**NSSE Foundations: A Primer on the National Survey of Student Engagement**

Spring 2009 Regional NSSE Users Workshop  
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National Survey of Student Engagement

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**Session goals**

- NSSE Basics  
- Administration  
- Understanding Your Results  
- Disseminating Results  
- Going Beyond Reports  
- Ideas and Inspiration

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**NSSE Basics**

- Provide reliable indicators of frequency with which students engage in educationally effective practices  
- Problem identification—results point to things institutions can do something about—almost immediately  
- Context setting—paint a picture of the institution  
- Evidence of outcomes and processes  
- Refocus conversation about collegiate quality  
- Helps inform decision-making  
- Provides lexicon for talking about collegiate quality in an understandable, meaningful way  
- Mobilize action

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**NSSE Basics: Purpose**

- Based on effective educational practices research  
- Designed and tested for high validity and reliability  
- Relatively stable over time  
- High credibility of self-reported data

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**NSSE Basics: Self-Reported Data**

Self-reported data is valid if five conditions are met:  
1. Information is known to respondents  
2. Questions are phrased clearly & unambiguously  
3. Questions refer to recent activities  
4. Respondents think the questions merit a serious & thoughtful response  
5. Answering the questions does not threaten or embarrass students, violate their privacy, or encourage them to respond in socially-desirable ways  
- NSSE was intentionally designed to satisfy these five conditions
**NSSE Basics: the NSSElings...**
- The “NSSElings”
- The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (2003)
- The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (2004)
- Additional Surveys
  - The Law Student Survey of Student Engagement
  - The College Student Experiences Questionnaire
  - The College Student Expectations Questionnaire
  - The High School Survey of Student Engagement*
  - The Community College Survey of Student Engagement*  
*Not administered by the Center for Postsecondary Research

**Administration**

**Administration: Response Rates**
- The percent of students who completed the survey from the possible group that received it.
  - Sample Size
  - Respondents
  - Legitimate Subtractions
    - Bad Address/e-mail
    - No longer attending institution
  - NSSE average ~ 39 percent; dependent on mode
  - Sample Error better statistic for larger institutions; NSSE has increased sample sizes over the years to assist with lowering sample error

**NSSE Basics: Recent Updates**
- No changes to survey content (2004-2009)
- 3 customized comparison groups
- Electronic report delivery & archive
- Executive Snapshot report
- Pocket Guide report
- Weighting changes
- New Carnegie classifications
- Benchmarks delivered early

**Administration: Timeline**
- May-September
  - NSSE registration opens
- September
  - NSSE registration approvals
  - Materials collection
  - October
  - Population files due
- Mid/Late-January
  - Administrations open
- June
  - Administrations close
- August
  - Institutional reports are sent

**Administration: Response Rates and Sample Error**
- Why is this important / Potential problems
  - Student beliefs
    - Age of Spam e-mail and junk mail
    - Over-surveying students (Survey Monkey, etc)
    - Does their opinion matter?
  - Are students getting the survey?
    - Do they check those mailboxes/e-mails
    - Are messages getting through e-mail system
    - Are other admin and faculty aware?
  - Will they endorse the idea if asked by students?
  - Do they see it as important?
Administration: Increasing Student Participation

- Customized invites
- Variety of templates with customized options
- Mode
  - Paper, Web, Web+
- Announcements and Follow-ups (up to five student contacts)
- Promotion

Administration: Increasing Respondents

- Advertising: Know your Students
  - Ads/Articles in Student Media
    - How have results been used in the past?
    - What are you hoping to learn/change based on results?
    - Flyers/table tents across campus (NSSE is coming)
    - Parking Lots, Caf., etc.
- E-mail announcements
  - Popular administrators
  - Student leaders
  - FY/SN faculty
- Other venues
  - Large events or assemblies
  - Res. Hall meetings
  - Student gov’t meetings
  - Advising meetings
  - Organization meetings
  - Front page of website

Administration: Customization

- Oversampling
  - Targeting specific types of students
- Group Variables
  - Up to five group variables
  - Fields for targeted oversampling or special analysis
    - School program, honors status, distance education, learning community, etc.
- Selected comparison groups
  - Your choice – pick schools by name, Carnegie, NSSE cohort
  - Consortia and Systems

Administration: Customization

- Northern Arizona University responded to interest from residence life to compare and contrast experiences of students in their new living-learning centers (LC) versus traditional housing options. They included LC students as an oversample, & used grouping variables to identify non-participants to do additional analyses. Residence Life staff received customized report to help them evaluate their LC project
- Texas State University-San Marcos circulated list of current-year NSSE participants to deans who then selected institutions to include in their customized groups. This helped build interest in successful administration, and when results arrived – deans and faculty were curious about how they performed against their selected comparators

Understanding Your Results

NSSE Results: Where do I start?

1. Start with what you want to know, then go to the data
   a. What burning questions do you have about your students?
   b. What are the hot topics on your campus?
   c. How can these data feed you with information on those topics?
2. Scan the results, noting trends or results you may not have anticipated. How are you stacking up in terms of educational practices of interest to your campus?
Making Sense of Your Data: Benchmarking

Approaches:

- **Normative** - compare your students’ responses to those of students at other colleges and universities.
- **Criterion** - compare your school’s performance against a predetermined value or level appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, etc.
- **Longitudinal** – compare your student’s scores over time

Review Respondent Characteristics

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

Digging Deeper into Items: Frequencies

- Frequency Distributions - for a focused look at your students (% that experienced activity)
  - Look at the “never” responses. What percentages are too high? Do these make sense? What does this tell you? Which “nevers” might you focus on reducing or eliminating?
  - Identify items with “positive percents” in which the majority of students report that they “very often” or “often” engage in this activity – are these the result of intentional efforts?
  - What other encouraging or challenging patterns do you see in the frequency reports?
Results Reports: Means

Mean Comparisons

- Means for first-years and seniors
- Engagement items, consortium/system items
- Significant differences when compared to peers
- Effect size
- Detailed statistics (standard errors, degrees of freedom, etc.)

Digging Deeper into Items: Means

- About how often have you done the following:
  - Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments?

  ![Example: The proposed “First Year Initiative” (FYI) includes elements to enrich collaborative learning. Do these data suggest attention is warranted?](image)

Results Reports: Benchmarks

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

  ![Peer Groups
  - Top 50% and Top 10%
  - Means, significant differences, and effect size
  - Detailed statistics](image)

Results Reports: Multi-Year Benchmarks

- NEW in 2008
- First-year and senior benchmark scores charted for all years of participation
- NSSE changes (weight, item changes, etc.) accounted for
- Detailed statistics (standard errors, confidence intervals, etc.)
- See our new Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide

Benchmarks as a Broad Overview

- Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)
- Benchmark Comparisons

  ![NSSE levels charted for all years of participation](image)

Using Results: Effect Size

- What is effect size?
  - Significant difference versus practical difference
    - We calculate effect size by dividing the difference between two means by their pooled standard deviation
  - Cohen’s $d$
    - Small: $d = .2$
    - Medium: $d = .5$
    - Large: $d = .8$
Using Results: Effect Size

Using NSSE data, we created our own NSSE recommendations for effect size

- See our NSSE Effect Size Analysis handout
- Small: $d = .1$
- Medium: $d = .3$
- Large: $d = .5$
- Very Large: $d = .7$
- Context is key!

Disseminating Results

Sharing your NSSE data

- Provide summaries of results
  - Copy NSSE tables; create your own
- Appeal to different stakeholder needs
- Use the Power Point template
- Involve groups from the beginning
- Make meaning of the data; why are the numbers what they are?
- Go back to other data sources
- How might scores be improved?

Helpful Resource: Facilitator’s Guide

- Facilitator’s guide can help you get organized
- Provides suggestions for leading a workshop or session on understanding, interpreting and taking action on NSSE data
- Simply reporting results may not lead to action

Copies available: www.nsse.iub.edu/institute

Exercises for Sharing Results

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 assess the facts. When trying to understand something as complex as the undergraduate experience, data from the NSSE survey (questions 27), are listed below. Select several items of interest from the table to assess what you predict and what 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 discussions about the quality of the student experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item from Survey Question</th>
<th>% Often or Very Often Predicted</th>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Gave an answer to an instructor's question in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Told an instructor what you needed to improve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Worked on an assignment before class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Worked on a paper or assignment before it was due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Included diverse perspectives (interpersonal, cultural, gender, political, etc.) in class discussions and assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NSSE: Only One Step in Assessment Process

Step #1: Survey Data
- Survey students
- Review results
- Develop preliminary list of strengths and opportunities for improvement

Step #2: Feedback
- Share results with faculty, administrators & students
- Identify themes & priorities
- Design action plan

Step #3: Action Plan
- Prepare plan
- Share plan with appropriate groups
- Link to strategic plan
- Implement action

Step #4: Follow-Up
- Use results as benchmarks to monitor progress
- Faculty & student focus groups

Taking Action on Student Engagement Results

Plan Action During Pre-results Phase
- Identify how results fit stakeholder assessment plans
- Create a campaign to raise awareness
- Solicit stakeholder input on selection of comparison groups
- Consider how results can be used for educational purposes

Examine & Share Results
- Discourage those who can do something about results
- Create short reports & share regularly
- Involve all stakeholders in interpretation of results
- Share results with faculty & administrative NSSE liaisons

Move Beyond NSSE Reports: Additional Analyses & Data Collection
- Connect NSSE data to other student information
- Add expanded values & institutional context to data by including inter-group & focus groups
- Conduct additional analyses relative to institutional issues
- Use data to assess impact of interventions to increase student engagement

Source: Kinzie, J. & Pennipede, B. (in press). Converting engagement results into action. New Directions for Institutional Research

Plan Action Before Results Arrive

Plan Action During Pre-results Phase
- Identify how results fit stakeholder assessment plans
- Create a campaign to raise awareness
- Solicit stakeholder input on selection of comparison groups
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Disseminating Your Results

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Going Beyond Reports

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NSSE in Your Assessment Plan

How often should I administer NSSE?
- Every Year: Gives you a snapshot of each class
- Every Three Years: Gives you a picture of a cohort at the beginning and the end of their college experiences
- Every Five Years: Works well with most accreditation cycles (Accreditation and Interim Reports)
- Other factors to consider:
  - Establishing a baseline
  - Costs (using all core surveys)
  - Additional Surveys/Sources of Data
  - Time to take absorb results, make changes

How often should I administer NSSE?
NSSE Services
- You become part of the NSSE Family with your participation
  - Consulting
  - Help with making sense of data
  - Presentation assistance
  - Technical questions
  - Updates, Briefs, Annual Report, new information
  - Special regional users workshops (meeting other users)
  - Feedback for NSSE – our Report Card

Beyond Reports
- Doing your own within-institution analyses using NSSE resources
  - SPSS data
  - Codebooks
  - Syntax library
- Additional tools and services from NSSE
  - Special analyses
  - Voluntary System of Accountability
  - Accreditation Toolkits (regional and specialized)
  - Multi-year Data Guide
  - Focus groups

Moving toward action...
- What concerns do you have about your NSSE administration and results?
- What opportunities do you see for using your NSSE data? What obstacles do you anticipate?
- Who might you want to involve in your next conversation about NSSE?
- What might you do within the week after returning from this meeting?

Questions?
Our website:
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www.nsse.iub.edu/institute
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