

NSSE 2012 Overview

[Revised 8/14/12]*

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information annually from first-year and senior students about the nature and quality of their undergraduate experience. Since its inception, more than 1,500 bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada have used NSSE 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, accountability, and related purposes. Launched in 2000 by a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, NSSE has been fully supported by institutional participation fees since 2002.

Over one and a quarter million first-year and senior students from 577 institutions in the United States (554) and Canada (23) were invited to participate in the 2012 NSSE administration. Of this survey population, 321,649 students responded to the survey. A searchable list of participating institutions by year is available on the NSSE Web site.

nsse.iub.edu/html/participants.cfm

The standard NSSE sampling methodology calls for either a census of first-year and senior students or an equal number of randomly sampled students from each group (with the sample size based on the total number of undergraduate students enrolled). Census administrations were only offered to institutions opting for the Web-only survey mode, in which students received all contacts by email and completed the survey online. Web-only institutions numbered 486 (84%). The Web+ survey option was used by 80 institutions (14%). This mode includes multiple email contacts and one paper questionnaire sent to a portion of nonrespondents. The remaining 11 institutions (2%) chose the paper administration mode.

Only census-administered and randomly selected students are included in the respondent profiles below, and in each institution's NSSE *Institutional Report 2012* comparison groups. Some Web+ and paper-mode institutions request random oversamples to increase the number of respondents, thereby reducing sampling error and

enhancing their ability to examine results by subgroups. Additionally, some participating institutions choose to oversample certain student subpopulations.

Data from eight institutions were excluded from respondent profiles and from report comparison groups due to nonstandard population files or survey administrations. Thus, the remainder of this *Overview* includes results from 569 institutions, (546 U.S. and 23 Canadian) except where otherwise noted.

2012 U.S. Respondent Profile

NSSE 2012 U.S. respondents profiled here include 285,926 first-year and senior respondents from 546 institutions. The first two columns in Table 1 show how NSSE 2012 U.S. institutions compare with the profile of all bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States. Comparative data for these tables are from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). NSSE 2012 institutions closely match the U.S. profile in most categories. Research Universities with high research activity and Master's Colleges and Universities with larger programs are somewhat overrepresented, while Baccalaureate Colleges-Diverse Fields are somewhat underrepresented. Public institutions and those with 2,500-9,999 undergraduates are slightly overrepresented in NSSE 2012, while very small institutions—those with fewer than 1,000 undergraduates—are underrepresented.

Table 1 also shows the distribution of NSSE 2012 respondents and the national distribution of students by these same characteristics. NSSE 2012 respondents largely



Eastern New Mexico University

*Changes from the original are highlighted.

**Table 1
Profile of NSSE 2012 U.S. Institutions and Respondents and All Bachelor's Degree-Granting U.S. Institutions and Their Students^a**

	Institutions		Students	
	NSSE	U.S. ^b	NSSE	U.S. ^b
Carnegie Classification – Basic 2010^c				
RU/VH	4%	6%	12%	22%
RU/H	9%	6%	19%	15%
DRU	5%	5%	7%	9%
Master's L	30%	25%	32%	30%
Master's M	12%	11%	9%	8%
Master's S	7%	8%	4%	4%
Bac/A&S	16%	16%	9%	5%
Bac/Diverse	17%	23%	7%	7%
Sector				
Public	37%	33%	57%	64%
Private	63%	67%	43%	36%
Undergraduate Enrollment				
Fewer than 1,000	11%	19%	3%	2%
1,000 – 2,499	33%	33%	19%	10%
2,500 – 4,999	22%	19%	17%	12%
5,000 – 9,999	18%	14%	23%	18%
10,000 – 19,999	10%	10%	22%	26%
20,000 or more	6%	6%	17%	32%
Region				
New England	7%	8%	5%	6%
Mid East	20%	18%	17%	16%
Great Lakes	16%	15%	18%	15%
Plains	11%	10%	9%	9%
Southeast	28%	24%	26%	23%
Southwest	8%	7%	11%	12%
Rocky Mountains	4%	4%	6%	5%
Far West	7%	11%	7%	11%
Outlying Areas	1%	2%	<1%	2%
U.S. Service Schools	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Location				
City	48%	46%	57%	60%
Suburban	21%	23%	18%	18%
Town	24%	20%	20%	15%
Rural	7%	10%	5%	6%

a. All percentages are unweighted and based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and belong to one of the eight Carnegie classes in the table. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

b. U.S. percentages are based on the data from the 2010 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics file for students at institutions in one of the eight Carnegie classes in the table.

c. For information on the 2010 Carnegie Classifications, see: classifications.carnegiefoundation.org.

Basic Carnegie Classification categories

RU/VH	Research Universities (very high research activity)	Master's M	Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)
RU/H	Research Universities (high research activity)	Master's S	Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)
DRU	Doctoral/Research Universities	Bac/A&S	Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences
Master's L	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	Bac/Diverse	Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields

reflect the U.S. undergraduate population, with a few exceptions. Students attending universities with very high research activity are underrepresented while those attending the next class of universities, those with high research activity, are somewhat overrepresented. Public institution students are underrepresented in the data. The proportion of students enrolled at institutions with enrollments between 1,000 and 9,999 is somewhat higher for NSSE respondents, while the proportion attending high enrollment institutions is smaller. Student percentages in NSSE 2012 are closely comparable in terms of region and location.

Overall, NSSE 2012 participating institutions and students reflect the diversity of U.S. higher education with respect to institutional type, size, sector, region, and location.

While small and private institutions account for a majority of institutions in NSSE and nationally, a majority of students and NSSE respondents attend large and public institutions. NSSE comparison reports use weights (as appropriate) to ensure proportional representation.

Table 2 shows selected characteristics of NSSE 2012 U.S. respondents and corresponding population estimates for

two groups, NSSE 2012 U.S. participating institutions and the U.S. bachelor's degree-seeking population. Response patterns indicate that female, White, and full-time students are overrepresented to varying degrees in the NSSE 2012 data, while African American, Hispanic, and part-time students are slightly underrepresented. Except in rare cases where weighting was not feasible, NSSE frequency distribution, mean, and benchmark reports were weighted to correct for disproportionate representation by gender and enrollment status.

Select U.S. Respondent Profile Characteristics

Characteristics of U.S. respondents are described below. Reported percentages are unweighted.

Year in School

The NSSE 2012 U.S. respondent cohort includes 122,344 (43%) first-year students and 163,582 (57%) seniors.

Age

Over 85% of first-year students were 19 years of age or younger, while more than three-fifths of seniors were

Table 2
Characteristics of NSSE 2012 U.S. Respondents, NSSE Population at Participating U.S. Institutions, and Undergraduate Population at All U.S. Bachelor's Degree-Granting Institutions^a

	NSSE 2012 Respondents	NSSE 2012 Population ^b	U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Population ^c
Gender			
Male	36%	45%	44%
Female	64%	55%	56%
Race/Ethnicity^d			
African American/Black	11%	13%	13%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	5%	5%	6%
Caucasian/White	70%	65%	63%
Hispanic	8%	10%	12%
Other	<1%	1%	n/a
Multiracial/Multiethnic	2%	3%	2%
International	3%	2%	3%
Enrollment Status			
Full-time	89%	86%	84%
Part-time	11%	14%	16%

a. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

b. NSSE 2012 population consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data are provided by participating institutions.

c. U.S. percentages are unweighted and based on data from the fall 2010 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data.

d. IPEDS and NSSE categories for race/ethnicity differ. Percentages exclude students whose ethnicity was unknown or not provided.

younger than 24. About 8% of first-year respondents and 38% of seniors were 24 or older.

Gender

Women made up more than three-fifths (64%) of respondents, consistent with widely reported survey research findings that women are more likely than men to respond to surveys. Frequency distribution, mean, and benchmark reports were weighted to adjust for the overrepresentation of women among NSSE respondents.

Race and Ethnicity

As noted earlier, African American and Hispanic students were somewhat underrepresented, while White students were overrepresented (Table 2).

Living Arrangements

Approximately 67% of first-year students and 15% of seniors lived in campus housing, while an additional 1% of seniors lived in a fraternity or sorority house. Although response options included other residence types differentiated by distance from campus, 4% of first-year students and 10% of seniors indicated that none of the choices applied, likely because they are primarily studying online.

Fraternity or Sorority

About 10% of first-year students and 11% of seniors were members of a social fraternity or sorority.

Grades

Approximately 46% of first-year students and 51% of seniors reported earning mostly “A” grades. Only 10% of first-year students and 5% of seniors reported earning mostly “C” grades or lower.

Enrollment Status

About 89% of all respondents were enrolled full time, somewhat higher than the NSSE 2012 and U.S. bachelor’s degree-seeking populations (Table 2). Frequency distribution, mean, and benchmark reports were weighted to adjust for the overrepresentation of full-time students among NSSE respondents.

Parents’ Education

Among respondents who provided education information for one or both parents, about 80% had at least one parent with some college education. Approximately 55% had at least one parent who completed a bachelor’s degree or

higher, and nearly a third of respondents (30%) indicated two parents with a bachelor’s or higher degree.

Transfer Status

More than two-fifths (44%) of senior respondents began postsecondary education at an institution other than the one they were attending when they completed the NSSE survey. Half of these students had previously attended another bachelor’s degree-granting institution, 71% had attended a community college, 14% had attended a vocational-technical school, and 5% had enrolled in some other form of postsecondary education (percentages sum to more than 100% because some students previously attended more than one type of institution).

Primary Major Field

Table 3 shows the percentage of students pursuing majors in various areas of study by class level and gender. Proportionally more men were pursuing studies in business and engineering, while more women were pursuing majors in education, the social sciences, and other professional fields (e.g., nursing).

U.S. Response Rates

The average U.S. institutional response rate for NSSE 2012 was 32% (Table 4). For the small number of paper mode schools, the average institutional response rate was 29%. Web-only and Web+ institutions recorded average institutional response rates of 31% and 33%, respectively. The highest institutional response rate in NSSE 2012 was 70%, and 52% of institutions achieved a response rate of at least 30%.

Additional information about response rates, including response rates for your institution, is provided in the *NSSE 2012 Respondent Characteristics* report.



Table 3
Primary Major Categories by Class and Gender at NSSE 2012 U.S. Institutions^a

Major Category ^b	First-Year Students		Seniors	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arts & Humanities	11%	13%	12%	14%
Biological sciences	9%	11%	7%	8%
Business	17%	12%	21%	16%
Education	4%	10%	5%	12%
Engineering	15%	3%	13%	3%
Physical sciences	5%	3%	5%	3%
Professional (other)	6%	17%	5%	15%
Social sciences	10%	15%	11%	17%
Other	20%	13%	19%	13%
Undecided	3%	4%	<1%	<1%

a. Data are unweighted.

b. NSSE codes major information using 85 categories developed by NSSE from the 2000 *Classification of Instructional Programs*. For information on the classification, see: nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002165. The major categories above are used for NSSE reporting purposes. The majors included in each category are documented in the *NSSE 2012 Codebook*.

2012 Canadian Respondent Profile

Canadian respondents profiled here include 22,084 students from 23 institutions. Of these, seven institutions were from Ontario, six from Alberta, five from British Columbia, two from Quebec, and one each from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan.

Response Rates

The average Canadian institutional response rate for NSSE 2012 was 41%, with the highest rate achieved being 88%. Three-quarters (75%) of Canadian institutions achieved a response rate of at least 30%.

Student Overview

More than 80,273 census-administered or randomly sampled Canadian students were invited to participate, yielding 11,869 and 10,215 first-year and fourth-year respondents, respectively (Table 5). Women made up about two-thirds of respondents, and 87% of first-year and 79% of fourth-year respondents were enrolled full time. Of fourth-year respondents, 21% were majoring in a social science, 19% in arts & humanities, 15% in business, and 9% in biological sciences.

Table 4
NSSE 2012 U.S. Participation and Response Information by Survey Administration Mode^a

Administration Mode	Number of Institutions ^b	Average Institutional Response Rate	Percentage of Students Responding via Web
Paper	11	29%	64%
Web-only	450	31%	100%
Web+	79	33%	95%
All Institutions	540	32%	99%

a. Response rates and percent of students responding via Web are based on census-administered and randomly sampled participants only.

b. Table does not include six U.S. NSSE 2012 institutions that participated as part of a special research project.

Table 5
Characteristics of NSSE 2012
Canadian Respondents^a

	First-Year	Fourth-Year
Gender		
Male	34%	35%
Female	66%	65%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	87%	79%
Part-time	13%	21%
Major Category		
Arts & Humanities	18%	19%
Biological sciences	10%	9%
Business	14%	15%
Education	3%	5%
Engineering	6%	6%
Physical sciences	4%	4%
Professional (other)	11%	8%
Social sciences	19%	21%
Other	14%	12%
Undecided	1%	<1%

a. Percentages are unweighted.

Summary of Ethnocultural Categories

Ethnocultural categories for Canadian institutions participating in NSSE were adapted from those used by Statistics Canada, Canada's national statistical agency. The majority of students providing ethnocultural information identified as White (73%). Additionally, 11% identified as Chinese, 5% as South Asian, 3% as Black, and 2% as Arab. Less than 2% of respondents identified with each of the remaining categories.

Age

Almost three out of five first-year (58%) Canadian respondents were 19 or younger, and a comparable proportion (61%) of fourth-year respondents was under 24. About 15% of first-year and 39% of fourth-year students were 24 years of age or older.



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