“As we started this initiative, we quickly discovered that success would depend on the ability to efficiently collect data in several different areas using the same instrument over a very short period of time. We selected StudentVoice to help commission and execute assessment studies on our campus because it is effective, efficient and secure.”

Dr. Robert Watson  
Vice President of Student Affairs

Founded in 1889 and purchased by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1926, Slippery Rock University, located 50 miles north of Pittsburgh, PA, has gained a national reputation for academic and athletic excellence in health sciences and physical education. Along with its national acclaim on the area playing fields and in the classroom, Slippery Rock has also gained national recognition as an assessment leader among colleges and universities across the country.

Regular assessment has been an intricate part of the Slippery Rock educational process since the 1980s, when the campus-wide creation of assessment teams and the penning of Governing Principles of Assessment have resulted in SRU receiving several nationally funded grants, totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“Even before our association with StudentVoice, the Slippery Rock assessment objective was to create a multi-year plan where improvements could be made based on data collected about student involvement with certain programs and services and the satisfaction levels of those services,” says Dr. Robert Watson, Vice President of Student Affairs at Slippery Rock University.

“As we started this initiative,” continued Dr. Watson, “we quickly discovered that success would depend on the ability to efficiently collect data in several different areas using the same instrument over a very short period of time. We selected StudentVoice to help commission and execute assessment studies on our campus because it is effective, efficient and secure.”

With such an ambitious plan already envisioned, it is no wonder that Slippery Rock University and StudentVoice would become ideal partners. Slippery Rock purchased over 30 handheld units and distributed them to all areas of campus life, allowing each unit to work on independent projects, yet Dr. Watson could continually monitor all projects using StudentVoice’s tiered-access web reporting module. “Assessment...
projects now have an amazingly short turnaround time and all results can be accessed from any computer on our campus,” says Watson.

While a project joining the assessment practices of several departments with over 30 handheld units was a daunting task, Slippery Rock administration found creative ways to financially support the project through student fees. A technology fee, established long before the introduction of StudentVoice was partially tapped to bring StudentVoice to the SRU campus. “It is always a challenge to deal with student fees, because on a college campus, money is sometimes spent wisely and sometimes unwisely,” said Dr. Bruce Russell, a Dean given the task of coordinating the StudentVoice assessment effort across the campus. “In this case, the StudentVoice program offers each student a direct return on investment because these assessment projects allow the university to quickly provide better, more relevant services for them. I think this is one of the ways we have spent their money wisely.”

With assessment projects easily accessible to each department, unit heads could now conduct regular studies. “Each unit director will be conducting multiple student surveys using the StudentVoice technology,” says Watson. “The results will allow us to monitor levels of use and levels of satisfaction. The plan is to reveal levels of performance, illustrate where we are now and choose where we want to be at a later date. We will use this ‘gap analysis’ to move forward, developing specific goals, action steps and assessment activities to be conducted over the next few years. The survey information will be easily collected, maintained, and stored with StudentVoice.”

“I am amazed by the many different ways StudentVoice is being used across our campus,” Russell notes. “Everyone who has come in contact with the StudentVoice assessment tool has great things to say about it. Departments are taking the initiative to connect with students and that is certainly a positive. For example, our Health Center, a 24/7 operation, placed five PDAs at their entrance, allowing students to self-complete a short project upon their visit to the facility. This method
"As the person who coordinated previous surveys for the office, it was such a pleasure to not have to deal with paper. The project was efficient, fast, and the students were especially appreciative of the anonymity the process provided."

Kimberly Zedreck
Office of Minority Student Affairs

resulted in approximately a 98% response rate and will undoubtedly assist the Heath Center to serve students in the best way possible."

The Health Center also commissioned a unique project that undoubtedly utilized the StudentVoice suggested data collection: students talking to other students. Several divisions of the Student Health Center led a study regarding condom use amongst SRU students, in an attempt to determine student comfort levels with purchasing condoms through the Health Center. "The StudentVoice platform was a perfect fit to achieve sensitivity and sincerity in this process," said Amanda Wolbert, who coordinated the project through The Health Outreach Peer Education (HOPE) & The Protection Connection offices on campus. "The student-to-student interaction provided a comfortable setting to address any questions about safe sexual practice, introduce them to our office and collect critical information for our day-to-day operations, all with great speed and efficiency." If not for the peer-to-peer interaction, this memorable project would have been difficult, if not unfeasible.

One staff member that benefited from this approach was Kimberly Zedreck in the Office of Minority Student Affairs. A project in her office measured student satisfaction of a quarter of the total minority student population over a five-day period. At the conclusion of the data collection period, project results were instantly ready for analysis, much to her delight: "as the person who coordinated previous surveys for the office," said Zedreck, "it was such a pleasure to not have to deal with paper. The project was efficient, fast, and the students were especially appreciative of the anonymity the process provided."

While the peer-to-peer concept has proven critical for many projects, the benefits are not exclusive to the actual research process. "Sometimes lost in the benefits of the peer-to-peer interaction is providing a real experience for students involved in research and business intelligence on our campus," says Russell, wearing his academic hat. "We are providing a great opportunity for students to actually apply concepts in our research methods courses, making our students better prepared and
more competitive in the job market – all while collecting the data to benefit the school."

With the Slippery Rock assessment plan well underway, several significant assessment projects are slated for the months ahead. "We are very excited to continue our partnership with StudentVoice," says Watson. "From conception of an assessment study, to placing it in the field, to the report that appears on the administrators desktop computer, StudentVoice makes it easy and empowers our campus community to communicate and exchange ideas or suggestions. As our projects continue, we are witnessing significant increases in the student respondents, full comfort with technology integration and the positive feedback we get from staff about the ease of the project process."

At the end of the Spring 2003 semester, the enrollment management staff will be conducting demographic and satisfaction studies during Open House and Campus Visitation orientation events of both prospective students and their parents. The Athletic Department will be conducting a study on the perception of "date rape" held by the student-athletes, and several academic areas are planning internal assessment studies for faculty and staff evaluations.

“We are excited and proud of our campus-wide assessment initiative,” says Russell. “From an academic prospective, the plan will provide both a better educational and life experience for all of our students. Additionally, our staff will finally have the necessary insight to determine program cuts or enhancements. The ability to integrate state-of-the-art technology to facilitate a meaningful project will have a huge influence on major decision making on our campus. It is clearly a win-win proposition.”