group on that item.

NOTE: Statistical significance and effect sizes can work together. If a mean difference is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (two asterisks), then the difference is unlikely to occur just by chance. To interpret the "practical" amount of this difference consider the effect size. For example, an effect size of 0.48 indicates a moderate effect size with a difference that isn't likely due to chance. If, however, the effect size for this difference was 0.75, then that would indicate a large practical difference.

Standard Deviation

The average amount by which students' scores differ from the mean.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review *Mean Comparisons* report.
2. Be prepared to explain key terms including statistical significance and effect size.
3. Note the items that contribute to benchmarks. Exercise #2 asks if particular items factor heavily in benchmark scores.
4. Determine if it is best for participants to complete **Worksheet #2** in advance of the workshop, or for you to provide data in the format of **Worksheet #3**.



University of the Ozarks

Exercise 4: Lead group in consideration of statistical differences in results:

1. Consider those items with one to three asterisks (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$) and their effect sizes to judge the practical significance or importance of the results. Use the worksheet provided, "**Making the Most of Your NSSE Data – Worksheet #3.**"

Topic 4: Pattern Analysis

Purpose:

1. Discover themes as well as areas of strength and challenge within institution.
2. Discuss characteristics, experiences, and differences between our first-year and senior students.
3. Compare areas of concern and strength with three comparison groups.

Key points to cover:

- In addition to focusing on items with small to large effect sizes, look for patterns in student responses. For example, do students consistently score above or below the mean of comparison groups in certain areas of engagement? Are the differences explainable? Could differences be related to the school's mission, the nature of the undergraduate program, or certain student characteristics?
- Do not rely exclusively on significance tests to identify areas that warrant attention. A consistent pattern of scoring above the mean, even though all items may not reach statistical significance, may indicate an institution is doing the right things in terms of good educational practice. At the same time, some institutions have very high expectations for student engagement and may fall short of their own aspirations even though comparisons with other institutions are favorable.

Facilitator Note:

Review results on items from scales that form the benchmarks in addition to other NSSE scales.



Baylor University

Terms and Definitions

See Terms and Definitions in Topic 2.



Ball State University

Exercise 5: Highlight the items that were determined to be of practical significance on **Worksheet #3** under each area of analysis. Lead group discussion on the following questions:

1. What story may patterns in the data tell about the quality of our first-year students' experiences? What does this suggest for their sophomore year experience?
2. What are areas of strength and areas that need improvement?
3. What are the unique characteristics, experiences, and differences in our first-year and senior responses?
4. Do these results reflect common challenges for institutions similar to ours?
5. How does our institution compare to others?

Topic 5: Frequency Distributions

Purpose:

1. Compare frequencies with which students responded to particular items to three comparison groups.
2. Invite group to identify percentages of “never” that cause them some concern, and to identify items with “positive percents” in which the majority of students report that they “very often” or “often” engage in this activity.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review *Frequency Distributions* report. It is not necessary to go into great depth when exploring these results. Asking questions for group discussion can help facilitate reflection and understanding.
2. Identify items that might be of greatest interest to the institution given its mission and goals or to the session participants as a way to make the data more relevant to their work or needs.

Exercise 6: Identify the most important items to the institution, unit, or department.

1. Invite participants to explore if the percentage distributions are appropriate for these items using the worksheets provided.
2. Do the responses correlate with what our institution, unit, or department expected?

Example: If an institution values career advising for its seniors, is it adequate for 30% of the seniors to report that they “never” talked with

a faculty member about career plans? Refer back to the opening exercise to see if predictions match.

3. Have group identify “never” percentages that cause them particular concern. These might then be ranked in order of priority and discussed if time is available.
4. Carry out the same exercise for “positive” percentages where students report that they “very often” or “often” engage in this activity as examples of what the institution is doing well. Discuss how and why these results might have come about and how they might be used to determine “success factors” that the institution might focus on and continue to support.
5. Lead group discussion on the following questions:
 - a. What results are adequate? Need attention?
 - b. What results are reflective of our institutional type?
 - c. How does our institution compare to others?
 - d. Are there important differences between first-year and senior responses?

Topic 6: Multi-Year Comparisons

Purpose:

1. Review benchmark scores across multiple years of survey administration
2. Review data quality across multiple years of survey administration

Key points to cover:

- Review the quality of your data for both first-year and senior respondents in each year of NSSE participation. Compare data quality indicators across years.
- Benchmark score means are reported for first-years and seniors. All statistics are weighted by gender and enrollment status.
- Benchmark scores can be examined through multi-year charts or through detailed statistics.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide
2. Be prepared to explain response rate, sampling error, and confidence intervals
3. Note which individual items are included in each benchmark
4. Consider using Worksheet #4

Exercise 7: Lead group in consideration of benchmark scores over time:

1. Download and print *Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice*, nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf, and your institution's *Multi-Year Benchmark Report*
2. What are areas of strength and areas that need improvement?
3. What are the unique characteristics, experiences, and differences in our first-year and senior responses?
4. Do these results reflect common challenges for institutions similar to ours?
5. How does our institution compare to others?
6. What individual items within the benchmarks might be driving these patterns?
7. What might be done to increase or maintain benchmark scores in the future?

Terms and Definitions

Confidence Intervals/Error Bars

“Upper” and “Lower” bounds of a confidence interval give a range of values that are 95% likely to contain the true population score. The error bars around each benchmark in the multi-year charts show the upper and lower bounds of the 95% confidence interval (mean \pm 1.96 * SEM).



McGill University

Topic 7: Major Field Comparisons

Purpose:

1. Review frequency distributions and benchmark statistics within your institution for up to eight groups of related majors (reports are subject to a minimum number of respondents).
2. Review frequency distributions and benchmark statistics for up to eight groups of majors at your institution and those same majors at your comparison groups.

Key points to cover:

- Your (hypothetical) average student does not describe all students and groups on your campus.
- It is important to “look within” your institution’s NSSE results. You may find that student experiences within your institution are much more varied than between your institution and your comparison groups.
- The Major Field Reports are examples of ways you can “look within.” It is important to examine differences in engagement across other student groups as well.
- Improving the experience of your least engaged students may be the most effective way to raise your benchmark scores and improve your overall institutional quality. Even high-performing institutions have much to learn by examining variation in student engagement – by looking within.
- When looking within you need to carefully consider the size of the student groups. You may not want to make any decisions based on the results of a very small subgroup.
- Aside from the “overall” percent column, all major field results are unweighted. NSSE’s weights are only designed for use at the institution level.
- Major groupings are detailed in your NSSE Codebook.
- First-year student reports of major are likely to be unstable and interpretations of their results should be made with caution.
- Major field results within your institution are presented in Part I of the Major Field Report. Major groups with at least 5 respondents also get a Part II report that compares those students against comparable students at your selected comparison groups.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Review all parts of your Major Field Reports, noting which major groups had enough students to generate a Part II report.
2. Make a list of areas of small and large differences in major fields within your institution and between your comparison groups. You may want to do this for all benchmarks and selected items of greatest interest/importance to your institution.
3. Be prepared to explain how the major field groupings were created.
4. Consider using Worksheets 1 and 2 to explore specific major groups.

Terms and Definitions

See Terms and Definitions in Topics 2 and 5.

Conclusion – Explore Next Steps

Focusing on issues in which large numbers of faculty, staff, and students have a stake attracts interest, animates discussion, and helps sustain enthusiasm and momentum over time.

To end the facilitation session and as inspiration for further action, NSSE has provided some examples of the ways other institutions have used NSSE data to improve the quality of undergraduate education.

• **Austin Peay State University**

Austin Peay State University presented its NSSE findings to the University's deans, chairs, and directors, connecting student engagement information with data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program and Your First College Year survey. After analyzing the responses of students majoring in education, the results were incorporated in the self-study prepared for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education review. In addition, NSSE results have been considered in freshman seminar and orientation workshops and other first-year student initiatives. Student affairs program directors in health services and counseling use NSSE data to guide outreach programming. The University also has included its NSSE results in proposals prepared for external funding, such as Title III grants for expanding institutional capacity to serve low-income students.

• **University of Nebraska Kearney**

The University of Nebraska Kearney (UNK) has administered NSSE four times. Each year, the results are reviewed by various departments and programs for setting priorities, recruiting, assessment, and program

the first-year experiences program and the undergraduate research program housed in the Office of Sponsored Programs use student engagement data to assess whether students are benefiting from these programs in the intended ways. Finally, NSSE findings have informed the University's strategic planning process to discern strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from a student perspective. As a predominantly undergraduate residential institution, UNK considers NSSE data to be indispensable to effective planning and it intends to continue using it to develop and implement action plans based on the institutional strategic plan.

• **Clayton State University**

Clayton State University discusses its NSSE results at faculty council, presidential retreats, student success forums, and in various standing committee meetings. The president of Clayton State has also led a discussion on what the data mean and how the institution can use the data to enhance its effectiveness.

• **Providence College**

At Providence College, the assessment director prepared a comprehensive special analysis. The special analysis included NSSE data as well as data from other assessments. The special analysis report was provided to several campus constituencies including the core curriculum committee, which is composed of faculty and other decision makers on campus.

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' Office of Institutional Research publishes a series of one- to

two-page research briefs on their Web site for faculty and staff members. Each brief is dedicated to one aspect of NSSE, with topics ranging from “Diversity” to “Academic Experiences.” The briefs are being used in campus meetings and serve not only to spark further discussion but to provide information to guide decision-making.

- **Bellarmino University**

The Division of Student Affairs at Bellarmine University used NSSE results to assess and better meet students’ needs by focusing on their performance on the Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark. Improving its performance on this benchmark is one of the goals of the University’s strategic plan. In addition, the Division used NSSE data to justify hiring new staff dedicated to overseeing the improvement of the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark with the implementation of a co-curricular transcript initiative, and increased assessment within the Division.

- **Towson University**

The Towson University women’s center added NSSE data to its ongoing assessment of programs and activities. Of particular value was the ability to view how women respond on individual NSSE items, allowing women’s center staff to develop from the results a narrative of the collegiate experience given gender differences. From this, the women’s center was able to strengthen programs that offer leadership opportunities and self-empowerment content and process. Individual items of importance included issues of affiliation, work and study habits, extracurricular engagement, and satisfaction, all of which combined to reveal a snapshot of the female student experience.

Additional examples of how institutions have used NSSE data for improvement initiatives, strategic planning and accountability, accreditation, faculty and staff development, and enrollment management and recruitment, can be found in the document, *Using NSSE Data*, included in your *Institutional Report 2010* and on the NSSE Institute Web site at nsse.iub.edu/use_examples.



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Predict Your NSSE Results - Benchmarks

This exercise is designed to facilitate consideration and discussion of the quality of the student experience from the perspective of staff, compared to the perspective of students.

The five NSSE benchmarks are listed below. You can use the document, *Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice** to find a list of NSSE survey items included in each benchmark. **Record if you think this is a strength (+), an area that your institution does well enough (=), or needs improvement (-).** Similarly, you can record what you would prefer this score to be. Comparisons of your predictions and preferences to actual NSSE

results are then possible. You will need to refer to your NSSE Institutional Report to complete the exercise.

Consider what the gaps between student responses and your predictions and preferences reveal about the quality of the student experience at your institution in relation to the particular scale you have chosen. What ideas might you have to address some of these gaps?

Additional copies of this document are available on the NSSE Institute Web site: www.nsse.iub.edu/institute.

NSSE Benchmark Scores			
	Prediction	Preference	Actual
Level of Academic Challenge			
Active and Collaborative Learning			
Student-Faculty Interaction			
Enriching Educational Experiences			
Supportive Campus Environment			

*available on the NSSE Web site, www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf.

KEY

+ strength

= done well enough

- needs improvement

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Predict Your Results

What do you know about your students? Because beliefs and assumptions play a role in shaping expectations and actions, it is helpful to account for them when trying to understand something as complex as the undergraduate experience. Items from the NSSE survey, question #1, are listed below. Select several items of interest from

the table to record what you predict and prefer students will do. Then compare your predictions to actual NSSE results and benchmark scores. Use the gaps between student responses and faculty and staff predictions as a catalyst for group discussion about the quality of the student experience.

Items from Survey Question #1	% Often or Very Often		
	Prediction	Prefer	Actual
a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions			
b. Made a class presentation			
c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in			
d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources			
e. Included diverse perspectives (difference races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions and assignments			
f. Come to class without completing readings or assignments			
g. Worked with other students on projects during class			
h. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments			
i. Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions			
j. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)			
k. Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course			
l. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment			
m. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor			
n. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor			
o. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor			
p. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class			

Worksheet 2 (continued)

Items from Survey Question #1	% Often or Very Often		
	Prediction	Prefer	Actual
q. Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance			
r. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations			
s. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)			
t. Discussed ideas from your readings and classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)			
u. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own			
v. Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values			

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Making the Most of Your NSSE Data

These worksheets are additional tools to help your team focus in on important item level results by NSSE benchmarks and other scales. You will need to reference your NSSE means report to complete the worksheets. Key terms are defined at the end of the means document. When an item is part of the scale that forms a benchmark, it is noted with an asterisk.

1. Please select a comparison group or groups to complete the worksheet.
2. Enter “*,” “**,” or “***” in the significance level column to indicate confidence level.

Item	Item Description	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)
Academic Challenge		FY	FY	SR	SR
9a	Hours students spend in a typical 7-day week preparing for class*				
3a	Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course reading*				
3c	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more*				
3d	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages*				
3e	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages*				
2b	Coursework emphasizing analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory*				
2c	Coursework emphasizing synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships*				
2d	Coursework emphasizing making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods*				
2e	Coursework emphasizing applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations*				
10a	Campus environment emphasizing spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work*				
1r	Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations*				
Academic Challenge–Related Items		FY	FY	SR	SR
1f	Come to class without completing readings or assignments				
4a	During a typical week, how many problem sets do you complete that take you more than an hour to complete				

Worksheet 3 (continued)

Item	Item Description	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)
4b	During a typical week, how many problem sets do you complete that take you less than an hour to complete				
Active and Collaborative Learning		FY	FY	SR	SR
1a	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions*				
1b	Made a class presentation*				
1g	Worked with other students on projects during class*				
1h	Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments*				
1j	Tutored or taught other students*				
1k	Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course*				
1t	Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)*				
Student-Faculty Interaction		FY	FY	SR	SR
1n	Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor*				
1o	Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor*				
1p	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class*				
1s	Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities)*				
1q	Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance*				
7d	Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements*				
Enriching Educational Experience		FY	FY	SR	SR
9d	Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, student publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports)*				
7a	Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment*				
7b	Community service or volunteer work*				
7e	Foreign language coursework*				
7f	Study abroad*				
7g	Independent study or self-designed major*				

Worksheet 3 (continued)

Item	Item Description	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)
7h	Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc)*				
1l	Using an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment*				
7c	Participating in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together*				
Supportive Campus Environment		FY	FY	SR	SR
10b	Campus environment that provides the support you need to help you succeed academically*				
10d	Campus environment that helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)*				
10e	Campus environment that provides the support you need to thrive socially*				
8a	Quality of relationships with other students*				
8b	Quality of relationships with faculty members*				
8c	Quality of relations with administrative personnel and offices*				
Integrative Learning		FY	FY	SR	SR
6d	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue				
6e	Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective				
6f	Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept				
Personal and Social Gains		FY	FY	SR	SR
11h	Working effectively with others*				
11j	Learning effectively on your own				
11k	Understanding yourself				
11n	Developing a personal code of values and ethics				
General Educational Gains		FY	FY	SR	SR
11a	Acquiring a broad general education				
11c	Writing clearly and effectively				

Worksheet 3 (continued)

Item	Item Description	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)	Significance Level (* significance)	Effect Size (indicate sign + or - and magnitude)
11d	Speaking clearly and effectively				
11e	Thinking critically and analytically				
Practical Competence Gains		FY	FY	SR	SR
11b	Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills				
11f	Analyzing quantitative problems				
11g	Using computers and information technology				
11m	Solving complex real-world problems				
Student Satisfaction		FY	FY	SR	SR
13	An evaluation of the student's entire educational experience at this institution				
14	If starting over would the student attend the same institution				
Time Usage and Demands		FY	FY	SR	SR
9b	Working for pay on campus				
9c	Working for pay off campus				
9e	Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)				
9f	Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)				
9g	Commuting to class				



Worksheet 4

Predict Your NSSE Results – Benchmarks Over Time

This exercise is designed to facilitate consideration and discussion of the quality of the student experience over time. The five NSSE benchmarks are listed below. You can use the document, Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice* to find a list of NSSE survey items included in each benchmark. Record if you

think this score will have increased over time (+), remained stable over time (=), or decreased over time (-). Comparisons of your predictions to actual NSSE results are then possible. You will need to refer to your NSSE Multi-Year Benchmark Report to complete the exercise. Consider what the visible trends and gaps between student responses and your predictions reveal about the quality of the student experience at your institution. What reasons might explain these trends and gaps?

NSSE Benchmarks Scores Over Time	Prediction	Actual
Level of Academic Challenge		
Active and Collaborative Learning		
Student-Faculty Interaction		
Enriching Educational Experiences		
Supportive Campus Environment		

KEY

- + increased scores over time
- = stable scores over time
- decreased scores over time

*available on the NSSE Web site, nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf

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