

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Frequently Asked Questions: Students

Survey Details

What is *The National Survey of Student Engagement*?

The National Survey of Student Engagement is a survey specially designed for students like you to provide information about your undergraduate experience, including your views about the quality of your education and how you spend your time. The survey has a broad scope, with hundreds of colleges and universities of all types and sizes participating each year. But the main reason your school is participating is that it wants to learn more about what students think and do so it can improve the undergraduate program.

Survey Administration

How did you get my name?

At most institutions, the survey is being completed by a random sample of students, but at selected institutions, all first-year students and seniors are being surveyed. As allowed for educational assessment purposes, your school gave us a file with the names and mailing or e-mail addresses of all eligible students. Theoretically, every first-year student and every senior at your institution had an equal chance of being chosen because the names were randomly selected from the list your school provided. The odds of being chosen depend in part on the number of students at your school. In general, the smaller the school, the greater the chance of being selected; the larger the school, the smaller the chance, unless your school chose to select all first-year students and seniors.

Why don't you ask someone else?

At most institutions, the survey is being completed by a random sample of students. For these institutions, this procedure ensures that every eligible student has an equal chance of being identified. This selection process increases the chance that survey results will be valid as long as enough students complete it. However, this procedure does not allow for adding people after the original group was identified from the list of students your school provided. At selected institutions, all eligible students will be surveyed. So, as you can see, it is very important that you complete the National Survey of Student Engagement, as it's not possible to ask someone else at your institution to take your place. Each individual response increases the confidence your school can have in its results.

Data Reporting

What will you do with the data?

The information from this study will be used in several ways. First, your answers will be combined with those of others at your school, analyzed and summarized in the aggregate. Your school will be able to examine the information in different ways; for example, to learn about the experiences of women and men or the experiences of students in different major fields. This is extremely valuable information because most schools do not have good information about how students spend their time and what they think of their institution. With this information in hand it is possible for people at your school to identify areas where, with some adjustments, the student experience can be improved. In other words, the more your school knows about its students and what they think of the institution, the more likely it is that faculty, academic and student life administrators and others can take appropriate action.

Another way the information you provide will be used is in comparisons with other schools that are more or less like yours. This isn't done very often, primarily because comparable information across institutions does not exist. Finally, a set of national benchmarks will be established for different types of institutions. A benchmark is a level of performance, reflecting an area of practice (in this case, educational practice) that potential consumers, customers, or others use to determine the quality of a product, service, or educational institution. The for-profit sector has used benchmarking practices for years and your answers to the National Survey of Student Engagement will allow your school as well as other colleges and universities across the country to do this.

Will my answers be shared with the institution?

Absolutely. One of the most important reasons to do this survey is so that your school discovers what you and other students at your college do and think.

What will my school do with the data?

Schools will use the information from The National Survey of Student Engagement in different ways. Most will share the results in summary form with faculty, staff, student leaders, and other groups that have a 'need to know' what it's like being an undergraduate at your school. Most colleges have an assessment committee that collects information

about various aspects of institutional performance, including the student experience. Surely your school's assessment committee will analyze information from The Report very carefully and use it in their own reports and in future planning for other assessment activities.

Your college will also use the information in reporting to external authorities, such as regional accrediting agencies, which are responsible to the general public for assuring quality in higher education. Your school may also share the results with other institutions in order to learn how your school compares. Finally, the information will be of keen interest to prospective students as it reveals what you and other students at your school do and think of their education. So, there are some very different uses, all important. Perhaps the most important is for your school to learn about you and your classmates, and where it should focus attention to improve.

Are you surveying my school only?

Each year, hundreds of schools are involved in the survey. This is an annual study, so the information you provide will become part of a database that researchers will be able to use to compare your responses with those students in the future. These studies will look at the collective experiences of undergraduate students, not individuals.

Reasons to Participate

Why should I complete the survey?

Simply put, your school needs to know what you think of your undergraduate experience, the kinds of activities in which you engage, and how you are benefiting from your studies. Without this information, it's not very easy for faculty and staff at your institution to identify the areas that can and should be improved. And because you were randomly selected from among your classmates to represent your school, it's imperative that you make your views known.

Unlike many other surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement has a real chance of making a difference in terms of how people at your institution use the information. There is great interest in this study for two reasons. First, your institution chose to participate; it wasn't required. This means there are people who want to see the results. Second, there are numerous people beyond your school who would like to know how well your school is doing - prospective students, their families, alumni, and others. So, your answers - after they are combined with those of your classmates - will be read with interest by a wide variety of people.

I get surveyed all the time. How is this survey different?

You've heard the expression, 'think globally, act locally'? This is a national project with immediate local implications; thousands of students are getting the same survey. And people will be interested in what undergraduate students as a group think about their education. But it's also important that your school find out directly from you about your experience and then share what it learns through comparisons with other colleges and universities. This will, possibly for the first time, give your faculty and administrators an answer to the question: 'How well are we doing?'

Survey results provide information your school can act on quickly. Your answers combined with those of your classmates will identify areas that your institution can examine more closely. For example, compared with other schools like yours, do students have more or less meaningful contact with faculty? Do students at your school study more or less than students at other schools? Do you and your classmates think your school supports them in their efforts? Answers to these and other questions on this survey will pinpoint areas that need immediate attention.

Finally, this survey differs from most others you get because what you say will become part of a continuing study that people at your school as well as hundreds of other colleges and universities will continue to use for the foreseeable future. So, your answers will not only help your school, but many others as well.

Project Administration

Who is in charge of the survey?

The project is located at Indiana University and is directed by [Alexander C. McCormick](#). The Center for Survey Research at IU, directed by John Kennedy, administers the surveys. These people are supported by dozens of others who help design, package, mail, and collect the surveys and then analyze and report the results to your school and the other participating colleges and universities around the country. These people were originally asked by a philanthropic organization, The [Pew Charitable Trusts](#), to do this study.