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A Wide Range of Colleges and Universities Show Gains in Effective Educational Practices, Survey Finds.

A national survey released today shows that a variety of colleges and universities have shown steady improvement in the quality of undergraduate education, as measured by students' exposure to and involvement in effective educational practices. The 2009 report from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), *Assessment for Improvement: Tracking Student Engagement Over Time*, details results from a 2009 survey of 360,000 students attending 617 U.S. colleges and universities, and it includes a special look at trends in student engagement at more than 200 of those schools that had four to six year's worth of data going back to 2004.

In examining trends, the researchers used several key quality measures: NSSE's "Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice" as well as the percentage of students who participate in high-impact practices such as learning communities, service-learning, study abroad, and research with faculty. They found that 41% of institutions showed positive trends on at least one quality measure for first-year students, and 28% did so for seniors. For first-year students, two benchmarks saw the largest number of institutions with steady improvement: active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction. Positive changes were found at public as well as private institutions, at doctorate- and master's-granting universities as well as undergraduate colleges, and at institutions in all size categories.

"Our findings provide compelling evidence that colleges and universities can improve the undergraduate experience, and that positive change is not limited to certain institutional types," says Alexander C. McCormick, NSSE director and associate professor of education at Indiana University. "These are not just isolated upticks, they are patterns of steady improvement over a period of several years."

The study also examined patterns of decline and found they were extremely rare. "Seeing steady improvement at a large number of institutions but hardly any instances of decline suggests that these changes reflect intentional improvement efforts. Some institutions have made improvement a priority, and they are achieving it," says McCormick.

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The survey annually provides diagnostic, comparative information about effective educational practices at participating colleges and universities. Five key areas of educational quality are measured: 1) Level of Academic Challenge, 2) Active and Collaborative Learning, 3) Student-Faculty Interaction, 4) Enriching Educational Experiences, and 5) Supportive Campus Environment.

“Colleges and universities derive enormous internal value from participating in NSSE; of equal importance is the reassurance to their external publics that a commitment to and improvement of undergraduate education are high priorities,” says Muriel A. Howard, President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and a member of NSSE’s National Advisory Board.

Other key findings from the 2009 survey and its companion surveys, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), include:

- About one in three seniors participated in a culminating experience such as a capstone course, senior project, or comprehensive examination. Compared with their peers who did not do so, these students scored higher on the NSSE benchmarks, reported greater participation in deep approaches to learning, and felt they gained more from their college experience.
- Students whose classes used course management technologies (which provide discussion boards and the posting of notes, readings, or assignments) or interactive technologies (such as collaborative editing software, blogs, simulations, and virtual worlds) scored higher on NSSE benchmarks, participated more in deep approaches to learning, and reported higher academic and personal gains during college.
- One in three seniors rated the quality of academic advising as only fair or poor.
- Results from BCSSE indicated that entering first-year students who were involved in co-curricular activities in high school expected higher grades and were more certain that they would persist at their college, and were more likely to aspire to graduate education.
- FSSE results indicate that about three-quarters of faculty felt their institution was very involved in assessment efforts, but only about a third believed the findings were being effectively disseminated or used.

The NSSE 2009 report is sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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The NSSE 2009 Report, *Assessment for Improvement: Tracking Student Engagement Over Time*, can be downloaded from the NSSE Web site (www.nsse.iub.edu) or it can be ordered for \$20 from the National Survey of Student Engagement, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 1900 E. 10th Street, Suite 419, Bloomington IN 47406-7512.