Frequently Asked Questions about the 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 eligible to vote, and who were found in the voting records, and whose record indicates that the student voted in the fall 2012 election

Registration rate: the percentage of your students who were eligible to vote, and who were found in the voting records, and whose record indicates that the student registered to vote in the fall 2012 election.

Rate of registered voters who voted: the percentage of students who registered to vote who actually turned out to vote in the fall 2012 election.

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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 4.3 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.

Some graphs 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 4.3 million students. A high number of "unknown" students in the field of study graph would not be surprising.

What does * 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 an n/a representing the turnout rate. We do not report this information to ensure the privacy of your students is protected.

Calculations

Why do you estimate the number of nonresident 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 nonresident aliens they serve. By calculating a percentage of nonresident 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 nonresident aliens.

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

We know *exactly* how many of our students are nonresident 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 nonresident aliens" number (page 1 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 Ishara Casellas Connors.

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 46 Study Families. We combined some of those families further to 19 fields of study.

Existing or combined Study Families (Note: Study Families combined under a new name are marked with *)	Combined (46 categories in total)
Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support	
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities	
Health Professions and Related Sciences, Knowledge & Skills*	Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences and Health-Related Knowledge and Skills
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	
Social Sciences	
Education	
Engineering	
Psychology, Personal Awareness and Self-Improvement	
Visual and Performing Arts	

Communications, Journalism, and Related Programs	
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	Area, Ethnic, Cultural, and Gender Studies
Humanities	English Language and Literature/Letters History Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics Philosophy and Religious Studies
Computer and Information and Library Sciences*	Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services and Library Science
Physical Sciences	Natural Resources and Conservation
Professions*	Public Administration and Social Service Professions Legal Professions and Studies Architecture and Related Services Theology and Religious Vocations Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC, ROTC)
Trades*	Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences Security and Protective Services Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness Studies Leisure and Recreational Activities Transportation and Materials Moving Personal and Culinary Services Precision Production Basic Skills Construction Trades
Mathematics and Statistics	
Agriculture, Agriculture Operations, and Related Sciences	

Technologies/Technicians*	Engineering Technologies/Technicians Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians Communications Technologies/Technicians and Support Services Science Technologies/Technicians Military Technologies

Next Steps

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: nonresident 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 nonresident 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 get better.

If we submit additional information, will NSLVE be able to use it?
Yes: if you have signed and submitted this authorization form allowing us to use non-directory information, specifically gender, race/ethnicity, and nonresident alien status, as well as degree-seeking and full- and part-time status.

Where do we direct questions?
Email is best – nslve@tufts.edu.