

Using NSSE Data Featured Examples

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

In its most recent reaccreditation review with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Gettysburg College was commended by the visiting team for its exemplary and innovative practices of effective, systematic use of indirect assessments, including NSSE, and for improving student learning. The visiting team commented, “Assessment data were among the motivators for considering improvements and change; multiple constituencies engaged in the discussions and established new goals and benchmarks; resources were allocated, despite unexpected constraints after the 2008 financial crisis; and new data demonstrate some significant achievements in each area.”

Gettysburg’s strong, systematic use of NSSE results and, in particular, its use of data to inform change, is fostered by the regular review and consideration of NSSE and other survey results by a wide range of groups and committees including the President’s Council, the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness, the Committee on Learning Assessment, task forces (such as the Academic Advising and Mentoring Task Force and the Task Force on the Intellectual Life of First-Year Students), at faculty meetings, and at divisional meetings and retreats.

The comprehensiveness of sharing NSSE results helped inform the development and refinement of the college’s strategic action goal on engagement, which states, “Gettysburg College will promote intellectual development, engagement, and leadership through active and innovative learning experiences.” Within this goal the college detailed several subgoals and implementation strategies, including academic rigor/level of academic challenge and high-impact learning opportunities. In these approaches, many initiatives have been expanded or created to address areas of concern identified in NSSE and other assessments.

Two examples of NSSE data use related to the engagement strategic action goal highlight Gettysburg’s practice. Results for Student-Faculty Interaction suggested the potential to enhance student participation in faculty-mentored research. In response, the college prioritized increasing support for student summer research and senior projects, expanding opportunities for student travel to academic and professional conferences and providing a place to showcase student research and creative work. In recent years, the college has expanded

student participation in research through increased financial support and new initiatives.

For example, the college launched Celebration—The Annual Colloquium on Undergraduate Research, Creative Activity, and Community Engagement to provide ongoing opportunities for students to present the results of their undergraduate research and creative projects to their faculty, peers, and others. Celebration brings together a wide range of engaged and energized students as they showcase their work from capstone research, independent study, coursework-related research, study abroad, service learning, and arts. The investment in faculty-mentored research has paid off, with more faculty and students reporting participation.

A second effort related to addressing Gettysburg’s engagement goal relied on NSSE results for student participation in internships, which were lower than expected. The college used these results as a call to action and has greatly expanded career-preparation programs for students through an initiative called “The Career Connector Challenge” and through closer collaboration between the development and alumni office and center for career development. The Career Connector Challenge was launched in 2010, by Gettysburg’s Center for Career Development, to create new career-related opportunities for students, including networking dinners, summer internships, shadowing opportunities, and informational interviews, through an intensive campaign among alumni, parents, and friends. Since this initiative was launched, student reported participation in career internships, externships, and job-shadowing experiences have increased, and Gettysburg’s NSSE 2014 results affirmed that student internship participation as reported by seniors now exceeded their Carnegie Classification peers (earlier results showed that Gettysburg was similar to its peers on this measure).

Informed by NSSE results and other assessments, the college has greatly increased its support for faculty mentored research, internship, and other high-impact learning experiences through resource allocation and new initiatives. Gettysburg College will continue to monitor its progress through various benchmarking assessments, including their next NSSE administration.

MORE NSSE data use examples in *Lessons from the Field*, and www.nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/LFF_3.pdf

DRAKE UNIVERSITY

Drake University has reviewed their NSSE results and drawn critical questions about how results align with expectations for student engagement, and has used these findings to prompt discussions about where they want their students to be. To better communicate their NSSE data and translate results into something that would encourage action, the university disaggregated the data and created reports for colleges and schools. In addition to recreating many of the NSSE aggregate reports, they also recreated their NSSE *Snapshot*, highlighting the top 5 items in which each unit excelled and the 5 areas in which they were below their comparison groups.

For initial analysis, they used the NSSE Report Builder to do some benchmarking and to create a report for each college and school. With the Report Builder, first, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) ran analysis by major and exported the data to Excel. From there they created a template, so that reports could be easily replicated across all colleges and schools. They programmed each spreadsheet to automatically highlight cells with the five top and five lowest items for first-year students and seniors. These custom reports focused on comparative data in two ways—national benchmarking based on major field and internal benchmarking with Drake students in different colleges. For some of the colleges and schools, they also disaggregated the data to align with the outcomes areas for the college or with disciplinary accreditation standards.

To share the reports, staff from OIRA set up face-to-face meetings with deans and associate deans to discuss the data. Disaggregated results by major were shared side by side with comparative data. Comparative data provided information for administrators to see how the results aligned with areas of need or current priorities and informed discussions about ways to use results. In response to these reports and meetings, several units have taken action. For example, the College of Business and Public Administration has undertaken a review of their curriculum to enhance students' development of writing skills. The School of Education and School of Journalism and Mass Communication have started a review of their curriculums to look for opportunities to enhance students' development of quantitative skills. Additionally, these conversations led to support for the faculty senate to review the core curriculum and contributed to a recommendation to examine their developmental sequence for greater focus on integrative

learning. Reports were also prepared at the institution level to share with several campus groups, including the faculty senate, dean's council, and academic affairs council. Looking at their Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and NSSE results together, these groups observed an integrative learning gap for Drake students.

Drake's NSSE *Snapshot* revealed that students' ability to take on diverse perspectives was low in comparison that of their peers. Specifically, while Drake students were comfortable experiencing different cultures, they were less comfortable discussing values with others and trying to understand somebody else's perspective. These results were shared with the Academic Affairs Leadership Group, which includes representatives from student life and the assessment committee. To address this issue, a group was tasked with looking at how discussions with diverse others could be addressed systematically in Drake's core curriculum. Additionally, they are looking across other internal surveys and existing data to contextualize this discussion. Overall, in response to this issue, campus conversations have shifted to finding ways to better emphasize critical thinking and integrative learning.

Drake is also using NSSE data to examine practices that support student engagement and learning. The display in Figure 2 was created to illustrate the positive gains in engagement at Drake related to participation in High-Impact Practices (HIPs) and mirrors an approach used in an AAC&U publication, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High Impact Practices*. The display offers a way to discuss HIPs that influence student-faculty interaction with the goal of determining strategies for increased impact across the university. Using a combination of data triangulation, customized report creation, and sharing results with relevant campus committees, Drake has developed a clear picture of the student experience and where it can be enhanced.

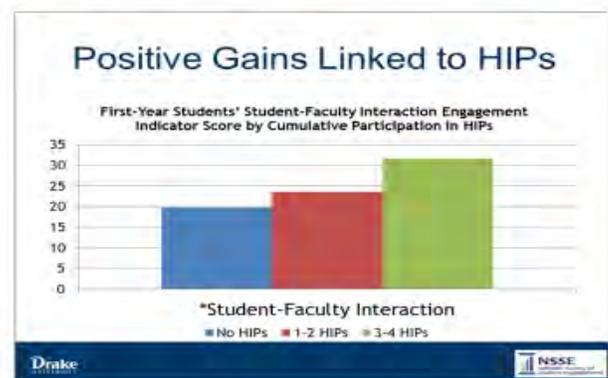


Figure 2. Drake University Display: First-Year Students' Student-Faculty Interaction Gains by Cumulative Participation in High-Impact Practices