



# National Survey of Student Engagement

## Inside

- 1 U.S. Institutions and Respondents
- 3 NSSE 2009 U.S. Cohort Profile
- 5 U.S. and Canadian Response Rates
- 6 Canadian Institutions and Respondents

## NSSE 2009 Overview

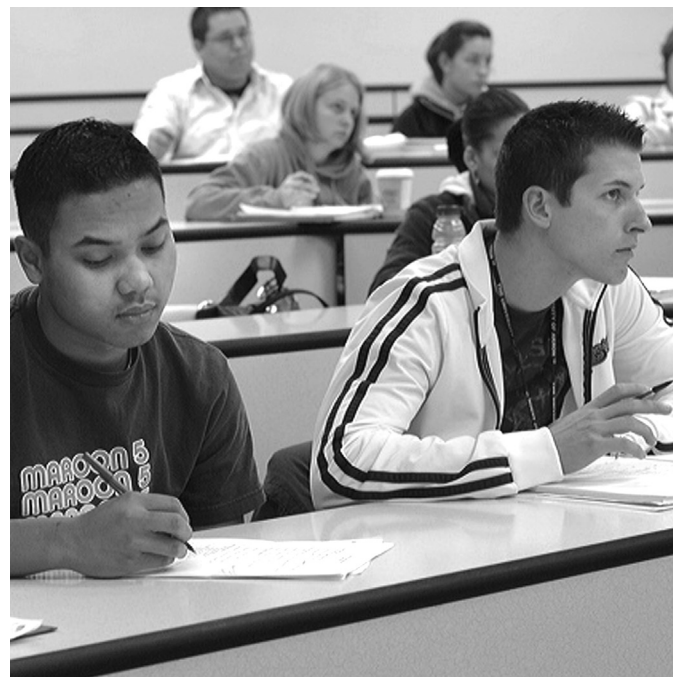
The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information annually from samples of first-year and senior students about the nature and quality of their undergraduate experience. Since its inception, nearly 1,400 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities in the US and Canada have used NSSE 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 student satisfaction, persistence, and graduation. NSSE data are used by faculty, administrators, researchers, and others for institutional improvement, accountability, and related purposes. Launched by a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, since 2002 the NSSE project has been supported by institutional participation fees.

About 1.1 million first-year and senior students from 640 institutions in the US and Canada were invited to participate in the 2009 NSSE administration. Of this survey population, 367,318 students responded, including 8,965 students from Canadian institutions. A list of all participating institutions is available on the NSSE Web site at: [www.nsse.iub.edu/nsse\\_2009/2009-colleges.cfm](http://www.nsse.iub.edu/nsse_2009/2009-colleges.cfm).

The trend of more institutions electing Web-based administrations continued in 2009 as 418 institutions (65%) opted for the Web-only administration mode, in which students received all contacts by e-mail and completed the survey online. The Web+ survey option was used by 180 institutions (28%). This mode includes multiple e-mail contacts and one paper questionnaire sent to a portion of nonrespondents. The remaining 42 institutions (7%) chose the paper questionnaire mode. Notably, more than half of all respondents at paper administration institutions elected to complete the survey online rather than complete and return the paper instrument. Overall, about 98% of all NSSE 2009 respondents completed the survey online.

## U.S. Institutions and Respondents

Table 1 shows how NSSE 2009 institutional characteristics compare with the profile of all baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities in the United States. Comparative data for these tables are from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Far West region is slightly underrepresented in NSSE 2009, while the Southeast region is slightly overrepresented. Although NSSE 2009 institutions are generally representative of the distribution of institutional types in the 2005 Basic Carnegie Classification, Master's Colleges and Universities with larger programs and Research Universities with high research activity are somewhat overrepresented, and Baccalaureate Colleges-Diverse Fields and Baccalaureate Colleges-Arts & Sciences are slightly underrepresented. In all, the NSSE 2009 participating institutions reflect the diversity of U.S. higher education with respect to institutional type, sector, region, and location.



University of Akron

**Table 1**  
**Profile of U.S. NSSE 2009 Institutions and Respondents Against All U.S. Baccalaureate-Granting Institutions<sup>a</sup> and their Students<sup>a</sup>**

	Institution-Level		Student-Level	
	NSSE	US <sup>b</sup>	NSSE	US <sup>b</sup>
<b>Carnegie Classification – Basic 2005<sup>c</sup></b>				
RU/VH	5%	6%	15%	21%
RU/H	10%	7%	18%	17%
DRU	6%	5%	8%	8%
Master's L	25%	22%	29%	28%
Master's M	12%	12%	9%	8%
Master's S	7%	8%	4%	4%
Bac/A&S	16%	18%	9%	7%
Bac/Diverse	19%	23%	9%	8%
<b>Sector</b>				
Public	40%	35%	57%	68%
Private	60%	65%	43%	32%
<b>Undergraduate Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 1,000	13%	19%	3%	2%
1,000 – 2,499	32%	33%	17%	11%
2,500 – 4,999	21%	18%	18%	12%
5,000 – 9,999	15%	15%	20%	20%
10,000 – 19,999	13%	10%	26%	27%
20,000 or more	6%	5%	17%	27%
<b>Region</b>				
New England	9%	9%	7%	6%
Mid East	18%	18%	17%	17%
Great Lakes	16%	15%	16%	16%
Plains	10%	11%	10%	9%
Southeast	26%	24%	26%	23%
Southwest	9%	8%	9%	11%
Rocky Mountains	3%	3%	5%	4%
Far West	8%	10%	8%	12%
Outlying Areas	1%	2%	<1%	2%
U.S. Service Schools	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
<b>Location</b>				
City	49%	46%	57%	60%
Suburban	20%	24%	19%	19%
Town	22%	21%	19%	15%
Rural	9%	9%	5%	6%

RU/VH	Research Universities (very high research activity)
RU/H	Research Universities (high research activity)
DRU	Doctoral/Research Universities
Master's L	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
Master's M	Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)
Master's S	Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)
Bac/A&S	Baccalaureate Colleges-Arts & Sciences
Bac/Diverse	Baccalaureate Colleges-Diverse Fields

- a. Percentages are unweighted and based on U.S. postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees and belong to one of the eight Carnegie classes in the table. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
- b. U.S. percentages are based on data from the 2008 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics File.
- c. For information on the 2005 Carnegie Classifications, see: [www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications).

Table 1 also shows the distribution of NSSE 2009 respondents and the national distribution of students by these same characteristics. At both the institution and student levels we see that NSSE 2009 participants largely reflect the U.S. undergraduate population. While small and private institutions account for a majority of institutions, more students attend large and public institutions, both in NSSE and nationally. NSSE comparison reports use weights to prevent distortions due to the presence of institutions of varying size in comparison groups.

Table 2 shows selected characteristics of NSSE 2009 U.S. respondents. The first column represents the students who responded to the survey in 2009. The second column represents the undergraduate population at NSSE 2009 participating institutions. The third column shows the profile of all students attending all baccalaureate-granting institutions in the US as indicated by IPEDS data.

## NSSE 2009 U.S. Cohort Profile

The standard NSSE sampling scheme calls for an equal number of randomly sampled first-year and senior

students at a given institution, with the sample size based on the total number of undergraduate students enrolled. Institutions participating in Web-only and Web+ administrations are afforded larger standard sample sizes than paper institutions with the same enrollment, made possible by the efficiency of Web-based data collection. In addition, many institutions request random oversamples to increase the number of respondents, thereby reducing sampling error and enhancing their ability to examine results by subgroups. All randomly selected eligible student respondents from U.S. institutions are referred to collectively as the NSSE 2009 U.S. cohort. Only randomly selected respondents are used for institution and comparison groups in institutional reports. The NSSE 2009 cohort consists of 341,285 respondents, made up of 332,487 students sampled under the standard sampling scheme and an additional 8,798 students selected through random oversamples. The data provided in the remainder of this *NSSE 2009 Overview* are based on the NSSE 2009 U.S. cohort unless otherwise noted.

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of NSSE 2009 Respondents, Undergraduate Population at Participating U.S. NSSE Institutions, and Undergraduate Population at All U.S. Baccalaureate-Granting Institutions<sup>a</sup>**

	NSSE 2009 Respondents	NSSE 2009 Population <sup>b</sup>	U.S. Baccalaureate Population <sup>c</sup>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	36%	45%	44%
Female	64%	55%	56%
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>d</sup></b>			
African American/Black	9%	11%	12%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	6%	6%	7%
Caucasian/White	75%	68%	67%
Hispanic	7%	10%	10%
Other	1%	1%	n/a
Multiracial/Ethnic	<1%	<1%	n/a
<b>International</b>	5%	2%	3%
<b>Enrollment Status</b>			
Full-time	89%	85%	82%
Part-time	11%	15%	18%

a. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

b. NSSE 2009 population data are provided by participating institutions.

c. U.S. percentages are unweighted and based on data from the 2008 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Enrollment data.

d. IPEDS and NSSE categories for race and ethnicity differ. Percentages exclude students whose ethnicity was unknown or not provided.

# Select NSSE 2009 U.S. Cohort Characteristics<sup>a</sup>

## Year in School

The NSSE 2009 U.S. cohort respondents were almost equally divided between first-year (48%) and senior (52%) students.

## Gender

Women made up more than three-fifths (64%) of respondents, compared with 55% of students enrolled at NSSE 2009 institutions and 56% of students enrolled nationally (Table 2). The larger proportion of female respondents is consistent with widely reported survey research findings that women are more likely than men to respond to surveys. Weighting adjusts for the gender imbalance in institutional comparisons.

## Age

Students 19 years of age or younger represent the largest group (40%) of respondents. About 38% of all respondents were 20-23 years old, 10% were between the ages of 24 and 29, and 13% were 30 years of age or older. Of first-year student respondents, 15% were 20 years of age or older, while 35% of seniors were 24 years of age or older.

## Race and Ethnicity

African American/Black and Hispanic students are slightly underrepresented, while Caucasian/White students are overrepresented (Table 2).

## Living Arrangements

Overall, approximately 39% of students lived in campus housing (65% of first-year students and 16% of seniors). The next most common locations were within driving distance (40%) and within walking distance (15%). The remainder lived in a fraternity or sorority house (1%) or indicated that none of the choices applied (6%).

## Fraternity or Sorority

About 11% of men and 10% of women were members of a fraternity or sorority.

## Grades

Approximately 46% of all students report earning mostly A grades (42% of first-year students and 49% of seniors). Only 4% of students report earning mostly C grades or lower (5% of first-year students and 2% of seniors).

## Enrollment Status

About 89% of all respondents were enrolled full time (Table 2). Institutional comparison reports are weighted to adjust for the slight overrepresentation of full-time students among NSSE respondents.

## Parents' Education

Of all respondents for whom education information was provided for both parents, about 81% of respondents had at least one parent with some college education. Approximately 56% had at least one parent who completed a baccalaureate degree, and about one-third of respondents (31%) indicated both parents having a baccalaureate or higher degree.

## Transfer Status

Approximately two-fifths (42%) of senior respondents began postsecondary education at an institution other than the one they were attending when they completed the NSSE survey. About 51% of these transfer students had previously attended another baccalaureate-granting institution, 70% had attended a community college, 14% had attended a vocational-technical school, and 5% had enrolled in some other form of postsecondary education (percentages sum to more than 100% because some students previously attended more than one type of institution).

## Primary Major Field

Table 3 shows the percentage of students pursuing majors in various fields of study, by class and by gender. Proportionally more men pursue studies in business, engineering, and physical sciences, while majors in arts & humanities, the social sciences, education, and other professional programs are more popular among women.

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a. Students for whom institutions did not provide class year are omitted from "Select NSSE 2009 U.S. Cohort Characteristics" findings. Percentages reported are unweighted.



Oxford College

**Table 3**  
**Primary Majors by Class and Gender at NSSE U.S. Institutions**

Major <sup>a</sup>	First-Years		Seniors	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arts & Humanities	12%	14%	13%	15%
Biological Sciences	8%	9%	7%	7%
Business	19%	14%	21%	17%
Education	5%	12%	5%	13%
Engineering	15%	3%	13%	2%
Physical Sciences	5%	3%	5%	3%
Professional (other)	5%	16%	4%	13%
Social Sciences	10%	14%	11%	17%
Other	18%	12%	20%	14%
Undecided	4%	4%	<1%	<1%

a. NSSE codes major information using 85 categories developed by NSSE from the 2000 Classification of Instructional Programs. For information on the classification, see: [www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002165](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002165). The condensed major categories above are used for NSSE reporting purposes. Additional details concerning the majors included in each category are available in the *NSSE 2009 Codebook*.

## U.S. and Canadian Response Rates

The average institutional response rate for NSSE 2009 was 36% (Table 4). The highest institutional response rate was 81%, with 70% of institutions achieving a response rate between 22% and 50%. The average institutional response rate for paper mode schools (institutions where students were invited by postal mail, but had the option of completing either the paper or the Web version of the survey) was 31%. Fewer than half of the students responding at these institutions completed the paper survey, while 54% elected

to complete NSSE online. The average institutional response rate for NSSE 2009 Web-only institutions (institutions where students were invited by e-mail to complete the survey online) was 37%. Institutions participating using the Web+ mode of administration recorded an average institutional response rate of 34%.

Additional information about response rates, including response rates for your institution, is provided in the *NSSE 2009 Respondent Characteristics* report.

**Table 4**  
**NSSE 2009 Participation and Response Information by Survey Administration Mode<sup>a</sup>**

Survey Administration Mode	Number of Institutions <sup>b</sup>	Average Institutional Response Rate	% of Students Responding via Web
Paper	39	31%	54%
Web-only	412	37%	100%
Web+	179	34%	96%
<b>All Institutions</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>98%</b>

a. Response rates and percent of students responding via Web are based on randomly sampled participants only.  
b. Table does not include results for 10 NSSE 2009 institutions that participated as part of a special research program.

## Canadian Institutions and Respondents

Fourteen Canadian institutions from six provinces participated in NSSE 2009. Of these, four institutions were from Ontario, four were from British Columbia, three were from Nova Scotia, and one each was from Quebec, Alberta, and New Brunswick. All Canadian institutions participated via the Web-only administration mode.

### Response Rates

The average Canadian institutional response rate for NSSE 2009 was 43%, with the highest rate achieved being 63%.

### Student Overview

More than 22,000 Canadian students were invited to participate and the total number of respondents was 8,965 (Table 5). Women made up 67% of the respondents. About 85% of respondents were enrolled full-time. Of all respondents, 23% were enrolled in a social science major, 15% in an arts & humanities major, 15% in business, and 9% in biological sciences.

### Summary of Ethno-Cultural Categories

The majority of students providing ethno-cultural information identified themselves as White (76%). Additionally, 11% identified as Chinese, 4% as South Asian, 3% as Black, and 2% each self-identified as North American Indian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, or Arab. Less than 2% of respondents identified with each of the remaining categories. Ethno-cultural categories for Canadian institutions participating in NSSE were adapted from Statistics Canada, Canada's national statistical agency, see [www.statcan.gc.ca/](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/) for additional details.



Ryerson University

### Age

Students 19 years old or younger represented the largest group (43%). About 39% of respondents were between 20 and 23 years old and 11% were between the ages of 24 and 29.

**Table 5**  
**Characteristics of Canadian NSSE 2009 Respondents<sup>a</sup>**

NSSE 2009 Respondents at Canadian Institutions		N=8,965
<b>Gender</b>		
Male		33%
Female		67%
<b>Enrollment Status</b>		
Full-time		85%
Part-time		16%
<b>Major</b>		
Arts & Humanities		15%
Biological Sciences		9%
Business		15%
Education		3%
Engineering		3%
Physical Sciences		4%
Professional (other)		10%
Social Sciences		23%
Other		18%
Undecided		1%

a. Percentages are unweighted.



## National Survey of Student Engagement

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