ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

PROGRESSIVE Measures

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1 FALL 2013

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- "The results of the Current Practices Inventory showed that ISU…" (p. 5)
- "...there were similarities between first-year students and senior students on the following activities…" (p. 11)
- "53.4% of respondents stated that the quality of their education relative to that of colleagues who graduated from other institutions was…" (p. 13)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

From the Director

Happy new year! Fall 2013 was a busy and exciting semester and, as always, Illinois State University faculty and staff should be proud of the accomplishments we make every year.

Three articles in this semester's edition of *Progressive Measures* focus on student engagement and experiences, including the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), annual Alumni Survey, and a survey of first-year and transfer students through ISU's participation in the Foundations of Excellence project. The NSSE results highlight the idea that a student's environment, and their own attitudes, perceptions, and expectations about that environment, can have an impact on learning. The Foundations of Excellence article briefly discusses survey results but also explores the idea that the process and design of an evaluation can have a significant impact on the quality of the instrument and how the results are used.

One highlight of the spring 2014 semester for us will be a move to the Instructional Technology and Development Center (ITDC), where we will be closer to the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT). Over the last decade, the assessment discipline has slowly shifted from a focus on measurement and compliance to more emphasis placed on using assessment to create meaningful conversations. In the workshops we have conducted, we have witnessed the significant impact faculty peers and colleagues can have when sharing their experiences, accomplishments, failures, and what they have learned from assessment. Being physically placed in the ITDC building will increase collaborations with CTLT staff and ISU faculty, and we look forward to the opportunity!

I hope everyone has a great semester!

Ryan Smith

Ryan Smith, Ph.D.
Director, University Assessment Services

The Mission of UAS:

"University Assessment Services is responsible for conducting a variety of assessment activities related to student learning outcomes using qualitative and quantitative research techniques, providing support services to other units engaged in such assessment, and sharing best practices for and results of assessment activities."

The Value of Assessment in Academic Degree Programs

Derek Herrmann, Coordinator, University Assessment Services

In higher education, assessment helps faculty, staff, and administrators focus on student learning and development and is an ongoing process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Based on best practices in assessment, degree program assessment plans at Illinois State University include four components: (a) program goals and learning outcomes, (b) direct evidence of student learning, (c) indirect evidence of student learning, and (d) use of the results. University Assessment Services staff can assist programs with each of these components.

Program goals are broad statements of the knowledge and skills that faculty expect students to achieve, while learning outcomes detail specifically what students will know or be able to do after they complete the program. Determining goals and outcomes set the foundation for assessment activities both by providing faculty and staff with direction for a program's curricular design and instructional methods and by providing students with an overview of what they will learn and be able to do after completing a particular degree program.

Direct evidence of student learning includes any tangible and/or visible verification of what students have (and have not) learned. Traditional assessments, such as multiple choice tests, can provide direct evidence of student learning, but often, they only are used to provide assessment information (i.e., students only demonstrate what they have learned); however, performance assessments, such as papers and projects, provide students with an opportunity both to demonstrate what they have learned and to receive feedback to improve their learning. Using direct evidence that already is embedded into existing coursework is a practical way to collect direct evidence of learning. Some examples of direct evidence of learning include case studies/critical incidents, clinical evaluations, comprehensive exams, development of a product, exhibitions, oral exams, papers/theses, performances, portfolios, and projects.

Curriculum mapping is a tool that can be used to examine the opportunities for learning by determining the alignment between the goals and the courses in a program. Completing this exercise can help to identify if and where misalignment occurs. In Table 1, seven required courses (required is used here because every student will take them and thus will have an equal chance to have their learning assessed) of an undergraduate degree program are aligned with the four goals for that program, with each of these courses contributing to at least two of the program goals. This can be compared to Table 2, where the '200' course is not contributing to any of the goals. This could mean that the content of this course should be examined to determine if it should be required. More than likely, it is contributing in some way, but the curriculum map can show where misalignment may have occurred. Curriculum mapping also can be used to show how what students do in their courses (direct evidence) is related to what faculty expect them to learn (goals), such as in Table 3. In this example the '111' course includes a paper that can be used to ad-

Table 1. Curriculum map with an alignment between courses and goals

Course	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
111	X			X
138		X	X	
200	X			X
231		X	X	X
331	X		X	
340		X		X
392	X	X	X	X

Table 2. Curriculum map with a misalignment between courses and goals

Course	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
111	X			X
138		X	X	
200				
231		X	X	X
331	X		X	
340		X		X
392	X	X	X	X

Continued on page 3...

The Value of Assessment (cont'd)

Table 3. Curriculum map with an alignment between courses, goals, and direct evidence of student learning

Course	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
111	Paper			Paper
138		Paper	Paper	
200	Project			Project
231		Performance	Performance	Performance
331	Exhibition		Exhibition	
340		Case study		Case study
392	Clinical evaluation	Clinical evaluation	Clinical evaluation	Clinical evaluation

dress goals 1 and 4, whereas the '392' course includes a clinical evaluation that can be used to address all four goals.

Indirect evidence of student learning consists of reports about learning (as opposed to an actual demonstration of it) that are solicited from various stakeholders. These stakeholders include students, faculty, field experience supervisors, alumni, and employers. Stakeholders should be able to provide feedback anonymously or confidentially, and an atmosphere of respect should be established so that genuine feedback will be provided. Common techniques for gathering this information are surveys, interviews, focus groups, and reflective essays. Other forms of indirect evidence of learning consist of indicators that students probably are learning, such as retention and graduation rates, job and graduate school placement rates, and student participation rates in out-of-class academic (e.g., Honors Program-related) and co-curricular (e.g., program-related Registered Student Organization) activities.

Use of the results is the final component, and sometimes, it can be the most challenging to implement. One tool that can assist with this (specifically in examining direct evidence of learning) is the rubric, which describes the criteria used to assess student work. Table 4 is an example of a descriptive rubric, and it includes the criteria (e.g., the learning outcomes associated with a program goal) and descriptions of the quality of work at each level. Another tool that can be used (specifically in examining indirect evidence of learning) is content analysis, which consists of looking for common themes by using coding categories that either are predetermined or emerge while being reviewed. After the assessment data have been reviewed, the results should be summarized (e.g., in frequency tables, qualitative summaries) and then shared. In doing so, it is important to celebrate the

Table 4. Sample descriptive rubric

Criteria	Not Present	Developing	Established	Advanced	Exemplary
Outcome 1	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating
Outcome 2	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating
Outcome 3	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating
Outcome 4	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating
Outcome 5	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating	Description that merits this rating

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The Value of Assessment (cont'd)

good results and to address the areas that may need improvement, as well as to incorporate the results into the program's planning and decision-making processes, with the intent of monitoring and improving student learning in the program.

It should be noted that this model is not limited to the assessment of academic degree programs. Any program or service can be assessed using these four components. For example, the Division of Student Affairs at Illinois State University has developed a comprehensive and systematic model of assessment, planning, and program review that includes core functions, primary functions, intended outcomes, and key performance indicators at the department level. Although the terminology is different, the concept is the same. The core and primary functions are similar to program goals, and the intended outcomes are similar to learning outcomes. The key performance indicators provide targets or benchmarks to which information from both direct and indirect measures are compared. Improvement plans then are created annually that detail who, what, where, and how the results will be used to improve, strengthen, or augment the department functions. Thus, if goals and outcomes are determined, the methods for collecting data related to those goals/outcomes are developed, and feedback mechanisms to examine and use the results for improvement are established, then this model can be used for any type of program-level or department-level assessment.

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A View in the Mirror: The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) Self-Study at Illinois State University

Danielle Miller-Schuster, Assistant to the Vice President for Planning and Development, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs

Dr. Ryan Smith, Director, University Assessment Services

New students are a significant part of the Illinois State University student body. Every year, about 5,800 new first-year and transfer students enroll at ISU for the first time, accounting for nearly one-third of all undergraduates. ISU has historically had success retaining and helping new students succeed. Over the last six years, about 83% of all ISU first-year students returned to ISU for their sophomore year. This rate has consistently been higher than the average retention rates (78%) at four-year public institutions. As a result of ISU's work in the area of first-year student success, we were recognized by being named one of 12 founding institutions in the national Foundations of Excellence (FoE) in the First College Year project in 2003.

The institution decided to participle in the First-Year Refresh Self-Study and the Transfer Focus Self-Study for several reasons, including key leadership and organizational changes within the University since 2003, anticipated demographic changes to the student population, the desire to continue recruiting and matriculating high-quality transfer students, and to continue to be nationally recognized for our first-year experience and high first-year to sophomore retention rate.

A major component of the FoE process is the self-study. This article provides an overview of ISU's self-study process as a form of assessment and evaluation. Findings and next steps are presented, along with best practice recommendations for evaluation and assessment. While focused at the institutional level, some of the principles and lessons learned can be applied at the department or program level.

In spring 2012, a steering committee was established to lead the FoE self-study process. That summer, nine teams were established around each of the FoE dimen-

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The Foundations of Excellence Self-Study (cont'd)

sions. During the 2012-13 academic year, the nine teams led the FoE self-study process within their dimension and played a vital role in establishing the recommendations and implementation ideas that developed from the self-study.

Overview of the self-study process

A self-study is both a form of assessment and a form of evaluation. The assessment component involves carefully collecting information about a program, and the evaluation component is about making a judgment and/or using the assessment information to make decisions (think of the word "value" in "evaluation"). Evaluation generally is used in two ways. First, it can be used to judge the effectiveness of a program or process. Second, it can be used to make decisions or recommendations. Suskie (2009) pointed out that "assessment results alone only guide us; they do not dictate decisions to us. We use our best professional judgment to make appropriate decisions" (p. 12).

Evaluators need to have an extensive knowledge of a program or process. Prior knowledge is a critical element of evaluation. As Weiss (1998) noted, "prior knowledge is important so that the observer knows where to look and whom to talk to" (p. 50). Weiss, however, also noted that evaluation designs should include processes for gathering information and providing people with a clear understanding of a program or process.

The FoE self-study process capitalized on both informal and formal knowledge bases by relying on the subject-matter expertise of ISU faculty, staff, and students and by providing a systematic evaluation process defined by four activities: a current practices inventory, the development of an evidence library, two surveys, and a final report. All of the components of the self-study process were stored in an online portal called FoETec, developed by the Gardner Institute and administered by the dimension committee co-chairs. Every member of the dimension committees had access to FoETec, including the ability to upload and edit documents.

Current Practices Inventory (CPI)

The Gardner Institute notes that "good practice in assessment and measurement begins with a review that identifies what a campus already knows about first-year students, practices, and outcomes. Among other things, this type of review assures that time and resources are used wisely and ultimately speeds the assessment process" (*What is the FoE, n.d.).* The ISU dimension committees inventoried data, demographics, courses, policies, programs, and assessments related to first-year and transfer students.

Table 1. Current Practices Inventory for first-year students

Policies	21
Program/ Interventions	23
Committees/ Councils	13
Assessments	39 (22 pre-term, 10 during the first year, and 7 in subsequent years)
Fall-to-spring retention rate	94%
Fall-to-fall retention rate	83%
Percent on financial aid	50%
Percent first generation college students	23%
Percent living on campus	88%
Percent female	57%
Percent racial/ethnic minority	21%
Five course with the highest enrollment in the fall semester	BSC 101, COM 110, ENG 101, GEO 102, and PSY 110

The results of the CPI showed that ISU invests a significant amount of time and resources in ensuring that first-year and transfer students succeed. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of policies, programs, and assessments that either directly or indirectly address first-year and transfer student needs.

Evidence library

A second component of the self-study process was the development of an evidence library. A total of 472

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The Foundations of Excellence Self-Study (cont'd)

Table 2. Current Practices Inventory for transfer students

Policies	6
Program/Interventions	8 ("special programs and initiatives")
Committees/Councils	12
Assessments	8
Fall-to-spring retention rate	95%
Fall-to-fall retention rate	86%
Percent full-time	71%
Percent transfer from two-year college	64%
Percent transfer students with associate degrees	52%
Percent female	47%
Percent racial/ethnic minority	16%
Five programs with the largest transfer student enrollment	Agriculture, Criminal Justice Sciences, Elementary Education, English, Special Education
Average transfer student GPA (with associate degree)	3.20
Average transfer student GPA (no associate degree)	3.00

pieces of evidence were uploaded to the first-year and transfer evidence libraries (355 in the first-year and 117 in the transfer). The online evidence library served as the central location for storing all of the evidence associated with the self-study process. Evidence was organized around the nine dimension areas, and each of the teams had the ability to upload documents, reports, and websites to the library. A key advantage of this approach was that it served as a central repository of information, thereby eliminating redundancy and saving time. A second advantage is that the format allowed team members to share their work, highlight accomplishments, and learn from each other.

Surveys

ISU administered two online surveys in fall 2012. One survey was administered to faculty and staff and the other to first-year and transfer students. The goal of the surveys was to provide evidence of student and employee perceptions of institutional and programmatic performance regarding the effectiveness of ISU in helping first-year and transfer students in their adjustment to college. The surveys were developed and administered by Educational Benchmarking Incorporated (EBI), an organization with whom the Gardner Institute partners in the administration of FoE assessments. All dimension teams had access to the summary-level data and used the quantitative and qualitative results in the development of their evaluations and recommendations.

The response rates for the student (11%, or 551 student responses) and faculty/staff (24%, or 534 employee responses) surveys were low. This means the results can be used only to describe the samples that responded to the survey and not inferred to the general student and employee populations. Table 3 outlines the major themes of the survey in terms of overall satisfaction among the sample of students who responded to the survey.

Final report

The end product of the self-study process was the final report. The report provided a review of the assessment processes (CPI, evidence library, and surveys) and other background information.

As described above, evaluations are generally used for two purposes: to judge performance and/or to make decisions. Dimension committees evaluated institutional performance by applying grades to each of their dimension areas. The grades represent the overall evaluation of a dimension by the team and were based on data from the CPI, evidence library, surveys and team member professional development. Then, the FoE steering committee developed a set of recommendations for action for the purposes of guiding future decisions. These recommendations are outlined in the FoE Executive Summary of the Final Report. A transition team of faculty and staff has responsibility for implementing the recommendations and is chaired by Dr. Amelia Noël-Elkins, Director of University College.

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The Foundations of Excellence Self-Study (cont'd)

Table 3. Student satisfaction with ISU (based on the FoE survey of students)

All students are most satisfied **when**...	All students are most satisfied **with**...
They are involved in campus activities	Communicated expectations (behavior)
They feel a course is appropriate to their level of preparation or skill level	Campus environment
They work on campus (ideally 1-10 hours a week)	Pre-enrollment transitions
All students are least satisfied **when**...	All students are least satisfied **with**...
They are not involved in campus activities	Exposure to/interaction with diversity
They think a course or program is too difficult	Making connections with faculty outside class and other
They are uncertain about direction or future plans	Structure and support (transfer only)

Best practice "take-aways"

Start with what already exists

What we learned from the FoE self-study process is that a lot of assessment and evaluation is being conducted at the institution and program-levels. There are two good reasons for doing an inventory of what already exists before embarking on a self-study or evaluation project. From a practical standpoint, it saves time and energy. Second, it honors the history and work that people have put into a program. People are more likely to take ownership – and use – evaluation results if they were responsible for or had input in the creation of outcomes, goals, measures, and their implementation.

Capitalize on subject-matter experts

One of the advantages of the FoE self-study process was that the nine dimension committees were composed of people with deep knowledge and expertise in their particular fields. Dimension committee members' insights added valuable information to our collective knowledge about first-year and transfer students. This is important because while we often view students through our program or discipline's lenses, students experience the University as a whole.

Use the data to inform, not drive, decisions

There is a difference between data-driven and data-informed decision making. At the end of the day, it is people, not data, who make decisions, and subject-matter experts informed by data make better decisions. The structure of the self-study process facilitated conversations that encouraged faculty and staff to talk about what the data mean, as opposed to just what they are.

Make the process flexible

The best processes and strategies are a combination of what is intended and what happens along the way. The FoE self-study process included a structured framework that included templates. This provided focus and direction for the dimension teams. However, the process also allowed for flexibility in terms of changing course along the way. Had the steering or dimension committees strictly adhered to a highly-structured plan, serendipitous opportunities and important ideas could have been missed.

The importance of good leadership

Bryson (2004) noted that strategy works best in places that need it the least and worst in places that need it the most. Good leadership provides vision, resources, and direction and also embraces the affective side of leadership by creating a culture of trust and making people feel valued. A self-study will inevitably lead to tough conversations about what needs to be improved. But good leadership creates safe environments where these kinds of conversations can occur. The dimension committees were composed of leaders at all levels from across the University who fostered these environments.

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Overview of the Illinois State University 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Results

Derek Herrmann, Coordinator, University Assessment Services

During the spring 2013 semester, University Assessment Services coordinated the administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to first-year and senior students at Illinois State University. The NSSE is one of several student engagement surveys that is administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (IUCPR) and complements the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), both of which also are administered at Illinois State University. According to the IUCPR, the NSSE collects data from students regarding the nature and quality of their undergraduate experiences. The questionnaire items measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are related empirically to learning and professional development, as well as to persistence, satisfaction, and graduation.

For the 2013 NSSE administration, 613 institutions from both the United States and Canada participated, and over 364,000 first-year and senior students responded to the questionnaire. At Illinois State University, 6,897 students were eligible to participate at the beginning of the spring semester. Students were mailed a letter from the President of the University announcing that they would receive an email with instructions regarding the NSSE and asking that they complete it. Then, students received an invitation email and three reminder emails, all requesting their participation. A total of 794 students responded to the NSSE, which represents an 11.5% overall response rate. Of these students, 228 (28.7% of those who responded) were first-year students, and 566 (71.3% of those who responded) were senior students (see Table 1 for demographic information for both the population and the sample). These numbers represent a 7.8% response rate for first-year students and a 14.2% response rate for senior students.

Because of the low overall response rate, comparisons of the demographic items from both the population and the sample were made to determine how similar these two groups were (with more similarities indicating greater confidence in the generalizability of the results). There was a significantly higher proportion of senior students in the sample than in the population, χ^2 $(1, N = 794) = 60.0, p < .001$. Similarly, there was a significantly higher proportion of female students in the sample than in the population, χ^2 $(1, N = 794) = 52.0, p < .001$. There were, however, no significant differences between the population and sample regarding enrollment status or race/ethnicity of the students. Thus, the sample seems to be somewhat representative of the population of first-year and senior students, but the results should not be interpreted as generalizable to the overall population of students.

Contact UAS for assistance with your program-level assessment project!

- We can provide assistance at all steps in the assessment process:
  - Developing an assessment plan
  - Collecting assessment data
  - Making sense of the assessment results
- An *Assessment Plan Tutorial* can be found on our website!

- We can provide assistance at all steps in the survey research process:
  - Developing survey questions
  - Collecting survey data
  - Making sense of the survey results
- The data can be used for your *program assessment plan*!

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Overview of the 2013 NSSE Results (cont'd)

Table 1. Demographic information for the 2013 NSSE

Demographic	Population (N = 6,897)		Sample (n = 794)	
	#	%	#	%
Classification				
First-year	2,919	42.3	228	28.7
Senior	3,978	57.7	566	71.3
Enrollment				
Full-time	6,531	94.7	747	94.1
Part-time	366	5.3	47	5.6
Gender				
Female	3,789	54.9	537	67.6
Male	3,108	45.1	257	32.4
Race/ethnicity				
Black or African American	494	7.2	41	5.2
Asian or Asian American	139	2.0	15	1.9
Hispanic, Latino/a, or Chicano/a	293	4.3	22	2.8
Multi-racial/ethnic	321	4.7	46	5.8
American Indian, Native American, or Native North American	15	0.2	0	0.0
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.0	0	0.0
White or Caucasian	5,503	79.8	649	81.7
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0
Foreign or Non-resident alien	39	0.6	7	0.9
Unknown	92	1.3	14	1.8

Results

To assist in the interpretation of the results, IUCPR has combined the responses to similar items on the NSSE to create ten Engagement Indicators. The scores on the items that compose these indicators are situated on a 60-point scale and then are averaged to provide an overall score for each Engagement Indicator (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics of each of the ten Engagement Indicators). These Engagement Indicators are organized into four themes: Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, and Campus Environment. The individual items with the highest and lowest mean scores for first-year and senior students on each Engagement Indicator are detailed below.

Academic Challenge

Higher-Order Learning. This indicator consisted of four items related to what was emphasized in students' coursework. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated a greater emphasis. Both first-year students (M = 3.1, SD = 0.8) and senior students (M = 3.2, SD = 0.8) reported that their coursework most emphasized applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations. First-year students reported that their coursework least emphasized forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information (M = 2.9, SD = 0.8), whereas senior students reported that their coursework least emphasized evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source (M = 3.0, SD = 0.8).

Reflective and Integrative Learning. This indicator consisted of seven items related to how often students completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. Both first-year students (M = 3.1, SD = 0.8) and senior students (M = 3.4, SD = 0.7) most often connected ideas from their courses to their prior experiences and knowledge. Similarly, first-year students (M = 2.5, SD = 0.9) and senior students (M = 2.8, SD = 0.9) least often included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments.

Learning Strategies. This indicator consisted of three items related to how often students completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a

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Overview of the 2013 NSSE Results (cont'd)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for each of the Engagement Indicators

Theme	Engagement Indicator	Mean (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning*	41.4	13.4
	Reflective and Integrative Learning**	39.4	12.7
	Learning Strategies**	39.8	143
	Quantitative Reasoning**	27.4	17.1
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning**	34.8	13.6
	Discussions with Diverse Others**	41.1	15.4
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction**	27.5	16.3
	Effective Teaching Practices*	42.1	13.2
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions***	43.1	10.4
	Supportive Environment*	38.7	12.8

Note. The scales for the Engagement Indicators range from 0 to 60; * for these items, the mean scores are situated on the following scale (based on the item response options): 0 = Very little; 20 = Some; 40 = Quite a bit; and 60 = Very much; ** for these items, the mean scores are situated on the following scale: 0 = Never; 20 = Sometimes; 40 = Often; and 60 = Very often; *** for this item, the mean score is situated on the following scale: 0 = Poor and 60 = Excellent.

four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. Both first-year students (*M* = 3.0, *SD* = 0.8) and senior students (*M* = 3.3, *SD* = 0.8) most often identified key information from their reading assignments. Similarly, first-year students (*M* = 2.8, *SD* = 0.9) and senior students (*M* = 2.9, *SD* = 0.9) least often reviewed their notes after class. First-year students also least often summarized what they learned in class or from course materials (*M* = 2.8, *SD* = 0.9).

Quantitative Reasoning. This indicator also consisted of three items related to how often students completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. Both first-year students (*M* = 2.5, *SD* = 0.9) and senior students (*M* = 2.5, *SD* = 1.0) most often reached conclusions based on their own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.). Similarly, first-year students (*M* = 2.2, *SD* = 0.9) and senior students (*M* = 2.4, *SD* = 1.0) least often used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.). In addition, first-year students least often evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information (*M* = 2.2, *SD* = 0.9).

Learning with Peers

Collaborative Learning. This indicator consisted of four items related to how often students completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. First-year students most often asked another student to help them understand course material (*M* = 2.7, *SD* = 0.8), whereas senior students most often worked with other students on course projects or assignments (*M* = 3.1, *SD* = 0.8). Conversely, first-year students least often worked with other students on course projects or assignments (*M* = 2.6, *SD* = 0.8), whereas senior students least often asked another student to help them understand course material (*M* = 2.6, *SD* = 0.8). First-year students also least often prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students (*M* = 2.6, *SD* = 0.9).

Discussions with Diverse Others. This indicator consisted of four items related to how often students had discussions with people from backgrounds different from their own. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. Both first-year students (*M* = 3.1, *SD* = 0.8) and senior students (*M* = 3.1, *SD* = 0.9) most often had discussions with people from an economic background other than their own. First-year students least often had discussions with people with religious beliefs other than

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Overview of the 2013 NSSE Results (cont'd)

their own (M = 2.9, SD = 0.9), whereas senior students least often had discussions with people from a race or ethnicity other than their own (M = 3.0, SD = 0.9).

Experiences with Faculty

Student-Faculty Interaction. This indicator consisted of four items related to how often students completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated more often. Both first-year students (M = 2.4, SD = 0.9) and senior students (M = 2.8, SD = 0.9) most often talked about career plans with a faculty member. Similarly, both first-year students (M = 1.7, SD = 0.9) and senior students (M = 2.3, SD = 1.1) least often worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups).

Effective Teaching Practices. This indicator consisted of five items related to the extent that instructors completed the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated a greater extent. Both first-year students (M = 3.2, SD = 0.8) and senior students (M = 3.3, SD = 0.7) reported that their instructors clearly explained course goals and requirements to the greatest extent. To the least extent, first-year students reported that their instructors provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments (M = 2.7, SD = 0.8), whereas senior students reported that their instructors provided feedback on a draft or work in progress (M = 2.9, SD = 1.0).

Campus Environment

Quality of Interactions. This indicator consisted of five items related to students' interactions with others at the University. These items were rated on a seven-point scale where a higher score indicated more positive interactions. Both first-year students (M = 5.6, SD = 1.2) and senior students (M = 5.8, SD = 1.2) reported that their interactions with other students were the most positive. Similarly, first-year students (M = 4.5, SD = 1.8) and senior students (M = 5.1, SD = 1.5) reported that their interactions with administrative staff and offices (other than academic advisors and student services staff, who were included as part of two other items) were the least positive.

Supportive Environment. This indicator consisted of eight items related to the extent to which the University emphasized the specified activities. These items were rated on a four-point scale where a higher score indicated a greater emphasis. First-year students reported that the University most emphasized using learning support services (tutoring services, writing centers, etc.; M = 3.3, SD = 0.8), whereas senior students reported that the University most emphasized providing support for their overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.; M = 3.3, SD = 0.8). Both first-year students (M = 2.5, SD = 1.0) and senior students (M = 2.4, SD = 1.0), however, responded that the University least emphasized helping them manage their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.).

Discussion

Summary

In looking at the overall mean scores from the ten Engagement Indicators, students reported that their interactions with others at the University were very positive, and faculty members used effective teaching practices quite a bit. It seems that students were quite engaged with higher-order learning activities (applying, analyzing, evaluating, etc.), and they often had discussions with diverse others. These scores also indicated that students' coursework sometimes emphasized quantitative reasoning and students sometimes interacted with faculty outside of class. In addition, students sometimes collaborated with other students on course material, and they felt that Illinois State University provided a quite supportive environment.

In looking at the individual item mean scores from the ten Engagement Indicators, there were similarities between first-year students and senior students on the following activities in terms of frequency of occurrence:

- Including diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments (least often)
- Reviewing notes after class (least often)
- Using numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (least often)
- Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (least often)
- Connecting ideas from courses to prior experiences (most often)
- Identifying key information from reading assignments (most often)
- Reaching conclusions based on own analysis of nu-

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Overview of the 2013 NSSE Results (cont'd)

merical information (most often)
- Having discussions with people from economic backgrounds different than their own (most often)
- Talking about career plans with a faculty member (most often)

There also were similarities between first-year students and senior students on the following aspects of their experiences at Illinois State University:

- University emphasizing managing non-academic responsibilities (least emphasis)
- Interacting with administrative staff and offices (least positive)
- Interacting with other students (most positive)
- Instructors clearly explaining course goals and requirements (greatest extent)
- Coursework emphasizing applying course material facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations (most emphasis)

There were, however, a few differences between first-year students' and senior students' scores. First-year students indicated that forming new ideas or understandings were least emphasized, but senior students indicated that evaluating a point of view was least emphasized. This could be due to the nature of coursework at different levels of an undergraduate education; first-year students may be expected to develop new ideas or understanding as opposed to evaluating a point of view, but senior students may be expected to do the opposite. Senior students least often worked with other students on assignments or projects, but first-year students did this the most often; conversely, first-year students least often asked another student for help understanding course material, but senior students did this the most often. This also could be due to the nature of coursework at different levels in that first-year students may have more opportunities to work with other students, while senior students may be expected to complete more independent work. First-year students indicated that their instructors provided feedback on tests or completed assignments the least, whereas senior students indicated that their instructors provided feedback on a draft or work in progress the least; this also could be due to differences in the nature of coursework at these two different levels (receiving feedback on tests and assignments versus a paper). Finally, first-year students indicated that the University most emphasized using learning support services, but senior students indicated that the University most emphasized providing support for their overall well-being. This could be due to differences in the levels of these two groups of students. Faculty and staff want students to be aware of the services that are available to them to help them succeed, so it is reassuring that first-year students know this during their transition from high school to college. Similarly, it is important for students to be ready for the 'real world' when they graduate, so it also is reassuring that senior students feel that their overall well-being is supported by the University.

Limitations and implications

There are some limitations that should be addressed in examining these results. The overall response rate at Illinois State University was 11.5%; although this response rate is similar to many of the other surveys that are administered by University Assessment Services, it certainly is not generalizable to the overall population of students at the University. Two of the four statistical analyses conducted to determine how representative the sample was of the population (based on demographic variables) indicated that there were significant differences between these two groups in terms of student classification (first-year or senior) and gender. This article focused on the similarities and differences between first-year students and senior students, as well as in which areas these two groups were engaged the most and the least (by comparing the mean scores of the items from each of the ten Engagement Indicators). Sometimes, these differences were a few tenths of a score, so there may not be significant differences between first-year and senior students or between the activities in which they were engaged the most and the least. These items were chosen simply because they had the lowest and highest mean scores and to show where the differences were, not to make any specific claims about them.

Despite these limitations, the results indicated that students at Illinois State University are engaged both in and out of the classroom. Based on first-year and senior students' responses, the following seem to be strengths of Illinois State University:

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Overview of the 2013 NSSE Results (cont'd)

- Applying course material
- Identifying important information from readings
- Making connections between course material and prior experiences and knowledge
- Discussing future plans with faculty
- Explaining course goals and requirements
- Encouraging interactions with students from different backgrounds
- Using learning support/tutoring services (especially for first-year students)
- Providing support for students' overall well-being (especially for senior students)

Conversely, the following seem to be areas for improvement at Illinois State University based on first-year and senior students' responses:

- Including diverse perspectives in coursework
- Reviewing notes after class
- Working with faculty beyond coursework
- Encouraging interactions with students from different backgrounds

Taken together, faculty and staff can continue to build on these strengths, as well as further encourage integrating diverse perspectives, reviewing and studying material after learning it, participating in activities outside the classroom, and interacting with students from different backgrounds. Doing this can assist students in their learning and personal development, as well as increase their engagement here at Illinois State University.

Highlights from the 2013 ISU Alumni Survey

Brian Day, Graduate Assistant, University Assessment Services

This past summer, the annual Illinois State University Alumni Survey was administered to those who graduated in 2008 and 2012. The overall response rate was 12.7% (1,210 responded out of 9,538 distributed), and response rates ranged from 5.0% to 43.7% among the departments/schools and programs. Respondents included 932 undergraduate alumni and 278 graduate alumni with 415 who graduated in 2008 and 795 who graduated in 2012. Some of the overall results include:

- 53.4% of respondents stated that the quality of their education relative to that of colleagues who graduated from other institutions was above average, and 20.0% stated that it was superior
- 10.3% of respondents have earned an additional degree since earning their degree at ISU, and 29.5% are currently enrolled in a college or university. Of these respondents, 70.5% stated they were well-prepared for their additional degree programs.
- 96.9% of respondents stated that they were adequately prepared for their career paths, including 70.5% who stated that they were well-prepared.
- 78.1% of respondents are employed full-time, 12.0% are employed part-time, and 4.2% are not employed and not seeking employment. Of those who were employed, 88.2% were satisfied with their current job, and 83.9% were employed in a job that is related to their degree major.
- 96.3% of respondents had a positive attitude towards ISU, including 52.7% that reported a strongly positive attitude.
- 93.2% of respondents had a positive attitude towards their degree program, including 48.7% that reported a strongly positive attitude.

After the decreases in response rates during previous administrations, changes were implemented to increase the response rate, including eliminating survey items not required by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and changing the survey recruitment letters and emails as coming from Department Chairpersons/School Directors or program coordinators. This year, ISU Alumni Survey bookmarks to were included in the survey invitation letters as opposed to offering a single randomly-determined incentive. Although the rate has increased slightly, we welcome any suggestions as we continue to work with our Assessment Advisory Council to increase the response rate in an effort to make the results more useful and meaningful for the University and its programs.