

Assessment Matters

January, 31, 2006

Volume 1, Number 1

Noel Levitz Survey Shows

SUU Students Very Satisfied

Students at SUU are highly satisfied with campus life and academic programs according to the results of a survey conducted earlier this year. More than 780 students who responded to a Student Satisfaction Survey conducted by Noel-Levitz, a consulting firm that provides services to colleges and universities, rated SUU above the national average on virtually all items surveyed.

The Survey

Students rate each item in the inventory by the importance of the specific expectation as well as their satisfaction with how well the expectation is being met. A performance gap is then determined by calculating the difference between the importance rating and the satisfaction rating. Items with large per-



formance gaps indicate areas where students perceive their expectations are not being met adequately.

The Items

The Student Satisfaction Inventory collects student feedback on over 100 items related to campus life and academics. Items are grouped into 12 composite scales that address specific dimensions of students' educational experience. Each scale results in three different scores for each item. Importance score ratings reflect how strongly students feel

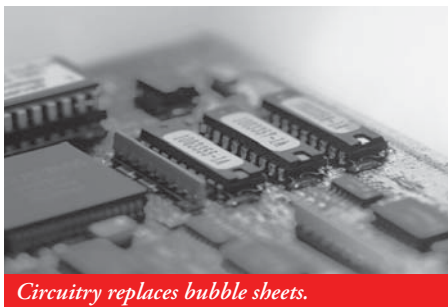
about the expectation. Satisfaction ratings show how satisfied students are that an institution has met the expectation and Performance Gap Scores show how well institutions meet the expectation overall.

The Results

SUU scored significantly higher in student satisfaction in eleven of the twelve areas assessed: Instructional Effectiveness, Concern for the Individual, Recruitment and Financial Aid, Safety and Security, Campus Climate, Registration Effectiveness, Student Centeredness, Campus Support Services, Service Excellence, Campus Life and Responsiveness to Diverse Populations. SUU scored at the national average in the area of Academic Advising. Detailed results of the Noel-Levitz survey are available on line at the Institutional Research web site (<http://www.suu.edu/general/ir/>).

Assessment Matters Newsletter On-line

The *Assessment Matters* newsletter is now available on-line at the Institutional Research web site (<http://www.suu.edu/general/ir/>). The publication which features news related to assessment and evaluation from across the SUU campus is published twice during the academic year by the Office of Institutional Research.



Circuitry replaces bubble sheets.

Return Rate High for On-line Course Evals

SUU conducted its course evaluations online for the first time this Fall, and found this approach to be highly successful.

The university received a 62 percent rate of return on electronic, course evaluations. That's 12 percentage points above the number of evaluations returned this time last year, and 15 percent higher than the average rate of return over the last three years.



IEAC Considers Plan

The SUU Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Committee is currently reviewing the university's newly adopted Strategic Plan and exploring implementation and assessment strategies.

The committee, chaired by Interim Associate Provost Lee Montgomery, will explore ways to monitor and document how effectively the units and programs of the University fulfill SUU's mission statement and its associated objectives.

In addition, the committee will prepare an annual report aimed at documenting the degree to which the University uses assessment results to improve educational programs and administrative and support services.

IR Factoid

“The Southern Utah University campus is comprised of 74 buildings with a combined capacity of 1,431,604 square feet.”

Source: SUU Fact Book

Leskes' 10 Tips for Improving Assessment

Representatives from SUU attended an annual “Educated Persons” conference held in Salt Lake City earlier this fall where keynote speaker Andrea Leskes detailed strategies for assessing general education outcomes. The following tips for better assessment, summarized from her presentation, serve as down-to-earth reminders for all members of the campus community.

1. Look for evidence of learning, not just statistics.

Worry about doing good, not looking good. Keep the focus of assessment on learning, not on surrogates of quality such as incoming SAT scores, the presence of certain types of programs, retention rates, etc. A learning environment that includes such options has a high potential to enhance learning, but there is no guarantee that it will, nor does an inventory of these inputs document student achievement.

2. Remain focused first on improving the quality of student learning, then on assuring its quality.

The debate has persisted for two decades: is assessment undertaken to improve student learning or to justify external demands for accountability? The answer has to be “for both,” but emphasis matters. While assessment for quality improvement can also serve quality assurance, an overriding focus on the latter is

unlikely to guide internal audiences toward the former.

3. Build on what is already occurring.

Most campuses, whether or not they have systematic programs of assessment in place, need not start assessment from scratch. An inventory is likely to reveal many individuals who are already examining student work, collecting data, overseeing portfolios, or gaining insights that then serve to improve various aspects of the educational experience.

4. Make assessment ongoing, not episodic.

The greatest benefits from assessment appear when the process is iterative and the effects (whether on curriculum, pedagogy, students, or faculty) cumulative. Too often, assessment is regarded as a matter of gathering some data, writing a report, and then forgetting about the entire exercise until the next request years later.

5. Divide the labor, share the responsibility.

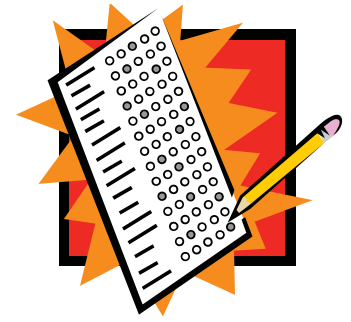
No student is the product of a single faculty member, a single course, or a single program. The logical conclusion is that assessment cannot be the responsibility of a single faculty member or program, either. The basic principle is to aim for collective responsibility but to divide the labor with the committee communicating frequently, enlisting help when needed and sharing its findings on a regular schedule.

6. Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Most campuses will not arrive at the definitive list of educational outcomes, will not develop ideal rubrics or have flawless teaching, a fully coherent curriculum, absolute consensus, or 100 percent student achievement at the highest level. In pursuit of perfection, madness lies, but fortunately perfection is not required. Even an imperfect process can yield useful results.

7. Prioritize.

Wise educators know that in teaching it often makes sense to scale back coverage to ensure deep understanding. In other words, less is more if it leads to learning that lasts. They know, similarly, that in



assessment, it is impossible to assess every outcome in every course; in fact trying to do so may well prove counterproductive. Well planned assessment means gathering the right amount of useful evidence—no more and no less.

8. Experiment, take risks, be creative.

Assessment offers an opportunity for a campus and its faculty to be self-reflective, inventive and pioneering. While assessment results may provide positive validation, they may also reveal deficiencies. A campus will do well not to shy away from bad news. The aim of assessment is not to prove but to improve. Assessments should be applied precisely where its insights can lead to the greatest positive changes.

9. Tell the whole story.

Assessment well done makes a wonderful story. Unfortunately, the telling often falls short by describing only the process and data; the concerns that motivated the inquiry, the choices made, and the insights gained should also be shared. Relating the whole story with its successes and failures is a way for the whole academy to bear witness to its serious responsibility for student learning.

10. Remember that assessment is both old and new.

Assessment is both old and new. It attaches new meanings to old vocabulary and new purposes to familiar techniques. Assessment builds on academic traditions but raises them to the next power. For example, assessment uses the format of department or committee meetings, but asks faculty members to supplement individual impressions with evidence and analysis. While building on the academy's traditions, assessment fundamentally challenges habitual ways of doing business and conventional academic values.

“Quote”

“The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge.”

Thomas Berger

