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, we created Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education: Lessons from the Field, nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons. This document provides in-depth accounts of ways institutions are using NSSE results to improve the undergraduate experience. This year we are conducting a new round of interviews with representatives from selected institutions to feature in the 2011 edition of Lessons from the Field.

Each year, more campuses use their NSSE results in innovative ways. We’ve highlighted these examples in publications including Using NSSE Data and Lessons from the Field. All these examples are now searchable via a new database of more than 500 examples of NSSE use, nsse.iub.edu/html/using_nsse_db.cfm. You can search for examples by keywords, institution name, or Carnegie classification, and by type of use such as for accreditation, or general education assessment, or using results to study retention, or strengthen advising. These campus examples provide instructive accounts and inspiring examples of how other colleges and universities are using their NSSE results to improve undergraduate education.

Using NSSE Data represents snapshots of data use, educational policy and practice informed by NSSE results, 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 Project 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

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.
• Benchmarking
• Communication with internal and external stakeholders
• Faculty and staff development
• General education reform
• Grant writing
• Institutional advancement
• Institutional research
• Retention
• State system performance reviews

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 improvement efforts.

• **Understand what student engagement data represent.** Consult the NSSE Psychometric Portfolio in the Findings Section of our Web site, nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio, for a framework on the validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE’s data.

• **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.

• **Ensure 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 are invited to complete the survey.) Major field reports also facilitate department-level work.

• **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.

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**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: nsse.iub.edu/html/vsa.cfm.)
• **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.

### 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 institutional priorities.

#### 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.

The University of Tulsa used NSSE data in several parts of its accreditation self-study report. The results helped demonstrate how the institution achieves the goals set forth in its mission as well as meets accreditation standards.

The College of St. Scholastica sets institutional strategic goals in order to monitor success and guide improvements. By administering NSSE annually, it provides year-to-year comparisons as to how they are meeting their performance indicators.

### 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.

Select NSSE results are shared with faculty during Fall Faculty Workshops at Lindenwood University. Faculty are asked to consider the results as they plan and develop their curriculum and interact with students. Faculty within the Retention Committee are working on identifying key areas that can be improved and ways to foster a more supportive campus environment.

### 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: nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Engagement_Data.cfm.
North Dakota State University (NDSU) has utilized technology in communicating their NSSE results. Specifically, NDSU developed a computer program which allows departments and colleges to generate a set of PowerPoint presentations for each of the five benchmarks and all other items. This program and NSSE data are often burned onto CDs for each department and each college.

American International College disseminates NSSE results to faculty and staff through various efforts. Results are published in the Center for Academic Success Newsletter which is distributed to faculty at the institution. Results are also shared with the Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, the President, and the President’s Cabinet.

Specialized reports are created at Clemson University to reflect the interests of various constituencies. This includes Student Affairs, Student Government, and Academic Affairs. The data are also used extensively in presentations to the Board of Trustees and department head meetings.

**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 and 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

<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>99%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chairs/Deans</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Staff</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Staff</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Staff</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs/News Office</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing Board</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Newspaper</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targeted Committees/Groups</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Experience</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Program</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 187 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2009 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2009 NSSE survey administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Audiences</th>
<th>Results were shared with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Agencies</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Students &amp; Parents</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Agencies &amp; Commissions</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools/Counselors</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 187 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2009 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2009 NSSE survey administration.
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.

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: academic advising, 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, planning and accountability, and writing programs.

Academic Advising

Academic advisors are integral in fostering student engagement at colleges and universities. Advisors are often the first people new students meet on campus and help shape the experiences of students inside and outside of the classroom. NSSE results can provide insights for institutions interested in improving academic advising.

In an effort to promote academic success, the University of Tennessee – Knoxville has used NSSE data to improve academic advising. This fall, the institution hired full-time academic advisors to provide more assistance to students. Additionally, UT-Knoxville made improvements to their first-year orientation program, providing students with one-on-one advising opportunities and information on specific program requirements.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) responded to its NSSE results, along with results from the Student Satisfaction Inventory and an exit survey for graduating seniors developed by the Office of Academic Assessment, by placing greater emphasis on academic advising. This included hiring more academic advisors, requiring advising for newly admitted freshman and transfer students, and creating the Academic Success Center to consolidate and enhance academic support services. Since these initiatives, UNLV has seen increases in the supportive campus environment benchmark scores.

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

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 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.
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 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 Fayetteville 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

Hendrix College
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.

**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

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“We have made several presentations including one at the Celebration of Teaching and Learning in which over 200 faculty attended. We have formed a university-wide committee called Persistence to Graduation Committee in which there is a strong faculty representation. We are using the results from the NSSE especially from Student-Faculty Interaction to help with strategic planning and programming to improve retention and graduation of our undergraduates.”

—Cheryl Gilchrist, Director of Retention Management and Research, University of Louisville

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**NSSE Reports and Commitment to Data Quality**

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

- **Annual Results** publications — This extensive report, nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_reports.cfm, published annually in November, disseminates new research on the quality of students’ educational experiences using the most recent data from NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE.

- **Conceptual Framework** — This paper, nsse.iub.edu/pdf/conceptual_framework_2003.pdf, 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** — As part of NSSE’s commitment to transparency as well as continuous improvement, we routinely assess the quality of our survey and resulting data, and we embrace our responsibility to share the results with the higher education community. The Psychometric Portfolio, nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio, is a framework for presenting our studies of the validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE’s data, including analysis of data subsets defined by a variety of student and institutional characteristics.

- **Summary Tables** — Basic tables of survey responses and benchmarks by student and institutional characteristics, nsse.iub.edu/html/summary_tables.cfm, are updated annually. We also provide summary characteristics of participating colleges and universities.

- **Publications & Presentations** — Papers, publications, and conference presentations by NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE staff and collaborators are available online, nsse.iub.edu/html/pubs.cfm. Sort the list by author and date, search by keyword, and limit your search to publications.

- **Institutional Web Site Examples** — Many colleges and universities post NSSE results on the Web. These examples of institutional Web Sites that display NSSE results, nsse.iub.edu/links/website_displays, go a step beyond the simple posting of standard NSSE reports. They format results for different audiences, integrate results with other institutional data, or present analyses beyond those provided in the standard reports. The representation of NSSE data on these sites was reviewed for adherence to basic standards and interpretation, but NSSE is not involved in their ongoing maintenance or revision.
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 undergraduates to interpret NSSE results. Student representatives are included on assessment committees at some institutions. 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 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 FSSE can be used to compare faculty and student perceptions.

Thompson Rivers University holds an institution-wide professional development day in February every year. A recent theme was student and employee engagement, which highlighted examples of how faculty and staff promote student engagement and what NSSE benchmarks mean to the institution.

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
expected for college life. Gatherings of prospective students to accurately convey in viewbooks, recruitment literature, brochures, and present empirically derived portraits of the typical student. Some institutions use NSSE data 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. 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.

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.

A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College

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 improve the quality of student writing in their classes.

NSSE TIP #2: Linking NSSE Data with Other Sources

NSSE results can and should be linked to other data sources on campus to determine whether improvement efforts are having the desired effect. Because the NSSE data file identifies individual student respondents, with local Institutional Review Board approval NSSE results can be linked with information from academic and financial aid transcripts, retention studies, focus groups, and results from other surveys to develop a rich, comprehensive picture of the undergraduate experience. Some institutions want multiple years of data before taking action. Other institutions corroborate NSSE results with existing evidence to address areas of concern, such as student use of technology, increasing the amount of assigned reading and writing in certain majors, and quality of academic advising.

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 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.

Other examples can be found within the Accreditation Toolkits on the NSSE Web site at nsse.iub.edu/links/accred_resources.
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.

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.

Wilmington College received a grant which provided the institution with resources to hire two full-time staff members to live in first-year residence halls and encourage students to attend orientation programs, improve study habits, and attend classes. These staff members mentored and counseled students. Staff also implemented an Early Alert Program to identify those students who are having academic difficulty and help students get connected to support services. NSSE results helped inform Wilmington College’s decision to implement these changes and follow-up NSSE results have shown improvement across several areas in the first year experience. These results validated the changes in the first year experience, and helped make the case for institutionalizing the programs after the grant funding ran out.

Writing Programs

NSSE results can be helpful for institutions seeking to improve student writing. Faculty and staff can explore the extent to which students engage in writing experiences and the relationship between student engagement and writing experiences. Additionally, through consortium participation, institutions can gain a deeper understanding of student writing.

Auburn University utilized results from NSSE and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to reveal strengths and weaknesses in student writing. The university launched a writing initiative, which resulted in the creation of a Director of University Writing position and the passage of a writing-in-the-disciplines policy by the University Faculty Senate. Auburn participated in the NSSE Consortium for the Study of 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.

NSSE is committed to data quality and continuous improvement, and embraces the responsibility to share detailed information about the survey with the higher education community. The Psychometric Portfolio, nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio, is a framework for presenting our studies of validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE’s data, including breakdowns by a variety of student and institutional characteristics. It serves higher education leaders, researchers, and professionals who have a vested interest in using NSSE data and trusting their results.

“NSSE results are used to inform our SACS QEP ... results are also distributed to our general education council. The general education council uses the NSSE results to incorporate high impact practices that increase student engagement in all courses in the general education core.”

—Alexi Matveev, Director, Office of Quality Enhancement and Critical Thinking Studies, Norfolk State University
Writing in College to better understand and improve student writing at the institution.

Graceland University – Lamoni also participated in the NSSE Consortium for the Study of Writing in College to help better identify strengths and weaknesses in the skills of their students. NSSE results helped the institution improve their first-year seminars where faculty placed an emphasis on writing, paying special attention to pre-writing strategies.

## 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.

In July 2006, the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State University System adopted a resolution in support of enhancing student engagement at the four universities of the CSU system, affirming CSU’s commitment to becoming more student-centered. The Board agreed that it was important to establish benchmarks to measure progress toward accomplishing the goals set forth in the resolution. The four universities agreed to participate in the NSSE survey and use the results for improvement.

The University of Texas System compares its benchmark scores with the overall NSSE cohort as a consistent way to assess progress at each of the system institutions. The Accountability and Performance Report for 2006-07 used multiple measures, including NSSE results, to assess “Student Access, Success, and Outcomes.”

## 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, 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.

“We promote the NSSE results in meetings with faculty committees, the University Senate, and occasionally with smaller faculty groups. Because we have participated for a number of consecutive years, we are also now able to pool results by college within the university, which really helps get deans’ attention.”

— Iryna Johnson, Associate Director for Assessment, Auburn University
## 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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<tr>
<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.</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 Psychometric Properties section of the NSSE Web site, nsse.iub.edu/links.psychometric_portfolio, 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, nsse.iub.edu, 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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