Journal Articles Cast Critical Eye on SSE Tools

Colleges and universities across the country rely on surveys of student engagement (SSE) to get a better understanding of their students’ involvement, integration and engagement. The University of Indiana’s School of Education has led the way in creating these assessment tools.

The Fall 2011 issue of The Review of Higher Education features a collection of issues which cast a critical eye on SSE tools. The five essays raise questions about the design and psychometrics of the SSE instruments and offer thoughtful suggestions to improve the project, especially the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, the Review of Higher Education is the official journal of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, a scholarly society with nearly 2,000 members dedicated to higher education as a field of study. Michael A. Olivas from the University of Houston Law Center served as guest editor of this special issue.

“If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, surely critique is its equal. And the papers assembled in this special issue are at the front end of this sincere critique, raising genuine concerns and taking the various SSE pieces on in a way that reveals both shock and awe, both respect and critical judgment,” Olivas writes in his introduction to the issue.

Authors of articles in the special issue are Alicia C. Dowd, Misty Sawatzky and Randi Korn (University of Southern California); Stephen R. Porter (North Carolina State University); Corbin M. Campbell and Alberto F. Cabrera (University of Maryland College Park); Amaury Nora, Gloria Crisp (University of Texas, San Antonio) and Cissy Matthews (College of the Mainland); and William M. Zumeta (University of Washington).

Olivas urges the NSSE researchers, particularly founder George Kuh, to carefully consider the points of the essays, particularly those focused on the representation of minority and first-generation college students.

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