



Plan — Research — Assess!

Welcome

Welcome to the first fall 2008 issue of **Plan — Research — Assess!** This newsletter is published by the Planning, Research, and Assessment Office (PRA) at Penn State Berks.

The purpose of the PRA newsletter is to disseminate information on current assessment, institutional research, and planning projects at the College.

The PRA office is grateful for the student workers who make the PRA newsletter possible. Three new student workers have joined PRA this fall: Linda Penny, Vang Pha, and Mayra Tuwnduva .

FYI: Go directly to articles by clicking on article titles listed below *Inside This Issue*.



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Inside This Issue

PRA Offers Assessment Grants	1
Campus & University Reports on the Web	1
Data Warehouse Requests	1
Penn State Participates in the NSSE	2
Campus Engages in Strategic Plan Implementation	2
Students & Families Rate the FTCAP Experience Favorably	2
Current Survey Projects	2

PRA Offers Assessment Grants

New in 2008-09 is the PRA Assessment Grant Program. The purpose of the Assessment Grant is assist faculty and staff in current assessment projects and to promote new assessment initiatives that may not have sufficient resources.

At the heart of the Assessment Grant Program is to encourage the evaluation of student learning. Funding from the Assessment Grant can be used toward:

- Development and administration of authentic assessments (student demonstration of skill, knowledge, competency),
- Construction and use of rubrics and similar scoring metrics, or
- National or external benchmark comparisons to program or support area assessment results.

Because most departments do not have specific assessment budgets to conduct program assessment, it is anticipated that the grant

funds will be the needed incentive to conduct quality assessment. All faculty and staff are encouraged to apply for the Assessment Grant. Priority will be given to projects that impact student learning in multiple courses, programs, or support areas.

Criteria

The Assessment Grant has several criteria that will be used to judge the merit, and hence, be used to determine award amounts. Some of the criteria are listed below.

- Ability to **evaluate** student learning outcomes,
- **Validity, reliability**, and generalizability of instruments and assessment design.
- **Originality** and **creativity** of assessment instruments and/or design, and
- **Scope** and number of students/programs impacted by the assessment project.

Guidelines

Additional information, the application and explanation of the application process is on the PRA web site: <http://www.bk.psu.edu/Information/30566.htm?cn711>

To Apply

For 2009-2010 Assessment Grant awards, the following timeline has been proposed.

- Consult with Dr. Mary Lou D'Allegro at mad23@psu.edu or (610) 369-6389 on feasibility and applicability of assessment proposal.
- Complete and submit [Assessment Grant Application Form](#) (includes Grant Application Budget Form) to Dr. Paul Esqueda.
- As part of the application, acquire all necessary signatures (division head, program coordinator, etc.)

Contact PRA with questions and inquiries.

Campus & University Reports on the PRA Web

Several reports and a Penn State Berks fact book have been compiled by PRA or the University and are now available on the PRA web page. These reports, listed below, provide information that can be used for planning, new program development, assessment, and benchmarking. Note that each report is also a hyperlink.

Penn State Berks Reports

- [2007-2008 Penn State Berks Fact Book](#)
- [Berks County & Surrounding Environmental Scan](#)
- [2007-2008 Recent Graduate Study](#)
- [2007 Market Research Survey](#)
- [HECBC & Other Economic Impact Studies](#)

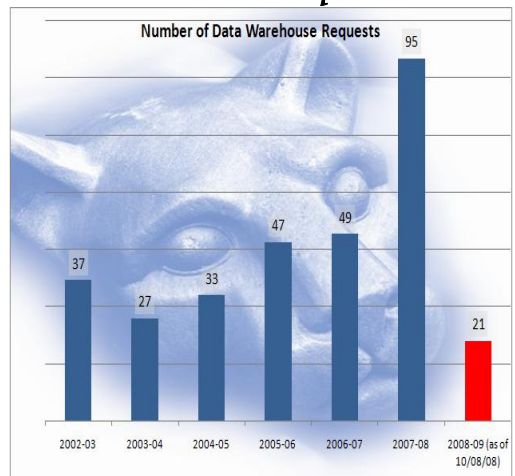
University Park Reports

- [University Budget Office Fact Book](#)
- [University Budget Common Data Set](#)
- [Planning & Institutional Assessment Strategic Indicators](#)

Reports and summaries chronicling recent research and survey projects will be posted this fall. These include the NSSE Executive Summary, update of the environmental scan, and assessments of the strategic plan.



Data Warehouse Requests





Penn State Berks participates in the NSSE

Introduction

Administered by the University of Indiana and originally funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, over 700 institutions participated in the NSSE in 2008. Over 400 (433) Penn State Berks students randomly selected by NSSE responded to the 2008 survey.

The purpose of the project is to ascertain the academic quality and experiences of both first year and senior students. Items are grouped into five composite areas:

- Level of Academic Challenge,
- Active and Collaborative Learning,
- Student-Faculty Interaction,
- Enriching Educational Experience, and
- Supportive Campus Environment.

Comparative Information and Benchmarking

The true value of the NSSE is the multitude of comparative information that is available. Comparisons between first year and senior students are available. Penn State Berks has three peer

sets: a) eight PSU campuses, b) a local competitive peer set, and c) national benchmark institutions. The College also has historical comparative information across three NSSE administrations: a) 2003, b) 2006, and c) 2008.

Results

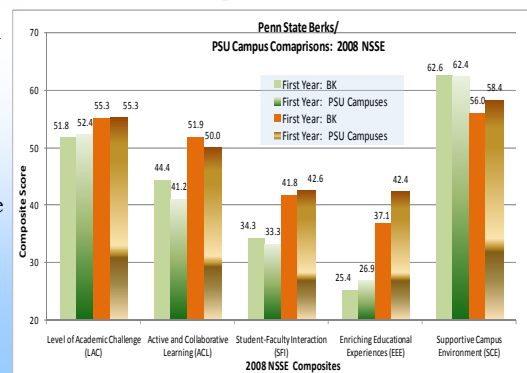
Penn State Berks first year students outscore the other PSU campuses and the other peer sets on the **Active & Collaborative Learning** composite, opportunities to work on a research project with a faculty member, and participation in learning communities. Penn State Berks first year students also fare better than the other PSU campuses on the **Supportive Campus Environment** composite. On the other hand, Penn State Berks respondents were less likely to engage in academic activities that were comprised the **Level of Academic Challenge** and **Enriching Educational Experience** composites. An executive summary and the full report is available on the faculty/staff

drive and upon request (mad23@psu.edu).

Moving Forward

Recommendations for curricular and program changes and improvements will be developed by several campus committees. Student focus groups will also be conducted to better understand the academic experiences and expectations of Penn State Berks students.

Chart 1: PSU Berks Comparisons to eight PSU Campuses on the Five NSSE Composites (2008)



Campus Engages in Strategic Plan Implementation

Building on 50 Years of Excellence, Penn State Berks 2008-2013 strategic plan is in its first year of implementation. The Strategic Planning Council (SPC) has met to discuss how the College can support its execution.

Strategic Plan Advocates

Identified with each action plan is a SPC **advocate**. The role of the advocate is threefold.

1. Monitor the progress of the action plan,
2. Provide feedback on resources needed to implement the action plan, and
3. Support the area(s) responsible for the action plan.

Dr. Susan Phillips Speece, Chancellor,

observes “When good people come together to craft a good plan, it is so much easier to follow the guide lines created by that plan. That is what is happening with our 2008-2013 Strategic Plan. We are only a few months into the plan and already we are seeing results. Ultimately this Strategic Plan will make a great Penn State Berks even better.”

Getting the Word Out

Although over 150 faculty, students, staff, and campus affiliates were involved in the development of *Building on 50 Years of Excellence*, continued involvement is instrumental to successful implementation of the strategic plan. Communication about the progress of

the implementation will include:

- Strategic plan is on the faulty/staff dive and on the internet,
- Information on the status of the implementation of the strategic plan will be shared at the three division meetings,
- The Budget & Strategic Planning Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate will also monitor its progress,
- The topic for the Faculty Retreat in January 2009 is *Implementing the Strategic Plan*, and
- The strategic plan will be featured in the forthcoming issue of the *Blue & White*.

Students & Families Rate the FTCAP Experience Favorably

Introduction

In summer 2008, new students and their parents were asked to complete a survey about the First Year Testing & Counseling Program (FTCAP) experience. Specifically, the respondents were asked to rate the level of satisfaction on several FTCAP sessions and services. Approximately 900 (924) students and 400 (396) parent surveys were returned.

Results

Both students and parents were favorable about the FTCAP experiences as indicated

by the mean score of the FTCAP items. For example, registration & check-in logged a mean score of 3.79 and 3.74 for students and parents respectively (4-point scale: 1 = not satisfied, 4 = very satisfied). Students and parents rated the session, University 101, very favorably (3.71 and 3.59 respectively).

Helpfulness of the faculty and staff was also perceived well (Mean = 3.90, 4-point scale: 1= not helpful, 4 = very helpful) for both students and parents.

The items with the lowest satisfaction ratings included the post-card that was mailed in advance of the FTCAP session and the clarity of the campus maps and directions. Also, some students and parents indicated that there was not enough time to attend all the information sessions.

Overall, comments were extremely positive. Student and parents alike were impressed with information available and the professionalism of the staff. The respondents also indicated that the program was very informative and well-done.

Current Survey Projects

PRA, in collaboration with several campus departments, are working on the following survey projects. If you are interested in developing a questionnaire, survey, or focus group call PRA for a quick consultation. PRA can provide advice on instrument development, research design, survey administration, construct online surveys, analyze survey results,

and provide guidance in the development of recommendations and distribution of results.

Some of PRA’s current survey projects include:

- Audio-Comments as a Teaching Tool (Teaching & Learning Innovation Grant)-TLI,

- Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) Survey of College Readiness,
- Career Services Exit Card,
- Student Mentor Program,
- New Student Orientation, and
- Survey on Student Substance Abuse.