



Context for EER Project on Student Engagement

NSSE: the National Survey of Student Engagement is a standardized measure of student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. Survey items on *The National Survey of Student Engagement* represent empirically confirmed "good practices" in undergraduate education. That is, they reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college.

"The cornerstones upon which...(our educational programs rest)...are (1) [Strategic Priority #1](#) of the *Strategic Plan for the Future*, "believing in the primacy of student learning, we will continue to develop high-quality learning environments both in and outside of the classroom," and (2) the [Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education](#). Working to implement our first strategic priority has animated the campus for years, because it is ultimately what the University is all about—teaching and learning and the recognition that it occurs in many dimensions of students' lives. Our second cornerstone grew directly out of efforts by a number of groups to define what constituted good teaching. We embraced the Seven Principles because these are proven practices that allowed students to succeed.

"The Seven Principles are so important to the campus that they now inform our General Education Program; they are embedded in our retention, tenure, and promotion processes; and they guide the continued development and elaboration of co-curricular programs and academic programs. They will shape the development of our campus Master Planning efforts as we design a green campus and create a physical environment that can help us realize these principles, e.g., enhancing student-faculty interaction, creating additional spaces for students to come together and learn, and using the physical spaces and features of the campus to reinforce messages about the environment and the history of the region.

"Assessment of our programs and implementation efforts is driven by our primary goal, which is to assure student success. A primary question that we have posed is whether or not we are in fact practicing the Seven Principles and whether or not it makes a difference to our students. One of our first efforts along these lines was to poll a random sample of all of our freshmen and seniors, as part of the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE questions were designed to find out whether or not a campus was engaged in the kind of practices that would enhance student learning. The study also allowed us to compare ourselves to similar campuses, and to measure our accomplishments against those of others.

Some of the results (e.g., compared to other campuses our students were not getting off to a good start and were not actively involved in their learning) were a bit surprising, because we all thought that we were doing what was necessary to help students succeed. We administered the same questionnaire after two years and found that the results of the second and third polls paralleled the first. This suggested that we needed to examine more closely the experiences of our students and campus practices. “

Chico's NSSE Project on Student Engagement is a best-practice-based attempt to expand the conversation on learning by expanding the evidence on student engagement using a periodic standardized measure.