

The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE, pronounced “bessie”), a companion survey to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), was launched in 2007. Since then, nearly one million first-year entering students, as well as thousands of transfer and older students at 540 institutions across the United States and Canada, have participated.

In 2019, BCSSE updated the survey to include entering transfer and older students. For entering first-year students, BCSSE collects data about their high school academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the first college year. For transfer and older students, BCSSE collects information about prior educational experiences, important entering characteristics, as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the college year.

BCSSE administration usually takes place prior to the start of fall classes and is designed to be paired with a NSSE administration in the spring to provide an in-depth understanding of first-year student engagement. Faculty, advisors, administrators, researchers, and others can use BCSSE data independently or in combination with NSSE data for program development, institutional assessment and improvement, and related purposes.

In fall 2019, 137 U.S. institutions and 4 from Canada participated in BCSSE. Of those, 91 (65%) also administered NSSE in spring 2020, allowing comparisons of incoming students’ prior experiences and expectations with their actual experiences during the first year.

Survey Administration and Respondents

BCSSE is administered locally by campus officials who facilitate the online administration or distribute the paper survey. In 2019, 109 institutions (77%) used the online survey, 25 (18%) used the paper survey, and 7 (5%) used a combination of the two. More than 86,000 entering first-year, 7,000 transfer, and 1,000 older students completed BCSSE in the summer or early fall. The winter administration included 473 entering first-year students, 721 transfer students, and 75 older students. Students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico completed BCSSE.

Table 1

Profile of BCSSE 2019 U.S. Institutions and All Bachelor’s-Granting U.S. Institutions

Institution Characteristics	BCSSE 2019 (%)	U.S. (%)
Carnegie Basic Classification		
Doctoral Universities (Very high research activity)	2	8
Doctoral Universities (High research activity)	9	8
Doctoral/Professional Universities	4	9
Master's Colleges and Universities (Larger programs)	28	21
Master's Colleges and Universities (Medium programs)	14	12
Master's Colleges and Universities (Smaller programs)	9	8
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences Focus	21	15
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	13	19
Control		
Public	40	36
Private	60	64
Undergraduate Enrollment		
Fewer than 1,000	12	22
1,000–2,499	41	31
2,500–4,999	11	17
5,000–9,999	15	15
10,000–19,999	13	8
20,000 or more	8	7

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

Wondering how to use your BCSSE data?

See *Using Your BCSSE Data* for illustrative recent examples:

bcsse.indiana.edu

BCSSE Participating Institutions

Many different types of U.S. institutions participated in BCSSE. Among them, 48% were classified as master’s colleges and universities, 34% as baccalaureate colleges, and 18% as doctorate-granting universities. BCSSE institutions generally reflect the diversity of U.S. bachelor’s-granting institutions with respect to Carnegie Classification, public or private control, and undergraduate enrollment (Table 1).

BCSSE U.S. Respondents

BCSSE is locally administered, so sampling schemes and data collection methods vary across participating institutions. Most institutions sample their entire incoming first-year population and collect data from 50% to nearly 100% of their students. BCSSE 2019 respondents are profiled in Table 2.

Table 2
Profile of BCSSE 2019 Respondents: Demographic Characteristics

	Percentage of Respondents
Gender Identity	
Man	39
Woman	60
Another gender identity	<1
I prefer not to respond	<1
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska native	<1
Asian	7
Black or African American	8
Hispanic or Latino	13
Middle Eastern or North African	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1
White	57
Multiracial	13
Other	<1
International Student	5
High School Graduation Year	
2016 or earlier	0
2017	1
2018	2
2019	97
First-Generation Student (No parent holds a bachelor’s degree)	40
Financial Aid Recipient (Received any scholarship, grant, or student loan.)	86

Notes: Includes respondents from U.S. and Canadian institutions. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Most BCSSE respondents graduated from a public high school, with more than half earning grades of A– or higher in high school (Table 3). In addition, about 39% of respondents attended an institution with two or more friends. About two thirds of all respondents attended their first-choice institution.



Pitzer College

Table 3
Profile of BCSSE 2019 Respondents: Other Characteristics

	Percentage of Respondents
High School Type	
Public	86
Private, religiously affiliated	10
Private, not religiously affiliated	4
Home school	<1
Other	<1
High School Grades (Typical)	
A/A+	42
A-	19
B+	18
B	14
B-	3
C+ or lower	3
Number of friends attending same institution	
None	43
1	18
2	14
3 or more	25
Choice of institution	
First	66
Second	25
Third or lower	9

Notes: Includes respondents from U.S. and Canadian institutions. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.