

## **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2005**

1. The data collected addresses information relating to what university group or situation?

The survey, applied to first-year and senior students, addresses student experiences at the university. The results are compared first-year to seniors for signs of improvement in five targeted areas: 1) level of academic challenge, 2) student interaction with faculty, 3) active and collaborative learning, 4) enriching educational experiences, and 5) supportive campus environment. The results are also compared to other Doctoral-Intensive institutions.

2. How often is this tool used and analyzed? What time of year?

UND has applied NSSE three times: 2000, 2003 & 2005.

3. To whom does the assessment group believe that an analysis of this report would be beneficial? In other words, what individuals, departments, or programs need this information in order to have reliable information to 'close the loop' on their assessment process?

The information from NSSE results might be useful to a number of offices, committees and colleges, departments & programs around the university. Our committee's discussion on October 24 indicated that campus groups, such as Enrollment Services, who would be interested in the NSSE results already receive copies of the report. I am not sure how the university assessment committee would determine who needs the report or summaries of our discussions/ findings.

NSSE may be useful as a secondary assessment tool to compare to other tools. As a primary tool, I find it lacking on two levels. First, the NSSE data are indirect measures of student learning and perception of student experiences. NSSE constructs the measures, with the goal of cross-institutional comparisons, leaving UND limited opportunities to specify goals, although we could include our own questions. Thus, measures tend to be very general, some might say vague. For example, the questionnaire asks respondents the extent to which UND contributed to writing clearly and effectively, speaking clearly and effectively, and thinking critically and analytically.

Such vague measures might still be of some value to assess UND changes over time. Even poor measures can give us indications of time trends. However, as noted in my report of NSSE 2003, the sample size of previous NSSE applications was so small that drawing inferences and comparisons from the 2000 or 2003 applications would be dubious.

The 2005 NSSE survey has a stronger sample size than previous applications. The total sample size is 803 (400 FY and 403 SR) with a 34 percent overall response rate. The report indicates that at the 95% confidence interval, we should read the figures with a +/- 3.1% margin of error for the total sample, +/-4.5% for FY and +/-4.2% SR. However, we still confront unacceptably low sample numbers when we disaggregate the sample according to academic colleges (types classified by NSSE). For example, there are 136 "business" students in the sample, on which primary or secondary assessment cannot be based. The numbers become even smaller when we locate respondent's majors. Thus, the NSSE report is of limited and questionable value to colleges, programs and departments, and increasing sample size to fit this purpose would likely increase costs to an unacceptable level.

4. Who is responsible to provide the assessment group the information for this report?

Office of Institutional Research

5. What UND student learning goals are being assessed?

NSSE includes questions on communication skills (written & oral), critical thinking, learning effectively and understanding people of other backgrounds. These questions are consistent with UND student learning goals. Other NSSE questions establish context, satisfaction, and future goals from which to evaluate student perceived experiences at UND, and perhaps we might link these to student learning goals.

6. What evidence is provided or should be provided to support the group's findings?

The data presentation is well-done. It provides all frequencies and some cross-tabulated figures. If we were interested in identifying contextual associations to student learning goals, some form of multiple regression analysis might be employed.

7. What evidence does the assessment group believe should be collected/compiled for the focused visit or the next accreditation visit?

The indirect measures of student learning would serve as a good backdrop for the presentation of other (direct) measures. Given the sample size, we could not infer performance measures on a program or department level.

8. Is this tool a direct measure, an indirect measure, or a non-measure of student learning?

NSSE includes some indirect measures, and some indicators that are not useful for evaluating student learning (for example, "understanding themselves").

9. Does this tool empower individuals or the university to better understand and assess student learning at the university? If so, how?

NSSE includes some indirect measures of student learning. In conjunction with other measures, this may further confirm or challenge other findings from other tools. With adequate sample sizes in the future, time trends might be discerned as well.

10. Is there a better way to obtain or report the data to be analyzed?

The specific questions (for example, "worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources") seem rather generic to me. I suspect these types of questions are asked at the program/department level in many cases with more specificity. In the ideal world, we would have a larger sample size that would allow for program and departmental inferences from NSSE, and results would be distributed to and compared by programs and departments to their own figures. These comparisons could be compared within the context of regular reporting, such as annual reports. As it stands, the committee can use this as a secondary tool to compare to more specific measures provided by departments.

11. At what level of assessment is the tool being used; beginning level, making progress level, or maturing stage of continuous improvement? Is there any evidence to support the assessment group's deduction?

I do not believe NSSE is a useful tool for the beginning level because the measures are too vague and the sample cannot be disaggregated. I would not be comfortable using NSSE as a benchmark to evaluate student learning or other goals against other assessment tools. It is more useful as a comparison to other assessment tools. Consistent results strengthen the assessment process, yet inconsistent results would not necessarily deny the findings of other assessment tools due to the vague nature of NSSE measures. I would be more inclined to accept counter findings from direct measures of student learning, than challenge these with NSSE findings if differences were observed.

12. Does the tool reflect a culture of assessment at UND?

UND's commitment to apply NSSE is minimal (small financial outlay). In conjunction with direct assessment tools and reports drawing on NSSE and other tools, it does reflect an additional avenue of assessment and in this way supports a conclusion about a positive culture of assessment. Without other, more direct assessment tools, it may imply a cheap, half-hearted attempt to go-through-the-motions of assessment to satisfy outside interested parties.

13. Does the tool need increased university or administrative support or faculty involvement in order to make it more useable or effective?

No, I do not believe increased support is necessary.

14. Does the assessment group need any administrative insight or guidance in order to analyze the tool effectively?

I do not believe so.

15. What value does the group place on this tool for helping to achieve the university's assessment plan?

As stated above, it can be useful as a secondary tool.

16. What are the findings of the assessment of this assessment tool?

The committee should discuss the expectations of student learning and specify other specific goals within our portfolio. NSSE provides indirect measures of assessment based on student perceptions toward rather vague concepts. For example, NSSE 2005 finds that 81 % of FY and 85% of SR students believe UND contributes to their abilities to "think critically and analytically." First, it is unclear if this is an indirect measure of student learning, or if it is student perceptions of what they think a university should provide (i.e. reaffirming the goal not a result). Secondly, given the ambiguity of a term like "critical thinking," it is unclear what students perceive in any specific sense. Thirdly, without a stated expectation or standard at the university level, it is difficult to determine if this is an acceptable or unacceptable rate if we assume the quality of the measure is good. Fourthly, and in the same vein, without an expectation or standard on progress, it is also difficult to ascertain whether this is an acceptable or unacceptable difference. Lastly, given that each sub-group has a +/- 4 percent margin of error, the figures are too close to tell whether any difference exists between the groups. Statistically speaking, the

figures could indicate that 85% of FY agreed and 80% of SR agreed, or that 76% of FY agreed and 89% of SR agreed. Other results are not as ambiguous in this respect, but without a predetermined statement of expectations or standards at the university level, we are forced to consider these figures in a post facto way which does little to advance assessment. Our goals should first be clearly spelled out before we try to make sense of the NSSE results.

#### 17. Review Summary

NSSE is an indirect tool of assessment. Some questions relate well to UND student learning goals while others are not as clear-cut. NSSE's sample size limits the inferences that can be drawn on the college or department/program level. Moreover, without predetermined university standards, it is difficult to interpret the results.

#### 18. Recommendations of the Reviewers

If the committee deems this a worthwhile secondary assessment tool, expectations should be recorded through a committee decision. Also, the committee should continue to press for a larger sample size or make efforts to increase the response rates.

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