

Enhancing engagement through institutional research

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about how institutional researchers can support high quality learning outcomes and a positive student experience.



How can institutional researchers advance student engagement?

Institutional researchers play a vital role in analysing, interpreting and communicating AUSSE data. AUSSE results provide a variety of staff, and students, with a wealth of information. They can inform course reviews, support strategic analysis at the faculty and campus levels, and enrich reviews of support services offered by administrative divisions.

A considered approach to using AUSSE data ensures that the data and analyses are fully understood so that the greatest benefit from participating in the AUSSE is achieved. A considered approach includes reporting results to staff and to students, and on actions planned by the institution in response to survey outcomes.

Demystifying AUSSE data

Users of AUSSE data need clear information and advice about what the data and analysis does – and does not – tell them. Institutional researchers are key links between the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the institution. They can offer their colleagues a comprehensive understanding of the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). They can explain the methodologies used to develop the survey sample and to determine results.

Identifying and responding to the data needs of different audiences

Reports and analyses based on AUSSE data need to be fashioned and presented so that they meet the needs and interests of different audiences. A summary university level report will offer a level of analysis and detail different to that provided for a course review. Similarly, a summary report for students of AUSSE findings and actions demands a particular focus.

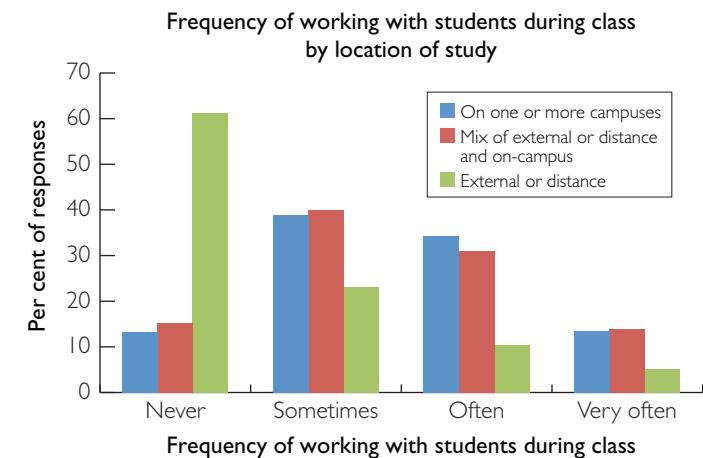
Responding to the specific needs of different audiences requires that summary tables and charts are supported by textual explanations to ensure understanding of what is being presented. Institutional researchers may provide support and advice to the interpretation of AUSSE data by: advising reference/steering groups; liaising with academic development units; contributing to resources developed to enhance the student experience.

Interpreting AUSSE data within an institutional context

Maximum benefit from AUSSE participation is gained through robust discussion of student engagement that is informed by AUSSE data analysed and interpreted within the context of an individual institution.

What is important to each institution at a point in time will depend on contextual factors relevant at that time. Interpretation of the data must recognise these contextual factors.

For example, some contexts may require careful interpretation of results for the SEQ item: 'Used an online learning system to discuss or complete an assignment'. If using such a system was a mandated requirement for all students at a particular institution, one would expect a high level of agreement with this item. Consider the SEQ item: 'Worked with other students on projects during class'. Results might be skewed at an institutional level by responses from a high proportion of students studying off campus. This graph illustrates this using data from the 2008 AUSSE.



Advanced analysis of student engagement data

Institutional researchers can support the nuanced application of AUSSE data in many ways:

- Benchmarking at the institution level, or at a lower level of disaggregation (faculty, school, course), depending on response rates and numbers of responses (see AUSSE Enhancement Guide on this topic).
- Linking with other data sets – the AUSSE data may be used to examine assertions made through analysing related data sets such as survey results, student load or enrolment patterns.
- Analysing AUSSE comments – two items in the AUSSE give respondents the opportunity to provide free form text comments. These items seek feedback about the 'best aspects' of the university's student engagement practices, and areas of potential 'improvement'. Perceived challenges in analysing qualitative comments should not deter universities from using these valuable sources of feedback on student engagement.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER and the broader AUSSE community to enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices. This guide was written by Scott Nichols, Head of the Planning Unit at Deakin University. Visit www.acer.edu.au/ausse for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.