

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 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 2023, including administration details, response rates, participating institutions, and respondent characteristics.

NSSE 2023 includes new and updated questions pertaining to student identity. As introduced in our [NSSE Sightings blog](#), many of these have modified response options and language to better reflect students’ experiences. Some examples include:

- The gender identity and sexual orientation items are now in “select all that apply” format and have new response options.
- Revised questions on race/ethnicity are more respectful of group self-identification, for example, expanding descriptions for “Indigenous, American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native.”
- The Greek-letter organization question is more inclusive of both social and service organizations.

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

Survey Data and Methodology

Approximately 1.5 million first-year and senior students from 541 institutions (473 in the US, 63 in Canada, and 5 in other countries) were invited to participate in NSSE 2023. Of this population, 354,067 students responded to the survey. First-year and senior students were about 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 517 institutions—456 in the US and 61 in Canada—that participated in NSSE 2023. Due to nonstandard details of their participation, 24 institutions are not represented. In these summary tables, and in the *Institutional Report 2023*, only data for census-administered and randomly sampled students are included. NSSE 2023 U.S. respondents profiled here include 239,753 first-year (48%) and senior (52%) respondents.

An Unexpected Disruption

Often taken for granted, technology is essential to a successful NSSE administration. To this point, this administration will be remembered, in part, for an unexpected disruption of recruitment email message delivery. The root cause of the disruption turned out to be the quarantining of an Indiana University server by one overly zealous email security organization. Although we halted and resumed message delivery within a brief time, the disruption affected data collection and response rates for some institutions that had messages delivered prior to March 20, 2023.

Table 1**Profile of NSSE 2023 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 Basic Classification | | | | |
| Doctoral Universities (Very high research activity) | 7 | 9 | 23 | 34 |
| Doctoral Universities (High research activity) | 10 | 8 | 19 | 16 |
| Doctoral/Professional Universities | 10 | 11 | 8 | 11 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Larger programs) | 26 | 20 | 28 | 23 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Medium programs) | 12 | 11 | 7 | 5 |
| Master's Colleges and Universities (Smaller programs) | 6 | 9 | 3 | 3 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences Focus | 17 | 13 | 7 | 3 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields | 14 | 19 | 5 | 5 |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 45 | 34 | 64 | 66 |
| Private | 55 | 66 | 36 | 34 |
| Undergraduate Enrollment | | | | |
| Fewer than 1,000 | 11 | 25 | 2 | 2 |
| 1,000–2,499 | 31 | 31 | 12 | 9 |
| 2,500–4,999 | 23 | 17 | 15 | 11 |
| 5,000–9,999 | 18 | 14 | 19 | 18 |
| 10,000–19,999 | 9 | 8 | 17 | 21 |
| 20,000 or more | 8 | 6 | 34 | 39 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 10 | 8 | 8 | 7 |
| Mid East | 17 | 17 | 15 | 16 |
| Great Lakes | 18 | 15 | 17 | 13 |
| Plains | 10 | 10 | 8 | 7 |
| Southeast | 24 | 26 | 24 | 24 |
| Southwest | 8 | 8 | 8 | 12 |
| Rocky Mountains | 2 | 3 | 7 | 6 |
| Far West | 10 | 11 | 13 | 13 |
| Outlying Areas | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Locale | | | | |
| City | 42 | 49 | 53 | 63 |
| Suburban | 26 | 24 | 26 | 23 |
| Town | 27 | 22 | 19 | 13 |
| Rural | 5 | 5 | 2 | 1 |

Notes: Percentages are unweighted and based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and belong to one of the eight Carnegie classifications in the table. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. U.S. percentages are based on the 2021 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics data. For information on the Basic Carnegie Classification, see carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu.

However, determining the impact on response rates for individual institutions is complicated. While 2023 response rates are down overall from last year, this trend has continued over multiple years and is true for other college student surveys. And, except for a relatively small minority, response rates at institutions that escaped the disruption are generally comparable to those affected. NSSE plans to prevent future disruptions by using a variety of approaches to minimize the impact of novel technical issues beyond our control. To the institutions most impacted by this event, we thank you for your patience and understanding as we addressed the issue.

U.S. Participating Institutions

NSSE 2023 participating institutions and students reflect the diversity of bachelor's-granting colleges and universities in the US with respect to institution type, public or private control, size, region, and locale (Table 1). A searchable list of participating institutions is [on the NSSE website](#).

Institutional Response Rates

The average response rate for U.S. NSSE 2023 institutions was 26%, a two-point decline from last year. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 90%, and about 48% of institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher. Higher average response rates were observed for midsize institutions and at institutions that offered incentives for survey participation (Table 2).

Sixty-four-percent of institutions chose to offer a survey incentive. On average, these institutions had a 28% institutional response rate, five 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 2023, 164 U.S. institutions chose this option, and the average share of respondents who accessed the survey this way was 30%.

Table 2**NSSE 2023 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 | 196 | 32 |
| 2,501 to 4,999 | 103 | 25 |
| 5,000 to 9,999 | 82 | 20 |
| 10,000 or more | 75 | 19 |
| Use of Incentives | | |
| Some institutions used recruitment incentives, such as small gifts or raffles, to encourage students to complete the survey. | | |
| Offered incentives | 290 | 28 |
| No incentives | 165 | 23 |
| All Institutions | 456 | 26 |

Survey Customization

Participating institutions may append up to two additional question sets in the form of NSSE Topical Modules or consortium questions (for institutions sharing a common interest and participating as a NSSE consortium) (Table 3). Of the ten modules available in 2023, the most widely adopted was Academic Advising (Table 4).

U.S. Respondent Profile

Table 5 displays selected demographic and enrollment characteristics of NSSE 2023 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. Note that NSSE 2023 includes new and updated questions pertaining to student identities. These expanded items are presented and available in institution data files and reports.

Canadian Respondent Profile

Canadian respondents profiled here include 107,364 students (57% first-year, 43% senior) from 61 institutions in 9 provinces, including 21 institutions in Ontario, 13 in Quebec, 9 in British Columbia, 7 in Alberta, 5 in Nova Scotia, 3 in New Brunswick, and 1 in Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan. Female students and full-time students accounted for about 64% and 86% of Canadian respondents, respectively. The average response rate for Canadian NSSE 2023 institutions was 31%, with the highest response rate being 68%. Thirty-nine institutions achieved a response rate of 25% 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 (45%), while 12% were South Asian, 10% multiracial, 10% Chinese, 5% Black, and less than 4% from each of nine other categories.

Table 3

NSSE 2023 Participation in Additional Question Sets

| Selection of Additional Question Sets | Number of Institutions | Percentage of Institutions |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| None | 41 | 8 |
| One module only | 115 | 21 |
| Two modules | 270 | 50 |
| Consortium items only | 9 | 2 |
| Consortium items plus one module | 106 | 20 |

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 4

NSSE 2023 Participation in Topical Modules

| Topical Module | Number of Institutions | Percentage of Institutions |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Academic Advising | 168 | 31 |
| Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity | 129 | 24 |
| First-Year Experiences & Senior Transitions | 112 | 20 |
| Career & Workforce Preparation | 110 | 20 |
| Mental Health & Well-Being | 71 | 13 |
| Experiences with Online Learning | 41 | 8 |
| Development of Transferable Skills | 40 | 7 |
| HIP Quality | 40 | 7 |
| Civic Engagement | 29 | 5 |
| Experiences with Writing | 21 | 4 |

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.

Table 5

Characteristics of NSSE 2023 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 | 44 |
| Female | 66 | 56 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| African American/Black | 9 | 12 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 1 | 1 |
| Asian | 7 | 8 |
| Native Hawaiian/other Pac. Isl. | <1 | <1 |
| Caucasian/White | 60 | 53 |
| Hispanic/Latino/Latine | 16 | 18 |
| Multiracial/multiethnic | 4 | 4 |
| Foreign/nonresident | 4 | 4 |
| Enrollment Status | | |
| Full-time | 90 | 83 |
| Not full-time | 10 | 17 |

Note: Percentages are unweighted and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Institution-reported, using categories provided in IPEDS. NSSE percentages do not include students with "another" or "unknown" sex (0.9% of all respondents) or unknown race/ethnicity (2.7% of all respondents). The NSSE 2023 sampling frame consists of first-year and senior undergraduates. Data were provided by participating institutions. U.S. percentages are based on data from the 2021 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data. Includes all class years.

Meet the NSSE Team

Leonard D. Taylor, NSSE Director (beginning July 2023)

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