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About NSLVE

What is NSLVE?
Launched in 2012, the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) is a service to colleges and universities interested in learning about their students’ voting habits, as well as a national
database for research on college student voting and, more broadly, political learning and engagement in democracy. By participating in NSLVE, American colleges and universities can learn the registration and voting rates of their students for the 2012, 2014 and future elections.

NSLVE is an initiative of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. Our research is conducted in collaboration with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), also a part of Tisch College, and a national leader in youth civic engagement research.

**Why should my institution participate?**
By joining the study, you will receive a tailored report indicating the registration and voting rates of your students. We can break that information down by age, class level, field of study, and voting method. **Participation is free and, through our full compliance with FERPA, incredibly protective of your student’s privacy.** You will also be helping us build a national database for research.

**How does it work?**
We formed a partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse), a nonprofit organization established by the higher education community in 1993 to provide educational reporting, verification, and research on behalf of its participating institutions. Over 3,900 in the U.S. colleges and universities send enrollment records to the Clearinghouse, and undoubtedly your institution does too.

Whether a person registered to vote and voted (not how they voted) are matters of public record, but because voting records are inconsistently maintained by states and municipalities, they can be hard to track down. Several organizations compile voting records. We’ve selected an organization called Catalyst, which collects local and state voting records to create a database that is widely respected and used for academic research. The Clearinghouse matches enrollment and voting records, removes all student personally identifiable information, and sends us de-identified data. We do not learn the names of your students.

**What elections are covered by NSLVE?**
We will provide data for 2012, 2014 and for future elections. At this time, we are not covering elections off-year or special elections.

**How much does NSLVE cost?**
Nothing. We are grant-funded and can offer you this service for free.

**Is this a survey?**
No. You do not complete a survey, nor do your students.

**Do we need to compile enrollment lists?**
No. You already do that when you submit data to the National Student Clearinghouse.

**How many colleges and universities currently participate in NSLVE?**
As of November, 2015 over 800 campuses have joined the study, and that number is growing rapidly. Our goal is to have 1,500 colleges and universities.

**Which colleges and universities are participating?**
National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement
We are not sharing the list of participating campuses at this time, but it includes colleges and universities from across the higher education landscape. Participating institutions come from 48 states and include over two thirds of the State Flagships, 241 private research universities, 211 private liberal arts colleges, 223 state public colleges and universities, and 211 community colleges. Ten state systems have signed up.

**I am a faculty or staff member on a campus. Will you tell me whether my campus is participating or share my campus’ report with me?**
No. One person on a campus is designated as the recipient of the report containing the voter data. All inquiries requiring your campus’ participation will be referred to that individual. NSLVE will not disclose the name of the report recipient. For inquiries by people unaffiliated with an institution, we will not disclose whether or not the institution is participating.

**I am not affiliated with a campus. May my organization obtain and/or use NSLVE data?**
NSLVE provides aggregate data such as national or regional voting rates, broken down by Carnegie Classification, and that is available on the website. NSLVE will not provide organizations with individual campus level data. Campuses may share the data at their discretion.

**Do you use NSLVE data to rank or compare colleges?**
We do not organize or support any competition or rating – we do not even publish campuses’ data. We do seek to provide guidance and technical assistance to campuses that participate. If others want to run competitions, they may use NSLVE but MUST clearly state that we do not participate in any way. And ideally, they will not make their competition hinge on NSLVE but will rather ask campuses to measure engagement using appropriate methods, which may include surveys as well as or instead of NSLVE.

### Signing Up

**What do we need to do to participate?**
You must opt in. Participation is not automatic, but it is easy. Simply download this [authorization form](mailto:nslve@tufts.edu), sign it, and send a scanned copy to nslve@tufts.edu.

**Who should sign the authorization form?**
Forms must be signed by someone with signing authority: a president/chancellor or vice president, dean of the college, or provost. We also accept forms signed by the chief enrollment officer or the director of institutional research.

**Is there a deadline for signing up?**
We match enrollment and voting records twice a year. The next deadline is October 15th, 2015.

**Can we wait to sign up?**
We would urge you NOT to wait. NSLVE can provide your campus with a valuable baseline and the sooner you receive your 2012 data, the sooner you can track your campus’ voting and registration rates more effectively across different election years.

**For how long is the authorization form valid?**
The form is valid through August, 2018. In 2018, we will ask you to sign a new authorization form for future election years.
Do we need IRB approval to participate?
At Tufts, we have exempt status because we work with de-identified enrollment records. It is unlikely that you need IRB approval because campus reports contain no individual-level information, only aggregate data.

What to Expect after Signing Up

When can we expect a report?
Compiling a complete set of voting records after an election takes seven months. We match enrollment and voting records twice a year and disseminate reports shortly after that. If there are delays, we’ll let you know. For this reason, we recommend interested campuses sign up for the study as soon as possible. You will receive your first report a few months after signing up for NSLVE due to the nature of the data matching process, so the sooner you sign up the sooner you will receive your report.

What is in a report?
You can see a sample report here. We provide two rates—registration and voting—as well as the percentage of your students who registered that actually voted. We also break those numbers down by age, field of study, class level, and, if your institution provides it to the Clearinghouse, race/ethnicity and gender. We also provide some specific voting information, such as whether your students voted locally or out of state.

Do we receive student-level data?
No; you receive aggregate data only. Remember: we do not have the names of your students.

Who receives the report?
When you sign up, you identify an individual who will be the report recipient. You can choose the signatory for the authorization form or that person's delegate.

May we designate multiple report recipients?
No; we can only send one report to each campus. The designated report recipient may then share it with peer institutions or colleagues.

What happens if our report recipient leaves the university?
If your report recipient has left the institution, we ask that you update your record with NSLVE as soon as possible. The best way to do this is to have your campus signatory email nslve@tufts.edu with the contact information of the new campus report recipient.

What does NSLVE do with the data?
Our database currently consists of nearly 7 million de-identified college student records, and we’re working hard to increase that number. We’re using the data to study comparisons and correlations (e.g., the relationship between voting rates and student participation in service experiences, or voting and student demographics). We’ve also completed a regression model to identify predictors of student voting. By comparing predicted and actual voting rates, we can identify positive outliers, those campuses with surprisingly high rates. Last spring, we visited several of those campuses to study their campus climate for student political engagement and will conduct new case studies this year.
We’re interested in finding institutions that track student experiences on an individual level (e.g., participation in student government, ROTC, Greek life, volunteering). If your institutions tags individual students with these kinds of experiences and you might be interested in further study, please contact Nancy Thomas, director of higher education research.

**Will NSLVE publish these findings?**
Yes, and we’ll let you know when we do. NOTE: We will never disclose your institution’s rates, nor will we publish data in such a way that your institution could be identified.

**We received a report, and we have some questions about it. Where do we direct them?**
You can read the Report FAQ or you can contact us at nsle@tufts.edu.

**How can we use the data?**
You are welcome to use the data as you choose: publicizing the results, including them in “fact sheets,” sharing them with peer institutions, studying the effectiveness of your academic programs, or keeping them confidential and comparing 2012 and 2014 with future years. Prospective students might like to know voting rates, and admissions offices might like to publicize them. We also view these numbers on registration and voting as strong baseline indicators for political learning on a campus, and this report and the NSLVE resources will make it easier for campuses to increase the amount of political learning that happens at their school.

**Student Privacy and FERPA**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows colleges and universities to share student lists and certain identifying information, which is often used for research purposes.

We worked with several university attorneys to develop a special FAQ on student privacy laws, which you can read here. These are the most frequently asked questions and answers.

**How do you match enrollment and voting records?**
To match enrollment and voting records, the Clearinghouse uses “directory information”: student name, address and date of birth when provided by the Clearinghouse. Accessing a secure matching tool created for this study, the Clearinghouse makes the match and imports the voting records. Names are then replaced with randomly-assigned identification numbers. Dates of birth are exchanged for age at the time of the election. Addresses are replaced with zip codes. The Clearinghouse then adds additional student information (class level, field of study, race/ethnicity, and gender, part- or full-time status, degree and non-degree seeking status) and sends the records to us via a secure server. We receive student level information, without names or other identifiers.

**How do you handle students in categories with small numbers?**
If a category has ten or fewer students (e.g., 10 students over the age of 30, or 4 students in a particular major), NSLVE does not receive that data. In our reports, those categories are marked with a *.

**How do you handle students who don’t want their information used for any purpose?**
Some students “check the FERPA box” when they enroll, indicating that they do not want their names or other directory information used for any purpose. The Clearinghouse already has that information and
will remove from the list any students who have “checked the box.” We receive a number of blocked records.

For how long and where will the data be stored, and how secure is it?
The Clearinghouse will store the data in a secure setting for five years to allow for comparisons with the next election cycle. After five years, the records will be destroyed.

The Clearinghouse adheres to a comprehensive information security program, including administrative, technical, and physical safeguards. Read more about the Clearinghouse’s privacy and security measures here.

NSLVE will store its de-identified data in a secured system for the duration of the study. The data will be destroyed within five years of the date the study ends.