Assessing and Strengthening General Education Using NSSE: Lessons from the Field

Jillian Kinzie, Indiana University & NSSE (jkinzie@indiana.edu)
John Burney and Rachel Boon, Drake University (john.burney@drake.edu) and (rachel.boon@drake.edu)
Jessica Jonson, University of Nebraska Lincoln (jjonson@unlnotes.unl.edu)

With a constant focus on liberal education outcomes ...

- across general education and majors, including pre-professional studies
- at progressively more challenging levels of learning from first year through final studies
- using active, hands-on, collaborative, and inquiry-based pedagogies
- framed by milestone and capstone assessments that help students deepen, integrate, and demonstrate their learning
- enhanced by well-designed programs of academic and social support for all students

Considering student engagement and general education assessment...

- NSSE is one tool to measure and monitor general education goals and outcomes and to assess LEAP goals, including success for students from underserved communities
  - How might you use NSSE results to consider students’ experiences in general education?
  - How do you use information to advance LEAP goals?

National Survey of Student Engagement (pronounced “nessie”)

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (pronounced “nessie”)

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

NSSE Review:

- NSSE is administered annually (spring) first-year & senior students at participating colleges and universities
  - Results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college; the extent to which they perceive their institutions support their academic and personal development.
    - Sample items: Frequency of active learning, integrated learning; Participation in learning community, service learning, senior capstone; coursework emphasizing analysis, synthesis, reading and writing.
    - NSSE items represent empirically confirmed 'good practices'; they reflect processes and behaviors associated with desired outcomes of college.

Liberal Education & America’s Promise

- Foster liberal education outcomes in all students, including . . .
- Through challenging studies in . . .
- With a constant focus on liberal education outcomes . . .
- With special attention to access and success

www.nsse.iub.edu
AAC&U General Education Assessment 2009
**NSSE’s Five Indicators of Effective Educational Practice**

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

**NSSE data related to General Education Assessment**

- Educational Gains and Personal Development (item 11)
- Deep Approaches to Learning
  - Higher order thinking (item 2b,c,d,e)
  - Integrated learning (items 1d,e,i,p,t)
  - Reflective learning (items 6d,e,f)
- Writing Items (3c,d,e; 1c, 11c)
- Diversity Experiences (1e,u,v;10c,11l)
- Service-learning (1k, 7b, 11o)
- Collaborative learning (1g,h,j;7c,11h)

**NSSE & Educational and Personal Gains**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Reported Educational and Personal Gains from College</th>
<th>First-Year Students</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring a broad general education</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working effectively with others</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning effectively on your own</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using computing and information technology</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing quantitative problems</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking clearly and effectively</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding yourself</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a personal code of values &amp; ethics</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving complex real-world problems</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the welfare of your community</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a deepened sense of spirituality</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting in local, state, or national elections</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NSSE and Learning Outcomes...**

*Indicators of student learning processes and outcomes: Writing in the First Year*

- To what extent are FY students developing their writing skills?
  - % FY writing papers > 5 pgs.
  - % FY students who prepare 2 or more drafts
  - % FY worked on paper requiring integrating ideas, sources
  - % FY reporting substantial gains in writing effectively

**First-Year Students and Writing at NSSEville State**

**What might these data suggest for First Year Student writing at NSSEville State?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Writing Items</th>
<th>Compared to Select Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58% FY have not written a paper 20pgs. or more</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65% FY have only written between 1-4 “medium” (5-19 pgs) length papers</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% FY students have never prepared 2 or more drafts</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% FY students “often” or “very often” worked on paper requiring integrating ideas, sources</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76% FY reporting “substantial” gains (quite a bit + very much) in writing effectively</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing and Strengthening General Education Using NSSE: UNL Lessons – Jessica Jonson, Ph.D., Director of Institutional Assessment

Current State of General Education at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

- Preparing for 2009-2010 implementation of new program
- ACE: Outcomes-based program
  - What should all undergraduate students—irrespective of their majors and career aspirations—know or be able to do upon graduation?
  - Build upon AAC&U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes

Ex: Deep Learning Items Reflective of “Heritage College” Integrative/Interdisciplinary Learning Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Years</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>78% +</td>
<td>86%+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57% +</td>
<td>65% +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40% -</td>
<td>50% =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% -</td>
<td>60% =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% “often” + “very often”; Compared to Select Peers (above +; comparable =; below -)

Aligning Gains & ACE Outcomes

ACE Outcome 1: Write texts, in various forms, with an identified purpose, that respond to specific audience needs, incorporate research or existing knowledge, and use applicable documentation and appropriate conventions of format and structure.

NSSE Item 11c Writing clearly and effectively
Aligning Gains & ACE Outcomes

ACE Outcome 8: Explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society.

NSSE Item 11n: Develop a personal code of values and ethics

NSSE Item 11o: Contributing to the welfare of your community

Aligning Gains & ACE Outcomes

ACE Outcome 10: Generate a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection.

NSSE Item 11e: Thinking critically and analytically

NSSE Item 11m: Solving complex real-world problems

Considering Process & Gains

NSSE Gain Items

NSSE Activity Items

ACE Outcomes

Aligning Activity & ACE Outcomes

ACE Outcome 1: Write texts, in various forms, with an identified purpose, that respond to specific audience needs, incorporate research or existing knowledge, and use applicable documentation and appropriate conventions of format and structure.

NSSE Items:
- 1c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.
- 1d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.
- 3c.- 3e. Number of written papers or reports.

Aligning Activity & ACE Outcomes

ACE Outcome 9: Exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue.

NSSE Items:
- 1e. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments.
- 6d. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue.
- 6e. Tried to better understand someone else’s views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective.
- 7f. Study abroad.

How NSSE will be used to assess UNL’s new program

Benchmarking and Trend data (2007 results)

Affirm what desire to occur in courses does occur (FSSE)

Consider along with direct evidence of student learning and within context of institutional assessment of learning outcomes

Initially consider by a representative institutional group
The Drake Curriculum, NSSE, and Continuous Improvement

Dr. Rachel Boon, Director of Institutional Research  
rachel.boon@drake.edu
and
Dr. John M. Burney, Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs  
john.burney@drake.edu

Drake University

Benchmarking & Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Previous Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>ACE Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>ACE’s First Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>ACE’s first 4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s the Mission

Drake’s mission is to provide an **exceptional learning environment** that prepares students for **meaningful personal lives, professional accomplishments, and responsible global citizenship**. The Drake experience is distinguished by **collaborative learning** among students, faculty, and staff, and by the **integration of the liberal arts and sciences with professional preparation**.

LEAP Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAP</th>
<th>Drake Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadth of knowledge</td>
<td>Intercultural knowledge and competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry, analysis, critical thinking</td>
<td>Capacity to develop reasoned values and arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical reasoning</td>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic knowledge and engagement</td>
<td>Responsible global citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative learning</td>
<td>Team work and problem-solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mission Explication – Student Learning Outcomes

- **2004/05** – Development of Mission Explication-learning outcomes
- **2005** – Mapping the outcomes against the current Drake Curriculum and preliminary assessment of outcomes using NSSE
- **Summer 2005** – Mission working groups made proposals on active learning, critical thinking, and engaged citizenship.
- **April 2006** – “Achieving Mission Learning Outcomes Through the Drake Curriculum,” approved by Faculty Senate
- **2006/07** – Curriculum development workshops for the first Engaged Citizen Experience were held in January, May, and August 2007
- **2007/08** – First year of implementation – supported partially by an Association of American Colleges and Universities “Bringing Theory to Practice” grant.
- **2008/09** – Drake Curriculum Task Force starts general education review

Drake and NSSE

- **Annual use 2001-2006, now in alternating years**
- **Developing direct assessment**
  - Use of Collegiate Learning Assessment, 2008-2010
  - Critical Thinking rubric (campus-developed)
  - Proposal to develop general education e-portfolio
  - Specific instruments – Civic Engagement Survey
Drake and NSSE

**Internal Audiences**
- Deans’ Council
- Faculty Senate
- University Curriculum Committee
- Drake Curriculum Analysis and Planning Committee
- Drake Curriculum Task Force
- Individual colleges and schools

Drake, NSSE, and 2008 self-study for HLC Accreditation

*Higher Learning Commission Criterion 3:*
- Student Learning – Primarily used NSSE questions that best reflected mission outcomes as indirect evidence.

NSSE Comparative Data Example: Exceptional Learning Environment

**2006 Benchmark Data**
First year students Drake have statistically significant higher scores over our Master’s peer institutions in:
- Level of Academic Challenge: 53.8 vs. 50.5
- Active and Collaborative Learning: 45.0 vs 40.9
- Enriching Educational Experiences: 29.7 vs. 25.8
- Supportive Campus Environment: 62.4 vs. 58.6
- Student-Faculty Interaction: 32.8 vs. 31.8 (not sig.)

Self-Study Example: Meaningful Personal Life

*Students are achieving the knowledge and skills necessary for Meaningful Personal Lives.*

- Take responsibility for their own learning:
  - 76% of first year students and 73% of seniors report that Drake has successfully helped them to learn effectively on their own.
- Context necessary for developing meaningful personal lives:
  - 81% of first year students and 80% of seniors agree that Drake has helped them acquire a broad general education.
- Majority indicate that their education has helped them to form a personal code of values and ethics:
  - 60% of first year students and 54% of seniors.

Mission and Data Driven Revision of the Engaged Citizen AOI

*Responsible global citizenship* Drake graduates understand that their individual knowledge and skills must be connected to the contributions of all cultures to the human experience. In practicing engaged citizenship they understand and exercise the individual freedoms and institutional responsibilities of a democratic society, and strive to sustain and expand the common good.
Responsible Global Citizenship learning outcomes

Drake graduates:
• Demonstrate an understanding of the historical and cultural foundations of a society other than their own.
• Understand the impact that our nation and its cultures have on the larger global community.
• Engage in strategies to promote inter-cultural communication and conflict resolution.
• Assume responsibility for the common good of local, national, and global communities.
• Fulfill their responsibilities as citizens in a participatory democracy.
• Serve as active stewards of both the natural environment and the cultural heritage of society.

The Outcomes and NSSE questions

Understand others:
1.e. diverse perspectives
11.l. Understanding people of other backgrounds
Concern – 42% of seniors in 2006
Communication:
1. u. Conversations with students of a different race;
1.v. with different beliefs;
10.c. Contact among...different backgrounds

The Outcomes and NSSE Questions

Common good
1.k. Participated in ...service learning
Concern – 14% seniors in 2006
11.o. Contributing to the welfare of your community
Concern – 39% seniors in 2006
Citizens
11.i. Voting in local, state, or national elections
Concern – 31% seniors in '06

Revision of the Engaged Citizen AOI: Learning Outcomes

Courses were revised and new courses created to meet these outcomes. Students will,
• Learn to evaluate the mix of diverse values and interests that influence democratic decision-making.
• Establish skills, knowledge, or dispositions that will lead them to be active stewards for the common good.
• Critically reflect on the social, economic, or political issues that they will face as citizens.
• Learn democratic practices or public engagement through participatory activities organized in the classroom and/or in the community.

Engaged Citizen Workshop – Annually in May
• Faculty receive course development stipends of $1500 for workshop to share best practices in achieving the learning outcomes and course development
• New courses developed across disciplines
  – Biology 145: Disease, Dialogue, and Democracy
  – English 83: English in America: Language, the Citizen, and National Identity
  – Environmental Science and Policy 50: Poverty Development and the Environment
  – Law, Politics, and Society 135: Contemporary American Indian Law and Politics
  – Psychology 134: Ethnopolitical Conflict and Peacemaking

Engaged Citizen Experience – blending curricular and co-curricular
• Based on an issue that has local, national, and global significance and is intended to engage the entire community in co-curricular events on the theme.
• Chosen using input from students in the first-year seminars
• Used to develop courses, co-curricular events, and events sponsored by student organizations.
ECE 08: Voices of Democracy: Dissent and Dialogue

- Drake Students and the Caucuses:
- "Only Connect: What Does It Mean to Be a Liberally Educated Person?" William Cronon,
- "Patriotism, Dissent, and Democratic Citizenship." Austin Sarat,
- "Towards a Democratic Culture: Faith, Politics and Justice." Ernesto Cortes, Jr., Southwest Regional Director for the Industrial Areas Foundation.
- Student organized events included
  - Domestic Workers United – speakers
  - What I Believe – faculty-student discussion
  - Blacks: Casualties of the War on Crime

Culminating Event: Engaged Citizen Experience Town Hall Meeting

Student-led roundtable discussions of critical issues that they have studied in EC classes
- Tables with 6-10 members of the audience (students, faculty, staff, community members)

Topics
1. Global Health and Engaged Citizenship
2. Alternative Religious Experiences in the Context of Civil Engagement
3. Black Christianity: From Pulpit to Politics
4. Class Differences in Reproductive Politics
5. Roll the Dice: The Question of Tribal Gaming
6. Religious Fundamentalism and Its Implications in American Politics
7. (Mis)Representation of the Hezbollah in the American Media

Engaged Citizen Experience 2009

Poverty, Development, and Social Responsibility: Whose World is it Anyway?

Drake -- Next Steps

- NSSE in alternate years
- Use of NSSE to raise questions for pursuing more information
- Connection of NSSE to CLA
- Drake Curriculum Task Force – mission driven revision of entire Drake Curriculum
- Engaged Citizen Experience – focus groups

Lessons Learned

- Cultivate shared understanding of essential learning outcomes
- Be strategic in timing your use of NSSE
- Use data to raise questions, or to confirm or refute concerns about educational processes and goals
- NSSE data are only one source of information; multiple data points are essential
- Use standard NSSE reports but also reshape the data when needed to answer your specific questions.
- Share results widely, but provide a context for data

Discussion & Application: LEAP and NSSE

- Considering your learning outcomes or general education goals, what could you examine using your NSSE data?
- How you might use NSSE or other measures on your home campus to leverage action, or bring about change on this outcome?
- If you are participating in the LEAP Campus Action Network: What might be helpful to your work?