

# NSSE

National Survey of  
Student Engagement

# 2004 Overview

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## Introduction

Since 2000, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has been collecting data from students at four-year colleges and universities around the country to assess the extent to which students engage in a variety of educationally effective activities. Our guiding proposition is that the frequency with which students engage in these activities is a meaningful proxy for collegiate quality. The NSSE project was launched with a grant from *The Pew Charitable Trusts* but is now sustained by institutional participation fees. NSSE is cosponsored by *The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* and the *Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning*.

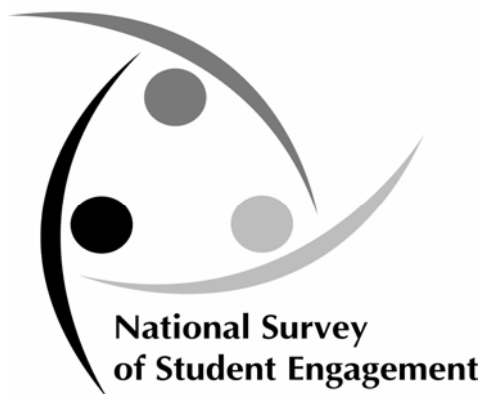
The NSSE 2004 overview is divided into five sections. First, we compare the characteristics of participating institutions and students with institutional and national profiles, as well as provide general information on overall response rates. In the second section we present selected findings, including descriptive information about the students who completed the survey and preliminary analyses of patterns of engagement among various groups of students. Finally, we provide suggestions for interpreting the data presented in this report.

Later this fall you will receive the National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice as well as benchmarks for your institution based on the aggregated data from over 750 different colleges and universities that have participated in NSSE from 2002-2004.

## NSSE 2004 Institutions and Respondents

Over 560,000 first-year and senior students were included in the NSSE 2004 sample.<sup>1</sup> These students were randomly selected from data files provided by 473 participating four-year colleges and universities. A list of these institutions is available in the “Additional Information” tab of the institutional report binder. NSSE sampling procedures call for sending the survey to an equal number of first-year and senior students with the standard sample size determined by the number of undergraduate students enrolled at the institution. Students at 200 colleges and universities, or 42% of participating institutions, had the option of responding either via a traditional paper questionnaire or online. One-hundred and seventy-five schools (37%) opted to be Web-only institutions where students received all contacts electronically and only completed the online survey. This year we also introduced the Web+ survey mode that included multiple electronic contacts and one traditional paper questionnaire delivered to a portion of non-respondents. Ninety-eight institutions (21%) participated through this method.

Tables 1 and 2 on the next two pages show that NSSE 2004 respondents and institutions approximate the characteristics of students enrolled at participating schools as well as the national profile of all four-year colleges and universities. The comparative data for these tables are from selected 2001-2002 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data files.



**NSSE 2004 schools closely resemble the national profile of four-year colleges and universities**



**Table 1**  
**NSSE 2004 Institutions and**  
**all Four-Year Colleges and Universities**

	<u>NSSE 2004</u>	<u>National</u>
<b>Carnegie Classification</b>		
Doc/Res – Ext	10%	11%
Doc/Res – Int	9%	7%
Master’s I & II	47%	43%
Bac – Liberal Arts	17%	16%
Bac – General	16%	23%
<b>Sector</b>		
Public 4-year	42%	37%
Private 4-year	58%	63%
<b>Region</b>		
Far West	7%	10%
Great Lakes	22%	15%
Mideast	19%	19%
New England	8%	8%
Plains	11%	11%
Rocky Mountains	3%	3%
Southeast	23%	25%
Southwest	6%	7%
<b>Location</b>		
Large city (>250,000)	23%	19%
Mid-size city (<250,000)	28%	28%
Urban fringe large city	14%	16%
Urban fringe mid-size city	8%	8%
Large town (>25,000)	4%	4%
Small town (<5,000)	18%	17%
Rural	5%	6%

*Note: Percentages are based on U.S. Postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees. NSSE-participating or other national institutions that do not share these characteristics were not included. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.*

*Source: National data are from the 2002 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics File.*

## Profile of NSSE 2004 Institutions

NSSE 2004 schools closely resemble the national profile of four-year colleges and universities in all areas. The Great Lakes region was slightly over-represented as were Master’s Colleges and Universities as defined by the 2002 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Whereas Baccalaureate Colleges-General were slightly under-represented.

Doctoral-Research Universities and Master’s Colleges and Universities enroll more than three-quarters of all undergraduates. The inclusion of an ample number of smaller institutions in NSSE 2004 insures that the results reflect the experiences of a broad cross-section of students attending four-year colleges and universities from both the public and private sector, from all regions of the country, and from different types of settings.

## Profile of NSSE 2004 Respondents

Table 2, on the following page, shows selected characteristics of the students who completed *The College Student Report* in 2004. The first column represents students who responded to the NSSE survey in 2004. The second column shows the characteristics of students at four-year schools that participated in NSSE 2004, as reflected by 2001 IPEDS data. The third column represents the national profile of students at all four-year colleges and universities.

### Year in School

NSSE 2004 respondents were equally divided between first-year (49%) and senior (51%) students.

### Gender

Women made up two-thirds (66%) of the respondents compared with 56% of the students enrolled at NSSE 2004 schools as well as nationally (Table 2). The larger proportion of women respondents is consistent with widely reported survey research findings that conclude that women are more likely than men to return questionnaires.

### Age

Students 19 years of age or younger comprise the largest group (43%), reflecting the fact that half the students selected to receive the survey were in their first-year of college. About 38% of respondents were 20-23, 8% were between the ages of 24 and 29, and 10% were 30 years of age or older.

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of NSSE 2004 Respondents,**  
**Students at NSSE 2004 Institutions, and**  
**Students at all Four-Year Institutions**

	<u>NSSE Respondents</u>	<u>All NSSE 2004 Schools</u>	<u>National</u>
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	34%	44%	44%
Women	66%	56%	56%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
African American/Black	7%	9%	11%
Amer. Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%	5%	6%
Caucasian/White	77%	71%	67%
Hispanic	5%	8%	8%
Other	.2%	4%	5%
Multiple	6%	-	-
<b>International</b>	5%	3%	3%
<b>Enrollment Status</b>			
Full-time	90%	82%	83%
Part-time	10%	18%	17%

*Note: Students could check more than one racial or ethnic group so the percentages exceed 100%. The IPEDS and NSSE categories for race and ethnicity differ. Percentages are based on U.S. Postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees. NSSE-participating or other national institutions that do not share these characteristics were not included. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.*

*Source: NSSE 2004 school and national data are from the 2001 IPEDS Enrollment Data File.*



**Race and Ethnicity**

White students are slightly over-represented while African American and Hispanic students are slightly under-represented (Table 2).

**Living Arrangements**

Forty-five percent (45%) of all students lived in campus housing (68% of first-year students, 22% of seniors). The remainder lived within driving distance (41%), within walking distance (13%), or in a fraternity or sorority house (1%).

**Fraternity or Sorority**

Eleven percent (11%) of men and 10% of women were members of a social fraternity or sorority.

**Grades**

Approximately 42% of all students reported that they have earned mostly A grades. Only 4% of students reported earning mostly Cs or lower.

**Parents' Education**

Thirty-two percent (32%) of all respondents were first-generation college students. Forty percent (40%) had parents who both graduated from college.

**Enrollment Status**

About 90% of all respondents were enrolled full-time (Table 2). Approximately 35% of students attended one or more other institutions in addition to the one at which they were currently enrolled. Of this group, 25% went to another four-year college, 36% to a community college, 7% to a vocational-technical school, 6% to another form of postsecondary education, and 26% went to a combination of these.

**35% of students have attended one or more other institutions in addition to the one at which they are currently enrolled**

**Female students are almost three times more likely to major in education than their male counterparts**

**The average institutional response rates for Paper and Web-only modes of administration were basically even, 40% and 41% respectively**

### Primary Major Field

Table 3 shows the percentages of students majoring in different fields broken down by class and gender. More men major in Business, Engineering, and Physical Sciences, while more women pursue degrees in Education, Professional Schools, and the Social Sciences.

**Table 3**  
**Primary Major Field of Study by Class and Gender**

<u>Major</u>	<u>First-Year Students</u>		<u>Seniors</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Arts & Humanities	14%	15%	15%	17%
Biological Sciences	7%	8%	6%	7%
Business	17%	13%	21%	17%
Education	6%	14%	6%	14%
Engineering	12%	1%	10%	1%
Physical Sciences	5%	3%	4%	3%
Professional Schools	6%	14%	4%	10%
Social Sciences	10%	14%	12%	17%
Other	18%	12%	22%	15%
Undecided	5%	6%	N/A	N/A

### **Response Rates**

The average institutional response rate for NSSE 2004 was 40%.<sup>2</sup> The average institutional response rate for paper schools (institutions where students had the option of completing either the paper or the Web version of *The College Student Report*) was 40%, with a range of 14% to 85% across schools. The average institutional response rate for NSSE 2004 Web-only schools (institutions where students only had the option of completing the survey online) was 41%, with a range of 9% to 89% across schools. This year we introduced the Web+ mode of administration which mixed Web and paper versions of the survey. Institutions participating in this new method recorded an overall response rate of 41% with a majority of Web+ respondents using the online version (86%).

About 13% of the NSSE 2004 respondents completed the paper version of *The College Student Report* and approximately 87% completed it using the Web. This reflects a reversal from just three years ago when the majority of students completed the paper version.

Additional information about response rates, including the response rate for your institution, can be found under the Respondent Characteristics tab of the institutional report binder. Please note the average institutional response rate of 40% is slightly higher than NSSE 2004 response rate of 38% reported in the Respondent Characteristic tab due to differences in the unit of analysis (institutions versus students).

## Selected Results

This section is divided into two parts. The first part presents a general view of the nature and frequency of undergraduate student engagement in effective educational practices. The second part briefly summarizes the results from a series of regression analyses examining the engagement patterns of different groups of students, controlling for various student characteristics and institutional factors such as Carnegie type and sector.

### College Activities

The first page of the survey includes questions about the nature of the activities in which students engage. A “substantial amount” of engagement is defined to be at least 50% of all students reporting “often” or “very often” on a given item (Table 4).

The least frequent activities are those where the percentage of students who respond “never” exceed 35%, meaning that roughly one third or more of the students had no experiences in these areas during the 2003-2004 academic year (Table 4).



**Table 4**  
**Most Frequently and Least Frequently Reported Activities**

<u>Most Frequent Activities</u>	<b>First-Year Students Responding “Very Often” or “Often”</b>	<b>Seniors Responding “Very Often” or “Often”</b>
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	75%	87%
Used email to communicate with an instructor	69%	79%
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	61%	75%
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)	58%	66%
Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)	56%	67%
Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs) in class discussions or writing assignments	58%	61%
<u>Least Frequent Activities</u>	<b>First-Year Students Responding “Never”</b>	<b>Seniors Responding “Never”</b>
Participated in community-based project as part of a regular course	62%	52%
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework	60%	44%
Tutored or taught other students	52%	42%

**75% of first-year students worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources**

**Almost half (44%) of all seniors never worked with faculty on activities other than coursework.**

**38% of seniors at Baccalaureate Liberal Arts colleges studied abroad, whereas only 17% of all seniors studied abroad**

### Course Emphasis and Educational Programs

Another way to gain insight into the student experience is to look at the kinds of intellectual and mental activities that institutions emphasize and the types of educational programs in which students take part that complement and enrich their collegiate experience.

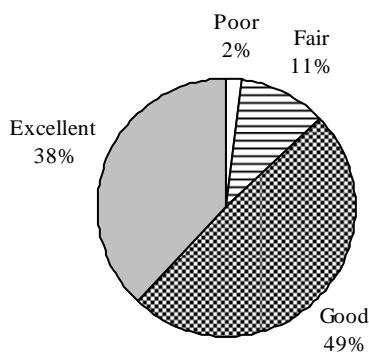
- Nearly 81% of seniors say their classes, to a substantial degree, emphasize applying theories or concepts to practical problems (combination of “quite a bit” and “very much” responses).
- More than four-fifths (86%) of seniors say their classes emphasized analyzing ideas or situations.
- Over half (56%) of all seniors complete an internship or other type of field experience and another one in five (19%) plan to do so before graduating (Table 5).
- One in five (20%) seniors work on research with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.
- Less than one-fifth (17%) of seniors study abroad.

**Table 5**  
Percentage of Seniors who Participated in Various Educationally Enriching Activities\*

	<u>DR- Ext</u>	<u>DR - Int</u>	<u>Master's</u>	<u>B-LA</u>	<u>B-Gen</u>	<u>Total</u>
Practicum, internship, field experience	51%	51%	53%	68%	59%	56%
Community service/volunteer work	58%	54%	57%	74%	64%	60%
Research with faculty member	20%	18%	17%	33%	19%	20%
Learning community	21%	22%	23%	23%	25%	23%
Foreign language	47%	34%	38%	68%	39%	43%
Study abroad	15%	10%	12%	38%	13%	17%
Independent study/self-designed	18%	17%	20%	40%	24%	23%
Culminating senior experience	25%	28%	31%	57%	38%	35%

\* Percentages in this table differ from past years due primarily to a change in the response set for question #7 on the survey.

**Figure 1**  
Satisfaction with College Experience



### Community Service and Volunteerism

Two-fifths of seniors (60%) do community service or volunteer work during college. Students who belong to Greek organizations are more likely than their non-member peers to perform a service activity. In addition, transfer and students 25 or older are less likely to engage in community service than their non-transfer or traditional-age peers. We also found that students who live on or near campus are more likely to volunteer than their peers who commute to campus.

### Student Satisfaction

Most students are generally satisfied with their college experience. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of all students rate their college experience “good” or “excellent” (Figure 1). Only 2% say their experience is “poor.” Eighty-four percent (84%) of first-year students and 81% of seniors would “probably” or “definitely” attend the same school if they were starting college again.

## Time on Task

What students put into their education determines what they get out of it. Of the six time-usage items on the survey, three are positively correlated with other engagement items and self-reported educational and personal growth. They are time devoted to preparing for class, extracurricular activities, and on-campus work. Of the remaining three items, two of them, working off campus and caring for dependents, may be prompted by circumstances not fully under the control of the student.

- Only about 11% of full-time students spend more than 25 hours a week preparing for class, the approximate number that faculty members say is needed to do well in college. More than two-fifths (43%) spend 10 or fewer hours a week (Figure 2).
- On average, part-time seniors work about 21 hours per week off-campus which is about double that of full-time seniors (Table 6).
- A non-trivial fraction of seniors (about 19%) spend 11 or more hours per week caring for dependents.
- Seventy-four percent (74%) of all students spend 15 or fewer hours a week relaxing and socializing. Nearly one out of every ten (8%) students spend more than 25 hours.

**Table 6**  
Student Time Usage Hours Per Week

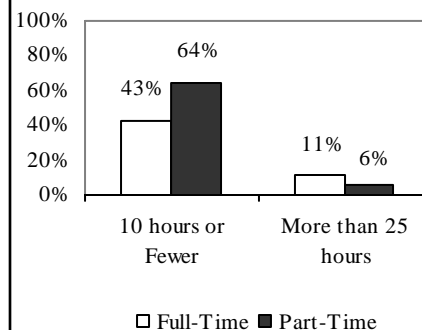
	First-Year Students		Seniors	
	<u>Part-time</u>	<u>Full-time</u>	<u>Part-time</u>	<u>Full-time</u>
Studying	9	13	10	14
Working on-campus	2	3	3	4
Working off-campus	18	5	21	10
Participating in co-curricular activities	1	5	2	5
Relaxing and socializing	10	12	10	11
Caring for Dependents	13	2	12	4
Commuting to class	5	4	5	5

## New Core Survey Items

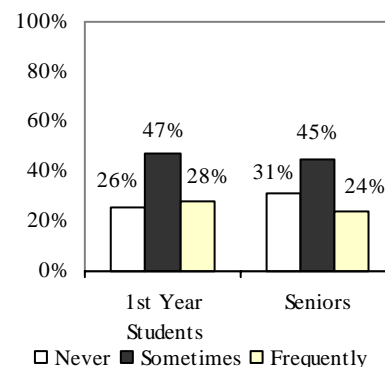
NSSE added several new questions to its core survey this year related to arts and culture, spirituality, and health and wellness.

- About a quarter of all students (26% first-year students; 31% seniors) never attend an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance (Figure 3). However, about the same number, 28% of first-year students and 24% of seniors, do so frequently (combination of “very often” and “often” responses).
- Approximately one in five students (17% first-year students; 22% seniors) never exercise, whereas, about half of all students (56% first-year students; 50% seniors) do so frequently.
- Two-fifths (42%) of both first-year students and seniors never participate in activities to enhance their spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.). This number decreases to one-fourth (26%) at religiously affiliated colleges and universities.

**Figure 2**  
Hours Per Week Students Spend Preparing for Class



**Figure 3**  
Percentages of Students Who Report Attending an Art Exhibit, Gallery, Play, Dance, or Other Theater Performance



## Patterns of student engagement are similar to those reported in previous years



## Patterns of Student Engagement

We conducted multivariate regression analyses for different groups of students using five clusters of items from *The College Student Report* as dependent variables while statistically adjusting for selected individual and institutional characteristics.<sup>3</sup> These clusters are:

- (1) college activities (22 items in question #1);
- (2) course emphasis on higher-order mental activities (Question #2, items b through e);
- (3) opinions of campus environment (Question #10);
- (4) educational and personal growth (Question #11);
- (5) satisfaction with your overall college experiences (Questions #13 and #14).

In general, the results reported below are similar to those reported in previous years.

### Year in School

Compared to first-year students, seniors are more engaged in effective educational practices. That is, they more frequently participate in college activities and report greater course emphasis on higher-order mental activities. Therefore, it's no surprise seniors also report greater gains in educational and personal growth. First-year students perceive the campus environment to be more supportive and were slightly more satisfied than seniors with their overall college experience.

### Gender

Women are slightly more engaged than men in their educational experience. That is, they are more involved in various college activities, report higher gains in educational and personal growth, perceive that their courses emphasize higher-order thinking to a greater degree, and are more satisfied with their overall college experience than men.

### Race and Ethnicity

African American and Hispanic students generally are more engaged in college activities, report greater course emphasis on higher-order mental activities, and have higher self-reported gains in educational and personal growth than their peers. Asian students also report increased educational and personal growth versus White students. Compared with other groups, African American and Hispanic students have the most favorable opinions about the campus environment. However, African American and Asian are the least satisfied with their college experience as a whole.

### Major Field of Study

Education, Social Science, and Professional majors are more engaged in effective educational activities than their counterparts in other majors. Among most groupings of majors, students report little difference in educational and personal growth, perceptions of a supportive campus environment, and general satisfaction with college. However, students in Professional majors, Engineering, and Physical Sciences report greater course emphasis on higher-order mental activities.



**Age**

Younger, traditional-age students (18-24 years) report spending slightly more time in educationally productive activities and perceive their campus environment to be more supportive than older students. However, older students did not differ much from their younger counterparts in educational and personal growth and in their perceptions of course emphasis on higher-order mental activities. Older students report greater satisfaction with their overall college experience.

**Transfer Students**

Overall, transfer students are less engaged in effective educational activities than their non-transfer peers. Transfer students tend to be older and have more external responsibilities such as working for pay off-campus and caring for dependents. Transfer students believe their coursework provides more emphasis on cultivating higher-order thinking abilities than their peers, yet they interact with faculty members and engage enriching educational programs at levels lower than their counterparts. Transfer students also perceive the campus environment to be less supportive.

**Fraternity and Sorority Members**

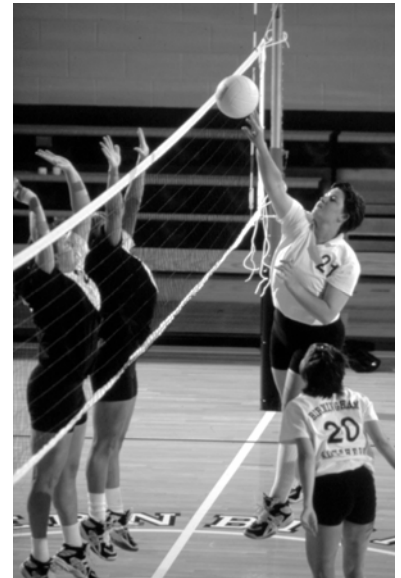
Taking into account selected student and institutional characteristics, members of Greek-letter social organizations are more engaged than non-members in all areas of good educational practice. Fraternity and sorority members also report their campuses as more supportive and are more satisfied overall with their educational experience.

**Student-Athletes**

Student-athletes, compared to their peers who did not participate in intercollegiate athletics are slightly more engaged in a variety of educationally effective activities and perceive the campus environment as more supportive. In general, athletes are similar to their non-athlete peers in terms of their overall satisfaction with college and in their perceptions of coursework that emphasizes higher-order thinking skills.

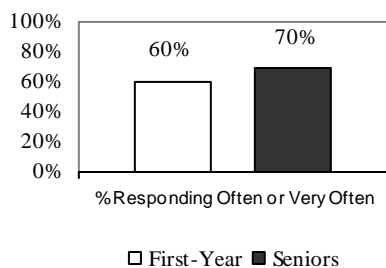
**Parents' Education**

Students whose parents hold college degrees are slightly more engaged than first-generation college students in a variety of college activities. However, students with college-educated parents did not differ from their first-generation counterparts in terms of their opinion of the campus, as well as the overall satisfaction with the college experience. Differences in engagement between first-generation students and their counterparts were even greater when a student's parent held a graduate degree.

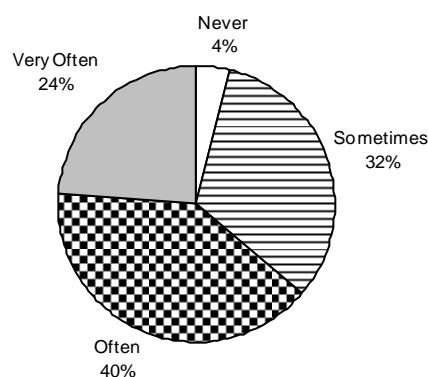


**Student-athletes  
perceive the  
campus  
environment more  
positively than their  
peers**

**Figure 4**  
**Students Who Frequently Used**  
**Media Sources to Stay Informed**  
**About Local Political or**  
**Community Issues**



**Figure 5**  
**Students Who Report Learning**  
**Something that Changed the**  
**Way They Understood an Issue**



## Experimental Questions

Similar to past years, NSSE 2004 experimented with a number of new questions for possible future inclusion in the survey. This year a set of questions related to civic engagement was included at the end of the on-line survey. Thus, only students responding to the on-line survey were asked these questions.

### Civic Engagement

Student responses to the civic engagement questions reveal that half to three-quarters of all students never participate in various civic related activities although many stay informed through various media outlets such as the newspaper, radio, television, and the Web.

- About two-thirds of students (60% first-year students; 70% seniors) frequently (combination of “very often” and “often” responses) use various media sources to remain informed about local political or community issues (Figure 4).
- Roughly half of all students (50% first-year students; 48% seniors) never expressed opinions about a political or community issue in a public forum (e.g. email to media, sign a petition, contact a government official, made a speech, etc.) during the last academic year.
- Approximately one in five students (18%) frequently participate in fundraising events. However, this number increases to 44% for students in fraternities and sororities.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of all students (75% first-year students; 70% seniors) never attend a rally, vigil, or protest about an issue that is important to them. Sixty-three percent (63%) of students at Liberal Arts Colleges say they never do this civic activity versus 77% at Doctoral-Intensive Universities.
- The majority of students (77% first-year students; 69% seniors) never led meetings or activities for a local community organization or religious group in the past year.

### Reflective Learning

Another small set of experimental items in this year’s online survey focuses on reflective learning. Examples of these items include learning something that changes the way a person understands a concept or idea, discussing questions that do not have clear answers, understanding another person’s point of view, and applying course material to real world situations.

- Over two-thirds of all seniors (69%) and almost as many first-year students (63%) report that they frequently examine the strengths and weaknesses of their views on a topic or issue.
- Of students who responded, only 6% never learned something from discussing questions that have no clear answers. This increases to 9% for part-time students and 15% for students who report grades of C– or lower.
- The majority of students (66% first-year students; 72% seniors) frequently try to better understand someone else’s views by imagining the issue from his or her perspective.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of all students (61% first-year students; 68% seniors) frequently report learning something that changed their understanding of an issue (Figure 5).

## Guidelines for Interpreting NSSE Results

Before sharing your NSSE results, become familiar with the nature of the data and the “story” of your school’s performance. Here are some things to consider.

### Check the Representativeness of Your Respondents

Compare your student respondents’ demographic characteristics, summarized in the Frequency Distribution and Respondent Characteristics sections, with your institutional data files for first-year and senior students. Women and White students are somewhat over-represented among NSSE 2004 respondents. Check to see if this is also true in your case and whether your respondents differ in any other ways from the institutional profile of your first-year and senior students. The determination of student year in school (“first-year” or “senior”) is based on information from the electronic file that your school provided to us last fall. The Frequency Distribution section also contains student-reported class information from the survey, which in a few cases may differ from the institution’s classification.

Another way to gauge representativeness is through sampling error, an estimate of the margin by which the “true” score for your institution on a given item could differ from the reported score due to random sampling. For example, if 60% reply “very often” to a particular item and the sampling error is +/- 5% there is a 95% chance that the population value is between 55% and 65%. Keep in mind that sampling error is based on the population of interest. If you want to estimate the sampling error for first-year male students, it must be calculated using the first-year male student population size. Increasing the number of respondents relative to the total population reduces sampling error. For this reason some schools increase their sample size using NSSE oversampling.

### Look Carefully at Items with Large Effect Sizes

In the Means Comparison Report an asterisk (\*) indicates your students’ responses differ at a statistically significant level from students at schools in your respective comparison group(s) or at all NSSE 2004 institutions. More asterisks reported for a particular item indicate a smaller probability that the difference noted is due to chance. Even so, the actual magnitude of some item score differences may seem trivial, even though they are highly reliable and statistically significant. For this reason, we also report the Cohen’s *d* effect size for comparisons that are statistically significant. The effect size represents the magnitude of the difference in the student or institutional behavior represented by the item. When the effect size is large, or a pattern of moderate effect sizes exists, it’s likely that the quality of the student experience is appreciably different and, therefore, may be of practical as well as statistical significance in the respective area of student engagement.

Large effect sizes are uncommon in most areas of non-experimental social science research, including the NSSE project. If your results include some medium or large effects, something may be going on that warrants immediate attention, especially if other empirical or anecdotal information corroborate the NSSE data. Here are some general guidelines for determining the relative importance of a Cohen’s *d* effect size:

- .20 is a small effect
- .50 is a medium effect
- .80 is a large effect



**Focus on items with medium to large effect sizes and look for patterns in your students’ responses**

**A consistent pattern of scoring above the mean may indicate your institution is doing the right things in terms of good educational practices**



### **Look for Patterns in Item Differences**

In addition to focusing on items with medium to large effect sizes, look for patterns in your students' responses. For example, are your students consistently above or below the mean of your comparison group in certain areas of engagement? Are the differences explainable, perhaps a function of your school's mission, the nature of the undergraduate program, or certain students' characteristics?

Also, do not rely exclusively on significance tests to identify areas that warrant attention. A consistent pattern of scoring above the mean, even though all items may not reach statistical significance, may indicate your institution is doing the right things in terms of good educational practice. At the same time, some institutions have very high expectations for student engagement and may fall short of their own aspirations even though comparisons with other institutions are favorable.

### **The Results are Unweighted**

The results in the Means Comparison Report are not weighted. That is, no adjustments were made to correct for potential bias in students' responses to approximate the populations of first-year and senior students at your school and other colleges and universities in your comparison groups. Later this fall, when we prepare the five National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, we'll use appropriate weighting techniques, similar to those employed in previous years, to make adjustments. That said, the unweighted and weighted results for most NSSE items tend to be very similar at the institution, comparison group, and national levels. Some possible exceptions may be the reading, writing, and time on task questions (e.g., study hours, caring for dependents) at schools that have substantial proportions of part-time students, as they take fewer classes per term and cannot be expected to read and write as much as full-time students. Keep this in mind when reviewing the results.

### **If Your School Is In A Consortium**

If your school belongs to a consortium that used additional questions, the responses to these additional questions are included in the Means Comparison Report (if non-categorical) and Frequency Distribution sections. These data are also in the institutional data file. When presenting the results of categorical questions to colleagues and others, please use the information in the Frequency Distribution section.

### **Take into Account Possible Mode-of-Administration Effects**

Our analyses show that a mode-of-administration effect slightly favors schools where a high percentage of students completed *The College Student Report* via the Web. However, the differences that favor the Web mode have very small effect sizes. This phenomenon has also been noted by others using the Web for survey research and is discussed in more detail in the Additional Information tab of the institutional report binder. We are still unsure whether this pattern of responses is a function of the mode of administration itself (e.g., something about responding via the Web induces students to slightly inflate their responses), a function of certain institutional features (e.g., technology investment), or whether students who complete the survey via the Web are different in some ways including engaging more frequently in good educational practices. Evidence of the last of these is that the Web effect is most prominent on the three technology-related items (“used e-mail to communicate with an instructor,” “used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment,” and self-reported gain in “using computing and information technology”). We are continuing to monitor this issue and will alert you if our analyses lead us to modify our conclusion that the Web mode has little practical impact on student responses to *The College Student Report*.

### **Review Responses to Experimental Questions (if applicable)**

In an effort to test potential survey items for future administrations, a small set of experimental questions related to civic engagement and reflective learning were added to the NSSE online survey. These questions were attached to the end of the survey and only students responding to the online version received these extra questions.

For schools that chose to participate, responses to the experimental questions are included in the institutional data file. However, due to their experimental nature and the fact that only students completing the online survey received them, these questions are not included in the Frequency Distribution and Means Comparison Reports. Rather, frequencies and means by Carnegie type and at the national level are provided in a separate report titled “NSSE 2004 Experimental Items” that will help inform institutional comparisons.

When reviewing your institution’s experimental item results, please pay attention to the number of respondents. If the number is small compared with your overall respondent group, interpret your results with extreme caution.

**For more information about mode-of-administration effects visit our website at [www.iub.edu/~nsse](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse) and explore the research section**



**A greater number of institutions are increasing the size of their sample in order to analyze results at both the school and major level**

### **Consortium, Carnegie, and National Comparison Groups Do Not Include Oversampled Students**

NSSE's minimum sample sizes are determined by undergraduate enrollment (i.e., less than 4,000 students = 450; 4,000 to 15,000 students = 700; greater than 15,000 students = 1,000). It is possible to add students to the minimum sample size by oversampling in one of two ways: (1) all Web-only and Web+ schools are oversampled using an algorithm based on undergraduate enrollment; and (2) some institutions request oversampling, which requires an additional fee. An increasing number of schools are using the oversampling option to add students to their sample, reduce sampling error, and insure an adequate number of respondents to analyze the information by major field, race and ethnicity, or other variables.

NSSE's policy is to use only respondents from the institution's standard random sample when developing the National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice as well as sector and national norms for the means and frequency report. Consortia data is also compiled with only the standard random sample of participating institutions in each group. This protects against the possibility that colleges and universities with oversamples might unduly influence the results. However, if your school requested a NSSE oversample, the responses of **all** your students (standard sample and NSSE random and targeted oversample) **are included** in your institution's means and frequency reports and data file. Excluding schools in the BEAMS project, students who were locally oversampled will appear only in an institution's data file and not in their reports.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The findings reported in the 2004 Overview represent approximately 90,000 students. The findings do not include a significant number of additional students who were oversampled. Oversampling was done at Web+ and Web-only institutions and at schools that requested more of their students be surveyed than dictated by the NSSE sampling strategy, which is a function of institutional size. When all modes of administration are combined (standard, local, and oversampling), approximately 200,000 students responded to the NSSE 2004 survey.

<sup>2</sup>The NSSE 2004 average institutional response rates most likely underestimate the actual adjusted rate. Student postal service and e-mail addresses were based on fall 2003 enrollment information provided by the institutions. An unknown number of students in the sample were no longer eligible to complete the survey because they had dropped out or transferred to another institution. Even though first-class postage was used to guarantee the return of survey packets that could not be delivered, experience suggests that packets were not returned for some students who were no longer in school or residing at their fall 2003 address. In addition, at Web-only and Web+ schools, institution-provided email addresses were used to send students their invitation to participate in NSSE 2004. We have found that many students have multiple e-mail accounts (e.g., Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail). Some institutions have more difficulty tracking these multiple email accounts and some students may not forward their institution assigned e-mail. Therefore, the actual NSSE response rate for Web-only institutions, when corrected for the unknown number of students who were no longer in school or did not receive the invitation to participate, may be several percentage points higher than 40%.

<sup>3</sup>The regression of each cluster of items on a group characteristic is net of the following student and institutional controls: class, residence, gender, enrollment status, race/ethnicity, age, major, parental education, sector, and 2002 Carnegie Classification.



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