At Humboldt State University (HSU), we are exploring whether freshman responses to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) can be used to tell us more about student retention or withdrawal. In the Spring 2002 national administration of the NSSE, random samples of HSU freshmen and seniors were contacted by mail with the standard follow-up. HSU respondents included 169 freshmen, whose responses subsequently were linked with their individual records in the student database. Based on this information, it was determined that by Spring 2003, 139 of the freshmen were still enrolled at HSU and 30 had withdrawn. Although the number of students who withdrew is rather small, the differences in the NSSE responses of the freshmen who were still attending and those who had withdrawn were substantial and cumulative in direction. For those who withdrew, the level of engagement was always lower. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never made a class presentation</td>
<td>27% 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never worked with classmates on class assignments</td>
<td>27 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often received prompt feedback from faculty</td>
<td>7 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never participated in a community-based project</td>
<td>87 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read five or more nonassigned books</td>
<td>17 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to have an internship or field experience</td>
<td>47 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent zero hours participating in cocurricular activities</td>
<td>77 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to understanding other races</td>
<td>27 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to solving real-world problems</td>
<td>23 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to developing code of ethics</td>
<td>35 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College contributed very little to your contributing to the community</td>
<td>47 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College has very little emphasis on helping students to thrive socially</td>
<td>37 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on page 2)
### Assessment Update

**Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education**  
July–August 2003  
Volume 15, Number 4

**Editor**  
Trudy W. Banta, vice chancellor for planning and institutional improvement, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis

**Managing Editor**  
Karen Elaine Black, assistant to the vice chancellor

**Assistant Editor**  
Frances W. Oblander, educational consultant

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Marcia Mentkowski, Alverno College  
Jeffrey A. Seybert, Johnson County Community College  
Peter J. Gray, United States Naval Academy  
Gary R. Pike, Mississippi State University  
Frances W. Oblander, educational consultant

**Designer**  
Kerry Golemon Schwartz, Insight Out!

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawals</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College puts very much emphasis on attending campus events</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regard relationships with other students as very friendly</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate entire college experience as fair to poor</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If starting over, would definitely or probably not go here again</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of implications for practitioners, some of these items describe student behavior that is directly observable. A large number of the items reflect attitudes that could be identified in conversations between students and advisers. Faculty and staff alertness to any and all of these items could reduce the likelihood of subsequent student withdrawal.

We plan to see how many of the students who took the NSSE in Spring 2002 are still enrolled in Spring 2004. We also have considered oversampling freshmen with the next administration of the NSSE, which should increase the numbers of both withdrawing and retained students. This would allow for more detailed analysis of and greater reliability on

(continued on page 15)

### Call for Contributions

The editor welcomes short articles and news items for Assessment Update. Guidelines follow for those who would like to contribute articles on outcomes assessment in higher education.

- **Content**: Please send an account of your experience with assessment in higher education. Include concrete examples of practice and results.
- **Audience**: Assessment Update readers are academic administrators, campus assessment practitioners, institutional researchers, and faculty from a variety of fields. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.
- **Style**: A report, essay, news story, or letter to the editor would be welcome. Limited references can be printed; however, extensive tables cannot be included.
- **Format**: In addition to standard manuscripts, news may be contributed via letter, telephone, or fax (317) 274-4651. The standard manuscript format is a 60-space line with 25 lines per page. If word processing is used, please submit a 3½” diskette and three paper copies of your article. Word is preferred. Articles may also be sent to <kblack@iupui.edu> as a Microsoft Word attachment.
- **Length**: Articles should be four to eight typed, double-spaced pages (1,000–2,000 words). Short news items and content for the Calendar and Book Review sections may be 100–500 words in length. Annotations of recent publications for the Resources feature should be about 50–100 words long.
- **Copyright**: Articles shall not have been registered for copyright or published elsewhere prior to publication in Assessment Update.
- **Deadlines**: Each issue is typically planned four months before its publication. Future deadlines for submitting articles are October 1 (January–February 2004 issue), December 1 (March–April 2004 issue), and February 1 (May–June 2004 issue).

Please address mailed contributions and comments to Trudy W. Banta, Editor, Assessment Update, Rm. 140 Administration Bldg., 355 N. Lansing St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2896.
the differences. We have also explored the possibility of distinguishing between those withdrawals that were voluntary (students still in academic good standing) and those that were involuntary.

Of the background items on the NSSE, two undoubtedly contribute to retention or withdrawal—grades and residence. Thirteen percent of the students who withdrew said that their grades were “C” or lower as compared with two percent of the others. At HSU, most freshmen live in campus residence halls. Programs in the residence halls are designed to promote college success. Every resident is given encouragement and help in using computers. Various activities promote good personal and interpersonal relationships, good study habits, good health, and advice and counseling. Of the students who were still enrolled at HSU in Spring 2003, 78 percent lived in the campus residence halls, compared with 63 percent of the students who withdrew. On other background items such as age, gender, race, and major, there were no significant differences between the groups.

In sum, the use of NSSE to explore reasons for student retention and withdrawal was relatively easy to complete, and we recommend it as a worthwhile application of NSSE data.

References


Fraigley, L., and Miller, T. P. “What We Learn from Writing on the Job.” College English, 1982, 44(6), 557–569.


Joanne M. Crossman is professor of communication and education in the graduate school, past director of university outcomes assessment, and co-chair of the Graduate School Outcomes Assessment/Curriculum Committee at Johnson & Wales University, Providence, Rhode Island.
The procedure applies to all students who withdraw or are excluded from the University and to University staff managing this procedure. Contact Officer Stuart Fitzpatrick, Academic Policy Officer.  2. The following terminology is used: (i) withdrawal from studies - this is a voluntary decision by the student to terminate their studies at the University. (ii) exclusion from studies - this is where a student is required to leave the University. This may be for academic or other reasons (see 8-29 below).  3. This procedure makes reference to the College, School and to the Head of College or Head of School.