AASCU Colleges and Universities: Examples of NSSE Use

Introduction
AASCU colleges and universities have used their NSSE data to assess the quality of student engagement, create action plans for improvement, set goals, and develop performance measures to evaluate progress. AASCU institutions reported a wide range of activities that incorporate NSSE data including: institutional task forces to examine aspects of student engagement that need attention; development of first-year experience programs; strategic planning, assessment and accountability studies; initiatives to expand awareness and use of NSSE data to campus stakeholders; and review and modification of general education programs.

Topics
- Accreditation
- American Democracy Project
- Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability
- Departmental and Student Support Services
- Dissemination to Campus Stakeholders
- Faculty Evaluation
- Faculty Teaching and Professional Development
- First-Year Experience
- General Education
- Grant and Funding Proposal Support
- Learning Communities
- Strategic Planning
- Student Engagement Initiatives
- Student-Faculty Interaction

Accreditation
Illinois State University. Illinois State primarily used NSSE data for a NCA self study in 2005. Specifically, NSSE data were quite valuable in developing the goals for the special emphasis, “Partnerships for Student Learning”.

Delta State University. The Delta State University Quality Enhancement plan for the Southern Association (SACS) is based on the belief that fully engaging students in learning environments leads to enhanced student learning. The University vision is “Delta State - an environment where you learn, discover, create, and grow in service to humanity.” The Quality Enhancement Plan is designed to directly address the methods of teaching and learning that create such an environment. NSSE data were used to assess educational effectiveness of the Delta State’s QEP vision and goals which include: increased student faculty interaction, engagement with technology, active learning and communication skills.

American Democracy Project
Illinois State University. Portions of the NSSE data have been identified as baseline information for the development of goals for the American Democracy Project for the 2005-06 academic year and beyond. The data will also serve as a means to assess goals/outcomes as the program develops.

Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability
Fort Hays State University. The 2005 Comprehensive Assessment Report and Strategic Plan prepared by the University Assessment Committee at Fort Hays reports on the current state of university-wide assessment including college and departmental level initiatives. It also builds a strategic plan for university-wide assessment to guide decision making and resource allocation. This document is available on the Fort Hays Web site at: www.fhsu.edu/aqip/reports_documents/ascplan.pdf

University of Central Oklahoma. UCO’s National Survey of Student Engagement Action Team was comprised of representatives from a variety of administrative areas and from the five undergraduate colleges. Using a Pareto approach to identify areas of concern, the Team then worked through cause and effect diagrams to uncover areas of concern and determine five root causes. Finally, the Team merged the five root causes into two with corresponding recommendations and rationale. The document is available on the UCO Web site at: bronze.ucok.edu/cit/NSSE%20Action%20Team%20Final%20Report%20OFIs%5B1%5D.pdf

University of Wisconsin System. The UW System accountability report for 2004-2005, Achieving Excellence, presents a balanced approach to system-wide accountability reporting that reflects a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests. Achieving Excellence focuses on two approaches to the measurement of university performance. First, it presents the UW System’s progress toward its goals for specific student and institutional outcomes. Second, it examines the ways in which
the UW provides positive campus environments that promote learning and student achievement. The document is available on the UWS Web site at: www.uwsa.edu/opar/accountability/achieve05/ae05.pdf

**Departmental and Student Support Services**

**Central Missouri State University.** Beginning with the 2005 academic year, all departments at CMSU received a data pack that included information on departmental programs assessed in a number of key areas (e.g., student quality and faculty productivity). NSSE data comprised part of the data pack. The University will establish standards of performance for the various measures in the data pack and a program "report card" will be produced. Each department’s progress towards attainment of the standards will be evaluated and reviewed annually by deans and the provost. The results, along with other information in the departmental annual report, will guide action planning and resource reallocation. The information will allow departments to identify areas of strength and weakness and provide information to continuously improve programs. NSSE data will be part of the data set that informs planning and program evaluation. The same strategy will be used for the student support services areas. The Student Life division at CMSU has been using CIRP, YFCY and NSSE data to guide department programming and program evaluation for the past three years. The division collects information related to the quality of residence halls, student programs and other student services they provide.

**University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point.** In the spring of 2005, the Student Success Advisory Committee at UWSP requested a "map of student success activities" on campus. Interviews were carried out with academic department chairs and student affairs units to uncover what activities they are engaged in to bolster student success. Interviews were organized around five benchmark items from the NSSE survey. This was done to learn what types of specific activities departments and units do that might affect NSSE responses and to gauge awareness of NSSE items by campus faculty and staff. It became clear that: 1) there was a need to describe activities more accurately to students. UWSP has activities related to the benchmark items that students may not identify or recognize on the survey, and 2) UWSP needed to raise awareness among the academic departments of the use, meaning, and validity of NSSE as a measure of student learning. Departments are doing many creative things to engage and challenge students. Using NSSE will help UWSP to work with departments to understand and communicate what contributes to student success.

**Dissemination to Campus Stakeholders**

**Florida Atlantic University.** Florida Atlantic University created a search tool on their institutional Web site from their 2001 NSSE data. The tool allows users to generate a custom report of the survey results from selected criteria. The search is available on the FAU Web site at: lea.fau.edu/nsse/nsse.asp

**University of Nebraska at Kearney.** NSSE data has been disseminated to faculty on campus through a variety of different efforts. These have included a panel discussion of the 2003 results in January of 2004. The results of the 2004 (and comparisons to 2002 and 2003) have been shared in an electronic newsletter on assessment and as part of a panel discussion in February 2005. Copies of the UNK results have been distributed to members of the Faculty Senate and various faculty councils (General Studies Council, First Year Program Advisory Council, Academic Affairs, Council for Undergraduate Education, UNK Assessment Committee, Dean’s Council) for the primary purposes of promoting awareness of the survey and stimulating discussion about student engagement.

**Faculty Teaching and Professional Development**

**Truman State University.** Truman State asked all disciplines this year to include, as part of their annual Discipline Action Plans, teaching method/learning strategy inventories to be filled out by individual faculty members. Disciplines were also asked to discuss and summarize how their programs are incorporating the pedagogies of service learning, study abroad, and internships. Each discipline is asked to follow-up on how its teaching methods promote student learning in its Five-year Program Review, a process that encourages reflection, self-assessment, and planning for improvement among faculty members. This information allows Truman State to provide assistance to faculty in the forms of workshops, fellowships, and speakers and facilitates the integration of pedagogies designed to promote student learning. The Center for Teaching and Learning has provided focused programs to help address some of these issues.

**First-Year Experience**

**Illinois State University.** NSSE data were used extensively by the FYE taskforce as part of the Dimensions of the Foundations of Excellence project. Future use of NSSE data will be determined by the newly formed FYE Council as they begin to establish goals/outcomes for the FYE at Illinois State and ways to evaluate them.

**State University of New York at Plattsburgh.** The results of the survey were discussed at the Executive Council, comprised of the President, Vice Presidents and Deans. The campus also held workshops on the results, where the Director of Institutional Research discussed their significance and the steps needed to improve the engagement of first-year students. From analysis of NSSE data and other indicators, such as the SUNY Student Opinion Survey, SUNY Plattsburgh created a new office for First-Year Programs. The University has also created a new residential living/learning
program for first-year students that encompasses about 25 percent of the first-year class and has begun new retention efforts aimed at students identified as at-risk.

**Western Michigan University.** Western Michigan University used 2002 and 2003 NSSE results to increase awareness of the definition and scope of student engagement through reports and presentations to the academic community. These results served as a call for the development of a first-year experience program. In 2004-2005, the provost/vice president for academic affairs and the vice president for student affairs and their staffs - with support of the president - planned and launched a fall 2005 program for entering freshmen. With the theme, “Start Right - Finish Strong,” the First-year Experience (FYE) for new, first-time students at WMU is designed to strengthen students’ academic performances during the first critical year of their enrollment and to help them transition into college life and campus living. FYE began with 30 sections of 22 students. Faculty and administrators assess the program and make adjustments as necessary. WMU’s goal over the next two years is to enroll every new, first time student in FYE.

**General Education Programs**

**South Dakota Board of Regents.** The report, *General Education and NSSE*, compiled by the South Dakota Board of Regents, presents data from the 2002 and 2003 NSSE and 2003 FSSE Pilot Test. Following background information on the surveys, a review of the principles of good practice, and a general education review report matrix, the paper presents table displays of NSSE results. The report is available on the SDBOR Web site at: www.sdbor.edu/administration/academics/gen_ed/Gen_Ed_NSSE_2-17-04-Revised.doc

www.sdbor.edu/administration/academics/gen_ed/Gen_Ed_NSSE_Selected_info_2-17-04.xls

**University of Nebraska at Kearney.** The General Studies Council has identified a number of NSSE items that will serve as indicators for the general objectives of the General Studies Program. These items have been incorporated into the Council’s General Studies Assessment Plan as indirect measures of student engagement. The items were found to be a particularly good fit for their program because freshmen are typically enrolled exclusively in General Studies Program courses during their freshmen year. Thus, most of their initial academic and campus activities have strong links to the General Studies Program. The results for the three baseline years are currently being analyzed. Recommendations regarding faculty development and related General Studies Program initiatives will be derived from these analyses.

**Grant and Funding Proposal Support**

**Dakota State University.** In October 2004, DSU received a Department of Education Title III Grant, *Strengthening Student Success and Retention through Improved Information Access and Services*. NSSE data were used to support the grant request and will be used as one means of evaluating several of the grant objectives. For example, one of the five-year grant objectives is to increase positive student responses in selected areas by 25 percent. To achieve these results, DSU is developing an online advising handbook, restructuring the first-year experience and redesigning the developmental education courses. The University’s tutoring system is also being revamped. Several new positions were funded through the grant to support these initiatives.

**Strategic Planning**

**Dakota State University.** The DSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment prepares a summary of the NSSE data along with other indicators of institutional effectiveness. The summary:

- Demonstrates how NSSE data is linked to DSU’s Strategic Plan and the six strategic initiatives
- Compares DSU data to statewide and national norms
- Identifies areas of strengths and challenges

The presentation is shared with various campus administrative groups and campus committees and is also presented to all faculty and staff during the fall orientation meetings. The NSSE information is also utilized by the colleges and departments to evaluate their institutional effectiveness plans. A summary of NSSE results is generally also published on the DSU Web site and in the campus newspaper.

**Truman State University.** Truman State is preparing to draft a new University Master Plan, using NSSE data to answer important questions. At the annual Master Plan and Assessment Workshop in July 2005, the Vice President organized his presentation around the questions posed by George Kuh, Director of NSSE, in his recent *Change* magazine article, “Never Let It Rest.” In answer to the question, “Are we allocating resources in ways that produce student learning?” he used NSSE data, along with other University-wide assessment data, to examine how learning is produced at Truman. Specifically, he presented data from the NSSE regarding the extent to which coursework emphasizes memorizing facts that are repeated in pretty much the same form. The workshop then examined items related to the powerful pedagogies of internship experiences and community service as part of coursework. In addition to studying performance in these areas, Truman State compared themselves to other members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts and Sciences Colleges and benchmarked their scores against this national group of similar institutions.
**Student Engagement Initiatives**

**Fort Hays State University.** Fort Hays compared their students’ responses to NSSE survey questions on diversity and critical thinking to those of students at peer institutions. In FHSU’s “The ESOL Multicultural Newsletter,” a faculty member suggests ways that the University can increase cultural diversity and offer more learning opportunities that engage students in examining their ideas and opinions.

**University of Nebraska at Kearney.** The Office of Sponsored Programs at UNK is responsible for promoting student research. It adopted the NSSE item that specifically referred to student engagement in out-of-class research activities as a benchmark for measuring student engagement. The office has noted a positive trend of increasing engagement between 2002 and 2004 which is due to increased research opportunities as well as greater promotion of student research activities.

**Student-Faculty Interaction**

**George Mason University.** George Mason wanted to improve their scores in relation to their peers on faculty/student interaction. The Provost agreed to provide funds to encourage academic units to hold various kinds of student/faculty get-togethers. The first to volunteer was the Psychology Department. They planned an afternoon social which was set up in the hallway of their classroom building so that students would not feel intimidated about stopping and talking with faculty. Two staff members from the office of Institutional Assessment attended and conducted brief interviews with student participants to evaluate their reactions to the event. Although the number of students participating was small, those who did were quite happy to have this opportunity to interact with faculty. Several students talked to an advisor who was in attendance and scheduled follow-up meetings. As a result of this activity, the VP for University Life is taking over the responsibility for planning such department-related events this coming academic year.