



Involvement Trends by Class Year and Academic Career

A Research Report from the
2020 Student Life Survey

Center for the Study of Student Life

April 2020



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

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, as well as to improve institutional practices and to address current issues affecting students at The Ohio State University. This report examines trends in campus involvement, employment and sense of belonging. All participants in this report were enrolled at the Columbus campus at the beginning of Spring semester 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **90.0%** of graduate and professional students reported having relationships with faculty members compared to **63.9%** of undergraduates.
- **68.0%** of first-year undergraduate students agreed that they developed as leaders since arriving at Ohio State – this percentage increased to **75.3%** among second-years, **79.1%** among third-years and reached a high of **81.9%** for fourth-year undergraduates.
- Compared to their first-year peers, second-year undergraduates are **1.7** times more likely to be a member of a student organization, **3.0** times more likely to work an on-campus job, **5.9** times more likely to participate in research with a faculty member and **1.8** times more likely to play intramural sports.
- Undergraduates in their fifth-year and beyond reported lower sense of belonging, fewer positive student outcomes and less satisfaction with their Ohio State experience compared to other class years.

METHODS

The 2020 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 8,200 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester. This sample comprised 4,000 undergraduate students on the Columbus campus, 1,000 graduate and professional students and 3,200 undergraduate students attending Ohio State regional campuses. A total of 1,329 students responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 16.2%. The response rate was 16.1% among undergraduate students and 16.7% among graduate and professional students. The sample for this report includes all 751 students from the Columbus campus who completed the survey (a response rate of 15.0%). The table below presents a breakdown of respondents by academic career and class year. Academic career groups students according to their current degree plan: either undergraduate or graduate/professional. Undergraduate class year groups students according to their year in school: first-, second-, third-, fourth- or fifth-year+. Note: undergraduate class year is self-reported and reflects students' year in school, not their rank according to credit hours.

Academic Career	<i>n</i>	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Undergraduate	581	77.4	76.1
Graduate/Professional	170	22.6	23.9
Undergraduate Class Year			
First-Year	165	28.4	28.5
Second-Year	134	23.1	23.3
Third-Year	120	20.7	20.4
Fourth-Year	129	22.2	21.5
Fifth-Year+	33	5.7	6.3

INCENTIVES

In addition to examining students' academic and co-curricular experiences, this year the Student Life Survey looked at the effect of incentives on students' participation in web surveys. All 8,200 students selected for the sample were randomly assigned to one of four incentive conditions (groups A, B, C and D). Each group comprised 2,050 students. When students were invited to participate in the survey, they were offered an incentive that corresponded to their assigned group. Students in group A had a chance to win one Apple Watch 5; students in group B had a chance to win one of twelve \$25 BuckID cash deposits; students in group C had a chance to win one of sixty \$5 BuckID cash deposits; and students in group D were not offered an incentive to complete the survey. Students were not made aware of these different incentive conditions.

WEIGHTING PROCEDURE

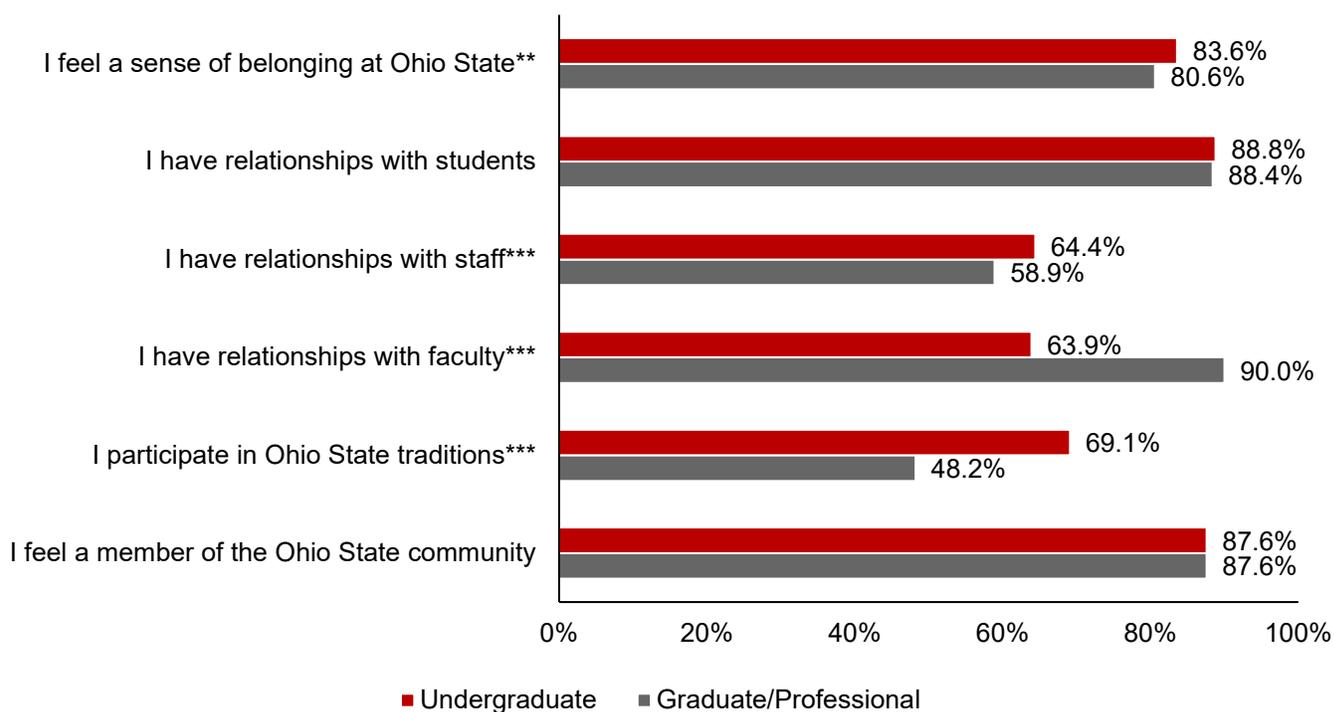
Responses were weighted to address differences between the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents compared to those invited to the survey and the general student population at Ohio State. Weights also accounted for the oversampling of students on the regional campuses. A base weight of 1 was adjusted to reflect non-response. A raking procedure adjusted the base weight to the demographic data available on the sampling frame using gender, race/ethnicity, campus and incentive condition. Weights were adjusted so the survey data are representative of the student population at Ohio State, based on demographic data from the Student Information System. For example, 63.4% of the survey respondents in the Student Life Survey were female, but 51.0% of the student population is female. The survey weight adjusts for the over-representation of females in the data to make responses more reflective of the student population, thus making the data more generalizable to Ohio State students. Weighted and unweighted demographic data for the survey respondents is available in Appendix A.

FINDINGS

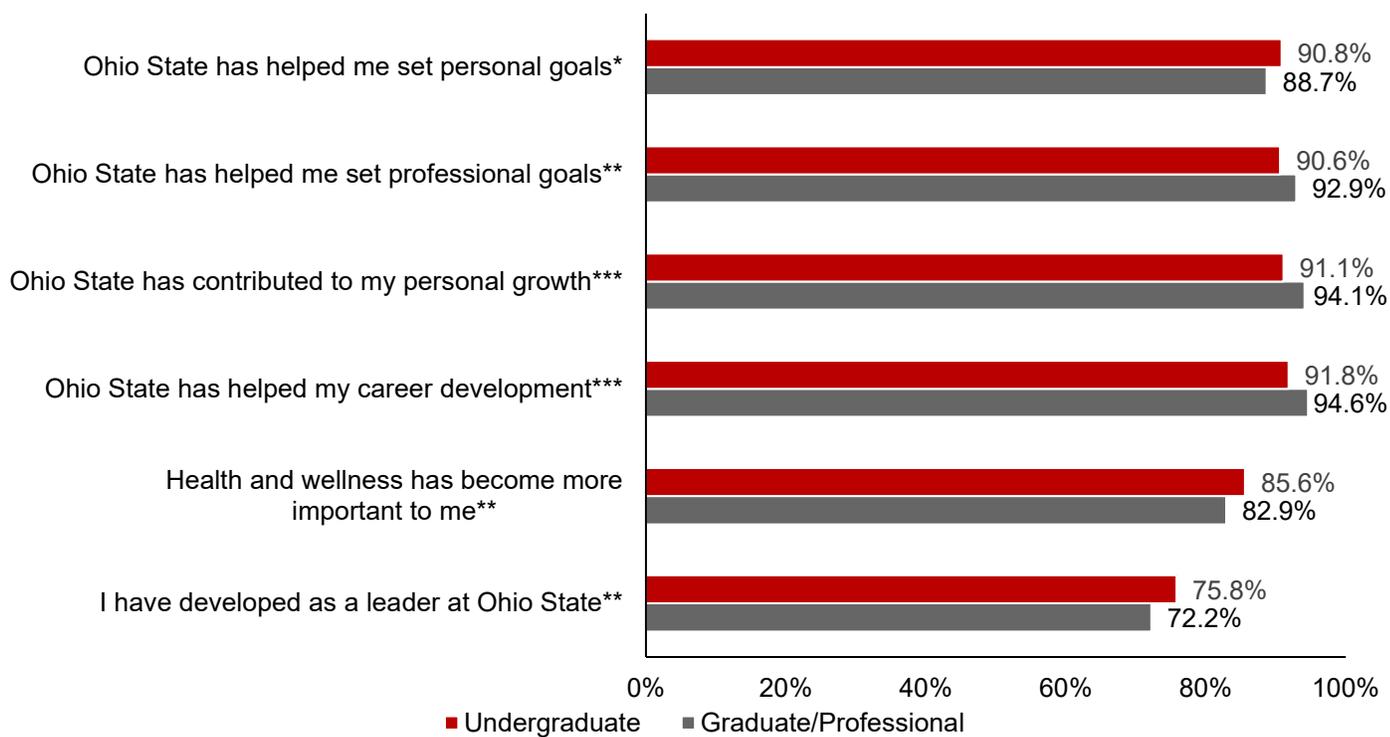
COMPARING UNDERGRADUATES TO GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Compared to undergraduates, graduate and professional students reported statistically significant differences regarding their sense of belonging on campus, student outcomes and overall satisfaction with Ohio State. The tables below reflect the percentage of students who either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with each statement. Chi-square tests showed that undergraduates were more likely to feel a sense of belonging on campus, develop relationships with university staff and participate in campus traditions. Conversely, 90.0% of graduate and professional students reported that they have relationships with faculty compared to only 63.9% of undergraduates. Graduate and professional students were more likely to agree that Ohio State helped them set professional goals, helped with their personal development and supported their career development. Undergraduates were more likely to report gains to their leadership development and concern for their health and wellness. Finally, graduate and professional students consistently expressed higher levels of satisfaction with their Ohio State experience, specifically noting that academic programs and campus services met their needs. There was no significant difference in terms of whether or not students would recommend Ohio State to others by academic career.

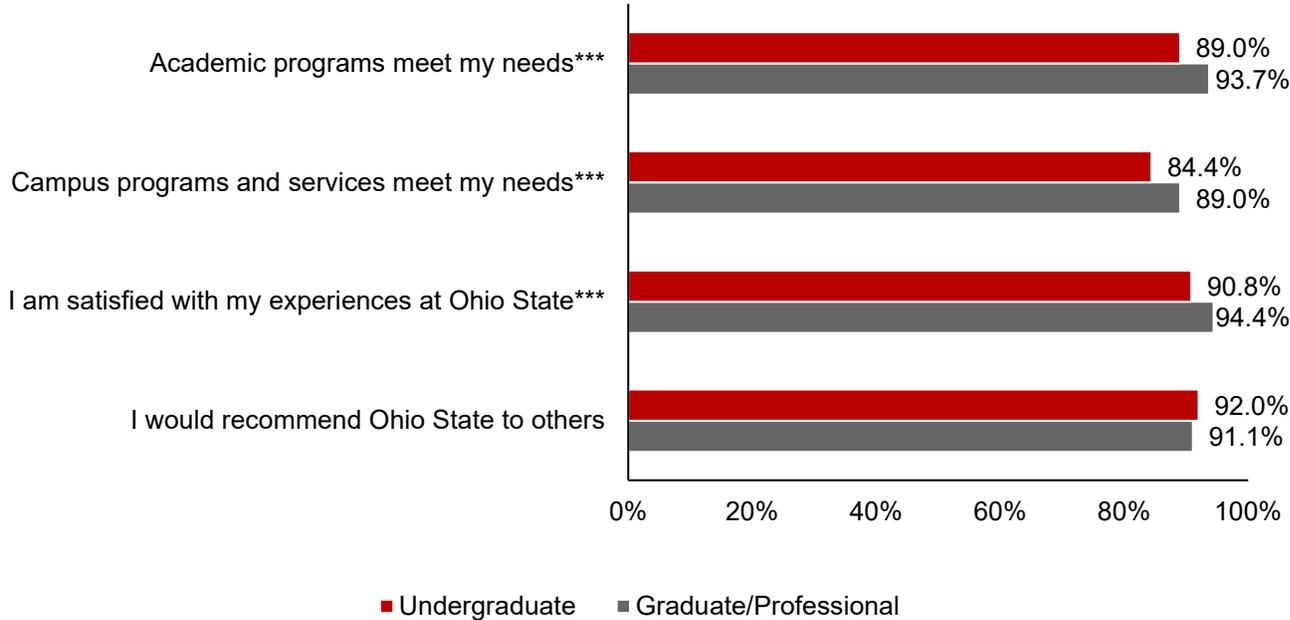
Sense of Belonging by Academic Career



Student Outcomes by Academic Career



Satisfaction by Academic Career



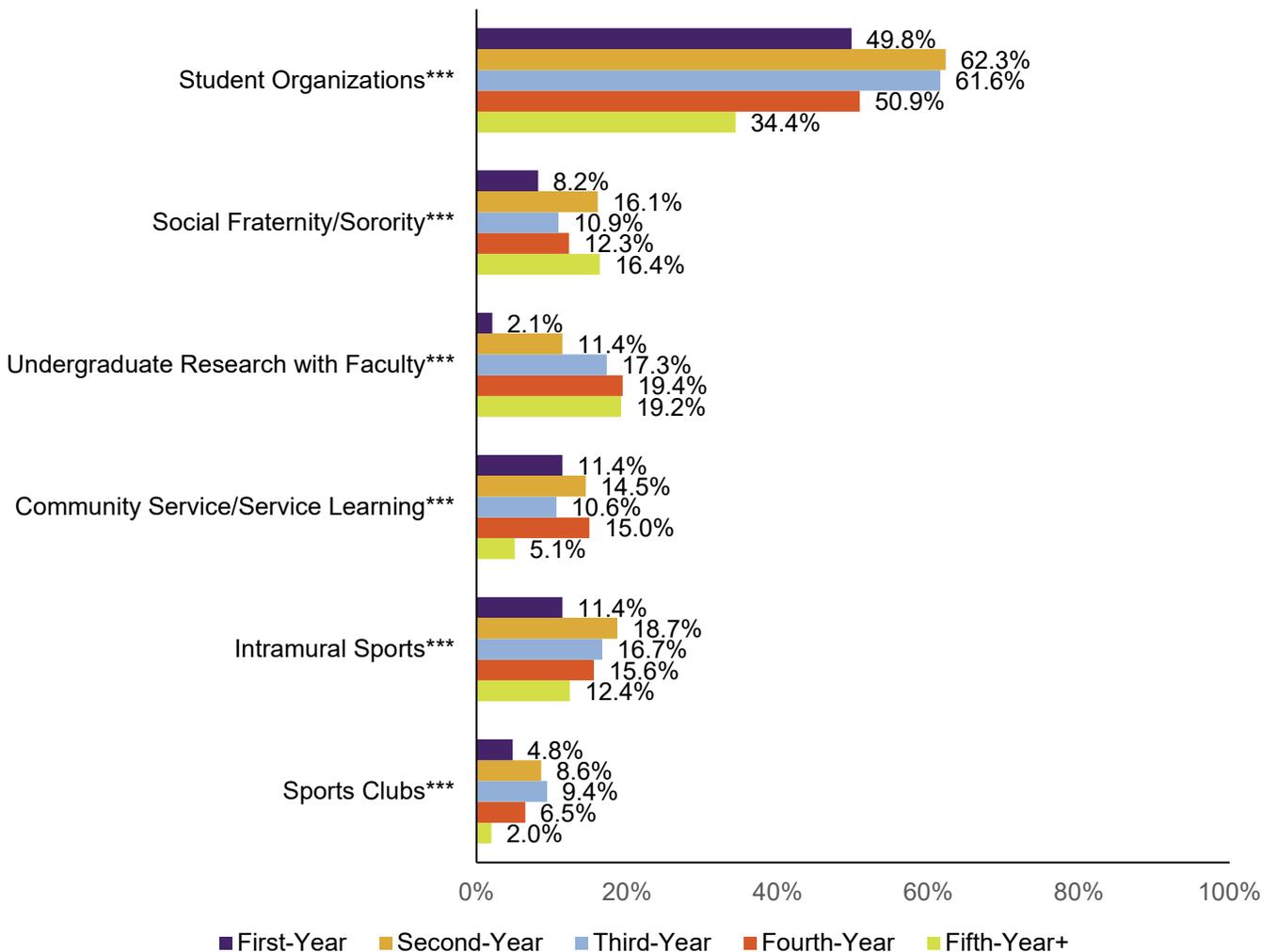
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

COMPARING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BY CLASS YEAR

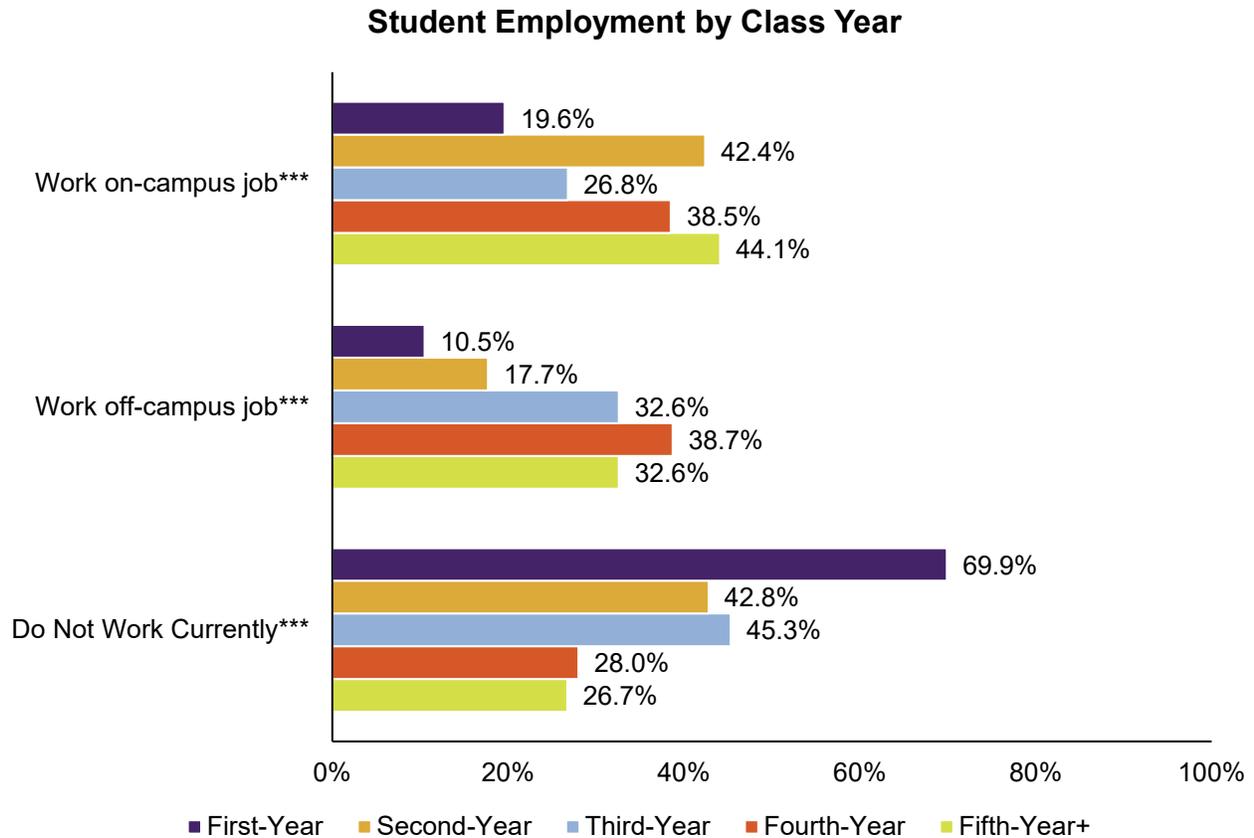
Below are undergraduate students' responses, grouped by class year. Beginning with student involvement, chi-square tests were conducted to investigate significant differences between classes in terms of membership in student organizations, involvement in Greek Life, undergraduate research activity, community service, participation in intramural sports and participation in club sports. Trends varied by activity, but first-year students were generally less involved in campus activities than their peers. This gap was most pronounced in terms of research activity with faculty. When strictly comparing the involvement of first-year and second-year students, second years were:

- 1.7 times more likely to join a student organization,
- 2.2 times more likely to join a social fraternity or sorority,
- 5.9 times more likely to conduct undergraduate research with faculty,
- 1.3 times more likely to participate in community service or service-learning,
- 1.8 times more likely to play intramural sports and
- 1.9 times more likely to play club sports.

Student Involvement by Undergraduate Class Year



Student employment constitutes a unique form of involvement. When this survey was administered, nearly 70% of first-year students were not working, 19.6% worked on-campus and 10.5% worked off-campus. Students across all other class years were more likely to hold either an on-campus or off-campus job. Odds ratios in the table below reflect the likelihood of student employment compared to the first-year class.

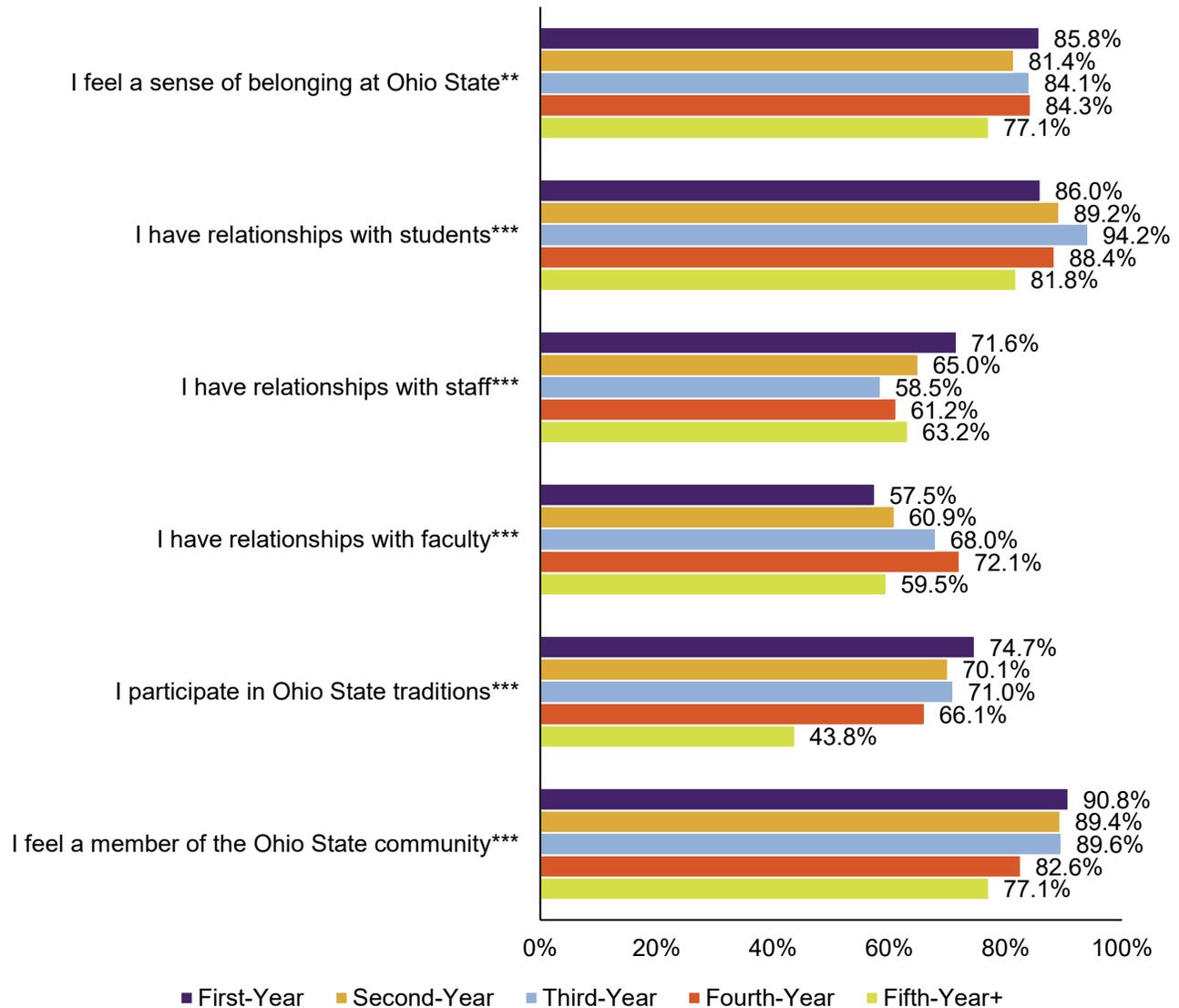


	Employed On-Campus		Employed Off-Campus	
	% (n)	Odds Ratio	% (n)	Odds Ratio
First-Years	19.6% (n = 30)	---	10.5% (n = 16)	---
Second-Years	42.4% (n = 52)	3.0 ***	17.7% (n = 20)	1.8 ***
Third-Years	26.8% (n = 32)	1.5 ***	32.6% (n = 41)	4.1 ***
Fourth-Years	38.5% (n = 49)	2.6 ***	38.7% (n = 50)	5.4 ***
Fifth-Years+	44.1% (n = 14)	3.2 ***	32.6% (n = 10)	4.1 ***

Sense of Belonging

Students' sense of belonging was assessed through six statements, which were measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The figure below reflects the percentage of students who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with each statement. An initial chi-squared test revealed significant differences between class years across all six statements.

Sense of Belonging by Class Year



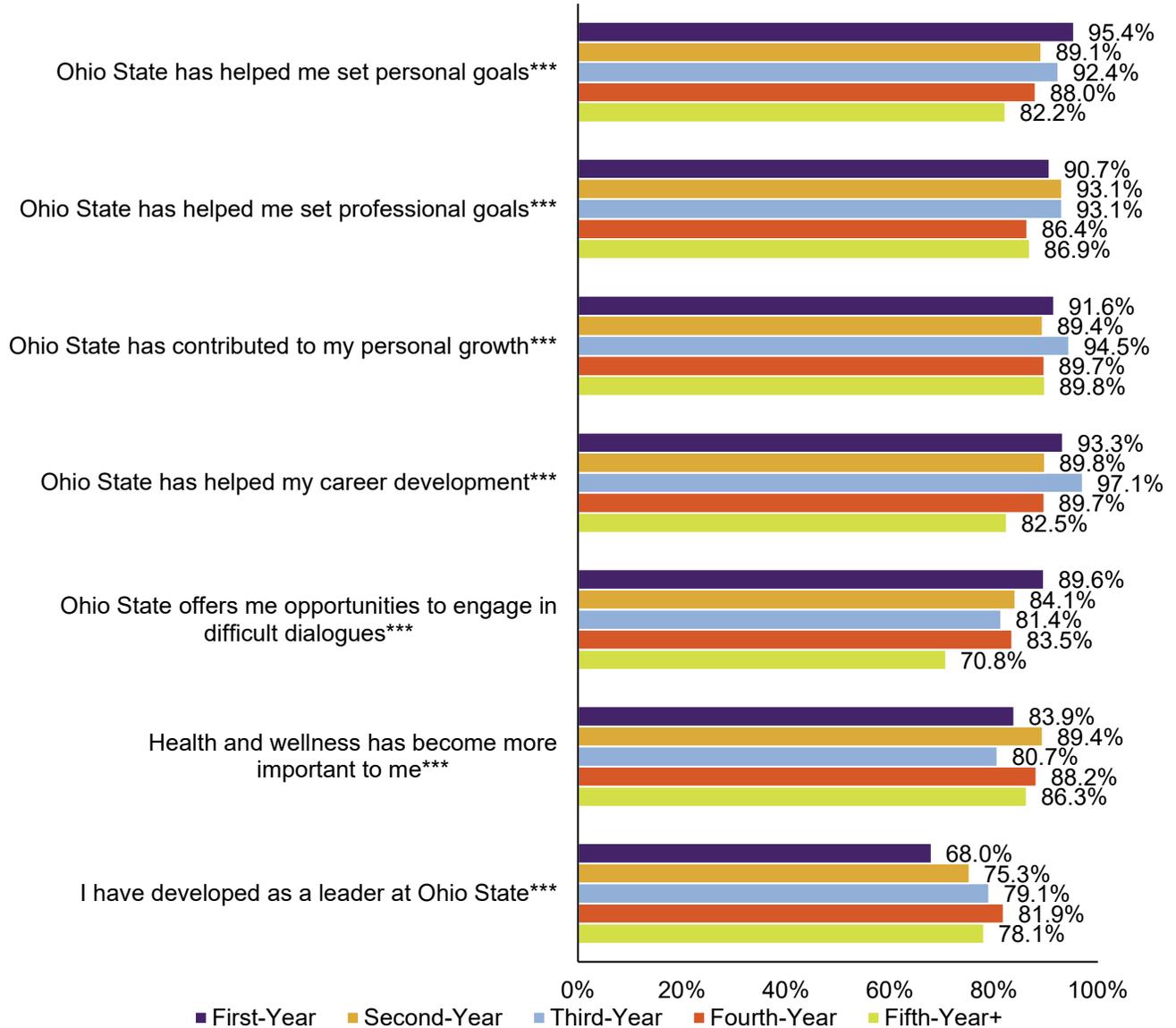
To further examine differences between class years, a sense of belonging score was calculated for students who answered at least four out of the six statements above. For each of the six statements on the previous page, students received a score of 0 if they 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with a statement and a score of 1 if they 'agreed' 'strongly agreed' with a statement. Scores for the six statements were totaled to calculate a mean sense of belonging score between 0 and 6 for each student, which were then added together to produce a mean score for each group. A one-way ANOVA revealed that differences in students' sense of belonging were largely due to the fact that fifth-year+ students' sense of belonging was significantly lower compared to all other undergraduate students.

Direct Comparisons in Sense of Belonging between Undergraduate Class Years ($n = 509$)

Class Year	Mean Belonging Score	Compared with...	Mean Belonging Score of Comparison Group	Significance
First-Year	4.66	Second-Year	4.55	
		Third-Year	4.64	
		Fourth-Year	4.53	*
		Fifth-Year+	4.01	***
Second-Year	4.55	First-Year	4.66	
		Third-Year	4.64	
		Fourth-Year	4.53	
		Fifth-Year+	4.01	***
Third-Year	4.64	First-Year	4.66	
		Second-Year	4.55	
		Fourth-Year	4.53	
		Fifth-Year+	4.01	***
Fourth-Year	4.53	First-Year	4.66	*
		Second-Year	4.55	
		Third-Year	4.64	
		Fifth-Year+	4.01	***
Fifth-Year+	4.01	First-Year	4.66	***
		Second-Year	4.55	***
		Third-Year	4.64	***
		Fourth-Year	4.53	***

This method was also applied to the student outcomes and the student satisfaction variables. Across the student outcome statements, differences were again largely driven by fifth-year+ students' responses. One notable exception was with respect to leadership development. Only 68.0% of first-year students agreed that they had developed as leaders since arriving at Ohio State. This percentage increased to 75.3% among second-year students, to 79.1% among third-year students and a high of 81.9% among fourth-year students before dropping slightly to 78.1% among students in their fifth-year and beyond.

Student Outcomes by Class Year

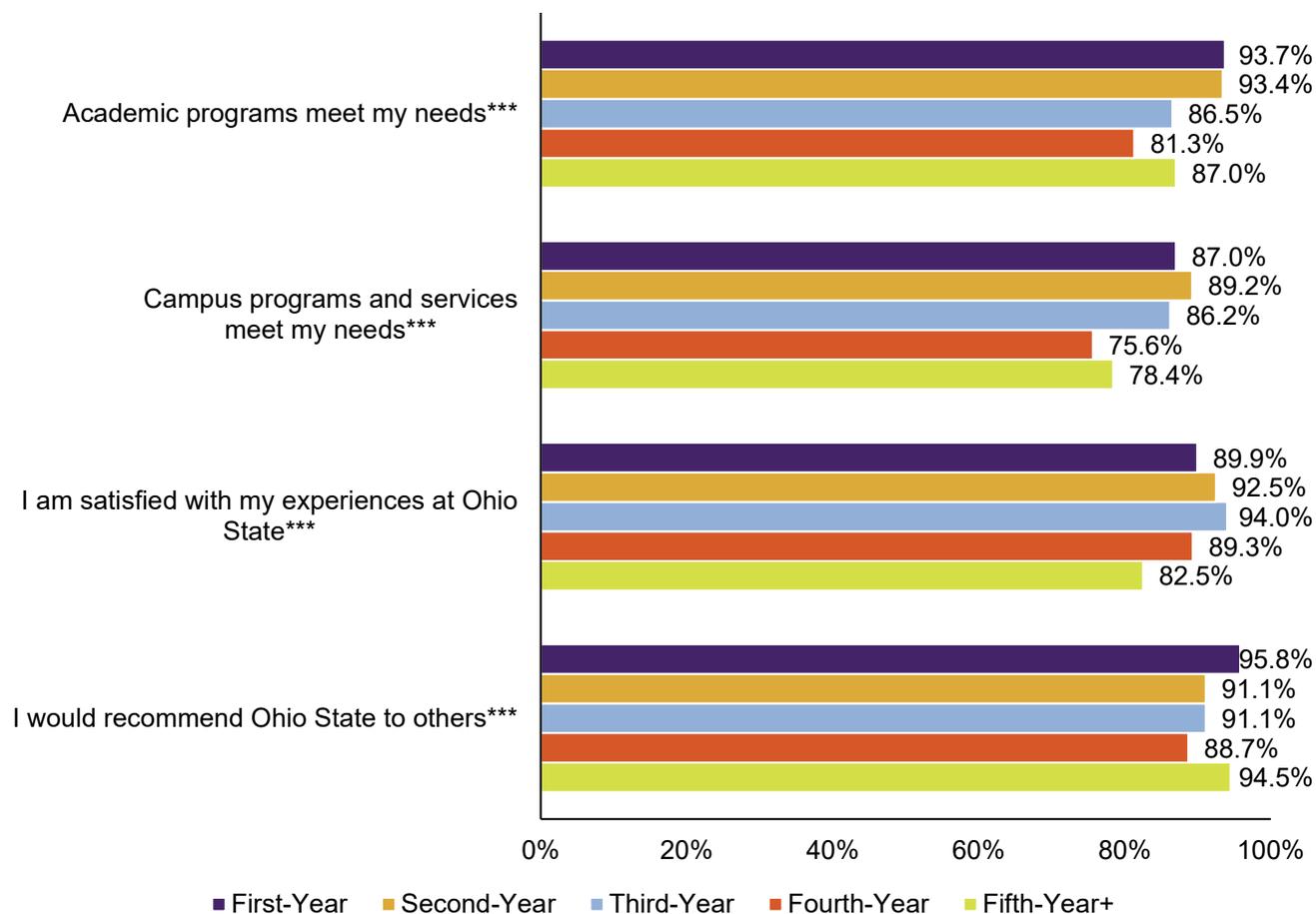


Direct Comparisons in Student Outcomes between Undergraduate Class Years ($n = 509$)

Class Year	Mean Outcome Score	Compared with...	Mean Outcome Score of Comparison Group	Significance
First-Year	6.11	Second-Year	6.09	
		Third-Year	6.17	
		Fourth-Year	6.05	
		Fifth-Year+	5.72	***
Second-Year	6.09	First-Year	6.11	
		Third-Year	6.17	
		Fourth-Year	6.05	
		Fifth-Year+	5.72	***
Third-Year	6.17	First-Year	6.11	
		Second-Year	6.09	
		Fourth-Year	6.05	
		Fifth-Year+	5.72	***
Fourth-Year	6.05	First-Year	6.11	
		Second-Year	6.09	
		Third-Year	6.17	
		Fifth-Year+	5.72	**
Fifth-Year+	5.72	First-Year	6.11	***
		Second-Year	6.09	***
		Third-Year	6.17	***
		Fourth-Year	6.05	**

Overall, students had a positive view of their Ohio State experience. More than 90% of first- and second-year students agreed that academic programs met their needs, and 94.0% of third-year students were satisfied with Ohio State, which is the highest proportion among all classes. However, when comparing mean satisfaction scores, students in their fourth-year, fifth-year and beyond were significantly less satisfied than students at the beginning of their undergraduate career. Fourth-year students in particular were least likely to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that academic and campus programs and services met their needs. They were also least likely to recommend Ohio State to others.

Satisfaction by Class Year



Direct Comparisons in Student Satisfaction between Undergraduate Class Years ($n = 499$)

Class Year	Mean Satisfaction Score	Compared with...	Mean Satisfaction Score of Comparison Group	Significance
First-Year	3.66	Second-Year	3.66	
		Third-Year	3.58	*
		Fourth-Year	3.34	***
		Fifth-Year+	3.39	***
Second-Year	3.66	First-Year	3.66	
		Third-Year	3.58	
		Fourth-Year	3.34	***
		Fifth-Year+	3.39	***
Third-Year	3.58	First-Year	3.66	*
		Second-Year	3.66	
		Fourth-Year	3.34	***
		Fifth-Year+	3.39	**
Fourth-Year	3.34	First-Year	3.66	***
		Second-Year	3.66	***
		Third-Year	3.58	***
		Fifth-Year+	3.39	
Fifth-Year+	3.39	First-Year	3.66	***
		Second-Year	3.66	***
		Third-Year	3.58	**
		Fourth-Year	3.34	

CONCLUSION

In summary, this report illustrated significant differences among students in terms of their academic career and undergraduate class year. These findings provide insight into how undergraduate, graduate and professional students describe their Ohio State experience and how undergraduate students' perceptions change as they progress toward the completion of their degrees. Undergraduate students in their fifth-year and beyond emerged as a noteworthy group. These students reported especially low scores with respect to their sense of belonging, student outcomes and overall satisfaction with Ohio State. However, these findings should be interpreted with some caution because fifth-year+ students ($n = 33$) made up such a small proportion of the overall sample. There are also a range of explanations for why students take at least five years to complete their degree, which may contribute to students' varying perceptions of their Ohio State experience. Future research can provide more insight into fifth-year+ students' pathways towards degree completion, and the relationships between academic/non-academic experiences with student outcomes.

APPENDIX A: COLUMBUS CAMPUS DEMOGRAPHICS

	<i>n</i>	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Percent
Total	752		
Sex			
Female	458	61.0%	50.6%
Male	284	37.8%	48.3%
Non-Binary	7	0.9%	0.9%
Unknown	2	0.3%	0.2%
Race/Ethnicity			
African American/Black	40	5.4%	6.3%
Asian	109	14.6%	16.5%
Hispanic/Latinx	25	3.4%	4.2%
Middle Eastern/Arab American	10	1.3%	1.2%
Native American /Alaska Native	2	0.3%	0.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0.0%
White	518	69.4%	65.4%
Two or more races	39	5.2%	5.5%
Prefer not to answer	1	0.1%	0.3%
Other/Unknown	2	0.3%	0.5%
Academic Career			
Undergraduate	581	77.4%	76.1%
Graduate/Professional	170	22.6%	23.9%

Note. Data are from the Student Information System. Language/terms used here reflect those used in the Student Information System.