



UNIVERSITY OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Office of Assessment
and Accreditation Support

NSSE 2021 Overview

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About the Survey & Report

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a nationwide survey administered to first-year and senior students at four-year colleges and universities across the US and Canada about the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. NSSE examines two features: the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educational activities (**engagement indicators** or **EIs**) and how an institution uses its resources and curriculum to promote educationally-meaningful activities (**high-impact practices** or **HIPs**). The questionnaire collects information across five categories: (1) participation in dozens of educationally purposeful activities, (2) institutional requirements and the challenging nature of coursework, (3) perceptions of the college environment, (4) estimates of educational and personal growth since starting college, and (5) background and demographic information.

NSSE also offers institutions the opportunity to participate in Topical Modules, which are short sets of questions on designated topic areas. In 2021, USF chose to participate in Coping with COVID and Experiences with Online Learning topical modules.

The survey was conducted between March 2, 2021 and May 16, 2021.

The results of the survey are compared to other Jesuit institutions, USF peer groups that participated in the 2021 survey, and all 2020/2021 NSSE participants. Results of topical modules are compared to all other institutions that participated in the module in 2021.

Please see Appendix A for figures detailing multi-year average frequency with which USF first-year and senior students reported participating in EIs and HIPs from 2014 to 2021. Also, included in Appendix A are multi-year comparisons to other institutions (Jesuit, Carnegie institutions with doctoral programs and moderate research activity, Far West private institutions in 2015, and in 2017 – 2021, peer institutions of our choosing) and detailed comparisons between USF first-year and seniors for the 2021 topical modules.

Demographics

USF			
	USF First-year	USF Senior	Total USF First-Year & Senior
Population surveyed	1043	1241	2284
Total respondents:	372	284	656
Response rate	36%	23%	29%

The 2021 USF total response rate of 29% was the same as the 2020 response rate and 14% higher than the 2018 response rate. USF did not participate in NSSE in 2019.

RESPONSE RATES FOR ALL OTHER PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS					
Jesuit First-year	Jesuit Senior	Peer First-year	Peer Senior	NSSE 2020 & 2021 First-year	NSSE 2020 & 2021 Senior
31%	29%	26%	21%	31%	29%

Key Takeaways

ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS

- USF first-year students' average scores were significantly higher than their counterparts at peer institutions, other Jesuit institutions, and all NSSE 2020 & 2021 participant institutions on more engagement indicators than USF seniors.
- USF first-year students' average scores were significantly higher or there was no significant difference from their counterparts at peer institutions and all NSSE 2020 & 2021 participant institutions on all but the *Collaborative Learning* engagement indicator.
- Average scores of both USF first-year and senior students were significantly lower than their counterparts at other Jesuit institutions on *Collaborative Learning* and *Student-Faculty Interaction*.

HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES

- The percentage of USF seniors who indicated they participated in service learning was overwhelmingly greater than their counterparts at peer institutions, other Jesuit institutions, and all NSSE 2020 & 2021 institutions. While the percentage of USF first-year students who indicated they participated in service learning was lower than USF seniors, as expected, it was higher than first-year students at peer institutions, other Jesuit institutions, and all NSSE 2020 & 2021 institutions.

COPING WITH COVID MODULE

- On average, first-year USF students positively rated the extent to which their faculty remained positive, had reasonable expectations of students, responded appropriately to the needs of students, and showed care and concern for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. These ratings were also significantly higher than their counterparts at other institutions.
- When compared to average ratings of seniors at other institutions, USF seniors rated the extent to which COVID-19 interfered with their educational plans and living situation significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions. They also rated the extent to which they experienced an increase in negative emotional experiences and nearly all stressors significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions.

EXPERIENCES WITH ONLINE LEARNING MODULE

- On average, both USF first-year students and seniors rated their online learning experience during the school year in which the survey was administered between fair and good. There was no significant difference between the responses of USF students and students at other institutions.

Engagement Indicators

NSSE included 47 survey questions related to ten engagement indicators (EIs), organized into four themes as follows:

Theme	Engagement Indicators
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
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions Supportive Environment

Engagement indicators are scored on a 60-pt. scale, with 0 = *Never*, 20 = *Sometimes*, 40 = *Often*, and 60 = *Very Often*. Institutional scores are weighted averages of the student-level scores for each class level.

SUMMARY OF 2021 COMPARISON TO JESUIT, PEER & NSSE 2020/2021 INSTITUTIONS

First-year students

First-year students’ average scores were significantly higher or there was no significant difference than first-year students at **peer institutions** and all **NSSE 2020 & 2021** institutions in nearly all EIs, with the exception of *Collaborative Learning*, which was significantly lower.

When compared to other **Jesuit institutions**, first-year students’ average scores were significantly higher on the *Higher-Order Learning*, *Effective Teaching Practices*, and *Quality of Interactions* EIs; significantly lower on the *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussions with Diverse Others*, and *Student-Faculty Interaction* EIs; and there was no significant difference on the remaining EIs.

Senior students

For the most part, there was not a significant difference in scores of USF seniors compared to **peer institutions**; though, seniors’ average score in the *Higher-Order Learning* EI was significantly higher.

USF seniors’ average scores were significantly higher than **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions in the *Higher-Order Learning*, *Reflective and Integrative Learning*, *Collaborative Learning*, and *Discussions with Diverse Others* EIs; there was no significant difference on the remaining EIs.

When compared to other **Jesuit institutions**, there was no significant difference in most EIs; however, USF seniors’ average scores in *Collaborative Learning*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, and the *Supportive Environment* EIs were significantly lower.

High-Impact Practices

NSSE included questions related to six high-impact practices (HIPs). HIPs are opportunities that have a positive association with student learning and retention. These questions are not limited to the current year; therefore, senior responses include participation in prior years.

HIP	Engagement Indicators
Service Learning*	Courses that include a community-focused project
Learning Communities*	A formal program where a group of students take two or more classes together
Research with Faculty*	Work with a faculty member on a research project
Internship or Field Experience	Internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching or clinical placement
Study Abroad	Pursuing educational opportunities in a country other than one's own
Culminating Senior Experiences	Engaging in a senior capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, or portfolio

*First-year students are only asked to report their participation in these HIPs.

SUMMARY OF 2021 COMPARISON TO JESUIT, PEER & NSSE 2020/2021 INSTITUTIONS

USF first-year and senior students' overall participation in HIPs was higher than students at **Jesuit, peer,** and **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

The below refers to the difference between USF students and comparison institutions in a given HIP.

Service Learning

- A higher percentage of USF first-year students and seniors reported participating in service learning than first-year and senior students at **Jesuit, peer,** and **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Learning Community

- A smaller percentage of first-year students at USF reported participating in learning communities than at **Jesuit** and **peer institutions,** but the percentage was about the same as students at **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.
- A smaller percentage of USF seniors reported participating in learning communities than seniors at other **Jesuit institutions,** but the percentage was slightly higher than seniors at **peer** and **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Research with Faculty

- A smaller percentage of both first-year and senior students at USF reported participating in research with faculty than first-year and seniors at other **Jesuit, peer,** and **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Questions regarding the following HIPs were only asked of senior students.

Internship or Field Experience

- A smaller percentage of seniors at USF reported participating in internships or field experiences than seniors at other **Jesuit** institutions, but a higher percentage participated in these than seniors at **peer** or **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Study Abroad

- A smaller percentage of seniors at USF reported participating in study abroad than seniors at other **Jesuit** and **peer institutions**, but a slightly higher percentage reported participating than seniors at **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Culminating Senior Experience

- A smaller percentage of seniors at USF reported participating in a culminating senior experience than seniors at **Jesuit** and **peer institutions**, but the percentage was about the same as seniors at **NSSE 2020 & 2021** participant institutions.

Please see Appendix A for figures comparing overall USF first-year and senior participation in HIPs to Jesuit institutions for 2014 – 2021. USF was compared to institutions with a similar Carnegie classification in 2014 and 2016, private institutions in the far western U.S. in 2015, and institutions considered to be peer institutions in 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021.

Coping with COVID Module

NSSE offers institutions the opportunity to participate in Topical Modules, which are short sets of questions on designated topic areas. In 2021, USF chose to participate in the Coping with COVID module which was created specifically for the 2021 administration and includes questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' educational experiences, mental wellness, and everyday life experiences. Perceptions of faculty and institutional responses, disruptions to educational plans, living situation details, stressors and negative emotional experiences, and changes in leisure activities and time demands are addressed.

COMPARISON TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The below comparisons are based on weighted averages of student responses.

Perception of Faculty Response

On average, USF first-year students rated the extent to which instructors did the following significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions:

- remained positive
- had reasonable expectations of students
- responded appropriately to the needs of students
- showed care and concern for students

There was no significant difference between USF seniors and seniors at other participating institutions.

Perception of Institutional Response

When asked to what extent their institution kept students safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic, USF first-year student ratings were significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions. USF senior student ratings were significantly lower than seniors at other participating institutions.

Disruptions to Educational Plans and Living Situation

USF first-year students rated the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the following significantly higher than students at other participating institutions:

- their college plans
- plans to participate in special learning opportunities (internships, study abroad, field experiences, etc.)
- their preferred living situation

There was no significant difference in how USF first-year students rated the extent to which COVID-19 interfered with their ability to succeed as a student or their ability to pay for college and living expenses.

USF seniors rated the extent to which COVID-19 interfered with all categories significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions.

Negative Emotional Experiences

USF first-year students rated the extent to which they experienced an increase in an inability to concentrate and loneliness significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions. There was no significant difference in how USF first-year students rated the extent to which they experienced the following compared to first-year students at other participating institutions:

- an increase in mental or emotional exhaustion
- depression that interfered with daily functioning
- anxiety that interfered with daily functioning
- feeling hopeless about their current situation
- difficulty sleeping

USF seniors rated the extent to which they experienced an increase in all categories significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions.

Stressors

USF first-year students rated the extent to which their concern about their ability to socialize and their future opportunities (employment, further education, etc.) increased significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions and rated the extent to which their concern about their ability to have enough food increased significantly lower. There was no significant difference in how USF first-year students rated the extent to which their concern about the following increased compared to first-year students at other participating institutions:

- ability to pay bills

- eviction or loss of housing
- their health and safety
- the health and safety of friends or family
- access to adequate medical care

USF seniors rated the extent to which their concern about the following increased significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions:

- their ability to socialize
- ability to pay bills
- their health and safety
- the health and safety of friends or family
- access to adequate medical care
- their future opportunities (employment, further education, etc.)

There was no significant difference in how USF seniors rated the extent to which their concern about having enough food and eviction or loss of housing increased compared to senior students at other participating institutions.

Changes in Leisure Activities and Time Demands

USF first-year students rated how much time they spent on their academic work compared to their general habits before the COVID-19 pandemic significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions and rated physical exercise and socializing significantly lower. There was no significant difference in how USF first-year students rated the following compared to first-year students at other participating institutions:

- hobbies
- consuming entertainment (music, movies, television, gaming, etc.)
- working for pay
- looking for work
- caring for dependents or others

USF seniors rated how much time they spent on consuming entertainment (music, movies, television, gaming, etc.) and looking for work compared to their general habits before the COVID-19 pandemic significantly higher than senior students at other participating institutions and rated working for pay significantly lower. There was no significant difference in how USF seniors rated the following compared to seniors at other participating institutions:

- academic work
- physical exercise
- hobbies
- socializing
- caring for dependents or others

Experiences with Online Learning Module

In 2021, USF chose to participate in the Online Learning module, which was new for the 2021 administration and was developed by NSSE in collaboration with Quality Matters, a leader in online instruction. Based in part on Standards for the Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric (6th Ed.), the item set measures instructional aspects that experts consider to be ideal for online courses. The set also assessed how students engage in both online and hybrid courses, their degree of comfort with online learning and experience of support, and ideas about how the learning experience can be improved.

COMPARISON TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Course Overview, Learning Objectives, Assessment, and Instructional Materials

The extent to which USF first-year students indicated their entirely or partly online courses provided the following was significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions:

- clearly stated learning objectives or goals
- clear guidance about how to get started in the course
- a clearly stated grading policy
- course information and activities that are easy to locate
- sufficient instructions for using technology
- clarity about when instructors would respond to them (answers to their questions, feedback about coursework, etc.)
- clear expectations for their interactions with other students
- assessments (quizzes, projects, assignments, exams, etc.) that help them achieve course learning objectives or goals
- instructional materials (readings, videos, etc.) that help them achieve course learning objectives or goals

There was no significant difference in the extent to which USF seniors and seniors at other participating institutions indicated their courses provided any of the above.

Learning Activities

The number of entirely or partly online courses that USF first-year students indicated included the following was significantly higher than first-year students at other participating institutions:

- live sessions including the instructor and students
- presentations or talks by experts in the field (live or recorded)
- group projects or presentations
- interaction among students in small groups or breakout rooms
- coursework that challenges them to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities
- opportunities for personalized feedback, support, and guidance from the instructor
- opportunities to apply their learning to a real-world problem or issue

There was no significant difference in the number of courses that USF first-year students indicated included pre-recorded presentations by the instructor and frequent quizzes or short assignments to check their understanding than first-year students at other participating institutions.

The number of courses that USF seniors indicated included the following was significantly higher than seniors at other participating institutions:

- live sessions including the instructor and students
- group projects or presentations
- interaction among students in small groups or breakout rooms
- opportunities to apply their learning to a real-world problem or issue

There was no significant difference in the average number of courses that USF seniors indicated included the following than seniors at other participating institutions.

- pre-recorded presentations by the instructor
- presentations or talks by experts in the field (live or recorded)
- frequent quizzes or short assignments to check their understanding
- coursework that challenges you to enhance your knowledge, skills, and abilities
- opportunities for personalized feedback, support, and guidance from the instructor

Learner Interaction

USF first-year students indicated they were significantly more comfortable doing the following in their entirely or partly online courses than first-year students at other participating institutions.

- participating in online discussion boards, forums, or other discussion tools
- interacting with other students
- interacting with their instructor to discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts
- seeking feedback and guidance from their instructor

There was no significant difference in how comfortable USF first-year students were compared to first-year students at other participating institutions in doing the following:

- participating in live course discussions
- taking proctored online exams
- using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)

USF senior indicated they were significantly less comfortable participating in online discussion boards, forums, or other discussion tools in their entirely or partly online courses than students at other participating institutions. There was no significant difference between USF senior and seniors at other participating institutions in any other area listed above.

Learning Support

When compared to first-year students at other institutions, USF first-year students felt it was significantly more important that, to improve the online course taking experience, their institution should increase interactions between students; there was no significant difference in the following areas:

- increase interactions with instructors
- improve responsiveness of instructors
- improve online tools for student collaboration
- provide more online learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)

When compared to seniors at other participating institutions, USF seniors felt it was significantly more important that, to improve the online course taking experience, their institution should do the following:

- increase interactions between student
- increase interactions with instructors
- improve responsiveness of instructors
- improve online tools for student collaboration

There was no significant difference between USF seniors and other participating institutions in how important they felt providing more online learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.) was to improving the online course-taking experience.

Course Technology

There was no significant difference between USF first-year students and first-year students at other participating institutions in level of agreement with the following statements:

- Internet service (availability, speed, reliability, etc.) where you live has been sufficient to participate in the course.
- The hardware (computer, tablet, mobile phone, printer, etc.) and software where you live have been sufficient to participate in the course.
- Study spaces where you live have been sufficient for your needs.
- Technology support has been available.
- The online course platform has been user-friendly (available when needed, easy to access and navigate, etc.).

USF seniors more significantly disagreed with all of the above statements than seniors at other participating institutions.

Overall Online Learning Experience

There was no significant difference between how USF first-year students and seniors rated their experience with online learning during the 2021 school year and first-year students and seniors at other participating institutions.