Frequently Asked Questions about NSLVE Campus Reports

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*Please note: We do not receive names, addresses, dates of birth, or other information that would allow us to identify your students. If you have questions about your students' privacy, see the **NSLVE FAQ.***

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Definitions

How are you defining "voting" and "registration" rates?
Voting rate: The percentage of your students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and (according to their voting record) voted in a given election.

Registration rate: The percentage of students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and (according to their voting record) registered to vote in a given election.

Rate of registered voters who voted: The percentage of students who registered to vote who actually turned out to vote in a given election.

About the data

Where do you get your data?
We use *enrollment records* sent by your institution to the National Student Clearinghouse ("Clearinghouse"). The Clearinghouse is a nonprofit organization established by the higher education community in 1993 to provide educational reporting, verification, and research on behalf of its participating institutions.

We use publicly available *voting records* compiled by Catalist. Catalist records are widely respected and used for academic research.

For some calculations, we use the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. All colleges and universities that participate in federal student financial aid programs annually report data to IPEDS.

Our institution submits enrollment records to the Clearinghouse periodically throughout the year. Which enrollment record did you use?
We use the record sent by your institution to the Clearinghouse on the closest date before the election.

Where did you get the "total student enrollment" number in the report?
From your institution, via the National Student Clearinghouse.

Our IPEDS enrollment total is different from the Clearinghouse total. Why?
The Clearinghouse collects a snapshot of your institution's enrollment, whereas IPEDS counts a year-long total. Your IPEDS enrollment number is probably larger than that of the Clearinghouse.

Why do you use Clearinghouse, rather than IPEDS, records?
We need individual student-level information to match with voting records. IPEDS collects only aggregate, institution-level data.

How confident are you that the voting record actually belongs to a particular student?
For each individual record, Catalist calculates a "confidence rating." The average of all confidence ratings among our nearly 10 million student records is 96%. If the rating on a record is below 0.66, it is viewed as an unmatched record.

How do you know how many of our students are under the age of 18?
With your permission, the Clearinghouse sends us de-identified student level information, including age on the date of the election.

How do you know how many students have opted to exercise a FERPA block?
That information also comes from the Clearinghouse.

What are the different ways that people can vote other than in person on Election Day?
Here are some definitions, from the National Conference on State Legislatures:

Most states have a method for any eligible voter to cast a ballot before Election Day, either during the early voting period or by requesting an absentee ballot. In 13 states, early voting is not available and an excuse is required to request an absentee ballot. States offer three ways for voters to cast a ballot before Election Day:

> 1. **Early Voting**: In 37 states (including 3 that mail ballots to all voters) and the District of Columbia, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. No excuse or justification is required.
> 2. **Absentee Voting**: All states will mail an absentee ballot to certain voters who request one. The voter may return the ballot by mail or in person. In 20 states, an excuse is required, while 27 states and the District of Columbia permit any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering an excuse. Some states offer a permanent absentee ballot list: once a voter asks to be added to the list, s/he will automatically receive an absentee ballot for all future elections.
> 3. **Mail Voting**: A ballot is automatically mailed to every eligible voter (no request or application is necessary). In-person voting sites may also be available for voters who would like to vote in-person and to provide additional services to voters. Three states mail ballots to all eligible voters for every election. Other states may provide this option for some types of elections.

If your campus has a high number of voting method "Unknown", it means that this information was not reported by local officials where your students were registered and voted.

Some tables contain information for "unknown" students. What does that mean?
You are probably reporting to the Clearinghouse that number of students without additional data (e.g., race, gender, field of study, or class level). Many institutions report no data of this nature to the Clearinghouse, which we encourage you to change.

Because, early in their college experience, many students have not declared a major, we have identified a field of study for only about half of the nearly 10 million students. A high number of "unknown" students in the field of study graph would not be surprising.

What does "*" and "n/a" mean in a graph?
The * indicates that the number of students represented in this data point is fewer than ten. In this case, there will also be "n/a" representing the turnout rate. We do not report this information to ensure the privacy of your students is protected. In some cases, "n/a" means that the data was not collected.

Calculations

Why do you estimate the number of non-resident aliens and deduct that from the total enrollment number?
Many colleges and universities serve large numbers of international students who are non-citizens. While your institution has the option of submitting that information to the Clearinghouse, at this time, most do not. Institutions do report to IPEDS their total enrollment and the number of non-resident aliens they serve. By calculating a percentage of non-resident aliens on each campus based on IPEDS number and applying that to the enrollment number you provide the Clearinghouse, we can estimate how many of your students are non-resident aliens and adjust your institutional voting and registration rates accordingly. For breakdowns by student characteristics, we cannot consistently adjust for non-resident aliens.

Our institution serves other non-citizens, specifically *resident* aliens and undocumented students. Did you take that into consideration?
Unfortunately, we have no way of adjusting for resident aliens or undocumented students. There is no national database that keeps track of those students, and the Clearinghouse does not collect that information.

How including ineligible voters might affect our campus registration and voting rates?
For a detailed answer, please read an IDHE staff report on college student voter ineligibility and its impact on turnout estimates on the AIR website.

We know *exactly* how many of our students are non-resident and/or resident aliens. Can we recalculate the registration and voting rates if we know this information?
Yes, you can recalculate the number of eligible voters by swapping your total for our "IPEDS estimated non-resident aliens" number (page 3 of your report). Then, simply divide the number of students who registered, or the number of students who voted, by that new number of eligible voters to determine a new rate.

We're always trying to improve our process. Please let us know if you recalculate your rates and how close they are to ours. To do so, email Alena Roshko.

How did you determine field of study?
Campuses provide chosen fields of study for each student to the National Student Clearinghouse. For those that did select a field of study, the Clearinghouse used the exact language provided by every institution, resulting in 8,100 fields. The Clearinghouse then uses IPEDS CIP information to cluster those 8,100 fields into 40 Study Families. We share those 40 families in your campus reports.

The gender data in our report looks inflated. Why?

The NSLVE database contains two sources of student gender: data submitted by NSLVE participating colleges and universities to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and data contained in publicly available voter files gathered by Catalist. Only half of the student enrollment records include gender whereas most voter files include gender. We compared students with both NSC and voter file gender data and found that they were identical in nearly all cases. Therefore, in the analyses for campus reports we replaced missing NSC gender with voter file gender values, when available. Most students in

NSLVE have a voter file, so by using this method we were able to include more of your students in breakdowns of voting by gender. However, NSC gender "missingness" is not random; students without any gender information tend to be those without voter files and, hence, they are disproportionately counted as nonvoters, relative to students identified as men and women. This results in a very low (sometimes zero percent) voting rate for "unknown gender" students and inflates the men's and women's voting rates slightly.

Next Steps

How I make sure our campus gets all this information?
If you have signed and submitted this authorization form allowing us to use non-directory information, specifically gender, race/ethnicity, and non-resident alien status, as well as degree-seeking and full- and part-time status, we will provide this data as long as your campus submits it to the Clearinghouse.

How can we improve the   accuracy of our reports?
Our accuracy is partly dependent on the quality of the data institutions submit to the Clearinghouse. Here are some of the more common problems with the data, and how to address them:

(1)   **Lack of Citizenship Status Data:** Your reports will be more accurate if you provide to the Clearinghouse two specific data fields: non-resident alien status, and whether or not an individual has a Social Security number (this is a yes/no field that does **not** require you submitting student SSNs). If you do this, we won't have to estimate the number of non-resident aliens on your campus.

(2)   **Inconsistent Clearinghouse and IPEDS Enrollment Totals:** In some cases, differences in enrollment totals are a result of inconsistencies in reporting part-time students. This is an easy problem to solve by indicating part- and full-time status for each student. Another valuable data element is degree- and non-degree seeking status.

(3)   **High FERPA blocks**: Nationally, 4%-5% of students block the use of their names for any reason. If your number is higher than 5%, you might be able to change that with different instructions to students and clarification about how their names might be used (e.g., for research).

(4)   **Large "Unknowns" Reflected in Class Levels**: Institutions are inconsistently reporting this information, the most common problem being that they only report for one or two class levels. Again, this is something you can correct through more detailed submissions to the Clearinghouse.

(5)   **Poor Data on Voting Methods**: This is a reflection of how states/counties/municipalities collect and report (or don't) on voting methods, and there is nothing that you can do to improve it. In cases where more than 90% of the students' voting method was "unknown," we confirmed with local officials that they do not collect voting method. We believe that the system will improve exponentially over the next five to ten years. Hang in there; this data will continue to get better.

Where do we direct questions?
Email: nslve@tufts.edu
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