



Belonging and Involvement

**A Research Report from the 2025
Student Life Survey**

Center for the Study of Student Life

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**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the involvement, engagement and belonging of undergraduate, graduate and professional students at The Ohio State University. Data for this report are from the 2025 Student Life Survey. In January 2025, 9,000 students on the Columbus campus were surveyed, out of which 1,258 responded, resulting in a response rate of 14.0%. A sample of 5,500 undergraduate students were surveyed; 12.3% responded ($n = 676$). A sample of 3,500 graduate and professional students were surveyed; 16.6% responded ($n = 582$). Data were weighted to be representative of the full Ohio State population.

Sense of Belonging

- Professional students (3.24) had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average**, compared to undergraduate (3.01) and graduate (3.06) students.
- Professional students were significantly more likely to feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State ($p < .01$) and feel that they are a member of the Ohio State community ($p < .05$) than undergraduate and graduate students.
- Professional students were significantly more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students ($p < .01$) and faculty ($p < .001$) than undergraduate and graduate students.

Belonging and Involvement: Undergraduates

- Undergraduate students who were involved with on-campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.03)** compared to undergraduate students who were not involved with on-campus activities (2.90).
- Compared to undergraduate students who were not involved, undergraduate students who were involved did not have any significant differences in their agreement with individual statements related to belonging.

Belonging and Involvement: Graduate Students

- Graduate students who were involved with on-campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.13)** compared to graduate students who were not involved with on-campus activities (2.81).
- Compared to graduate students who were not involved, graduate students who were involved with campus activities were:
 - **2.9** times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students ($p < .001$).
 - **2.7** times more likely to have relationships with Ohio State faculty ($p < .001$).
 - **1.8** times more likely to have relationships with Ohio State staff ($p < .05$)



Belonging and Involvement: Professional Students

- Professional students who were involved with on-campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.13)** compared to professional students who were not involved with on-campus activities (2.81).
- Compared to professional students who were not involved, professional students who were involved with campus activities were:
 - **3.9** times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students ($p < .05$).



INTRODUCTION

This report explores the involvement and sense of belonging on campus of undergraduate, graduate and professional students at The Ohio State University. Involvement in on-campus activities during college plays a critical role in student success, from bolstering a student's sense of belonging to increasing retention and academic success (Tinto, 2006-2007; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Involvement fosters experiential learning during college, which is linked to getting a good job after graduation, workplace engagement, overall well-being and alumni attachment (Gallup, 2014). Additionally, involvement can influence sense of belonging. This report outlines student belongingness and the relationship between belongingness and involvement for students at Ohio State.

METHODS

The Student Life Survey is administered annually by the Center for the Study of Student Life to examine trends in student engagement, sense of belonging and satisfaction with the college experience. The 2025 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 9,000 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester (January 2025). This sample was comprised of 5,500 undergraduate students and 3,500 graduate and professional students, all on the Columbus campus. A total of 1,258 students responded to the survey, resulting in an overall response rate of 14.0%. The response rate was 12.3% among undergraduate students and 16.6% among graduate and professional students. See Appendix A for a summary of respondents' demographic and academic characteristics.

Data were broken down by students' educational level (undergraduate, graduate and professional). Data from 676 undergraduate students, 484 graduate students and 98 professional students are included in this report. Demographics of the students included in the report did not substantially vary from the overall Student Life Survey sample. Note that not all students who completed the survey answered every question, resulting in different totals for some questions.

Weighting Procedure

Responses were weighted to address differences between the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents compared to the general student population at Ohio State in the spring semester of 2025. Weights were adjusted so the survey data were representative of the student population at Ohio State. For example, 62.8% of survey respondents in the Student Life Survey were female, but 52.6% of the total population at Ohio State was female. The rake weight procedure adjusts for the over-representation of female students in the data to make responses more reflective of the student population, thus making the data more generalizable to Ohio State students. The procedure adjusted the base weight to the demographic data available on the sampling frame using sex, race/ethnicity and



student status (i.e., undergraduate, graduate student or professional student). Weighted and unweighted demographic data for survey respondents is available in Appendix B.

FINDINGS

Sense of Belonging

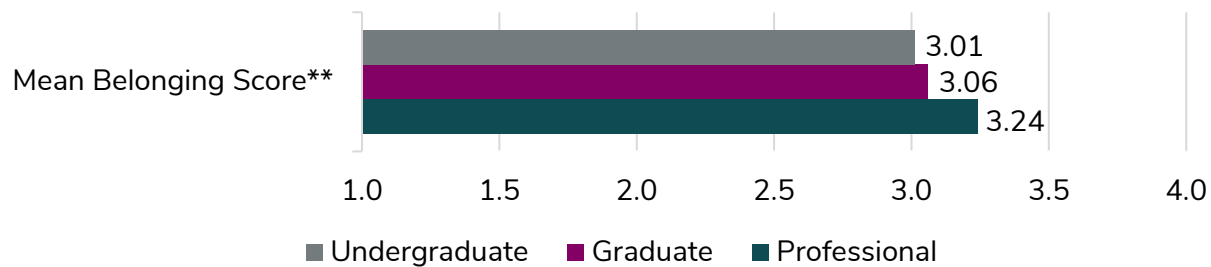
To measure sense of belonging, students were asked to rate their agreement with five statements to create a composite belonging score. Each item was a four-point Likert question (i.e., Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), meaning that a minimum possible score was one, and a maximum possible score was four. Students were given a score if they answered at least four out of the five questions on the belongingness scale.

Table 1 illustrates which items were incorporated into the scale and shows the association of the individual scale items with educational level using chi-square tests of independence. Additional analyses demonstrated that the items had an acceptable reliability score ($\alpha = 0.79$) and loaded onto a single factor, indicating this is a reliable scale for measuring sense of belonging. Figure 1 shows the average belonging score by each educational level. A simple linear regression was used to test for overall significant differences between educational levels.

Table 1: Sense of Belonging Scale Items by Educational Level

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 676)	Graduate students (<i>n</i> = 484)	Professional students (<i>n</i> = 98)	Significance
I feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State	86.7%	82.0%	93.8%	*
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	88.8%	82.0%	91.3%	**
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	90.5%	85.4%	97.2%	**
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	66.9%	85.8%	88.9%	***
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	65.2%	73.0%	72.0%	*



Figure 1: Average Belonging Score by Educational Level

Campus Involvement

The percentage of students involved was calculated by examining participation across thirteen different types of campus activities and community service. Among all respondents, 84.1% report being involved in at least one of thirteen types of involvement. More specifically, 85.6% of undergraduate students, 77.6% of graduate students and 83.3% of professional students reported being involved. The tables below summarize campus activities and community service involvement.

Undergraduate students were most likely to be involved with a student organization (59.7%) and working at an on-campus job (29.3%). Graduate students were most likely to be involved in research with a faculty member (45.1%) and working at an on-campus job (22.9%). Professional students were most likely to be involved in student organizations (67.8%) and one day service events (33.6%). A full set of involvement tables can be found in Appendix A.

Sense of Belonging and Involvement

To examine the association between involvement and one's attitudes about and sense of belonging, chi-square tests of independence and logistic regressions were employed. A student was coded as involved if they participated in at least one of the thirteen activities illustrated in Appendix A.

First, associations between student responses and involvement status were examined. Second, logistic regression analyses were used to determine if the association between involvement and student outcomes remained after considering demographic and academic characteristics. Control variables included gender identity, race/ethnicity, international student status, living on campus, academic rank, cumulative GPA and first-generation student status. Results from these analyses are reported in the following sections in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

The difference in average belonging score and involvement status was also explored using simple linear regression. Figures 2, 3, and 4 summarize the average belonging scores by



level of involvement as well as the statistical significance of the regression results. All analyses were repeated for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

Undergraduate Students

Table 2 displays the proportion of undergraduate students who agreed or strongly agreed with items about their sense of belonging at Ohio State. Results from the chi-square test and logistic regression odds-ratios are also shown for each item. In general, undergraduate students did not differ significantly in their agreement by involvement status on the individual items.

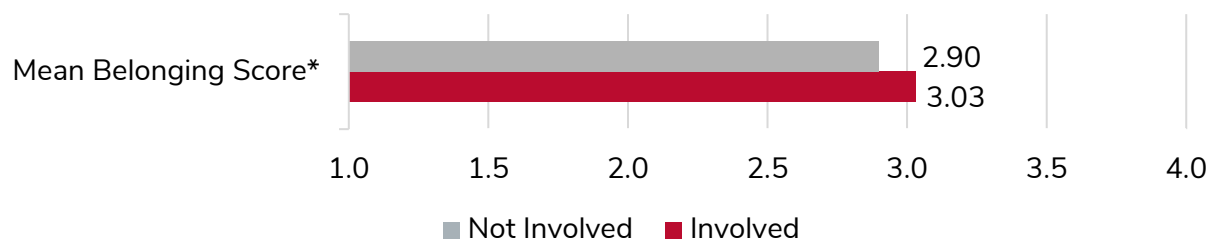
Table 2: Undergraduate Student Involvement and Belonging

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Involved (n =)	Not Involved (n =)	χ^2	Odds Ratio ^a
I feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State	86.9%	85.2%	0.2	0.8
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	89.6%	83.9%	2.5	1.3
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	91.8%	82.5%	7.5**	1.2
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	68.0%	60.5%	1.9	1.3
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	66.4%	57.7%	2.4	1.5
I participate in Ohio State traditions	74.6%	69.0%	1.2	1.2

^a Results from logistic regression controlling for, or taking into account: gender, race, international status, living on campus, academic rank, cumulative GPA and first-generation student status.

As shown in Figure 2, undergraduate students who were involved in at least one of the thirteen activities in Appendix A had a significantly higher average belonging score than students who were not involved with on-campus activities ($p < .05$).

Figure 2: Average Undergraduate Belonging Scores by Involvement



Graduate Students

Table 3 displays the proportion of graduate students who agreed or strongly agreed with items about their sense of belonging at Ohio State. Results from the chi-square test and logistic regression odds-ratios are also shown for each item. Graduate students who were involved were significantly more likely to agree that they had relationships with other Ohio State students ($p < .001$), faculty ($p < .001$), and staff ($p < .05$) than graduate students who were not involved.

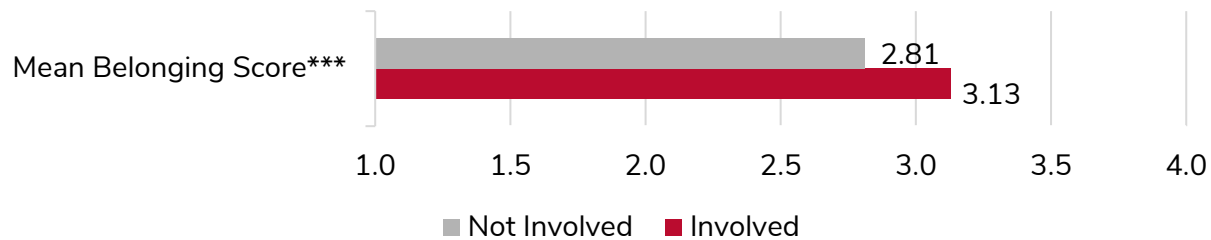
Table 3: Graduate Student Involvement and Belonging

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Involved	Not Involved	χ^2	Odds Ratio ^a
I feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State	84.0%	75.1%	4.2*	1.3
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	83.6%	76.3%	2.8	1.5
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	88.9%	73.0%	15.9***	2.9***
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	90.4%	69.5%	28.0****	2.7***
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	75.9%	62.8%	6.7*	1.8*
I participate in Ohio State traditions.	55.5%	56.4%	0.0	1.1

^a Results from logistic regression controlling for, or taking into account: gender, race, international status, living on campus, academic rank, cumulative GPA and first-generation student status.

Graduate students who were involved in at least one activity had a significantly higher average belonging score than students who were not involved with on-campus activities.

Figure 3: Average Graduate Student Belonging Scores



Professional Students

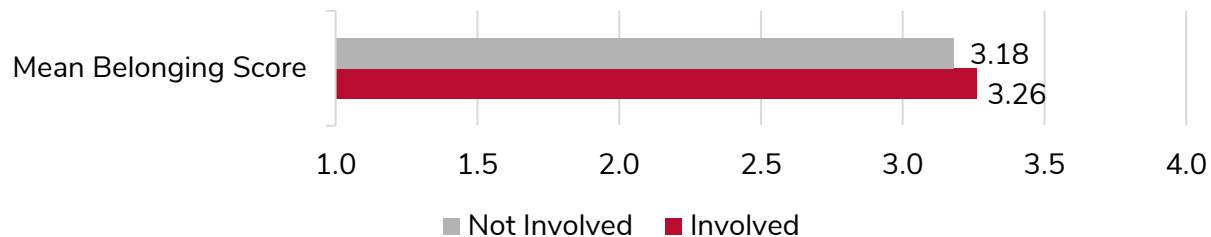
Table 4: Professional Student Involvement and Belonging

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Involved	Not Involved	χ^2	Odds Ratio ^a
I feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State	93.8%	93.8%	0.0	1.4
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	92.0%	88.1%	0.3	1.5
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	97.9%	93.8%	0.8	3.9*
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	87.9%	93.8%	0.4	0.7
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	71.9%	72.4%	0.0	1.0
I participate in Ohio State traditions.	71.3%	78.4%	0.3	1.2

^a Results from logistic regression controlling for, or taking into account: gender, race, international status, living on campus, academic rank, cumulative GPA and first-generation student status.

Professional students who were involved in at least one activity had a significantly higher average belonging score than students who were not involved with on-campus activities.

Figure 4: Average Professional Student Belonging Scores



CONCLUSION

This report provides valuable information for understanding the relationship between students' belonging and involvement at Ohio State. Undergraduate activity involvement was generally associated with higher levels of overall belonging. For graduate students, involvement was also associated with higher levels of belonging. Professional students had significantly higher levels of belonging than their undergraduate and graduate peers, but involvement did not have a significant relationship with professional student's sense of belonging. Overall, this report reinforces the importance of examining involvement and sense of belonging across all educational levels.

REFERENCES

- Gallup. (2014). *Great jobs, great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index report*. Washington, D.C.
- Morrow, J., & Ackermann, M. (2012). Intention to persist and retention of first-year students: The importance of motivation and sense of belonging. *College Student Journal*, 46(3), 483-491.
- Tinto, V. (2006-2007). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 8(1), 1-19.



APPENDIX A: INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Table 5: Campus Involvement by Educational Level

	Undergraduate students (n = 675)	Graduate students (n = 484)	Professional students (n = 98)
A social fraternity or sorority	9.7%	0.9%	5.0%
A business fraternity or sorority	3.9%	0.4%	5.1%
Intramural sports	12.0%	3.5%	11.6%
Sports clubs	8.9%	3.4%	3.6%
Student organizations (e.g., Psychology Club, Running Club, Black Student Association)	59.7%	22.5%	67.8%
Research with a faculty member	7.8%	45.1%	16.0%
Working at an on-campus job	29.3%	22.9%	14.2%
A learning community in the Residence Halls (e.g., Engineering House, Stadium Scholarship Program, Morrill Scholars Program, Global Business)	7.5%	0.0%	0.9%
A capstone project or experience (e.g., senior thesis, portfolio, doctoral dissertation)	5.9%	20.6%	0.0%

Table 6: Community Service Involvement by Educational Level

	Undergraduate students (n = 665)	Graduate students (n = 474)	Professional students (n = 95)
An academic course with a service-learning component	9.7%	8.5%	16.4%
A one-day service event	24.8%	11.5%	33.6%
Multi-day service event (e.g., Buck-I-SERV, a church or club-based service trip)	7.9%	3.2%	5.7%
An ongoing service/volunteer program (e.g., volunteered at a community organization once a month or more)	21.0%	10.0%	27.6%

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Note: Participant demographics below represent all respondents in the 2025 Student Life Survey.

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students			Professional Students		
	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent
Total	676			484			98		
Academic Level	548			—			—		
First-year undergraduate	158	28.8%	28.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Second-year undergraduate	122	22.3%	23.0%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Third-year undergraduate	154	28.1%	27.4%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fourth-year undergraduate	81	14.8%	14.4%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fifth-year or beyond undergraduate	33	6.0%	6.7%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gender Identity	676			484			98		
Man	239	35.4%	45.5%	176	36.4%	45.3%	26	26.5%	36.2 %
Non-binary	3	0.4%	0.4%	7	1.5%	1.6%	1	1.0%	0.9%
Woman	410	60.7%	50.5%	278	57.4%	48.3%	69	70.4%	61.3%
Another identity not listed	5	0.7%	0.8%	11	2.3%	2.1%	1	1.0%	0.7%
Multiple identities selected	10	1.5%	1.4%	5	1.0%	1.1%	1	1.0%	0.9%
Prefer not to answer	9	1.3%	1.5%	7	1.5%	1.6%	—	—	—
Transgender Identity	548			416			83		
Transgender	12	2.2%	2.2%	8	1.9%	2.0%	1	1.2%	1.2%
Cisgender	523	95.4%	95.1%	392	94.2%	93.7%	80	96.4%	96.0%
Prefer not to answer	13	2.4%	2.8%	16	3.9%	4.3%	2	2.4%	2.9%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students			Professional Students		
	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent
Race/Ethnicity	676			484			98		
Black and/or African American	48	7.1%	9.2%	28	5.8%	7.1%	2	2.0%	2.5%
Asian/Asian American, Pacific Islander, Desi American, and/or Native Hawai'ian	99	14.6%	14.6%	84	17.4%	16.0%	6	6.1%	4.9%
Latine and/or Hispanic	36	5.3%	3.9%	21	4.3%	3.6%	8	8.2%	6.3%
Middle Eastern and/or North African (MENA)	10	1.5%	1.4%	15	3.1%	2.8%	3	3.1%	2.9%
White and/or European American	404	59.8%	59.6%	248	51.2%	52.8%	69	70.4%	74.0%
Multiracial and/or Biracial	53	7.8%	7.2%	32	6.6%	6.8%	7	7.1%	5.9%
Another identity not listed	3	0.4%	0.5%	5	1.0%	0.9%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	23	3.4%	3.7%	51	10.5%	9.9%	3	3.1%	3.6%
Sexual Orientation	544			415			84		
LGBTQ+	124	22.8%	21.9%	106	25.5%	25.0%	10	11.9%	11.1%
Heterosexual/straight	398	73.2%	73.7%	279	67.2%	67.3%	67	79.8%	81.3%
Prefer not to answer	22	4.0%	4.4%	30	7.2%	7.7%	7	8.3%	7.5%
Generational Status	676			484			98		
First-generation student	162	24.0%	24.0%	138	28.5%	27.9%	11	11.2%	12.2%
Continuing-generation student	514	76.0%	76.0%	346	71.5%	72.1%	87	88.8%	87.8%
Disability	548			415			84		
Has a disability	86	15.7%	15.7%	63	15.2%	16.4%	10	11.9%	10.5%
Does not have a disability	440	80.3%	80.2%	325	78.3%	77.0%	68	81.0%	82.4%
Prefer not to answer	22	4.0%	4.1%	27	6.5%	6.6%	6	7.1%	7.1%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students			Professional Students		
	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Un-weighted Percent	Weighted Percent
Education Route	676			—			—		
Campus change	48	7.1%	7.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Transfer student	99	14.6%	14.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Continuing Ohio State student	529	78.3%	77.9%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Residence	549			416			84		
On-campus	227	41.4%	40.9%	24	5.8%	5.4%	2	2.4%	2.6%
Off-campus	308	56.1%	56.5%	391	94.0%	94.4%	82	97.6%	97.4%
Sorority or fraternity housing	14	2.6%	2.6%	1	0.2%	0.3%	—	—	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$