A Portrait of Change: Student Engagement at Western Michigan University

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The NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) is a national survey that asks first-year (FY) and senior (SR) students about their college experience, how much time they spend studying, and the types of interactions they have with faculty. The results are used in a variety of ways, including assessment, institutional improvement, and prompting discussion on teaching and learning initiatives.

The NSSE was initiated in response to a growing interest in understanding how to best measure and improve the quality of undergraduate education. The NSSE was developed to:

1. Include items known to empirically relate to important college outcomes,
2. Be used at both private and public four-year institutions,
3. Include first-year and senior students,
4. Adequately sample participating institutions,
5. Be flexible, and
6. Be administered by a credible third-party organization.

The connection between student engagement and institutional effectiveness has been established based on the direct connection between student behaviors and desired outcomes of enrollment at an institution of higher education.

As defined by Kuh (2003), “Student engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices.”

The FSSE (Faculty Survey of Student Engagement) is the faculty companion used for comparative purposes. The intended purpose of the FSSE is to identify areas of strength at an institution, as well as aspects of the undergraduate experience that may warrant attention.

The NSSE was piloted in 1999 and has been administered at over 1,200 four-year degree-granting universities. The FSSE was piloted in 2003 and is typically administered in parallel to the NSSE. Both assessment projects are administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

The WMU NSSE/FSSE Project

The 2008-09 ATIS Faculty Development Academic Leadership Academy included the opportunity to complete a leadership project to put theory into practice. I selected the 2008 NSSE/FSSE project as my opportunity to become more involved in WMU campus life as a leader.

The 2008 WMU NSSE was completed by 1,500 students (30% response rate). Students are asked to complete the survey in reference to the current school year, as the WMU administration occurred during the Spring, 2008 semester.

The 2008 WMU FSSE was completed by 684 faculty (34% response rate). Faculty are asked to complete the survey in reference to the current school year, as the WMU administration occurred during the Spring, 2008 semester.

2008 NSSE Findings

Comparable to selected and Carnegie peers
SCE has improved notably for both FY and SR students
Advising improved from 2006; importance of 1-on-1 relationships
80%(FY)–71%(SR) would choose WMU again (up from 2006)
Multi-year trends stable/improving since 2002
36% FY compared to 25% SR participate in faculty-led research

2008 FSSE Findings

UD students more engaged than LD students
41-55% faculty report working with students only during class
1/3 faculty spend 50% class time in instructor-led lecture
Faculty spend 1-8 hrs/wk on:
- research activities: ~40%
- UG teaching: ~55%
*59%(LD) – 49%(UD) faculty report 0 hours working with undergraduates on out-of-class research
Faculty spend 0-4 hrs/wk on:
- advising: ~63%
- service: ~76%

Future Steps

Link outcomes to goal setting processes
Increase academic challenge in coursework
Increase student/faculty collaborative research opportunities

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