CLOSING THE LOOP: USING THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE) FOR PLANNING

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Background/Interest

• 19+ years in higher education
• 15 years in student affairs administration
• Interest in data driven decision-making
  – We collect so much...how do we use it?
• How/Where/With Whom NSSE data was shared at my institution and others
Statement of Problem

• Academic performance impacts persistence and graduation
• Majority of time outside of classroom
• Best Practices – DEEP project
• No research regarding specific student affairs’ usage of NSSE
• Context of accreditation
Significance – Closing the Loop

• Focus on accountability and accreditation (government and accreditation agencies)
• Focus on how institutions impact student learning across curriculum and co-curriculum
• How student engagement and student learning data is being used across the student service functional areas.
Conceptual Framework

- **Institution Level**
  - Unit/Department Level

- **Strategic Planning Process**

- **Institutional Characteristics**
  - Public vs. Private Control
  - Institutional Size

- **Accreditation Method**
  - PEAQ
  - AQIP

- **Assessment Practices: Use of NSSE**

- **Student Affairs Functional Area**
  - Chief Student Affairs Officer
  - Housing & Residential Life
  - Orientation & New Student Programs
  - Multicultural Affairs
  - International Education
  - Student Support Programs
  - Academic Advising
  - Student Life & Student Activities
Research Questions

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

• In what ways, if any, does
  – accreditation method
  – institutional characteristics
  – strategic planning process
predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
Literature Review

• Accreditation in Higher Education
  – PEAQ/AQIP
  – Role of Assessment
• Student Engagement
  – Role of Student Affairs
• Student Affairs Functions
• Assessment Practices in Student Affairs
• Data Driven Decision-Making
• National Survey of Student Engagement
• Data Driven Decision-Making
  – Research indicates 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.
  – 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.
Literature Review

• National Survey of Student Engagement
  – National benchmarks for good practice, which participating schools can use to estimate the effectiveness of their improvement efforts
  – Contrary Studies
  – NSSE Research mostly done by NSSE affiliated researchers
Methods

- Quantitative
- Researcher constructed survey
- 47 questions and 74 response items
Methods

• At the time, 445 schools participated in NSSE that were in the geographic area covered by the Higher Learning Commission
• Eliminated:
  – unaccredited (4),
  – private/for profit (19)
  – My employer (1)
  – My degree granting school (1)
• 420 institutions remained
• Random sample -100 institutions - NSSE participants accredited by Higher Learning Commission – 25 AQIP and 75 PEAQ
Methods

• Administrators from eight student affairs functional areas (643 participants invited)
  – Senior Student Affairs Officer/Administrator
  – Multicultural Affairs
  – International Education/Study Abroad
  – Academic Advising
  – Housing & Residential Life
  – Student Life/Activities
  – Orientation/New Student Programs
  – Student Support Programs
Results

• 164 responses (25.5% response rate)
• Experienced Respondents
  – Student Affairs ~14 yrs
  – Administration ~11 yrs
• Student Affairs Functional Areas
  – Housing & Res Life (14.8%)
  – Student Life & Activities (14.2%)
  – Academic Advising (12.9%)
  – CSAO (11.6%)
Results (cont.)

• Institutional Characteristics
  – 48.2% private (n=79)
  – 51.8% public (n=85)
  – Majority (n= 101) from institutions with less than 10,000 UG students enrolled

• Public vs. Private Control and Institution Size are strongly correlated $r(164) = .672$, $p < .01$
Results – Research Question 1

• To what extent and in what ways, if any, do higher education institutions use the NSSE data in decision-making or planning?
  – The NSSE report is mostly shared with senior level administrators (93.8%)
  – Not as much with faculty (79%) and student affairs professional staff (72.3%)
  – 42.4% indicated it’s shared with little explanation or training for how to use the information.
  – The NSSE report is usually NOT shared with students (30.4%) or community/other stakeholders (36.6%).
  – The NSSE report is used in similar ways with all of the components of the report being used by the institutions.
Results – Research 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?
  – Student affairs functional area has an effect on the department/units’ use of the NSSE data
  – Student affairs functional area (specifically Chief Student Affairs Officer and Academic Advising Administrators) has an effect on
    • the individuals’ use of the NSSE data to inform/plan work activities.
    • the individual’s use of the NSSE data during planning meetings
Results – Research Question 3

• Accreditation Model
  – I don’t Know or No Response (~40% of all responses)
  – AQIP (45.5%) and PEAQ (54.5%)

• In what ways, if any, does accreditation method or status predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
  – No statistically significant differences between AQIP and PEAQ accredited institutions
  – Which stage of the accreditation cycle the institution is in has an effect
Results – Research Question 4

• In what ways, if any, do institutional characteristics predict the extent and ways that institutions use the NSSE data?
  – Private/Public control and Institution size based on undergraduate enrollment both have an impact
  – Private/Public Control has more impact on NSSE report being shared with Community/Other Stakeholders than institutional size.
  – Institutional size has 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.
Results – Research Question 5

- In what ways, if any, does strategic planning process predict the extent and ways that institutions use NSSE data?
  - 97.1% of institutions participate in institution level strategic planning
  - Length of time an institution has been planning has an effect on NSSE data usage.
  - How long an institution level plan has been in place did not significantly predict how an institution uses the NSSE data.
Results – Research Question 5 (cont.)

– 62.9% of respondents participate in department/unit level strategic planning
– The department/units that had a strategic plan were more likely to use the contents of the NSSE institutional report
– The length of time a department/unit has participated in strategic planning has an effect on the department/units’ usage
– How long a department/unit level plan has been in place has an effect on the department/units’ usage
Limitations

• Data clean up – 28 responses changed
• Accreditation model changes
  – Pathways
• NSSE instrument and report changes
• Response Rate
  – “Other” category
Recommendations – Closing the Loop

• Sharing the Data
  – Accessible to all invested members
  – Active in dissemination
  – Utilize best practices

• Understanding the Data
  – Training opportunities
  – Assessment and Accreditation processes
  – Program improvement
  – What it is and What it is not
Recommendations – Closing the Loop

• Using the Data
  – Initial goals
  – Item level results
  – Connect with other data sources
  – Part of program development
Recommendations – Closing the Loop

• Accreditation & Assessment
  – NSSE items align with criteria
  – Culture of evidence based decision making
  – Connected across the institution

• Strategic Planning
  – Department level improvements
  – Connect to assessment and outcomes
  – Use available data/tools
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.” (Learning Reconsidered, 2004, p. 1).
Questions?


Read the entire study: http://bit.ly/ClosetheLoop