



NSSE Position Statement: Using Student Engagement Results for College Rankings

Rankings of colleges and universities are a fact of life. While the organizations that produce rankings have every right to do so, it's important that institutions that participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) understand that the NSSE project discourages the use of NSSE results in any way that compromises the integrity of the project or undermines the growing confidence in the survey as a tool for institutional improvement and accountability. For this reason we wish to clarify NSSE's position on using student engagement data for college rankings.

1. **NSSE does not support using NSSE results for rankings.** The NSSE National Advisory Board and NSSE co-sponsors -- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning -- believe that rankings reduce complex dimensions of institutional life to a single indicator and are, therefore, inherently flawed as a tool for accountability and improvement, whatever the information on which they are based. Such comparisons become even more problematic in the case of schools with very different profiles in terms of percentages of students who are enrolled full- or part-time, transfers, and majoring in various fields.
2. **Whether a participating institution shares their student engagement results with ranking organizations is up to the institution.** Consistent with the NSSE participation agreement, NSSE does not make institutional scores available to third parties. Institutions may do so if they wish as stated in the NSSE Participation Agreement. Some people see requests for institutional results from the NSSE survey as an opportunity for NSSE institutions to help educate the public about the value of student engagement as a new metric for examining collegiate quality. At the same time, others are concerned that these requests might be the first wave of an effort to eventually use NSSE data in rankings. It's possible that any perceived link between NSSE and organizations that produce rankings at this stage in NSSE's development could undermine the growing confidence that participating institutions have in NSSE. Thus, while organizations are certainly entitled to request NSSE results, NSSE neither encourages nor discourages institutions to supply it.
3. **NSSE does support the use of student engagement data to invent approaches to accountability that enable thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons while encouraging and celebrating institutional diversity.** Several efforts are underway to examine how NSSE data might be used to identify different groups of institutions with distinctive patterns of student engagement. NSSE is developing policies and procedures by which scholars and policy makers will be able to examine aggregated NSSE results in ways that increase our understanding of collegiate quality and document improvement strategies that enhance student learning and improve institutional effectiveness.