



# Involvement and Belonging

A Research Report from the 2021  
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 sense of belonging on campus of undergraduate, graduate and professional students at The Ohio State University. Data for this report are from the 2021 Student Life Survey. In January 2021, 4,410 undergraduate students on the Columbus campus were surveyed; 19.9% responded ( $n = 878$ ). 1,090 graduate and professional students were surveyed; 21.7% responded ( $n = 237$ ). Data were weighted to be representative of the Ohio State Columbus campus population.

### Involvement

- 73% of all Ohio State students report being involved with at least one campus activity, including 75% of undergraduate students and 65% of graduate and professional students.

Top campus activities among undergraduate students	Top campus activities among graduate and professional students
Student organizations (54%)	Research with a faculty member (44%)
Working at an on-campus job (24%)	Student organizations (29%)
A social fraternity or sorority (10%)	Working at an on-campus job (11%)
Research with a faculty member (10%)	A capstone project or experience (6%)

### Sense of Belonging: Undergraduates

- Undergraduate students who were involved with campus activities had **significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.04)** compared to undergraduate students who were not involved with on-campus activities (**2.68**).
- Compared to undergraduate students who were not involved, undergraduate students who were involved with campus activities were:
  - 4.6 times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State students.
  - 2.9 times more likely to be satisfied with their experiences at Ohio State.
  - 2.7 times more likely to feel they were a part of the Ohio State community.
  - 2.7 times more likely to have relationships with Ohio State staff.

### Sense of Belonging: Graduate and Professional Students

- Graduate and professional students who were involved with campus activities **did not have significantly higher sense of belonging scores on average (3.04)** compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved with campus activities (**2.91**).
- Compared to graduate and professional students who were not involved, graduate and professional students who were involved with campus activities were:
  - 4.2 times more likely to have relationships with other Ohio State faculty.
  - 2.7 times more likely to feel that Ohio State had helped them progress in their career development.

## INTRODUCTION

This report explores the involvement, engagement and sense of belonging on campus 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 2021 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 5,500 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester (January 2021). This sample comprised 4,410 undergraduate students and 1,090 graduate and professional students, all on the Columbus campus. A total of 1,115 students responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 20.3%. The response rate was 19.9% among undergraduate students and 21.7% among graduate and professional students. See the Appendix for a summary of respondents' demographic and academic characteristics. Students who skipped any questions on the items used for this report were removed from analyses, resulting in an unweighted sample size of 1,042 students for this report with 825 undergraduate students and 217 graduate or 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 those invited to the survey and the general student population at Ohio State. Weights were adjusted so the survey data are representative of the student population at Ohio State, based on demographic data from the survey sample. For example, 61.5% of the survey respondents in the Student Life Survey were female, but 50.8% of the total sample 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 and race/ethnicity. Weighted and unweighted demographic data for survey respondents is available in the Appendix.

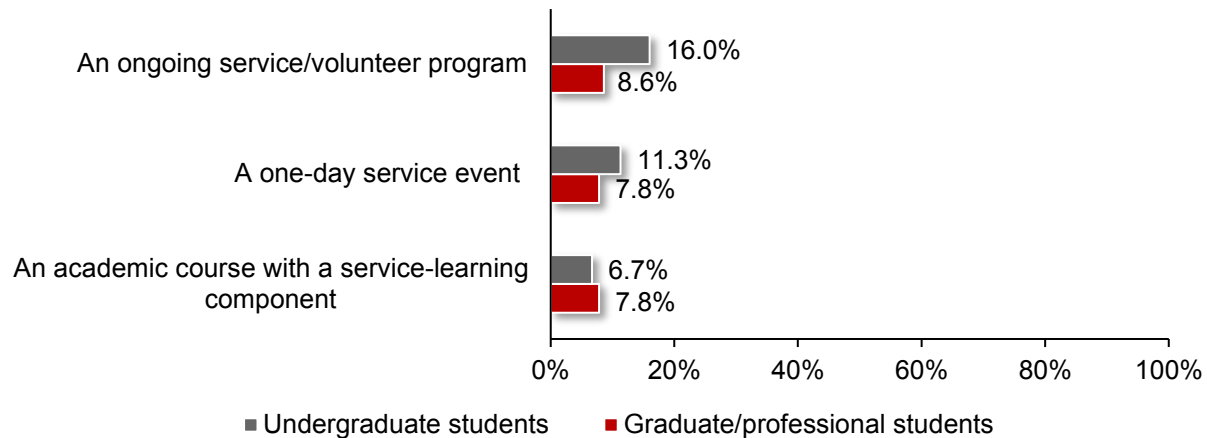
## FINDINGS

### CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

The percentage of involved students was calculated by examining participation across eleven different campus activities. Among all respondents, 72.8% report being involved in at least one of eleven types of involvement on campus. 74.8% of undergraduate students and 65.3% of graduate and professional students report being involved. Additionally, student involvement in community service was examined across three items. Figures 1 and 2 summarize student campus involvement and service-learning involvement. Undergraduate students were most likely to be involved with a student organization (54.1%) and working at an on-campus job (23.5%). Graduate and professional students were most likely to be involved in research with a faculty member (43.6%) and student organizations (28.3%).

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



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

## 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. 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 remain 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 has strong associations with students' sense of belonging and perception of Ohio State, even when controlling for demographic and academic factors. A student was coded as "involved" if they participated in at least one of the eleven activities illustrated in Figure 1.

**Table 1: 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	91.4%	79.7%	20.6***	2.7***
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	93.6%	74.8%	55.8***	4.6***
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	60.4%	44.2%	16.4***	2.1***
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	59.3%	39.2%	24.8***	2.7***
I participate in Ohio State traditions	74.1%	56.8%	21.8***	2.4***
I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State	86.0%	70.5%	25.2***	2.5***
Ohio State offers me opportunities to engage in difficult dialogues	83.1%	77.1%	3.7	1.4
Ohio State has helped me progress in my career development	89.7%	85.5%	2.7	1.3
Ohio State has contributed to my personal growth	93.9%	87.7%	8.4**	2.1*

My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set personal goals	91.5%	84.1%	9.3**	1.8*
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals	93.6%	85.9%	12.1**	2.3**
I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State	81.3%	63.3%	28.1***	2.6***
During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me	87.0%	77.3%	11.1**	2.4***
Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs	92.2%	87.9%	3.4	1.5
Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., student support offices, student activities)	86.9%	84.5%	0.7	1.1
I would recommend Ohio State to other students	94.2%	89.6%	5.0*	1.7
Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University	93.0%	83.0%	17.7***	2.9***

<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 student sense of belonging and perceptions of Ohio State. Similar demographic factors were incorporated into the logistic regression analyses, except that graduate and professional status was used instead of academic rank. Additionally, the variable flagging whether a student lives on campus was excluded. As Table 2 demonstrates, the relationship between graduate and professional student involvement and sense of belonging was relatively low, except for the items related to faculty involvement and career development.

**Table 2: Graduate and Professional 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	83.2%	80.3%	0.3	1.5
I have relationships with other Ohio State students	93.1%	89.5%	0.9	1.8
I have relationships with Ohio State faculty (e.g., professors)	93.7%	81.6%	7.8**	4.2**
I have relationships with Ohio State staff (e.g., academic advisors, hall directors, Student Life employees)	58.7%	56.6%	0.1	1.2
I participate in Ohio State traditions	56.3%	47.4%	1.6	1.6
I feel a sense of belonging to Ohio State	75.4%	68.4%	1.2	1.5
Ohio State offers me opportunities to engage in difficult dialogues	74.6%	78.9%	0.5	1.1
Ohio State has helped me progress in my career development	93.0%	84.2%	4.2*	2.7*
Ohio State has contributed to my personal growth	91.6%	86.8%	1.2	1.7

My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set personal goals	88.1%	82.7%	1.2	2.1
My experiences at Ohio State have helped me to set professional goals	93.1%	93.4%	0.0	1.3
I have developed as a leader during my time at Ohio State	79.0%	77.6%	0.1	1.1
During my time at Ohio State, wellness (i.e., physical, mental and emotional health) has become more important to me	79.7%	82.9%	0.3	1.2
Academic programs at Ohio State meet my needs	85.9%	89.2%	0.5	1.1
Programs and services at Ohio State meet my needs (e.g., student support offices, student activities)	71.8%	81.3%	2.4	1.5
I would recommend Ohio State to other students	86.0%	88.0%	0.2	1.0
Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at The Ohio State University	85.9%	86.7%	0.0	1.3

<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 1 and Table 2 were used to create a scale. Table 3 illustrates which items were incorporated into the scale measuring sense of belonging. 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 four-point Likert question (i.e., Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), so each student could have a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 4. Students were given a score if they answered at least four out of the five questions on the belongingness scale.

**Table 3: 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

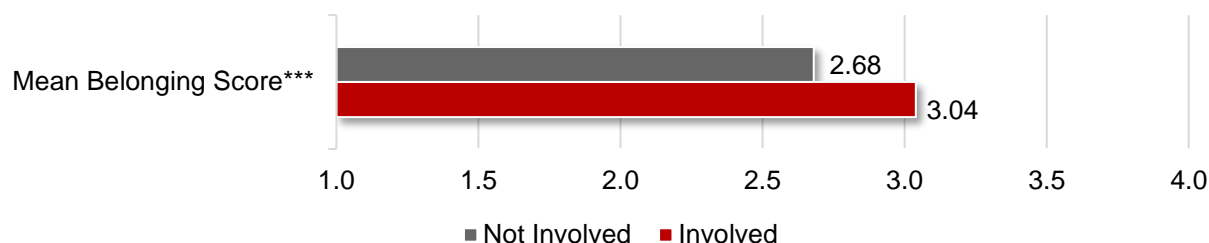
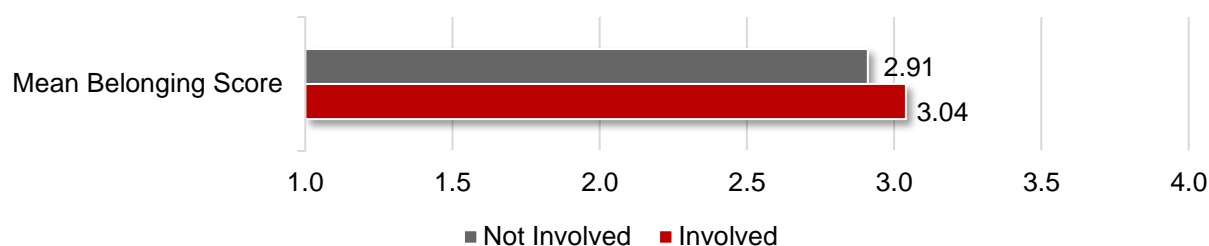
I have relationships with other Ohio State students

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 3 and Figure 4 below summarize these findings. Undergraduate students who were involved in at least one of the eleven activities in Figure 1 had a significantly higher average belonging score on average than students who were not involved with on-campus activities. However, there were no significant differences in mean belonging scores between involved and uninvolved graduate and professional students. This is consistent with the results from the chi-square and logistic regression analyses, which demonstrated that involvement was more highly related to sense of belonging for undergraduate students than for graduate and professional students.

**Figure 3: Average Undergraduate Belonging Scores****Figure 4: Average Graduate and Professional Involvement Scores**

## CONCLUSION

This report provides valuable information for understanding student sense of belonging and activity involvement at Ohio State, as well as the relationship between these two variables. Three in 4 undergraduate students and nearly 7 out of 10 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 nearly one quarter had an on-campus job. Among graduate and professional students, nearly one half were involved with research with a faculty member and over 25% 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, building relationships with Ohio State staff and overall satisfaction with Ohio State. However, involvement was not significantly related to the opportunity to engage in difficult dialogues, perception that Ohio State helped with career development and perceptions that academics and programs at Ohio State met student needs. This suggests that involvement is influential for shaping sense of belonging among undergraduate students.

Involvement was less related to graduate and professional student sense of belonging, although involved graduate and professional students were significantly more likely to have relationships with faculty and feel that Ohio State helped them progress in their career development if they were involved. Although one interpretation of this data is that involvement matters less to graduate and professional student 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 for some other reason. 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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- 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: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>1</sup>

Note: Participant demographics below represent all respondents in the 2021 Student Life Survey. Demographics of respondents for this report did not substantially vary from the overall sample.

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
	<i>n</i>	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Percent
<b>Total</b>	878			237		
<b>Educational Level</b>						
First-year undergraduate	119	13.6%	13.7%	-	-	-
Second-year undergraduate	235	26.8%	26.0%	-	-	-
Third-year undergraduate	242	27.6%	26.9%	-	-	-
Fourth-year undergraduate	223	25.4%	26.0%	-	-	-
Fifth-year or beyond undergraduate	59	6.7%	7.3%	-	-	-
Graduate student	-	-	-	185	78.1%	77.8%
Professional student	-	-	-	52	21.9%	22.2%
<b>Sex<sup>1</sup></b>						
Female	547	62.3%	51.7%	139	58.6%	47.6%
Male	327	37.2%	47.4%	98	41.4%	52.4%
Unknown	4	0.5%	0.9%	0	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>1,2</sup></b>						
Asian	74	8.4%	8.6%	16	6.8%	5.8%
Black or African American	32	3.6%	5.8%	11	4.6%	7.7%
Hispanic	29	3.3%	4.1%	16	6.8%	8.3%
International Student	46	5.2%	5.2%	53	22.4%	22.6%
White	633	72.1%	68.2%	134	56.5%	52.7%
Two or more races	40	4.6%	5.4%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Other/unknown	24	2.7%	2.8%	7	3.0%	2.9%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>						
LGBQ+	165	18.8%	17.8%	52	21.9%	21.9%
Heterosexual/straight	683	77.8%	78.5%	173	73.0%	72.9%
Prefer not to say	30	3.4%	3.8%	12	5.1%	5.2%
<b>First Generation Student Status</b>						
First-generation student	176	20.0%	20.0%	9	3.8%	3.7%
Continuing-generation student	702	80.0%	80.0%	228	96.2%	96.3%

<sup>1</sup>Data are from the Student Information System and language/terms used reflect those used in the Student Information System. This variable was used for weighting.

<sup>2</sup>Racial/ethnic groups with fewer than five respondents were included in the "Other/unknown" category.

## APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS CONTINUED

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
	<i>n</i>	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Percent	<i>n</i>	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Percent
<b>Total</b>	878			237		
<b>Disability Status</b>						
Has physical, cognitive and/or learning disability	69	7.9%	7.1%	17	7.2%	6.9%
Does not have a physical, cognitive and/or learning disability	777	88.5%	89.2%	212	89.5%	89.5%
Prefer not to state	32	3.6%	3.7%	8	3.4%	3.6%
<b>Educational Route</b>						
Continuing Ohio State student	701	79.8%	79.0%	-	-	-
Campus change	58	6.6%	6.9%	-	-	-
Transfer student	119	13.6%	14.2%	-	-	-
<b>Residence<sup>3</sup></b>						
On-campus	212	59.9%	60.8%	-	-	-
Off-campus	125	35.3%	35.2%	-	-	-
Sorority or fraternity housing	17	4.8%	4.0%	-	-	-

<sup>3</sup>Only first-year and second-year undergraduate students are included in this group.