

### Tips on Maximizing the Value of Your NSSE Institutional Report: Customizing Comparison Groups

Thank you for joining us.  
The Webinar will begin at 3:00pm.  
Some general advice before we begin:

**PRINT PDF of the slides:**  
[www.nsse.iub.edu/webinars/TuesdaysWithNSSE/2009\\_05\\_12\\_TipsOnMaximizingValue/Comparison\\_Groups.pdf](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/webinars/TuesdaysWithNSSE/2009_05_12_TipsOnMaximizingValue/Comparison_Groups.pdf)

**Sound:**

- Please turn up your computer speakers or plug in your headphones to listen to the Webinar.
- For best results, close all other applications – they may interfere with audio feed for Webinar.

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- If this does not work, the Webinar is being recorded. You will be able to view the session on the NSSE Web site several days after the live session.

**Using the Chat feature:**


- The Chat window will be available throughout the presentation for participants to interact with presenters and each other. Please use chat to pose questions, suggest a resource etc.

### Tips on Maximizing the Value of Your NSSE Institutional Report: Customizing Comparison Groups

**Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director  
and Rick Shoup, Research Analyst**



This Webinar will provide some strategies and guidelines for identifying the most relevant, appropriate institutions for comparison from the available pool of current-year NSSE participants. Innovative strategies for customization, involving campus stakeholders in the selection, and four approaches to building comparison groups (peer groups, aspirational groups, overlap groups, and pre-existing groups) will be discussed. The ability to customize these groups to suit your assessment needs is an important way to ensure the usefulness of your NSSE reports.



### Overview of Webinar

- Introduction to comparison groups and NSSE Institutional Report customization
- Review approaches to selecting comparison groups
- Illustrate value of customizing groups
- Suggestions for making selections
- Your ideas and questions

### Importance of Customization and Comparison

**Customization and comparison useful to data informed decision-making.**

- Compare institutional performance against meaningful groups
- Valuable in the accreditation process
- Useful for benchmarking and planning
- Helps bolster justification for budget requests, decisions about programming, teaching and learning initiatives etc.

### NSSE Report Customization

Over the last 3 years, NSSE has increased the degree to which institutions can customize their *Institutional Report* through selecting their comparison groups.

**ALL 3 groups customizable!**

Faculty	Institution	Class	NSSEville State			Mid East Public			Carnegie Class			NSSE 2008			
			Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE	
Academic and Intellectual Experiences															
1. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	CLQUEST	ACL	FY	2.94	2.61	***	.40	2.64	***	.35	2.78	***	.18		
			SR	3.25	2.90	***	.39	2.91	***	.39	3.07	***	.21		

### Participant Feedback

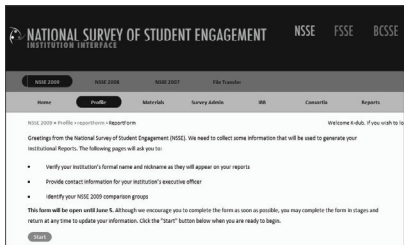
**Can you name one of your comparison groups?**



**Please respond via the Chat**

## NSSE Report Customization

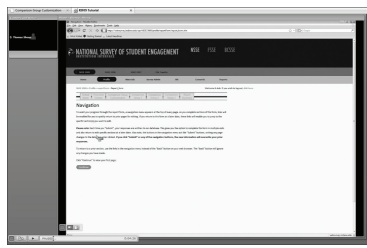
NSSE collects preferences for your Institutional Report, including comparison groups via the Report Information Form --- See the Institution Interface



The screenshot shows the 'National Survey of Student Engagement Institution Interface' with a navigation menu (Home, Profile, Materials, Survey Admin, IRB, Consortia, Reports) and a form titled 'Customizing Your NSSE Institutional Report'. The form includes instructions and a 'Start' button.

## Resource: RIF Tutorial

Tutorial describing the mechanics of completing the RIF via the Institution Interface



The screenshot shows a tutorial page with a 'Navigation' section and a 'Click here later to start tutorial' button at the bottom right.

## Resource: Guide to Selecting Comparison Groups

- Document provides some guidelines to keep in mind as you make your selections.

**Customizing Your NSSE Institutional Report: A Guide to Selecting Your Comparison Groups**

A key benefit of your NSSE Institutional Report is the ability to customize up to three comparison groups. NSSE enables you to identify the most relevant, appropriate institutions from the available pool of current-year NSSE participants. This document provides some guidelines to keep in mind as you make your selections.

**Selecting NSSE Comparison Groups**  
NSSE reports specific to each institution alongside the results of three comparison groups. To customize all of your comparison groups, do the following:  
(1) Identify specific institutions from a list of all current-year NSSE participants.  
(2) Select institutions using criteria from IPEDS, Barron's and the Carnegie Classification.  
(3) Begin with the institutional criteria, then add or remove specific institutions to refine your group, or (3) accept default groups (see the table) provided by NSSE which provide relevant comparisons for most institutions.

**Default Comparison Groups**  
Default group 1 - For institutions not participating in a NSSE consortium, this group contains all current-year NSSE institutions in the same geographic region (New England, Mid East, Great Lakes, Plains, Southwest, Southeast, South Atlantic, West, Midwest, Far West, Study Area, US Service Schools) and sector (Private/2-yr, For-credit institutions, this column contains results for the other comparison members and is not customizable).  
Default group 2 - All current-year NSSE institutions sharing your institution's Basic Carnegie Classification (Doc RI-VI, Doc RI-IV, Doc ORU, Master's, Master's/Postdoc, Bar/CL, Bar/CL/MS).  
Default group 3 - All current-year U.S. NSSE institutions (Canadian universities receive all Canadian and U.S. institutions).

[Click here to open the Guide](#)


## Stats on Comparison Selections

### NSSE 2007 Selected Comparison Groups

- 57% of institutions customized at least one comparison group.
- Most institutions selected specific schools from a list of current-year participants. 79% selected institutions by name from list, & 21% used criteria.
- Average comparison group size** when selected from a list was **9 institutions**. NSSE requires a comparison group to include at least 6 institutions.
- Most popular default comparisons were Basic Carnegie Classification & all current-year NSSE institutions.

## NSSE Report Customization

- In NSSE 2008, **3 out of 4 participating institutions** customized at least one comparison group.
- Substantial increase between 2007 and 2008 in number of institutions customizing groups.
- However, many institutions are accepting NSSE-defined defaults, are selecting large, unrefined groups, and are not taking advantage of labeling comparison columns.



**How might your institution use customization options more effectively??**

## NSSE's Institutional Comparisons

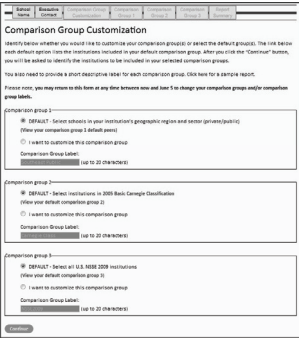
**In your NSSE Institutional Report you can customize up to 3 comparison groups. Here are some options for creating comparison groups.**

- Identify specific institutions from a list of all current-year NSSE participants.
- Select peers based on characteristics from IPEDS, Barron's Guide, and the Carnegie Classification.
- Begin with institutional criteria and refine your group by adding or removing specific schools.
- Accept default groups provided by NSSE with relevant institutional comparisons.

## Building Comparison Groups

- **Your choices:**
  - Accept NSSE defaults
  - Create customized groups for all 3 columns
  - Select a mix of custom groups and defaults

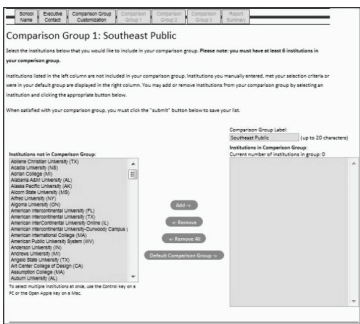
(note: if your institution is in a consortia/system, this is your 1<sup>st</sup> comparison column)



## Building Comparison Groups

- **Your choices:**
  - Accept NSSE defaults (view lists on the RIF)
    - Group 1 = Geographic region and sector (pub/private)\*
    - Group 2 = 2005 Basic Carnegie
    - Group 3 = All U.S. NSSE participating institutions
  - \* or consortium/system
  - Create customized groups for all 3 columns.
  - Select a mix of custom groups and defaults.
- **Benefits of customization vs. accepting defaults**
  - Increases comparability and credibility of comparison results;
  - Opportunity to expand investment of stakeholders; Advances institutional awareness of aspirants or like institutions.

## Create customized groups for all 3 columns – You need at least 6 institutions!



## Building Comparison Groups

### Four Approaches to Building Comparison Groups

1. **Peer groups** – Identify a group of most similar institutions to evaluate performance.
2. **Aspiration groups** – Compare your institution with exemplar colleges and universities on some key dimension.
3. **Overlap/Competitor groups** – Evaluate an institution's performance with colleges and universities that overlap or compete for students, faculty, and/or other financial resources.
4. **Pre-existing groups** – Assess an institution with other schools that share common missions and goals (religious affiliation, HBCUs), athletic conferences, university system, classification-based for national or regional reporting

## NSSE Comparison Group Examples

1. **Peers Groups:** Most similar based on Carnegie classification, size, educational offerings, etc.
  - **University of Maryland, Baltimore County** – Chose 11 science-technology peers from top 30% of schools that awarded degrees in science or technology.
2. **Aspiration groups** – Exemplar institutions on some key dimension.
  - **Stevenson University** – Conducted a benchmarking study and created a list of 10 peer and 10 aspiration institutions. Their group was any of those 20 institutions which were current NSSE participants.

## NSSE Comparison Group Examples

3. **Overlap Groups:** Institutions that overlap for students, faculty, and other resources.
  - **Drexel University** – Chose 6 institutions with graduation and retention rates that are within 10% of Drexel's and that had higher admissions cross applications.
4. **Pre-existing groups** – Institutions that share common missions and goals.
  - **Hendrix College** – Selected 7 schools that are members of the Associated Colleges of the South.
  - **Huston-Tillotson University** – Chose 19 colleges and universities that are fellow HBCUs as identified by the "White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities" Web site.

## NSSE Comparison Group Labels

**Sample Comparison Column Labels:**

NSSE 2008 Mean Comparisons  
NSSEville College

NSSEville College compared with:

NSSEville College	Private Lib Arts Colleges	Great Lakes Colleges	NYCollege Comps
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NSSE 2008 Mean Comparisons  
NSSEville University

NSSEville University compared with:

NSSEville University	20,000+ Students	Selective Research U	Deans Choice
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NSSE 2008 Mean Comparisons  
Big State University

Big State University compared with:

Big State University	AAUDE Consortium	Competitive Peers	Urban Peers
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## Building Comparison Groups


### Suggestions for Building Comparison Groups

- 1. Involve stakeholders** – Solicit input about selecting comparison groups. Administrators and faculty who are interested in how your results compare to peers will improve the utility and impact of your NSSE reports.
- 2. Consider comparison group size** – A mix of both small and large groups may be best. Smaller groups offer more specific comparisons. Larger groups are more stable.
- 3. Comparison group stability** – Using similar comparison groups over time is valuable in evaluating change.
- 4. Keep it simple** – Selecting one or two dimensions such as size, region, or educational offering will ease eventual interpretations of results.

## Approach to Building Comparison Groups

### 1. Involve Stakeholders in Selection

- **Texas State University- San Marcos** circulated list of current-year NSSE participants to deans who then selected institutions to include in their customized groups. This helped build interest in successful administration, and when results arrived – deans and faculty were curious about how they performed against their selected comparators



## Create an Informal Consortium Comparison Group

### 2. Is your institution affiliated with a group of institutions, research project, common mission?


(examples: Associated Colleges of the Midwest, Appalachian College Association, Campus Compact)

- **Example:** Institutions affiliated with “Colleges That Change Lives” want to create a 2009 comparison group of CTCL member schools.
- **Action:** CTCL sent email to members schools encouraging members to create a comparison group consisting of CTCL schools participating in NSSE (sent attached list). Column label: “Colleges That Change Lives.” CTCL intends to discuss common concerns or strengths revealed in comparison results.

## Approach to Building Comparison Groups

### 3. Which groups, departments, current campus initiatives might want comparison results?

- **Example:** Institution participating in *Foundations of Excellence* project wanted to compare their FY students results to students at institutions with established First Year Experience programs. FOE team selected 8 comparison institutions with similar institutional characteristics, strong first year experience programs, and exemplary FY retention results. Results helped team identify strengths and shortcomings in their first year program.



## Group Size and Variability

### 4. A mix of both small and large groups may be best.

- ✓ **Smaller groups offer more specific comparisons.**  
**Example:** Selective Privates NE - Amherst College; Bryn Mawr College ; Middlebury College; Mount Holyoke College; Smith College; Swarthmore College; Wellesley College; Williams College;
- ✓ **Larger groups are more stable.**  
**Example:** Consistent Urban University comparison group

Bellevue University	Bellevue	NE	Pace University	New York	NY
Boise State University	Boise	ID	SUNY-Buffalo State College	Buffalo	NY
Colorado State University-Pueblo	Pueblo	CO	University of Arkansas at Little Rock	Little Rock	AR
CUNY Herbert H. Lehman College	Bronx	NY	University of Baltimore	Baltimore	MD
DePaul University	Chicago	IL	University of Colorado Denver	Denver	CO
Florida International University	Miami Dobbis	FL	University of Massachusetts Boston	Boston	MA
Mercy College	Ferry	NY	University of Nebraska at Omaha	Omaha	NE
Metropolitan State College of Denver	Denver	CO	University of Washington Tacoma	Tacoma	WA
New Jersey City University	Jersey City	NJ	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Milwaukee	WI
Norfolk State University	Norfolk	VA	Wichita State University	Wichita	KS
Northeastern Illinois University	Chicago	IL	Wright State University	Dayton	OH

## Considerations for Selecting Groups

- 5. You can always compare to NSSE cohort!** Just reference Grand Means and Frequency comparisons -- available on NSSE website

[www.nsse.iub.edu/NSSE\\_2008\\_Results/results.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2008_Results/results.cfm)

Demographic Views	Benchmarks
Frequencies by Gender	Codebook
Means by Gender	Benchmark Descriptive Statistics - First-Years
Frequencies by Major (First-year)	Benchmark Descriptive Statistics - Seniors
Frequencies by Major (Senior)	Executive Snapshot (NSSEville State example)
Means by Major (First-year)	
Means by Major (Senior)	

## Considerations for Comparison Groups: Benchmarking

### Benchmark approaches:

- 1. Normative** - compare your students' responses to those of students at other colleges and universities.
- 2. Criterion** - compare your school's performance against a predetermined value or level appropriate for your students, given your institutional mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, etc.
- 3. Longitudinal** - compare your student's scores over time

### Corresponding selection considerations:

- 1. Normative** - important to tailor groups to ensure comparability, meaning, appropriateness
- 2. Criterion** - use comparison group results simply to inform the identification of reasonable criterion values; again groups should be tailored to achieve institutional objectives
- 3. Longitudinal** - least related to comparison groups selection since this comparison is within the institution; however, the ability to do mean comparisons over time is compromised due to different institutional participation schedules

## Final Considerations

- Effect of customization on interpreting results - will multiple comparisons be confusing? Who decides what to report to whom?
- Potential to create tailored reports
  - Report comp column results to specific audiences
  - Example:* Orientation & Admissions staff might be most interested in results for FY students compared to customized "Admissions Overlap" group
- Scan the institutional environment. What comparison data might be needed?
  - Example:* AACSB accreditation; Foundations of Excellence involvement; Strategic Planning initiatives, Mission review

## Discussion

- What comparison groups has your institution found useful?
- What approach did you take to identify relevant comparison groups?
- What else could NSSE do to support your efforts?



## NSSE Webinars

### Recent Webinars - Recordings Available on NSSE Web Site

**Digging Deeper** series of Webinars presented in April by NSSE research analysts,  
<http://nsse.iub.edu/webinars/archives.cfm>

- Core Concepts
- Intermediate Concepts
- Advanced Use: Multi-year Analysis

### Future Webinar topics include:

- June 22** - Using high impact activities to maximize student gains
- August 18** - Integrating NSSE results across academic/support departments
- October 13** - Linking NSSE data with other institutional data.

Complete listing at [www.nsse.iub.edu/webinars](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/webinars)