Student engagement results are used across all sectors and types of institutions. Discovering and sharing how is one of NSSE’s most important activities. To provide richer, more detailed narratives about how institutions put their results into action, we have published *Using NSSE to Assess and Improve Undergraduate Education: Lessons from the Field - Volume 1* and *Moving from Data to Action: Lessons from the Field - Volume 2*. These documents provide in-depth accounts of ways institutions use NSSE results to improve the undergraduate experience.

nsse.iub.edu/links/lessons_home

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 examples are searchable via a new database of more than 500 examples of NSSE use. You can search for examples by keyword, 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.

nsse.iub.edu/html/using_nsse_db.cfm

*Using NSSE Data* contains 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
- 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

nsse.iub.edu/html/staff.cfm

Loyola University New Orleans
Lessons Learned About Using NSSE Data

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

- **Consult the NSSE Psychometric Portfolio.** In the NSSE Findings section of our Web site, find a framework on the validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE’s data. nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

- **Encourage faculty and staff to 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.

- **Drive data down to department or unit level.** Beginning in 2010, all eligible students were invited to complete the survey. NSSE’s census administration enables institutions to drill down to the department or unit level, which may increase faculty interest in using engagement data. The Major Field Report also facilitates department-level work. nsse.iub.edu/html/major_field_report.cfm

- **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.** Numeric results and statistical comparisons are more accessible when accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from them.

- **Examine results from multiple perspectives.** Normative comparisons may confirm or challenge assumptions about performance relative to other institutions. You may also consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement in the context of your institution’s mission or program offering.

- **Link 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 likelihood that changes in policy and practice will succeed 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.

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**NSSE TIP #1: Posting Your NSSE Results**

Many colleges and universities publish some or all of their results on the Web. This is an effective 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 that emphasize 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

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**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: normative and criterion. 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 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.

**Criterion Approach**

With the criterion approach, you compare your institution’s results against a predetermined value that you and your colleagues deem appropriate, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth.

**Tulane University**’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) established the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT). The Center is the hub for fostering engaged learning experiences in four core areas: research engagement, social innovation engagement, classroom engagement and experiential engagement. Tulane used NSSE results along with other indicators of students’ interest in public service and research to establish the warrant for the project. NSSE item responses of “expect to do” for first-year students showed high levels of interest in three High Impact Practices: Internships (71%), Undergraduate Research (44%), and Study Abroad (62%), and suggested the need to expand opportunity based on students interest. NSSE results related to the types of engaged learning activities indicative of CELT serve as baseline indicators and subsequent results will be used to continuously monitor student participation and educational effectiveness.

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 share their results using a combination of dissemination strategies (Table 1).

**Selected Audiences**

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

Selected NSSE results are shared with faculty during Fall Faculty Workshops at **Lindenwood University**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Data Sharing With and Use by Internal Institutional Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td><strong>Results were shared with:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President/Senior Administration</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chairs/Deans</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Staff</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Staff</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Staff</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs/News Office</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing Board</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Newspaper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Committees/Groups</strong></td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Experience</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Program</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 153 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2010 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2010 NSSE survey administration.
Faculty are asked to consider the results as they plan and develop their curriculum and interact with students. Faculty members of the Retention Committee are working on identifying key areas that can be improved and ways to foster a more supportive campus environment.

**North Dakota State University** (NDSU) developed a computer program that allows departments and colleges to generate a set of PowerPoint presentations for each of the five benchmarks and all other survey items. This program and NSSE data are provided to each department and college to promote a clearer understanding of engagement indicators.

**Clemson University** created specialized reports to reflect the interests of various constituencies including student affairs, student government, and academic affairs. The data are also used extensively in presentations to the Board of Trustees and department head meetings.

**Wofford College** designed a four-page brochure, *Measuring Student Engagement — Learn What Your Student Will Actually Get*, for distribution to support groups, such as the Alumni Executive Council, and for use by admissions staff with visiting prospective students and high school counselors. The brochure provides a context for student engagement and describes how purposeful activities promote student learning. Graphs of NSSE benchmark results illustrate the Q&A format. Questions such as: “How does the survey of student engagement work at Wofford and other participating colleges?” and “How do colleges measure their performance in engaged learning?” help to interpret and explain Wofford’s NSSE results.

**Campus Wide**

To distribute NSSE results broadly, many institutions post summaries of important findings online and invite colleagues to review the full report or request it through the appropriate office. Others share results through displays created 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 express interest in seeing institutionally-specific NSSE results. Many NSSE institutions have publicized some or all of their results in some form (e.g., Web site, alumni magazine, press release) (Table 2).

**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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**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. [nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Benchmarks/Engagement_Data.cfm](http://nsse.iub.edu/html/Public_Reporting_Benchmarks/Engagement_Data.cfm)
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. As a result, office staff members could refer prospective students and parents to the site to review the report online.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Audiences</th>
<th>Results were shared with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Agencies</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Students &amp; Parents</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Agencies &amp; Commissions</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools/Counselors</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data were collected from 153 institutional respondents to the NSSE 2010 Report Card, an assessment of the spring 2010 NSSE survey administration.

### Institutional Improvement Examples

In this section we present examples of how colleges and universities use NSSE data in 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 play an integral role in fostering student engagement, having early contact with new students and shaping their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. NSSE results can inform institutional efforts to improve academic advising.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT Knoxville) sought to improve the effectiveness of advising programs. To accomplish that goal, the university administration and advising community examined a number of indicators such as the ratio of students per advisor, information from student focus groups regarding their advising experiences, and a comprehensive program review by external consultants. They also used NSSE responses to explore students’ use of academic support programs, frequency of discussions about career plans with advisors or faculty, perceptions of the academic experience, level of participation in service-learning and undergraduate research, and their experiences with diversity.

All of these indicators align with the university’s advising program goals and learning outcomes, and are related to the overall undergraduate academic experience.
experience. Advisors are expected to guide students toward academic support services, programs in service-learning and undergraduate research, co-curricular opportunities, and a comprehensive campus initiative on understanding the diversity of our world and global affairs. As a result of this two-year assessment process, the university has increased the number of full-time academic advisors, restructured orientation advising for first-year students, which includes extended contact with college academic advisors and individual advising sessions, and implemented a new advising policy that targets students who are most at-risk for progressing to graduation, such as new transfers, students on probation, and those without declared majors.

**General Education**

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

The University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) has used five administrations of NSSE and one administration of Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) as indirect and direct measures, respectively, to assess and guide revision of its general education core curriculum, the Basic Studies Program. UNCW is an AAC&U VALUE Partner campus, part of a multi-year, national project to develop rubrics for assessing general education learning outcomes. In 2008, UNCW’s efforts focused on developing 37 common learning outcomes that were used to select departments and courses from which student work would be assessed. CLA scores were used to assess critical thinking and written communications skills. NSSE results were used to establish trends and to plan for longitudinal disaggregation of data by department and school. Concern over lower than desired results on NSSE items relating to integrating ideas or information from various sources also generated a rubric-based plan for assessing information literacy.

**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 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**

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.

Hendrix College uses NSSE data to monitor the success its collaborative learning program, Your Hendrix Odyssey: Engaging in Active Learning. The program requires students to complete at least three experiential learning projects before graduation from six areas ranging from global awareness to leadership development to undergraduate research. A recent program change now provides students with official transcript recognition for their successful completion of courses, participation in activities, and work on their own projects. Since 2005, various internal funding sources have allowed Hendrix College to provide over one and a half million dollars in support to student and faculty projects in the Odyssey program.

**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.

**Dalhousie University**’s 2008 NSSE results indicated that first-year students needed to be more engaged and needed to form stronger connections to the Dalhousie community. A new position was established in the Centre for Learning & Teaching through the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost specifically to nurture and develop high-impact student engagement initiatives.

In addition to general overall results, NSSE provides breakdowns by program and department to help each faculty review strengths and areas that need improvement. For example, in Computer Science, NSSE results revealed a need for more hands-on, project-driven, first-year classes, that would help students link theory with everyday applications. Student response to these classes was so enthusiastic, additional sections needed to be added. The department even saw improvement in second-year retention rates.

**Enriching the Undergraduate Educational Experience**

Several institutions 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.

**Norfolk State University** (NSU) has participated in numerous administrations of NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE. Results from all three surveys were used for the Wal-Mart Minority Student Success Grant. NSU was concerned about the gaps between student expectations and experiences, and faculty perceptions. Results from interviews with students and faculty members indicated that more faculty involvement was needed to improve the student experience. The grant provided funding for a faculty led mentoring program

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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** — Extensive reports, published each November, disseminate new research on the quality of students’ educational experiences using recent data from NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE. nsse.iub.edu/html/annual_reports.cfm

**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 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. nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

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

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

**Institutional Web Site Examples** — Many colleges and universities post NSSE results on the Web. These examples of institutional Web sites that display NSSE results 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. nsse.iub.edu/links/website_displays

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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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Westminster College (MO)
for students who participate in the Summer Bridge Program, an orientation program for first-generation, potentially at-risk students who are about to enter their first semester at NSU. Mentoring clusters consist of 5-7 students, one faculty member, and peer leaders.

Supportive Campus Environment

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

Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) has participated in BCSSE and NSSE since 2004, and 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 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 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 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.

Service Learning

Students who are engaged in service learning activities create meaningful connections with the community, as well as their faculty and peers.

NSSE data revealed that University of Georgia (UGA) students wanted more opportunities to engage in service-learning experiences. The institution responded by creating the Office of Service-Learning in 2005. The office has sought to provide students and faculty with opportunities to integrate service-learning into the formal curriculum, and in 2006 it created the Service-Learning Fellows Program, a development program to assist faculty in their efforts to incorporate service-learning into their teaching, research, and service. More than 40 faculty members from various disciplines across campus have already participated in the program.

Tulane University used NSSE results related to students’ expectations for and involvement in service-learning, undergraduate research, and internships, plus other indicators of students’ interest in public service and research, to establish the warrant for the Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching (CELT). Developed as part of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation, the CELT will be the hub for fostering engagement in four core areas: (1) research engagement; (2) social innovation engagement; (3) classroom engagement; and (4) experiential engagement. Growing out of Tulane’s recognized strength in public service and service-learning, as well as students’ keen interest in engaging in public service programs, the project will expand opportunities for more students and faculty to participate in meaningful, high-impact practices and learning experiences that complement their academic and career goals.

NSSE data related to the activities of CELT will be used as baseline indicators, and future results will be used to monitor student participation and educational effectiveness. For example, NSSE items related to working with other students on projects during class will serve as a proxy for engaged classroom activity, and participation in undergraduate research and service-learning will provide feedback on participation in high-impact activities. Highlights of Tulane’s assessment plan include the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment activities and the use of multiple measures and methods. To assess the extent
to which involvement in CELT activities relates to the learning outcome of “effectively live and work in a culturally complex society,” Tulane will collect evidence using the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Intercultural Knowledge and Competence rubric and review NSSE results on diverse interactions. Tulane’s plan promises to create an enriched environment for student learning and promote innovative approaches to teaching.

**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.

Part of the Illinois state system, **Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, (SIUE)** uses two surveys for planning long-range goals. In addition to an alumni survey, SIUE uses NSSE data to monitor student engagement. Long-term Goal 1 of SIUE’s strategic plan focuses on creating “engaged students and capable graduates” through attracting a diverse student body. NSSE results are used to measure progress toward reaching long-term goals. Highlights of FY10 include a number of collaborative activities to support these efforts. Academic Affairs and Students Affairs formed the Student Success Advisory Council and charged the group with creating a retention model unique to SIUE. They were also responsible for designing and implementing activities and programs to support student success. In 2011, the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs reviewed the Council recommendations and planned initial implementation of short-term goals to improve graduation rates and retention.

**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.

**Faculty and Staff Development**

NSSE results are appropriate for faculty and staff development workshops and retreats, such as those sponsored by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). 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.

**Denison University** places great emphasis on effective teaching practices and establishing a community of learning. As a result, student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning, and undergraduate research are prioritized by faculty members across disciplines. Denison administers various assessment tools in order to show evidence of effective teaching and student learning. NSSE serves as an example of such efforts. Denison administered NSSE from 2002-2006 and in 2008 and 2010. NSSE is used as an indirect measure of student learning which serves as a compliment to the direct measures occurring in the academic departments. Denison strives to further the level of student-faculty interaction. In doing so, they reduced the teaching load for faculty from six courses per academic year to five in order to provide faculty with more opportunities for one-on-one interaction with students. Denison also established the Summer Scholars Program, which...
provides students with the opportunity to spend the summer engaged in research with a faculty member.

**Illinois State University** uses NSSE, BCSSS, 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, BCSSS, 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.

*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.

nsse.iub.edu/html/pocket_guide_intro.cfm

Institutions that participate in NSSE receive *The Student Experience in Brief* report which provides their students’ responses to questions found in the pocket guide. Results are presented in an easy-to-read format and can be used by admissions staff as a user-friendly resource for prospective students and families.

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 *A 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.

## Accreditation

Accreditors are the most common external audience for NSSE results (Table 2, p.5). More than half of NSSE institutions tell us that they use their results in self-studies and accreditation reports.

**Morgan State University** was reaccredited by MSCHE in 2008. Designated as “Maryland’s Public Urban University” by the Maryland State Legislature, Morgan chose to pursue a model for its 2008 Self-Study, which aligned Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence with the 14 MSCHE standards for excellence. Morgan used focus groups, NSSE results, and other national assessment instruments as evidence of student and stakeholder satisfaction to support MSCHE Standards. For MSCHE Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning, one of the two major standards of MSCHE’s Characteristics of Excellence guidelines, Morgan linked Baldrige Category 7, Organizational Performance Results, and used NSSE and FSSE results to measure the success of the university’s assessment plan.

To support its 2009 Self-Study prepared for the
NWCCU, Washington State University used multi-year analyses of NSSE results to show evidence of the impact of several programs initiated to improve student engagement and learning. These programs included:

- A first-year living-learning community titled “Freshmen Focus”
- Integrated residence hall programming and cocurricular activities
- Implementation of a new foreign language requirement for the Honors program as well as an elective for general education studies
- Residence hall tutoring services
- Increased emphasis on experiential learning

To further support first-year initiatives and improve NSSE benchmarks scores on student-faculty interaction and active and collaborative learning, WSU offered faculty curriculum improvement grants.

Georgia State University’s QEP for SACS, Critical Thinking Through Writing (CTW), used NSSE results to assess gains in work-related knowledge and critical thinking skills. The CTW initiative is nested within academic departments where faculty members serve as CTW ambassadors and train instructors in CTW classes. As a new graduation requirement, GSU students must pass two CTW courses. The QEP will use direct assessments including departmental annual reports of student learning outcomes by major, surveys of instructors and students, written reports from CTW faculty ambassadors, as well as indirect assessments such as NSSE results and senior exit surveys.

Other examples can be found in the regional Accreditation Toolkits on the NSSE Web site.

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.

Reporting by Majors and Programs

NSSE results disaggregated by categories of related majors and programs may be used for assessment by deans, department chairs, and faculty.

A cycle of student surveys including NSSE are administered by the office of Institutional Analysis at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU-Boulder) to emphasize program-level data, benchmarking, and student reflection on learning, and other campus goals. Results are reported publicly by college, school, division, and department. CU-Boulder is also the national coordinator of the Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) program. The AAUDE-NSSE consortium allows institutions to add optional questions and/or share NSSE response-level data among participating institutions. Information

“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
gathered from these efforts was used in the CU-Boulder Self-Study, Shaping the New Flagship, for reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC-NCA).

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.

NSSE’s **Major Field Report** facilitates department-level work.

**Student Affairs**

Student affairs departments use NSSE data to create programs that support a climate of success on their campuses. Through collaborative ventures with academic affairs, they have initiated numerous assessment and improvement efforts.

**University of Texas at Tyler** (UT Tyler) uses NSSE data as indicators of student learning and a positive overall college experience. Directors within the student affairs division have identified NSSE items that are specifically related to their unit mission, goals and expected outcomes. Each year, the directors and staff review these items and track longitudinal progress on both internal and external comparisons. Action plans for improvement are determined using the comparative data. The staff has identified the selected NSSE items in the annual assessment plan so the results and action plans and follow-up are reported annually. The assessment plans are reviewed formally by members of the University Assessment Committee, the Assessment & Institutional Effectiveness staff, and by the Vice-President of Student Affairs.

**Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi** (TAMUCC) prepares targeted reports for individual departments in the Division of Student Affairs, such as first-year programs and student housing, that include longitudinal analysis of relevant NSSE items. For example, University Center and Campus Activities receives results on the time students spend in co-curricular activities and the extent to which students perceive an emphasis on attending campus events. A main report for University Housing examines whether students who live on-campus are more engaged than students who live off-campus. These results provide evidence to support departments’ assessment reports for the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). In addition, breakout reports comparing BCSSE and NSSE data have been used by first-year programs to better understand how the institution is meeting first-year students’ expectations.

**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.

In Fall 2009, a task force composed of faculty, administrative staff, and one student was charged with establishing a plan to highlight the “distinctiveness” of the **State University of New York Oneonta** (SUNY Oneonta) from other comparable institutions. To derive “important attributes” and “distinguishing strengths,” the task force reviewed numerous resources including internal and external survey results [Student Opinion Survey (SOS), NSSE, Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)], strategic planning documents, and enrollment data. Additional information was collected through an e-mail survey of academic department heads and an open forum held for the campus community. Four themes of “distinctiveness” emerged: reputation, engagement, service, and environment. Scores from the SOS from 2009, admissions data, a rigorous assessment program, and participation as an early adopter in the VSA program were used as evidence of SUNY Oneonta’s reputation of excellence in teaching and learning. NSSE benchmark scores from 2008 provided support that SUNY Oneonta fostered high levels of student engagement inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, NSSE results for seniors on survey items related to technology demonstrated that students were using computer and information technologies more frequently than their SUNY system counterparts.

NSSE results helped inform **Wilmington College**’s decision to implement changes in several areas of the first year experience. Wilmington applied for and received a grant that 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 that identifies students who are experiencing academic difficulties and helps get them connected to support services. Follow-up NSSE scores have shown improvement and validated the changes made in the first year experience which, in turn, helped to make the case for institutionalizing the programs after grant funding ran out.

**Writing Programs**

NSSE results can be helpful for institutions seeking to improve the use of student writing in their courses. Faculty and staff can explore the extent to which students engage in writing experiences and the relationship between student engagement and writing experiences. Through consortium participation or addition of NSSE survey modules, 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 Writing in College to better understand and improve student writing at the institution.

**NSSE Tip #4: Contextualize Your NSSE Data Using Cognitive Interviews and Focus Groups**

Techniques such as cognitive interviews and focus groups can be used by institutions to provide a more contextualized understanding of students’ responses to NSSE. Cognitive interviewing can be employed to gain an enriched sense of respondents’ perceptions of particular items. Focus groups provide an opportunity to contextualize and validate the meaning of NSSE aggregate results, and can help enhance understanding of results to increase the likelihood that reform efforts based on survey results would prove effective. NSSE has created a step-by-step guide to conducting cognitive interviews and focus groups. A PDF is available on the NSSE Web site.

Results from **Harvey Mudd College**’s (HMC) participation in the 2008 NSSE administration revealed that students felt they were not acquiring as high a level of professional writing skills as the other students in their peer comparison group institutions. Viewed in light of findings from its Strategic Planning Process (SPP), HMC began an overhaul of its core curriculum. A Writing Course Subcommittee was charged with working on a new curriculum. The committee recommended the addition of two required writing courses – research-based and academic writing – to help bridge what was seen as the gap in skills. The core curriculum was implemented in 2010 and HMC continues to assess its progress.

See also the consortium example listed below under “Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results.”

**Promoting Diversity**

Engaging diverse perspectives is an important goal and an effective educational practice to promote learning and development. Several NSSE items indicate students’ experience with diversity and can be used as a meaningful gauge.

NSSE results at the **State University of New York at Geneseo** revealed that diversity and academic advising were two important areas of concern. Responses to items related to diversity reinforced the need to address issues repeatedly brought up by students. A number of initiatives were implemented including: the Campus Diversity Plan, Real World Geneseo, and Deliberative Dialogues. The Multi-Cultural Organization Space for Activities, Inclusion, and Collaboration (MOSAIC) was also installed on campus. The goals of the Campus Diversity Plan included: recruitment, support, and retention of a diverse student body; faculty, staff, and administration; addition of international learning, experiences, and perspective important components to the curriculum; promotion of an inclusive campus community; and enhancement of students’ knowledge and appreciation of diverse populations and cultures.

MOSAIC provides a dedicated meeting space where activities such as the Deliberative Dialogues sessions led by faculty, staff, and student moderators provide an opportunity to discuss diversity issues and suggest solutions. “Real World Geneseo” modeled on MTV’s “Real World” is a four-day intensive workshop held in a Rochester hotel where students explore their differing perspectives on such issues as race, gender, sexual identity, and class differences.
All major divisions at Geneseo also sponsor diversity-related activities. The Vice President’s Diversity Grant provides funding for innovative programs that promote campus diversity. Departments report to Academic Affairs annually on progress made toward advancing diversity through their curricular offerings and opportunities for research with Geneseo faculty. A number of administrative departments also sponsor workshops and speakers as evidence of a continued commitment to diversity on campus.

Coordinated Uses of NSSE Results

From 2000-2009, 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. In 2010, 177 institutions participated in 15 different consortia. Consortia often represent very distinctive 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.

Data from a national pilot of a joint NSSE and Writing Program Administrators survey of student engagement and writing allows the University of Colorado at Boulder to assess connections between good writing practices and student learning. Over 24 survey items related to writing skills will allow CU Boulder’s data to compare its performance to that of other schools in the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (CSWC).

A major focus of CU-Boulder’s NCA Self-Study described the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) and the creation of the campus Writing Center to address a decentralized and diffuse writing curriculum and lack of focus on first-year writing programs. PWR expanded upper-division courses, redesigned lower-division courses, and established a full-service Writing Center to reinforce pedagogical reforms driven by assessment. Results on several NSSE survey items related to student writing from the 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2009 NSSE administrations showed that CU-Boulder students improved over time and compared well to students at peer institutions.

How Often Should an Institution Participate in NSSE?

Table 3 details institutional participation patterns. The most appropriate participation cycle for each institution depends on the purposes for the assessment, but four considerations might influence these decisions. Specifically, your institution may be:

1. Conducting NSSE as part of a regular assessment plan. Institutions that include NSSE in their assessments plans establish a cycle of administration that fits their assessment needs. A standard assessment plan might place NSSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>NSSE Participation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Participating Colleges &amp; Universities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000...276</td>
<td>2007...610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001...321</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002...366</td>
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<td>2010...603</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004...473</td>
<td>2011...761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005...529</td>
<td>2012...584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006...557</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Different Colleges &amp; Universities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 – 2012 1,523</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation Frequency of NSSE 2012 Institutions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Time Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-to-Three Time Participants</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-to-Five Time Participants</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-to-Twelve Time Participants</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participation numbers represent all colleges and universities that participated in a standard NSSE administration wherein all sampling and participant recruitment were administered by NSSE. Data summaries in some NSSE reports may exclude institutions where conditions (e.g., low respondent n, lack of data for weighting, international institutions) rendered data inadequate for standard comparisons.
administrations on a three-year cycle to collect periodic information about educational quality.

2. **Evaluating the effectiveness of a new programmatic offering or change in the curriculum.** If your institution is considering implementing a change in undergraduate education, then scheduling a NSSE administration both before and after the reform can help assess the impact of the initiative on student engagement.

3. **Using engagement data for accreditation.** One of the most common uses of NSSE data is for accreditation. If an institution is conducting its self-study over a three-year time span, the most useful time to register for NSSE is in year one. In year two and three of the self-study, an institution can review and share results across campus and determine a course of action to improve in specific areas. On a longer accreditation cycle, it may be wise to administer NSSE more than once. In the first year or two of the self-study, NSSE results can assist in determining where to focus attention. After obtaining results and implementing campus improvement plans, another NSSE administration three to four years later would help determine the impact of such changes. This would allow ample time for assessment of results and perhaps additional adjustments to priorities in subsequent progress reports.

4. **Benchmarking performance against similar institutions.** A key benefit of your NSSE participation is the ability to customize up to three comparison groups from a list of all current-year NSSE participants. This feature allows building comparison groups based on similar peer groups, aspirational groups, or pre-existing groups. Sometimes NSSE participation is linked to membership in or affinity with a group of institutions such as consortia or state systems. Consortia are formed for a number of reasons including institutional mission (e.g., religious-affiliation, arts, engineering). Multi-campus state and university systems (e.g., The University of Texas) can also coordinate their NSSE participation. A regular cycle of participation in a consortium or university system allows institutions to benchmark performance against peer institutions and to work collaboratively on mutual interests. Since consortia can append additional questions to NSSE, institutions can better measure institutional effectiveness in key areas of interest and explore data over time.

5. **Other considerations.** These might include the general allocation of institutional assessment resources such as costs, staff time, the desire to collect other data for triangulation purposes, and generally making time to put the data you have to good use before collecting more. Then, you will need to consider your schedule of undergraduate surveys to avoid survey fatigue among students. Given the varied purposes and aims involved in NSSE participation, we recommend institutions let their assessment and improvement agendas guide their cycle of participation.

**NSSE Updated for 2013**

We are pleased to announce the release of an updated NSSE survey. The update maintains NSSE’s signature focus on providing diagnostic and actionable information related to engagement in effective educational practice, while incorporating what we have learned from more than a decade of research and experience with NSSE.

Look for the following in the updated NSSE instrument:

- Refinements of existing measures and new scales
- New measures related to effective teaching and learning
- Improved clarity and applicability of survey language, including terms related to online instruction
- Updated terminology, primarily related to technology

These enhancements reflect our continued commitment to improve and respond to contemporary assessment needs. The updated NSSE survey will advance institutional improvement efforts as it has been built upon rigorous testing, institutional feedback and recent advances in educational and survey research.

Find more details on the NSSE Web site.

[nsse.iub.edu/nsse2013](http://nsse.iub.edu/nsse2013)
### Overcoming 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small number of respondents</strong></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. Average response rate based on institutional type can help put response patterns in perspective. Use appropriate cautions with low participation rates. If possible, combine two years of data to increase numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions about validity and reliability</strong></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 provides information about these important issues. nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limited capacity to analyze and report results</strong></td>
<td>The reports that NSSE sends institutions can be quickly packaged and sent to faculty and staff with little extra analysis. 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 which allows for easier print or electronic distribution. nsse.iub.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Average” results across the board</strong></td>
<td>If your results are comparable to your select comparison groups, 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of faculty awareness or interest in student engagement results</strong></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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**NSSE**

national survey of student engagement

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