

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 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 1,500 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. After two years of pilot testing and extensive analysis, 2013 marked the first year of NSSE's updated survey instrument and new customization options. This document provides an overview of NSSE 2015, the third administration of the updated NSSE.

## Survey Data and Methodology

Nearly 1.4 million first-year and senior students from 585 institutions (564 in the US and 21 in Canada) were invited to participate in NSSE 2015. Of this population, 315,815 students responded to the survey. Less than half (43%) of these were first-year students and 57% were seniors.

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 the sample size based on total undergraduate enrollment. Census administration is available only via the email recruitment method, in which students receive a survey invitation and up to four reminders by email. For NSSE 2015, all but four participating institutions opted for this method. Sampled students at the four remaining institutions received up to three messages by postal mail and up to two reminders by email.

Unless noted otherwise, the results presented below are from 561 institutions—541 in the US and 20 in Canada—that participated in NSSE 2015. Due to nonstandard population files or survey administrations, 24 institutions are not represented. In these summary tables, as in each *Institutional Report 2015*, only data for census-administered surveys and randomly sampled students are included.

## NSSE 2015 Overview

### U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2015 U.S. respondents profiled here include 300,543 first-year (43%) and senior (57%) respondents from 541 institutions. NSSE 2015 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).



Simon Fraser University

### Institutional Response Rates

The average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2015 institutions was 29%. The highest institutional response rate among U.S. institutions was 89%, and three out of five institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Higher average response rates were observed for smaller institutions, and for institutions that offered incentives (Table 2).

Note: A searchable list of participating institutions by year is on the NSSE website at [nsse.indiana.edu/html/participants.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/participants.cfm).

**Table 1****Profile of NSSE 2015 U.S. Institutions and Respondents and Bachelor's-Granting U.S. Institutions and Their Students**

Institution Characteristics	Institutions (%)		Students (%)	
	NSSE	U.S. <sup>a</sup>	NSSE	U.S. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Carnegie Basic Classification<sup>b</sup></b>				
Research Universities (very high research activity)	4	7	14	23
Research Universities (high research activity)	9	6	19	15
Doctoral/Research Universities	6	5	7	8
Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	32	25	36	31
Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)	11	11	7	7
Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)	5	7	3	4
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts and Sciences	15	16	7	5
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	18	23	8	7
<b>Control</b>				
Public	38	34	61	66
Private	62	66	39	34
<b>Undergraduate Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 1,000	13	20	3	2
1,000–2,499	31	33	14	10
2,500–4,999	21	17	15	12
5,000–9,999	18	14	21	19
10,000–19,999	11	9	22	24
20,000 or more	6	6	25	33
<b>Region</b>				
New England	8	8	6	6
Mid East	19	18	15	16
Great Lakes	17	15	19	15
Plains	11	11	9	9
Southeast	23	24	20	23
Southwest	9	7	13	12
Rocky Mountains	4	4	6	5
Far West	9	11	12	12
Outlying Areas	1	2	<1	2
<b>Locale</b>				
City	48	47	61	61
Suburban	24	26	20	22
Town	23	21	17	15
Rural	5	6	2	2

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 2013 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data.
- For information on the Carnegie Foundation's Basic Classification, see [carnegieclassifications.iu.edu](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu).

**Table 2****NSSE 2015 U.S. Participation and Response Rates by Undergraduate Enrollment and Use of Incentives**

Institution Characteristics	Number of Institutions	Average Institutional Response Rate (%)
<b>Undergraduate Enrollment<sup>a</sup></b>		
2,500 or fewer	242	35
2,501 to 4,999	110	28
5,000 to 9,999	97	22
10,000 or more	89	20
<b>Incentives Offered<sup>b</sup></b>		
Offered incentives	332	31
No incentives	209	25
<b>All Institutions</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>29</b>

- Three institutions had no enrollment information in the IPEDS data.
- Some institutions used recruitment incentives, such as small gifts or raffles, to encourage students to complete the survey.

## Survey Customization

Participating institutions may append up to two additional question sets in the form of Topical Modules (NSSE-created) or consortium questions (for institutions sharing a common interest and participating as a NSSE consortium) (Table 3). Of the nine modules available in 2015, the most widely selected module was Academic Advising, followed by First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions (Table 4). Another customization option—including a question about sexual orientation in the demographic section of the core survey—was elected by 30% of participating institutions.

**Table 3****Summary of Participation in Additional Question Sets in NSSE 2015**

Selection of Additional Question Sets	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
None	78	13
One module only	125	21
Two modules	240	41
Consortium items only	17	3
Consortium items plus one module	125	21

Notes: These data include both U.S. and Canadian institutions and 24 institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 4****Participation in Topical Modules in NSSE 2015**

Topical Module	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
Academic Advising	197	34
Civic Engagement	57	10
Development of Transferable Skills	53	9
Experiences with Diverse Perspectives	45	8
Experiences with Information Literacy	61	10
Experiences with Writing	69	12
First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions	138	24
Global Perspectives–Cognitive and Social	51	9
Learning with Technology	59	10

Notes: These data include both U.S. and Canadian institutions and 24 institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages sum to more than 100 because many institutions participated in two modules.

## U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 5 displays selected demographic and enrollment characteristics of NSSE 2015 U.S. respondents alongside all U.S. bachelor's degree-seeking students, for comparison. Among NSSE respondents, female, White, and full-time students were overrepresented in varying proportions. 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 10,816 students (53% first-year, 47% fourth-year) from 20 institutions in 8 provinces, including 8 institutions in Ontario; 4 in Alberta; 2 each in British Columbia and New Brunswick; and 1 each in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Female students and full-time students accounted for about 64% and 92% of Canadian respondents, respectively. The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2015 institutions was 44%, with the highest institutional response rate being 86%. Nine out of ten Canadian institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher.

About 13% of Canadian respondents were at least 24 years old. The majority of students providing ethnocultural information identified as White (74%), while 9% identified as Chinese; 7% South Asian; 4% Black; and at least 2% each Arab, Latin American, and North American Indian. Less than 2% of respondents identified with other categories.

**Table 5****Characteristics of NSSE 2015 U.S. Respondents and Undergraduate Population at All U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Institutions**

Student Characteristics	NSSE 2015 Respondents <sup>a</sup> (%)	U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Population <sup>b</sup> (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	35	45
Female	65	55
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>		
African American/Black	9	12
American Indian/Alaska native	1	1
Asian	5	6
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	<1	<1
Caucasian/White	65	60
Hispanic/Latino	13	14
Multiracial/multiethnic	3	3
Foreign/nonresident alien	4	4
<b>Enrollment Status</b>		
Full-time	89	84
Not full-time	11	16

Note: Percentages are unweighted and may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

- The NSSE 2015 sampling frame consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data were provided by participating institutions.
- U.S. percentages are based on data from the 2013 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years.
- Institution-reported, using categories provided in IPEDS. Excludes students whose race/ethnicity was unknown or not provided.

**Table 6****Additional Characteristics of NSSE 2015 U.S. Respondents**

	%
At least 24 years old	25
First-generation college student <sup>a</sup>	46
Transfer student	31
Expects to complete a master's degree or higher	66
Living on campus <sup>b</sup>	36
Taking all classes online	7

Note: Percentages are unweighted.

- Neither parent (or guardian) holds a bachelor's degree.
- Dormitory or other campus housing, fraternity, or sorority.

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