

PROGRAM TITLE

Assessing Good Practices: The National Survey of Student Engagement Program

PROGRAM ABSTRACT

This session features a panel presentation describing the new National Survey of Student Engagement, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts. The project will annually gather and disseminate information about collegiate quality, specifically (1) how students spend their time (their activities and experiences) inside and outside the classroom, and (2) what instructors and student affairs staff do to engage students in empirically-proven educational practices.

BRIEF OUTLINE/DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENTATION

What drives the national conversation about quality in undergraduate education? Media rankings focus on student selectivity and faculty credentials. Accreditation agencies concentrate on resources and programs. Government oversight emphasizes regulation and procedural compliance. Often lost in this sea of quality indicators is what matters most: what students put into and get out of their college experience.

In 1998, The Pew Charitable Trusts asked a small group of higher education assessment experts (including Alexander Astin, Gary Barnes, Arthur Chickering, Peter Ewell, John Gardner, George Kuh, and Ted Marchese) to design a national survey of college students that would accurately describe the undergraduate experience and could be used by colleges and other interested groups. The result was the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a joint undertaking of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

The NSSE asks students about their college experiences, how they spend their time, what they feel they have gained from their classes, their assessment of the quality of their interactions with faculty and friends, and other important indicators. Extensive research indicates that good educational practices in the classroom and interactions with others such as faculty and peers are directly related to desired student outcomes, and the NSSE focuses on these practices.

Presenters will discuss the evolution, status, and future of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a multi-year project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Specifically, presenters will describe the development of the survey instrument (The College Student Report), describe the implementation of the two 1999 field tests and the spring 2000 national survey, summarize the approaches being used to analyze and report the data, and discuss ongoing issues associated with the full implementation of the project.

After briefly summarizing the preliminary discussions of the original Pew working group, presenters will distribute copies of the paper version of the NSSE and describe the guiding principles for constructing the instrument. Audience members will have an opportunity to complete the first page of the survey and familiarize themselves with the type of data gathered. Presenters will also describe changes that were made to the survey based upon the spring 1999 and fall 1999 field tests, as well as extensive psychometric analyses. We will explain how the size, scope, and founding principles of The National Survey of Student Engagement make this a high-stakes effort to assess collegiate quality.

Presenters will then report on the planning and implementation of the two field tests conducted in 1999 and the spring 2000 national rollout of the NSSE. The spring 1999 field test included 7,500 students at 12 colleges and universities. The fall 1999 field test included about 42,00 students at 65 colleges and universities, and the spring 2000 operational rollout of the project is expected to include 150,000 students at approximately 250 colleges and universities. We will also review the development of the web-based alternative data collection approach being used for the first time on a national scale.

Presenters will describe the procedures for working with participating institutions. The NSSE project requires participating institutions to provide the Indiana University Survey Research Center with an electronic file of all first-year and all senior students. To reinforce the credibility and representativeness of institutional samples, the NSSE project staff randomly select from each institution's student record file those students who will compose the institution's sample. Sample sizes in the 1999 field tests ranged from about 450 students at the small colleges, to 700 students at medium size schools, and 1,000 students at the largest universities. We will also summarize what was learned from debriefing meetings with the institutional contacts who coordinated the data collection efforts at their respective institutions.

We will summarize initial results and the psychometric properties of the survey instrument and additional aspects of data collection under the auspices of the NSSE project that include an audit of institutional policies and practices, institutional selectivity, demographic information about students and faculty, and field research at selected participating institutions.

We will report on one University's experience in administering and using the results from The College Student Report, including a discussion on the opportunities for collaboration between academic affairs, student affairs, and institutional research presented by participation in the NSSE project.

A discussion between the presenters and audience members related to the content of the instrument, survey procedures, proposed uses and products by student affairs divisions, and future NSSE activities will conclude the presentation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The desired learning outcomes are:

- to gain a better understanding of the need to reframe the discussion about quality in undergraduate education
- to learn about the evolution, status, and future of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- to know how the NSSE project compiles survey and other data to create institutional profiles and comparative data for similar colleges
- to understand potential applications of NSSE results to student affairs and how NSSE data might promote collaboration between student affairs, academic affairs, and institutional research officers

RELATIONSHIP TO THEME

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) project will provide colleges and universities with valuable information about students' views of collegiate quality. The NSSE is a versatile, research-based tool for gathering information that will focus local and national conversations on learning-centered indicators in undergraduate education; thereby creating a data-driven shared vision for the new century to which student affairs must contribute.

HOW MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM

Audience members will be involved by:

- o completing the first page of the National Survey of Student Engagement and commenting on the instrument
- o discussing their institution's experiences with the NSSE
- o engaging in an interactive discussion about survey procedures
- o commenting on proposed uses and products of the NSSE by student affairs professionals