The Updated NSSE Survey

After years of evidence-based and collaborative testing, the updated NSSE survey is official. While survey changes range from minor adjustments to entirely new content, the instrument maintains NSSE’s signature focus on diagnostic and actionable information related to effective educational practice.

Why Update NSSE?

After more than a decade in the field, we know more about what matters to student success, institutional improvement efforts, and properties of the NSSE survey itself. Moreover, as higher education faces increasing demands for assessment data and other evidence to improve educational quality, NSSE must stay relevant to current issues and concerns.

New and Updated Content

Sets of new and updated items have been rigorously tested and are grouped within ten Engagement Indicators in broad areas including:

Academic Challenge
- Higher-Order Learning
- Reflective and Integrative Learning
- Learning Strategies
- Quantitative Reasoning

Learning With Peers
- Collaborative Learning
- Discussions With Diverse Others

Experiences With Faculty
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Effective Teaching Practices

Campus Environment
- Quality of Interactions
- Supportive Environment

Plus, new summary measures of reading and writing have been created along with a new High-Impact Practices report on participation in enriching activities such as learning communities, service-learning, internships and field experiences, research with a faculty member, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences.

How Has the Survey Changed?

Compared to NSSE 2012, about a quarter of the items are new, and nearly the same proportion is unchanged. Of the half that was changed, an equal number were modified in major or minor ways. Of course, it was necessary to delete some items to make room for new content. An item-by-item comparison showing how the survey was updated—indicating items unchanged, slightly modified, significantly altered, and deleted—is available on our Web site: nsse.iub.edu/nsse-update

New Items

The updated survey introduces valuable new content to enrich institutional assessment efforts. Here are some examples of new items:

Quantitative Reasoning

How often have you ...
- Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)
- Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)

Reflective and Integrative Learning

How often have you ...
- Connected your learning to societal problems or issues
- Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge

View the updated survey at
nsse.iub.edu/links/surveys
Supportive Environment

How much does your institution emphasize ... 

- Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)
- Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues

Teaching Practices

To what extent have your instructors...

- Clearly explained course goals and requirements
- Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress

Learning Strategies

How often have you...

- Identified key information from reading assignments
- Reviewed your notes after class
- Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials

Collaborative Learning

How often have you...

- Asked another student to help you understand course material
- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students

These are only some examples of new content. To see the entire updated survey, visit our Web site.

nsse.iub.edu/links/surveys

Topical Modules:

Additional Question Sets

New customization options for participating institutions include appending topical modules—or short sets of questions—on focused topics such as academic advising, civic engagement, experiences with diversity, writing, and technology. NSSE will develop additional modules for future administrations of the survey.

nsse.iub.edu/html/modules.cfm

FSSE and BCSSE

FSSE has been updated to complement NSSE’s changes and launched in a new format that combines both course-based and typical-student questions—and that also introduces topical modules.

fsse.iub.edu/fsse-update

BCSSE has also been updated with new and modified items to increase alignment with NSSE for a more comprehensive analysis of the first-year experience.

bcsse.iub.edu/bcsse-update

How Do the Changes Affect Comparisons With Prior-Year Results?

Even the best surveys must be periodically revised and updated, affecting multi-year analyses such as trend studies or pre/post designs. Although many NSSE survey items remain unchanged, others have been modified and a few have been dropped, limiting longitudinal comparability of individual questions and historical benchmarks.

While some new results are not directly comparable to past results, institutions can still evaluate longitudinal questions. For instance, if previous comparison group results indicate above-average performance in a particular area, institutions can still gauge whether they outperform the same or a similar comparison group.

We are confident that these changes enhance NSSE’s value to institutions. NSSE will continue to provide useful resources and work with participating institutions to ensure maximum benefit from survey participation.

“At a time when US standards for higher education are being evaluated in a competitive global context, NSSE data provide real insights into the qualities of the campus learning environment.”

—Molly Corbett Broad, President, American Council on Education

Additional Information, Comments, and Questions

Contact us via email (nsse@indiana.edu) or phone (812-856-5824).