

Listening to Students

Listening to Students is a project, implemented to date at two separate institutions, which brings the perspectives of students directly to those who serve them in education, using the power of student voices to expand minds, touch hearts, and contribute in profound ways to institutional transformation in the name of inclusivity, equity, and student success. This work may be found at the California State University, Sacramento Student Academic Success and Educational Equity Programs website:

[Listening to Students](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html)

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One quick look at the work will show its tremendous potential to transform your own campus.

Listening to Students can be done at any institution of higher education, in a number of different ways and to any degree, smaller- to larger-scale, and by just about any one, ranging from instructors at any level and in any department to administrators or staff in a host of organizations and services.

The Value of the Project

The more we know about the students we serve, the better we can do our jobs. *Who best to tell us what they need in their education than the students themselves?*

This work is meant to inform and inspire those in higher education and foster greater awareness and advocacy for all students, and especially those most at risk and in need in academia. The objectives of the work are to:

- (1) Enhance diversity awareness and equity on campus and in the classroom.
- (2) Provide useful information and concrete suggestions for working with and teaching many different types of students.
- (3) Increase knowledge of the campus resources applicable to different types of student groups.
- (4) Inspire faculty and staff to appreciate all the more the students they serve and the value of the jobs they do in the fight for student success and closing the achievement gap.

The work may further be used in a number of ways: Faculty and staff training, institutional documents, campus webpages, committee work, reform efforts, student course readings and assignments, accreditation reports, and the Guided Pathways movement occurring at many institutions of higher education.

How the Project Works

This project is based on a very simple premise: *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 asking them to share their thoughts and feelings regarding their education at the institution. About 800 student responses were returned at the community college where this project commenced (Sierra College in Rocklin, California), and 1,600 student surveys were returned at the university where this project was undertaken a year or so later (California State University, Sacramento). Students answered the questions with one word, one sentence, one paragraph, or full pages, writing about their trials and tribulations in, hopes and aspirations for, and opinions and beliefs about getting their education.

The students' responses were then categorized into sections that include: New, Transfer, and Reentry Students; Students of Different Ages; Students with Physical Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, and Psychological Disabilities; Students of Color and Minority Underrepresented Students; Students from Around the World, Multilingual Students, and Students of Different Cultural Backgrounds; and Students

Who Are Athletes, Parents, Veterans, LGBT, First Generation College Students, Students of Different Financial Means, Dreamer Students, and more.

Each of these sections contains:

- (1) The stated perspectives of that type of student (from the survey responses)
- (2) Information regarding that type of student group
- (3) Suggestions for faculty and staff to better work with or teach that type of student
- (4) A list of applicable campus programs and services for that student group

At both institutions, one section per week was shared with the campus: At the first institution where this work was done, the sections were e-mailed directly to all faculty and staff over one semester. At the second institution, the sections were posted one by one to the campus website for the project and announced each week in the online employee news briefing over three semesters.

How to Bring the Project to Your Own Campus and Why

Student voices can reach us and teach us in ways unlike any other, and they deserve to be heard far more in higher education. This is true for all students, and especially those historically marginalized and underrepresented.

Listening to Students is very likely the first of its kind in the nation, and something more campuses need.

The innovative nature of the work has been featured by the [American Association of State Colleges and Universities](https://www.aascu.org/PROGRAMS/IE/SubmissionDetails.aspx?id=29055) <https://www.aascu.org/PROGRAMS/IE/SubmissionDetails.aspx?id=29055>, [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators](https://www.naspa.org/blog/innovation-on-campus-how-to-support-student-diversity-through-the-power-of-student-voices) <https://www.naspa.org/blog/innovation-on-campus-how-to-support-student-diversity-through-the-power-of-student-voices>, [Network for Change and Continuous Innovation in Higher Education](https://www.ncci-cu.org/learn/innovation-spotlight/) <https://www.ncci-cu.org/learn/innovation-spotlight/>, [Association of Institutional Research for Higher Education](https://www.airweb.org/collaborate-learn/reports-publications/eair-newsletter/announcements) <https://www.airweb.org/collaborate-learn/reports-publications/eair-newsletter/announcements>, and the [RP Group: Researching, Planning, and Professional Development for California Colleges \(PDF\)](https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Perspectives/PerspectivesJanuary2018.pdf) <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Perspectives/PerspectivesJanuary2018.pdf>. The work is also shared as a resource for “Making Excellence Inclusive” by the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive) <https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive>.

To meet the unique needs of your students, you need to know their unique perspectives. Unlike more general resources on student diversity, this type of work is meant to be campus-specific—tailored to the institution on which it is done. The perspectives of the students who attend the campus would be featured, the specific school’s facts and figures relevant to each student group would be provided, and student resources available on that specific campus highlighted.

Given that it has been done at both the two-year college and four-year university level, the project is entirely scalable to a variety of institutions across the country. The work may also be done in a variety of ways, in shorter or different formats, and by a range of campus employees.

The ***Listening to Students*** website provides a way forward for other institutions to follow, in whole or in part, by offering what has been called a “blueprint for inspiration,” and the Project Summary and Process there at the top right contains further information and the step-by-step process taken to do the project. Most importantly, there you will see the real potential of the work to transform campus life and classroom learning, and the true power of student voices.

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