NSSE

national survey of student engagement

NSSE 2020 Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced "nessie") collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience. Since the inception of the survey, more than 1,600 bachelor's-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada have used it to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with learning, personal development, and other desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, and graduation.

NSSE data are used by faculty, administrators, researchers, and others for institutional improvement, public reporting, and related purposes. Launched in 2000 with the support of a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, NSSE has been fully sustained through institutional participation fees since 2002. This document provides an overview of NSSE 2020, including administration details, response rates, participating institutions, and respondent characteristics.

A Pandemic Strikes

The coronavirus pandemic had a profound impact on almost all colleges and universities across North America. Despite the tumult it caused, the vast majority of schools' participating in NSSE 2020 successfully collected data to improve undergraduate education. An in-depth analysis of NSSE data revealed survey response behavior and results to be relatively unaffected. Ultimately, only nineteen institutions needed to withdraw and four more eventually decided to exclude post-disruption survey respondents from their reports. Visit our website to learn more about how the NSSE 2020 administration unfolded, actions taken by NSSE to minimize the pandemic's impact, and the various analyses completed to ensure data quality. **nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/about-nsse/covid.html**

Survey Data and Methodology

Approximately 1.8 million first-year and senior students from 601 institutions (531 in the US, 65 in Canada, and 5 in other countries) were invited to participate in NSSE 2020. Of this population, 484,242 students responded to the survey. First-year and senior students were about equally represented among the respondent population.

NSSE's sampling methodology calls for either a census of all first-year and senior students or a random selection of an equal number of students from each group, with sample size based on total undergraduate enrollment. Census administration is available only via email recruitment, in which students get a survey invitation and up to four reminders by email. In 2020, all but two participating institutions opted for this method rather than the regular mail option, in which sampled students get up to three messages by post and up to two email reminders.

Unless noted otherwise, the results presented below are from 584 institutions—521 in the US and 63 in Canada—that participated in NSSE 2020. Due to nonstandard details of their participation, 17 institutions are not represented. In these summary tables, as in each *Institutional Report 2020,* only data for census-administered and randomly sampled students are included. NSSE 2020 U.S. respondents profiled here include 343,045 first-year (47%) and senior (53%) respondents.

U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2020 participating institutions and students reflect the diversity of bachelor's-granting colleges and universities in the US with respect to institution type, public or private control, size, region, and locale (Table 1). A searchable list of participating institutions is on the NSSE website: **nsse.indiana.edu/support-resources/participating-institutions/index.html**

Ashland University

Table 1

Profile of NSSE 2020 U.S. Institutions and Respondents and Bachelor's-Granting U.S. Institutions and Their Students

Institution Characteristics	Institutions (%)		Students (%)	
	NSSE	U.S.	NSSE	U.S.
Carnegie Basic Classification				
Doctoral Universities (Very high research activity)	8	8	25	30
Doctoral Universities (High research activity)	9	8	14	16
Doctoral/Professional Universities	9	9	10	10
Master's Colleges and Universities (Larger programs)	25	21	29	26
Master's Colleges and Universities (Medium programs)	12	12	7	6
Master's Colleges and Universities (Smaller programs)	8	8	4	3
Baccalaureate Colleges— Arts & Sciences Focus	17	15	7	4
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	13	19	4	5
Control				
Public	48	36	68	67
Private	52	64	32	33
Undergraduate Enrollment				
Fewer than 1,000	13	22	2	2
1,000–2,499	31	31	12	9
2,500–4,999	20	17	13	11
5,000–9,999	19	15	21	19
10,000–19,999	8	8	15	22
20,000 or more	9	7	37	37
Region				
New England	10	8	8	6
Mid East	17	18	12	16
Great Lakes	15	15	14	14
Plains	10	10	8	7
Southeast	29	25	26	24
Southwest	7	8	11	12
Rocky Mountains	3	3	7	6
Far West	8	10	14	13
Outlying Areas	1	2	<1	1
Locale				
City	45	46	57	61
Suburban	23	26	25	24
Town	27	22	16	14
Rural	5	6	2	1

Notes: Percentages are unweighted and based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and belong to one of the eight Carnegie classifications in the table. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. U.S. percentages are based on the 2018 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data. For information on the Carnegie Foundation's 2018 Basic Classification, see **carnegieclassifications.iu.edu**

Institutional Response Rates

The average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2020 institutions was 30%, up two percentage points from last year. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 79%, and about three out of five achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Higher average response rates were observed for smaller institutions and across all undergraduate enrollment tiers relative to last year's administration (Table 2).

Fifty-nine-percent of institutions chose to offer a survey incentive to increase response rates. On average, these institutions had a 33% institutional response rate, seven percentage points higher than those who did not offer an incentive. Institutions also had the option to use their learning management system or student portal to recruit students. In 2020, 114 U.S. institutions chose this option, and the average share of respondents who accessed the survey this way was 23%.

Table 2

NSSE 2019 and 2020 Response Rates (%) by Undergraduate Enrollment Tier

	2019	2020
2,500 or fewer	33	36
2,501 to 4,999	25	28
5,000 to 9,999	24	25
10,000 or more	21	23

Survey Customization

Participating institutions may append up to two additional question sets in the form of NSSE Topical Modules or consortium questions (for institutions sharing a common interest and participating as a NSSE consortium) (Table 3). Of the nine modules available in 2020, the most widely adopted was Academic Advising, followed by First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions (Table 4).

Table 3

Summary of NSSE 2020 Participation in Additional Questions Sets

Selection of Additional Question Sets	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
None	64	11
One module only	142	24
Two modules	220	37
Consortium items only	13	2
Consortium items plus one module	162	27

Notes: Includes U.S., Canadian, other international institutions, and institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4

NSSE 2020 Participation in Topical Modules

Topical Module	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
Academic Advising	223	37
First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions	169	28
Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity	131	22
Development of Transferable Skills	61	10
Civic Engagement	51	8
Experiences with Writing	33	5
Experiences with Information Literacy	29	5
Global Learning	28	5
Learning with Technology	19	3

Notes: Includes U.S., Canadian, other international institutions, and institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages sum to more than 100 because many institutions selected two modules.

U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 5 displays selected demographic and enrollment characteristics of NSSE 2020 U.S. respondents alongside all U.S. bachelor's degree-seeking students for comparison. NSSE reports use weights as appropriate to correct for disproportionate survey response related to institution-reported sex and enrollment status at each institution. Table 6 provides additional details about U.S. respondents.

Canadian Respondent Profile

Canadian respondents profiled here include 134,288 students (59% first-year, 41% senior) from 63 institutions from ten provinces, including 24 institutions in Ontario; 12 in Quebec; and under 10 from each of the remaining eight provinces. Female students and full-time students accounted for about 65% and 89% of Canadian respondents, respectively. The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2020 institutions was 37%, with the highest response rate being 74%. Over 90% achieved a response rate of 25% or higher.

About 16% of Canadian respondents were at least 24 years old. The majority of students providing ethnocultural information identified as Caucasian or White (49%), while 10% were multiracial, 10% Chinese, 10% South Asian, 5% Black, and less than 4% from each of nine other categories.

Table 5

Characteristics of NSSE 2020 U.S. Respondents and Undergraduate Population at All U.S. Bachelor's Degree-Granting Institutions

Student Characteristics	NSSE Respondents (%)	U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Population (%)
Sex		
Male	34	44
Female	66	56
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	10	12
American Indian/Alaska Native	<1	1
Asian	7	7
Native Hawaiian/other Pac. Isl.	<1	<1
Caucasian/White	57	55
Hispanic/Latino	16	17
Multiracial/multiethnic	4	4
Foreign/nonresident	4	5
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	90	84
Not full-time	10	16

Note: Percentages are unweighted and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Institution-reported, using categories provided in IPEDS. NSSE percentages do not include students with "another" or "unknown" sex (0.3% of all respondents) or unknown race/ethnicity (11% of all respondents). The NSSE 2020 sampling frame consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data were provided by participating institutions.

U.S. percentages are based on data from the 2018 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years.

Table 6

Additional Characteristics of NSSE 2020 U.S. Respondents

Student Characteristics	%
At least 24 years old	22
First-generation (no parent has a bachelor's degree)	44
Transfer	30
Expects to complete a master's degree or higher	57
Living on campus (includes campus and Greek housing)	39
Taking all classes online	15

Note: Percentages are unweighted.

Meet the NSSE Team

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