

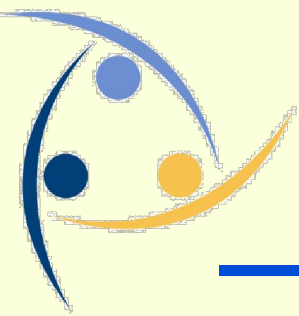
The Transparency-Accountability Puzzle: Where Does NSSE fit?



Alexander C. McCormick

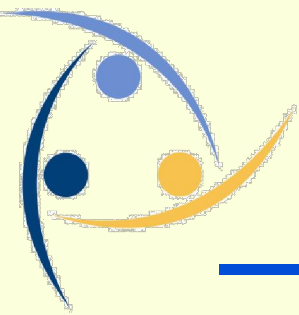
NSSE Webinar

November 18, 2008



Agenda

- ◆ Technical issues
- ◆ NSSE in the national picture
- ◆ Accountability & transparency pressures
- ◆ Assessment, accountability, & improvement
- ◆ NSSE & accountability
- ◆ Institutional summaries & their limits
- ◆ Selected Questions



NSSE in the National Picture

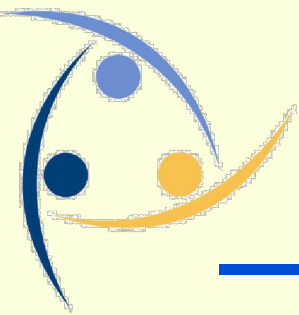
- ◆ Key aims:
 - ◆ To enrich the discourse about college quality
 - ◆ Focus on teaching & learning
 - ◆ Proven effective educational practices
 - ◆ To provide diagnostic information to support the improvement of undergraduate education
 - ◆ Random samples of first-years & seniors
 - ◆ Customizable comparison groups
- ◆ “Scholarship of teaching & learning at the institutional level”



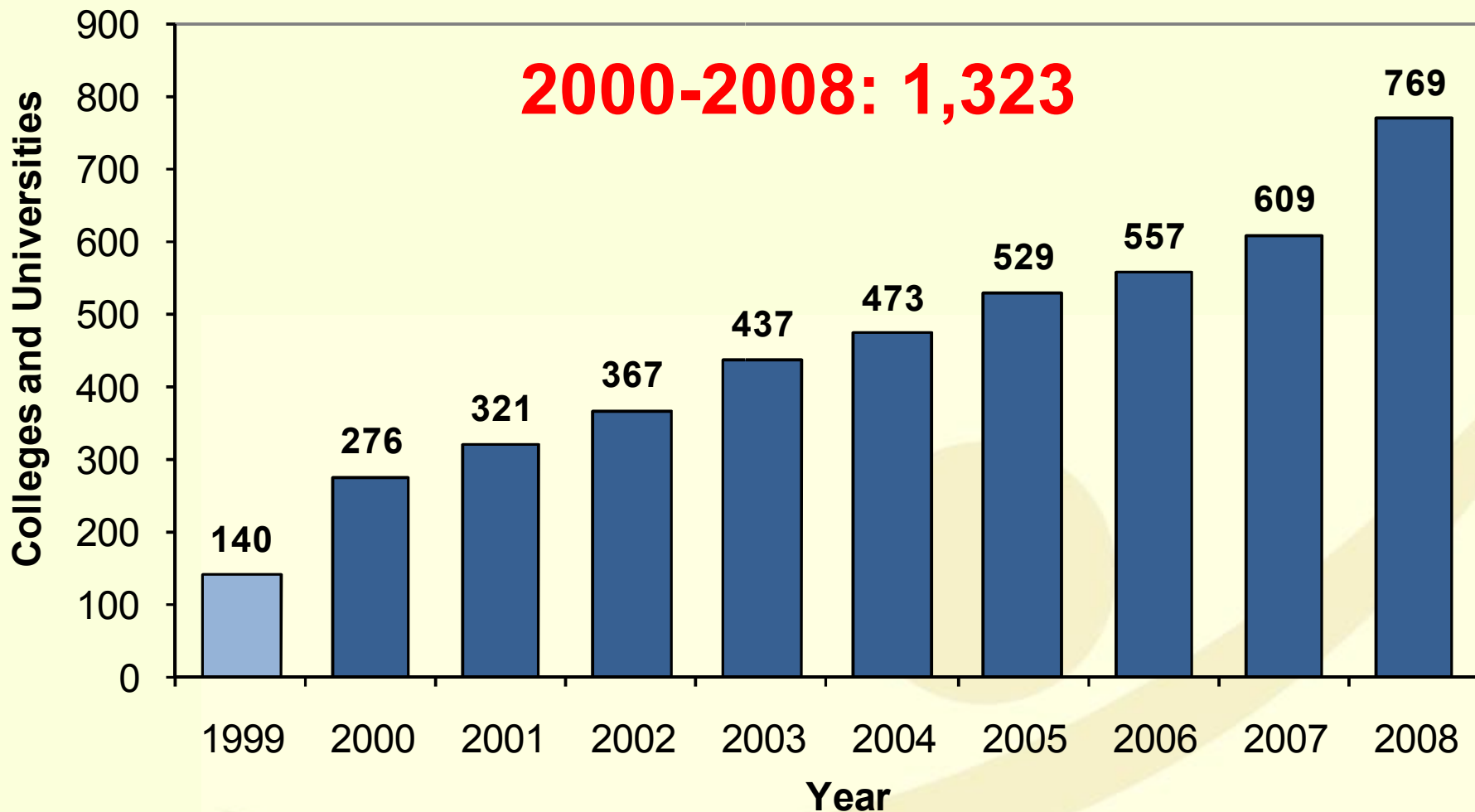
NSSE Products

- ◆ Institutional Report
 - ◆ Comparison Reports
 - ◆ Respondent characteristics
 - ◆ Survey frequencies & means
 - ◆ Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice
 - ◆ User Resources
 - ◆ Using NSSE Data
 - ◆ Facilitator's Guide
- ◆ Respondent data file
- ◆ Annual Results Report
 - ◆ National perspective
 - ◆ Examples of use by campuses





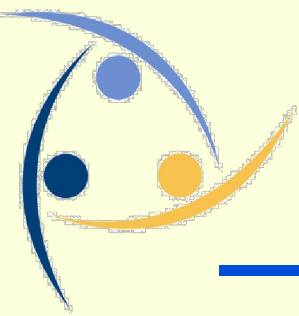
NSSE: A Visual History





Accountability Demands

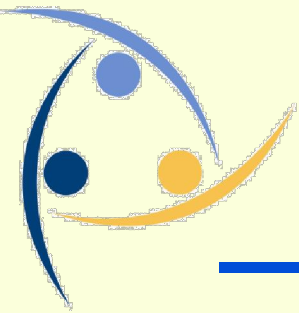
- ◆ An enduring issue given new urgency
 - ◆ Cost and quality concerns
 - ◆ Erosion of international standing on participation & attainment
- ◆ Many forms & mechanisms (Burke, 2005)
 - ◆ Professional
 - ◆ Managerial
 - ◆ Political
 - ◆ Market



Accountability

What have you done for me lately?

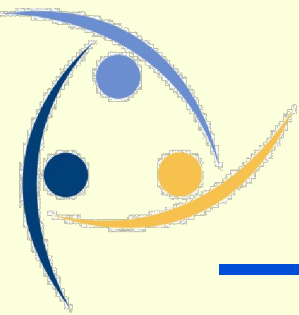
- ◆ Exchange relations
- ◆ External actors who provide resources want proof that their support is justified
 - ◆ Accreditors
 - ◆ Governmental agents
 - ◆ Students & parents
 - ◆ Alumni
 - ◆ Governing Boards



Professional Accountability

Accreditation, program review

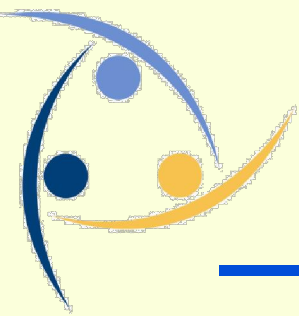
- ◆ Self-assessment
- ◆ Peer review process
- ◆ Largely hidden from public view
- ◆ Assumptions
 - ◆ Unbiased, diagnostic information
 - ◆ Intrinsic will to improve beyond mere survival



Market Accountability

Consumer focus

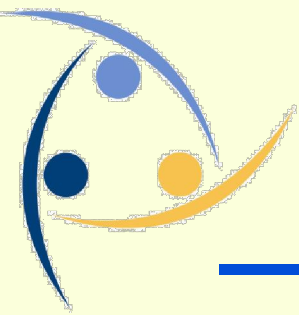
- ◆ Public information about price & performance
- ◆ Assumptions
 - ◆ Performance information is clear & accurate
 - ◆ Consumers respond to performance information
 - ◆ Consumer preferences are known
 - ◆ Providers respond to market signals



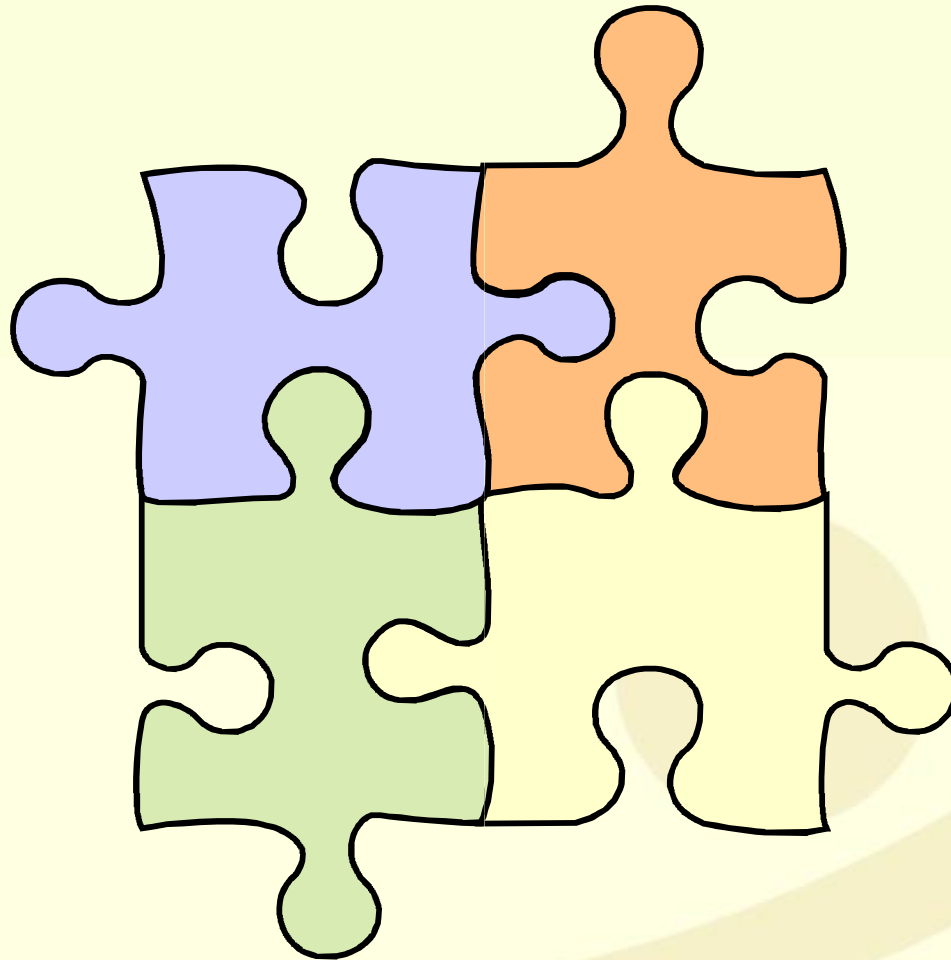
Market Accountability

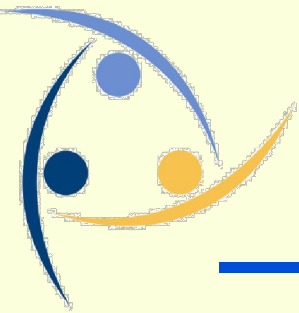
Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information with students and families... This information should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policy makers an accessible, understandable way to measure the relative effectiveness of different colleges and universities.

Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006, p. 4



Assessment, Accountability, & Improvement

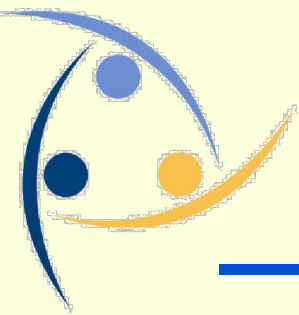




What's the Problem?

Designing an accountability system that motivates the right behavior is very tricky.

For the entity being held accountable, the process can lead to an emphasis on **PROVING** rather than **IMPROVING**



Proving vs. Improving

Proving suggests...

Strategy

Persuasion & advocacy

Managing the process

Image management

Damage control

Improving suggests...

Reflection

Analysis

Candid examination

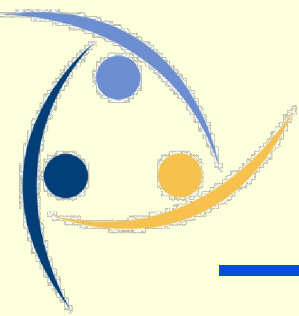
Diagnosis

Intervention / action



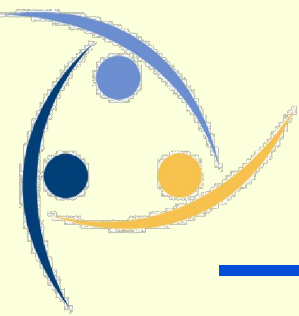
Assessment, Accountability, & Improvement

- ◆ Assessment for accountability
 - ◆ High stakes
 - ◆ Efforts to control or manage the process
 - ◆ Emphasize strengths
 - ◆ Minimize or suppress negative results
- ◆ Assessment for improvement
 - ◆ High yield
 - ◆ Diagnostic: points to action
 - ◆ Candid, unbiased information



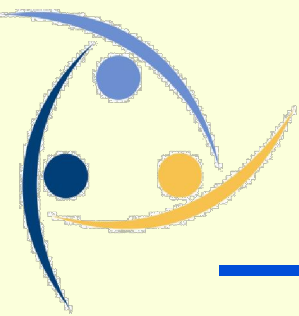
Public Reporting: NSSE's Position (excerpt)

NSSE encourages public reporting of student engagement results in ways that serve to **increase understanding of college quality** and that **support institutional improvement efforts.**



NSSE and Accountability & Transparency

- ◆ Reporting NSSE results on Web sites
- ◆ Widespread use in accreditation self-studies
- ◆ One of four assessments named by Spellings Commission
- ◆ Use in the Voluntary System of Accountability College Portrait (NASULGC & AASCU)
 - ◆ “Student experiences and perceptions”
 - ◆ 23 NSSE items (seniors only)



NSSE and Accountability & Transparency

- ◆ *US News* solicitation of individual NSSE item results
- ◆ *USA TODAY* online database
 - ◆ Voluntary release of benchmark scores
 - ◆ 5 benchmarks, first year & senior
 - ◆ Carnegie type comparisons only
 - ◆ No ranking



NSSE and Accountability & Transparency

NSSE products that institutions can use

- ◆ Accreditation toolkits
- ◆ Benchmark reports
- ◆ Multi-year benchmark reports (new)
- ◆ “What Students are Saying...” report (Web ready)



Customized “What Students Are Saying...” Pocket Guide Report

What Students Are Saying About Their NSSEville State Experience



National Survey
of Student Engagement

Each year the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) asks students at hundreds of colleges and universities to reflect on the time they devote to various learning activities. The topics explored are linked by previous research on student success in college.

Results from NSSE can provide prospective students with insights into how they might learn and develop at a given college. To help in the college exploration process, NSSE developed *A Pocket Guide to Choosing a College* to provide students and parents key questions to ask during campus visits.

The following responses were provided by 1043 randomly selected NSSEville State students on the 2008 NSSE survey.



Academic Challenge

To what degree is studying and spending time on academic work emphasized?

Active Learning

How often are topics from class discussed outside of the classroom?

54% of FY students frequently discuss readings or ideas from coursework outside of class.²

Do students work together on projects – inside and outside of class?

38% of FY students frequently work with other students on projects in class, 40% work with peers on assignments outside of class.²

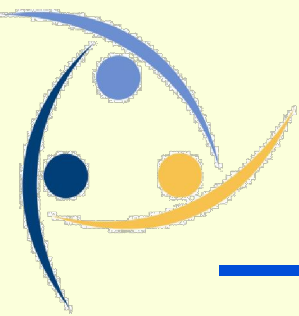
How often do students make class presentations?

28% of FY students report that they make frequent presentations in class.²

How many students participate in community-based projects in regular courses?

15% of FY students frequently participate in service-learning or community-based projects during a given year.² 55% never took part in such activities.

How many students apply their classroom learning to real life through internships or off-campus field



Customized “What Students Are Saying...” Pocket Guide Report

Active Learning

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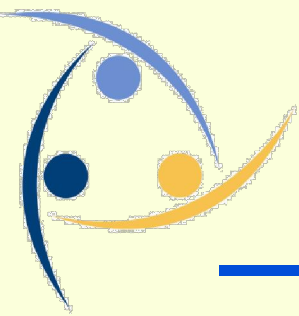
39% of FY students frequently work with other students on projects in class, 40% work with peers on assignments outside of class.²

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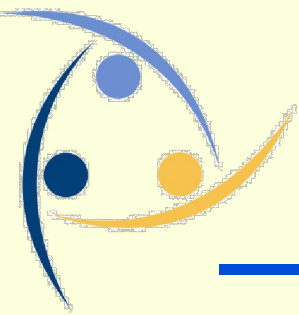
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NSSE's fine line to walk

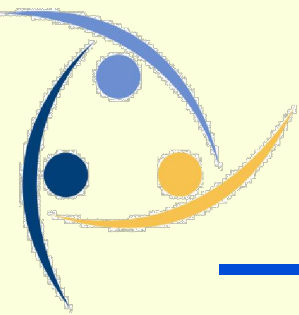
- ◆ Mention by Spellings, use in VSA beneficial
- ◆ Need to remain relevant to accountability movement without getting hijacked by it
- ◆ Retain focus on diagnosis and improvement while enriching discourse about college quality
- ◆ Provide opportunities for responsible *voluntary* public reporting of results (e.g., *USA TODAY*)



NSSE's fine line to walk

Danger in making NSSE a high-stakes test

- ◆ Compliance-motivated participation
- ◆ Proving might trump improving
 - ◆ Temptations to manage process & results
 - ◆ Students' motivations might get compromised



Some Concerns about Institutional Summary Measures

Quality as an institutional attribute

- ◆ A seductive notion, reinforced by...
 - ◆ Our own rhetoric and institutional narratives
 - ◆ The accreditation process
 - ◆ Contemporary policy focus
 - ◆ Popular assessments, including NSSE
- ◆ But...



An Illustration from NSSE

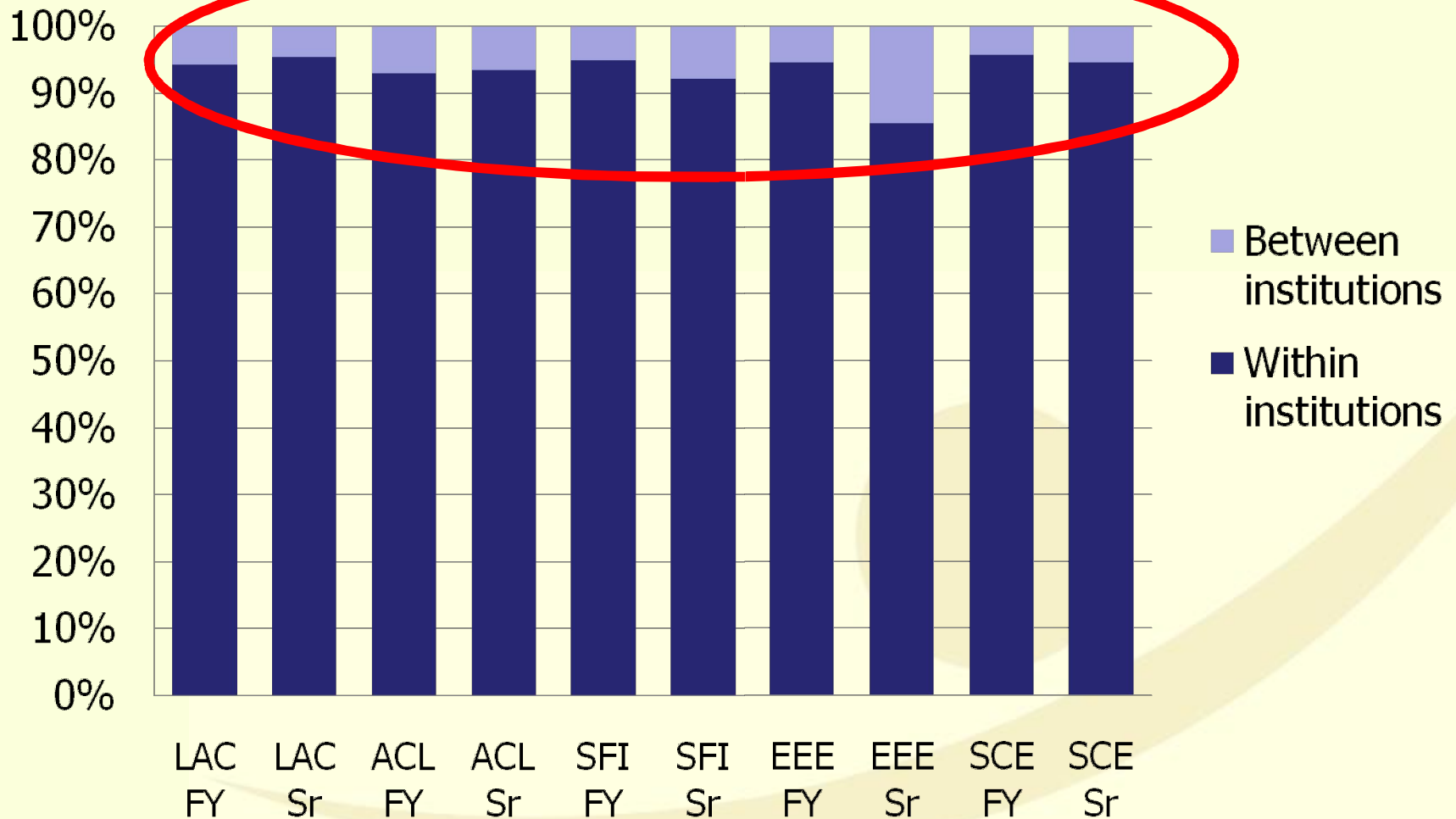
Institution share of total variation in student benchmark scores (percent)

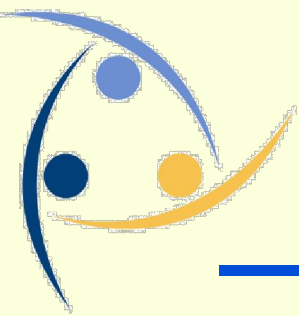
	First-year	Senior
Academic Challenge	5.7	4.5
Active & Collaborative Learning	7.0	6.5
Student-Faculty Interaction	5.1	7.8
Enriching Educational Experiences	5.4	14.5
Supportive Campus Environment	4.3	5.4



Another View

Allocation of benchmark score variation





Implications

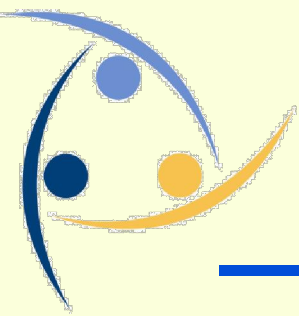
- ◆ Accountability climate drives a focus institution-level summaries
- ◆ Such a focus limits our conversation about quality and improvement to the tip of the iceberg





Selected Question Themes

- ◆ NSSE & learning outcomes
- ◆ Pros and cons of making results public
- ◆ Using NSSE results for improvement
 - ◆ Institutional Report: Using NSSE Data
 - ◆ Annual Results Report: Using NSSE Data
 - ◆ Gen Ed assessment



Selected Question Themes

- ◆ Using NSSE at the school or department level
- ◆ Using NSSE & FSSE in concert
- ◆ Impact of student mobility
- ◆ Technical issues
 - ◆ Response rates
 - ◆ Interpreting effect sizes



Resources

- ◆ NSSE Web site: nsse.iub.edu
- ◆ NSSE Institute: nsse.iub.edu/institute
 - ◆ Web presentation examples
 - ◆ Survey promotion examples
- ◆ NSSE Institution Interface (password protected)
 - ◆ Access from the NSSE home page