Engagement
Insights

Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education

NSSE
national survey of student engagement

Annual Results 2021

The Pandemic and Student Engagement
Trends, disparities, and opportunities observed throughout COVID-19

Flexible and Adaptable Teaching
Teaching and learning during a year of disruption, isolation, and innovation

Using NSSE Results in DEI Practices
Equity-centered methods when examining minoritized student experiences

Quick Facts from NSSE 2021

The **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning. Its primary activity is annually surveying college students to assess the extent to which they engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.

Audiences

NSSE's audiences include college and university leaders, faculty members, advisors, teaching and learning center staff, assessment professionals, institutional researchers, student life staff, governing boards, students, higher education scholars, accreditors, government agencies, higher education organizations, prospective students and their families, high school counselors, and journalists.

Participating Colleges and Universities

More than 1,600 four-year colleges and universities in the US and Canada have participated in NSSE since its launch in 2000, with 353 institutions participating in 2021. Participating institutions generally mirror the national distribution of institutions in the 2021 Basic Carnegie Classification (Figure 1).

In addition to the participation of individual institutions, state and multi-campus systems may coordinate system-level participation in NSSE. Institutions sharing a common interest or mission also can coordinate to add questions to the core survey through consortium participation.

Participation Benefits

Participation benefits include uniform third-party survey administration with several customization options. Deliverables include a student-level data file of all respondents, a comprehensive report package with results for three customizable comparison groups, major field reports, concise summary reports for campus leaders and prospective students, and resources for interpreting results and using them to inform practice.

Survey

The Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University's School of Education administers NSSE, in partnership with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. Completed in about 15 minutes, the online survey represents a census or a random sample of first-year and senior students. Institutions may append to the core survey up to two Topical Modules, permitting deeper examination of particular interest areas.

Validity & Reliability

NSSE is continuously and extensively tested to ensure validity and reliability. The Psychometric Portfolio available on the NSSE website provides more information about NSSE data quality.

Response Rate & Respondents

The average institutional response rate in 2021 was 30%. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 93%, and three out of five institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Unless otherwise noted, the results in this report are based on 203,284 first-year (47%) and senior (53%) respondents from 337 U.S. colleges and universities.

Use of Student Data

Participating colleges and universities agree that NSSE can use the data for aggregate reporting and other research and improvement initiatives. NSSE may not disclose institutionally identified results without permission. Colleges and universities may use their own data for institutional purposes, including public reporting, which NSSE encourages.

Other Programs & Services

The NSSE Institute offers workshops and webinars, faculty and staff retreats, custom analyses, and consulting. Companion surveys include the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

NSSE Website

The NSSE website includes a participating institution search, sample reports, examples of NSSE data use, summary tables, archived webinars, a research blog, publications, presentations, and more (see page 16).

nsse.indiana.edu

Figure 1. NSSE 2021 Participating Institutions
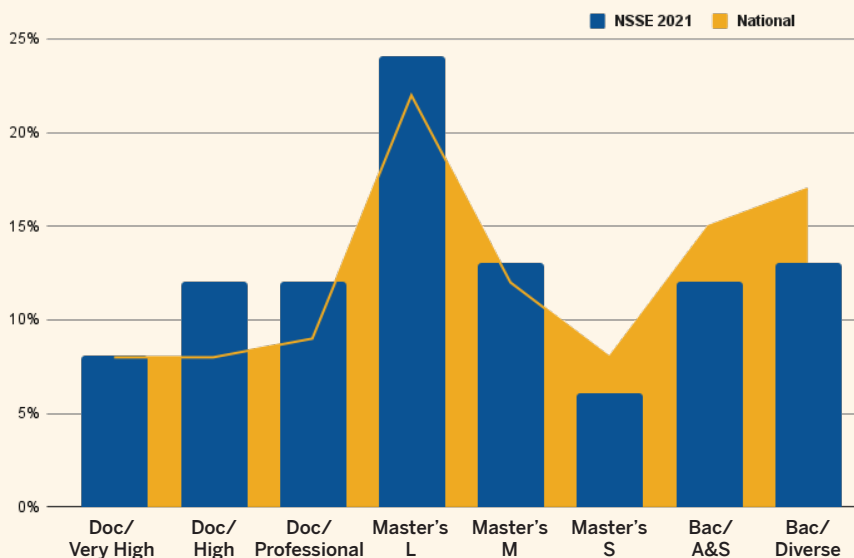
Carnegie 2021 Basic Classification

Doc/Very High	Doctoral Universities (Very High Research Activity)
Doc/High	Doctoral Universities (High Research Activity)
Doc/Professional	Doctoral/Professional Universities
Master's L	Master's Colleges/Universities (Larger Programs)
Master's M	Master's Colleges/Universities (Medium Programs)
Master's S	Master's Colleges/Universities (Smaller Programs)
Bac/A&S	Baccalaureate Colleges-Arts & Sciences Focus
Bac/Diverse	Baccalaureate Colleges-Diverse Fields

Percenteages are based on U.S. institutions that belong to one of the eight Carnegie Classifications above.

carnegieclassifications.iu.edu

NSSE National Advisory Board

Contents

University of Toronto

Enhancing Attention to Equity

We are excited to begin what we hope is a short tenure as Interim Co-Directors of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)! While "interim" certainly conveys our provisional status, we are very much envisioning some important changes to aspects of NSSE and are looking forward to being the bridge to NSSE's next full-time Director. We will do everything we can to sustain the project, enhance our work, and ensure NSSE is well-positioned to attract new leadership.

Toward this end, we're pleased to introduce this third installment of NSSE's Annual Results—Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education—which focuses on the critically important topic of equity in assessment. To be sure, it is our core goal to enhance attention to equity in NSSE survey design, administration, analysis, reporting, and research.

Jillian Kinzie

Cindy Ann Kilgo

Among the many findings that have emerged from NSSE, one of the most enduring is the variation that exists within institutions. Meaning that engagement results of students attending the same institution differ from each other much more than the average score of students at other institutions. This emphasizes the need for institutions to look within and consider educational quality and engagement for all students. Even more, institutions that seem reasonably similar—in size, context, student body demographics, programs, and so on—nevertheless are quite different when it comes to engagement among some student populations. In thinking about this more deeply, such variation is not as surprising as one might assume. As the results featured in this final Annual Results 2021 story make plain, one of the most important variations in student engagement is among student populations.

NSSE Needs Your Input

As co-directors, we recognize that we do not operate in a vacuum. We rely on invaluable feedback from the field. We would love to hear from you. Please contact Jillian Kinzie (jikinzie@indiana.edu) and Cindy Ann Kilgo (cakilgo@iu.edu) to provide input on our imaginings for NSSE's future legacy.

NSSE and its affiliated projects do not exist to survey college students. Rather, we support evidence-informed improvement. We're eager to learn more about how findings from NSSE are put to good use, in particular to enhance equity and inclusion in colleges and universities.

> **❝These issues represent a vital dimension of NSSE's future and to assuring the value of the project to assessing quality in undergraduate education."**

Where NSSE is Headed

As we strike into NSSE's third decade and prepare for NSSE's next Director, we plan to actively engage in our goal of enhancing attention to equity. Below are a few examples of how we have started to lean into this focus and are present within this third installment of Annual Results:

Inclusive Language to Document Student Identities

We are evolving toward student identity language that is more equitable and precise. For example, the introductory story uses specific age ranges rather than the common but problematic labels of "traditional" or "non-traditional." In addition, we note that while gender identity beyond the binary is not fully captured in NSSE's demographic question and in many student information systems, we encourage institutions to add information from their student records to the NSSE population file when possible to be more gender inclusive.

Survey Questions that Affirm Students' Identities

We emphasize survey questions that not only capture students' identities accurately, but also affirm their existence. You can see this in our change to the disability question, which allows students more expansive options to capture their identity. We are also aware of the limitations of our current gender identity question and are considering the use of 'Latinx' in future survey development.

Unmasking Group Differences through Disaggregation of Data

As noted in our report, we are considering the groups featured in comparisons and aim to disaggregate as much as possible to not mask inequities or exclude specific groups. One example of this is moving away from comparing Students of Color (as an aggregated group) to white students. Another instance is the approach of centering, or focusing, on a specific population in analyses, as we do with the exploration of the educational experiences of students who report having multiple disabilities or conditions.

Critical Quantitative Methodologies

We are moving towards the use of critical quantitative methodologies. These methodologies center the experiences of minoritized student populations and ultimately allow colleges and universities better utility of their data in serving underserved populations at their institutions.

Selected Results and Institution Stories

The Pandemic Continues

The coronavirus pandemic continued to have a profound impact on higher education and its students this past year, demanding rapid adaptation to unusual circumstances like shifting academic calendars and constantly changing health and safety requirements. NSSE adapted by adding a pandemic-specific question and introduced two salient modules, Coping with COVID (created specifically for the 2021 administration) and Experiences with Online Learning.

Recognizing these difficult and changing circumstances, NSSE asked students about the extent faculty and staff had done a good job helping them adapt to pandemic-induced changes. Hearteningly, nearly 3 out of 4 respondents (73%) said faculty and staff had helped them substantially ("quite a bit" or "very much") in this regard. However, some student groups reported slightly less support than their peers, such as those studying mostly online (71%), those at a doctoral degree-granting institution (71%), and Black or African-American students (72%).

In addition, student responses to the NSSE item about course type demonstrates a substantial shift to mostly remote instruction, with over 60% of all students reporting this course modality.

Look for the "Faculty Insights"

The faculty insights shared throughout this report come from the 2021 administration of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). based on results from 9,022 faculty from 75 bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States. FSSE ensures faculty members' expectations and practices related to student engagement in educational activities that are empirically linked with high levels of learning and development. FSSE results, especially when used in combination with NSSE findings, can identify areas of institutional strength as well as aspects of the undergraduate experience that may warrant attention. More information is available on the FSSE website.

fsse.indiana.edu

Insititution Stories -- Examples of Data Use

Throughout this section, you'll also find three brief examples on how institutions put NSSE data to use. Many more examples are documented in our series, *Lessons from the Field*.

go.iu.edu/4zVK

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

The Pandemic and Student Engagement: Trends, Disparities, and Opportunities

After the sudden shift to online instruction in spring 2020, colleges and universities faced a daunting task for the 2020-2021 academic year: to continue teaching and campus activities in the safest but least disruptive way possible, while confronting even greater uncertainty as the pandemic continued to unfold. In planning the 2021 survey administration, NSSE recognized the need to address these challenges and their impact on students. Two ways we sought to accommodate these shifts were to revise an existing survey question about course modality and the development of a topical module focused specifically on the challenges and adaptations resulting from the pandemic: Coping with COVID. Questions from the module focus on topics such as faculty and institutional responsiveness, disrupted educational plans, stressors and negative emotional experiences, and changes in activities and time demands.

Dramatic Shifts in Course Modality

Results from the new course modality question are striking. Although direct comparisons to prior years cannot be made, until 2021 relatively few students took all courses online in the spring—for example, in 2019, only 8% of first-years and 20% of seniors took all spring courses online. In 2021, however, fully 65% of first-year students took mostly remote courses, while 16% took mostly hybrid, and 12% took a balanced mix of modalities. Just 7% of said their courses were mostly in-person! For seniors, 66% of courses were mostly remote, 13% hybrid, and 10% a balanced mix, while only 11% were mostly in-person (Figure 1). These patterns varied somewhat depending on the type of student and institution. Students at doctorate-granting universities were more likely to take most courses online, whereas students at baccalaureate-level institutions were more likely to take most courses in-person or in a hybrid format. Nontraditionally aged students (21 and older for first-years; 25 and older for seniors) were much more likely to take mostly remote courses. While on-campus residents were more likely to have in-person courses, it is noteworthy that 47% of first-years and 44% of seniors who lived on campus had mostly remote courses.

COVID Module Results: Group Differences a Cause for Concern

Exploring the spring 2021 module data illuminates several obstacles that students have faced during the pandemic. With responses from 7,413 first-year students and 9,229 seniors from 47 bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the US, we investigated multiple pandemic-related topics. Broad patterns indicate increases in mental health issues, with around two-thirds of both first-years and seniors experiencing substantial increases in mental or emotional exhaustion, and nearly half experiencing increases in anxiety and inability to concentrate. Students also felt that the pandemic had a negative impact on their educational plans, most notably with more than half expressing an interference with participation in special learning opportunities such as internships, study abroad, or field experiences.

Mental Health Differences by Gender Identity

Female students were more likely to experience increased mental health issues. This was particularly notable with anxiety that interfered with daily functioning with 56% of first-year female students suffering a substantial ("very much" or "quite a bit") increase, compared to 36% of males. Other

> **I have enjoyed meeting people in my Living Learning Community, but COVID restrictions, although they are necessary, have caused some difficulties for me in making friends and connections."**
>
> First-Year Student, Psychology Major

Figure 1. What Types of Courses Have You Taken This Year?

	First-year	Senior
Mostly in-person	7%	11%
Mostly remote	65%	66%
Mostly hybrid	16%	13%
Balanced mix	12%	10%
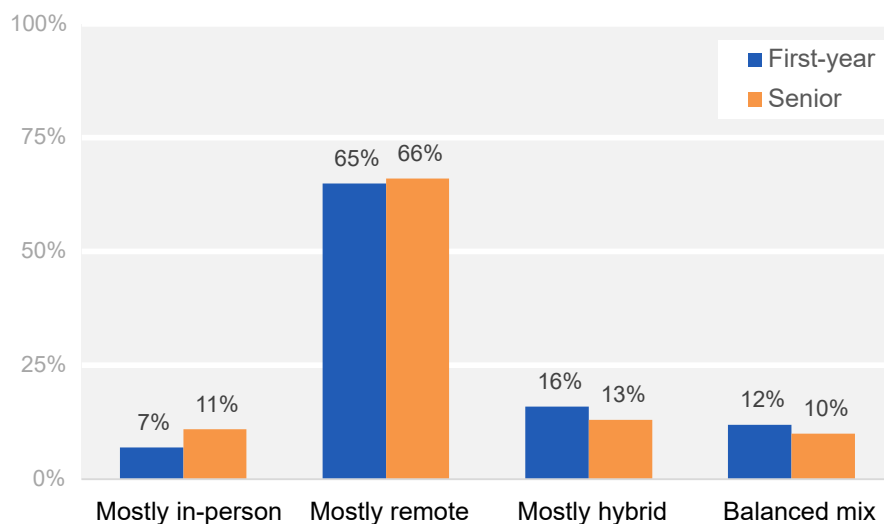
Note: NSSE 2021 results in Figure 1 are from 154,653 first-year and senior students at 337 U.S. bachelor's degree-granting institutions

concerning gaps involved increases in mental and emotional exhaustion, depression, feeling hopeless, inability to concentrate, and difficulty sleeping (Table 1). Female respondents were also more likely to have increased concerns about personal health and safety, as well as that of friends and family. These are troubling findings, as women students seem to struggle with greater emotional burdens of the pandemic, and this kind of stress can damage overall health and college success. Also troubling is that exacerbated mental health issues appear to be even more prominent among nonbinary gender identities (for instance, 74% of nonbinary first-year students noted a substantial increase in anxiety that interfered with daily functioning), although such results may be less conclusive due to the relatively small numbers in this group.

Course Modality Impacts Perceptions

Given the dramatic shift in course modality for the 2020-2021 academic year, we explored differences across subgroups of students. First-year students taking mostly remote courses were more likely than others to feel that the pandemic interfered with their college plans and their preferred living

**Table 1. Selected Mental Health Issue Increases by Gender Identity**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, have you experienced an increase in the following?	First-year female	First-year male	Senior female	Senior male
Mental or emotional exhaustion	74%	57%	72%	56%
Depression that interfered with daily functioning	46%	34%	43%	34%
Anxiety that interfered with daily functioning	56%	36%	52%	36%
Feeling hopeless about your current situation	41%	31%	36%	28%
Inability to concentrate	55%	41%	51%	41%
Difficulty sleeping	46%	31%	42%	32%

Notes: Percentages are the sum of "very much" and "quite a bit." Results for nonbinary gender identities are not displayed due to low counts.

situation (Figure 2). A larger percentage (66%) of first-year remote students were living with family members, compared to 34% of in-person and 37% of hybrid, which may partially explain the perceived hindrance with preferred living situations. First-year students taking most courses in person were more likely to feel their instructors were substantially ("very much" or "quite a bit") responsive to the needs of students, compared to those taking most courses remotely

and in hybrid formats (73% versus 62%). First-year students taking their courses in remote or hybrid formats were also somewhat more likely to feel an increase in mental health issues such as inability to concentrate (51% of remote and 52% of hybrid, compared to 40% of in-person), as well as depression, feeling hopeless, and difficulty sleeping (Table 2). However, few of these discrepancies by course modality were evident for seniors.

Figure 2. To What Extent Has the Pandemic Interfered with First-Year Students' Plans and Living Situations?
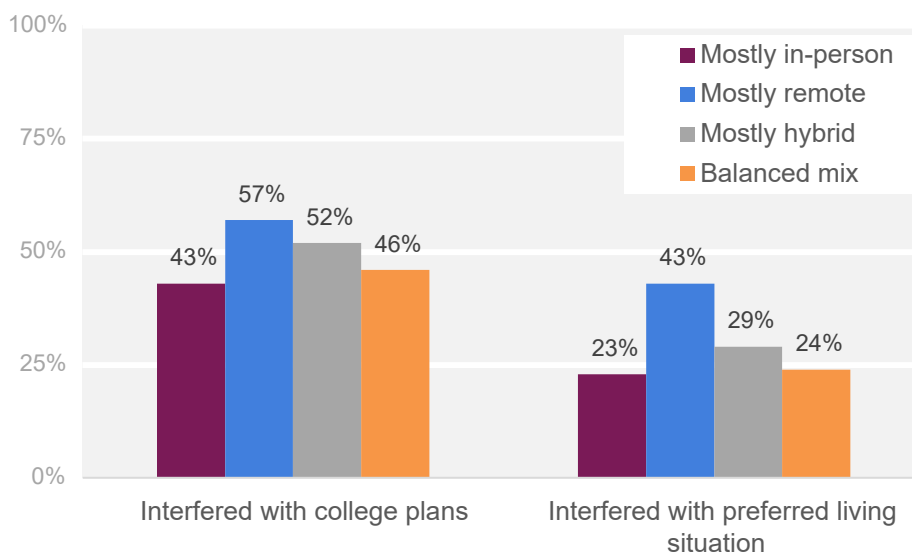
Faculty Insights
Faculty during the Pandemic

21% of faculty disagreed that their environments were conducive to teaching, down from 24% in 2020.

80% of faculty believed their institution has substantially done a good job helping students adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic.

8 hours per week is the average amount of time faculty spent preparing for class in the 2020-21 school year.

Note: See page 3 for more information on the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

Age-Related Differences in the Student Experience

Some differences were observed for nontraditional-age students (21 and older for first-years; 25 and older for seniors), compared with their traditional-age counterparts. Given the variation in course modality for these groups, this is understandable, but further investigating discrepancies can help to reveal opportunities for customized support aligned with the needs of the group. Both first-year and senior traditional-age students were more likely to feel that the pandemic interfered with their college plans, ability to succeed as a student, ability to participate in special learning opportunities, and preferred living situation (Table 3). These traditional-age students were also more likely to struggle with increased mental health issues, including feeling hopeless, inability to concentrate, and difficulty sleeping, as well as increased concern about their ability to socialize. It may be that traditional-age students had

higher or more developed expectations about the changes that college would bring, but given pandemic shifts in course modality and social life not all of these experiences were possible. In comparison, nontraditional-age students may have better tempered their expectations or could be more resilient and have better coping strategies than their younger counterparts. Meanwhile, first-year nontraditional-age students

were more likely to feel increased concern about their ability to pay bills, health and safety, and access to medical care (Figure 3). Not surprisingly, both first-year (33%) and senior (36%) nontraditional-aged students were more likely to substantially ("more" and "much more") increase their time spent caring for dependents and others, compared to 17% (first-years) and 19% (seniors) of traditional-aged students.

Figure 3. As a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, To What Extent, If Any, Has Your Concern About the Following Increased? Results for First-Year Students by Age Group
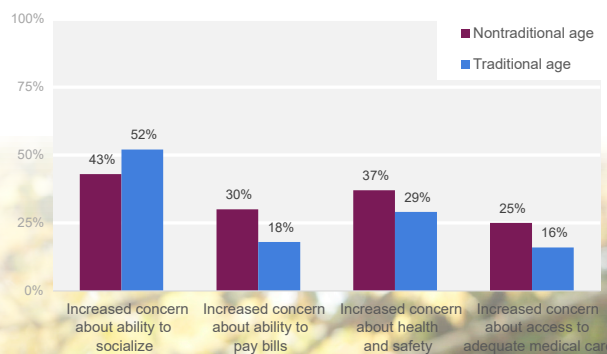
Table 2. Selected Mental Health Issue Increases for First-Year Students by Course Modality

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, have you experienced an increase in the following?	Mostly in-person	Mostly remote	Mostly hybrid	Balanced mix
Mental or emotional exhaustion	63%	69%	70%	65%
Depression that interfered with daily functioning	35%	42%	43%	37%
Anxiety that interfered with daily functioning	43%	49%	49%	46%
Feeling hopeless about your current situation	30%	38%	40%	34%
Inability to concentrate	40%	51%	52%	47%
Difficulty sleeping	33%	41%	42%	38%

Note: Percentages are the sum of "very much" and "quite a bit."

Table 3. Pandemic Interference by Age Group

To what extent, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the following?	First-year traditional age	First-year nontrad. age	Senior traditional age	Senior nontrad. age
Your college plans	55%	39%	49%	35%
Your ability to succeed as a student	43%	36%	41%	30%
Your plans to participate in special learning opportunities	57%	36%	60%	40%
Your ability to pay for college and living expenses	33%	37%	36%	36%
Your preferred living situation	37%	30%	33%	25%

Note: Percentages are the sum of "very much" and "quite a bit." Nontraditional age is defined as 21 and older for FY students and 25 and older for seniors.

SUNY College at Oneonta

Figure 4. Distribution of Institution-Level Differences in First-Year Engagement Between 2021 and Prior Years, by Engagement Indicator
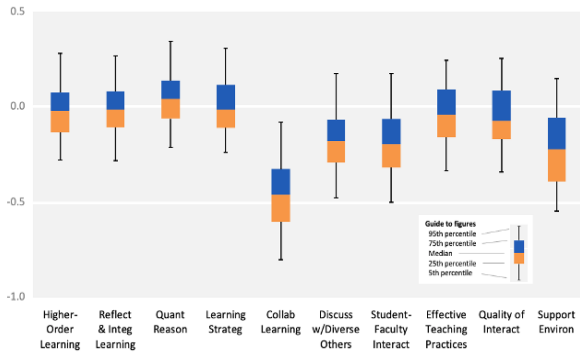
Figure 5. Distribution of Institution-Level Differences in Seniors' Engagement between 2021 and Prior Years, by Engagement Indicator
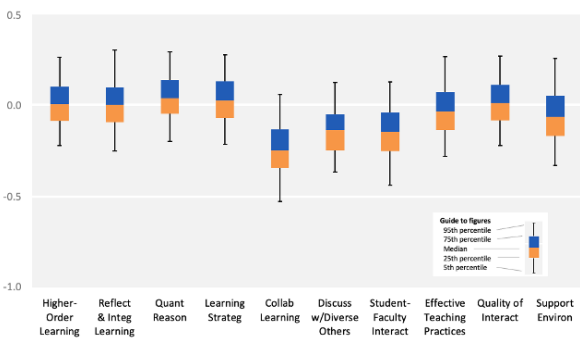
Figure 6. Distribution of Institution-Level Differences in First-Year High-Impact Practice Participation between 2021 and Prior Years, by High-Impact Practice
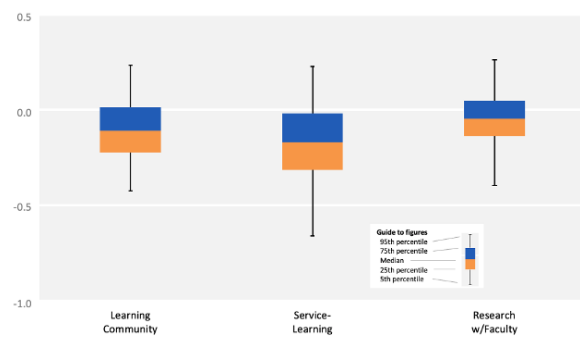
Figure 7. Distribution of Institution-Level Differences in Seniors' High-Impact Practice Participation between 2021 and Prior Years, by High-Impact Practice
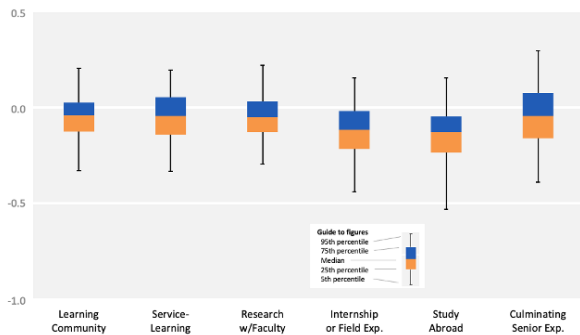
How Engagement Shifted During the Pandemic

Given the widespread adoption of online learning during the 2020-21 academic year as well as the tumult—both organizational and personal—caused by the pandemic, it comes as no surprise that certain forms of student engagement shifted from prior years at many institutions. What is surprising is that only a few engagement measures declined substantially.

We used information from more than 200,000 first-year and senior respondents at 296 institutions to shed light on whether and how engagement was affected. The institutions included in this analysis participated in NSSE 2021 and at least one recent administration other than 2020 (2018 or 2019[1]).

Coping with COVID Topical Module

This module, created specifically for the 2021 administration, explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' educational experiences, mental wellness, and everyday life experiences. The following are select examples from the items included in the module.

1. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent have your instructors done the following?
Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not at all, Not applicable

a. Remained positive
b. Had reasonable expectations of students
c. Responded appropriately to the needs of students
d. Shown care and concern for students

2. To what extent has your institution kept students safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not at all, Don't know/Unsure

3. To what extent, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the following?
Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not at all

a. Your college plans
b. Your ability to succeed as a student
c. Your plans to participate in special learning opportunities (internships, study abroad, field experiences, etc.)
d. Your ability to pay for college and living expenses
e. Your preferred living situation

4. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, have you experienced an increase in the following?
Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not at all, Don't know/unsure

a. Mental or emotional exhaustion
b. Depression that interfered with daily functioning
c. Anxiety that interfered with daily functioning
d. Feeling hopeless about your current situation
e. Inability to concentrate
f. Difficulty sleeping
g. Loneliness

5. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, has your concern about the following increased?
*Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not at all, Don't know/unsure*

a. Your ability to socialize
b. Your ability to pay bills
c. Having enough food
d. Eviction or loss of housing
e. Your health and safety
f. The health and safety of friends or family
g. Access to adequate medical care
h. Your future opportunities (employment, further education, etc.)

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

We examined NSSE's 10 Engagement Indicators (EI) and six High-Impact Practices (HIP), as shown in the slideshow for Figures 4 to 7. For each Engagement Indicator, we calculated a standardized difference (effect size) using 2021 and prior year data for first-year and senior respondents at each institution; negative scores indicate that engagement decreased in 2021. Reviewing the distribution of institution-level difference scores for each EI leads to several conclusions.[2] Most notably, forms of student engagement that have historically relied on face-to-face interactions or accessing services and attending events, including Collaborative Learning, Discussions with Diverse Others, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Environment, declined at many institutions. While approximately half of institutions saw a 0.5 standard deviation or more decrease in first-year Collaborative Learning scores, the other measures showed more modest shifts (median declines of 0.14 to 0.20 standard deviations). In contrast, six EIs tended not to decrease substantially, including

Higher-Order Learning, Reflective & Integrative Learning, Quantitative Reasoning, Learning Strategies, Effective Teaching Practices, and Quality of Interactions. In fact, many institutions scored slightly higher on these measures in 2021, regardless of class level. Though a comparison of results between class levels shows similar difference score distributions, Collaborative Learning and Supportive Environment appeared to decline more for first-year students than for seniors, suggesting that seniors may have weathered pandemic-related obstacles by relying on their pre-pandemic support networks and awareness of campus resources.

We analyzed HIP participation rates using standardized difference scores to assess the extent of change as well, but using different effect size evaluative criteria for four of the six practices.[3] In the aggregate, most HIP participation rates declined in trivial or modest ways in 2021. The median effect sizes for first-year and senior students all indicated small declines in participation rates, with

standardized difference scores averaging about −0.08; a review of 25th percentile scores indicated slightly greater decline but still within the range of small effect sizes. First-year participation in service-learning as well as senior participation internships and study abroad showed the strongest relative decline of all HIPs with approximately 25% of institutions showing standardized difference scores of −0.30, -0.22, and −0.25 or less, respectively. A small number of institutions saw increases in HIP participation, but for the vast majority of these the shift was small or trivial in size.

Overall, the pandemic resulted in fairly predictable changes to student engagement from prior years. Students, faculty, and staff have persevered, finding ways to be engaged remotely or in hybrid modes and to take advantage of pandemic-altered opportunities for learning. We encourage institutions to examine where their results diverge from our comparative analysis to enhance the interpretation of institution-level engagement trends.

Institution Stories

Sense of Belonging as Validation of the Power of Community

Taylor University, a faith–based liberal arts institution in Upland, Indiana, teaches students that community extends beyond the physical campus. They challenge students to live authentically, while also supporting others in their community. In essence, they promote sense of belonging through their campus culture, and their NSSE 2020 results validate this notion. Their data show strong belonging scores overall, and specifically in comparison to peer institutions. Sense of belonging data is particularly important to note considering the COVID–19 pandemic. In

Fall 2020, Taylor's retention rate was 89%, which indicated to them that students had a strong desire to return to campus, even with all the safety protocols in place due to the pandemic. For Taylor, the high retention rate was also an indication that the on–campus experience is a vital part of the students' education. Knowing the power of belonging in student success, Taylor University is enthusiastic about using NSSE 2020 sense of belonging data and has already started considering campus partners with whom they can collaborate, such as the marketing and admissions departments and faculty.

Auburn University

1. Despite NSSE 2020 institutional results being mostly unaffected by the pandemic, we chose to use earlier administration data to err on the side of caution given the baseline's importance for measuring change.

2. To assess the magnitude of Engagement Indicator changes, differences greater than .1, .3, and .5 are considered small, medium, and large, respectively. For service-learning, internships, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences, an effect size of about .2 may be considered small, .5 medium, and .8 large. For learning community and research with faculty, .1 may be considered small, .3 medium, and .5 large (Rocconi & Gonyea, 2018).

3. For first-year students, we only analyze participation in three HIPs that are likely to be experienced during the first-year of college: learning community, service-learning, and research with faculty.

Flexible and Adaptable: Teaching and Learning in A Year of Disruption

As colleges and universities began this winter term, many pushed their return-to-campus dates out further or opted for a return to remote instruction in response to COVID-19. Since the onset of the pandemic, teaching and learning has demanded significant flexibility among faculty and students. Instructional practices and student engagement adapted to suit changing campus conditions and institutions provided varying levels of customized support to students and faculty. Results from NSSE and FSSE 2021 (surveys conducted in spring 2021) point to strengths and shortcomings in these offerings and experiences and present considerations for rethinking approaches to teaching and learning.

Students: Positive Perceptions of Faculty Teaching

Faculty teaching and interactions with students can provide insight into how students recognize that their faculty are interested and attentive to their needs (Pychyl et al., 2022). These teaching practices typically include providing clear and organized instruction, considering students' perspectives and personal goals, and providing students opportunities to engage with different learning strategies (Smith & Baik, 2019). Such teaching practices were even more on display as higher education continued to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, four items about new student-centered teaching practices were added to the NSSE to supplement existing items in the Effective Teaching Practices Engagement Indicator (Figure 1). These items were added to be more responsive to online learning, to capture innovative pedagogical practice, and to present more opportunities to learn about different ways faculty incorporated teaching practices in their classrooms.

Generally, student ratings of these four effective teaching practices were relatively high. Only a little over half of students reported their faculty substantially taught in ways that students preferred to learn (56%). Given how the 2021 academic year was fueled by adaptability to meet the needs of ever-changing circumstances, it is a highlight to report that faculty instruction was relatively effective for students.

Faculty: Highly Engaged in Effective Teaching Practices

These results align with faculty responses about their teaching practices, as they reported relatively high engagement in effective teaching practices (Figure 2). For example, approximately 98% of faculty used examples and illustrations to explain difficult points. The alignment of both student and faculty responses on teaching practices can show that students recognize the efforts faculty are making to create meaningful classroom experiences.

During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following?
Response options include very much, quite a bit, some, and very little.

- Enabled you to demonstrate your learning through quizzes, assignments, and other activities — 79%
- Reviewed and summarized key ideas or concepts — 74%
- Explained in advance the criteria for successfully completing your assignments — 73%
- Taught in a way that aligns with how you prefer to learn — 56%

Figure 1. Percentage Who Experienced Substantial Use of Effective Teaching Practices
Note: Percentages are the sum of "very much" and "quite a bit."

- Teach course sessions in an organized way — 98%
- Use examples or illustrations to explain difficult points — 98%
- Clearly explain course goals and requirements — 97%
- Provide prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments — 91%
- Review and summarize material for students — 87%
- Provide standards for satisfactory completion of assignments (rubrics, detailed, outlines, etc.) — 86%
- Use a variety of teaching techniques to accommodate diversity in student approaches to learning — 86%
- Provide feedback to students on drafts or works in progress — 76%

Figure 2. Substantial Use of Effective Teaching Practices by Faculty
Note: Percentages are the sum of "very much" and "quite a bit."

Did You Know?

86% of faculty believe they substantially did a good job helping students adapt to the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic

73% of students believe that the faculty and staff at their institution did a substantially good job helping students adapt to the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

Effective Teaching Relates to Quality Interactions and Support

We also explored more deeply how effective teaching practices relate to other forms of student engagement (Table 1). For example, students who perceived higher quality interactions with their faculty were more likely to experience faculty members who engaged in effective teaching.

In addition to the quality of interactions, students who experienced more effective teaching from faculty also perceived more institutional support to help them succeed and were more likely to feel valued by their institution. These results are supported by relationships found between the Effective Teaching Practices Engagement Indicator and other Engagement Indicators.

These results exhibit how valuable quality interactions and relationships between students and faculty are to students' perceptions of how supportive their institution is of them and their success. Furthermore, these results show how despite difficulties faculty have experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic, they are still showing up for students to bring them quality experiences in the classroom.

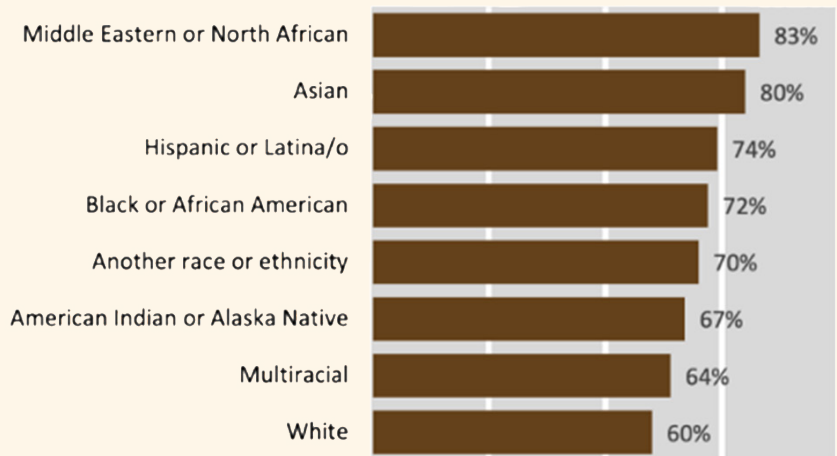## Older Students Have Better Perceptions of Faculty Teaching

Lastly, we explored effective teaching practices by students' age. Results showed that non-traditional aged students felt their faculty members engaged in effective teaching practices (M=40.3, SD=15.3) more than traditional aged students (M=38.0, SD=13.7). This relationship remained the same when course modality was taken into consideration, with over 60% of NSSE respondents reporting being in 'mostly remote courses' in the 2020-21 academic year. Combined with the results above, these results demonstrated that faculty adapting to more remote course options may have proved to be more beneficial for non-traditional aged students who may have experienced difficulties with access to mostly in-person courses.

Faculty Adapt to Teaching Challenges During the Pandemic

Seven new items were also added for a subset of institutions participating in the 2021 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), to learn more about faculty members' teaching experiences during the pandemic, specifically as it relates to how they viewed their own practices and what contributed to their stre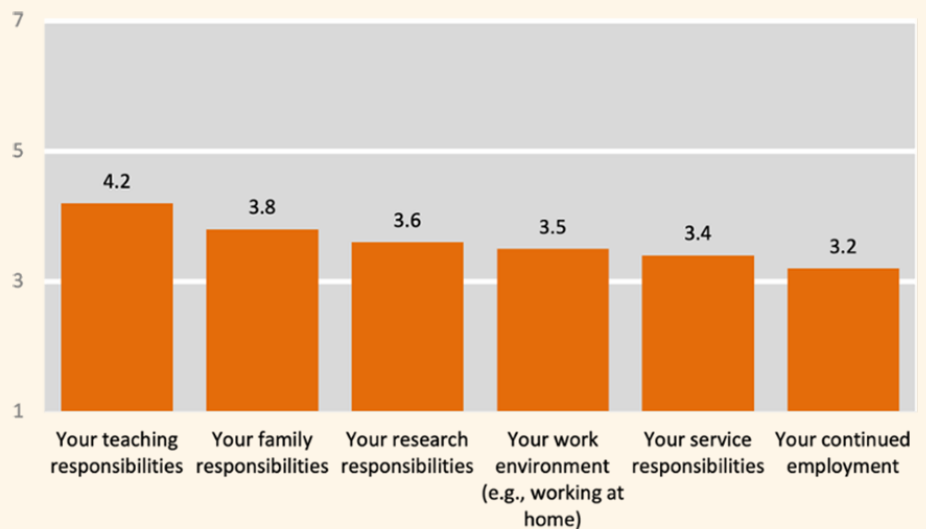ss. As mentioned previously, the 2021 academic year was characterized by adaptations to address ever-changing circumstances and to enhance access and provide flexibility for students and faculty. Of the faculty surveyed, 87% felt that they specifically did a good job with helping students adapt during the pandemic. Some of those adjustments that faculty made were some of the exact things that students asked for. For example, most faculty significantly

Figure 3. Percentage of Faculty Who Significantly Adjusted Readings and Required Reference Material by Racial/Ethnic Identification

Racial/Ethnic Identification	Percentage
Middle Eastern or North African	83%
Asian	80%
Hispanic or Latina/o	74%
Black or African American	72%
Another race or ethnicity	70%
American Indian or Alaska Native	67%
Multiracial	64%
White	60%

Note: Percentages are the sum of "strongly agree," "agree," and "slightly agree."

Figure 4. Average Faculty Stress Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Category	Value
Your teaching responsibilities	4.2
Your family responsibilities	3.8
Your research responsibilities	3.6
Your work environment (e.g., working at home)	3.5
Your service responsibilities	3.4
Your continued employment	3.2

Note: Response options ranged from 1=Not at all stressed to 7=Extremely stressed

Lycoming College

during the pandemic, only four out of five (80%) felt that their institution did a good job helping students adapt. Table 1 shows the relationships between institutional support and teaching practices.

Faculty Most Stressed About Teaching and Family Responsibilities During Pandemic

Making teaching adjustments during the pandemic is great, but that still did not eliminate the possibility of faculty experiencing stress. Of the various things that can contribute to faculty stress such as research and service responsibilities, work environment, and continued employment, it was teaching responsibilities followed by family responsibilities that gave faculty the most stress during the pandemic (Figure 5). In addition to what contributed to their stress during the pandemic, around half (49%) of faculty felt their mental health and sleeping patterns got worse. And those were not the only things that faculty felt had worsened, 35% of faculty felt their relationships with colleagues suffered along with 35% feeling that their relationships with students had suffered as well.

Table 1. Relationships Between Institutional Support and Faculty Teaching Practice

	I plan to use more innovative teaching approaches.	I am learning to be a more effective teacher.
My institution is responding appropriately to the COVID-19 pandemic.	+	++
My institution is providing me the support I need to fulfill my duties as a faculty member.		+
My institution is providing me the support I need to teach well.	+	++
My institution is providing me the resources I need to support my students.	+	+
My institution's communications about changes to academic operations help me.	+	++
My institution is providing students with the support they need to succeed academically.	+	+

Key: + r > .1 (small), ++ r > .2 (small-medium); All correlations significant at p < .001

adjusted the nature of course assignments (88%) and were more flexible about assignment due dates (89%). Although, slightly fewer faculty stated they adjusted their readings (64%) and their approach to grading (69%), it was faculty of color who made such adjustment more for their students (Figure 3).

But it wasn't just about making adjustments that would accommodate

students, it appeared as though faculty were striving to be better instructors in general. Nearly all faculty stated they were learning to be a more effective teacher (91.8%), 92.3% said they plan to use more innovative teaching approaches, and 92.8% of faculty agreed that they increased their efforts to be connected to students.

Although faculty generally felt that they did a good job helping students adapt

> **// What has particularly impressed me about students, fellow faculty, and my institution alike has been the overall resilience and personal dedication evoked in response to this challenge and all its attendant uncertainty."**
>
> Associate Professor, Theological Studies, Private Doctoral/Professional University

Pychyl, T. A., Flett, G. L., Long, M., Carreiro, E., & Azil, R. (2022). Faculty perceptions of mattering in teaching and learning: A qualitative examination of the views, values, and teaching practices of award-winning professors. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 40(1), 142-158.

Smith, C. D., & Baik, C. (2021). High-impact teaching practices in higher education: A best evidence review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(8), 1696-1713.

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

Using NSSE Results in Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Assessment Practices

Colleges and universities across the country strive to create inclusive, welcoming environments for their students. Broad sets of policies and practices termed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) encompass institutional efforts to create a sense of belonging for all students, facilitate cross-cultural engagement between students, and when necessary, advocate for minoritized student groups.

The needs of students, which differ from institution to institution, drive efforts to build and maintain welcoming, equitable environments. Accordingly, assessment practices around DEI must consider the variety of students an institution serves. Institutions can leverage their NSSE survey data in ways both typical (summary survey responses presented in a report or dashboard) and less common (analysis of student comments or of specific student groups) to address the range of DEI-related assessment needs.

Demographic Profiles of Institutions Vary Considerably

And there is quite a range. Figure 1 plots the demographic variation of six institutions that participated in the 2021 NSSE administration. DEI concerns may look very different at small residential institutions (gold and plum) which serve a very high share of students between ages 15 and 25, compared to either of the for-profit schools (brown and navy) whose students tend to be older and the first in their family to pursue a postsecondary degree. The small, private not-for-profit, residential university serves a relatively small share of students of Hispanic or Latina/o background, but a fairly high share (nearly half) of first-generation students and those with a disability that impacts their learning, working, or living activities.

In a similar vein, DEI assessment at the very small, public, residential college (plum color in Figure 1) might consider the relatively high proportion of respondents having another gender identity, as gender identity beyond the

Figure 1. Selected Student Characteristics for Six NSSE 2021 Institutions
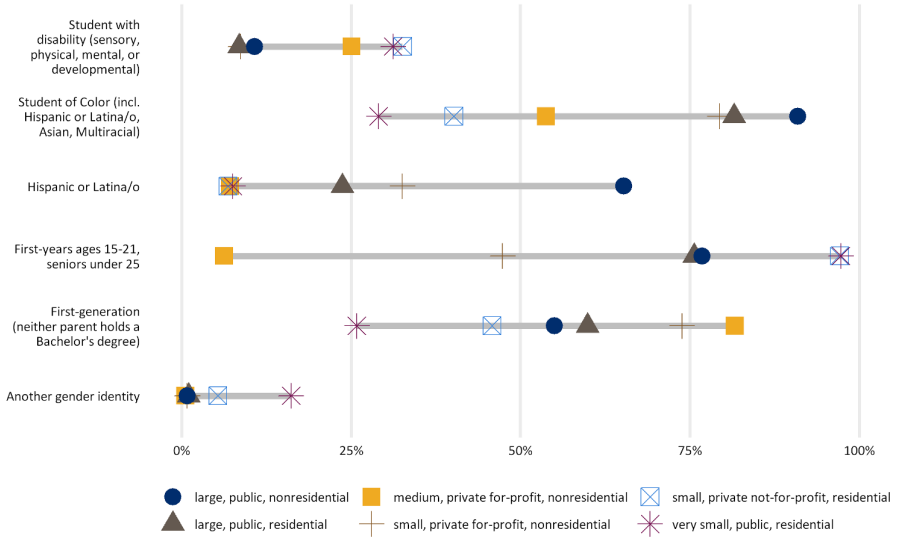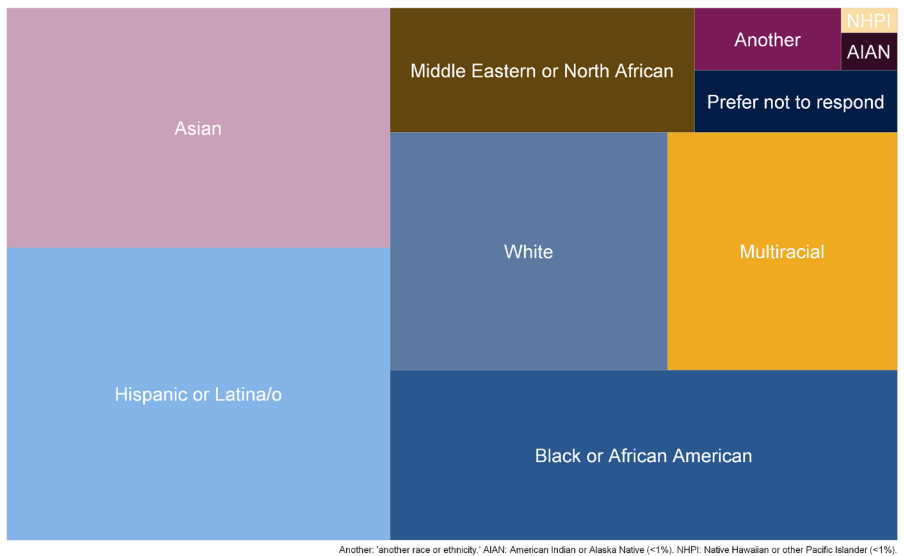

Figure 2. Racial/Ethnic Composition at a Large, Public Residential University

Another: 'another race or ethnicity.' AIAN: American Indian or Alaska Native (<1%). NHPI: Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (<1%).

binary is not always captured in many student information systems or records (Kilgo, 2020; Linley & Kilgo, 2018).

An institution like the large, public residential university (blue in Figure 1) would make use of NSSE data in DEI assessments, perhaps comparing results between racial/ethnic groups or isolating responses of one group for a closer look. Centers or offices on campus dedicated to affinity groups (e.g., gay-straight alliance, LGBQ center, Black student union) could avail themselves of

survey data to identify potentially unmet needs and refine programming for the students they serve (Figure 2). Student characteristics like these and others drive (and sometimes confound) efforts to assess diversity, equity, and inclusion, and require an array of methods for data collection and analysis. In the feature entitled "Equity-Centered Methodologies Recommended When Examining Minoritized Student Experiences," we present a selection of methods for interrogating data toward these ends.

Kilgo, C. A. (2020). *Supporting success for LGBTQ+ students: Tools for inclusive campus practice.* University of South Carolina, The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Linley, J. L., & Kilgo, C. A. (2018). Expanding agency: Centering gender identity in college and university student record systems. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(6), 756-761.

Equity-Centered Methodologies Recommended When Examining Minoritized Student Experiences

Researchers and practitioners use an array of methodologies to explore diverse college student experiences. However, common approaches such as comparative analysis or aggregate examinations of results can further perpetuate inequities in research, mask significant findings for specific subpopulations, and hinder diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. We offer three equity-centered methodological approaches and brief examples that can be employed to better examine diverse college student experiences.

Person-Centered Approaches to Understand the Complexities of Identity

Person-centered approaches focus on the relationships among individuals (Murray et al., 2014), as they allow for the complexities of identity to be explored by identifying respondents who are similar to each other based on their survey responses. Taking our example institutions above, a person-centered approach would look different at each institution based on characteristics of the student population. For example, one large, public, nonresidential institution serves a sizeable population of women who are Hispanic and

Latina/o, under 21 years old (first-year students) or under 25 years old (seniors), and first-generation. Such characteristics inform us that a large proportion of the student population holds multiple minoritized identities.

A cluster analysis was conducted to examine how students with different identity characteristics conveyed their sense of belonging at this institution. Cluster analyses allow researchers to explore variables of interest while grouping respondents by similarities and differences. In this case, the cluster analysis on the sense of belonging scale

yielded four groups primarily made up of:

Cluster 1. Hispanic/Latino, first-year students under 21 and seniors under 25, non-first-generation men

Cluster 2. Multiracial, first-year students under 21 and seniors under 25, first-generation women

Cluster 3. Hispanic/Latino students over age 21 (first-years) or 25 (seniors), first-generation women

Cluster 4. Hispanic/Latino, first-year students under 21 and seniors under 25, non-first-generation women

Table 1. Mean Scores of Four Clusters Based on Identity Characteristics and Selected NSSE Engagement Indicators

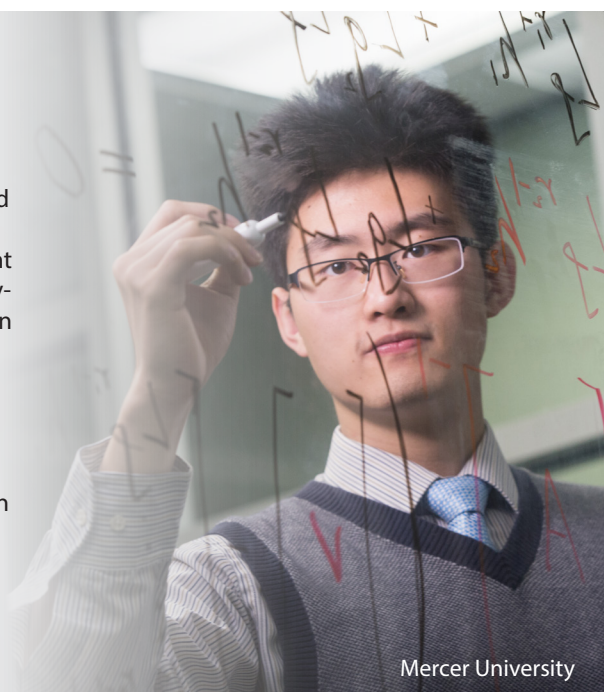| Engagement Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
Sense of Belonging	40.3	41.5	39.2	43.3
Discussions with Diverse Others	30.1	30.5	30.9	27.9
Supportive Environment	32.8	32.2	30.7	33.8
Student-Faculty Interaction	17.9	18.8	17.7	18.6

Note: Engagement Indicator scores range from 0 to 60.

Institution Stories

Campus Improvement for Engagement of Minoritized Student Populations

Norfolk State University (NSU) has participated in several administrations of NSSE, BCSSE, and FSSE. Results from all three surveys were used in their Walmart Minority Student Success Grant. Specifically, NSU featured BCSSE, NSSE, and FSSE results to demonstrate the gap between student expectations, student experiences, and faculty perceptions (see Appendix B, Norfolk State University). They paid special attention to in-class engagement and followed up on the topics with the largest gaps, including class presentations and group work, by conducting interviews with faculty and

students. Results from these efforts helped the institution realize that attention from faculty was needed to improve the student experience. The grant focused on a faculty-led mentoring program for first-generation students who participate in Summer Bridge. Mentoring clusters of five to seven students, one faculty member, and peer leaders were established to promote collaboration and student success. NSSE has helped to encourage faculty interest in student learning processes and effective ways to contribute to student learning, as well as how faculty can further measure student engagement in the classroom.

Mercer University

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

Table 1 shows how we can gather a deeper understanding of the identity complexities of students at this institution through a cluster analysis of Engagement Indicators and sense of belonging. In the table, the data represented are the mean scores on selected Engagement Indicators for each cluster numbered above. Furthermore, each group has a slightly different sense of belonging and average engagement in different areas, such as Discussions with Diverse Others, Supportive Environment, and Student-Faculty Interaction. The results show that Cluster 4 (Hispanic/Latino, first-year students under 21 or seniors under 25, non-first-generation women) had the highest sense of belonging but were the least engaged in Discussions with Diverse Others. These results demonstrate a complex picture of how engagement differs for various student groups.

Centering Methodologies Validate Specific Populations' Experiences

Centering methodologies focus on examining a specific population's experiences. Survey results are frequently analyzed comparatively to understand how certain concepts are experienced by different groups. However, centering, or focusing, on a specific population in analyses can demonstrate a commitment to validate their common experiences.

For example, about 30% of respondents at a small, private not-for-profit, residential university said they have a disability that impacts their learning, working, and living activities. What's more, a quarter of those respondents (27%) have multiple disabilities or conditions (Figure 1). Using a centering approach, stakeholders at this institution may want to further explore the educational experiences of students who report having multiple disabilities or conditions.

These students feel their institution emphasizes academic support, learning support services, and interactions with

University of Houston Victoria

peers from different backgrounds. On the other end, students with multiple disabilities or conditions feel that their institution can better emphasize helping them manage non-academic responsibilities. Using these results with a centering approach can help to identify areas for improvement for specific groups and to create intentional initiatives that increase engagement for students with multiple disabilities or impairments.

Critical Methodologies Create Space for Discussions About Social Inequities

Critical methodologies center around issues that perpetuate inequities and marginalization (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), situating them within the socio-historical context. In critical methodologies, the theories and frameworks emphasize a social justice lens to interrogate systemic inequities, such as Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, and feminist theories/methodologies. Although frequently associated with qualitative research, critical methodologies are gaining traction in quantitative studies to provide researchers with more resources for how to be more intentional when analyzing minoritized groups' experiences. An example of where critical methodologies could be employed is examining racialized experiences at the large, public, residential university whose racial/ethnic diversity is portrayed in Figure 3 on the main page. The figure displays a racially/ethnically diverse student population, with more representation of Asian, Hispanic or Latina/o, and Black or African American students than other racial groups. Based on the characteristics of this institution, prevailing theories of student engagement that do not explicitly consider racial identity (e.g., Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto. 1975) may not best capture what their students experience. It may be advantageous for institutions with this amount of racial diversity to use

theories and frameworks, such as Critical Race Theory and the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments framework (Museus, 2014), that are specific to understanding racially minoritized students' experiences on college campuses. Additionally, consider that the "typical" experience at this institution is more likely to be a racially minoritized students' experience, and one that should be considered in decision-making centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Disaggregating results by race and ethnicity is another critical approach that can help assess student engagement of minoritized groups. Researchers often group students of color together to have a sufficient sample to compare to White student experiences. However, that approach reinforces the White student experience while demonstrating how students of color deviate from that normalized experience. That approach also conflates the experiences of racially minoritized students as a monolithic experience, when we know that this is not accurate. In the case of a large, public, residential university, a comparative approach where White and People of Color's experiences are examined would not capture the racialized experiences at this institution. For this institution, a more appropriate approach would be to use theories and frameworks that address the racialized component of student engagement and disaggregate analysis by race and ethnicity to gather a better sense of how each subgroup engages with the campus environment.

Faculty Insights
Faculty on Diversity & Inclusion

52% of faculty provided substantial opportunities for students to engage in discussions with those of a different race or ethnicity.

89% of faculty believed it is important for their institution to increase its emphasis on encouraging contact among diverse students

71% of faculty believed it is important that students include diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments.

Note: See page 3 for more information on the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

Figure 1. Percentage of Students with Disability That Impacts Their Learning, Working, or Living Activities
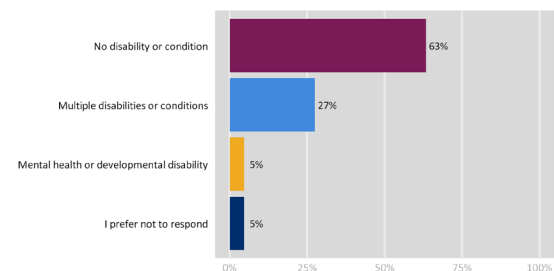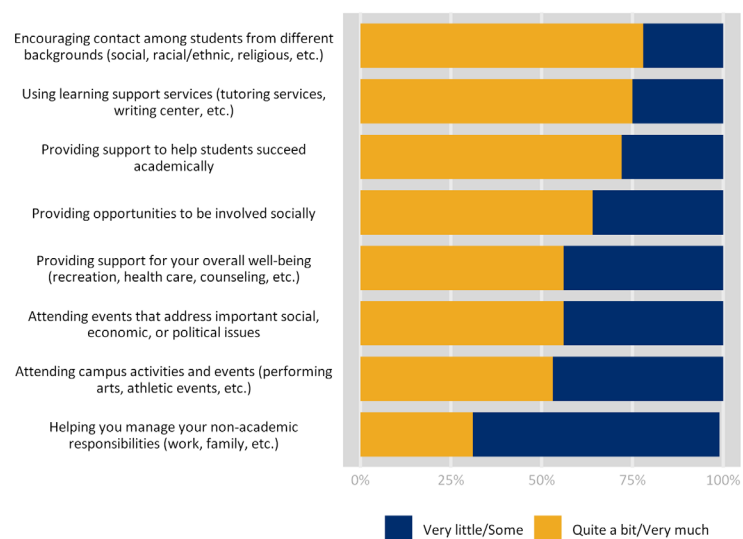

Figure 2. Responses to Supportive Environment Items for Students with Multiple Disabilities or Impairments

Note: The question stem for the Supportive Environment items is "How much does your institution emphasize the following?"

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.

Murray, C., Lombardi, A., & Kosty, D. (2014). Profiling adjustment among postsecondary students with disabilities: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(1), 31.

Museus, S. D. (2014). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of success among racially diverse college student populations. *In Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 189-227). Springer, Dordrecht.

Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). A typology of student engagement for American colleges and universities. *Research in higher education*, 46(2), 185-209.

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

New Disability Item Fosters Inclusion

NSSE staff worked with disability scholars to reimagine a more inclusive demographic item to identify students with disabilities. Given individuals with disabilities are often excluded from DEI conversations, NSSE findings illuminate ways for institutions to better serve this student population. The process for creating the new disability item is detailed below.

Within higher education research, disability is often measured using exclusionary language which perpetuates derogatory or offensive terms based on deficit perceptions (e.g., the word "diagnosed"), examined from the lens of services provided, or lacking in specificity regarding types of disability. Such approaches fail to account for the complexity of this identity and limit further understanding of disabled populations.

Figure 1. Percentages of Disability Follow-up Responses in 2020

Note: In 2020, the question read: "Have you been diagnosed with any disability or impairment?"

Figure 2. Percentages of Disability Follow-up Responses in 2021

Drafting a Better Disability Question

We sought to identify ways to provide a comprehensive item that was inclusionary and affirming. We did this in two ways. First, we reconstructed the question stem and response options to be consistent with the inclusive language used within disabled communities and disability researchers. The new stem asks respondents "Do you have a disability or condition that impacts your learning, working, or living activities?" Second, they expanded the disability list to provide educators and researchers with better options for disaggregating data. In the previous form of this item, there was no distinction between the deaf and blind communities, and there lacked differentiation between mental health issues like depression and anxiety. The new item also boasts new options for chronic health issues and traumatic or acquired brain injury; these changes provide a more expansive and inclusive view of disability.

New Item Generates More Useful Data

For higher education institutions to meet the needs of the students they serve, stakeholders must first understand whom they serve. Using questions like the NSSE disability item allows institutional researchers to examine student engagement across broad categories. In 2020, 14% of students identified as having been diagnosed with a disability or impairment. Similarly, in 2021, 14% of students said they had "a disability or condition that impacts their learning, working, or living activities." Despite this similarity in results for the initial question, we see great differences in the results of follow-up questions (Figures 1 and 2). In 2020, 11% of students with a disability indicated a sensory impairment, but in 2021, 3% and 4% of students indicated blind or low vision and deaf or hard of hearing, respectively. This disaggregation can allow for accommodations for students with very different sensory needs. Similarly, 2020's indication of a mobility impairment can now be more

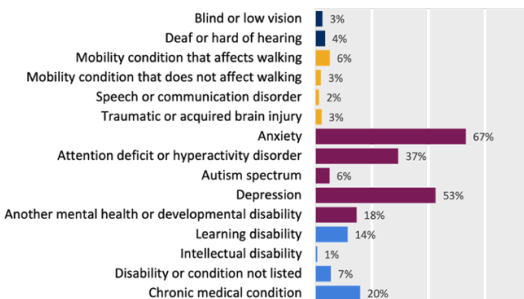accurately identified by a variety of physical disabilities in 2021.

Although students indicated an increase in mental health issues since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 (NSSE, 2021; Olsen et al., 2021), the disaggregation of mental health or developmental disabilities allows student services staff, administrators, and faculty to be more targeted in their efforts to support students. At first glance, it might appear that learning disabilities declined substantially between 2020 and 2021 (40% vs. 14%), but it's important to note that in 2021, in addition to a learning disability, students were able to select other issues such as an intellectual disability and attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Indeed, the generic "disability or impairment not listed" in 2020 dropped from 17% in 2020 to 7% in 2021. Aligned with the critical methodologies component of this Annual Results installment, the new, disaggregated disability item allows students to better categorize themselves and helps them feel more affirmed by their institution by recognizing their specific disability.

National Survey of Student Engagement. (2021). *Engagement insights: Survey findings on the quality of undergraduate education–annual results 2020*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Retrieved from *https://nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/2021/index.html*.

Olson, R., Fryz, R., Essemiah, J., Crawford, M., King, A., & Fateye, B. (2021). Mental health impacts of COVID-19 lockdown on US college students: Results of a photoelicitation project. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-11.

University of Toronto

Student Comments Provide Detailed Insight on DEI-Related Campus Issues

The way students engage in their campus environments has changed drastically over the past two years, partially due to the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest, which led to differential effects for several minoritized populations. Research suggests that an increasing number of minoritized college students lack a sense of belonging or adequate resources to support their engagement efforts (Hussain & Jones, 2019; Koo, 2021). While quantitative data on student engagement is a meaningful resource to capture large-scale perceptions around diversity and inclusion on college campuses, researchers and administrators must seek the voices and opinions of the diverse students they serve. Sometimes forgotten amid the volume of NSSE data are the student comments (Kinzie, Silberstein & Palmer, 2021). NSSE provides institutions with a choice of

end-of-survey open-text questions (including an option to customize your own) (Table 1).

These questions provide space for students to remark about their perceptions of the campus climate and their experiences with peers, faculty, and administration. Utilizing student comments can enhance institutions' assessments of equity and inclusion by providing in-depth accounts of diversity issues students face on campus or by highlighting laudable efforts already in place. Our analysis of the NSSE 2021 comments identified topics related to inclusion and equity that were common across institutions, including the need for more representation amongst students, faculty, and staff holding minoritized identities; improved cultural competency in engagement efforts; and criticism of institutions that dismiss social issues related to race and diversity.

Table 1. NSSE End of Survey Open-Text Questions: Four Customization

Options for Institutions

A. If you have any additional comments or feedback that you'd like to share on the quality of your educational experience, please enter them below.

B. What has been most satisfying about your experience so far at this institution, and what has been most disappointing?

C. Please describe the most significant learning experience you have had so far at this institution.

D. What one change would most improve the educational experience at this institution, and what one thing should not be changed?

Note: Participating institutions may also submit their own customized question in lieu of the above options.

Selected Results and Institution Stories *continued*

> **Commitments to equity and inclusion support the elevation of student voices in assessment."**

Figure 1. A Word Cloud Based on the Five Student Comments Shown Below

An institution's student comment data may reveal its own pattern of DEI-related issues that deserve exploration and attention. For example, the student voices below point to recommendations for improving inclusion and equity:

"More conversations in class about diversity, equity, and inclusion and how it connects to that specific discipline."

"Showing more advocacy towards diversity equity and inclusion that it not solely the responsibility of student organizations or clubs would be something that would make campus more inclusive."

"My most satisfying experience was leading a group to create an LGBTQIA+ Living Learning Community....the Housing department and multiple faculty and staff members supported and worked on the project. Seeing fundamental change at your university as a result of your hard work felt incredibly satisfying."

"The University could be more progressive on behalf of its minority populations, specifically in terms of race and LGBT+ issues. I was very lucky to be a part of a department filled with wonderful professors who genuinely cared about their students and were open-minded in their classroom discussions."

"The demographic of students, faculty, and staff at the university is very disappointing. It's very hard to find other people of my race to connect with on-campus because it's a PWI and remains one of the most diverse schools in my state. I wish I wasn't often the only black person in my class, or even the only person of color in my class. That can be really disheartening and discouraging when I want to connect with other students or faculty because I feel like I can't relate to them and I don't feel represented, especially in my fields of study, as much as I wanted to in college."

Such comments could be featured in the context of numerical information or can help enliven conversations about results and remind audiences of the individuals behind the numbers. Student comments can be further analyzed for sentiment, equity themes, or by social identity groups (Kinzie, Silberstein & Palmer, 2021). Analyses to examine diversity and equity could be narrowed demographically to focus on comments from a subpopulation. Student comments can reveal or amplify insights, offering colleges and universities an opportunity to explore further through follow-up surveys or engaging students directly in interviews or focus groups. Commitments to equity and inclusion support the elevation of student voices in assessment. Including students' comments and identities in assessment analyses, reports, and discussions helps validate these students as experts in their learning and as vital sources of information about the campus climate for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 63.

Kinzie, J., Silberstein, S. & Palmer, D. (2021). Elevating student voice in Assessment: Approaches to using NSSE's student comments. *Assessment Update*, 33(2), 1-2,15-16.

Koo, K. K. (2021). Am I welcome here? Campus climate and psychological well-being among students of color. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 58(2), 196-213.

Mental Health and Academic Difficulty: Checking In With Our 2021 First-Year Students

Students entering college in fall 2021 experienced a disrupted final year of high school. COVID-induced distance learning challenged students and required some to take on new responsibilities at home while managing unfamiliar expectations to finish high school. How might we expect their engagement in college to be affected?

Nearly 85,000 new students at 108 bachelor's-granting colleges and universities completed the 2021 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, offering insights into entering students' high school experiences and their expectations for their first college year.

Ashland University

" Online learning, especially in this pandemic, has been very difficult... It's definitely not the college experience I expected."

First-Year Student, Computer Science Major

Toll of Pandemic on New Students is Evident

The toll of the pandemic on student mental health is evident. For example, more than half (55%) identified substantial ("very much" or "quite a bit") increases in depression, hopelessness, or loneliness due to COVID. In addition, more than half (53%) identified substantial feelings of mental exhaustion.

Although the majority of entering students across racial/ethnic groups (80-89%) were optimistic about their first year of college and most (76%) did not believe that COVID-19 interfered much with their college plans, mental health challenges present a lingering concern.

Notably, mental and emotional exhaustion may be related to expectations of academic difficulty. Nearly 70% of entering students who experienced a substantial increase in mental and emotional exhaustion indicated high expectations of academic difficulty, compared to 42% of their peers who did not experience substantially increased exhaustion. The combination of exhaustion and expected academic difficulty suggests an imperative for colleges and universities to implement widespread, early, and frequent check-ins by faculty, academic advisors, and student life staff to offer the support

Figure 1: Percentage Experiencing Substantial Increases in Mental and Emotional Exhaustion by Expected Academic Difficulty

| Low | Medium | High |

Expected Academic Difficulty
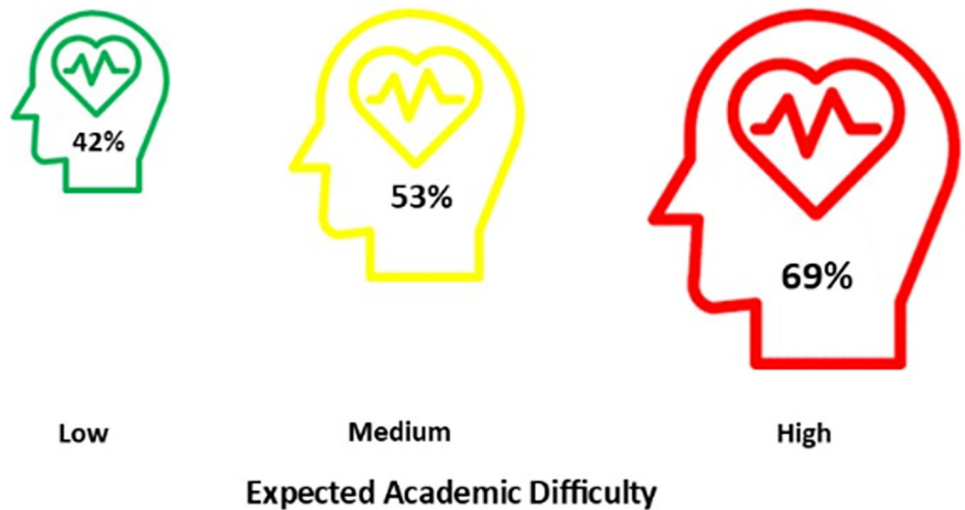
and—if necessary—intervention to help students be successful in their first year of college.

How are First-Year Students Faring?

In response to these concerns, many colleges have strengthened their academic outreach or offered bootcamp-like programs to help students make up deficiencies, while others have expanded peer tutoring options. Given entering students' realities and the ongoing influence of the pandemic, winter and spring 2022 is a prudent time to check in on first-year students. Because

expectations of academic difficulty may persist, instructors of first-year students may offer early assessments to help students gauge the level of their preparation or need for learning support. Student success staff could also check on students' mental health needs and offer reminders about healthy participation in campus events and available learning support resources. Checking in with first-year students about their transition to college at this mid-point may be more important than ever, and particularly sensitive to pandemic-related mental health and learning needs.

To learn more about findings from BCSSE 2021, view the webinar, Students Entering College Fall 2021: What Colleges & Universities Should Know and explore the BCSSE COVID data on the new dashboard.

Resources Available Online

To support efforts to improve undergraduate education, NSSE provides multiple tools and resources—including those listed below—to participating institutions and others interested in utilizing engagement data.

Lessons from the Field

Volume 4 highlights examples of data-informed improvement and how institutions are using NSSE results to enhance undergraduate teaching and learning. All volumes of Lessons from the Field can be downloaded from the NSSE website:

go.iu.edu/4C49

Data Use in Brief

These briefs present themed summaries — Topical Modules, High-Impact Practices, Specific Student Populations, and Educational Practices — illustrating how institutions have used student engagement results to inform efforts to enhance undergraduate education.

go.iu.edu/4C4a

How Institutions Use NSSE

A searchable database featuring hundreds of examples of how colleges and universities have used NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE data is available:

go.iu.edu/4C4b

NSSE Sample Reports

A sample Institutional Report, which is distributed each year to participating institutions, can be seen on the NSSE website, including the Snapshot Report, the Engagement Indicators Report, Comparison and Multi-Year Reports, and the Student Comments Report.

go.iu.edu/4C49

Webinars

Live webinars are offered for faculty, administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals, and all are recorded and available in NSSE's Webinar Archive. Topics include tips for data use and sharing, interpreting results, ideas for a successful survey administration, trends in engagement research, and much more.

go.iu.edu/4C4c

NSSE Report Builder

This interactive tool displays NSSE results by user-selected student andinstitutional characteristics. Two versions are available:

- The Public Version is for media, institutions, researchers, and others interested in unidentified, aggregated results.
- The Institution Version is for participating institutions to create tailored reports using their own NSSE data.

nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/reports-data/report-builder

NSSE Sightings

NSSE Sightings is a blog by CPR staff featuring publications, conference presentations, and other findings about student engagement.
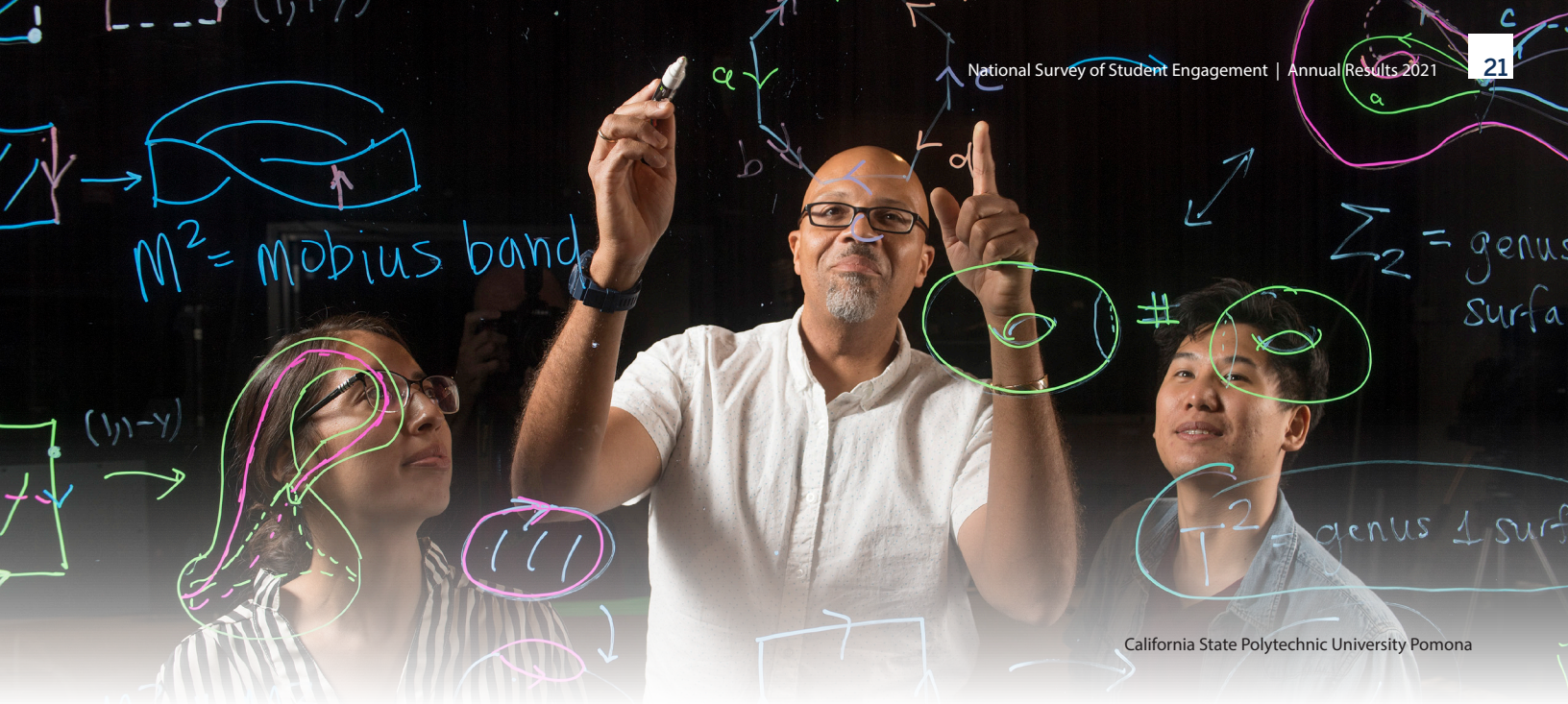
nssesightings.indiana.edu

Psychometric Portfolio

Studies of validity, reliability, and other indicators of NSSE data—including breakdowns by a variety of student and institutional characteristics—are detailed in this resource.

go.iu.edu/4C4e

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