

OIR Assessment Tool
National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) 2013
November 2013

Purpose of Survey:

The purpose of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) is to measure the extent to which students engage in practices understood to be effectively linked with learning outcomes, personal development, student satisfaction, and graduation.

It is noted by the committee that the NSSE instrument that was administered in spring 2013 is significantly different compared to previous years.

1. The data collected addresses information relating to what university group or situation? (i.e., from whom is the university collecting this information? Whose perceptions are we reading?)

Data are collected from first year and senior undergraduate students at the University of North Dakota. In spring 2013, 2,728 first-year (FY) students and 3,076 senior (SR) students were invited to participate in NSSE at UND. 446 FY students and 655 SR students responded to the survey, for a response rate of 19%. [excerpted from <http://und.edu/research/institutional-research/surveys/2013-nsse.cfm>]

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

The NSSE is administered every other year in the spring semester.

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?

All members of the university community should be interested in the results. More specifically, individuals in leadership positions, such as Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Assistant Vice Presidents, Deans, and Department Heads would find the information in the NSSE report to be beneficial. Those in professional positions that oversee first-year programs and offices within the Division of Student Affairs may find the NSSE information particularly useful.

4. What UND student learning goals are assessed?

- a. Use Y, N, to indicate whether the instrument collects data relevant to each of the following Institutional and/or Essential Studies goals:

 Y 1 Communication – written or oral (“able to write and speak in various settings with a sense of purpose/audience”)

 Y 2 Thinking and reasoning – critical thinking (or “be intellectually curious”; analyze, synthesize, evaluate)

 Y 3 Thinking and reasoning – creative thinking (or “be intellectually creative”; explore, discover, engage)

 Y 4 Thinking and reasoning – quantitative reasoning (“apply empirical data...analyze graphical information”)

 Y 5 Information literacy (“be able to access and evaluate...for effective, efficient, and ethical use”)

 Y 6 Diversity (“demonstrate understanding of diversity and use that understanding...”)

 N 7 Lifelong learning (“commit themselves to lifelong learning”)

 Y 8 Service/citizenship (“share responsibility both for their communities and for the world”)

- b. Additional goals

5. What are the findings/results of this tool?

- a. From Question 4a above: For the goals with a Y, describe the relevant findings/results from this survey:

UND students indicated that slightly more than half of their writing assignments involved analyzing or evaluating material that they “read, researched or observed”. They also reported that fewer writing assignments involved arguing a position using evidence and reasoning (42% for first-year students, 39% for seniors). Finally, some assignments required students to “explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data” (20% for first-year students, 31% for seniors).

Measures of transferrable skills that were used in the classroom were reported, which included how frequently students engaged in creative thinking, critical thinking, discussing complex problems, discussing and debating social, political and philosophical issues, discussing ethical issues, delivering speeches, and working in groups with people from different backgrounds. First-year and senior students most often used creative thinking skills and critical thinking skills. Delivering speeches to a group was the least used skill reported by all students (first-year and seniors). In addition, 37% of first-year students indicated that they discussed ethical issues in class.

Outside of the classroom, UND first-year students participated in fewer learning communities, service learning activities, and research with faculty when compared to students at peer institutions. Similarly, UND seniors were not as active in learning communities and they participated in fewer service learning activities, co-ops and internships, and study abroad experiences. However, UND seniors participated more frequently in research with faculty (though not at a statistically significant level) and “culminating senior experiences” than students at peer institutions.

- b. Other findings/results of note for faculty or in reference to student learning

6. Does this tool measure student learning or behaviors associated with student learning? If it measures student learning, does it do so directly or indirectly?

The NSSE is an indirect measure of student learning. The instrument asks students to report how frequently they participate in specific learning activities and how often they use skills that directly correlate to the essential studies goals. In addition, the NSSE provides information about behaviors that are related to student learning.

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

The NSSE provides information that is useful in understanding how frequently students engage in specific skill development. Student behaviors that are related to student learning are also reported. This information has the potential to illuminate how students use their classroom knowledge across courses and in their own personal lives. It also allows for the institution to see the aggregate changes between the first year and the senior year of study; this should allow us to see what differences there are during a timeframe at UND.

8. Are there recommendations for changes (e.g., additional or better tools, different means of analysis, etc.) that might improve the university's ability to use this information?

No recommendations at this time.

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

The NSSE provides an excellent source of data on student engagement and provides us with information related to skill development and behaviors that are key components of the foundation for student learning. Moreover, analysis of NSSE data provides a unique opportunity to determine changes in behaviors between the first year and the senior year of study for each NSSE theme and high-impact practice. This information is particularly helpful because the NSSE themes align with the Essential Studies goals and institutional strategic priorities that are outlined under "Exceptional UND".

10. Review Summary (one or two sentences).

The NSSE measures the extent to which students engage in practices understood to be effectively linked with learning outcomes, personal development, student satisfaction, and graduation. Data collected from first-year and senior students are organized into major themes: academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment. In addition, the frequency with which first-year and senior students engage in "high-impact practices" is reported. Data are also collected on two additional indicators: Development of transferrable skills and experiences with writing.

11. What might faculty want to know about this survey? (Please provide one to two paragraphs describing some findings from this survey. These paragraphs will be forwarded to academic departments as a means of keeping them informed about the existence of information that might be useful to them.)

The NSSE measures the extent to which students engage in practices understood to be effectively linked with learning outcomes, personal development, student satisfaction, and graduation. The instrument was most recently administered in spring 2013. At that time, students at UND did not feel as academically challenged as students did at peer institutions, but the difference was slight. Specific inquiry into skills that were developed and used by UND students revealed that first-year and senior students most often used creative thinking skills and critical thinking skills in class. They also reported that they frequently "reached conclusions based on [their] own analysis of numerical information". Seniors more frequently "used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue" and "combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments". Formally delivering speeches to a group was the least used skill reported by all students (first-years and seniors). Also, students worked collaboratively in informal ways. They asked peers for help in understanding course material and they frequently explained course material to each other. However, they tended not to engage in discussions with individuals of a race or ethnicity different from their own. Seniors also reported fewer instances of having discussions with people of different religious beliefs or economic backgrounds.

Engagement and interactions with faculty were noted by first-year students and seniors, but in different ways. First-year students talked about career plans with a faculty member, yet the quality of their interactions with faculty was low when compared with that which was reported by students at other institutions. The quality of student-faculty interactions increased over time (from the first-year to the senior year). More specifically, UND seniors participated frequently in research with faculty and engaged in significantly more

“culminating senior experiences” than students at peer institutions. As in previous years, UND lagged behind peer institutions in terms of student participation in learning communities and service learning activities.

Overall, UND students felt that the institution provides support for their well-being. Students’ satisfaction with their overall experience at UND is around 85% and the majority of students would re-attend UND if they could start over. However, there is room for improvement. For example, first-year students’ perception is that UND does not emphasize opportunities to attend events that address social, economic, or political issues. Also, students are not frequently encouraged to use learning support services.

12. What results about this survey would students find interesting? *(Please provide a few sentences or bullet points of highlights, written in student-friendly language. This will be posted on the assessment website and distributed to students via other means as well.)*

- ***First year (FY) students at UND spend an average of 14 hours per week preparing for class; seniors spend an average of 16 hours per week.***
- ***In an academic year, first-year students at UND were assigned an average of 41 pages of writing and seniors estimated they were assigned 75 pages.***
- ***A slight majority of UND students (56%) complete a “culminating senior experience”, such as a capstone project, senior thesis or project, comprehensive examination, portfolio, etc. This percentage is significantly more than students at peer institutions.***
- ***UND students do not participate in learning communities, service learning activities, internships, co-ops, or study abroad as much as students at other institutions do. We encourage you to get involved in these types of activities. Make the most of your college experience!***
- ***The majority (85%) of seniors indicated that they would “probably” or “definitely” attend UND if they had to make the choice again.***

13. Should review of this instrument be continued as part of the UAC review cycle? If so, how frequently?

Yes. This instrument should be reviewed by the UAC every other year.

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