Using NSSE Data

NSSE results are being used across all sectors and types of institutions. Discovering and sharing ways student engagement results are being used is one of NSSE’s most important activities. We are constantly seeking examples and stories of NSSE data use to feature in publications and presentations. To provide richer, more detailed narratives about how institutions are putting their results into action, over the past year we conducted interviews with representatives from selected institutions that are using NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE. Examples from these interviews were used to create Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education: Lessons from the Field, a new document included with the Institutional Report 2009 (www.nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons). This document provides in-depth accounts of ways institutions are using NSSE data to improve the undergraduate experience.

Using NSSE Data represents snapshots of changes in educational policy and practice informed by NSSE data, and suggests ways colleges and universities can use their data productively. The institutional examples in this document were collected from representatives of participating colleges and universities who provided feedback at conferences, through NSSE Client Services teams, in response to our Report Card feedback process, and in response to direct solicitations.

Because NSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practice, colleges and universities have found many instructive ways to use survey results:

- Accountability
- Accreditation self-studies
- Alumni outreach
- Assessment and improvement
- Benchmarking
- Communication with internal and external stakeholders
- Faculty and staff development
- General education reform

Tell Us Your Story

Collecting and documenting ways that NSSE colleges and universities are using their results is an ongoing process. We want to know how institutions are using their NSSE data. Using the contact information at the back of this document, please send us specific examples of internal reports or brochures highlighting NSSE data, usage strategies, and special activities. These examples will form a shared resource for colleges and universities and assist in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience for all.
Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of past NSSE users, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating NSSE data in institutional change efforts.

- **Understand what student engagement data represent.** Consult the NSSE Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties (www.nsse.iub.edu/2004_annual_report/pdf/2004_Conceptual_Framework.pdf) and other resources on the Researchers section of our Web site (www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm) to learn more about what student engagement is and why it is important.

- **Make sure faculty and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.** The value of student engagement results for improving teaching and learning needs to be convincingly explained to those faculty less familiar with assessment in general and the engagement concept in particular.

- **Collect results from enough students so the information is usable at the department or unit level.** Surveying more students than called for by NSSE’s standard sample size can enable institutions to drill down to the department or unit level, which may increase faculty interest in using engagement data. (Beginning in 2010, for institutions electing the Web-only administration mode, all eligible students will be invited to complete the survey.)

- **Report student engagement results in a responsible way.** NSSE encourages institutions to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of collegiate quality and that promote institutional improvement efforts.

- **Don’t allow the numbers to speak for themselves.** Every number and comparison reported should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results.

- **Examine the results from multiple perspectives.** Use peer comparisons (normative perspective) to confirm or challenge assumptions about performance. As described later, consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement in the context of the institution’s mission.

- **Link the results to other information about the student experience and complementary initiatives.** The positive impact of student engagement results will be multiplied if the data can be combined with other student information and made relevant to groups of faculty and staff working on different reform efforts around the campus.

- **Don’t go it alone.** The chances that changes in policy and practice will succeed tend to increase when campus teams are formed and institutions work together in consortial arrangements on topics of mutual interest. Even greater success may be achieved when institutions develop these partnerships at the start of a NSSE administration cycle to make early decisions about priorities and strategic use of the data.

**NSSE TIP #1: NSSE on the Web**

Many colleges and universities have published some or all of their results on the Web. This is an appropriate way to highlight institutional strengths and demonstrate your institution’s commitment to quality improvement.

Some institutions display all their NSSE reports online, while others post selected results highlighting institutional strengths or news releases emphasizing institutional participation and findings relevant to performance priorities. Another option is to post the NSSE Executive Snapshot (delivered in November) and The Student Experience in Brief, two short reports that summarize key student engagement findings. Participants in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) who elect to feature NSSE results have the opportunity to post additional information about their performance (see the NSSE Web site for VSA-NSSE updates: www.nsse.iub.edu/html/vsa.cfm).
Establishing Standards of Comparison

NSSE data serve a diagnostic function by identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses with respect to effective educational practices. Comparisons with peer institutions and NSSE cohort averages help reveal aspects of institutional and student performance not readily available from other sources. It is also important to examine internal variation in student engagement, to identify groups of students who are least engaged and what may be done to improve their experience.

Benchmarking

Institutions use two basic approaches to benchmarking with NSSE. One or both may be appropriate, depending on your institution’s situation.

Normative Approach

The normative approach compares your students’ responses to those of students at other colleges and universities. If enough students have participated, this can also be done at the school, department, or major field level—a particularly effective way of stimulating faculty interest in the findings.

Tarleton State University formed an ad hoc group of campus leaders and held ongoing discussions as a means to review Tarleton’s NSSE results. The findings were thought-provoking when the University compared its scores with other Texas A&M University institutions, institutions within its Carnegie classification, and the NSSE cohort. In an attempt to gather additional insights, the group visited with other Tarleton campus leaders to outline its discussions and to seek other thoughts and ideas.

Indiana University South Bend’s Institutional Research Office is using specific metrics to track how much time students spend working off campus. Institutional research staff compared their students’ responses with other Master’s institutions. As a one-person office, this approach was an efficient way to monitor students’ responses and behavior patterns in a comparative way.

Criterion Approach

A second approach to benchmarking is criterion-referenced, whereby you compare your institution’s results against a predetermined value or level that you and your colleagues deem appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth.

Communicating Results

Institutions often report their results using several approaches because a combination of dissemination strategies is typically most effective (Table 1).

Selected Audiences

Targeting specific audiences who may have expressed an interest in, or who should be aware of, one or more aspects of the results may spark focused dialogue about implications of the findings for policy and practice.

Stony Brook University has disseminated their results to department chairs and the Faculty Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education. The results were helpful in addressing some common myths about the undergraduate experience. For example, Stony Brook found that students with more responsibilities (e.g., work, child care) report a higher level of engagement. Sharing results with various stakeholders has helped the institution address specific deficits in engagement and improve the Stony Brook experience.

NSSE results were shared with faculty at Johnson Bible College in order to improve the in-class

NSSE’s Position on the Public Reporting of Student Engagement Information

NSSE encourages public reporting of student engagement results in ways that increase understanding of college quality and support institutional improvement efforts. Publicizing institutional results from the NSSE survey provides an opportunity to educate the public about the value of student engagement as an approach to assessing college quality. NSSE supports public reporting of student engagement results in ways that enable thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons while encouraging and celebrating institutional diversity. For more information on NSSE’s position, visit: www.nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Engagement_Data.cfm.
experience of undergraduates. As a result, faculty are revising syllabi and employing new teaching methods. The institution also took steps to reduce class sizes in an effort to help instructors utilize a greater variety of pedagogical methods.

At Rockford College NSSE results were presented at a student leadership conference. Student leaders predicted NSSE results and then discussed differences between their predictions and actual results. The program concluded with a discussion of how student leaders can be positive examples for their peers by engaging in educationally purposeful activities.

**Campus Wide**

To distribute NSSE results broadly, many institutions post summaries of important findings and invite colleagues to review the full report online or by request through the appropriate office. Another way to share results is to post them to internal or public Web sites or create displays in public areas such as student unions or dining halls.

Clayton State University (CSU) discusses their NSSE results at faculty council, presidential retreats, student success forums, and in various standing committee meetings. The president of the University has also led a discussion regarding what the data mean and how CSU can use the data to enhance its institutional effectiveness.

Utah Valley University first administered NSSE in 2008 but has been very active in disseminating the results and fostering a campus dialogue about improving the undergraduate experience. Presentations have been given on the findings and reports were posted on the institution’s Web site. NSSE data were disaggregated by school and provided to deans. This helped faculty recognize the importance of NSSE data and ways they can be used to inform their efforts.

**External Audiences**

Prospective students, parents, the media, researchers, and others have expressed interest in seeing institutionally specific NSSE results. Many NSSE institutions have made some or all of their results publicly available in some form (e.g., Web site, alumni magazine, press release).

Iona College uses NSSE benchmark data in their communication with parents and students. To help increase students’ commitment to Iona, letters are sent to first-year parents and students over the summer discussing the institution’s emphasis on engagement.

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### Table 1
Data Sharing With and Use by Internal Institutional Audiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Stakeholders</th>
<th>Results were shared with:</th>
<th>Results were explicitly used by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President/Senior Administration</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chairs/Deans</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Staff</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Staff</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Staff</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs/News Office</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing Board</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Newspaper</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targeted Committees/Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Results were shared with:</th>
<th>Results were explicitly used by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Experience</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Program</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 219 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2008 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2008 NSSE survey administration.

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### Table 2
Data Sharing With External Institutional Audiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Audiences</th>
<th>Results were shared with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Agencies</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Students &amp; Parents</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Agencies &amp; Commissions</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools/Counselors</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 219 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2008 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2008 NSSE survey administration.
After several years of NSSE participation, the University of Maryland Baltimore County Office of Institutional Research (OIR) staff compiled a comprehensive analytical report that tracked benchmark scores over time. The comparisons included groups within the university community, comparisons to research universities and a special science and technology public peer group. This report was posted to OIR’s Web site and made available to the public. As a result, office staff members could refer prospective students and parents to the site to review the report online.

Institutional Improvement Examples

In this section we have organized examples of how colleges and universities are using NSSE data into the following categories: general education, academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching the undergraduate experience, supportive campus environment, civic engagement, fostering collaboration and focus, faculty and staff development, enrollment management and recruiting, accreditation, first-year experience, and planning and accountability.

General Education

General education (GE) is widely presumed to provide the foundation on which essential learning outcomes will be developed. Given the increasing focus on specialization and career preparation, GE introduces students to a variety of topics thought vital to a liberally educated citizenry. It is also intended to help students develop such valuable skills as integrative thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking that will serve them over the course of their lives.

To enhance engagement in the first year at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), a faculty-appointed committee defined five objectives: (a) to encourage critical thinking, information literacy, and evidence-based writing; (b) to engage first-year students with current events, societal problems, and human needs; (c) to promote in each first-year student a personal foundation for lifelong learning; (d) to cultivate a more intellectually stimulating environment at WPI; and (e) to contribute to civic engagement and community partnerships. The committee has begun to develop a new first-year general education curriculum featuring interdisciplinary, inquiry-based seminars, better integration of the disciplines, and broader, more engaging introductions to major areas of study.

NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice

NSSE Institute associates are available to provide direct assistance to individual institutions or university and state systems. Additional details can be found at www.nsse.iub.edu/institute/.

Regional User Workshops and Webinars — NSSE staff members and institutional representatives facilitate daylong workshops in different locations around the country and free, live, interactive Webinars to help schools make the most of their results.

Campus Audits — NSSE staff members can conduct comprehensive or targeted campus audits to identify institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Consulting — NSSE staff members can help develop improvement initiatives and address accreditation or other campus goals.

Presentations & Conferences — NSSE staff members are available to participate in panels or research presentations at professional meetings and conferences.

Workshops and Retreats — NSSE staff members can assist with presenting information at faculty and staff workshops and retreats.
NSSE results and an institutional survey at Plymouth State University have been used to revise the general education program. NSSE results supported a successful grant application to establish a faculty development center charged with improving the first-year experience with special focus on undeclared students.

**Academic Challenge**

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.

At the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, the Provost’s Faculty Advisory Committee organized a meeting around its students’ reading and writing abilities, and raised the question of how much writing students have to do as undergraduates. A report providing an overview of both NSSE and FSSE included a set of questions that addressed essential aspects of academic challenge.

At Fayettville State University, NSSE data are disaggregated by major and provided to department chairs so they can determine areas of improvement. Student participation in a capstone course or learning community has been of particular interest. The institution has invested more in learning communities and developing capstone courses in an effort to strengthen writing across the curriculum and increase the amount of time students spend preparing for class.

**Active and Collaborative Learning**

Research shows students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others to solve problems prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily, during and after college.

Washington State University’s (WSU) NSSE results indicated that students’ perception of the supportiveness of the campus environment was above average, but was not meeting their expectations for collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and educationally enriching experiences. WSU has a successful living-learning community but it was limited to a small number of students. Freshman Focus learning communities were created to provide all incoming students the opportunity to engage in an extensive living-learning community system.

Hendrix College uses NSSE data to monitor the success of some of its collaborative learning programs. The College recently established a program called “Your Hendrix Odyssey” that requires students to complete at least three experiential learning projects before graduation. The projects address areas ranging from global awareness to service. Different “Odyssey” experiences also are geared toward different student cohorts. For example, during the College’s new student transition seminar course, first-year students complete “mini-Odyssey” projects.

**Student-Faculty Interaction**

The level of student interaction with faculty members is a frequently expressed concern. For instance, some small liberal arts colleges were surprised to find that students did not report as much contact with faculty as institutional leaders expected. NSSE results related to student-faculty interaction are also disquieting for many research-intensive universities.

James Madison University’s NSSE results for first-year student interaction with faculty indicated a need for increased interaction. This issue was addressed by sharing the data with the deans of each of the colleges who in turn shared the information with academic department heads. This was also addressed through increased advisor training.

After reviewing its NSSE results, Grand View College initiated a faculty-student engagement grant program whereby instructors can apply for funds to host engagement activities with students outside of class.
Faculty members have interacted with students by hosting a pizza study session the night before final exams, taking literature students to a coffee shop to enjoy a poetry slam, and inviting students into their homes for dinner.

**Enriching the Undergraduate Experience**

Several institutions have responded to their NSSE results by increasing opportunities to study abroad, adding service-learning components to courses, creating living-learning communities, and further developing capstone experiences for seniors.

After reviewing its NSSE data, Jacksonville State University wanted to improve student engagement in Enriching Educational Experiences as defined by the NSSE items that make up the benchmark. As a result, the strategic planning committee focused on expanding service-learning opportunities. The vice presidents for academic and student affairs are developing a new Office of Leadership and Service to coordinate service-learning opportunities, promote service-learning, and provide support to faculty interested in developing service-learning courses.

Saint Thomas University (FL), a member of the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) Project, used its NSSE results to inform the restructuring of several areas of the Division of Student Affairs. To improve engagement and foster development of leadership skills, the Vice President for Student Affairs created the L.I.F.E.L.O.N.G. Center for Leadership and Student Engagement. The student affairs division developed courses, workshops, experiential learning exercises, online resources, and developmental opportunities to build on the existing strengths and talents of students.

“(NSSE) brings more focus to teaching and learning initiatives and demonstrates institutional interest in and commitment to improving student engagement. It provides information and data that helped us to identify areas for improvement and establish baselines for future measurement.”

— Pam Montgomery, Director of Educational Planning, Vancouver Island University

### NSSE Research

The following publications provide detailed information about NSSE data and benchmarks.

**Annual Results publications** — Each year NSSE publishes a document ([www.nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_reports.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_reports.cfm)) that summarizes major findings for the year and highlights ways that colleges and universities are using NSSE data to improve collegiate quality at their institutions. The report also provides an overview of NSSE’s benchmarks of effective educational practice and lists all institutions that have participated in NSSE.

**Conceptual Framework** — This paper ([www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm)) provides an overview of the NSSE conceptual framework and construction of the survey instrument as well as qualitative and quantitative efforts to ensure validity and reliability.

**Psychometric Portfolio** — The NSSE Web site ([www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/researchers.cfm)) and the NSSE 2009 Psychometric Properties document included in the Institutional Report binder answer questions about the development of the survey instrument and benchmarks as well as questions about the validity and reliability of NSSE survey data.

**NSSE Technical and Norms Report** — This historical document ([www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/norms1.pdf](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/norms1.pdf)), published after the inaugural administration of NSSE in 2000, provides a full description of NSSE’s guiding principles and goals, technical information, administrative details, and descriptive statistics based on the NSSE 2000 data.

**Grand Frequencies and Means** — Tables on NSSE’s Web site ([www.nsse.iub.edu/html/overall_results](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/overall_results)) provide frequencies, means, and standard deviations for first-year students and seniors, with items broken down by class and Carnegie classification.

**Comparative Data on NSSE Benchmarks** — Tables on NSSE’s Web site ([www.nsse.iub.edu/html/overall_results](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/overall_results)) show descriptive statistics for the NSSE benchmarks by class and by Carnegie classification. These tables also report results for schools scoring in the top ten percent and fifty percent of participating schools.

**Research Papers** — NSSE staff members have published a number of articles and presented a variety of papers focusing on specific areas of the results and research methodology. Details can be found at [www.nsse.iub.edu/links/publications](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/links/publications).
Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and to the working and social relations among different groups on campus.

Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) has participated in BCSSE and NSSE since 2004, and they are following cohorts of students who completed both BCSSE and NSSE to learn more about their college experiences and persistence toward a degree. They also track students in the cohort who have left SCSU through the National Student Clearinghouse. Their analyses indicate that the non-returning students had a different level of relationships with faculty members, peers, and administrative personnel and offices than did the returning students. At SCSU, one of the two most important predictors of whether students in the cohort persisted to their junior year was the NSSE Supportive Campus Environment benchmark. Knowing students’ scores on the items in this cluster can help predict if they are likely to persist at SCSU or leave.

Bennington College continues to be mindful of students’ scores on the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark, which have improved over several years, but are still a priority given the small campus size and individualized mission. Staff members ran several focus groups to learn more about why students stayed and why they might have considered leaving. In a new class on the senior experience at Bennington, some of the agenda focused on finding out about students’ experiences, tied to engagement benchmark results. Bennington expects that small changes can make a difference and that asking students for broader input related to survey items can help elaborate responses and suggest possible solutions to problems.

Civic Engagement

Research demonstrates that students who are more engaged in civic activities gain more during college in terms of ethical development and contributing to the welfare of their community. Participating in civic activities also helps students develop habits that will lead them to continue participating in civic life.

James Madison University’s NSSE results indicated that first-year student involvement in service-learning programs was lower than desired. They addressed this shortfall by increasing the number and quality of class presentations about service-learning and by increasing the number of contacts with new faculty members regarding the importance of emphasizing service-learning opportunities.

The State University of New York (SUNY) Plattsburgh’s NSSE results were included in a recent audit of campus civic engagement. The results will also be compared with the SUNY Student Opinion Survey. SUNY Plattsburgh is now in its second year of a new first-year initiative and is looking at ways to strengthen student civic engagement. NSSE was not the impetus for this new initiative, but student engagement results are being used to assess the campus’ current situation and how it compares with other institutions.

Fostering Collaboration and Focus

NSSE results can serve as a mechanism for fostering collaboration among campus constituencies and developing broader ownership in efforts to improve the educational experience. Some institutions invite their undergraduates to interpret NSSE results. Student representatives are included on assessment committees at some institutions, and sharing results with student government and other student organizations is another approach to obtaining student insights into what NSSE data mean and suggestions for how the institution might respond.

At Texas Christian University, NSSE and FSSE results were instrumental in helping increase the first-year to sophomore retention rate, as well as the graduation rate, by helping to ‘clear away the clutter’ and focus institutional energies on areas that seemed to really make a difference in students’ lives. Since beginning to use NSSE and FSSE in 2001, there has been a marked increase in collaborative efforts between Academic and Student Affairs to increase student engagement both in and out of the classroom.

NSSE helped foster collaboration at Winston-Salem State University. The student affairs division partnered with various academic departments to offer a program where students would increase their cultural understanding while interacting with faculty and staff. Additionally, following the program, students were asked to write a reflective paper about their experience. This program was designed to address concerns specifically from NSSE.

Faculty and Staff Development

NSSE results may be appropriate for faculty and staff development workshops and retreats, such as those sponsored by the local chapter of The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). Presenting student engagement data is one way to initiate discussions about a variety of teaching and learning
issues, and results from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) can be used to compare faculty and student perceptions.

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Iowa State University has sponsored campus-wide Faculty Forums that provide discussion about ways to enhance learning related to NSSE results, benchmarks, and student engagement. The benchmarks are also shared at the annual University Teaching Seminar, at new faculty orientation, and at CELT workshops throughout the year.

Illinois State University uses NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE findings to guide campus conversations among students, faculty, student affairs personnel, and other stakeholders. Solution-based programming has been designed using data from NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE, providing a vehicle for meaningful conversations about student engagement and effective and timely support to faculty and staff. For example, a four-part series cosponsored with the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology titled “Improve Student Writing and Still Have a Life” was developed for faculty based upon results from the FSSE and NSSE surveys. This series focused on the information learned about student and faculty perceptions of writing and manageable methods faculty can utilize to improve the quality of student writing in their classes.

Illinois State University uses NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE findings to guide campus conversations among students, faculty, student affairs personnel, and other stakeholders. Solution-based programming has been designed using data from NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE, providing a vehicle for meaningful conversations about student engagement and effective and timely support to faculty and staff. For example, a four-part series cosponsored with the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology titled “Improve Student Writing and Still Have a Life” was developed for faculty based upon results from the FSSE and NSSE surveys. This series focused on the information learned about student and faculty perceptions of writing and manageable methods faculty can utilize to improve the quality of student writing in their classes.

**Enrollment Management and Recruiting**

NSSE data are also used to provide more accurate and realistic descriptions of campus life to prospective students and parents. Some institutions use NSSE data to present empirically derived portraits of the typical student in viewbooks, recruitment literature, brochures, and gatherings of prospective students to accurately convey expectations for college life.

The University of Massachusetts-Lowell examined differences in NSSE responses between first-year students who had been retained and those who were no longer enrolled by the subsequent spring, computing benchmark scores for the two groups. The reported frequency of exposure to effective teaching and learning practices was greater for students who were retained. Since half of Lowell’s students are commuter students, what goes on in the classroom is particularly vital. NSSE data supported the emphasis on students’ classroom experiences in order to maintain high student persistence rates.

At Nova Scotia Agricultural College NSSE results are used extensively for public relations and marketing purposes. NSSE’s *Pocket Guide to Choosing a College* was adapted, printed, and distributed to prospective students and parents at the Open House. The results are also highlighted in admission letters, and communication to alumni.

*A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College* provides prospective students with a list of questions organized around NSSE benchmarks to help them focus on issues of student engagement as they investigate various college options. The guide is provided free to high school guidance offices as well as college and university admissions offices. The pocket guide is available in PDF format at [www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm).

NSSE has also developed a companion to the pocket guide for colleges and universities that participate in NSSE. *The Student Experience in Brief* report provides answers to questions in the pocket guide from NSSE respondents at a given institution. Results are presented in an easy-to-read format, providing prospective students and families a user-friendly resource.
Accreditation
Some institutions choose not to share their data with external audiences and use it solely for institutional improvement. Some defer public reporting until they have corroborated the results with other institutional data. Accreditors are the most common external audience for NSSE results (Table 2). More than half of NSSE institutions tell us that they are using their results in self-studies and accreditation reports.

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.

At Agnes Scott College, NSSE data were used to help identify the focus and features of their Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and will serve as a baseline from which to measure the success of interventions. In addition, a variety of measures, including direct and indirect quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as a mix of institutionally administered instruments and nationally normed surveys, will be used to assess the overall effectiveness of the plan.

NSSE TIP #3: Improving Campus Confidence in Results
Faculty members and administrative staff often raise questions about the validity and reliability of student self-reported data. It may be helpful to build a case for the validity of the findings at your institution.

In response to skeptics who question whether their results really capture student educational experiences, some institutions have administered local instruments with items similar to those in NSSE to validate their NSSE results to the campus community. The use of additional instruments may help build a stronger sense of the validity of the findings.

NSSE has done a lot to establish the robustness of the survey. Consider reviewing the NSSE 2009 Psychometric Properties document (in the NSSE tab of the Institutional Report) when planning a faculty or administrative retreat and plan to have a few copies on hand for those who want more details.

First-Year Experience
First-year experience programs are commonplace today. Student responses to relevant survey items can assist institutions in determining the effectiveness of those first-year experience programs.

California State University-Chico’s Freshman Year Experience Initiative is based upon the University’s primary goal, which is to assure student success. Driven by priorities of the University’s Strategic Plan and its creation of and commitment to the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, the University analyzed student responses on selected NSSE items to determine whether or not the seven principles were being practiced and if the campus was engaged in practices that enhanced student learning.

The University of Akron used NSSE results for its Foundations of Excellence self-study to help identify areas for improvement. These included developing and distributing a campus-wide first-year philosophy; creating more exposure to diversity in first-year and general education courses; more professional development for faculty and administrators who work with first-year students; creation of more common components in the first-year curriculum; better and more effective ways of communicating with first-year students; and promoting service-learning, mentoring, and undergraduate research programs as vehicles to foster student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom.

Planning and Accountability
NSSE results are used along with other surveys and existing institutional data for strategic planning and key performance indicators to fulfill standards established by state systems and other governing agencies.

University of Northern Iowa is one of many institutions using NSSE data in the Voluntary

“NSSE is becoming increasingly helpful in improving student success and building public confidence in the commitment of colleges and universities to improve teaching and learning.”

— Paul E. Lingenfelter, President, State Higher Education Executive Officers
Youngstown State University used NSSE data in developing a new strategic plan. To improve the enriching educational experiences of students, Youngstown State plans to increase internship opportunities and co-curricular programming.

**Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results**

In NSSE’s first ten years, more than 750 colleges and universities participated in 55 self-selected consortia that supplemented the NSSE core survey with questions that related to shared interests. The consortia represent very different types of institutions—women’s colleges, urban universities, Jesuit institutions, engineering colleges, art and design colleges, and research universities.

Multi-campus university systems and state systems of higher education also regularly coordinate survey administration within the same year to standardize assessment initiatives.

The State University of New York (SUNY) System Administration and SUNY campuses have been working to implement Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment (SCBA), as directed in a SUNY Board of Trustees’ June 2004 resolution. The SCBA plan encompasses professional development, the development and administration of rubrics and of nationally normed tests, and the administration of NSSE every three years, with the first administration in 2008. This work is a central component of the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) initiative, which is designed to provide ongoing review of campus-based general education assessment plans.

**How Often to Participate in NSSE?**

Ideally, NSSE should be used in combination with other assessment tools to capture a comprehensive picture of the college student experience. Institutional NSSE results generally do not change dramatically from one year to the next. Therefore, NSSE recommends that an institution use the survey every 2–4 years, as part of a comprehensive assessment program (see Table 3 for a summary of NSSE institutional participation). That said, some colleges and universities have specific reasons for using NSSE more frequently, even annually. For example, some institutions want data every year for longitudinal tracking purposes or to monitor the impact of specific improvement initiatives. The new Multi-Year Data Analysis Guide (www.nsse.iub.edu/links/mydag) was created to provide researchers interested in analyzing NSSE data across years with helpful resources and suggested approaches to multi-year analysis.

Sometimes NSSE participation is linked to an institution’s accreditation cycle or to coordinated use by a group of institutions (e.g., university system or NSSE consortium participation). Still others are using NSSE to obtain information they can use in funding proposals.

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“In conjunction with other data (internal and external) NSSE helps us monitor progress on student engagement, directs our efforts at finding and promoting best practices, and provides a vehicle for starting conversations about engagement, retention, and academics with audiences who might not otherwise participate in such conversations.”

— Chris Fastnow, Associate Director, Office of Planning and Analysis, Montana State University-Bozeman
Overcoming Potential Obstacles to Using NSSE Data Effectively

Converting assessment information into action is a challenge for all colleges and universities. Below we provide ways to address some of the more common obstacles.

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<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Approach</th>
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<td>Small number of respondents.</td>
<td>Check various demographics of your NSSE respondent file to see how representative the sample is compared to your campus population. Review sampling error. In future administrations, consider oversampling to increase number of respondents, and promote survey participation.</td>
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<td>Questions about validity and reliability.</td>
<td>NSSE has conducted a number of studies to document the validity of the instrument, including stability analyses, test-retest, focus groups, and non-respondent bias checks. The NSSE 2009 Psychometric Properties document (in the NSSE tab of the Institutional Report) provides information about these important issues.</td>
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<td>Limited capacity to analyze and report results.</td>
<td>The reports that NSSE sends institutions can be quickly packaged and sent to faculty and staff with little work. All data files, reports, and supporting documents related to NSSE Institutional Reports are available in electronic format through the Institution Interface accessible from the NSSE home page at <a href="http://www.nsse.iub.edu">www.nsse.iub.edu</a>, which allows for easier print or electronic distribution.</td>
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<td>“Average” results across the board.</td>
<td>Try using a different comparison group or consider a criterion-based approach to determine the degree to which student performance is consistent with institutional expectations. Analyze results by subgroups (e.g., departments or special programs) to reveal variation within your institution.</td>
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<td>Lack of faculty awareness of, or interest in, learning about and using student engagement results.</td>
<td>Consider administering the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) as a way to look at student engagement from the faculty perspective. Results may be useful to discuss at a retreat or workshop. Also, make available a summary of the literature on the value of effective educational practices.</td>
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