

NSSE 2013 Overview

NSSE's Purpose and History

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information 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, public reporting, 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. After two years of pilot testing and extensive analysis, 2013 marked the first year of an updated survey instrument and administration options.

Survey Data and Methodology

More than 1.5 million first-year and senior students from 613 institutions (586 in the United States and 27 in Canada) were invited to participate in the 2013 NSSE administration. Of this population, 364,193 students responded to the survey. About two in five respondents (41%) were first-year students and 59% were seniors.

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 all 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 available only to institutions opting for the email recruitment method, in which students received survey invitations and up to four reminders by email and completed the survey online. The vast majority of participating institutions (609, or 99%) opted for email recruitment. For the remaining institutions, sampled students received up to three messages by regular (postal) mail and up to two email reminders if email addresses were provided.

Only census-administered and randomly sampled students are included in the respondent profiles below, and in each institution's NSSE *Institutional Report 2013*. Institutions electing recruitment via regular mail had the option to add random oversamples to increase the number of respondents, thereby reducing sampling error and enhancing their ability to examine results by subgroups. Additionally, some noncensus institutions chose to oversample certain student subpopulations. Data from 18 institutions were excluded from respondent profiles and comparison groups due to nonstandard population files or survey administrations. Thus, the remainder of this overview includes results from 595 institutions (568 U.S. and 27 Canadian) except where otherwise noted.

U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2013 U.S. respondents profiled here include 335,702 first-year (41%) and senior (59%) respondents from 568 institutions. NSSE 2013 participating institutions and students reflect the diversity of all bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States with respect to institution type, size, sector, region, and locale (Table 1, next page).

At the institution level, Research Universities (high research activity), Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs), public institutions, and institutions with 5,000 to 19,999 undergraduates are somewhat overrepresented while somewhat underrepresented categories include Master's Colleges and Universities (small programs), Baccalaureate Colleges–Diverse Fields, private institutions, and institutions with fewer than 1,000 undergraduates.

With regard to students, those attending Research Universities (high research activity) and institutions with 1,000 to 2,499 undergraduates are somewhat overrepresented and those at Research Universities (very high research activity), public institutions, and institutions with 20,000 or more undergraduates are somewhat underrepresented.

While small and private institutions account for the majority of institutions in NSSE and in the U.S., a majority of NSSE respondents and U.S. students attend large and public institutions. NSSE comparison reports are weighted (as appropriate) to ensure that each institution is proportionally represented.

Table 1**Profile of NSSE 2013 U.S. Institutions and Respondents and All Bachelor's-Granting U.S. Institutions and Their Students^a**

Institution Characteristics	Institutions		Students	
	NSSE	U.S. ^b	NSSE	U.S. ^b
Carnegie Basic Classification^c				
Research Universities (very high research activity)	4%	6%	12%	22%
Research Universities (high research activity)	9%	6%	21%	15%
Doctoral/Research Universities	7%	5%	9%	9%
Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	30%	25%	33%	31%
Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)	10%	11%	8%	8%
Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)	5%	8%	3%	4%
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences	15%	16%	7%	5%
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	19%	23%	8%	7%
Control				
Public	39%	34%	57%	64%
Private	61%	66%	43%	36%
Undergraduate Enrollment				
Fewer than 1,000	12%	18%	3%	2%
1,000–2,499	32%	33%	14%	10%
2,500–4,999	19%	18%	13%	12%
5,000–9,999	17%	14%	20%	18%
10,000–19,999	13%	10%	24%	26%
20,000 or more	7%	6%	26%	33%
Region				
New England	8%	8%	7%	5%
Mid East	16%	18%	13%	16%
Great Lakes	16%	15%	18%	15%
Plains	13%	10%	13%	9%
Southeast	25%	25%	23%	23%
Southwest	11%	7%	13%	12%
Rocky Mountains	3%	4%	7%	5%
Far West	8%	11%	7%	12%
Outlying Areas	1%	2%	<1%	2%
Locale				
City	44%	46%	55%	60%
Suburban	21%	23%	18%	19%
Town	25%	21%	20%	16%
Rural	10%	10%	7%	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 classifications in the table. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
- b. U.S. percentages are based on the 2011 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics file for institutions in one of the eight Carnegie classifications in the table.
- c. For information on the Carnegie Foundation's Basic Classification, see classifications.carnegiefoundation.org

Institutional Response Rates

Table 2 shows that the average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2013 institutions was 30% (27% for first-year students and 33% for seniors). Institutions that opted for email recruitment recorded average response rates of 30%. For the small number of institutions that opted for regular mail recruitment, the average response rate was 18%. The highest institutional response rate among U.S. institutions was 80%, and 45% of institutions achieved a response rate of at least 30%.

The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2013 institutions was 37% (35% for first-year students and 40% for seniors), with the highest institutional rate being 94%. About 70% of Canadian institutions achieved a response rate of at least 30%.

For information about your institution's response rate, refer to your *NSSE 2013 Administration Summary*.

Table 2**NSSE 2013 U.S. Participation and Response Rates by Recruitment Method and Undergraduate Enrollment**

Recruitment Method	Number of Institutions	Average Institutional Response Rate
Recruitment Method		
Email	565	30%
Regular mail	3	18%
Undergraduate Enrollment		
2,500 or fewer	255	37%
2,501 to 4,999	113	28%
5,000 to 9,999	96	22%
10,000 or more	104	21%
All Institutions	568	30%

Survey Customization

The 2013 update of the NSSE survey added the ability for institutions to append up to two additional item sets in the form of NSSE-created topical modules and/or consortium questions. Consortium questions were available to institutions sharing a common interest and participating as a NSSE consortium. The 2013 update also provided the option to add a question about sexual orientation to the demographic section of the core survey. Roughly one quarter of participating institutions (24%) opted to include the sexual orientation question.

About one third of participating institutions (30%) appended two topical modules, one quarter appended a single module, and one quarter participated as part of a consortium (Table 3). About four out of five consortium member institutions elected to include a topical module as well.

Six topical modules were available in 2013, with participation in a given module ranging from 50 to 239 institutions. The most widely adopted modules were Academic Advising, used by 39% of participating institutions, and Experiences with Writing (19%). Learning with Technology and Development of Transferable Skills modules were selected by 13% each, followed by Civic Engagement (10%), and Experiences with Diverse Perspectives (8%).

Table 3
Module and Consortium Participation for U.S. and Canadian NSSE 2013 Participants*

Selection of Additional Items	Number of Institutions	% of Institutions
None	124	20%
One module only	151	25%
Two modules	182	30%
Consortium items only	36	6%
Consortium items plus one module	120	20%

*Includes 18 institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations.

U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 4 displays selected characteristics of NSSE 2013 U.S. respondents and all U.S. bachelor's degree-seeking students. Compared to all U.S. students, female, White, and full-time NSSE students were overrepresented in varying proportions. NSSE comparison reports use weights as appropriate to correct for disproportionate survey response related to gender and enrollment status at each institution.

As Table 5 illustrates, approximately 29% of U.S. respondents were at least 24 years old, and 35% lived on campus. One in ten NSSE respondents reported taking all classes online. Two thirds of respondents (67%) expected to complete a master's, doctoral, or professional degree. Among those who provided education information for at least one parent or guardian, nearly half (46%) were first-generation college students. About one in three NSSE respondents (34%) began postsecondary education at an institution other than the one they were attending when they completed the NSSE survey.

Table 4

Characteristics of NSSE 2013 U.S. Respondents and Undergraduate Populations at All U.S. Bachelor's Degree-Granting Institutions^a

Student Characteristics	NSSE 2013 Respondents ^b	U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Population ^c
Gender		
Male	36%	44%
Female	64%	56%
Race/Ethnicity^d		
African American/Black	10%	13%
American Indian/Alaska native	1%	1%
Asian	3%	6%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%
Caucasian/White	70%	62%
Hispanic/Latino	10%	12%
Multiracial/multiethnic	2%	2%
Foreign/nonresident alien	3%	3%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	87%	81%
Part-time	13%	19%

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

b. NSSE 2013 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 2011 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years.

d. Institution-reported data; excludes students whose race/ethnicity was unknown or not provided.

Table 5

Additional Characteristics of NSSE 2013 U.S. Respondents

Respondent Characteristics	%
At least 24 years old	29%
First-generation student ^a	46%
Transfer student	34%
Expects to complete a master's degree or higher	67%
Living on campus ^b	35%
Taking all classes online	10%

Note: Data are unweighted.

a. Neither parent (or guardian) holds a bachelor's degree.

b. Dormitory or other campus housing, fraternity, or sorority.

Canadian Respondent Profile

Canadian respondents profiled here include 20,795 students from 27 institutions in seven provinces, including eight institutions from Ontario, five each from Alberta and British Columbia, three each from Quebec and Nova Scotia, two from New Brunswick, and one from Manitoba. Canadian respondents included approximately 11,600 first-year and 9,200 fourth-year students. Women and full-time students, respectively, accounted for about 65% and 85% of Canadian respondents. About 23% of Canadian respondents were at least 24 years old. 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%), while 9% identified as Chinese, 6% South Asian, 3% Black, 3% Arab, and 2% Latin American. Less than 2% of respondents identified with each of the remaining categories.

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