Using NSSE in Accreditation and Quality Improvement Plans

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Overview

• Introduction and Rationale for Using NSSE in Accreditation
• NSSE and Regional Accreditation Timelines
• Mapping NSSE to Accreditation Standards
• Institutional Examples
• Wrap Up
• Questions

One of the most common institutional uses of NSSE data is for accreditation.

➢ What is your “Accreditation story”? (when are you up? What is your role?)
➢ What questions do you have about using NSSE in your accountability efforts?

Using NSSE for Public Accountability:

Perspectives on NSSE and Accreditation

“Our NSSE results have provided us with a very meaningful framework for organizing our data and assessing our ongoing progress for our accreditation self study.”
— Mary J. Meehan, President, Alverno College

“NSSE is used more widely today than ever as an effective way to assess what both institutions and students themselves do to foster student success.”
— Belle S. Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Introduction:
Using NSSE in Accreditation

• Accreditation agencies de-emphasize indicators of institutional resources, and mandate evidence of student learning
• Regional and discipline-specific standards encourage use of data in ongoing, strategic reviews of institutional effectiveness and improvement plans
Rationale for Using NSSE in Accreditation

• Measures effectiveness in key areas of interest
• Systematically identifies areas of strength and needs for improvement
• Can be used as evidence of systematic assessment

Rationale for Using NSSE in Accreditation (cont’d)

• Enables institutions to benchmark against similar and aspirational peer comparison groups
• Results reveal widely held assumptions about students and how they use institutional resources to enhance learning
• Results are accessible and understandable by various internal and external stakeholders

Types of Measures

➢ Outcomes measures
  -- Evidence of what students have learned or can do

➢ Process Measures
  -- Evidence of effective educational activity by students and institutions

Using NSSE in Accreditation

• NSSE as evidence
  – Provides student learning process and outcomes indicators
  – Benchmarking
  – Participation in survey demonstrates ongoing evaluation, institutional improvement, and effectiveness activities

• NSSE in quality improvement efforts
  – Catalyst for institutional action
  – Guide for improvement plan
  – Baseline and outcomes measures to assess improvement

Benchmarking

Two Approaches:

• Normative - compares your students’ responses to those of students at other colleges and universities.
• Criterion - compares your school’s performance against a predetermined value or level appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, and so forth.
• Longitudinal – comparisons to performance over time
Connecting NSSE Data to Accreditation Standards - Example

- **Accreditation standard: “Demonstrate effectiveness of student academic and social support services”**
- Evidence for institutional self-study:
  - Information about availability and student use of tutoring, writing support, peer study groups, counseling services
  - NSSE indicates FY & SR believe institution emphasizes spending time studying and support for student success; 79% seniors tutored or taught peers; positive correlation between peer collaboration outside of class, satisfaction and first-year retention
  - Positive student satisfaction data about support services
  - Area for improvement - seniors indicate low gains in writing and completing drafts of papers; institution responds with examination of writing requirement in senior capstone and targets seniors for increased use of writing center

NSSE Accreditation Tool-kit

1. Background information on using student engagement in accreditation
2. Customized to each of the six regional accrediting bodies
3. Complete map of NSSE items to accreditation standards
4. Vignettes from other institutions on using NSSE in accreditation

NSSE and Regional Accreditation Timelines

**EXAMPLE: Standard Reaffirmation SACS – 10 year cycle**

- Years 1-4 Preplanning; Review accreditation principles, past reaffirmation materials; prepare Impact Report; Register for & administer NSSE (1 or 2 times) to assess institutional effectiveness and impact (ex. NSSE years 3 & 4)
- Year 5 Impact Report due from previous reaffirmation
  - Consider additional NSSE administration (or other assessment tools)
- Year 7 Orientation of Accreditation Leadership Team
  - Use NSSE results as evidence for Compliance and to identify areas for institutional engagement and reflection in the QEP
- Year 8 Compliance Certification due; off-site peer review
- Year 9 Quality Enhancement Plan due
- Year 10 Reaffirmation decision
  - NSSE administration to demonstrate impact of QEP (NSSE year following full implementation of QEP goals, no later than year 13)
- Year 15 Impact Report due

NSSE and Regional Accreditation Timelines

- **Short Cycle**
  - Due in less than three years?
    - Year one – administer NSSE
    - Years two and three – review and share NSSE results with internal and external stakeholders
- **Long Cycle**
  - Seven to Ten Year Cycle
    - Year one or two – administer NSSE
    - Year three or four – administer NSSE
      - Allows time to implement assessment results, review impact

NSSE and Regional Accreditation Timelines

- **Coming up for Reaffirmation in a Year or Two?**
  - September - register for NSSE
  - Spring - NSSE administered
  - August - results available
  - Use the information as a baseline for areas of strength and improvement

Accreditation Timeline Considerations

- Plan to administer NSSE once, and perhaps twice, to establish baseline data
- Develop a communication plan for disseminating data to internal and external audiences and keep them abreast of progress
  - Web sites, annual reports, presidential speeches, retreats, student organizations, etc.
Timeline: Using NSSE to Demonstrate Institutional Improvement

- The Improvement Plan
  - 2006: register for NSSE
  - 2007: administer NSSE (Spring)
  - 2007–08: review NSSE results; develop action plan and area of focus
  - 2008–09: refine and implement your action plan
  - 2009: register for 2010 NSSE (to assess action plan)
  - 2010: administer NSSE, determine impact of changes on area of focus

Using NSSE for Accreditation: Institutional Examples

HLC-NCA
- Augustana College
  - Self-study included NSSE results to support goals to increase participation in senior culmination experience and service learning, and to improve campus diversity.
- St. Cloud University
  - Used NSSE results and other data to address HLC Standards Criterion 2, preparing for the future, and Criterion 3, evidence of an effective teaching and learning environment.

Mapping NSSE to Accreditation Standards

- Begin with an audit of evaluation practices and extant data that can be used for accreditation
- Always use multiple sources of data
- NSSE can be linked as evidence of meeting certain accreditation standards
- NSSE is most meaningful when coupled with other forms of formative and summative evaluation

Using NSSE for Accreditation: Institutional Examples

North Central Association
- Lawrence Technological University
  - Improvement plan included NSSE results which indicated a need to more closely study the types and amounts of required writing
- University of Missouri-St. Louis
  - Self-study included 2000–2004 NSSE results to support evidence of compliance with life-long learning
EXAMPLE: Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

NSSE data support Action Projects:
- New Student Transition Action Project
  - Included a New Freshmen Seminar requirement
    - NSSE data used to measure response differences between students who had taken pilot version and those who had not
    - NSSE data measure effectiveness of newly developed seminars

SIUE Action Project=>New Freshman Seminar
- Common Goals:
  1. Assist new freshman in making the transition to college level work and expectations;
  2. Orient students to the services and culture of the University;
  3. Engage students in an intellectual community of students and faculty.
- Piloted four options:
  - Honors Seminars
  - University Experience Course
  - Culture, Ideas, Values Course (CIV)
  - Learning Communities in Academic Development

SIUE Oversampled First-Year class in 2003:
Of the questions that showed significance at the 0.1 level, four either directly or indirectly related to the objectives of the freshman seminar course as outlined in the proposal. These included the following questions:
1 A—Asked questions class or contributed to class discussion.
10 F—Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, etc.)
11 K—Understanding yourself
13—How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?

(Summary Report—NSSE 2003 Special Course Oversample April 18, 2004)

Accreditation - HLC/AQIP & the Freshman Seminar Proposal

SIUE - New Student Seminar Task Force Report and Recommendations (June, 2004)
- Recommendation 1: Adopt a freshman seminar requirement
- Recommendation 2: Include a freshman seminar in general education reform.
- Recommendation 3: Create committee for implementation and management.

Using NSSE to support AQIP in Three Fundamental Ways
1. Support for the Systems Portfolio
2. Measures and benchmarks for the strategic plan
3. Support for Action Projects

NSSE - Continuous Improvement and Action Planning
- Student engagement as measured by NSSE can be incorporated into Action Project - AQIP Criterion
- NSSE results reflect areas of strength and need for improvement
- Data can be used to improve policies, programs, and procedures
## NSSE Items Mapped to SACS Standards

### 2009 NSSE Questions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SACS Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a. Asked questions in class/contributed to class discussion</td>
<td>3.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. Made a class presentation</td>
<td>3.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1e. Included diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments</td>
<td>3.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent have exams during the current year challenged you to do your best work?</td>
<td>3.3.1, 3.4.10</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>8b. How would you rate the quality of your relationships with faculty members?</td>
<td>3.7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10b. To what extent does your institution emphasize providing support you need to help you succeed academically?</td>
<td>2.9, 2.10, 3.3.1, 3.4.9, 3.8.1, 3.8.2, 3.8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11e. To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your skills at thinking critically and analytically?</td>
<td>3.3.1, 3.5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Overall, how would you rate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?</td>
<td>2.10, 3.3.1, 3.2.8, 3.4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**“Sophomores: Scholars-in-Residence”**

- **Theme of UR’s QEP**
  - Enhance undergraduate sophomore education by bridging curricular and residential experiences
  - Living-learning connection
  - Address “sophomore slump”

- **Process and Outcomes Evaluation**
  - NSSE results as long-term indirect outcome measure – compare responses of students in living-learning vs. cohort and control group

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- NSSE scores from 2004, 2005, and 2006 on diversity, study abroad, and taking a foreign language were not at desired levels. The 10 goals of the QEP focused on strengthening leadership, financial, and infrastructure commitments to global learning.

- NSSE will be used biennially to assess gains in targeted areas as well for trend analysis.

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Southern Polytechnic State University

- SPSU Enrolls equal numbers of trad and non-trad students
- QEP “Engaged Communities: Engaging Entering Students through Learning Communities” to improve student outcomes and provide a stronger safety net to ensure student success.
- Goal – cohort participation in general orientation course, major specific orientation course, and selected general education course to improve student success

Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (IRPA) using 2005 and 2008 NSSE data in support of SACS Standards including:

- **Criterion 2.10**: The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.
- **Criterion 3.9.3**: The institution provides services supporting its mission with qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs program.

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Texas A&M University-Kingsville

- TAMUK’s NSSE scores showed weak student engagement. QEP intended to improve student success through discipline-based engagement and had two objectives:
  - provide course-level engagement in 1 or more of 3 areas: civic, professional, and/or research
  - provide faculty support for engagement courses, specially designated as “QEP courses”
- Students are surveyed and faculty measure and report learning outcomes from QEP courses. IR office compares results with students not taking QEP courses.
The WTAMU QEP team used NSSE as an assessment tool throughout their plan to improve the experience of first-year students. Also conducted focus groups.

Three guiding questions:
1. Who are our students?
2. What is the lived experience of a first-year student on our campus?
3. Where are our students experiencing failure and frustration?

Used NSSE benchmarks and selected NSSE item responses on student-faculty relationships, community- and problem-based learning.

### Using NSSE for Accreditation: Institutional Examples

**Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities**
- **University of Utah**
  - Aware of the need to work on student outcomes assessment in preparation for a 2006 reaccreditation visit, U of U created an assessment plan focusing on three core issues: 1) student progression, 2) student learning, and 3) student engagement and university experiences. NSSE data were analyzed to target areas for improvement.

**New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)**
- **Gordon College**
  - Used NSSE results as evidence of learning outcomes and general education achievements (NEASC 4.19)
- **Roger Williams University**
  - For Standard One, Mission and Purposes, RWU used NSSE results to confirm the rigor of its academic programs, experiential learning opportunities, and research activities.

### NSSE and Accreditation

**Final Thoughts**

1. Results are one direct indicator of what students put into their education and an indirect indicator of what they get out
2. Items can be used to appraise effectiveness of mission fulfillment
3. Data are actionable and easily understood by internal and external constituents
4. Share data widely
5. Use FSSE to identify areas of strength and to stimulate discussions related to improving teaching and learning

### Conclusions

- Accrediting bodies have shifted from simple quantitative to more empirically-based measures of educational effectiveness
- Campuses and accreditation bodies have moved towards productive use of longitudinal self studies and systematic reviews rather than one-point-in-time reports
- Corroborating evidence important
- Change in emphasis signifies importance of “cultures of evidence”