



Australasian Survey of Student Engagement

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The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) is developed and managed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to stimulate evidence-focused conversations about students' engagement in university study. By providing information that is generalisable and sensitive to institutional diversity, the AUSSE plays an important role in helping institutions monitor and enhance the quality of education.

The AUSSE has introduced new and advanced survey methodologies into Australasian higher education. It involves administration of the state-of-the-art Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) to a representative sample of first-year and later-year students at participating institutions. ACER has developed procedures to manage the quality of survey processes and hence the integrity of survey outcomes. Contemporary analytical methodologies are used to manage, analyse and report AUSSE data.

The AUSSE has formative links with the United States National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a collection developed in the mid-1990s that has been run in over 1,300 US and Canadian higher education institutions since then. AUSSE results can be benchmarked with NSSE results, providing powerful perspectives for internationally focused higher education institutions.

Value of the AUSSE

Student engagement is defined as students' involvement in activities and conditions that are linked with high-quality learning. A key assumption is that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate student involvement.

Understanding and effectively managing students' engagement in education plays a significant role in enhancing learning processes and outcomes. AUSSE data:

- provides real-time information on learning processes
- offers the most reliable proxy measures of learning outcomes
- provides excellent diagnostic measures for enhancement activities
- helps identify how to attract and, importantly, retain students
- can be benchmarked against international and institutional points of reference
- highlights the value of a university experience
- helps manage resources, and monitor programs and services



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Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES)

All institutions that participate in the AUSSE are invited to take part in the Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES). The SSES measures academics' expectations for student engagement in effective educational practices.

The SSES is a survey of academic staff about students. While academic staff are the respondents, the student remains the 'unit of analysis'. The SSES focuses on:

- academics' perceptions of how often students engage in different activities
- the importance staff place on various areas of learning and development
- the nature and frequency of staff-student interactions
- how academics organise their time, both in and out of the classroom

The SSES builds directly on the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), a survey that has been run since 2004 by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. To date, more than 100,000 academics from more than 600 universities have taken part in the FSSE.

Compared with student feedback, relatively little information is collected from academic staff in Australasian higher education. Such information is important, as it can help:

- identify relationships and gaps between student engagement and staff expectations
- engage staff in discussions about student engagement and in student feedback processes
- provide information on staff awareness and perceptions of student learning
- enable benchmarking of staff responses across institutions

Survey instruments

The Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) is the AUSSE measurement instrument. The parallel Staff Student Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ) is used to survey staff and the Postgraduate Student Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ) is used to survey postgraduate coursework students.

The SEQ, SSEQ and PSEQ are designed for administration in under 15 minutes. They are based on the NSSE and FSSE instruments and are validated for use in Australasian higher education. They measure six target areas:

- Active Learning - students' efforts to actively construct knowledge
- Academic Challenge - the extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
- Student and Staff Interactions - the level and nature of students' contact and interaction with teaching staff
- Enriching Educational Experiences - students' participation in broadening educational activities
- Supportive Learning Environment - students' feelings of support within the university community
- Work Integrated Learning - integration of employment-focused work experiences with study

Information is also reported on these outcomes: self-reported learning and development outcomes; average overall grades; retention intentions; career readiness; overall satisfaction; and a range of individual demographics and educational contexts.

Instrument validation has involved focus groups, expert consultations, cognitive interviews, pilot testing, expert reviews, and psychometric analyses. These activities build on the extensive validation activities undertaken by the NSSE. Like the phenomenon of student engagement, the instruments will grow with further development.

Reporting and enhancement

ACER provides institutions with a carefully designed AUSSE Institution Report. Reports contain an overview of the AUSSE, a range of tables and graphs, and materials to help institutions make the most use of their AUSSE results. Each institution receives a validated set of their own data.

The AUSSE is designed to stimulate evidence-based conversations about student engagement. It provides a basis for engagement-focused meetings, the development of enhancement resources, and a range of collaborations. Resources and insights will evolve as institutions make use of AUSSE data to interpret and enhance practice.

Developing the AUSSE

The AUSSE was developed to bring together existing work in student engagement and leverage benefits from a collaborative, multi-institutional approach. It is critical that surveys involve valid instruments and processes to provide the kind of contextualised and high-quality data that can be used to improve practice. It is vital to have well-tested strategies for embedding results into practice.

Development of the AUSSE is an ongoing process. A team of staff is led by Dr Hamish Coates at ACER. Guidance is provided by the AUSSE Advisory Group, and NSSE staff provide input into survey design and development. Institutions play a formative and critical role in shaping AUSSE resources and methodologies, and in generating conversations about student engagement. The AUSSE continues to grow through workshops and seminars, institutional activities, formal reviews and publications.



Further information

At any stage, please make contact with the ACER team if you would like further information about the AUSSE. The team can be contacted at ausse@acer.edu.au or +61 3 9277 5487. Summary information is available at www.acer.edu.au/ausse.

Summary features

Several characteristics distinguish the AUSSE as a highly valuable quality enhancement activity in Australasian higher education:

Robust technical properties

- Psychometrically validated Student Engagement Questionnaire
- Efficient and robust sampling strategy
- High-quality analysis and reporting practices

Significant new perspectives

- Evidence on student learning processes and institutional supports
- Proxy measures of key learning and development outcomes
- 'Learner-centred whole-of-institution' perspective
- Index of students' involvement in study

Quality-assured approach

- One of the world's most advanced institutional research activities
- Central management and collaboration with institutions
- Standardised survey support materials
- Quality-assured administration strategy

New opportunities

- Cross-institutional benchmarking
- Cross-national comparison
- Data on the support provided by institutions for student learning
- Information for attracting, engaging and retaining students

... By providing information that is generalisable and sensitive to institutional diversity, the AUSSE plays a very important role in helping institutions monitor and enhance the quality of education.

