Frequently Asked Questions about the Campus Reports (updated 11-19)

Top-line Data on Page 3 of the Report
- **On page 3 of the report, you provide three rates. Please explain the differences.**
- **In your national report, Democracy Counts 2018, you provide two voting rates, the Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR) and a National Student Voting Rate (NSVR). Which do you use in the report for institutional comparisons?**
- **How did you calculate the 2018 Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR)?**

About the Data
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 our FERPA FAQ.
- **Where do you get your data?**
- **Our institution submits data to the Clearinghouse throughout the year. Which enrollment record do you use?**
- **Where did you get the "total student enrollment" number in the report?**
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Top-line Data on Page 3

On page 3 of the report, you provide three rates. Please explain the differences.
Voting rate: The percentage of your students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and voted in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

Registration rate: The percentage of your students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and registered to vote in 2014 and 2018 elections.

Rate of registered students: The percentage of your students who registered and actually turned out to vote in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

In your national report, [Democracy Counts 2018](#), you provide two voting rates, the Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR) and a National Student Voting Rate (NSVR). Which do you use in the report for institutional comparisons in 2018?
Compare your rate with the AIVR of 39.1% or with similar types of institutions on page 4 of your report.

How did you calculate the 2018 Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR)?
The AIVR reflects an average of the 2018 voting rates of participating NSLVE campuses.

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 throughout the year. Which enrollment record do 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 Clearinghouse.

Our IPEDS enrollment total is different from the Clearinghouse total. Why?
We are not sure, but disparities can affect the accuracy of your voting rates. Usually, the registrar submits data to the Clearinghouse and an office of institutional research or assessment submits data to IPEDS. Clearinghouse data is individual level; IPEDS data is in the aggregate. They may be counting students differently (e.g., part-time, degree seeking, international). You should check with the offices submitting the data to understand (and reconcile) the differences.

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 do you know how many of our students are under the age of 18?
For each (de-identified) student record, we receive an age on the date of the election. We remove anyone under the age of 18.

How do you know how many students have opted to exercise a FERPA block?
Your institution sends that information to the Clearinghouse, which then sends it on to us.

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:

Voting in the U.S. is decentralized, and voting conditions are a matter of state law. States provide three ways for voters to cast a ballot before Election Day:

*Early Voting***:** In 39 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.

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 19 states, an excuse is required, while 28 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.

*Mail-in Voting***:** A few states automatically mail ballots to all registered voters (no request or application is necessary) voters for every election. Hawaii is moving to all-mail ballots in 2020. Other states may provide this option for some types of elections.

Some graphs contain information for "unknown" students. What does that mean?
Your institution is probably reporting to the Clearinghouse that number of students without additional data (e.g., race, gender, or class level). You can improve the quality and usefulness of your report by submitting missing data to the Clearinghouse (see more on this below).

Vote method data comes to us through Catalist, which collects it directly from the states and even districts. If a state or district does not maintain vote method, then we cannot include it in our calculations. Currently, vote method information is unavailable for students who voted in Alabama, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Vermont.

What does "*" (asterisk) mean in a graph?
An asterisk indicates that the number of students represented in this data point is fewer than ten. We do not report information with small cell sizes to protect student privacy.

What does "-" (dash) mean in a graph?
A dash indicates that there are zero results in the field.

Calculations

How accurate are these calculations?
Your estimated voter registration and voting rates are based on enrollment records that are matched to publicly available voting records. This process removes a large source of error inherent to most voting estimates, which usually rely on self-reported responses to surveys or estimates without a firm number of eligible voters. That said, NSLVE is both a new project and new process. We want to collaborate with representatives at participating institutions to flag and work with us to correct problems. Since the first set of reports were issued in 2014, we have identified several data issues that we then correct through testing and improving the matching process and campaigns to campuses to improve student-level data. Your estimates improve with each election, but we do rely on you to flag things that don't look right.

We have identified two main categories of issues: (1) false positive or negative results from the matching process and (2) incomplete enrollment records submitted by campuses to the Clearinghouse.

Issues Related to Matching Enrollment Records to Voting Records

Errors in the matching process can be more difficult to correct due to our system of building the database. IDHE never receives personally identifiable information (PII) or student names, and as a result, we cannot cross validate the results of the matching process with the relevant public voting records.

When campuses sign up to participate in the NSLVE study, the Clearinghouse matches their enrollment data to voting records using a system developed by an external vendor – Catalist. This matching process is a sophisticated algorithm, but it's not perfect and might lead to false positive or false negative matches. (At this time, we believe that there are incidents of false negatives, but we see no evidence of false positives.) Enrollment records that do not match voting records are usually nonvoters (i.e. they do not match because there is no record to match), but the matching algorithm may fail because the data fields are inaccurate – for instance, a student's name in an enrollment record may not match the way it is present in a voting record-- or because the campus location data (city, state, and zip code) does not align with the address used by students when they register to vote (e.g., "PO Box 123, Tufts"). We are currently testing a new matching process and will keep you posted on issues across the varied geographies and institutional types among NSLVE campuses.

Problems Related to Incomplete Enrollment Records

Incomplete or inaccurate enrollment data submitted by campuses to the Clearinghouse has long been a problem. While the data is improving, we need more support from campuses. For this reason, we added institutional researchers as report recipients in the 2018 dissemination process in the hope that reporting errors will be caught and corrected.

We use the campus-submitted Clearinghouse data to determine the student enrollment and the number of students ineligible to vote by age (under 18 at the time of the election). We use IPEDS to estimate how many students are non-resident aliens (often international students) who are ineligible to vote because of citizenship status. Ideally, IPEDS and Clearinghouse totals match.

At this time, we can identify several reasons why Clearinghouse and IPEDS enrollment totals for a single campus may differ.

1. **Some campuses do not report *all* students to the Clearinghouse.**
One source of confusion might be whether to use Social Security numbers as the reporting unit. At one time, Clearinghouse submissions required a Social Security number; students without SSNs on file could not be submitted. That rule changed in 2009, but a few campuses continue to submit only students with SSNs. It is possible that some students who are eligible to vote nonetheless do not provide an SSN to the institution, and this is more likely to be true of students not receiving financial aid. This will bias the voting rate estimate because the omitted student records are not random.

Similarly, some campuses only submit to the Clearinghouse students who are US citizens. Noncitizen students are counted in the numbers for IPEDS, and our calculations assume they are present in the campus enrollment records. Campuses will improve the accuracy of their NSLVE reports if they include all students in the Clearinghouse enrollment file and flag nonresident aliens under the category for race/ethnicity.

2. **Some campuses report different numbers to IPEDS and Clearinghouse.**
For example, under the same OPEID scheme some campuses report the full headcount of students as affiliated with one branch of an institution to IPEDS and submit an incomplete headcount of students to Clearinghouse, or vice versa.

3. **Some campuses define "students" differently.**
A few campuses treat post-docs as students in their submission to Clearinghouse when, in fact, they are employees and should not be included in either submission. It is also important that students be identified as degree seeking or non-degree seeking in both the submission to Clearinghouse and IPEDS. We include only degree granting institutions in NSLVE, and track voting for both degree-seeking and non-degree seeking students, either full- or part-time. Complete data in these categories is important.

4. **Some campuses have unusually high numbers of records blocked by a FERPA request.**
Some students block their directory information from any use, including for research, pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Since we use directory information to perform the match to voting records, these students are removed from the enrollment records before the process of matching enrollment and voting records. About 4% of all students nationally exercise this right. We provide in each campus report the number of students removed due to a FERPA block. If that number is large, consider how students are presented with the option of blocking the use of their records (campuses requiring an affirmative decision by students have lower FERPA blocks). If those students voted at lower or higher rates, that could slightly affect the voting rate. They are also not removed from the aggregate count submitted to IPEDS, which could affect the enrollment numbers or estimated NRAs as well.

5. **Some campuses do not submit race/ethnicity data, which means we cannot easily remove non-resident aliens (mostly international students) from the database.**

Institutions do, however, 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. That, however, is a less-than-perfect work around and we would prefer to

work with accurate numbers non-resident aliens. Note that we cannot remove these students from the disaggregated data starting on page 5 of your report.

6. We cannot remove from the database students who are ineligible to vote because they are *resident aliens* (the technical term for undocumented people) or have been disenfranchised due to a criminal conviction. Do you take that into consideration?

Unfortunately, we have no way of adjusting for these students. There is no national database that keeps track of them, and the Clearinghouse does not collect that information. We do not expect campuses to compile and submit lists of undocumented or disenfranchised students, but we provide a Recalculation Tool on our website that you can use to recalculate your rates if you have these exact numbers.

How did you determine fields 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 51 Study Families. We further regroup these to share in total of 42 families in your campus reports. In addition, we also share 7 topline fields of study- Business, Education, Health, Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM and Others. The following table details how these 7 topline fields are generated.

Combined Top 7 Fields of Study (Note: Study Families combined under a new name are marked with *)	(42 categories in total that we distribute to campuses)
Business (1)	Business, Management, and Marketing
Education (1)	Education
Health (2)	Health Professions Health-Related Knowledge and Skills
Humanities (10)	Architecture Personal and Culinary Services English Language and Literature Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics History Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities Philosophy and Religious Studies Theology and Religious Vocations Visual and Performing Arts
Social Sciences (6)	Communication and Journalism Library Science Psychology Public Administration & Social Service Professions Law Enforcement, Firefighting, & Protective Services Social Sciences
STEM (10)	Agriculture and Agriculture Operations Biological and Biomedical Sciences Computer and Information Sciences Engineering and Engineering Technologies Family and Consumer/Human Sciences Mathematics and Statistics Natural Resources and Conservation Physical Sciences Science Technologies/Technicians Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians
Others (12)	Basic Skills and Developmental Education Communications Technologies/Technicians Construction Trades Legal Professions and Studies Leisure and Recreational Activities Military Science, Leadership and Operational Art Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies Precision Production Transportation and Materials Moving Other Unknown

Next Steps

How can we improve the accuracy of our reports?
Our accuracy is largely 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 the Clearinghouse with accurate information about a student's nonresident alien status, which is a subset of the race and ethnicity category. If more campuses do this, we won't have to estimate the number of nonresident aliens on your campus. For now, even if your campus submits that data, we use the estimates based on IPEDS.
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). The other option is to send to us an authorization form that the Clearinghouse created in 2019 for institutions with high-FERPA-blocks. You can contact us at nslve@tufts.edu to discuss this process. With this new form, we can use FERPA blocked records under the "special studies" exception to FERPA.
4. **Large "Unknowns" Reflected in Class Levels**: Institutions are inconsistently reporting this information; the most common problem is that they only report for one or two class levels. Again, this is something you can correct through more detailed submissions to the Clearinghouse. This also enables us to provide data broken down by undergraduate class standing.
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 were "unknown," we confirmed with local officials that they do not collect voting methods. We believe that the system will improve over the next five to ten years. Hang in there; this data will continue to get better.

You need to work with the office on campus, usually the registrar, that submits your data to the National Student Clearinghouse. The submission process is automated, so it may be a simple matter of asking the responsible person to add data fields. We suggest that you take the report over to the individual responsible for submitting information, show that person the number of fields marked with "unknown" in your report, and explain why this would be valuable. If you are missing entire pages, such as for race/ethnicity and gender, you might want to bring along a Sample Report that shows what you *could* receive. You may need to involve senior institutional leaders, in which case you should be prepared to explain how you and people at other campuses use the data.

If we submit additional information, will NSLVE be able to use it?
We cannot retroactively apply data or reissue old reports, but you will have it for future elections.

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