Documenting the Value of Higher Education with Student Engagement Data

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Eastern Connecticut State University
Our Plan Today

• Introduce prevailing narratives about college value
• Consider how student engagement can inform the value narrative
• Review the use of NSSE results as evidence of college value
  ▪ NSSE core survey
  ▪ Senior Transition Topical Module
  ▪ Open-ended comments
• Illustrate approaches to telling the value story using NSSE results
• Detailed example: Eastern Connecticut State University
• Crafting a story
Views about the Value of Higher Education: *The Good*

3 of 4 Americans believe it’s easier to be successful with a college degree than without, and that higher education is primarily a social good or both a social good and a private benefit.

– Varying Degrees, New America’s Annual Survey on Higher Education 2017
Views about the Value of Higher Education: The Bad

Employers question students’ critical thinking skills, written and oral communication skills, and capacity to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings

– AAC&U Employer Survey and Inside Higher Ed

Improving the Quality of Education

By concentrating so heavily on graduation rates, policy makers are ignoring danger signs that the amount that students are learning in college may be declining, writes Derek Bok.
Crafting the College Value Narrative

• We teach our students to back up their claims with evidence.
  ▪ Do we back up our claims about college value?
• Telling the value story requires evidence about...
  ▪ educational experiences that promote learning and development
  ▪ specific knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that students gain from the undergraduate experience
Student Engagement and the Value Narrative

Student Engagement is...

The extent to which students are exposed to and participate in effective educational practices

- Educationally purposeful activities and practices
- Empirically linked to desired outcomes
A Profoundly Different Approach to Assessing the College Experience

- From satisfaction (happiness) to *experiences that promote learning*
- Strong focus on *behavior* rather than attitudes and opinions
• Annual survey of first-year and senior students
• NSSE asks about the time and effort students devote to behaviors that are linked to learning and development
NSSE’s Place in the College Value Discourse

• 20 years of “big picture” reporting
• Drawing on results from 300-500K students at 500-700 institutions each year
• 2018 Annual Results focus on career preparation

As you view the next slides, think about what stands out for a story you want to tell – to whom?
NSSE’s Place in the College Value Discourse

NSSE 2018 included experimental questions about student perceptions and experiences with career preparation administered at 38 institutions
NSSE’s Place in the College Value Discourse

College Degree and Employability

93% of seniors believe that what they are learning in college is relevant to their career paths

• Most seniors confident in their career & post-college plans
• Confidence positively related to conversations about career interests with professionals in the field, academic advisors, and family members
NSSE Evidence about Value (Example)

Tell a story of the experiences and gains of graduating seniors:

- Coursework emphasizes applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations
- Service-Learning
- Career-related experiences
- Educational Gains
78% of seniors: Courses emphasized* applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems

62% of seniors: At least some Service-learning courses

*Percentage “Very much” or “Quite a bit”
49% of seniors: Participated in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement

23% of seniors: Worked with a faculty member on a research project
49% of seniors:
Participated in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Category</th>
<th>Internships (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comm., Media, &amp; PR</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bio. Sci., Agric., &amp; Nat. Res.</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Service Professions</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Professions</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phys. Sci., Math., &amp; Comp.</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>38%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
81% of seniors: Discussed career plans with a faculty member at least “sometimes”
Perceived Institutional Contribution to Gains: Work-related skills (Seniors)

- Thinking critically and analytically: 13% Very little, 38% Some, 47% Quite a bit, 85% Very much
- Working effectively with others: 5% Very little, 20% Some, 38% Quite a bit, 37% Very much
- Writing clearly and effectively: 5% Very little, 21% Some, 40% Quite a bit, 34% Very much
- Speaking clearly and effectively: 7% Very little, 23% Some, 38% Quite a bit, 32% Very much
- Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills: 8% Very little, 23% Some, 34% Quite a bit, 34% Very much
- Understanding people of other backgrounds: 9% Very little, 26% Some, 34% Quite a bit, 31% Very much
- Solving complex real-world problems: 9% Very little, 27% Some, 36% Quite a bit, 28% Very much

Very much or Quite a bit: 85%, 75%, 74%, 70%, 68%, 65%, 64%
NSSE Module: First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions

Targeted questions for first-year students and seniors

- First-year items focus on academic perseverance, help-seeking behaviors, and institutional commitment
- Senior items explore post-graduation plans, links between the academic major and future plans, and confidence in skill development
### Seniors’ Confidence in Career Abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative thinking and problem solving</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and analysis of arguments and...</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear writing</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technological skills</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuasive speaking</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networking and relationship building</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and business management skills</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial skills</td>
<td>43%</td>
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Percentage “Very much” or “Quite a bit”
Considering NSSE & the Higher Education Value Story

• So, what’s the story here? What meaning do you make of these results?
• What else do you want to know about students’ experiences?
• What evidence is important to whom?
How are institutions using NSSE results to tell their value story?
Approaches to Using NSSE in an Institution’s College Value Story

• Feature NSSE results aligned to mission
• Share senior results of educational gains and HIPs
• Share Senior Transitions module results by major or program to focus attention on post-college preparation and plans
• Complement statistics with authentic voices
Westmont is a place of academic rigor matched by a supportive, close-knit campus culture.

Demonstrating a liberal arts mission: To foster Westmont’s blend of intellectual curiosity and social responsibility, the college draws students to a variety of forums and discussions beyond the classroom.

NSSE results reveal that Westmont seniors are more inclined than students from all NSSE institutions to “attend events that address important social, economic, or political issues” (71% vs. 46%)... Given the residential and global planks of Westmont’s mission, it is notable that NSSE scores for “supportive environment” and “global study” place the college in the nation’s upper 10%.
### Did You Know?

**CSUSB promotes significant academic and personal growth?**

Institutional Research

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2014 National Survey of Student Engagement Respondents (1,068)

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Seniors reported how much their experience at CSUSB contributed to their development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of development</th>
<th>Comparison institution type</th>
<th>% reported “Quite a bit” or “Very much”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSUSB</td>
<td>Community Engaged</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Hispanic Serving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
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<td>Pell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td></td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaking clearly and effectively</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzing numerical and statistical information</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acquiring job related knowledge and skills</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>68</td>
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</table>
Telling the Value Story with NSSE Data

Did You Know

66% of CSUSB seniors have participated in High Impact Practices?

2011 & 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement Respondents (1,468)

High Impact Practices (HIPs) are:

- Capstone Course, Culminating Senior Experience: 45%
- Internship, Practicum, Field Experience: 37%
- Foreign Language or Additional Language Coursework: 26%
- Learning Community: 21%
Bucknell Educational Goals Compared to Employer Priorities

Bucknell seniors participating in the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) said that their college experience substantially contributed to acquiring skills and knowledge. Compared to the 2015 Hart survey of employers, the results indicated that Bucknell’s education meets or exceeds employer needs.
Telling the Value Story with NSSE Data

• “Transferable Skills and Career Services” report features career-related results from NSSE core survey and Development of Transferable Skills Topical Module

• Reports customized by 8 major fields disseminated to programs and faculty

NSSE 2017: Transferable Skills and Career Services
https://apir.wisc.edu/students/nsse/

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a survey of college freshmen and seniors designed to assess student involvement in practices associated with high levels of learning. Results of the survey tell us what students think of their undergraduate experience, the kinds of activities in which they engage, and how they are benefiting from their studies.

About this report
The majority of this report focuses on questions from the 2017 NSSE “Transferable Skills” optional module, which includes questions that reflect on UW-Madison students’ preparation for the world of work. As this module was optional, the AAU peer group used for the core NSSE questions is not available. Any questions included in the transferable skills module will not include peer data as a result.

Any questions included in this summary that came from core NSSE questions will include AAU peer data. In this summary, differences between UW-Madison students and the peer group for the mean score on each question is noted as being different if the \( p \) value is greater than or equal to 0.05 and the effect size is greater than 0.10 or less than -0.10. Such cases are marked with an up (positive difference) or down (negative difference) pointing triangle in the attached data table.

Participation in career development activities
Telling the Value Story with NSSE Data

• Demonstrates that UW-Madison students participate in career development activities at rates similar to peer institutions.

• Make a Case to Strengthen Career and On-Campus Work: 50% of UW-Madison seniors work on-campus for pay -- on-campus work presents opportunities to incorporate skill-building activities related to career development into their student employment experience.

https://apir.wisc.edu/students/nsse/
“Fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and enterprising attitudes” is documented by NSSE Senior Transitions module results...

- taking risks in courses without fear of penalty,
- inventing new methods to arrive at unconventional solutions
One Institution’s Value Story Using NSSE

EASTERN
CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
A Liberal Education. Practically Applied.
What Students Said About Advising

“Trying to figure out my major was hard, because I was not advised well at all.”

“I’ve seen my advisor only once all year; she causes me more stress than my schoolwork!”
Student Satisfaction: NSSE Comparison Data

Freshman Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Faculty</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt Feedback</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retention Data (2015-18)
What Students Said About the LAC

“Taking the liberal arts core requirement, in addition to courses required in my major, makes it hard to complete a BA in four years.”

“There are too many general education requirements!”
Using NSSE Student Comments to Tell a Compelling Story

- If you have any additional comments or feedback that you’d like to share on the quality of your educational experience, please enter them below.
- What has been most satisfying about your experience so far at this institution, and what has been most disappointing?
- Please describe the most significant learning experience you have had so far at this institution.
- What one change would you most like to see implemented that would improve the educational experience at this institution, and what one thing should not be changed?
I really appreciate how the College of Business partners with so many successful companies. Either through events like career fairs, the Boeing Case Competition, or a Lean Six Sigma practicum, I have been able to gain valuable interactions with business professionals.

SENIOR, Supply chain management
Student Comments Enrich Numbers

I really liked my freshman seminar which was part of a living-learning community. It was more than just a seminar, it was about life and how to live with others and consider others all while working on leadership.

SENIOR, Marketing
I think my most significant learning experience has been the undergraduate research I’ve been doing for the past three years as it ties into my course work and a career I want post grad.

SENIOR, Biochemistry
My most significant learning experience has been in the community. I did a service learning project with a community garden and learned a lot about social justice, sustainability, and leadership. I was provided with valuable skills that books cannot teach.

SENIOR, Finance
Crafting an Evidence-based Value Story Using NSSE Results
Lessons for Crafting a NSSE Data-Rich Value Story

• Start with your claims about student learning and educational quality and a specific audience in mind. *Use NSSE evidence to create stories to persuade a specific audience.*

• Blend numerical infographics with student quotes and images to bring the narrative to life.

• Consider telling a story of improvement by thinking about components of a good story: it’s easy to read, introduces a problem, and shares how the problem was solved highlighting the role of the institution in addressing the problem.
Let’s Practice: What Story Can you Tell about These NSSE Results?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE’s 10 Educational Gains</th>
<th>Percentage Seniors Responding &quot;Very much&quot; or &quot;Quite a bit&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaking clearly and effectively</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people of other backgrounds (econ., racial/ethnic, pol., relig., nation., etc.)</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing numerical and statistical information</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving complex real-world problems</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an informed and active citizen</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What kind of story are you telling? (compliance, improvement, problem, struggle, goal, tragedy, fantasy)
- Who is your audience and what do you want them to take away from this story?
What stories have you told with NSSE results?
What stories do we need to tell?