

## Defining Involvement, Engagement & Sense of Belonging

NACA has adopted the following definitions for involvement, engagement, and sense of belonging to provide a baseline and framework to guide the work of the Association as we strive to create college communities where everyone belongs. The Research and Scholarship Group reviewed current literature and conducted focus groups at NACA Live to define the terms. This resource also provides questions to guide discussions on campuses and case study scenarios to illustrate each term.

- **Involvement** – Interactions that allow for intentional participation and consumption of experiences which allow participants to choose a level of investment in the university experience.
- **Engagement** – Sustained and shared interactions that create experiences for personal meaning making, emotional responses, and/or further personal development.
- **Sense of Belonging** – The extent to which individuals feel their authentic self is personally accepted, respected, included, supported, and safe in the university environment.

### Discussion Questions for Staff

- How does your department / division define involvement, engagement, and belonging? How do they align or not align with NACA's definitions?
- How are NACA's definitions of involvement, engagement, and belonging reflected in your office's guiding documents (e.g., mission, vision, values, goals)?
- Think about the ways students interact with your department or unit. According to NACA's definitions, which are opportunities for involvement? Which are opportunities for engagement? How are they different from each other?
- Break down the definition of engagement into its components. How do you provide students opportunities for "sustained and shared interactions"? How do you encourage "personal meaning making"? How do you elicit "emotional responses"? How do you foster "further personal development"? How can you do more of these?
- Involvement is often the first step to engagement. How can these definitions inform how you encourage students to get involved?
- How do you think interactions with your office / department / unit influence students' sense of belonging?
- How can you identify sense of belonging on your campus? How do you know it when you see it? What behaviors would you expect to see?
- The definitions intentionally are not limited to students. How are staff members involved in your office / department / unit? What engagement opportunities do you provide to staff? How do staff foster each other's sense of belonging?
- How can you use these definitions to talk about your work with students? With faculty and staff?
- Based on these definitions, how do you think involvement, engagement, and sense of belonging are interrelated?
- Using these definitions, how can you measure involvement, engagement, or sense of belonging?

### Best Practices for Measurement

#### Involvement & Engagement

- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a common survey administered on many campuses. If you do not already have access to the results of this survey on your campus, we encourage you to reach out to the office on your campus in charge of assessment. If they are not already administering the NSSE on your campus this is a good place to start for gathering data.
- Establish a culture of tracking attendance at all programs/experiences. Work with your Institutional Research office or the similar respective entity on your campus to gather this data into helpful reports regarding trends, demographics, retention, return on investment (ROI), etc. This data can help inform conversations about interventions for students who are not involved or engaged at the level that your campus desires.

- Leveraging student organization management systems (e.g. Engage, CampusGroups, Presence) or other software with easily accessible data patterns
- As a NACA member you have access to the Employability Skills Assessment which is based on the most up-to-date NACE competencies. This is an assessment tool that can help you establish a dialogue with your students based on their self evaluation and your evaluation of their skill development as their advisor.
- There are many assessment best practices that can also be done “in-house” if you do not have the financial resources to support national surveys and/or organization software. Some of these examples include longitudinal studies, rubrics, reflection papers, portfolios, co-curricular transcripts etc.

### Sense of Belonging

- The NSSE has specific Sense of Belonging questions that can be included when it is administered. You may have to request for these questions to be added to the survey on your campus.
  - Other common surveys that have belonging items available or already included are the Assessment of Collegiate Residential Environment and Outcomes survey and the Healthy Minds Study.
- There are multiple existing measurement instruments for Sense of Belonging that can be adapted to meet your needs for measuring Sense of Belonging on your campus:
  - The Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI) is a generic instrument that can be used with any population of people. It has 27 items, and all are on a 4-point Likert scale. This instrument was developed by Hagerty and Patusky but has been adapted for a wide variety of scenarios.
    - Hagerty, B. M. K. & Patusky, K. (1995). Developing a measure of sense of belonging. *Nursing Research*, 44(1), 9-13.
    - Knekta, E., Chatzikyriakidou, K., & McCartney, M. (2020). Evaluation of a questionnaire measuring university students' sense of belonging to and involvement in a biology department. *CBE – Life Sciences Education*, 19(3), 1-14.
  - The General Belongingness Scale is also a generic instrument but is often chosen because it is shorter than the SOBI. It has 12 items, and all are on a 7-point Likert scale.
    - Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2011). The general belongingness scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 311-316.
  - The University Belonging Questionnaire (UBQ) is a newer measurement instrument specifically designed with university students in mind as the primary participants. It has 24 items and the three factors included in the instrument are: university affiliation, university support and acceptance, and faculty and staff relations.
    - Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Deemer, E. D., Hughes, H. A., & Shemwell, D. A. (2018). The development and validation of the university belonging questionnaire. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 86(4), 633-651.
  - The University Sense of Belonging Scale (USBS) is an instrument also designed with university students in mind based on the answers to the 10 Words Question: “What comes to mind when you think of belonging at <insert university name>?” It has 54 items and the four factors included in the instrument are: feelings that impact belonging, school spirit, social connections at the university, and academic focus & support.
    - Loper, K. (2022). *University student belonging scale: Defining and evaluating students' sense of belonging to their university* [Doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

### Case Study Examples

#### Involvement

Jane Doe arrives at her university and attends an Involvement Fair event during Welcome Week. She signs up for a listserv for a few organizations that she is interested in learning more about. Jane attends an open house for the Women's Center on campus and follows their department on social media to be in the loop on upcoming events and information that the Center has to offer.

During Jane's first semester, she attends a few organization interest meetings and even decides to become a member of one: the Frisbee Golf club. She attends organization meetings and goes to a few Frisbee Golf tournaments that are hosted throughout the year. Jane meets many new people, remains an active organization member by attending the required events, and hopes to return to the organization next year.

#### Engagement

Jane Doe arrives at her university and attends an Involvement Fair event during Welcome Week. After joining the Frisbee Golf organization on campus, Jane meets all the requirements to remain an active member, but also goes above and beyond in two ways during her first semester in the organization:

First, she attends an optional Team Development Day that the officers of the organization put together for the group. During that outing, the members participate in an escape room and debrief how each group worked together as a team to solve the puzzle. Jane learns a lot about her teammates and how they can best work together towards a common goal on and off the Frisbee Golf field.

Second, Jane meets with the organization's Treasurer to learn more about that particular officer role within the organization. Jane is an accounting major and thinks that this role would set her up well for her future career, but she is not sure if she wants to take on a positional leadership role just yet. Regardless, she hopes to return to the organization next year and bring everything she has learned with her!

### **Sense of Belonging**

Jane Doe arrives at her university as an out-of-state student who does not know anyone else who is attending this institution. It was not her first-choice school, so she is not sure if she will stay past the first semester or not. She decides to attend an Involvement Fair during Welcome Week and eventually joins the Frisbee Golf organization because she loves to play but she has no one to play with.

Jane is an accounting major, and on the first day of Accounting 101, the class all introduced themselves with their name and an interesting fact about themselves. Jane said she loves Cosplay and a student in her class made a side comment to someone about how Cosplay is just glorified Halloween dress-up.

When Jane went to the Frisbee Golf interest meeting, she did not share that interesting fact again. By attending Frisbee Golf meetings and tournaments, Jane was able to make a few friends that were also Accounting majors. She learns that one of those students is in her Accounting 101 class, so she now sits with that student and forms a study group with them.

Later in the semester, Jane attends the optional Team Development Day with the Frisbee Golf organization, and she finally feels comfortable enough to share that she is passionate about Cosplay. A member of the team is a student athlete and has never heard of Cosplay before. He asks Jane questions of genuine interest to learn more about it. He thinks it sounds really interesting and fun, so he encourages Jane to think about starting a Cosplay Club on campus next year!

Inspired by this encouragement, Jane talks to the Student Involvement office on campus about how to start a Cosplay Club. With their help, she finds other students who are interested in Cosplay, and she decides to commit to another semester at the university in order to get the club started. To her surprise, the student athlete who originally encouraged her to start the club joins in the spring semester. Jane ultimately finds that she is proud to be a student at her university now that she has found her people.

**NACA empowers members to amplify the campus experience through inclusive learning, meaningful connections and engaging entertainment that transforms college communities.**

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