

Improving Student Success through Sense of Belonging: A Look at the Diverse Learning Environment Survey

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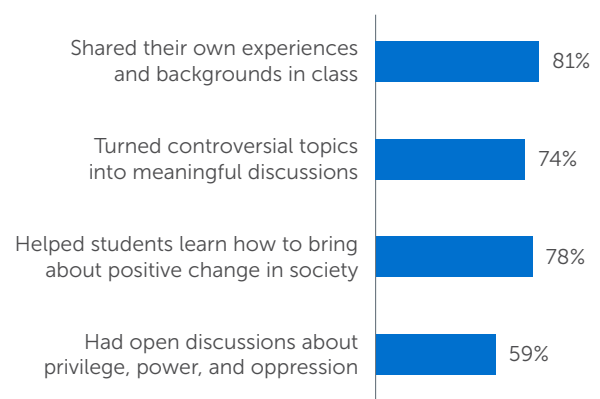
Students who feel accepted, valued, and connected to their institution have a more developed sense of belonging. Sense of belonging can be strengthened by building relationships on campus through a variety of ways such as friendships, mentorships, and campus activities. This allows students to feel a connection with faculty and peers. A strong sense of belonging has been shown to increase retention, and ultimately graduation, as well as improving the mental health and overall wellbeing of students (Lu, 2023). An efficient way to gauge a student's sense of belonging is by surveying them.

The Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) survey is nationally administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. The purpose of the survey is to assess the experience of undergraduate students by asking questions about their interactions with faculty and peers, any engagement with co-curricular activities, opinions on campus climate, and their overall satisfaction with their collegiate experience. The data can then be utilized to better understand institutional practices, assess student learning outcomes, and identify strengths and areas of improvement for the campus.

The DLE survey is fielded annually, with the most recently released data being the 2021 administration. It was administered to 30,103 students at 27 colleges and universities across the United States. Overall, students felt that their faculty and instructors helped to develop meaningful experiences and discussions in the university experience.

Sense of belonging in the DLE survey is measured using three core questions that ask students about their feelings of connection to the institution, as well as if they would

Faculty and Instructors...



recommend their school to others. California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) found that while 73 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that "I feel a sense of belonging with the campus," a larger number (92 percent) would recommend CSUSM to others.

Another aspect evaluated by the DLE is "Habit of Minds", a collection of traits and behaviors that are required for academic success, such as being able to seek solutions, support opinions with logical arguments, and accept mistakes. The aggregate analysis of the DLE found that students who frequently interacted with other students who were outside of their own socioeconomic background tended to score higher on Habit of Minds, as well as civic engagement. One possibility is that students who naturally have a higher habit of mind also seek out ways to be civically engaged, which causes them to interact with others of a different socioeconomic background.



Surveying students on their sense of belonging and satisfaction can provide campuses a glimpse into the background of their students, as well as their interactions at the institution. This information can be invaluable in helping to inform the mission of the university as well as student sense of belonging. By fielding the [DLE survey](#) or the [Trellis Campus Climate survey](#), institutions can better understand the student experience and inform campus policies to increase student retention and graduation.



Recent Trellis Research publications

Inside the College Mental Health Crisis: Evidence from the Healthy Minds Study

Cornett, A. (2023). Inside the College Mental Health Crisis: Evidence from the Healthy Minds Study. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Research-Brief_Mar23_MentalHealthCrisis.pdf

Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2021

Fletcher, C., Webster, J., Cornett, A., Niznik, A., Gardner, T., & Knaff, C. (2022). *Student Financial Wellness Survey report: Fall 2021*. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SFWS-Report-Fall-2021.pdf>

No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Cornett, A., & Fletcher, C. (2022). No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/no-food-for-thought-insights-on-basic-needs-insecurities-and-mental-health-challenges/>

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Trellis Research ([trelliscompany.org/research](https://www.trelliscompany.org/research)) provides colleges and policymakers insight into student success through the lens of higher education affordability. With more than three decades of experience studying key issues such as student debt, student loan counseling, and the financial barriers to attainment, our research team explores the roles of personal finance, financial literacy, and financial aid in higher education.

Interested in collaborations or need research expertise? Trellis Research welcomes opportunities to inform policymakers and help organizations address their analytical needs. For more information, please contact Trellis Research at Trellisresearch@trelliscompany.org or visit us on Twitter ([@TrellisResearch](https://twitter.com/TrellisResearch)).

The Student Financial Wellness Survey is a free national survey offered by Trellis Company that explores the connections between student finances, academic success, and more. Interested in participating in the Fall 2023 implementation of SFWS? Learn more here: www.trelliscompany.org/SFWS-get-started

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Sources

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