

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, nearly 1,700 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 other 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 2026, including administration details, response rates, participating institutions, and respondent characteristics.

NSSE changes in 2026 included one minor update to the international item on the core survey. No changes were made to NSSE Topical Modules.

For more information and a complete list of changes by survey year, [visit our website](#).

Survey Data and Methodology

Approximately 1.6 million first-year and senior students from 444 institutions (381 in the US, 60 in Canada, and 3 in other countries) were invited to participate in NSSE 2026. Of this population, 310,414 students responded to the survey. First-year and senior students were equally represented among the respondent population.

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 sizes based on total undergraduate enrollment. Census recruitment is available via email, in which students get a survey invitation and up to four reminders.



Fort Lewis College

Unless noted otherwise, the results presented below are from 423 institutions—363 in the US and 60 in Canada—that participated in NSSE 2026. Due to nonstandard details of their participation, 21 institutions are not represented. In these summary tables, and in the *Institutional Report 2026*, only data for census-administered and randomly sampled students are included. NSSE 2026 U.S. respondents profiled here include 104,050 first-year (50%) and 104,049 senior (50%) respondents.

Survey Customization

Participating institutions may append up 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 1). Of the twelve modules available in 2026, the most widely adopted was Career & Workforce Preparation (Table 2).

Table 1

NSSE 2026 Participation in Additional Question Sets

Selection of Additional Question Sets	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
None	28	6
One module only	126	28
Two modules	200	45
Consortium items only	10	2
Consortium items plus one module	80	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.

Table 2

NSSE 2026 Participation in Topical Modules

Topical Module	Number of Institutions	Percentage of Institutions
Career & Workforce Preparation	159	36
Academic Advising	129	29
First-Year Experiences & Senior Transitions	110	25
Mental Health & Well-Being	47	11
HIP Quality	30	7
Civic Engagement	27	6
Experiences With Online Learning	26	6
Development of Transferable Skills	24	5
Inclusiveness and Engagement With Cultural Diversity	23	5
Experiences With Writing	14	3
Experiences With Information Literacy	13	2
Global Learning Experiences	4	1

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. Counts do not include the 6 institutions that agreed to administer an experimental HIP module revision in lieu of their original HIP Quality selection.

U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2026 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 3). A searchable list of participating institutions is [on the NSSE website](#).

Table 3

Profile of NSSE 2026 U.S. Institutions and Respondents and Bachelor's-Granting U.S. Institutions and Their Students

Institution Characteristics	Institutions (%)		Students (%)	
	NSSE	U.S.	NSSE	U.S.
Carnegie Research Activity Designations				
No Research Designation	60	77	36	40
Very High Spending and Doctorate Production	13	9	35	36
High Spending and Doctorate Production	11	6	16	13
Research Colleges and Universities	16	9	13	10
Carnegie Award Level Focus				
Associate/Baccalaureate	1	12	<1	5
Baccalaureate	30	42	12	12
Undergraduate/Graduate - Master's	31	21	28	26
Undergraduate/Graduate - Doctorate	39	26	60	56
Control				
Public	46	31	61	65
Private	55	69	39	35
Undergraduate Enrollment				
Fewer than 1,000	7	37	2	4
1,000–2,499	30	26	11	10
2,500–4,999	23	14	12	11
5,000–9,999	18	11	17	17
10,000–19,999	12	6	22	19
20,000 or more	9	5	37	40
Region				
New England	9	7	7	7
Mid East	18	19	14	15
Great Lakes	18	15	16	13
Plains	9	10	6	6
Southeast	25	25	25	26
Southwest	9	8	15	12
Rocky Mountains	4	3	10	6
Far West	9	11	7	13
Outlying Areas	1	3	<1	1
Locale				
City	49	51	60	63
Suburban	23	24	23	22
Town	21	17	13	12
Rural	7	8	4	2

Notes: Percentages are unweighted and based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and are eligible to participate in NSSE. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. U.S. percentages are based on the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data. For information on the Carnegie Classifications, see carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu.

Institutional Response Rates

The average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2026 institutions was 23%, a two-point decrease from last year. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 80%, and about 39% of institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Higher average response rates were observed for small-size institutions and at institutions that offered incentives for survey participation (Table 4).

Seventy-two percent of institutions chose to offer a survey incentive. On average, these institutions had a 25% institutional response rate, six percentage points higher than those who did not offer an incentive. Institutions also had the option to use their learning management system or student portal to recruit students. In 2026, 103 U.S. institutions chose this option, and the average share of respondents who accessed the survey this way was 38%.

Table 4 NSSE 2026 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	136	30
2,501 to 4,999	84	22
5,000 to 9,999	65	18
10,000 or more	78	17
Use of Incentives		
Some institutions used recruitment incentives, such as small gifts or raffles, to encourage students to complete the survey.		
Offered incentives	261	25
No incentives	102	19
All Institutions	363	23

U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 5 displays selected demographic and enrollment characteristics of NSSE 2026 U.S. respondents alongside all U.S. bachelor’s degree-seeking students for comparison using IPEDS-defined institutional and student characteristics. NSSE reports use weights as appropriate to correct for disproportionate survey response related to institution-reported sex and enrollment status at each institution.

Table 5 Characteristics of NSSE 2026 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	33	43
Female	66	57
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	11	13
American Indian/Alaska Native	<1	<1
Asian	7	8
Native Hawaiian/other Pac. Isl.	1	<1
Caucasian/White	51	49
Hispanic/Latino/Latine	18	21
Multiracial/multiethnic	4	5
Foreign/nonresident	4	4
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	92	82
Not full-time	9	18
Note: Percentages are unweighted and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Values are institution-reported, using categories provided in IPEDS. NSSE percentages do not include students with “another” or “unknown” sex (1.2% of all respondents) or unknown race/ethnicity (4.1% of all respondents). The NSSE 2026 sampling frame consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data were provided by participating institutions. U.S. percentages are based on data from the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years.		

U.S. Self-Reported Respondent Profile

In 2023, NSSE included updated student identity questions. These questions provided student opportunities to self-report gender, racial/ethnic identity, disability, and first-generation status. For gender identity, a majority of U.S. respondents identified as women (63%) and men (32%). Other U.S. respondents self-reported as cisgender (5%), genderqueer/non-binary/gender non-conforming/genderfluid (3%), and transgender (2%). About 62% of respondents identified as White, 18% as Hispanic/Latino/a/Latiné, 13% as Black or African American, and 12% as Asian. Approximately 74% of respondents indicated having no disability or condition, with 11% indicating they have mental health or developmental disabilities. Additionally, a majority of respondents were not- first-generation students (57%), with at least one parent/guardian holding a bachelor’s degree.

Canadian Respondent Profile

Canadian respondents profiled here include 97,367 students (58% first-year, 42% senior) from 60 institutions in 9 provinces, including 24 institutions in Ontario, 13 in Quebec, 7 in British Columbia, 6 in Alberta, and 5 in Nova Scotia. Female students and full-time students accounted for about 62% and 88% of Canadian respondents, respectively. The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2026 institutions was 25%, with the highest response rate being 52%. 25 institutions achieved a response rate of 26% or higher. About 16% of Canadian respondents were at least 24 years old. A plurality of students providing ethnocultural information identified as Caucasian or White (42%), 12% South Asian, 11% multiracial, 10% Chinese, 6% Black, 3% Arab, 2% Filipino, 2% Other, and less than 2% from each of six other categories.

International Institution Respondent Profile

Respondents at international institutions (other than Canada) include 3,310 students (68% first-year, 32% senior) from 3 institutions in Mexico, Lebanon, and Egypt. Female and full-time students accounted for about 58% and 96% of respondents at international institutions, respectively. The majority of these respondents were 23 years old or younger (96%). The average response rate for international NSSE 2026 institutions was 26%, with the highest response rate being 44%.

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