Discussion of Institutional Data

- **Types of surveys that the Office of Institutional Assessment conducts:**
  - Freshman surveys are given every three years
  - National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is given every three years
    - This is given to a sample of freshman and seniors
    - The next administration of the NSSE will take place in spring 2009
  - Before College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)
  - Exit surveys are given every semester to undergrads and grads
    - In these surveys students tend to comment on the diversity at Mason
  - Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey—from UCLA
    - Tells us about incoming students and what they expect from Mason
  - They also have competency assessments to measure students’ abilities in scientific reasoning, quantitative reasoning, information technology, oral communication, written communication, and critical thinking

- **What we know about students...**
  - 60% of our students who graduate are transfers
  - Many students expect to transfer out of Mason the day they enter—this is a real issue
  - Our students expect faculty to contact them several times a week
    - They have the same expectations for their academic advisors

- **Questions/concerns that were raised by this data**
  - Perceptions that students have (as reported on the CIRP and NSSE) vs. actual student competencies (where are our students scoring?)
  - Do the AP/IB classes that students take in high school make it feel like there’s less academic challenge when they come to college?
    - One way to research this discrepancy would be to ask the high schools what they’re doing to challenge their students
    - We need to have more information about the knowledge and skills that students are coming in with and what faculty should expect of them
    - Departments should have a connection with high schools to see what’s going on
      - Ex: Music Education majors who are given the opportunity to student teach in area high schools
      - Students who are going into education have the opportunity to see what high schools are doing and what is going on in the classrooms
  - Is Mason trying to graduate students or exclude students from graduating?
  - In what ways can faculty engage students beyond the classroom?
  - We should be asking what students’ actual competencies are after taking a class—not whether it was easy or hard for them
  - We should have an international survey testing the same benchmarks at other institutions
    - We could pick schools that have a strong emphasis on global competence/understanding
    - We could also look to other American institutions who have a strong international emphasis
What does this mean for our QEP?

- The qualitative nature of college—it should be different than high school
  - What would create curricular conditions where this is likely to happen?

- Big theme/issue of the day: academic challenge

- Structurally Mason’s policies are very merciful—could this have a connection to the academic challenge issue?
  - Ex: Students are allowed to drop courses later and later in the semester, they can repeat a failed course as many times as they need to, and they can add courses weeks into the semester
  - If we’re going to be forgiving, we have to be forgiving consistently—especially when thinking about the gen ed curriculum
    - Students should be able to prove their competency in advance (the Math Department uses the math placement exam) and take a course that is more relevant to their interests/goals

- How can faculty effectively teach to students who are at different levels with different educational backgrounds (i.e. majoring in different areas)?
  - Where are each of the students headed in the future?
  - This is an issue in gen ed classes
  - Accountability levels vary

- Does the gen ed curriculum teach students to succeed in their respective fields?
  - If students don’t see the relevance of the course in regard to their self-image, they tend to devalue the information that is being taught

- We might want to change the definition about the purpose of gen eds
  - The curriculum is exploratory and preparatory for every major
  - We could make it fun and exciting

- A global and gen ed focus could be fused for our QEP