“Closing the loop” is a commonly used phrase in discussing cyclical processes, such as the area of outcomes assessment in higher education. Increased interest in accountability and a shift in accreditation focus have necessitated that higher education institutions are closing the assessment loop and creating a culture of evidence to demonstrate that programs and services are having the intended impact and using resources effectively. That culture includes both academic and co-curricular elements of the student experience. This research examined if, and to what extent, student affairs administrators use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), one of the most prominent instruments available to gauge the student experience, as part of their assessment and planning processes. A survey of student affairs leaders from 100 identified institutions, including a mix of institutions utilizing Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) accreditation models, was conducted for this study. The overall response rate was 25.5% with 164 responses. This analysis includes an exploration of the connections between institution characteristics, strategic planning, accreditation practices and the use of NSSE data for decision-making specifically in student affairs functional areas. Results show that there are differences between different student affairs functional areas’ use of
the NSSE data at the department/unit and individual level. Additional results reveal that there are differences in usage of the NSSE data based on institutional characteristics (public or private control, institutional size). Although the accreditation model does not affect NSSE data usage, where an institution is in the accreditation cycle does. Moreover, the length of time an institution has been participating in strategic planning and how old the strategic plan is impacts the use of the NSSE data at both the institution and department/unit levels. As expectations increase for more data driven decision-making, institutions will need to be more inclusive with the sharing of NSSE and other data with those on the front line providing student services and planning programs. Nevertheless, student affairs administrators will need to be more involved with accreditation and strategic planning processes to assist institutions with achieving student learning outcomes.