



# National Survey of Student Engagement

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## Accreditation Toolkit: Mapped to 2007 NSSE Survey Questions

### Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

#### Introduction and Rationale for Using NSSE in Accreditation

*Accreditation organizations have responded to the growing salience of learning outcomes in a variety of ways. Virtually all now include explicit references to student learning in their standards for accreditation. Most also require institutions or programs to examine student achievement or “institutional effectiveness” as part of their self-study and review process – usually in the form of some kind of “assessment.”*

—Ewell, P. (2001). *Accreditation and student learning outcomes: A proposed point of departure*. CHEA Occasional Paper. Washington, DC: CHEA

*The single most powerful contributor to assessment’s staying power has been its championing by regional and professional accreditors.*

—Wright, B. (2002). Accreditation and the scholarship of assessment. In T. W. Banta & Associates, *Building a scholarship of assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

One of the most common institutional uses of NSSE data is for accreditation. In fact, NSSE schools report that accrediting agencies are the primary external group with which they share NSSE results. There are two major reasons for this.

First, accreditation agencies are giving less weight to indicators that represent institutional resources such as library holdings and inputs such as student characteristics. More emphasis is being given to evidence of student learning. Indeed, regional associations and various specialized accrediting organizations are urging colleges and universities to more thoroughly measure student learning and to demonstrate that processes are in place to assess and enhance learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness on an ongoing basis. Student engagement results from NSSE are a direct indicator of what students put into their education and an indirect indicator of what they get out of it. That is, NSSE data show how

engaged various types of students are in effective educational practices during the first and last years of college.

Second, regional and discipline- or program-specific accreditation standards encourage institutions to focus on self-evaluation and formative reviews that guide improvement efforts. So, rather than fashion self-studies as a stand-alone document for one-time use, they have begun to feature more elements of strategic planning and program evaluations that can be used to identify areas where institutions wish to improve. NSSE data are especially valuable for this purpose. The results are actionable; that is, they point to aspects of student and institutional performance that institutions can do something about related to the curriculum, pedagogy, instructional emphases, and campus climate. In addition, because NSSE benchmarks allow a school to compare itself to others, the results often point to areas where improvement may be desired. NSSE results help answer key questions related to institutional policies and programs associated with high levels of student engagement and learning.

Specific applications of student engagement information for accreditation vary. They range from minimal use such as including the results in a self-study appendix to systematic incorporation of NSSE results over a several-year period to demonstrate the impact of improvement initiatives on student behavior and the efficacy of modifications of policies and practices.

An effective accreditation plan is context specific. No one approach or template can do justice to the wide variety of institutional missions, curricula, and campus environments the plan is designed to address. However, two common early steps to developing an accreditation plan are to identify the assessment practices already in place and the data that are available and then to augment this evidence with the self-study process (*ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*. “*Why does accreditation matter?*”).

## NSSE as a Tool for Documenting Student Learning Outcomes

Here are several examples of how student engagement information can respond to accreditation goals related to documenting student learning processes and outcomes:

- NSSE is a national survey that can help institutions measure their effectiveness in key areas of interest.
- Used systematically over time, NSSE provides data that illustrate (1) a college or university is using assessment to determine the extent to which it is meeting its educational objectives, (2) whether current institutional goals remain appropriate, and (3) various areas of teaching and learning in need of improvement.
- Institutions can benchmark their performance against select peer comparison groups, Carnegie classification, and NSSE national norms.
- Information about student engagement and institutional effectiveness is evidence of efforts to meet accrediting standards and continuously improve.
- NSSE results can yield insights into widely held assumptions about the nature of students and how they use the institution's resources for learning.
- Student engagement results are intuitively accessible and understandable by different groups of stakeholders, on and off the campus.

This toolkit provides suggestions for incorporating NSSE into regional accreditation processes and products with an emphasis on mapping student engagement results to regional accreditation standards. In addition, we offer examples of how to use NSSE data in your regular accreditation processes.

## NSSE and Regional Accreditation Timelines

NSSE results can be used in all components of the institutional accreditation process. These include but are not limited to (a) the self-study that responds to evaluation criteria established by the accrediting body; (b) the visit by the team of peer evaluators who gather additional evidence; and (c) the response to a decision by an accreditation body requesting an

improvement plan or additional evidence of student learning and related areas.

When and how often to collect and integrate student engagement data in the accreditation process are decisions facing all colleges and universities. The answers will vary, depending on several factors. Some schools want to collect student engagement information to establish a baseline. Ideally, this would be done three to five years before preparing the self-study. This way, the institution has enough time to analyze, interpret, and vet the results with appropriate audiences, identify areas for improvement, take action in these areas, and administer the survey in subsequent years to demonstrate whether student and institutional performance are moving in the desired direction.

Other institutions will establish different timelines to meet their self-study objectives. For this reason, some schools administer NSSE on an annual or biennial basis. The appropriate NSSE participation cycle for your school depends on how you intend to use your data. Many institutions have found it valuable to have several years of NSSE results to establish a reliable baseline of data. Then, institutions assess their students every few years to allow time for institutional changes to take effect. This planned administration cycle maximizes the use of student engagement data for most accreditation purposes.

A substantial number of schools have gathered student engagement information multiple times. This suggests that they may be comparing the results over time to estimate areas in which student performance is changing. It may also indicate that some of these colleges are carefully monitoring student learning processes to track trends over time and to make certain that institutional performance remains at the desired level.

While the reasons schools use NSSE at different intervals can legitimately vary, the best answer to how frequently an institution should obtain student engagement data depends on the needs of a given college or university.

Listed on the next page are suggestions for determining when and how often to administer NSSE as part of a self-study process, depending on the length of the accreditation cycle.

## Timeline for NSSE Administration on a 3-Year Accreditation Cycle

If your institution is conducting its self-study over a three-year time span, the most useful time to register for NSSE is in year one. The survey is administered each spring between February and May (schools must register the preceding sum-

mer). Institutional Reports complete with analyzed results are returned to participating schools in August of the year the survey is administered.

In years two and three of the self-study, your institution can review and share results across campus and determine your course of action to improve in specific areas.

### Example of Administering NSSE in Regional Accreditation Timeline

#### Middle States Commission - 3 year cycle - academic year calendar - spring evaluation visit

Year 1 - fall	Institution registers for NSSE before end of September Steering Committee Chair and members chosen Campus representatives attend Commission Self-Study Institute
Year 1 - spring	Institution chooses model and self-study design Self-study preparation visit of Commission staff liaison Self-study design document completed Administer NSSE
Year 2	Working groups review NSSE data Campus Steering Committee develops draft of self-study report
Year 3 - fall	Institution prepares final self-study report to send to Evaluation Team and Commission
Year 3 - spring	Commission Evaluation Team visit Commission team report issued Institutional response
Summer or fall after Year 3	Commission action

## Timeline for NSSE Administration on a 7 to 10-Year Accreditation Cycle

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 your institution to determine where to focus attention. After obtaining your 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 the Progress Report for your accreditation commission.

### Example of Administering NSSE in a Regional Accreditation Timeline

#### Western Association of Schools and Colleges – 10 year cycle

Year 1	Proposal approved Administer NSSE
Years 1 & 2	Preparatory Review (PR) Analyze NSSE results, incorporate into PR Demonstrate use of results to improve practice for inclusion in Education Effectiveness Review (EER)
Years 2 & 3	Second NSSE administration, use results as support for the EER
Years 9 & 10	Prepare for and submit Progress Report/New Proposal Register for and administer NSSE to demonstrate ongoing review/change based on improvement plan

## What if accreditation is around the corner?

For some institutions, a self-study or site visit review may be just a year away. In this case, NSSE can still provide some valuable information to schools during a single year. Keep in mind that schools must register for NSSE by September, the survey is administered during the spring semester, and results are provided to schools in August. This timeline offers institutions baseline data to demonstrate educational strengths and weaknesses and results to corroborate institutional evidence. In addition, subsequent NSSE administrations can be used to evaluate institutional improvement efforts outlined in the self-study.

## Mapping NSSE to Middle States Standards

A successful accreditation plan is authentic to each institution. However, an important step to developing an accreditation plan is to determine what evaluation practices are currently in place and the evidence that can be linked to accreditation standards. This document offers a guideline for aligning NSSE survey items with regional accreditation standards. A team of NSSE staff members reviewed accreditation standards for each accreditation organization and mapped NSSE survey items to those standards that we thought closely corresponded. Our hope is that this alignment stimulates institutions to consider various ways to integrate NSSE data into accreditation processes, beyond simply mentioning NSSE as an element in its systematic assessment activities.

This toolkit is not intended to be a “formula” for mapping NSSE results to accreditation standards, but is designed to encourage institutions to think more broadly about how this data can be used as evidence to support specific standards. Also, NSSE findings and benchmark scores may be used to support and document institutional improvement efforts, but will be most meaningful when coupled with other measures of student learning outcomes from your campus.

## Specific Middle States Standards

Specific standards within *Middle States’s Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, are necessarily interrelated. Institutions may find that NSSE results can apply to the following accreditation standards:

### Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

“An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource

allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.”

### Standard 6: Integrity

As an institution-wide assessment, NSSE results can be made “available to prospective students” in “print, electronic, or video presentation” format to support several criteria under the “Fundamental Elements of Integrity” for this standard.

## Middle States Standards for Assessment

Participation in the NSSE administration and analyses of survey results can be used as one of a number of “planned, organized, systematized, and sustained” assessment processes to support Standards 7, 11, 12, 13 and 14 which use assessment of student learning as their fundamental elements.

### Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

“The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and compliance with accreditation standards.”

NSSE results may be used to assess Standard 7 - “an effective planning process” which includes “review of relevant quantitative and qualitative information to determine if institutional and unit level mission and goals are being achieved, to understand why they have or have not been achieved...”

### Standard 11: Educational Offerings

“The institution’s educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.”

### Standard 12: General Education

“The institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.”

### Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

“The institution’s programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.”

## 2007 NSSE Survey Items Mapped to Middle States Commission Standards

## Middle States Standards

1	Academic and Intellectual Experiences		
	a.	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	11, 12, 14
	b.	Made a class presentation	11, 12, 14
	c.	Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	11, 12, 14
	d.	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	11, 12, 14
	e.	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	6, 11, 12, 14
	f.	Come to class without completing readings or assignments	14
	g.	Worked with other students on projects during class	11, 12, 14
	h.	Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	11, 12, 14
	i.	Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	11, 12, 14
	j.	Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	3, 9, 14
	k.	Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course	9, 11, 14
	l.	Used an electronic medium (Listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment	3, 9, 11, 12, 14
	m.	Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	3, 9, 11, 14
	n.	Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	10, 11, 14
	o.	Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	10, 11, 14
	p.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	6, 14
	q.	Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	10, 14
	r.	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	11, 14
	s.	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	9, 10, 11, 14
	t.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)	14
	u.	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	6, 11, 12, 14
	v.	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	6, 11, 12, 14

2007 NSSE Survey Items Mapped to Middle States Commission Standards (continued)

Middle States Standards

2	Mental Activities		
	a.	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	11, 12, 14
	b.	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	11, 12, 14
	c.	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	11, 12, 14
	d.	Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	11, 12, 14
	e.	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	11, 12, 14
3	Reading and Writing		
	a.	Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	11, 14
	b.	Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	11, 14
	c.	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	11, 12, 14
	d.	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	11, 12, 14
	e.	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	11, 12, 14
4	Problem Sets		
	a.	Number of problem sets that take you more than an hour to complete	11, 14
	b.	Number of problem sets that take you less than an hour to complete	11, 14
5	Exams		
	Mark the box that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work.		11, 14
6	Additional Collegiate Experiences		
	a.	Attended an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater, or other performance	11, 12
	b.	Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities	9
	c.	Participated in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.)	9
	d.	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	12, 14
	e.	Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	6, 12, 14
	f.	Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	12, 14

**2007 NSSE Survey Items Mapped to Middle States Commission Standards (continued)**

**Middle States Standards**

7	Enriching Educational Experiences		
	a.	Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	9, 11, 13, 14
	b.	Community service or volunteer work	6, 13, 14
	c.	Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together	13, 14
	d.	Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	9, 10, 13, 14
	e.	Foreign language coursework	14
	f.	Study abroad	3, 13, 14
	g.	Independent study or self-designed major	13, 14
	h.	Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)	13, 14
8	Quality of Relationships		
	a.	Relationships with other students	6
	b.	Relationships with faculty members	6, 9, 10
	c.	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	3, 5, 6, 8, 9
9	Time Usage		
	a.	Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities )	9, 14
	b.	Working for pay on campus	9
	c.	Working for pay off campus	
	d.	Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	11
	e.	Relaxing & socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)	9, 11
	f.	Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	9
	g.	Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.)	9
10	Institutional Environment		
	a.	Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	1, 11, 12, 14
	b.	Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	1, 2, 5, 9
	c.	Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	1, 6, 12

**2007 NSSE Survey Items Mapped to Middle States Commission Standards (continued)**

**Middle States Standards**

	d.	Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	1, 9
	e.	Providing the support you need to thrive socially	1, 9
	f.	Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)	1, 11
	g.	Using computers in academic work	1, 2, 9, 11, 12
11	Educational and Personal Growth		
	a.	Acquiring a broad general education	11, 12, 14
	b.	Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	9, 12, 14
	c.	Writing clearly and effectively	11, 12, 14
	d.	Speaking clearly and effectively	11, 12, 14
	e.	Thinking critically and analytically	11, 12, 14
	f.	Analyzing quantitative problems	11, 12, 14
	g.	Using computing and information technology	2, 9, 11, 12, 14
	h.	Working effectively with others	12, 14
	i.	Voting in local, state, or national elections	6
	j.	Learning effectively on your own	12, 14
	k.	Understanding yourself	6, 12
	l.	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	6, 12
	m.	Solving complex real-world problems	11, 12, 14
	n.	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	6, 12, 14
	o.	Contributing to the welfare of your community	6
	p.	Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	6
12	Academic Advising		
	Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?		2, 9, 10
13	Satisfaction		
	How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?		14
14	Satisfaction		
	If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?		

## Institutional Examples

Interest in using NSSE in accreditation is growing across all sectors and types of institutions. Because NSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practices, colleges and universities have found productive ways to incorporate survey results in their institutional self-studies. In this section, we describe how selected institutions are using NSSE in accreditation.

### Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association (HLC-NCA)

#### Augustana College

Augustana used NSSE results to support several goals of its strategic plan, *Authentically Augustana: A Strategic Plan for a Premier Liberal Arts College, 2005*, prepared as part of the college's self-study for HLC reaccreditation. Among the plan's six broad goals, the centerpiece of the plan, Senior Inquiry, was initiated in response to NSSE scores which showed low student participation in a senior culminating experience or project. Another goal focused on improving scores on NSSE items related to diversity. The Diversity and Gender Equity Committee and the Task Force on Diversity are examining issues relating to diversity and working toward increasing the racial and ethnic make-up of the Augustana campus community.

Although NSSE scores for service learning showed that Augustana students were more likely to participate in service learning opportunities, many did not do so as part of regular coursework. Over the next few years, The Center for Vocational Reflection at Augustana will take the lead on initiatives to shift the focus from service alone to service, engagement, and learning through existing programs such as learning communities. Furthermore, as a member of Illinois Campus Compact, a coalition of campuses that foster campus-community programs, Augustana will draw on that group's resources and support to help faculty integrate service learning into their courses.

Augustana has made substantial efforts to define outcomes and assess its effectiveness in achieving them. Administrators and institutional researchers share assessment results with campus stakeholders and have made assessment data available to students by encouraging articles in student publications and providing data for students doing papers.

#### Iowa State University

In collaboration with the vice provost for Undergraduate Programs and the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Iowa State University Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) conducted a longitudinal analysis of its 2004 NSSE data as part of the supporting materials for its institutional self-study for HLC-NCA reaccreditation.

The results of the longitudinal study revealed that Iowa State had carried out successful efforts to increase student engagement. Senior students at Iowa State scored significantly higher in targeted areas such as higher order thinking skills, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, practical competence, and general education gains. First-year students scored higher on diversity-related items and were more satisfied with campus support services and their overall undergraduate experiences.

RISE also used the analyses to explore possible curricular models and programming efforts to enhance student engagement. For example, students in specific colleges reported differing levels of engagement, satisfaction and gains in learning.

#### St. Cloud State University

In its self-study, "Reaching Higher," prepared in April 2007 for HLC, St. Cloud State reports that externally, norm-referenced instruments used at the institutional level, NSSE and other survey data "have been collected since 2001 and have been used as action guides for student life and development staff as well as for improvements in academic support and academic programs." NSSE results have been used as evidence to support numerous Criteria for St. Cloud's self-study. Several examples are included here.

In Criterion Two of the HLC standards, Core Component 2A, which addresses an institution's preparation for the future, St. Cloud states that NSSE data in conjunction with other assessment tools have been discussed in academic and administrative groups resulting in changes in the Division of Student Life, the First-Year Experience program, and the development of an early warning system for students experiencing academic difficulty.

Core Component 2C requires an institution to provide evidence of an effective, ongoing evaluation and assessment process. NSSE along with other survey results are used to provide a snapshot of the St. Cloud student experience: for example, how students are interacting with one another and how St. Cloud might enhance these interactions in terms of diversity; and to explore how technology is used in communication and course content. Students report that faculty members are using technology effectively and incorporate self-paced Web and supplemental electronic material to enhance their courses. Student responses are used to plan student services and have led to the creation of the First-Year Experience program and the appointment of additional staff to the Advising Center, Honors program, and Counseling.

In terms of student learning and effective teaching, Criterion Three, NSSE results were used to support Core Component 3C on effective learning environments. Scores on NSSE items showed that St. Cloud students participate in signifi-

cantly more community-based projects than selected peers and the entire NSSE cohort. St. Cloud students also worked with peers inside and outside of the classroom more frequently, “developing important skills in becoming lifelong learners.”

### **University of Indianapolis**

A NSSE participant since 2004, the University of Indianapolis has used and disseminated its survey results to support its HLC-NCA reaccreditation efforts. The University used 2004 baseline data to guide the direction of its AQIP action project on student learning. The same NSSE results on perceptions of senior experiences prompted an internal survey of program directors and chairs to further assess the status of capstone experiences across campus. These combined initiatives serve as the foundation for a new student learning action project that will begin this fall.

NSSE results have also been a valuable resource in the writing of the AQIP Systems Portfolio. Many NSSE survey questions can be mapped to the nine AQIP Categories and NSSE results were used to support nearly half of the Categories within the Portfolio.

### **Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)**

#### **Daemen College**

Daemen College used NSSE results to support the College’s seven Core Competencies and as evidence to measure several specific learning objectives. Students’ responses on NSSE items related to “Literacy in Information and Multimedia Technology,” “Civic Responsibility,” and “Service Learning” were gathered and compared to benchmarks set by the committee overseeing the assessment process which formed part of Daemen’s reaccreditation efforts.

#### **Skidmore College**

After reviewing its 2003 NSSE data, Skidmore decided to use its self-study for MSCHE reaccreditation to focus on improving student engagement. The institution was particularly concerned about the differences in NSSE scores between first-year and senior students on items related to student-faculty interaction and academic engagement. Although seniors showed high levels of engagement, retention of Skidmore’s first-year students did not compare well with its peer institutions. These findings were also confirmed by institutional studies on retention. To address these issues, Skidmore created a plan to concentrate efforts in three areas: (1) designing a new model for the first-year experience, (2) strengthening recruiting and the programs in the sciences, and (3) creating a more culturally-diverse learning environment for students.

### **New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)**

#### **Roger Williams University (RWU)**

Roger Williams used selected 2005 NSSE survey results as supporting evidence of the rigor of its academic programs, experiential learning opportunities, and research activities for Standard One, Mission and Purposes, in the NEASC reaccreditation process. Student perceptions of their level of engagement in the learning practices promoted as part of the University’s core values and their impressions of the intellectual environment at RWU were used by the institution to foster and reinforce its mission. NSSE items relating to research, writing, group work, social and cultural experiences, collaboration with faculty, use of technology, and interaction with support services were some of the measures used to compare RWU’s NSSE scores with peer institutions and the annual NSSE cohort. NSSE data were also added to the Online Evidence Center, a portion of the campus Blackboard™ repository of electronic resources dedicated to NEASC reaccreditation documents.

### **Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)**

#### **Brigham Young University (BYU)**

BYU used NSSE results as evidence of progress in accomplishing its mission in support of NWCCU Standard 1.A, Institutional Mission and Goals. BYU’s 2004 NSSE results were compared with other doctoral-extensive universities on the five benchmark areas of the survey to show that students were highly satisfied with their educational experience, particularly in terms of a supportive campus environment and participation in activities that enhance spirituality. As part of the challenges and recommendations in this standard, BYU planned to establish a Web site that published the results from all assessment tools used to evaluate the BYU undergraduate experience and to “work with University communications to distribute relevant findings to university stakeholders and local media sources.”

#### **University of Utah (U of U)**

Based on previous accreditation visits, the University of Utah was aware that it needed to work on a comprehensive and systematic student outcomes assessment plan. To help prepare for a 2006 reaccreditation visit from NWCCU, the University created an assessment plan that focused on three core issues: student progression, student learning, and student engagement and university experiences. Two teams were formed to coordinate and direct this effort, the Student Outcomes Assessment Council (SOAC) and Assessment Working Group (AWG).

In terms of student progression, NSSE results in combination with other surveys have shown that U of U students spend more hours off-campus involved in work, family, and church missions. The University planned to increase its efforts to retain these students.

The plan also focused on improving student engagement in social and academic areas so that the University's future NSSE scores compare more favorably with its peer institutions. The University has been working to "increase enrollments in courses with substantial amounts of student-faculty interaction, and to develop structures and events that can build social networks and create a shared sense of community on our urban, de-centralized, and largely commuter campus."

## **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)**

### **Kennesaw State University (KSU)**

Kennesaw State's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for 2007-2012, "Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship" is a "five-year plan . . . to raise global learning to the top tier of KSU's educational priorities and outcomes." The plan relies heavily on longitudinal assessment of NSSE data as well as "nuggets" from 2005 NSSE results to provide baseline evidence of KSU's impact on student learning outcomes.

KSU's QEP contains ten goals with related action plans and strategies for assessing progress. For example, analyses of NSSE scores from 2004, 2005, and 2006, indicated the KSU students did not report desired levels of exposure to diversity, participation in study abroad, and taking a foreign language to support KSU's global learning goals. Goals 1-9 of the plan concentrate on strengthening leadership, financial, and infrastructure commitments "to the promotion and interaction of visibility and awareness of the importance of global learning," and to enhancing student success programs. The action plan for Goal 10, "Campus-wide Engagement in Global Learning Will Increase Greatly," focuses on assessing the summative impact of Goals 1-9 and includes biennial participation in NSSE through 2012. Survey responses of KSU seniors will be used for trend analysis and to show gains in targeted areas.

### **Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK)**

The QEP at TAMUK is intended to improve student success through discipline-based engagement. Objectives in support of this goal are (1) to provide course-level student engagement in one or more of three areas: civic, professional, and research; and (2) to provide faculty support for engagement courses. Instructors of specially designated "QEP Courses" receive start-up funding to support their student engagement objectives.

Students are surveyed to measure their perceptions of learn-

ing in QEP courses. QEP instructors measure and report learning outcomes from their courses. The Office of Institutional Research will compare indicators of student success (GPA, time to degree, etc.) for students who have and have not taken QEP courses.

The TAMUK QEP was conceived following lengthy research and deliberations by a large committee. Much of the QEP sprang from NSSE data showing weak student engagement by some measures, and generally weak levels of overall student satisfaction.

## **The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)**

The University of Texas at Arlington used NSSE (and corresponding FSSE) results to identify the key issues to be addressed in developing its QEP for SACS. For example, a gap between faculty and students in their perception of active learning (the focus of the QEP) environments was revealed. This analysis, along with other institutional assessments, led to the conclusion that systematic, University-wide intervention in the classroom would enhance students' ability to make better use of current active learning efforts put forth by faculty.

UTA has also incorporated NSSE as an assessment tool to examine the impact of its QEP on the development of higher order thinking skills among students. The QEP centers around 12 pilot projects. Annual NSSE testing will include an oversample of the students in these pilot project classes in order to (1) help assess the impact of active learning pedagogies, and (2) compare the results against students who were in classes that did not employ extensive active learning techniques.

## **West Texas A&M University (WTAMU)**

The WTAMU QEP team used NSSE as an assessment tool throughout their plan to improve the experience of first-year students, QEP: Engaging the First-Year Student. The plan originated from SACS requirements to develop a QEP that would enhance student learning outcomes, part of which involved investigating the experiences of their students. The QEP team used three guiding questions: (1) Who are our students? (2) What is the lived experience of a first-year student on our campus? (3) Where are our students experiencing failure and frustration?

The QEP team used 2003 NSSE results to clarify issues around the first-year experience at WTAMU using scores on the NSSE benchmarks to first outline areas that needed improvement. To further understand its NSSE results, the QEP team conducted focus groups with students to discover what they found engaging or not in their classroom experiences. They found, for example, that students were more engaged when they had an invested relationship with their professors, felt challenged in their coursework, actively participated in discussions, felt what they were learning had real-world

applications, and thought their professors were enthusiastic about the subject matter and teaching it. Conversely, students were less engaged in classes delivered mainly in a lecture format and when they did not have relationships or interaction with instructors. The QEP team also assessed that first-year students were not developing relationships with faculty. Results from NSSE and other assessment tools also showed that students did not engage in community and problem-based learning in the first-year curriculum.

Ten initiatives were developed to address areas that WTAMU wished to improve. These initiatives aligned with the four goals of the QEP Vision and Goals section of their SACS application for reaffirmation of accreditation. NSSE results were used to support multiple objectives for 8 out of the 10 initiatives.

## Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

### Humbolt State University (HSU)

Humbolt State was able to use its recently completed five-year strategic plan, multi-decade master plan, and a comprehensive diversity plan to develop its WASC reaccreditation proposal. A WASC Proposal Steering Committee, including administrative, faculty and staff representatives, was created upon recommendation of HSU's administration to guide the WASC proposal process. The Committee made presentations and distributed a modified version of WASC self-review to campus-wide units. After analyzing the data, the committee recommended focusing on three themes: academic excellence, diversity, and retention.

For the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the University enhanced its Web-based data repository of materials to provide WASC teams and the campus community with access to reaccreditation materials – “data, policies, and procedures as evidence in support of the standards and related criteria.”

NSSE results will be one of the assessment tools used to support Standard 2, “Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions,” and for Standard 4, “Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement.”

### University of Hawaii at Manoa

The University of Hawaii at Manoa has experienced several major challenges in recent years including budgets cuts, changes in administrative governance, understaffing, and facilities damage due to flooding - factors which have contributed to a decline in retention rates. Based on concerns raised over these issues by a WASC visiting team in 2003 and NSSE results that showed a need to “restore a sense of community” to the campus, Manoa prepared a two-stage review report in 2006 targeted at educational effectiveness and sustainability in preparation for the reaccreditation process. The report to WASC, an extension of its 2000-2010 strategic plan, was

organized along the themes of building community, campus renewal, and reform of campus governance. NSSE results were used to measure expected outcomes for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). Under the community building theme, efforts to produce sustained increases in NSSE scores through 2012 will be included as part of a campaign to raise the awareness of campus stakeholders to the importance of student success and engagement. Under the theme to reform campus governance to promote communication and student success, sustained improvement on NSSE, FSSE, and other internal survey scores will be used to provide evidence of increased participation in campus governance activities and progress toward forging “meaningful and long-term relationships among stakeholders.”

## Recent Trends in Accreditation

The following trends in accreditation support the use of student engagement results in assessment and institutional improvement initiatives:

- Campuses and accrediting bodies are moving toward self-studies that systematically over time review existing processes (like strategic planning, program evaluation, student services, and enrollment management), as contrasted with one-point-in-time reports that have limited utility.
- Accrediting bodies have shifted away from setting and holding institutions to rigid quantitative standards that feature inputs and resources toward empirically-based indicators of institutional effectiveness and student learning.
- Regional and program accreditors are emphasizing the importance of cultivating “cultures of evidence” that nurture and sustain continuous improvement. Progressive campus leaders increasingly are harnessing the regional re-accreditation process as a “chariot for change.” Rather than viewing the process as a burden or hurdle to be overcome, presidents, provosts, and deans are using the self-study and team visit as an opportunity to stimulate productive dialogue and to guide constructive change.

## Accreditation Tips

### Tip #1:

Student engagement results provided by NSSE are one direct indicator of what students put into their education and an indirect indicator of what they get out of it.

### Tip # 2

NSSE items can be used to analyze the resources and appraise the effectiveness of the institution in fulfilling its mission. Two such measures included in the educational gains

items are the extent to which students' experiences at the institution have: 1) contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in acquiring a broad general education, and 2) helped them develop a personal code of values and ethics. The measurement of these experiences could be used to demonstrate achievement of the institution's mission and goals.

**Tip #3:**

NSSE data are actionable; that is, they point to aspects of student and institutional performance that institutions can address related to the curriculum, pedagogy, instructional emphases, and campus climate. In addition, because NSSE benchmarks allow a school to compare itself to others, the results often point to areas where improvement may be desired.

**Tip #4:**

Share NSSE results widely to expand the audience's view of the accreditation data. Spend time thinking about with whom you will share specific results from your data. For example, Oregon State University has disseminated its NSSE results to relevant student affairs departments, like housing and academic advising, who in turn can use the data to better understand how their students interact with available services.

**Tip #5**

The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) measures faculty expectations of student engagement in educational practices that are empirically linked with high levels of learning and development. Taken together, the combination of NSSE and FSSE results can be used to identify areas of strength as well as aspects of the undergraduate experience that may warrant attention and stimulate discussions related to improving teaching, learning, and the quality of students' educational experience.

**Tip #6:**

Share NSSE results with appropriate campus community members to help sharpen their reports to the accreditation team. For example, distribute NSSE results regarding the experience of first-generation and commuter students to academic support services and commuter student offices. Data regarding the degree to which students report the institution helps them cope with non-academic responsibilities and helps them succeed academically and report their satisfaction with advising can be used to demonstrate adequate provision of services to meet students' learning and personal development needs.

**Tip #7:**

NSSE results can help assess the degree to which the institution encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds and the extent to which students report that their experiences at the institution have contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Results also can demonstrate institu-

tional effectiveness in responding to the increasing diversity in society through educational and co-curricular programs.

**Additional Information:**

Copies of this document, accreditation toolkits from previous years, examples of how institutions have used NSSE data for accreditation, and research reports related to NSSE data and accreditation are available on the NSSE Institute Web Site: [www.nsse.iub.edu/institute/index.cfm?view=tools/accred](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/institute/index.cfm?view=tools/accred).

**Standards in effect as of 1/1/07**

*Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation*, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Twelfth Edition, 2006.

**NSSE update 5/01/07**



**National Survey  
of Student Engagement**

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