

How Prospective Students Can Use National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Results from Current Students to Choose a College

As you discuss your educational choices, whether you are a student looking for a college or one who is deciding where to continue your studies, you have probably been asked by relatives, friends, or people you might have just met: “You are considering Alverno? Well, how is Alverno doing?” When we at Alverno answer that question we also try to say: “How are Alverno **students** doing?” We know that **news about current students** doing well helps students make enrollment choices.

So we take up these familiar questions.

**What is Alverno’s National Reputation
as a College?**

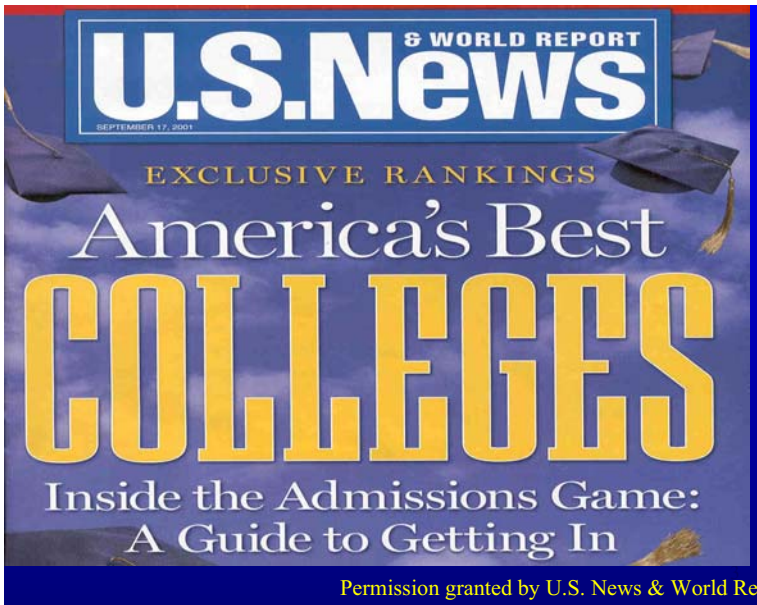
**How Do Alverno Students Experience Learning
at Alverno?**

**How Can Alverno Use Survey Findings
to Enhance Enrollment?¹**

**How Can Prospective Students Use Survey
Findings to Choose a College?**

Alverno Institute, General Session
January 15, 2002

What is Alverno's national reputation as a college?
There are many sources. Here is one.



Many of you know that every fall, you'll find this one issue of *U.S. News* to be almost as popular as the *National Inquirer*.

Why? Because Americans like rankings? Perhaps. Because students who are choosing a college or choosing to continue their studies want to know what colleges are best for them? Yes.

How is Alverno doing in *U.S. News* rankings?

Alverno has been consistently ranked
in the top tier of regional liberal arts
colleges in the Midwest

Source: *U.S. News and World Report* 2001 edition of [America's Best Colleges](#), September 17, 2001

That's good news. But given the evidence we have in *Learning That Lasts*¹, a book published by Jossey-Bass in 2000 about how well our students learn, we know Alverno students judge their education here as highly effective, during and even after college. We don't think *U.S. News* measures what is most important in choosing a college, that is, how students are learning. Others agree.

The New York Times Business Day section

'Best' List For Colleges By U.S. News
Is Under Fire

By Alex Kuczynski
Monday, August 20, 2001

This *New York Times* article says "'Best' List for Colleges by US News is Under Fire." The fine print suggests that students and parents who are choosing a college should rely much more on the results from a new measure of student engagement in learning instead. This new measure is the National Survey of Student Engagement, known as NSSE, pronounced "Nessie".

Why Use a New Survey, NSSE, to Choose a College?

- **U.S. News surveys colleges.** Rankings are based on characteristics of a college (prestige, financial resources) and who gets admitted (student selectivity).
- **NSSE surveys students.** Policy-makers and parents want to know whether students are learning at a college as a result of the quality of educational practices. Students want to know what students there do.

Why use a new survey, NSSE, to choose a college?

The old measure surveys various colleges. This new measure surveys current students at those colleges.

NSSE offers the opportunity for changing how students and parents choose colleges:

- from institutional prestige, resources offered, and who attends
- to the quality of the education that students actually experience

What kinds of questions does NSSE ask students? The next slide shows sample questions.

National Survey of Student Engagement Sample NSSE Questions for Students*

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)

* 83 questions (69 substantive, 14 demographic)

Notice that the survey asks students how they contribute to their learning, and what kind of educational experiences they have had.

Why does Alverno participate in the National NSSE survey? Alverno faculty and academic staff said “The information could help us do even better.”

- Alverno faculty generally endorse the 83 survey questions because NSSE focuses on how engaged students are in learning
- Alverno faculty generally agree that the *5 effective educational practices* that serve as NSSE benchmarks should help define a college’s contribution to the actual educational experiences of students

Five Effective Educational Practices: NSSE Benchmarks*

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student Interactions With Faculty
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

* Each benchmark of effective educational practice summarizes student responses across 6 to 11 questions

What are those 5 effective educational practices?

- **Level of Academic Challenge**
This means asking students, †“What kinds of academic work are you engaged in and how often? What do you think your coursework expected you to do: memorize information? analyze basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory? synthesize and organize ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships? make judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods? apply theories or concepts to practical problems in new situations?”
- **Active and Collaborative Learning**
How often did you ask questions in class, contribute to class discussions, or work on group projects?
- **Student Interactions with Faculty**
How often did you receive prompt feedback? How often did you talk about career plans with faculty?
- **Enriching Educational Experiences**
Have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own? Have you: studied abroad? completed foreign languages? conducted research with faculty? done an independent study?
- **Supportive Campus Environment**
How good are your relationships with students, faculty, support staff? How well does the campus environment help you cope with work and family responsibilities? How well does it help you succeed academically?

How do Alverno students experience learning on the 5 educational practices that research shows stimulate student engagement? What do students, their parents, spouses, or employers want to know?

Prospective students and their parents might ask:

- How do Alverno students experience learning on five educational practices compared with students at other colleges and universities?
- Compared with what NSSE researchers predict, based on Alverno institutional and student characteristics?

On this Alverno website, we're showing prospective students and their parents, spouses, or employers how to use survey results to choose any college.

As part of their work, Alverno faculty and academic staff have the complete findings on their "inside Alverno" site (U:\Shared\Data\Institute Handouts\Institute January 2002\). They also meet regularly to interpret the findings in detail and to discuss implications for pedagogy.

Who participated in the NSSE survey?

- ∑ 467 four-year colleges and universities participated
- ∑ 105,000 randomly selected first-year and senior students participated
- ∑ In Spring 2001, 239 randomly-selected Alverno students completed the survey, 55% of the 450 who NSSE surveyed, compared to a national response rate of 42%.

Alverno First-Year Percentiles Above...

<i>Effective Practice Benchmarks</i>	Bac-General	All NSSE	Beyond Prediction
Level of Academic Challenge	98 th	90 th	99 th
Active and Collaborative Learning	90 th	90 th	99 th
Student Interactions With Faculty Members	90 th	90 th	98 th
Enriching Educational Experiences	70 th	60 th	80 th
Supportive Campus Environment	90 th	90 th	99 th

Let's look at how first-year students compared. The 5 effective educational practices are in the left column. The numbers are percentiles and range from 1 to 100; the higher the percentile, the higher the college's score.

Notice that first-year student percentiles range from 60 to 99. Most of the percentiles are at 90 or above. When NSSE asks current first-year Alverno students, Alverno scores are above 60 to 99 percent of the scores of other participating colleges and universities.

For the column on the right, NSSE researchers considered various characteristics of institutions and their students to predict a college's score. In this comparison, Alverno scores are above 80 to 99 percent of scores at other colleges and universities.

Are Alverno faculty completely satisfied with these results? Not entirely. They noticed that Enriching Educational Experiences is at the 90th percentile for first-year students. They noted that students' responses showed that Alverno excels in fostering student interactions with those of differing beliefs, values, and backgrounds. However, they wondered whether Alverno offers enough opportunities for foreign language, independent study, research with faculty, and study abroad. Years ago, faculty decided that each Alverno student must demonstrate the ability, "Developing a Global Perspective," in order to graduate. They have also just created a new International Business Major for the weekend college time frame. However, based in part on NSSE results, Alverno faculty created a new International/Intercultural Center to strengthen the study abroad program for students.

Improving Opportunities for Study Abroad

- Alverno has had international students since the early 1950's
- Alverno's current international student program began in 1989
- In 2002, faculty created an international business major for the weekend college time frame
- In 2002, the college created the International/Intercultural Center

Alverno Senior Percentiles Above...

<i>Effective Practice Benchmarks</i>	Bac-General	All NSSE	Beyond Prediction
Level of Academic Challenge	99 th	90 th	99 th
Active and Collaborative Learning	99 th	90 th	99 th
Student Interactions With Faculty Members	60 th	60 th	90 th
Enriching Educational Experiences	80 th	70 th	90 th
Supportive Campus Environment	90 th	90 th	98 th

Here are the percentiles for seniors. Notice that again, numbers range from the 60th to the 99th percentile. Notice that most percentiles are at 90 or above.

When NSSE statistically uses or "factors in" institutional and student characteristics to predict how Alverno might do compared to other colleges and universities, Alverno scores are above 90 to 99 percent of the other institutions' scores.

Are Alverno faculty completely satisfied? Not entirely. Currently, faculty and academic staff are working on expanding the ways they interact with senior students outside of class. As they studied the findings together one morning in January, they noticed that Alverno faculty excelæ from the students' point of viewæat giving prompt feedback to both first-year and senior students. However, they also noticed that Alverno is at the 90th percentile for first-year students compared to the 60th percentile for senior students in interacting with faculty outside of class. While faculty noted that senior students are probably having more discussions with community professionals in internships than first-year students do, they met that afternoon to ask the following questions:

- How do I engage with students outside the classroom?
- In what settings do I have discussions with students inside and outside of class?
- What kinds of interactions do I have?
How do they differ in their quality, time, focus?

Even so, when NSSE asks current senior students, Alverno scores are above the 60th percentile of the scores of other participating institutions on Student Interactions with Faculty Members.

Nevertheless, Alverno faculty think that how they *continually improve learning for students* is some of the most important information students can have about a college. Evidence of a faculty continually improving in response to students is some of the best information a new student can have that *their* learning is a faculty's top priority.

Even so, an individual student might look at Alverno scores and say, "But will faculty help *me* in *my* learning?" Notice the next set of questions faculty asked themselves:

Given the diversity of our students,
their life experiences, and
the uniqueness of each student...

- **What kinds of interactions with students outside of class are most crucial?**
 - For student learning?
(beginning) (intermediate) (advanced)
 - For student retention?
(beginning) (intermediate)
- **What strategies enable these kinds of interactions?**

Faculty focus is on *each* student's learning at *each* point in their program. Faculty then generated the following strategies. They asked, "Which strategies could we improve?"

Example of Faculty Interpreting Results: *Large Group Summary*

Key issues and questions

- Availability of Models of Effective Interaction with Students Beyond the Classroom
- Modeling Building Community for our Students
- Fostering Informal Conversations that Elicit Diverse Perspectives on Learning
- Reinforcement of the Whole Person

The Chronicle of Higher Education

Colleges Praise New Source of Data, as Long as Their Scores Stay Secret

Institutions insist on confidentiality to participate in study of student engagement

By Thomas Bartlett
November 23, 2001

Some colleges put NSSE results on their website and some do not. *The Chronicle* encourages colleges to release results so students and parents can use results to choose colleges.

Here are some who do. Notice the wide range of colleges and universities that release their results.

Institutions that Release NSSE Results on their Website/Press

- UW-Stout
- UW-Green Bay
- Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
- Bowling Green State University
- University of Virginia State System (ROIE)
- Portland State University
- Antioch College
- Elon University
- College of William and Mary

In sum,

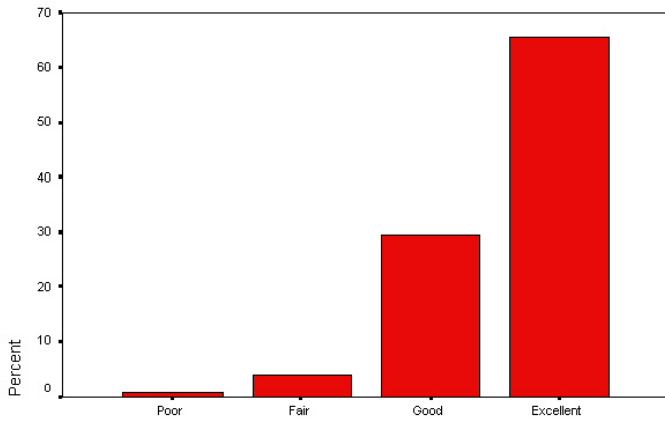
Why Spread the News?

- Alverno students are engaged in learning and we want to encourage prospective students to use that information to help them choose a college
- Public policy makers want to know
- Higher education wants Alverno to release their results because our results support the credibility of the survey
- NSSE has selected Alverno as an example for educational practices: **Level of Academic Challenge** and **Active and Collaborative Learning**

We can feel confident about spreading the news because NSSE results show that Alverno students are very positive about their learning experiences.

Evaluation of Entire Educational Experience

Ratings by Students



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Notice that most Alverno students evaluated their entire educational experience as excellent.

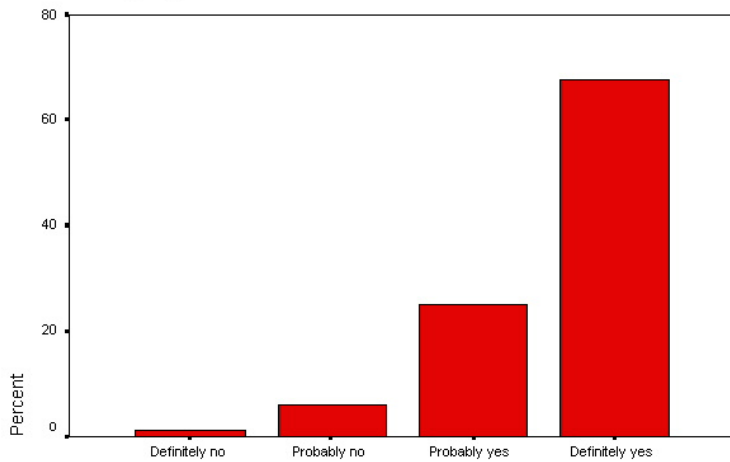
NSSE question

If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Probably no
- Definitely no

Would Attend Alverno Again?

Ratings by Students



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Again, Alverno students were most likely to say they would definitely attend Alverno again.

Alverno faculty and academic staff continually interpret and use these findings to look for areas to improve, because...

Retention and Graduation

- Student retention is strongly affected by academic advising and the quality of their learning experiences
- Student engagement in learning determines student educational outcomes

NSSE results are on our website so students can use them too!

Your comments: