Lessons Learned from Research Using NSSE

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Start Small ... or at Least be Specific
Testlets

“A testlet is a group of items related to a single content area that is developed as a unit and contains a fixed number of predetermined paths that an examinee may follow [in a computerized adaptive test].” (Wainer & Kiely, 1987, p. 190)
NSSE Scalelets

“A scalelet consists of a set of survey questions related to a specific aspect of the educational experiences of a group of students.”
Research on Scalelets

- Scalelets provided generalizable group means using 25-50 students.

- Scalelet scores were more strongly related to learning outcomes than benchmark scores.

- The relationships between engagement and outcome scores were more nuanced for scalelet scores than for benchmark scores.
Most Things in College are Indirect
The Indirect Effects of College

- The relationships between educational expenditures (and educational programs) and student learning are indirect.

- The relationships between the structural diversity of a campus and positive diversity outcomes are indirect.

- The negative relationships between working for pay and grades in college are indirect.
It Depends
Contingent Effects of College

- The relationships between engagement and educational outcomes depend on the types of students involved.

- The nature of the (indirect) relationships between education programs and expenditures and learning outcomes depend on the type of institution.

- Are there doubly contingent relationships?
To Weight or Not to Weight?

That is the Question
Weighting Adjustments for Nonresponse

- Weighting adjustments are frequently used to adjust for nonresponse.

- Weighting adjustments are not needed unless there are differential response rates for subgroups AND those subgroups differ in their responses to NSSE items.

- Weighting adjustments can reduce precision (i.e., increase the standard error). As a result they should be used with caution.