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Assessing General Education Learning Outcomes: NSSE Benchmarks and Institutional Practice

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Drake University

Along with other sources of information, Drake University is using its NSSE results in the assessment of its general education curriculum, specifically to examine areas such as service learning, multicultural understanding, and critical thinking skills. NSSE data are also expected to inform the review of capstone courses and other senior culminating experiences as the process moves forward. Drake participated in the inaugural administration of the Beginning College Student Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and anticipates that BCSSE results combined with NSSE findings will provide instructive insight into the review of undergraduate advising. Finally, to respond to the national interest in institutional accountability and transparency, Drake is participating in the NSSE-USA TODAY initiative and reporting NSSE data along with other information on its public "Drake Student Outcomes"

Grand Valley State University

Seniors at Grand Valley State University reported lower gains on NSSE than their comparison groups in working effectively with others, solving complex real-world problems, and developing a personal code of ethics. These data were incorporated into the institution's "Claiming a Liberal Education" (CLE) campus change initiative, which is designed to align faculty and student expectations with the goals of a liberal arts education. To estimate the impact of the CLE project, students in an advertising and public relations course collected additional information from students and faculty using their own locally developed surveys that elaborated on NSSE items. In addition, references to student engagement often emerge in discussions about culture change at the university, with some faculty making such comments as, "I now require my students to make presentations because the NSSE seniors said they needed more help in speaking clearly and effectively." Student affairs staff used NSSE results to advance the collaboration between academic and student life and took the lead in establishing learning communities.

Kennesaw State University

Based on AAC&U's Call for a New Vision of Greater Expectations, which underscores the philosophy of greater integration and realignment of general education, the major, and electives into a coherence education experience, KSU developed 14 college-level competencies. These competencies closely match NSSE's student learning outcomes survey items. The competencies include: critical thinking, information technology skills, writing skills, oral/presentation skills, analytic/quantitative skills, interpersonal/teamwork skills, independent learning skills, problem solving skills, self-awareness, cultural/global awareness, professional ethics/practices, community engagement, demonstrating a broad general education, and demonstrating job or work-related knowledge and skills.

Lees-McRae College

NSSE data from 2000 and 2003 were key pieces of information to help guide institution towards a focused and coherent plan with the simple yet powerful aim of enhancing student learning. NSSE data were used to develop professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, particularly with regard to teaching. General Education core curriculum has been under review for some years. The NSSE data was used in gen ed revision and QEP for the SACS reaffirmation of accreditation. The revised General Education core curriculum is more structured, focuses on gaining basic skills in math, writing, reading and computing at the beginning before moving on to discipline-specific courses, and also uses a common cohort approach throughout the curriculum to further enhance learning.

Morehead State University

Morehead State is involved in an initiative to rethink and reformulate its general education experience. The institution is using NSSE results as key indicators for several general education goals and anticipates that changes in the General Education program will be made as result of an analysis of NSSE and FSSE data. Morehead is also in a continuing discussion on how to increase student engagement to increase retention and learning. Use of NSSE is contributing significantly to that analysis and planning. NSSE is also used by the Retention Task Force to develop additional retention strategies. In addition, NSSE results are used to prepare reports for the state agency related to meeting Morehead's institutional goals.

Plymouth State University

The Division of Student Affairs at Plymouth State University reviews responses from first-year students to determine how well the institution is meeting student needs for out-of-class personal support. NSSE results and an institutional survey have been used to revise the general education program. NSSE results supported a grant application that was funded to establish a faculty development center charged with improving the first-year experience with special focus on undeclared students.

South Dakota Board of Regents

The *2006 NSSE/FSSE Summary Report* is a report compiled by the South Dakota Board of Regents, presents data from the both NSSE and FSSE. The report provides a brief background of the NSSE and FSSE surveys, past participation, system wide findings broken down by benchmarks, and a plan for future analysis of NSSE data. The report closes with institution-specific examples of use of NSSE data such as how Northern State University shares its data with campus stakeholders and the way Black Hills State University incorporates data into their strategic planning.

University of Georgia

The University of Georgia (UGA) Vice President for Instruction engaged in a series of *NSSE Campus Conversations* to discuss its NSSE results with deans, departmental faculty, members of the Teaching Academy, the University Curriculum Committee, TA Mentors, the Student Government Association, academic advisors, and other groups on campus. In 2004, the Provost organized a Task Force that was charged "to explore questions related to whether the University has a rigorous intellectual climate, how students learn and should learn...and whether the University's general education requirements remain innovative and engaging for undergraduate students..." (Report of the Task Force on General Education and Student Learning, University of Georgia, August, 2005, Executive Summary). Although the Task Force members read and discussed many documents during their year of study, they noted in their Final Report that "perhaps the most influential document we examined was the 2003 report of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)" (Task Force Report, p. 2). Based on NSSE data and the Report of the Task Force on General Education and Student Learning, a number of initiatives have been introduced including an Office of Service Learning, expanded residential learning communities, additional resources allocated to writing programs, and a revised general education curriculum submitted it to the University System Board of Regents. UGA plans to use its 2007 NSSE data to assess these initiatives.

University of Nebraska at Kearney The General Studies Council has identified a number of NSSE items that will serve as indicators for the general objectives of the General Studies Program. These items have been incorporated into the Council's General Studies Assessment Plan as indirect measures of student engagement. The items were found to be a particularly good fit for their program because freshmen are typically enrolled exclusively in General Studies Program courses during their freshmen year. Thus, most of their initial academic and campus activities have strong links to the General Studies Program. The results for the three baseline years are currently being analyzed.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

To enhance engagement in the first year at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a faculty-appointed committee defined five objectives: (a) to encourage critical thinking, information literacy, and evidence-based writing; (b) to engage first-year students with current events, societal problems, and human needs; (c) to promote in each first-year student a personal foundation for lifelong learning; (d) to cultivate a more intellectually stimulating environment at WPI; and (e) to contribute to civic engagement and community partnerships. In 2006, the committee began developing a new first-year general education curriculum featuring interdisciplinary, inquiry-based seminars, better integration of the disciplines, and broader, more engaging introductions to major areas of study.

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