

### 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

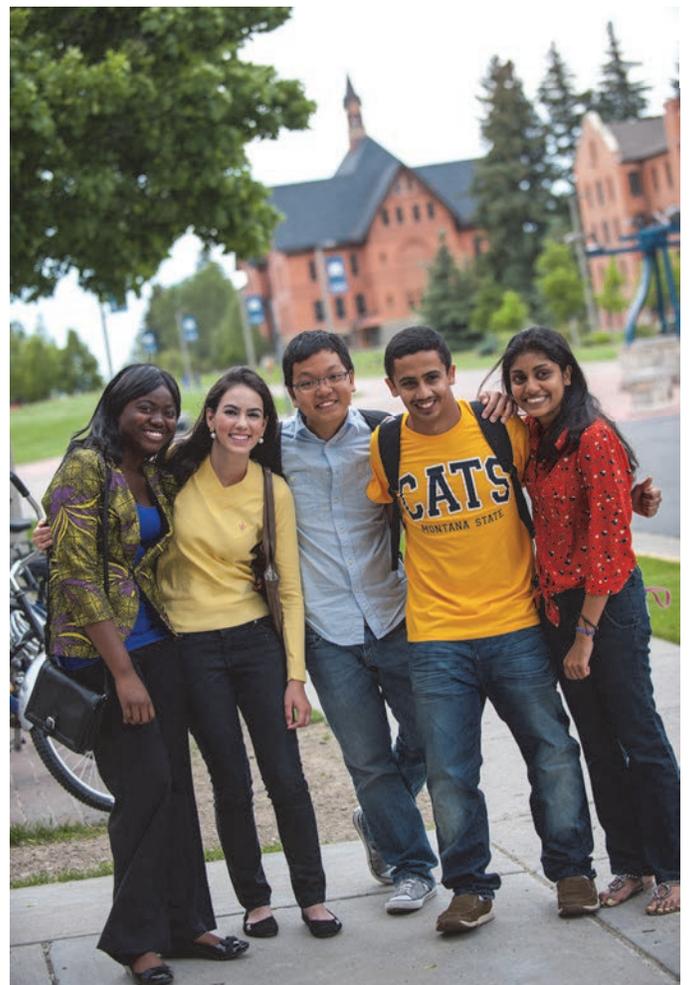
There are many ways to use BCSSE data. Results can be used to enhance the first-year student experience by informing the design of precollege orientation, student service initiatives, and other programs. BCSSE results, especially when linked with NSSE results, can be used to shape initiatives that align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

### Outreach Services

**BCSSE Website.** The BCSSE website offers information and resources for BCSSE users such as administration tips, survey content, linking BCSSE-NSSE data, and much more.

[bcsse.indiana.edu](http://bcsse.indiana.edu)

**BCSSE Webinars.** NSSE offers free, live webinars for faculty, administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals who want to better understand and use their NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE data. Archived on the NSSE website, recordings of these webinars are available for convenient viewing.

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/webinar](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/webinar)

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

- *Introduction to BCSSE 2019*
- *An Overview of BCSSE 2017 Updates and Data Uses*
- *Using BCSSE and NSSE to Help Retention Efforts*
- *Using BCSSE and NSSE Data to Investigate First-Year Student Financial Stress and Engagement*

**NSSE User Workshops.** Coordinated by the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice, NSSE User Workshops provide opportunities to share ideas about how to use NSSE and BCSSE results. To participate in or host a workshop, contact Jillian Kinzie ([jikinzie@indiana.edu](mailto:jikinzie@indiana.edu)) or BCSSE staff ([bcsse@indiana.edu](mailto:bcsse@indiana.edu)). Materials from past workshops are at [nsse.indiana.edu/links/workshops](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/workshops)



Clark University

### Did You Know . . . ?

The average entering first-year college student expects to study 16 hours per week—about 7 hours more than they reported studying in high school.

Source: BCSSE 2018

### 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.

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/BCSSE\\_Summary](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/BCSSE_Summary)

### Publications and Presentations

NSSE staff are continually presenting and publishing research using BCSSE and NSSE data. Publications and presentations related to BCSSE and NSSE can be found on NSSE's Publications and Presentations web page.

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/pubs](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/pubs)

A recent presentation by Bombaugh and Cole discussed how the University of South Florida is using BCSSE for student advising, as well as predictive analytics. A recent poster presentation by Mu and Cole (2018) used BCSSE-NSSE data to examine how students' learning strategies change in the transition from high school to college. Cole, Gonyea, and Rocconi (2017) wrote a book chapter that described results from a study using BCSSE and NSSE data to examine first-year retention, with examples of institutions' uses of BCSSE and NSSE data in efforts to improve first-year retention. Look for BCSSE presentations and papers at upcoming conferences including the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience and the Association for Institutional Research Annual Forum.

#### Recent Publications and Conference Presentations

Bombaugh, M., & Cole, J. S. (2019). *Leveraging survey data and predictive analytics to support first-year students*. Presentation at the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience, Las Vegas, NV.

Mu, L., & Cole, J. (2018). *Learning strategies in high school and first year in college*. Poster session at the Association for Institutional Research Annual Forum, Orlando, FL.

Cole, J. S., Gonyea, R. G., & Rocconi, L. (2017). With retention, the key is "Act locally." In R. Feldman (Ed.), *The first year of college: Research, theory, and practice on improving the student experience and increasing retention* (pp. 187–211). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.