Recovering Equilibrium for Student Engagement, Learning and Success

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

UW System Student Success Summit Series – Engaging and Retaining Students
October 19, 2021

My points of view: Higher education scholar of student development & success, assessment practice, quality improvement, and teaching & learning

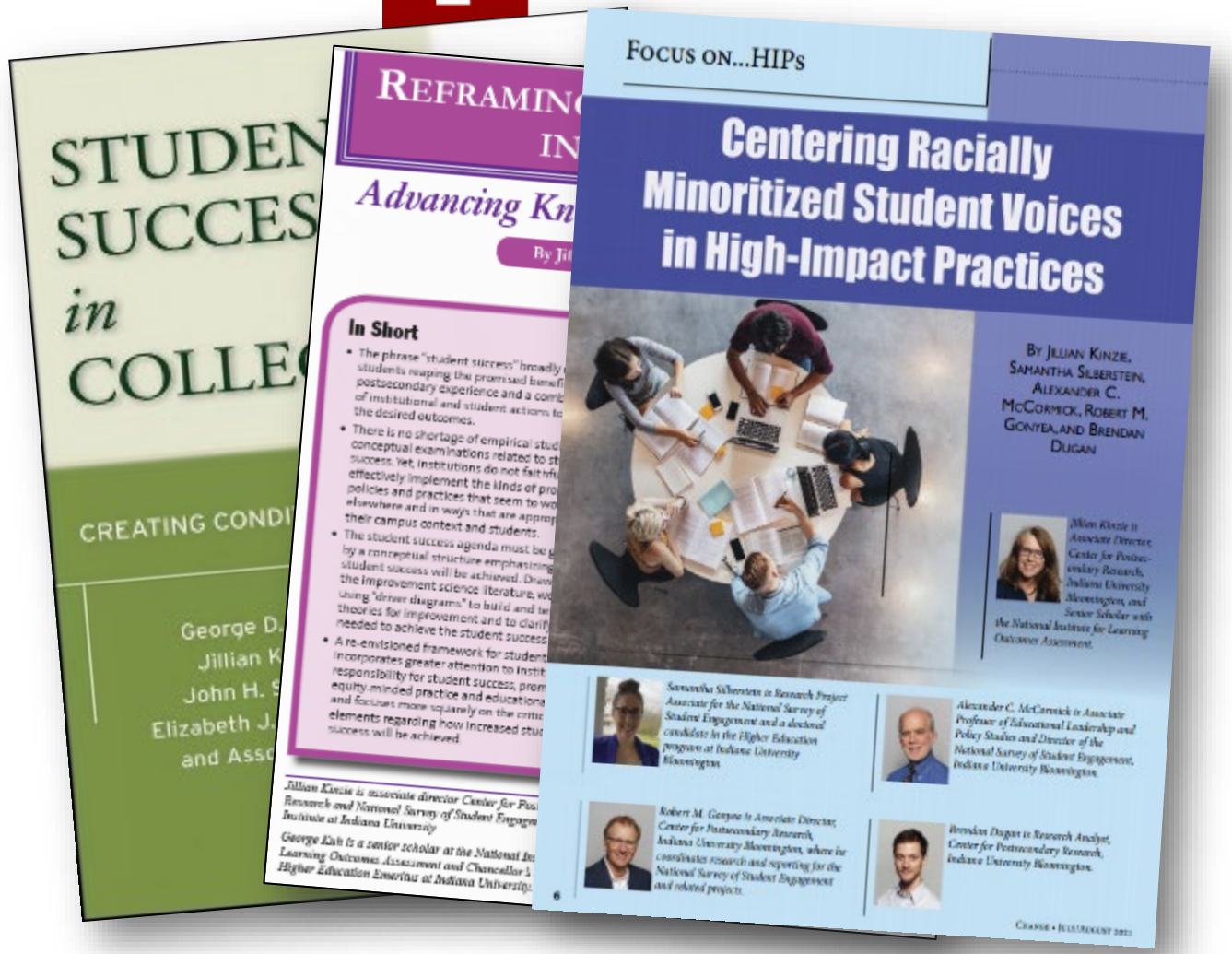
INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON

NSSE national survey of student engagement

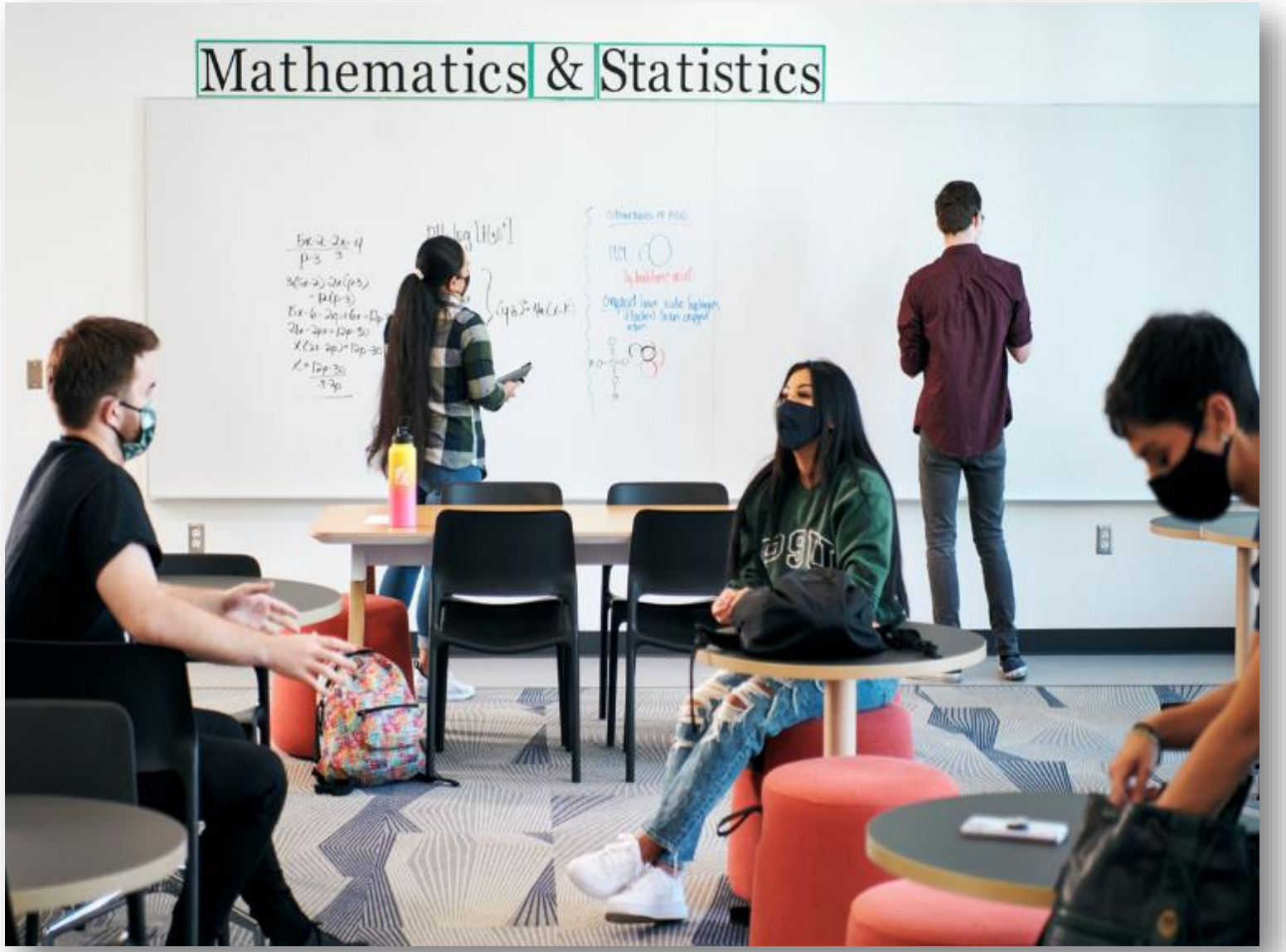
20 Year Survey Project

6.4 million students @

1,700 4 yr. institutions

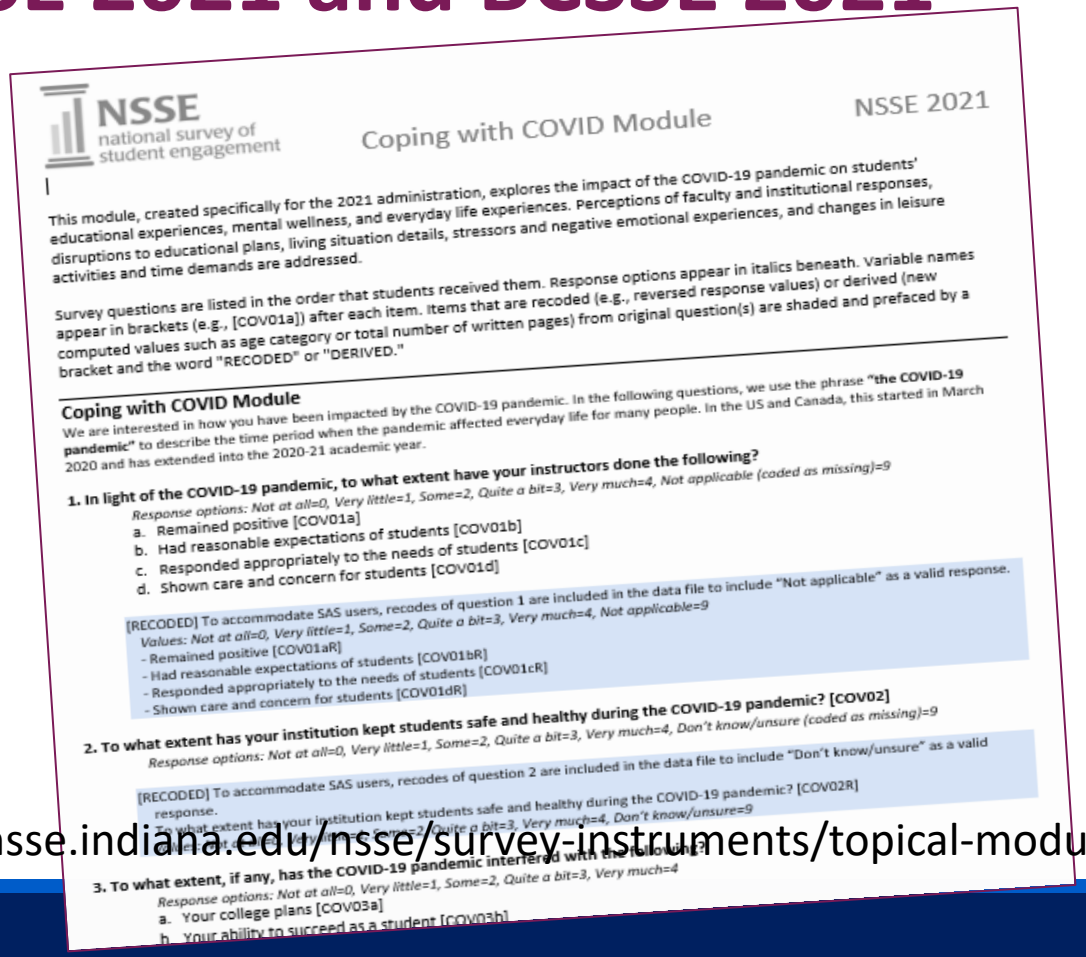


As we continue to operate in a disrupted undergraduate experience, what should colleges and universities have front of mind to foster equitable student learning and success?



Students and the COVID-19 Disruption

Added short COVID-19 item set – questions about disruption, learning experiences, well-being and personal concerns – to NSSE 2021 and BCSSE 2021



NSSE national survey of student engagement

Coping with COVID Module

NSSE 2021

This module, created specifically for the 2021 administration, explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' educational experiences, mental wellness, and everyday life experiences. Perceptions of faculty and institutional responses, disruptions to educational plans, living situation details, stressors and negative emotional experiences, and changes in leisure activities and time demands are addressed.

Survey questions are listed in the order that students received them. Response options appear in italics beneath. Variable names appear in brackets (e.g., [COV01a]) after each item. Items that are recoded (e.g., reversed response values) or derived (new computed values such as age category or total number of written pages) from original question(s) are shaded and prefaced by a bracket and the word "RECODED" or "DERIVED."

Coping with COVID Module

We are interested in how you have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following questions, we use the phrase **"the COVID-19 pandemic"** to describe the time period when the pandemic affected everyday life for many people. In the US and Canada, this started in March 2020 and has extended into the 2020-21 academic year.

1. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent have your instructors done the following?

Response options: Not at all=0, Very little=1, Some=2, Quite a bit=3, Very much=4, Not applicable (coded as missing)=9

a. Remained positive [COV01a]
b. Had reasonable expectations of students [COV01b]
c. Responded appropriately to the needs of students [COV01c]
d. Shown care and concern for students [COV01d]

[RECODED] To accommodate SAS users, recodes of question 1 are included in the data file to include "Not applicable" as a valid response.
Values: Not at all=0, Very little=1, Some=2, Quite a bit=3, Very much=4, Not applicable=9
- Remained positive [COV01aR]
- Had reasonable expectations of students [COV01bR]
- Responded appropriately to the needs of students [COV01cR]
- Shown care and concern for students [COV01dR]

2. To what extent has your institution kept students safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic? [COV02]

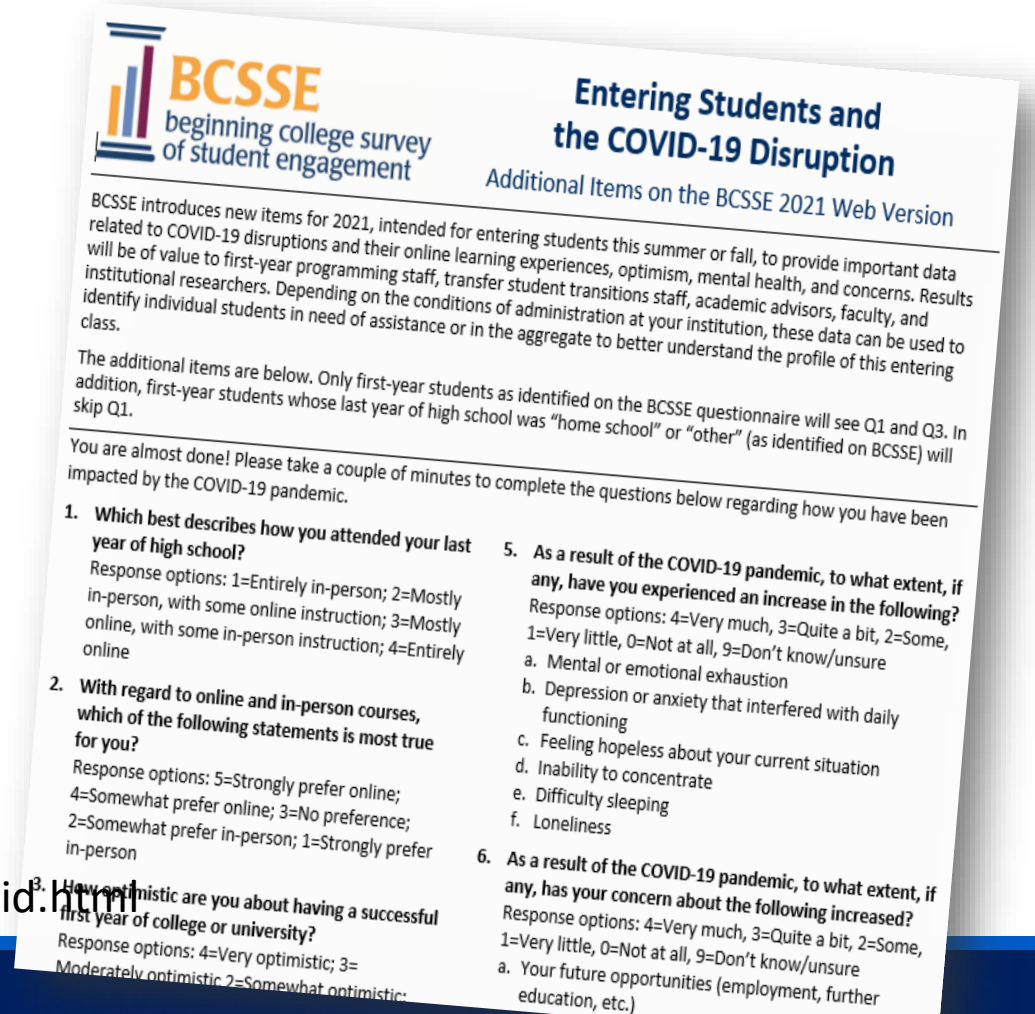
Response options: Not at all=0, Very little=1, Some=2, Quite a bit=3, Very much=4, Don't know/unsure (coded as missing)=9

[RECODED] To accommodate SAS users, recodes of question 2 are included in the data file to include "Don't know/unsure" as a valid response.
To what extent has your institution kept students safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic? [COV02R]
Response options: Not at all=0, Very little=1, Some=2, Quite a bit=3, Very much=4, Don't know/unsure=9

3. To what extent, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the following?

Response options: Not at all=0, Very little=1, Some=2, Quite a bit=3, Very much=4

a. Your college plans [COV03a]
b. Your ability to succeed as a student [COV03b]



BCSSE beginning college survey of student engagement

Entering Students and the COVID-19 Disruption

Additional Items on the BCSSE 2021 Web Version

BCSSE introduces new items for 2021, intended for entering students this summer or fall, to provide important data related to COVID-19 disruptions and their online learning experiences, optimism, mental health, and concerns. Results will be of value to first-year programming staff, transfer student transitions staff, academic advisors, faculty, and institutional researchers. Depending on the conditions of administration at your institution, these data can be used to identify individual students in need of assistance or in the aggregate to better understand the profile of this entering class.

The additional items are below. Only first-year students as identified on the BCSSE questionnaire will see Q1 and Q3. In addition, first-year students whose last year of high school was "home school" or "other" (as identified on BCSSE) will skip Q1.

You are almost done! Please take a couple of minutes to complete the questions below regarding how you have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Which best describes how you attended your last year of high school?**
   Response options: 1=Entirely in-person; 2=Mostly in-person, with some online instruction; 3=Mostly online, with some in-person instruction; 4=Entirely online
2. **With regard to online and in-person courses, which of the following statements is most true for you?**
   Response options: 5=Strongly prefer online; 4=Somewhat prefer online; 3=No preference; 2=Somewhat prefer in-person; 1=Strongly prefer in-person
3. **How optimistic are you about having a successful first year of college or university?**
   Response options: 4=Very optimistic; 3=Moderately optimistic 2=Somewhat optimistic;
5. **As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, have you experienced an increase in the following?**
   Response options: 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Some, 1=Very little, 0=Not at all, 9=Don't know/unsure
   a. Mental or emotional exhaustion
   b. Depression or anxiety that interfered with daily functioning
   c. Feeling hopeless about your current situation
   d. Inability to concentrate
   e. Difficulty sleeping
   f. Loneliness
6. **As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, has your concern about the following increased?**
   Response options: 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Some, 1=Very little, 0=Not at all, 9=Don't know/unsure
   a. Your future opportunities (employment, further education, etc.)

https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/survey-instruments/topical-modules/covid.html

New, Entering First-Year Students (BCSSE 2021)

Sophomores (NSSE 2021)

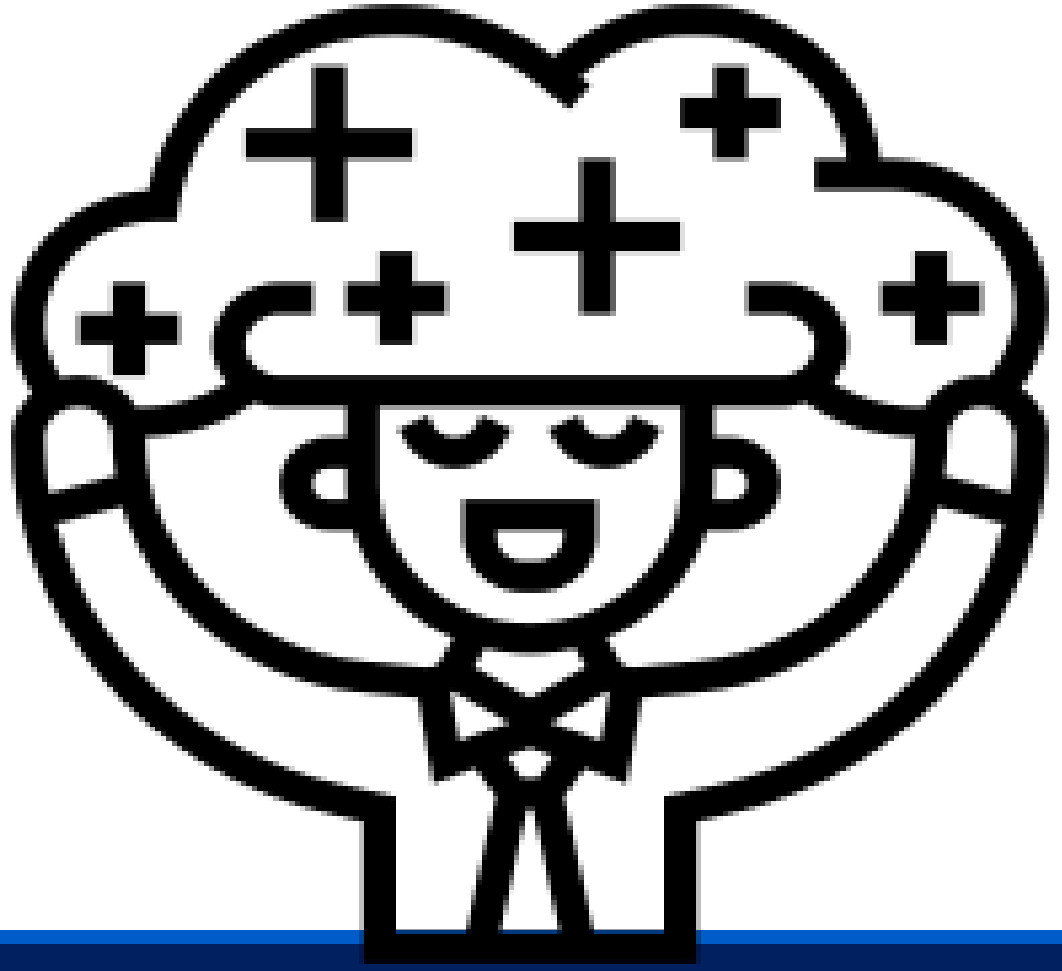
2021 Entering Student Attitudes about their First College Year

(BCSSE 2021 results for Entering Students)

85%

optimistic* about having a successful first year

(*Very optimistic + moderately optimistic)



2021 Entering Student Comments Reflecting Optimism (BCSSE 2021 results for Entering Students)

"I plan on being the best version of myself that I can be and I hope that UNIVERSITY is where I can pull this off. Thank you for the opportunity"

"I am looking for a fresh start in the "Sunshine State" in an elite Florida college with a great atmosphere and chance to succeed. I will not take this experience for granted."

"I'm excited for this next chapter of my life!"

"Thank you for giving me the option to tell my experience during the pandemic. It was a really hard time for me and it felt good getting it off my chest"

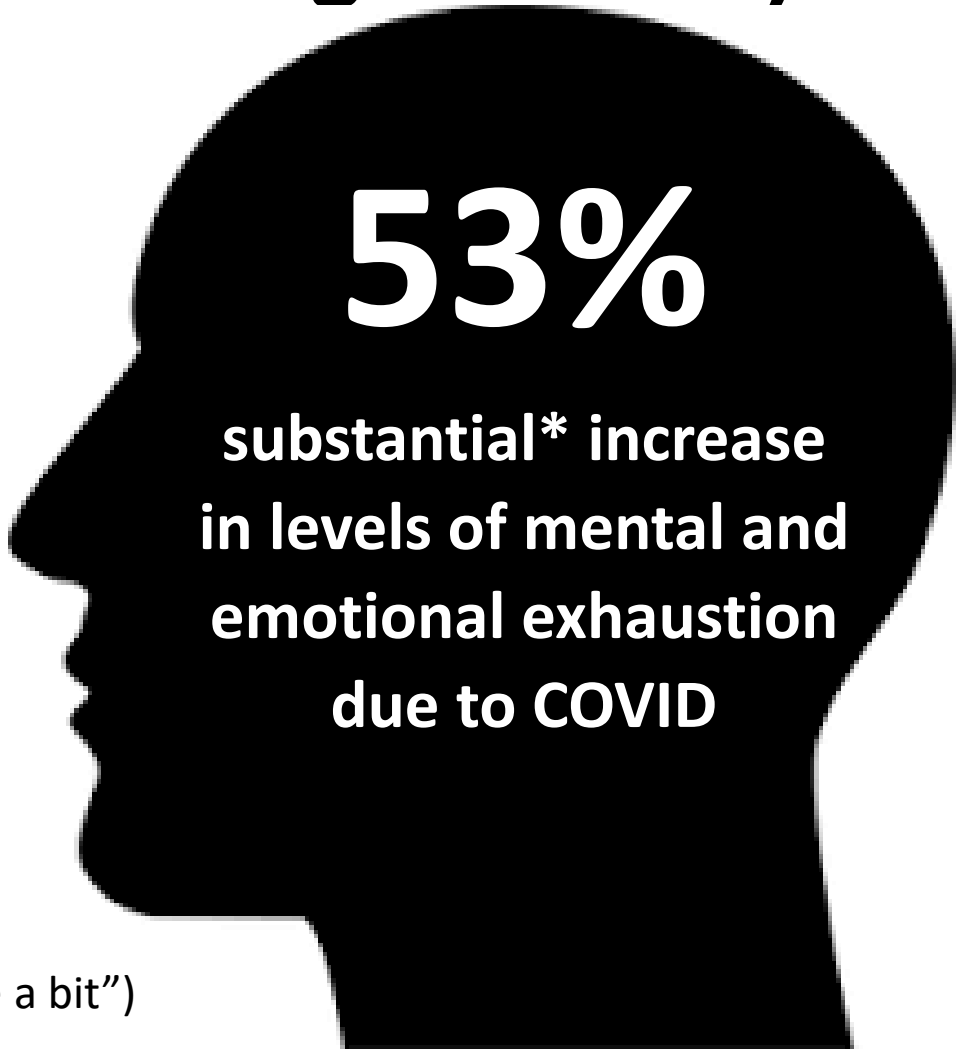
Ideas for Building on Entering Student Optimism

- Encourage students to envision and enact their “next chapter”
- Invite reflection on their pandemic experience
- Foster appreciation for opportunities, “Don’t take this for granted”
- Be straightforward about reality, expectations

Mental & Emotional Health

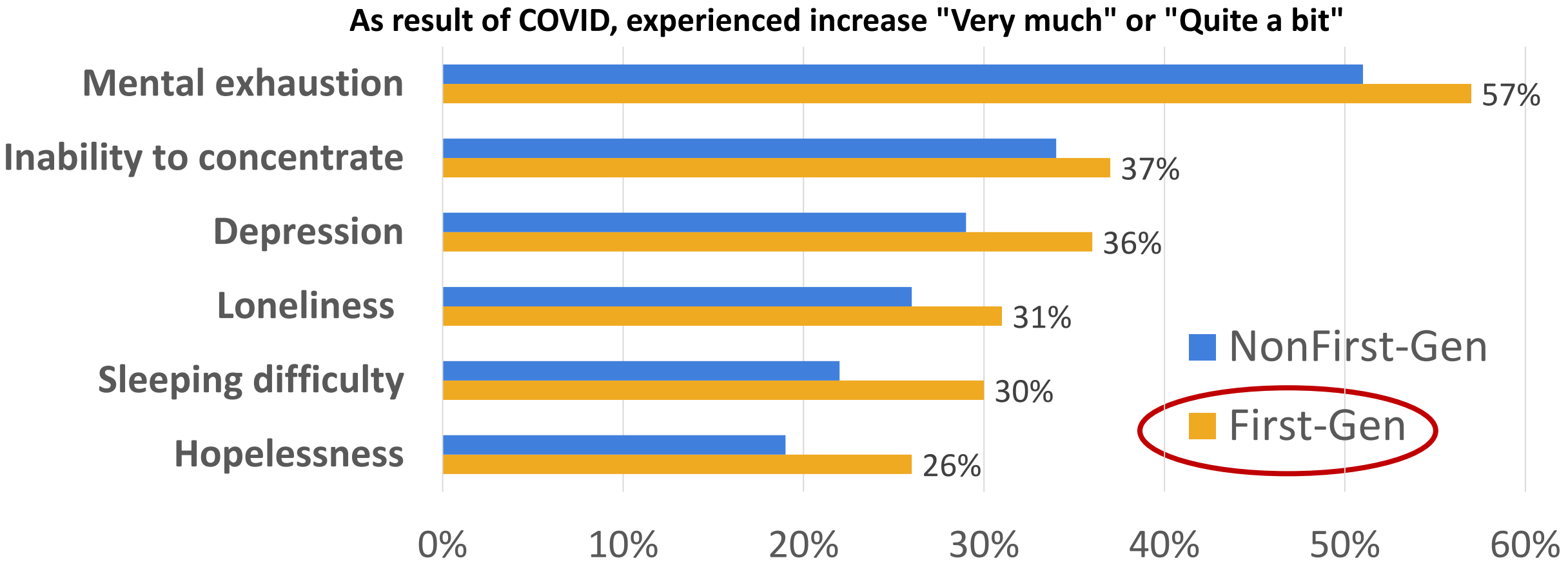
(BCSSE 2021 results for Entering Students)

How has the COVID pandemic impacted students' mental and emotional health?



(substantial = "very much" or "quite a bit")

Pandemic Effect: 2021 Entering Students - Increased Experiences by First-Generation Status

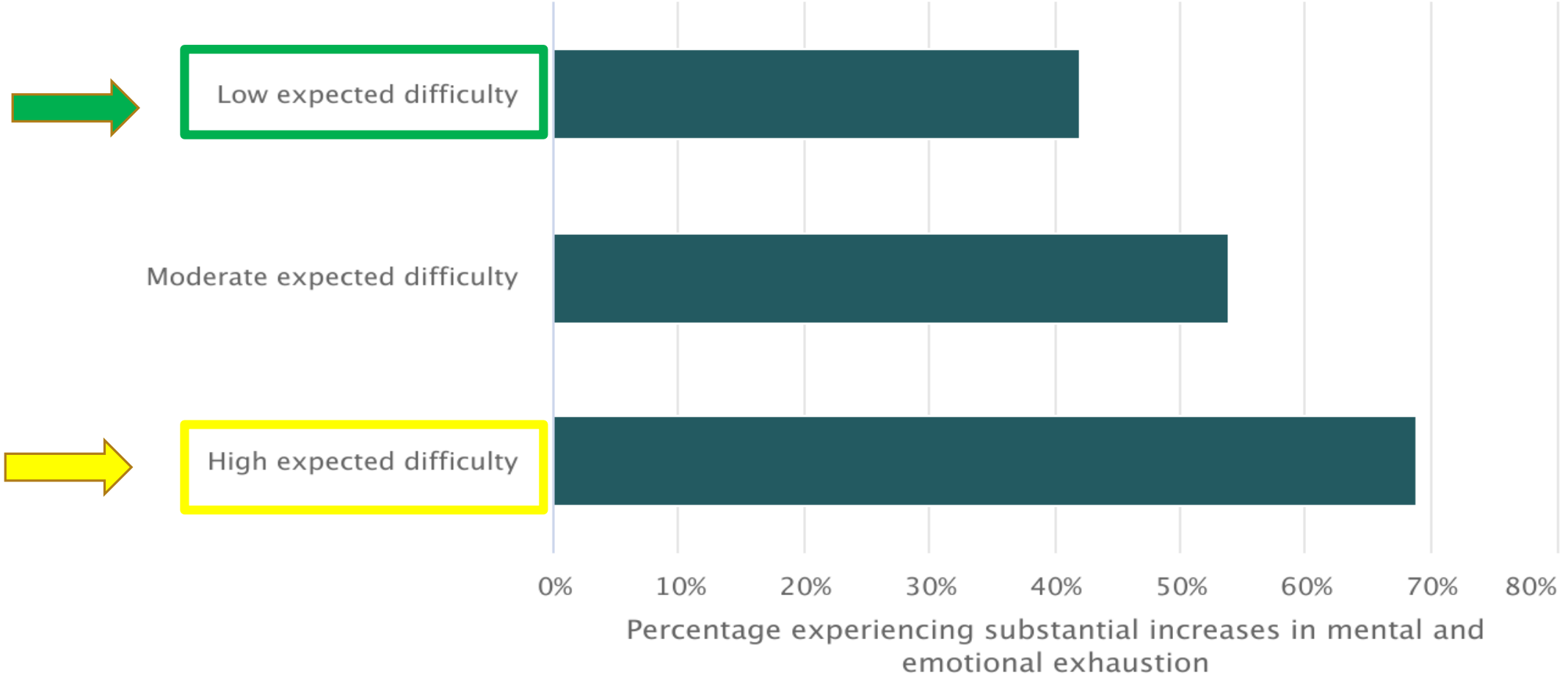


Source: Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) 2021 results; 91 IHEs, 51,000 students

Mental & Emotional Health

(BCSSE 2021 results for Entering Students)

Mental and emotional exhaustion appears to be linked with expectations for academic difficulty

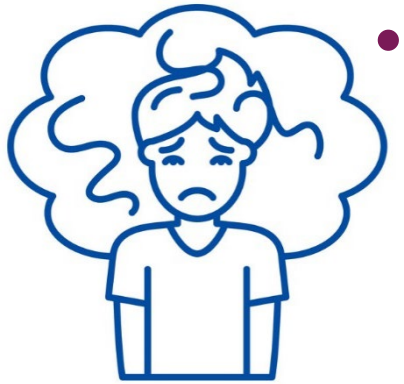


Mental and Emotional Health

Combination of mental & emotional exhaustion and expected academic difficulty strongly suggests an imperative to implement widespread and early check-ins by faculty, academic advisors, and student life staff to offer the support and—if necessary—intervention to help students' first college year be successful

Sophomores (NSSE 2021 first-year student responses)

- To what extent have faculty and staff **done a good job** helping you adapt to pandemic-induced changes? Nearly 3 of 4 (73%) said substantially ("quite a bit" or "very much")



- Students' **concerns increased the most** regarding: ability to **socialize**, **worry about health & safety** of family, and regarding **future opportunities** (employment, further education)
- **55%** students indicated the pandemic interfered "substantially" with their plans to participate in special learning opportunities (HIPs – research, learning community, field experiences)

NSSE 2021 FY Student Comments (current sophomores)

COVID makes UNIVERSITY a terribly not fun school. I am disassociated from everyone…students and faculty. It affects my mental health and negatively affects my school work.

I'm entirely online,…it has been honestly pretty bad. I bought a computer that my family could afford just to find out I can't do half of the things I need to on it. This has immensely impacted my ability to do my work. I care less and less about school because it is clear that they do not care about me.

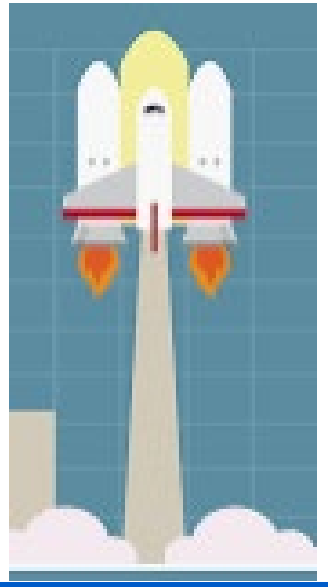
My university has done a great job providing students the best experience possible even through the pandemic. I have not joined any groups or participated in events to limit my exposure to CV-19. I hope next year I will find my place.

The pandemic has neutered my experience. Everything feels sterile, disconnected…the effort required is less like "initiative" and more like "an ordeal".

2021 AY: Front of Mind Student Success Factors

New, entering students (from BCSSE 2021):

- Increased worry, mental health concerns; wider gap for FirstGen & by racial identity groups
- Increased sense of self-directed learning, but fears about preparation gaps, academic difficulty



Sophomores, continuing students (comments on NSSE 21):

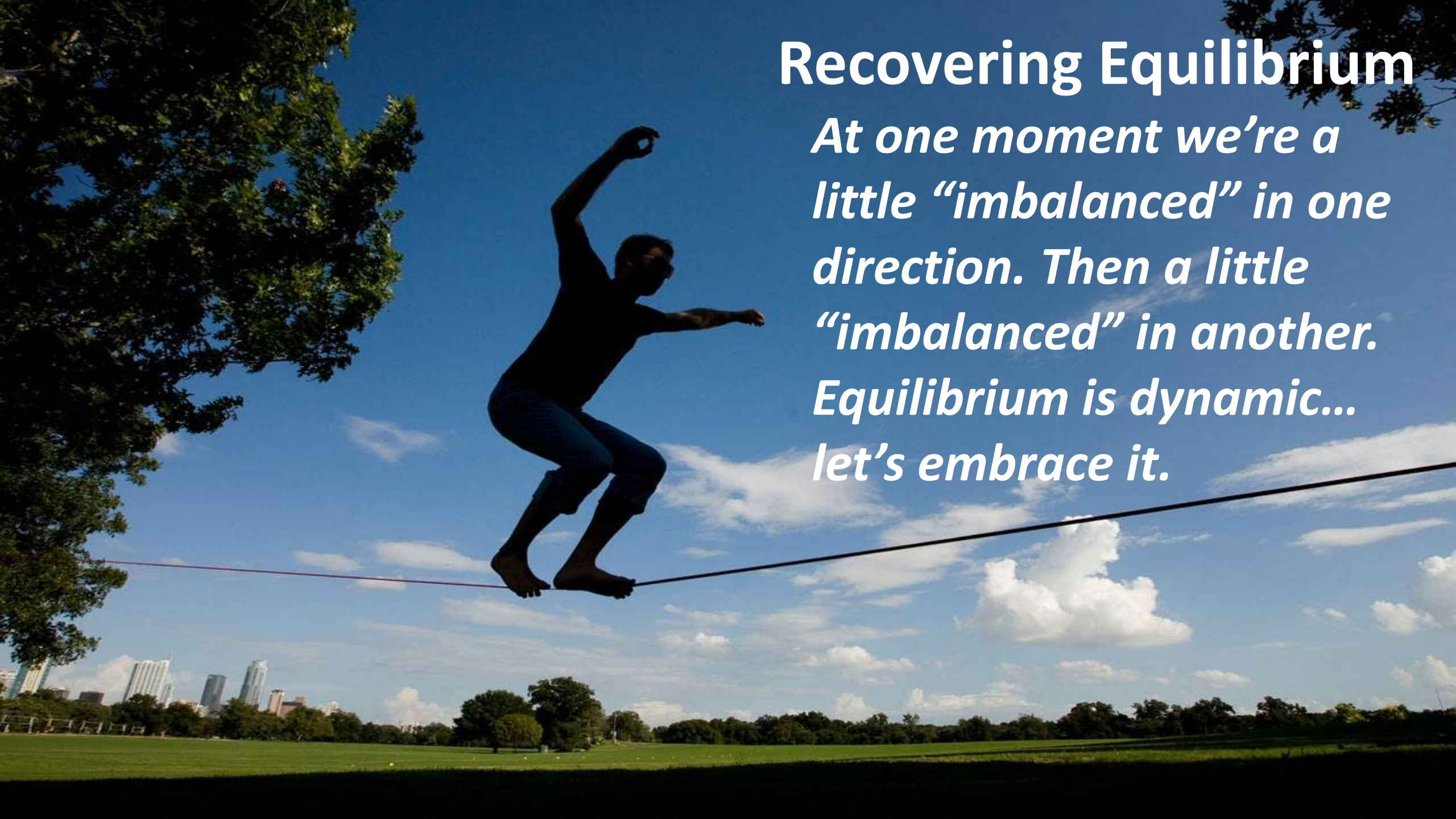
- Desire for missed student-life
- Heightened expectations for virtual services
- Worry about future
- Pent up demand for experiential learn
- Sophomore year is “FY makeup”

How are YOU doing?

Let's CHAT

What do these pandemic-specific results suggest for your first-year students and sophomores?

What is your campus doing well in this regard?



Recovering Equilibrium

At one moment we're a little "imbalanced" in one direction. Then a little "imbalanced" in another. Equilibrium is dynamic… let's embrace it.

21st Century Student Success Goal

More students completing the degree they start, in an <u>equitable,</u> <u>high quality educational experience</u> that prepares them for 21st century workforce.

Student Engagement & Success Agenda

Everyone is responsible for student success

Equity-Centered Student Success

Campus leaders increasingly recognize the economic and social imperatives to permanently close achievement gaps for low socioeconomic (SES), First Generation, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students.

“Student failure” to succeed in college was once seen as a student shortcoming

Student success shifted to an institutional responsibility

From ------ To

Equity: Closing the Racial Identity Achievement Gap

Quality: Completion through an engaging student experience and quality learning

Strategies and Tools

There isn’t a silver bullet that, once adopted, will help campuses increase retention and success. Rather, there are multiple programs, strategies, and tools that campuses can employ to create change.

Creating more equitable and inclusive higher education environments can improve persistence, completion and outcomes and for students with minoritized identities.

Today's Topics for Creating Equitable Learning Environments

1. Quality of Interaction/ Relationship-Rich
2. Sense of Belonging
3. Advising – *Listening, Respect, Caring*
4. High-Impact Practices

Attending to Quality & Equity; Disaggregating Data

Student engagement is a gateway to student success

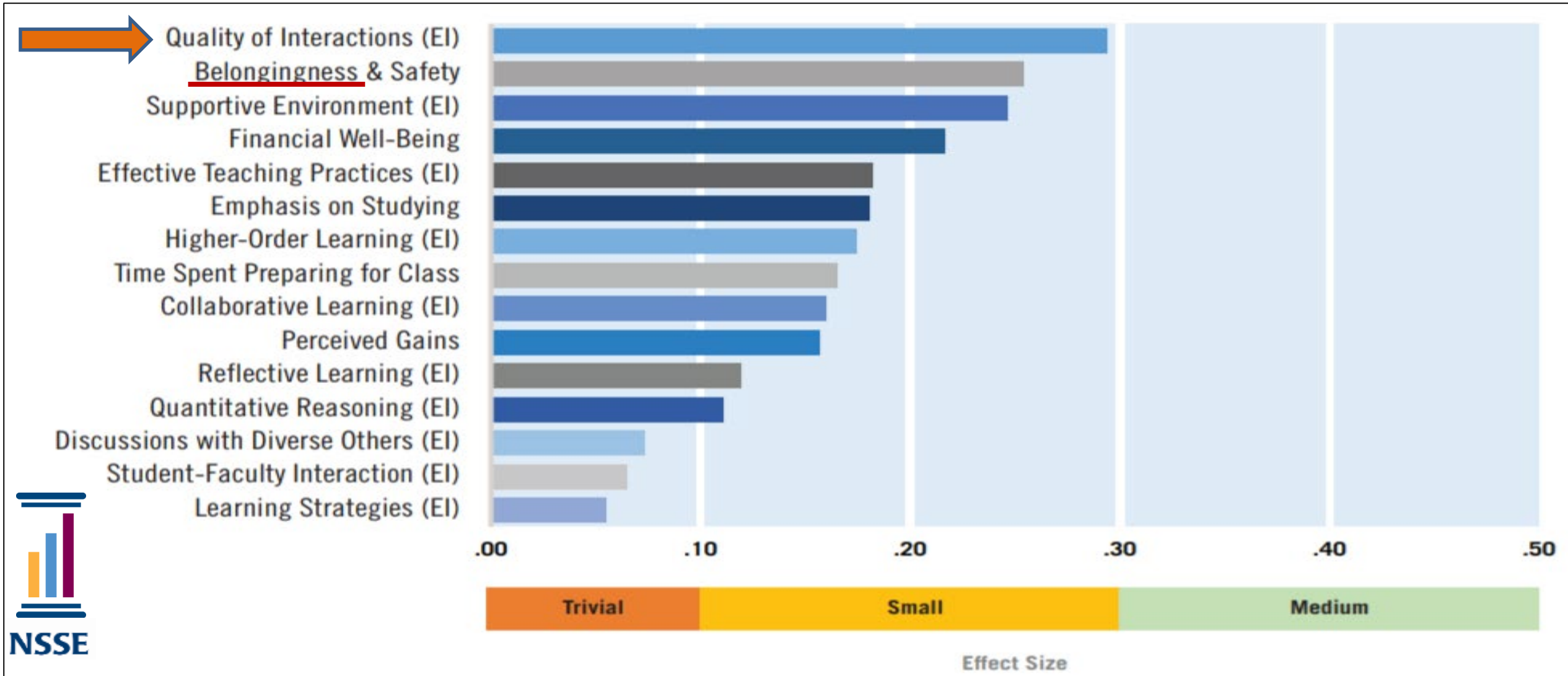
Students who engage more frequently in educationally purposeful activities both in and outside the classroom get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist and graduate.

To Increase Student Persistence & Success, Foster Student Engagement

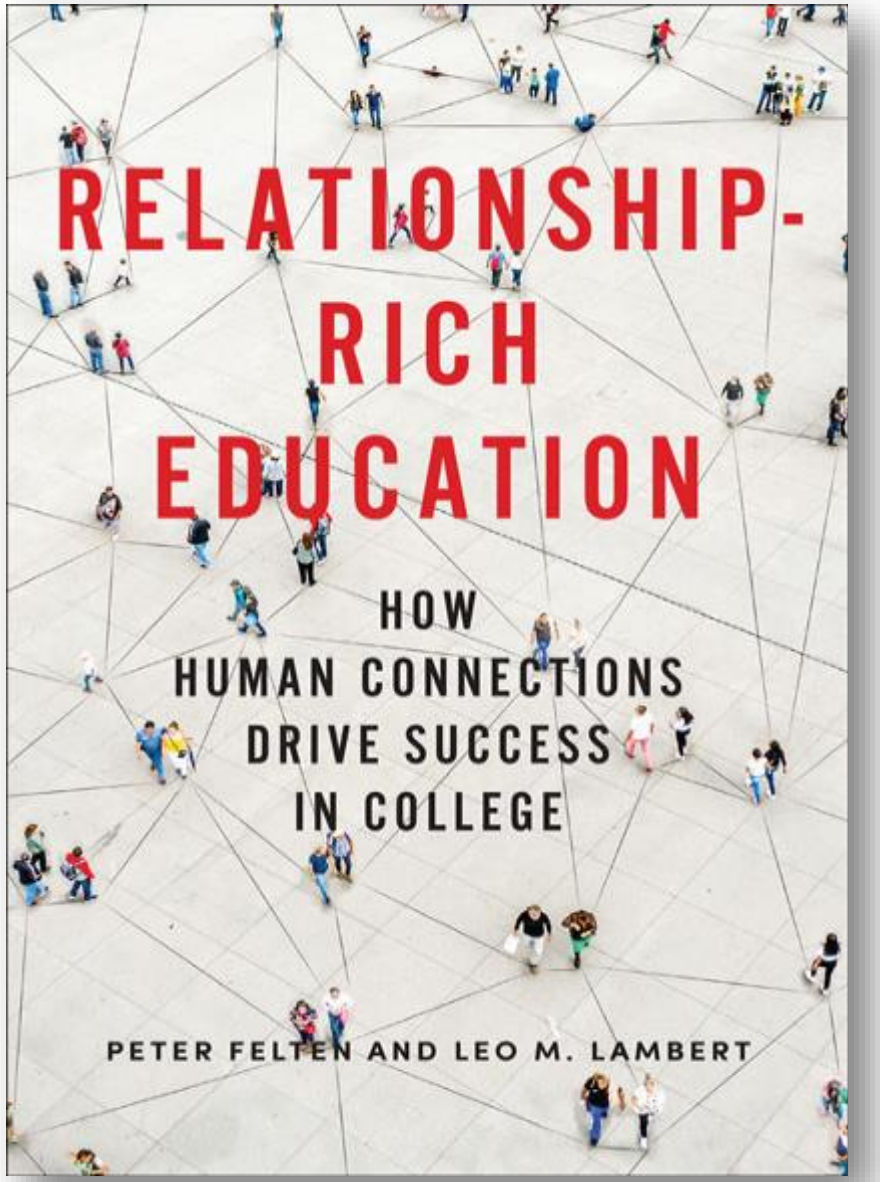
Theme	Engagement Indicators
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning Reflective & Integrative Learning Learning Strategies Quantitative Reasoning
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning Discussions with Diverse Others
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction Effective Teaching Practices
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions Supportive Environment

Association between Student Engagement Indicators and Persistence

All 10 Engagement Indicators are positively reated to persistence



Quality Interaction in Higher Education



Relationships make higher education work.
At all institutions, the simple act of a professor asking a student how they are doing can have a tremendous impact on the student's success.

-- Felten & Lambert, 2020

Practices Influencing Positive Quality of Interaction

- Expectations for interaction with faculty, advisors set at orientation & practiced in FY courses and service offices
- Accessible & responsive faculty & staff
- Inclusive teaching, welcoming environments
- Physical (and virtual) space arranged to increase accessibility to faculty, student collaboration
- Small, interactive first-year seminars, events, that put students into regular meaningful contact with faculty, advisors and peers

Sense of Belonging

Do I belong here?
How can I fit?

The psychological feeling of belonging or connectedness to a social, spatial, cultural, professional, or other type of group or a community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Whether or not students feel respected, valued, accepted, cared for, included, and that they matter, in the classroom, at college, or in their chosen career path (Strayhorn, 2012)

Why Sense of Belonging?

- Sense of belonging influences student persistence
- Interventions can improve students' sense of belonging

Why Sense of Belonging?

The Pandemic and Racial Turmoil Are Changing Curricula. Here's How.

By Alexander C. Kafka | OCTOBER 19, 2020

The Chronicle: Colleges are offering new classes on racial history and social justice…creating equity-and-justice centers, and hiring ethnic-minority specialists in neglected topics to deepen students' understanding. Also, in concert with co-curricular and extracurricular study groups & clubs, offering students in underrepresented minority groups a deeper **sense of belonging**.

NSSE's Sense of Belonging Items

Debut on NSSE 2020!

Also appear on NSSE 2021; and previously featured on the Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity module

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

a. I feel comfortable being myself at this institution.

b. I feel valued by this institution.

c. I feel like part of the community at this institution.

NSSE 2020: Sense of Belonging Overall

N = 121,955 FY, 149,466 Seniors from 521 institutions

90%	80%	80%
OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL COMFORTABLE BEING THEMSELVES AT THEIR INSTITUTION	OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL VALUED BY THEIR INSTITUTION	OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL LIKE PART OF THE COMMUNITY AT THEIR INSTITUTION

Most students feel they belong, but differences exist among student subgroups

Black/African American Students and Level of Sense of Belonging

- Black or African American first-year students sense of belonging scores divided into Low, Middle & High SB groups.
- By examining what relates to groups, we can identify ways to improve experiences.

Table 1. Proportions of First-Year Black or African American Students within Sense of Belonging (SB) Groups by Aspects of Engagement

Aspect of engagement	Lowest SB	Middle SB	Highest SB
Frequently (very often or often) included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	51%	54%	63%
Excellent (six or seven on a seven-point scale) interactions with faculty	30%	45%	66%
Substantial (very much or quite a bit) institutional emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)	38%	61%	75%
Substantial (very much or quite a bit) institutional emphasis on attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	32%	54%	65%

Note: Values in the table represent the proportion of all Black or African American students in the group who responded favorably (frequent, excellent, or substantial) to the item.

Engagement Practices Associated with High Sense of Belonging: Black/African American FY Students

1. Emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds
2. Excellent interaction with faculty
3. Emphasis on attending events that address important social, economic, political issues
4. Frequently included diverse perspectives in courses

NSSE 2021: First-Year Students Sense of Belonging (current sophomores) Declined Sharply

What can instructors and staff do to cultivate a strong sense of belonging?

- ❑ Acknowledge challenges of belonging and normalize worries – discuss the pandemic & lost connections
- ❑ Build in more opportunities to help students build connections (group work, required office visits, structured study sessions)
- ❑ Plan student check-ins – ask “how are you doing?” “what are you watching?” “what campus events have you gone to?”
- ❑ “Warm your syllabus”, give wise feedback, communicate support
- ❑ Harness power of peer mentors, tutors to help cultivate belonging

Let’s CHAT

What do these sense of belonging results suggest?

What is your campus doing well in this regard?

Academic Advising

- Advising is vital to student learning and persistence
- Need to make advising less transactional and more purposeful
- Strong emphasis on improving or “reimagining advising” (more holistic, integrated coaching, teaching, reflective…)

Gordon, V. N., Habley, W. R., & Grites, T. J. (Eds.). (2011). Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook.

Importance of Advising

- With their **relationship building and advocacy**, academic advisors help students feel welcomed and supported as they transition to college and progress toward graduation.
- A **trusting and respectful rapport** with an advisor is essential for new students **adjusting to and navigating** a complex institution and for seniors looking to **maximize opportunities** within their major.
- Among the primary traits possessed by advisors who develop positive relationships with students are **active listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.**

NSSE's Academic Advising Module

Module includes 35 items regarding:

- Frequency of student-advisor discussions regarding academic interests, course selections, or academic performance
- Student awareness of how to contact an advisor
- Quality of advising
- Frequency of student-advisor discussions regarding goals and future plans

Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following?

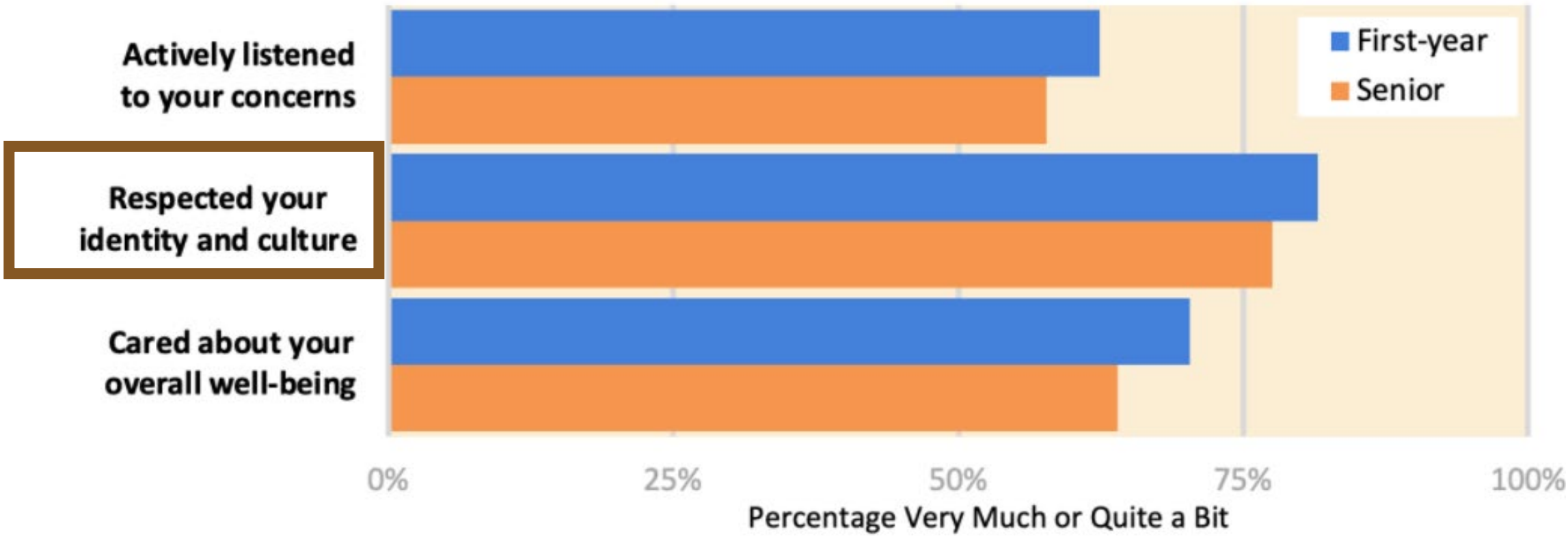
Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little, Not applicable

a. Been available when needed
b. Provided prompt and accurate information
c. Provided information about learning support services (tutoring, writing center, success skills, etc.)
d. Notified you of important policies and deadlines
e. Reached out to you about your academic progress or performance
f. Followed up with you regarding something they recommended
g. Asked questions about your educational background and needs

LRC scale

h. Actively listened to your concerns
i. Respected your identity and culture
j. Cared about your overall well-being

NSSE Listening, Respecting, Caring Scale

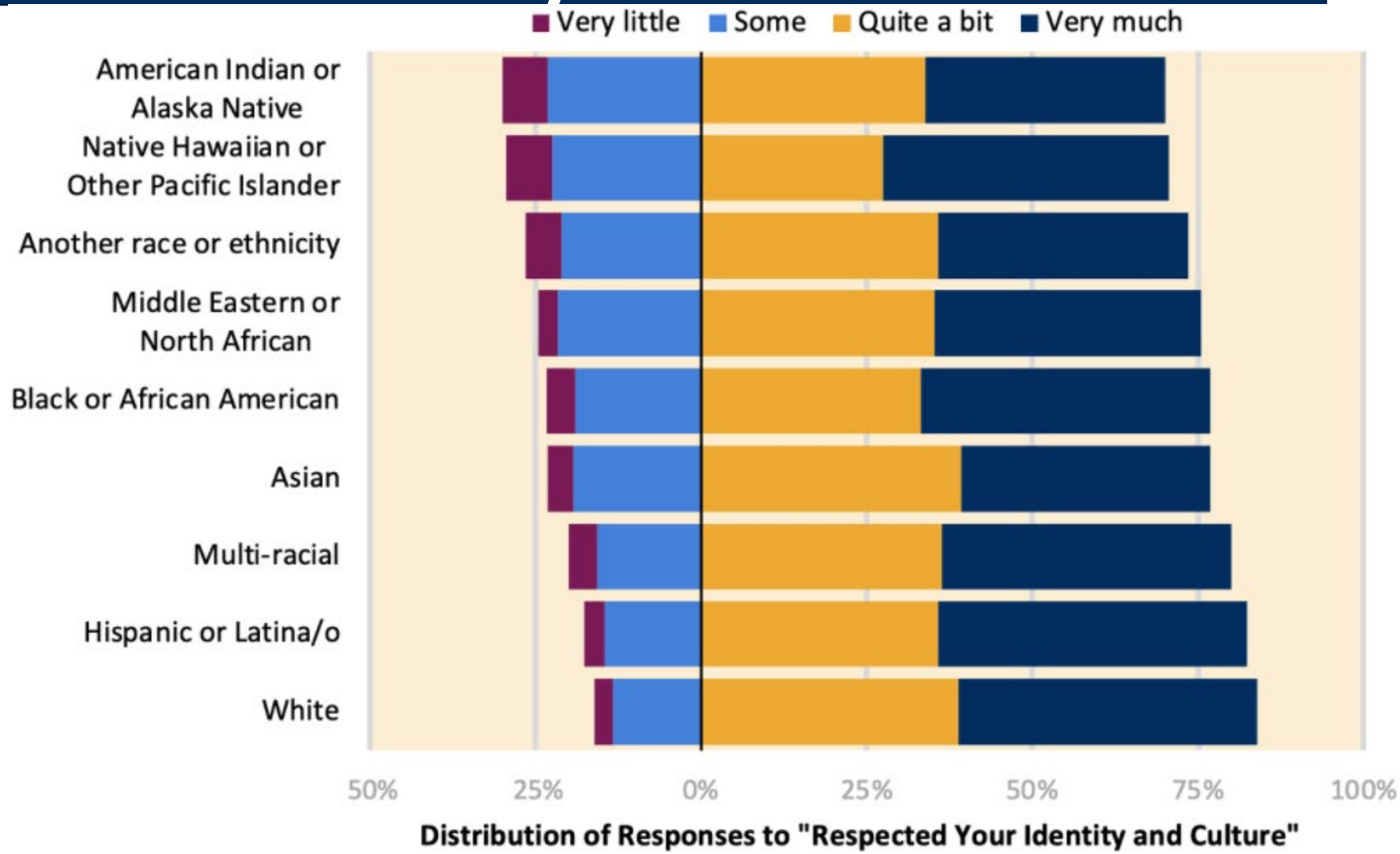


Most students feel listened to, respected, and care about . . .

NSSE 2020: Advising LRC by Racial/Ethnic Identity

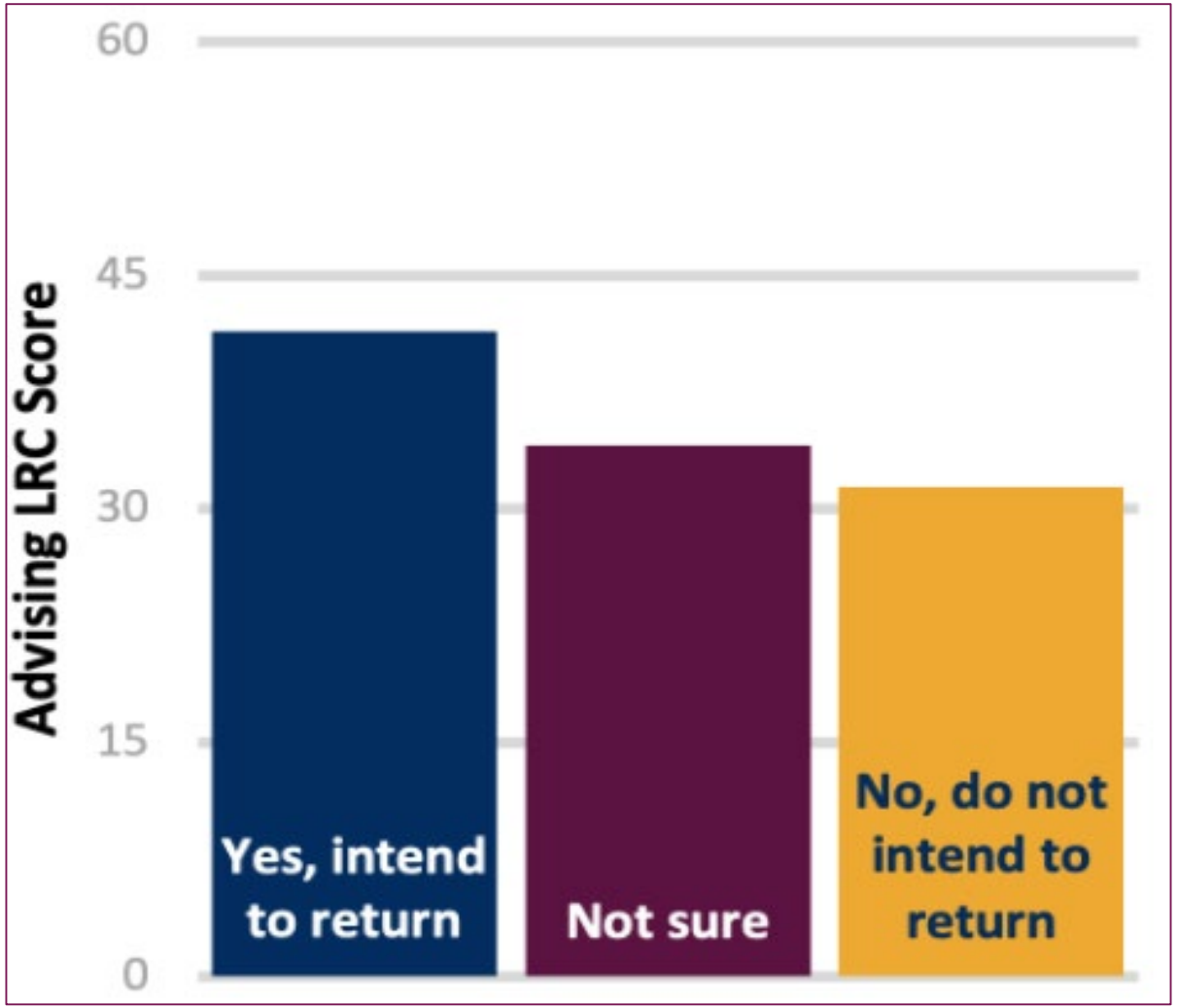
. . . however there is more to the story.

Institutions looking to meet the needs of a diverse student body need to look closely at the experiences of students by the items that comprise the LRC scale.



NSSE 2020: LRC and Intention to Persist

Not surprisingly, the higher the LRC score, the higher the intent to return for FY students



LRC and Effective Advising Practice

- Structured prompts to inquire about students' goals, explorations, and opportunities
- Longer appointment to allow discussion
- Sensitivity to student identity, inclusive approaches
- Comprehensive adviser assignments – students assigned a professional academic advisor, a faculty mentor, and a career coach
- Dedicated Student Success Centers housing advisors and learning support and enrichment services
- Implementing best practices from coaching models and appreciative advising

What does your campus do?

High-Impact Practices

Widespread emphasis on expanding HIP opportunities

Substantial evidence that – when done well – a handful of selected practices engage students at levels that boost their performance across a variety of educational activities and desired outcomes

High-Impact Practices

- Learning community
- Service-learning
- Research with faculty
- Internship or field experience
- Study abroad
- Culminating senior experience

High-Impact Practices

- ★ First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- ★ Common Intellectual Experiences
- ★ Learning Communities
- ★ Writing-Intensive Courses
- ★ Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- ★ Undergraduate Research
- ★ Diversity/Global Learning
- ★ Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- ★ Internships
- ★ Capstone Courses/Projects
- ★ *E-portfolios (new in 2016)*

Association of American Colleges and Universities

College Learning for a New Global Century (2007)

HIPs help ensure that students are getting the most out of college

HIPs Increase Probability of First-Year Student Retention

HIP "Done" (FY)	% Increase in Retention*
Learning Community	3%**
Research w/ Faculty	3%**
Service Learning	2%

* A 1 point change in each NSSE measure corresponds to a 2- 4 percentage point increase in retention rates

** Looking within each SAT group, we see a difference within the bottom SAT quartile of about 7 percentage points compared to 4 and 2 percentage points for the middle and top SAT groups.

Employers Endorse High-Impact Practices

More likely to hire employees with these experiences:	Executives
Internships/apprenticeship with company/organization	93%
Multiple courses requiring significant writing assignments	82%
Research project done collaboratively with peers	81%
Advanced, comprehensive senior project/thesis	80%
Field-based project in diverse community	72%
Service Learning project with community organization	71%
Study Abroad program	54%

Source: Hart Research Associates. *Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work* (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2018) www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research.

HIPs have many enthusiasts

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

University of Wisconsin system: "Our promise is that every student will be exposed to at least 2 high impact learning practices. These include internships, undergraduate research, service learning, capstone projects, and collaborative learning."

Are HIPs reaching all students?

Calling Attention to Equity

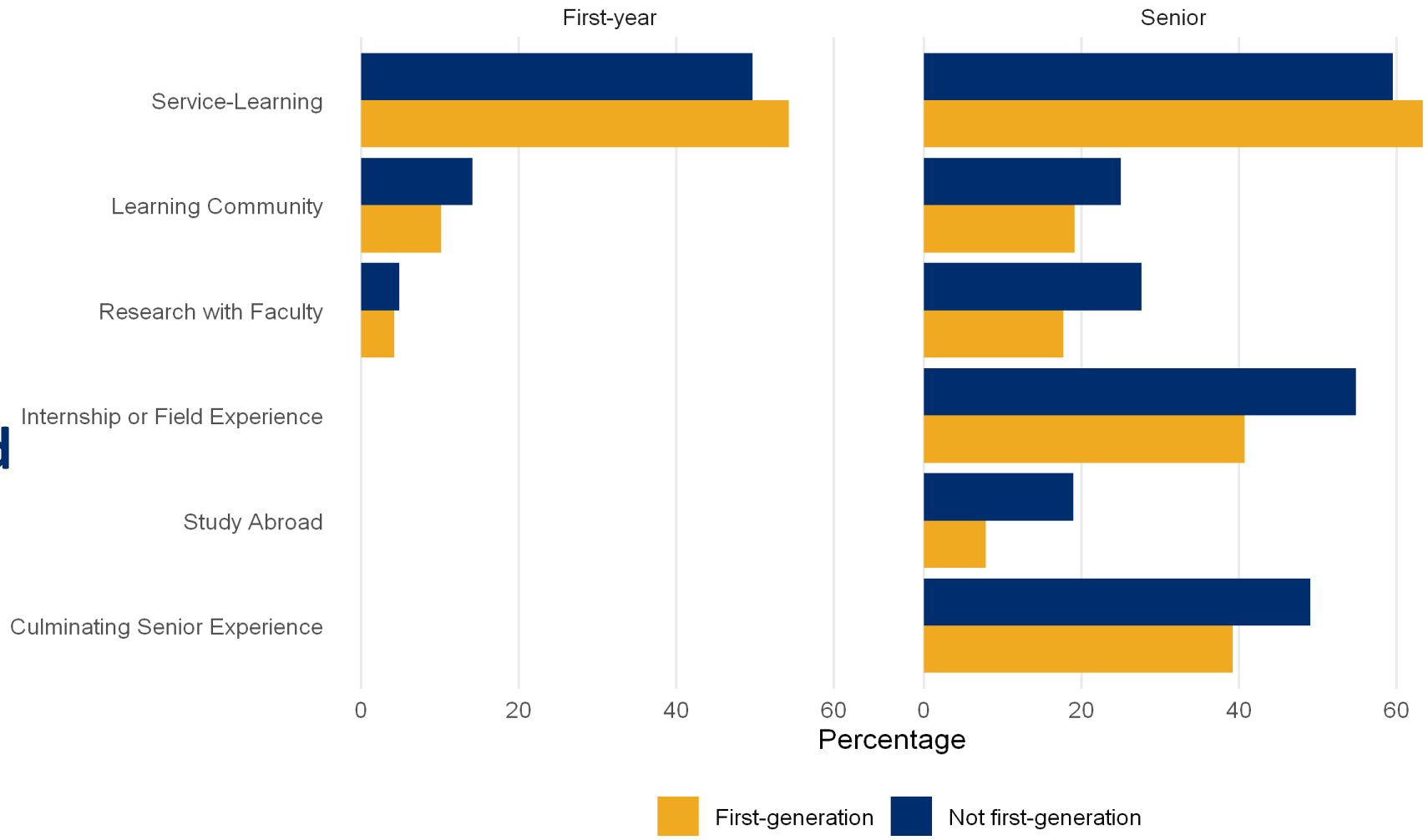
Inequities in HIPs: Access and Participation

- % participation by student populations
- Access inequities, for example, involvement in service-learning

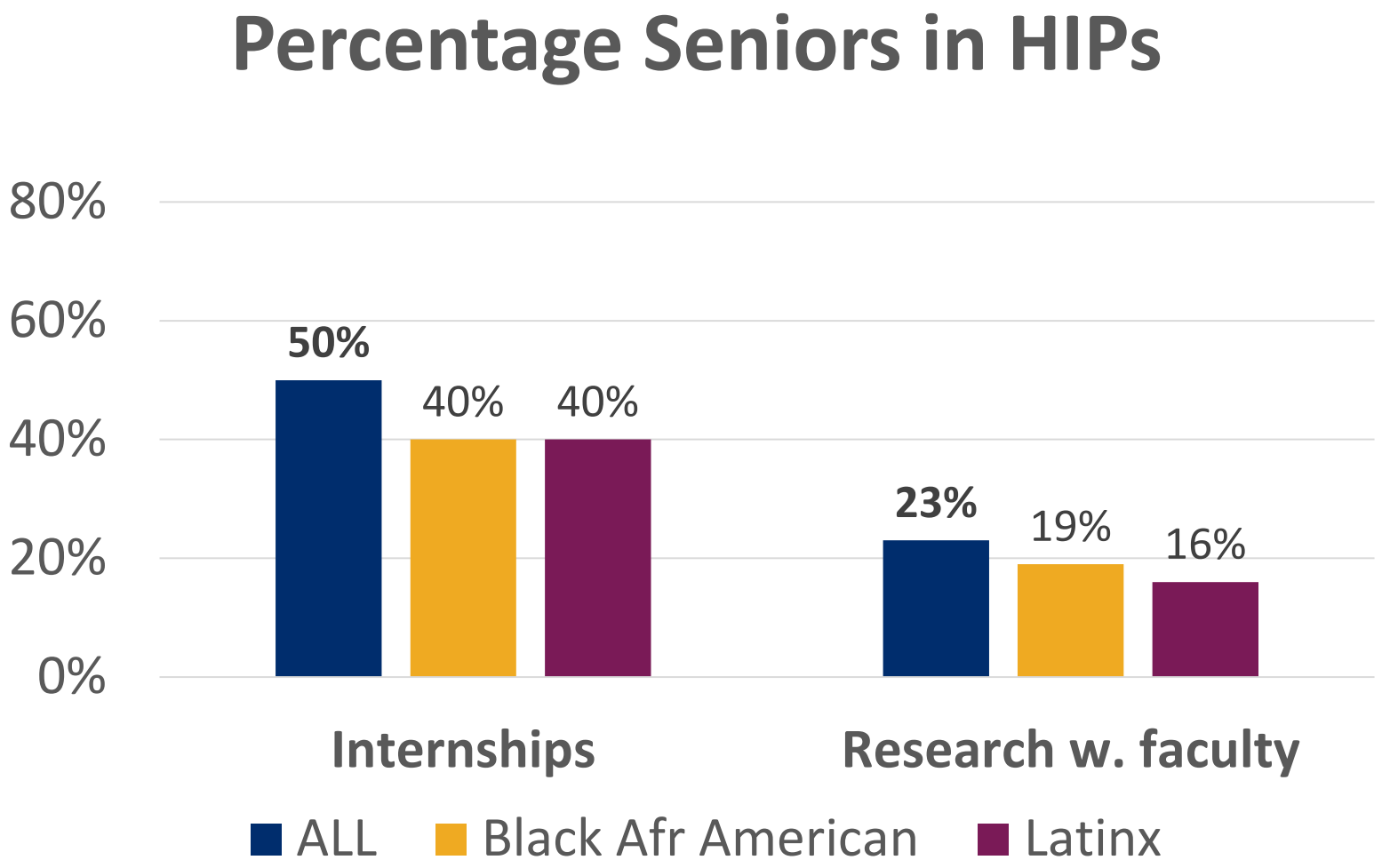
"necessitates a level of leisure time, money, and an ability to access local organizations; these are luxuries many multiply marginalized students do not always have." (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018)

First-generation Seniors' Participation Lags That of Peers by HIP

- Non-FG seniors more likely to do
  - Research with faculty (1.5x)
  - Internships etc. (1.3)
  - Study abroad (2.7)
- FG seniors participated in service-learning slightly more
- Patterns consistent since 2007



In Some HIPs, Participation Varies by Racial Identity



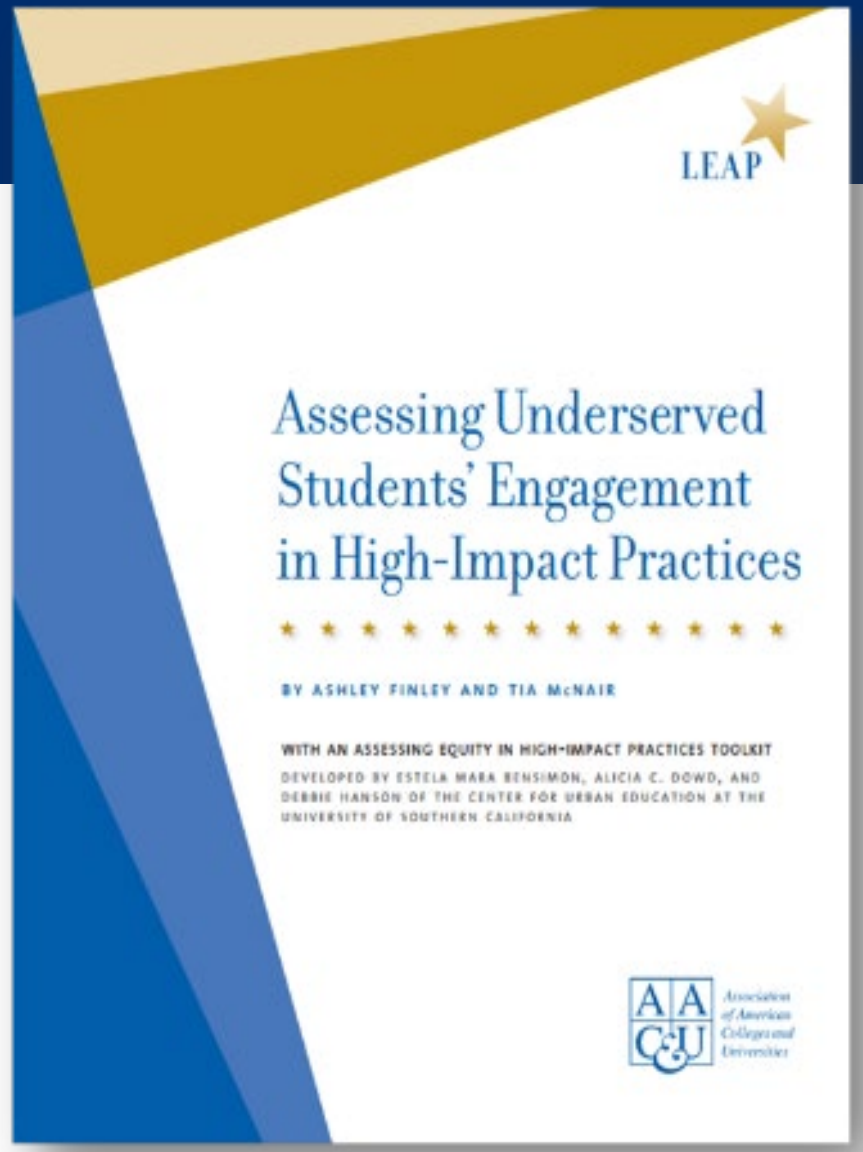
Ensuring Equity in HIPs

- **ALL Students must gain HIP experiences**
  - **What assumptions, biases, inequitable policies and practices are harming marginalized students participation?**
  - **Use an asset-based approach – focus on *what facilitates marginalized students' success, who and what was most supportive***
- **Study your racially minoritized students' HIP experiences – ask *what's most and least satisfying?***

Challenges to Equity in HIPs

Deficit-minded campus practices are barriers to increasing underserved student participation

- **Competing priorities (e.g., family, work, earning money to pay for school)**
- **Students lack information about HIPs and where to find them**
- **Underserved students are keenly aware of contexts where they could be marginalized**
- **Lack of direct guidance from advisors and faculty**



Finley & McNair, 2013 AAC&U

Increasing HIP Equity

- **Faculty guide students to HIPs**

  "we put HIPs in students path"

- **Emphasize short service-learning abroad**
  - **Help families think through if student is a caregiver, and parents reluctant to send student abroad**
  - **GoFundMe accounts**
- **Brought features of HIPs into large intro courses, and track students doing each**

Expanding Participation in HIPs

- Address pandemic induced pent-up demand for experiential learning – create more on-campus, short term special experiences
- Introduce HIPs early and often – get on students radar
- Explore assumptions about practices (who participates, cost, demands, etc.) – ***debunk myths***
- Study who is NOT participating

Reflections: What do these findings suggest for you and your campus?

1. Quality of Interaction/ Relationship-Rich
2. Sense of Belonging
3. Advising – *Listening, Respect, Caring*
4. High-Impact Practices

Attending to Quality & Equity; Disaggregating Data

Recovering Equilibrium for Student Engagement, Learning and Success

Thank you!

Questions?

NSSE Annual Results:
https://nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/index.html

Contact: jikinzie@indiana.edu