NSSE Logo


# NSSE 2019 Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced “nessie”) 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 1,600 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. This document provides an overview of NSSE 2019, including administration details, response rates, participating institutions, and respondent characteristics.

## Survey Data and Methodology

Approximately 1.5 million first-year and senior students from 531 institutions (504 in the US, 19 in Canada, and 8 in other countries) were invited to participate in NSSE 2019. Of this population, 294,507 students responded to the survey. Less than half (47%) of these were first-year students and 53% 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 sample size based on total undergraduate enrollment. Census administration is available only via email recruitment, in which students get a survey invitation and up to four reminders by email. In 2019, all but three participating institutions opted for this method rather than the regular mail option, in which sampled students get up to three messages by post and up to two email reminders.

Unless noted otherwise, the results presented below are from 510 institutions—491 in the US and 19 in Canada—that participated in NSSE 2019. Due to nonstandard details of their participation, 21 institutions are not represented. In these summary tables, as in each *Institutional Report 2019,* only data for census-administered and randomly sampled students are included. NSSE 2019 U.S. respondents profiled here include 281,136 first-year (46%) and senior (54%) respondents.

## U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2019 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). A searchable list of participating institutions is on the NSSE website: [**nsse.indiana.edu/links/participants**](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/participants)

A student at Mississippi State University

Mississippi State University

## Institutional Response Rates

The average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2019 institutions was 28%. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 67%, and about three out of five achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Higher average response rates were observed for smaller institutions and for institutions offering incentives (Table 2).

Institutions had the option to use their learning management system or student portal to recruit students. In 2019, 85 U.S. institutions chose this option, and the average share of respondents who accessed the survey this way was 28%.

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| Table 1Profile of NSSE 2019 U.S. Institutions and  Respondents and Bachelor’s-Granting U.S.  Institutions and Their Students | | | | | |
|  | **Institutions  (%)** | |  | **Students  (%)** | |
| **Institution Characteristics** | **NSSE** | **U.S.** |  | **NSSE** | **U.S.** |
| **Carnegie Basic Classification** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Doctoral Universities (Very high research activity) | 6 | 8 |  | 20 | 30 |
| Doctoral Universities (High research activity) | 10 | 8 |  | 18 | 16 |
| Doctoral/Professional Universities | 13 | 9 |  | 17 | 10 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Larger programs) | 26 | 21 |  | 25 | 26 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Medium programs) | 15 | 12 |  | 8 | 6 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Smaller programs) | 6 | 8 |  | 3 | 3 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges— Arts & Sciences Focus | 12 | 14 |  | 5 | 4 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields | 12 | 19 |  | 4 | 5 |
| **Control** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Public | 42 | 36 |  | 62 | 67 |
| Private | 58 | 64 |  | 38 | 33 |
| **Undergraduate Enrollment** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fewer than 1,000 | 12 | 22 |  | 3 | 2 |
| 1,000–2,499 | 33 | 31 |  | 14 | 9 |
| 2,500–4,999 | 21 | 17 |  | 14 | 11 |
| 5,000–9,999 | 17 | 15 |  | 20 | 19 |
| 10,000–19,999 | 10 | 8 |  | 21 | 22 |
| 20,000 or more | 7 | 7 |  | 29 | 37 |
| **Region** |  |  |  |  |  |
| New England | 8 | 8 |  | 7 | 6 |
| Mid East | 19 | 18 |  | 13 | 16 |
| Great Lakes | 12 | 15 |  | 12 | 14 |
| Plains | 12 | 10 |  | 13 | 7 |
| Southeast | 26 | 25 |  | 25 | 24 |
| Southwest | 11 | 8 |  | 13 | 12 |
| Rocky Mountains | 4 | 3 |  | 8 | 6 |
| Far West | 9 | 10 |  | 8 | 13 |
| Outlying Areas | 1 | 2 |  | 1 | 1 |
| **Locale** |  |  |  |  |  |
| City | 45 | 46 |  | 56 | 61 |
| Suburban | 24 | 26 |  | 22 | 24 |
| Town | 26 | 22 |  | 20 | 14 |
| Rural | 5 | 6 |  | 2 | 1 |
| 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 2018 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data. For information on the Carnegie Foundation’s 2018 Basic Classification, see [**carnegieclassifications.iu.edu**](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/) | | | | | |

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| Table 2NSSE 2019 U.S. Participation and Response Rates by Undergraduate Enrollment and Use of Incentives | | |
| **Institution Characteristics** | **Number of Institutions** | **Average Institutional Response Rate (%)** |
| **Undergraduate Enrollment** | | |
| 2,500 or fewer | 230 | 33 |
| 2,501 to 4,999 | 101 | 25 |
| 5,000 to 9,999 | 80 | 24 |
| 10,000 or more | 80 | 21 |
| **Use of Incentives** Some institutions used recruitment incentives, such as small gifts or raffles, to encourage students to complete the survey. | | |
| Offered incentives | 315 | 30 |
| No incentives | 176 | 25 |
| **All Institutions** | 491 | 28 |

## Survey Customization

Participating institutions may append up to two additional question sets in the form of NSSE Topical Modules or consortium questions (for institutions sharing a common interest and participating as a NSSE consortium) (Table 3). Of the nine modules available in 2019, the most widely adopted was First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions, followed by Academic Advising (Table 4).

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| Table 3Summary of NSSE 2019 Participation in Additional Questions Sets | | |
| **Selection of  Additional Question Sets** | **Number of Institutions** | **Percentage of Institutions** |
| None | 57 | 11 |
| One module only | 122 | 23 |
| Two modules | 242 | 46 |
| Consortium items only | 16 | 3 |
| Consortium items plus one module | 94 | 18 |
| Notes: Includes U.S., Canadian, other international institutions, and institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. | | |

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| Table 4NSSE 2019 Participation in Topical Modules | | |
| **Topical Module** | **Number of Institutions** | **Percentage of Institutions** |
| First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions | 188 | 35 |
| Academic Advising | 178 | 34 |
| Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity | 108 | 20 |
| Civic Engagement | 63 | 12 |
| Experiences with Writing | 48 | 9 |
| Development of Transferable Skills | 45 | 8 |
| Global Learning | 28 | 5 |
| Learning with Technology | 24 | 5 |
| Experiences with Information Literacy | 18 | 3 |
| Notes: Includes U.S., Canadian, other international institutions, and institutions with nonstandard population files or administrations. Percentages sum to more than 100 because many institutions selected two modules.  Academic Advising includes institutions that administered an experimental set. | | |

## U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 5 displays selected demographic and enrollment characteristics of NSSE 2019 U.S. respondents alongside all U.S. bachelor’s degree-seeking students for comparison. 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 9,091 students (58% first-year, 42% senior) from 19 institutions in four provinces, including nine institutions in Ontario; two in Alberta; five in British Columbia; and one from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan. Female students and full-time students accounted for about 69% and 90% of Canadian respondents, respectively. The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2019 institutions was 42%, with the highest response rate being 81%. About three out of four achieved a response rate of 25% or higher.

About 16% of Canadian respondents were at least 24 years old. The majority of students providing ethnocultural information identified as Caucasian or White (67%), while 10% were multiracial, 6% Chinese, 6% South Asian, 3% Black, and less than 3% from each of nine other categories.

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| Table 5Characteristics of NSSE 2019 U.S. Respondents and Undergraduate Population at All U.S. Bachelor’s Degree-Granting Institutions | | |
| **Student Characteristics** | **NSSE Respondents (%)** | **U.S. Bachelor's-Granting Population  (%)** |
| **Sex** |  |  |
| Male | 34 | 44 |
| Female | 66 | 56 |
| **Race/Ethnicity** |  |  |
| African American/Black | 9 | 12 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 1 | 1 |
| Asian | 5 | 7 |
| Native Hawaiian/other Pac. Isl. | <1 | <1 |
| Caucasian/White | 64 | 55 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 13 | 17 |
| Multiracial/multiethnic | 4 | 4 |
| Foreign/nonresident | 3 | 5 |
| **Enrollment Status** |  |  |
| Full-time | 89 | 84 |
| Not full-time | 11 | 16 |
| Notes: Percentages are unweighted and may not sum to 100 due  to rounding. Student characteristics are institution-reported, using categories provided in IPEDS. NSSE percentages do not include students with “another” or “unknown” sex (0.2% of all respondents) or unknown race/ethnicity (14% of all respondents). The NSSE 2019 sampling frame consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data were provided by participating institutions. U.S. percentages are based on data from the 2018 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years. | | |

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| Table 6Additional Characteristics of NSSE 2019 U.S. Respondents | |
| **Student Characteristics** | **%** |
| At least 24 years old | 23 |
| First-generation (No parent or guardian holds a bachelor’s degree.) | 44 |
| Transfer | 30 |
| Expects to complete a master’s degree or higher | 59 |
| Living on campus (campus housing, fraternity, or sorority) | 39 |
| Taking all classes online | 12 |
| Note: Percentages are unweighted. | |

## Meet the NSSE Team

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