

Sense of Belonging at Clovis Community College: Brief Overview of Findings

Overview

In a 2024 Spring study at Clovis Community College, focus groups with students aimed to understand their sense of belonging on campus. Participants included various affinity groups like Hispanic, Asian-American, African American/Black, LGBTQIA+, first-generation students, and an unhoused youth. There were 24 participants in total (five groups), received incentives, and no risks were expected. The study's findings will be anonymous.

Summary

Sense of Belonging Defined by Students

Participants defined sense of belonging as being recognized without question, feeling safe and comfortable, being represented, and valued. Belonging involved finding community and classes where they feel respected, valued, and cared for, according to student responses

Sense of Belonging on Campus

Participants shared incidents of belonging at CCC, noting non-judgmental peers, responsive staff, and a sense of belonging increasing with time on campus. One participant felt a strong sense of community during a solar eclipse event, where diverse individuals gathered to observe the eclipse together, fostering a feeling of belonging.

Hispanic

Participants at CCC find a sense of belonging through student clubs, English courses, and inclusive environment. Spending more time on campus contributes to their sense of belonging. Some note the lack of Hispanic representation but appreciate increased cultural events.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ participants expressed feeling welcomed by pride flags on campus. One student mentioned being supported by professors in changing their name and pronouns. Another felt welcomed when greeted by name at the tutorial center. However, participants also noted instances of misgendering and feeling excluded during club rush.

African American/Black

A student who identified as Black and Muslim at CCC initially felt uncomfortable but eventually found belonging through campus involvement. They praised Dr. Armstrong's welcoming nature and club participation for fostering a sense of belonging. However, they expressed feeling comfortable "most of the time" and hesitated to elaborate further. The student struggled with being themselves, knowing where to wait on campus, and understanding CCC initially, which almost led to dropping courses. Despite feeling somewhat comfortable, they remained cautious of others' perceptions.

Asian American/Pacific Islander

Participants who identified as Asian-American shared their experiences. One student, new to the country, initially struggled to make friends but found support from staff and faculty after a car accident. They appreciated the safe environment, friendly classmates, and caring English professor. Despite feeling overwhelmed once and wanting to drop out, making friends changed their mind. Another participant felt a sense of belonging at CCC during an Asian Pacific event and appreciated the inclusive environment where they can express themselves without judgment.

<p>Student Engagement</p>	<p><i>Classroom Engagement</i> Some professors enhance class engagement through discussions, previews of lessons, critical thinking questions, and personal check-ins. Participants appreciated when professors valued students' stories and shared similar views. However, some classes lack participation despite high engagement on online platforms like Canvas. Participants emphasized the importance of class discussions for understanding others' perspectives and building connections. Engaging classroom experiences included mini-debates, discussions allowing student input, and group activities that fostered strong collaboration.</p> <p><i>Campus Engagement</i> Participants at CCC found belonging through clubs like GSA and ASG, campus events like the haunted house and field trips, and independent events like the LGBTQIA+ Christmas party, creating memorable experiences and traditions. However, many students have work or other obligations, leading to a lack of socializing after class. Also, participants shared experiences of feeling like they didn't belong on campus, such as being the only female in a philosophy debate where their responses were dismissed based on gender.</p>
<p>Campus Student Supports</p>	<p>Participants at CCC highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive aspects: Educational plans from counselors reduced stress and kept them on track. • Negative aspects: Some found counselors confusing and felt they did most of the work themselves. • Lack of awareness: Many were unaware of resources like the transfer center. • Helpful programs: EOPS was praised for academic and emotional support. • Support systems: Dr. Armstrong helped students network, online classes were valued for flexibility and accessibility. • Benefits of community college: Participants mentioned graduating debt-free, improving grades, transferring to better schools, and saving time and money on their education.
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>Participants provided recommendations for fostering a sense of belonging for CCC students, including a gender-neutral restroom, more food options, study rooms, nap spaces, and incentivizing student engagement. Suggestions also included campus orientation for new students, increased classroom discussion time, clearer course drop procedures, less stressful registration processes, varied event times, family-friendly events, support for student clubs, and updating buildings with more color and greenery.</p>