

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, approximately 1.2 million new first-year, transfer, and older students at 589 institutions across the United States and Canada, have participated.

BCSSE collects data from entering first-year, 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 their 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 upcoming 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. There is also an optional winter administration for students entering after the December break. 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 2023, 100 U.S. institutions and 2 from Canada participated in BCSSE. Of those, 45 (44%) also administered NSSE in spring 2024, 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 2023, 95 institutions (93%) used the online survey and 3 (3%) used the paper survey, while 5 (5%) used both online and paper. More than 63,000 entering first-year, 11,000 transfer, and nearly 1,000 older students completed BCSSE in the summer or early fall. The winter administration included survey responses from 223 entering first-year students, 446 transfer students, and 31 older

students.

**Table 1**

**Profile of BCSSE 2023 U.S. Institutions and All Bachelor’s-Granting U.S. Institutions**

Institution Characteristics	BCSSE 2023 (%)	U.S. (%)
<b>Carnegie Basic Classification</b>		
Doctoral Universities (Very high research activity)	5	9
Doctoral Universities (High research activity)	11	8
Doctoral/Professional Universities	9	11
Master’s Colleges and Universities (Larger programs)	26	20
Master’s Colleges and Universities (Medium programs)	12	11
Master’s Colleges and Universities (Smaller programs)	7	9
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences Focus	18	13
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	11	18
<b>Control</b>		
Public	49	34
Private	51	66
<b>Undergraduate Enrollment</b>		
Fewer than 1,000	21	26
1,000–2,499	31	31
2,500–4,999	13	16
5,000–9,999	15	13
10,000–19,999	13	7
20,000 or more	7	6

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 2022 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data. For information on the Basic Carnegie Classification, see [carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu](https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu).

### Wondering how to use your BCSSE data?

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

[bcsse.indiana.edu](https://bcsse.indiana.edu)

## BCSSE Participating Institutions

Many different types of U.S. institutions participated in BCSSE. Among them, 45% were classified as master’s colleges and universities, 29% as baccalaureate colleges, and 25% 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 typically collect data from 50% to nearly 100% of their students. BCSSE 2023 respondents are profiled in Table 2.

	Percentage of Respondents
<b>Gender Identity</b>	
Man	40
Woman	57
Another gender identity	2
I prefer not to respond	2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian or Alaska native	2
Asian	11
Black or African American	14
Hispanic or Latino	25
Middle Eastern or North African	2
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1
White	58
Other	1
<b>International Student</b>	5
<b>High School Graduation Year</b>	
2023	80
2022	4
2021 or earlier	16
<b>First-Generation Student</b> (No parent holds a bachelor’s degree)	48
<b>Financial Aid Recipient</b> (Received any scholarship, grant, or student loan)	83

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 approximately two-thirds reporting grades of A– or higher in high school (Table 3). In addition, about 36% of respondents attended an institution with two or more friends. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents were attending their first-choice institution.



Pitzer College

	Percentage of Respondents
<b>High School Type</b>	
Public	85
Private, religiously affiliated	9
Private, not religiously affiliated	3
Home school	1
Other	1
<b>High School Grades (Typical)</b>	
A/A+	50
A-	15
B+	17
B	14
B-	3
C+ or lower	2
<b>Number of friends attending same institution</b>	
None	45
1	19
2	14
3 or more	22
<b>Choice of institution</b>	
First	65
Second	26
Third or lower	9

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