How CIC Institutions are Using NSSE Data

CIC Chief Academic Officers were invited to report how their institutions are using results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in August 2005.

CIC institutions reported a range of activities, including institutional task forces to examine aspects of student engagement that need attention, revisions in first-year students’ programs, accreditation self-studies organized around student engagement themes, and capstone courses for all seniors. NSSE data are helping to document the effectiveness of small and mid-sized private colleges and universities. This type of documentation can provide one answer to increased calls for greater information and accountability.

Brief Summaries

University of the Ozarks
- Public relations
- Institutional assessment

University of the Ozarks uses NSSE in two ways: (1) to demonstrate to internal and external constituencies that they are modeling best practices for student engagement and learning (because they score above the national averages in all five categories); (2) as one element in overall assessment process.

William Woods University
- Support of other internal indicators for change
- University-wide study of academic challenge

No one NSSE indicator prompted change. However, NSSE results supported other indications that the following changes were needed:
1. English Department restructured the common studies required composition courses. Changes are in place for 2005-06. Emphasis is on expository writing, reflective analysis, and argumentation. Previously, courses focused more on creative writing and response to literature.
2. Since Nov., 2004, faculty and administration have been engaged in analysis of the level of academic challenge at the university. The discussions, which are ongoing, have included faculty, division chairs, President’s Cabinet, and newly formed Common Studies Learning Community.
3. The Academic Dean and faculty Personnel Committee developed two new evaluation instruments: a Faculty Performance Rubric and Teaching Performance Rubric. Both emphasize student learning. Also, students were involved in interpreting NSSE data and communicating results via a marketing course.

Eastern Mennonite University
- Creating a balance between resources and programming
- NSSE is helpful in evaluating programs

Eastern Mennonite University engaged in a process of evaluating and prioritizing all academic and administrative programs with the goal of strengthening programs and creating a better balance between resources and programming. Using Dr. Robert Dickeson’s book on prioritization and have had faculty and staff write evaluation reports on over 200 programs. In preparation, the Research and Effectiveness Office supplied data on a variety of factors. NSSE was one source of data. Each program is now being rated on 9 criteria. This means that NSSE results weigh in on the program rating. Ultimately some programs will be eliminated and others will be strengthened.

Lees-McRae College
- Accreditation review
- Professional development
- General education core curriculum revision

NSSE data from 2000 and 2003 were key pieces of information to help guide institution towards a focused and coherent plan with the simple yet powerful aim of enhancing student learning. NSSE data were used to develop professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, particularly with regard to teaching. General Education core curriculum has been under review for some years. The NSSE data was used in general revision and QEP for the SACS reaffirmation of accreditation. The revised General Education core curriculum is more structured, focuses on gaining basic skills in math, writing, reading and computing at the
beginning before moving on to discipline-specific courses, and also uses a common cohort approach throughout the curriculum to further enhance learning.

**Sweet Briar College**
- **External communications/promotion**
  Folded messages about high level of student engagement into admissions. Numbers are up. Contributed to better understanding of our campus culture and can communicate it more effectively as a result of the NSSE studies. Data useful as an external assessment tool in communicating about our programs to the Board of Directors. The profile of the academic component of the college has been elevated in their eyes as a result.
- **New approach to advising**
  During a recent major strategic planning initiative, NSSE data helped identify those things that "didn't need fixing." SBC was able to identify important strengths upon which to build. Resulting in a new team approach to advising, unified student portfolios of curricular and co-curricular accomplishments, increased study-abroad opportunities, and expanded internship options. Each was shaped by what was learned from NSSE.
- **Academic challenge for seniors**
  Many departments have reconfigured their senior exercises in response to initial data suggesting a perceived decrease in rigor during the senior year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this has been successfully addressed.

**University of Charleston**
- **Making changes to the first year experience, the senior experience, and the mid-level curricular and co-curricular experiences based on the data and campus discussion of the possible changes that might be implemented to enhance student learning.**
- **Linking the NSSE data with CLA data, Academic Profile, California Critical Thinking instrument, etc. to assess areas of strength and areas for improvement**
  UC has linked NSSE data with other instruments to reveal trends after four years of administering NSSE and Academic Profile. Major goal is to show measurable growth in liberal learning outcomes.

**Marywood University**
- **Improvements on campus at the operational level**
- **Improving the first-year experience**
- **Foundations of Excellence in the First Year: founding institution.**
- **Marywood University accreditation self-study**
- **measuring the effectiveness of meeting mission goals (presentation at AIR 2005)**

**Seattle Pacific University**
- **Training faculty who teach in our freshman program;**
- **Assessment newsletter to all faculty and staff;**
- **Parent Orientation program;**
- **We are in the beginning of our 10-year self-study (accreditation) process and anticipate using these data (as well as FSSE data) in this process.**

**Meredith College**
- **Enrollment managers examine trends in the NSSE data to guide marketing strategies, and make adjustments to programs and campus visitation days to ensure that students are aware of engagement opportunities.**
- **Academic deans share NSSE information as evidence of the quality of the Meredith College experience to prospective students and families.**
- **President uses NSSE results to keep alumnae informed about the quality of Meredith education, while Advancement staff use NSSE as background information for potential donors.**

**Using Data Themes:**
- **Generate Interest in Using Survey Data**
- **Develop a Communications Strategy**
- **Validate Findings by Linking NSSE to Other Data**
- **Identify Sub-populations of Interest**
- **Identify Peer or Aspirational Institutions**
- **Translate Data into Action**