NSSE
national survey of student engagement

Accreditation Toolkit:
Mapped to 2006-2010 NSSE Survey Questions

Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS)

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 use in shaping 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.[1]

[1] Alstete, J.W. (2004). *Accreditation matters: Achieving academic recognition and renewal.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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 (a) a college or university is using assessment to determine the extent to which it is meeting its educational objectives; (b) whether current institutional goals remain appropriate; and (c) 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.

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 disseminate the results to

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.

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 summer). *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.

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.

Listed below 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.

Example: Administering NSSE Timeline - Middle States Commission, 3-year cycle

Year 1 -
Create a budget for accreditation process, including NSSE administration fees
Register for NSSE before mid-September deadline
Select committee chair, steering committee, and working group members
Campus representatives attend Commission Self-Study Institute
Choose model and self-study design
Review accreditation standards and timeline
Self-study preparation visit of Commission staff liaison
Complete self-study design
Administer NSSE

Year 2
Working groups review NSSE results and related institutional data for self-study
Gather supporting materials such as faculty credentials and institutional financial reports
Steering committee develops draft of self-study report
Create campus awareness of accreditation process and progress

Year 3
Prepare final self-study report to send to Evaluation Team and Commission
Commission Evaluation Team visit in spring
Commission team report issued
Prepare institutional response

After Year 3
Notification of Commission action

Example: Administering NSSE Timeline - Western Association, 7-year cycle

Years 1 & 2
Institutional Proposal Workshop
Submit Institutional Proposal
Administer NSSE
Analyze NSSE results and exhibit as educational effectiveness indicators
Institutional Proposal approval

Years 2 - 4
Review NSSE results
Prepare and submit Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR)
CPR team site visit
Final team report to institution
Institutional response
Commission action
Second NSSE administration
Incorporate CPR work plan for Educational Effectiveness Review (EER)
Demonstrate use of NSSE results as educational effectiveness indicators and to improve practice for
inclusion in EER

Years 5-7
Prepare and submit EER
EER team site visit
Final report to institution
Institutional response
Commission action
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 SACS Criteria

A successful accreditation plan is authentic to each institution. However, an important step in 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 encourages 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 as a stimulus 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 Core Requirements

SACS 2.12: The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

NSSE results can be used by institutions for data-driven, evidence-based decision-making and to focus on a course of action for the QEP. As direct assessments, NSSE results support the first and fifth criteria of the QEP strategy, (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement (Quality Enhancement Plan). Subsequent NSSE administrations can continue to document quality and effectiveness in institutional programs.

SACS 2.5: Institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes

Institutions may consider using NSSE results as institution-wide sources of evidence to support the three criteria under this Core requirement: (1) systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) continued improvement in institutional quality; and (3) documentation that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. NSSE Benchmark results may be particularly helpful as they cut across both academic and student affairs evaluation processes.

SACS 3.3.1: Institutional effectiveness

NSSE results can be used to demonstrate expected outcomes in educational programs, administrative support services, and educational support services.

2006-2010 NSSE Survey Items Mapped to SACS Criteria

<div align="right">SACS Criteria</div>

1		Academic and Intellectual Experiences	
	a.	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3.3.1.1
	b.	Made a class presentation	3.3.1.1
	c.	Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	3.3.1.1
	d.	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	3.3.1.1
	e.	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	3.3.1.1
	f.	Come to class without completing readings or assignments	3.3.1.1
	g.	Worked with other students on projects during class	3.3.1.1
	h.	Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	3.3.1.1
	i.	Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	3.3.1.1
	j.	Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	2.10
	k.	Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course	2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.5
	l.	Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment	12.9, 3.3.1.1, 3.4.9, 3.4.12, 3.8.1, 3.8.2, 3.11.3,
	m.	Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	2.9, 3.4.12, 3.8.1, 3.8.2
	n.	Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	3.3.1.1, 3.4.9, 3.7.1
	o.	Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.3, 3.4.9, 3.7.1
	p.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	2.10, 3.7.1
	q.	Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance	3.3.1, 3.7.1
	r.	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	3.7.1
	s.	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	2.10, 3.4.2
	t.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)	
	u.	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.3
	v.	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	3.3.1.1

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	
	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	3.3.1.1
	c.	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	3.3.1.1
	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	3.3.1.1
	e.	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	3.3.1.1
3		Reading and Writing	
	a.	Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
	b.	Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
	c.	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
	d.	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
	e.	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
4		Problem Sets	
	a.	Number of problem sets that take you more than an hour to complete	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
	b.	Number of problem sets that take you less than an hour to complete	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
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.	3.3.1.1, 3.4.10
6		Additional Collegiate Experiences	
	a.	Attended an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater, or other performance	2.10, 3.3.1.3
	b.	Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities	2.10
	c.	Participated in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.)	2.10
	d.	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	3.3.1.1
	e.	Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	f.	Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	2.10; 3.3.1.1

7	Enriching Educational Experiences		
	a.	Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	2.9, 2.10, 3.4.9
	b.	Community service or volunteer work	2.9, 2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.5, 3.4.2
	c.	Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together	2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.4.9
	d.	Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	2.10, 3.3.1.3, 3.4.9
	e.	Foreign language coursework	
	f.	Study abroad	2.9, 2.10, 3.3.1.1
	g.	Independent study or self-designed major	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	h.	Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)	2.10, 3.3.1.1
8	Quality of Relationships		
	a.	Relationships with other students	
	b.	Relationships with faculty members	3.7.1
	c.	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	3.2.8, 3.3.1.2, 3.9.3
9	Time Usage		
	a.	Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)	3.3.1.1
	b.	Working for pay on campus	3.3.1.1
	c.	Working for pay off campus	3.3.1.1
	d.	Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	2.10
	e.	Relaxing & socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)	2.10, 2.11.2
	f.	Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	2.10, 2.11.2
	g.	Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.)	2.10, 2.11.2
10	Institutional Environment		
	a.	Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	3.3.1.1
	b.	Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	2.9, 2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.3, 3.4.9, 3.8.1, 3.8.2, 3.8.3

			SACS Criteria
	c.	Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	2.10
	d.	Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	2.10
	e.	Providing the support you need to thrive socially	2.10
	f.	Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)	2.10, 2.11.2, 3.11.3
	g.	Using computers in academic work	2.9, 2.11.2, 3.11.3, 3.4.12, 3.8.1, 3.82, 3.8.3
11	Educational and Personal Growth		
	a.	Acquiring a broad general education	3.3.1.1, 3.5.1
	b.	Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	2.10, 3.3.1.1, 3.4.9, 3.5.1
	c.	Writing clearly and effectively	3.3.1.1, 3.5.1
	d.	Speaking clearly and effectively	3.3.1.1, 3.5.1
	e.	Thinking critically and analytically	3.3.1.1, 3.5.1
	f.	Analyzing quantitative problems	3.3.1.1, 3.5.1
	g.	Using computing and information technology	2.9, 2.10, 2.11.2, 3.11.3, 3.4.12, 3.5.1
	h.	Working effectively with others	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	i.	Voting in local, state, or national elections	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	j.	Learning effectively on your own	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	k.	Understanding yourself	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	l.	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	m.	Solving complex real-world problems	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	n.	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	o.	Contributing to the welfare of your community	2.10, 3.3.1.1
	p.	Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	2.10, 3.3.1.1
12	Academic Advising		
		Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?	2.10, 3.2.8, 3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.3, 3.4.9
13	Satisfaction		
		How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?	
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 fosters 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.

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 describes how 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 significantly 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 Colorado at Boulder

A cycle of student surveys including NSSE are administered by the office of Institutional Analysis at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU-Boulder) to emphasize program-level data, benchmarking, and student reflection on learning,and other campus goals. Results are reported publicly by college, school, division, and department. CU-Boulder is also the national coordinator of the Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) program. The AAUDE-NSSE consortium allows institutions to add optional questions and/or share NSSE response-level data among participating institutions. Information gathered from these efforts was used in the CU-Boulder Self-Study, Shaping the New Flagship, for reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC-NCA).

Since CU-Boulder's last reaccreditation review in 2001, major changes have been made in the university's writing

program. Another major focus of CU-Boulder's Self-Study described the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) and the creation of the campus Writing Center to address a decentralized and diffuse writing curriculum and lack of focus on first-year writing programs. PWR expanded upper-division courses, redesigned lower-division courses, and established a full-service Writing Center to reinforce pedagogical reforms driven by assessment. Results on several NSSE survey items related to student writing from the 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2009 NSSE administrations showed that CU-Boulder students improved over time and compared well to students at peer institutions.

Data from a national pilot of a joint NSSE and Writing Program Administrators survey of student engagement and writing will allow assessment of connections between good writing practices and student learning. Over 24 survey items related to writing skills will allow CU-Boulder's data to compare its performance to that of other schools in the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (CSWC).

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.

Morgan State University (MSU)

Morgan State University was reaccredited by MSCHE in 2008. Designated as "Maryland's Public Urban University" by the Maryland State Legislature, Morgan chose to pursue a model for its 2008 Middle States Self-Study, which aligned Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence with the 14 MSCHE standards for excellence.

Morgan used focus groups, NSSE results, and other national assessment instruments as evidence of student and stakeholder satisfaction to support MSCHE Standard 9, Student Support Services: "The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students" which was combined with Baldrige Category 3, Student Stakeholder and Market Focus. A series of focus groups titled "Opportunities for Continuous Improvement in Academics" was carried out in 2007 where students, faculty, and administrators offered suggestions to improve the

quality of customer service at MSU. In addition, results from NSSE, an internal first-year survey, and findings from an external consultant agency helped to address concerns with customer service, especially student registration processes. The University also established the "Morgan Cares" and "Helping Hands" programs as a result of its involvement in Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) project.

For MSCHE Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning, one of the two major assessment standards of MSCHE's Characteristics of Excellence guidelines, Morgan linked Baldrige Category 7, Organizational Performance Results and used NSSE and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) results to measure the success of the University's assessment plan. Specific NSSE items on working to meet faculty expectations, participation in community-based projects, applying theories and concepts to practical problems, number of papers and books read, and gaining work-related knowledge and skills were highlighted. The University continues to promote a strong liberal arts curriculum and improvement in the levels of its students' written and oral communication skills through a quality General Education program. NSSE and FSSE results provided responses that assessed student engagement from both student and faculty perspectives. In addition to effective written and oral communication, survey items of particular relevance to Morgan's assessment included acquiring a broad general education, thinking critically and analytically, analyzing quantitative problems, using computing and information technology, and solving complex real world problems.

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

College of the Atlantic (COA)

College of the Atlantic was founded in the late 1960's to incorporate the concepts of human ecology into a traditional liberal arts curriculum. COA prepares students "…to practically apply their learning to improve prospects for a sustainable, peaceful, and just society." In an action-oriented environment, students are self-directed and participate in the construction of their own academic programs. Coursework is interdisciplinary and experiential. There are no academic departments, faculty are non-ranked, and all members of the campus communityare encouraged to become involved in the institution's governance. It is in this spirit of participatory governance that COA prepared it NEASC self-study for re-affirmation.

For NEASC Standard Four – Academic Program, overall participation in the survey and student responses on selected NSSE items provided evidence of an effective institutional assessment strategy and successful program of academic advising. In particular, items relating to making

a class presentation, interacting with peers from different backgrounds, participating in co-curricular activities, and writing multiple drafts of papers were used for assessment. In addition, qualitative and quantitative evidence - NSSE results and increased retention rates, particularly from the first- to second-year of study - were used to demonstrate a successful approach to academic advising.

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)

Washington State University (WSU)

To support its 2009 Self-Study prepared for theNWCCU, WSU used NSSE scores over multiple years to show evidence of the impact of several programs initiated to improve student engagement and learning. These programs included:

- A first-year living-learning community titled "Freshmen Focus"

- Integrated residence hall programming and co-curricular activities

- Implementation of a new foreign language requirement for the Honors program as well as an elective for general education studies

- Residence hall tutoring services

- Increased emphasis on experiential learning

To further support first-year initiatives and improve NSSE benchmarks scores on student-faculty interaction and active and collaborative learning, WSU offered faculty curriculum improvement grants.

"Preliminary data from the 2008 NSSE indicates that the pilot projects introduced in 2005-07 have begun to impact the student experience." Built into WSU's new strategic plan for 2008-2013 are goals to enhance the student

experience and build deep learning experiences into curriculum at all levels.

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 and Assessment Working Group.

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)

Centenary College of Louisiana

Centenary College of Louisiana states its mission is "to enhance [students'] self-knowledge and social awareness through career and graduate school preparation, intercultural engagement, and civic involvement." To accomplish this, the institution focuses on experiential learning. The process of developing its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in support of reaffirmation by SACS, offered Centenary the opportunity to further increase its emphasis on experienced-based curriculum, particularly in a global framework. The QEP is titled *C4: A Quality Enhancement Plan of Experiential Learning*, where the four C's are "Centenary, Career, Culture, and Community." The QEP expands on the institution's strategic plan, and focuses on three goals:

1. Nurture for the entire campus community a rich intellectual atmosphere and personalized, distinctive experiences through innovative curricular, interactions between students and faculty, interdisciplinary studies, internships, and intercultural opportunities.

2. Strengthen the campus community and enrich its

social atmosphere, specifically by invigorating service-learning with enhanced curricular and co-curricular opportunities that increase our larger community connections.

3. Enroll and graduate students who seek a vibrant college experience that will afford them superior preparation for career and citizenship in the real world. (QEP, p. 6)

NSSE results will provide indirect measures to assess C4 progress on the following survey items:

- 1k. Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course

- 1o. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor

- 1s. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)

- 7d. Work on research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.

Georgia State University (GSU)

NSSE results regarding educational gains in acquiring work-related knowledge and critical thinking skills informed the focus of the GSU QEP.

As part of the QEP, *Critical Thinking Through Writing* (CTW), GSU implemented a new graduation requirement – students must pass two CTW courses. The CTW initiative is nested within academic departments where faculty members serve as CTW ambassadors and train instructors in CTW classes. The QEP will use direct assessments including departmental annual reports of student learning outcomes by major, surveys of instructors and students, written reports from CTW faculty ambassadors, as well as indirect assessments such as NSSE results and senior exit surveys.

NSSE items related to academic and intellectual experiences (asking questions in class, applying ideas and theories, etc.), critical thinking and writing skills, and acquisition of job-related skills will play an important role in assessing CTW progress.

Furthermore, NSSE results have been the impetus for departments to implement capstone or "culminating senior experiences." GSU anticipates that the numbers of students participating in these projects will improve over time.

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.

The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)

The University of Texas at Arlington used NSSE (and cor-responding 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, Uni-versity-wide intervention in the classroom would enhance students' ability to make better use of current active learn-ing 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:

- Who are our students?

- What is the lived experience of a first-year student on our campus?

- 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 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)

California State University Sacramento

In its Educational Effectiveness Review, submitted in January 2009 to WASC as part of the reaccreditation process, CSUS used its NSSE results to support Criterion 2.10 under Standard 2.C, "Regardless of mode of program delivery, the institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students and assesses their needs, experiences, and levels of satisfaction. This information is used to help shape a learning-centered environment and to actively promote student success." NSSE results along with data gathered from student and alumni surveys, assessment surveys, and the learning skills and honors programs were used as evidence that the University gathers information about student needs, experiences, and satisfaction on a regular basis and uses this information for institutional planning and review.

In addition, executive summaries, respondent characteristics, and mappings of CSUS's NSSE results from 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2008 to WASC standards are displayed on its institutional Web site, www.csus.edu/oir/Reports/NSSE/NSSE.html.

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: (a) academic excellence, (b) diversity, and (c) 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.

Mills College

Mills College used results from its participation in NSSE 2008 in its WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review Report. On WASC Standard One, Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives, a newly approved strategic plan helped Mills align its mission with focus on enhancing "the multicultural learning community, and developing programs that emphasize interdisciplinary and interactive learning, social justice, leadership skills, and global diversity" (p. 4). Mills detailed the use of NSSE responses of first-year and senior students on the levels of academic challenge, faculty support, and collaborative learning as part of its evidence in support of Criteria for Review (CFR) 1.2 - the institution "develops indicators for the achievement of its purposes and educational objectives at the institutional, program, and course levels" and "has a system of measuring student achievement, in terms of retention, completion, and student learning."

Historically, Mills has placed major emphasis on faculty pedagogy and scholarship. Over the past five years, full-time faculty members have reported a significant decrease in the amount of their reliance on lecturing in favor of actively involving students in the learning process. To support WASC Standard Two, Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions, NSSE results on items related to active and collaborative learning were used to show that Mills students compare well against comparison groups and the entire NSSE cohort.

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 reaccreditation 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 be used to demonstrate institutional 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**.

Standards in effect January 2010
The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2010 Edition.
NSSE update March 2010