

## Learning from NSSE: An Approach to Assessing and Improving the First-Year Experience

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July 2003



## NSSE as a Tool for Assessment

- Research-based
- User Friendly
- Comparative Data
- Guide for improvement and accountability efforts

## Assertion

We all want the same thing—an educational experience that results in high levels of learning and personal development for all students.

## Advance Organizer

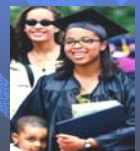
What *kinds* of evidence about student learning and institutional effectiveness are compelling and useful for improving undergraduate education?

## The Challenge

There's too much at stake to assume students are doing the things that lead to high levels of learning and personal development.

## One Promising Response

- To consistently use effective educational practices throughout the institution



## Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

(Chickering & Gamson, 1987)

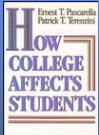
- Student-faculty contact
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Time on task
- High expectations
- Respect for diverse learning styles
- Cooperation among students



## Lessons from the Research

- What matters most to desired outcomes is what students *do*, not who they are
- A key factor for student learning is the *quality of effort* students devote to educationally purposeful activities

## What Really Matters in College: Student Engagement



“The research is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not so involved.”

*Ernest T. Pascarella & Patrick T. Terenzini, How College Affects Students*

## Lessons from the Research

- What matters most is what students do, not who they are
- A key factor is the quality of effort students expend
- Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities

## Two Components of Student Engagement

- What students do -- time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities
- What institutions do -- using effective educational practices to induce students to do the right things

## Evidence of Student Engagement

- To what extent are students engaged in effective educational practices?





# National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report



## National Survey of Student Engagement *(pronounced "nessie")*



National Survey of Student Engagement  
The College Student Report

## Community College Survey of Student Engagement *(pronounced "sessie")*



College student surveys that assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development

NSSE's core activities:

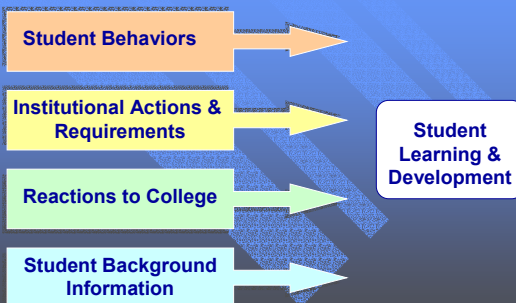


## NSSE Project Scope

- 400,000 students from 730 different schools
- 58% of 4-yr undergraduate FTE
- 50 states, Puerto Rico
- 50+ institutional consortia



## The College Student Report



## NSSE Survey Administration

- Third Party Administration
- During Spring Semester
- Random Sample of First-year & Senior Students
- Paper, Web or Mixed, Version



## NSSE

**10** In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? Mark your answers in the boxes. Examples:  or

|  | Very often<br>▼          | Often<br>▼               | Some-<br>times<br>▼      | Never<br>▼               |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Made a class presentation   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

www.iub.edu/~nsse

## NSSE

**9** About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

| # of hours per week | a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities) | b. Working for pay on campus | c. Working for pay off campus |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 0                   | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 1-5                 | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 6-10                | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 11-15               | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 16-20               | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 21-25               | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| 26-30               | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| More than 30        | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>      |

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## NSSE

**11** To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

|   | Very much<br>▼           | Quite a bit<br>▼         | Some<br>▼                | Very little<br>▼         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Acquiring a broad general education                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Writing clearly and effectively                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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## Institutional Report

- Overview
- Institutional data
- Means & frequencies
- 1st year students, seniors
- Comparisons by Carnegie, national
- National benchmarks

## Mean Summary Report

## Frequency Distribution Report

## NSSE Benchmarks

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active & Collaborative Learning
- Student Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

## Benchmark Report

## Institutional Engagement Index



## National Survey of Student Engagement The College Student Report

What have we learned so far from NSSE?

How do your first-year students compare?



## Student Engagement Quiz

What percent of full-time students study two hours or more for every hour in class?

(a) 14% (b) 20% (c) 31% (d) 39% (e) 49%

a. 14%

## Student Engagement Quiz

What percent of first-year students *never* discuss ideas outside of class with a faculty member?

(a) 14% (b) 19% (c) 30% (d) 35% (e) 42%

e. 42%

## Student Engagement Quiz

True or false?

Seniors report more experiences with diversity during the current academic year than do first-year students.

False

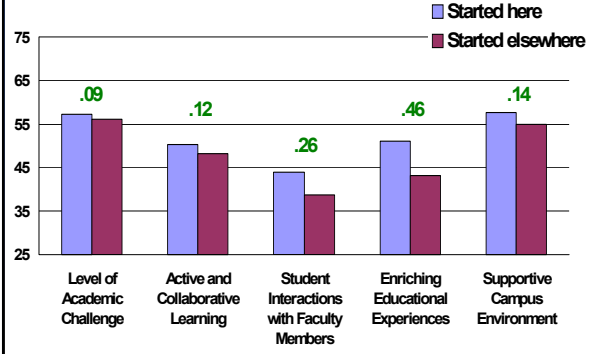
## Student Engagement Quiz

True or false?

Transfer students are generally more engaged overall than native students.

False

### Senior Transfer Status and Effect Size on NSSE Benchmarks



### Transfer shock?!?

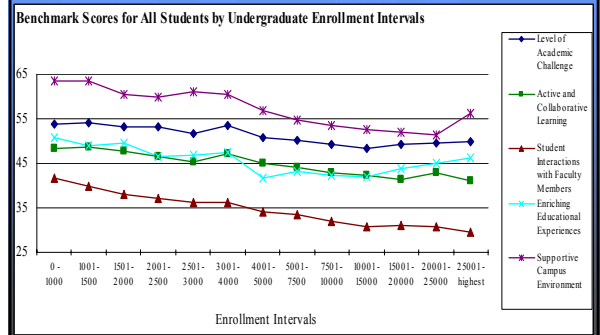


### Or transfer daze/malaise?!?

Academic reputation is *not* related to:

- active & collaborative learning
- student-faculty interaction
- supportive campus environment

### Benchmark Scores for All Students by Undergraduate Enrollment

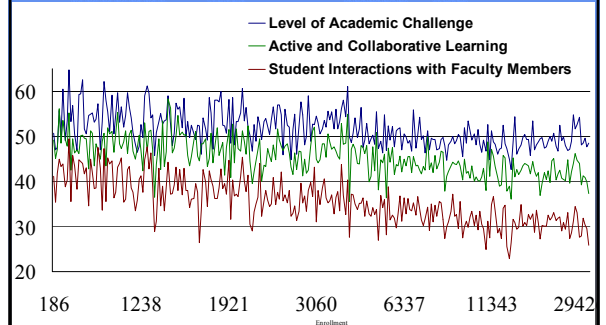


Does institutional size matter to engagement?

**Yes**, size matters.

Smaller is generally better.

### Academic Challenge, Active Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction by Enrollment



Student engagement varies more within than between institutions.



## Educationally Enriching Activities

|   | 1 <sup>st</sup> Year (%) | Senior (%)   |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Educationally Enriching Activities</b> | <b>Nat'l</b>             | <b>Nat'l</b> |
| Community service/volunteer work          | 71                       | 63           |
| Practicum, internship, field exp., etc    | 80                       | 72           |
| Work on Research Project with Faculty     | 27                       | 25           |
| Foreign language                          | 48                       | 42           |
| Study abroad                              | 37                       | 18           |
| Participate in learning community         | 30                       | 23           |

## Who's more engaged?

- Women
- Full-time students
- Students who live on campus
- Fraternity & sorority members
- Learning community students
- Students with diversity experiences

## Who Is Most Likely to Experience Diversity?

|                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>More</u>              | <u>Less</u>             |
| Students of color        | White students          |
| Traditional-age students | Older students          |
| Women                    | Men                     |
| First-year students      | Upper-division students |



How has NSSE data been used for improvement and accountability efforts?



## Assessment Purposes

- Accountability
- Improvement



## Types of Measures

- **Outcomes measures**
  - Evidence of what students have learned or can do
- **Process Measures**
  - Evidence of effective educational activity by students and institutions

## How Schools and Stakeholders are Using NSSE Results

- NSSE results point to things institutions can do something about – almost immediately
- NSSE provides a lexicon for talking about collegiate quality in an understandable, meaningful way



## Audiences

- College and University Administrators
- Faculty members
- Governing Boards
- External Authorities (accreditors, government agencies)
- Current and prospective students
- College advisors
- Institutional researchers
- Higher education scholars

## Communicating Results INTERNAL

| NSSE Schools Sharing NSSE 2001 Results | %  |
|--|----|
| President                              | 90 |
| Administrative Staff                   | 84 |
| Faculty                                | 72 |
| Department Chairs                      | 65 |
| Academic Advisors                      | 49 |
| Governing Board                        | 33 |
| Students                               | 33 |
| Other (web site, fact book, etc.)      | 26 |

## Communicating Results EXTERNAL

| NSSE Schools Sharing NSSE 2001 Results | %  |
|--|----|
| Accreditation Agencies                 | 28 |
| Media                                  | 18 |
| Prospective Students                   | 17 |
| Alumni                                 | 16 |
| Parents                                | 12 |
| Other                                  | 12 |
| Have Not Shared with External Groups   | 47 |

## Using NSSE Data

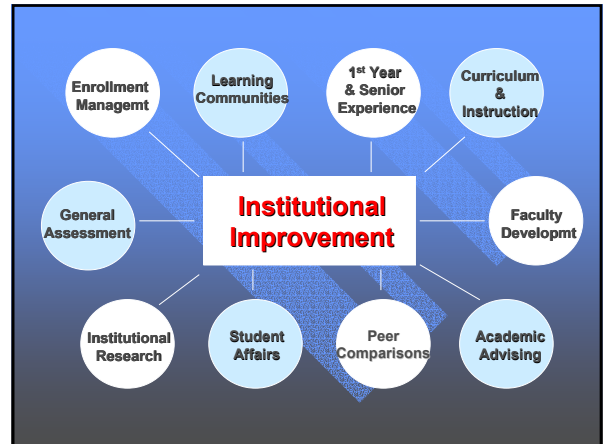
- Discover current levels of engagement (institution, major field, year in school)
- Determine if current levels are satisfactory (criterion reference, normative or peer comparison)
- Target areas for improvement
- Modify programs and policies accordingly
- Teach students what is required to "succeed"
- Monitor student and institutional performance



## Benchmarking

Two Approaches:

- Normative - compares your students' responses to those of students at other colleges and universities.
- Criterion - compares your school's performance against a predetermined value or level appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth.



*“NSSE is a great way to stimulate reflection and debate about what we do more and less well, and why. For us it’s proving an exciting and enlivening tool for self-reflection and self-improvement.”*

- Michael McPherson, President,  
Macalaster College

## Institutional Improvement Examples

**Concern:** level of student interaction with faculty members

The University of Richmond designed strategies to increase first-year student involvement in research projects and has expand opportunities for students to serve on institutional committees

## Institutional Improvement Examples

**Concern:** level of active and collaborative learning among first year students

The University of the South used data to inform the development of their First Year Program and as an assessment measure for a grant

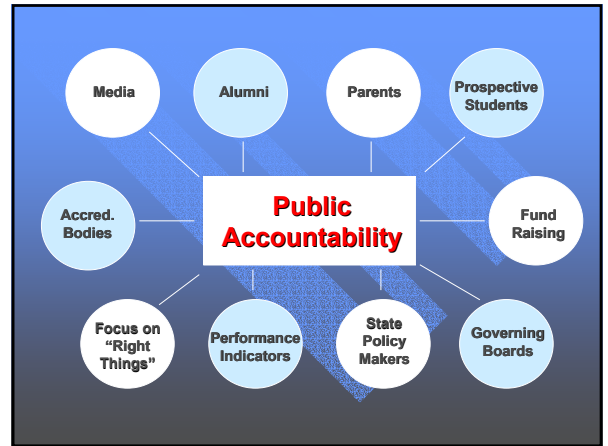
## Institutional Improvement Examples

**Concern:** level of active and collaborative learning and small seminar experiences for first-year students

University of Michigan established a first-year seminar experience that is intellectually stimulating, interactive, and provides students the opportunity to connect with a faculty member

## Other Reported Uses

- Assessing impact of learning communities
- Communicating norms for first-year students during Orientation
- Sharing NSSE data with academic advisors so they can help students better manage their time and use academic resources
- Organizing campus symposia around the topic of student engagement



## How have you used NSSE data?



## Lessons Learned: Principles for Data-Driven Learning-Centered Change

### 1. Get the ideas right

- Focus on a real problem (e.g., persistence, raising expectations, success in major field courses)
- Concentrate on effective educational practices

### Characteristics of Educationally Effective Colleges

- Organizational Culture that values - High expectations, respect for diverse talents, emphasis on early years of study
- Curriculum - Coherence in learning, synthesizing experiences, ongoing practice of learned skills, integrating education and experience
- Instruction - Active learning, assessment and prompt feedback, collaboration, adequate time on task, out-of-class contact with faculty

## Project DEEP

To discover, document and describe what high performing institutions do and how they achieved this level of effectiveness.



## DEEP Selection Criteria

- A. Higher-than-predicted graduation rates
- B. Higher-than-predicted student engagement scores

## Project DEEP

### Doctoral Extensives

University of Kansas  
University of Michigan

### Doctoral Intensives

George Mason University  
Miami University (Ohio)  
University of Texas El Paso

### Master's Granting

Fayetteville State University  
Gonzaga University  
Longwood University

### Liberal Arts

California State, Monterey Bay  
Macalester College  
Sweet Briar College  
The Evergreen State College  
University of the South  
Ursinus College  
Wabash College  
Wheaton College (MA)  
Wofford College

### Baccalaureate General

Alverno College  
University of Maine at Farmington  
Winston-Salem State University

## Academic Challenge

- Cal State Monterey Bay adopted an asset model (contrasted with a deficit model) to guide policy and pedagogical practices. First-year ProSeminars emphasize writing. Assessment of student learning is extensive, and deeply imbedded in the campus culture.

## Active & Collaborative Learning

- University of Texas at El Paso uses learning communities and course-based service learning and volunteerism to actively engage its mostly commuter, first-generation students.

## Active & Collaborative Learning

- U of Maine at Farmington teaches students how to “do” active and collaborative learning using service learning, portfolios, web-enhanced activities. The “Summer Experience” attracts 20% of new students to the weeklong discussion-oriented seminar before fall classes.

## Active & Collaborative Learning

- Ursinus College's Common Intellectual Experience (CIE) is a two-semester course for first year students. Common readings and the "Uncommon Hour" provides opportunities for students to have a shared intellectual experience outside the classroom that complements class activities.

## Student-Faculty Interaction

- Longwood University students have the same faculty member as their advisor for all four years. The assumption is that "If you are not in your office with the door open, people wonder if something is wrong with you..."

## Student-Faculty Interaction

- Elizabeth City State University requires first-year students to meet with their advisor six times a semester, and immediately after mid-term grade reports either to celebrate good progress or discuss ways to improve.

## Enriching Experiences

- Diversity at George Mason University is deeply rooted, and intentionally woven into the curriculum, especially at New Century College. Through the STAR Center and other venues students are encouraged to use technology to enrich learning.

## Supportive Environment

At Fayetteville State University all first- and second-year students are assigned to University College, which is designed as a transitional bridge. "Failure is not an option here..."

## Characteristics of Educationally Effective Institutions

Take a look at the NSSE benchmark items.

How are these items reflected in your institution?

## A Challenge:

“I know what works. What I don't know is how to get people here to do those things.” (College President)

## 2. Get grass roots buy-in

- Leaders endorse, but don't dictate
- Structures not (nearly) as important as relationships
- Validate pockets of quality

## 2. Get grass roots buy-in

### Examples

- ✓ Ask deans about their concerns
- ✓ Focus groups
- ✓ Get students “engaged” in the improvement effort (Illinois State, Oregon State)
- ✓ Ask: “What surprised you?”
- ✓ Faculty version of NSSE survey

## Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)

### 2003 Field Test

- 147 schools
- 16,000 faculty respondents

[www.iub.edu/~nsse/html/fsse](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse/html/fsse)

## FSSE

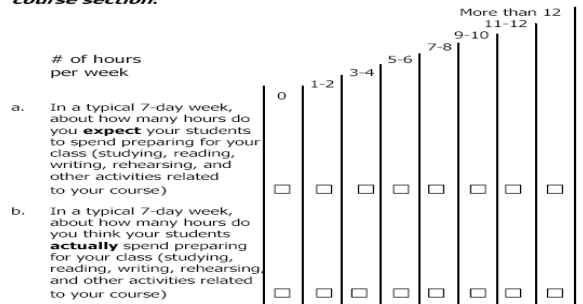
### 5 About what percent of students in your selected course section do the following?

|   | None                     | 1-24%                    | 25-49%                   | 50-74%                   | 75% or Higher            |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Frequently ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Discuss grades or assignments with you                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Discuss ideas from readings or classes with you outside of class     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Work harder than they usually do to meet your standards              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

[www.iub.edu/~nsse](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse)

## FSSE

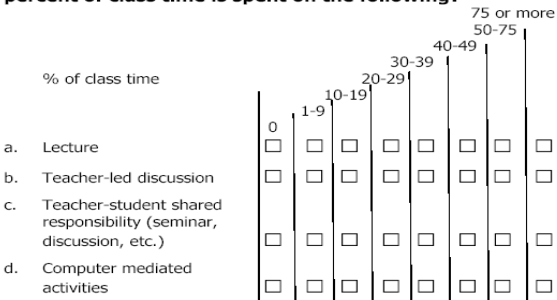
### 9 Time students spend preparing for your selected course section:



[www.iub.edu/~nsse](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse)

## FSSE

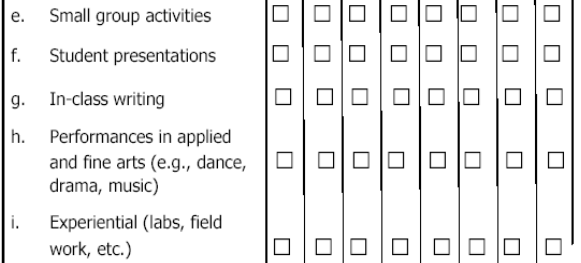
**11** In your selected course section, on average, what percent of class time is spent on the following?



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## FSSE

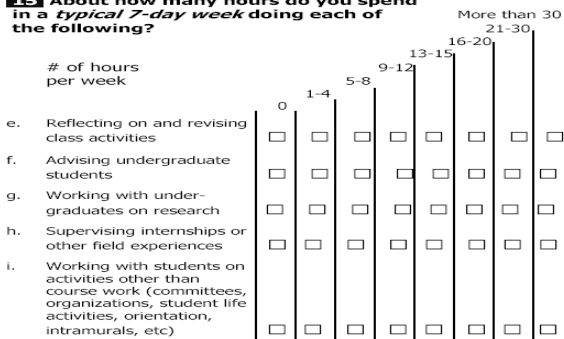
**11** In your selected course section, on average, what percent of class time is spent on the following?



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## FSSE

**15** About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?



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## Percent responding "often" or "very often"

|   | 1 <sup>st</sup> year student | Lower division faculty | Seniors | Upper division faculty |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Work with other students on projects during class | 59%                          | 47%                    | 71%     | 58%                    |
| Receive prompt feedback                           | 54%                          | 92%                    | 64%     | 92%                    |

## Percent responding "quite a bit" or "very much"

|                                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> year student | Lower division faculty | Seniors | Upper division faculty |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Coursework emphasizes memorizing   | 70%                          | 30%                    | 60%     | 21%                    |
| Coursework emphasizes synthesizing | 64%                          | 76%                    | 72%     | 86%                    |

## % Students Responding at Least "Sometimes" and % Faculty Reporting Less than Half of their Students

|                          | 1 <sup>st</sup> year students | Lower division faculty | Seniors | Upper division faculty |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Asked questions in class | 97%                           | 66%                    | 98%     | 50%                    |
| Came to class unprepared | 82%                           | 64%                    | 84%     | 73%                    |

## Faculty Development: Using NSSE to Enhance the 1<sup>st</sup> Year Experience

Which activity listed in question #1 if increased would lead to greatest learning and development for 1<sup>st</sup> year students?

Ideas, Strategies,  
and Approaches  
to Increase Most  
Valued  
Benchmark?



## Student Engagement Tips

- From Robert Smallwood, AVPAA at SWTSU
- <http://www.assessment.swt.edu/> and then “NSSE at SWT”

## 3. Think and act systemically

- Link innovations and change efforts from different parts of the campus (e.g., Greater Expectations, Gen Ed reform, SOTL, NSSE, service learning, diversity)
- Link different sources of data
- Work across units with common improvement agendas

## Where To Look

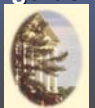
- ❖ Southwest Texas State U.
- ❖ University of Akron
- ❖ Oregon State University
- ❖ CC of Denver
- ❖ Juniata College
- ❖ Radford University
- ❖ Truman State University
- ❖ Indiana University
- ❖ University of Montana

## The Effective Educational Practices Agenda

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- The NSSE Institute
- Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP)
- Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS)

## Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS)

- 5-year project funded by Lumina Foundation for Education
- AAHE & NSSE Partnership
- Alliance for Equity in Higher Education institutions
- Using student engagement data to guide change initiatives
- Provides resources for improvement initiatives





**National Survey of  
Student Engagement**  
The College Student Report



## **Questions & Discussion**

For more information:

NSSE web site  
[www.iub.edu/~nsse](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse)