

Review of data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2007 Results

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

The NSSE collects data relevant to virtually everyone on campus, since it generates information about students' academic engagement and college experiences.

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

The University of Indiana (which hosts the NSSE) administers the test yearly and UND participates every other year. First year and senior students are sampled. Data about UND students are reported back to campus, along with benchmark data from comparable institutions.

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?

NSSE findings are primarily at the institutional level rather than at the level of colleges or departments, so the data should inform institutional policy. Vice presidents and deans should be highly interested in the findings and should make time for discussion.

However, since the data are directly relevant to students' academic engagement and other factors linked to student learning and development, faculty and administrators (e.g., directors, coordinators) should also be interested. In fact, these people "in the trenches" should be enlisted to help push for greater campus-wide conversation about findings.

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

The Office of Institutional Research prepares and disseminates the internal report.

5. What UND student learning goals are being addressed?

a. Institutional and General Education goals?

Critical thinking, written and oral communication skills, quantitative reasoning, and life-long learning/citizenship are all addressed via this tool.

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

Findings from the NSSE should be examined using other tools as well in order to drill down and determine where opportunities for improvement exist. E.g., in the areas where UND students experience shortcomings as compared to the experiences of students elsewhere, are those deficiencies within the general education program (now transitioning to a new system) or within early classes in the major? Are the problems created by class size, by lack of innovative teaching strategies, or by student expectations (e.g., if our students disproportionately arrive on campus coming from very small schools, where

opportunities are different)? What options exist for generating improvement in some of these practices? Various offices and programs should generate additional data as relevant to their own specific missions.

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

This is not about preparing for the focused visit or about accreditation – it's about being more responsible to our students (and about helping them understand how to be more responsible for themselves, where appropriate).

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

The NSSE is an indirect measure of student learning.

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

Although not direct evidence, the NSSE is a highly regarded instrument that generates data about issues that are demonstrably linked to student learning and development.

Therefore, the NSSE does empower the institution to more fully understand student learning by understanding the degree to which students see themselves as engaged in activities that might be described as “best practices” in teaching and learning.

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

No. The NSSE is well regarded and we should continue to participate.

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?

This is a “maturing stage of continuous improvement” in that we now have several years of data for comparison and the NSSE itself is a highly regarded, highly useful instrument that aligns well with important institutional priorities.

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

The fact that we participate in the NSSE does reflect a culture of assessment. However, the fact that most faculty and others who might be interested in the findings are unaware of the instrument or its value does not reflect such a culture. This is an important tool and there should probably be an article about findings in a faculty-friendly venue like “On Teaching.”

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

The tool needs increased visibility among faculty and staff generally. At the administrative level, people are more aware of the NSSE and its usefulness. One area in which administrators might be helpful is in building support among students for the survey. UND has a response rate slightly behind that of our peers, which means that our

data has a greater degree of potential error. Our first year students respond at a high level, but seniors respond poorly – and yet data from seniors should be highly useful.

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

Analyses provided through the University of Indiana and UND's Office of Institutional Research are sufficient.

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

This tool has long-term value in the assessment plan and should be retained.

16. What are the assessment findings of this tool?

There are several significant dimensions on which UND students are significantly less engaged than peers at Doctoral Intensive institutions (in fact, this is the pattern on 19 of 22 categories for UND seniors). Further, UND students report more emphasis on memorization and less on analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation than do peers at similar institutions. This is highly disturbing and should be a topic for campus-wide discussion.

Reported contribution of the institution to "personal growth" (especially in soft skills like "working effectively with others" or "understanding people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds") is also behind that of students at similar institutions. UND students report institutional contribution to general education skills like "speaking clearly and effectively" and "thinking critically and analytically" at a level similar to students at peer institutions.

UND students do appear to engage in more writing than peers elsewhere, particularly writing of short papers. Students report that they spend more time socializing and relaxing than do students at comparable institutions, which suggests that faculty can reasonably ask more of students, generally, if they believe it to be necessary for their learning.

17. Are there any findings which may be of potential interest to other parties on campus? Who should be encouraged to access these findings?

Faculty generally should be involved in discussion of these findings, which should influence their thinking about pedagogy.

18. Review Summary

The National Survey of Student Engagement is a highly useful survey tool which generates student perception data and benchmarks the data against other similar institutions – creating a highly useful database of information about how UND students experience the education they receive at UND. The activities focused on within this tool are those that are known (via research) to be highly linked with successful learning, and perceptions regarding these activities are therefore quite useful. Readers learn, for example, how UND students (compared with students at similar institutions) perceive

themselves to have been influenced as critical thinkers, as writers and speakers, as quantitative reasoners. The study shows the degree to which students have participated in various activities, both class-based (like group projects, writing papers) and institutional (like study abroad, volunteering, internships) that are known to increase engagement and enhance learning. Although the data are not broken down by college or department, they do reflect perceptions of both first-year and senior students, and what they report is highly significant for anyone who cares about the quality of UND as an institution. The NSSE allows early identification of problems and analysis of potentially disturbing trends (e.g., via comparison of first-year and senior data, or by longitudinal comparison of UND's data) as well as comparison with similar institutions elsewhere. This is a key tool which should be widely read and discussed on campus, and all faculty who teach in the undergraduate program, as well as staff having interactions with student activities, should be engaged in discussion of the findings.

19. Recommendations of the reviewers

Discuss options for generating greater institution-wide awareness of findings.