

# Engagement Insights

Survey Findings on the Quality  
of Undergraduate Education

## *Motivating Students to Do Their Best Work*

Are students sufficiently challenged?

## *Seniors' Post-Graduation Plans*

Are seniors adequately prepared by  
their major?

## *Students' Financial Stress*

Who is financially stressed & how does  
it affect engagement?

## *High School Study Habits*

Do good study habits carry forward to  
college?

## *Faculty Perceptions of Safety and Support*

How much do they vary?



# Quick Facts from NSSE 2015

## Audiences

NSSE's audiences include college and university leaders, faculty members, advisors, teaching and learning center staff, assessment professionals, institutional researchers, student life staff, governing boards, students, higher education scholars, accreditors, government agencies, higher education organizations, prospective students and their families, high school counselors, and journalists.

## Participating Colleges & Universities

More than 1,500 four-year colleges and universities in the US and Canada have participated in NSSE since its launch in 2000, with 564 U.S. and 21 Canadian institutions in 2015. Participating institutions generally mirror the national distribution of institutions in the 2010 Basic Carnegie Classification (Figure 1).

In addition to the participation of individual institutions, state and multi-campus systems may coordinate system-level participation in NSSE. Institutions sharing a common interest or mission also can coordinate to add questions to the core survey through consortium participation.

## Participation Benefits

Participation benefits include uniform third-party survey administration with several customization options. Deliverables include a student-level data file of all respondents, comprehensive reports with results for three customizable comparison groups, major field reports, concise summary reports for campus leaders and prospective students, and resources for interpreting results and transforming them into practice.

## Survey

The Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University's School of Education administers NSSE, in partnership with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. Completed in about 15 minutes, the online survey captures a census or a random sample of first-year and senior students. Institutions may append to the core survey up to two topical modules, permitting deeper examination of particular interest areas.

## Validity & Reliability

NSSE is continuously and extensively tested to ensure validity and reliability. A Psychometric Portfolio (available on the NSSE website) provides more information about NSSE data quality.

## Response Rate

The average institutional response rate in 2015 was 29%. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 89%, and 3 out of 5 institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher.

## NSSE Findings

Visit the NSSE website for summary tables of Engagement Indicators, High-Impact Practices, and individual items. The website also provides access to NSSE publications, examples of institutional data use, lists of participating institutions, and much more.

[nsse.indiana.edu](http://nsse.indiana.edu)

## Use of Student Data

Participating colleges and universities agree that NSSE can use the data for aggregate reporting and other research and improvement initiatives. NSSE may not disclose institutionally

identified results without permission. Colleges and universities may use their own data for institutional purposes, including public reporting, which NSSE encourages.

## Other Programs & Services

The NSSE Institute offers workshops and webinars, faculty and staff retreats, custom analyses, and consulting. Companion surveys include the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

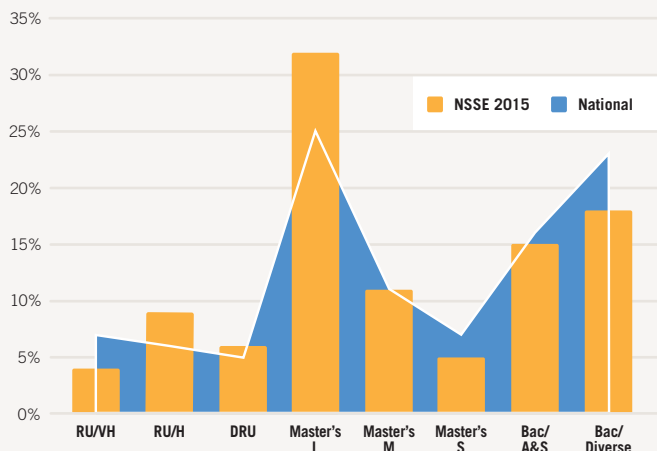
## Partners

NSSE was established with a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. For more about NSSE's origins, visit [nsse.indiana.edu/html/origins.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/origins.cfm).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning. Its primary activity is annually surveying college students to assess the extent to which they engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.

*Annual Results 2015* is sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Figure 1: NSSE 2015 Participating Colleges and Universities



Carnegie 2010 Basic Classification	
<b>RU/VH</b>	Research Universities (very high research activity)
<b>RU/H</b>	Research Universities (high research activity)
<b>DRU</b>	Doctoral/Research Universities
<b>Master's L</b>	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
<b>Master's M</b>	Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)
<b>Master's S</b>	Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)
<b>Bac/A&amp;S</b>	Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences
<b>Bac/Diverse</b>	Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields

Percentages are based on U.S. institutions that belong to one of the eight Carnegie classifications above.

[carnegieclassifications.iu.edu](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu)

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George Fox University

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NSSE findings help campuses explore the connections between their expectations for student achievement and what students actually experience. The survey results also encourage faculty to delve into the research on campus practices that support—or frustrate—liberal education.

—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER, PRESIDENT,  
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES  
AND UNIVERSITIES

NSSE data inform planning and decision making, provide a comprehensive snapshot of the quality of the undergraduate experience, and encourage institutions to adopt best models and practices.

—JAMES A. ANDERSON, CHANCELLOR,  
FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY



University of Guelph

## Director's Message

In 2015, NSSE collected responses from more than 315,000 first-year and senior students attending 585 bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. The following pages present selected NSSE results from students at 541 U.S. institutions or subsets of that group where supplemental survey items were included. We also report selected results from NSSE's two companion surveys, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

For this report, we investigated NSSE results that bear on the importance of challenging students to do their best work, seniors' preparation in the major, and the relationship of financial stress to engagement and views of the campus environment. The BCSSE analysis examined high school study habits and their relationship with the first year of college. We used FSSE results to investigate faculty perceptions safety and crisis preparedness.

### Preview of Key Findings

- Challenging Courses:** Only about half of first-year students and three in five seniors reported that their courses highly challenged them to do their best work. The extent of course challenge was unrelated to institutional selectivity for first-year students, and had a modest negative relationship for seniors. Selectivity neither assures nor is a prerequisite for this aspect of educational quality.
- Developing Creative Skills in the Major:** Coursework in the major that emphasizes creative skills (e.g., generating new ideas, taking risks, inventing new methods to find solutions) was positively related to student engagement in several areas. There were pronounced differences by field of study in the extent to which students felt they could take risks in their coursework without fear of penalty.
- Financial Stress:** Financial stress was common among undergraduates, particularly among first-generation, women, Black, and Hispanic students. Although the most financially stressed students worked more hours at an on- or off-campus job than their less-stressed peers, they were about as engaged in both academic and co-curricular activities.

- First-Year Experiences:** Academic habits developed in high school, such as the amount of time devoted to studying, tend to carry over to college with lasting positive effects.

- Faculty Views on Safety and Crisis**

**Preparedness:** Nearly nine out of ten faculty felt safe at their institutions. Institutions where faculty felt safer provided more training about sexual assault, more resources for victims of sexual assault, and more crisis response training. Most faculty expressed confidence in their institution's ability to handle a crisis, but this varied widely from campus to campus.

We are grateful for the data-use examples provided by **Harvey Mudd College, University of Mount Union, and University of West Florida.** They remind us that NSSE's aim is not to gather data, but to promote evidence-informed improvement. For more examples, refer to the latest volume in our *Lessons from the Field* series: [nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons](https://nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons)

NSSE and its related projects assist colleges and universities committed to monitoring and improving the quality of the undergraduate experience. More than 1,600 institutions have participated—from small undergraduate colleges to large research universities—with the majority participating on a cyclical basis. This is truly a team effort, involving campus personnel who work to ensure a successful administration and facilitate the use of results, our collaborators at Indiana University's Center for Survey Research, a dedicated project staff committed to quality in all of our processes and products, and a vital National Advisory Board whose wise counsel helps to guide our work. It is a privilege to be part of the team.

**Alexander C. McCormick, Ph.D.**

**Director, National Survey of Student Engagement**

**Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University Bloomington**

# Selected Results

## Motivating Students to Do Their Best Work

Setting high expectations and supporting students to meet those expectations is an important element of educational effectiveness. When students are both challenged and provided the appropriate amount of support, they are motivated to reach their potential. In 2015 we found that not all students were sufficiently challenged by their courses. For example, only 54% of first-year and 61% of senior students were highly<sup>a</sup> challenged to do their best work.

NSSE asks: “During the current school year, to what extent have your courses challenged you to do your best work?”  
(Response options: 1=“Not at all”, to 7=“Very much”)

First-year and senior students who were highly challenged by their courses were more likely to engage in a variety of effective educational practices (Table 1). Notably, some of the strongest relationships were between course challenge and Higher-Order Learning, Learning Strategies, and Effective Teaching Practices. Thus, the more students’ coursework emphasized complex cognitive tasks, the more they said their courses challenged them to do their best work. And “doing their best work” in part requires success-oriented learning strategies like active reading, reviewing notes after class, and summarizing what was learned in courses. Greater clarity and organization of courses, including prompt and formative feedback, were also positively related to course challenge. Finally, we found that course

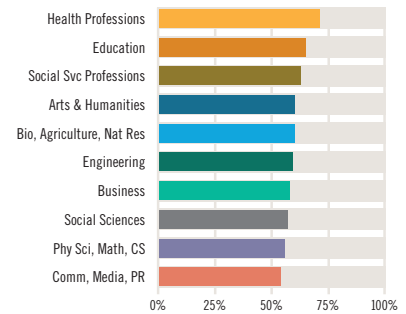
challenge was positively associated with perceived gains in learning and development as well as overall satisfaction with the educational experience.

Students’ age and their learning environments made a difference in their perceptions of course challenge. Nontraditional-aged students were more likely than their younger peers to be highly challenged to do their best work (Figure 2). Mode of instruction also played a role. For example, about three-quarters of nontraditional-aged students taking *all* of their courses online were highly challenged by their courses, compared with about two-thirds with some or no online courses. Among traditional-aged students, the pattern of high challenge being more common among all-online students was observed for first-year students, but not for seniors.

Course challenge also varied across related-major categories (Figure 3). The proportion of seniors who were highly challenged by their courses ranged from 71% among majors in the health professions to 54% of those pursuing degrees in communications, media, and public relations.

Interestingly, the extent to which students’ courses challenged them to do their best work was unrelated to admissions selectivity for first-year students, and had a modest inverse relationship for seniors (Table 2). In addition, we identified the top 50 institutions with regard to the average course challenge score for first-year students and seniors, and found that

**Figure 3: Percentage of Seniors Highly<sup>a</sup> Challenged in Their Courses, by Related-Major Category**



institutions of low or medium selectivity were well represented in the top-50 groups. While highly selective institutions made up 9% of all institutions in the analysis and 14% of the top-50 group for first-year students, none were in the top-50 group for seniors. This is further evidence that admission selectivity is neither a prerequisite for nor a guarantee of a high-quality educational experience.

These findings highlight the importance of setting high expectations and creating the conditions for students to achieve. Although an appreciable share of students does not experience these conditions, *all* institutions are capable of delivering on the imperative to challenge students to do their best work.

a. At least 6 on a 7-point scale where 1=“Not at all” to 7=“Very much”

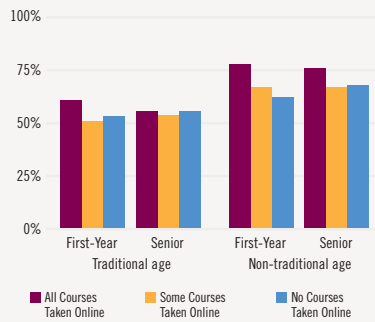
**Table 1: Relationship of Course Challenge with Engagement and Students’ Assessment of Their Experience**

Engagement Indicators	First-Year	Senior
Higher-Order Learning	++	+++
Reflective & Integrative Learning	+	++
Learning Strategies	++	+++
Quantitative Reasoning	+	+
Collaborative Learning	+	+
Discussions w/Diverse Others	+	+
Student-Faculty Interaction	+	+
Effective Teaching Practices	++	+++
Quality of Interactions	++	+++
Supportive Environment	++	++

How Students Assess their Experience		
Perceived Gains*	+++	+++
Satisfaction with Entire Educational Experience	++	+++

**Figure 2: Percentage Highly Challenged in Their Courses, by Age and Distance Education Status**



Note: Traditional age is defined as under 21 for first-year students, and under 25 for seniors.

**Table 2: Average Course Challenge Score and Distribution of Institutions by Admissions Selectivity<sup>a</sup>**

Selectivity <sup>b</sup>	Average Course Challenge Score				Distribution of Institutions (%)			
	Overall	Top 50 <sup>c</sup>	Overall	Top 50 <sup>c</sup>	Overall	Top 50 <sup>c</sup>	Overall	Top 50 <sup>c</sup>
Low	5.6	6.0	5.8	6.2	19	26	19	36
Med	5.5	5.9	5.7	6.1	72	60	72	64
High	5.6	5.9	5.5	--	9	14	9	0
Total	5.5	5.9	5.7	6.1	100	100	100	100

a. The table is limited to institutions with a selectivity rating in *Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges* (Barron’s Educational Services, Inc., 2013).

b. Low selectivity combines Barron’s Non-Competitive and Less Competitive categories. Medium selectivity combines Competitive and Very Competitive, and High selectivity combines Highly Competitive and Most Competitive.

c. The Top-50 group identifies the 50 institutions with the highest average course challenge score, computed separately for first-year and senior students.

Notes: Continuous variables were standardized before entry into regression models. Engagement Indicators, perceived gains, and satisfaction were dependent variables. Controls included major, enrollment status, courses taken online, grades, transfer status, first-generation status, gender identity, age, citizenship, racial/ethnic identification, living situation, Carnegie classification, and institutional control.

Key: + p<.001 Unst. B>1; ++ p<.001 Unst. B>2; +++ p<.001 Unst. B>3

\*Perceived gains is a scale composed of 10 items that explore the degree to which students believe their college experience contributed to their gains in a variety of personal, practical, and general education competencies.

## Selected Results *continued*

### Seniors' Post-Graduation Plans Influenced by Major and Participation in High-Impact Practices

A new NSSE topical module on senior transitions, completed by more than 31,000 seniors at 126 institutions, provides evidence in two areas of effectiveness for higher education institutions—post-graduation plans and confidence in skill development. In 2015, the vast majority of seniors (83%) planned on either full-time employment (60%) or further education (23%) after graduation, but the balance between these options differed considerably by field of study (Figure 4). For example, business, education, and engineering majors were the most likely to plan on full-time employment immediately after graduation, while biological sciences and social science majors were the most likely to plan on attending graduate or professional school.

In addition, taking part in High-Impact Practices (HIPs) was positively related to seniors' perceptions of preparation for their post-graduation plans, perhaps because they exposed students to new opportunities or provided experiences related to students' future plans. Seniors who had participated in an internship or field experience, learning community, research with faculty, culminating experience, or service-learning were more likely to believe that coursework in their academic programs prepared them for their post-graduation plans (Figure 5).

Future success depends on a variety of skills that are acquired in school, and the module

### University of Mount Union: Using NSSE Results to Redesign the First-Year Seminar

In fall 2012, **University of Mount Union** launched a new four-credit, topic-based and e-Portfolio-supported First-Year Seminar (FYS), replacing the former one-credit introduction to college course. In the new model, all FYS instructors are full-time faculty who serve as the students' first-year academic advisors. To assess the redesigned FYS outcomes, Mount Union reviewed results from their 2013 and 2015 NSSE administrations.

NSSE 2013 reports were shared with department chairs, faculty, students, and administrators who reviewed the results in multiple forums such as student senate meetings, presentations, and focus groups. Among other findings, the 2013 results indicated that Mount Union first-year students rated the quality of their interactions lower when compared to their peers at aspirant institutions. Based on this finding, the FYS core group decided to focus additional enhancements of the FYS on the Quality of Interactions Engagement Indicator.

To do so, faculty collaborated with the First-Year Experience director to introduce co-curricular

activities into the FYS course and to encourage a seamless learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. Starting in fall 2014, each FYS class was assigned a peer mentor to guide students through co-curricular and transitional issues. Instructors also worked with the FYE director to implement early intervention strategies for specific students.

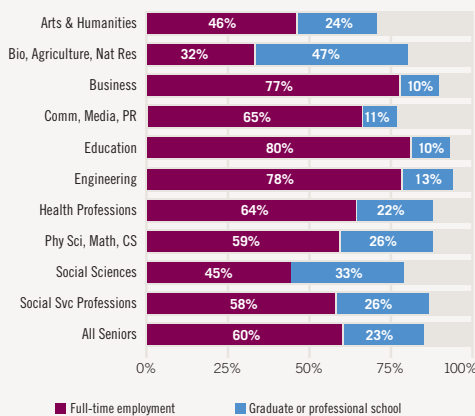
Mount Union's NSSE 2015 results show improvement in the Quality of Interaction, which was higher than that of peer and aspirant institutions. At the same time, Mount Union's first-year retention rate improved significantly in 2014 and 2015 when compared with the previous seven years. Although no causal relationship can be made between better scores on the Engagement Indicator and increased retention, research suggests a correlation. Mount Union continues to be actively engaged in interpreting their 2015 data to identify further actions to enhance the first-year experience of their students.

addressed a variety of important skills and abilities. Yet students' confidence in skill development and coursework that emphasized certain problem-solving strategies differed by major field category, often in predictable ways. For example, engineering majors had high confidence<sup>a</sup> in their technological skills (91% compared to 65% of those in arts and humanities). In contrast, those in the arts and humanities felt their major coursework emphasized taking risks without fear of

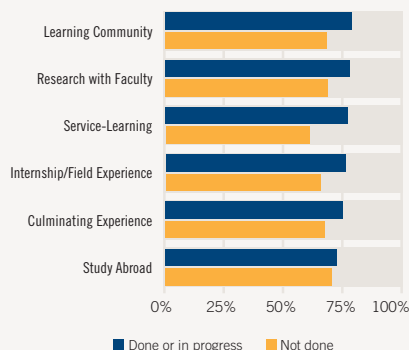
penalty (64% compared to 35% for those in engineering). Not surprisingly, communications, media, and public relations majors had high confidence in their persuasive speaking abilities (83% compared with 74% overall and as low as 66% for those in physical science, math, and computer science majors).

Emphasis on creative skill development in academic major coursework was positively correlated with all Engagement Indicators, and many of the relationships were noteworthy

**Figure 4: Percentage of Seniors Planning on Full-time Employment or Further Education by Type of Major**



**Figure 5: Percentage of Seniors Whose Major Coursework Prepared Them for Post-Graduation Plans, by HIP Participation**



Note: Values are the percentage of seniors responding "Very much" or "Quite a bit" to the following question: "To what extent have courses in your major(s) prepared you for your post-graduation plans?"

**Table 3: Notable Bivariate Correlations Between Engagement and Emphasis on Creative Skill Development in Coursework**

	Major coursework emphasized:			
	Generating new ideas or brainstorming	Taking risks in your coursework without fear of penalty	Evaluating multiple approaches to a problem	Inventing new methods to arrive at unconventional solutions
Higher-Order Learning	+++	++	+++	+++
Reflective & Integrative Learning	++	+	++	++
Quantitative Reasoning	+	+	+	+
Learning Strategies	++	+	++	+
Collaborative Learning	+	+	+	+
Discussions with Diverse Others	+	+	+	+
Student-Faculty Interaction	+	+	+	++
Effective Teaching Practices	+++	++	+++	++
Quality of Interactions	++	+	++	+
Supportive Environment	++	++	+++	++

Key: + <.30, ++ ≥.30, +++ ≥.40 All correlations statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .



“Courses are challenging and force the student to grow and dedicate time outside of the classroom in order to succeed.”

—SENIOR, EARTH SCIENCE, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

in magnitude (Table 3). Three of the EIs—Higher-Order Learning, Effective Teaching Practices, and Supportive Environment were markedly related to all four areas of creative skill development, while Reflective & Integrative Learning notably correlated with three of the four. Other associated EIs were Learning Strategies, Quality of Interactions, and Student-Faculty Interaction.

The relationships between exploratory and creative aspects of coursework in the major and multiple indicators of engagement reveal important nuances about the role of student engagement in higher education. Students may acquire a range of skills and abilities that are useful in the future, but the development and nurturing of creativity and problem-solving abilities are increasingly important. Institutions, schools, and departments should consider how they can best develop these competencies in their students. As one senior commented at the close of the survey, “While I learned a lot in my field, I do not feel prepared for the work world... I need more job support and guidance, and a better understanding as to what my degree can do for me.” Colleges and universities have a responsibility to instill in their students the skills and habits of mind that will pay off over a lifetime. As another senior noted, “The knowledge and dispositions I have gained from my major are priceless... it was hard, at times extremely hard, but definitely worth it.”

a. Responding “Very much” or “Quite a bit” to “How much confidence do you have in your ability to complete tasks requiring the following skills and abilities?”

## Financial Stress Remains a Concern, Especially for Historically Underserved Populations

In *Annual Results 2012*, we investigated how financial stress influenced the undergraduate experience during the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis and recession. The recession reduced state support for higher education, placing a greater financial burden on students and parents at a time when their incomes were already squeezed. We reported then that about 60% of students frequently<sup>a</sup> worried about having enough money to meet regular expenses. Additionally, about one in three students frequently did not purchase required academic materials due to their cost, and about the same percentage believed that financial concerns interfered with their academic performance.

We asked the same questions in 2015 and found that despite the gradual economic recovery, financial stress has not abated since 2012, and in some cases has worsened

(Table 4). The largest increase was in the percentage who frequently chose not to purchase required academic materials due to their cost.

We examined financial stress among students of different backgrounds using an index calculated on a 60-point scale akin to the NSSE Engagement Indicators using 2015 data. Overall, seniors evidenced more financial stress than first-year students (Table 5). Financial stress was inversely related to parental education, and women had slightly higher average levels of financial stress than men. Black and Hispanic students had above-average financial stress, while White students were below average. First-year Asian students experienced less financial stress on average, but Asian seniors had average financial stress levels.

We were also interested in how financial stress varied by students’ time commitments. Interestingly, first-year students with higher financial stress spent only about an hour less per week preparing for class and about one to

**Table 4: Percentage of First-Year Students and Seniors Who Evidenced Various Forms of Financial Stress in the Current School Year: 2012 and 2015**

	First-Year		Senior	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Worried about having enough money for regular expenses <sup>a</sup>	60	60	62	63
Worried about paying for college <sup>a</sup>	59	58	53	55
Chose not to participate in an activity due to lack of money <sup>a</sup>	42	40	47	48
Chose not to purchase required academic materials due to their cost <sup>a</sup>	27	31	34	40
Investigated transferring to a less expensive college <sup>a</sup>	20	19	12	12
Investigated withdrawing from college due to costs <sup>a</sup>	13	13	11	11
Investigated working more hours to pay for costs <sup>a</sup>	40	43	44	46
Investigated increasing your borrowing to pay for costs <sup>a</sup>	27	28	36	39
Agree: Financial concerns have interfered with my academic performance <sup>b</sup>	32	34	36	38
Agree: Work schedule has interfered with my academic performance <sup>b</sup>	20	23	38	41
Disagree: College is a good investment <sup>c</sup>	27	30	25	28

a. “Very often” or “Often”

b. At least 4 on a 6-point scale where 1=“Not at all” and 6=“Very Much”

c. Less than 4 on a 6-point scale where 1=“Not at all” and 6=“Very Much”

**Table 5: Average Financial Stress Score by Selected Student Characteristics**

	First-Year	Senior
	<b>Parental Education<sup>a</sup></b>	
High school or less	28	28
Associate’s/Some college	24	27
Bachelor’s	21	24
Graduate degree	19	22
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	23	27
Male	21	24
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
Asian	21	26
Black	25	29
Hispanic	28	30
White	21	24
All others	25	27
Prefer not to respond	27	29
<b>Age</b>		
19 or younger	22	18
20-23	27	24
24-29	26	30
30-39	22	28
40 or older	19	22
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>

Note: Financial Stress index scored on a 0-60 scale.

a. Highest degree held by either parent

South Dakota State University

## Selected Results *continued*

two hours less per week relaxing and socializing, and there were few differences in the amount of time spent on co-curricular activities. However, first-year students with above average levels of financial stress spent substantially more time working, commuting, and caring for dependents than their low-stress peers (results for seniors were similar). Although the most financially stressed students have considerably heavier nondiscretionary time commitments, they devote almost as much time to academic work as their less-stressed peers.

Finally, we analyzed the relationship of financial stress with students' engagement with peers and perceptions of the campus environment (Figure 6). First-year, financially stressed students engaged *more frequently* in collaborative learning activities with their peers and in discussions with diverse others. Despite this higher level of interaction with peers, financially stressed first-year students on average rated their interactions with others on campus less favorably than their low-stressed peers. Additionally, they perceived a less supportive campus environment. These results were similar for seniors.

Overall, the results suggest that financial stress is not declining as the economy improves, and that financial stress is more prominent in historically underserved populations. Despite their busier schedules, financially stressed students appear to be engaged in both academic and co-curricular activities on par with their peers, and more so in some respects. However, their lower ratings of interactions with others and environmental support are cause for

concern. Given their time commitments and the amount of debt most students incur to attend college, financially-stressed students have limited ability to work more or take on additional debt. Consequently, policymakers should take affirmative steps to reduce the net costs of college.

a. "Very often" or "Often"

### Enduring Effects: The Benefits of Good High School Study Habits Carry Forward into the First College Year

Educators, parents, and researchers have become concerned about the quantity and quality of students' studying, noting for example that the pervasiveness of technology might be distracting students (Kirshner & Karpinski, 2010). In addition, there is evidence of a "behavioral consistency" from high school to the first year of college (Funder & Colvin, 1991). Using data from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement, we examined how many hours per week students studied in high school and the relationship between study time, high school grades, and students' experiences in the first year of college.

As high school seniors, almost half (45%) of respondents spent no more than five hours per week preparing for class, while only about one in eight (13%) spent more than 15 hours per week. We also found that the less

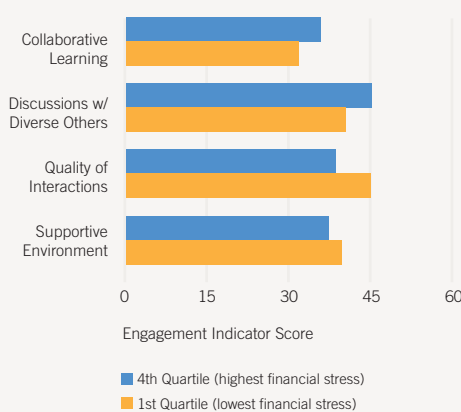
time students spent studying in high school, the more likely they were to be distracted by other activities while studying (Figure 7). For example, students who studied the least used social media and browsed the Internet more frequently while studying. In addition, those who studied the most did so more frequently<sup>a</sup> in a quiet place (46%) compared to those who studied the least (27%).

As one would expect, those who studied the most were much more likely to earn mostly As in high school compared to those who studied the least (66% versus 46%). About 40% of those who studied the least admitted that if they had studied more they would have done better, compared with about 25% of those who studied the most. Yet study time was associated with more than just grades. More time studying was associated with greater use of effective learning strategies in high school, and those who studied the most found high school to be more challenging.

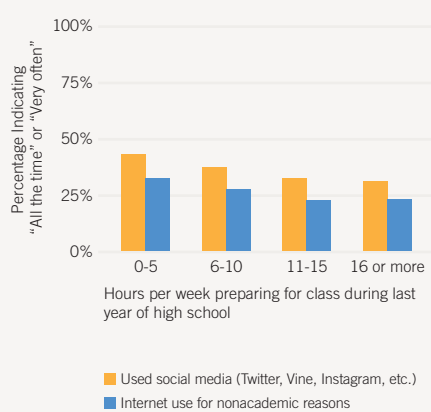
We found evidence of behavioral consistency between high school and the first year of college regarding study time. For example, over two-thirds (68%) of those who studied more than 15 hours a week in high school also studied at least that much during the first year of college. In contrast, only a quarter (25%) of those who studied five or fewer hours per week in high school studied more than 15 hours per week in the first college year.

Good habits in high school appeared to carry over to college with lasting positive effects. For example, students who studied the most in

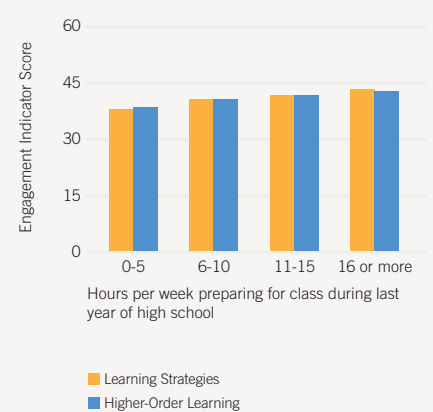
**Figure 6: Selected Engagement Indicator Scores by Financial Stress Quartile: First-Year Students**



**Figure 7: Use of Social Media and Internet While Studying in High School by Class Preparation Time**



**Figure 8: First-Year Engagement with Learning Strategies and Higher-Order Learning in College by High School Class Preparation Time**





high school were more likely to use effective Learning Strategies and engage in Higher-Order Learning during the first year of college (Figure 8). What's more, they were much more likely than those who studied the least to earn As in the first year of college (63% vs. 41%).

These results challenge colleges and universities to provide guidance for incoming first-year students to identify maladaptive study habits (e.g., use of social media while studying) and to intervene with a corrective plan of action. This is especially important for underprepared students and those who are the first in their family to attend college.

Note: BCSSE data were from about 16,000 students enrolled at 37 bachelor's-granting institutions who completed the survey during the summer of 2014. NSSE data were from nearly 13,000 students enrolled at 77 bachelor's-granting institutions who completed BCSSE during the summer of 2014 and NSSE in the spring of 2015.

a. Percentage responding "All the time" or "Very often"

“ Making the transition from high school to college was very difficult. I didn't know how to study, how to prepare for a class, or even what a challenging class was like.”

— FIRST-YEAR STUDENT,  
ENGINEERING, CASE WESTERN  
RESERVE UNIVERSITY

## University of West Florida: Increasing High-Impact Practices and Engaging Commuter Students

NSSE data are an integral part of **University of West Florida's** (UWF) accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). In 2015, UWF established a quality enhancement plan (QEP) titled "Communication for Professional Success" focusing on high-impact practices (HIPs) with an emphasis on written and spoken communication outcomes. A High-Impact Practices Action Team was established to review assessment data, including 2014 NSSE results, which reinforced their interest in expanding HIP implementation. For example, UWF found that 79% of seniors participated in at least one high-impact practice—a lower level of participation compared to the averages of all NSSE respondents and the State University System of Florida, and most importantly, lower than the institution desired. In addition, increasing student participation in HIPs is a stated UWF goal in response to

work plans required by the Florida Board of Governors. The university set the goal of improving mean scores on five or more NSSE Engagement Indicators and three or more HIPs, and it plans to administer NSSE in 2017 and 2020 to assess progress toward these goals.

Student engagement results also helped spark a new focus on commuter students. Given the size of this population at UWF, it was not surprising that less than half of these students participated in activities outside of the classroom. With this as the rationale, the Division of Student Affairs launched a campaign to connect commuter students to campus information, events, and activities. The initiative's goal is to better facilitate lifelong connections to the institution by broadening commuter student awareness of campus resources, improving participation rates, and increasing the number of students living on campus.



## Selected Results *continued*

### Faculty Perceptions of Safety and Support

As a part of the 2015 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), over 2,900 faculty from 16 bachelor's degree granting-institutions responded to a series of experimental questions that explored their feelings of safety, perceptions of institutional support based on types of identity, and understandings of policies and procedures related to crisis response and sexual assault. In general, a large majority (88%) of faculty members felt safe<sup>a</sup> at their institutions, and 70% substantially<sup>a</sup> agreed that if a crisis happened their institution would handle it well.

Faculty members believed their institutions were generally supportive of people across a variety of characteristics (Figure 9). Although this support varied by categories of identity, about 70% to 80% believed that their institution was supportive across the categories examined. With regard to their own experience, three quarters of faculty (77%) faced no offensive behavior, discrimination, isolation, or harassment at their institutions.

These perceptions of support and safety varied by institution. For example, the percentage of faculty who felt safe<sup>a</sup> ranged from 75% to 98% across the 16 institutions. Faculty members' views on their institution's ability to handle a crisis varied even more, with a range of 24% to 84% indicating substantial<sup>a</sup> agreement. We also examined faculty perceptions of policies and procedures for student and faculty safety and well-being, and how these perceptions varied with faculty members' feelings of safety. At institutions where faculty felt safer, they substantially agreed that their institution provided them with training about crisis

### Harvey Mudd College: Using NSSE and FSSE to Improve Writing Instruction

**Harvey Mudd College** is a science, engineering, and mathematics college with a strong liberal arts emphasis. In 2010, the college revised its core curriculum to include a renewed focus on writing—based in part on the observation that students reached capstone without advanced writing skills. The revised curriculum required first-year students to take Introduction to Academic Writing (Writ 1), a half-semester course taught by faculty from all disciplines. NSSE and FSSE results, in particular student and faculty responses to the Experiences with Writing topical module, have been important in assessing the impact of this course on students and faculty.

Prior to teaching Writ 1, faculty members participate in a week-long intensive workshop focusing on current composition theory and pedagogy and reflecting on lessons learned the previous semester. During the 2015 workshop, faculty discussed strategies for helping students apply the skills taught in Writ 1 to their writing in the various disciplines. NSSE and FSSE results identified patterns suggesting where effective practices could be expanded. Workshop attendees discussed strategies to encourage reflection, to foster skills transfer, and to clarify the applicability of what students learn about writing in Writ 1 across disciplines.

response and incidents of sexual assault, and that their institution provided adequate support and resources for individuals who experienced sexual assault (Figure 10).

Although one might assume that women and underrepresented groups of faculty would feel less safe, faculty feelings of safety differed very little by gender identity, racial/ethnic identification, or sexual orientation. While men felt slightly safer than women<sup>b</sup>, there were no statistically significant differences in the feelings of safety between faculty of color and White faculty, or between heterosexual faculty and gay, lesbian, or bisexual faculty.

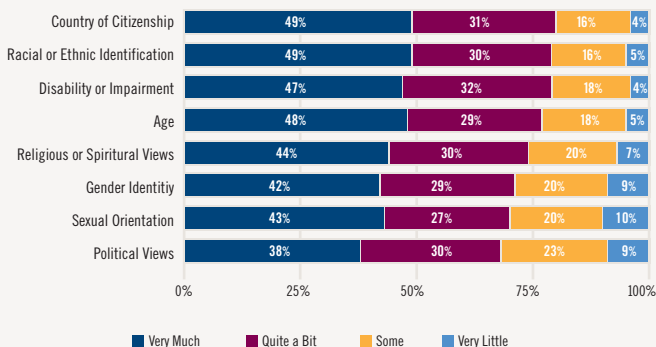
Although these findings are encouraging, more work is needed. For example, over a quarter of faculty did *not* believe their institution was supportive of people based on religious or spiritual views, sexual orientation, gender identity, or political views. This support varied greatly by institution. For example, support

for people based on sexual orientation ranged from 21% to 80% among the 16 institutions. Of the quarter of faculty (23%) who experienced offensive behavior, discrimination, isolation, or harassment at their institutions, two in five (41%) said that it interfered with their ability to work. Nearly a third of faculty (30%) did not substantially<sup>a</sup> agree that if a crisis happened, their institution would handle it well. And even at institutions where faculty felt safer, about half did not substantially agree that they had received training regarding crisis response or incidents of sexual assault and slightly less than half of faculty did not substantially believe that their institution has adequate support and resources for individuals who experienced sexual assault.

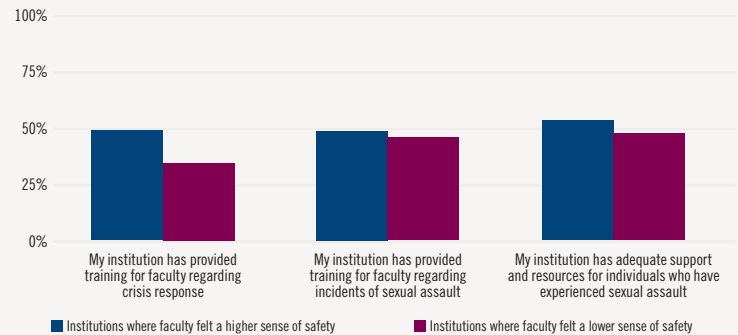
a. "Very much" or "Quite a bit"

b. Mean differences were analyzed with a *t*-test,  $p < .001$ , effect size (standardized mean difference) = .19

**Figure 9: Extent to Which Faculty Believed Their Institution Supports People in Different Identity Categories**



**Figure 10: Extent to Which Faculty Agreed<sup>a</sup> that Their Institution Provided Support, by Faculty Sense of Safety<sup>b</sup>**



a. "Very Much" or "Quite a Bit"

b. The 16 institutions were sorted and divided in two groups, higher and lower, based on their average faculty feelings of safety.

As Writ 1 approached its fifth year, to evaluate what was and was not working well, the college was interested to know if engagement around writing had improved. Results from both NSSE and FSSE suggested Harvey Mudd's students and faculty compared favorably to those of its Carnegie peer group. Additionally, since the implementation of Writ 1, first-year students and seniors indicated that most writing assignments asked them to use evidence and reasoning to argue a position, to explain the meaning of numerical

and statistical data, and to write in the style and format of a specific field—all outcomes stressed in Writ 1.

By disaggregating NSSE results, Harvey Mudd seeks to better understand how students access resources and how faculty meet the needs of a diverse student body. These results will help the faculty make Writ 1 clearer for *all* students—by defining expectations, addressing learning preferences, and uncovering underlying assumptions.

“ Our faculty own the curriculum. When I share our NSSE and FSSE findings there is a hunger to make meaning of it. Our results don't sit on shelves.”

—LAURA PALUCKI BLAKE, PHD, DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND EFFECTIVENESS, HARVEY MUDD COLLEGE

Allegheny College

## NSSE-CCCSE Collaboration: Engaging Latino Students for Transfer and Completion

Latinos are a growing share of students in higher education (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Although they are more likely to begin postsecondary education in a two-year institution, their transition to a four-year college or university is too often unsuccessful, making transfer the key leakage point along their pathway to a baccalaureate degree (Núñez & Elizando, 2013).

To strengthen the capacity of two- and four-year institutions to foster Latino student success, NSSE and the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE), in partnership with Excelencia in Education, launched the Engaging Latino Students for Transfer and College Completion project. With support from the Kresge Foundation and Greater Texas Foundation, NSSE and CCCSE have worked with a select group of institutions to examine Latino student engagement, transfer patterns, educational quality, and educational equity—and to use this evidence to inform action.

The project paired 24 institutions—12 community colleges with 12 bachelor's-granting institutions—all from urban locations in Texas,

California, Michigan, and Florida—to work in partnership on Latino student success. Among other commitments, the institutions formed teams of five leaders to examine student engagement data; to review and discuss student cohort transfer results; to work collaboratively at an intensive two-and-a-half-day institute focused on interpreting data and learning more about approaches to strengthen Latino student engagement, transfer, and college completion; to take action on institutional and mutually determined efforts; and to study the impact of these efforts.

The 12 NSSE-participating institutions received customized reports disaggregated by race/ethnicity and transfer status to explore differences in student engagement. Partner institutions also completed a longitudinal analysis tracking the 2008 entering student cohort to examine transfer and completion rates. Reviewing these results, they identified salient student engagement and transfer patterns for collaborative analysis with their two-year partner institutions. Some institutions learned, for example, that Latino students were actually more engaged than their peers

in student-faculty interaction, and had more favorable perceptions of support for learning, identifying strengths upon which to build. At one institution, while transfer students were generally less engaged, those in the most popular majors were actually as engaged as their nontransfer counterparts.

With insights like these, each pair of two- and four-year institutions designed action plans to strengthen Latino student success. Several pairs established a Transfer Advisory Council—a formal group of representatives from each institution—to convene regularly throughout the year. Other partners established innovative ways to enhance community and family involvement to help smooth the transfer process, and some designed collaborative advisor summits and professional development sessions involving faculty, administration, and staff at both institutions.

By developing strategies to address concerns revealed in their shared data, these colleges and universities have made important advances in supporting Latino student transfer and completion.



# Engagement Indicators & High-Impact Practices

To represent the multiple dimensions of student engagement, NSSE reports scores for 10 Engagement Indicators calculated from 47 NSSE questions and grouped within four themes. Additionally, NSSE provides results on six High-Impact Practices, aptly named for their positive associations with student learning and retention.

## Engagement Indicators

Engagement Indicators (EIs) provide valuable information about distinct aspects of student engagement by summarizing students' responses to sets of related survey questions.

The EIs and component items were rigorously tested both qualitatively and quantitatively in a multi-year effort that included student focus groups, cognitive interviews, and two years of pilot testing and analysis. As a result, each EI provides valuable, concise, actionable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement.

Theme	Engagement Indicator
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning
	Reflective & Integrative Learning
	Learning Strategies
	Quantitative Reasoning
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning
	Discussions with Diverse Others
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction
	Effective Teaching Practices
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions
	Supportive Environment

## EI Component Items

*Theme: Academic Challenge*

### Higher-Order Learning

*During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following:*

- Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations
- Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts
- Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source
- Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information

### Reflective & Integrative Learning

*During the current school year, how often have you*

- Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments
- Connected your learning to societal problems or issues
- Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments
- Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue
- Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective
- Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept
- Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge

### Learning Strategies

*During the current school year, how often have you*

- Identified key information from reading assignments
- Reviewed your notes after class
- Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials

“The reports have been incredibly helpful! The format is user-friendly and the graphs help to illustrate the points without being overwhelming.”

—JODI FISLER, ASSISTANT TO THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AND DIRECTOR OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT, COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

## Quantitative Reasoning

*During the current school year, how often have you*

- Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)
- Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)
- Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information

*Theme: Learning with Peers*

## Collaborative Learning

*During the current school year, how often have you*

- Asked another student to help you understand course material
- Explained course material to one or more students
- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students
- Worked with other students on course projects or assignments

## Discussions with Diverse Others

*During the current school year, how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups:*

- People from a race or ethnicity other than your own
- People from an economic background other than your own
- People with religious beliefs other than your own
- People with political views other than your own

## Available on the NSSE Website:

**Summary statistics** for individual survey questions as well as EI and HIP scores by Carnegie classification, sex, and related-major category:

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/summary\\_tables](https://nsse.indiana.edu/links/summary_tables)

The **NSSE Report Builder**—an interactive tool that displays results by user-selected student and institutional characteristics:

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/report\\_builder](https://nsse.indiana.edu/links/report_builder)



Providence College

*Theme: Experiences with Faculty*

### Student-Faculty Interaction

*During the current school year, how often have you*

- Talked about career plans with a faculty member
- Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)
- Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class
- Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member

### Effective Teaching Practices

*During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following:*

- Clearly explained course goals and requirements
- Taught course sessions in an organized way
- Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points
- Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress
- Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments

*Theme: Campus Environment*

### Quality of Interactions

*Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution:*

- Students
- Academic advisors
- Faculty
- Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)
- Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)

### Supportive Environment

*How much does your institution emphasize the following:*

- Providing support to help students succeed academically
- Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)
- Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)
- Providing opportunities to be involved socially
- Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)
- Helping you manage your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)
- Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues

### High-Impact Practices

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) represent enriching educational experiences that can be life-changing. They typically demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback.

NSSE founding director George Kuh recommends that all students participate in at least two HIPs over the course of their undergraduate experience—one during the first year and one in the context of their major.

NSSE reports student participation in six HIPs: three for both first-year students and seniors, and three for seniors only.

#### High-Impact Practices

##### Learning Community

Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together<sup>a</sup>

##### Service-Learning

About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service-learning?)<sup>b</sup>

##### Research with Faculty

Work with a faculty member on a research project<sup>a</sup>

##### Internship or Field Experience

Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement<sup>a</sup>

##### Study Abroad

Participate in a study abroad program<sup>a</sup>

##### Culminating Senior Experience

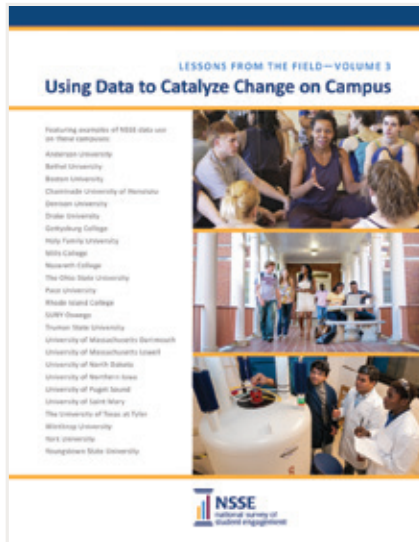
Complete a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.)<sup>a</sup>

a. Stem question: "Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate?"

b. Response options: "All", "Most", "Some", and "None"

# Resources Available Online

To support efforts to improve undergraduate education, NSSE provides multiple tools and resources—including those listed below—to participating institutions and others interested in utilizing engagement data.



## Lessons from the Field, Volumes 1, 2, and 3

This three-volume repository highlights examples of how institutions are using NSSE data to enhance undergraduate teaching and learning. Volume 3, released in August 2015, showcases institutions' varied uses of the updated NSSE (introduced in 2013), including the new and revised measures and redesigned reports.

All volumes of *Lessons from the Field* can be downloaded from the NSSE website:

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons)

A searchable database featuring examples of how colleges and universities have used NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE data is also available:

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/data\\_use](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/data_use)

## NSSE Data User's Guide

This ready-to-use resource assists campus leaders in sharing results and facilitating workshops, presentations, and discussions about their findings. The guide includes worksheets and exercises to identify priorities for action and to generate productive, campuswide conversations among stakeholders about using data for improvement.

[nsse.indiana.edu/html/data\\_users\\_guide.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/data_users_guide.cfm)

## NSSE Item Campuswide Mapping

This adaptive tool connects NSSE items to institution departments, units, committees, functional areas, and interest groups, and encourages institutions to think more broadly about how engagement data can be shared and used campuswide.

[nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/NSSE\\_Item\\_Campuswide\\_Mapping.pdf](http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/NSSE_Item_Campuswide_Mapping.pdf)

## Summary Tables

Concise tables of annual survey responses as well as Engagement Indicator and High-Impact Practice Scores by Carnegie classification, sex, and related-major categories are available:

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/summary\\_tables](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/summary_tables)

## NSSE Report Builder

This interactive tool displays NSSE results by user-selected student and institutional characteristics. Two versions are available:

- The *Public Version* is for media, institutions, researchers, and others interested in unidentified, aggregated results from the updated NSSE.
- The *Institution Version* is for participating institutions to create tailored reports using their own NSSE data.

[nsse.indiana.edu/html/report\\_builder.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/report_builder.cfm)

## Psychometric Portfolio

Studies of validity, reliability, and other indicators of quality of NSSE's data—including breakdowns by a variety of student and institutional characteristics—are plainly detailed in this resource.

[nsse.indiana.edu/links/psychometric\\_portfolio](http://nsse.indiana.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio)

## Webinars

Live webinars for faculty, administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals are frequently offered, and all are recorded and available in NSSE's webinar archives. Topics include tips for data use and sharing, interpreting results, ideas for a successful survey administration, trends in engagement research, and much more.

[nsse.indiana.edu/webinars](http://nsse.indiana.edu/webinars)

## Publications and Presentations

NSSE staff actively conduct and present scholarly research on students, faculty, and institutional quality. One such example includes the chapter by McCormick, Kinzie, and Gonyea, "Student Engagement: Bridging Research and Practice to Improve the Quality of Undergraduate Education," in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Vol. 28 (2013, Springer).

For a full list of NSSE-related research articles, book chapters, conference presentations, and other works, visit the searchable database:

[nsse.indiana.edu/html/pubs.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/pubs.cfm)



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