



INSTITUTE FOR  
**Well-being**  
AT BUTLER UNIVERSITY





## Why Well-being?

In recent years, colleges and universities across the United States have begun to focus more and more on holistic student well-being—and with good reason. Research has shown that students who sleep more (Cresswell, Tumminia, Price, Sefidgar, Cohen, Ren, ... & Lovet; 2023) and who eat more nutritiously (Burrows, Whatnall, Patterson & Hutcheson, 2017) have higher GPAs. We also know that strong social well-being can help college students effectively manage their stress (Altaher & Runnerstrom, 2018), and that interacting with people from different backgrounds helps to promote learning and development (Fosnacht, Gonyea & Graham, 2020). Further, engagement in learning communities, study abroad, and undergraduate research is related to increased democratic awareness and participation (Howe & Fosnacht, 2017); and prevention and treatment of mental health issues leads to increased student retention and higher GPAs (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009).

Momentum for this focus has increased since the creation of the Okanagan Charter in 2015, and the publication of the NASPA/NIRSA *Health and Well-being in Higher Education* statement in 2019 (updated in 2020). This latter statement raises student well-being to a multifaceted goal for the entire campus, and one for which each unit in the institution has responsibility. *Health and Well-being in Higher Education* has now been adopted by more than a dozen higher education associations in addition to NIRSA and NASPA, including ACHA, ACPA, ACUHO-I, ACUI, NACA, and NODA.

The COVID-19 pandemic in particular drew focused attention to the need for colleges and universities to support student well-being and mental health. Research from Qualtrics shows that 39% of students who experienced remote or virtual schooling, which is nearly all students (94%) in the study, self-reported that their mental health declined as a result (Qualtrics, 2022). Despite the growing prioritization of student mental health as a top institutional priority, 29% of students in Qualtrics's study said their school doesn't have mental health resources or they don't know if it does.

Among students who were aware of the mental health resources available at their institutions, 63% identified at least one problem with what's available. The top issue, reinforcing the criticality of informing students of mental health resources, is that students don't know what is available to them. Increasing access and uptake of mental health resources isn't only about creating new supports; it's also about making the existing ones better and more widely known. Other top issues that students identified are long wait times (20%) and only short-term treatments (19%).



# Why Now?

Layering this research with the stressors we know students are facing today, including effects of an ongoing pandemic, reverberations from social unrest over racial injustices, a toxic political environment, and climate change; it is clear that supporting student well-being should be a priority for institutions of higher education. And the good news is that, while institutions cannot control the levels of individual well-being that students bring with them to college, they can control the supports provided to students once they enroll.



Given the stressors our students are experiencing and the literature that supports providing college students with opportunities to enhance their own well-being, the time is ripe for this first national report on student-wellbeing. The Institute for Well-being at Butler University and Qualtrics hope this report will inspire thinking at the national and campus levels about innovative ways to integrate well-being throughout academics and the co-curriculum, as well as inform those innovations with findings we have collected. Our intention is that this report fuels data-informed action that increases pathways and possibilities for student success in higher education.

## Student Well-being for Institutional Support Survey



To respond to the growing needs of college and university students and to the interests of institutions of higher education in knowing they are meeting those needs, the Institute for Well-being at Butler University developed a survey that allows institutions to collect student perceptions on areas of strength and opportunity in institutional support for aspects of their well-being: the Student Well-being Institutional Support Survey (SWISS).



The SWISS was purposefully designed to give actionable information to practitioners about areas of strength and opportunity in their work to support holistic student well-being. As the literature clearly indicates, helping to ensure our students have a strong foundation of well-being from which to grow and thrive during their time in higher education is beneficial not only for the students themselves, but for the institution. Without measures that inform practitioners of the effects of their efforts in these areas, not only will our work potentially be inefficient, but students may not receive the supports they need to flourish. Further, without efficient ways to communicate the results of those measures to resource-holders and decision-makers, assessment of the student experience can have little impact. Using the Qualtrics Experience Management platform, SWISS empowers campuses to quickly collect digital survey responses and easily visualize and interpret their results. The real-time feedback and reporting tools enable campuses to take informed, data-driven action on a fast timeline to optimize student support.

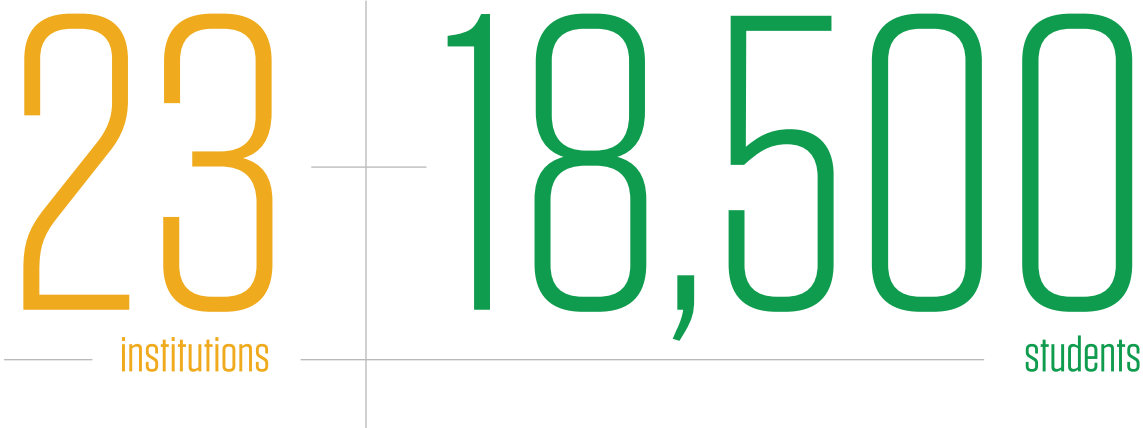
## How SWISS Measures Climate for Well-being

The primary differentiator of SWISS is that respondents are asked to rate how well their institution is doing in supporting holistic student well-being. Prior to SWISS, existing student well-being surveys focused on how students rated their own well-being and personal behaviors related to well-being. The SWISS fills a gap in the tools available to institutions to understand student perception of institutional supports.

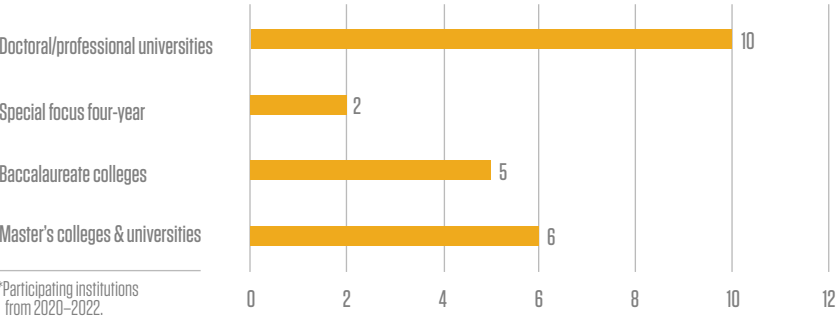
In addition, SWISS captures insights about more than one aspect of student supports on campus because support for student well-being is at its most effective when it is interconnected throughout a student's experience. The survey asks about supports for mental and physical health needs, accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion, social and campus engagement opportunities, academic support and faculty interest in the student experience, support for students to develop their own senses of meaning and purpose, financial literacy, spirituality, interactions with diversity, residential and dining support, and availability of welcoming physical spaces on campus. When paired with the demographic items on the survey, these measures offer campuses direct and actionable insights into areas of success and opportunity, along with the ability to drill down into the data by student characteristics to uncover possible inequities in support across groups. Further, with the Qualtrics-powered dashboards SWISS provides to campus contacts, the data can be easily translated across campus audiences to generate buy-in and support for new initiatives.

# What Have We Learned from SWISS?

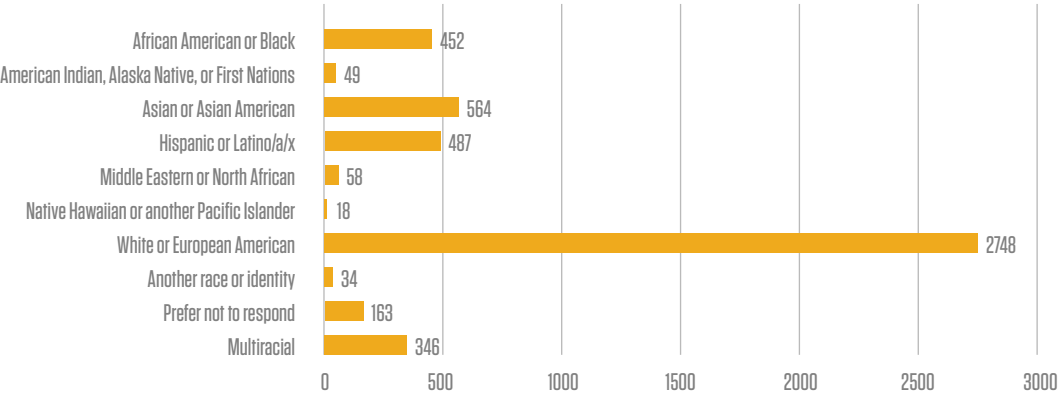
Since the launch of the pilot survey in fall 2020, more than 23 institutions and 18,500 students have participated in SWISS. Respondents come from a variety of institution types and represent a wide range of student characteristics. The findings presented in this report are undergraduate responses from the 2021–2022 administration year, except where noted.



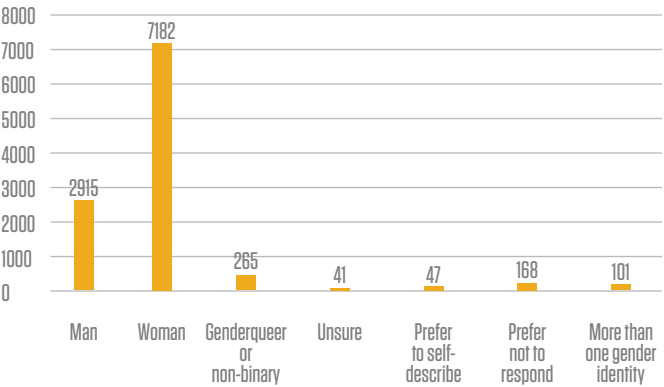
## Participating Institutions by Carnegie Classification\*



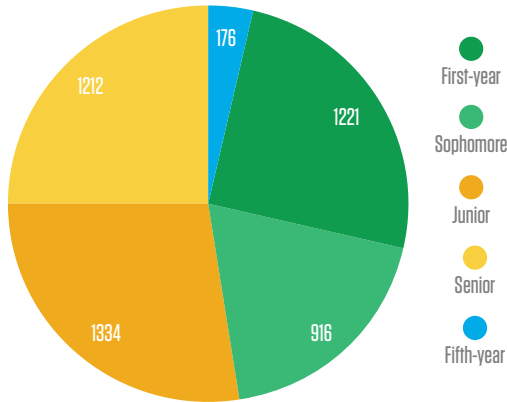
## Racial/Ethnic Identities



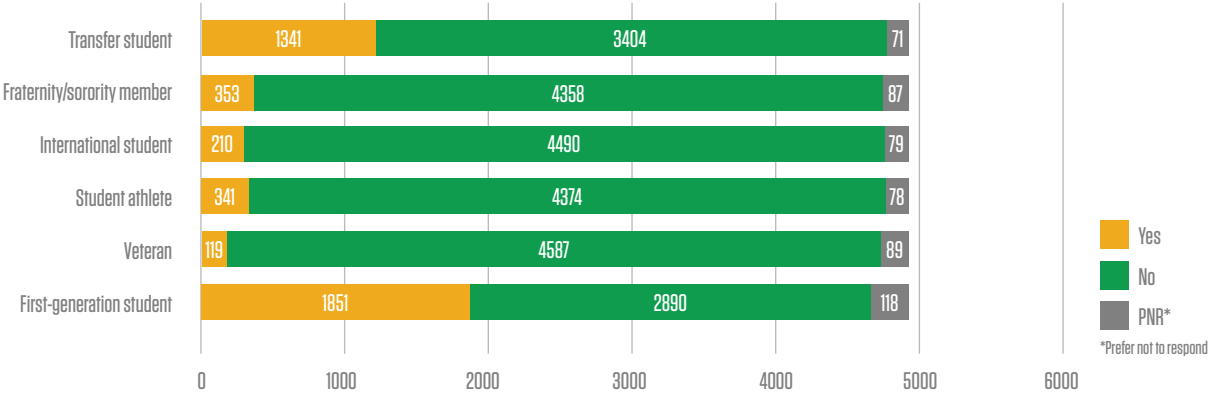
## Gender Identities



## Class Standing



## Additional Student Demographics





# Results

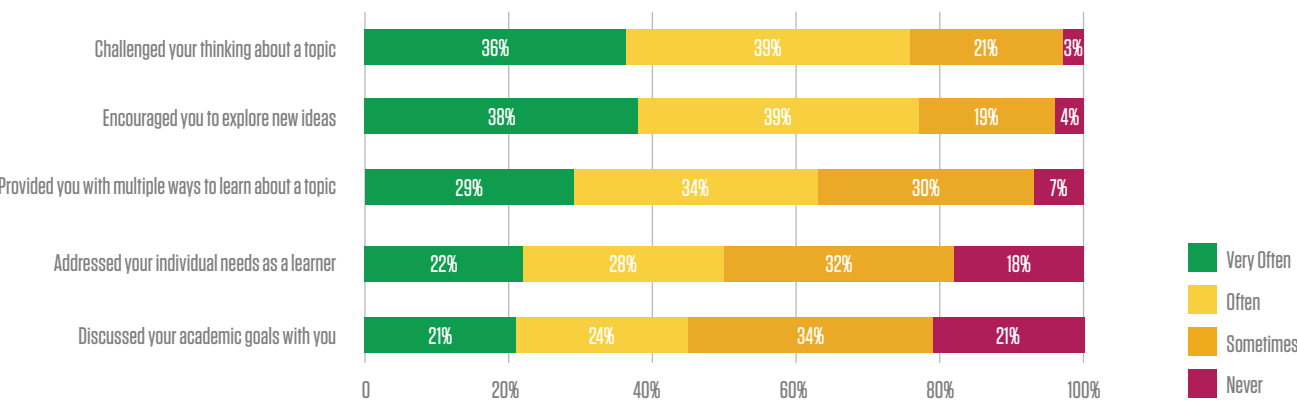
SWISS captures student feedback about a number of areas on campus, both inside and outside of the classroom. By grouping responses by theme, institutions, researchers, and practitioners are better able to see areas of success and opportunity.

## Academic supports

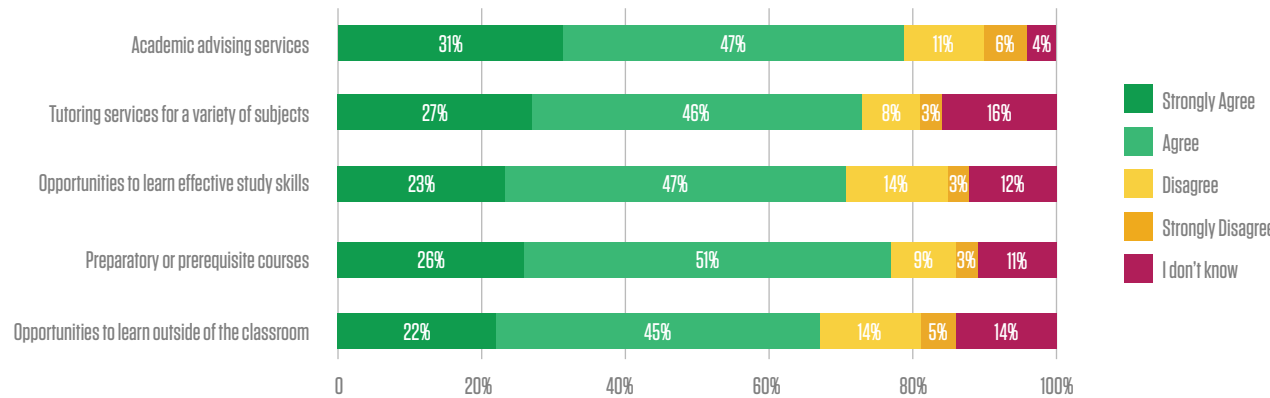
An obvious area of interest for institutions of higher education is how well students feel supported in their academic pursuits. Overall, students reported that their instructors often or very often challenged their thinking about a topic (*n* = 4,443, 76%) and encouraged them to explore new ideas (*n* = 4,511, 77%). Fewer respondents said that their instructors often or very often assessed their individual needs as a learner (*n* = 2,937, 50%) or discussed academic goals with them (*n* = 2,600, 44%). This latter finding points to an area of opportunity for instructors, considering the positive influence of student-faculty interaction on student well-being (Trolan, Archibald & Jach, 2022), belonging, and retention (Moore, 2022).

Many undergraduates perceived strong academic support services outside of their courses with 79% (*n* = 4,608) agreeing that they have access to adequate academic advising and 74% (*n* = 4,327) saying the same about tutoring services for a variety of subjects. Opportunities to learn outside of the classroom are perhaps an area of opportunity for institutions, as it was the lowest-rated in terms of academic support.

Thinking about your experiences with course instructors/faculty at this institution, how often have your instructors:



To what extent do you agree that your institution offers adequate:



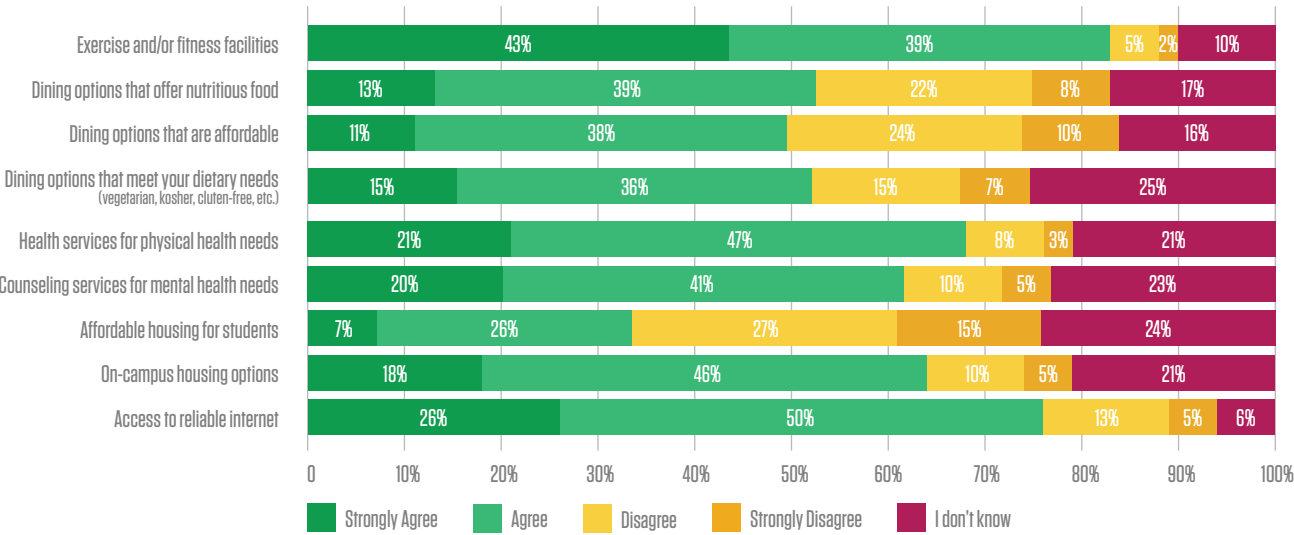
## Campus resources

Providing basic resources on campus such as dining options, housing, exercise facilities, health and counseling services, and reliable internet are key aspects of supporting student well-being. Students report that their institutions are supporting them well with access to exercise or fitness facilities (*n* = 5,922, 83% agree/strongly agree), and reliable internet (*n* = 5,450, 76% agree/strongly agree).

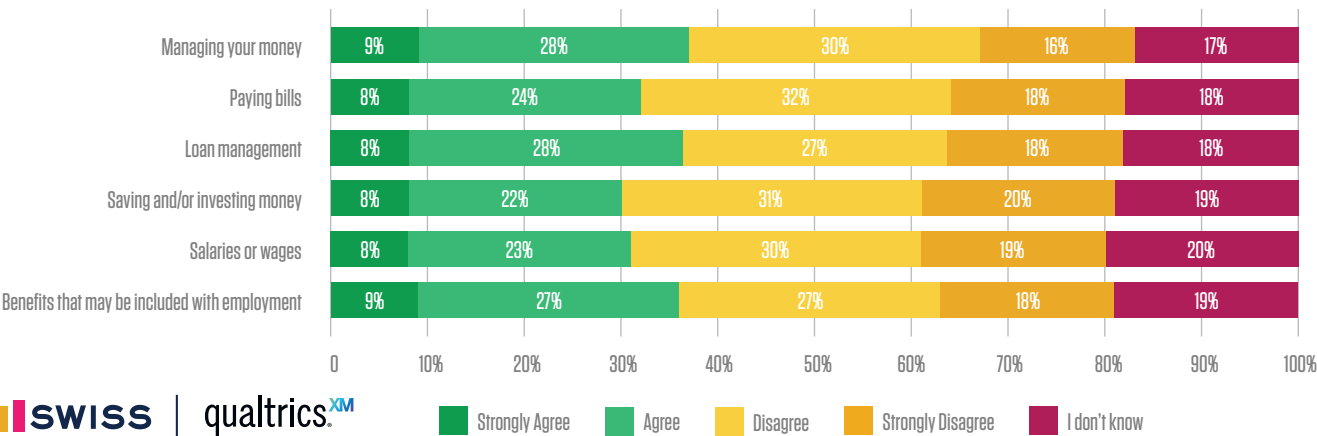
However, campus dining and housing are areas in which students perceive less-than-adequate support. For example, less than half of respondents agree that their campus has dining options that are affordable (*n* = 3,530, 49%), and slightly more than half agree that their dining options offer nutritious food (*n* = 3,759, 53%) or food that meets their dietary needs (*n* = 3,708, 52%). Looking at campus housing, 64% of students (*n*=4,564) agree that there are adequate housing options for them on campus; however, only 33% of students (*n* = 2,378) agree their institution provides affordable housing for students. This is a particularly salient finding given research that links availability of affordable housing with student well-being (e.g., Sotomayor, Tarhan, McCartney & Mas, 2022).

Another area of financial impact on student well-being is financial literacy, the lack of which can negatively influence students during their college years and far into a student's future (see Gutter & Copur, 2011 for an overview). Unfortunately, financial literacy is an area in which many students do not feel supported by their institution. Less than 37% of respondents agreed that their institution provides them with adequate financial literacy support in any of the areas measured on SWISS, indicating an area of opportunity for campuses to engage in this type of education.

Thinking about resources on your campus, to what extent do you agree that your institution provides adequate:



To what extent do you agree that your institution provides adequate resources for you to learn about:



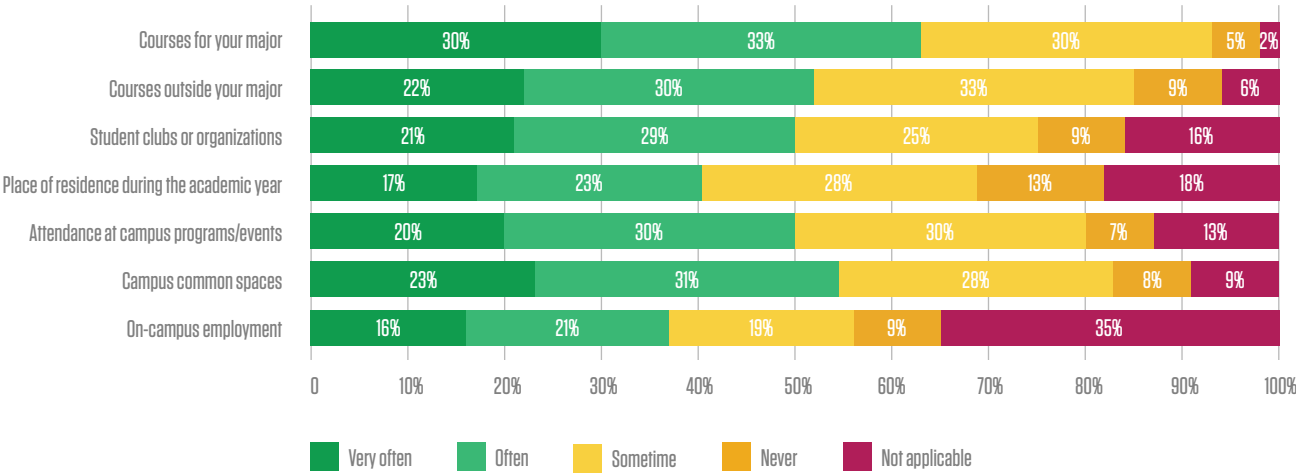
Diversity, equity & inclusion

Responses to SWISS’s questions about support for diversity, equity, and inclusion are thought-provoking. Broadly, students report strong institutional support for DEI (n = 5,495, 84%) and engaging with people of different backgrounds (n = 5,129, 79%). However, students also said that their institutions emphasized the importance of understanding aspects of their own identities to quite a lesser degree (n = 4,238, 65%). Considering that understanding one’s own identity and how one interacts with the world are foundational steps to take in better understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion; it is interesting that students report less emphasis on these key facets but more emphasis on DEI overall. This is, perhaps, an area in which institutions could dig deeper to support their overall emphasis on DEI by helping students with the building blocks of this work.

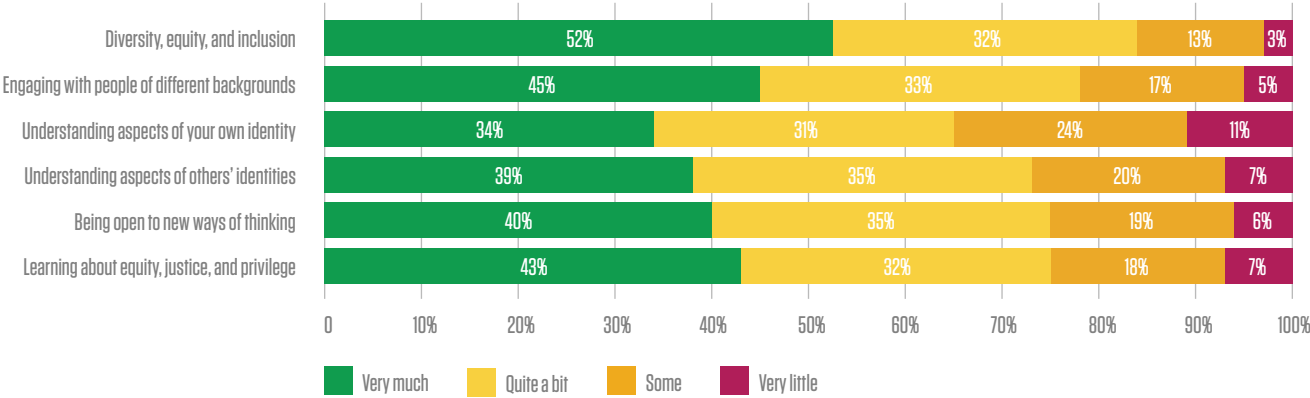
Also interesting to note is respondents’ indication that they most often interact with a diverse array of people in courses for their major, as opposed to in their place of residence, student clubs or organizations, or campus programs and events. This finding points to another inroad for institutions to help support students navigate DEI: a concerted effort to facilitating interaction among difference in instruction. Of course, this interaction already happens in many courses. But, perhaps knowing that major courses are where students are most often encountering difference could add additional weight to the work being done in courses.



We all have many aspects to our identities. How often do you have opportunities to interact with a diverse array of people in:



How much does your institution emphasize the importance of:



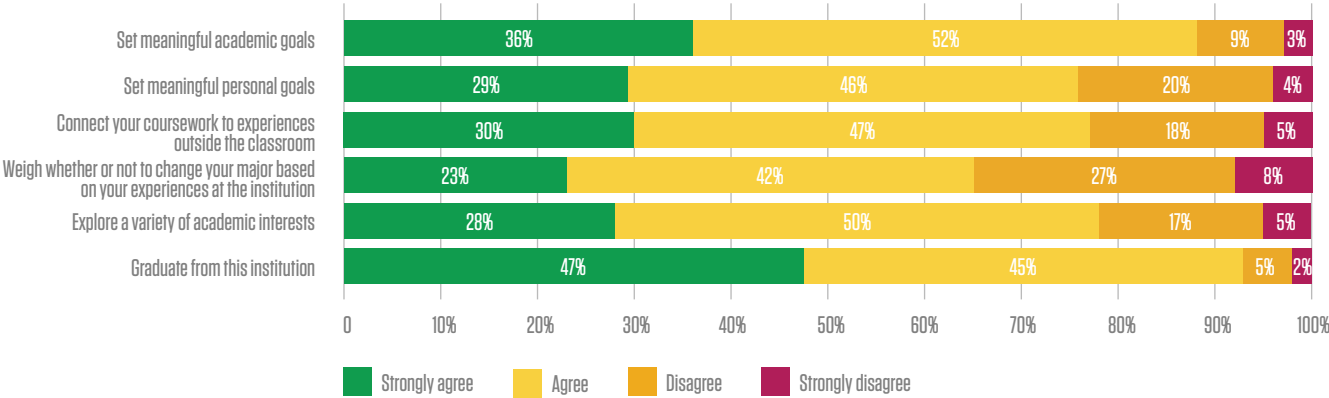


Meaning & purpose

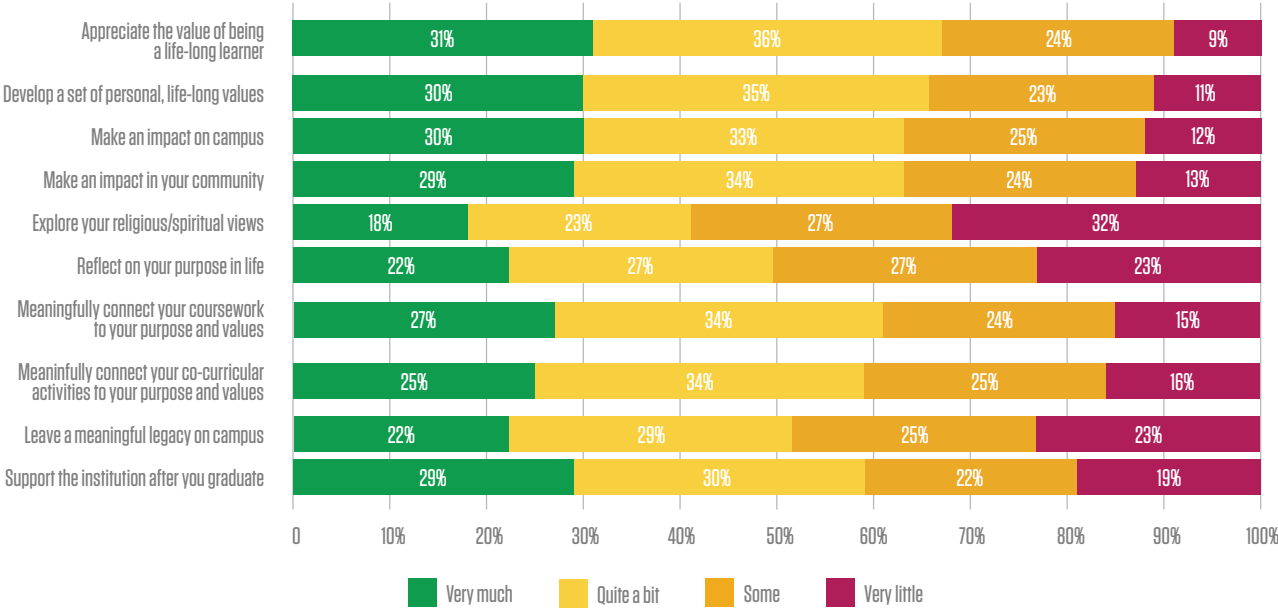
Many institutions of higher education consider it a part of their mission to help students develop their own sense of meaning and purpose. Encouragingly, SWISS respondents indicate that they perceive these efforts and encouragement from their institutions. For example, a majority of respondents (*n* = 4,438, 88%) feel encouraged by their institution to set meaningful academic goals and to connect their coursework to experiences outside of the classroom (*n* = 3,901, 77%). These results support the idea that integrative learning, or learning that requires making connections between unrelated ideas or contexts, is alive and well in the university (Huber, Hutchings, Gale, Miller & Breen, 2007).

Beyond academics, students also said that their institutions encouraged them to appreciate the value of being a life-long learner (*n* = 3,372, 67%) and to develop a set of personal, life-long values (*n* = 3,328, 66%). However, across the board, students rated support from their institution on developing these more personal and less academic values and purposes as lower than the emphasis placed on academic goals and meaning-making. The lowest-rated area of support was for students exploring their religious or spiritual views (*n* = 2,063, 41%).

To what extent do you agree that your institution encourages you to:



To what extent does your institution encourage you to:

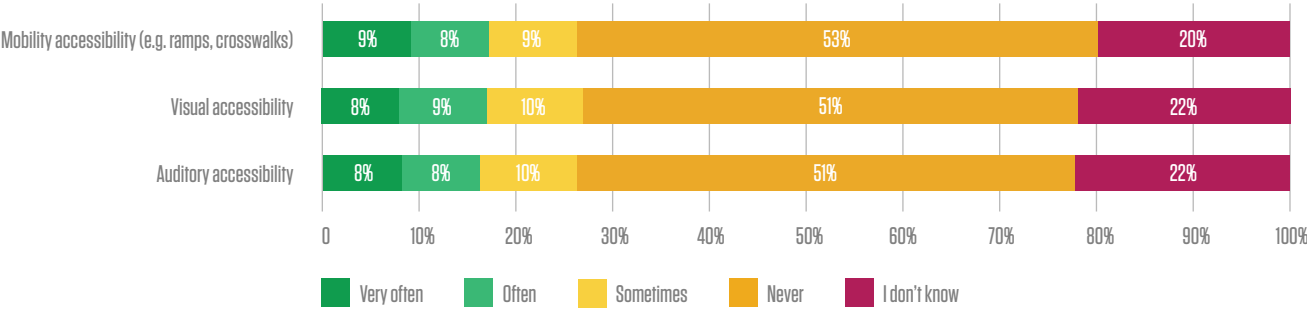


Navigating campus

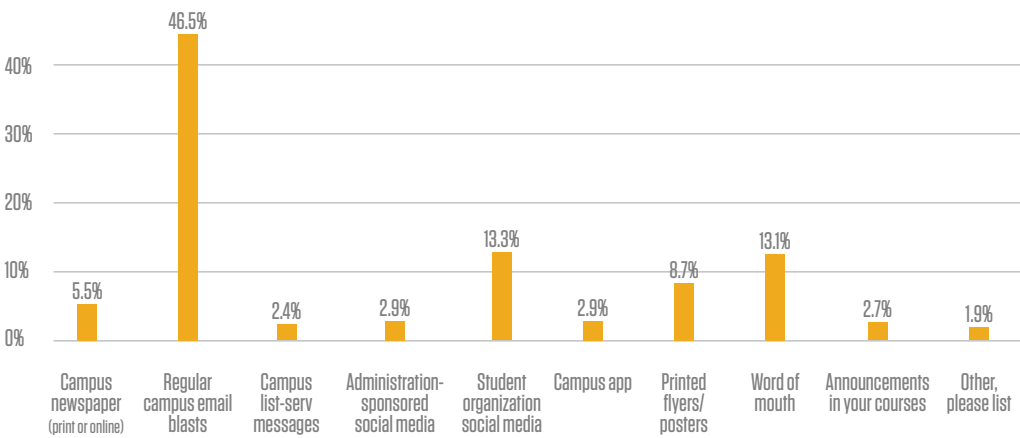
Two sometimes-overlooked aspects of the student experience are the navigability of campus for those with disabilities, and the ease students may or may not have in learning about all that the campus has to offer. According to undergraduate respondents to SWISS, a minority of students find lack of mobility, visual, and auditory accessibility bars them from engaging in all the institution has to offer. However, close to 20% of students do find accessibility to be a barrier often or very often, which is concerning.

In terms of learning about events, programs, and services on campus; the all-campus email blast appears to remain a top source of information for students.

How often does lack of accessibility prevent you from engaging in all your institution has to offer?



How do you most often learn about events, programs, or services on your campus



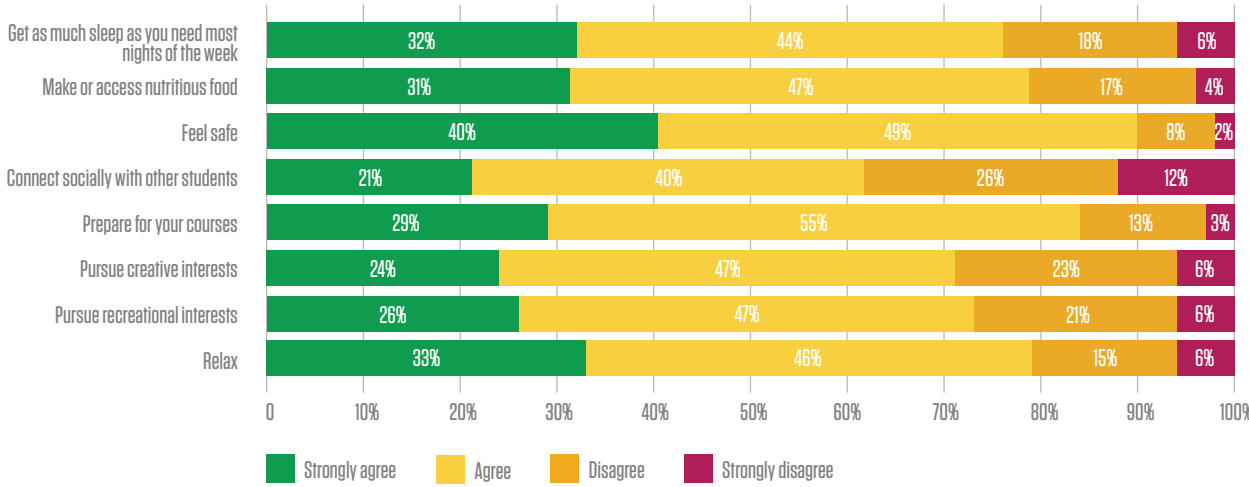
Residential supports



Having a safe place to live is considered a basic need, one necessary to thrive in other areas of life. Fortunately, according to SWISS respondents, the majority of undergraduates (n = 6,961, 90%) do feel safe in their place of residence during the academic year. In addition, 85% (n = 6,611) of students feel they can prepare for their courses, 79% (n = 6,146) can relax, and 79% (n = 6,130) can make or access nutritious food in their place of residence. Notably, however, only 61% (n = 4,758) agree that their place of residence allows them to connect socially with other students. With social isolation being a potential contributor to depression and mental health issues (Hefner, & Eisenberg, 2009), particularly for minoritized student groups, faculty and staff would do well to ensure that appropriate social connection is attainable for students who wish to engage in it.

Because college and university students may live in a range of places during the time they are enrolled (e.g., residence hall, Greek chapter house, on-campus apartment, at home with family, off-campus housing, etc.), SWISS asks about where students live during the academic year without narrowing the question by housing type. Housing type is offered on the survey as a demographic question by which institutions can disaggregate their results.

Thinking about where you live during the academic year, to what extent do you agree that your housing situation allows you to do the following, if you choose to:

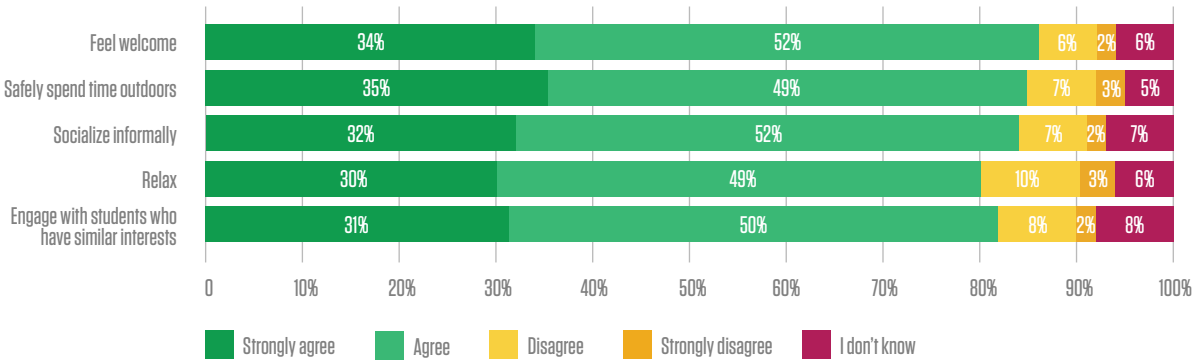


Engaging on campus

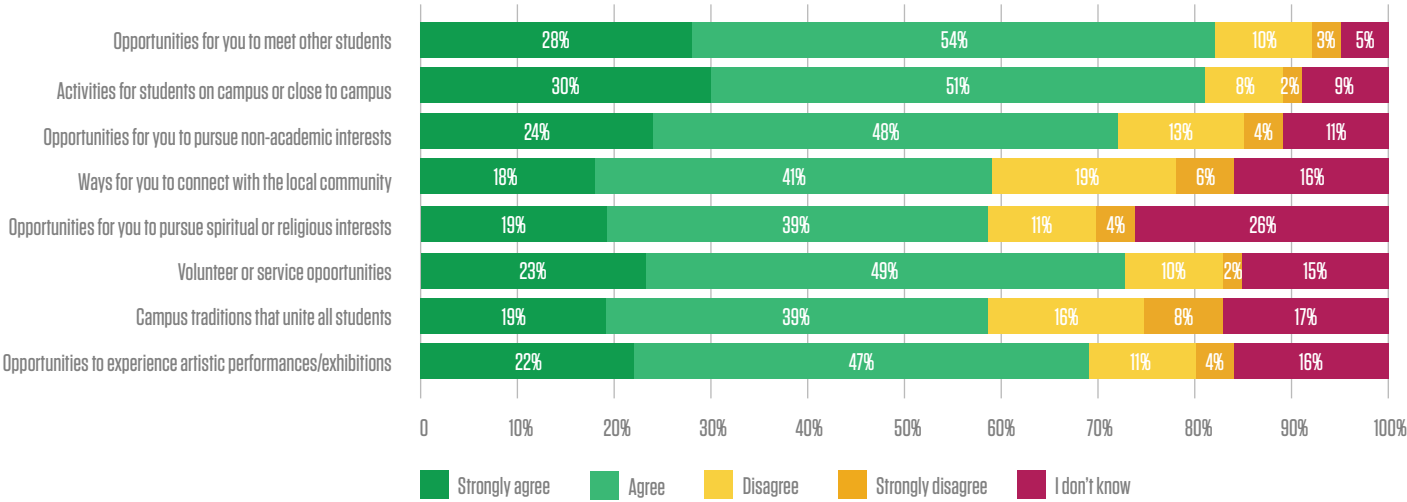
The physical spaces of campus can offer a range of supports for student well-being and can contribute to sense of belonging and retention as well (Ezarik, 2022). And respondents to SWISS indicate that institutions are doing a good job in providing adequate physical spaces that support their well-being. In fact, the physical space on campus is one of the most highly-rated areas on the entire SWISS instrument.

In addition to having supportive spaces on campus, students also agreed/strongly agreed that institutions support their social wellbeing by providing opportunities to meet other students (n = 4,451, 82%) and activities for students on or close to campus (n = 4,382, 81%). Fewer students agreed/strongly agreed that their institution provides ways to connect with the local community (n = 3,193, 59%) or opportunities to pursue religious/spiritual interests (n = 3,161, 58%).

To what extent do you agree that your institution provides adequate physical spaces where all students can:



To what extent do you agree that your institution provides:





# Final Thoughts

An assessment of campus climate for well-being has utility in every department and office on campus that interacts with students, helping give actionable feedback on areas of success and opportunity. From the ways in which students interact with faculty, staff, and their peers; to how they are supported through campus resources and opportunities; institutions need to consider their programs, services, and facilities through a lens of well-being to make informed decisions on improving student experiences.

Action items indicated for institutions by the SWISS findings presented in this report include examining their support for students in terms of:

- Financial literacy
- Faculty roles in supporting students’ academic goal-setting
- Affordable housing
- Learning about aspect of their own identities
- Exploring religious/spiritual interests
- Social connection in their place of residence

An emerging area of application for SWISS findings has been in relation to the continually-increasing demands for mental health resources on campus. Mental health can be influenced by all other aspects of well-being, from basic needs to social engagement, spirituality, academics, and more. By targeting resources toward holistic well-being, institutions can relieve some of the stressors felt by students who need support in these other areas of well-being, and potentially lower the acute needs of those seeking appointments at the counseling center.

# About the Authors



**Dr. Bridget Yuhas** is the Director of Student Affairs Assessment and Strategy and the Executive Director of the Institute for Well-being at Butler University. She has worked in higher education functional areas such as student activities, alumni engagement, development, housing, and assessment; and spent five years at the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) where she frequently wrote experimental item sets for NSSE’s partner survey, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement. She has presented original research on student well-being at NASPA Strategies, NASPA Annual Conference, Assessment Institute, NIRSA Annual Conference, First-Year Experience Conference, and NIRSA’s Summer of Learning; and has partnered with the National Wellness Institute to study professional well-being practitioner competencies both within and outside of higher education. Dr. Yuhas developed and leads the Student Well-being Institutional Support Survey (SWISS).



**Dr. Katie Johnson** is the Global Head of Research for Education at Qualtrics. She is passionate about using data to tell stories that help practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better understand complex problems in education to improve student and educator experiences. Prior to Qualtrics Katie worked as a Content Director at Hanover Research and a Research Education Analyst at RTI International focusing on college student surveys for NCES.

# References

Altaher, Y. & Runnerstrom, M. G. (2018). Psychological restoration practices among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(2), 227-232.

Burrows, T. L., Whatnall, M. C., Patterson, A. J., & Hutchesson, M. J. (2017, December). Associations between dietary intake and academic achievement in college students: A systematic review. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 60). Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

Creswell, J. D., Tumminia, M. J., Price, S., Sefidgar, Y., Cohen, S., Ren, Y., ... & Lovett, M. C. (2023). Nightly sleep duration predicts grade point average in the first year of college. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(8), e2209123120.

Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. B. (2009). Mental health and academic success in college. *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9(1).

Ezarik, M. (2022). Campus spaces lay the foundation for students’ success—or struggle. *Inside HigherEd*. Retrieved February 10, 2023 from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/11/22/survey-campus-facilities-impact-student-success>.

Fosnacht, K., Gonyea, R. M., & Graham, P. A. (2020). The relationship of first-year residence hall roommate assignment policy with interactional diversity and perceptions of the campus environment. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 1-24.

Gutter, M., & Copur, Z. (2011). Financial behaviors and financial well-being of college students: Evidence from a national survey. *Journal of family and economic Issues*, 32, 699-714.

Hefner, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2009). Social support and mental health among college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 79(4), 491-499.

Howe, E. C. & Fosnacht, K. (2017). Promoting democratic engagement during college: Looking beyond service-learning. *Journal of College and Character*, 18(3), 155-170.

Huber, M. T., Hutchings, P., Gale, R., Miller, R., & Breen, M. (2007, Spring). Leading initiatives for integrative learning. *Liberal Education*, 93(2), 46–51.

International Conference on Health Promoting Universities & Colleges (7th : 2015 : Kelowna, (B.C.)). *Okanagan Charter : An international charter for health promoting universities & colleges*.

Moore, M. Z. (2022). Fostering a sense of belonging using a multicontext approach. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 24(3), 703-720.

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2019). *Health and well-being in higher education: A commitment to student success*. Retrieved from <https://www.naspa.org/about/blog/naspa-and-nirsa-board-of-directors-endorse-joint-statement-on-well-being>.

Qualtrics (2022). 2022 State of College Student Experience. Retrieved February 16, 2023 from: <https://www.qualtrics.com/ebooks-guides/hed-state-of-student-experience-2022/>.

Trolan, T. L., Archibald, G. C., & Jach, E. A. (2022). Well-being and student–faculty interactions in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(2), 562-576.

Sotomayor, L., Tarhan, D., Vieta, M., McCartney, S., & Mas, A. (2022). When students are house-poor: Urban universities, student marginality, and the hidden curriculum of student housing. *Cities*, 124, 103572.









**BUTLER**  
UNIVERSITY