

Listening to Students: Project Introduction

Listening to Students is a project first started over a decade ago and done in four different survey project segments throughout the years. To follow is an introduction to each of these, and all of the project sections may be found on the [Listening to Students](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html) website (<https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html>).

The First Project Survey – Listening to Students

One of the best ways to learn about the different types of students that you teach or work with is to just ask. Accordingly, students were invited to take a survey, to be taken anonymously, that asks them to first state whatever demographics they identified themselves with and then to write about what it is like to be a student with that particular background. The survey asks questions about what the students think and feel regarding their education here at California State University, Sacramento.

Students answered the questions with one word, one sentence, one paragraph, or full pages. They wrote about their trials and tribulations in, hopes and aspirations for, and opinions and beliefs about getting their education at Sacramento State. Many of the students write about how much they have learned and grown here, how welcome they feel, how involved they are in campus life, how much they like the staff, faculty, and other students. Some of the students write about how overwhelmed, isolated, or disconnected they feel on campus, how dissatisfied they were by some aspect of college life or dismayed at something unfortunate that happened in the classroom or in interaction with students, faculty, or staff.

Listening to Students shares these students' perspectives with you. The students' responses are categorized into sections based on the demographic information and/or responses they provided in the survey. These sections include:

- Students Coming in at Different Points in Their Education: New, Transfer, and Reentry Students
- Students at Different Class Levels: Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors
- Students of Different Ages: Teens, Twenties, Thirties, Forties, Fifties
- Students with Physical Disabilities: Health, Vision, Hearing, Speech, and Mobility Limitations
- Students with Learning Challenges: Learning Disabilities and ADHD
- Students with Psychological Disabilities: Depression, Anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and Schizophrenia
- Minority Underrepresented Students: African American, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander and Asian American Students
- Students of Different Cultures: Students from Around the World, Multilingual Students, and Students of Different Cultural Backgrounds
- Students Who Are: Athletes, Parents, Veterans, LGBTIQ, First Generation College Students, Dreamer Students, Students of Varying Financial Means, and More!

Each of these sections is typically followed by further information regarding that type of student group, suggestions for faculty and staff to better work with or teach that type of student, and a list of applicable campus programs and services.

The Second Project Survey – Listening to Students at This Time in Online Learning During the Pandemic

When the pandemic hit and the forced, sudden pivot to online learning occurred, along with severe societal racial tensions, students were ever so greatly at-risk in their college education—but some more than others. Accordingly, a survey was sent out to these two broad at-risk groups enrolled at the university, to ask for their thoughts and experiences in their online learning at this time:

- Students with Disabilities
- Students of Color

Students wrote about their experiences with online learning and the pandemic so severely disrupting their education and their lives, as well as thoughts and experiences with regard to bias, ableism, and/or racism. This work was then put into two sections, one for each of those two student groups. Each section contains the perspectives of the students (one on students with disabilities and the other on students of color), followed by further information, and suggestions and resources for better serving these two student groups in higher education at this time.

The Third and Fourth Project Surveys – Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Did Leave College and Came Back and Listening to Students Who Left College

Given the drop around the nation in college enrollment and concerns regarding student retention post-pandemic, as well as the low completion rate of people who start college around the nation but do not finish, more generally, two surveys went out: One survey to undergraduate students and another survey to students who had left the university and were not yet back. The surveys asked students to discuss the factors in their consideration of leaving college or actually leaving college, and what gets them to stay or come back—or what would get them to return if they have not yet.

The students wrote about the many barriers experienced in trying to complete college classes and pursue a degree, including cost and academics, work and family demands, stress and mental health struggles, finding a sense of belonging and major/career path, and more. Each section of this work shares a portion of the students' perspectives and provides information and concrete suggestions for students, faculty, and staff on one key aspect of keeping students on track and successful in college through to completion. These are the completed sections:

- The Need for a Good First Year of College
- The Need for Belonging
- The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework
- The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles
- The Need to Manage Costs and Financial Pressures
- The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible
- The Need to Return
- The Need to Be Engaged in Learning
- The Need for Greater Mental Health
- The Need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
- The Need to Find One's Path
- The Need for Support and Services
- The Need to Graduate
- The Need to Continue
- Our Need to Do More

The Project's Purpose

Listening to Students is intended as a resource to inform and inspire those in higher education, and a reminder to never stop listening to the people who can teach us best about what they want, need, and think regarding their college education, our students.

The innovative nature of ***Listening to Students*** has been featured by the following organizations, as the links provided will show: The [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators](#), the [RP Group: Researching, Planning, and Professional Development for California Colleges](#), and the [National Communication Association](#). Other organizations have also acknowledged the innovativeness of the work and its value as a resource over the past years, including the American Association of State College and Universities, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Association for Institutional Research: Data and Decisions for Higher Education, the International Listening Association, and the Network for Change and Continuous Innovation in Higher Education.

Listening to Students is written for this campus, yet also meant as a resource for anyone in higher education, to increase awareness of the ways to better work with and support a diversity of students and help students overcome challenges to staying and succeeding in college.

The ***Listening to Students*** website also offers a blueprint for folks wanting to do this work and an [invitation](#) to do so. For anyone wanting to see how each of the different segments of the work (the four different surveys and their accompanying sections) were completed, please see the [Project Summary and Process – Student Diversity](#) (the first and second survey work) and the [Project Summary and Process – Student Retention](#) (the third and fourth survey work).

Student voices can reach us and teach us in ways unlike any other—and they deserve to be heard far more in higher education.

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