To focus discussions about the importance of student engagement and guide institutional improvement efforts, NSSE created five clusters or "benchmarks" of effective educational practice: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. This Benchmark Comparisons Report compares the performance of your institution with your selected peers or consortium. In addition, page 9 provides two other comparisons between your school and (a) above-average institutions with benchmarks in the top 50% of all NSSE institutions and (b) high-performing institutions with benchmarks in the top 10% of all NSSE institutions. These displays allow you to determine if the engagement of your typical student differs in a statistically significant, meaningful way from the average student in these comparison groups. More detailed information about how benchmarks are created can be found on the NSSE Web site at www.nsse.iub.edu/2007_Institutional_Report/.

Statistical Significance

Benchmarks with mean differences that are larger than would be expected by chance alone are noted with one, two, or three asterisks, denoting one of three significance levels (p<.05, p<.01, and p<.001). The smaller the significance level, the smaller the likelihood that the difference is due to chance. Please note that statistical significance does not guarantee that the result is substantive or important. Large sample sizes (as with the NSSE project) tend to produce more statistically significant results even though the magnitude of mean differences may be inconsequential. It is recommended to consult effect sizes to judge the practical meaning of the results.

Effect Size

Effect size indicates the practical significance of the mean difference. It is calculated by dividing the mean difference by the standard deviation of the group to which the institution is being compared. In practice, an effect size of .2 is often considered small, .5 moderate, and .8 large. A positive sign indicates that your institution’s mean was greater, thus showing an affirmative result for the institution. A negative sign indicates the institution lags behind the comparison group. Look for patterns of effect sizes that point to areas of student or institutional performance that warrant attention.

Bar Charts

A visual display of first-year and senior mean benchmark scores for your institution and your selected peer or consortium groups.

Benchmark Description & Survey Items

A description of the benchmark and the individual items used in its creation are summarized.