

Learning about student engagement

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide covers a few different ways in which you can learn about student engagement.



Analysing AUSSE quantitative data

A first step you might consider to learn more about student engagement is to consider the AUSSE quantitative data for your institution. These data tell a story about student engagement within your institution.

Look at both the mean scores achieved in individual items and on each of the six scales. This information will provide a quick snapshot of student engagement at your institution. It may be valuable to compare the student engagement of different groups of students - for example compare the results achieved by international versus domestic students, first- versus final-year students or on-campus and off-campus students to get a better understanding of student engagement.

For an even clearer picture of student engagement within your institution, it is important to consider the contexts or situations which impact upon student engagement. Also tracking the results achieved in the AUSSE survey over several years will further deepen understanding of student engagement at your institution.

You may also wish to compare the AUSSE data with other indicators of student engagement and satisfaction, including retention data, student quality of teaching surveys, graduate surveys or other relevant data. Comparisons can also be made against relevant criteria or internal expectations of results and also against Australasian results.

The standard AUSSE data file is provided in SPSS 15.0 format and includes codes and labels which institutions can use to further manage and analyse their own data. A file containing basic syntax is also provided to assist in the preparation and analysis of the data. The data file provided uses the same file format for all institutions which allows institutions to readily share and compile cross-institutional files, at their own discretion. The file format also mirrors the data file format used by a great number of US and Canadian institutions, enabling benchmarking internationally.

ACER offers a data analysis service and can assist institutions with the analysis of their AUSSE data in greater detail. Please contact ACER for further information on this service.

Analysing AUSSE qualitative data

As part of the AUSSE survey, students are asked two open-ended questions which can also be used to gauge student engagement. These questions are:

- What are the BEST ASPECTS of how your university engages students in learning?
- What could be done to IMPROVE how your university engages students?

The answers provided to these questions can also be the basis for further talks, focus groups or interviews with students about student engagement, and may provide specific ideas for improvement.

The qualitative data can be analysed using the IT-enabled quantitative analysis tool, CEQuery. This tool was developed and tested through a

partnership of 10 Australian universities in 2003 and distributed free of charge, with a user manual and training, to all Australian universities in 2004 and 2005. The tool can identify those components of university experience that students themselves see as most (or least) engaging them in productive learning, both at an overall institution level and for different fields of tertiary education. It can help produce a framework to enable the use of these findings to improve the quality of learning design, course delivery, student support and assessment in university learning programs along with their associated support services, administrative systems and infrastructure.

The software can be used to automatically classify respondent written comments provided on the SEQ into 5 main domains (Outcomes, Staff, Course Design, Assessment, and Support) and 26 sub-domains using a custom-tailored dictionary. Further, users can undertake a wide range of customised analyses against any of the variables gathered in the SEQ (university, field of education, qualification, fees, sex, age, mode and type of attendance, etc.), as well as SEQ quantitative results. There is also a custom search facility to be employed when a more detailed analysis of themes within a sub-domain is needed. Finally, the dictionary itself can be modified.

CEQuery is distributed by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA). For further information, please contact GCA on +61 3 9605 3700 or info@graduatecareers.com.au.

Discussions about AUSSE results and student engagement

The AUSSE offers an opportunity to stimulate new conversations about student engagement both internally with staff and students, and externally with other institutions and with the wider public. These conversations should focus on learners and their interactions with the university. A guide to conducting enhancement workshops is available on the AUSSE website at www.acer.edu.au/ausse/resources.html.

Institutions are encouraged to hold internal meetings and workshops that bring together people from across an institution to discuss the AUSSE results achieved and student engagement more broadly. These people are teaching, supporting students, developing policy and strategy, learning, managing staff and learning resources, and managing relationships with external stakeholders. Students should also be invited to be part of these meetings and conversations.

In the USA and Canada, communities of practice have developed to help people share insights and resources for enhancing student engagement. ACER plans cross-institutional meetings at key times to stimulate these conversations by facilitating analysis and interpretation of AUSSE data, and identifying the best ways of using the data to enhance practice.

The AUSSE is intended to provide a basis for publication and presentation of analyses within higher education communities more generally, at conferences, and in magazines and journals.

Possible questions that can be discussed as part of these workshops and meetings are:

- What patterns emerge from the scale results?
- What was surprising about the results?
- Which areas appear to be the areas of strength?
- Which areas need improvement?
- What assumptions about the university were confirmed or refuted?
- How does our institution perform, given our student and institutional characteristics?
- How does our institution compare, given our student and institutional characteristics?
- What are the important differences between first-year student responses and later-year student responses?

Conversations with other institutions participating in the AUSSE may also be valuable. You may choose to discuss your results, and student engagement more generally with other institutions, and may even choose to begin a more formal benchmarking relationships with other institutions.

Learning more about student engagement

This AUSSE Institution Report offers a foundation for further inquiry into student engagement. A range of resources are available to learn more about relevant ideas and practices.

Most institutions in Australia and New Zealand have staff developing ideas and practices for enhancing student engagement in learning. Many such staff work in academic development units, planning offices, education faculties, student services, libraries, and online support areas.

The following resources provide further information on student engagement and include a range of websites, peer-reviewed journal articles and other texts.

Key resources include:

- Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving Educational Excellence: A critical analysis of priorities and practices in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) - www.acer.edu.au/ausse
- Brennan, J., Brighton, R., Moon, N., Richardson, J., Rindl, J., & Williams, R. (2003). *Collecting and Using Student Feedback on Quality and Standards of Learning and Teaching in HE: A report to Higher Education Funding Council for England*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher*

Education, 47 (1), 1-32. Accessed from: http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/research_papers/testing_linkages.pdf

- Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11(1), 25-36.
- Coates, H. (2006). *Student Engagement in Campus-based and Online Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Ewell, P.T., & Jones, D.P. (1996). *Indicators of 'Good Practice' in Undergraduate Education: A handbook for development and implementation*. Boulder, Colorado: National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems.
- Froh, R. C., & Hawkes, M. (1996). Assessing student involvement in learning. In R. J. Menges, M. Weimer, & Associates (Eds.), *Teaching on solid ground: Using scholarship to improve practice* (pp. 125-153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Krause, K.-L. (2005). Understanding and promoting student engagement in university learning communities. Paper presented at the *James Cook University Symposium 2005, Sharing Scholarship in Learning and Teaching: Engaging Students*, 21-22 September 2005, Townsville/Cairns, Queensland. Accessed from: www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/Stud_eng.pdf
- Kuh, G. D. (2002). What we're learning about student engagement from NSSE. *Change*, 35(2), 24-31.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). What matters to student success: a review of the literature. *Commissioned report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialogue on Student Success*. Accessed from: http://nces.ed.gov/IPEDS/research/pdf/Kuh_Team_Report.pdf
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., Whitt, E.J. & Associates (2005). *Student Success in College: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H. & Whitt, E.J. (2005). *Assessing Conditions to Enhance Educational Effectiveness: The inventory for student engagement and success*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, R. B., Greene, B. A., Montalvo, G. P., Ravindran, B., & Nichols, J. D. (1996). Engagement in academic work: The role of learning goals, future consequences, pleasing others, and perceived ability. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21, 388-422.
- Pace, C.R. (1988). *Measuring the Quality of College Student Experiences: An account of the development and use of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire*. Los Angeles: University of California Higher Education Research Institute.
- USA National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) - nsse.iub.edu

For more information on the AUSSE survey, please refer to the 2008 Australasian Student Engagement Report which provides further summary information about the AUSSE, including its technical characteristics.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER to assist institutions enhance their students' engagement in effective educational practices. Visit www.acer.edu.au/ausse for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.