

Do institutions use survey data as intended by NSSE?

Purpose

The NSSE project developed from a need for assessment instruments that provide valuable information about institutional quality and information for institutions about student participation in educationally purposeful activities. Results are intended to be used as a component in evaluating overall educational effectiveness and as diagnostic information about the quality of undergraduate education. Results are expected to be useful to institutions themselves in improving undergraduate education. NSSE has been clear from the outset that results were not intended to be used to produce college and university rankings or in other "high-stakes" settings.

Given NSSE's central aim to foster the use of data to guide institutional improvement, we are committed to examining considerations of consequences and intended use. These considerations fall into the area of validity known as the consequential aspect of validity. Consequential validity is a topic of much debate in educational research (Moss, 1998). The importance of research in this area is generally acknowledged, but questions remain about the appropriateness of using consequences to determine validity (Shepard, 1997). Popham (1997) argues against the notion of consequential validity, claiming that the inclusion of consequences in determining validity only results in confusion rather than clarity. This argument is supported by Mehrens (1997) who describes the idea of making inferences about the validity of instruments based on the decision-making as "unwise." Others (Linn, 1997; Messick, 1989; Shepard, 1997), however, argue that attention should be given to interpretation and consequences of test use in determining test validity.

This section of NSSE's psychometric portfolio focuses on evidence of the intended and potential consequences of NSSE use. There are numerous examples of how institutions use their student engagement data. In general, institutions use their results to improve the undergraduate experience, both inside and outside of the classroom. Specifically, Banta, Pike, and Hansen (2009) describe four main purposes, which include: (a) accreditation; (b) accountability; (c) strategic planning; and (d) program assessment. These areas serve as the framework for the findings in the results section.

Data

The four institutional examples of using NSSE data featured in the results section were retrieved from the NSSE database (http://nsse.iub.edu/html/using_nsse_db.cfm). This repository of examples of NSSE use was designed to foster understanding about using results and provide institutional stakeholders with instructive examples. This searchable database contains over 500 examples of participating colleges

This report is part of NSSE's *Psychometric Portfolio*, a framework for presenting our studies of the validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE data, available online at nsse.iub.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio.

and universities putting engagement data to use, which includes NSSE as well as FSSE and BCSSE data. These examples were gathered using two sources: (a) the NSSE Report Card, an annual survey administered to NSSE users; and (b) telephone interviews conducted with NSSE users. These examples of institutional use have also been published annually in the "Using NSSE Data" section of NSSE's [Annual Results](#) and [Institutional Reports](#), and in the 2009 resource, [Lessons from the Field](#). The database can be searched using various identifiers (e.g., institution name, Carnegie classification, type of use).

Methods

Accreditation. California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) had existed for only six years before undergoing its first Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation review. Results from NSSE played an important role in this process by informing strategic planning and program review. Drawing on two years of NSSE data, results were used as evidence for several WASC standards, like Standard 2.5 (Teaching and Learning). NSSE items that focused on active class participation and prompt feedback were used to show that academic programs at CSUMB involve students in the learning process and provide students with continuous feedback on their learning and academic performance. NSSE data were also used, along with results from an alumni survey, to show the impact the institution's core values had on students and that students felt well-prepared in regards to personal and professional development.

Accountability. The Spellings Commission identified NSSE as an example of student learning assessment for accountability in higher education and NSSE is also considered a data source for the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) (McCormick, 2009). Youngstown State University (YSU) featured NSSE data as part of their participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) project. Specifically, results from items that capture active and collaborative learning experiences, student-faculty interaction, and institutional commitment to student success are of particular interest as these results will be included Ohio's College Portrait. In addition, along with NSSE data, faculty reviewed information about student learning using electronic portfolios and classroom assignments and will consider these results in relation to academic performance. This process will contribute to improvements in teaching and learning and as well as satisfy accountability requirements.

Strategic Planning. Kennesaw State University (KSU) relies on NSSE data to meet the goals of their 2007-2012 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), "Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship." This five-year plan positions global learning as a key outcome of undergraduate education at KSU. The QEP consists of ten goals, each with action plans and assessment strategies to ensure institutional effectiveness in providing global learning opportunities and promoting engaged citizenship. NSSE data are used to explore relevant areas, like study abroad, foreign language, and exposure to diverse perspectives.

Program Assessment. At Western Kentucky University, NSSE benchmark reports are broken down by and disseminated to various departments. This includes bar graphs which compare department scores to the rest of the university. The goal here is for departments to explore their overall impact on engagement activities and the level of academic challenge they provide. Similar efforts were done at University of Central Missouri where programs were assessed in several key areas, such as engagement. Each department's progress in improving their efforts is assessed annually by deans and the provost.

Conclusion

The examples provided in the results section serve as evidence of institutional use of NSSE data coinciding with the intended purposes of the NSSE instrument. Certainly, more work is needed to better understand the extent to which institutional use aligns with the intended purposes of the NSSE instrument. Areas related to consequential validity include institutional users' beliefs about the quality of results but it seems we can infer that ongoing participation suggests that users, systems, and accrediting agencies find the results credible.

References

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