

# Sense of Belonging and First-Year Student Success

**Jim Cole**  
Project Director, BCSSE

**Jillian Kinzie**  
Co-Director, NSSE

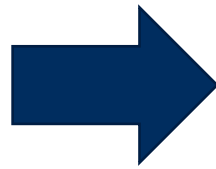


SAIR Conference 2022 – October 3, 2022 New Orleans

# Conceptualizing Student Success



**Solutions to increasing student success in college are complex**



**One factor that influences students' success from the start and is particularly salient given current efforts to create more inclusive campus environments**



**The extent to which students feel they fit at their college, or are accepted into, and *feel they belong* as a member of a group or the community**

# Agenda

- **Introduction to Sense of Belonging (SB)**
  - **Results from NSSE SB items**
- **BCSSE and NSSE and SB**
- **Uses of BCSSE and NSSE data to improve first-year student success**
- **Wrap up and questions**



# Who's Here and What's Your Interest in this Session?

**What's your interest in this session?**

**Is sense of belonging a topic of discussion on your campus? How are you examining it?**

***Do you have NSSE or BCSSE data?***



# Sense of Belonging

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**
- **Salient to design of first-year experience**



# NSSE's Sense of Belonging Items

NSSE Debut in 2020!



**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.

# November 2020 - Annual Results

## Building a Sense of Community for All



Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart University

### Building a Sense of Community for All

We examined the relationships between students' sense of belonging (three new items on the 2020 survey) with engagement, perceived gains, and persistence, and also looked at patterns related to selected student characteristics.

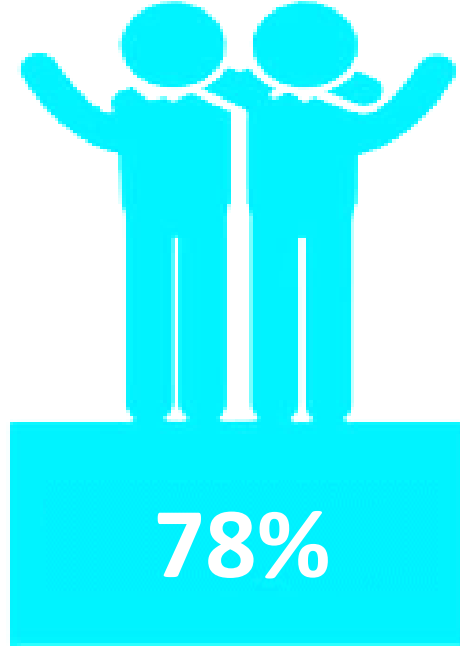
**Read the story at:**

[nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/](https://nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/)

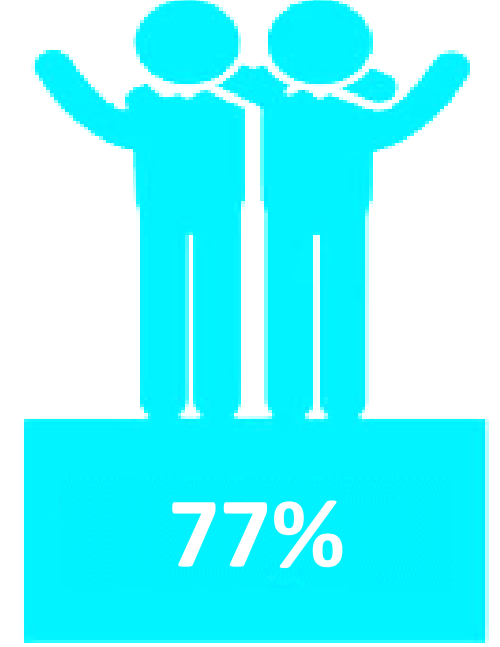
# FY Student Sense of Belonging 2020 (prior to pandemic)



I feel comfortable being myself at this institution



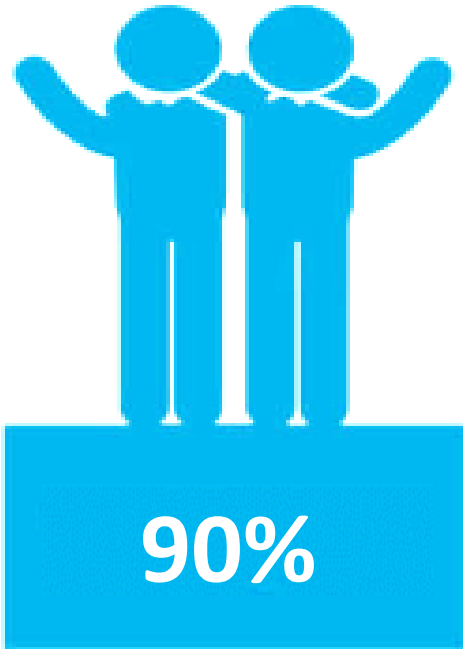
I feel valued by this institution



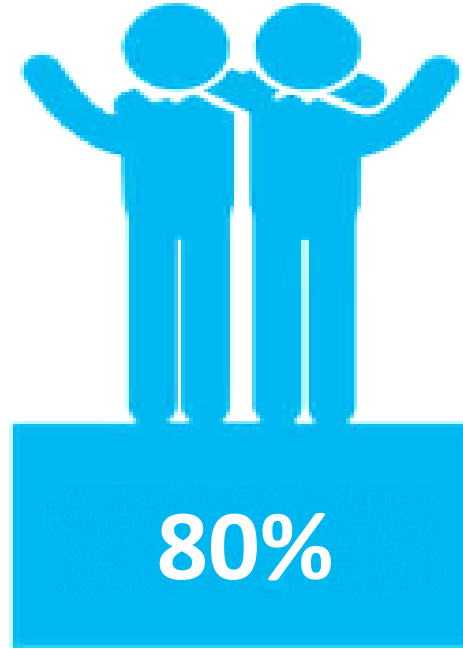
I feel like part of the community at this institution

**Most students feel they belong, but there are important differences by social identities**

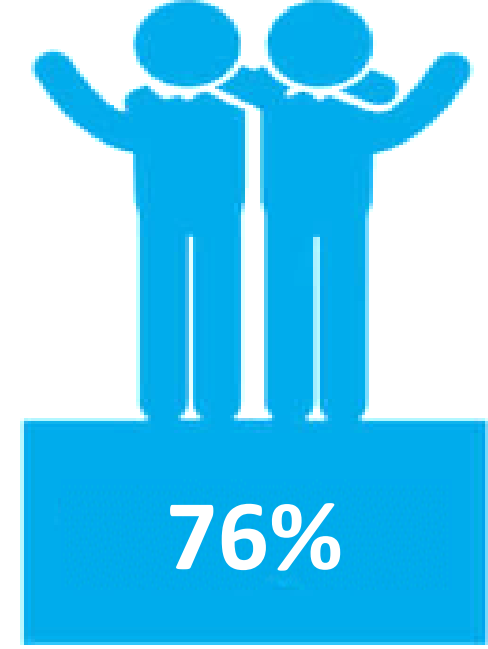
# FY Student Sense of Belonging 2021 (during pandemic)



I feel comfortable being myself at this institution



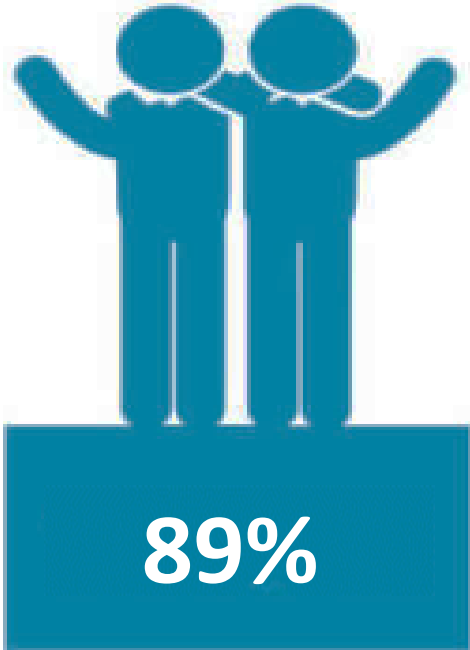
I feel valued by this institution



I feel like part of the community at this institution

**Most students still experiencing high belonging, despite disruption**

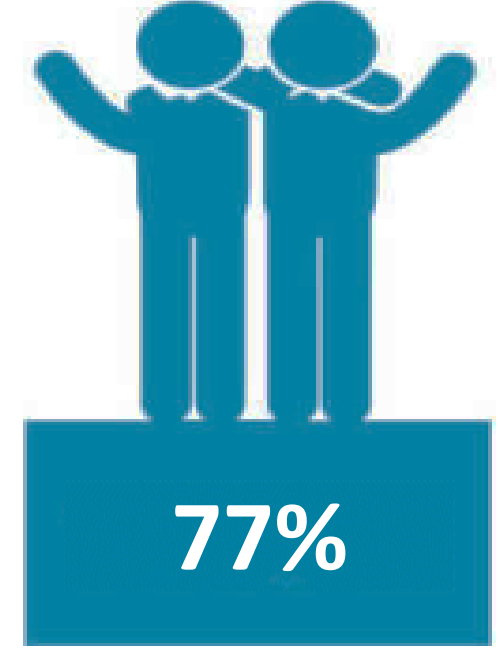
# FY Student Sense of Belonging 2022 (current pandemic)



I feel comfortable being myself at this institution



I feel valued by this institution



I feel like part of the community at this institution

**Consistent sense of belonging...but important differences by social identities**

## Digging Deeper: Sense of Belonging by Student Populations



Most students feel they belong, 89%  
feel comfortable being themselves,  
78% feel valued...

*but differences exist among  
subgroups*

**Critical to disaggregate  
data by social identities**

# Black or African American Students, Levels of Sense of Belonging, and Other Experiences

- Black or African American first-year students' sense of belonging scores divided into Lowest, Middle & Highest groups.
- Examining how NSSE items relate to SB group membership helps to identify ways to improve belonging.

**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.

# Black or African American Students and Levels of Sense of Belonging

Black or African American first-year students' sense of belonging scores divided into Low, Middle & High groups.

◆ Low SB     ◆ High SB

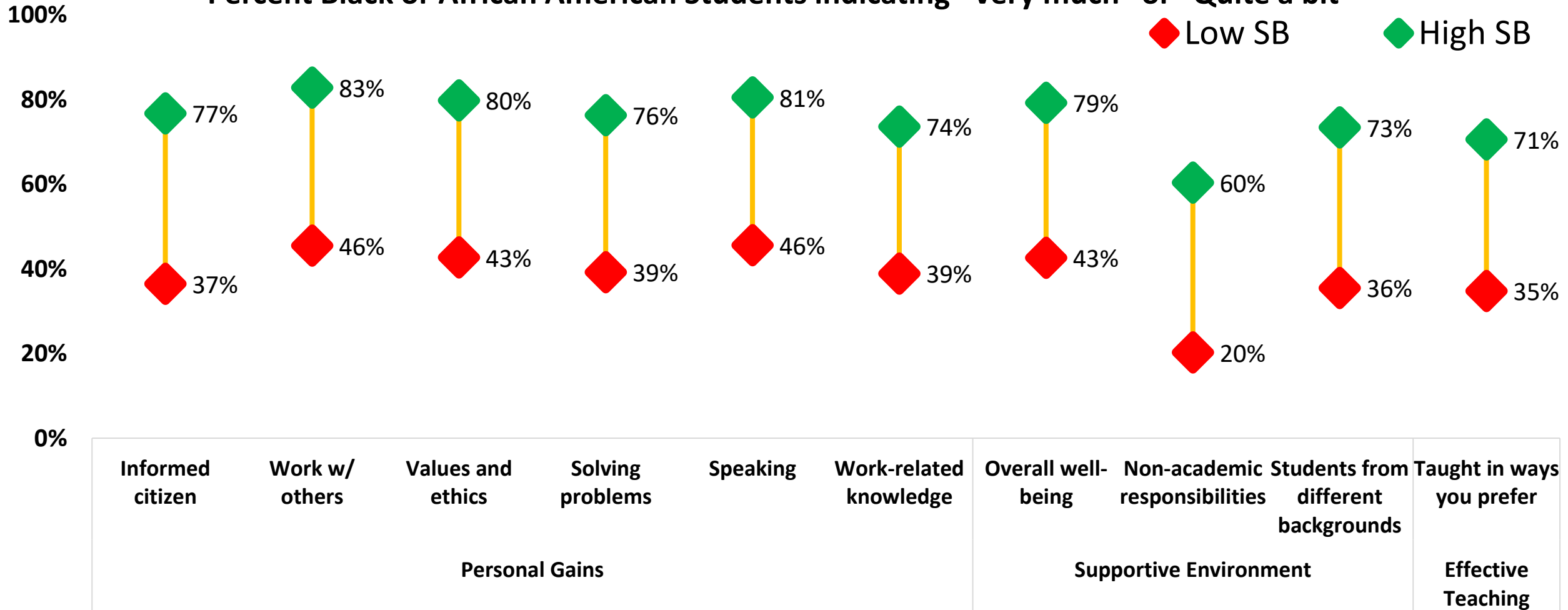
On which engagement practices do the **Low** and **High** SB groups show the greatest and the least difference?

- Top 10 Engagement Practices greatest difference
- Top 10 Engagement Practices with least difference



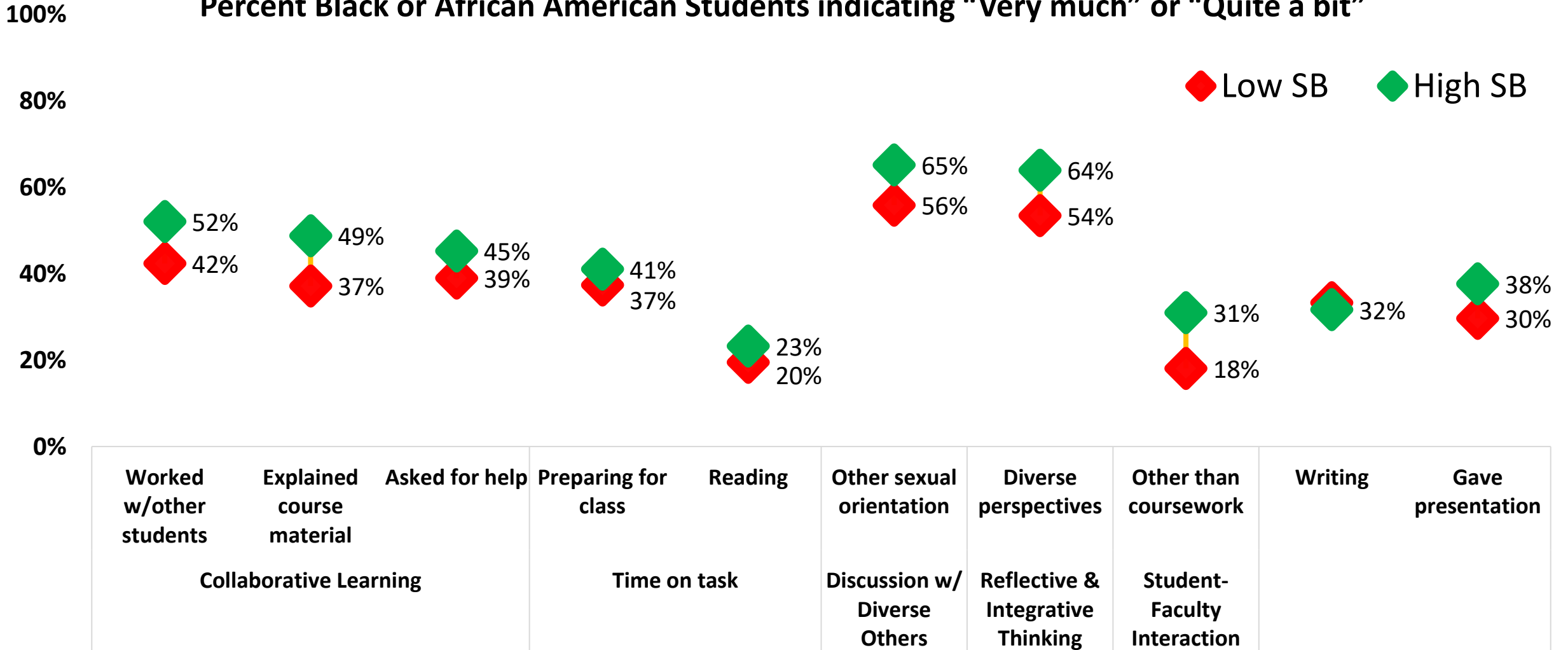
# Black or African American Students Top 10 Engagement Practices: Greatest Difference

Percent Black or African American Students indicating “Very much” or “Quite a bit”



# Black or African American Students Top 10 Engagement Practices: Least Difference

Percent Black or African American Students indicating "Very much" or "Quite a bit"



Worked w/other students	Explained course material	Asked for help	Preparing for class	Reading	Other sexual orientation	Diverse perspectives	Other than coursework	Writing	Gave presentation
Collaborative Learning			Time on task		Discussion w/ Diverse Others	Reflective & Integrative Thinking	Student-Faculty Interaction		

# Sense of Belonging Results: Implications

Knowing what relates to high sense of belonging for under-represented student groups or other populations of interest suggest more specific ways institutions can foster belonging.

NSSE results suggest a focus on:

- Positive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers
- Effective teaching practices
- Support for wellbeing, success
- **Reflective activities in courses**
- **Institutional support for diversity (encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds, emphasizing events that address important social, economic and political issues)**

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# Student Populations and Sense of Belonging

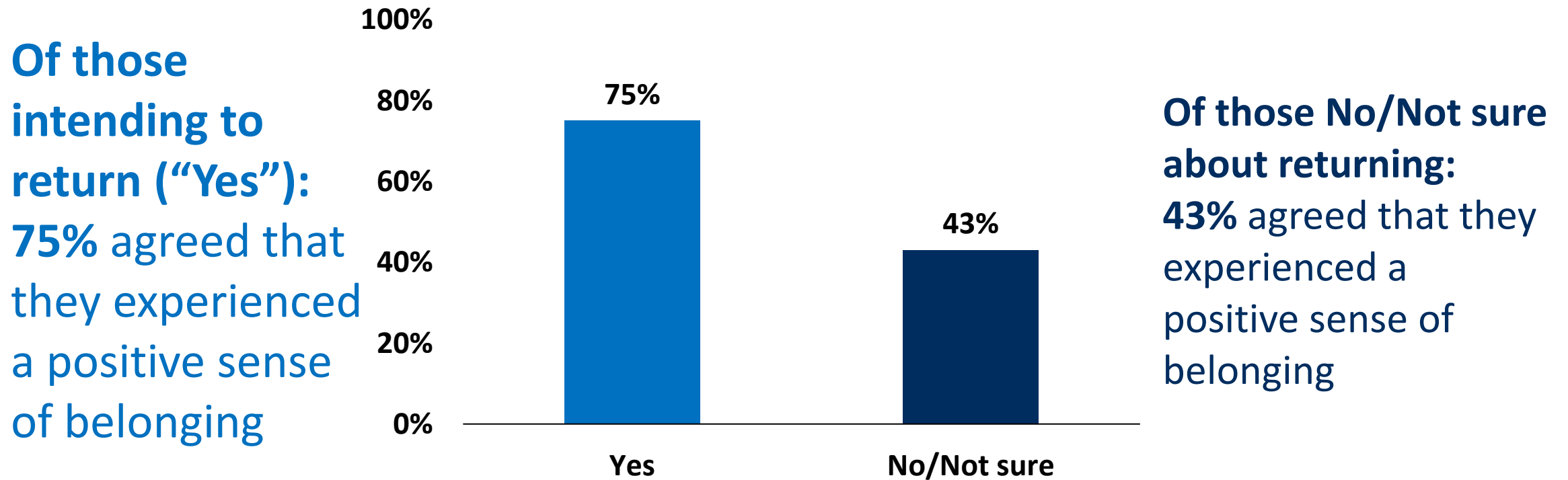
**What student characteristics do you want to examine for sense of belonging results?**

*Gender identity, race/ethnicity, international, first-generation status....*



# Relationship Between Sense of Belonging & Persistence

Majority of FY students feel valued...but differ on intention to return



Sense of belonging has very strong, statistically significant relationships with first-year students' intent to return to their institution.

# Learning from Institution Stories



## Affirming the Importance of Belonging

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
DOMINGUEZ HILLS

California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) is using its NSSE 2020 sense of belonging results in a variety of ways, including as part of their integrated assessment of their First Year Experience, in their routine sharing of results, and in an analysis of retention.



## Complementary Efforts to Study and Act on Belonging

GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

In Georgia's statewide effort to increase graduation rates, universities are designing interventions to develop productive academic mindsets such as learning from setbacks, having a sense of purpose, and finding a place in the institutional environment.



## Sense of Belonging as Validation of the Power of Community

TAYLOR UNIVERSITY

Taylor University, a faith-based liberal arts institution in Upland, Indiana, teaches that community extends beyond the physical campus. They challenge students to live authentically, while also supporting others in their community—promoting belongingness via campus culture.

# Data Use Example: Pairing SB with Data on Productive Mindsets



## Complementary Efforts to Study and Act on Belonging

GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

In Georgia's statewide effort to increase graduation rates, universities are designing interventions to develop productive academic mindsets such as learning from setbacks, having a sense of purpose, and finding a place in the institutional environment.

- **NSSE 2020 sense of belonging results provide GSW a complementary measure to examine alongside belonging data from the institutions' results on the University System of Georgia's Mindset Survey.**
- **Results help identify topics for institutional action, with a focus on how aspects of student life such as contact among students from different backgrounds, being involved socially, and attending campus events, could be redesigned to focus more intentionally on their contribution to productive academic mindsets.**

# Data Use Example: To Assess FYE Program & Retention Analysis



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- **SB results included as part of integrated assessment of First Year Experience**
- **Results shared with Associate Vice Presidents and Vice Presidents, General Education curriculum committee, advising council; and in analysis of retention**
- **FY belonging averages looked good, affirmation that CSUDH is inclusive**
- **Results informed Faculty Development Center emphasis on faculty's role in helping students feel valued and part of the community**

## BCSSE and NSSE

Data from BCSSE and NSSE can deepen our understanding of students' sense of belonging

Institutions using BCSSE and NSSE can undertake these same analyses to better understand sense of belonging and the first-year experience on their campus



# BCSSE and NSSE

Students enter with a variety of backgrounds, expectations, and beliefs about the coming year. BCSSE pairs with NSSE to allow a longitudinal view of student engagement.



# Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

Students enter with excitement for the coming year, but also many expect difficulties during this time of transition





## Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

***What do you think?*** Are entering students who expect difficulty with the following during their first year:

- 1) Getting help with schoolwork,
- 2) Making new friends, and
- 3) Interacting with faculty

more likely to have a low sense of belonging in the spring?

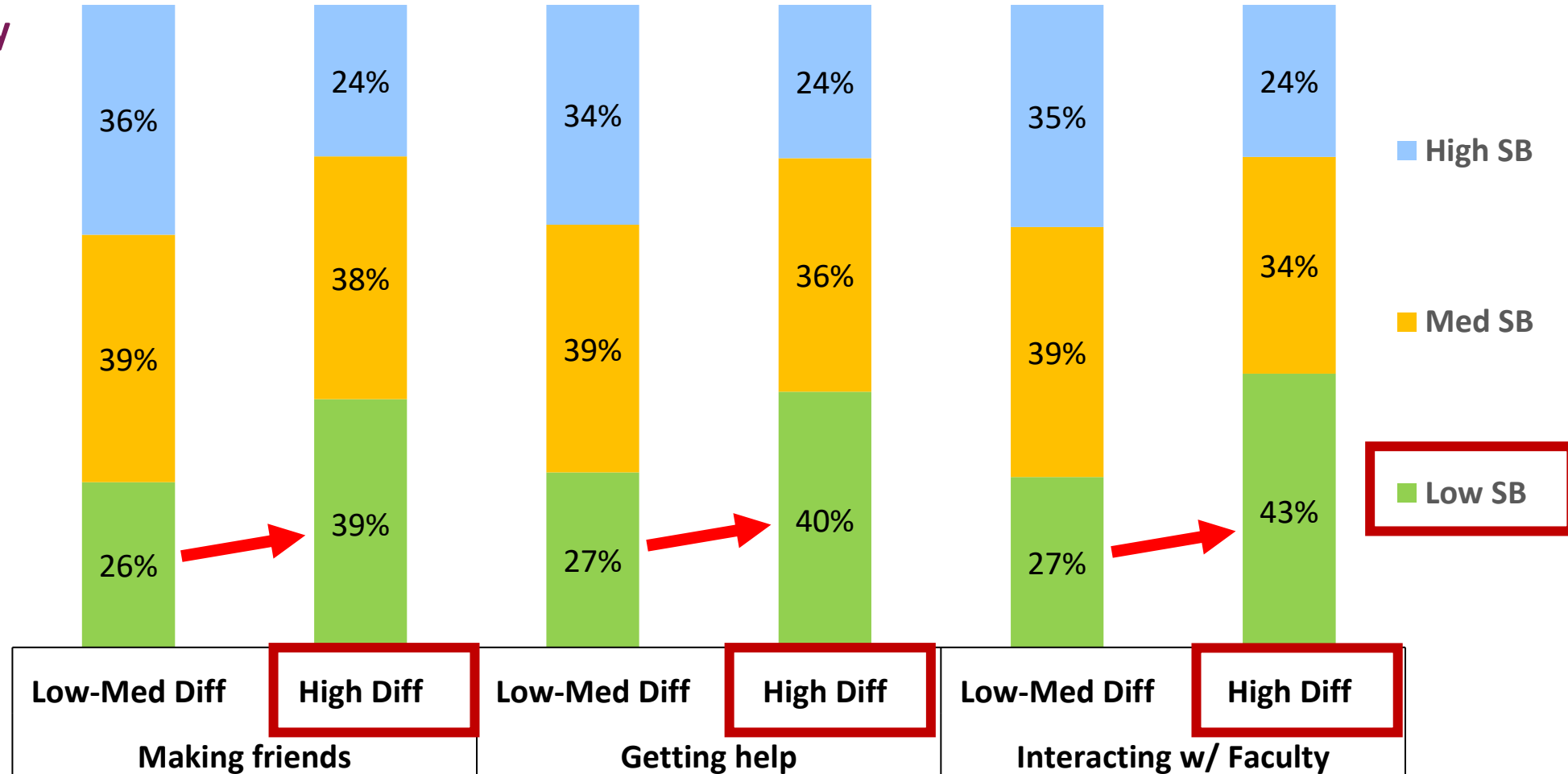
***Yes or No?***

***Which do you think matter the most to low sense of belonging?***

# Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

## Expected high difficulty by each level of SB for each item

- Consistently, we see that students expecting **high difficulty** making friends, getting help, and interacting with faculty were 13% - 16% points more likely to experience **low sense of belonging**.



# Entering Mindset and Sense of Belonging

## Entering mindset for those who experienced high sense of belonging:

- Expected less difficulty getting help with schoolwork, making friends, and interacting with faculty at the beginning of the school year
- Expectations are not destiny, but they influence choices and decisions students make as they progress through the school year



# Applying NSSE & BCSSE SB Findings to Improve First-Year Student Success

- SB results vary by student subgroups – don't overlook variation; focus attention on practices associated with high SB for specific populations
- Persistence influenced by feeling valued – can you focus on students with low SB? Can you ask FY students what contributes to feeling valued? Are these things emphasized and intentionally developed in your First Year Experience (FYE)?
- Invite student reflection on belonging – increase reflection activities in courses, FYE programs
- Design for diverse experiences (encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds, and attending events that address important social, economic and political issues)
- Students who expect difficulty getting help, making friends and interacting with faculty deserve interventions to assist with academic mindset

# Opportunities for Sense of Belonging Results

- **Bring Student and Academic Affairs together to discuss results and identify strategies to enhance engagement practices associated with high levels of belonging**
- **Explore sense of belonging among students by level of academic performance, work with learning support services & faculty teaching first year courses to devise early indicators of belonging**





## NSSE & BCSSE and how to get involved:

- **NSSE recruitment 2023 (Closes Oct 7, 2022)**
  - 10 NSSE Topical Modules in 2023, helpful for focused exploration of institutional priorities, including Career & Workforce Preparation, Inclusion & Engagement with Diversity, Writing, Academic Advising, First Year & Senior Transition, HIP Quality...
- **BCSSE recruitment 2023 (March- Sept.)**



Join us...REGISTER FOR NSSE 2023!



# Thanks so much for joining us!

**Jim Cole & Jillian Kinzie**  
**National Survey of Student  
Engagement (NSSE)**  
**Indiana University Center for  
Postsecondary Research**

[nsse.indiana.edu](http://nsse.indiana.edu)

