

Understanding First-Year Students

Creating conditions that foster student success is more important than ever for institutions. Toward this end, many institutions seek to better understand their incoming first-year students. The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) annually collects data about students' high school experiences and their expectations for the first college year from tens of thousands of first-time college and university students prior to their enrollment at four-year institutions in the US and Canada.

An effective use of BCSSE data is in combination with data from its companion survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Institutions participating in both surveys receive the *BCSSE-NSSE Combined Report*, which provides an in-depth analysis of the experiences of first-year students on their campuses.

Enhancing the First-Year Experience

There are many ways to use BCSSE data. Results can be used to enhance the first-year student experience by informing the design of precollege orientation, student service initiatives, and other programs. BCSSE results, especially when linked with NSSE results, can be used to shape initiatives that align the first-year experience with recognized effective educational practices. BCSSE-NSSE results can inform the following:

- Academic advising
- Accreditation and self-studies
- Assessment and improvement
- Curricular reform
- Faculty development
- First-year program evaluation
- Recruitment
- Retention efforts

More specifically, data on students' precollege engagement and expectations can be used in various ways, including:

- Understanding student backgrounds, experiences, and expectations so that institutions can minimize unmet expectations and maximize student engagement, learning, satisfaction, and persistence

- Informing advisors about students' prior academic and co-curricular experiences, attitudes, and expectations
- Providing valuable data for the development of strategic plans for implementing effective teaching and learning practices
- Designing and evaluating first-year programs to more effectively align them with student background characteristics, dispositions, and expectations
- Helping faculty know their students better and informing the design of curriculum materials and teaching practices
- Merging with other data sources to provide a richer understanding of the first-year experience



Tools and Resources

Publications and Presentations

Publications and presentations related to BCSSE may be downloaded from the BCSSE website, in the Publications and Presentations section.

bcsse.indiana.edu/publications_presentations.cfm

Two issues of *New Directions for Institutional Research* include chapters regarding BCSSE and the importance of collecting precollege student data: *Using NSSE in institutional research* (Cole, Kennedy, & Ben-Avie, 2009) and *Longitudinal assessment for institutional improvement* (Cole & Korkmaz, 2010).

Look for BCSSE presentations and papers at upcoming conferences including the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience and the Association for Institutional Research.

Summary Tables

Annual summary reports by institution type are posted on the BCSSE Summary Tables web page. These results can be used to put your institution's results into context.

bcsse.indiana.edu/summary_tables.cfm

Outreach Services

BCSSE Webinars. NSSE offers a series of free, live webinars for faculty, administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals who want to better understand and use their NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE (Faculty Survey of Student Engagement) data. Recordings of these webinars are archived on the NSSE website and available for convenient viewing.

nsse.indiana.edu/webinars/archives.cfm

BCSSE-specific webinars develop in-depth understanding of the BCSSE project and provide guidelines and examples for using BCSSE and BCSSE-NSSE data:

- *Using BCSSE and NSSE to Help Retention Efforts* (April, 2015)
- *An Overview of BCSSE 2013* (April, 2013)
- *Using BCSSE and NSSE Data to Investigate First-Year Student Financial Stress and Engagement* (June, 2012)
- *Engagement Readiness of First-Year Students* (April, 2011)
- *Using BCSSE-NSSE Data to Assess the Effects of Learning Communities on First-Year Experiences* (November, 2010)
- *Using BCSSE Data for Faculty Development: Do Faculty Really Know Their Students?* (March, 2010)
- *Using BCSSE Data: Understanding That Student Expectations Are Important* (March, 2009)

Did You Know . . . ?

During the last year of high school, 48% of first-year students devoted more time to co-curricular activities than to studying.

91% of first-year students expect to graduate from their current institution.

NSSE User Workshops. Workshops are coordinated through the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice and provide opportunities to gather and share ideas about how to use NSSE and BCSSE results. If you are interested in participating in or hosting a workshop, contact Jillian Kinzie (jikinzie@indiana.edu) or BCSSE staff (bcsse@indiana.edu). Materials from past workshops may be found online:

nsse.indiana.edu/html/institute_workshops_webinars_meetings.cfm

BCSSE Website. The BCSSE website offers a range of information and resources for BCSSE users. Information includes administration tips, survey content, linking BCSSE-NSSE data, and much more.

bcsse.indiana.edu

References

Cole, J. S., Kennedy, M., & Ben-Avie, M. (2009). The role of precollege data in assessing and understanding student engagement in college. In R. M. Gonyea & G. D. Kuh (Eds.), *Using NSSE in institutional research. New Directions for Institutional Research, (2009)141, 55–69.*

Cole, J. S., & Korkmaz, A. (2010). Using longitudinal data to improve the experiences and engagement of first-year students. In T. A. Seifert (Ed.), *Longitudinal assessment for institutional improvement. New Directions for Institutional Research, 2010(S2), 43–52.*



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