

Many colleges and universities post NSSE results on their Web sites. NSSE encourages public reporting of student engagement results in ways that serve to increase understanding of college quality and that support institutional improvement efforts.

Displaying results is critical at a time when transparency and public accountability figure prominently in our lexicon. To that end, NSSE is committed to helping institutions display their results. See NSSE's position on public reporting of student engagement information, (nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Engagement_data.cfm). In addition, accountability initiatives like the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), and the University and College Accountability Network (UCAN), provide leadership and a platform for disclosing information about colleges and universities, student learning outcomes, and institutional performance.

Purpose

Posting standard issue NSSE reports, such as the *Snapshot*, *Engagement Indicators*, or the former *Benchmark Comparisons Report* can be helpful. However, we encourage institutions to go a step further by displaying NSSE results in modified, accessible formats for internal and external audiences. For example, colleges and universities may highlight selected results to demonstrate distinct undergraduate experiences to visitors and prospective students, variation in engagement by student major for faculty and administrators, or public self-study analyses beyond those provided in the NSSE *Institutional Report* (nsse.iub.edu/links/institutional_reporting). Institutional researchers and others seeking guidance on analyzing and interpreting their results should consult the relevant one-page guide, at the start of each report, designed to aid in the interpretation of results in each NSSE comparison report and the following documents or NSSE staff.

Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide <http://nsse.iub.edu/links/mydag>

Accreditation Toolkits http://nsse.iub.edu/links/accred_toolkits

Psychometric Portfolio http://nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

Contextualizing NSSE Effect Sizes: Empirical Analysis and Interpretation of Benchmark Comparisons http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/effect_size_guide.pdf

Translating results into accurate, accessible formats for different audiences can be challenging. This guide will aid personnel from institutional research, admissions, public relations, communications, web development, and other areas to display information that is accurate, intended for a general audience, and consistent with NSSE's advice and policy against rankings.

Background

In *Assessment, Accountability, and Improvement: Revisiting the Tension*, published by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (2009), Peter Ewell describes a shift to “a new policy centrality of higher education... Colleges and universities are being asked to disclose more and more about academic results and are responding in kind” (p. 6). To respond in part to this imperative, many institutions have made some or all of their NSSE survey results publicly available on their Web sites.

We regularly review institutional Web sites for creative displays that meet basic standards of data representation and interpretation. Examples are featured on the NSSE Web site (nsse.iub.edu/links/website_displays) to illustrate the varied ways institutions have posted their results. These sites are consistent with NSSE's policy against rankings and with the recommendations described in this guide.

This guide offers suggestions for good displays and how to address some common pitfalls.



12 Tips for Displaying NSSE Results on Web Sites

Detailed below are elements to consider when posting NSSE results on your institutional Web site. This list of recommendations is not exhaustive. However, it reflects elements commonly found in the most effective Web site displays.

- 1** Incorporate “NSSE” as some part of the URL and in metatags
This will help showcase data in a manner that is searchable and easy to locate
Example: <http://und.edu/research/institutional-research/surveys/2013-nsse.cfm>



- 2** Include an introductory or summary of what the survey is designed to do and how it connects to the institution’s overall goals, mission, strategic plan, etc.
Note: While it may seem desirable to infer students’ “growth” or development by comparing first-year and senior scores, this is not a valid inference.

- 3** At a time when accountability, transparency and improvement are topics of frequent discussion, highlight strengths and areas for improvement to demonstrate candor and acknowledge continual improvement as an institutional goal
Example: http://www.usu.edu/aaa/nsse_paged.cfm

- 4** Keep multi-year comparisons concise, and provide a clear definition of the selected measures and a rationale for their selection
If your institution has multiple years of survey administration, displaying results over time and illustrating changes in scores and in campus practice is an effective way to demonstrate action on the part of the institution with regard to improving the student experience. Make sure multi-year analyses are done appropriately and adequately explained. Consult NSSE’s Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide: <http://nsse.iub.edu/links/mydag>
Example: <http://www.ir.colostate.edu/engagement.aspx>

- 5** Make sure sample definitions and use of weights are appropriate and clearly explained
Your NSSE Campus Project Manager can advise on appropriate ways to express these to general audiences. You may also consult NSSE resources about weighting.

- 6** Provide appropriate context that allows the viewer to understand the assessment efforts at your institution, and the specific role of NSSE results
Convey the importance of interpreting results within the appropriate institutional context and class year. Do not combine first-year and senior data.
Example: <http://wheatoncollege.edu/institutional-research/publications/nsse/>

- 7** Remove references to a “National” cohort
When referring to all NSSE participating institutions, identify this group as the “NSSE sample” or “NSSE cohort.” Avoid using “national” or calling the NSSE cohort “nationally representative.” NSSE does not sample institutions for national representativeness. However, the profile of participating institutions is broadly reflective of the national profile of US colleges and universities.

- 8** Label graphs or charts clearly and legibly and use proper terminology
Include year of survey participation in the label for graphs or charts. When discussing data and results include definitions when necessary, but avoid technical or professional jargon. Use language your audience will understand.

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Consider specific audiences (prospective students, parents, internal audiences, faculty, etc.) when developing content, and make sure it is easy for them to find

Example: <http://www.kzoo.edu/college/?p=ir&s=nsse>

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Although NSSE 200-2012 benchmark results were historically presented on a 100-point scale, they are not percentages. NSSE results from 2013 and forward are presented on a 60-point scale and should be represented as such, and referred to as “scores.”

More information about 2000-2012 benchmarks and Engagement Indicators:

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/benchmark_construction.cfm

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/engagement_indicators.cfm

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Include links to additional resources

Such as the NSSE psychometric portfolio: http://nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

Or, the Voluntary System of Accountability <http://www.voluntarysystem.org/>

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Read more examples of NSSE data use

Check out guides *Lessons from the Field, volumes I and II*

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/lessons_from_the_field.cfm

Search specific examples of NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE data use:

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/using_nsse_db/

Common Pitfalls in NSSE Results Displays

Ranking

The intent of the NSSE project is not to rank or rate institutions. The data are collected to assess dimensions of student engagement at a given institution and to provide actionable information about educational quality. With that in mind, it is inaccurate to portray NSSE as a source of data for collegiate rankings or to imply that results establish a ranking for your institution. For example, claiming to be a “top 10% institution” in relation to scores runs counter to NSSE’s policy against ranking and mischaracterizes what we report to institutions. View NSSE’s Positions and Policies

http://nsse.iub.edu/links/position_policies

Comparing First-Year and Senior Data

While it may seem desirable to infer students’ “growth” or development by comparing first-year and senior scores, this is not a valid inference for several reasons. First, engagement is a process measure, not an achievement measure. Second, the first- and senior-year experiences are different. Even if the same students were compared at two time points (which NSSE does not do), different levels of engagement are more likely to reflect differences in the educational experience than institutional impact on the students. Third, the populations are incomparable, in that the senior cohort includes only those students who persisted from the first year plus, transfer students who began elsewhere. It also includes students who may have stopped out or attended part time, prolonging the amount of time since their first year.

Labeling Benchmark Scores as Percentages

Institutional benchmarks are the weighted means of the students’ benchmark scores, and should be called “benchmark scores.” Although they are presented on a 100-point scale, benchmark scores are not percentages. In addition, scores from different benchmarks should not be compared – for example, it is not valid to say a 50 on SFI is “as good as” a 50 on SCE. Interpretation of benchmark scores should be made in the context of comparison group scores, your institution’s prior results, or pre-established standards or goals for each benchmark.

Vague References to Survey Participation Year

Specify the actual year or years of NSSE participation – instead of using unclear phrases such as “in the four years of the survey.” This helps clarify comparability and provides specific information about participation cycles.