

Engagement Insights

Survey Findings on the Quality of
Undergraduate Education



Annual Results 2017

Embargoed until
November 16, 2017
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Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity

Do students experience inclusive practices in their coursework? Are college environments supportive of diversity?

Sexual Orientation and Gender-Variance on Campus

What are the experiences of our LGBTQ+ and gender-variant students?

Student Activists

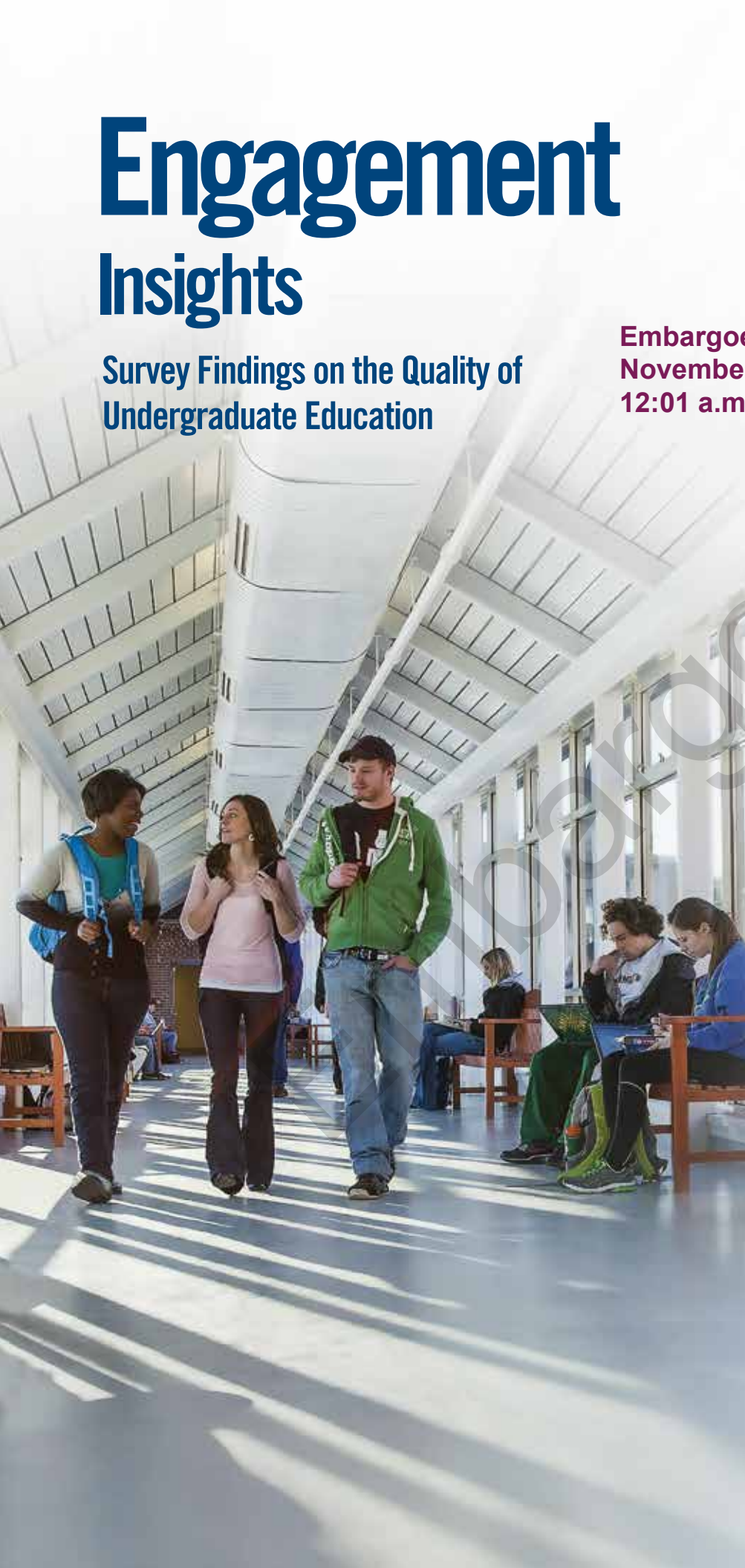
Is there a relationship between student activism and engagement?

Entering Students' Expectations

What are the consequences when expectations for faculty interaction aren't met?

Faculty: Incorporating Diversity in the Curriculum

How much do faculty incorporate diversity in their courses and teaching practices?



Quick Facts from NSSE 2017

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 1,600 four-year colleges and universities in the US and Canada have participated in NSSE since its launch in 2000, with 650 U.S. and 72 Canadian institutions participating in 2017. Participating institutions generally mirror the national distribution of institutions in the 2015 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, a comprehensive report package 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 using them to inform 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 represents 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 2017 was 30%. The highest response rate among U.S. institutions was 76%, and 3 out of 5 institutions achieved a response rate of 25% or higher.

NSSE Findings

Engagement Indicators (EIs) and measures of participation in High-Impact Practices (HIPs) (pp. 14-15) summarize key facets of student engagement. Visit the NSSE website for summary tables of EIs, HIPs, 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

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.

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.

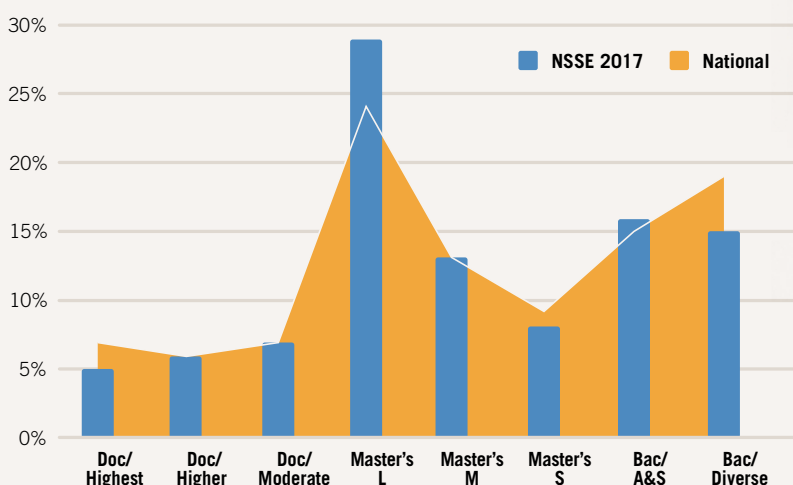
Other Programs & Services

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).

NSSE Origins

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

Figure 1: NSSE 2017 Participating Colleges and Universities



Carnegie 2015 Basic Classification

Doc/Highest	Doctoral Universities—Highest research activity
Doc/Higher	Doctoral Universities—Higher research activity
Doc/Moderate	Doctoral Universities—Moderate research activity
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 Focus
Bac/Diverse	Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields

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

carnegieclassifications.iu.edu

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Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

Cover Image: Northern Michigan University

Director's Message

The National Survey of Student Engagement and its companion projects serve bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities committed to assessing and improving the quality of the undergraduate experience. While each participating institution receives a detailed, customized *Institutional Report*, the *Annual Results* series presents noteworthy aggregate findings to a nationwide audience. This year we present selected results from students at more than 700 U.S. institutions or subsets of that group where supplemental questions were included. It also provides results from NSSE's two companion surveys, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).

For most of U.S. higher education's history, the college-going population was predominantly White and male, and access to college was largely limited to those from the upper rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. However, the last half-century has witnessed considerable expansion of higher education opportunities for women, historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and students from modest socioeconomic backgrounds. Colleges and universities now enroll more women than men. The National Center for Education Statistics projects that between 2013 and 2024 the largest increases in college enrollment by U.S.

residents will be among non-White students: 10% among Asian/Pacific Islander students, 13% among multiracial students, 25% among Hispanic students, and 28% among African American students, compared to 7% among White students (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). (The number of American Indian or Alaska Native students is projected to stay about the same.)

Higher education increasingly recognizes other forms of diversity as well. Many colleges and universities are working to provide safe, welcoming, and educationally effective environments for students across a wide range of difference—in addition to socioeconomic and racial/ethnic background—including gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status.

How well is higher education responding to the needs of our new student population? Several analyses in this report bear on this important question, focusing on first-generation college students, students of color, gender-variant students (i.e., those who identify with a gender other than man or woman), and students who indicated a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. In addition to examining how student characteristics relate to the quality of interactions with others on campus and to perceptions of a supportive campus environment, we present findings from a new NSSE Topical Module, Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity, as well as a parallel module from FSSE. Module results illuminate the extent to which students' coursework engages with issues of diversity and inclusion, as well as how institutions manifest their commitment to diversity.

Reflecting the heightened national attention to issues of racial equity, social justice, and political polarization, we also investigated political and social activism among today's college students. Our findings document a range of differences between student activists and their non-activist peers, with notable contrasts in the extent to which these two groups engage in educationally purposeful activities.

In addition, we examined the alignment of entering students' expectations for interactions with faculty during college—as reported in BCSSE—with their actual experience as reported in NSSE. The findings demonstrate the crucial links between realistic and achievable expectations, actual college experiences, and students' satisfaction.

Finally, the FSSE section presents intriguing results from a novel analysis of how faculty members allocate their time across the three principal domains of their professional activity: teaching, research, and service.

NSSE's primary purpose is not just to survey undergraduates but to promote evidence-informed improvement of the undergraduate experience by providing detailed portraits of what institutions do well and where they might improve. To illustrate, **Biola University; California State University, San Bernardino; Keene State College; Southern Connecticut State University; University of Minnesota Duluth; Winthrop University; Youngstown State University;** and others have generously shared examples of how they have put NSSE data to use. Many more examples are documented in our series, *Lessons from the Field*:

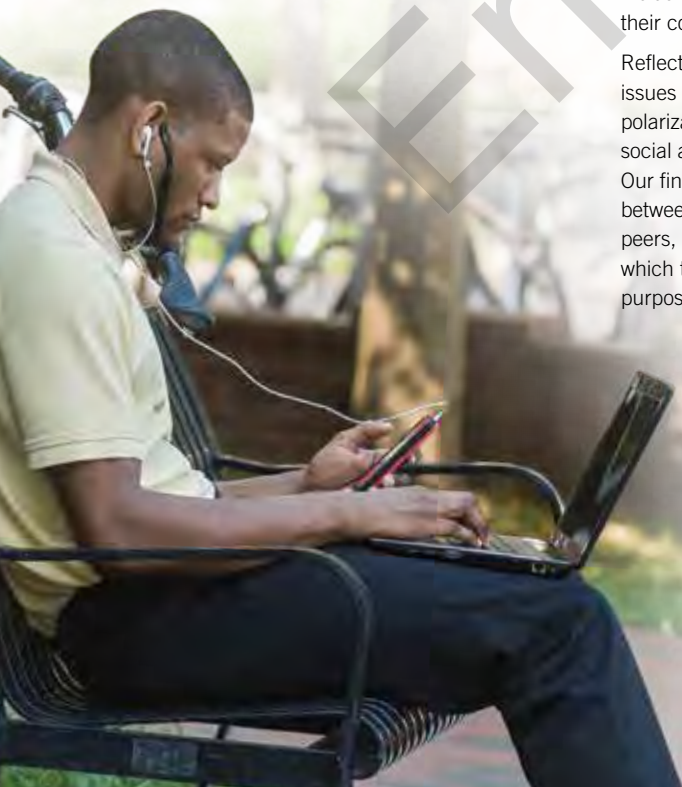
nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons

NSSE represents the contributions of a great many people. Staff at hundreds of institutions provide needed information for our customized processes and promote survey participation and data use on their campuses. Colleagues at Indiana University's Center for Survey Research manage a complex survey administration. Project staff develop and refine survey content and produce top-quality analyses and reports. A National Advisory Board representing diverse roles and constituencies provides wise counsel that keeps us focused on NSSE's core mission—to add meaningfully to the discourse on educational quality while providing tools to guide improvement. Most important of all, *hundreds of thousands of students* take time out of their day to help us, our users, and the broader community gain a better understanding of the contemporary college experience. Please join me in thanking all who make this work possible.

Alexander C. McCormick, Ph.D.

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

Virginia Commonwealth University



Selected Results and Institutional Stories

Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity

To maximize the educational benefits of a diverse student body, colleges and universities need to be supportive and welcoming of *all* students and equip them with the skills to collaborate with people from a variety of backgrounds. When college environments are inclusive and nondiscriminatory, students feel a stronger sense of belonging, develop intercultural competence, and manifest greater cognitive development. In 2017, NSSE introduced the Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity Topical Module^a to examine environments, processes, and activities that embrace cultural diversity and promote greater understanding of societal differences. More than 55,000 students from 132 institutions answered questions about inclusive teaching practices, perceptions of institutional support for diverse students, and participation in diversity-related programming and coursework.

About 3 in 5 students took courses that substantially emphasized sharing their own perspectives and experiences or respecting the expression of diverse ideas. However, only half said their courses emphasized learning about other cultures or discussing issues of equity or privilege (Figure 2).

Greater emphasis on inclusive coursework was positively related to an emphasis on higher-order learning in courses, reflective

and integrative learning, the quality of interactions with others on campus, and favorable perceptions of institutional support. Students who experienced more inclusive practices in coursework also perceived greater institutional contributions to their gains in personal and social development. In particular, when coursework emphasized inclusivity and engagement with cultural diversity, students were much more likely to perceive gains in understanding people with different backgrounds and in becoming active and informed citizens.

The module also revealed positive relationships between inclusive practices in coursework and positive perceptions of an inclusive environment, although perceptions of support for diversity varied by student characteristics. For example, Hispanic/Latino and White students had more positive views than the average student, while gender-variant students had less positive views. Less positive perceptions of support were also held by students with disabilities and by STEM majors.

These findings demonstrate the importance of infusing and coordinating diversity and inclusion efforts throughout the institution. Differences in perceptions by student subpopulations, some of which have been historically marginalized, call attention to the need for such coordinated efforts and their routine assessment.

a. FSSE has a parallel module. See page 13.

Results from NSSE's new Topical Module! See:

nsse.indiana.edu/html/modules.cfm

Topical Module: Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity^a

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

Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little

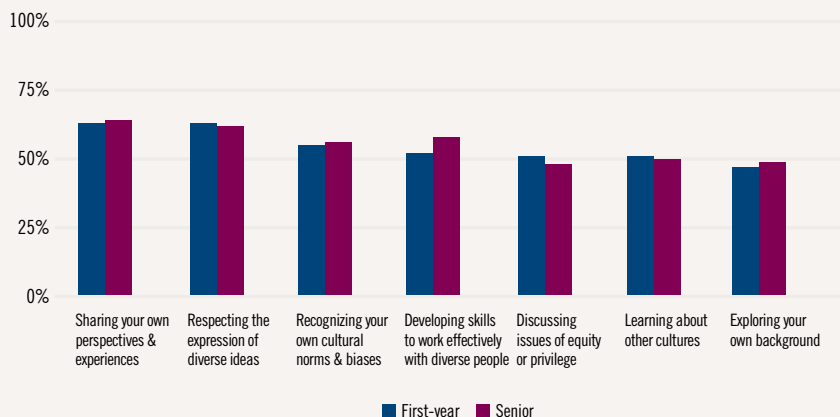
- Developing the skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds
- Recognizing your own cultural norms and biases
- Sharing your own perspectives and experiences
- Exploring your own background through projects, assignments, or programs
- Learning about other cultures
- Discussing issues of equity or privilege
- Respecting the expression of diverse ideas

How much does your institution emphasize the following?

Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little

- Demonstrating a commitment to diversity
- Providing students with the resources needed for success in a multicultural world
- Creating an overall sense of community among students
- Ensuring that you are not stigmatized because of your identity (racial/ethnic identification, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.)
- Providing information about anti-discrimination and harassment policies
- Taking allegations of discrimination or harassment seriously
- Helping students develop the skills to confront discrimination and harassment

Figure 2: Extent to Which Courses Substantially^a Emphasized Inclusive and Culturally Engaging Activities by Class Level



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

a. Selected items. See the complete module at nsse.indiana.edu/html/modules.cfm

Selected Results and Institutional Stories *continued*

Putting Results to Use: Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity

The Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity Topical Module provides institutions with actionable information about students' experiences with culturally inclusive teaching practices and their perceptions of the institution's commitment to diversity; a similar module was also offered with FSSE. Over 130 institutions administered this module in NSSE 2017, and many are already finding good uses for the data. To start, institutions have shared the

results with important stakeholders including college and university presidents, vice presidents of academic affairs, vice presidents of student affairs, chief diversity officers, presidents' diversity councils, curriculum committees, and faculty development offices.

One institution plans to develop a faculty data action team to analyze data from the NSSE and FSSE versions of this Topical Module and submit recommendations to the president. Another institution will use their module results as a baseline to gauge the impact of a new core curriculum with diversity components and a new diversity and inclusion action plan. A third institution

intends to use the data to inform the strategies and focus of a newly developed position in multicultural student programs.

Because this module complements other campus climate assessments, several institutions are using results to strengthen and add nuance to their interpretations or to identify the types of questions or areas needing further investigation. These institutional uses demonstrate that results from this Topical Module hold promise for informing other institutional efforts to establish more inclusive and equitable practices and policies.

Positive Engagement Findings for Students of Color

Students have diverse sets of identities, and their educational experiences vary for different groups. Many differences in engagement by race and ethnicity previously found by NSSE (2004; 2012) are also evident in our most recent data. For instance, relative to the average senior, those from some traditionally disadvantaged groups rated the quality of their interactions with students, advisors, faculty, and other staff *higher*, and perceived the campus environment to be *more supportive* (Table 1). We also compared the experiences of students of color attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) with those of their counterparts at other institutions. Interestingly, Hispanic/Latino seniors at HSIs experienced an even more supportive environment,

but Black/African American seniors at HBCUs rated the quality of their interactions lower compared to their same-race counterparts at other types of institutions. The latter finding is counterintuitive and disappointing, but it may signify higher expectations held by students of color attending HBCUs.

First-Generation Students Lag in HIP Participation

Because they are generally less familiar with the college experience, first-generation students may need help learning about enriching educational opportunities. In fact, results show that first-generation students were less likely to participate in five of six High-Impact Practices (HIPs), with generally larger differences for seniors (Table 2). Although seniors at baccalaureate colleges had higher rates of HIP participation than their peers attending doctoral and

master's institutions (regardless of first-generation status), the gaps remained between first-generation seniors and their peers with college-educated parents.

Given lower HIP participation by first-generation students, we examined first-year students' *plans for* HIP participation to see if this pattern emerges early. Indeed, first-generation students were less likely to plan to participate in a number of HIPs: internships and field experiences, study abroad, research with faculty, and a culminating senior experience (Figure 3), but the gaps in first-year students' HIP plans were smaller than the gaps in actual participation by seniors. To close gaps in HIP participation by first-generation students, institutions may need to provide more tailored information and resources early in students' college careers, and also to address financial barriers that may deter participation in certain HIPs (e.g., internships and study abroad) by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Table 1: Relationship of Race/Ethnicity with Campus Environment Among Seniors

	Quality of Interactions	Supportive Environment
American Indian/Alaska Native		
Asian		
Black/African American	++	++
Hispanic or Latino	+	+
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		++
White	+	-
Multiracial	+	

Notes: Engagement Indicators were dependent variables in regression models and standardized before entry. Models also included "Other" and "Prefer not to Respond" race/ethnicity categories. Controls included age, first-generation status, gender identity, diagnosed disability, sexual orientation, international student status, educational aspirations, enrollment status, transfer status, distance learner status, major, living situation, estimated GPA, institution size, control, and Carnegie classification. Effect coding was used for race/ethnicity, so comparisons are to the average student.

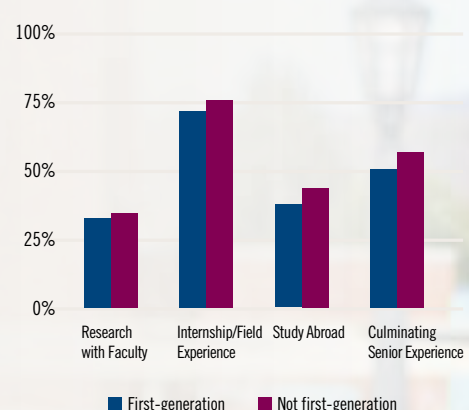
Key: - $p < .001$, Unst. $B < .1$; + $p < .001$, Unst. $B > .1$; ++ $p < .001$, Unst. $B > .2$

Table 2: HIP Participation Rates by First-Generation Status

	First-generation	Not first-generation
First-year		
Learning Community	12	14
Service-Learning	54	50
Research with Faculty	4	5
Senior		
Learning Community	20	25
Service-Learning	61	59
Research with Faculty	18	28
Internship/Field Experience	42	55
Study Abroad	8	18
Culminating Senior Experience	40	49

Notes: Participation includes the percentage responding "Done or in progress" except for service-learning which is the percentage who responded that at least "Some" courses included a community-based project. First-generation is defined as neither parent or guardian having a bachelor's degree. All differences are significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 3: HIP "Plan to Do" Rates for First-Year Students by First-Generation^a Status



a. Neither parent holds a bachelor's degree.

Advancing Campus Diversity and Equity Goals

NSSE results have been used to motivate action and demonstrate progress on diversity-related goals in a number of ways:

Youngstown State University held “NSSE Data Conversations” for faculty and including one on diverse interactions and experiences where results were presented from three Engagement Indicators (Reflective & Integrative Learning, Discussions with Diverse Others, and Supportive Environment), the Global Learning Topical Module, and several Perceived Gains items. Discussions followed that probed how these findings related to Youngstown’s mission and core values, and that generated recommendations to improve practice—including stronger support for faculty of color who mentor students of color and funding for faculty and staff to facilitate diverse perspectives projects.

Winthrop University integrated the Discussions with Diverse Others Engagement Indicator into its strategic plan. Using its NSSE 2014 results as a baseline, Winthrop established a target for 2024. Given its NSSE participation pattern, the university will be able to track progress toward this goal every two years and determine needs for further interventions to ensure success.

Biola University paired its NSSE data with its results from the Taylor University Christian Life survey and found some possible discrepancies related to students’ engagement with people with different religious beliefs and political views. In response, Biola created more opportunities for faculty training in inclusive pedagogy with Faculty Investment Day sessions such as “The Black Lives Matter Movement, Evangelical Churches, and Biola Classrooms” and the installation on the undergraduate curriculum committee of a staff member from the office of the Vice Provost of Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement.

Just as important as examining students’ engagement on NSSE’s diversity-related items, institutions have found value in investigating differences in engagement by subpopulations to inform targeted efforts to ensure all students have access to a high-quality learning environment. Two examples illustrate how institutions can use NSSE data strategically to better support student populations that often face higher barriers to academic success:

University of Minnesota Duluth found that, compared to their peers at other institutions, first-year students of color rated interactions with staff lower, and seniors of color had more outside responsibilities (work, family, etc.)

potentially impeding their ability to manage academic commitments. These findings were discussed at a Division of Student Life retreat where staff in student activities, housing and residence life, diversity and inclusion, and other areas considered ways to better address the needs of students of color.

California State University, San Bernardino used NSSE data along with institutional and system-wide graduation rates to support the warrant for three new student success resources: the Pan-African, the LatinX, and the First Peoples’ Student Success Centers. Additionally, the campus used NSSE data to inform the creation of a Veterans Learning Community where military-affiliated students receive support in their transition to the institution, in choosing a major, and through additional programmatic efforts.

Clarion University

“ My experience here has allowed me to get outside of my White, rural, middle class upbringing to give me the chance to become more worldly, even if I am commuting just 10 minutes from home. Through the experience of taking classes with those from such different backgrounds and thoughts, I have been able to become a better version of myself that strives for respect, love, and honor.”

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT,
ENGLISH,
MIAMI UNIVERSITY
MIDDLETOWN



Selected Results and Institutional Stories *continued*

New Insights on Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Engagement

NSSE has refined its questions about gender identity and sexual orientation to better understand the experiences of diverse populations. In response to feedback from students as well as scholars and institutional staff, questions about both have undergone several refinements (see box at right). This section explores what we have learned.

Gender Identity^a

When asked about their gender identity, almost two-thirds of NSSE respondents identified as women, about one-third as men, and a scant 1% preferred not to respond. An additional 1% identified as another gender, or *gender variant*, with the most popular write-ins being nonbinary, non-conforming, gender fluid, agender, transgender, genderqueer, and two spirit.

Gender differences (men vs. women) in academic major and career choice are well established in higher education research, so we examined whether these differences extend to gender variance. Gender-variant seniors were much more likely than their cisgender^b counterparts to major in arts and humanities while they were less well represented in business and health professions (Figure 4). The latter difference is concerning given the special health needs of many gender-variant people.

What is your gender identity?

- Man
- Woman
- Another gender identity, please specify: _____
- I prefer not to respond

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Straight (heterosexual)
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Another sexual orientation, please specify: _____
- I prefer not to respond

Gender-variant students were more engaged in some activities, and less so in others. For example, one-third of gender-variant seniors had done research with a faculty member compared to a quarter of men and women, and a larger share of gender-variant seniors (44%) were student leaders compared to 36% of men and 39% of women. However, gender-variant seniors participated less often in service-learning (50%, compared to 57% of men and 66% of women).

One finding of concern is that gender-variant students felt less supported by staff members who may influence their well-being outside the classroom. While first-year gender-variant students rated their interactions with students, advisors, and faculty highly (as did their cisgender peers), their ratings for student services and administrative staff and offices were notably lower and revealed a gap with their peers (Figure 5). Such discontent is also evident in first-year gender-variant students' perceived support from their institution, particularly for helping manage non-academic responsibilities and providing support for their overall well-being (Figure 6).

a. All statistics in this section are unweighted. NSSE weights are calculated using a binary institution-reported sex (male/female) which does not account for non-binary options and may not align with gender identity.
 b. Gender identity corresponds with birth sex.

Figure 4: Senior Majors by Gender Identity

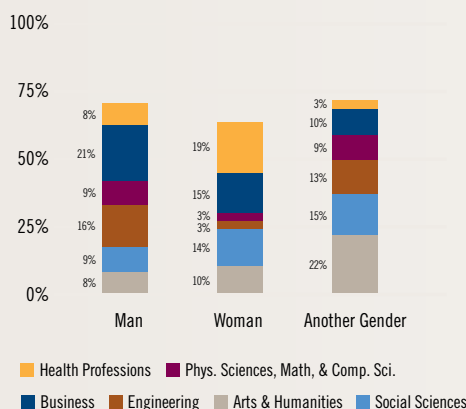
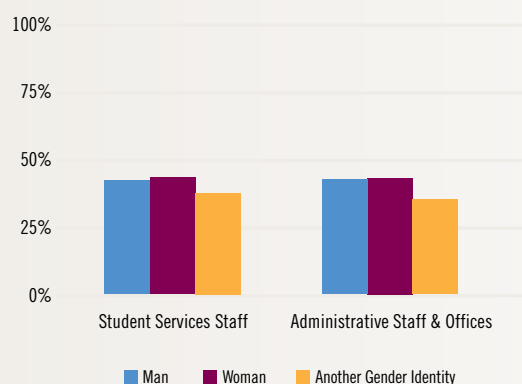


Figure 5: High Quality of Interactions^a for First-Year Students by Gender Identity



a. Percentage responding 6 or 7 on a scale from 1 = "Poor" to 7 = "Excellent"

“ I am overjoyed to see the college taking action to create a healthy learning environment for individuals of the LGBTQ+ community.”

SENIOR, BIOLOGY,
ADRIAN COLLEGE

Sexual Orientation

In 2017, NSSE revised the sexual orientation question and included it for all respondents for the first time. (Institutions previously elected whether to include the question.) Results show that the new item captured the majority of students' sexual orientations (Figure 7), but additional smaller groups were identified in the write-ins (e.g., asexual and pansexual). Consistent with past research, the percentage of students identifying as LGBQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning or other non-straight orientations) was 10% overall, but ranged from 0% to 51% within participating

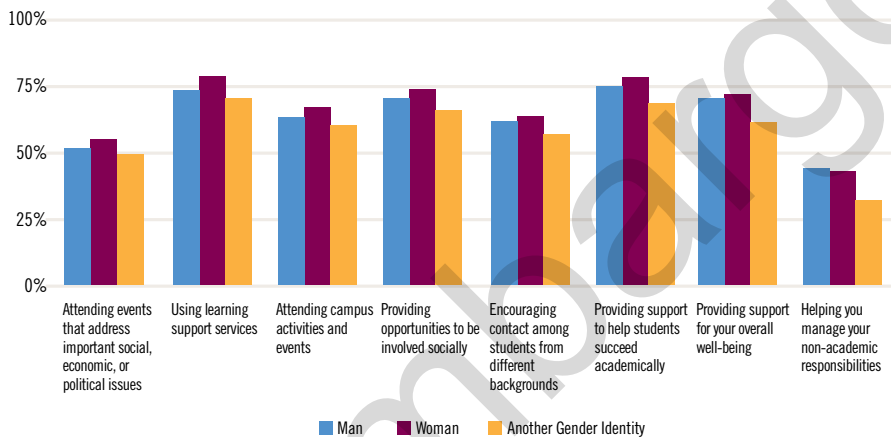
institutions. Institutions with the largest proportions of LGBQ+ students tended to be smaller, private institutions, including some with a special curricular focus. LGBQ+ students were more engaged than their peers in reflective and integrative learning activities, such as including diverse perspectives in coursework and connecting learning to societal problems or issues (Table 3; results for seniors were similar). On the other hand, straight students had more positive interactions with others and felt more supported by their institution, although such differences were small.

Table 3: First-Year Student Frequent^a Participation in Reflective & Integrative Learning by Sexual Orientation

	LGBQ+	Straight
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	61	51
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	64	50
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	69	64
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective	76	70

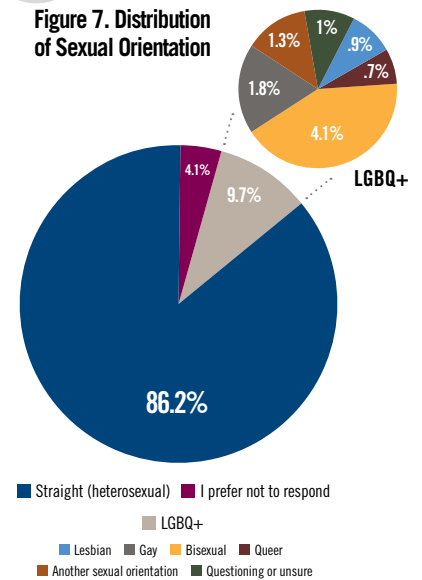
a. Percentage responding "Very often" or "Often"

Figure 6. First-Year Student Perceptions of Substantial^a Institutional Support by Gender Identity



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

Figure 7. Distribution of Sexual Orientation



Out on Campus

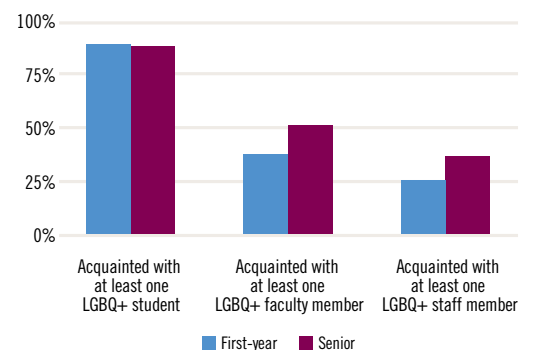
More than 14,000 students from 31 institutions answered additional questions about issues surrounding sexual orientation. A large majority of these respondents (84%) identified as straight (heterosexual) and 4% preferred not to respond. LGBQ+ respondents were about 12% overall, and among these 41% identified as bisexual, 16% gay, 12% questioning or unsure, 10% queer, 9% lesbian, and smaller proportions identified with other sexual orientations.

While about 7 out of 10 respondents were comfortable bringing up LGBQ+ issues in

course discussions, only about half (56% first-year, 50% senior) felt their institutions demonstrated a substantial^a commitment to the overall well-being of LGBQ+ people. Many LGBQ+ respondents were acquainted with other LGBQ+ students, but far fewer knew a LGBQ+ faculty or staff member (Figure 8). More distressing, 1 in 5 LGBQ+ students personally experienced offensive behavior, discrimination, or harassment at their institution based on their sexual orientation.

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

Figure 8. Percentage of LGBQ+ Respondents Acquainted^a with LGBQ+ Others at Their Institution



a. Percentage responding "Yes"

Selected Results and Institutional Stories *continued*

Student Activism and Engagement: Is There a Link?

Amid a widening national political divide, colleges and universities have been challenged by a number of high-profile student-led protests. The rise in student activism recalls past oppositions to war, apartheid, and other contentious political and social issues. In recent years, student activists have protested controversial speakers, pressed for action in cases of sexual misconduct, and even led efforts to remove prominent campus leaders—all while bringing questions of free speech and academic freedom to the fore. Some argue that student activism should not be ignored, and should even be embraced (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016).

With this context in mind, we surveyed more than 6,000 students from 26 institutions about their experiences with social and political activism. Students were asked if they planned to or had engaged in various forms of activism such as being part of a group that submitted demands to the administration or participating in or organizing a boycott, strike, sit-in, walk-out, or the like. Roughly 1 in 8 respondents said they had participated in at least one of these activities, and we identified these students as “activists.”

Activists resembled their less outspoken peers in many ways but with notable exceptions: A larger share was of traditional college age (90% vs. 84% among non-activists), lived on or near campus (78% vs. 63%), aspired to complete an advanced degree (74% vs. 62%), and were students of color (38% vs. 28%) or LGBTQ+ (23% vs. 8%). In addition, proportionally more student activists were double majors (22% vs. 15%) and liberal arts majors^a (57% vs. 42%); fewer had professional majors^a (43% vs. 58%).

Results suggest that student activism is positively related to several dimensions of engagement after controlling for a number of student and institutional characteristics (Table 4). For example, courses taken by both first-year and senior student activists were more likely to emphasize Higher-Order Learning, such as evaluation and synthesis of information, and activists more frequently engaged in Reflective & Integrative Learning, such as reassessing one’s views and considering others’ perspectives—a critical skill set in times of escalating dissension and polarization. Student activists also had stronger relationships with faculty and perceived greater personal development in academic and practical domains, regardless of class level.

In some areas, the relationship between activism and engagement appeared to be stronger for first-year students. For example, first-year student activists interacted more often than non-activists with people who differ with regard to race/ethnicity, economic background, religious beliefs, and political views, whereas no such differences existed among seniors.

These findings shed light on the interplay of student activism and students’ personal and intellectual growth. Rather than being a threat to the ideals of higher education, student activism appears to signal reflection, critical thinking, and engagement with ideas, combined with a vision for change.

a. Liberal arts include majors in the following categories: arts and humanities, biological sciences, agriculture, natural resources, physical sciences, mathematics, computer science, and social sciences. Professional includes business, communications, media, public relations, education, engineering, health professions, and social service professions. These designations include intended major for first-year students.

Table 4: Relationship of Student Activism with Engagement

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 ^a	++	++
Satisfaction with Entire Educational Experience		

Notes: Continuous variables were standardized prior to use in regression models. The satisfaction outcome reflects a dichotomized measure (“Excellent or Good” and “Fair or Poor”). Controls included age, first-generation status, sex, diagnosed disability, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, international student status, educational aspirations, enrollment status, transfer status, distance learner status, major, living situation, self-reported grades, institution size, control, and Carnegie Classification.

a. 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 educational competencies.

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



One College's Commitment to Civic Engagement

"Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve"—the motto of **Keene State College**—boldly and succinctly expresses the college's commitment to building students' competence for civic engagement by preparing them to purposefully and effectively serve their communities upon graduation. To assess student skills and engagement in local, state, national, and global issues, Keene State administered NSSE's Civic Engagement Topical Module in both 2014 and 2016. Findings indicated that first-year students lacked confidence in several key civic skills including leading a group of people from different backgrounds, helping people resolve disagreements, and contributing to the community well-being. However, results also showed that these students were more likely than their national peers to raise awareness about issues, ask others to address issues, and organize others to work on issues at all levels—illustrating that first-year Keene State students, while lacking confidence in some civic skills, were gaining

relevant experience via a range of intentionally designed curricular and co-curricular opportunities at the college. Keene State seniors were more likely than their national peers to help people resolve disagreements, contribute to the well-being of their community, and engage with civic issues especially at the local level.

To gain even deeper insight into the experiences that foster civic outcomes in its students, Keene State collected student focus group feedback and, to assess the effect of civic courses on critical thinking skills, administered the Critical Thinking Assessment Test. Combined, these findings inform and bolster Keene State's efforts to engage students in multiple civic engagement experiences and to emphasize the connections between these experiences. Demonstrating the value of the college's continuing investment in civic engagement opportunities, the 2016 results showed improvement for first-year students and consistency for senior students in their confidence in all key civic skills. Results were also utilized in Keene State's mid-term accreditation self-study report to document evidence

of Collegewide Learning Outcomes. These cumulative findings attest to the health of the culture of civic engagement and the strength of the commitment to students' service-learning and community service experiences at Keene State.

“ Student groups and activism has been the most enriching and important experience in my time at UMass. The integrative experience has been extremely informing and will impact me for the rest of my life.”

SENIOR, PUBLIC HEALTH,
UMASS AMHERST

Butler
University



Selected Results and Institutional Stories *continued*

Minding the Student-Faculty Expectations Gap

Most entering first-year students expect frequent interactions with faculty related to coursework, career plans, and other activities and, when those expectations are met, they are more likely to stay in school and succeed (Pleitz, McDougall, Terry, Buckley, & Campbell, 2015). Using data from 141 institutions that participated in both the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and NSSE, we investigated the relationship between entering first-year students' expectations for student-faculty interaction (SFI; see p. 15 for related survey questions) and their actual SFI near the end of the academic year. We also investigated how the gap between SFI expectations and experience corresponded to the quality of interactions with faculty and whether or not students would attend the same institution if starting over. BCSSE data, including expected SFI during the first year, were collected prior to or at the start of the fall term. NSSE data, including actual SFI during the first year, were collected over several months during the following spring.

It may not be surprising that students who did not meet their expected SFI started their first year of college with higher expectations than their peers whose expectations were met or exceeded^a (Figure 9). What is surprising is that while these students began the year with very

high SFI expectations, they experienced *lower* levels of SFI than their peers who began with more modest expectations. The expectations gap for students who met their SFI expectations was thus much smaller than for those who did not. These results suggest that some students begin college with what may be unrealistic expectations for SFI that ultimately lead to *disengagement*.

First-year students who met their SFI expectations were more inclined to “definitely” return to the same institution if they could start over (Figure 10) and were more likely to have high-quality interactions with faculty. These findings reinforce the importance of helping new students to meet their expectations for the college experience.

Although opportunities for SFI are related to institution size and the student-faculty ratio, the BCSSE-NSSE data suggest that these factors alone do not account for the expectations gap. For both those whose SFI expectations were met and not met, the average institution size was approximately 8,800 students and the average student faculty ratio was about 16:1. Rather, institutions differed notably in the average gap between expected and

actual SFI (Figure 11). In other words, a low student-faculty ratio was no guarantee that students' expectations for faculty interaction would be met.

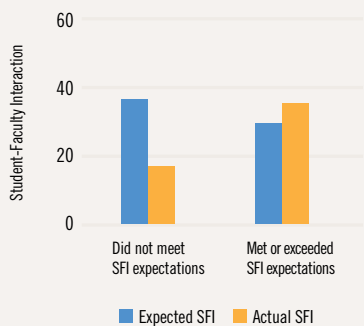
These results suggest that having realistic expectations for student-faculty interaction is important and that entering students' expectations should inform orientation programs and other resources directed toward improving the first-year experience.

a. For the remainder of this discussion, “met” refers to students whose expectations were met or exceeded.

“The most satisfying aspect of my time is that I realized the faculty are truly invested in our learning and success.”

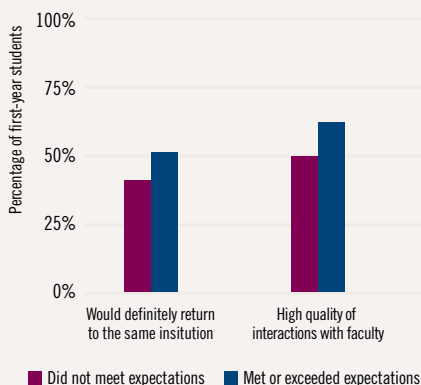
SENIOR, BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING,
BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY

Figure 9: SFI Expectations and Experience by Whether Expectations Were Met



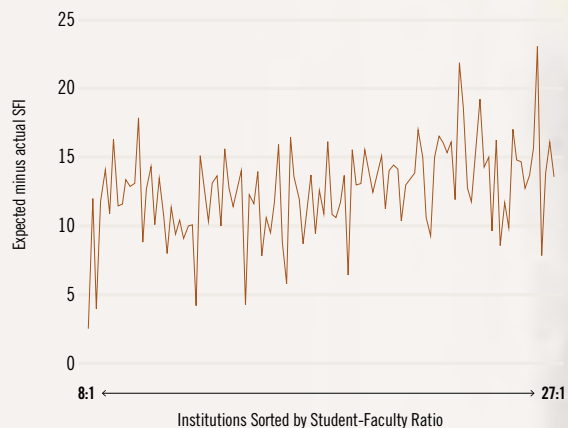
Notes: SFI score on a 60-point scale. Respondents with the lowest expectations—less than 2%—were removed from this analysis so that all students would be eligible for either “not met” or “met or exceeded.”

Figure 10: Relationship of Satisfaction and High Quality of Interactions^a with Faculty by Whether SFI Expectations Were Met



a. Responding 6 or 7 where 1=Poor and 7=Excellent.

Figure 11: Gap Between Expected and Actual SFI by Student-Faculty Ratio



Notes: Difference on a 60-point scale. Institutions with fewer than 50 respondents were excluded.

Using BCSSE to Better Understand Student Success

Southern Connecticut State University has found numerous ways to effectively utilize NSSE and BCSSE data. The Student Success Task Force, chaired by the dean of the school of arts and sciences and vice president for student affairs, used BCSSE data to identify the most important predictors of student academic learning, persistence, and graduation outcomes. They found that responses of “Uncertain” to the question, “Do you expect to graduate from this institution?” was a predictor of student retention. Other predictive items included expected academic difficulty; preparedness to speak clearly and effectively; and frequency of talking with a counselor, teacher, or other staff member

about university or career plans—highlighting the importance to student success of supportive relationships with individuals at the institution. In response to these findings, Southern Connecticut created the Academic Success Center and the Coordinator of Student Financial Literacy and Advising position. Additionally, analysis of NSSE and BCSSE data that underscored the importance of offering greater support to students who are first in their families to attend college led to the university's implementation of First-Generation College Student Living and Learning Communities. In Southern Connecticut's most recent NSSE administration, the first-generation students who participated in this learning community rated their education experience at the institution higher than their peers.

“The school provided me with so much support and guidance not only through advisers, but through the faculty they choose to put in their institute. The faculty of this school is truly the heart of it all; they are so supportive and positive.”

SENIOR,
PARKS, RECREATION, AND LEISURE,
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Georgia Institute of
Technology



Selected Results and Institutional Stories *continued*

Faculty Incorporation of Diversity and Institutional Commitment

As colleges and universities grapple with how to provide more inclusive environments for all of their students, many—some prompted by student protests—are seeking ways to bring diversity into more aspects of the curriculum. In 2017, to re-examine how faculty members incorporate diversity into their courses, a set of items was appended to FSSE for 42 institutions. These items were adapted from a set administered in 2007 and rooted in a model developed by Nelson Laird (2011, 2014) that illustrates how each element of a course (e.g., purpose, pedagogy, learners, instructors) can be inclusive of diversity—or not. Results from 2017 validate findings from 2007 and suggest that institutional commitment to diversity plays an important role in how much faculty include diversity in their courses, and that—despite calls for greater inclusivity—the incorporation of diversity in courses has not increased over the last decade.

The diversity inclusivity set includes two groups of questions: Diverse Grounding (the inclusivity of the goals, content, perspectives, and instructors of a course) and Inclusive Learning (the inclusivity of the learners, pedagogy, classroom environment, assessment practices, and adjustment of a course). Results show that, in general, more faculty members used inclusive learning practices than diverse grounding practices (Figures 12 and 13).

Similar to the findings from a decade ago, women, LGBTQ+ faculty, faculty of color, and faculty with a heavier teaching load incorporated inclusive learning and diverse grounding practices in their courses more often than their colleagues, as did faculty from the arts and humanities; social sciences; communications, media, and public relations; education; and social service professions. This suggests hiring diverse faculty (e.g., faculty of color and LGBTQ+ faculty) and promoting greater use of inclusive practices by other faculty (e.g., White and STEM faculty) are viable strategies for increasing the inclusion of diversity into the curriculum.

“The faculty are very open-minded and accepting. Without exception I have felt my classrooms were safe, comfortable environments.”

SENIOR, EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN DEARBORN

Figure 12: Distribution of Diverse Grounding Practices

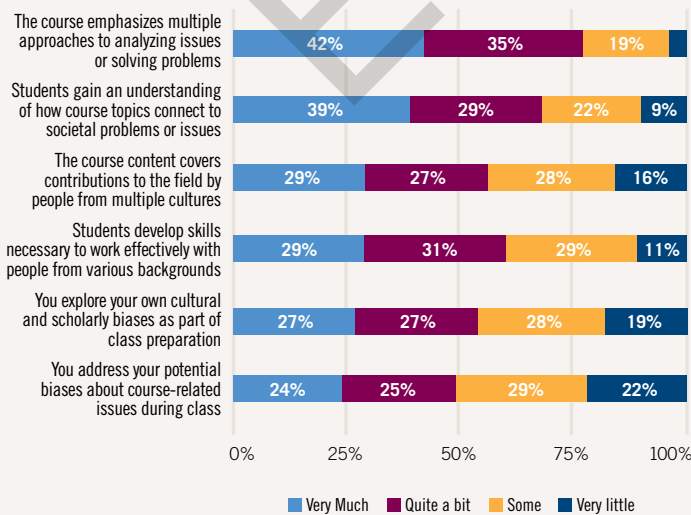
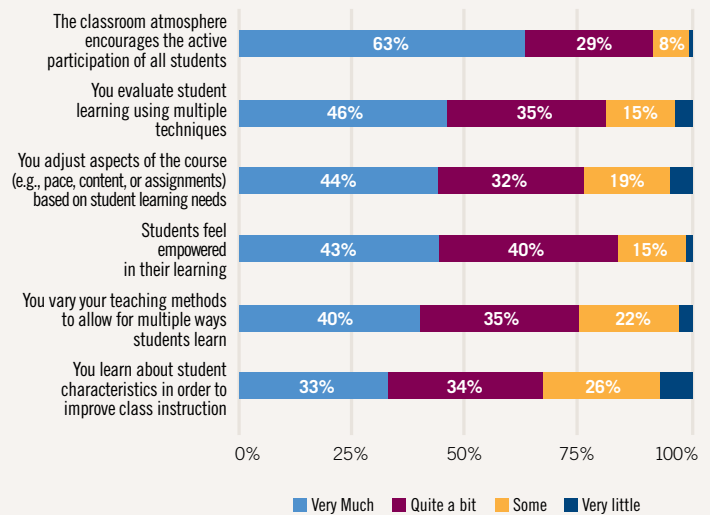


Figure 13: Distribution of Inclusive Learning Practices



Simon Fraser University

How Faculty Spend Their Time

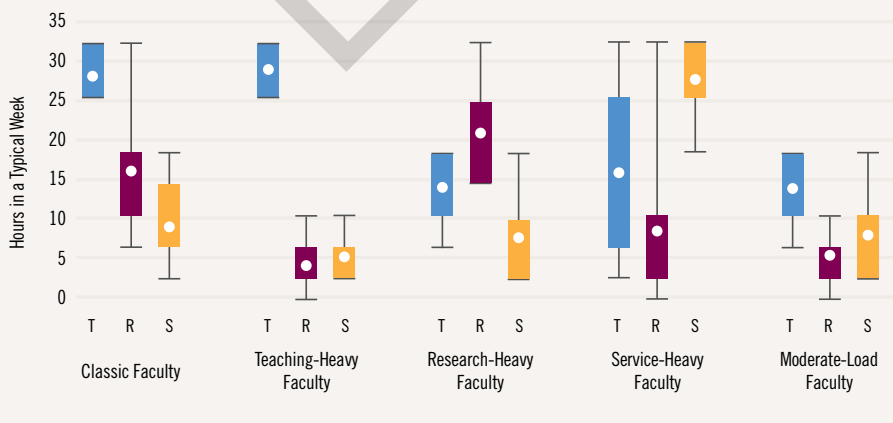
Given the array of expectations and increased scrutiny from various stakeholders (students, families, administrators, policy makers, etc.), faculty members face multiple, often conflicting demands on their time. We examined how much time more than 16,000 full-time faculty spent on teaching, research, and service activities, and identified five distinct groups (Figure 14). The first, *Classic Faculty* (16% of respondents), represented those who allocated considerable time to teaching, a moderate amount of time on research, and a moderate but lesser amount of time on service activities. *Teaching-Heavy Faculty* (33%) also spent a lot of time teaching but with relatively little time on research and service. *Research-Heavy Faculty* (15%) spent most of their time on research, a moderate amount

of time on teaching, and a moderate to low amount of time on service. The smallest group (9%), *Service-Heavy Faculty*, spent most of their time on service activities, a moderate amount of time on teaching, and a moderate to low amount of time on research. The last group, *Moderate-Load Faculty* (27%) spent a moderate amount of time on teaching (about the same as *Research-Heavy Faculty*), relatively little time on research, and a moderate to low amount of time on service. This categorization of faculty based on their allocations of time raises interesting points of discussion as to how or why such divisions come to be, and affirms that even faculty in specialized roles will not likely be able to focus solely on a single kind of activity.

FSSE Topical Module: Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity

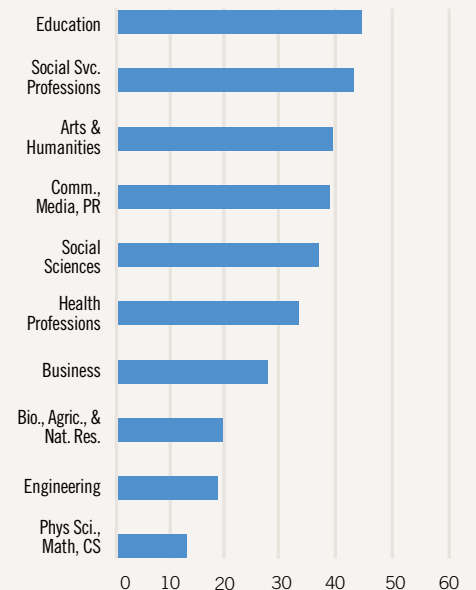
FSSE's Topical Module was administered to 4,095 faculty at 30 institutions in 2017. Faculty were asked how much their selected course emphasized the various inclusive and culturally engaging activities asked of students on NSSE's module (see page 3). We combined these activities into a 60-point scale and analyzed them by disciplinary area (Figure 15). Inclusive practices were emphasized most in coursework in education and social service professions and least in engineering and physical sciences.

Figure 14. Distribution of Time Spent on Teaching, Research, and Service by Faculty Groups



Note: T=Time on teaching, R=Time on research, S=Time on service; Upper and lower bars represent the 95th and 5th percentiles, shaded boxes represent the middle 50%, and dots represent the means. Data were analyzed using a two-step cluster analysis.

Figure 15. Emphasis on Inclusive and Culturally Engaging Activities by Disciplinary Area



Engagement Indicators and High-Impact Practices

To represent the multiple dimensions of student engagement, NSSE reports scores for 10 Engagement Indicators (EIs) calculated from 47 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

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 their 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 most significant learning experience I've had is being placed in an environment with people I've never met and opening my eyes to different cultures and personalities.”

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT, PSYCHOLOGY,
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT
BUFFALO

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

The **NSSE Report Builder**—an interactive tool that displays results by user-selected student and institutional characteristics: nsse.indiana.edu/links/report_builder



**Fredonia State University
of New York**

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 non-academic 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 (see below), including first-year students' plans to participate in the three upper-level experiences.

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^a

Service-Learning

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

Research with Faculty

Work with a faculty member on a research project^a

Internship or Field Experience

Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement^a

Study Abroad

Participate in a study abroad program^a

Culminating Senior Experience

Complete a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.)^a

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

The just-released Volume 4 highlights 23 institutional examples of data-informed improvement. The four-volume *Lessons from the Field* repository showcases examples of how institutions are using NSSE data to enhance undergraduate teaching and learning. All four volumes can be downloaded from the NSSE website:

nsse.indiana.edu/links/lessons

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

How Institutions Use NSSE

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

nsse.indiana.edu/links/data_use

NSSE Item Campuswide Mapping

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

nsse.indiana.edu/links/item_mapping

Webinars

Live webinars are offered for faculty, administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals, and all are recorded and available in NSSE's Webinar Archive. 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

Summary Tables

Annual survey responses as well as scores for Engagement Indicators and High-Impact Practices are available by Carnegie classification, sex, and related-major category: 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
- The *Institution Version* is for participating institutions to create tailored reports using their own NSSE data

nsse.indiana.edu/links/report_builder

NSSE Sightings

NSSE Sightings is a research blog by Center for Postsecondary Research staff featuring publications, conference presentations, and other findings about student engagement.

nsesightings.indiana.edu

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/links/publications

Psychometric Portfolio

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

nsse.indiana.edu/links/psychometric_portfolio

Westminster College

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Blog: **NSSEsightings.indiana.edu**