

Development notes

Since 2022, we've visited eight institutions to conduct focus groups with hundreds of students, staff, and faculty. These institutions included a technical college, private liberal arts colleges, and public universities. We asked the following questions about community during the focus groups:

- What do you like most about being a student/faculty member/staff member at [Institution Name]?
- What makes you feel like you are part of the [Institution Name] community?
- What, if anything, makes you feel like you are not part of the [Institution Name] community?
- What can [Institution Name] do to better support you and increase your sense of belonging to the [Institution Name] community?

These questions elicited rich and actionable information about participants' sense of belonging at their institution and the kinds of experiences and activities that promoted or diminished their sense that they were a valued part of the community. The conversations in response to these questions invited participants to reflect on how their identity, their position at their institution, and their interactions with fellow students, coworkers, colleagues, and supervisors impacted their sense of community. These conversations led us to believe that a survey focused on community and people's sense of whether they were valued and respected members of that community would be helpful for institutions looking to enhance the quality of their community for all members. The survey that we've created below is our response to that idea.

HEDS Sense of Community Survey

This is a PDF representation of the online version of the survey. It includes all questions and response options, as well as notes (in italics) about how questions will display to survey takers.

[Institution Name] is using this survey to get a better understanding of the extent to which students, faculty, staff, and administrators feel a sense of community at [Institution Name] and the experiences that create or diminish community. [Institution Name] wants to create an environment where everyone feels welcome in the community.

Your participation is voluntary. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete. You may stop taking the survey at any time or choose not to answer particular questions.

Your responses are anonymous. The survey is being administered by an independent organization, the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS). They will exclude any personal information, such as your name, email address, student or employee identification number, and your IP address, from the data they send to our institution. Please note, anything you write in the text boxes in response to open-ended questions will be sent to [Institution Name] exactly as you write it. If you do not want people at your institution to know who you are, please do not write anything that might identify you.

The [Institution Name] leader(s) of this survey effort [is/are] [name(s)], and [he/she/they] can be reached at [email address(es) and/or phone number(s)].

By clicking "Continue," you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years old, have read the information above, and agree to participate in the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate it.

[Respondents see a "Continue" button here.]

[The survey will branch based on answers to Q1.]

1. What is your primary role at [Institution Name]?

- Undergraduate Student
- Graduate Student (Masters/Doctoral/Professional)
- Faculty
- Staff
- Administrator
- Other role: _____

Development notes

McMillan & Chavis (1986) define sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan, 1976).” (p. 9) We’ve used the four dimensions of McMillan & Chavis’s definition and theory of community to develop this survey:

1. Membership
2. Influence
3. Integration and fulfillment of needs
4. Emotional connection

We’re going to break draft survey questions into four sections, with each section focusing on one of the four dimensions. We’ve inserted more detailed definitions of these dimensions before each section.

Membership

From McMillan & Chavis:

- “Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness.” (p. 9)
- “Membership is a feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Buss & Portnoy, 1967). It is a feeling of belonging, of being a part (Backman & Secord, 1959). Membership has *boundaries*; this means that there are people who belong and people who do not. The boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop (Bean, 1971; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971; Wood, 1971).” (p. 9)

2. To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel like I belong to [Institution Name’s] community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The [Institution Name] community is welcoming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The [Institution Name] community is supportive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel valued in the [Institution Name] community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel connected to people in the [Institution Name] community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Q3 is optional. Institutions can decide whether to include this question in their survey. If an institution decides to include this question, they can also opt to remove one or more of the seven items from the question.]

3. At [Institution Name], I believe that people can be full members of the community regardless of their:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Political beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social class and economic background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious beliefs and commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial/ethnic identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Role on campus (e.g., students, groundskeepers, office staff, janitorial staff, coaches, dining hall staff, library staff, academic support staff, IT staff, student affairs staff, faculty, administrators)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Overall, how comfortable are you sharing your beliefs, perspectives, and opinions at [Institution Name]?

- Very comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Very uncomfortable

Q4A will only be seen by respondents who answered “Somewhat uncomfortable” or “Very uncomfortable” to the previous question.]

4A. In the previous question, you indicated that you are uncomfortable sharing your beliefs, perspectives, and opinions at [Institution Name]. We would appreciate it if you could provide more detail about why you are not comfortable sharing these things.

5. How satisfied are you with the sense of community at [Institution Name]?

- Very satisfied
- Generally satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Generally dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Development notes

Influence

From McMillan & Chavis:

- "...influence, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members." (p. 9)
- "Influence is a bidirectional concept. In one direction, there is the notion that for a member to be attracted to a group, he or she must have some influence over what the group does (Peterson & Martens, 1972; Solomon, 1960; Zander & Cohen, 1955). On the other hand, cohesiveness is contingent on a group's ability to influence its members (Kelley & Volkart, 1952; Kelley & Woodruff, 1956). This poses two questions: Can these apparently contradictory forces work simultaneously? Is it a bad thing for a group to exert influence on its members to attain conformity?" (p. 11)

Questions 6A and 7A will only be seen by those who chose "Undergraduate Student" or "Graduate Student" as their primary role.

6A. To what extent do the following groups at [Institution Name] take your input, ideas, and concerns seriously?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Students that I interact with in my classes	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students that I interact with during extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, theater, clubs) and other out-of-class activities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Administrators that I interact with (e.g., the president, deans, associate deans, vice presidents)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff that I interact with in the business office, registrar's office, dining hall, library, career services, academic support offices, IT, housing, student affairs, or other parts of the campus	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty that I interact with	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My advisor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7A. In your interactions with the following groups at [Institution Name], to what extent do you feel treated fairly and with respect?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Students that I interact with in my classes	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students that I interact with during extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, theater, clubs) and other out-of-class activities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Administrators that I interact with (e.g., the president, deans, associate deans, vice presidents)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff that I interact with in the business office, registrar's office, dining hall, library, career services, academic support offices, IT, housing, student affairs, or other parts of the campus	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty that I interact with	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My advisor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Questions 6B and 7B will only be seen by those who chose “Staff” or “Administrator” as their primary role.

6B. To what extent do the following groups at [Institution Name] take your input, ideas, and concerns seriously?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Colleagues in your office or unit that you work with every day	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff in other offices or units on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Your supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Senior administrators with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7B. In your interaction with the following groups at [Institution Name], to what extent do you feel treated fairly and with respect?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Colleagues in your office or unit that you work with every day	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff in other offices or units on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Your supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Senior administrators with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Questions 6C and 7C will only be seen by those who chose “Faculty” as their primary role.

6C. To what extent do the following groups at [Institution Name] take your input, ideas, and concerns seriously?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Colleagues in your department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty outside your department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Your department chair	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Senior administrators with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7C. In your interaction with the following groups at [Institution Name], to what extent do you feel treated fairly and with respect?

	Very much	Moderately	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
Colleagues in your department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Faculty outside your department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Your department chair	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Senior administrators with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Staff with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Students with whom you interact	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Development notes

Integration and fulfillment of needs

From McMillan & Chavis:

- “This is the feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group.” (p. 9)
- “The third component of our definition of sense of community is integration and fulfillment of needs, which, translated into more ordinary terms, is reinforcement. Reinforcement as a motivator of behavior is a cornerstone in behavioral research, and it is obvious that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members.” (p. 12)
- “The following summarizes the role of integration and fulfillment of needs in a sense of community:
 1. Reinforcement and need fulfillment is a primary function of a strong community.
 2. Some of the rewards that are effective reinforcers of communities are status of membership, success of the community, and competence or capabilities of other members.
 3. There are many other undocumented needs that communities fill, but individual values are the source of these needs. The extent to which individual values are shared among community members will determine the ability of a community to organize and prioritize its need-fulfillment activities.
 4. A strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet others’ needs while they meet their own.” (p. 13)

[All respondents will see the following questions.]

8. To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Faculty in the [Institution Name] community are skilled, committed, and capable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff in the [Institution Name] community are skilled, committed, and capable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students in the [Institution Name] community are motivated, eager to learn, and committed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Administrators in the [Institution Name] community are skilled, committed, and capable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>(For faculty, staff, and administrators)</i> I’ve grown professionally because of my everyday interactions with the [Institution Name] community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>(For students)</i> I’ve grown as a student because of my everyday interactions with the [Institution Name] community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. The [Institution Name] community is working together effectively to fulfill our mission to [insert short mission statement provided by the institution].

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Development notes

Emotional connection

From McMillan & Chavis:

- "...the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences." (p. 9)
- "A shared emotional connection is based, in part, on a shared history. It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it. The interactions of members in shared events and the specific attributes of the events may facilitate or inhibit the strength of the community." (p. 13)

"Emotional connection – it includes shared history and shared participation and identification with that history, and a deeply felt connection between members. It is the most nebulous aspect of the Sense of Community, but still very important." (Communities Reinvented, 2021)

10. To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have a group of people at [Institution Name] that I trust and with whom I can share my experiences, my hopes, and my concerns about [Institution Name].	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are opportunities at [Institution Name] to participate in events and activities that help build a sense of community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. What makes you feel like you are part of the [Institution Name] community?

12. What, if anything, makes you feel like you are not part of the [Institution Name] community?

13. What can [Institution Name] do to better support you and increase your sense of community at [Institution Name]?

Demographic Questions

In the next section, we ask questions about your identity. You may choose not to respond to any of these questions. We use responses to these questions to develop a picture of how an individual's background and identity are related to their experiences.

14. What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Nonbinary, please self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to respond

15. Are you transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Prefer not to respond

16. What is your citizenship status?

- U.S. citizen
- U.S. permanent resident but not a U.S. citizen
- Not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Prefer not to respond

17. What is your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, Maya, etc.
- Asian
For example, Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Hmong, Afghan, etc.
- Black or African American
For example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Ghanaian, Congolese, etc.
- Hispanic or Latino
For example, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Dominican, Guatemalan, Colombian, Honduran, Spaniard, etc.
- Middle Eastern or North African
For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, Israeli, Moroccan, Yemeni, Kurdish, etc.
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, Chuukese, Palauan, Tahitian, etc.
- White
For example, English, German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Scottish, French, Swedish, Norwegian, etc.
- Some other race or ethnicity: _____
- Prefer not to respond

[The following demographic questions will only be seen by those who chose "Undergraduate Student" or "Graduate Student" as their primary role.]

Undergraduate and graduate students will see Q18 and Q19.

18. How do you attend classes at [Institution Name]?

- Primarily or entirely on campus
- Primarily or entirely online
- Split between on campus and online
- Prefer not to respond

19. What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents or those who raised you?

- Did not finish high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Attended college but did not complete degree
- Associate's degree (AA, AS, etc.)
- Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, etc.)
- Master's degree (MA, MBA, MS, etc.)
- Doctoral or professional degree (PhD, JD, MD, etc.)
- Prefer not to respond

All undergraduate students will see Q20.

20. Have you ever received a Pell Grant during your time at college?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to respond

Undergraduate students at 4-year institutions will see Q21.

21. What is your current academic classification?

- Freshman/First Year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other academic classification: _____
- Prefer not to respond

Undergraduate students at 2-year institutions will see Q22, Q23, and Q24.

22. What is your current age?

- Younger than 25
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45 or older
- Prefer not to respond

23. How many credits did you enroll in at the beginning of the semester?

- Less than 12 credits
- 12 or more credits
- Prefer not to respond

24. How many academic terms (semesters, quarters, trimesters) have you been enrolled at [Institution Name]?

- This is my first academic term
- This is my second academic term
- This is my third or fourth academic term
- This is my fifth or sixth academic term
- I have been enrolled more than six academic terms
- Prefer not to respond

Graduate students will see Q25.

25. What year are you in your graduate/certificate program?

- This is my first academic term
- This is my second academic term
- This is my third or fourth academic term
- This is my fifth or sixth academic term
- I have been enrolled more than six academic terms
- Prefer not to respond

[The following demographic questions will only be seen by those who chose “Faculty,” “Staff,” or “Administrator” as their primary role.]

Faculty, staff, and administrators will see Q26.

26. How do you work at [Institution Name]?

- Primarily or entirely on campus
- Primarily or entirely online
- Split between on campus and online
- Prefer not to respond

Faculty will see Q27.

27. Which of the following best describes your academic rank?

- Professor/Associate Professor/Assistant Professor
- Lecturer/Instructor/Adjunct
- Prefer not to respond

Staff and administrators will see Q28.

28. Which category best describes your primary role?

- Hourly (non-exempt)
- Salaried (exempt)
- Prefer not to respond

[If your institution chooses to add supplemental questions they will be inserted here, preceded by this statement.]

The following questions were provided by [Institution Name]. Of course, like the rest of the survey, you may choose to skip any of these questions.

[The following language appears after respondents click the “Submit” button.]

Thank you for participating in the Sense of Community Survey.

The information you have given us is anonymous. Your name is not connected in any way with your responses to this survey, and any identifying information from the computer on which you took the survey was removed before we received the data.

We deeply appreciate your cooperation and willingness to provide information that will help us make [Institution Name] a place where everyone feels welcome and valued.

The [Institution Name] leader(s) of this survey effort [is/are] [name(s)], and [he/she/they] can be reached at [email address(es) and/or phone number(s)]. He/She/They can answer additional questions you may have about the survey.

Development notes

References

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