



Involvement and Belonging

A Research Report from the
2023 Student Life Survey

Center for the Study of Student Life

April 2023

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 2023 Student Life Survey. In January 2023, 8,500 students on the Columbus campus were surveyed, out of which 1,282 responded, resulting in a response rate of 15.1%. A sample of 4,250 undergraduate students were surveyed; 13.7% responded ($n = 582$). A sample of 4,250 graduate and professional students were surveyed; 16.5% responded ($n = 700$). Data were weighted to be representative of the Ohio State Columbus campus population.

INVOLVEMENT

- **78.4%** of all Ohio State students report being involved with at least one campus activity, including **78.8%** of undergraduate students, **76.1%** of graduate students and **79.7%** of professional students.

| Top campus activities among undergraduate students | Top campus activities among graduate students | Top campus activities among professional students |
|--|---|---|
| Student organizations (50.3%) | Research with a faculty member (35.8%) | Student organizations (66.2%) |
| Working at an on-campus job (28.9%) | Working at an on-campus job (25.5%) | An ongoing service/volunteer program (20.2%) |
| A one-day service event (20.6%) | Student organizations (23.3%) | A one-day service event (20.0%) |
| An ongoing service/volunteer program (16.8%) | A capstone project or experience (15.5%) | Research with a faculty member (17.5%) |

SENSE OF BELONGING: UNDERGRADUATES

- Undergraduate students who were involved with on-campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.00)** compared to undergraduate students who were not involved with on-campus activities (**2.77**).
- Compared to undergraduate students who were not involved, undergraduate students who were involved with campus activities were:
 - **1.6** times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students.
 - **1.9** times more likely to feel they were a part of the Ohio State community.
 - **2.1** times more likely to have had experiences that helped them set professional goals.
 - **1.3** 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 (3.02)** compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved with campus activities (**2.79**).
- Compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved, graduate and professional students who were involved with campus activities were:
 - **2.4** 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 2023 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 8,500 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester (January 2023). This sample comprised 4,250 undergraduate students and 4,250 graduate and professional students, all on the Columbus campus. A total of 1,282 students responded to the survey, resulting in an overall response rate of 15.1%. The response rate was 13.7% among undergraduate students and 16.5% 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 582 undergraduate students, 577 graduate students, and 123 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.

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, 60.9% of the 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 A.

FINDINGS

CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

The percentage of involved students was calculated by examining participation across thirteen different types of campus activities and community service. Among all respondents, 78.4% report being involved in at least one of thirteen types of involvement. More specifically, 78.8% of undergraduate students, 76.1% of graduate students and 79.7% 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 (50.3%) and working at an on-campus job (28.9%). Graduate students were most likely to be involved in research with a faculty member (35.8%) and working at an on-campus job (25.5%). Professional students



were most likely to be involved in student organizations (66.2%) and ongoing service or volunteer programs (20.2%).

Table 1: Campus Involvement by Educational Level

| | Undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 576) | Graduate students (<i>n</i> = 567) | Professional students (<i>n</i> = 122) |
|---|---|--|--|
| A social fraternity or sorority | 9.9% | 0.5% | 6.1% |
| A business fraternity or sorority | 2.6% | 0.2% | 1.5% |
| Intramural sports | 10.8% | 2.2% | 8.6% |
| Sports clubs | 9.8% | 2.3% | 0.0% |
| Student organizations (e.g., Psychology Club, Running Club, Black Student Association) | 50.3% | 23.3% | 66.2% |
| Research with a faculty member | 12.7% | 35.8% | 17.5% |
| Working at an on-campus job | 28.9% | 25.5% | 9.5% |
| A learning community in the Residence Halls (e.g., Engineering House, Stadium Scholarship Program, Morrill Scholars Program, Global Business) | 7.9% | 0.5% | 0.0% |
| A capstone project or experience (e.g., senior thesis, portfolio, doctoral dissertation) | 5.7% | 15.5% | 3.5% |

Table 2: Community Service Involvement by Educational Level

| | Undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 567) | Graduate students (<i>n</i> = 568) | Professional students (<i>n</i> = 116) |
|---|---|--|--|
| An academic course with a service-learning component | 8.4% | 11.7% | 7.1% |
| A one-day service event | 20.6% | 12.6% | 20.0% |
| Multi-day service event (e.g., Buck-I-SERV, a church or club-based service trip) | 4.3% | 4.2% | 2.6% |
| An ongoing service/volunteer program (e.g., volunteered at a community organization once a month or more) | 16.8% | 10.7% | 20.2% |

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 thirteen activities illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

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, even when controlling for demographic and academic factors.

Table 3: Undergraduate Involvement and Belonging

| % Agree or Strongly Agree | Involved | Not Involved | χ^2 | Odds Ratio ^a |
|---|----------|--------------|----------|-------------------------|
| I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State | 84.0% | 76.5% | 4.0 | 1.9** |
| I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community | 91.0% | 85.0% | 5.8 | 1.9** |
| I have relationships with other Ohio State students | 94.1% | 83.1% | 18.6*** | 1.6* |
| I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors) | 63.3% | 45.4% | 12.3** | 2.1** |
| I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees) | 61.8% | 48.7% | 6.5* | 1.5 |
| I participate in Ohio State traditions | 79.9% | 65.4% | 10.9** | 1.8* |
| My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals. | 92.1% | 81.7% | 11.3** | 2.1** |
| I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State. | 76.0% | 64.0% | 7.3* | 1.7* |
| During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me. | 85.5% | 82.2 | 1.8 | 1.6* |
| Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs. | 92.3% | 86.8% | 6.6 | 1.4 |
| Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., support offices, student activities). | 87.3% | 84.8% | 3.0 | 1.8* |
| I would recommend Ohio State to other students. | 94.2% | 90.7% | 10.2** | 1.4 |
| Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University. | 92.0% | 90.9% | 1.9 | 1.3 |

^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.

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 strong, particularly for the items related to relationships with other Ohio State students and faculty.

Table 4: Graduate/Professional Student Involvement and Belonging

| % Agree or Strongly Agree | Involved | Not Involved | χ^2 | Odds Ratio ^a |
|---|----------|--------------|----------|-------------------------|
| I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State | 78.9% | 77.2% | 8.6* | 1.9** |
| I feel that I am a member of the Ohio State community | 81.3% | 79.9% | 8.7* | 2.0** |
| I have relationships with other Ohio State students | 88.4% | 83.8% | 18.9*** | 2.4*** |
| I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors) | 85.5% | 78.9% | 22.7*** | 2.4*** |
| I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees) | 65.9% | 61.7% | 6.1 | 1.7** |
| I participate in Ohio State traditions. | 57.5% | 58.3% | 7.0* | 1.8** |
| My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals. | 93.8% | 86.8% | 10.8** | 1.6* |
| I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State. | 77.3% | 66.5% | 7.5* | 2.0*** |
| During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me. | 83.4% | 79.6% | 1.8 | 1.6** |
| Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs. | 89.2% | 88.5% | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., support offices, student activities). | 84.1% | 82.4% | 0.7 | 1.4 |
| I would recommend Ohio State to other students. | 91.1% | 92.1% | 0.3 | 1.2 |
| Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University. | 88.3% | 89.3% | 7.2* | 1.2 |

^a 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 ($\alpha = 0.78$) 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

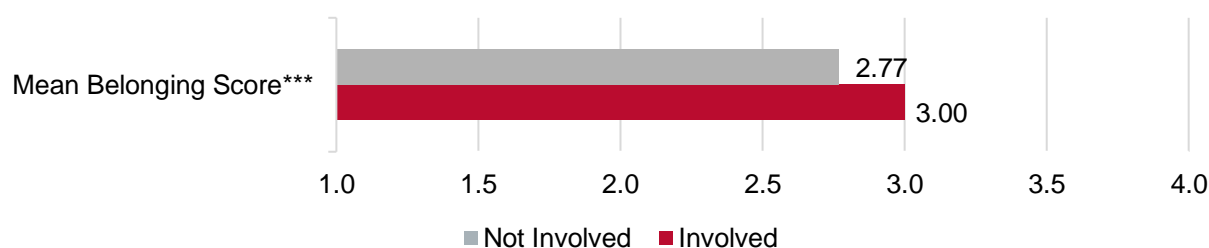
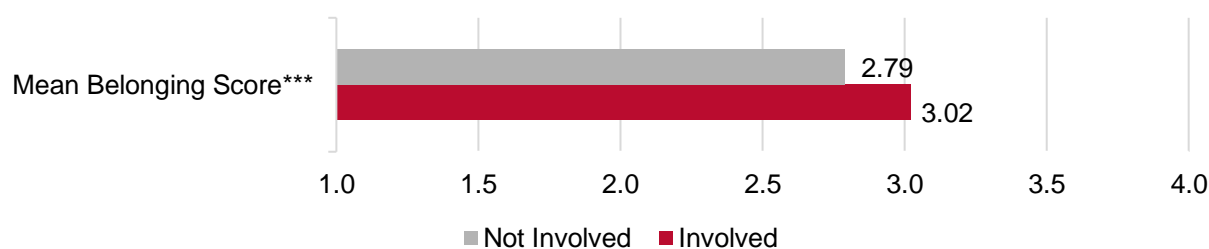
I have relationships with other Ohio State students

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 thirteen 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. Over one third of graduate students were involved with research with a faculty member, and roughly 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. For these students, involvement was positively related to having relationships with other Ohio State students, faculty, and staff. Graduate and professional students who were involved were also likely to feel that they are members of the Ohio State community, participate in Ohio State traditions, and feel that have developed as leaders during their time at Ohio State.

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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- 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: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Note: Participant demographics below represent all respondents in the 2023 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 | 582 | | | 577 | | | 123 | | |
| Academic Level | 582 | | | — | | | — | | |
| First-year undergraduate | 172 | 29.6% | 29.5% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Second-year undergraduate | 124 | 21.3% | 21.5% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Third-year undergraduate | 157 | 27.0% | 26.8% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Fourth-year undergraduate | 100 | 17.2% | 17.5% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Fifth-year or beyond undergraduate | 29 | 5.0% | 4.7% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Gender Identity | 582 | | | 577 | | | 123 | | |
| Man | 205 | 35.2% | 43.3% | 206 | 35.7% | 42.3% | 36 | 29.3% | 37.8% |
| Non-binary | 5 | 0.9% | 0.8% | 7 | 1.2% | 1.3% | 1 | 0.8% | 1.1% |
| Woman | 339 | 58.3% | 50.2% | 330 | 57.2% | 50.1% | 78 | 63.4% | 54.4% |
| Another identity not listed | 9 | 1.6% | 1.6% | 6 | 1.0% | 1.0% | 2 | 1.6% | 1.4% |
| Multiple identities selected | 10 | 1.7% | 1.5% | 14 | 2.4% | 2.7% | 3 | 2.4% | 2.5% |
| Prefer not to answer | 14 | 2.4% | 2.5% | 14 | 2.4% | 2.6% | 3 | 2.4% | 2.7% |
| Transgender Identity | 577 | | | 570 | | | 123 | | |
| Transgender | 13 | 2.3% | 1.8% | 17 | 3.0% | 2.8% | 1 | 0.8% | 1.1% |
| Cisgender | 549 | 95.2% | 95.5% | 537 | 94.2% | 94.2% | 115 | 93.5% | 93.3% |
| Prefer not to answer | 15 | 2.6% | 2.6% | 16 | 2.8% | 3.0% | 7 | 5.7% | 5.6% |

| | 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 | 581 | | | 576 | | | 123 | | |
| Black and/or African American | 25 | 4.3% | 6.4% | 38 | 6.6% | 9.4% | 4 | 3.3% | 5.0% |
| Asian/Asian American, Pacific Islander, Desi American, and/or Native Hawai'ian | 90 | 15.5% | 13.0% | 156 | 27.1% | 21.7% | 22 | 17.9% | 15.9% |
| Latine and/or Hispanic | 17 | 2.9% | 3.0% | 27 | 4.7% | 4.1% | 4 | 3.3% | 3.4% |
| Middle Eastern and/or North African (MENA) | 9 | 1.6% | 1.6% | 15 | 2.6% | 2.4% | 4 | 3.3% | 4.1% |
| White and/or European American | 371 | 63.9% | 63.9% | 278 | 48.3% | 51.5% | 71 | 57.7% | 58.0% |
| Multiracial and/or Biracial | 53 | 9.1% | 9.1% | 37 | 6.4% | 6.1% | 11 | 8.9% | 7.2% |
| Another identity not listed | 3 | 0.5% | 0.5% | 1 | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Prefer not to answer | 13 | 2.2% | 2.5% | 24 | 4.2% | 4.6% | 7 | 5.7% | 6.5% |
| Sexual Orientation | 580 | | | 572 | | | 123 | | |
| LGBQ+ | 131 | 22.6% | 21.1% | 145 | 25.4% | 25.0% | 24 | 19.5% | 19.8% |
| Heterosexual/straight | 426 | 73.5% | 75.0% | 397 | 69.4% | 69.4% | 94 | 76.4% | 75.9% |
| Prefer not to answer | 23 | 4.0% | 3.9% | 30 | 5.2% | 5.6% | 5 | 4.1% | 4.3% |
| Generational Status | 582 | | | 577 | | | 123 | | |
| First-generation student | 120 | 20.6% | 20.8% | 114 | 19.8% | 19.6% | 12 | 9.8% | 10.1% |
| Continuing-generation student | 462 | 79.4% | 79.2% | 463 | 80.2% | 80.4% | 111 | 90.2% | 89.9% |
| Disability | 578 | | | 572 | | | 123 | | |
| Has a disability | 66 | 11.4% | 11.3% | 56 | 9.8% | 10.7% | 16 | 13.0% | 13.0% |
| Does not have a disability | 488 | 84.4% | 84.2% | 497 | 86.9% | 85.8% | 104 | 84.6% | 84.3% |
| Prefer not to answer | 24 | 4.2% | 4.5% | 19 | 3.3% | 3.5% | 3 | 2.4% | 2.7% |

| | 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 | 581 | | | — | | | — | | |
| Campus change | 40 | 6.9% | 7.2% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Transfer student | 95 | 16.4% | 15.9% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Continuing Ohio State student | 446 | 76.8% | 76.9% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Residence | 582 | | | 576 | | | 123 | | |
| On-campus | 254 | 43.6% | 43.7% | 32 | 5.6% | 5.1% | 2 | 1.6% | 1.8% |
| Off-campus | 322 | 55.3% | 55.1% | 543 | 94.3% | 94.7% | 121 | 98.4% | 98.2% |
| Sorority or fraternity housing | 6 | 1.0% | 1.2% | 1 | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |