Promoting Engaged Learning at KU: Lessons from NSSE
KU Teaching Summit - August 18, 2009

Jillian Kinzie
NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice
www.nsse.iub.edu
Context for a Commitment to Learning

We all want the same thing: an undergraduate experience that results in high levels of learning and personal development for all students.

For a variety of reasons, most of them good, college and university faculty these days are more interested in the learning processes of their students than ever before.

John Tagg, 2008
Environment for Engaged Learning at KU

- Vibrant and supportive learning environment
- Pride in effective teaching and strengthening undergraduate learning
- Commitment to creating exceptional experiences for students through curricular and co-curricular offerings
- Campus traditions promote persistence and student success
The NSSE Challenge

How to use data to improve quality in undergraduate education

✓ Document strengths
✓ Identify opportunities for improvement
✓ Motivate wider use of effective practices
✓ Strengthen the learning environment
Why NSSE?

To shift the conversation about college quality

*Away from*
- Reputation
- Resources
- Research activity

*Toward*
- Undergraduate teaching and learning
Why NSSE? (cont’d)

- Direct assessment of learning is problematic
  - Diversity of institutions and missions
  - Diversity of fields of study
  - Considerable measurement challenges
  - Unintended behavioral responses

- Focus instead on *effective practices*
  - Grounded in research on student learning
  - Easy to document
  - Difficult to “game”
NSSE’s Key Aims

- To enrich the discourse about **college quality**
  - Shift the focus to teaching & learning
  - Proven effective educational practices

- To provide **diagnostic information** to support the improvement of undergraduate education
  - Actionable information
  - Meaningful comparisons
What is Student Engagement?

The extent to which students engage in and are exposed to empirically proven, effective educational practices

- Activities and practices shown to be related to desired educational outcomes
Yes, but what *is* Engagement?

- Challenging academic work
  - High expectations
  - Deep approaches to learning
- Quality involvement with faculty
- Enriching activities and high-impact practices
  - Active and collaborative learning
  - Powerful educational experiences
- Supportive peers, faculty, staff, campus
Why Does Engagement Matter?

The time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development.
Conceptual & Empirical Foundations

Time on task (Tyler, 1930s)
Quality of effort (Pace, 1960s & 70s)
Student involvement (Astin, 1984)
Academic & social integration (Tinto, 1980s & 90s)
Good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)
College impact (Pascarella, 1985)
Student engagement (Kuh, 1991, 2005)
Good Practices in Undergraduate Education

✓ Student-faculty contact
✓ Active learning
✓ Prompt feedback
✓ Time on task
✓ High expectations
✓ Respect for diverse learning styles
✓ Cooperation among students

Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005
Implications for Institutions

Because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement.

NSSE Survey Content

- Academic activities and experiences
- Academic challenge
- Reading and writing
- Active learning
- Cognitive tasks emphasized in courses
- Enriching educational experiences
- Co-curricular activities
- Campus relationships
- Time usage
- Institutional emphases
- Cognitive and noncognitive gains
- Satisfaction
- Demographic and enrollment characteristics
What Have We Learned from NSSE?
Lessons about Effective Educational Practice

1. Engagement benefits all students, but *some students benefit more.*

2. Deep approaches to learning are worth fostering.

3. Some educational activities have greater impact on student learning than others.

4. Variation in engagement is greater *within* than between institutions.
NSSE Finding: Compensatory Effect of Engagement

✓ Engagement has a compensatory effect on FY grades & persistence to the second year.

✓ Historically underserved students tend to benefit more from engagement than majority students.
Educational Activities that Matter to Success in the First Year

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class on assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project as part of course
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with faculty outside class
- Received prompt feedback on your academic performance
- Worked harder than you thought
- Worked with faculty on activities outside coursework (committees, student life, etc.)
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with others
- Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and those who differ from you - religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
Deep Approaches to Learning: The kind of learning we want for all students

- From AAC&U: We “hope for students to engage intellectually and seriously with what is taught... [leading to] *deep learning* ...the ability to defend positions...write well and think clearly... to develop rational and reflective minds, open to continuous learning...” (*Greater Expectations* pp. 8-9)
Deep Approaches to Learning

**Deep Learning** – identification of concepts, questioning assumptions, considering applications, and implications

vs.

**Surface Learning** – memorizing details, replication; or **Strategic Learning** – focused on making good grades, choosing easiest way out, spends time trying to master

(Marton & Saljo)
Deep Approaches to Learning

- Attend to the underlying meaning as well as surface content
- Integrate and synthesize different ideas, sources of information
- Discern patterns in evidence or phenomena
- Apply knowledge in different situations
- View issues from multiple perspectives
- Increase in learning-centered activities that foster deeper levels of understanding and application for global work and citizenship

Findings about Deep Approaches to Learning

- Associated with engagement in other areas, including enriching educational experiences, time spent preparing for class, time spent on co-curricular activities

- Strong relationship between deep approaches and self-reported gains in intellectual and social development

- Moderate relationship between deep learning and satisfaction
Growing evidence that “high-impact practices” provide substantial educational benefits to students.

Findings from NSSE and AAC&U: High-Impact Practices
High Impact Activities in NSSE

- Learning Communities
- Service Learning
- Co-ops & internships
- Research with a Faculty Member
- Study Abroad
- Writing-Intensive (2008)
- Culminating Senior Experience
Writing Intensive Practices (NSSE 2008)

- Amount of writing positively correlated with engagement – the more students wrote, the more they engaged in active & collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and deep learning.

- Good writing practices:
  - pre-writing (feedback on ideas);
  - clear expectations;
  - higher-order writing - analysis & argument;
  - collaboration and review with classmates;
  - integrated media (numerical data, visual content)
Writing Practice Findings

- Writing enhances learning by driving student engagement.
- Writing that contributes most substantially to learning is that which engages students in deep learning activities – higher order learning, integrative & reflective learning.
- The more students are asked to write in ways that involve deep learning activities, the more writing enhances their learning & development.

High Impact Activities

- All are associated with desirable learning and personal development outcomes.
- Design features matter.
- Not all students take part.
Why Are High-impact Activities Effective?

They increase the odds that students will...

✓ Invest time and effort
✓ Interact with faculty and peers about learning
✓ Experience diversity
✓ Be “intentional,” active learners
✓ Discover relevance of their learning through real-world applications
Implications for Institutions

Make it possible for every student to participate in \textbf{at least} two high-impact activities:

- First year
- Later, in the major
Implications for Institutions

- One high-impact activity in the First Year
  - First-year seminars
  - Learning communities
  - Service learning

- One Later, in the Major
  - Study abroad
  - Student-faculty research
  - Field placement or internship
  - Capstone project
Quality is promoted as an institutional attribute. A seductive notion, reinforced by:

- Our own rhetoric and institutional narratives
- Quality assurance processes
- Popular assessments, including NSSE

But, is quality really an institutional attribute? Uniform across students?
To understand quality...

Don’t look in comparison to similar or competitor institutions.
Instead, look within.
NSSE Scores Vary More *Within* an Institution than Between

**Allocation of benchmark score variation**

- Between institutions
- Within institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LAC FY</th>
<th>LAC Sr</th>
<th>ACL FY</th>
<th>ACL Sr</th>
<th>SFI FY</th>
<th>SFI Sr</th>
<th>EEE FY</th>
<th>EEE Sr</th>
<th>SCE FY</th>
<th>SCE Sr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students attending the same institution differ from each more than the average student at that institution differs from those at other institutions.
Examine engagement patterns within KU. How do experiences differ by major, student subgroups, race, SES etc. Who are the least engaged students? What can you do?
## BA attainment rates by SES quartiles and ACT/SAT score bands for 12\textsuperscript{th} grade students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1200 – 1600</th>
<th>1100 – 1199</th>
<th>1000 – 1099</th>
<th>800 – 999</th>
<th>400 – 799</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top SES</strong></td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2\textsuperscript{nd} SES</strong></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3\textsuperscript{rd} SES</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bottom SES</strong></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the qualities of an engaged campus, department or program?

How might KU more actively promote engaged learning for all students?
What does it mean to be an engaged campus?

An engaged campus (or department or program) is one in which...

- everyone embraces the challenge of continually doing better for students.
- people actively collaborate to understand more about the student experience and work together to design better approaches and programs.
- faculty seek out student perspectives on their own learning, and see them as critical voices in teaching & learning and ongoing conversations about quality.
An engaged campus, cont’d

An engaged campus (or department or program) is one in which...

- educators are actively involved in asking questions about the experience of their students, talking together about the impact of that experience on what students know and can do,

- demanding more of themselves and their students,

- digging deeper, trying new approaches, asking why and how, and always learning from their own experience as educators.
An engaged campus, cont’d

- Puts money where it makes a difference in student engagement

- Notably, engaged campuses put more money into “academic support” – category that includes: teaching & learning centers, faculty development, writing support, other academic support services

“…in professional baseball it still matters less how much you have than how well you spend it”
Promising Signs of an Engaged Campus

- Faculty from range of disciplines and fields treating their classrooms as sites for inquiry, consulting pedagogical literature, systematically exploring their students’ learning, and doing so in ways that not only improve their own classrooms, but can inform the work of colleagues.
Promising Signs of an Engaged Campus cont’d

- Interest in data about learning at the course, program, department and institution level.

- Faculty exploring their students’ learning in their own classrooms also need a sense of larger context (such as: what happens to those students when they move to the next course in the sequence) to make meaning of what they’re seeing and to think about what might be done differently or better.

- Need more educators using a wider range of good tools and methods to understand more deeply how to help all learners learn.
To Consider: Promoting Engaged Learning

- How might you induce students to get engaged?

- Who are your least engaged students? How can you narrow the gap between the least and most engaged?

- Which “high impact” practices do you want to learn more about or structure into more KU students experiences?

- How might you assess students approaches to learning and create more opportunities for students to use deep approaches to learning?
Final thought on Promoting Engaged Learning...

“We don’t want students to go through school, but for school to go through them.”

Faculty member, Fayetteville State University