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Closing The Loop: A Study of How the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is Used for Decision-Making and Planning in Student Affairs

Jennifer Lee McCaul

Western Michigan University, j.l.mccaul@gmail.com

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CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY
OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION-
MAKING AND PLANNING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

Jennifer Lee McCaul

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctoral Committee:

Andrea L. Beach, Ph.D., Chair
Ramona B. Lewis, Ed.D.
Wendy J. Wenner, Ph.D.

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION- MAKING AND PLANNING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

Jennifer Lee McCaul, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2015

‘Closing the loop’ is a commonly used phrase in discussing cyclical processes, such as the area of outcomes assessment in higher education. Increased interest in accountability and a shift in accreditation focus have necessitated that higher education institutions are closing the assessment loop and creating a culture of evidence to demonstrate that programs and services are having the intended impact, and using resources effectively. That culture includes both academic and co-curricular elements of the student experience. This research examined if, and to what extent, student affairs administrators use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)—one of the most prominent instruments available to gauge the student experience—as part of their assessment and planning processes. The researcher conducted a survey of student affairs leaders from 100 identified institutions, including a mix of institutions utilizing Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) accreditation models. The overall response rate was 25.5% with 164 responses. The analysis includes an exploration of the connections between institution characteristics, strategic planning, accreditation practices, and the use of NSSE data for decision making, specifically in student affairs functional areas. Results show that there are differences between how people in the different student affairs functional areas’ use

the NSSE data at the department/unit and individual level. Additional results show there are differences in usage of the NSSE data based on institutional characteristics (e.g., public or private control, institutional size). Although the accreditation model does not affect NSSE data usage, where an institution is in the accreditation cycle does.

Additionally, the length of time an institution has been participating in strategic planning and how old the strategic plan is affects the use of the NSSE data at both the institutional and departmental/unit levels. As expectations increase for more data-driven decision making, institutions will need to be more inclusive with the sharing of NSSE and other data with those on the front line providing student services and planning programs.

Additionally, student affairs administrators will need to be more involved with accreditation and strategic planning processes to assist institutions with achieving student learning outcomes.

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‘We’ve waited long for this day to come. For all the midnight lights we’ve burnt into the morning sun. Yes you can change the world.’

Big Head Todd and the Monsters, Blue Sky, 2005

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“And so today, my world it smiles, your hand in mine, we walk the miles, Thanks to you it will be done, for you to me are the only one.”

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Jennifer Lee McCaul

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Closing the loop” is a commonly used phrase in discussing cyclical processes, such as the area of outcomes assessment in higher education. This is a common activity on today’s college campuses as part of strategic planning and accreditation processes. Strategic planning can be described as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions to shape and guide an organization, its mission, and purpose” (McCaul, 2011, p. 14). Accreditation in higher education today is the primary means by which institutions and programs in the United States assure and improve their academic quality (Ewell, 2008; Jones, 2002). The structure of accreditation in the United States is over 100 years old and provides self-regulation through an in-depth self-study and a peer review site visit (Ewell, 2008; Jones, 2002; Ruben, 2007). In 1989, the U.S. Department of Education mandated that accrediting organizations examine student-learning outcomes as a condition of recognition (Ewell, 2001, 2008). As a result of government and accrediting organization requirements to focus less on resources and more on measuring outcomes, higher education institutions moved toward demonstrating that the offered programs were having the intended impact (Banta, 2002; Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001).

Higher education today is facing uncertainty with changes in the economy, and federal and state support for education dwindling. This means a greater call for

accountability at the national, state, and institutional levels (Burke 2005; Ewell, 2001; Kalsbeek, 1989; Ruben, 2007). There is a vested interest to know how funding is being spent, which explains why the federal and state governments are interested in both assessment and regional accreditation (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001). Given increasingly tight budget restrictions, the federal and state governments are taking a more active role in determining the outcomes and quality of institutions for the money invested.

Meaningful criteria are necessary in order to assess the quality and effectiveness of programs and services. Strategic planning allows institutions to evaluate the resources they have and determine which processes allow the organization to remain competitive in the changing landscape (McCaul, 2011). Success in programs that facilitate student learning is a result of embracing and acting upon data used in decision making and resource allocation (Ruben, 2007; Tinto 1993). Kanoy indicates “perhaps the hardest part of any assessment effort is the most important part: using the results in a way that facilitates positive change on campus” (Kanoy, 1992, p. 6).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) measures how students are engaged in practices considered conducive to high levels of learning (Kuh, 2001, 2003b). Students respond to questions that require reflection as to what they are contributing to and receiving from their college experience (Kuh, 2001, 2003b). The results from the NSSE have allowed for the production of national benchmarks of good educational practices, which can be used by institutions to measure themselves in their own efforts (Kuh, 2001, 2003b) compared to other institutions.

Key student engagement theorists (Astin, 1984, 1985; Tinto 1987, 1993) have developed constructs that generally portray the interaction between academic and social engagement as a factor in student persistence and degree attainment. That is, how ‘involved’ (Astin, 1984, 1985) or ‘integrated’ (Tinto, 1987, 1993) students are in their institution’s culture, both academic and social, can be critical in a student’s decision to persist toward degree. Tinto (1987, 1993) indicated that activities students participated in outside of the classroom allowed students the opportunity for exposure to others, in order to be incorporated into the college culture. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) found that academic experiences designed to assist students with academic success and persistence, such as first year programming, advising, and learning communities, are consistently successful. A student’s involvement in other co-curricular activities was also a contributing factor to student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Research (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2003b; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) shows that one of the single best predictors of student persistence is how much time and energy students devote to educational activities. Tinto’s model (1987, 1993) additionally recognized that there is a connection between the academic and social experiences of college and that these experiences influence each other. Simply, what students do during college has a higher impact in their persistence in college than other characteristics (Kuh, 2003b; Kuh, et al, 2005b).

The key is getting students involved and engaged in the campus culture. The best-known indicators of student engagement are the ‘Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education’ (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These seven principles include faculty contact, cooperation, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high

expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. Institutions deemed effective generally engage students in activities that correspond with these principles (Kuh, 2003a, 2003b) both inside and outside of the classroom.

When speaking of student engagement, there are two significant measurable components (Kuh, 2003a; Kuh, et al., 2005b): the time and effort students put into the experience and the amount and kind of resources that institutions devote to planning them. Research (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andreas, et al., 1991) has shown that college students spend nearly two-thirds of their available time participating in activities outside of traditional classroom experiences. How institutions prepare and plan for these activities and programs is critical to how successful these activities are and whether students will participate.

Problem Statement

There have been numerous studies (Adelman, 1999, 2004; Astin, 1993; Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, & McCormick, 1996; Horn, 1998) that demonstrate that academic performance leads to greater persistence and graduation rates for students enrolled in higher education institutions. However, since the majority of college students' hours are spent participating in activities outside of traditional classroom experiences, there are several important questions institutions need to ask themselves as they design programs and activities for students. The first question is how are students spending the majority of their time? The second question is, what opportunities are there for learning and personal development outside of the classroom? The use of the NSSE is a starting point for institutions.

There have been reports about individual institutions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005a, 2005b) that have used the NSSE in their improvement efforts. There have also been general overviews of how the NSSE data could, or should, be used (Gonyea & Kuh, 2009; Kuh, et al, 2005a; 2005b). However, there has not been research to date that compiles information regarding how specific functional areas of student affairs choose to utilize the NSSE data in their planning and decision making regarding educationally purposeful activities, and no research has looked at such planning activities within the context of accreditation.

Proposed Research

The purpose of this quantitative survey study is to determine if, and to what extent, institutions use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey data for decision making or program planning purposes in student affairs. Furthermore, the study also seeks to determine if, and to what extent, there are differences between institutions that participate in Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) compared to Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) methods of Higher Learning Commission accreditation. The study will further seek to determine if particular university student affairs service functional areas are more likely to use the data than others are.

The basis of this research is the theoretical concept map shown in Figure 1. As shown, institutions that participate in the NSSE have data available for use as part of the assessment practice of the institution. The student affairs functional areas can potentially use this data to improve performance and increase student engagement and involvement

in activities and programs. Other factors that may affect assessment practices include accreditation method; institutional characteristics; involvement in strategic planning; and types of student affairs functional areas.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined.

- To what extent and in what ways, if any, do higher education institutions use the NSSE in decision making or planning?
- To what extent and in what ways, if any, do particular student affairs functional areas use the NSSE in decision making or planning?
- In what ways, if any, does accreditation method predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
- In what ways, if any, do institutional characteristics predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
- In what ways, if any, does strategic planning process predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?

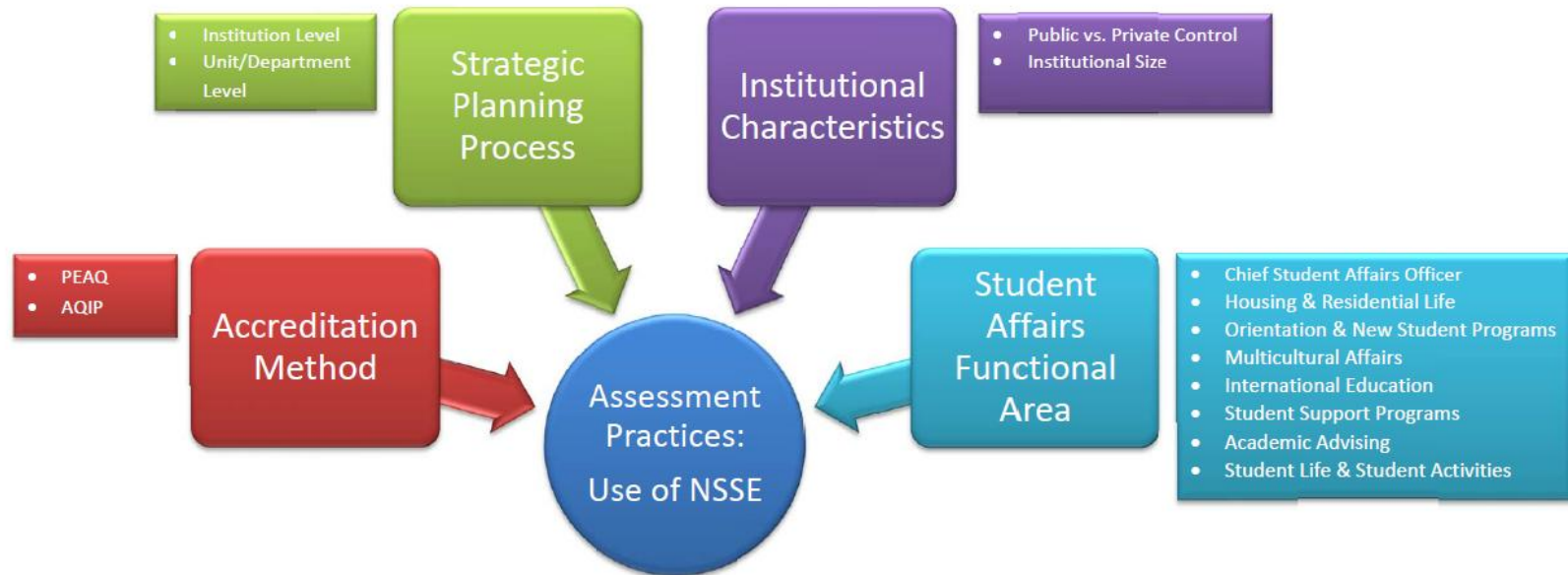


Figure 1. Theoretical conceptual map underlying research design

Methods

The sample of 100 institutions were randomly selected from the institutions accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools which participated in the NSSE survey from 2005-2012 (NSSE, 2012). One fourth of the participants used the AQIP and the other three-fourths used the PEAQ model of accreditation.

This research uses quantitative methods, with a web-based survey sent to up to eight participants identified at each of the 100 institutions in the sample, for a total of 800 possible participants. Participants were directors or senior administrators within the identified student affairs functional area. The survey was created to determine if, how, and to what extent the institution, specific student affairs functional areas, and the directors or senior leaders individually use the NSSE data in program planning and decision making. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and relational statistics.

Delimitations

This study was confined to institutions within the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement, based on the 2005-2012 participant list (NSSE, 2012). The study was further delimited to include only what are traditionally considered student services or student affairs functional areas. Within each institution, eight student affairs functional areas were surveyed, including: Senior Student Affairs Office, Multicultural Affairs, Study Abroad, Academic Advising, Housing & Residential Life, Student Life/Activities, Orientation/First Year Experience, and Student Support Programs. Within

each department, the director was surveyed related to use of the NSSE data in decision-making and planning.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that because only institutions accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools are being studied, findings cannot be generalized to all institutions that participate in the NSSE, nor all institutions in general. In addition, there was not an equal number of responses from the different types of departments across institutions to generalize to the departmental level. In addition, not all identified offices were available on all campuses, or it is also possible that multiple functional areas merged. For these reasons, the consideration of response rate becomes critical. Finally, as the research design includes a survey, there is a possibility that participants interpret questions or terms differently, which may lead to different responses.

Summary

Increased interest in accountability and a shift in accreditation focus have necessitated that higher education institutions focus on more informed decision making and a culture of evidence to demonstrate that programs and services are having the intended impact and using resources effectively and efficiently. The introduction of the NSSE as a resource for institutions to measure the learning impact of student's engagement in meaningful activities has provided an opportunity for student affairs functional areas specifically to engage with student learning outcomes as an assessment

measure traditionally used in academic programs. NSSE data awareness and usage has led to improvement efforts for some institutions and researchers have shown how the NSSE data could, or should, be used to provide models for others. Institutions that participate in the NSSE have access to a wealth of data about their own students as well as a comparison tool to measure themselves against others. This data can be very valuable in planning and decision-making efforts regarding educationally purposeful activities.

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which student affairs areas within a particular accreditation context are using the NSSE resources for planning and program improvement. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature addressing accreditation, assessment, student engagement, student affairs functions, and the NSSE. Chapter 3 includes a presentation of the specific methods used in this study, including a discussion of the survey instrument developed for it. Chapter 4 provides a presentation of the data and results from this study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study results and the implications for student affairs practitioners and leaders.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This review of the literature and research is divided into the following sections: 1) an overview of accreditation in higher education and a review of two of the methods of accreditation; 2) the role of assessment in the process of accreditation; 3) student engagement, the role of student affairs professionals, and a review of common student affairs functions; 4) using data and information in decision making; and 5) the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as an assessment tool.

Accreditation in Higher Education

Accountability and accreditation have become the focus of higher education institutions over the past few decades. The pressure from federal and state governments as well as accrediting agencies to determine how institutions impact student learning (Ewell, 2008; Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001) started in secondary education, but then eventually moved into secondary institutions as well. In most other countries, there is a government-sponsored approach to external review and quality assurance in higher education conducted by the Ministry of Education or a similarly titled governmental office (Eaton, 2002; Ewell, 2008). Since the United States does not have this kind of government sponsored oversight office, accreditation is the primary means by which

institutions and programs assure and improve their academic quality (Ewell, 2008; Jones, 2002). Private, non-profit organizations designed for this specific purpose (Eaton, 2002) carry out accreditation in the United States. The accreditation structure in place in the United States is considered to be decentralized and complex, which mirrors the similarly complex American higher education system (Eaton, 2002).

Accreditation in the United States is more than 100 years old, and is a form of structured self-regulation of higher education institutions featuring a two-step process of in-depth self-study and peer review by site visit (Ewell, 2008, Jones, 2002; Ruben, 2007). The original audience for accreditation was internal and sought to certify colleges and universities as legitimate higher education institutions (Jones, 2002). Now, emerging from concerns to serve the public interest (Eaton, 2002; Ewell, 2008), accreditation has become widely accepted as the primary method for assuring the quality of higher education to external audiences (Jones, 2002). Accreditation is an on-going cyclical process ranging from every three to ten years (CHEA, 2006; Eaton, 2002).

Accreditation serves two main purposes: assures the quality of the institution and maintains access to public funds. Accredited status is a sign to students and the general public that the institution or program meets some minimum criteria for quality (Eaton, 2002). Additionally, accreditation is required to access federal funds such as student aid and other federal programs, because the government relies on accreditors to confirm the quality of institutions and programs where students are using their federal funds (Eaton, 2002). Accreditation has been concerned with institutional quality since the very beginning (Wolff, 2005; Ewell, 2008).

Leading college presidents formed the six regional accrediting bodies between 1885 and 1924 based on the principles of academic freedom and self-regulation (Wolff, 2005.) The regional associations represent the culture of the region, provide regional approaches to accreditation, and allow for experimentation and adaption (Wolff, 2005). At first, the regional bodies set standards for course equivalencies to facilitate transfer of credits and admission to secondary schools. The standards, based on self-review and quality assurance, grew in complexity and strength over time (Wolff, 2005).

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, created in 1895, developed the first set of criteria defining eligibility for membership in 1913 (Ewell, 2008). The criteria for membership were heavily quantitative and once institutions were approved, they were rarely reviewed again. The North Central Association was also the first among the regional associations to establish different standards for two-year, four-year, and teacher training institutions in 1918 (Ewell, 2008). In the 1950s, the North Central Association was the first to make some fundamental changes to the review processes (Geiger, 1970; Newman, 1996). The most significant change was the creation of seven generalist criteria used during implementation of a regular ten-year cycle of review (Geiger, 1970; Newman, 1996). In addition, most of the processes used today were created during this time, including self- study, multi-day site visit by peer reviewers, and a formal decision by the accrediting commission to reaffirm or withdraw accreditation (Ewell, 2008; Orlans, 1975). The other regional associations looked at these changes and adopted very similar standards by 1965 (Orlans, 1975).

The North Central Association eventually diverged into two independent corporations, one for higher education and one for K-12 education. In 2000, these

corporations were legally empowered to conduct accrediting activities for educational institutions (HLC, 2003). The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is the corporation tasked with accrediting degree-granting institutions of higher education.

In 1996, college and university presidents voted to establish an organization that would provide national coordination of accreditation (Ewell, 2008) and called it the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Fees paid by its member institutions fund this organization, which serves to provide advocacy for accreditation and oversight of accrediting organizations (CHEA, 2006; Ewell, 2008). CHEA is the largest higher education membership organization in the United States with nearly 7,400 member institutions and 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations (CHEA, 2011). CHEA provides external periodic review and recognition of the regional, national, and specialized/professional accrediting associations (Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007; Wolff, 2005). This recognition is in addition to the reviews done by the U. S. Department of Education (CHEA, 2006; Wolff, 2005.)

In 1989, the U. S. Department of Education mandated that accrediting organizations examine student-learning outcomes as a condition of recognition by the association (Ewell, 2001). The North Central Association was one of the first to require all member institutions to prepare assessment plans for each program and for general education that focused directly on evidence of student academic achievement and provided workshops and materials to train practitioners and reviewers about how to evaluate student-learning outcomes (Ewell, 2001, 2008). The other regional associations followed suit and by the 1990s, all associations had some kind of assessment policy in place (Ewell, 2001).

Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ)

Under this more traditional model of accreditation, institutions prepare for a 10-year cycle of review and site visit by developing document information examined by a team of individuals representing a regional accrediting body. The Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) employs a four-step evaluation process to determine accreditation status. PEAQ's comprehensive evaluation process consists of these four steps (HLC, n.d.):

- The organization engages in a self-study process and prepares a report of its findings in accordance with Commission expectations.
- The Commission sends a team of peer reviewers to conduct a comprehensive visit for continued accreditation and to write a report containing the team's recommendation.
- A decision-making body reviews the documents relating to the comprehensive visit.
- The decision-making body takes action on the team's recommendation.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)

In 2000, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools introduced an alternative accreditation process instead of the traditional ten-year review (Nichols & Nichols, 2005). This new model, based on quality management principles, included an annual review of data and assessment of learning outcomes rather than the single 10-year cycle (Higher Learning Commission, 2007.) These accreditation reforms have resulted in

greater attention to the assessment of student learning outcomes. Traditional methods of accreditation are highly based on quantitative data, while this new model is more focused on data that measures improvement and true quality.

Quality improvement principles and processes form the foundation for the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) (HLC, 2003.) The AQIP process includes strategy forums, annual updates, portfolio appraisals, and an on-campus visit. The strategy forum, used as a brainstorming session, identifies institutional improvement projects in which to focus on including one that is identified as a priority for promoting and assessing student learning (HLC, 2007.) On an annual basis, the Higher Learning Commission is provided with an update describing the progress made on each project. The HLC provides feedback on the progress and recommends additional improvements. At the end of three years, the institution submits a portfolio, which includes a progress report describing the implementation of continuous improvement and their progress achieving the goals of becoming a quality-based organization related to the nine AQIP criteria. The portfolio is reviewed and feedback provided.

Role of Assessment in Accreditation

Higher education today is facing uncertainty about the global economy as well as federal and state support for education. This means a greater call for accountability and learning outcome measures, which have been significantly increasing at the national, state, and institutional level (Alexander, 2000; Burke, 2005; Ewell, 2001; Kalsbeek, 1989; Ruben, 2007, Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007). ‘Expanding access and the resulting enrollment growth experienced mostly by public sector institutions have

compelled governments to give greater scrutiny to the use of public resources’
(Alexander, 2000, p. 416).

The idea is that there must be meaningful criteria to assess the quality and effectiveness of programs and services. This information can allow programs to be measured against peers, and can be used to inform decision making and resource allocation (Ruben, 2007). Assessment and the management of data determined how effectively colleges and universities respond to today’s challenging higher education landscape (Kalsbeek, 1989). Performance measures provide a means for governments to compare and rank one institution against another and to provide fiscal incentives to those that are meeting the targets and goals set forth by legislators (Alexander, 2000).

Assessment has become a dominant issue in higher education than can no longer be ignored. However, it has been difficult to garner a consistent definition of exactly what assessment is. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) have defined it as: “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence, which describes institutional, divisional, and agency effectiveness” (p. 18). A national focus on assessment began in the 1970s and early 1980s (Siegel, 2003; Nichols & Nichols, 2005; Burke, 2005). At that time, there was a national call to hold institutions accountable for meeting student’s needs and using resources efficiently (Siegel, 2003). This systematic concern for what students were learning grew out of the K-12 education crisis and moved up the education ladder to include higher education (Ewell, 2001).

At first, accreditation standards focused on quantitative measures of variables that would contribute to student learning such as number of books in the library or size of the endowment (Angelo, 1999). However, the accountability shift focused more on the

qualitative measures of learning. Since that time, student-learning outcomes have become the principle gauge of a higher education institution's effectiveness (Ewell, 2001). The North Central Association was a trendsetter in the assessment movement by requiring all institutions to prepare assessment plans that focused directly on student academic achievement evidence and offering training and materials to help guide institutions and peer-reviewers (Ewell, 2001). The remainder of the regional associations began to incorporate outcomes assessment broadly into their requirements during the 1990s (Ewell, Finney, & Lenth, 1990; Ewell, 2001; Nichols & Nichols, 2005). Current accreditation standards and practices give increased attention to outcomes and much less focus on intentions or inputs (Ruben, 2007). Under the new requirements, institutions establish learning outcomes, gather evidence (using tools of their choice), and use the results to make improvements (Ewell, 2005). Even though this process is essential to higher education, because there is a lack of systematic research on the influence of accreditation on program outcomes and learning (Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007), this change is not necessarily agreed on.

One thing that is agreed on is that accountability and assessment should be in concert with each other. Recently, accreditation agencies have recommended that institutions embed accreditation reviews into ongoing processes such as strategic planning (Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007) to reduce the cost and burden of the accreditation process. Strategic planning provides visions of what is possible and provides a framework for gathering information about the big picture (McCaul, 2011). Through the process of monitoring the internal and external environment and using benchmarks (Birnbaum, 2000), institutions can find examples for how to best implement

plans and programs. This information can also be a powerful motivator for administrative staff who can see that small improvements can add up (Barnard & Walker, 1994). A recent publication by the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (2012) specifically addresses strategic planning and the role of every department on campus to be responsible for student learning when it states that each college and university is:

“encouraged to articulate its specific goals for student learning and prominently announce these goals to various stakeholders and the public. Similarly, the major academic divisions and co-curricular departments within an institution are encouraged to state their goals and their connection to the broader institutional aims and the constituencies they seek to serve. Faculty members, staff, and administrators should understand the relationship of their work to these learning goals. Students should also understand and be able to articulate the relationship of their coursework and co-curricular experiences to the learning goals”(p. 5).

Wolff and Harris (1994) coined the term “culture of evidence” and determined that regardless of size or type of institution, certain principles apply. One of these principles is the idea of embedding assessment activities in the infrastructure of the institution, rather than keeping them as a separate activity. Another important principle is the idea that assessment should be promoted at all levels of the institution. “A culture of evidence involves everyone, not just a director of institutional research”(Wolff & Harris, 1994, p. 277). Other principles included using evidence to support assertions, starting with the current situation and with questions that will be of great interest to faculty and staff, and start small and build (Wolff & Harris, 1994). Unfortunately, assessment is used primarily

as a measure of compliance and accountability for an accreditation process, rather than being incorporated into the institution's culture (Ewell, 2005).

Student Engagement

Active participation in activities and events that complement the educational mission of the institution but are not part of the classroom curriculum provide key opportunities for learning and personal development (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andreas, et al., 1991; Kuh, et al., 2005a, 2005b). There is a long history of research to support that student engagement in academically purposeful activities is more critical to student success than personal characteristics or prior academic achievement (Astin, 1975, 1984, 1985; Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Kuh, et al, 2005a, 2005b; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Astin's (1975, 1984, 1985) Theory of College Student Involvement comes from his longitudinal studies of college dropouts, which aimed to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affected the students' persistence in college. Astin determined (1985) that every significant affect was either positively or negatively related to the amount of student involvement. Astin's (1985) definition of involvement refers "to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 134). A student considered highly involved (Astin, 1985) spends time studying, participates in student organizations, and interacts with faculty and students. In contrast, an uninvolved student (Astin, 1985) may avoid studies, refrain from outside class activities, and may not be in contact with faculty or other students.

Historically, research shows (Astin, 1973, 1977, 1982; Chickering, 1974) that the most important factor in persistence appears to be the student's living situation. Astin concluded (1985) that living in campus residence facilities was positively related to retention regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background, as these students have more time and opportunity to get involved in campus life. Additional results (Astin, 1985) indicated that students who joined social fraternities or sororities or participated in extracurricular activities of almost any type were more satisfied and less likely to drop out than those students who did not participate (Skipper & Argo, 2003). Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) found participation in orientation activities, such as freshman seminars, positively influenced social integration and had positive effects on overall student satisfaction and persistence. The benefits derived from the involvement in outside-of-class activities are a function of both the quality and quantity of the effort put forth by the student. According to Pace (1984), "what counts most [for students] is not who they are or where they are but what they do" (p. 1).

Institutions should use the time outside of class that students have available to engage in non-curricular activities to capitalize on the tremendous potential for learning and personal development (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andreas, et al., 1991; Schuh, 1991). One operational definition of student engagement specifically addresses the institution's responsibility in this process:

'Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second component of student engagement is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities,

and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation.” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 44)

Role of Student Affairs in Student Engagement

The literature identifies several terms used concurrently and interchangeably to describe the work done by student affairs personnel on campus, including student relations, student personnel, student development, and student services (Crookston, 1994). However, student affairs is the term that has become most predominate across institutions (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Crookston, 1994). Student affairs is an invention of the American higher education system (Caple 1998; Nuss, 1996; Rhatigan, 2000; Thelin, 1996) and has been part of higher education since the days of the early colonial colleges. This profession has been recognized as an essential component to support the academic mission of the college (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Fenske, 1989a; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987; Mable, 1991; Nuss, 1996, Rhatigan, 2000). Harvard claims to be the first institution to appoint a college dean (Fenske, 1989b, Rentz, 1996a; Sandeen, 2004). This person was an administrator responsible for student enrollment and discipline (Fenske, 1989b; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987; Rhatigan, 2000).

Since that time, student affairs divisions have grown larger and more complex as the student population has become more diverse (Brown, 1997; Sandeen, 2004). A student affairs division today typically includes responsibility for student activities, housing, financial aid, health and wellness, and academic support (Sandeen, 2004).

Although student affairs within the institution has not always been viewed as an essential service (Sandeem, 1991, 2004) or an opportunity for learning (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002), that has changed in the past quarter century as student affairs has become a central and essential part of higher education (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002).

Once student affairs emerged as a profession, the student has always been the center of every student affairs process. According to Ambler (1989), ‘the high regard for and the devotion to students that have characterized this profession are perhaps its most significant contribution to the unique character of higher education in the United States’ (p. 254). Data indicate (Brown, 1997) that approximately 50-75% of students’ time outside of the traditional classroom is spent with a student affairs professional, in a student affairs developed activity, program, or workshop, or in a student affairs operated facility.

The main tenet of the student affairs profession is the education of the whole student (Caple, 1998; Cowley, 1994; Fenske, 1989b; Nuss, 1996, O’Banion, Thurston, & Gulden, 1994; Rentz, 1996a; Young, 1996). Student affairs professionals are concerned with a student’s emotional and social development, health and well-being, academic concerns, residence, financial needs, and extracurricular activities that influence a student’s education (Cowley, 1994; Rentz, 1996a; Young, 1996). As one student affairs officer indicated (Hartley, 2001), ‘it’s the faculty’s role to teach students to think well. It’s student affairs’ role to help students to learn to live well’ (p. 228). According to Hartley (2001), it’s the responsibility of student affairs to create a powerful learning environment, including safe and positive residential living experiences; to promote student

development, including diversity initiatives, wellness, and civic engagement; and to support academic achievement, by providing out of class learning activities which complement traditional classroom learning, such as advising, first year courses, and other campus activities.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) identified the ‘great separation, sometimes to the point of isolation, between academic and social life on campus’ (p. 5). In response, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) proposed an integration of the academic and social lives of students so they would reinforce each other and enhance student learning. The idea that faculty and student affairs should coordinate was not new; however, the fact that it came from an extensive meta-analysis of the literature gave it more credence (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002). Subsequent studies have reaffirmed the role that student affairs plays in the student learning process. Astin’s research (1993) suggested that faculty participation in a residential setting would enrich students’ educational experiences. Additionally, another study (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994) indicated that persistence and educational outcomes were directly associated to living on campus, involvement in Greek organizations, working part time, interaction with faculty, and other extracurricular activities. This same study (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994) also found that students who have balanced involvement in both academic and social activities are able to think more critically and evaluate information more logically than their counterparts.

When ‘Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning’ (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998) was released, it identified ten ways that student learning could be strengthened. The collaboration of these organizations to produce this publication

showed that the responsibility for student learning was no longer just for the teaching faculty, but for the entire campus community—including student affairs.

Student Affairs Functions

Wrenn (1951) indicated that “the only justification for student personnel services is that they can be shown to meet the needs of students. . . These include both the basic psychological needs of all young people and the specific needs that are the direct results of the college experience” (p. 26-27). Within that context, many functional areas of student affairs have developed. Student affairs functions are well established and organized, with professional associations, publications, and standards of practice for the distinct areas within the field (Mable, 1991; Sandeen, 1996).

Although there is no standard administrative model used by all institutions in the United States, the governing board (Sandeen, 1996) determines the organization of a college or university. There are several standard, or “essential” (Hopkins, 1994, p. 82), functional areas of student affairs found at colleges and universities in the United States. Although available, they may vary in organization, style, and scope of service due to the extraordinary diversity of institutions (Dungy, 2003; Sandeen, 1996). At larger institutions, each functional area will likely have a separate space with specialized staff, whereas smaller institutions may cross boundaries and have wider responsibilities per staff member (Dungy 2003). This section focuses on the identified areas that are considered “essential” and are relatively uniform across institutions (Dungy, 2003; Hopkins, 1994; Sandeen, 1996).

Chief Student Affairs Officer. The position of chief student affairs officer (CSAO) is experiencing a time of high visibility and influence due to the increasingly complex needs of the institution (Sandeen, 1991). The position of chief student affairs officer is the single most important factor in shaping the design and structure of the division of student affairs (Ambler, 2000). This position determines the organizational and leadership structure, the coordination and oversight for services, and serves as a resource for the entire division of student affairs, which may include housing, student activities, health services, child care, campus security, academic support programs, and a host of others (Ambler, 2000; Sandeen, 1991, 1996).

The CSAO position has evolved over the last 100 years from the beginnings as a Dean of Men, considered the “father figure” for the students on campus (Sandeen, 1991), to the current position often titled as Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs (Kuh, Evans, & Duke, 1983; Sandeen, 1991). Eventually, Dean of Women were hired as more females were admitted into higher education (Sandeen, 1991). These positions provided for the daily needs, welfare, and health of students for whom they were responsible. The Dean of Students was better known for control and discipline functions, than educational or learning-focused efforts (Parker, 1978). The doctrine of *in loco parentis* (in place of parents) meant that the Dean of Students and the university were responsible for the behavior of their students on and off campus (Bowden, 2007, 2010). In the 1960s and 1970s, the role of the CSAO began to change as relationships between students and their universities changed due in part to increased protests about civil rights and the Vietnam War (Ambler, 2000; Bowden, 2007; Nuss, 1996; Parker 1978).

During this time, it was very difficult to control behavior as students began to be involved in protests and invoke their status as adults through court cases, such as *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* in 1961. During this case, the court rejected the idea of *in loco parentis* by educational institutions (Kaplin & Lee, 2007). There was also the ratification of the 26th Amendment of the Constitution in 1971 changing the age of majority to 18 from 21 (Bowden, 2010; Kaplan & Lee, 1997). These legal changes profoundly affected the role of colleges and universities toward students. The legal issues associated with these changes in philosophy also changed the reporting structure of the CSAO to an executive level, reporting directly to the Provost, President or Chancellor (Ambler, 2000; Sandeen, 1991) depending on the administrative model used at an institution. This change allowed the CSAO the opportunity to have direct access to the executive administration and have an impact in institutional planning, including educational, social, and financial policy (Ambler, 2000; Brown, 1997; Sandeen, 1991).

The CSAO has a general control over a broad range of functional student service areas with middle managers with specific student service responsibilities reporting to him or her (Kuh, Evans, & Duke, 1983; Mills, 2000). At large universities, there may be 1000 or more full-time staff in the student affairs division, whereas smaller campuses may have fewer than 20 (Sandeen, 1991). A major responsibility of the CSAO is to work closely with the directors or senior administrators of these service areas to ensure that systematic assessments are made of student learning, and to use this information for the improvement of educational and support programs (Sandeen, 1991).

Housing and Residential Life. Historically, residential living in the United States was adapted from the English models that brought students, faculty, and tutors into one

living space so learning could be integrated inside and outside of the classroom (Schuh, 1996). However, the U.S. model was not as successful in that often the student and faculty relationship was adversarial and the dormitories were viewed as just a place to eat and sleep (Schuh, 1996). In the mid-1800s, the Germanic model, which was not concerned with life outside of the classroom, took over the adapted English system and colleges and universities no longer saw student housing as an institutional responsibility (Schuh, 1996).

At the end of the 19th century, interest in student housing renewed due to the large number of women enrolling in college and the development of campus life outside the classroom in the form of extracurricular activities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Schuh, 1996). This interest continued through the early 20th century and then dramatically shifted again after World War II. Due to the number of veterans returning to complete their education, housing focus changed to reflect the needs of older or non-traditional students who may have families (Schuh, 1996). Construction on more apartment style units occurred during that time to accommodate these students. Interest in on-campus housing continued through the 1970s and 1980s, fueled by economic conditions and convenience (Schuh, 1996). However, since the 1990's, students have become sharper "consumers" of student housing, which challenges the university to provide luxury services, as well as to maximize personal freedom, while guaranteeing personal safety (Schuh, 1996).

Arboleda, Yongyi, Chelley, and Whale (2003) indicated that residence hall communities play a major role in constructing a comfortable, yet powerful, environment for students' involvement in activities during their undergraduate years. As Blimling (1993) observed, "at the core of any established student affairs organization at a residential

college is a strong resident hall program. Life outside the classroom is amplified here. Residential life provides more opportunities to influence student growth and development in the first year or two of college than almost any other program in student affairs. none are as pervasive in scope or have the potential to influence as many students as residence halls do' (p. 1). Astin (1999) also found that students who live on campus have an advantage over those who commute when it comes to getting involved with the college outside of the classroom, and this increases the student's chances of persisting to degree. Tinto (1993) agreed that students living on campus had significantly improved social integration and connection to the institution.

Additionally, research has shown (Arboleda, et al., 2003; Astin, 1999; Pike, 1999; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996) that the benefits of residential living does not come from the place or space itself, but the activities and opportunities that students have the ability to participate in within the shared living and learning environment. This is especially prevalent in communities defined as residential learning communities (RLCs), in which the environment is specifically designed to promote and enhance student learning and development. These types of communities are designed to: "promote greater student involvement, improved faculty-student interaction, and a more supportive peer climate" (Pike, 1999, p. 270).

Student affairs professionals within the area of housing and residence life have a unique opportunity to connect with students where they live through meaningful programming, interaction, and appropriate use of resources. With this comes a responsibility to maximize the available learning opportunities, encourage students to get

involved, and challenge them to learn and grow from one another (Arboleda, et al., 2003; Blimling, 1993).

Orientation and New Student Programs. The idea of orienting students to college has been around since the beginning of American higher education in both formal and informal ways (Rentz, 1996b). Orientation is defined as “any effort on the part of the institution to help entering students make the transition from their previous environment to the college environment and to enhance success in college” (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984, p. 27). Orientation makes connections as the first interaction between newly admitted students and the institution, and sets the tone of the college experience (Gordon, 1989; Jacobs, 2003; Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991; Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Schuh, 2003).

There are historically three main models for orientation programming (Rentz, 1996b). The first emerged in the late 1800s when Boston University offered an orientation day that focused on students’ personal adjustment to college (Jacobs, 2003; Rentz, 1996b). This eventually evolved into a weeklong model used in many institutions today (Jacobs, 2003; Rentz, 1996b). Reed College introduced the second model in the early 1900s, when they offered a course for academic credit that taught students how to use university resources and be successful (Gordon, 1989; Rentz, 1996b). This evolved into the highly popular freshman seminar or “first year experience” in which students are provided information about their transition and supported socially by faculty and peers in small classes (Cuseo, 2003; Gordon, 1989; Hunter & Linder, 2005; Jacobs, 2003; Rentz, 1996b). The third model is a pre-registration event that began in the 1940s at Michigan State University in which students participate in testing and advising, and receive

information about resources and academic programs (Rentz, 1996b). Often a weeklong model before the beginning of the term is used in conjunction with a pre-registration event in the summer months (Rentz, 1996b).

In the past century, the purpose of new student orientation has remained unchanged; however, support for orientation and related programming has varied greatly from one end of the spectrum where it was seen as essential, to the opposite end where it was viewed as irrelevant (Rentz, 1996b). This is especially true of the academic credit courses, which are often fewer credits than traditional academic classes, are graded pass/fail, are not highly valued by faculty, and do not count as part of an academic curriculum (Mandel & Evans, 2003). However, research (Barefoot, 2000; Hunter & Linder, 2005) shows that over 70% of colleges and universities in the United States have some type of first-year seminar.

Orientations, regardless of which model an institution implements, consider four main goals important in assisting students with the transition to college. The first goal is to provide information about the academic setting, including requirements, rigor, how to assess abilities, and academic support resources and services that are available to students (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). The second goal for orientation is to assist with the personal adjustment to college, including how to identify developmental issues, how to participate in the environment, and what personal support resources and services are available (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). The third goal is to include families in the adjustment process by informing them about what their students may be experiencing and how to assist them with the transition (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005;

Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). The final goal of orientation is for participating faculty and staff to learn more about the entering students so that they can make connections with them (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984).

In an era concerned with retention and student success data, orientation and first-year programming become an integral part of the student persistence equation (Levitz & Noel, 1989). Students need to become acquainted with their campus environment and culture, as well as receive assistance with academic and social adjustment, in order to remain enrolled and graduate (Hunter & Linder, 2005). There is substantial evidence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) that orientation and first-year programming directly impact student satisfaction and persistence.

Multicultural Affairs. The role of the office of multicultural affairs is typically to support underrepresented groups and to help all students develop an awareness of, understanding about and sensitivity to differences, and to foster communication amongst different groups (Palmer & Shuford, 1996). There is also a responsibility to serve as a change agent to promote a more diverse institution academically, socially, and politically (Palmer & Shuford, 1996).

Substantial numbers of students of color entered American higher education in the 1960s and later (Levin & Levin, 1991; Palmer & Shuford, 1996). At that time the attitude of higher education administrators was that these students would “assimilate into the institutional culture” (Palmer & Shuford, 1996, p. 222) without any consideration for their needs. Understandably, this left many students of color feeling isolated and alienated from their institutions. In response to the increasing population of students of color,

pressure from student protests, and changes implemented due to the Civil Rights movement (Palmer & Shuford, 1996; Williams, 2003), institutions created offices of minority student services. According to Palmer and Shuford (1996), “these offices served as mini-student affairs divisions for minority students” (p. 223). More recently, these offices evolved into offices of multicultural affairs, which still meet the needs of minority students, but also include outreach to other underrepresented populations and to student affairs areas to help other professionals “recognize, be sensitive to, and respond appropriately to cultural issues” (Palmer & Shuford, 1996, p. 223-224).

Racial and ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented in higher education. However, since the 1990s there continues to be a steady increase in the enrollment of African American students, primarily at predominantly white institutions (Bourne-Bowie, 2000). For many racial and ethnic minority students, adjusting to a new environment can be challenging, and how these students perceive their “fit” into the campus culture can influence their involvement in campus activities (Hawkins & Larabee, 2010). Empirical research (Astin, 1975, 1993; Bean, 2005; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Kuh, 2001, 2007; Kuh, et al, 2005a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2005) shows that increasing the engagement for various student populations is worthwhile. It is therefore imperative that offices of multicultural affairs are aware of the needs of their underrepresented students and are providing resources, programming, and guidance that can support them in achieving their educational goals.

International Education Support Services. Many colleges in the United States consider international education, more commonly referred to as study abroad, an essential part of the development of an educated person and an integral part of the higher

education experience (Lamson & O'Maley, 1995; Study abroad, 2002). Dr. Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education, indicates, "the generation that will lead our country tomorrow must receive an international education today. They must have opportunities to learn about other countries, other cultures and other points of view from direct experience, as an integral part of their higher education" (as quoted in NAFSA Association of International Educators, 2003, p. 2).

Some of the goals of liberal education are related to the learning outcomes of study abroad programs and are very similar to participants' motivations for taking part in the programs, such as the enhancement or acquisition of a foreign language, increased knowledge of another culture, or transforming a student's worldview (Fugate, 1991; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Pickert, 1992). One study (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005) showed that students who participated in study abroad programs reported that they questioned their assumptions, were able to gather and interpret data, and used this information to determine how they fit into a complex, global society.

Study abroad at American colleges dates back to the 1600s with the founding of the nine colonial colleges (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). However, during those times these opportunities were primarily reserved for those students of great wealth or influence and concentrated on studies in Europe (Bowman, 1987; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). During World War II, study abroad programs were disrupted because of war-related issues such as safety concerns, shortages of food, unreliable travel, and limited housing options (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Pickert, 1992). From the 1950s forward, study abroad had a different approach that included international educational opportunities for a wide array

of students from all backgrounds, and extended beyond the boundaries of Europe (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

There has been a significant increase in the number of students participating in study abroad (Lonabocker & Wager, 2003). The Institute of International Education (2012) indicates that the number of students studying abroad in the past two decades has more than tripled. The rise continue to be steady with a total of 273,996 students abroad in 2010-2011 which was an increase of 1.3% over the previous year (IIE, 2012).

To serve the increased number of students studying abroad, many institutions have a study abroad office or center. Although they may differ in how they are organized or staffed (Walker, 1999) they typically provide similar services from institution to institution. These services can include coordinating exchange agreements, supporting efforts to internationalize the curriculum, advising students about opportunities abroad, assisting with financial aid opportunities, working with the registrar's office regarding credit transferability, and programming using students and faculty who have been abroad (Pickert, 1992; Shapiro, 1991; Walker, 1999).

Student Support Programs. Tens of thousands of undergraduate students come to college with circumstances that may challenge their ability to succeed academically (Kuh, 2007), including: socioeconomic background, financial means, college readiness, and support from home. In fact, according to Kuh (2007), one quarter of students enrolled in four-year institutions must complete at least one remedial course.

Higher education institutions try to address this situation by providing services to help students be more successful. These services are often provided through comprehensive academic success or learning centers. Learning centers (Carranza &

Ender, 2003; Newton & Smith, 1996; Simpson, Hynd, Nist, & Burrell, 1997) generally offer learning support resources to improve academic skills through services such as tutoring, academic skill development programs, supplemental instruction courses, mentoring programs, learning strategy workshops, and self-management techniques. Additionally some schools will also implement early warning systems to support students that need help (Kuh, 2007). Depending on the needs of the institution's students, the learning center could serve both ends of the learning spectrum, for those that need remediation and intrusive support through those that need just a bit of extra guidance to be even more successful (Carranza & Ender, 2003). Often the better students are the first ones to request services, such as tutoring, in order to maintain their academic success (Carranza & Ender, 2003).

Although tutoring has existed since the beginning of higher education in the United States (Boylan & White, 1987), these multi-service learning centers, have expanded since the 1960s. This development was due to the rapid increase in enrollment and the changed demographics of college students (Simpson, Hynd, Nist, & Burrell, 1997). Unfortunately, they are very difficult to define as each center may offer several different types of academic services as well as be open to a restricted student population or open to the entire campus (Simpson, et al, 1997).

According to one national study (Ender, Newton, & Caple, 1996) 43% of respondents indicated they had a learning center or equivalent within the division of student affairs. Additionally, 53% of the respondents offered tutoring services and 71% participated in some sort of early warning/alert program. Of the 92% of respondents who indicated they had disability support services, 61% indicated that this program was

housed within the student affairs division. According to Kuh (2007), nine out of every 10 students starting college say they intend to use an academic-assistance or learning center. However, only half as many actually do (Kuh, 2007).

Academic Advising. Prior to the 20th century, academic programs were highly structured, had limited choices in curriculum, and low enrollment (Goetz, 1996) which meant academic guidance was provided strictly through faculty interaction (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Frost, 2000). In the late 19th and early 20th century, the expansion of the college curriculum to include a broader array of electives and the growth of professional curricula created a need for specialization in a particular subject area by the faculty (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Frost, 2000; Goetz, 1996). Advising began as a core group of faculty selected by the president of the institution to counsel students regarding their academic programs (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Grites, 1979). Once the student development movement began to consider the student holistically, this created an interest area within student affairs, which was called educational counseling (Goetz, 1996). The term academic advising first became a keyword descriptor in the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) in 1981, which recognized advising as an intentional effort to bring academic planning assistance to students (Goetz, 1996).

There are a variety of organizational models for advising, as it must fit with the institution's mission for the process to be effective (Goetz, 1996). The faculty model of advising is often the only model used at smaller institutions, but can also be a part of a more complex model used at larger institutions (Goetz, 1996). In these more complex models, faculty provide guidance within their disciplines and professional advisors typically assist first year, undeclared, or other special population students (Goetz, 1996).

Many institutions have a complex model created around a centralized advising center, which combines faculty, professional advisors, and sometimes peer-advisors to assist students with their academic decisions (Crockett & Levitz, 1984; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1984; Goetz, 1996). The advising center could serve an entire institution, a particular unit, or a special population (Crockett & Levitz, 1984; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1984) and has been shown to be an effective mechanism for handling a large number of students (Grites, 1979).

Advising can enhance the relationship between the student and the institution by exchanging information about the complicated curriculum, academic requirements, policies and procedures, and the learning that happens in and out of the classroom (Goetz, 1996). The relationship between the student and the institution is critical to the educational quality of the experience (Greenwood, 1984). When the academic advising system forges relationships, there is great potential for positive views of the institution as a whole as an effective, personal, caring, and welcoming place (Greenwood, 1984). Academic advising is also tied very closely to the curriculum as the process assists students with selecting a field of study and appropriate courses (Goetz, 1996).

Advising is a service provided to most students, creates out-of-class connections with a faculty or staff member of the institution, and involves conversation about matters that are important to the student (Frost, 1991). For this reason, advising may be one of the most important student service areas related to educational outcomes, retention, and student satisfaction. Research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) has consistently shown that advising can play a role in student persistence and educational outcomes.

Student Life and Student Activities. College life has always included some type of 'student life' with coordinated and scheduled activities outside of the classroom. During colonial times, the church was the center of student life with regular prayer, church attendance, and activities related to the study of religion (Whipple, 1996). However, Harvard in 1719 saw a change to more irreverent activities such as reading poetry, deep life discussions, and the use of beer and tobacco (Whipple, 1996). Literary societies took a major role in campus life to provide outlets for public speaking and discussions of literature (Whipple, 1996). These literary societies eventually evolved into Greek letter organizations, which also sparked the development of Greek letter social organizations, more commonly known as fraternities and sororities, which can be found on campuses today (Whipple, 1996). In the early 19th century, student government was created to provide an outlet for students, as well as to enforce university regulations (Whipple, 1996).

After the Civil War, other types of organizations started to gain popularity, while literary societies declined as schools began to expand their curricula and include more elective opportunities (Cowley & Waller, 1994; Whipple, 1996). This made room for social organizations, academic clubs, athletics and student government to emerge as extracurricular outlets and common denominators for students to talk about (Cowley & Waller, 1994; Whipple, 1996). The first student union was built in 1896 at the University of Pennsylvania to house student organizations (Whipple, 1996). This type of building quickly became seen as a 'living room' for college campuses and construction rapidly increased after World War I (Whipple, 1996). After World War II, campuses changed as

students returned from war; however, the traditional fraternities and sororities still dominated the campus life scene (Whipple, 1996).

During the 1960s and 1970s as cultural movements were sweeping across the United States, students on campuses turned away from the traditional activities such as sororities and fraternities in favor of leadership and volunteerism efforts (Whipple, 1996). Since the 1980s, as college campuses have become more diverse, so have the student organizations, which include cultural, religious, and other interests not seen before (Whipple, 1996).

According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), the development of the whole student includes attending to their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth. As discussed earlier, since students spend so much of their day outside of the classroom, the impact of campus activities on student development is critical (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Whipple, 1996). At many institutions, presidents and administrators hail the student life staff as the campus experts on students as they assist students through developmental difficulties and help create links between the academic programs and the out-of-class activities (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991).

Assessment Practices in Student Affairs

Because students spend so many hours outside of the classroom per week, many co-curricular activities are crucial to the student learning process and should be assessed. In addition, many institutions have mission statements that include focuses in diversity, justice, leadership, citizenship, etc. that are not housed within most curricular offerings and are more likely to be measured within student affairs areas (Wehlburg, 2008). It is

important that academic affairs and student affairs both be responsible for assessing student learning outcomes.

Since the very beginning of the profession, assessment has been a topic of concern for student affairs professionals. In the early 1900s, several student affairs leaders (Talbot, 1910; Lloyd-Jones, 1929) recognized the need to gather data about students and their experiences so that their learning could be improved. In the 1930s, the *Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) listed as one of the essential functions for student personnel services: “carrying on studies designed to evaluate and improve these functions and services” (p. 4). In the 1960s, assessment done by personnel engaged in student affairs was viewed as a professional responsibility and the sign of an effective program (Mueller, 1961; Williamson, 1961). Student affairs assessment began to grow during this period, but more as part of the larger public movement toward accountability in higher education and the response to external pressures, rather than internal effort focused on student learning or the quality of the undergraduate experience (Sandeen, 2001; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Wehlburg, 2008).

Although student affairs leaders have been urging practitioners to partake in assessment activities from the very beginning, very few actually engage in any research or program evaluation (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Sandeen & Barr, 2006). Many practitioners realize the importance of assessment, but either due to workload or lack of expertise most have not fully embraced the concept, relying instead on studies about students and student learning conducted outside of student affairs (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). Leaders of student affairs units need to assure their stakeholders that the activities for which they are responsible contribute to student learning and are consistent with the

institution's mission and as such they must contribute to the accountability process (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, 2005.)

Assessment is seen as a necessary, periodic process tied to accreditation rather than a way to produce more successful programs (Angelo, 1999). It is necessary to get the assessment data to those that create programs for more informed decision making about resources or programming to happen and to close the feedback loop. The phrase "closing the feedback loop" refers to using results from student learning outcomes to make adjustments to the programming, which should change the learning outcomes in the next cycle (Angelo, 1999). Most often, student affairs stop short of closing the loop. Student affairs areas will create learning outcomes and measure them, but often will file the report after an initial review so there is no long-term impact of the data (Angelo, 1999). One reason it's often hard to close the feedback loop is because the data used for external accountability to the general public and accreditors measures student learning (are students learning what the department says they will), rather than looking at issues as they contribute to learning (does this program contribute to the learning that students are achieving) (Angelo, 1999). Outcomes assessments are very difficult to measure, but they are necessary to provide the evidence that programs are achieving their objectives, and can be used to guide strategic planning, determine cost effectiveness, and guide decision making (Upcraft, 2003; Schuh, 2007). The ability to use information effectively is a critical element of student affairs work (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Madson, Benedict, & Weitzer, 1989) and it is essential for the evaluation of all university operations to be evaluated if an institution is to be effective in achieving its total mission. This means

assessing student affairs as well as instructional components within higher education (Reichard, 1995.)

Using Data and Information in Decision Making

Making a decision always involves making a choice. Even if there is only one option, there is still the choice to take it not take it. Decision making can be defined as “a process of choosing among alternative courses of action for the purpose of attaining a goal or goals” (Turban, Aronson, & Liang, 2004, p. 34).

While administrators may intend to make decisions that are well informed and based on facts, other factors, such as prior experience, can influence decisions. Research indicates (Goleman, Boyatzus, & McKee, 2002; LaFrance, 1989; Wagner 1990) that when individuals are faced with new problems in an area of expertise, the problems are reworked to fit solutions that already exist in the memory banks, rather than coming up with new solutions. Therefore, decisions have an emotional aspect, in addition to rational. Intuition can help individuals find meaning in the data, which leads to better decisions. As the decisions that higher education administrators have to make became more complex and strategic, the role of data in making good decisions has been recognized (Bonabeau, 2003; Goleman, Boyatzus, & McKee, 2002). As Kuh states, “[without the data]... it’s hard to know where to target institutional effort and resources to enhance student learning” (2001, p. 15)

Using data in decision making is not a one-time activity, but instead the “use of systemically and systematically collected data to guide a range of decisions” (Swan, 2009, p. 107). This process allows the raw information that makes up data to be put into context

so that relationships between data can be understood. This context is then merged with experience and judgment to form knowledge and understand the patterns in the information being presented (Swan, 2009). “Improvement-oriented institutions rely on systematic information to make good decisions.” (Kuh, et al., 2005b, p. 152). Higher education institutions need to have administrators who can interpret data to identify challenges and articulate strategies to improve student-learning outcomes.

To achieve success in the use of data in decision making, users must give full attention to the quality, timeliness and relevancy of data (Swan, 2009). Further, decision making using data cannot be seen as a singular activity focused only on data collection, but as a broader activity that leads to meaningful performance benchmarks that help academic leaders achieve the institution mission outcomes (Bonabeau, 2003; Goleman, Boyatzus, & McKee, 2002). Knowledge creation that leads to enhanced institutional effectiveness is the ultimate objective of data-driven decision making.

National Survey of Student Engagement as an Assessment Tool

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), or “Nessie,” measures the extent to which students are engaged in activities that contribute to their learning and development during college (Kuh, 2001; NSSE, n.d.; NSSE, 2009; Pike, 2006). The design of this instrument provides an alternative to the growing trend of focusing on college rankings based on reputation and resources (Lipka, 2007; Pike, 2006). Many institutions were caught up in the rankings of quality by media outlets, such as U. S. News and World Report, which focused on such things as student selectivity and faculty credentials (Kuh, 2001; NSSE, n.d.) rather than the enhancement of undergraduate

education through activities, experiences, and outcomes. With the NSSE's emphasis on student engagement and focus on good practices, the intention is to shift the measure of quality away from resources and inputs and more toward outcomes (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 2001; NSSE, n.d.).

This instrument has the capability of reframing the conversation about collegiate quality to include the findings of the literature, which indicate that the time and energy students devote to educational activities is more important than any other factor including resources and reputation (Kuh, 2001). According to George Kuh (as quoted in Lipka, 2007), "It's one thing to know what a college has in terms of resources, its reputation, and so forth, but it's quite another to know what students actually do with those resources" (p. A32).

The NSSE, administered by a third party in both paper and web versions (Kuh, 2001), is given to randomly selected first year and senior students in the second term of the academic year who were enrolled in the prior term (Kuh, 2003b). NSSE relies on self-reports from students to assess the quality of undergraduate education (Kuh, 2003b). Research (Pace, 1984; Pascarella, 2001) shows that it is reasonable and appropriate to pay attention to what college students say they have gained from their experiences. It is also a common practice to use self-report for indicators of educational practice as student reports are often the only meaningful way to gather information about how students use their time (Kuh, 2003b).

Origins. Conceived in 1998, The NSSE was developed after the Pew Charitable Trusts convened a working group of leaders from across higher education to discuss the college ranking systems that were growing in favor (Kuh, 2001; NSSE, n. d.). After

these meetings, the conclusion was that an instrument that could measure undergraduate quality could provide colleges and universities, as well as stakeholders, with more valuable information than had been established by the media rankings using measures of reputation (Kuh, 2001; 2003b; NSSE, n.d.)

The framework for the NSSE is drawn from the literature including Pace's (1984) concept of quality student effort, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) 'Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education', and Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement (Pike, 2006). The instrument asks students about their engagement in activities demonstrated as good practice in undergraduate education (Kuh, 2003b; Pike, 2006).

As defined by NSSE, there are three possible uses for the data collected through this instrument. First, institutions are provided with useful data to improve undergraduate education (NSSE, n.d.). Second, external stakeholders can use the results as part of an assessment of institutional effectiveness (NSSE, n.d.). Third, if the institutions would choose to make the data public, it might be interesting to the media, as well as prospective students and their parents, college counselors, academic advisors, researchers, and others interested in learning about how students spend their time at different institutions and what they gain from their experiences (NSSE, n.d.)

The initial pilot of the instrument occurred in 1999 with 75 colleges and universities participating (NSSE, n.d.). The inaugural launch occurred in 2000 with 275 institutions participating that first year (NSSE, n.d.).

Instrument. The NSSE instrument is known as The College Student Report (Kuh, 2001; 2003b; NSSE, n.d.; Pike 2006). It is a 40-item survey administered in both

an electronic and paper format (Kuh, 2001). It begins with basic demographic data such as age, gender, race or ethnicity, living situation, educational status, and major. The instrument then asks students to reflect on what they are putting into, and getting out of, their college experience (Kuh, 2003b). Students report the frequency with which they engage in dozens of activities that represent desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college as defined by the literature (Kuh, 2003b). Students also record their perceptions of features of the college environment that are associated with achievement, satisfaction, and persistence (Kuh, 2003b). Students also estimate their educational and personal growth since starting college in seven areas: general knowledge, intellectual skills, written and oral communication skills, personal, social, and ethical development, and vocational preparation (Kuh, 2003b).

The NSSE also has two direct measures of student satisfaction (Kuh, 2003b) by asking students: a) How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? and b) If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

Institutions have the option of customizing the instrument with up to 20 additional questions specific to the institution (Kuh, 2003b). Additionally, institutions can link the responses to their own databases in order to examine other aspects of the undergraduate experience in relation to the student's self-reported responses on the NSSE (Kuh, 2003b)

Benchmarks. The results of the NSSE have been used to develop national benchmarks for good practice, which participating schools can use to estimate the effectiveness of their improvement efforts (Kuh, 2001). Colleges that participate in the NSSE receive this information in an annual report showing how each compare to peer

institutions in the five different categories (Wasley, 2006). These benchmarks can also serve as measures to identify opportunities to improve undergraduate education (Pike, 2006).

The five institutional benchmarks (Kuh, 2001; 2003b; NSSE, n.d.) developed from the survey include:

- Level of academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student interaction with faculty members
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment

The NSSE instrument was designed by several leading assessment experts using items that have been used for years in established assessment programs such as the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), so the construct validity of the instrument is strong (Kuh, 2003b). In general, “the psychometric properties of the NSSE are very good, as the vast majority of items equal or exceed the recommended measurement levels. Those items that are not in the normal range are due to the nature of the student experience, not because of the psychometric shortcomings of the instrument” (Kuh, 2003b, p. 23). Since the first administration in 2000, more than 1200 different institutions across the United States and Canada have participated in the NSSE. As a result of the acceptance of this tool, additional instruments have been created which are specific to community colleges (CCSSE), law schools (LSSSE), and faculty (FSSE) based on the NSSE framework and supported by NSSE participation fees (NSSE, n.d.) According to Kuh (2001), “.data from

the NSSE project are the only reliable sources of information that a school has about student engagement in effective educational practices’ (p. 15).

Although colleges and universities participating in the NSSSE receive an annual report providing important information about their institution’s strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to peers, not all institutions report that they are using the survey results for decision making. George Kuh indicates (as quoted in Lipka, 2007), “just doing the NSSE doesn’t improve undergraduate teaching and learning. You have to do something with the data” (p. A32).

Challenges. There have been some studies (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Gordon, Ludlum, & Hoey, 2007; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) that have demonstrated that the NSSE’s engagement benchmarks may not associate strongly with outcomes for every institution. There has also been some challenge to how the benchmark scales have been adopted which may mean inconsistency between each of the items on the scale (Gordon, et al., 2007).

There is also the challenge that the majority of the research, articles, and reports coming out about the NSSE are by researchers affiliated with the NSSE or Indiana University. Yet even with these challenges, the NSSE remains one of the only methods of institution-level assessment of student engagement and a readily accessible tool for student affairs administrators to use.

Summary

Increased interest in accountability and a shift in accreditation focus have necessitated that higher education institutions focus on more informed decision making

and a culture of evidence to demonstrate that programs and services are having the intended impact and resources are being used effectively and efficiently. The introduction of the NSSE as a resource for institutions to measure the learning impact of student's engagement in meaningful activities has provided an opportunity for student affairs functional areas specifically to engage with student learning outcomes as an assessment measure traditionally used in academic programs. Institutions that participate in the NSSE have access to a wealth of data about their own students as well as a comparison tool to measure themselves against others. This data can be very valuable in closing the loop for planning and decision-making efforts regarding educationally purposeful activities.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this study is to determine the extent to which student affairs functional areas within a particular accreditation context are using the NSSE resources for planning and program improvement. This study is designed to research the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data by student affairs functional areas at institutions accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The purpose is to determine whether the NSSE data are used, how the NSSE data are used, and if there are institutional characteristics that predict who uses the data. Various comparisons are planned between different institutional characteristics, between different accreditation models (PEAQ or AQIP), and among specific student service functional areas participating. This research provides data for how the NSSE is used in planning by specific types of institutions, accreditation model affiliations, or specific student service functional areas.

The following research questions are examined.

- To what extent and in what ways, if any, do higher education institutions use the NSSE in decision making or planning?
- To what extent and in what ways, if any, do particular student affairs functional areas use the NSSE in decision making or planning?

- In what ways, if any, does accreditation method or accreditation cycle stage predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
- In what ways, if any, do institutional characteristics predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
- In what ways, if any, does strategic planning process predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?

Research Design

There are several research designs that could be applied to study use of NSSE data for planning and accreditation, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. Creswell (2009) describes the appropriate criteria to use when determining which method is best. The criteria include the research problem, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the audience for the research. When identifying factors that influence a specific outcome, quantitative methods are appropriate (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher has been trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods through course work and practical experience and has conducted numerous quantitative surveys related to student learning outcomes and program assessment. The audience for this study includes higher education administrators involved in decision making and assessment, and scholars of assessment and accreditation. These individuals would be experienced in understanding quantitative information and would be expected to understand the significance of the study results.

Population, Sample, and Participants

The focus of this study is on institutions of higher education that participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This regional accrediting body oversees the accrediting process in 19 states located in the north and central part of the United States. Using the list of participating schools for 2005-2012 available on the NSSE website (NSSE, 2012), it was determined that 445 participating institutions were located in the geographic region covered by the Higher Learning Commission.

This list was compared to the list of institutions accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC, 2012) to determine if the institution was accredited, whether they participated in AQIP or PEAQ models, when the date of their last reaffirmation of accreditation was, and the type of control (public, private not for profit, or private for profit). Examining this list closely determined that four of the NSSE participating institutions were not accredited by the Higher Learning Commission due to: not meeting regional accrediting standards, serving as a distant campus of an institution primarily located in another region, and being accredited by another regional association, or no longer being in operation. For the purposes of this study, it was further determined to eliminate 19 organizations designated as private, for profit control from the sample pool to focus on not for profit public and private institutions. From this pared down list of 422 NSSE participating institutions with HLC accreditation, it was determined that there were 53 AQIP institutions (30 private and 23 public) and 369 PEAQ institutions (218 private and 151 public). For the purposes of this study, the two institutions that the researcher is

closely affiliated with through long-term employment or academic attendance have also been removed from the sample pool leaving 420 institutions as the population for sampling.

For this study, 100 of the possible institutions were randomly selected to participate, including 25 that participate in AQIP and 75 that participate in PEAQ. The study focuses specifically on eight student service functional areas within each of the institutions: Senior Student Affairs Officer/Administrator, Multicultural Affairs, International Education Support Services, Academic Advising, Housing and Residential Life, Student Life/Activities, Orientation/New Student Programs, and Student Support Programs. The resulting sample size was 100 institutions, consisting of public and private institutions that participate in AQIP and PEAQ from across the North Central region and up to 800 individuals, consisting of directors or senior administrators in each of the eight identified student service areas. For this population, a sample size of 252 responses was necessary for power (Macorr Research Solutions Online, n.d.) with 90% confidence level and 5% confidence interval. This would be a response rate of approximately 30% given the sample parameters.

Instrumentation

The researcher constructed a survey to gather data relevant to the research questions indicated in Chapter 1. Questions were designed to collect demographic information and more specific information about each of the student service functional areas presented in the literature review found in Chapter 2 as well as the use of the NSSE data for decision making.

The survey instrument consists of 47 questions comprised of 74 different response items. Most respondents would not answer more than 57 response items based on responses to some questions redirecting to other questions relevant to the prior response. This process of branching questions directs respondents through different paths in a survey based on logic applied to the responses. A diagram of the instrument structure can be found in Figure 2 to demonstrate the flow that a participant experiences while completing the survey. A complete copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix C. The survey instrument can be broken down into four major sections: (1) Institutional and Individual Characteristics, (2) Accreditation Method and Involvement, (3) Existence and Usage of a Strategic Plan, and (4) Use of the NSSE Data.

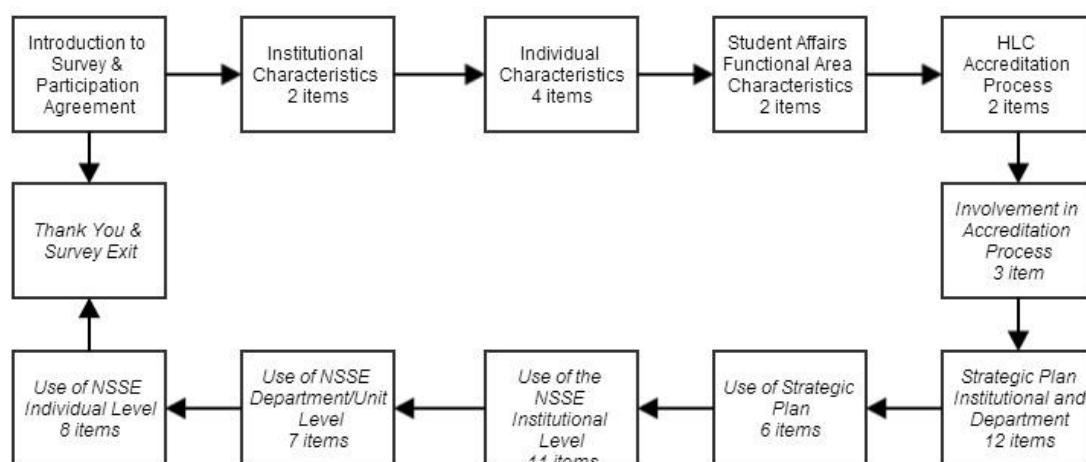


Figure 2. Survey instrument structure and flow.

Institutional and Individual Characteristics. Institutional characteristic information includes the control of the institution (public vs. private) and the size of the undergraduate population. The other questions in this section are based on individual

characteristics to determine the amount of experience the individual has working in student affairs, the length of time spent as a student affairs administrator, and length of time in the current position as well as functional area of current role. There are then two additional questions specific to each student affairs functional area to determine the size and scope of the role by determining how many professional staff members the administrator supervises and the number of annual student contacts to determine scale and scope of the position.

Accreditation Method and Involvement. This section of the instrument poses questions about the accreditation method and the individual's involvement in the accreditation process. The first question is to determine the participant's knowledge about the institution's accreditation method (PEAQ vs. AQIP). If the accreditation method is known, the next question determines the status of the current accreditation cycle. The next three questions are used to determine if the individual is involved in the accreditation process, to what extent, and in what ways. If the respondent does not know which accreditation method is used, the instrument skips to the next section regarding strategic planning.

Existence and Usage of a Strategic Plan. The first question in this section determines if there is an institution level strategic plan in place at the institution. If known, the next two questions are to determine how long the institution has been involved in strategic planning and how long the current plan has been in place. The next question determines if the participant is involved in institution level strategic planning. If a positive response, two additional questions are asked to determine to what extent and in what ways. If the respondent does not know if there is an institutional strategic plan in

place then the survey moves to the next set of questions related to department/unit level strategic plan.

The next set of questions determines if there is a department/unit level strategic plan in place in the participant's functional area. If known, the next two questions are to determine how long the department/unit has been involved in strategic planning and how long the current plan has been in place. The next question determines if the participant is involved in department/unit level strategic planning. If a positive response, two additional questions are asked to determine to what extent and in what ways. The next two questions each include three items to determine if the institutional and department/unit strategic plans are commonly discussed, used for program planning, or developing program outcomes. If a respondent does not know if there is a department/unit strategic plan in place, the survey skips to the next section regarding usage of the NSSE data.

Use of the NSSE Data. The next section of the instrument poses questions about the usage of the NSSE data at the institutional, department/unit, and individual level. The first question is about the institutional level use of the NSSE data. There are five items in this section to determine who the NSSE data report is shared with (senior administration, faculty, professional staff, students, and other stakeholders). The next five items determine to what extent, if any, the data are disaggregated at various levels to compare the data with peers, and look deeper at specific question areas, or for specific populations or student characteristics. The last item in this set is to determine if the institution provides explanation or training for how to use the data and what the benchmarks are.

The next question is related to the department/unit usage of the NSSE data. The first four items in this set is to determine familiarity of department members with the

NSSE instrument, the contents of the institutional report, and the highest and lowest benchmarks for the institution. The next item is to gauge the respondent's view of the NSSE data as being related to or describing the student affairs functional area the individual works in. The final two items in this set are to determine the extent to which the NSSE data are used in setting department/unit goals or creating collaborative partnerships.

The final question in this set determines individual understanding and usage of the NSSE data. The first seven items include individual usage of the NSSE for planning purposes, and the usage of specific NSSE benchmark items as part of the planning process. The final item asks if any other assessment tools are used to gauge if data are being used for planning, but not the NSSE.

The instrument was procedurally tested twice during the process of development to ensure that there were no confusing questions and that the items elicited appropriate responses based on the research questions. The procedural testing allowed the instrument to be revised and to provide a survey experience that was more concise, more clearly worded, and elicited the types of responses that the researcher anticipated for the questions.

Data Collection Methods

The publicly available list of NSSE participants for 2005-2012 (NSSE, 2012), was compared with the geographic region covered by the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation authority to filter for those participating schools that are within the 19 states of the HLC region. From these institutions, 100 were randomly selected to participate.

Through a web search or personal contact with the institutions, the director or senior administrator for each of the eight student affairs functional areas were identified and their names and email addresses entered into a spreadsheet for use in distributing the survey and follow-up reminder contacts. After the appropriate individuals have been identified and entered, email communication were sent requesting their participation. This email communication included a link to the online instrument and a request to complete the survey.

Follow up communication has consistently been identified as a powerful method of increasing response rates (Dillman, 2000). However, timing is critical for the follow up as to not be seen as spam or irritate the participants. The average response time for online surveys is 5.59 days (Ilieva, Baron, & Healey, 2002). For this survey, participants who had not completed the survey after five business days received a reminder email repeating the request for completion and the link to the online instrument. A second reminder was sent five days later for those that had still not yet completed the survey. If the overall response rate is low for this study, a phone call was made to any participants who had not responded after the third message attempt as a final reminder. An additional email was sent depending on the discussion and their intention to complete the survey based on the phone conversation. Participants had the opportunity to opt out of the survey and receive no further reminders in the email request.

An online survey format was selected for several reasons. The survey sample is of personnel from higher education institutions; which generally have adequate Internet access for completion of an online instrument and they are used to directed links in emails. In addition, web-based surveys have the benefits of reduced completion time,

reduced cost over traditional mail, and surveys that are more complex are possible due to the directed branching of questions (Dillman, 2000.)

The survey instrument was administered using a reliable online survey tool called Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). One of the issues with conducting an online survey is that the participant may need clarification of an item on the survey. To offset this issue, two procedural pilot surveys were conducted with the defined student affairs functional areas at non-sample institutions. Creswell (2009) recommends carrying out field tests of a new instrument prior to carrying out a study. These procedural pilots were designed to anticipate and correct any confusing instrument items and to determine appropriate length of the instrument. Additionally, the researcher's contact information was included on the survey instrument in case any questions or technical issues arise with the survey instrument.

Data Analysis

Five research questions are proposed in this study. Analysis included basic descriptive statistics (sometimes categorized at the institution, department/unit, and individual levels) of all of the demographic information to get an overview of the sample. Additional statistical methods were used including: t-test to compare the means of two groups and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine significance of mean differences among specific characteristics within a group as appropriate. All survey data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This software is specifically designed for data analysis and is particularly well suited for survey research. A summary of the data analysis can be found in Table 1.

Summary

Accountability and accreditation have become the focus of higher education institutions over the past few decades. The pressure from federal and state governments, as well as accrediting agencies, to determine how institutions impact student learning has increased, and includes all facets of the institution. This study should be beneficial to higher education administrators at NSSE participating institutions to determine how the data that is rich with information about student engagement and student learning is being used across the student service functional areas. The use of this information for program planning and utilization of scarce resources would support the institution's mission of student learning. More information regarding the results can be found in Chapter 4.

Table 1

Data Analysis Summary

Research Question	Data Analysis	Survey Item
	Descriptive Statistics	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38, Q39, Q40, Q41, Q42, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q46, Q47
1. To what extent and in what ways, if any, do higher education institutions use the NSSE in decision making or planning?	Mean Standard Deviation	Q45

Table 1—Continued

2. To what extent and in what ways, if any, do particular student affairs functional areas use the NSSE in decision making or planning?	Mean	Q46 (Q6)
	(by functional area)	
	Standard Deviation	Q47 (Q6)
	(by functional area)	
3. In what ways, if any, does accreditation method or accreditation cycle stage predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?	t-Test (PEAQ vs. AQIP)	Q45 (Q25)
	ANOVA	Q45 (Q26 or Q27)
	(accreditation cycle status)	
4. In what ways, if any, do institutional characteristics predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?	t-Test (Public/Private)	Q45 (Q1)
	ANOVA (size of institution)	Q45 (Q2)

Table 1—Continued

5. In what ways, if any, does strategic planning process predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?	Institutional Level:	Institutional Level:
	t-Test (Yes/No)	Q31
	ANOVA (Yes Q31)	Q45 (Q32)
	ANOVA (Yes Q31)	Q45 (Q33)
	Unit/Department Level:	Unit/Department Level:
	t-Test (Yes/No)	Q37
	ANOVA (Yes Q37)	Q46 (Q38)
	ANOVA (Yes Q37)	Q46 (Q39)

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter describes the survey process and the analysis of the survey data relevant to the research questions. A description of the sample is presented as an overview of the results. For personal and institutional characteristics that had categorical data, the results are presented in the text rounded to the nearest whole number to be more precise in the data reporting. This chapter also includes the results of the data analysis for each research question in this study, including: the extent and ways institutions use NSSE data; the extent and ways student affairs functional areas use NSSE data; accreditation method and cycle stage as a predictor for use of the NSSE data; institutional characteristics as a predictor for use of the NSSE data; strategic planning processes as a predictor for use of the NSSE data; and finally a discussion.

Description of the Sample

The research survey, entitled *Closing the Loop: A Study of How the NSSE is Used for Decision making and Planning in Student Affairs* was distributed in multiple waves online as each sampling process was completed. The first launch occurred on March 8, 2014 to 217 participants identified as directors or coordinators for the identified student affairs areas at public institutions that participate in the NSSE and also participate in the PEAQ method of accreditation (4 of these email addresses bounced back and 1 opted out,

leaving a sample of 212 participants in this group). The second launch occurred on March 8, 2014 to 167 participants identified as directors or coordinators for the identified student affairs areas at institutions that participate in the NSSE and also participate in the AQIP method of accreditation (3 of these email addresses bounced back, leaving a sample of 164 participants in this group). The final launch occurred on June 24, 2014 to 271 participants identified as directors or coordinators for the identified student affairs areas at privately controlled institutions that participate in the NSSE and also participate in the PEAQ method of accreditation (4 of these email addresses bounced back, leaving a sample of 267 participants in this group).

Reminders were sent to each sample group who had not responded or opted out after two weeks from the initial request and then after one more week from the reminder (March 16, March 26, July 8, and July 15). The surveys closed on April 4, 2014 and July 31, 2014 respectively. The overall response rate was 25.5% with 164 responses, although not all respondents provided complete data (136 provided complete data). All 164 responses were used in the statistical analysis for this study. If a specific question did not have a response, it was coded as No Response and removed from the valid data for the analysis of that question.

Some other data cleanup was done to ensure the most accurate results for this study. Some of the respondents indicated zero years of student affairs experience or student affairs administration experience. However, these same respondents had entries for their current administrative role. Since this sample only included those identified by the researcher to hold positions in student affairs functional areas, these results were changed to No Response so that they would not be factored into the analysis as zero.

Additionally, five respondents indicated Other as their functional area, but included positional titles that clearly matched one of the identified functional areas in this study. These responses were moved out of Other and categorized under the appropriate functional areas. One respondent indicated that there were 1,000,000 student contacts annually. Since this was a significant outlier from the other responses, this was changed to No Response in order to reduce the skew on the data analysis. Finally, 28 respondents indicated AQIP as their accreditation model, yet the sampling methods allowed the researcher to know that they should be classified as PEAQ. In these cases, the responses were changed to PEAQ for data analysis.

The respondents were split nearly in half based on institutional control with 48.2% (n=79) privately controlled and 51.8% (n=85) publicly controlled (Table 2). The majority of respondents indicated that the size of their institutions based on total undergraduate enrollment was mostly less than 10,000 students (n=101) as seen in Table 2 with a minority of respondents coming from medium or large universities (n=63).

Table 2

Total Undergraduate Student Enrollment

Enrollment	n	%	Private	Public
Less than 3,000	52	31.7	50	2
3,000-9,999	49	29.9	24	25
10,000-19,999	24	14.6	3	21
20,000-29,999	30	18.3	1	29
30,000-39,999	4	2.4	1	3
40,000 or More	5	3.0	0	5
Total	164		79	85

The respondents reported that three-fourths of them had an on-campus population of less than 5,000 students, with the majority being between 750-2,499 students (Table 3).

Table 3

Institutions' Undergraduate On-campus Residential Population

Population	n	%
Less than 750	5	21.7
750-2,499	8	34.8
2,500-4,999	5	21.7
5,000-7,499	3	13.0
7,500-9,999	2	8.7
No Response	9	

When looking at the work experience of the respondents (Table 4), they have been in a student affairs role for an average of 13.71 years and an administrative role for an average of 11.30 years. The data was further grouped into bands of work experience (Table 4) which shows that nearly half of the respondents have between 8 and 16 years of total student affairs experience (47.6%, n=70) and between 4 and 12 years of student affairs administrative experience (56.9%, n=83). Although the majority have only been in their current roles for less than 3 years (41.6%, n=64), overall the data demonstrates that the respondents overall qualified, experienced and appropriate for this study.

Table 4

Total Years of Student Affairs Experience—Grouped

Years	Student Affairs		Administration		Current Position	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0-3	11	7.5	15	10.3	64	41.6
4-7	26	17.7	40	27.4	48	31.2
8-12	37	25.2	43	29.5	24	15.6
13-16	33	22.4	19	13.0	9	5.8
17-20	13	8.8	11	7.5	6	3.9
More than 20	27	18.4	18	12.3	3	1.9
No Response	17		18		10	
Mean	13.71		11.30		6.17	
Median	12		10		5	
Mode	15		10		2 ^a	

Note. a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The respondents were split across the 8 functional areas (Table 5) with the majority indicating they worked in Housing and Residential Life (14.8%, n=23) or Student Life and Activities (14.2%, n=22). The fewest respondents indicated they worked in Orientation and New Student Programs (4.5%, n=7). Some participants indicated Other Functional Area (10.3%, n=16) and when asked to describe their work, indicated multiple functional areas and roles identified in this study. Additionally, the number of staff respondents supervised varied widely from the high average of 18 staff members for directors of Housing and Residence Life to a low of three staff members for International Education (Study Abroad) directors. Chief Student Affairs Officers on average supervised 28 staff members. The number of student contacts also varied widely from a low average of 2,533 in International Education (Study Abroad) to a high average of 13,542 in the Academic Advising group. The complete data table can be found in Appendix D.

Table 5

Survey Respondents by Student Affairs Functional Area

<i>Functional Area</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Chief Student Affairs Officer	18	11.6			
Total # of staff			8.5	28.17	40.790
Total # student contacts			3000.00	11911.76	25544.737
Academic Advising	20	12.9			
Total # of staff			3.00	8.00	9.987
Total # student contacts			8221.00	13542.41	19961.333
Housing & Residential Life	23	14.8			
Total # of staff			6.00	17.74	34.973
Total # student contacts	*asked about residential population instead. Responses can be found in Table 3				
International Education (Study Abroad)	15	9.7			
Total # of staff			2.50	2.63	2.247
Total # student contacts			500.00	2533.44	3857.281
Orientation & New Student Programs	7	4.5			
Total # of staff			2.00	4.57	7.068
Total # student contacts			3500.00	5814.29	8105.847
Student Life & Activities	22	14.2			
Total # of staff			4.00	4.10	3.820
Total # student contacts			1000.00	11167.14	33599.911
Other	16	10.3			
Total # of staff			10.5	22.00	29.158
Total # student contacts			2250.00	8708.83	16995.045
No Response	9				

Accreditation type was also split with respondents indicating 45.5% (n=45) AQIP and 54.5% (n=54) PEAQ (Table 6). Interesting to note was that 65 participants indicated either I Don't Know (n=48) or did not provide a response (n=17) to the question.

Table 6

Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Accreditation

	n	Overall %	Valid %
AQIP	45	27.4	45.5
PEAQ	54	32.9	54.5
I Don't Know	48	29.3	
No Response	17	10.4	

When asked where the institution was in the current accreditation cycle, responses spread throughout the cycle evenly for AQIP schools (Table 7). Twenty-six AQIP respondents either specifically indicated they did not know (n=9), or did not respond to the question (n=17). The majority of respondents from PEAQ schools indicated they had recently received reaccreditation status. That group also had 29 respondents who either specifically indicated they did not know (n=11), or did not respond to the question (n=18). The number of respondents who were unable or chose not to respond to this question may also speak to the level of involvement or knowledge of the accreditation process.

Table 7

Current Institution's Accreditation Cycle Status

Accreditation stage	n	%
AQIP		
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	6	16.7
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	8	22.2
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	6	16.7
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	16.7
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	10	27.8
I Don't Know	9	
No Response	17	
PEAQ		
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	20	47.6
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	5	11.9
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	9	21.4
Finalized self-study report to commission(year 8)	3	7.1
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	5	11.9
I Don't Know	11	
No Response	18	

Since it is a criterion for accreditation, it is not surprising that 97.1% of the respondents indicated that their institution had a high-level strategic plan in place (Table 8). However, far fewer respondents indicated that their individual department/unit had a strategic plan in place with just 62.9% responding affirmatively. The majority indicated that their institutions had been involved in strategic planning for ten years or more (64.6%) and that the current institutional-level plan is less than five years old (89.1%) which matches with the results of the accreditation cycles being within the first five years. At the department/unit level, the majority indicated that they had been planning for fewer than five years (61.4%) and most plans were less than three years old (63.1%).

Table 8

Existence and Length of Time for Strategic Planning

	Institutional Level		Department/Unit Level	
	n	%	n	%
Is there a strategic plan?				
Yes	135	97.1	90	62.9
No	4	2.9	53	37.1
I Don't Know	5		1	
No Response	20		20	
How long has strategic planning been occurring?				
Less than 3 years	10	10.4	30	36.1
3-5 Years	12	12.5	21	25.3
6-7 years	9	9.4	10	12
8-9 Years	3	3.1	4	4.8
10 Years or more	62	64.6	18	21.7
I Don't Know	39		7	
No Response	20		20	
How old is current strategic plan?				
Less than 3 years	59	49.6	53	63.1
3-5 Years	47	39.5	20	23.8
6-7 years	6	5	5	6
8-9 Years	3	2.5	3	3.6
10 Years or more	4	3.4	3	3.6
I Don't Know	16		6	
No Response	20		20	

A slight majority of respondents (n=78, 53.8%) indicated that they were involved with the accreditation process at their institutions. More of the respondents were involved in the strategic planning process (n=92, 68.1%) and nearly all were involved in the strategic planning process for their own department/unit (n=85, 94.4%).

For the respondents who indicated that they were involved in accreditation and strategic planning processes, it was evident that the Chief Student Affairs Officers were most often involved in the accreditation process (83.3%) (Table 9). Academic Advising (58.8%) and Housing and Residential Life (56.5%) were also more involved in the accreditation process than the other student affairs areas. Those who classified

themselves as Other (largely encompassing multiple functional areas), were involved in accreditation at a high rate as well (76.9%).

Chief Student Affairs Officers were also most often involved with the institutional strategic planning process (94.1%), as can also be seen in Table 9. The CSAO's were followed by those classified as Other (84.6%), Housing and Residence Life (71.4%), and Student Life and Activities (68.4%). For the department/unit strategic planning processes, six of the nine categories responded with 100% involvement, including Academic Advising, Housing & Residential Life, Multicultural Affairs, Orientation & New Student Programs, Student Life & Activities, and those classified as Other.

Table 9

Accreditation and Planning Involvement by Functional Area

Student Affairs Functional Area	Accreditation Process		Institution Level Strategic Planning		Department/Unit Level Strategic Planning	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Chief Student Affairs Officer	15	83.3	16	94.1	12	92.3
Academic Advising	10	58.8	10	62.5	13	100.0
Housing & Residential Life	13	56.5	15	71.4	15	100.0
International Education (Study Abroad)	6	40.0	7	53.8	6	66.7
Multicultural Affairs	7	46.7	9	64.3	13	100.0
Orientation & New Student Programs	2	28.6	2	28.6	3	100.0
Student Life & Activities	7	35.0	13	68.4	8	100.0
Student Support Programs	8	47.1	9	60.0	10	90.9
Other	10	76.9	11	84.6	5	100.0

The survey participant's level of involvement in the accreditation process seemed to be limited (46.8%) or some (35.1%) extent (Table 10) with the role most often indicated as providing data for the self-study. The involvement in the institutional

strategic planning process was also limited (32.6%) or some (48.9%) extent (Table 10) with the role most often indicated as providing data for the strategic plan. In contrast, the involvement in the Department/Unit strategic planning process was a great extent (77.6%) for the survey participants (Table 10), with the majority indicating they were responsible for the strategic plan.

The survey responses regarding usage of the strategic plan have a mean response clustered around 1.37 - 2.06, which indicates some usage overall toward decision making and planning (Table 11). Respondents indicated that the institutional strategic plan does provide direction for programming to some (43.8%) or a great (31.3%) extent and programmatic and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals to some (39.6%) or a great extent (36.1%). The department/unit strategic plans were never discussed at planning meetings according to 23.6% of the respondents. Yet, the department/unit strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop planning to some (28.5%) or a great (36.8%) extent and programming and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals to some (32.6%) or great (40.3%) extent.

Table 10

Extent and Type of Involvement in Accreditation and Planning

	n	%	Limited	Some	Great	Mean	SD
			n (%)				
Involvement in Accreditation Process	77		36 (46.8)	27 (35.1)	14 (18.2)	1.71	.758
Chair of accreditation committee	1	0.7					
University steering organizing committee	18	12.1					
Serve on subcommittee	37	24.8					
Provide data for self-study from my reporting area	63	42.3					
Involved with planning of quality improvement project	26	17.4					
Other	4	2.7					
Involvement in Institutional Strategic Planning	92		30 (32.6)	45 (48.9)	17 (18.5)	1.86	.704
I'm responsible for the strategic plan	5	3.6					
I'm on a committee that developed the strategic plan	43	30.7					
I provide data for the strategic plan	77	55.0					
Other	15	10.7					
Involvement in Department/Unit Strategic Planning	85		8 (9.4)	11 (12.9)	66 (77.6)	2.68	.640
I'm responsible for the strategic plan	53	42.1					
I'm on a committee that developed the strategic plan	30	23.8					
I provide data for the strategic plan	40	31.7					
Other	3	2.4					

Note. No Response = 20 for all three extent of involvement categories. 1 = Limited Extent, 2 = Some Extent, 3 = Great Extent

Table 11

Usage of Institutional and Department/Unit Strategic Plans

	Not at All	Limited	Some	Great	Mean	SD
	n (%)					
The institution level strategic plan is discussed at every important planning meeting I attend	22 (15.3)	51 (35.4)	54 (37.5)	17 (11.8)	1.46	.892
The institution level strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop institution programming	13 (9)	23 (16)	63 (43.8)	45 (31.3)	1.97	.916
Program and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals at the institution level	9 (6.3)	26 (18.1)	57 (39.6)	52 (36.1)	2.06	.891
The department/unit level strategic plan is discussed at every important planning meeting I attend	34 (23.6)	43 (29.9)	47 (32.6)	20 (13.9)	1.37	.995
The department/unit level strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop programming	29 (20.1)	21 (14.6)	41 (28.5)	53 (36.8)	1.82	1.138
Programming and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals at the department/unit level	17 (11.8)	22 (15.3)	47 (32.6)	58 (40.3)	2.01	1.017

Note. n=144; 20 No Response. 0 = Not at all, 1 = Limited Extent, 2 = Some Extent, 3 = Great Extent

Institutions' Use of the NSSE Data

The survey data indicates (Table 12) that the NSSE Institutional Report is mostly shared with senior level administration (mean=3.51) and to some extent with faculty (mean=3) and academic and student affairs professional staff (mean=2.91). However, there is little explanation or training for how to use NSSE benchmarks (mean=2.14) as reported by the participants. The report is also not often shared with students (mean=1.87) or community/other stakeholders (mean=1.97).

Table 12

Institutions' Distribution of the NSSE Institutional Report

Distribution	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't Know	Mean	SD
	n (%)						
Shared with Senior Level Administration	59 (61.5)	31 (32.3)	2 (2.1)	4 (4.2)	44	3.51	.740
Shared with Faculty	25 (32.9)	35 (46.1)	7 (9.2)	9 (11.8)	64	3.00	.952
Shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	37 (34.3)	41 (38)	13 (12.0)	17 (15.7)	32	2.91	1.046
Shared with Students	6 (7.6)	18 (22.8)	15 (19)	40 (50.6)	61	1.87	1.017
Shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders	5 (7)	21 (29.6)	12 (16.9)	33 (46.5)	69	1.97	1.028
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	11 (12)	28 (30.4)	16 (17.4)	37 (40.2)	48	2.14	1.085

Note. Strongly Agree = 4, Somewhat Agree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

The survey respondents indicated (Table 13) that their institutions use the NSSE report in very similar ways, with means between 3.00-3.13 for all five questions about usage of the NSSE report.

Table 13

Institutions' Usage of the NSSE Institutional Report

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't Know	Mean	SD
	n (%)						
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	29 (30.5)	46 (48.4)	11 (11.6)	9 (9.5)	45	3.00	.899
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	35 (35.7)	48 (49)	8 (8.2)	7 (7.1)	42	3.13	.845
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	24 (29.6)	42 (51.9)	7 (8.6)	8 (9.9)	59	3.01	.887
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	27 (32.9)	41 (50)	8 (9.8)	6 (7.3)	58	3.09	.849
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	26 (33.8)	38 (49.4)	3 (3.9)	10 (13)	63	3.04	.952

Note: Strongly Agree = 4, Somewhat Agree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

Student Affairs Functional Areas' Use of the NSSE Data

When looking at the survey data to determine extent and what ways the NSSE data are used by specific functional areas, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare means for significant differences between groups at the department/unit and individual levels. The data showed that there was significant, or approaching significant, differences between groups for the four questions presented in Table 14 for the department/unit level. The full list of items and corresponding data can be found in Appendix E.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between student affairs functional areas was approaching significance, $F(8,114) = 1.765$, $p = .091$ for a

question related to department members being familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report. However, results were more significant for department members being aware of their institution's highest performing NSSE benchmarks $F(8,110) = 2.135$, $p = .038$; department members being aware of their institution's lowest performing NSSE benchmarks $F(8,110) = 2.318$, $p = .024$; and department members creating partnerships or collaborations based on NSSE report $F(8, 110) = 2.040$, $p = .048$.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that there was approaching significant difference between International Education (Study Abroad) and Multicultural Affairs ($p = .064$) for department members being aware of their institution's highest performing NSSE benchmarks, as well as department members being aware of their institution's lowest performing NSSE benchmarks ($p = .061$). There were not significant differences between the other functional areas or other items.

The results of the department/unit usage of the NSSE data indicates that although student affairs functional areas do seem to have a subtle effect on several of the dependent variables, due to limited sample size there is not enough information to draw statistical inferences from one group to another.

The data showed that there was significant difference between groups of student affairs functional areas for the two questions presented in Table 15 for the individual level. The full list of items and corresponding data can be found in Appendix F.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between student affairs functional areas was significant, $F(8,128) = 2.962$, $p = .004$ regarding whether the individual uses NSSE data to inform planning and work activities. It was also significant

regarding whether the individual uses NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings $F(8,128) = 2.456, p = .017$.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that there were significant differences between International Education (Study Abroad) administrators, who are less likely to use the NSSE data, than both the Chief Student Affairs Officers ($p = .017$) and Academic Advising administrators ($p = .047$) to inform planning and work activities. There was also approaching significant difference between International Education (Study Abroad) administrators, who are less likely to use the NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings than Academic Advising administrators ($p = .069$). There were not significant differences between the other functional areas or other items.

The results of the individual usage of the NSSE data indicate that student affairs functional area does seem to have an effect on several of the dependent variables.

Table 14

Department/Units' Usage of the NSSE Institutional Report

Student Affairs Functional Area	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Don't Know	n	Mean	SD
			n (%)					
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report	14 (11.4)	45 (36.6)	27 (22)	37 (30.1)	16	122	2.29†	1.022
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	9	1	3		14	2.50	.941
Academic Advising	3	8	1	5		17	2.41	1.121
Housing & Residential Life	3	5	5	7		20	2.20	1.105
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	5	4		11	1.82	.874
Multicultural Affairs	4	5	4	1		13	2.92	.760
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	2		5	2.00	1.000
Student Life & Activities	1	6	4	8		19	2.05	.970
Student Support Programs	0	5	3	5		13	2.08	.954
Other	2	4	2	2		10	2.60	1.265

Table 14—Continued

Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items	13 (10.9)	34 (28.6)	25 (21.0)	47 (39.5)	20	11 9	2.11*	1.05 6
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	3	4	5		13	2.00	1.00 0
Academic Advising	3	8	1	5		17	2.53	1.12 5
Housing & Residential Life	3	2	7	7		19	2.05	1.07 9
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	3	7		11	1.45	.688
Multicultural Affairs	4	5	2	3		14	2.71	1.13 9
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	1	3		5	1.60	.894
Student Life & Activities	0	8	1	10		19	1.89	.994
Student Support Programs	0	3	3	5		11	1.82	.874
Other	2	3	3	2		10	2.50	1.08 0
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items	11 (9.2)	31 (26.1)	29 (24.4)	48 (40.3)	20	11 9	2.04*	1.02 0
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	2	4	6		13	1.85	.987
Academic Advising	3	6	3	5		17	2.41	1.12 1
Housing & Residential Life	2	3	8	7		20	2.00	.973
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	3	7		11	1.145	.688
Multicultural Affairs	3	6	1	3		13	2.69	1.10 9
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	0	4		5	1.40	.894
Student Life & Activities	0	6	3	10		19	1.79	.918
Student Support Programs	0	3	4	4		11	1.91	.831
Other	2	3	3	2		10	2.50	1.08 0

Table 14—Continued

My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report	10 (8.4)	25 (21.0)	27 (22.7)	57 (47.9)	20	11 9	1.90*	1.01 2
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	3	2	7		13	1.85	1.06 8
Academic Advising	2	8	2	5		17	2.41	1.06 4
Housing & Residential Life	3	1	5	11		20	1.80	1.10 5
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	4	6		11	1.55	.688
Multicultural Affairs	3	4	2	4		13	2.46	1.19 8
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	0	1	4		5	1.20	.447
Student Life & Activities	0	2	5	11		18	1.50	.707
Student Support Programs	0	4	3	5		12	1.92	.900
Other	1	2	3	4		10	2.00	1.05 4

Note. Strongly Agree = 4, Somewhat Agree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$). † indicates that ANOVA shows approaching significance ($p < .10$)

Table 15

Individuals' Usage of the NSSE Institutional Report

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	n	Mean	SD
	n (%)						
I use NSSE data to inform my planning and work activities	8 (5.8)	48 (35.0)	24 (17.5)	57 (41.6)	137	2.05*	1.002
Chief Student Affairs Officer	2	10	3	2	17	2.71**	.849
Academic Advising	3	8	2	4	17	2.59**	1.064
Housing & Residential Life	1	5	7	9	22	1.91	.921
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	3	1	10	14	1.50**	.855
Multicultural Affairs	1	5	3	6	15	2.07	1.033
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	2	0	5	7	1.57	.976
Student Life & Activities	0	5	5	8	18	1.83	.857
Student Support Programs	0	4	3	8	15	1.73	.884
Other	1	6	0	5	12	2.25	1.138
I use NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings	5 (3.6)	38 (27.7)	32 (23.4)	62 (45.3)	137	1.90*	.934
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	5	8	3	17	2.24	.831
Academic Advising	1	10	1	5	17	2.41†	1.004
Housing & Residential Life	1	2	8	11	22	1.68	.839
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	2	10	14	1.43†	.756
Multicultural Affairs	1	5	2	7	15	2.00	1.069
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	0	2	5	7	1.29	.488
Student Life & Activities	0	4	4	10	18	1.67	.840
Student Support Programs	0	5	3	7	15	1.87	.915
Other	1	5	2	4	12	2.25	1.055

Note. Strongly Agree = 4, Somewhat Agree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$). † indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis shows approaching significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .10$).

Accreditation Method and Cycle Stage and Use of the NSSE Data

In review of the respondent's knowledge of accreditation method (Table 6), it was interesting that nearly 40% of the responses were either I Don't Know, or No Response, to the question related to what accreditation method their institution participated in. Since this was such a large group, the researcher thought it was important to explore if those that responded I Don't Know or did not respond at all were in some way different from those that did respond with the accreditation type. A dichotomous variable was created with those who responded AQIP or PEAQ as one variable and those who responded I Don't Know or did not respond as a second variable. An independent t-test was run for this variable (Table 16) to look at characteristics of the respondents, including student affairs functional area, institution size, institutional control, how many years in student affairs, and how many years in the current position. There was approaching significant difference for the total amount of time in student affairs ($p = .057$), but no significant differences were found between the groups, which confirms that respondents who did not know or did not respond regarding accreditation type are not significantly different from those that did respond with accreditation model and are not biasing the results of this study.

Table 16

Institutional and Personal Characteristics and Accreditation Response

	t	df	p
Institutional control	.417	162	.678
Institution's total undergraduate student enrollment	1.404	162	.162
Current student affairs functional area	1.294	153	.198
Total amount of time in a student affairs functional area	-1.921	145	.057†
Total amount of time in a student affairs administrative role	-1.236	144	.218
Total amount of time in current administrative role	-1.085	152	.280

Note. Equal variances assumed via Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. † indicates that t-test shows approaching significance ($p < .10$)

When looking at the survey data (Table 17), to determine if accreditation method was a predictor for NSSE data usage, an independent samples t-test was used to compare means for significant difference between AQIP and PEAQ accreditation types. The t-test results found that there were no statistically significant differences between AQIP and PEAQ accredited institutions and their usage of NSSE data.

Table 17

NSSE Data Usage by Accreditation Type

Accreditation Type	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	n	Mean	SD
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration							
AQIP	17	11	2	2	32	3.34	.865
PEAQ	23	12	0	1	36	3.58	.649
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty							
AQIP	9	10	3	3	25	3.00	1.00
PEAQ	12	16	1	3	32	3.16	.884
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff							
AQIP	15	9	7	6	37	2.89	1.125
PEAQ	14	17	3	4	38	3.08	.941
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students							
AQIP	2	6	5	12	25	1.92	1.038
PEAQ	4	10	5	12	31	2.19	1.108

Table 17—Continued

The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders							
AQIP	2	5	3	11	21	1.90	1.091
PEAQ	3	11	5	11	30	2.20	1.064
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)							
AQIP	11	18	3	3	35	3.06	.873
PEAQ	11	16	4	2	33	3.09	.843
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)							
AQIP	15	15	4	3	37	3.14	.918
PEAQ	13	19	1	1	34	3.29	.676
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)							
AQIP	11	12	2	3	28	3.11	.956
PEAQ	8	19	2	1	30	3.13	.681
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)							
AQIP	11	12	2	3	28	3.11	.956
PEAQ	11	18	2	1	32	3.22	.706
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)							
AQIP	10	11	2	4	27	3.00	1.038
PEAQ	10	15	1	2	28	3.18	.819
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks							
AQIP	4	9	7	9	29	2.28	1.066
PEAQ	5	12	7	10	34	2.35	1.070

Note: Strongly Agree = 4, Somewhat Agree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

Although the accreditation type was not significant, the data showed that there were significant differences, or approaching significant differences, in the mean scores between the accreditation cycle stages for both AQIP and PEAQ. The AQIP accreditation cycle stages were significant for the three items presented in Table 18. The full list of items and corresponding data can be found in Appendix G.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between AQIP accreditation cycle stages was significant, $F(4, 26) = 2.968$, $p = .038$ regarding whether the institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers). It was also approaching significance regarding the tracking of individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers) $F(4, 19) = 2.448$, $p = .082$ as well as further disaggregating the information by a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.) $F(4, 17) = 2.414$, $p = .089$. There were not significant differences between the other accreditation cycle stages or other items.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that there was approaching significant difference between completed a systems appraisal (year 5) and reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7) accreditation cycle stages ($p = .089$) for tracking overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers).

The PEAQ accreditation cycle stages were significant for the two items presented in Table 19. The full list of items and corresponding data can be found in Appendix G. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between accreditation cycle stages was significant, $F(4, 22) = 4.850$, $p = .006$ regarding whether the institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers). It was also approaching significance regarding whether the institution further disaggregates the information by a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.) $F(4, 20) = 2.360$, $p = .088$. There were not significant differences between the other accreditation cycle stages or other items.

Table 18

Institutional Usage of the NSSE Data by AQIP Accreditation Cycle Stage

Accreditation Cycle Stage (AQIP)	n	Mean	SD
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	31	3.06*	.964
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	6	2.50	1.049
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	6	3.33	.816
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.80††	.447
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	3.50	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	8	2.50††	1.069
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	24	3.04†	.999
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	4	2.25	.957
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	3.20	.837
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.60	.548
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	5	3.60	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	5	2.40	1.342
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	22	2.91†	1.109
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	5	2.20	.837
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	6	3.50	.548
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	3	2.67	1.528
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	4	3.75	.500
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	4	2.25	1.500

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$). † symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was approaching significant difference for this item ($p < .10$). †† indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis shows approaching significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .10$).

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that there was significant difference between the reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10) stage and the recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5) ($p = .004$); the starting self-study work (year 6) ($p = .010$); and the working on a self-study and draft report (year 7) ($p = .048$) stages when looking at whether the institution tracks individual questions

compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers). There was very close to significant difference between the reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10) stage and the recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5) ($p = .054$) regarding whether the institution further disaggregates the information by a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.).

Table 19

Institutional Usage of the NSSE Data by PEAQ Accreditation Cycle Stage

Accreditation Cycle Stage (PEAQ)	n	Mean	SD
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	27	3.22*	.698
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	13	3.46**	.519
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.67**	.577
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.17**	.408
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.00**	1.000
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	25	3.28†	.678
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	3.50††	.522
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	2	3.50	.707
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.33	.516
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.33††	1.155

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$). † symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was approaching significant difference for this item ($p < .10$) †† indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis shows approaching significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .10$)

The results of the analysis indicate that accreditation type does not seem to have an effect on the institution's usage of the NSSE data. However, which stage of the accreditation cycle the institution is in does seem to have an effect on several of the

dependent variables because the usage increases as schools approach their re-accreditation stage and then falls off thereafter.

Institutional Characteristics and Use of the NSSE Data

A review of the survey data to determine if an institution's characteristics were a predictor for NSSE data usage, compared by private versus public control and size of the institution based on undergraduate student enrollment.

Public or Private Control. An independent samples t-test was used to compare means for significant difference between private and public institutions. The t-test (Table 20) found that there were some statistically significant differences between privately and publicly controlled institutions and their distribution and usage of NSSE data.

Table 20

NSSE Data Usage by Institutional Control

Institutional Control	n	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration						
Private	44	3.41	.871			
Public	52	3.60	.603			
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty						
Private	38	2.97	.972			
Public	38	3.03	.944			
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff						
Private	51	2.82	.994			
Public	57	2.98	1.094			
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students						
Private	39	1.59	.938			
Public	40	2.15*	1.027	-2.530	77	.013

Table 20—Continued

The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders						
Private	34	1.62	.888			
Public	37	2.30*	1.051	-2.931	69	.005
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)						
Private	46	2.78	.941			
Public	49	3.20*	.816	-2.337	93	.022
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)						
Private	48	3.04	.898			
Public	50	3.22	.790			
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)						
Private	39	2.79	.951			
Public	42	3.21*	.782	-2.175	79	.033
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)						
Private	40	2.95	.932			
Public	42	3.21	.750			
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)						
Private	34	2.88	1.038			
Public	43	3.16	.871			
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks						
Private	46	1.85	.965			
Public	46	2.43*	1.128	-2.681	90	.009

Note. The * symbol indicates that independent t-test shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$) with equal variances assumed via Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

Regarding the distribution of the NSSE data, the t-test showed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores for private ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .938$) and public ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.027$) control; $t(77) = -2.530$, $p = .013$ regarding whether the NSSE

institutional report was shared with students. There was also significant difference in means for private ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .938$) and public ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.027$) control; $t(69) = -2.931$, $p = .005$ regarding the NSSE report being shared with the community or other stakeholders.

Related to the usage of the data, the t-test showed that there was significant difference between private ($M = 2.78$, $SD = .941$) and public ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .816$); $t(93) = -2.337$, $p = .022$ institution's tracking of overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants). Additionally, there was significant difference between private ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .951$) and public ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .782$); $t(79) = -2.175$, $p = .033$ institution's tracking of individual questions (disaggregated with all participants). Finally, there was also difference between the institution's providing explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks with private ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .965$) and public ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.128$); $t(90) = -2.681$, $p = .009$

Institution Size. To determine if the institution's size (based on undergraduate student enrollment) was a predictor for NSSE data usage, the survey data were compared (Table 2). However, there were not enough test cases for several of the statistical analysis to be performed. In order to create a more useful data set, the data were regrouped to include only four categories (rather than six) by collapsing everything above 20,000 students into one group. The institution's size was significant for several of the items presented in Table 21.

Table 21

NSSE Data Usage by Institution Size—Grouped

Undergraduate Enrollment	n	Mean	SD	p
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	96	3.51	.740	
Less than 3,000	26	3.38	.852	
3,000-9,999	32	3.41	.875	
10,000-19,999	17	3.76	.437	
20,000 or More	21	3.62	.498	
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	76	3.00	.952	
Less than 3,000	25	3.04	.889	
3,000-9,999	22	2.82	1.053	
10,000-19,999	13	3.15	.801	
20,000 or More	16	3.06	1.063	
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	108	2.91	1.046	
Less than 3,000	32	2.81	.965	
3,000-9,999	34	2.76	1.130	
10,000-19,999	17	3.41	.870	
20,000 or More	25	2.88	1.092	
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students	79	1.87*	1.017	
Less than 3,000	27	1.37++**	.839	
3,000-9,999	22	2.00++	1.024	.098
10,000-19,999	9	2.78**	.441	.001
20,000 or More	21	2.00	1.095	
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/Other Stakeholders	71	1.97*	1.028	
Less than 3,000	23	1.39**	.783	
3,000-9,999	20	2.35**	.988	.008
10,000-19,999	9	2.56**	.726	.014
20,000 or More	19	2.00	1.155	
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	95	3.00+	.899	
Less than 3,000	28	2.61	.956	
3,000-9,999	29	3.14	.875	
10,000-19,999	17	3.18	.529	
20,000 or More	21	3.19	.981	

Table 21—Continued

The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	98	3.13	.845	
Less than 3,000	30	2.97	.964	
3,000-9,999	30	3.10	.845	
10,000-19,999	17	3.29	.470	
20,000 or More	21	3.29	.902	
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	81	3.01	.887	
Less than 3,000	24	2.75	1.073	
3,000-9,999	25	2.92	.812	
10,000-19,999	14	3.36	.497	
20,000 or More	18	3.22	.878	
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	82	3.09	.849	
Less than 3,000	24	2.96	1.042	
3,000-9,999	25	2.92	.812	
10,000-19,999	16	3.38	.500	
20,000 or More	17	3.24	.831	
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	77	3.04	.952	
Less than 3,000	21	2.71	1.102	
3,000-9,999	24	3.04	.955	
10,000-19,999	14	3.29	.611	
20,000 or More	18	3.22	.943	
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	92	2.14*	1.085	
Less than 3,000	27	1.56††**	.801	
3,000-9,999	28	2.32**	.983	.036
10,000-19,999	14	2.36††	1.082	.093
20,000 or More	23	2.48**	1.275	.012

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$); † indicates that ANOVA shows approaching significance ($p < .10$). †† indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed approaching significance ($p < .10$).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between institution's size was significant, $F(3,75) = 5.650$, $p = .002$ regarding whether the

institution shares the NSSE institutional report with students; whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with the community/other stakeholders $F(3,67) = 5.076$, $p = .003$; and also whether the institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks $F(3,88) = 4.205$, $p = .008$. It was also very close to significant regarding whether the institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants) $F(3, 91) = 2.678$, $p = .052$. There were not significant differences between institutions for the other items.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that when looking at whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with students there was approaching significant difference (Table 21) between institutions that had fewer than 3,000 enrolled undergraduates and those that have 3,000-9,999 students ($p = .098$) and very significant differences between those with fewer than 3,000 enrolled students and those institutions that have 10,000-19,000 students ($p = .001$). When looking at whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with the community/other stakeholders there were very significant differences between the smaller institutions (fewer than 3,000 enrolled students) and those that have 3,000-9,999 students ($p = .008$) and also those that have 10,000-19,000 students ($p = .014$). Regarding whether the institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks there were significant, or approaching significant, differences between the smallest group of schools (fewer than 3,000 enrolled students) and each other category.

The results of the analysis above indicate that an institution's control and an institution's size both have an effect on the institution's usage of the NSSE data. The researcher wanted to look further to see if one of these two factors was stronger in the

NSSE report usage areas that were significant for both institutional control and size.

Using Pearson's Bivariate Correlation it was determined that institutional control and size were strongly correlated, $r(164) = .672, p < .01$. A linear regression with institutional control and institutional size was run with the three dependent variables for NSSE data usage that were found to be significant (Table 22). When the linear regression was run separately, both factors are significant or approaching significance in each case. However when run together, in all except one case, there is a colinearity issue that causes institution size and institution control to cancel each other out and make the impact not significant.

In one instance, institutional control is significant for The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders ($p = .030$) meaning that private institutions regardless of size don't share as much with the community/other stakeholders. However, in the other two cases there is no clear variable that is dominant so additional testing was necessary.

A stepwise regression was done to control for colinearity to see if one of the institutional characteristics had more impact on the NSSE report being shared with students and whether the institution provides explanation or training about how to use the NSSE data. In both cases, institutional size was kept in the model and institutional control was removed. That means that once institutional size has its impact in this model, the other factor does not add more explanation to the variance in the dependent variable, and is excluded. These results show that in both of the instances the size of the institution is a stronger factor than institutional control. Since the relationship is positive, it indicates

that a larger school is more likely to share the NSSE report ($p = .013$) as well as provide training for how to use the NSSE data ($p = .003$).

Strategic Planning Processes and Use of the NSSE Data

The data were analyzed at both the institution level and department level to determine if there were any significant predictors related to how an institution uses the NSSE data report.

Institution Level Strategic Planning. When looking at the survey data (Table 8) to determine if involvement in institution level strategic planning was a predictor for NSSE data usage, it was determined that an independent samples t-test would not be necessary due to the overwhelming majority (97.1%) responding that the institution had an institution level strategic plan in place and the majority (64.6%) also indicated they had been participating in planning for over 10 years. Using the data from only those respondents who indicated they did have an institution level plan, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the length of time that the institution has been participating in planning is significant, as well as if how long the current institution level plan has been in place is meaningful .

Table 22

Control vs. Size as a Factor in Usage of NSSE Data

		The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students				The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders				The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks			
		β	Std. Error	t	p	β	Std. Error	t	P	β	Std. Error	t	p
Independent Variable – run individually	Which best describes your institution's control?	.560	.221	2.530	.013*	.680	.232	2.931	.005*	.587	.219	2.681	.009*
	Which best describes your institution's total undergraduate student enrollment?	.219	.086	2.545	.013*	.175	.095	1.841	.070†	.270	.088	3.074	.003*
Independent Variable – run together	Which best describes your institution's control?	.337	.290	1.162	.249	.662	.299	2.212	.030*	.229	.310	.738	.462
	Which best describes your institution's total undergraduate student enrollment?	.134	.113	1.191	.237	.011	.119	.095	.924	.203	.125	1.622	

Table 22—Continued

Stepwise Regression	Which best describes your institution's control?	excluded				Excluded			
	Which best describes your institution's total undergraduate student enrollment?	.219	.086	2.545	.013**	.270	.088	3.074	.003**

The * symbol indicates that linear regression shows significance for this item ($p < .05$); † indicates that linear regression shows approaching significance for this item ($p < .10$). ** symbol indicates that stepwise regression model showed significance for this factor.

The data showed that there were significant, or approaching significant, differences in the mean scores between the lengths of time an institution has been participating in strategic planning and how they use the NSSE data. The length of time was significant for the four items presented in Table 23. The full list of items and corresponding data can be found in Appendix H. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences between how long an institution has participated in institution level strategic planning were significant, $F(4, 70) = 3.703, p = .009$, regarding whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with senior level administration, and also whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with the faculty $F(4, 56) = 3.059, p = .024$. It was also approaching significant regarding whether the institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers) $F(4, 60) = 2.247, p = .075$ as well as whether the institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.) $F(4, 55) = 2.378, p = .063$. There were not significant differences by length of time planning for the other items.

Table 23

Institutions' Usage of NSSE Data by Length of Time Participating in Institution Level Strategic Planning

How long participating in institution level planning	n	Mean	SD
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	75	3.56*	.683
Less than 3 years	7	2.71***††	1.254
3-5 Years	8	3.88**	.354
6-7 years	8	3.63††	.518
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	50	3.62**	.567
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	61	3.08*	.900
Less than 3 years	7	2.14	1.215
3-5 Years	4	3.00	.000
6-7 years	6	3.17	.753
8-9 Years	1	2.00	.
10 Years or more	43	3.26	.819
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	65	3.09†	.824
Less than 3 years	7	2.43	.976
3-5 Years	6	3.00	.632
6-7 years	8	2.75	.886
8-9 Years	2	3.00	.000
10 Years or more	42	3.29	.774
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	60	3.08†	.926
Less than 3 years	7	2.43	1.134
3-5 Years	5	2.60	.894
6-7 years	8	2.75	.707
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	38	3.32	.873

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$); † indicates that ANOVA shows approaching significance ($p < .10$). †† indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed approaching significance ($p < .10$).

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that when looking at whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with senior level administration there were significant difference between institutions that had been planning for less than 3 years and those that have been planning for 3-5 years ($p = .007$) and 10 years or more ($p = .007$). For this item there was also approaching significant

difference between less than 3 years planning and 6-7 years ($p = .055$). When looking at whether the institution shares the NSSE institutional report with the faculty, it was not possible to perform the Tukey HSD comparison because one group had fewer than two cases. Therefore, although length of time planning does appear to have an effect on this item, it is not possible to determine between which groups.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also run for how long an institution level plan has been in place to determine if how old the plan was predicted how an institution uses the NSSE data. The ANOVA showed nothing significant based on how long the plan has been in place.

Department/Unit Level Strategic Planning. An independent samples t-test was used to compare means for significant difference between those that do have a department/unit plan and those that do not. The t-test results (Table 24) found that there were statistically significant or approaching significant differences between participating in department/unit planning and usage of NSSE data for every item. These results indicate that the department/units that have a strategic plan are more likely to use the contents of the NSSE institutional report.

Table 24

Unit/Department's Usage of NSSE Data by Those with Unit/Department Strategic Plan

Department/unit has strategic plan in place	n	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument						
No	48	2.08	1.028			
Yes	74	2.43†	1.008	-1.854	120	.066
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report						
No	48	1.98	.956			
Yes	75	2.49*	1.018	-2.796	121	.006
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items						
No	46	1.76	.923			
Yes	73	2.33*	1.081	-2.948	117	.004
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items						
No	46	1.72	.886			
Yes	73	2.25*	1.051	-2.837	117	.005
My department's activity is described in the NSSE data						
No	44	2.27	1.086			
Yes	65	2.80*	1.034	-2.560	107	.012
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures						
No	48	1.56	.823			
Yes	71	2.17**	.971	-3.666	111	.000
My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report						
No	47	1.40	.648			
Yes	72	2.22**	1.078	-5.167	116	.000

Note. The † indicates the independent t-test shows there was approaching significant difference ($p < .10$) with equal variances assumed via Levene's test for equality of variances. The * symbol indicates that independent t-test shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$) with equal variances assumed via Levene's test for equality of variances. The ** indicates the Levene's test for equal variances was not met, but the more conservative result for the independent t-test shows there was significant difference ($p < .05$).

Using the data from only those respondents who indicated they did have a department/unit strategic plan, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the length of time that the department/unit has been participating in planning is significant, as well as if how long the current department/unit plan has been in place is meaningful. The results of this analysis (Table 25) show that the length of time planning has been occurring is significant regarding whether members of the department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument $F(4,64) = 2.525$, $p = .049$ and approaching significance for the items regarding if department members are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report $F(4,65) = 2.279$, $p = .070$ and if department's goals are based on NSSE measures $F(4, 61) = 2.244$, $p = .075$.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that when looking at whether department members are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument there was approaching significant difference between institutions that had been planning for less than 3 years and those that have been planning for 10 years or more ($p = .065$). When looking at whether members of the department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report there was significant difference between institutions that had been planning for less than 3 years and those that have been planning for 10 years or more ($p = .038$).

Table 25

Unit/Department's Usage of NSSE Data by Length of Time Participating in Unit/Department Level Strategic Planning

How long participating in dept./unit level planning	n	Mean	SD
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument	69	2.52*	.979
Less than 3 years	23	2.13††	1.014
3-5 Years	18	2.61	.979
6-7 years	9	2.33	1.000
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	17	2.94††	.748
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report	70	2.59†	.985
Less than 3 years	23	2.17**	1.072
3-5 Years	18	2.72	.895
6-7 years	9	2.44	1.014
8-9 Years	3	2.67	1.528
10 Years or more	17	3.06**	.659
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items	68	2.41	1.068
Less than 3 years	22	2.05	1.090
3-5 Years	18	2.44	1.149
6-7 years	9	2.44	.882
8-9 Years	3	2.33	1.155
10 Years or more	16	2.88	.957
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items	68	2.32	1.043
Less than 3 years	22	1.95	1.090
3-5 Years	18	2.33	1.085
6-7 years	9	2.33	1.000
8-9 Years	2	3.00	.000
10 Years or more	17	2.71	.920
My department's activity is described in the NSSE data	60	2.92	.962
Less than 3 years	18	2.67	1.085
3-5 Years	16	3.00	.816
6-7 years	9	2.67	1.000
8-9 Years	2	4.00	.000
10 Years or more	15	3.13	.915
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures	66	2.23†	.957
Less than 3 years	22	1.95	.999
3-5 Years	18	2.33	.970
6-7 years	9	1.78	.833
8-9 Years	1	3.00	.
10 Years or more	16	2.69	.793

Table 25—Continued

My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report	67	2.28	1.070
Less than 3 years	22	2.00	1.069
3-5 Years	17	2.47	1.125
6-7 years	9	2.00	1.118
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	17	2.47	.943

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$); † indicates that ANOVA shows approaching significance ($p < .10$). †† indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed approaching significance ($p < .10$).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also run for how long department/unit level strategic plan has been in place to determine if how old the plan was predicted how department/unit uses the NSSE data (Table 26). This analysis found there was significant, or approaching significant, difference for each item regarding how a department/unit uses the NSSE data. The age of the current department/unit strategic plan is significant regarding whether members of the department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument $F(4, 66) = 2.902$, $p = .028$; if the department's goals are based on NSSE measures $F(4, 63) = 3.343$, $p = .015$; and if the department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on the institution's NSSE report $F(4, 64) = 2.866$, $p = .030$. It's also approaching significance for the items regarding if department members are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report $F(4, 67) = 2.240$, $p = .074$; if department members are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items $F(4, 65) = 2.122$, $p = .088$; if department members are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items $F(4, 65) = 2.329$, $p = .065$; and if department's activity is described in the NSSE data $F(4, 57) = 2.263$, $p = .074$.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD comparisons (Table 27) indicated that when the plan had been in place for less than three years, results were significantly different than when the plan had been in place for ten years or more for every category, except if the department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on the institution's NSSE report where it was approaching significance ($p = .067$). It was also approaching significance for the item related to whether department members are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items between plans that were three to five years old and ten years old ($p = .061$).

Table 26

Unit/Department's Usage of NSSE Data by Age of Strategic Plan

Age of current dept./unit level plan	n	Mean	SD
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument	71	2.48*	.998
Less than 3 years	43	2.26**	.978
3-5 Years	19	2.68	.820
6-7 years	4	2.50	1.291
8-9 Years	2	3.00	1.414
10 Years or more	3	4.00**	.000
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report	72	2.54†	1.006
Less than 3 years	43	2.37**	1.001
3-5 Years	19	2.74	.806
6-7 years	4	2.50	1.291
8-9 Years	3	2.33	1.528
10 Years or more	3	4.00**	.000
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items	70	2.37†	1.079
Less than 3 years	42	2.24**	1.031
3-5 Years	18	2.44	1.097
6-7 years	4	2.50	1.291
8-9 Years	3	2.00	1.000
10 Years or more	3	4.00**	.000

Table 26—Continued

Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items	70	2.29†	1.051
Less than 3 years	43	2.16**	1.045
3-5 Years	18	2.28	1.018
6-7 years	4	2.25	.957
8-9 Years	2	2.50	.707
10 Years or more	3	4.00**	.000
My department's activity is described in the NSSE data	62	2.85†	1.006
Less than 3 years	35	2.69	1.022
3-5 Years	19	3.05	.911
6-7 years	4	2.25	.957
8-9 Years	1	4.00	.
10 Years or more	3	4.00	.000
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures	68	2.19*	.966
Less than 3 years	41	1.95**	.921
3-5 Years	18	2.50	.924
6-7 years	4	2.00	.816
8-9 Years	2	2.50	.707
10 Years or more	3	3.67**	.577
My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report	69	2.25*	1.077
Less than 3 years	42	2.02	1.000
3-5 Years	18	2.56	1.097
6-7 years	4	1.75	.957
8-9 Years	2	3.00	1.414
10 Years or more	3	3.67	.577

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$); the † indicates that ANOVA shows approaching significance ($p < .10$)

Table 27

Tukey HSD Post Hoc Results after ANOVA

Age of current dept./unit level plan		<i>p</i>
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.024
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.050
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.048
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.027
3-5 Years	10 Years or more	.061
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.019
My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report		
Less than 3 years	10 Years or more	.067

The results of the analysis indicate that length of time an institution has participated in institution-level strategic planning does seem to have an effect on the institution's usage of the NSSE data. There was no effect related to how old the current institution level plan is. In comparison, the department/unit strategic plan had an extremely significant impact on the usage of the NSSE data. The department members were more likely to be familiar with the NSSE instrument, the contents of the report, and set goals based on NSSE measures, especially for those that had been planning for ten years or more. The age of the plan was also significant with those having a plan that was ten years old or more having greater usage of the NSSE data.

Discussion

Five research questions were proposed in this study to determine which factors could impact the use of the NSSE data report in decision making and planning. A full summary of the results can be found in Table 28. It was assumed that the NSSE Institutional Report was being reviewed and used by senior level administrators but not as much by those on the ground in student affairs functional areas. The data showed that the NSSE report is being shared at multiple levels; however, there is not much training or explanation for what to do with the information. The results also indicated that some student affairs functional areas are more likely to use the data than others are at both the department and individual level. Accreditation method was not a predictor, but where an institution sits in the accreditation cycle was important for how the data were being used. In addition, public institutions were more likely to be using and sharing the information than private ones, particularly with students and external stakeholders. Medium- or large-sized institutions were also more likely to be sharing and using the information versus smaller institutions. Institutions that had been participating in strategic planning longer were more likely to be using the data, but how old the current institution-level strategic plan was did not matter. In addition, those participating in department-unit level strategic planning were more familiar with the NSSE reports and using the data, especially when the department/unit had been planning for a longer period and had an older plan in place.

Chapter 5 discusses the results described in this chapter and compares them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to establish findings from this research. Additionally limitations of the study are described as well as implications for student affairs practice and for future research based on the results of this study.

Table 28

Summary of Research Study Results

<p>Question 1: To what extent and in what ways, if any, do higher education institutions use the NSSE data in decision making or planning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NSSE report is mostly shared with senior level administrators, faculty, and academic and student affairs professional staff with little explanation or training for how to use the information. • The NSSE report is not usually shared with students or community/other stakeholders. • The NSSE report is used in similar ways with all of the components of the report being used by the institutions.
<p>Question 2: To what extent and in what ways, if any, do particular student affairs functional areas use the NSSE in decision making or planning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student affairs functional area does seem to have an effect on the department/units' use of the NSSE data but due to limited sample size there was not enough information to draw statistical inferences from one group to the next. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items ○ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items ○ My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report • Student affairs functional area does seem to have an effect on the individuals' use of the NSSE data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individual uses NSSE data to inform planning and work activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Student Affairs Officer and Academic Advising are both more likely to use NSSE data than International Education (Study Abroad) ○ Individual uses NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings

Table 28—Continued

<p>Question 3: In what ways, if any, does accreditation method or status predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no statistically significant differences between AQIP and PEAQ accredited institutions and their usage of NSSE data. • Which stage of the accreditation cycle the institution is in does seem to have an effect on how the institution uses NSSE data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The AQIP institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers) ○ The PEAQ institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was significant difference between the reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10) stage and the recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5); the starting self-study work (year 6); and the working on a self-study and draft report (year 7) stages
<p>Question 4: In what ways, if any, do institutional characteristics predict the extent and ways that institutions use the NSSE data?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private/Public control did have an impact on how the NSSE Institutional report was used. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public institutions more likely to share the report with students and community/other stakeholders ○ The Public Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants) ○ The Public institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants) ○ The Public institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks • Institution size based on undergraduate student enrollment had an impact on how the NSSE data was used. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The NSSE Institutional Report is more often shared with Students at schools with enrollment 10,000-19,999 versus less than 3,000 students. ○ The NSSE Institutional Report is more often shared with Community/ Other stakeholders with enrollment between 3,000 and 19,999 versus less than 3,000 students.

Table 28—Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks when enrollment is between 3,000-9,999 or 20,000 or more students versus those with less than 3,000 students. • Private/Public Control had more impact on NSSE report being shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders than institutional size. • Institutional size had more impact on whether institutions shared the report with students and whether the institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use the NSSE data and benchmarks.
Research Question 5: In what ways, if any, does strategic planning process predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97.1% of institutions participate in institution level strategic planning • Length of time an institution has been planning does appear to have an effect on NSSE data usage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most often when institutions have been planning for 3-5 years or 10 years or more versus those that have been planning for 3 years or less. ○ The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty • How long an institution level plan has been in place did not significantly predict how an institution uses the NSSE data. • The department/units that had a strategic plan were more likely to use the contents of the NSSE institutional report in these ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument ○ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report ○ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items ○ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items ○ My department's activity is described in the NSSE data ○ My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report

Table 28—Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The length of time a department/unit has participated in strategic planning does seem to have an effect on the department/units' usage of the NSSE data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument ○ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those who have been planning for 10 years or more much more likely to be familiar than those who have been planning for less than 3 years. • How long a department/unit level plan has been in place does seem to have an effect on the department/units' usage of the NSSE data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report. ○ When plans were 10 years or older the department members were more likely to be familiar with these items than those with plans less than 3 years old: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument ▪ Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report ▪ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items ▪ Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items • My department's goals are based on NSSE measures
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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Research Findings

In this quantitative study, the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement data was looked at in relation to institutional characteristics, student affairs functional areas, accreditation type, and strategic planning processes. Significant differences were found in specific student affairs functional areas usage of the data at the department/unit and individual levels; which stage of the accreditation cycle an institution was in; the institutional control (public/private); institutional size; and how long an institution has been participating in strategic planning. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings, as well as implications for practice that would allow institutions to create a culture of data driven decision making and provide an opportunity to close the loop.

Institutions' Use of the NSSE Data. Best practices indicate that institutions need strong senior leadership; however, they also need effective leaders in different places and different levels throughout the organization (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005b). The collaboration among these leaders is what moves an institution forward. The results of this study show that the NSSE Institutional Report is mostly shared with senior level administration (93.8%), and to a lesser extent with faculty (79%) and academic and student affairs professional staff (72.3%). The report is also often not shared with

students (30.4%) or community/other stakeholders (36.6%). These results are different from reports provided by NSSE, which indicate data are shared at higher rates than this study found (NSSE, 2013a). The results of this study are also in contradiction to the best practices that the literature suggests regarding decision making using data. The use of data cannot be seen as a singular activity focused only on data collection, but as a broader activity that leads to meaningful performance benchmarks that help academic leaders achieve the institution mission outcomes (Bonabeau, 2003; Goleman, Boyatzus, & McKee, 2002). However, with little explanation or training for how to use NSSE benchmarks as reported by the participants (42.4%), then there is neither an opportunity for learning, nor creation of a culture of data driven decision making which can lead to enhanced institutional effectiveness.

The results also show that those that did use the NSSE data used it in very similar ways, tracking all five categories for how to aggregate and disaggregate the data. This was in line with the literature, which indicates that to achieve success in the use of data in decision making, users must give full attention to the quality, timeliness and relevancy of data (Swan, 2009). This is evidenced by the complete usage of the data rather than just focusing on one area of the NSSE report.

Student Affairs Functional Areas' Use of the NSSE. The results of this study show that when looking at a department/unit's usage of the NSSE data there are some subtle differences between student affairs functional areas, but not enough data to make statistical inferences about which areas had an impact. Student affairs functional areas showed approaching significance in being familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report. There were significant differences between those that were aware of

their institution's highest performing NSSE benchmarks; department members being aware of their institution's lowest performing NSSE benchmarks; and department members creating partnerships or collaborations based on NSSE report. Although it's not possible to determine which student affairs functional area is more likely to be using this information, it does show that the NSSE benchmarks, which were developed to allow participating schools to compare themselves to their peers (Kuh, 2001), are being discussed on campuses so that the respondents were aware of the highest and lowest performing areas. It also shows that there are some functional areas that are creating partnerships or collaborations based on the NSSE Institutional report to identify opportunities to improve undergraduate education (Pike, 2006).

The results of this study showed that the differences between student affairs functional areas was significant regarding whether the individual uses NSSE data to inform planning and work activities and whether the individual uses NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings. International Education (Study Abroad) administrators, are less likely to use the NSSE data, than both the Chief Student Affairs Officers ($p = .017$) and Academic Advising administrators ($p = .047$) to inform planning and work activities. There was also approaching significant difference between International Education (Study Abroad) administrators, who are less likely to use the NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings than Academic Advising administrators ($p = .069$).

As the literature indicates, the chief student affairs officer is important in shaping the design and structure of the division of student affairs (Ambler, 2000) and has a major responsibility to ensure that systematic assessments are made of student learning, and to

use this information for the improvement of educational and support programs (Sandeem, 1991). The literature also indicates that academic advising may be one of the most important student service areas related to educational outcomes, retention, and student satisfaction. Research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) has consistently shown that advising can play a role in student persistence and educational outcomes. There were not significant differences between the other functional areas or other items. The results of the individual usage of the NSSE data indicate that student affairs functional area does seem to have an effect on several of the dependent variables.

Another recent study (Ewell, Paulson, & Kinzie, 2011) found that there was a large perception gap between individuals at the department/unit level and senior leaders regarding the value of understanding assessment methods and other institutions' assessment activities. More than 50% of the program level individuals vs. about 30% of senior leaders (Ewell, Paulson, & Kinzie, 2011) felt that better understanding of assessment measures and more information about assessment methods would be helpful. That same study (Ewell, Paulson, & Kinzie, 2011) showed that less than 20% of senior leaders thought that knowledge about how assessment is done in other places would be beneficial, whereas 45% of program level respondents said so. This demonstrates that there is a significant gap between senior leaders and those on the frontline regarding the necessary information to better participate in assessment and program improvement activities.

Although colleges and universities participating in the NSSSE receive the annual report providing important information about their institution's strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to peers, it is clear that not all institutions are using the

survey results for decision making. George Kuh indicates (as quoted in Lipka, 2007), “just doing the NSSE doesn’t improve undergraduate teaching and learning. You have to do something with the data” (p. A32). Higher education institutions need to have administrators who can interpret data to identify challenges and articulate strategies to improve student-learning outcomes.

Accreditation Model and Use of the NSSE Data. There have been some significant changes to HLC accreditation since this study began, including the major transition of the PEAQ model to the Pathways models (HLC, 2015). Although three pathways are available (Standard, Open and AQIP), institutions must focus on specific criteria and a culture of continuous improvement (HLC, 2015) regardless of which pathway they choose. The Standard and Open Pathways still follow a ten-year accreditation review cycle but require institutions to participate in a mid-cycle peer review in year 4 and annual reporting of certain data (HLC, 2015). The Open pathway allows institutions to select a Quality Initiative Project to work on during years 5-9 of the cycle (HLC, 2015). The AQIP pathway allows institutions to work on several Action Projects simultaneously to improve quality, requiring three projects annually with a portfolio review in year 3 and 7 and a full peer review in year 8 (HLC, 2015).

NSSE results have become important data elements in many institutions’ self-studies for accreditation. In fact, as one of the most common uses of NSSE data there are now Accreditation Toolkits (NSSE, 2015a) to assist institutions with how to best use and share NSSE results as part of the accreditation process. The toolkit provides suggestions for which NSSE survey items align with specific regional accreditation criteria and takes

into consideration the PEAQ, AQIP, and the transition to the Pathway models of accreditation (NSSE, 2015a).

Overall, this study showed that the survey participant's level of involvement in the accreditation process seemed to be limited (46.8%) or some (35.1%) extent with the role most often indicated as providing data to others for the self-study. There were no statistically significant differences between AQIP and PEAQ accredited institutions in relation to the usage of the NSSE data. This was actually an unexpected result of this study. It was anticipated that institutions using the AQIP method, which focuses on an annual review of learning outcomes and quality measures in order to focus on improvement, would be more likely to utilize available data, such as the NSSE, to impact learning outcomes and program measures versus the ten year cycle of the PEAQ method which is focused more on quantitative measures (HLC, 2007).

It was interesting to note how many participants indicated either I Don't Know (n=48) or did not provide a response (n=17) to the question about which accreditation method their institution participated in. Through additional analysis it was determined that there were no significant differences between those that did not know or did not respond and those that responded with the accreditation type. Additionally, when asked where the institution was in the current accreditation cycle, 26 AQIP respondents either specifically indicated they did not know (n=9), or did not respond to the question (n=17). The PEAQ group also had 29 respondents who either specifically indicated they did not know (n=11), or did not respond to the question (n=18). The number of respondents who were unable or chose not to respond to this question may speak to the level of involvement or knowledge of the accreditation process. This demonstrates that a

significant number of student affairs administrators are not yet engaged in the “culture of evidence” (Wolff & Harris, 1994) and using data to support assertions.

Institutional Characteristics and Use of the NSSE Data. The results of this study show that there were some statistically significant differences between privately and publicly controlled institutions and their distribution of the NSSE data. Public institutions were significantly more likely to share the NSSE Institutional report with Students ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.027$) and Community/Other Stakeholders ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.051$) than the private institutions. This difference could be explained by the differences between public institution mandates to report or share data that are not necessarily there for private institutions. Additionally, publicly controlled institutions were significantly more likely to track overall benchmarks aggregated with all participants ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .816$) and individual questions disaggregated with all participants ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .782$). This also shows an interest in institutions comparing themselves to responses from all institutions and a culture of benchmarking. Finally, public institutions were significantly more likely to train administrators how to use the NSSE data and benchmarks ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.128$) again showing a commitment of resources to using data. Although the accreditation standards are the same for both public and privately controlled institutions, there is an extra layer of transparency for those institutions funded using state dollars to report on student learning outcomes and other dashboard measures to demonstrate educational quality and ensure that economic returns are maximized (Alexander, 2000).

The institutions’ size was significant for several of the items as well. There was significant differences ($p = .001$) found in the NSSE Institutional report being shared with students at medium sized (10,000-19,999 students, $M = 2.78$, $SD = .441$) institutions

rather than smaller institutions (less than 3,000 students, $M = 1.37$, $SD = .837$).

Additionally the smaller institutions were also significantly less likely to share the report with Community/Other Stakeholders ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .783$) than both slightly larger (3,000–9,999 students, $p = .008$, $M = 2.35$, $SD = .988$) and medium sized (10,000-19,999 students, $p = .014$, $M = 2.56$, $SD = .726$) institutions. Regarding whether the institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks there was significant, or approaching significant, difference between the smallest group of schools (less than 3,000 students enrolled students) and those 3,000-9,999 students ($p = .036$); those 10,000-19,999 students ($p = .093$); and those 20,000 or more students ($p = .012$).

It is interesting to note that the smaller institutions (less than 3,000 students) were 96% privately controlled and medium sized (10,000-19,999 students) were 88% publicly controlled. Through additional analysis using Pearson's Bivariate Correlation it was determined that size and control were strongly correlated, $r(164) = .672$. However, through a stepwise regression it was determined that institutional size had more impact on whether the NSSE data was being shared with students and whether an institution provides explanation or training for how to use the NSSE data than institutional control. Larger schools are more likely to share the information and provide training than smaller schools. In the case of sharing the NSSE data with community and other stakeholders, an institutions' control was a stronger indicator and confirms the analysis that private institutions are less likely to share the data and do not have the mandates to do so. However, as indicated earlier in creating a "culture of evidence" (Wolff & Harris, 1994),

institutions regardless of size or type should promote assessment activities at all levels and involve everyone.

Strategic Planning Processes and Use of the NSSE Data. Strategic planning goes hand in hand with accreditation since criterion one of the HLC accreditation guidelines states that an “institution’s mission is clear and articulated publicly [and] it guides the institution’s operations” (HLC, 2015, p. 8). HLC’s criterion five also includes the guidelines that an “institution’s resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities [and] the institution plans for the future” (HLC, 2015, p. 11).

The results of this study showed that 97.1% of participating institutions had an institution level strategic plan in place and the majority (64.6%) indicated they had been participating in strategic planning for over 10 years. Chief Student Affairs Officers indicated they were involved with the institutional strategic planning process (94.1%) most often, followed by those classified as Other (84.6%) which had multiple roles including oversight for several of the student affairs functional areas. Since a major responsibility of the CSAO is to work closely with the directors or senior administrators of student service areas to ensure that systematic assessments are made of student learning, and to use this information for the improvement of educational and support programs (Sandeem, 1991) it would be expected that they are heavily involved in the institutional strategic planning process and utilize the data reported to them.

The areas of Housing and Residence Life (71.4%) and Student Life and Activities (68.4%) also indicated involvement with the institution level strategic plan. Student affairs professionals within the areas of housing and residence life and student life and

activities have a unique opportunity to connect with students outside of the classroom and with this comes a responsibility to maximize the available learning opportunities, encourage students to get involved, and challenge them to learn and grow from one another (Arboleda, et al., 2003; Blimling, 1993, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Whipple, 1996). Since these areas tend to be very visible components of an institution they may be more likely to be included in the institution level strategic planning processes. The involvement in the institutional strategic planning process for most of the study participants was limited (32.6%) or some (48.9%) extent with the role most often indicated as providing data for the strategic plan.

The study also showed that the length of time an institution had been participating in strategic planning was significant for how the NSSE data was distributed to Senior Level Administration ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .683$) and Faculty ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .900$) with those institutions that had been planning for less than 3 years to be less likely to distribute the NSSE data.

There is some room for improvement in the department/unit level planning since only 62.9% of respondents indicated their unit had a plan and 36.1% indicated they had been planning for less than 3 years. This is in contrast to the results of a recent study that indicated that 80% of respondents had identified program-level student learning outcomes (Ewell, Paulson, & Kinzie, 2011).

Interestingly, the amount of involvement in strategic planning changed greatly at the unit/department level where six of the nine categories responded with 100% involvement, including Academic Advising, Housing & Residential Life, Multicultural Affairs, Orientation & New Student Programs, Student Life & Activities, and those

classified as Other. In addition, the level of involvement in the department/unit strategic planning process was a great extent (77.6%) for the survey participants, with the majority (42.1%) indicating they were responsible for the strategic plan. This is in line with the literature, which specifically addresses strategic planning and the role of every department on campus to be responsible for student learning on campus (NLASLA, 2012).

The study results also show that even though most of the units/departments had strategic plans and that the survey participants were directly responsible for them, that the department/unit strategic plans were only talked about at meetings for 76.4% of respondents. Yet, the department/unit strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop planning and programming for 79.9% of the respondents and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals for 88.2%. If the strategic plan provides visions of what is possible and provides a framework for gathering information about the big picture (McCaul, 2011) and respondents indicate that outcomes are tied to it than it should be discussed more regularly at meetings to provide everyone in the unit the opportunity to see that small improvements can add up (Barnard & Walker, 1994) to achieve unit/department goals.

However, the study did show significant results indicating that unit/departments with strategic plans were more likely to be familiar with the contents of the NSSE institutional report, the respondents felt their unit was described in the NSSE data, and that unit goals were based on NSSE measures. Those units that had been planning for more than 10 years were significantly more familiar with contents of the NSSE institutional report than those that had been planning for less than three years. There was

also significant difference for those that had plans that were ten years or older versus plans that were less than three years old in every category except collaborations. This demonstrates that repeated exposure to the content and having a more mature plan provides more opportunities to connect with and use the NSSE data.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that during the data cleanup process, the researcher changed the responses on 28 surveys where the respondent indicated the wrong accreditation model, determined based on the survey completed. The researcher did not change or edit the responses for those that indicated I Don't Know or did not respond to the accreditation type question even though it was also available based on the survey completed. At the time, the focus was on the accreditation type being important and it was deemed more important to have the right accreditation model for the data analysis for those that answered. It was later determined to look at the respondents that answered I Don't Know or did not respond because it ended up being such a large part of the sample. However, further analysis showed there were not significant differences between the two types of respondents other than length of time in the field of student affairs.

Additionally, the survey specifically used the terms PEAQ and AQIP for accreditation models. Effective September 2012, these models were being transitioned into a new "Pathway" model (HLC, 2015). Institutions following PEAQ status would be transitioned to either a "Standard Pathway" or an "Open Pathway" by the end of 2015 (HLC, 2015.) and the AQIP method would continue as a third pathway option. It is possible that respondents who were newer to their positions were not familiar with the PEAQ

terminology if their institution had adopted a “pathway” and started using that language after 2012. This study started prior to this changeover, the sample was pulled from the directory of institutions for 2012, and the accreditation status was confirmed prior to the survey being deployed.

In 2013, another change was to the NSSE instrument that had been largely the same since 2005 to allow institutions to complete year-to-year comparisons (NSSE, 2013b). The survey changes included some minimal wording changes, but also entirely new content related to effective educational practice and reflects current educational contexts (NSSE, 2013b). In addition, the Institutional Report was also redesigned with color and graphics with the idea that the report should be shared widely (NSSE, 2013b). The sample for this study was determined from NSSE participants 2005-2012, yet changes to the survey instrument or institutional report may have had an impact on participant responses.

Another limitation was there were not an equal number of responses from the different types of units/departments across institutions to generalize to the unit/departmental level. In addition, when identifying the participants for the sample the researcher noted that some campuses did not have some of the student affairs offices identified, or they were merged with other services with a single person responsible for multiple areas. There were also respondents within the sample who identified themselves as Other because they believed their role encompassed multiple areas. For these reasons, response rate was critical and unfortunately, there were sometimes not enough responses to identify significance, though it was clear that there was a relationship in some of the cases.

Implications for Practice

This study identified several implications for practice that would improve the usage of the NSSE data (and other data collection tools) and assist institutions with creating a culture of data driven decision making. The implications for practice include:

- Sharing the data
- Understanding the data
- Using the data
- Involvement in accreditation and assessment activities
- Improved strategic planning activities

These implications for practice are further explained in the next section.

Sharing the Data. This study shows mostly top down sharing of the information and does not represent best practices for learning institutions. When institutions choose to participate in data collection opportunities such as the NSSE, they need to make full use of this investment and make the information accessible to all invested members of the campus community including administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other community stakeholders. Institutions should also take an active role in the dissemination of the information rather than leaving it to linger on an institutional analysis website. According to NSSE (2015b) about 40% of participating institutions post results on their websites and they recommend distributing results broadly in ways that encourage “thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons.”(p. 5). Higher education is demanding more transparency and accountability and this data should be readily available to anyone who would like to see it. There are multiple examples of best practices for sharing the

information available on the NSSE website that other institutions could utilize. These examples include, Clemson University who created specialized reports for different constituencies to make data relevant; North Dakota State University which developed a computer program to generate power point presentations for each of the benchmark areas to promote clear understanding of NSSE indicators; and Wofford College which created a four-page brochure to provide context for student engagement and interpret key NSSE results (NSSE, 2013a). Making NSSE data accessible is the key to engaging constituents to identify shortcomings and develop strategies for improvement as well as celebrate successful student engagement opportunities.

Understanding the Data. Another facet of the investment in data collection tools like the NSSE is the opportunity for members of the community learn what the data means and how to use it to make the best use of limited resources and better decisions for the needs of the campus community. Institutions should work to provide training opportunities for those interested in learning more about how to utilize data in planning and decision making processes. The NSSE website has suggestions for how to facilitate workshops and help stakeholders understand, interpret, and take action using NSSE data. Recently a workshop held at Bucknell University (NSSE, 2015c) provided a combination of plenary and concurrent sessions for participants to learn about NSSE data, how to link it to other data sources, and use it for educationally effective practice. Sharing the results does not lead to action, people must be interested, engaged, and understand what the data means before they can do something with it.

Frontline staff need to be trained in what the data means and how they can use it in their work to improve programs and student experiences on campus.

Using the Data. The results of this study show that respondents are mostly familiar with the highest and lowest performing benchmarks, which is a great starting point. However, there is much more data to look at. Institutions should reflect on the reasons they administered the NSSE in the first place. If there were specific strengths, concerns or points of interest that they were seeking information about, what does the NSSE data indicate? Institutions can identify areas that require attention with a review of engagement indicator scores or item level results. Institutions can predict the results and then compare to student responses to determine if there are gaps in service or if the student experience is different than the institution believes. The data can facilitate consideration of the student experience in the development of programming and initiatives. Additionally, the NSSE data can be linked with other available data such as academic and financial aid transcripts, retention studies, focus groups, and other survey tools (NSSE, 2013a) to determine if efforts are having the desired effect. One example is the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, which examined NSSE and other data from surveys and focus groups to improve academic advising on their campus (NSSE, 2015b).

Individual student affairs administrators can be using the NSSE data to inform unit/department work planning and use measures and benchmarks during meetings when new programs and initiatives are developed. Winona State University used the NSSE data in the Student Life and Development office when the findings influenced the department to focus specifically on programming that would improve faculty and student interaction as well as increase peer interaction with different racial or ethnic backgrounds (NSSE, 2013a). This institution can now use NSSE benchmarks to determine if the implemented programming had the desired effect and met the department/unit strategic goals.

Accreditation and Assessment.. Simply collecting data is not sufficient to meet the goals of accountability. An institution must use assessment tools to guide and reinforce a cycle of activities that creates an institutional culture of planning and decision- making based on evidence. This culture must emphasize the importance of data throughout the accreditation cycle, it cannot only be important at the end when it is time to report. An example of a best practice is a recent self-study report prepared by St. Cloud State University about Criterion Two of HLC standards (NSSE, 2015a). This criterion is about an institution's preparation for the future,“*St. Cloud states that NSSE data, with other assessment tools, are discussed in academic and administrative groups resulting in changes in the Division of Student Life and the First-Year Experience, and the development of an early warning system for students experiencing academic difficulty*” (NSSE, 2015a, p. 7).

The NSSE, though powerful on its own, can also be linked with other institutional data to learn more about student educational backgrounds, financial aid, and other factors that might help an institution evaluate the effectiveness of programs or activities. It is also important for data to be collected across multiple years to provide tracking of trends and evaluation of specific initiatives across or among cohorts of students. A campus community must see assessment data as a guide for improvement and is an important step for an institution on its way toward developing a culture based on evidence. Morgan State University (MSU) used their NSSE results along with focus groups and other national assessment instruments as evidence to support their reaccreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (NSSE, 2015a). In addition, MSU integrated the NSSE

into their assessment matrix for use by administrators to develop programming and allocate resources (NSSE, 2015a).

Institutions may have started looking at student learning outcomes and assessment in general as part of a “culture of compliance” (Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski, Cain, Ewell, Hutchings, & Kinzie, 2015) where external stakeholders such as accreditation bodies were seen as the primary reason for partaking in assessment activities. However, to create a true culture of assessment and data-driven decision making the institution has to align assessment processes with campus needs and priorities that focus on students and the campus partners that are responsible for student learning. Administering the NSSE survey, or any assessment tool, and receiving the data reports only starts the process. An institution must commit to share and interpret the data results with the community, identify priorities for action and set goals, formulate and implement plans for improvement, and then circle back to assess the impact of the changes with those that are responsible for the work on a campus, not just those responsible for continuing accreditation.

Strategic Planning . Programs may be looking at outcomes and student learning as part of an assessment process, but may not be connecting them to strategic planning processes and goals, which is an important first step. NSSE can be a robust instrument for assessing progress toward achieving an institution’s strategic planning goals. The first step in creating a culture based on evidence is to involve appropriate constituents in a process of identifying goals for student learning and student engagement in the service areas that are designed to promote learning and development.

Institutions engaging in strategic planning, should consider the use of NSSE and other available data collection tools to assist with goal identification. The NSSE can provide valuable insight into the student experience, which might identify areas for strategic improvement or provide measures for successful strategic goals. Institutions can identify NSSE instrument questions/items that closely relate to strategic goals and determine if the responses are what is expected or if there are actions that can be taken to affect the response in the future. Juniata College has senior administrators that gather a significant amount of data from multiple sources to inform planning efforts and they integrate NSSE benchmarks into their strategic plan (NSSE, 2015a). Institutions can use NSSE data as one source of evidence to develop data-driven plans to improve educational experiences for students. They must be fully engaged in the planning, evaluation, and improvement cycle.

Implications for Future Research

While this research study has been able to identify some characteristics (institutional or individual) that impact the use of the NSSE data in decision making and planning, it has not been able to adequately identify the specific characteristics in many cases due to low response rate in some categories. Further study should include additional cases to get enough responses to be statistically significant for a closer look at differences among the identified student affairs functional areas.

Additionally, future research should look at if each of the student affairs areas studied is responsible for a high impact learning practices, why are they not using NSSE data, which specifically measures student engagement and the student experience? Is this

an issue of lack of awareness of the data (issues with how the data is shared on campus), lack of understanding the data (issues with training and how to use the data), or a lack of interest in the data (issues with expectations and not having a culture of data driven decision making)? This study only asked about what they knew and how they used the NSSE data.

In this study, there were surprisingly no differences between those that were using PEAQ and AQIP accreditation models. Future studies may want to look specifically at the individuals' understanding of accreditation type and use of the NSSE data, especially with the changes to the accreditation models since 2012 since there is an expectation for all three pathways to provide a culture of continuous improvement. In addition, although this study looked at if there was a strategic plan, a future study may want to focus on if the NSSE benchmarks are embedded into the plan and how that impacts the institutions' use or understanding of the NSSE data.

Final Thoughts

All campus educators, including student affairs professionals, are accountable “for identifying and achieving essential student learning outcomes and for making transformative education possible and accessible for all students.” (Keeling, 2004, p. 1). This research was undertaken because expectations are increasing for student affairs professionals to participate in conversations about student learning and to demonstrate outcomes for programming and activities. Accreditation and assessment processes are driving a lot of change in higher education today so it is important that student affairs professionals are able to understand the potential for programming and activities to

promote student learning and fulfill strategic goals for the institution. The NSSE is the most available and readily used tool to measure student engagement and yet the findings of this study show that there is not as much use of the NSSE data as there could be. Some individuals (Chief Student Affairs Officer and Academic Advising) are more likely to use the NSSE data for planning and work activities. However, as higher education continues to move toward more systematic accountability, with accreditation models focusing on continuous improvement, institutions will need to grapple with how they penetrate beyond the senior leadership level with the results of the NSSE and other assessment tools and involve front-line leaders in the strategic planning and assessment and accreditation processes. This would allow institutions to close the loop in their planning and assessment activities.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects IRB Exemption

Date: February 5, 2014

To: Andrea Beach, Principal Investigator
Jennifer McCaul, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 14-02-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled "Closing the Loop: A Study of How The National Survey of Students Engagement (NSSE) is Used for Decision-Making and Planning in Student Affairs" has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing a process and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.

Appendix B

Email to Study Participants

Dear (supply name via Survey Monkey):

I would like to ask for your participation in a web-based survey. I am currently in the process of my dissertation research on the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement for decision making and planning for student affairs professionals in eight identified functional areas across Higher Learning Commission accredited schools. You have been identified as one of the Directors or senior leadership for your institution in one of these areas, which is why you have been included in this survey.

A link to this web-based survey is below. The survey will take between 5 minutes for those who do not have a lot of involvement in decision making and planning, and up to about 15 minutes for those who have. Your replies will be confidential and you may choose to exit the survey at any time.

<Survey Link>

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message. If you choose not to participate in the survey and you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list. You may also simply not complete the survey and ignore any future email reminders.

<Remove Link>

Thank you in advance for your assistance. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 616-331-6890 or at Jennifer.l.mccaul@wmich.edu. You may also contact the dissertation Chair, Dr. Andrea Beach at Western Michigan University (269) 387-1725 or andrea.beach@wmich.edu

For those of you interested in receiving a copy of the summarized results, email me directly at Jennifer.l.mccaul@wmich.edu and I will provide it at the conclusion of this study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. McCaul

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

CLOSING THE LOOP

Western Michigan University
Educational Research, Leadership and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Beach
Student Investigator: Jennifer L. McCaul
Title of Study: CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION-MAKING AND PLANNING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

You have been invited to participate in a research project. This project will serve as Jennifer L. McCaul's dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D in Higher Education Leadership. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. This survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. All responses will remain confidential.

Your replies will be confidential and you may choose to exit the survey at any time. To ensure confidentiality, your name and email address have been attached to the online survey creator only to determine who should receive reminder emails. Once you complete the survey your name is removed from the email distribution list and is no longer connected with any survey data.

If you choose not to participate in the survey you may close out of the program at any time prior to hitting submit and your answers will not be recorded. You may also opt out of email reminders.

Completing this survey indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board has approved this consent document for use for one year. This was approved on February 5, 2014 (HSIRB#14-02-03).

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact the student investigator Jennifer L. McCaul at 616-331-6890 or via email to jennifer.lmccaul@wmich.edu. You may also contact the dissertation Chair, Dr. Andrea Beach at (269) 387-1725 or via email to andrea.beach@wmich.edu

You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the summarized results at the conclusion of this study, email the researcher at jennifer.lmccaul@wmich.edu

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Please respond to the following questions to describe your current institution:

* 1. Which best describes your institution's control?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

* 2. Which best describes your institution's total undergraduate student enrollment?

- ☐ Less than 3,000
- ☐ 3,000-9,999
- ☐ 10,000-19,999
- ☐ 20,000-29,999
- ☐ 30,000-39,999
- ☐ More than 40,000

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Please respond to the following questions to describe your professional experience

* 3. What is the total amount of time you have worked in a student affairs functional area (total at all institutions rounded up to the nearest year)?

Enter Number of Years

* 4. What is the total amount of time you have worked in a student affairs administrative role (total at all institutions rounded up to the nearest year)?

Enter Number of Years

* 5. What is the total amount of time you have worked in your current administrative role (rounded up to the nearest year)?

Enter Number of Years

* 6. Which of these student affairs functional areas best describes your current administrative role?

- ☐ Chief Student Affairs Officer
- ☐ Academic Advising
- ☐ Housing & Residential Life
- ☐ International Education Support (Study Abroad)
- ☐ Multicultural Affairs
- ☐ Orientation & New Student Programs
- ☐ Student Life & Activities
- ☐ Student Support Programs
- ☐ Other

If you selected Other, please specify

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Chief Student Affairs Officer**

* 7. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?

(This should include all units you supervise but does not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of

professional staff

supervised:

* 8. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

(This should include all units you supervise)

Enter the total number of

student contacts:

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING****Academic Advising**

* 9. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?

(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

* 10. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Housing & Residential Life**

* 11. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?
(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

12. Which best describes your institution's undergraduate on-campus residential population?

- ☐ Less than 750
- ☐ 750-2,499
- ☐ 2,500-4,999
- ☐ 5,000-7,499
- ☐ 7,500-9,999
- ☐ More than 10,000

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

International Education Support (Study Abroad)

* 13. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?

(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of

professional staff

supervised:

* 14. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of

student contacts:

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Multicultural Affairs

* 15. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?
(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

* 16. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Orientation & New Student Programs

* 17. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?

(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

* 18. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Student Life & Activities**

* 19. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?
(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

* 20. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Student Support Programs

* 21. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?

(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff

supervised:

* 22. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Other Functional Area**

* 23. How many professional staff members do you supervise in your functional area?
(This should not include student workers or graduate assistants)

Enter the total number of
professional staff
supervised:

* 24. To the best of your knowledge, how many student contacts does your functional area have annually?

Enter the total number of
student contacts:

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Please respond to the following regarding the accreditation process at your current institution:

* 25. Which Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation process does your current institution participate in?

- ☐ Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) - A comprehensive accreditation and self evaluation process that focuses on enhancing the operations of the institution through quality improvement.
- ☐ Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) - A traditional 10 year cycle - Employs a four-step comprehensive evaluation process consisting of an institutional self-study, an evaluation by a team of trained peer reviewers, and final decision-making by the Commission.
- ☐ I do not know

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

AQIP

* 26. Where is your current institution in the most recent accreditation cycle?

- ☐ Held strategy forum to determine critical categories (year 1)
- ☐ Working on action projects (year 2-3)
- ☐ Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)
- ☐ Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)
- ☐ Completed quality check-update visit (year 6)
- ☐ Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)
- ☐ I do not know

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

PEAQ

* 27. Where is your current institution in the most recent accreditation cycle?

- ☐ Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)
- ☐ Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)
- ☐ Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)
- ☐ Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)
- ☐ Site visit (year 9)
- ☐ Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)
- ☐ I do not know

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Involvement in Accreditation Process

* 28. Are you involved in the accreditation process in any way?

☐ Yes

☐ No

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Involvement in Accreditation Process**

* 29. Which best describes your level of involvement with accreditation activities or processes at your current institution?

	Great Extent	Some Extent	Limited Extent
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30. In what ways have you been involved in accreditation activities/processes in your current position (check all that apply)?

- ☐ Chair of accreditation committee
- ☐ University steering/organizing committee
- ☐ Serve on subcommittee
- ☐ Provide data for self study from my reporting area
- ☐ Involved with planning of quality improvement project

Other (please specify)

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Please respond to the following regarding the strategic planning process at your current institution

31. Does your current institution have an institutional level strategic plan?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Institution Level Strategic Plan

* 32. How long has your current institution been participating in strategic planning at the institutional level?

	Less than 3 years	3-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years	10 years or more	I am not sure
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 33. How many years has the current institutional level strategic plan been in place?

	Less than 3 years	3-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years	10 years or more	I am not sure
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Involvement in Institution Level Strategic Planning Process

* 34. Are you involved in the strategic planning process at the institution level in any way?

☐ Yes

☐ No

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Involvement in Institution Level Strategic Planning Process**

* 35. Which best describes your level of involvement with institution level strategic planning activities or processes at your current institution?

	Great Extent	Some Extent	Limited Extent
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. In what ways have you been involved with institution level strategic planning activities or processes? (check all that apply)

- ☐ I'm responsible for the strategic plan
- ☐ I'm on a committee that developed the strategic plan
- ☐ I provide data for the strategic plan

Other (please specify)

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Please respond to the following regarding the strategic planning process at your current institution

37. Does your department/unit have a strategic plan?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Department/Unit Strategic Plan

* 38. How long has your department/unit been participating in strategic planning at the unit level?

	Less than 3 years	3-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years	10 years or more	I am not sure
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 39. How many years has the current department/unit strategic plan been in place?

	Less than 3 years	3-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years	10 years or more	I am not sure
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Involvement in Department/Unit Strategic Planning Process

40. Are you involved in the strategic planning process at the Department/Unit level?

☐ Yes

☐ No

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Involvement in Department/Unit Strategic Planning Process**

* 41. Which best describes your level of involvement with department/unit level strategic planning activities or processes at your current institution?

	Great Extent	Some Extent	Limited Extent
Choose one:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

42. In what ways have you been involved with department/unit level strategic planning activities or processes? (check all that apply)

- ☐ I'm responsible for the strategic plan
- ☐ I'm on a committee that developed the strategic plan
- ☐ I provide data for the strategic plan

Other (please specify)

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**Use of Institution Level Strategic Plan**

* 43. To what extent are the following statements true about your current institution:

	Great Extent	Some Extent	Limited Extent	Not at All
The institution level strategic plan is discussed at every important planning meeting I attend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The institution level strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop institution programming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Program and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals at the institution level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Use of Department/Unit Strategic Plan

* 44. To what extent are the following statements true about your department/unit:

	Great Extent	Some Extent	Limited Extent	Not at All
The department/unit level strategic plan is discussed at every important planning meeting I attend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The department/unit level strategic plan provides focus and direction to develop programming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programming and student outcomes are tied to strategic goals at the department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Institution Use of NSSE Survey Results

* 45. Please respond to the following statements based on your understanding of how the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results are used at your institution:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't Know
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other Stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't Know
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING

Department/Unit Use of NSSE Results

* 46. Please respond to the following statements based on your understanding of how the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results are used in your department/unit:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't Know
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark Items	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark Items	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My department's activity is described in the NSSE data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Student Affairs Leaders Use of NSSE Results

* 47. Please respond to the following statements based on your understanding of how the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results are used by you individually:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I use NSSE data to inform my planning and work activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the benchmark Level of Academic Challenge as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the benchmark of Active and Collaborative Learning as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the benchmark Student-Faculty Interaction as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the benchmark Enriching Educational Experiences as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the benchmark Supportive Campus Environment as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use other assessment tools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If any, which other assessment tools do you use? (CRP, Your First College Year, etc.)

**CLOSING THE LOOP: A STUDY OF HOW THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) IS USED FOR DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING**

Thank You

Thank you again for taking the time to assist with this research project. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the summarized results at the conclusion of this study, email the researcher at jennifer.L.mccaul@wmich.edu

Appendix D

Description of Survey Respondents by Student Affairs Functional Area

<i>Functional Area</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Chief Student Affairs Officer	18	11.6			
Total # of staff			8.5	28.17	40.790
Total # student contacts			3000.00	11911.76	25544.737
Academic Advising	20	12.9			
Total # of staff			3.00	8.00	9.987
Total # student contacts			8221.00	13542.41	19961.333
Housing & Residential Life	23	14.8			
Total # of staff			6.00	17.74	34.973
Total # student contacts	*asked about residential population instead. Responses can be found in Table 3				
International Education (Study Abroad)	15	9.7			
Total # of staff			2.50	2.63	2.247
Total # student contacts			500.00	2533.44	3857.281
Multicultural Affairs	15	9.7			
Total # of staff			.00	3.33	5.300
Total # student contacts			750	6813.33	17769.913
Orientation & New Student Programs	7	4.5			
Total # of staff			2.00	4.57	7.068
Total # student contacts			3500.00	5814.29	8105.847
Student Life & Activities	22	14.2			
Total # of staff			4.00	4.10	3.820
Total # student contacts			1000.00	11167.14	33599.911
Student Support Programs	19	12.3			
Total # of staff			4.00	5.15	5.019

Total # student contacts			3000.00	6554.25	10861.496
Other	16	10.3			
Total # of staff			10.5	22.00	29.158
Total # student contacts			2250.00	8708.83	16995.045
No Response	9				

Appendix E

Department/Unit Usage of the NSSE Data by Student Affairs
Functional Area Complete Data Table

Student Affairs Functional Area	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Don't Know	n	Mean	SD
	n (%)							
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Survey Instrument	14 (11.5)	45 (36.9)	26 (21.3)	37 (30.3)	17	123	2.29	1.022
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	8	2	3		14	2.50	.941
Academic Advising	3	6	3	5		17	2.41	1.121
Housing & Residential Life	3	5	5	7		20	2.20	1.105
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	3	3	5		11	1.82	.874
Multicultural Affairs	3	6	4	0		14	2.92	.760
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	2	1	2		5	2.00	1.000
Student Life & Activities	1	6	5	7		19	2.05	.970
Student Support Programs	0	6	2	5		13	2.08	.954
Other	3	3	1	3		10	2.60	1.265
Members of my department are familiar with the contents of the NSSE Institutional Report	14 (11.4)	45 (36.6)	27 (22)	37 (30.1)	16	122	2.29	1.022
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	9	1	3		14	2.50	.941
Academic Advising	3	8	1	5		17	2.41	1.121
Housing & Residential Life	3	5	5	7		20	2.20	1.105
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	5	4		11	1.82	.874
Multicultural Affairs	4	5	4	1		13	2.92	.760
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	2		5	2.00	1.000
Student Life & Activities	1	6	4	8		19	2.05	.970
Student Support Programs	0	5	3	5		13	2.08	.954
Other	2	4	2	2		10	2.60	1.265
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Highest Performing Benchmark items	13 (10.9)	34 (28.6)	25 (21.0)	47 (39.5)	20	119	2.11*	1.056
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	3	4	5		13	2.00	1.000
Academic Advising	3	8	1	5		17	2.53	1.125
Housing & Residential Life	3	2	7	7		19	2.05	1.079
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	3	7		11	1.45	.688
Multicultural Affairs	4	5	2	3		14	2.71	1.139
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	1	3		5	1.60	.894
Student Life & Activities	0	8	1	10		19	1.89	.994
Student Support Programs	0	3	3	5		11	1.82	.874

Other	2	3	3	2		10	2.50	1.080
Members of my department are familiar with the institution's Lowest Performing Benchmark items	11 (9.2)	31 (26.1)	29 (24.4)	48 (40.3)	20	119	2.04*	1.020
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	2	4	6		13	1.85	.987
Academic Advising	3	6	3	5		17	2.41	1.121
Housing & Residential Life	2	3	8	7		20	2.00	.973
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	3	7		11	1.145	.688
Multicultural Affairs	3	6	1	3		13	2.69	1.109
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	0	4		5	1.40	.894
Student Life & Activities	0	6	3	10		19	1.79	.918
Student Support Programs	0	3	4	4		11	1.91	.831
Other	2	3	3	2		10	2.50	1.080
My department's activity is described in the NSSE data	23 (21.1)	45 (41.3)	14 (12.8)	27 (24.8)	30	109	2.59	1.082
Chief Student Affairs Officer	3	10	0	1		14	3.07	.730
Academic Advising	6	5	2	4		17	2.76	1.200
Housing & Residential Life	4	3	3	6		16	2.31	1.250
International Education (Study Abroad)	1	2	1	3		7	2.14	1.215
Multicultural Affairs	4	5	1	2		12	2.92	1.084
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	3	0	1		4	2.50	1.000
Student Life & Activities	1	10	2	4		17	2.47	.943
Student Support Programs	1	4	3	4		12	2.17	1.030
Other	3	3	2	2		10	2.70	1.160
My department's goals are based on NSSE measures	6 (3.7)	32 (26.9)	28 (23.5)	53 (44.5)	20	119	1.92	.958
Chief Student Affairs Officer	0	6	4	4		14	2.14	.864
Academic Advising	1	8	2	6		17	2.24	1.033
Housing & Residential Life	3	2	4	11		20	1.85	1.137
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	2	7		11	1.55	.820
Multicultural Affairs	1	4	2	3		10	2.30	1.059
Orientation & New Student Programs	1	0	1	3		5	1.80	1.304
Student Life & Activities	0	3	6	10		19	1.63	.761
Student Support Programs	0	4	3	6		13	1.85	.899
Other	0	3	4	3		10	2.00	.816

My department created partnerships or collaborations with other student service areas based on our institution's NSSE report	10 (8.4)	25 (21.0)	27 (22.7)	57 (47.9)	20	119	1.90*	1.012
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	3	2	7		13	1.85	1.068
Academic Advising	2	8	2	5		17	2.41	1.064
Housing & Residential Life	3	1	5	11		20	1.80	1.105
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	1	4	6		11	1.55	.688
Multicultural Affairs	3	4	2	4		13	2.46	1.198
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	0	1	4		5	1.20	.447
Student Life & Activities	0	2	5	11		18	1.50	.707
Student Support Programs	0	4	3	5		12	1.92	.900
Other	1	2	3	4		10	2.00	1.054

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$);

Appendix F

Individual Usage of the NSSE Data by Student Affairs
Functional Area-Complete Data Table

Student Affairs Functional Area	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	n	Mean	SD
	n (%)						
I use NSSE data to inform my planning and work activities	8 (5.8)	48 (35.0)	24 (17.5)	57 (41.6)	137	2.05*	1.002
Chief Student Affairs Officer	2	10	3	2	17	2.71	.849
Academic Advising	3	8	2	4	17	2.59	1.064
Housing & Residential Life	1	5	7	9	22	1.91	.921
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	3	1	10	14	1.50	.855
Multicultural Affairs	1	5	3	6	15	2.07	1.033
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	2	0	5	7	1.57	.976
Student Life & Activities	0	5	5	8	18	1.83	.857
Student Support Programs	0	4	3	8	15	1.73	.884
Other	1	6	0	5	12	2.25	1.138
I use NSSE measures/benchmarks during planning meetings	5 (3.6)	38 (27.7)	32 (23.4)	62 (45.3)	137	1.90*	.934
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	5	8	3	17	2.24	.831
Academic Advising	1	10	1	5	17	2.41	1.004
Housing & Residential Life	1	2	8	11	22	1.68	.839
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	2	10	14	1.43	.756
Multicultural Affairs	1	5	2	7	15	2.00	1.069
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	0	2	5	7	1.29	.488
Student Life & Activities	0	4	4	10	18	1.67	.840
Student Support Programs	0	5	3	7	15	1.87	.915
Other	1	5	2	4	12	2.25	1.055
I consider the benchmark Level of Academic Challenge as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	12 (8.8)	27 (19.7)	32 (23.4)	66 (48.2)	137	1.89	1.012
Chief Student Affairs Officer	1	4	5	7	17	1.94	.966

Academic Advising	2	8	1	6	17	2.35	1.115
Housing & Residential Life	2	2	7	11	22	1.77	.973
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	2	2	10	14	1.43	.756
Multicultural Affairs	1	3	4	7	15	1.87	.990
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	0	3	4	7	1.43	.535
Student Life & Activities	2	1	7	8	18	1.83	.985
Student Support Programs	2	3	3	7	15	2.00	1.134
Other	2	4	0	6	12	2.17	1.267
I consider the benchmark of Active and Collaborative Learning as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	18 (13.1)	29 (21.2)	29 (21.2)	61 (44.5)	137	2.03	1.091
Chief Student Affairs Officer	4	3	5	5	17	2.35	1.169
Academic Advising	3	7	1	6	17	2.41	1.176
Housing & Residential Life	3	3	6	10	22	1.95	1.090
International Education (Study Abroad)	1	2	2	9	14	1.64	1.008
Multicultural Affairs	2	5	1	7	15	2.13	1.187
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	4	7	1.57	.787
Student Life & Activities	1	1	9	7	18	1.78	.808
Student Support Programs	2	3	3	7	15	2.00	1.134
Other	2	4	0	6	12	2.17	1.267
I consider the benchmark Student-Faculty Interaction as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	14 (10.2)	30 (21.9)	34 (24.8)	59 (43.1)	137	1.99	1.033
Chief Student Affairs Officer	3	5	4	5	17	2.35	1.115
Academic Advising	3	6	4	4	17	2.47	1.068
Housing & Residential Life	2	4	6	10	22	1.91	1.019
International Education (Study Abroad)	0	4	2	8	14	1.71	.914
Multicultural Affairs	1	4	2	8	15	1.87	1.060

Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	4	7	1.57	.787
Student Life & Activities	2	2	7	7	18	1.94	.998
Student Support Programs	1	1	6	7	15	1.73	.884
Other	2	3	1	6	12	2.08	1.240
I consider the benchmark Enriching Educational Experiences as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	27 (19.7)	28 (20.4)	29 (21.2)	53 (38.7)	137	2.21	1.160
Chief Student Affairs Officer	6	4	4	3	17	2.76	1.147
Academic Advising	4	5	3	5	17	2.47	1.179
Housing & Residential Life	3	4	5	10	22	2.00	1.113
International Education (Study Abroad)	5	1	0	8	14	2.21	1.477
Multicultural Affairs	2	5	3	5	15	2.27	1.100
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	4	7	1.57	.787
Student Life & Activities	3	3	6	6	18	2.17	1.098
Student Support Programs	2	2	4	7	15	1.93	1.100
Other	2	3	2	5	12	2.17	1.193
I consider the benchmark Supportive Campus Environment as part of the planning process at our department/unit level	27 (19.7)	38 (27.7)	22 (16.1)	50 (36.5)	137	2.31	1.160
Chief Student Affairs Officer	5	7	2	3	17	2.82	1.074
Academic Advising	4	7	2	4	17	2.65	1.115
Housing & Residential Life	4	3	5	10	22	2.05	1.174
International Education (Study Abroad)	2	4	1	7	14	2.07	1.207
Multicultural Affairs	4	6	1	4	15	2.67	1.175
Orientation & New Student Programs	0	1	2	4	7	1.57	.787
Student Life & Activities	3	4	5	6	18	2.22	1.114
Student Support Programs	3	3	2	7	15	2.13	1.246
Other	2	3	2	5	12	2.17	1.193

Appendix G

Institutional Usage of the NSSE Data by Accreditation
Cycle Stage-Complete Data Table

Accreditation Cycle Stage (AQIP)	n	Mean	SD
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	27	3.30	.912
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	6	2.83	1.472
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	3.40	.548
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.80	.447
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	5	3.40	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	6	3.17	.983
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	20	2.95	1.099
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	5	2.40	1.342
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	4	3.00	.816
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	3	4.00	.000
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	5	3.20	.837
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	3	2.33	1.528
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	31	2.84	1.128
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	6	2.00	1.265
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	3.20	.837
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	6	3.17	1.329
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	3.50	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	8	2.50	1.069
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students	21	1.90	1.044
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	4	1.75	1.500
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	4	2.50	.577
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	4	1.50	1.000
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	4	2.25	1.258
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	5	1.60	.894
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other stakeholders	19	2.00	1.106
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	5	1.80	1.304
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	4	2.25	.957
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	3	1.67	1.155
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	4	2.50	1.291
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	3	1.67	1.155
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	29	3.00	.926
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	5	2.80	1.304
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	6	3.17	.753
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.40	.548

Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	3.50	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	7	2.29	.951
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	31	3.06*	.964
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	6	2.50	1.049
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	6	3.33	.816
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.80	.447
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	3.50	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	8	2.50	1.069
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	23	3.04	1.022
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	4	2.50	1.291
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	3.00	.707
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.40	.548
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	5	3.80	.447
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	4	2.25	1.500
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	24	3.04	.999
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	4	2.25	.957
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	3.20	.837
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	5	3.60	.548
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	5	3.60	.548
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	5	2.40	1.342
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	22	2.91	1.109
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	5	2.20	.837
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	6	3.50	.548
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	3	2.67	1.528
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	4	3.75	.500
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	4	2.25	1.500
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	24	2.25	1.073
Working on action projects (year 2-3)	4	1.75	1.500
Submitted a systems portfolio (year 4)	5	2.40	.548
Completed a systems appraisal (year 5)	3	2.33	1.155
Completed quality check-up/site visit (year 6)	6	2.83	.753
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 7)	6	1.83	1.329

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$);

Accreditation Cycle Stage (PEAQ)	n	Mean	SD
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	29	3.55	.686
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	15	3.67	.488
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	4.00	.000
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	5	3.60	.548
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	3	3.33	.577
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.67	1.528
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	26	3.19	.849
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	3.33	.888
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	2	4.00	.000
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.33	.516
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	3	2.67	.577
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.33	1.155
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	31	3.16	.934
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	15	3.33	.976
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.67	.577
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	7	2.86	.900
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	3	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.67	1.528
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students	25	2.16	1.106
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	2.33	1.155
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	2	2.00	1.414
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	2.17	1.329
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	3	2.00	1.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	2	1.50	.707
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other stakeholders	24	2.25	1.032
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	2.58	.900
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	2	2.00	1.414
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	5	2.00	1.414
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	3	2.00	1.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	2	1.50	.707
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	27	3.07	.829
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	3.33	.492
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.00	1.000
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	7	2.86	1.069
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.67	1.528

The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	28	3.25	.645
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	14	3.43	.514
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.00	.000
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.33	.516
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.67	1.528
The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	26	3.15	.675
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	3.33	.492
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.67	.577
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.00	.632
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.33	1.155
The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	27	3.22*	.698
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	13	3.46**	.519
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	3.67**	.577
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.17**	.408
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.00**	1.000
The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	25	3.28	.678
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	12	3.50	.522
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	2	3.50	.707
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	3.33	.516
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.33	1.155
The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	28	2.43	1.034
Recently received reaffirmation of accreditation (year 1-5)	14	2.43	1.089
Starting self-study work (committees formed) (year 6)	3	2.33	1.528
Working on self-study & draft report (year 7)	6	2.50	1.049
Finalized self-study report to commission (year 8)	2	3.00	.000
Reaffirmation of accreditation (year 10)	3	2.00	1.000

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$)

Appendix H

Institutional Usage of the NSSE Data by Strategic Planning
Process-Complete Data Table

Length of time institution level planning	n	Mean	SD
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Senior Level Administration	75	3.56*	.683
Less than 3 years	7	2.71**	1.254
3-5 Years	8	3.88**	.354
6-7 years	8	3.63	.518
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	50	3.62**	.567
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Faculty	61	3.08*	.900
Less than 3 years	7	2.14	1.215
3-5 Years	4	3.00	.000
6-7 years	6	3.17	.753
8-9 Years	1	2.00	.
10 Years or more	43	3.26	.819
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Academic & Student Affairs Professional Staff	80	3.05	1.005
Less than 3 years	7	2.57	1.272
3-5 Years	10	2.90	1.197
6-7 years	9	2.89	1.167
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	52	3.15	.916
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Students	62	1.95	.982
Less than 3 years	8	1.63	1.061
3-5 Years	7	2.00	1.000
6-7 years	8	2.00	1.069
8-9 Years	2	1.00	.000
10 Years or more	37	2.05	.970
The NSSE Institutional Report is shared with Community/ Other stakeholders	55	2.00	1.000
Less than 3 years	8	1.88	1.246
3-5 Years	4	2.00	1.155
6-7 years	6	1.67	.816
8-9 Years	2	2.50	2.121
10 Years or more	35	2.06	.938
The Institution tracks overall benchmarks (aggregated with all participants)	75	2.99	.908
Less than 3 years	7	2.43	1.272
3-5 Years	9	2.78	.972
6-7 years	7	2.57	.976

8-9 Years	2	3.00	.000
10 Years or more	50	3.16	.817
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The Institution tracks overall benchmarks compared to peers (aggregated with selected peers)	74	3.15	.839
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Less than 3 years	7	2.71	1.254
3-5 Years	8	3.00	.756
6-7 years	8	3.00	.926
8-9 Years	2	3.00	.000
10 Years or more	49	3.27	.785
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The institution tracks individual questions (disaggregated with all participants)	65	3.02	.875
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Less than 3 years	7	2.43	1.134
3-5 Years	6	2.83	.408
6-7 years	8	2.75	.886
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	42	3.17	.853
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The institution tracks individual questions compared to peers (disaggregated with selected peers)	65	3.09	.824
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Less than 3 years	7	2.43	.976
3-5 Years	6	3.00	.632
6-7 years	8	2.75	.886
8-9 Years	2	3.00	.000
10 Years or more	42	3.29	.774
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The institution further disaggregates the information for a specific population (student demographic classification, academic college/major, etc.)	60	3.08	.926
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Less than 3 years	7	2.43	1.134
3-5 Years	5	2.60	.894
6-7 years	8	2.75	.707
8-9 Years	2	3.50	.707
10 Years or more	38	3.32	.873
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The institution provides explanation or training for administrators about how to use NSSE data and benchmarks	68	2.26	1.101
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Less than 3 years	7	1.86	1.215
3-5 Years	9	2.11	1.054
6-7 years	8	1.50	.756
8-9 Years	1	2.00	.
10 Years or more	43	2.51	1.099

Note. The * symbol indicates that ANOVA shows there was significant difference for this item ($p < .05$); the ** symbol indicates that Tukey HSD post hoc analysis showed significant difference between groups for this item ($p < .05$)