BCSSE 2007-2008 Overview

After three pilot years, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) was launched in 2007 as a companion survey to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). BCSSE collects data about entering college students’ high school academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the first college year. BCSSE administration usually takes place prior to the start of fall classes and is designed to be paired with a NSSE administration at the end of the first college year, providing an in-depth understanding of first-year student engagement on your campus.

In fall 2007, 126 U.S. and Canadian institutions participated in BCSSE. Of those, 105 (83%) also administered NSSE in 2008, allowing comparisons of incoming student experiences and expectations with their actual experiences at the end of the first year. BCSSE data can be used independently or in combination with NSSE data by faculty, academic advisors, administrators, researchers, and others for program development, institutional improvement, accountability, and related purposes.

Administration and Respondents

BCSSE is administered locally by campus officials who distribute the paper survey or send invitations and reminders for online administration. In 2007 approximately two-thirds of participating schools (68%) utilized paper administration and the remaining institutions (32%) chose the Web-based survey. More than 100,000 incoming students from 34 states and two Canadian provinces were invited to participate in the 2007 BCSSE administration. In total 63,077 U.S. and 3,963 Canadian students completed the survey.

BCSSE 2007 Institutions

Many different types of U.S. institutions and three Canadian institutions participated in BCSSE 2007. Almost half (48%) of the U.S. institutions were classified as masters level, with 38% baccalaureate, and 14% doctoral (Figure 1).

In general, the characteristics of BCSSE 2007 U.S. institutions reflected the national distribution of baccalaureate-granting institutions with respect to Carnegie Classification, control, and undergraduate enrollment size (Table 1). Master’s colleges and universities were slightly overrepresented while baccalaureate and doctoral institutions were slightly underrepresented.

Public and private BCSSE institutions closely matched the distribution of U.S. institutions nationally. Finally, medium sized colleges and universities with enrollment sizes between 5,000–9,999 undergraduates were slightly overrepresented in this sample, while small schools with fewer than 1,000 students were underrepresented.

Profile of U.S. Respondents

Given that BCSSE is a locally administered survey, sampling schemes and data collection methods vary between institutions. However, most institutions sampled the entire first-year population. With this in mind, it is important to understand the general characteristics of BCSSE 2007 respondents (Table 2).

---

1 In Canada, the BCSSE project is known as the Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement (BUSSE).
Overall, there is very little gender difference in the BCSSE 2007 sample compared to the national representation of women in their first year of college. Women made up more than half (58%) of the BCSSE U.S. respondents, closely matching the percentage of first-time, first-year women at baccalaureate-granting institutions nationally.

### Race and Ethnicity

BCSSE data also closely comport with the representation of students in U.S. baccalaureate-granting institutions by race and ethnicity. Of BCSSE U.S. respondents approximately 69% were Caucasian, 11% were Black/African American, 7% Asian American, and 5% Hispanic/Latino.

### First-Generation Status

Approximately 39% of BCSSE respondents indicated that neither of their parents (or legal guardians) graduated from college with at least a bachelor’s degree. Given the difficulties that many first-generation students face when entering higher education, it is important that institutions focus resources to assure the success of these students.

---

**Table 1**

Profile of BCSSE 2007 U.S. Institutions Compared to All U.S. Baccalaureate-Granting Colleges and Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carnegie Classification - Basic 2005&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>BCSSE 2007</th>
<th>US&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral (RU/VH, RU/H, DRU)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s (Master’s L, Master’s M, Master’s S)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate (Bac/A&amp;S, Bac/Diverse)</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BCSSE 2007</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Undergraduate Enrollment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>BCSSE 2007</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 1,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 – 2,499</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500 – 4,999</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 – 9,999</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 – 19,999</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 or more</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Percentages are based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and belong to one of the eight Carnegie classes in the table. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup> U.S. percentages are based on the data from the 2007 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics File.

<sup>c</sup> For information on the 2005 Carnegie Classifications see www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications.

---

High School Graduation Year

BCSSE U.S. respondents are, for the most part, traditional-age college students. Approximately 94% graduated from high school in 2007, 3% graduated in 2006, and 3% graduated in 2005 or earlier.

Financial Aid

Not surprisingly, about 87% of all respondents indicated they received some form of financial aid (loans or grants). Specifically, 17% of students indicated that they received a federal Pell Grant, compared to approximately 26% nationally.\(^3\)

Selected Findings

BCSSE data are useful for a multitude of analyses to better understand the students’ first year. Below are a few selected results that illustrate the kinds of analyses that are possible using your BCSSE and NSSE data.

How is engagement in high school related to expected engagement in the first year of college?

Figure 2 provides a comparison of high school academic engagement and expected engagement in effective educational practices during the first year of college.

As anticipated, most students who were less engaged in high school expressed low expectations for engagement in effective practices, whereas most students who were more engaged in high school expect to be more engaged in college.

Are students’ expectations for grades reasonable?

Figure 3 provides a comparison of expected grades in college and overall grades near the end of the first year (as reported in NSSE).

Overall, most students reported grades consistent with what they expected and in some cases exceeded their expected grades. For instance, of the students who expected to earn B– or lower, 58% reported higher grades. For those students expecting to earn grades of B to B+, 78% reported overall grades of B or higher. Only 22% of these students reported grades of B– or lower. One area of concern may be students who do not do as well as they expect. For instance, 45% of the students who expected to earn A– or higher, actually earned lower grades. These students may be academically struggling in ways they did not expect at the beginning of the year.

Do most first-year students intend to graduate from the institution in which they are currently enrolled?

The majority of students who completed BCSSE in 2007 (80%) intend to graduate from the institution they are currently attending. Only 3% of the students indicated they do not intend to graduate from their current institution, while 17% were not sure. Students intending to graduate are also more likely to persist to their sophomore year. Nationally, the first-year to sophomore persistence rate in 2001 was approximately 74%.

Do first-generation students have the same general academic motivations as non-first-generation students?

Many are concerned (and rightly so) about the ability of first-generation students to succeed in college. Some worry that these students may not be as motivated as other students. One indicator of academic motivation is the certainty that the student will persevere when facing difficult academic challenges. As indicated in Figure 4, there is very little difference between first-generation students and their counterparts regarding their attitudes about academic perseverance. First-generation students face many challenges, but their confidence to persevere when confronting difficulties may not be one of them.