College Rankings Don’t Tell Us How Well Students Learn

Just what makes for a really good undergraduate experience? Rankings in magazines are based mostly on what students were like when they started college—their entrance exam scores or high school class rank. The rankings also emphasize what institutions have—number of faculty members, library books, computer terminals, and so forth. Oddly enough, what matters most to student learning—what they do with the resources their school provides—gets little attention. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) focuses on the things that are really important to a high quality undergraduate education: what students do and what they say about their experience.

Over the next few months, randomly selected first-year and senior students at CSUS and about 365 other colleges and universities across the nation will share their views by completing a short survey. The survey takes students less than 15 minutes to complete via either a paper or web version. The questions ask about how and where students spend their time, the nature and quality of their interactions with faculty members and peers, and what they have gained from their classes and other aspects of their college experience. All these activities are directly related to desired outcomes of college. For this reason, the survey is like an anonymous suggestion box. The results get the attention of people who can make changes for the better. Among the other groups that are interested in what students say about their experience are governing boards, state agencies, and prospective students.

The Office of Institutional Research will prepare the survey results and summary reports that will be available for colleges and departments. The NSSE results can be used to improve undergraduate education by providing valuable information about student engagement in learning and learning outcomes. The NSSE is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is cosponsored by the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For more information about this survey, please call us at 916-278-6566.

OIR Flooded with Mail Every Semester

Do you ever wonder why you’re asked to turn in all of those Assigned & Reimbursed Time Request, Administrative/Coordinative Time, and Personnel Transaction forms to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR)? Your hard work, as well as getting them to us in a timely manner does not go unnoticed or unappreciated! In fact, the information taken from this paperwork goes directly into the Academic Planning Data Base (APDB), which provides data for academic workload and course planning, and is also used for standardized reporting of class enrollment and faculty data to the CSU Chancellor’s Office every semester.

An error free APDB requires the OIR to work closely with the departments and colleges ensuring a system of “checks and balances” which helps with data integrity and accuracy. Data combined in the APDB (the Faculty Master File and the Section Master file) provides a comprehensive record of curricular offerings and faculty workload characteristics. Users of this data are able to get information in areas such as facility utilization, enrollment analyses and patterns, total full-time equivalent students (FTES) per semester, as well as faculty workload. From this information, important determinations about space allocations, budget, and hiring can be made. Examples of information extracted from the APDB can be seen in the Faculty/Student Workload section of the Academic Program Review web page http://www.oir.csus.edu/ProgRev on the OIR website.

We hope you now have a better understanding of the importance of the data submitted to the OIR, as well as its University-wide use in the APDB. Thank you for your diligence in getting it to us by the deadlines every semester. We really appreciate your effort!
Quality Improvement
Rolls On at CSUS

Have you ever been in a data crunch? Maybe a survey’s due date snuck up on you or a pressing presentation hovers in the immediate future. Perhaps someone has stood over your desk or held on a phone line requesting university data and you just weren’t sure where to begin. Before that situation happens again, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the types of data the OIR has to offer. You will be able to wow people with your rapid data know-how and be an Institutional Research web site pro. The following are examples of information and reports included in the OIR website: www.oir.csus.edu.

The Common Data Set (CDS) is a good starting point for those seeking frequently requested information such as enrollment, degrees conferred, financial aid, student fees, and average entering test scores. The CDS could be an important bookmark on your Internet browser. To view the CDS, please visit http://www.oir.csus.edu/Reports/cds, or select “Reports” and then choose “Common Data Set” from the OIR home page.

Are you looking for an overview of the student population at CSUS? Do you need enrollment trends based on student level or perhaps enrollment based on full-time/part-time status, ethnicity, gender, or age? This information can be found by visiting the OIR home page and choosing “Students.”

Retention and graduation information can be found on the OIR home page by choosing “Students.” From the “Students” page, you will find “Graduation Analyses” and “Retention Analyses” that present summaries and tables of first-time freshman and transfer student graduation and retention rates at the University, college, and program levels.

Do you need to find information to support programs undergoing academic program review? A great place to start is the “Academic Program Review” section of the OIR web page. This site contains grade distribution reports, retention and graduation rates, faculty/student workload, enrollment, degrees awarded, and program profiles.

Are you interested in what the Council for University Planning (CUP) is doing and what the process is for doing it? You can find that information by going to the OIR home page, choosing “Assessment” and then “Planning Process.” This page contains information about the university planning process in relation to the CSUS Strategic Plan, key performance indicators, objectives, progress reports, and budget and action plans. Various supporting information for CUP is also available on this site by choosing “Assessment” from the OIR home page and then “Council for University Planning (CUP).”

If you need additional information or assistance, please give us a call at 916-278-6566. We can help you navigate to the appropriate section of our website or gather the data for you.

More than you ever wanted to know: www.oir.csus.edu

Ever wonder about the sudden appearance of “real” toilet paper in the rest rooms? That change is a direct and visible result of feedback received from ongoing campus initiatives in Quality Improvement.

Once again, CSUS is participating in systemwide customer satisfaction surveys provided by the CSU Chancellor’s Office. This semester, we will be assessing student perceptions of University Police and Student Health Services. We will also survey faculty and staff in regard to Mail Services, Purchasing, and University Police. These surveys are just one of the tools being used to evaluate and improve operations and services at CSUS. The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) in conjunction with Administration and Business Affairs (ABA) have been coordinating this effort.

Last spring, more 1,200 CSUS students in 43 course sections selected at random were surveyed. More than 800 students responded to the in-class surveys; more than 700 faculty and staff responded to surveys mailed to their offices.

In the next few weeks, students will be surveyed in classes again. Faculty teaching these course sections will receive a memo from the Vice President for Academic Affairs asking them to choose a convenient time for survey administration. Someone from the OIR or ABA will be calling to confirm date, class size and location.

This year, we’re hoping to try a new approach to the faculty/staff surveys and invite participants to complete the surveys online.

Results from the in-class and online surveys will be used to review program effectiveness and make changes to improve services. Therefore, your participation in these surveys is very important. Your feedback helps programs and services know where to focus attention for improvement as well as understanding where they are strong. Thank you to those responding to past surveys. Your comments and suggestions regarding the customer satisfaction surveys and the Quality Improvement process are always appreciated!
The following page is a snapshot of what you can find on the new OIR website.

**Office of Institutional Research at CSUS**

**Students:** Presents information about CSUS students and includes Student Profiles which are brief overviews of student populations by student level and career objective; student retention and degrees awarded organized by academic levels and degree objectives. Also presented in this section are long-term trends in enrollment, student age, gender, ethnicity, full-time/part-time status, new and continuing status, residence area, class level, college of major, and degrees granted.

**Reports:** Presents summaries, reports, and various survey results. Summaries and reports include the Common Data Set providing answers to standard questions; the University Factbook showing current and historical enrollment figures, degree awarded data, and other student demographic information categorized by University, Colleges, and Departments. In addition, there are various survey results presented in this section including results from the CASPER Survey, Faculty Survey, Student Needs and Priorities Survey, and more.

**Assessment:** Presents assessment information at CSUS that takes place on two tracks: Institutional assessment, addressing the CSUS Strategic Plan and coordinated by the Council for University Planning and Academic Program assessment starting with the program review process coordinated by Academic Affairs and involving the Faculty Senate Curriculum Policies Committee.

**Office:** Presents information about the Office of Institutional Research including its mission and Institutional Research staff members.

**Other:** Presents publications and correspondence like the OIR newsletter (OIR bits) and other items not easily categorized in one of the other choices on the OIR home page.
Electronic Portfolios Showcase Assessment Activities

In Spring 1998, CSUS was invited to join the Urban University Portfolio Project (UUPP), a national initiative funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts in which six urban public universities developed prototypes of electronic institutional portfolios. Participation in this project has provided CSUS with the opportunity to develop a web-based portfolio that communicates University assessment activities to audiences both internal and external to campus. Although the UUPP has recently ended, CSUS is continuing to develop its University Portfolio.

A unique element of the CSUS portfolio is that it includes both academic programs and their assessment initiatives and University level planning and assessment activities. Academic departments are able to showcase all aspects of their programs including faculty and student work. The online portfolios can also be used to answer self-study questions for Academic Program Review. In addition to academic programs, portfolios on General Education and Writing Requirements are being designed.

An extremely important function of the Portfolio will be its use as a vehicle to communicate the University’s mission, expectations, accomplishments, and improvement efforts for our next accreditation self-study for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Programs are using their portfolios for various purposes including program-specific accreditations and recruiting efforts.

To view the University Portfolio, please visit [www.csus.edu/portfolio](http://www.csus.edu/portfolio). Academic Program Portfolios for Sociology, Chemistry, and Speech Pathology and Audiology are linked from the University Portfolio main page. You can also access them directly at [http://www.csus.edu/portfolio/program.htm](http://www.csus.edu/portfolio/program.htm). A list of contacts for various aspects of the portfolio can be found at [www.csus.edu/portfolio/questions.htm](http://www.csus.edu/portfolio/questions.htm). Your feedback and questions are welcome!

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