Accreditation Toolkits

Accreditation organizations have responded to the growing salience of learning outcomes in a variety of ways. Virtually all now include explicit references to student learning in their standards for accreditation. Most also require institutions or programs to examine student achievement or “institutional effectiveness” as part of their self-study and review process – usually in the form of some kind of “assessment.”


One of the most common institutional uses of NSSE data is for accreditation. NSSE data can be used in all components of the accreditation process: self-studies, visits by the team of peer evaluators, and in response to a decision by an accrediting body requesting improvement or additional evidence of student learning. The NSSE Accreditation Toolkits include guidelines that suggest ways to map specific items from the NSSE instrument to regional accreditation board standards, timelines to help institutions decide when and how often to collect student engagement data, and examples of how other institutions in each region have used NSSE in their accreditation efforts. The mapping of items to standards is not intended as a formula, but rather to stimulate institutions to consider ways to integrate NSSE data with other measures of student learning outcomes and evidence for effectiveness into accreditation processes.

Beginning in 2005, we reviewed the standards for all regional accrediting bodies and created toolkits for each region. Institutions select a toolkit based on their administration year and the applicable standards.

www.nsse.iub.edu/links/accred_toolkits

Regional Accreditation Toolkits

The toolkits include maps of NSSE items to regional standards, sample timelines to help institutions decide when and how often to collect student engagement data for integration into your accreditation process, and examples of how other institutions in each region have used NSSE in their accreditation efforts.

Regional toolkits available:

- Higher Learning Commission - North Central Association (HLC-NCA)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Specialized Accreditation Toolkits

In 2004, we introduced a series of specialized accreditation toolkits that map NSSE survey items to professional accreditation standards for the business and accounting program standards of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSBO), teacher education program standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE); and applied science, computer science, engineering, engineering technology, and information systems program standards of ABET. All toolkits are reviewed annually.

Specialized Accreditation Toolkits provide suggestions on how institutions can incorporate NSSE results into the processes and products that support specialized and professional accreditation. Guidelines map survey items to specific accreditation standards.

Specialized toolkits available:

- ABET: Applied Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering, Engineering Technology, Information Systems
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB): Business, Accounting
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE): Teacher education
- Teacher Accreditation Education Council (TEAC): Teacher education
Institutional Examples

Because NSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practices, colleges and universities have found productive ways to incorporate survey results in their institutional self-studies. In the following section, we describe how selected institutions are using NSSE in accreditation.

Regional Accreditation Examples

Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association (HLC-NCA)

University of Indianapolis
A NSSE participant since 2004, the University of Indianapolis has used and disseminated its survey results to support its HLC-NCA reaccreditation efforts. The University used 2004 baseline data to guide the direction of its AQIP action project on student learning. The same NSSE results on perceptions of senior experiences prompted an internal survey of program directors and chairs to further assess the status of capstone experiences across campus. These combined initiatives serve as the foundation for a new student learning action project. NSSE results have also been a valuable resource in the writing of the AQIP Systems Portfolio. Many NSSE survey questions can be mapped to the nine AQIP categories and NSSE results were used to support nearly half of the Categories within the Portfolio.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

Medaille College
NSSE data at Medaille College inform its strategic planning and institutional assessment plan. Data were reported to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in Medaille’s Periodic Review Report and will be in their next self-study, by which time they will have two more rounds of NSSE data to draw on in evaluating overall mission effectiveness.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

Centenary College of Louisiana
Centenary College’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in support of reaffirmation by SACS is titled “C4: A Quality Enhancement Plan of Experiential Learning,” where the four C’s are “Centenary, Career, Culture, and Community.” The QEP expands on the institution’s strategic plan, and focuses on three goals:

1. Nurture for the entire campus community a rich intellectual atmosphere and personalized, distinctive experiences through innovative curricular, interactions between students and faculty, interdisciplinary studies, internships, and intercultural opportunities.
2. Strengthen the campus community and enrich its social atmosphere, specifically by invigorating service-learning with enhanced curricular and co-curricular opportunities that increase our larger community connections.
3. Enroll and graduate students who seek a vibrant college experience that will afford them superior preparation for career and citizenship in the real world. (QEP, p. 6)

NSSE results will provide indirect measures to assess C4 progress on survey items related to community-based projects, discussing career plans with faculty, working with faculty on research projects as well as activities outside of coursework.

Specialized Accreditation Examples

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)

California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)

In its progress report to AACSB, the College of Business Administration (CBA) at CSULB reported on several areas of concern that emerged during the reaffirmation process including the need for an “appropriate, applicable, and effective assessment system” and continued efforts toward retaining and supporting faculty. To address the first of these concerns, CBA’s planning and assessment team developed a set of eight learning goals and outcomes for its undergraduate students derived from CSULB’s general strategic plan. NSSE results will be used as stand-alone assessment measures for seven of these goals which include: (a) conceptual learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills; (b) awareness of ethical, social responsibility, and citizenship issues; (c) interpersonal skills for working in diverse contexts; (d) effective written and oral communication skills; (e) understanding of business-related functions and practices and the ability to apply this knowledge to real-world problems; (f) ability to use quantitative and technological skills to analyze and interpret business data; and (g) understanding of the impact of globalization on business.

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