

**AAC&U's Working Conference Winter/Spring 2008 - Integrative Designs for General Education Assessment**  
**Assessing General Education Learning Outcomes: NSSE Benchmarks and Institutional Practice**  
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In an era of heightened calls for accountability and demands for graduates with strong abilities in problem solving, teamwork, communication, and leadership, it is incumbent on colleges and universities to demonstrate the effectiveness of their general education program. Since 2000, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has collected data on general education aims and the extent to which students' undergraduate education features higher order thinking skills and integrated learning experiences. This roundtable session will highlight how national results, particularly for seniors by major, can serve as benchmarks for institution and department assessment efforts and be used as a stimulus for campus discussions about general education goals and outcomes. Several institutional examples for using NSSE results in general education assessment and accreditation self-studies will be featured to stimulate the exchange of ideas.

**Shifts in Goals and Concerns for Liberal Education**

	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century</b>
<b>Liberal Education</b>	A set of COURSES	A set of OUTCOMES
<b>Concerns</b>	Taking prescribed courses  Registration	Promoting the right outcomes  Quality of Teaching and Learning

**AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes**

Intellectual Skills	Personal & Social Respon.	Integrative Learning
✓ Inquiry & analysis	✓ Civic knowledge & engagement--local & global	✓ Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
✓ Critical & creative thinking	✓ Intercultural knowledge & competence	
✓ Written & oral communication	✓ Ethical reasoning & action	
✓ Quantitative literacy	✓ Foundations & skills for lifelong learning	
✓ Information literacy		
✓ Teamwork & problem solving		

Approaches to using NSSE Results to Assess General and Liberal Education Outcomes

1. Identify NSSE items that correspond to your liberal education outcomes (see Valdosta State example). How are your students performing in comparison to institutional goals, NSSE norms by Carnegie or select peers?
2. Examine liberal education outcomes within majors or by department at your institution. Are students in certain majors more likely to report greater liberal education gains? How do your students compare to NSSE seniors by major?

NSSE Seniors Frequencies and Means by Major (within Annual Report folder on Website):

- [http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE\\_2007\\_Annual\\_Report/docs/NSSE07GrandFrequencyByMajorsSenior.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2007_Annual_Report/docs/NSSE07GrandFrequencyByMajorsSenior.pdf)  
[http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE\\_2007\\_Annual\\_Report/docs/NSSE07GrandMeansByMajorsSeniors.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2007_Annual_Report/docs/NSSE07GrandMeansByMajorsSeniors.pdf)

For Discussion:

1. Are essential learning outcomes (ELOs) defined on your campus?
2. How are assessment initiatives informing dialogue about ELOs?
3. How have you or might you use NSSE and FSSE data to inform assessment of Gen Ed Outcomes & ELOs?
4. How can general education requirements, majors, and other curricular structures work together to promote ELOs? In other words, what does promoting ELOs across the curriculum look like?
5. What are the roles faculty members should play in determining what outcomes are important and how to promote them?
6. How are faculty involved in conversations about promoting ELOs?
7. How are faculty tailoring their teaching to promote ELOs?
8. How is the curriculum structured on your campus to achieve these outcomes? Does responsibility for ELOs fall largely on general education courses?

**NSSE Items Relevant to General and Liberal Education Outcomes:**

<b>Higher Order Thinking</b>	1	analyze	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components
	2	synthesz	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
	3	evaluate	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
	4	applying	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
<b>Integrative Learning</b>	1	integrat	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
	2	divclass	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments
	3	intideas	Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions
	4	facideas	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
	5	oocideas	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)
<b>Reflective Learning</b>	1	ownview	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue
	2	othrview	Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective
	3	chngview	Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept
<b>Gains in</b>	1	gnethics	Developing a personal code of values and ethics

<b>Personal and Social Development</b>	2	gndivers	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
	3	gnself	Understanding yourself
	4	gninq	Learning effectively on your own
	5	gnspirit	Developing a deepened sense of spirituality
	6	gncommun	Contributing to the welfare of your community
	7	gncitizn	Voting in local, state (provincial), or national (federal) elections
	<b>Gains in Practical Competence</b>	1	gnwork
2		gnothers	Working effectively with others
3		gncmpts	Using computing and information technology
4		gnquant	Analyzing quantitative problems
5		gnprobsv	Solving complex real-world problems
<b>Gains in General Education</b>	1	gnwrite	Writing clearly and effectively
	2	gnspeak	Speaking clearly and effectively
	3	ngenled	Acquiring a broad general education
	4	gnanaly	Thinking critically and analytically
<b>Writing</b>	1	rewropap	How often have you ... prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
	2	integrat	How often have you ... worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from vairous sources
	3	writemor	During current school year .... number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more
	4	writemid	During current school year .... number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages
	5	writesml	During the current school year ... number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
<b>Diversity</b>	1	divrstud	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
	2	diffstu2	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own
	3	envdivrs	Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds



## NSSE Educational & Personal Gains Items

("To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?" -- % "very much" or "quite a bit")

Self-Reported Educational and Personal Gains from College	First-Year Students NSSE	Seniors NSSE
Thinking critically and analytically	80%	87%
Acquiring a broad general education	80%	83%
Working effectively with others	69%	76%
Writing clearly and effectively	71%	75%
Learning effectively on your own	67%	73%
Using computing and information technology	72%	79%
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	58%	67%
Analyzing quantitative problems	66%	72%
Speaking clearly and effectively	61%	70%
Understanding yourself	59%	62%
Developing a personal code of values & ethics	53%	55%
Solving complex real-world problems	53%	59%
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	52%	51%
Contributing to the welfare of your community	42%	44%
Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	32%	28%
Voting in local, state, or national elections	26%	32%



## FSSE Educational & Personal Gains Items

("To what extent do you structure your selected course section so that students learn and develop in the following areas?" -- % "very much" or "quite a bit")

Self-Reported Educational and Personal Gains from College	Teaching Lower Division FSSE	Teaching Upper Division FSSE
Thinking critically and analytically**	91%	96%
Acquiring a broad general education*	66%	53%
Working effectively with others*	53%	63%
Writing clearly and effectively*	56%	68%
Learning effectively on your own**	85%	87%
Using computing and information technology*	37%	44%
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	59%	75%
Analyzing quantitative problems*	42%	46%
Speaking clearly and effectively*	44%	58%
Understanding yourself	51%	54%
Developing a personal code of values & ethics	45%	55%
Solving complex real-world problems	55%	70%
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	43%	45%
Developing a deepened sense of spirituality*	14%	15%

KEY: \*\* = FSSE 10%+ higher than NSSE; \* = FSSE 10% LOWER than NSSE; Remainder = FSSE NSSE about same

## Using NSSE Results in General Education Program Review: Valdosta State University



### Valdosta State University General Education Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate understanding of the society of the United States and its ideals.
- Students will demonstrate cross-cultural perspectives and knowledge of other societies.
- Students will use the computer and information technology when appropriate.
- Students will express themselves clearly, logically, and precisely in writing and in speaking, and they will demonstrate competence in reading and listening.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of scientific and mathematical principles and proficiency in laboratory practices.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultural heritages in the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze, to evaluate, and to make inferences from oral, written, and visual materials.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of principles of ethics and their employment in the analysis and resolution of moral problems.

## Linking NSSE Questions with VSU's Expected Outcomes

(contact Marsha Krotseng, or Linda Calendrillo, Valdosta State University)



- US Society
  - 11i Voting in local, state, national elections
  - 11o Contributing to welfare of your community
- Cross-cultural Perspectives
  - 11i Understanding people of other racial, ethnic backgrounds
- Computer and Information Technology
  - 11g Using computing & info. technology
- Written and Spoken Expression
  - 11c Writing clearly and effectively
  - 11d Speaking clearly and effectively
- Scientific and Mathematical Principles
  - 11f Analyzing quantitative problems
- Diverse Cultural Heritages
  - 11i Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Ability to Analyze and Make Inferences
  - 11e Thinking critically and analytically
  - 11m Solving complex, real-world problems
- Principles and Employment of Ethics
  - 11n Developing personal code of values and ethics
- Overall General Outcomes
  - 11a Acquiring a broad general education
  - 11b Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills
  - 11h Working effectively with others
  - 13 Evaluation of your entire experience at this institution

## Valdosta State University National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2006 Questions Related to General Education



		Freshmen				Seniors			
		Very Much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Very Much	Quite a bit	Some	Very Little
11a Acquiring a broad general education	VSU	25%	48%	25%	2%	40%	44%	14%	2%
	NSSE	35%	45%	17%	3%	44%	39%	14%	3%
b Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	VSU	18%	30%	37%	14%	40%	37%	18%	5%
	NSSE	23%	35%	31%	11%	37%	34%	21%	7%
c Writing clearly and effectively	VSU	32%	43%	22%	3%	33%	46%	18%	3%
	NSSE	30%	41%	23%	6%	36%	39%	20%	5%
d Speaking clearly and effectively	VSU	28%	34%	29%	9%	34%	44%	19%	3%
	NSSE	24%	37%	29%	10%	32%	38%	24%	6%
e Thinking critically and analytically	VSU	36%	40%	20%	3%	45%	45%	8%	2%
	NSSE	38%	42%	17%	3%	49%	38%	12%	2%
f Analyzing quantitative problems	VSU	26%	37%	29%	7%	33%	43%	18%	6%
	NSSE	27%	39%	27%	7%	35%	37%	23%	5%
g Using computing and information technology	VSU	38%	34%	24%	5%	50%	37%	11%	2%
	NSSE	35%	37%	22%	6%	45%	34%	17%	4%

### VSU Report on General Education Outcomes

- 87% of VSU seniors report developing their ability to use computing and information technology "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 85% of VSU seniors report acquiring abroad general education "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 82% of VSU seniors report increasing their ability to work effectively with others "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 88% of VSU seniors report developing their ability to think critically and analytically "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 77% of VSU seniors report developing their ability to analyze quantitative problems "quite a bit" or "very much."
- 75% of VSU seniors report developing their ability to write clearly and effectively "quite a bit" or "very much."

## Analyzing the Results



- First Year with Senior Responses
  - Is there growth in the percentage of "Very Much" and "Quite a Bit"?
- Your Institution with Overall NSSE Results
  - Are there items on which we are significantly above or below the national results?
- Trends Over Time
  - Are the results consistent across years?
  - Is there improvement where desired?
- Highest and Lowest Ranking Items
  - What items do students report as most or least affected by their experiences at the institution?



## Example: First Year - Senior Comparisons

To what extent has your experience contributed "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much" to acquiring a broad general education?

First Year: 79%      Senior: 85%

To what extent has your experience contributed "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much" to thinking critically and analytically?

First Year: 83%      Senior: 88%



## VSU - NSSE Comparisons

To what extent has your experience contributed "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much" to writing clearly and effectively?

	<u>First-Year</u>	<u>Senior</u>
VSU	79%	75%
Master's	73%	77%
All NSSE	73%	77%



## 2005 - 2006 Comparisons

To what extent has your experience contributed "Quite a Bit" or "Very Much" to writing clearly and effectively?

	<u>First-Year</u>	<u>Senior</u>
VSU 2005	79%	75%
VSU 2006	75%	79%
NSSE 2005	73%	77%
NSSE 2006	71%	75%



## Highest Rankings: Seniors

### 2005 VSU

Thinking critically and analytically  
Using computing, information technology  
Acquiring a broad general education  
Working effectively with others

### NSSE

Thinking critically and analytically  
Acquiring a broad general education  
Working effectively with others  
Using computing, information technology

### 2006 VSU

Thinking critically and analytically  
Using computing, information technology  
Acquiring a broad general education (tie)  
Working effectively with others (tie)

### NSSE

Thinking critically and analytically  
Acquiring a broad gen education  
Using computing, info technology  
Working effectively with others



## Lowest Rankings 2005: Seniors

**VSU** Voting in local, state, national elections  
Contributing to welfare of community  
Understanding other racial backgrounds  
Developing a personal code of values

**NSSE** Voting in local, state, national elections  
Contributing to welfare of community  
Understanding other racial backgrounds  
Developing a personal code of values (tie)  
Solving complex, real-world problems (tie)



## Lowest Rankings 2006: Seniors

**VSU** Voting in local, state, national elections  
Contributing to welfare of community  
Understanding other racial backgrounds  
Solving complex, real-world problems

**NSSE** Voting in local, state, national elections  
Contributing to welfare of community  
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