

# Best Practices in Using Systemwide Student Satisfaction Surveys

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines best practices in administering student surveys across university systems, based on conversations with experts and a review of the experiences of select systems around the country. The report also profiles five survey instruments' potential for use by a university system as a systemwide student satisfaction survey.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>3</b>
KEY FINDINGS.....	3
<b>Section I: Best Practices and Related Experiences of University Systems .....</b>	<b>5</b>
OVERVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES .....	6
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SYSTEM.....	9
<i>THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>CAMPUS CLIMATE STUDY.....</i>	<i>10</i>
TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION .....	13
SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS .....	15
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM.....	18
<b>Section II: Review of Commercial Surveys.....</b>	<b>21</b>
NOEL-LEVITZ STUDENT SATISFACTION INVENTORY .....	21
HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE: YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR .....	24
NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT .....	26
COMMUNITY COLLEGE SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT .....	29
COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM .....	30

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the following report, Hanover Research addresses student satisfaction surveys implemented across a university system. The first section includes a discussion of general best practices, gleaned through conversations with industry professionals, and discusses student satisfaction surveys and related initiatives designed by and implemented at university systems in California, Tennessee, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The second section presents profiles of five student satisfaction survey instruments. Overall, the potential for such instruments is significant, although the present use of systemwide student satisfaction surveys appears somewhat limited.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **A critical best practice in administering a systemwide student satisfaction survey is communication and coordination between the system office and individual institutions throughout the implementation process.** Experts stress the importance of leadership buy-in, mutual respect and trust between institutions and the system office, and the need to evaluate each institution in context rather than using the survey as a scorecard. As much as possible, a bottom-up approach to facilitating survey design and implementation should be taken.
- **Institutions should select an instrument that permits some degree of customization.** Within a university system, individual institutions face unique challenges and situations which may not be shared by their peers. Developing a supplementary set of questions to evaluate institution-specific issues is a best practice. The University of California's modular survey design, in which there are common core questions and a set of institution-specific questions, exemplifies this approach.
- **From an institutional research standpoint, there are many benefits to implementing a systemwide student satisfaction survey.** The primary value of this approach is to have a common dataset to evaluate experiences at different campuses, identifying areas of strength, of challenge, and allowing institutions to collaborate and learn from one another. A coordinated evaluation effort is preferable particularly when some customization is permitted to address institutions' individual needs, and when the survey is implemented in an atmosphere of mutual trust between institutions and the system office.
- **Experts' favored approach for survey implementation is coordination by the system office delegated through individual institutions.** However, this does not appear to be the most common approach, and a number of university systems reviewed by Hanover showed no evidence of system involvement in survey administration.
- **The most common frequency of survey implementation appears to be biannually,** although practices vary across systems. Experts have also suggested administering surveys annually or at different periods for different populations.

- **Effective communication and coordination between the system office and individual institutions is the primary support needed for survey implementation.** Additional supports are often supplied by survey providers, including webinars and workshops. On campus, successful implementation is supported by robust servers, advertisements to increase awareness, and incentives for student participation such as prize drawings for parking passes, sports tickets, and scholarships.
- **Among the profiled survey instruments, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is the most common among university systems.** The NSSE is used by 26 university systems, including a number of the systems reviewed for this report. The instrument, administered to freshmen and seniors, collects a range of data related to student learning and personal development to provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time in college and what they gain from the experience. It offers an Extended State System Package to systems which provides an array of supports, and deliverables include customized institutional reports and comparisons of student performance at different institutions.
- **The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) has also been used by a range of university and community college systems in the past.** The survey seeks to measure student satisfaction and identifies issues important to students. The SSI consists of a core set of questions to which clients may add additional surveys for targeted populations or up to ten custom questions per institution. System deliverables consist of a report for each individual campus and a composite report comparing aggregated results.
- **Hanover Research found no evidence that the Higher Education Research Institute's Your First College Year Survey has been used to evaluate a university system.** The survey, administered to college freshmen only, seeks to provide information on the first-year experience which supports improvement of first-year programs and retention. Institutions may ask up to 20 questions in addition to the core survey. The instrument is often used as a follow-up to the CIRP Freshman Survey but can be used independently.
- **The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) are less ideal candidates for use by university systems.** Specifically, the CSEQ is ceasing operations at the end of this year.

## SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES AND RELATED EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS

In this section, Hanover Research presents an overview of best practices in implementing systemwide student satisfaction surveys, drawing on phone conversations with survey and university representatives. The section also profiles the experience of several university systems in implementing student surveys. In reviewing systemwide use of surveys, and particularly student satisfaction surveys, Hanover examined the following systems:

- Montana University System
- University of Maine System
- University of Hawaii System
- University of Idaho
- University of Texas System
- University of California System
- Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- South Dakota Board of Regents
- University of Wisconsin System
- University of Minnesota

The use of systemwide surveys in four of these systems (California, Tennessee, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) is profiled in more depth below. For the University of Hawaii System and the University of Idaho, Hanover was able to confirm with institutional research officials that no systemwide student satisfaction surveys have been implemented, in the latter case because Idaho does not consider itself part of a system.<sup>1</sup> For the Maine and Montana systems, no evidence was found of the use of systemwide surveys. The University of Texas System appears to rely on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as a gauge of student satisfaction across its campuses,<sup>2</sup> like several of the systems profiled below.

The University of Minnesota, which includes four “coordinate” campuses in addition to the flagship Twin Cities campus, has since 1997 used a locally developed instrument,<sup>3</sup> the University of Minnesota Student Experiences Survey (UMSE), to “measure student satisfaction,” during which time the UMSE has been administered every other year.<sup>4</sup> However, in 2009 the Twin Cities campus was invited to participate in the Student Experience in the Research University survey, a project originating at the University of California which has been expanded to include other AAU research universities. Accordingly, the coordinate campuses of the University of Minnesota will continue to use the locally

<sup>1</sup> [1] Iboshi, Pearl. Director of the Institutional Research and Analysis Office, University of Hawaii System. E-mail Correspondence. October 1, 2013.

[2] George, Archie. Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, University of Idaho. Personal Email. September 27, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., “Accountability and Performance Report 2009-2010.” University of Texas System. p. E.3. <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/utsfiles/documents/accountability-and-performance/accountability-and-performance-reports/accountabilityreport09-10.pdf> (citing NSSE results across multiple campuses as evidence that “students are satisfied with their college experience.”).

<sup>3</sup> “Student Experiences Survey.” University of Minnesota. <http://www.oir.umn.edu/surveys/ses>

<sup>4</sup> “Student Satisfaction – Twin Cities.” University of Minnesota. [http://www.academic.umn.edu/accountability/reports/student\\_sat\\_tc.html](http://www.academic.umn.edu/accountability/reports/student_sat_tc.html)

developed UMSE, while the Twin Cities campus will rely principally on the SERU, although it will also incorporate “portions of the UMSE” in an optional item section of the SERU.<sup>5</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

Conversations with Julie Bryant, Associate Vice President of Retention Solutions at Noel-Levitz,<sup>6</sup> and Dr. Dennis Hengstler, Assistant Vice President and Director of Institutional Research at the University of Tennessee,<sup>7</sup> yielded information on best practices in designing, implementing, and evaluating systemwide student satisfaction surveys. Both individuals bring a unique perspective: Bryant’s views are impacted by her position at Noel-Levitz, but her experience provides strong general oversight into best practices in survey implementation. Hengstler has experience in working with student satisfaction surveys, primarily at the University of California.

Both Bryant and Hengstler agree that the purpose of implementing a systemwide student satisfaction survey is to collect data to evaluate institutional performance. Use of a single survey enables institutions to **obtain consistent data across multiple institutions**. Bryant argues that the purpose of systemwide student satisfaction surveys is to identify opportunities for institution-by-institution improvement. The data will serve to highlight institutional strengths and challenges and help to monitor these strengths and challenges across all campuses. This can help to encourage collaboration between campuses: if one institution is identified as particularly strong in one area, it can support other institutions which may be struggling with that issue.

According to Hengstler, the greatest advantage of implementing a systemwide student satisfaction survey is **the ability to compare institutions to one another over time**. Through a systemwide student satisfaction survey, institutions can track goals, values, and changing perspectives related to student performance. Combined with registrar data, this is a valuable source of information. He cautioned, however, that **the context of each institution must be taken into account**—for example, the situation of a research-oriented flagship in comparison to that of a regional institution with a lot of commuter students. Through research, a deeper understanding of all kinds of issues can be obtained, leading to further integration in the campus community.

Hengstler’s **ideal survey instrument is a modular approach**, consisting of a core set of items administered every year and supplementary modules randomly assigned to survey-takers. Each individual campus can also implement its own custom module with questions reflecting institutional concerns. Hengstler identifies the University of California’s student

<sup>5</sup> [1] “Assessing University of Minnesota Student Experiences and Outcomes: A Policy Analysis Design.” University of Minnesota. April 2009. p. 5.

[http://www.oir.umn.edu/static/publications/updates/OIR\\_Updates\\_Series01\\_Assessment\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.oir.umn.edu/static/publications/updates/OIR_Updates_Series01_Assessment_Plan.pdf)

[2] “Surveys – Student Experience and Satisfaction Surveys.” University of Minnesota.

<http://www3.crk.umn.edu/administration/institutionalresearch/Surveys.htm> (showing continued administration of UMSE to coordinate campuses).

<sup>6</sup> Bryant, Julie. Phone Conversation. October 1, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Hengstler, Dennis. Phone Conversation. October 1, 2013.

satisfaction survey as an example of this approach. Ideally, Hengstler would develop a survey battery for the following groups of students on the specified timetable:

- Admitted students (annually)
- Students who declined admission (annually)
- Entering freshman (annually)
- Entering transfer students (annually)
- Undergraduate students (annually)
- Graduating seniors (biannually)
- Graduate and professional school students (biannually)
- Short-term alumni (biannually)
- Long-term alumni (every five years)

Hengstler also discussed his views on other survey instruments. He does not like the NSSE, which he regards as expensive, with minimal opportunity for additional items. Further, the NSSE evaluates only freshmen and seniors, whereas Hengstler believes that it is important to track students all the way through the system rather than selecting some years as more worthy of evaluation than others. Hengstler regards the student satisfaction survey at the University of California, which he helped to design, as the best model. He also has a high opinion of SERU (Student Experience in the Research University), which also operates out of the University of California.<sup>8</sup>

In Bryant's experience, **successful survey implementation is primarily based on communication**. There needs to be good communication for leadership to buy into the survey, at both the systemwide and institutional level. This can be a particular problem for larger university systems, as the profile for the University of Wisconsin reveals below. The survey's timing can cause problems between individual institutions, along with the source of funding for the survey. Between different institutions, the experience should be viewed as **an opportunity for collaboration rather than as a scorecard or competition**. The system office should inform institutions of the benefits of the survey, with emphasis on its benefits to individual institutions. Such benefits include accreditation, strategic planning, and retention initiatives. Good communication on campus is also important, in order to let students and faculty know why the survey is being conducted.

Like Bryant, most of Hengstler's comments on successful implementation are about **diplomatic negotiations with various members of the academic community**. He states that the head of the university system should discuss the survey with chancellors on each campus to discuss pros and cons, funding issues, the housing of the survey, and survey analysis. Hengstler emphasizes the importance of buy-in from the top for the survey to be successful. How the survey is going to be used is often a concern of institutional leadership, and he stresses that it is critical for data to be presented to each campus prior to presenting it to trustees, the legislature, or a comparable body.

<sup>8</sup> "Student Experience in the Research University: Project and Consortium." University of California, Berkeley – Center for Studies in Higher Education. <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/seru/>

With regard to potential challenges with survey implementation, Hengstler again addressed the need to work with system institutions. He advised that the university system must be the friend and advocate of individual campuses. To facilitate cooperation, he recommends **face-to-face meetings between the system and individual institutions** to discuss survey design, questions, and implementation. There should be a bottom-up approach to facilitate survey design and implementation as much as possible, and institutions must see benefits from the survey. Hengstler warned about particular resistance from individual institutions that may not want to change long-standing survey instruments to the new model.

Hengstler also identified **technology capabilities as a potential problem with survey implementation**. Institutions must prevent server overloads, particularly as students turned away from the instrument on their first survey-taking attempt may be disinclined to return for a second try. Security issues must also be addressed: there are sensitivities with regard to data management that depend on the trust level between individual campuses and the system offices. Institutions must choose whether to administer surveys locally on campus and whether information reported to the system office should be unit data or aggregate data. Every campus should be involved in this process, Hengstler argues. Data should be fully integrated in a data warehouse, which can be an expensive undertaking. He states that **every campus should have a survey research expert** to do analysis and perform reports, and the system office will likely require someone to do the same tasks. While the system office is more high-level and outcome-based, the campus is more operational and transactional in nature.

Finally, in order to get students to respond to the survey, institutions must incentivize students. Hengstler mentioned one particularly successful attempt at the University of Florida which obtained a 70 percent response rate through rewarding survey-takers with free tickets to the University's athletic games.

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SYSTEM

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The UC System uses a locally developed survey, the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey, to gauge student engagement.
- The UC Undergraduate Experience Survey is administered biannually.
- The survey includes three systemwide modules, and a fourth module for individual campuses to ask students questions of specific institutional concern.
- Campuses may use the survey results for accreditation purposes or to evaluate the quality of student services; the system has used the data for various special-purpose committees.

The University of California consists of 10 campuses: Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz.<sup>9</sup> The UC System has a long-running systemwide Undergraduate Experience Survey as well as a recently-launched Campus Climate Study, which also attempts to survey all undergraduate students in addition to other members of the educational community.

### *THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY*

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), administered on all 10 UC campuses, collects data on student opinions on academics, extracurricular activities, instruction, advising, and student services, among other topics. The survey is conducted every two years.<sup>10</sup> Examples of past survey instruments are available online.<sup>11</sup> The survey provides information on student “time use and academic engagement and community involvement...self-perceptions and goals, political beliefs and affiliation, and perceptions of the role of the research university” along with demographic information, such as “self-reported language background, family immigration experience and social class.”<sup>12</sup> The UC System uses survey results in institutional, instructional, and administrative research, as well as scholarly research, to improve the undergraduate experience at the University of California.<sup>13</sup>

The UCUES is a modular design, administered online since 2003, with a 36 percent response rate in 2012.<sup>14</sup> The questionnaire contains core questions administered to every respondent as well as four unique modules of additional questions that are randomly assigned. Core questions address academic program review, student demographics, use of time, and

<sup>9</sup> “UC Campuses.” University of California. <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/campuses/welcome.html>

<sup>10</sup> “Summery Report.” University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/reports/summary.html>

<sup>11</sup> “Copy of Survey.” University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/admin/survey.html>

<sup>12</sup> “Welcome to UCUES.” University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Methodology.” University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/about/method.html>

general satisfaction. The modules include Student Life and Development, Academic Engagement, and Civic Engagement, as well as a fourth module for individual campuses to poll students on questions of particular institutional relevance. Students evaluate many aspects of campus life, providing information about student behavior, attitudes, and background which are not available from other sources.<sup>15</sup>

UCUES data is used to improve the undergraduate student experience at the University of California. Individual campuses use results to gauge and report on the quality of their academic programs, sometimes using data in accreditation self-studies. Several campuses use UCUES to evaluate the quality and use of student services. Some campuses use the survey to report on campus climate and its impact on student educational experiences. UCUES data is also used by various Regents' Committees, including "the Long-Range Guidance Team, the Student Mental Health Committee and the Diversity Study Group."<sup>16</sup>

### *CAMPUS CLIMATE STUDY*

In Spring 2013, the University of California conducted a systemwide Campus Climate Study, with plans to re-administer the study every four to five years.<sup>17</sup> For the study, 'campus climate' is defined as "the current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities and potential."<sup>18</sup> With this initiative, UC sought to collect a variety of data relating to institutional climate, inclusion, and work-life balance to better assess the learning, living, and working environment for students, faculty, and staff across the UC System.<sup>19</sup> The first phase of the two-phase project consisted of a population survey of the entire UC community: all students, faculty, and staff, comprising more than 430,000 individuals. The University of California describes this initiative as the "largest project of its kind in the nation."<sup>20</sup> Based on the findings of phase one, phase two will develop strategic initiatives and action plans.

Prior to implementing the Campus Climate Study, the UC Office of the President Steering Committee reviewed the efforts of other institutions to conduct comprehensive climate studies. Identified best practices included "the need for external expertise in survey administration," which encourages higher response rates, less inhibited responses, and more credible findings. Susan Rankin of Rankin & Associates Consulting was selected as consultant for the Campus Climate Study, on the basis of her past experience with conducting "multi-location institutional climate studies at more than 100 institutions across

<sup>15</sup> "Structure and Content of UCUES." University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/about/structure.html>

<sup>16</sup> "Usage of Data." University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/about/usage.html>

<sup>17</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions." Campus Climate Study. <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/faq/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> "What is campus climate? Why does it matter?" Campus Climate Study. <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/what-is-campus-climate/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> "Overview and Timeline." Campus Climate Study. <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/overview/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the country.”<sup>21</sup> In total, the Campus Climate Study Team consisted of Susan Rankin of Rankin & Associates Consulting, two system-wide Work Team Co-Chairs, and the employees depicted in Figure 1.1. The Campus Climate Study Team also worked with the UC President’s Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture and Inclusion as well as other campus communities.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1.1: System-wide Work Team**

UC Berkeley	UC Davis	UC Irvine	UC Los Angeles	UC Santa Barbara
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Chancellor, Equity &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• Chief of Staff to the Vice Chancellor, Equity &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• 2011 Chair, Systemwide Academic Council</li> <li>• 2012 Student Regent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Vice Chancellor, Community Engagement</li> <li>• 2011-2012 Staff Advisor to the Regents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Executive Vice Chancellor, Equal Opportunity &amp; Diversity</li> <li>• Associate Director, Equal Opportunity &amp; Diversity</li> <li>• Undergraduate student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Provost, Diversity &amp; Faculty Development</li> <li>• Director, Faculty Diversity &amp; Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting Associate Vice Chancellor, Diversity, Equity, &amp; Academic Policy</li> <li>• Director, Office of Equal Opportunity &amp; Sexual Harassment</li> <li>• Graduate student</li> </ul>
UC Riverside	UC San Diego	UC San Francisco	UC Santa Cruz	UC Merced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Vice Chancellor, Diversity, Excellence &amp; Equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Chancellor for Diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Chancellor, Diversity &amp; Outreach</li> <li>• Professor of Pediatrics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Chancellor &amp; Campus Diversity Officer for Staff and Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Health &amp; Wellness</li> </ul>
	UC Office of the President	Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory	UC Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interim Diversity Coordinator, Academic Affairs</li> <li>• 2011 Chair, Council of University of California Staff Assemblies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager, Diversity &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• 2011 Acting President, CUE-Teamsters Local Statewide Executive Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief of Staff to the Vice President, Agriculture &amp; Natural Resources</li> </ul>	

Source: University of California<sup>23</sup>

Rankin’s model for campus climate studies is a “comprehensive, five-phase, and strategic model of assessment, planning, and intervention. The model is designed to assist campus communities in conducting inclusive assessments of their institutional climate to better understand the challenges facing their respective communities.”<sup>24</sup> Figure 1.2 depicts the Study Concept Map.

<sup>21</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” Op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> “Our goals.” Campus Climate Study. <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/goals/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> “The Campus Climate Study Team.” Campus Climate Study. <http://campusclimate.ucop.edu/team/index.html>

<sup>24</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” Op. cit.

**Figure 1.2: Study Concept Map**

IDENTITY/DEMOGRAPHICS	CLIMATE	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position (student, faculty, staff)</li> <li>• Race</li> <li>• Gender Identity</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Socioeconomic Status</li> <li>• Veteran Status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Experiences</b> of community members</li> <li>• <b>Perceptions</b> of institutional climate by community members</li> <li>• <b>Institutional Actions</b> to support climate of inclusion and equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Success</li> <li>• Professional Success</li> <li>• Persistence</li> </ul>

Source: University of California<sup>25</sup>

Rankin & Associates committed to providing each institution with an individual report as well as a systemwide aggregate report. Each report included the following components: “an executive summary; a report narrative of the findings based on cross tabulations selected by the consultant; frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of quantitative data; and content analysis of the textual data.” Reports include high-level summaries of findings and identify themes. Generalizations are provided only for groups or subgroups with response rates of 30 percent or higher. Individual campuses are not compared with one another, but are compared to the aggregate UC findings as well as to national data. After receiving its final report, each institution will construct an action plan based on the findings, identifying two or three areas for targeted attention.<sup>26</sup>

The University of California administered the surveys on a location-by-location basis between October 2012 and February 2013, staggering start dates. Surveys remained open at each location for two to four weeks. Community members received an email with instructions and a link to the survey on their location’s start date.<sup>27</sup> The survey was publicized through emails, including follow-up emails reminding community members to take the survey. The survey was also publicized through posters and fliers. Print surveys, in English and Spanish, were provided to employees without access to computers. Participants do not need to complete the survey in one sitting—the software remembers where in the survey that respondents need to resume at a later time.<sup>28</sup> Survey participants cannot go back to previous pages of the survey to alter responses.

To encourage participation, survey takers who answered at least half of the questions in the 20- to 45-minute survey were entered into a prize drawing.<sup>29</sup> Incentives included a \$10,000 undergraduate scholarship, two \$5,000 faculty research grants, five \$2,000 staff professional development grants, and iPads. In addition to the systemwide incentives, individual institutions also offered prizes, including tickets to athletic events and parking passes.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> “Overview and Timeline.” Op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” Op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> “Overview and Timeline.” Op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Jones, Dave. “‘Be Heard!’ Campus joins systemwide climate survey.” February 1, 2013. UC Davis: *Dateline*. [http://dateline.ucdavis.edu/dl\\_detail.lasso?id=14352](http://dateline.ucdavis.edu/dl_detail.lasso?id=14352)

<sup>29</sup> Mok, Harry. “Systemwide survey focuses on campus climate.” October 15, 2012. UC Newsroom. <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/article/28503>

<sup>30</sup> “UC Berkeley Campus Climate Survey.” UC Berkeley Division of Equity & Inclusion. <http://diversity.berkeley.edu/campus-climate>

## TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- All public four-year institutions in the state must use the NSSE to measure student satisfaction in order to compete for performance funding (community colleges must use the CCSSE).
- NSSE replaced a locally developed survey in 2005 to allow for broader peer comparisons.
- Survey is administered at least every three years.
- System only analyzes results for purposes of performance funding scoring, but provides training to help institutions further exploit survey data.
- Institutional involvement includes academic affairs, student affairs, and institutional research personnel.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) acts as the coordinating body for the state's higher education institutions, including both the Tennessee Board of Regents System, which includes six state universities and the state's community colleges, and the University of Tennessee System, which includes the flagship University of Tennessee-Knoxville and two UT campuses at Martin and Chattanooga.<sup>31</sup>

For over 30 years, Tennessee has used a performance funding system for its public higher education institutions, in which colleges and universities can earn up to an additional 5.45 percent of their operating budgets "based on performance on a number of measures common to all."<sup>32</sup> The measures are weighted, with three quarters of the measures relating to student learning and engagement, and the remainder to student access and success. The student learning and engagement measures in turn are broken into six standards, including program accreditations, job placement rates, and "satisfaction studies."<sup>33</sup> This last standard, worth 10 percent of the total performance funding score, includes three components: a student engagement survey, an alumni satisfaction project, and an employer satisfaction project. The latter two components are developed and administered locally, with oversight and approval by THEC. Student engagement, however, is uniformly measured across all four-year institutions by using the NSSE (community colleges use the CCSSE).<sup>34</sup>

Tennessee's performance funding system operates on a five-year cycle. For the "satisfaction studies" standard, student engagement is measured by administering the NSSE in the first and fourth years of the cycle, while the alumni and employer projects are carried out in the second and third years, respectively. In the fifth year, institutions "supply evidence of actions taken based on the results" of the various satisfaction studies.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "The Commission." Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

<http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/Commission/Commission.html>

<sup>32</sup> "2010-2015 Performance Funding Quality Assurance." Tennessee Higher Education Commission. July 2010. p. 3.

[http://www.tn.gov/moa/documents/perf\\_fund\\_task\\_force/THEC%20PF%202010-15%20Guidebook.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/moa/documents/perf_fund_task_force/THEC%20PF%202010-15%20Guidebook.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> "2010-2015 Performance Funding Quality Assurance." Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Op. cit., p. 16.

THEC has used the NSSE for this purpose since 2005, after using a locally developed survey for most of the history of the performance funding system, as well as experimenting briefly with the ACT Alumni Opinion Survey. A limitation of the locally developed survey, in particular, was that it “permitted comparisons only with other institutions in the State of Tennessee.”<sup>36</sup> Under the current system, universities’ NSSE results are measured by how they compare to a group of six peers, which are selected by each institution within broad parameters set by THEC (the peers must be in the same Carnegie classification and from one of the 16 states of the Southern Regional Education Board).<sup>37</sup>

After the NSSE has been administered, THEC analyzes the results. However, this appears to be solely for the purpose of scoring institutions within the performance funding framework,<sup>38</sup> within which institutions receive points for meeting their peer mean scores on the NSSE or, alternatively, for improving their NSSE results between administrations.<sup>39</sup> THEC does, however, support institutions in “[maximizing] the NSSE and CCSSE administration,” by providing training workshops for administrators on “best practices in collecting and analyzing NSSE and CCSSE data.” For the NSSE workshop, universities in both the Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee systems were invited to “assemble a team of attendees” from academic affairs, student affairs, and institutional research.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond scoring institutions for performance funding purposes, THEC also makes available institutional and aggregate data on a number of items as a measure of Tennessee’s performance against the national average.<sup>41</sup> THEC also reports institutional results for a summary question on the NSSE (“how would you evaluate your entire education experience at this institution”) as a gauge of “student satisfaction” in the state’s annual higher education fact book,<sup>42</sup> and individual institutions may publicize these results as a measure of “student satisfaction.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> [1] Bogue, E.G. and Johnson, B.D. “Performance Incentives and Public College Accountability in the United States: A Quarter Century Policy Audit.” *Higher Education Management and Policy*. 22:2. 2010. pp. 10, 15-16.

[http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance\\_funding/Research%20Bogue%20Dandridge%20Johnson.pdf](http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance_funding/Research%20Bogue%20Dandridge%20Johnson.pdf)

[2] “TTU Students Most Satisfied with Their Educational Experience.” Tennessee Tech University. February 15, 1996.

<http://www.tntech.edu/pressreleases/ttu-students-most-satisfied-with-their-educational-experience/>

<sup>37</sup> “2010-2015 Performance Funding Quality Assurance.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Rhoda, R. “Tennessee Performance Funding 2010-2015 Program: Quality Assurance.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. September 1, 2011. p. 3.

[http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance\\_funding/THEC%20PF%202010-15%20Cycle%20Year%201%20Update%20Sept%202011.pdf](http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance_funding/THEC%20PF%202010-15%20Cycle%20Year%201%20Update%20Sept%202011.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> “2010-2015 Performance Funding Quality Assurance.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Rhoda, R. “Tennessee Performance Funding 2010-2015 Program: Quality Assurance.” Op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Rocconi, L. and Gonyea, B. “Student Engagement in Tennessee Universities.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. October 2011. [http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance\\_funding/TN\\_NSSE\\_Key%20Findings.pdf](http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/performance_funding/TN_NSSE_Key%20Findings.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> “2011-2012 Tennessee Higher Education Fact Book.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. p. 64.

<http://www.tn.gov/thec/Legislative/Reports/2012/2011-%202012%20Fact%20Book%20for%20Web%20%2813.1.9%29.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> E.g., “UT Martin Ranks First in Student Satisfaction Among Tennessee Public Universities.” *Campus Scene* (UT-Martin). Summer/Fall 2012. p. 10. [http://www.utm.edu/departments/univrel/\\_pdfs/summer\\_fall\\_2012.pdf](http://www.utm.edu/departments/univrel/_pdfs/summer_fall_2012.pdf)

## SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SDBOR has used the NSSE since 2002 to measure student engagement systemwide.
- SDBOR initially administered the survey every year, but moved to biannual administration after the first three years.
- With the 2014 administration, SDBOR will discontinue “consortium enrollment” in the NSSE, instead allowing individual institutions to tailor their own supplementary questions.
- The system director of academic assessment and chief academic officer have been responsible for producing a report analyzing NSSE results and their systemwide policy implications; however, this report appears to have been discontinued, and has not been produced for the last two survey administrations.
- The SDBOR chief academic officer has suggested that NSSE reporting should focus on comparing the system with national data, rather than comparing institutions within the system.
- Individual campuses disseminate and use NSSE results in different ways, but typical offices involved include the assessment office or committee, academic affairs, and student affairs, as well as deans and senior administrators.

The South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) oversees six public universities in the state, including the flagship University of South Dakota, the land-grant South Dakota State University, the specialized South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, and three master’s-level regional universities.<sup>44</sup> In 2002, the SDBOR undertook to have all six institutions participate in the NSSE in order to “facilitate general education modifications and institutional improvement initiatives.”<sup>45</sup> The NSSE was used annually for the first three years, after which it was decided to move to a biannual administration,<sup>46</sup> which remains the system’s practice. The SDBOR has also used the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, a complementary instrument surveying faculty about students’ engagement with academics, but this survey is being moved to a quadrennial administration.<sup>47</sup>

The NSSE appears to have served in the South Dakota system both as a “tool for the regents [i.e., the SDBOR]”<sup>48</sup> and a “tool for the campuses,”<sup>49</sup> although recent indications suggest that the use of the survey is becoming more decentralized. After the 2008 administration,

<sup>44</sup> “Campus at a Glance.” South Dakota Board of Regents.

<http://www.sdbor.edu/services/financeadmin/rfp/CampusAtAGlance.htm>

<sup>45</sup> “2006 NSSE/FSSE Report.” South Dakota Board of Regents. March 15, 2007. p. 1.

[http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/03-07AAC\\_6.A\\_nsse\\_report\\_2002-2006.pdf](http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/03-07AAC_6.A_nsse_report_2002-2006.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> “Minutes of the Meeting – AAC Retreat.” South Dakota Board of Regents. October 17-18, 2006. p. 3.

<http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/10-06-AAC-minutes.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> “NSSE/FSSE Survey Administration (Spring 2014).” South Dakota Board of Regents. September 5, 2013.

<http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/5.AANSSE-FSSESurveyAdministration-Spring2014AAC0913.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> “National Survey Gathers Information on Student Experiences.” South Dakota Board of Regents. April 13, 2007.

<http://www.sdbor.edu/mediapubs/pressreleases/2007/041207NSSE.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> “Minutes of the Meeting – AAC Retreat.” South Dakota Board of Regents. Op. cit., p. 4.

for instance, the SDBOR produced a report summarizing NSSE results by individual institution and systemwide, both for that year and longitudinally since 2002, and including a review of policy issues affected by the engagement benchmarks reflected in the survey.<sup>50</sup> The SDBOR chief academic officer specifically requested that the report, which was produced by the SDBOR's director of academic assessment, focus on the systemwide implications of the survey, suggesting that it is "more important to look at the system and how [it compares] with the rest of the world" than for the SDBOR to "compare institutions."<sup>51</sup>

Since this 2009 report, however, the SDBOR has not produced another report looking at the NSSE results at a systemwide level, and with the 2014 administration the SDBOR will "no longer coordinate a consortium enrollment" in which a "common set of system level questions are included on the assessment." Instead, individual institutions will have the option to use additional questions to "develop items that can be used to better inform practices at the campus level."<sup>52</sup> Within the system, individual institutions have already made a practice of using NSSE results to make improvements, or at a minimum to increase the awareness of faculty and administrators. Practices at the six four-year SDBOR institutions are shown below.

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<sup>50</sup> "Enhancing Postsecondary Success: Engagement in the South Dakota Public Higher Education System." South Dakota Board of Regents. 2009. p. 11.  
[http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/ReportsAccountability/documents/NSSE\\_stud\\_engage\\_report\\_BOR06-2009.pdf](http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/ReportsAccountability/documents/NSSE_stud_engage_report_BOR06-2009.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> [1] "Academic Affairs Council Meeting – Minutes." South Dakota Board of Regents. April 16, 2009. p. 5.  
[http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/04-16-09AAC\\_minutes.pdf](http://www.sdbor.edu/services/academics/aac/documents/04-16-09AAC_minutes.pdf)

[2] "South Dakota Native to Head Assessment Office." South Dakota Board of Regents. August 18, 2006.  
<http://www.sdbor.edu/mediapubs/pressreleases/2006/081806Turman.pdf> (identifying Paul Turman's role at the SDBOR)

<sup>52</sup> "NSSE/FSSE Survey Administration (Spring 2014)." South Dakota Board of Regents. Op. cit.

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS – INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS FROM NSSE RESULTS**

**Black Hill State University:** The NSSE report is reviewed by the university’s assessment committee and has been used in developing the institutional strategic plan. In particular, NSSE reporting areas have been integrated into the plan’s goals and objectives. The report is also distributed to the Academic Council of Deans, through whom it is disseminated to the faculty, and the president uses it with an informal advisory group “to build a picture of students.”

**Dakota State University:** NSSE results are disseminated through general faculty meetings, as well as relevant committees, and are uploaded to the institution’s online dashboard system. More specifically, the institution uses the data to evaluate academic advising, reading and writing activities, and technology use against the parameters of the system-wide general education standards. A faculty advising taskforce has also conducted a faculty workshop to review NSSE data.

**Northern State University:** NSSE results are distributed to the academic affairs office, the deans’ council, and the president’s cabinet, as well as the university assessment committee.

**South Dakota School of Mines and Technology:** The school has aligned the NSSE with the system-wide general education standards, and uses specific NSSE questions to assess its performance on specific standards. It also uses NSSE results to assess specific programs, such as an interdisciplinary sciences program. The student affairs office uses NSSE results to evaluate programs such as its professional development initiative.

**South Dakota State University:** NSSE data are used by the university assessment committee and administration in tandem with data from other assessments (e.g., ACT, CIRP, HERI) to “identify trends or inform initiatives” in various areas, such as reading and writing, internationalization, and community service. The university assessment committee identifies specific NSSE items to track as “markers” in specific areas of interest. More generally, data are used to produce reports to “inform discussions” about specific issues, and are presented to the faculty through workshops at the start of the year.

**University of South Dakota:** The office of academic assessment manages NSSE results, and uses data longitudinally to address inquiries from faculty and committees making policy decisions. Based on NSSE data, the University has moved to include more writing assignments in general education courses, initiated an “in-depth investigation” of academic integrity and formed a task force to develop relevant policy, and restructured student advising practices so that general education advising is centralized, rather than performed by faculty.

Source: South Dakota Board of Regents, “2006 NSSE/FSSE Report,” pp. 22-23.

## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The UW System developed a local survey for measuring the diversity climate on system campuses
- Campus participation was voluntary, with the survey instrument developed by a working group of representatives from participating campuses

The University of Wisconsin System serves 181,000 students and 29,000 faculty and staff across 13 four-year universities, 13 community colleges, and the statewide University of Wisconsin-Extension. The System confers approximately 35,700 degrees annually and has an annual budget of \$6 billion.<sup>53</sup>

Similar to the University of California System’s Climate Study outlined above, the University of Wisconsin launched a campus diversity climate assessment led by Rankin & Associates, in collaboration with a systemwide Climate Study Working Group.<sup>54</sup> All 26 UW institutions were invited to participate in the survey, and 17 chose to participate in the first-year pilot program, launched in September 2007, including the 13 community colleges and four universities, along with UW System Administration.<sup>55</sup> Estimated costs for the pilot program were \$147,000 for the 17 campuses.<sup>56</sup>

Each campus formed focus groups with a wide range of representation (people of color, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, etc.) to inform the development of the survey tool.<sup>57</sup> In December 2007, each campus formed Diversity Leadership Committees to support the surveying process. The focus groups and the Diversity Leadership Committees worked with the Climate Study Working Group and Rankin & Associates to facilitate the survey implementation.<sup>58</sup>

The survey instrument sought to evaluate “the climate of diversity and inclusiveness at each campus with regard to multiple identity groups (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, veteran status, sexual orientation etc.)” with the opportunity for each institution to address and contextualize concerns specific to their campus.<sup>59</sup> Overall, the goal of the survey was for conclusions to “aid each institution in developing tailored action plans for

<sup>53</sup> “About UW System.” University of Wisconsin System. <http://www.wisconsin.edu/about/>

<sup>54</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” University of Wisconsin System. <http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/FAQ.htm>

<sup>55</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project.” University of Wisconsin System. <http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/index.htm>

<sup>56</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” Op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Fact-finding Groups.” University of Wisconsin System. <http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/groups.htm>

<sup>58</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” Op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project.” University of Wisconsin System. <http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/index.htm>

inclusion and diversity that will assist in focusing their efforts to make their campus inclusive and welcoming for all.”<sup>60</sup>

Final results were presented to the campuses in fall 2009, with meetings open to all members of the campus community. The meetings were followed by a presentation to the Board of Regents.<sup>61</sup> Following the success of the pilot program, four additional campuses chose to participate in the second round of the campus climate assessment, gathering data in Fall 2009 with results delivered in Spring 2010. A third study was planned for the remaining campuses in 2010-2011.<sup>62</sup>

The campus climate assessment consisted of four phases, outlined in Figure 1.3 below.<sup>63</sup> All phases were conducted by Rankin & Associates in collaboration with the Climate Study Working Group.

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<sup>60</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” Op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project.” University of Wisconsin System.

<sup>62</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Campuses.” University of Wisconsin System.  
<http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/campuses.htm>

<sup>63</sup> “Diversity Climate Assessment Project: Scope of the Work.” University of Wisconsin System.  
<http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/climate/scope.htm>

**Figure 1.3: Four Phases of the UW Campus Climate Assessment**

<b>Phase I. Fact-Finding Groups</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delineate and conduct fact-finding groups                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The fact-finding groups will include members from the Women’s Studies Consortium, OADD, M&amp;D Coordinators, Affirmative Action Officers, the Equity Scorecard Team, Faculty Representatives, Staff Representatives, Student Representatives, United Council, the Inclusivity Initiative for LGBTQ People, ADA Coordinators, Disability Service Coordinators, the President’s Council on Disabilities, &amp; the Status of Women Initiative. Additional groups may be added.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop protocol for fact-finding groups and individual interviews                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Protocol will be developed and shared with the CSWG for approval.</li> <li>○ Fact-finding groups peer facilitators will be selected and trained by the consultant.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Phase II. Assessment Tool Development, Communication Plan, IRB Proposal, &amp; Survey Implementation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of assessment tool                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development of paper-and-pencil and/or web-based survey instruments in collaboration with the CSWG.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop communication plan for the assessment                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coordination with the CSWG and OADD on the marketing and communication plan strategy (e.g., letter of invitation, talking points to be shared among the constituent groups).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• IRB proposal                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development of proposal in collaboration with institutional contacts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Survey administration (design, methods, sampling) and monitoring                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consultation with the CSWG on the strategy for administration that will yield the highest response rates</li> <li>○ Creation of Diversity Leadership Committee on each campus. The consultant strongly recommends that each campus create a campus-based Diversity Leadership Committee to assist with the survey process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Phase III. Data Analysis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data coding and database management</li> <li>• Data analysis (descriptive statistics, frequency tables) as deemed appropriate by Rankin &amp; Associates</li> </ul>
<b>Phase IV. Development and Presentation of Report</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of institutional reports (executive summary, data presentation, and report findings)</li> <li>• Presentation of institutional reports by respective Diversity Leadership Committees or by S. Rankin</li> <li>• Development of aggregate report</li> </ul>

Source: University of Wisconsin

## SECTION II: REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL SURVEYS

In this section, Hanover Research profiles the five surveys identified by the University of Alaska-Anchorage as potential instruments for systemwide student satisfaction surveys:

- **Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey**
- **Higher Education Research Institute: Your First College Year**
- **National Survey of Student Engagement**
- **Community College Survey of Student Engagement**
- **College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program**

### NOEL-LEVITZ STUDENT SATISFACTION INVENTORY

The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) measures student satisfaction and identifies issues important to students. In total, Noel-Levitz Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys “have been taken by more than 4,900,000 students at 2,600 campuses.”<sup>64</sup> The survey allows institutions of higher education to:<sup>65</sup>

- Guide strategic action planning
- Strengthen student retention initiatives
- Meet accreditation requirements
- Identify areas of strength for institutional marketing
- Chart your progress toward campus goals

Noel-Levitz provides an array of customizable options for the SSI. The survey may be taken either online or in paper format, with targeted survey instruments for a range of institution types (four-year, two-year, etc.).<sup>66</sup> Clients may add up to 10 questions specific to an institution, and may add one additional demographic item. Clients may also choose from additional Satisfaction Priorities Surveys for particular campus populations, including adult students and online learners.<sup>67</sup> There are online and paper samples available for each variety of survey on Noel-Levitz’s website.

Noel-Levitz has experience in implementing the SSI across university systems, according to Julie Bryant, Associate Vice President of Retention Solutions.<sup>68</sup> Past clients of Noel-Levitz have included the University of Alaska System, the North Dakota University System, for which they administered the SSI to both four- and two-year campuses every two years over

<sup>64</sup> “Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI).” Noel-Levitz. <https://www.noellelitz.com/student-retention-solutions/satisfaction-priorities-assessments/student-satisfaction-inventory>

<sup>65</sup> Quoted from source: Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Samples.” Noel-Levitz. <https://www.noellelitz.com/student-retention-solutions/satisfaction-priorities-assessments/student-satisfaction-inventory/samples>

<sup>67</sup> “Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI).” Op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Bryant, Op. cit.

an extended period of time, and state-wide community college systems in Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and West Virginia. Noel-Levitz has also done multi-campus projects for other organizations, including the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and the for-profit Education Management Corporation.

Bryant stated that the SSI deliverable for a university systemwide survey would consist of a report for each individual campus and a composite report that would compare aggregated results from the three campuses into one data set. Typically the SSI is implemented for individual campuses, and the standard Campus Report includes the following components:<sup>69</sup>

- **Introduction and interpretive guide:** assists in interpreting the survey findings.
- **Strategic planning overview:** identifies an institution's strengths and challenges, along with the top issues for campus discussion
- **Demographic summary:** provides demographic context for survey data.
- **Scale summary:** supports institutions in understanding the importance and satisfaction scores for each composite scale.
- **Institutional summary:** reviews the importance scores, satisfaction scores, and performance gap scores.
- **Summary items:** compares the institutional responses on overall satisfaction to national satisfaction scores
- **Conclusion:** presents recommendations for transforming data into action on campus.

Noel-Levitz provides support to institutions implementing the SSI. The company has produced a 10-step guide to implementing their satisfaction assessment on a college campus, partially reproduced in Figure 2.1 (note that this guide is intended for a single campus, rather than a system).

Additional support provided by Noel-Levitz includes free phone consultations with clients, free webinars, opportunities for face-to-face workshops, and the option for a Noel-Levitz consultant to travel to campus to interpret results for an additional fee.

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<sup>69</sup> "Samples." Op. cit.

**Figure 2.1: Ten-Step Student Satisfaction Assessment Plan**

<p><b>Step One: Determine that satisfaction assessment needs to be done</b></p>	<p><b>Step Two: Select a satisfaction tool that will allow you to:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data should be gathered on a regular basis – don’t continue to rely on assessments that were done several years ago</li> <li>• Get buy-in from the top (president, cabinet, etc.)</li> <li>• Identify how satisfaction assessment contributes to your overall assessment plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be comprehensive in your assessment</li> <li>• Gather data on both satisfaction and importance</li> <li>• Compare your institution with national benchmarks</li> <li>• Isolate data by demographic subgroups</li> <li>• Assess other populations (faculty, adults, distance learners, etc.) with comparable instruments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Three: Get buy-in on campus for administering the survey</b></p>	<p><b>Step Four: Administer the survey</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform the campus</li> <li>• Include the following campus constituencies: Deans, Directors, Faculty, Staff, Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select the appropriate time of year</li> <li>• Select whom to survey</li> <li>• Select appropriate administration method</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Five: Process the results</b></p>	<p><b>Step Six: Review the reports</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select the appropriate reporting options</li> <li>• Return completed surveys to Noel-Levitz for Processing</li> <li>• Reports are processed and ready within approximately 10-12 business days of when they arrive at Noel-Levitz</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the reports yourself and with identified individuals responsible for satisfaction assessment</li> <li>• Identify institutional strengths and challenges</li> <li>• Take advantage of optional free phone review of your results with Noel-Levitz</li> <li>• Consider optional on-campus consultation to present and review the results (additional fees apply)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Seven: Share the results</b></p>	<p><b>Step Eight: Identify action team and next steps</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with the President, Cabinet, or Top leadership team, the Board of Directors, Deans or Directors, Faculty, and Students</li> <li>• Share information through face-to-face presentations, articles in internal and external publications, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a group to be responsible for next steps with the data</li> <li>• Identify if you need to review data by target groups (demographic variables)</li> <li>• Consider conducting focus groups:</li> <li>• Involve students and campus personnel</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Nine: Establish your response plan</b></p>	<p><b>Step Ten: Survey again to track results</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share strengths and build on and celebrate successes</li> <li>• Form plan to address challenges</li> <li>• Inform the campus of the plan</li> <li>• Work the plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey annually or every other year</li> <li>• Before surveying again, be sure everyone is aware of the changes that have been implemented since the last assessment</li> <li>• Identify ways that the administration and follow-up process can be improved</li> <li>• When you receive the results, identify and communicate areas where satisfaction levels have improved as a result of actions taken and identify current issues or areas that have not seen improvement</li> </ul>

Source: Noel-Levitz<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Table contents adapted from: “Ten-Step Satisfaction Assessment Program.” Noel-Levitz. [https://www.noellevitz.com/upload/Student\\_Retention/SSI/TenStepSatisfactionAssessment08.pdf](https://www.noellevitz.com/upload/Student_Retention/SSI/TenStepSatisfactionAssessment08.pdf)

## HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE: YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR

Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) has offered the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey since 2000. YFCY “enables institutions to identify features of the first year that encourage student learning, involvement, satisfaction, retention and success, thereby enhancing first-year programs and retention strategies at campuses across the country.”<sup>71</sup> YFCY may be used as a stand-alone instrument, although it was designed as a follow-up survey to the CIRP Freshman Survey.

The YFCY is conducted from March to June, surveying freshman at the end of their first college year. The survey collects data on cognitive and affective measures to provide “comprehensive institutional and comparative data for analyses of persistence, adjustment, and other first-year outcomes.”<sup>72</sup>

Institutions of higher education participating in the YFCY receive an institutional profile, which breaks out institutional results “by sex, full and part-time status, comparisons with other similar institutions, significance testing, effect sizes, CIRP Constructs and Theme reports, and a data file of [the institution’s] student responses.”<sup>73</sup> Institutions using the YFCY as a post-test to the CIRP Freshman Survey also receive a Longitudinal Profile.

Institutions may choose to implement the survey via a paper or online format, or a mixture of both for maximum participation. A paper Sample Survey Instrument for 2013 is available online,<sup>74</sup> as is a sample online survey instrument for 2013.<sup>75</sup> While most of the survey instrument is standard, YFCY permits up to 20 institution-specific questions. Figure 2.2 depicts the ways institutions use the survey.

<sup>71</sup> “About the Your First College Year Survey.” HERI: Your First College Year Survey.  
<http://www.heri.ucla.edu/yfcyoverview.php>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “2013 Your First College Year Survey.” 2013. HERI: Your First College Year Survey.  
<http://www.heri.ucla.edu/researchers/instruments/YFCY/2013YFCY.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> “Your First College Year Survey Demonstration Survey.” 2013. HERI: Your First College Year Survey.  
<https://www.dracsurveys.com/YourFirstCollegeYearSurvey2013/DemoTicket.aspx>

**Figure 2.2: Uses of YFCY**

Evaluate student adjustment to college
YFCY includes several measures of adjustment during the first year of college, such as students' level of satisfaction with various aspects of campus life, institutional facilities, and student services; personal challenges that they face during their transition from high school to college; and feelings of personal success at the end of the first year.
Assess students' academic experiences and achievement
The survey collects information on a number of academic experiences of first-year students, including classroom activities, academic engagement and disengagement, and interaction with faculty. Further, YFCY asks students to rate their overall academic capabilities as well as skills in specific intellectual areas and to report their first-year GPA.
Collect information about extracurricular experiences
YFCY collects information on all aspects of student life including social commitments, study habits, volunteer and service work, student employment, residential life experiences, involvement in campus organizations, religious practices, and family obligations. Survey items provide information on both the quantity and quality of these experiences.
Study specific first-year programs
Several questions on YFCY assess students' experiences with various campus programs such as orientation, honors courses, first-year seminars, remedial coursework, service learning opportunities, academic advising, and learning communities as well as interaction with campus advisors, counselors, and other support personnel.
Examine student change
As a follow-up instrument, YFCY is designed to help institutions assess how their students have changed since entering college. When combined with CIRP Freshman Survey data, the YFCY serves as a longitudinal measure of students' cognitive and affective growth during the first year.

Source: Higher Education Research Institute<sup>76</sup>

Hanover Research did not find any example reports examining multiple institutions or campuses, and it is unclear whether YFCY can be used to compare results from multiple institutions. Detailed, recently updated administration guidelines for YFCY are available online.<sup>77</sup> Figure 2.3 depicts the costs for survey administration.

**Figure 2.3: YFCY Costs**

ITEM	COST
<b>Standard Costs</b>	
Participation Fee	\$825
Processing Fee	\$3.25 per survey processed
<b>Optional Costs</b>	
Customized Welcome and Thank You Pages	Free
Integrated Additional Questions	\$350
Email Distribution to Students	\$375
Online Data Analysis	\$150

Source: Higher Education Research Institute<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Quoted from source: "About the Your First College Year Survey." Op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> "Your First College Year (YFCY) 2013 Administration Guidelines." 2013. HERI: Your First College Year Survey. <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/surveyAdmin/YFCY/2013/2013YFCYAdminGuidelines.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> "About the Your First College Year Survey." Op. cit.

## NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), established in 1998, collects information on student participation in programs and activities provided by institutions for student learning and personal development. Overall, results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time in college and what they gain from the experience. The NSSE is governed by the Indiana University Bloomington Institutional Review Board. The survey is administered to first-year and senior students in four-year institutions. In 2013, 364,000 students from 613 institutions took the survey.<sup>79</sup> The instrument is available online.<sup>80</sup>

NSSE provides participating institutions with a variety of reports comparing student responses from the responses of students at a selected group of comparison institutions. Survey items represent best practices in undergraduate education, and while the NSSE does not directly measure student learning, survey results “reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college.”<sup>81</sup> Comparisons are available for individual survey questions and for the five NSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice. Institutions use NSSE results to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience, inside and outside of the classroom, which can be improved thorough policy changes and actions consistent with best practices.

The NSSE survey instrument, most recently updated in 2013, seeks to assess “the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.”<sup>82</sup> To accomplish this, the survey collects five categories of information:<sup>83</sup>

- Participation in dozens of educationally purposeful activities,
- Institutional requirements and the challenging nature of coursework,
- Perceptions of the college environment,
- Estimates of educational and personal growth since starting college, and
- Background and demographic information.

Beginning in 2013, institutions are able to append topical modules to the core survey. One module may be added for no charge and a second for \$150.<sup>84</sup> Currently available modules are listed below, and the questions for each module are available online.<sup>85</sup>

- |                     |                            |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| ■ Academic Advising | ■ Learning with Technology |
| ■ Civic Engagement  | ■ Experiences with Writing |

<sup>79</sup> National Survey of Student Engagement. <http://nsse.iub.edu/>

<sup>80</sup> “Survey Instrument.” National Survey of Student Engagement. [http://nsse.iub.edu/html/survey\\_instruments.cfm](http://nsse.iub.edu/html/survey_instruments.cfm)

<sup>81</sup> “About NSSE.” National Survey of Student Engagement. <http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm>

<sup>82</sup> “Survey Instrument.” Op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> “NSSE Topical Modules.” National Survey of Student Engagement. <http://nsse.iub.edu/html/modules.cfm>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

- Development of Transferable Skills
- Information Literacy
- Experiences with Diverse Perspectives
- Global Perspectives—Cognitive and Social

Since 2000, the NSSE has been used by 26 university systems.<sup>86</sup> Figure 2.4 lists university systems of interest to the University of Alaska-Anchorage, along with their years of participation in the NSSE. Of the ten university systems identified by the University of Alaska, four states do not use the NSSE: Montana, Maine, Idaho, and California. However, while the NSSE identifies both the University of Hawaii System and Tennessee Publics as participants, the system-level institutional research offices of both university systems told Hanover Research that they do not have a systemwide student satisfaction survey. This indicates either that both systems have since stopped using the NSSE or that they do not consider the NSSE to be a systemwide student satisfaction instrument.

**Figure 2.4: Peer University Systems Participating in the NSSE, 2000-2013**

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM	YEARS OF PARTICIPATION
University of Hawaii System	2009, 2005
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities	2013, 2011, 2009
South Dakota Board of Regents	2012, 2010, 2008, 2006, 2004, 2003, 2002
Tennessee Publics (including University of Tennessee System)	2011, 2009, 2006
University of Texas	2002 to 2012 (inclusive)
Texas A&M System	2011, 2009, 2007, 2005, 2003, 2001
University of Wisconsin Comprehensives	2011, 2008, 2006, 2004, 2001

Source: NSSE<sup>87</sup>

The NSSE offers an Extended State System Package to university systems to “help facilitate administration planning and logistics, selection of comparison groups and benchmarking, and strategies for increasing response rates.” Available support includes customized workshops, interactive webinars, in-person workgroup sessions, conference call meetings, and consultations. NSSE staff can also help to interpret NSSE data “to inform action and strategic plans, implement improvement initiatives, and prepare accreditation self-studies.”<sup>88</sup> Deliverables received by university systems include the following analyses and information tools:<sup>89</sup>

- **Customized Institutional Report** – Presents your students' responses by class year and provides statistical comparisons with three comparison groups of your choosing
- **Engagement Indicators** – Compare your students' scores on key NSSE indicators (successors to the Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice) to those of students at your comparison institutions

<sup>86</sup> “System Participation.” National Survey of Student Engagement. [http://nsse.iub.edu/html/system\\_participation.cfm](http://nsse.iub.edu/html/system_participation.cfm)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “State and Multi-Campus Systems.” National Survey of Student Engagement. <http://nsse.iub.edu/html/systems.cfm>

<sup>89</sup> Quoted from source: Ibid.

- **Specialized Summary Reports** – Executive Snapshot, Major Field, and The Student Experience in Brief reports
- **Student Data File** – Includes student responses to survey items and composite measures, with student identifiers, to facilitate your own within-institution analyses
- **Annual Results** – Reports important findings, institutional improvement initiatives, and the landscape of undergraduate assessment.

The NSSE recommends coordinating with individual campuses to implement the survey instrument. University systems should appoint a system coordinator, typically someone from the system office or from a system institution, to formally register a system and coordinate necessary communications among participating institutions, including the completion of necessary data-sharing agreements. Overall, the NSSE identifies three approaches in how university systems can coordinate with individual campuses to implement the NSSE:<sup>90</sup>

- **Encourage individual campus participation:** Individual campuses participate in the NSSE without funding, coordination, or oversight from the system office.
- **Facilitate system institution involvement:** The system facilitates participation, underwrites all or a portion of the costs to participate in the NSSE, and identifies someone to coordinate participation. Data sharing agreements are required to produce system-level reports and share student-level data.
- **Coordinate system administration.** The system coordinates institution registration with the NSSE, may or may not cover the costs of participation, conducts additional data analyses across the system, promotes and uses results, coordinates workshops and sessions in using data, and facilitates communication across the university system. Data sharing agreements are required to produce system-level reports and share student-level data.

The system coordinators of university systems adopting one of the latter two strategies receives summary reports for the entire system, containing reports for each institution along with comparisons of institutional results.<sup>91</sup> NSSE highlights a number of ways in which university systems can use NSSE data:<sup>92</sup>

- Compare student responses to survey questions across system campuses, and use the data for improvement initiatives, mission differentiation and growth, longitudinal evaluation, and system discussions about assessment
- Merge NSSE data with other system or institutional data
- Include in studies about systemwide concerns, such as retention, transfer student engagement, degree attainment, differences in engagement among first-generation, or by race-ethnicity and outcomes.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted from source: Ibid.

- Explore engagement patterns by various student or institutional characteristics or track student engagement across campuses from year-to-year
- Add up to 20 questions to the NSSE instrument that probe system issues by participating as a NSSE consortium (additional fee required)
- Request customized analyses such as campus comparisons at the school/college or major level, or systemwide comparisons by gender or race (additional fee required)

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is the community college counterpart of and partner to the NSSE.<sup>93</sup> The CCSSE was established in 2001 as a project of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. As the list of current participants in the 2014 survey reveals, the vast majority of participating institutions are community colleges. One of 134 participants is a university campus awarding four-year degrees.<sup>94</sup>

Every year, the CCSSE presents the results of its annual survey, which assists community colleges in improving student outcomes. To facilitate this process, CCSSE has introduced five benchmarks of effective educational practice in community colleges: **active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners.**<sup>95</sup> All data are public, and the core CCSSE survey instrument is available online.<sup>96</sup> It is primarily used by campuses as a:<sup>97</sup>

- **Benchmarking Instrument:** establishing national norms on educational practice and performance by community and technical colleges.
- **Diagnostic Tool:** identifying areas in which a college can enhance students' educational experiences.
- **Monitoring Device:** documenting and improving institutional effectiveness over time.

A consortium group of three or more institutions with common interests may coordinate to share CCSSE data, obtain consortium comparison reports, and for an additional fee of \$500 may add up to 15 custom items to their survey.<sup>98</sup> According to the survey website, "some states and community college systems already are adopting CCSSE as part of statewide

<sup>93</sup> "About the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)." Community College Survey of Student Engagement. <http://www.ccsse.org/aboutccsse/aboutccsse.cfm>

<sup>94</sup> "Member Colleges." Community College Survey of Student Engagement. <http://www.ccsse.org/aboutccsse/colleges.cfm>

<sup>95</sup> "2013 Cohort Key Findings." 2013. Community College Survey of Student Engagement. <http://www.ccsse.org/survey/survey.cfm>

<sup>96</sup> "The Community College Student Report." Community College Survey of Student Engagement. [http://www.ccsse.org/aboutsurvey/docs/CCSR\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ccsse.org/aboutsurvey/docs/CCSR_2005.pdf)

<sup>97</sup> "About the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)." Op. cit.

<sup>98</sup> "CCSSE 2014 Membership Options and Pricing." Community College Survey of Student Engagement. <http://www.ccsse.org/join/options.cfm>

performance, quality improvement, and/or accountability systems.”<sup>99</sup> For instance, Northern Virginia Community College, a 2-year public institution, has used CCSSE data to compare the performance of its six campuses.<sup>100</sup> Other community colleges are using CCSSE results to inform specific improvements, such as increasing group work in classrooms to reduce rote memorization, increasing the presence of student mentors in challenging classes, and providing targeted advising to English language learners.<sup>101</sup>

### COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) Assessment Program is run by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. The program, “dedicated to improving the quality of undergraduate student learning environments,” provides two survey instruments to achieve this goal.<sup>102</sup> Sample surveys for both instruments are available online.<sup>103</sup> In the past, a great variety of institutions of higher education have used both surveys.<sup>104,105</sup>

- **The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ)** measures the quality of student experiences, perceptions of the campus environment, and progress toward important educational goals.
- **The College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ)** measures new student expectations for the college experience. When paired with the CSEQ it can assess the degree to which those expectations were met.

While the CSEQ may have provided a good opportunity for systemwide student satisfaction surveys, the program will shortly cease operation. In response to Hanover Research’s request for information on the CSEQ, CSEQ Director Robert M. Gonyea stated:<sup>106</sup>

CSEQ is in its last year of operation so may not be suitable for your survey. We will continue to make it available for granting item-usage permission, but will no longer be operating it as a survey.

<sup>99</sup> “About the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).” Op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> “Community College Survey of Student Engagement: 2011 Campus Comparison.” Northern Virginia Community College. September 2011. <http://www.nvcc.edu/about-nova/directories--offices/administrative-offices/oir/bulletins/docs/6611ccsecampuscomparisonsspr11final.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> Marklein, Mary Beth. “Survey helps schools create environment for learning.” June 2, 2009. *USA Today*. [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-05-26-comcol-cessie\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-05-26-comcol-cessie_N.htm)

<sup>102</sup> The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program. <http://cseq.iub.edu/>

<sup>103</sup> “College Students Experiences Questionnaire.” The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program. [http://cseq.iub.edu/pdf/cseq\\_whole.pdf](http://cseq.iub.edu/pdf/cseq_whole.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> “CSEQ: Participating Institutions.” The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program. [http://cseq.iub.edu/cseq\\_recentusers.cfm](http://cseq.iub.edu/cseq_recentusers.cfm)

<sup>105</sup> “CSXQ: Participating Institutions.” The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program. [http://cseq.iub.edu/csqx\\_recentusers.cfm](http://cseq.iub.edu/csqx_recentusers.cfm)

<sup>106</sup> Gonyea, Robert Michael. Personal E-mail. September 27, 2013.

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