



# Involvement and Belonging

A Research Report from the  
2022 Student Life Survey

Center for the Study of Student Life

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the involvement, engagement and sense of belonging on campus of undergraduate, graduate and professional students at The Ohio State University. Data for this report are from the 2022 Student Life Survey. In January 2022, 11,701 students on the Columbus campus were surveyed, out of which 1,639 responded, resulting in a response rate of 14.0%. A sample of 6,741 undergraduate students were surveyed; 14.4% responded ( $n = 970$ ). A sample of 3,795 graduate students were surveyed; 14.5% responded ( $n = 552$ ). A sample of 1,100 professional students were surveyed; 10.4% responded ( $n = 114$ ). Data were weighted to be representative of the Ohio State Columbus campus population.

### INVOLVEMENT

- 74.4% of all Ohio State students report being involved with at least one campus activity, including 74.3% of undergraduate students, 73.1% of graduate students and 78.8% of graduate and professional students.

Top campus activities among undergraduate students	Top campus activities among graduate students	Top campus activities among professional students
Student organizations (54.3%)	Research with a faculty member (46.6%)	Student organizations (63.2%)
Working at an on-campus job (28.2%)	Student organizations (22.7%)	Research with a faculty member (22.7%)
Research with a faculty member (10.9%)	A capstone project or experience (20.2%)	Community service and/or service-learning (12.0%)
A social fraternity or sorority (9.9%)	Working at an on-campus job (20.0%)	Working at an on-campus job (10.2%)

### SENSE OF BELONGING: UNDERGRADUATES

- Undergraduate students who were involved with on-campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (2.94)** compared to undergraduate students who were not involved with on-campus activities (**2.64**).
- Compared to undergraduate students who were not involved, undergraduate students who were involved with campus activities were:
  - 3.2 times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students.
  - 2.6 times more likely to feel they were a part of the Ohio State community.
  - 2.4 times more likely to participate in Ohio State traditions.
  - 1.9 times more likely to be satisfied with their experiences at Ohio State.

### SENSE OF BELONGING: GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

- Graduate and professional students who were involved with campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (2.99)** compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved with campus activities (**2.75**).
- Compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved, graduate and professional students who were involved with campus activities were:
  - 3.3 times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students.

## INTRODUCTION

This report explores the involvement, engagement and sense of belonging of 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).

## 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 2022 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 11,701 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester (January 2021). This sample comprised 6,741 undergraduate students, 3,795 graduate and 1,100 professional students, all on the Columbus campus. A total of 1,639 students responded to the survey. Three respondents were removed for mischievous or careless response patterns, resulting in a final sample of 1,636 respondents and an overall response rate of 14.0%. The response rate was 14.4% among undergraduate students, 14.5% among graduate students and 10.4% among professional students. See the Appendix for a summary of respondents' demographic and academic characteristics. Students who did not respond to the items used for this report were removed from analyses, resulting in an unweighted sample size of 1,489 students for this report with 869 undergraduate students, 510 graduate students and 110 professional students. Demographics of the students included in the report did not substantially vary from the overall Student Life Survey sample.

## 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 2022. Weights were adjusted so the survey data are representative of the student population at Ohio State. For example, 63.1% of the survey respondents in the Student Life Survey were female, but 52.3% 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 the Appendix.

## FINDINGS

### CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

The percentage of involved students was calculated by examining participation across eleven different campus activities. Among all respondents, 74.4% report being involved in at least one of eleven types of involvement on campus. More specifically, 74.3% of undergraduate students, 73.1% of graduate students and 78.8% of professional students reported being involved. Additionally, student involvement in community service was examined across three items. The tables below summarize student campus involvement and service-learning involvement. Undergraduate students were most likely to be involved with a student organization (54.3%) and working at an on-campus



job (28.2%). Graduate students were most likely to be involved in research with a faculty member (46.6%) and student organizations (22.7%). Professional students were most likely to be involved in student organizations (63.2%) and research with a faculty member (22.7%).

**Table 1: Campus Involvement by Educational Level**

	Undergraduate students ( <i>n</i> = 1,142)	Graduate students ( <i>n</i> = 257)	Professional students ( <i>n</i> = 82)
Student organizations (e.g., Psychology Club, Running Club, Black Student Association)	54.3%	22.7%	63.2%
Student Life sponsored program (e.g., Buck-I-Serv, Wellness Ambassadors)	2.1%	1.1%	1.9%
A social fraternity or sorority	9.9%	0.4%	6.6%
A business fraternity or sorority	2.0%	0.0%	2.2%
Intramural sports	7.6%	1.8%	5.8%
Sports clubs	7.3%	3.1%	0.0%
Community service and/or service-learning (e.g., Pay It Forward, Buck-I-Serv, Nonprofit Immersion Program)	7.1%	1.7%	12.0%
Undergraduate research or research with a faculty member	10.9%	46.6%	22.7%
Working at an on-campus job	28.2%	20.0%	10.2%
A learning community in the Residence Halls (e.g., Engineering House, Stadium Scholarship Program, Morrill Scholars Program, Global Business)	6.6%	0.2%	0.0%
A capstone project or experience (e.g., senior thesis, portfolio)	4.7%	20.2%	5.7%

**Table 2: Service-learning by Educational Level**

	Undergraduate students ( <i>n</i> = 1,142)	Graduate students ( <i>n</i> = 257)	Professional students ( <i>n</i> = 82)
An academic course with a service-learning component	6.0%	7.9%	13.5%
A one-day service event	14.1%	6.4%	20.0%
An ongoing service/volunteer program	14.5%	9.7%	22.7%

## SENSE OF BELONGING AND INVOLVEMENT: UNDERGRADUATES

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 eleven activities illustrated in Table 1.

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 taking into account 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. These analyses

suggest that involvement had strong associations with students' sense of belonging and perception of Ohio State, even when controlling for demographic and academic factors.

**Table 3: Undergraduate Involvement and Belonging**

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Involved	Not Involved	$\chi^2$	Odds Ratio <sup>a</sup>
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	88.9%	74.6%	34.9***	2.6***
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	90.6%	70.3%	71.5***	3.2***
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	60.0%	45.1%	19.6***	1.8***
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	54.0%	43.0%	10.6***	1.6***
I participate in Ohio State traditions	75.8%	54.6%	46.9***	2.4***
I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State	82.8%	69.4%	23.9***	2.0***
Ohio State offers me opportunities to engage in difficult dialogues	80.0%	68.6%	16.2***	1.7***
Ohio State has helped me progress in my career development	88.1%	81.9%	7.1**	1.6*
Ohio State has contributed to my personal growth	89.5%	83.6%	7.2**	1.5
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set personal goals	89.6%	82.6%	10.1**	1.9**
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals	89.0%	83.0%	6.6*	1.6*
I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State	75.8%	58.6%	29.6***	2.3***
During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me	81.2%	77.6%	1.7	1.3
Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs	87.0%	82.0%	4.1*	1.4
Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., student support offices, student activities)	79.7%	74.3%	3.6	1.5*
I would recommend Ohio State to other students	91.0%	83.5%	12.3***	1.9**
Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University	89.0%	80.3%	14.0***	1.9**

<sup>a</sup> 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.

## SENSE OF BELONGING AND INVOLVEMENT: GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

A similar set of analyses employing chi-square tests of independence and logistic regressions were used to examine how involvement shapes graduate and professional students' sense of belonging and perceptions of Ohio State. As with the previous set of analyses, associations between student responses and involvement status were first examined. Second, logistic regression analyses were

used to determine if the association between involvement and student outcomes remained after taking into account demographic and academic characteristics. Control variables included gender identity, race/ethnicity, international student status, graduate/professional status, cumulative GPA and first-generation student status. Due to small sample sizes, graduate and professional students were analyzed together rather than separately.

As Table 4 demonstrates, the relationship between graduate and professional student involvement and sense of belonging was relatively low, except for the items related to relationships with other Ohio State students and faculty.

**Table 4: Graduate Student Involvement and Belonging**

% Agree or Strongly Agree	Involved	Not Involved	$\chi^2$	Odds Ratio <sup>a</sup>
I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community	84.1%	76.7%	2.4	1.5
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	90.8%	72.1%	18.8***	3.3***
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	86.9%	77.9%	3.9*	1.8
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	55.4%	48.3%	1.3	1.3
I participate in Ohio State traditions	47.8%	45.3%	0.2	1.2
I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State	75.0%	69.8%	0.9	1.3
Ohio State offers me opportunities to engage in difficult dialogues	71.3%	77.6%	1.3	0.7
Ohio State has helped me progress in my career development	92.1%	90.7%	0.2	1.1
Ohio State has contributed to my personal growth	86.5%	86.0%	<0.1	0.9
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set personal goals	86.5%	89.5%	0.5	0.6
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals	91.1%	92.6%	0.2	0.7
I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State	75.4%	73.2%	0.2	1.1
During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me	81.9%	73.2%	2.9	1.6
Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs	87.5%	93.9%	2.6	0.4
Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., student support offices, student activities)	75.7%	85.4%	3.4	0.5
I would recommend Ohio State to other students	87.9%	91.5%	0.8	0.7
Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University	89.1%	86.6%	0.4	1.2

<sup>a</sup> Results from logistic regression controlling for, or taking into account: gender, race, international status, graduate/professional status, cumulative GPA and generational status.

## OVERALL BELONGING SCORES

The final set of analyses examined variations in students' average sense of belonging. To obtain a mean score, select items from Table 3 and Table 4 were used to create a sense of belonging scale. Table 5 illustrates which items were incorporated into the scale. Additional analyses demonstrated that the items had an acceptable reliability score ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) and loaded onto a single factor, indicating this is a reliable scale for measuring sense of belonging. 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 5: Items in Sense of Belonging Scale**

**Based on your experience at Ohio State thus far, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:**

I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community

I have relationships with other Ohio State students

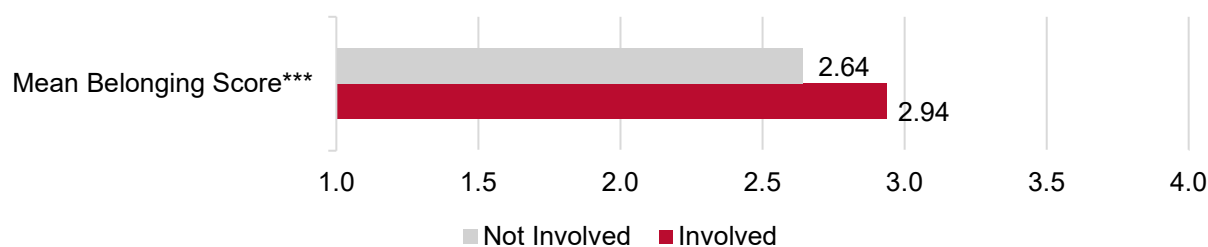
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)

I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)

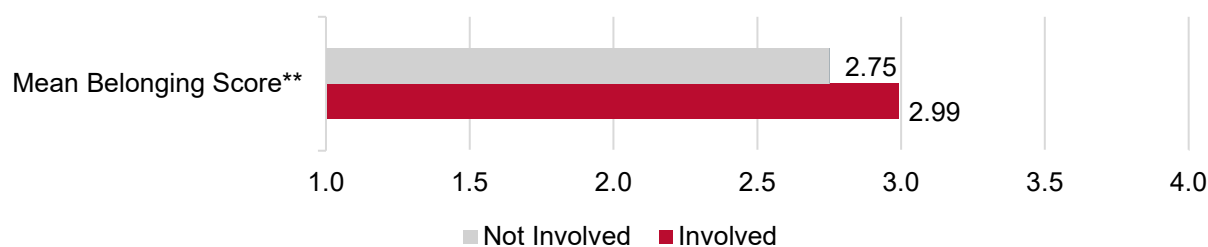
I feel a sense of belonging at Ohio State

The first set of analyses involved independent sample *t*-tests to examine whether average scores differed by involvement. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below summarize these findings. Undergraduate students who were involved in at least one of the eleven activities in Table 1 had a significantly higher average belonging score than students who were not involved with on-campus activities. Similarly, graduate and 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 1: Average Undergraduate Belonging Scores**



**Figure 2: Average Graduate and Professional Student Involvement Scores**



## CONCLUSION

This report provides valuable information for understanding students' sense of belonging and activity involvement at Ohio State, as well as the relationship between these two variables. Nearly three out of four undergraduate, graduate and professional students reported being involved in at least one campus activity at Ohio State. Over half of undergraduate students reported being involved with a student organization, and over one quarter had an on-campus job. Nearly one half of graduate students were involved with research with a faculty member, and almost two-thirds of professional students were involved with a student organization.

Undergraduate activity involvement was generally associated with higher sense of belonging among undergraduate students, particularly for building relationships with other Ohio State students, feeling that they are a member of the Ohio State community, participating in Ohio State traditions and having an overall sense of satisfaction with Ohio State. This suggests that involvement is influential for shaping sense of belonging among undergraduate students.

Involvement was also related to graduate and professional student sense of belonging. In particular, involvement was positively related to having relationships with other Ohio State students. However, there was not a statistically significant relationship between belonging and any of the other items related to involvement and belonging for graduate and professional students. Although one interpretation of this data is that involvement matters less to graduate and professional students' sense of belonging, another explanation for this difference could be that Ohio State does not offer campus activities for graduate and professional students that could shape their sense of belonging, or that graduate and professional students do not participate in these activities. Our data cannot speak to which of these interpretations are most accurate, suggesting this as an area for future research.

Overall, this report reinforces the importance of examining sense of belonging and activity involvement across all educational levels. Ohio State should continue to emphasize co-curricular student involvement for student development, academic growth and retention.

## REFERENCES

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- 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: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>1</sup>

Note: Participant demographics below represent all respondents in the 2022 Student Life Survey. Demographics of respondents for this report did not substantially vary from the overall sample.

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>970</b>			<b>552</b>			<b>114</b>		
<b>Academic Level</b>	<b>947</b>			—			—		
First-year undergraduate	203	21.4%	21.1%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Second-year undergraduate	287	30.3%	30.7%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Third-year undergraduate	223	23.5%	23.4%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fourth-year undergraduate	185	19.5%	19.1%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fifth-year or beyond undergraduate	49	5.2%	5.7%	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>970</b>			<b>552</b>			<b>114</b>		
Man	321	33.1%	43.7%	217	39.3%	49.3%	30	26.3%	35.9%
Woman	610	62.9%	52.0%	325	58.9%	48.6%	81	71.1%	61.1%
Another identity not listed	30	3.1%	3.4%	4	0.7%	0.8%	3	2.6%	3.1%
Prefer not to say	9	0.9%	0.9%	6	1.1%	1.3%	0	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Transgender Status</b>	<b>930</b>			<b>536</b>			<b>114</b>		
Transgender	18	1.9%	2.2%	5	0.9%	1.1%	2	1.8%	1.9%
Cisgender	896	96.3%	96.0%	524	97.8%	97.4%	110	96.5%	95.7%
Not sure	9	1.0%	0.9%	0	0.0%	0.0%	1	0.9%	1.2%
Prefer not to say	7	0.8%	0.9%	7	1.3%	1.5%	1	0.9%	1.2%

	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
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>970</b>			<b>545</b>			<b>114</b>		
African American or Black	53	5.5%	8.7%	23	4.2%	6.6%	2	1.8%	2.0%
Asian or Asian American	119	12.3%	11.9%	146	26.8%	23.9%	17	14.9%	16.1%
Latinx or Hispanic	28	2.9%	2.8%	28	5.1%	5.1%	4	3.5%	2.9%
Middle Eastern or Arab American	12	1.2%	1.3%	11	2.0%	1.9%	1	0.9%	0.8%
White or European American	721	74.3%	71.3%	315	57.8%	58.2%	80	70.2%	68.5%
Prefer not to answer	20	2.1%	2.1%	10	1.8%	2.2%	8	7.0%	7.7%
Another identity not listed	16	1.6%	1.8%	11	2.0%	1.9%	2	1.8%	2.0%
Biracial or Multiracial	1	0.1%	0.1%	1	0.2%	0.3%	0	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>930</b>			<b>537</b>			<b>114</b>		
LGBQ+	243	26.1%	25.5%	96	17.9%	17.5%	23	20.2%	18.4%
Heterosexual/straight	659	70.9%	71.4%	419	78.0%	78.7%	87	76.3%	78.3%
Prefer not to say	28	3.0%	3.2%	22	4.1%	3.8%	4	3.5%	3.3%
<b>Generational Status</b>	<b>970</b>			<b>552</b>			<b>114</b>		
First-generation student	756	77.9%	77.4%	485	87.9%	87.4%	105	92.1%	92.1%
Continuing-generation student	214	22.1%	22.6%	67	12.1%	12.6%	9	7.9%	7.9%
<b>Disability Status</b>	<b>933</b>			<b>539</b>			<b>114</b>		
Has a disability	92	9.9%	9.7%	43	8.0%	7.7%	9	7.9%	6.7%
Does not have a disability	802	86.0%	86.0%	481	89.2%	89.3%	101	88.6%	90.2%
Prefer not to say	39	4.2%	4.3%	15	2.8%	2.9%	4	3.5%	3.1%
<b>Education Route</b>	<b>940</b>			—			—		
Campus change	63	6.7%	7.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Transfer student	152	16.2%	16.6%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Continuing Ohio State student	725	77.1%	75.9%	—	—	—	—	—	—

	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
<b>Residence</b>	<b>954</b>			—			—		
On-campus	402	42.1%	42.0%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Off-campus	535	56.1%	56.3%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sorority or fraternity housing	17	1.8%	1.6%	—	—	—	—	—	—