


Memorandum

To: Faculty Senate
Seton Hall University

From: Karen E. Boroff, Ph.D. 
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President

Re: ITC Response to Provost re: NSSE
(2019-FS-24)

Date: October 28, 2019

Higher education has generally become aware of the benefits of using data to understand the complex issues that motivate our undergraduate students. We continue to accept that student engagement, broadly defined, is the key to various insights regarding academic success and retention. Retention, advising and completion are areas of extra focus for us this year, and we are collecting a number of data points to infuse that discussion before the next class of freshmen enters in September 2020. The need for data is “more, better and sooner” than ever before.

The Faculty Senate sees value in some aspects of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); others see it as a grand customer satisfaction survey that lacks a mechanism to develop actionable results for our institution and our mission. I cannot think of any research/actionable steps we have taken that is based on NSSE results. We can get a dashboard for benchmarking one year against the next, but as the Senate’s response indicates, we lack the ability to make even internal comparisons at the college level, let alone external ones with peers and aspirants.

Some blame the pool of responses, others that the questions are too vague, but whatever criticisms, we need to reduce survey fatigue for students (especially if we do not use the results), review carefully the length of the survey, understand how else we are already gathering similar data, link results to data collected elsewhere, improve the action-oriented nature of the questions, provide better longitudinal data, and ensure that the questions are nested in strategic directions.

Since the faculty find value in this benchmarking, I am receptive to the request to continue NSSE every three years as some of our peer and aspirants do yet, even as this is being written, other work is now underway to define peer schools. I am proceeding with a University survey that would allow a greater degree of focus on the elements that define the Seton Hall University experience and assess how well we meet our promise. I welcome faculty who are willing to work on this project.